

THE PURGE OF THE ARTS

The chill winds of antisemitism, anti-liberalism and anti-Marxism, combined with a degree of stuffy moral disapproval of 'decadence', also howled through other areas of German culture in the first six months of 1933. The film industry proved relatively easy to control because, unlike the cabaret or club scene, it consisted of a small number of large businesses, inevitably perhaps in view of the substantial cost of making and distributing a movie. As in other sectors, those who saw which way the wind was blowing soon began to bend to its pressure without being told explicitly what to do. As early as March 1933 the giant UFA studios, owned by Alfred Hugenberg, still a member of Hitler's cabinet at this time, began a comprehensive policy of dismissing Jewish staff and cutting contacts with Jewish actors. The Nazis soon co-ordinated the German Cinema Owners' Association. Unionized film workers were Nazified, and on 14 July Goebbels established the Reich Film Chamber to oversee the entire movie industry. Through these institutions leading Nazis, and particularly Goebbels, an enthusiastic connoisseur of the movies himself, were able to regulate the employment of actors, directors, cameramen and backroom staff. Jews were gradually removed from every branch of the industry despite the fact that it was not covered by the Law of 7 April. Actors and directors whose politics were unacceptable to the regime were frozen out.³¹

Under the new conditions of censorship and control, a minority of people in the motion picture industry preferred to seek their fortune in the freer atmosphere of Hollywood. Those who found it included the director Fritz Lang, who had scored a series of successes with films such as *M: Murderer Amongst Us*, *Metropolis* and *The Nibelungen*, an epic that remained favourite viewing for Hitler. Lang's film *The Testament of Dr Mabuse*, an indirect satire on the Nazis, was banned shortly before its scheduled premiere in the spring of 1933. He was followed into exile by Billy Wilder, whose popular romantic films had so far betrayed few hints of the boldness he was to show in his Hollywood films such as *Double Indemnity* and *The Lost Weekend*. Both men created some of Hollywood's most successful movies in the following decades. Other movie directors migrated to Paris, including the Czech-born G. W. Pabst, director of the classic Weimar film *Pandora's Box* and a cinema version of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Threepenny Opera*, and Max Ophüls, born in 1902 in Germany as Max Oppenheimer. Some German directors and film stars, however, had been lured by the pulling power of Hollywood well before the Nazis came to power.

The departure of Marlene Dietrich in 1930, for instance, had more to do with money than with politics. One of the few who left as a direct result of the coming of the Third Reich was the Hungarian-born Peter Lorre, who had played the shifty, compulsive child-murderer in Fritz Lang's *M*; Nazi propaganda later attempted to suggest that the murderer was Jewish, an insinuation entirely absent from Lang's film.³² But while these emigrés attracted deserved attention, the great majority of the people employed in Germany's thriving film industry stayed. Of the 75 film stars listed in the magazine *Film Week* in 1932 as the most popular in Germany (on the basis of fan-mail received), only 13 emigrated, though these included three of the top five - Lilian Harvey and Kaethe von Nagy, both of whom left in 1939, and Gitta Alpar, who left in 1933. Lower down the list, Brigitte Helm left in 1936, and Conrad Veidt in 1934. Apart from Alpar, only one other star, Elisabeth Bergner, who was Jewish, left in 1933; 35 out of the 75 were still working in German films in 1944-5.³³

Cinema had become increasingly popular in the course of the late 1920s and early 1930s, above all with the advent of the talkies. But in an age before television, the most popular, and fastest-growing modern means of mass communication was the radio. Unlike the film industry, the radio network was publicly owned, with a 51 per cent stake belonging to the nationwide Reich Radio Company and the other 49 per cent to nine regional stations. Control was exercised by two Reich radio commissioners, one in the Ministry of Posts and Communications and the other in the Interior Ministry, together with a series of regional commissioners. Goebbels was very conscious of the power of radio. During the election campaign of February-March 1933, he had succeeded in blocking all attempts by parties other than the Nazis and the Nationalists to get party-political broadcasts transmitted. Soon, he had secured the replacement of the two existing Reich radio commissioners by his own appointments, and obtained a decree from Hitler on 30 June 1933 vesting control of all broadcasting in the hands of the Propaganda Ministry.

Goebbels immediately enforced a massive purge of broadcasting institutions, with 270 sackings at all levels in the first six months of 1933. This represented 13 per cent of all employees. Jews, liberals, Social Democrats and others not wanted by the new regime were all dismissed, a process made easier by the fact that many of them were on short-term contracts. Radio managers and reporters identified with the previous liberal broadcasting regime, including the founder of German radio, Hans Bredow, were arrested on corruption charges, taken to Oranienburg concentration camp, and condemned in a massive show trial held, after months of preparation, in 1934-5. The majority, however, were willing to carry on under the new regime. Continuity was ensured by the presence of men like Hans Fritzsche, a former director of Hugenberg's radio news department in the 1920s and head of the German

Wireless Service, who was in charge of news broadcasts under the new regime. Like many others, Fritsche took steps to secure his position by joining the Party, in his case on 1 May 1933. By this time most radio stations had been effectively co-ordinated, and were broadcasting increasing quantities of Nazi propaganda. On 30 March one Social Democratic broadcaster, Jochen Klepper, whose wife was Jewish, was already complaining that 'what is left of the station is almost like a Nazi barracks: uniforms, uniforms of the Party formations'. Just over two months later he too was dismissed.^{[34](#)}

Radio, Goebbels declared in a speech of 25 March 1933, was 'the most modern and the most important instrument of mass influence that exists anywhere'. In the long term, he said, radio would even replace newspapers. But in the meantime, newspapers remained of central importance for the dissemination of news and opinion. They presented an obstacle to the Nazi policy of co-ordination and control more formidable by far than that posed by the film and radio industries. Germany had more daily newspapers than Britain, France and Italy combined, and many more magazines and periodicals of every conceivable type. There were independent papers and periodicals at national, regional and local level, representing the whole range of political views from far left to far right. The Nazi Party's attempt to build a successful press empire of its own had not met with much success. Political papers were in decline in the late Weimar Republic and the printed word seemed to take second place to the spoken in winning adherents to the Nazi cause.³⁵

In this situation, Goebbels had no option but to move gradually. It was easy enough to close down the official Communist and Social Democratic press, as repeated bannings in the early months of 1933 were followed by total closure once the parties had been swept from the scene. But the rest had to be tackled on a variety of fronts. Direct force and police measures were one way of bringing the press to heel. Conservative dailies such as the *Munich Latest News* (*Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*) were as liable to periodic bannings as centrist and liberal publications. The Catholic *Franconian Press* (*Fränkische Presse*), an organ of the Bavarian People's Party, was forced to carry a front-page declaration on 27 March 1933 apologizing for having printed lies about Hitler and the Nazis for years. Such pressure easily convinced the major press organizations that they would have to adjust to the new climate. On 30 April 1933 the Reich Association of the German Press, the journalists' union, coordinated itself, as did so many other similar bodies. It elected Goebbels's colleague Otto Dietrich as its chairman and promised that future membership would be compulsory for all journalists and at the same time only open to the racially and politically reliable.³⁶ On 28 June 1933 the German Newspaper Publishers' Association followed suit by appointing the Nazi Party publisher Max Amann as its chairman and voting Nazis onto its council instead of members who had now become politically undesirable.³⁷ By this time the press had already been cowed into submission. Non-Nazi journalists could only make their views known by subtle

hints and allusions; readers could only glean their meaning by reading between the lines. Goebbels turned the regular open government press conferences that had been held under the Weimar Republic into secret meetings where the Propaganda Ministry passed on detailed instructions to selected journalists on items in the news, sometimes actually supplying articles to be printed verbatim or used as the basis for reports. 'You are to know not only what is happening,' Goebbels told the newspapermen attending his first official press conference on 15 March 1933, 'but also the government's view of it and how you can convey that to the people most effectively.'³⁸ That they were not to convey any other view did not need to be said.

In the meantime, the Nazis were busily arresting Communist and pacifist journalists as fast as they could. The arrests had begun in the early hours of 28 February 1933. One of the first to be taken into custody was Carl von Ossietzky, editor of *The World Stage*, a high-profile intellectual organ of generally left-wing, pacifist journalism. Ossietzky had earned notoriety not only as a biting critic of the Nazis before 1933 but also for publishing an expose of a secret and illegal programme of rearmament in the aircraft industry, an act for which he had been put in prison at the end of a sensational trial in May 1932. A massive campaign by writers outside Germany failed to secure his release after his rearrest in 1933. Imprisoned in a makeshift penal camp run by the brownshirts at Sonnenburg, the frail Ossietzky was forced to undertake hard manual labour, including digging what the guards told him was his own grave. Born in Hamburg in 1889, he was not Jewish or Polish or Russian, despite his name, but German in the full sense of the term as employed by the Nazis. Disregarding these facts, the stormtroopers accompanied their regular beatings and kickings of their prisoner with cries of 'Jewish pig' and 'Polish pig'. Never physically strong, Ossietzky only narrowly survived a heart attack on 12 April 1933. Released prisoners who talked discreetly to his friends described him as a broken man after this point.³⁹

Ossietzky fared only marginally better than another radical writer of the 1920s, the anarchist poet and playwright Erich Mühsam, whose involvement in Munich's 'regime of the Coffee House Anarchists' in 1919 had already earned him a period in gaol under the Weimar Republic. Arrested after the Reichstag fire, Mühsam was a particular object of hatred for the brownshirts because he was not only a radical writer but also a revolutionary and a Jew. Subjected to endless humiliations and brutalities, he was beaten to a pulp by SS guards in the Oranienburg concentration camp when he refused to sing the Horst Wessel Song, and was soon afterwards found hanged in the camp latrine.⁴⁰ His former colleague in the short-lived revolutionary government in Munich, the anarchist and pacifist Ernst Toller (another Jewish writer) had also been in prison for his part in the Revolution. A series of realistic

plays attacking the injustices and inequities of German society in the 1920s kept him in the public eye, including a satire on Hitler performed under the ironic title of *Wotan Unbound*. At the end of February 1933 Toller happened to be in Switzerland, and the mass arrests that followed the Reichstag fire persuaded him not to return to Germany. He undertook lengthy lecture tours denouncing the Nazi regime, but the hardships of exile made it impossible for him to continue his life as a writer, and he committed suicide in New York in 1939, driven to despair by the imminent prospect of a new world war.⁴¹

There were some who were better able to adapt to the literary world outside Germany, most notably the Communist poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, who left Germany for Switzerland, then Denmark, in 1933, before finding work eventually in Hollywood. One of the most successful exiles was the novelist Erich Maria Remarque, author of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, who despite his name and the heavy hints of the Nazis was not French but German (they also alleged he was Jewish, and had reversed the order of the letters in his original name, Remark, which they claimed, without any evidence to back up their assertion, had been Kramer). He continued to write in exile, and made a good enough living from the sale of film rights to a number of his works to acquire the image of a wealthy playboy in Hollywood and elsewhere in the later 1930s, enjoying much-publicized liaisons with a string of Hollywood actresses.⁴² More famous still was the novelist Thomas Mann, whose novels *Buddenbrooks* and *The Magic Mountain*, along with novellas such as *Death in Venice*, had established him as one of the world's literary giants and won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929. Mann had become one of the principal literary supporters of Weimar democracy, and toured Germany and the world ceaselessly lecturing on the need to sustain it. He was under no direct threat of violence or imprisonment from the Nazis, but from February 1933 onwards he remained in Switzerland, despite overtures from the regime for his return. 'I cannot imagine life in Germany as it is today,' he wrote in June 1933, and a few months later, after he had been ousted amid a flurry of hostile rhetoric from the Prussian Academy of Arts along with other democratic authors such as the poet and novelist Ricarda Huch, he made his commitment even firmer, telling a friend: 'As far as I personally am concerned, the accusation that I left Germany does not apply. I was expelled. Abused, pilloried and pillaged by the foreign conquerors of *my* country, for I am an older and better German than they are.'⁴³

Thomas Mann's brother Heinrich, author of biting satires on the mores of the German bourgeoisie such as *Man of Straw* and *The Blue Angel*, was dealt with more harshly by the regime, which he had offended by his open criticism of the Nazis in numerous speeches and essays. In 1933 he was deprived of his post as President of the literary section

of the Prussian Academy of Arts and went to live in France. There he was joined in August 1933 by the novelist Alfred Döblin, who had been a leading exponent of literary modernism in novels such as *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, set in the low-life and criminal world of the German capital in the postwar years. A Jew and a former Social Democrat, he was effectively proscribed by the Nazis. The same fate overcame another well-known novelist, Lion Feuchtwanger, also Jewish, whose novels *Success* and *The Oppenheims*, published in 1930 and 1933 respectively, were sharply critical of conservative and antisemitic currents in German society and politics; Feuchtwanger was visiting California when he learned that his works had been suppressed, and he did not return to Germany. The novelist Arnold Zweig fled to Czechoslovakia in 1933 and thence to Palestine; he, too, had been proscribed by the regime as a Jew, and was unable to get his works published in Germany any longer.⁴⁴

Under the circumstances of rapidly growing Nazi censorship and control, few writers were able to continue producing work of any quality in Germany after 1933. Even conservative writers distanced themselves from the regime in one way or another. The poet Stefan George, who had gathered round himself a circle of acolytes devoted to the revival of a 'secret Germany' that would sweep aside the materialism of Weimar, offered his 'spiritual collaboration' to the 'new national movement' in 1933, but refused to join any Nazified literary or cultural organizations; several of his disciples were Jews. George died in December 1933, but another prominent radical-conservative writer, Ernst Jünger, who had been close to the Nazis in the 1920s, lived on, indeed, until the very end of the twentieth century, when he was over 100. Jünger, much admired by Hitler for his glorification of the soldier's life in *Storm of Steel*, his novel of the First World War, found that the terrorism of the Third Reich was not at all to his liking, and retreated into what many subsequently called 'inner emigration'. Like others who took this course, he wrote novels without a clear contemporary setting—a good number of writers favoured the Middle Ages - and even if these sometimes cautiously expressed some criticism of terror or dictatorship in a general sense, they were still published, distributed and reviewed so long as they did not attack the regime in an explicit way.⁴⁵

Prominent figures, like the previously unpolitical Expressionist writer Gottfried Benn, who became enthusiastic champions of the new regime, were relatively rare. By the end of 1933 there was scarcely a writer of any talent or reputation left in Germany. The playwright Gerhart Hauptmann, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1912, was one exception, perhaps. But he was over 70 when Hitler became Chancellor, and well past the peak of his creative powers, when he had been famous for his moving dramas of poverty and exploitation. He continued to write, and tried to show outward conformity by giving the

Nazi salute and joining in the singing of the Horst Wessel Song. But he did not become a National Socialist, and his naturalistic plays were frequently attacked by the Nazis for their supposedly negative attitudes. A Hungarian writer who met Hauptmann in Rapallo in 1938 was treated by him to a long catalogue of complaints about Hitler. Hauptmann said bitterly that Hitler had ruined Germany and would soon ruin the world. Why, then, had he not left the country, the Hungarian asked. 'Because I am a coward, do you understand?', Hauptmann shouted angrily, 'I'm a coward, do you understand? I'm a coward.'⁴⁶



The loss of so many prominent writers of one kind and another was accompanied by a similar exodus among artists and painters. There was also a parallel here to the wave of persecution that swept the German musical world at the same time. In the art world, however, it was fuelled in addition by the strong personal antipathy shown towards modernism by Hitler, who considered himself an artist at heart. He had declared in *My Struggle* that modernist art was the product of Jewish subversives and 'the morbid excrescences of insane and degenerate men'. His views were shared by Alfred Rosenberg, who took a resolutely traditionalist view of the nature and function of painting and sculpture. While German music in the 1920s was no longer the dominant force it had been in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries German painting, liberated by Expressionism, abstraction and other modernist movements, had undergone a remarkable renaissance in the first three decades of the twentieth century, outstripping even literature as the most prominent and internationally successful of all the arts. This was what the Nazis, with Alfred Rosenberg in the vanguard, now undertook to destroy, following the precept of Point 25 of the Nazi Party Programme of 1920, which stated: 'we demand the legal prosecution of all tendencies in art and literature of a kind likely to disintegrate our life as a nation.'⁴⁷

Controversy had long raged over the work of painters such as George Grosz, Emil Nolde, Max Beckmann, Paul Klee, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Otto Dix and many others. Conservatives as well as Nazis detested their paintings. A major furore had been caused by Grosz's use of religious motifs for the purposes of political caricature, which had already led to Grosz undergoing two (unsuccessful) prosecutions for blasphemy before the Nazis came to power.⁴⁸ In July, Alfred Rosenberg excoriated the paintings of Emil Nolde as 'negroid, blasphemous and crude' and the Magdeburg war memorial of Ernst Barlach as an insult to the memory of the dead, whom the artist portrayed, according to Rosenberg, as 'half-idiotic'. Otto Dix's uncompromising representations of the horrors of the trenches in the First World War came in for equally sharp criticism from super-patriotic Nazis. Anything that was not obviously, slavishly representational was liable to arouse hostile comment. Art, according to the Nazis, had to spring, like everything else, from the soul of the people, so 'every healthy SA-man' was as capable of reaching a just conclusion on its value as any art critic was.⁴⁹ Not only German, but also foreign artists came in for strongly worded attacks. German galleries and museums had

purchased many paintings by French Impressionists and post-Impressionists over the years, and nationalists considered that the money would have been better spent on furthering German art, particularly given the behaviour of the French in the Rhineland and the Ruhr during the Weimar Republic.⁵⁰

Some figures, like Grosz, a member of the Communist Party, saw the writing on the wall even before 30 January 1933 and left the country.⁵¹ The policies of the Nazi state government in Thuringia since 1930 had carried a clear warning of what was to come. It had removed works of painters like Klee, Nolde and Oskar Kokoschka from the state museum in Weimar and ordered the destruction of frescoes by Oskar Schlemmer in the stairwell of the Bauhaus in Dessau, shortly before the Bauhaus itself was closed. All this should have made it clear that Nazi activists were likely to mount a serious assault on artistic modernism. But room for manoeuvre seemed to be supplied by the fact that Expressionism was well regarded by some within the Party, including the Nazi Students' Union in Berlin, which actually mounted an exhibition of German art in July 1933 that included work by Barlach, Macke, Franz Marc, Nolde, Christian Rohlf and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff. The local Party bosses forced the exhibition's closure after three days. Hitler especially detested Nolde's work, which Goebbels, whose taste was more catholic, rather admired; when the Nazi leader inspected the Propaganda Minister's new house in Berlin in the summer of 1933, he was horrified to see 'impossible' pictures by Nolde hanging on the walls and ordered them to be removed immediately. Nolde was expelled from the Prussian Academy of Arts, to his considerable chagrin, since he had been a member of the Nazi Party virtually since its foundation in 1920. In the course of 1933, local and regional Party bosses sacked twenty-seven art gallery and museum curators, replacing them with Party loyalists who immediately had modernist works removed from exhibition and even in some cases exhibited separately as 'Images of Cultural Bolshevism' in a 'Chamber of Art Horrors'.⁵² Other directors and their staff bent with the prevailing wind, joined the Nazi Party, or went along with its policies.⁵³

As in other spheres of cultural life, the purging of Jewish artists, whether modernist or traditional, rapidly gathered pace in the spring of 1933. The 'co-ordination' of the Prussian Academy of Arts began with the enforced resignation of the 86-year-old Max Liebermann, Germany's leading Impressionist painter and a past President of the Academy, from his membership as well as his position as Honorary President. Liebermann declared that he had always believed that art had nothing to do with politics, a view for which he was roundly condemned in the Nazi press. Asked how he felt at such an advanced age, the artist replied: 'One can't gobble as much up as one would

like to puke.' When he died two years later, only three non-Jewish artists attended the funeral of a once nationally fêted painter. One of them, Käthe Kollwitz, celebrated for her drastic but not overtly political portrayals of poverty, had been forced to resign from the Prussian Academy; the sculptor Ernst Barlach resigned in protest against her expulsion and that of other artists, but stayed in Germany, even though his work was banned, like that of Schmidt-Rottluff.⁵⁴

Paul Klee, a favourite target of Nazi cultural polemics for his supposedly 'negroid' art, was sacked from his professorship in Düsseldorf and left almost immediately for his home country of Switzerland. But other non-Jewish modernist artists decided to see how things would turn out, hoping that Hitler and Rosenberg's anti-modernism would be defeated by more sympathetic figures in the regime, such as Goebbels. Max Beckmann, previously based in Frankfurt, actually moved to Berlin in 1933 in the hope of being able to influence policy to his advantage. Like many of these other artists he was internationally famous, but unlike Grosz or Dix he never produced directly political work, and unlike Kandinsky or Klee he never even tended towards abstraction. Nevertheless, Beckmann's paintings were taken off the walls at the Berlin National Gallery and the artist was dismissed from his teaching post in Frankfurt on 15 April 1933. Sympathetic dealers managed to ensure that he could continue to make a living privately while he waited to see what his eventual fate would be. In contrast, Kirchner agreed to resign from the Academy, but pointed out that he was not Jewish and had never been politically active. Not only Oskar Schlemmer but even the Russian inventor of abstract painting, Wassily Kandinsky, who had been resident in Germany for decades, also thought the assault on modernist art would not last very long and decided to sit it out in Germany.⁵⁵

The Prussian purge was accompanied by similar purges in other parts of Germany. Otto Dix was expelled from the Dresden Academy but continued to work in private even though his paintings were being removed from galleries and museums. The architect Mies van der Rohe refused to resign his membership of the Academy and was expelled. Mies van der Rohe had briefly tried to re-create the Bauhaus in a disused factory in Berlin before it was raided by the police and closed down in April 1933. He protested in vain that it was an entirely unpolitical institution. The founder of the Bauhaus, Walter Gropius, complained that as a war veteran and patriot he had aimed only to re-create a true, living German culture of architecture and design. It was not intended to be political, still less a statement of opposition to the Nazis. But art was anything but unpolitical in Germany at this time, for the radical modernist movements of the Weimar years, from Dadaism to the Bauhaus itself, had propagated the view that art was a means of transforming the world; the Nazis were only adapting this cultural-political imperative to their own

purposes. Besides, pinning one's hopes on Joseph Goebbels was always a risky enterprise. The expectation of these artists that he would in time vindicate them would eventually be dashed in the most spectacular manner possible.^{[56](#)}

IV

It has been estimated that around 2,000 people active in the arts emigrated from Germany after 1933.⁵⁷ They included many of the most brilliant, internationally famous artists and writers of their day. Their situation was not made any easier by Goebbels's subsequent decision to deprive them of their German citizenship. For many such exiles, statelessness could mean considerable hardship, difficulty in moving from one country to another, problems in finding work. Without papers, officialdom often refused to recognize their existence. The regime published a series of lists of those whose German citizenship, passports and papers were officially withdrawn, beginning on 23 August 1933 with writers such as Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich Mann, Ernst Toller and Kurt Tucholsky; three further lists were issued shortly afterwards, including most of the other prominent emigrés. Thomas Mann was not only deprived of his citizenship but also stripped of the honorary degree he had been awarded by Bonn University; his open letter of protest to the Rector quickly gained cult status among the emigrés.⁵⁸ The damage done to German cultural life was enormous. Scarcely a writer of international stature remained, hardly an artist or painter. A whole galaxy of leading conductors and musicians had been forced to leave, and some of Germany's most talented film directors had gone. Some flourished in exile, others did not; all knew that the difficulties culture and the arts faced under the Third Reich were going to be greater than anything most of them encountered abroad.

What was in store for those art and culture lovers who remained in Germany from 1933 was graphically demonstrated by a new play, dedicated to Hitler at his own request, and premiered in the State Theatre in Berlin on 20 April 1933, Hitler's birthday. Present in the audience were Hitler and other leading Nazis, including Goebbels. On the stage, the principal roles were played by Veit Harlan, soon to become one of the mainstays of German cinema in the Third Reich, by the popular actor Albert Bassermann, who had taken on his part only after a personal request from Goebbels that he felt unable to refuse, and by Emmy Sonnemann, a young actress in whom Hermann Goring had more than a passing interest, since he took her as his second wife not long afterwards. At the end of the patriotic drama, there was no applause; instead, the whole audience rose in unison and sang the Horst Wessel Song. Only then did the clapping begin, with the entire cast repeatedly giving the Nazi salute, with the exception of Bassermann, who crossed his arms over his chest and bowed in the traditional theatrical fashion; married to the Jewish actress Else Schiff, and scion of a famous family of

liberal politicians, he was ill at ease with the new regime, and emigrated with his wife to the United States the following year. The play was *Schlageter*, and it dramatized the story of the nationalist uprising against the French in the Lower Rhine in the early 1920s. The writer was Hanns Johst, a war veteran who had made his name as an Expressionist dramatist. Johst had gravitated towards the Nazi Party in the late 1920s. His Expressionist method was given a new twist in the final scene, when the firing squad was directed to shoot at the bound figure of Schlageter from the back of the stage, the flashes of its guns passing through his heart right into the auditorium, inviting the audience to identify with his incorporation of the Nazi themes of blood and sacrifice and to become victims of French oppression with him.⁵⁹

But the play quickly became famous for a reason that had nothing to do with the Nazi glitz and razzmatazz of its premiere. Thanks to all the publicity it gained, it was widely felt to symbolize the Nazi attitude to culture. People noted, either from going to see the play or from reading about it in the press, that one of the main characters, Friedrich Thiemann, played by Veit Harlan, rejected all intellectual and cultural ideas and concepts, arguing in a number of scenes with the student Schlageter that they should be replaced by blood, race and sacrifice for the good of the nation. In the course of one such argument, Thiemann declared: 'When I hear "culture", I release the safety catch of my Browning!'⁶⁰ To many cultured Germans, this seemed to sum up the Nazis' attitude to the arts, and the phrase quickly went the rounds, becoming wholly detached from its original context. It was soon attributed to various leading Nazis, but above all to Hermann Goring, and simplified in the process to the catchier, wholly apocryphal, but oft-repeated statement: 'When I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun!'⁶¹

‘AGAINST THE UN-GERMAN SPIRIT’

Germany's best-known philosopher in the last years of the Weimar Republic, Martin Heidegger, had acquired his formidable reputation as a thinker above all through the publication in 1927 of his massive work on *Being and Time*, a treatise on fundamental philosophical questions such as the meaning of existence and the nature of humanity. Difficult to understand, and often expressed in rebarbatively abstract language, it applied the 'phenomenological' method of his teacher and predecessor in the Chair of Philosophy at Freiburg University, Edmund Husserl, to issues that had troubled philosophers since the Ancient Greeks. It was immediately greeted as a classic. In future years, Heidegger's thought was to have a significant influence on the French existentialists and their followers. More immediately, however, its pessimistic cast of mind reflected the philosopher's gradual emancipation from the Catholicism into which he had been born in 1889 and his turn to a mode of thought more influenced by Protestant ways of thinking. In particular, Heidegger, by the late Weimar years, had come to believe in the need for a renewal of German life and thought, the advent of a new age of spiritual unity and national redemption. By the early 1930s he was beginning to think he had found the answer to what he was looking for in National Socialism.⁶²

Heidegger already established contacts behind the scenes with leading figures in Freiburg's National Socialist German Students' League in 1932. He was totally inexperienced in university administration, but, as far as the small group of Nazis amongst the professors were concerned, Heidegger was the man for the job of Rector when the Nazis came into power. He carried both the academic prestige and the political convictions to make him acceptable as a replacement for the liberal professor Wilhelm von Möllendorff, who was due to take office in April 1933. Keen to do the job, Heidegger began talking to the newly Nazified Ministry of Education in Baden, while Möllendorff was persuaded by personal vilification in the local and regional press to stand aside. The Nazi professors put Heidegger forward, and under pressure from within the university and without, he was duly elected as Rector on 21 April 1933 by an almost unanimous vote of the professoriate. Indeed, the only substantial body of professorial opinion that did not support him consisted of the 12 out of 93 holders of chairs in Freiburg who were Jewish. They were not allowed to cast their votes, however, since they had been suspended from their posts under the law of 7 April by the Nazi Reich Commissioner for Baden,

Regional Leader Robert Wagner, as 'Non-Aryans'.⁶³

On 27 May Heidegger delivered his inaugural address as Rector. Speaking to the assembled professors and brown-shirted Nazi dignitaries, he declared that "academic freedom" would no longer be the basis of life in the German university; for this freedom was not genuine, because it is only negative. It means a lack of concern, arbitrariness of views and inclinations, a lack of anchorage in doing things or not doing them.' It was time, he said, for the universities to find their anchor in the German nation and to play their part in the historic mission it was now fulfilling. German students were showing the way. Heidegger's speech was replete with the new language of the leadership principle. In the very first sentence he told his audience that he had taken over the 'spiritual leadership of this university' and he used the pseudo-feudal term 'retinue' to refer to the students and staff, much as leading Nazis were doing in the general sphere of employment and labour relations at this time. With concepts such as these being used by the university's new Rector, it was clear that academic freedom, however it was defined, was definitely a thing of the past.⁶⁴ To give symbolic emphasis to this, at the end of the ceremony the attending professors and guests sang the Horst Wessel Song, the text of which was helpfully printed on the back of the programme, together with the instruction that right hands should be raised in the fourth verse and the whole proceeding should end with a shout of 'Hail Victory!' ('*Sieg Heil!*').⁶⁵

Heidegger soon set about bringing his university into line. Formally joining the Nazi Party amid a blaze of publicity on 1 May, the 'Day of National Labour', he now introduced the leadership principle into university administration, bypassing or silencing democratic and representative collegial bodies, and taking a hand in the drafting of a new Baden law that made the Rector into the unelected 'leader' of the university for an unlimited period of time. He soon informed the Baden Ministry of Education that 'we must now commit all our strength to conquering the world of educated men and scholars for the new national political spirit. It will be no easy passage of arms. Hail Victory!'.⁶⁶ Heidegger denounced a colleague, the chemist Hermann Staudinger, to the state authorities, on false charges, and helped the political police with their enquiries about him, although in the end the police were unconvinced, and Staudinger, pleading the national importance of his work, remained in post. Heidegger was also happy to enforce the dismissal of Jews from the university staff, requesting an exception only for the internationally renowned philologist Eduard Fraenkel, who was dismissed anyway, and the chemistry professor Georg von Hevesy, a man with powerful international connections and the recipient of large research funds from the Rockefeller Foundation, who was retained until his departure for Denmark the following year. Those Jews forced to sever

their connection with the university included Heidegger's own assistant Werner Brock and his mentor Edmund Husserl, although there is no foundation in the oft-repeated story that he personally issued an order banning Husserl from the university library. A patriotic nationalist who had lost his son on the battlefield in the First World War, Husserl had considered himself a personal friend of Heidegger, and was deeply upset at his treatment. 'The future alone will judge which was the true Germany in 1933,' he wrote on 4 May, 'and who were the true Germans—those who subscribe to the more or less materialistic-mythical racial prejudices of the day, or those Germans pure in heart and mind, heirs to the great Germans of the past whose tradition they revere and perpetuate.'⁶⁷ When Husserl died in 1938, Heidegger did not attend his funeral.⁶⁸

Joining in the widespread and rapidly growing Hitler cult, Heidegger told students: 'The Führer himself and he alone is the German reality, present and future, and its law. Study to know: from now on, all things demand decision, and all action responsibility. Hail Hitler!'⁶⁹ His ambition even extended to trying, in collaboration with other, like-minded university rectors, to take a leading role in the entire national university system. In a speech delivered on 30 June 1933, he complained that the 'national revolution' had not yet reached most universities, prompting Nazi students at Heidelberg to launch an impassioned campaign to oust the Rector, the conservative historian Willy Andreas, who was replaced by the Nazi candidate Wilhelm Groh a week later, on 8 July.⁷⁰ But Heidegger was completely inexperienced in politics, and he soon got bogged down in the usual university in-fighting about appointments, where he was outmanoeuvred by the bureaucrats in the Baden Ministry of Education and ridiculed by the brown-uniformed students, who considered him little better than a dreamer.

By the beginning of 1934, there were reports in Berlin that Heidegger had established himself as 'the philosopher of National Socialism'. But to other Nazi thinkers, Heidegger's philosophy appeared too abstract, too difficult, to be of much use. He had achieved widespread influence amongst his colleagues by advocating the voluntary reconnection of German university life to the life of the nation through a renewed concentration on fundamental values of knowledge and truth. This all sounded very grand. But though his intervention was welcomed by many Nazis, on closer inspection such ideas did not really seem to be in tune with the Party's. It is not surprising that his enemies were able to enlist the support of Alfred Rosenberg, whose own ambition it was to be the philosopher of Nazism himself. Denied a role at the national level, and increasingly frustrated with the minutiae of academic politics - which seemed to him to betray a sad absence of the new spirit he had hoped would permeate the universities—Heidegger resigned his post in April 1934, though he continued to be a supporter of the Third Reich and consistently refused to

reconsider or apologize for his actions in 1933-4 right up to his death in 1976.^{[71](#)}

II

The Nazi leadership had a relatively easy time with the universities, because, unlike in some other countries, these were all state-funded institutions and university staff were all civil servants. They were thus directly affected by the law of 7 April 1933, which provided for the dismissal of politically unreliable state employees. By the beginning of the academic year 1933-34, 313 full professors had been dismissed, part of a total of 1,145 out of 7,758 established university teachers, or 15 per cent of the whole. In Berlin and Frankfurt the proportion reached nearly a third. By 1934, some 1,600 out of 5,000 university teachers had been forced out of their jobs. Most of the university teachers who were dismissed lost their posts for political reasons; about a third were sacked because they were classified as Jewish.⁷² A mass exodus of academics took place; 15.5 per cent of university physics teachers emigrated, and at Göttingen University so many physicists and mathematicians left or were expelled that teaching was seriously disrupted.⁷³ Those who went were generally better than those who stayed, too; a study of university biologists has shown that the 45 who left their posts and survived the war had an average of 130 citations per person on the standard index of citations of scientific papers between 1945 and 1954, while the comparable score for the survivors of the 292 who stayed was only 42.⁷⁴

World-famous scientists were dismissed from their posts in Germany's universities and research institutes if they were Jewish or had Jewish wives or were known critics of the Nazis. They included twenty past or future Nobel laureates, among them Albert Einstein, Gustav Hertz, Erwin Schrödinger, Max Born, Fritz Haber and Hans Krebs. Einstein, whose theory of relativity had revolutionized modern physics, had been based in Berlin for twenty years. On a visit to America in January and February 1933, he denounced from afar the brutal violence of the Nazis after the Reichstag fire. In retaliation, the government seized his property, while the Education Minister told the Prussian Academy of Science to expel him. Einstein pre-empted this by resigning first, generating a public row in which the Academy accused him of having peddled atrocity stories abroad. He left for the United States again, and spent the rest of his life at Princeton.⁷⁵ 'You know, I think,' he wrote on 30 May to his colleague Max Born, who also went into exile, 'that I have never had a particularly favourable opinion of the Germans (morally and politically speaking). But I must confess that the degree of their brutality and cowardice came as something of a surprise to me.'⁷⁶

The chemist Fritz Haber did not share Einstein's pacifist and internationalist instincts; indeed, he had been largely responsible for the development of poison gas as an instrument of warfare in 1914-18, and, though Jewish, was exempt from dismissal because of his war service; but the sacking of numerous Jewish colleagues from his institute caused him to resign on 30 April 1933, declaring openly that he would not be told whom to choose as his collaborators and whom not. He left for Cambridge University, where he was not happy, and died the following year.⁷⁷ The loss of famous figures such as these was deeply alarming to many in the German scientific community. In May, the non-Jewish Max Planck, who was equally celebrated as a scientist and by this time had become President of Germany's premier scientific research institution, the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, went to see Hitler in person to protest. He met with a blanket declaration, so he later recalled, that it was impossible to make distinctions between Jews: 'The Jews are all Communists and these are my enemies ... All Jews cling together like burrs. Wherever one Jew is, other Jews of all types immediately gather.'⁷⁸

Like Haber, some Jewish scientists, including the Nobel laureate James Franck, an experimental physicist at Göttingen University, protested publicly against the treatment of other Jewish scientists and resigned even though they could have stayed in post under the exemption granted to Jewish war veterans. Accused of sabotage in a collective letter signed by forty-two colleagues at the University - only one of them from the field of physics and mathematics—Franck reluctantly left for a post in the United States. The reaction of the Medical Faculty at Heidelberg to the dismissal of Jewish colleagues was remarkable precisely because it was so unusual: in an official statement issued to Baden's Education Ministry on 5 April 1933, the chairman, Richard Siebeck, pointed out the contributions Jews had made to medical science, and criticized the 'impulsive violence' that was pushing aside autonomy and responsibility in the University.⁷⁹ His example, and that of his Faculty, found few imitators elsewhere. Most of those non-Jewish scientists who remained, with Max Planck at their head, attempted to preserve the integrity and political neutrality of scientific research by paying lip-service to the regime. Planck began to address meetings of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society with the Nazi salute and the Hitler greeting, in an attempt to avoid further purges. Werner Heisenberg, a physicist awarded the Nobel Prize for his development of quantum mechanics, argued that it was important to remain in Germany to keep scientific values intact. But in time it was to become clear that they were fighting a losing battle.⁸⁰

The vast majority of German professors remained in post. Overwhelmingly conservative in political orientation, they broadly shared the view of Hitler's Nationalist coalition

partners that Weimar democracy had been a disaster and that a restoration of old hierarchies and structures was long overdue. Many, however, went beyond this and positively welcomed the National Socialist state, particularly if they taught in the humanities and social sciences. On 3 March, some three hundred university teachers issued an appeal to voters to support the Nazis, and in May no fewer than seven hundred signed an appeal on behalf of Hitler and the National Socialist State. At the University of Heidelberg, the sociologist Arnold Bergsträsser justified the regime's creation of unity between state and society as a way of overcoming the patent failure of democracy; while the lawyer Walter Jellinek defended the 'revolution' of 1933 as anti-liberal but not anti-democratic, and declared that citizens gained the dignity of being fully human only through their subordination to the state. A member of the German People's Party and a strongly right-wing opponent of the Weimar Republic, Jellinek agreed that the regime's anti-Jewish measures were necessary because of the overcrowding of the academic profession. He also thought - presaging the view of later historians - that Hitler's power would be limited by the existence of other power-centres in the Reich. But wherever else this might have been true, it was not the case with the regime's policy towards the Jews, of whom Jellinek was indeed himself one, and he was duly removed from his chair in the course of the nationalist revolution that he so warmly welcomed. Other professors in the same faculty demanded that the law should be the expression of the people's soul, and judges should deliver their verdicts in accordance with Nazi ideology. The Professor of German declared that the Nazi revolution had given new, patriotic meaning to the study of the German language. He condemned 'Jewish thinking' and 'Jewish literature' for undermining Germany's 'will to live'.⁸¹

Very quickly, newly Nazified Education Ministries made political criteria central not only for appointments but also for teaching and research. Reich Education Minister Bernhard Rust reserved sweeping powers for himself in this area. The Bavarian Minister of Culture told a gathering of professors in Munich in 1933: 'From now on it is not up to you to decide whether or not something is true, but whether it is in the interests of the National Socialist Revolution.'⁸² The Nazi leaders cared little for the traditional freedom of teaching and research, or for the values of the traditional university. They cared little, indeed, for science itself. When the Chairman of the Board of Directors of I.G. Farben, the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Carl Bosch, met Hitler in the summer of 1933 to complain about the damage to Germany's scientific interests done by the dismissal of Jewish professors, he got a rough reception. The proportion of sackings was particularly high in physics, he said, where 26 per cent of university staff had been dismissed, including 11 Nobel Prizewinners, and chemistry, where the figure was 13 per cent. This was

gravely undermining German science. Brusquely interrupting the elderly scientist, Hitler said he knew nothing about any of this, and Germany could get on for another hundred years without any physics or chemistry at all; then he rang for his adjutant and told him that Bosch wanted to leave.[83](#)

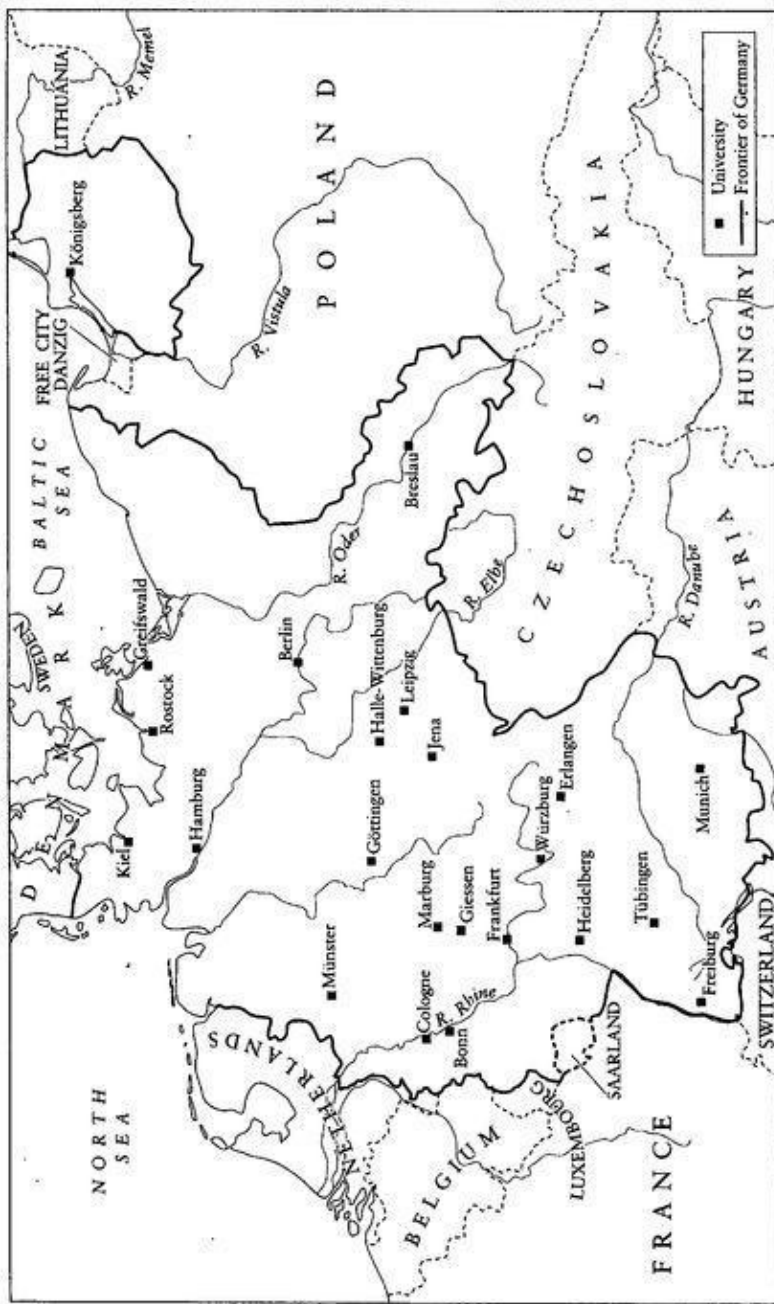


It was above all the students who drove forward the co-ordination process in the universities. They organized campaigns against unwanted professors in the local newspapers, staged mass disruptions of their lectures and led detachments of stormtroopers in house-searches and raids. Another tactic was to underline the political unreliability of some professors by arranging visiting lectures by politically correct figures such as Heidegger, who could be relied upon to give the regime the enthusiastic endorsement that others sometimes failed to provide. At Heidelberg University, one Nazi activist disrupted the work of the physicist Walter Bothe by conducting lengthy marching sessions for SS men on the roof of his institute, directly above his office.⁸⁴ In one university after another, respected Rectors and senior administrators were elbowed aside to make way for often mediocre figures whose only claim to their new position was that they were Nazis and enjoyed the support of the Nazi students' organization. A typical figure was Ernst Krieck, a convinced Nazi theorist of male supremacy who became Rector of Frankfurt in 1933; until his sudden elevation he had been a lowly professor of pedagogy in the city's teacher training college.⁸⁵ At Darmstadt Technical University, the adjunct lecturer Karl Lieser, who joined the Party early in 1933, aroused the wrath of his colleagues in the Architecture Department by denouncing many of his colleagues to the Hessian Ministry of Education in May; outraged, the University Senate deprived Lieser of his right to teach, asked the Ministry to dismiss him, and temporarily closed the University in protest. The next day, however, the students reopened and occupied the buildings, while the Ministry named the Mayor of Darmstadt provisional Rector. The professors caved in under this pressure. Lieser was reinstated, and became a professor himself in 1934. By 1938 he had become Rector. These events, which had their parallels in all of Germany's universities, marked a sharp fall in the traditional power of the professoriate. 'We lads have got the university in our hands,' declared the Nazi student leader in Leipzig, Eduard Klemt, 'and we can do with it what we will.'⁸⁶

The students' unions did not rest content with pushing forward the Nazification of the professoriate. They also demanded a formal role in professorial appointments and representation on disciplinary committees. However, this proved a step too far. Participation by the student body in these matters crassly contradicted the leadership principle. By the summer of 1933, Nazified education ministries and university authorities were beginning to clamp down on

student disorder, banning students from removing and destroying objectionable books from libraries, and scotching a plan by the national students' union to set up a pillory in each university town, where the publications of 'un-German' professors would be nailed up. No student was actually disciplined for disorderly conduct of a political nature in the first six months of 1933, despite the massive disruption and violence that virtually crippled university life during this period. But the message was now clear: as the Prussian Ministry of Education declared, it was the duty of the student unions 'to keep every one of its members orderly and disciplined'.⁸⁷ Before this happened, however, the students dealt their most dramatic and most notorious blow to intellectual freedom and academic autonomy, an act that reverberated around the world and is still remembered whenever people think of Nazism today.

On 10 May 1933, German students organized an 'act against the un-German spirit' in nineteen university towns across the land. They compiled a list of 'un-German' books, seized them from all the libraries they could find, piled them up in public squares and set them alight. In Berlin the book-burning event was joined at the students' request by Joseph Goebbels. He told them that they were 'doing the right thing in committing the evil spirit of the past to the flames' in what he called a 'strong, great and symbolic act'.⁸⁸ One after another, books were thrown onto the funeral pyre of intellect, to the accompaniment of slogans such as: 'Against class struggle and materialism, for the national community and an idealistic outlook: Marx, Kautsky; Against decadence and moral decay, for discipline and morality in family and state: Heinrich Mann, Ernst Glaeser, Erich Kästner.' The works of Freud were consigned to the flames for their 'debasing exaggeration of man's animal nature', the books of the popular historian and biographer Emil Ludwig were burned for their 'denigration' of the 'great figures' of German history; the writings of the radical pacifist journalists Kurt Tucholsky and Carl von Ossietzky were destroyed for their 'arrogance and presumption'. A particular category in itself was reserved for Erich Maria Remarque, whose critical novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* was thrown onto the fire 'against literary betrayal of the soldiers of the World War, for the education of the nation in the spirit of military preparedness.' Many other books besides those read out in these incantatory slogans were thrown onto the pyres. The national student organization issued 'twelve theses against the un-German spirit' to accompany the action, demanding the introduction of censorship and the purging of libraries and declaring: 'Our opponent is the Jew and anyone who submits to him.'⁸⁹



Map 18. German Universities in 1933

On 12 March, in a prelude to this action, stormtroopers had already ransacked the library of the trade union centre in Heidelberg, removed books and burned them in a small bonfire outside the door. A similar event had taken place, as we have seen, outside Magnus Hirschfeld's sex research institute in Berlin on 6 May. But the 10 May book-burning was on a much larger scale, and much more thoroughly prepared. Students had been combing libraries and bookshops in readiness for the occasion since the middle of April. Some booksellers courageously refused to hang up posters advertising the event in their shop windows, but many others gave in to the threats with which the students accompanied their action. In Heidelberg, where the book-burning took place on 17 May, the students processed with flaming torches, accompanied by SA, SS and Steel Helmets and members of the duelling corps, and threw Communist and Social Democratic insignia into the flames as well as books. The event was accompanied by

the singing of the Horst Wessel Song and the national anthem. Speeches were delivered in which the action was presented as a blow against the 'un-German spirit' represented by writers such as Emil Julius Gumbel, the statistician of right-wing murders in the Weimar years, hounded out of his chair at the university in the summer of 1932. The Weimar Republic had incorporated this 'Jewish-subversive' spirit; it was now finally consigned to history.⁹⁰

All this marked the culmination of a widespread action 'against the un-German spirit' set in motion weeks before by the Propaganda Ministry.⁹¹ As so often in the history of the Third Reich, the apparently spontaneous action was in fact centrally co-ordinated, though not by Goebbels, but by the national students' union. The Nazi official in charge of purging Berlin's public libraries helpfully provided a list of the books to be burned, and the central office of the national student union wrote and distributed the slogans to be used in the ceremony. In this way, the Nazi students' organization ensured that the book-burning took a roughly similar course in all the university towns where it was carried out.⁹² And where the students led, others followed, in localities across the land. At a celebration of the summer solstice of 1933 in the small town of Neu-Isenburg, for instance, a large crowd watched 'Marxist' literature being burned in a huge pile in an open space behind the fire station. As the local women's gymnastics' club danced around the fire, the local Party leader gave a speech, followed by a rendition of the Horst Wessel Song by the assembled multitude. Book-burning was by no means a practice confined to the highly educated.⁹³

The Nazi book-burning was a conscious echo of an earlier ritual, performed by radical nationalist students at the celebration of the three-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's launching of the Reformation with the publication of his theses attacking the Catholic Church, at the Wartburg in Thuringia on 18 October 1817. At the close of the day's festivities, the students had thrown symbols of authority and 'un-German' books such as the *Code Napoléon* onto a bonfire in a form of symbolic execution. This action may have provided a precedent in Germany's canon of nationalist demonstrations, but in fact it had little in common with its later imitation in 1933, since a principal concern of the Wartburg Festival was to express solidarity with Poland and to demonstrate in favour of the freedom of the German press, constricted by massive censorship from the police regime inspired by Prince Metternich. Still, as the flames rose to the skies in Germany's ancient seats of learning on 10 May 1933, encouraged or tolerated by the newly Nazified university authorities, there must have been more than a few who recalled the poet Heinrich Heine's comment on that earlier event, over a century before: 'Where books are burned, in the end people will be burned too.'⁹⁴

IV

Amid all the violence, intimidation and brutality of the Nazi assault on civil society in the early months of 1933, one particular, small group of Germans came in for a particularly intense degree of hatred and hostility: German Jews. This was not because they were outright opponents of Nazism, like the Communists and the Social Democrats, or because they needed to be intimidated and brought into line like other political and social groups and institutions as part of the rapid Nazi drive to create a dictatorial, one-party state. The Nazi attack on the Jews was of quite a different character. As the expulsion of Jews from key cultural institutions such as the Prussian Academy of Arts, the major orchestras, or the art schools and museums, dramatically illustrated, the Nazis saw the Jews above all as the repositories of an alien, un-German spirit, and their removal as part of a cultural revolution that would restore 'Germanness' to Germany. Antisemitism had always borne a very tenuous and indirect relation to the real role and position of Jews in German society, most of whom lived blameless, conventional and on the whole politically rather conservative lives. But from the very beginning of the Nazi seizure of power, they felt the full force of the stormtroopers' pent-up hatred. Already in the autumn of 1932, indeed, brownshirts had carried out a series of bomb attacks on Jewish shops and businesses, synagogues and other premises. In the weeks following Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor, stormtroopers broke into synagogues and desecrated the religious furniture, smashed the windows of Jewish shops, and subjected Jews to random acts of humiliation, shaving off their beards or forcing them, in an imitation of a punishment devised by the Italian Fascists, to drink large quantities of castor oil.⁹⁵ The violence reached new levels in the aftermath of the elections of 5 March. The day after the election, gangs of brownshirts rampaged along the Kurfürstendamm, a fashionable shopping street in Berlin, which many Nazis saw as an area where Jews tended to congregate, hunting down Jews and beating them up. In Breslau, a gang of stormtroopers kidnapped the Jewish director of the theatre, beating him to within an inch of his life with rubber truncheons and dog-whips. A synagogue was set on fire in Königsberg in East Prussia, and a Jewish businessman was abducted and beaten so badly that he later died of his injuries. Gangs of stormtroopers daubed and blockaded Jewish shops in several localities.⁹⁶

In Breslau, stormtroopers assaulted Jewish judges and lawyers in the court building on 11 March. The courts suspended business for three days, and when they reconvened, the President of the Court, under pressure

from the brownshirts, ruled that henceforth only 17 out of the 364 Jewish lawyers who had hitherto practised in Breslau would be allowed entry into the court building. Other stormtroopers burst into courthouses all over Germany, dragged Jewish judges and lawyers out of the proceedings and beat them up, telling them not to return. The disruption caused by all this was too much even for Hitler, who called on 10 March for a stop to 'individual actions' of this kind if they disrupted official business or harmed the economy (a problem on which he had already received complaints from influential business circles, from the Reichsbank downwards). Hitler also personally forced the Leipzig Party bosses to call off a planned raid on the Reich Court with the object of hauling out Jewish lawyers.⁹⁷ Courts lower down the hierarchy were a different matter, however, and here he did not intervene. The Nazi press continued to print rabid incitements to purge the judiciary and the legal profession of Jews, backed by a flood of petitions to the Reich Justice Ministry from 'nationalist' groups of lawyers to the same end. The fact was that while attacks on Jewish shops and businesses were disturbing to Hitler's Nationalist coalition partners, attacks on Jewish lawyers on the whole were not. In the legal profession, the attacks met with little or no resistance even from those who disapproved of them. The trainee judge Raimund Pretzel was sitting in the library of the Berlin courthouse when the brownshirts burst into the building, loudly expelling all the Jews. 'A brownshirt approached me and took up position in front of my work table,' he remembered later. "'Are you Aryan?'" Before I had a chance to think, I had said, "Yes." He took a close look at my nose - and retired. The blood shot to my face. A moment too late I felt the shame, the defeat ... What a disgrace to buy, with a reply, the right to stay with my documents in peace!⁹⁸

Hitler's intervention only caused a temporary let-up in the sequence of violent incidents, and altogether failed to halt them completely. Little more than a fortnight later, they had begun again. On 25 March 1933, thirty stormtroopers from out of town broke into Jewish homes in Niederstetten in the south-west, hauled off the men to the town hall and beat them up with barely controlled savagery; the same morning, in the nearby town of Creglingen, a similar incident led to the deaths of two of the eighteen Jewish men subjected to this treatment. Groups of youths smashed the windows of Jewish shops in Wiesbaden. The regional administrator of Lower Bavaria reported on 30 March:

Early in the morning of the 15th of this month, towards 6 o'clock, a truck with several men dressed in dark uniforms appeared before the house of the Jewish trader Otto Selz, in Straubing. Selz was taken out of his house still dressed in his nightshirt and abducted in the truck. Around 9.30 Selz was discovered in a wood near Weng, Landshut District, shot dead ... Several country people claim to have noticed red armbands

with the swastika on some of the men in the truck.⁹⁹

As Hitler's intervention suggested, these incidents were not part of any preconceived plan. Rather, they expressed the antisemitic hatred, fury and violence that lay at the heart of Nazism at every level. The stormtroopers' brutality had hitherto been directed mainly against the Reichsbanner and the Red Front-Fighters' League, but it was now released in all directions by the Nazi election victory. Unchecked by the intervention of the police or by any serious threat of legal prosecution, it vented itself particularly in attacks on Jews. Despite their desire to control the violence, the Nazi leaders in practice continually fuelled it with their rhetoric, and with the constant antisemitic diatribes in the Nazi press, led by Julius Streicher's *The Stormer*.¹⁰⁰ According to one doubtless incomplete estimate, Nazi stormtroopers had murdered 43 Jews by the end of June 1933.¹⁰¹

These incidents did not go unnoticed abroad. Foreign newspaper correspondents in Berlin reported seeing Jews with blood streaming down their faces lying in the streets of Berlin after having been beaten senseless. Critical reports began to appear in the British, French and American press.¹⁰² On 26 March the conservative Foreign Minister von Neurath told the American journalist Louis P. Lochner that this 'atrocious propaganda', which he described as reminiscent of Belgian myths about atrocities committed by German troops in 1914, was most likely part of a concerted campaign of misinformation against the German government; revolutions were bound to be accompanied by 'certain excesses'. Unlike Neurath, Hitler himself described the stories openly as 'Jewish atrocity smears'. At a meeting with Goebbels, Himmler and Streicher in Berchtesgaden the same day, Hitler decided to take action, in order to channel the antisemitic energies of the rank-and-file into a concerted action. On 28 March he ordered the Party at every level to prepare a boycott of Jewish shops and businesses to be carried out on 1 April. The action was approved by the cabinet the following day.¹⁰³ Far from being a rapid, spur-of-the-moment response to 'atrocious propaganda' abroad, however, the boycott had long been contemplated in Nazi circles, particularly those most hostile to 'Jewish' big businesses such as department stores and finance houses. Neither for the first nor the last time, the leading Nazis assumed an identity of interest, a conspiratorial connection even, between Jews in Europe and Jews in America, that simply was not there. It was necessary to show the Jews, wrote Goebbels in the published version of his diary, 'that one is determined to stop at nothing'.¹⁰⁴

The unreality of such beliefs was illustrated when the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith cabled the American Jewish Committee in New York to ask it to call off 'demonstrations hostile to Germany', only to be

sharply rebuffed despite divided views in the American Jewish community. Protest meetings in a number of American cities on 27 March were followed by a campaign to boycott German goods that met with an increasing amount of success in the months after 1 April.¹⁰⁵ This only served to confirm Goebbels in his view that the boycott should be carried out 'with the greatest toughness'. 'If the foreign smears come to an end, then it will be stopped,' he added, 'otherwise a fight to the death will begin. Now the German Jews must influence their racial comrades in the world so that they're not in for it over here.' As Goebbels drove through Berlin on 1 April to check the progress of the boycott, he declared himself more than satisfied: 'All Jewish shops are shut. SA sentries are standing in front of the entrances. The public has declared its solidarity. An exemplary discipline obtains. An imposing spectacle!' The spectacle was made more dramatic by a mass demonstration of '150,000 Berlin workers' against 'foreign smears' in the afternoon, and a march-past of 100,000 members of the Hitler Youth in the evening. 'There is', reported Goebbels with satisfaction, 'an indescribable mood of boiling rage ... The boycott is a great moral victory for Germany.' So great was it, indeed, that already the next day he could report triumphantly: 'Foreign countries are gradually coming to their senses.'¹⁰⁶

Germans reading Goebbels's account when it was published a few months later knew, however, that it put an optimistic construction on the events of 1 April from the Nazi point of view. Certainly there was plenty of activity by the stormtroopers, who posted up garish placards everywhere telling people: 'Don't buy anything in Jewish shops and department stores!', ordering them not to use Jewish lawyers and doctors, and informing them of the supposed reason for all this: 'The Jew is smearing us abroad.' Trucks bedecked with similar posters and full of stormtroopers raced through the streets, and SA and Steel Helmet units stood threateningly outside the doors of Jewish retailers, demanding the identity papers of any shoppers going in. Many non-Jewish shops put up posters advertising the fact that they were 'recognized German-Christian businesses', just to avoid misunderstandings. And as far as the stormtroopers were concerned, the Nazi leadership had made an important point: this action against the Jews was to be centrally co-ordinated, and they were not to commit individual acts of violence. The stormtroopers who enforced the boycott on 1 April did indeed mostly avoid serious breaches of the peace, and kept their behaviour at the level of threats and intimidation. Little actual physical damage seems to have been done to the shops themselves on the day, although in many places the brownshirts daubed slogans on the shop windows, and in a few localities they were unable to resist breaking the glass, looting the contents, arresting objectors, or taking the Jewish shop-owners out, driving them through the streets and beating them up when they dropped through

exhaustion.^{[107](#)}

Crowds gathered to see what was going on and stood outside the boycotted shops. Yet, contrary to reports in the Nazi press, they did not demonstrate their anger against the Jews, but remained for the most part passive and silent. In some places, including two department stores in Munich, there were even small counter-demonstrations by citizens, some of them wearing the Party badge, who tried to get past the brownshirt sentries on the door. In Hanover, determined shoppers tried to enter the Jewish shops by force. In most places, however, few went in. To this extent, at least, the boycott was a success. On the other hand, some smaller towns failed to implement the boycott altogether. Everywhere, numerous Jewish shopkeepers shut up shop anyway, to avoid unpleasantness. Warned of the boycott in advance, many people rushed to purchase their goods in the Jewish shops the day before, much to the annoyance of the Nazi press. A young soldier and his girlfriend were overheard in a cinema the evening before the boycott arguing about what they should do. 'Actually one's not supposed to buy anything from the Jews,' he said; 'but it's so terribly cheap,' she replied. 'Then it's poor and doesn't last,' was his answer. 'No, really,' she riposted, 'it's just as good and keeps just as well, really just the same as in Christian shops - and it's so much cheaper.'^{[108](#)}

Only small shops and businesses were affected by the boycott; the largest Jewish firms, who had borne the brunt of the Nazis' verbal attacks over the years, were exempted because of their importance to the national economy, and because they were major employers who would be forced to lay off workers if the boycott really had a serious impact on their economic position. The Tietz department store chain alone had 14,000 employees. The Nazi employees' organization in the huge Ullstein publishing firm noted that while the company was exempted from the boycott, the banning of many of its publications was leading to the dismissal of many 'good national comrades', thus illustrating the economic dangers of the regime's policies.^{[109](#)} All this made the boycott a good deal less impressive than Goebbels claimed. The general lack of public opposition to the action was striking, but so too was the general lack of public enthusiasm for it; a combination that was to be repeated more than once in subsequent years when the government launched antisemitic measures of one sort or another. Realizing the problems which the boycott caused, both for the economy and for the regime's reputation abroad, and conceding privately that it had not met with a great deal of success, Hitler and the Party silently dropped the idea of continuing it on a national basis, despite the fact that American newspapers carried on printing 'atrocious stories' about Nazi violence against the Jews in the following weeks and months. But the idea of a boycott took root in the Nazi movement. In the following months, many local newspapers repeatedly called upon their readers not to patronize Jewish shops, while Party

activists in a wide variety of localities often placed 'sentries' outside Jewish premises, and organized letter-writing campaigns to rebuke and admonish those customers who dared to enter them.^{[110](#)}

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A major purpose of the boycott had been to advertise to the Nazi rank-and-file that antisemitic policy had to be centrally co-ordinated and pursued, as Hitler had written many years before, in a 'rational' manner rather than through spontaneous pogroms and acts of violence. The boycott thus prepared the way for Nazi policy towards the Jews to take on a legal, or quasi-legal, course, in pursuit of the Party Programme's statement that Jews could not be full German citizens and therefore, clearly, could not enjoy full civil rights. A week after the boycott, on 7 April 1933, the Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service added Jews to Communists and other politically unreliable individuals in state employment as targets for dismissal. 'Non-Aryan' civil servants, defined in a supplementary law on 11 April as people with one or more 'non-Aryan, particularly Jewish' grandparent, were to be retired, unless (on Hindenburg's explicit insistence) they were war veterans or had lost a father or son in combat, or had been in the forces before the First World War. Pushed through by Wilhelm Frick, the Nazi Reich Interior Minister, who had already proposed a similar law as a humble Reichstag deputy in 1925, the legislation, in characteristic Nazi style, co-ordinated measures already in progress at the regional and local level, where dismissals of Jewish state employees had been going on for some weeks. Similar provisions were applied to Jewish lawyers, worked out in the Ministry of Justice at the same time and incorporated into a separate law passed on the same day. A decree of 25 April 'Against the Overcrowding of German Schools and Universities' drastically reduced the flow of qualified Jewish Germans into the professions by imposing a quota of 5 per cent Jewish pupils on all schools and universities and 1.5 per cent of new entries each year. The exemptions meant that many Jews were able to continue working - 336 out of a total of 717 Jewish judges and state prosecutors, for example, and 3,167 out of a total of 4,585 Jewish lawyers.¹¹¹ Eastern European Jews who had migrated to Germany under the Weimar Republic lost their citizenship by a law of 14 July 1933, in a measure already contemplated by the government of Franz von Papen in 1932. This bundle of different measures meant the end of the civil equality of the Jews that had existed in Germany since 1871.¹¹²

Those Jews who carried on with their jobs did so in an atmosphere of continuous and steadily mounting suspicion and hostility. The decrees set off a wave of denunciations, personally as well as politically motivated, and many lawyers, civil servants and state employees were obliged to start checking their ancestry, or even to submit themselves

to medical examination in an effort to determine their supposed racial character. Ministers and heads of civil service departments were overwhelmingly hostile to any continued Jewish presence, in the institutions they ran. Conservatives such as Herbert von Bismarck, State Secretary in the Prussian Interior Ministry, were as enthusiastic supporters of anti-Jewish measures as were their Nazi colleagues. Measures to restrict the civil rights of the Jews had, after all, been part of the Conservative, later Nationalist, Party programme since the early 1890s. Hitler took due account of the feeling of such men that antisemitic policies should not go too far, vetoing a proposal to ban Jewish doctors on 7 April, for example, and trying to ensure that the purge did not have adverse effects on business and the economy. Yet the fact remained that in the basic thrust of his policy of exclusion at this time, his Nationalist colleagues were right behind him.^{[113](#)}

And where the state led, other institutions followed. A central part of the whole process of co-ordination at every level was the exclusion of Jews from the newly Nazified institutions which resulted from it, from the German Boxing Association, which excluded Jewish boxers on 4 April 1933, to the German Gymnastics League, which 'Aryanized' itself on 24 May. Municipalities began banning Jews from public facilities such as sports fields.^{[114](#)} In the small north German town of Northeim, where there were only 120 practising Jews in 1932, the boycott of 1 April 1933 seemed half-hearted, only lasting a few hours, and not applying at all to some businesses. Here, as in many other communities, the local Jewish population had been generally accepted, and Nazi antisemitism was regarded as abstract rhetoric without concrete applicability to the Jews everyone knew. Now the boycott suddenly brought home the reality of the situation to all sectors of society. The income of the local Jewish physician in Northeim began to drop as patients left him, while local voluntary associations, including not only the shooting club but even the Veterans' Club, dropped their Jewish members, often for 'non-attendance', since local Jews soon became reluctant to continue participating in the town's associational life; many resigned before being asked to leave. For every old Social Democrat who ostentatiously continued patronizing Jewish shops, there were several local stormtroopers who bought goods there on credit and refused to pay their bills. By the late summer of 1933, amidst a continuous barrage of antisemitic propaganda from the political leaders of the Reich at every level, from newspapers and the media, the Jews of Northeim had effectively been excluded from the town's social life. And what happened in Northeim, happened all over the rest of Germany, too.^{[115](#)}

Some Jews thought the antisemitic wave would soon pass, rationalized it, or did their best to ignore it. Many, however, were in a state of shock and despair. As widespread as political violence had been before 30

January 1933, the fact that it was now officially sanctioned by the government, and directed so openly against Germany's Jewish population, created a situation that seemed to many to be entirely new. The result was that Jews began to emigrate from Germany, as the Nazis indeed intended. Thirty-seven thousand left in 1933 alone. The Jewish population of Germany fell from 525,000 in January to just under 500,000 by the end of June; and that was merely the fall amongst those who were registered as belonging to the Jewish faith. Many more would follow in subsequent years. But many also decided to stay, particularly if they were elderly.¹¹⁶ For the older generation, finding a job abroad was difficult if not impossible, especially since most countries were still deep in the throes of the Depression. They preferred to take their chance in the country that had always been their home. Others harboured the illusion that things would get better once the Nazi regime had settled down. The youthful energy of the stormtroopers would surely be tamed, the excesses of the National Socialist Revolution soon be over.

One Jewish citizen who did not have any illusions was Victor Klemperer. He was already complaining in his diary about the 'right-wing terror' before the election of 5 March, when it was relatively limited compared to what was to come. He found himself unable to agree with his friends who spoke up for the Nationalists and supported the banning of the Communist Party. Klemperer was depressed at their failure to recognize the 'true distribution of power' in the Hitler cabinet. The pre-election terror, he wrote on 10 March, was nothing but a 'mild prelude'. The violence and propaganda reminded him of the 1918 Revolution, only this time under the sign of the swastika. He was already wondering how long he would be left in his post at the university. A week later he was writing: 'The defeat of 1918 did not depress me as deeply as the present situation. It's really shocking how day after day naked force, violations of legality, the most terrible hypocrisy, a barbaric frame of mind, express themselves as decrees completely without any concealment.' The atmosphere, he noted despairingly on 30 March, two days before the boycott, was

like the run-up to a pogrom in the depths of the Middle Ages or in innermost Tsarist Russia ... We are hostages ... 'We'—the threatened community of Jews. Actually I feel more ashamed than afraid. Ashamed of Germany. I truly have always felt myself to be a German. And I have always imagined that the 20th century and Central Europe are something other than the 14th century and Romania. Wrong!

Like many conservative Jewish Germans, Klemperer, who sympathized with most of what the Nationalists believed in apart from their antisemitism, insisted first and foremost on his German identity. His allegiance was to be severely

tested in the months and years to come.

Germany, wrote Klemperer on 20 March 1933, was not going to be rescued by the Hitler government, which seemed to be driving rapidly towards a catastrophe. 'Apart from that,' he added, 'I believe that it will never be able to wash away the ignominy of having fallen prey to it.' One after another he noted the dismissal of Jewish friends and acquaintances from their jobs. He felt guilty when the law of 7 April allowed him to stay in post because he had fought on the front in 1914-18. The egoism, helplessness and cowardice of people dismayed him, still more the open antisemitism and abusive anti-Jewish placards of the students in his university. His wife was ill and suffering from nerves, he was worried about his heart. What kept him going was the business of buying and preparing a plot at Döltzschen, on the outskirts of Dresden, on which to build a new house for himself and his wife, as well as his academic writing; that, and his unquenchable human sympathy and intellectual curiosity. In June he was already beginning to compile a private dictionary of Nazi terminology. His first recorded entry, on 30 June 1933, was *protective custody*.^{[117](#)}