

## Nazism and the Voices of the Working Class

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If there was a German economic ‘recovery’ in the early 1930s, its centrality to German history has rarely been questioned. However, a thorough understanding of revival lies not solely in statistical analysis, but also in what was said, what people felt, and what actions were taken by German workers between 1933 and 1939. Recovery can be defined best by the perceptions of those involved rather than through mathematics.

Attempts to increase state authority over labour began early. Workers found little room in which to maneuver until the massive rearmament push in 1936 gave way to illicit, yet atomized, wage increases. An examination of primary sources including Socialist reports from within Nazi Germany, post-war testimony and secret police files shows that German workers often responded to the economics of recovery as flexibly as the state would allow. Before 1936, workers coexisted alongside mounting domination through active opposition, passive resistance and compliant acceptance. Between 1936 and the war’s outbreak in 1939, workers in armament industries negotiated with what little bargaining power they had, and often without the consent of the state.

As early as 2 May 1933, the Third Reich’s labour leader, Robert Ley, acknowledged that the National Socialist movement did not yet have the full support of industrial workers.<sup>1</sup> That same day, Ley’s police raided the offices of the Free Trade Union—Germany’s largest labour union—arrested its leaders and assaulted employees.<sup>2</sup> Germany’s unions were dismantled within months, and by the end of 1933 virtually all major opposition groups were broken. As Tim

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Pridham and Jeremy Noakes, “Nazism and the Working Class,” in *Nazism: A Documentary Reader, 1919-1945*, ed. J. Noakes and G. Pridham (Exeter: Exeter University Publications, 1998), 332.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

Mason has said, by the end of 1933, the working people of Germany “did not have a single ally, whether in the political or in the economic arena.”<sup>3</sup>

Although the full range of reactions expressed by Germany’s workers in 1933 is difficult to assemble, the preceding years allow possible insight. As the economic crisis deepened, Nazi labour groups—National Socialist Factory Cell Organizations (NSBO)—grew larger in size. By December 1931 the national NSBO had 39,000 members. May 1932 saw the ‘union’ rise to 106,000, and by January 1933 the NSBO had approximately 294,000 members.<sup>4</sup> Competing against established trade unions with over five million members, the NSBO had little more than six years to swell its ranks.<sup>5</sup> So, do NSBO membership numbers represent a latent tendency of workers to divest freedom to attain of perceived economic and national stability? If not, do they begin to explain the origins of the apathy later expressed by many Germans in 1933?

In an appraisal of the workers in the early 1930s, Francis Carsten cites a Berlin police report that feared metal workers would “fall ‘for the lively propaganda of the National Socialists in the factories’.”<sup>6</sup> Carsten believes the Communist party’s unwillingness to cooperate with other trade unions contributed to NSBO gains. To Carsten, the NSBO was an inchoate “left wing” of the Nazi movement, participating in work stoppages in Mansfeld, Berlin, Hanover and Saxony in 1930.<sup>7</sup> In 1932 the NSBO organized a walkout of over 1,300 Berlin transit workers in an attempt to resist wage cuts.<sup>8</sup>

NSBO popular acclaim before 1933 should not be exaggerated. The 1931 Berlin factory elections saw the Free Trade Union (FTU) attain 81.5 percent of worker support, while the NSBO a mere 0.014 percent.<sup>9</sup> Many NSBO strikes failed, including the 1931 Berlin transit action, and it appears that prior to 1933 the NSBO was rarely equated with genuine support for the working

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy W. Mason, *Social Policy in the Third Reich* (Providence, RI: Berg Publishers, 1993), 72.

<sup>4</sup> F.L. Carsten, *The German Workers and the Nazis* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Mason, *Social Policy*, 65. The figure of 5.8 million, as Mason points out, does not include the one million members of the *Reichsbanner*.

<sup>6</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

classes.<sup>10</sup> These figures, however, were almost entirely reversed in the factory elections of March 1933. Months before the destruction of free unions, the NSBO received wide gains of support: at a Krupp factory in Essen, the Nazi Factory Cell Organization received 26.9 percent of worker support; in the Ruhr mines, 30.9 percent; in an August-Thyssenhütte Factory in Dinslaken, 55 percent; and in Cologne's public transit, a majority of 66 percent.<sup>11</sup> The NSBO's overall membership grew to over 371,000 in March 1933, and by May it stood at 727,000 members.<sup>12</sup>

In the wake of the 1933 elections, violent arrests and mass unemployment coerced many hesitant workers to accept the new Nazi government. The arrest of 10,000 KPD and SPD functionaries was followed by an estimated 20,000 more after opposition parties were outlawed.<sup>13</sup> Surprisingly, reactions were mixed: two men from Augsburg believed workers no longer "[want] to know any more of the old Weimar Republic... [or] to hear the name Social Democracy. They only laugh about it."<sup>14</sup>

SPD files identify strong resentment to both the old government and the new one. One file maintained: "the problem for [workers] today is: what have the old leaders done wrong, not, what is Hitler doing wrong?"<sup>15</sup> A report in Bavaria said that industrial workers did not place "any hope in the SPD."<sup>16</sup> Compounding this resentment was the growing strain on workers to accept Nazi rule. As Ian Kershaw's study of Bavaria notes:

The experience of repression was not confined to witnessing the arrest and hearing of the maltreatment of party activists and functionaries. The threat of instant dismissal and of being ignored in the distribution of Winter Aid and unemployment benefit was a constant sword hanging over the head of any worker who felt tempted to show his disapproval of

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<sup>10</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Ian Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich, Bavaria 1933-1945* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1983), 70-71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

the way things were being run... Industrial workers...were now subjected to continual surveillance, harassment, and intimidation.<sup>17</sup>

Reaction to these pressures varied, from open support to struggle, and from passive resistance to a resigned admission of Nazi authority.

Early attempts by workers to protect leftist groups were often smashed through organized attacks, arrests, insults and threats.<sup>18</sup> Open resistance took form in different capacities wherever possible. At a brewery in Munich, only 72 workers out of 800 appeared at a May 1934 factory assembly, where the speaker was forced to flee amid taunts from those in attendance. The meeting was cancelled and replaced with mandatory “duty roll calls” instead.<sup>19</sup> Similar instances occurred throughout Munich. In 1933 a group of Bremen SPD supporters marched unimpeded by the police to the graves of those killed during 1919 Socialist revolts.<sup>20</sup> The unsteady days of 1933—1934 were marked by irregular repression and attempts at cooperation by authorities.

Acts of passive resistance were rarely politically-minded. One group of workers from Frankfurt held a mock gathering in the woods on May Day 1933.<sup>21</sup> Of the 425 offences the Special Court of Munich received, ranging from refusal to perform the Hitler salute to derisive remarks against the regime, more than half were from individuals without any political affiliation.<sup>22</sup> This is not to say all passive resisters were apolitical; polls of working class districts in August 1934 demonstrated a heavy refusal to acknowledge the regime.<sup>23</sup> In Bremen, negative votes reached 25.2 percent, while other industrial areas showed votes of “No” as high as 29.2 percent.<sup>24</sup>

As violent repression continued, the longevity of Hitler’s government grew clear. Conduits of open dissent such as marches and protest became less

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<sup>17</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 104.

<sup>19</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 77.

<sup>20</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 20.

<sup>21</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’: Reality and Image in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press), 68.

<sup>24</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 28.

visible, and were seen only when they were possible without retribution, such as public ‘works councils’ elections in Weiden, in which Nazi candidates received only 40 percent of the vote.<sup>25</sup> Between 1933 and 1934 Germany endured a lack of “broad opposition” with infrequent and isolated resistance.<sup>26</sup>

To much of the working population, the years following 1933 were marked with growing acquiescence. An SPD man from Offenbach recounted an instance in which he:

Could not recognize [his] town...Swastikas flags...hanging so thick...that it was almost impossible to get through. [Offenbach had been] the main stronghold of the KP and [SDP]... Where on earth had they got all the flags from? Well we knew, of course, there was a lot of despair involved.<sup>27</sup>

Other SPD reports said that many “previously indifferent [workers...had] gone over into the NSBO,”<sup>28</sup> and that “no opposition was noticeable in factories.”<sup>29</sup> One report from southern Bavaria reported that “viewed generally, workers seem to be stuck at present in a condition of uncertainty and waiting.”<sup>30</sup> Many workers simply sought anonymity.

Unemployment and violence produced an overall compliant populace. As repression continued and employment increased, passive resistance and general indifference marked typical reactions of the working classes. Created to assist in dismantling trade unions, the German Labour Front (DAF) increasingly became the focus of worker opinion. It is difficult to establish workers’ attitudes to the DAF precisely, but it is clear that many associated it with widespread corruption.<sup>31</sup> In Augsburg, workers were reported to have said that “the new ‘Bigwigs’ [DAF officials] were far outdoing the old in their exploitation of material advantage.”<sup>32</sup> Kershaw notes many workers criticized the DAF in

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<sup>25</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 76.

<sup>26</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 105.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>29</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 74.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>31</sup> See Kershaw’s “five typical Germans” in *Ibid.*, 96-97.

<sup>32</sup> Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, 101.

moralistic terms: organization head Robert Ley's rampant drinking was the subject of common gossip;<sup>33</sup> and the Nuremberg party rallies were well known for their rumoured "nocturnal debaucheries."<sup>34</sup>

The DAF's attempt to reform work places through the "Beauty of Labour" (*Schönheit der Arbeit*) campaign often had little effect. The organ of examination—the Factory and Mine Inspectorate—existed before the Nazi assumption of power, and in many instances still acted independently.<sup>35</sup> The Inspectorate's reports document a cement factory in Prussia where the "roof threatened to fall in,"<sup>36</sup> a button factory in Prussia in which workers were exposed to "hot dry air [surrounding] the steam heated press,"<sup>37</sup> and a uniform facility in Mecklenburg so congested it was "obviously unsuitable for the accommodation of the 145 persons of the working staff."<sup>38</sup>

Despite spending RM 200 million on inspecting and implementing changes in over 38,000 businesses—approximately half of which acted upon DAF recommendations<sup>39</sup>—most workers either did not appreciate the alterations or were not affected by them. One SPD report from central Germany stated that "Beauty of Labour makes no impression whatsoever – the splendours are normally built near the entrance to the plant so that visitors can see them."<sup>40</sup> Another report from Berlin in February 1938 affirmed that "Beauty of Labour [has created] ...great indignation...and many are of the opinion: 'it is simply intended to look good.'"<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, some did not accept the Beauty of Labour campaign as adequate recompense for the removal of previous labour rights.<sup>42</sup>

Workers participating in the Labour Front recreational program "Strength through Joy" (*Kraft durch Freude*, KdF) enjoyed films, concerts and

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<sup>33</sup> Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, 101.

<sup>34</sup> Mason, *Social Policy*, 160. See note 20.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>36</sup> Jurgen Kuczynski, *Germany: Economic and Labour Conditions under Facism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 146.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>39</sup> Mason, *Social Policy*, 163.

<sup>40</sup> Noakes and Pridham, "Nazism and the Working Class," 352.

<sup>41</sup> Noakes and Pridham, "Nazism and the Working Class," 352.

<sup>42</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 95.

vacations at subsidized prices and in large numbers. Implored to view employment as the “highest duty in life,” members were persuaded to disregard wage increases.<sup>43</sup> The spying and political messages injected into KdF events were frequently received poorly by participants: in 1936 a number of workers noted “the presence of strangers (on vacations) prevented them from talking freely.”<sup>44</sup> SPD reports portray workers as “generally unimpressed with the Nazi community propaganda associated with [KdF] and yet quite happy to take advantage of the benefits on offer and prepared to give the regime some credit for them.”<sup>45</sup> On 19 July 1934, a KdF representative in Lauf told 400 workers to participate in a march before a group screening of a film about a Nazi official. Only four workers attended and the movie was promptly cancelled.<sup>46</sup> Thousands of Krupp workers in Magdeburg drafted for a KdF-organized May Day parade in 1935 left amidst celebrations because they “disliked being marshaled about and having to listen to boring speeches.”<sup>47</sup>

One SPD report notes a 1936 KdF swim meet in Saxony in which “over fifty [women] took part, and...there was very little [Nazi] Party atmosphere. The participants were all ordinary people. There were scarcely any ‘Heil Hitlers’.”<sup>48</sup> Women in the Ruhr reportedly did not appreciate that their free time was organized by the DAF for Nazi purposes.<sup>49</sup> Their opinions of the DAF reflect those of one worker in Bavaria who saw the KdF *Volkswagen* as a “lump of meat thrown to the workers so that they would not see what happened to the millions collected by the [Nazi Labour Front].”<sup>50</sup>

Tim Mason has argued that the KdF’s recreational side was undone by relentless DAF propaganda. Many workers, he says, saw vacations, cruises and films as rare few chances to escape the strain of politics and economy. Robert Ley himself made comments to vacationers that “regarding KdF as simply an

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<sup>43</sup> Noakes and Pridham, “Nazism and the Working Class,” 347.

<sup>44</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> Noakes and Pridham, “Nazism and the Working Class,” 351.

<sup>46</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 77.

<sup>47</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 195

<sup>49</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 83.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

institution for having fun” was wrong: “letting oneself go...had little to do with real joy.”<sup>51</sup>

Millions of workers did indeed engage happily in KdF events. A 1936 SPD report read: “KdF events have become very popular. Even ordinary workers can afford [the] walking trips...almost all national comrades rate KdF as one of National Socialism’s really creditable achievements.”<sup>52</sup> Although created to help blur the distinction between economic classes, KdF retained elements of social hierarchy as large KdF functions such as cruises and foreign vacations were inaccessible to much of the working population. In Zweisel, Bavaria, some workers perceived trips abroad as primarily beneficial to the well-to-do.<sup>53</sup> Workers could afford only less exotic and overcrowded trips, while businessmen used the more expensive voyages to mingle with potential clients.<sup>54</sup> Many Germans grew to identify large crowds with less expensive excursions. SPD reports of April 1939 from Central Germany and Bavaria reported irritation from crowds on a worker’s second trip abroad, and stated that “people look for places where there are no KdF visitors.”<sup>55</sup> In 1934 alone, over two million trips were organized, and by 1938 the figure grew to almost seven million.<sup>56</sup> It appears the majority of these participants enjoyed KdF functions as non-political and recreational activities, quite apart from what authorities intended them to be.

While Strength through Joy’s mitigation of DAF-directed resentment was marginal, some Germans expressed ambiguous or even negative accounts of economic ‘progress’. Detlev Peukert demonstrates that many post-war accounts of 1933 to 1939 note a prosperous *direction* of economic progress instead of a content *reality*.<sup>57</sup> Those employed in non-rearmament sectors worked difficult jobs for little pay. As the Factory and Mine Inspectorate archives indicate, worksites were frequently uncomfortable, and wages continued to stay low after 1933. In January 1934, the town of Marktredwitz, Franconia, reported higher unemployment *after* the Nazis came to power than before. There, the prospects

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<sup>51</sup> Mason, *Social Policy*, 160.

<sup>52</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 195.

<sup>53</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 80-81.

<sup>54</sup> Noakes and Pridham, “Nazism and the Working Class,” 353.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>57</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 56.



of porcelain and textile consumer factories were reported as “hopeless,” and worker opinion was phrased as “apathetic [and] ignored.”<sup>58</sup>

As wages became stagnant, food prices rose. Bavaria saw increases in food costs as high as 33 percent for meat and 25 percent for bread.<sup>59</sup> The material hardship of the early 1930s is captured in a Westphalian song: “We’ve got a leader now, they say / Bread’s gone up, but not your pay / Soon the lot’ll blow sky-high / Then once more we’ll say ‘Heil Hitler.’” In Dortmund, the *Gestapo* reported that scant food was becoming “simply catastrophic for morale.”<sup>60</sup> In May 1935 the Munich police wrote:

Forced] work-places are...hot-beds of communism... For the most part workers complain about insufficient wages. They do not satisfy the needs of food, clothing, and accommodation... The people also complain about poor treatment. No consideration is shown for their needs and there is no place where complaints or grievances can be aired.<sup>61</sup>

Grievances were not always so silent. Workers in the Ruhr, for instance, marched to the local DAF office to request refund of their member dues because they “had not joined to be shat upon.”<sup>62</sup> Unemployed workers often viewed compulsory Labour Service with derision. One *Autbahn* worker is described as saying:

We work outdoors in all kinds of weather, shoveling dirt for 51 pfennigs an hour. Then there are the deductions, and the voluntary contributions they take out automatically, and 15 pfennigs a day for a straw mattress in a drafty wooden barracks, and 35 pfennigs for what they ladle out of a cauldron and call dinner... Six months ago we were still getting 66 pfennigs an hour, and now they’re pushing us harder and harder.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 78.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>60</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 83.

<sup>62</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 55.

<sup>63</sup> Bernt Engelmann, *In Hitler’s Germany: Daily Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 107.

Some towns withheld welfare benefits to those unemployed who would not join the Labour Service.<sup>64</sup> During a 1934 work-finishing celebration in Hanover, one worker sang, “we are the working men, the proletariat,” to which many other conscripted workers joined in shortly before being arrested.<sup>65</sup>

In Duisburg, compulsory labourers appealed to the local municipality to raise their wages to par with industrial workers. In protest, the labourers distributed a brochure entitled “Down with Punitive Labour,” and asserted the Duisburg welfare office was led by a “social fascist.”<sup>66</sup> Municipal and city DAF headquarters were responsible for wages and conditions on work sites. Workers were clearly aware where protests were to be levied, as situations in the Ruhr and Duisburg illustrate.

Compulsory labour was highly unpopular. SPD contacts reported that upon discharge from the Labour Service, “the majority of [workers] had not become conscious anti-fascists, [but] they had at least become embittered and rebellious non-Nazis.”<sup>67</sup> The Gestapo reported government-directed hostility at its highest among *Autobahn* workers. The “Heil Hitler” was a rarity on highway construction sites, and trucks were frequently painted with anti-Nazi sayings.<sup>68</sup> In Upper Franconia a work party of approximately thirty “downed [their] tools on a pay day...as a protest at not being given the extra mark”<sup>69</sup> required to travel to the work site everyday.

Richard Overy and Daniel Silverman tend to emphasize the insignificant relation of work-creation projects and fiscal recovery. In the 1930s those Germans who were not forced into Labour Service projects viewed them as positive attributes of a benevolent and proactive Nazi state helping to end unemployment. Tim Mason put it well when he said that the “successes of employment creation projects were more apparent than real.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Dan P. Silverman, *Hitler's Economy: Nazi Work Creation Projects, 1933-1936* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 127-128.

<sup>65</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 55.

<sup>66</sup> Silverman, *Hitler's Economy*, 129.

<sup>67</sup> Noakes and Pridham, “Nazism and the Working Class,” 355.

<sup>68</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 82.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Mason, *Social Policy*, 160-161.

The appearance of recovery is a powerful belief that dominates the post-war testimony of many Germans who were not forced to work. Ursula Kretzchmar, who came from a poor family in Umstäden, said after the war that “through the construction [of the *Autobahn*, the Nazis] got rid of unemployment all at once!”<sup>71</sup> This point is reiterated by Anna Rigl, the daughter of a bricklayer, who believes “when Hitler came [the unemployed] built the *Autobahn* [and] got paid 50 cents an hour... People were happy they earned a little something.”<sup>72</sup>

Optimistic sentiment was widespread during the recovery. Two Labour Service men on a train to Berlin in 1936 were told by a woman active in the National Socialist Women’s League that “[the men] should be grateful that [they] have work and [should] thank the Führer for getting rid of unemployment!”<sup>73</sup> Those men fortunate to have found work in factories, however, increasingly found life during ‘recovery’ unnecessarily intolerable. Worker sentiment increasingly found articulation in strike actions. By 1936, labour shortages improved the selective bargaining position of skilled labourers, and the desire to switch to higher paying jobs became stronger. SPD files from the time report employees in southern Bavaria who struggled to change employment after resistance from the government and management.<sup>74</sup> As shortages occurred, workers who were able to fill vacancies could superimpose a degree of pressure over the wishes of the state *without* the presence of trade unions, through an increase of worker solidarity and belligerence.<sup>75</sup>

Before 1936, industrial action focused on preventing wage *reductions*; after 1936 workers struck or threatened to strike to affect wage *increases*.<sup>76</sup> In Augsburg November 1937, payday erupted in workers’ protest and riot at the receipt of a low weekly wage.<sup>77</sup> Time regulations were resisted by 130 workers stopping production in 1937,<sup>78</sup> while brick makers reportedly gave notice in such

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<sup>71</sup> Alison Owings, *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 187.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 284.

<sup>73</sup> Engelmann, *In Hitler’s Germany*, 107.

<sup>74</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 81.

<sup>75</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 98.

<sup>76</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 98.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>78</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 88.

large numbers that arrest would have meant virtually no production.<sup>79</sup> Workers could reduce productivity when unhappy, such as the three-hour work stoppage by Bavarian glass makers to resist piece-rates, who afterwards felt a “moral victory which [gave] them again the feeling of their own strength.”<sup>80</sup> A Bavarian SPD report from 1938 said that “slackness and criticism [were] increasingly evident”<sup>81</sup> in the workplace. Nazi works councils describe numerous refusals to work more than 48 hours per week.<sup>82</sup> Some workers even feigned illness to convey displeasure, while some sites reported weekend absenteeism. Time away from work was clearly enjoyed; in a Thuringian mine, attendance plunged after Christmas 1938.<sup>83</sup>

These power struggles are illustrative of specific changes brought about by bottleneck shortages in the armaments labour market. 50,000 more metal workers were needed in the aviation industry to meet Four Year Plan targets. Skilled labourers lured to the industry often saw wages of up to *three times* higher than the tariff minimum.<sup>84</sup> A ‘wage-contest’ erupted in Nuremberg between M.A.N. Industries and Siemens-Schuchert, following massive resignations at a Zündapp-Werke factory after wage cuts.<sup>85</sup>

In efforts to retain control, the Nazi Labour Ministry instituted individual rates of pay, forcing each worker to independently lobby for a raise or to resist a wage cut. An SPD report from Saxony in May 1936 noted this system “atomized [workers and destroyed] class solidarity... Each man [became] the enemy of the other and [envied] him.”<sup>86</sup> A 1935 SPD file stated that the individual worker “often goes to the boss on his own to try to avert a deterioration in wages...and gets a concession out of the boss on the condition that he tells his workmates nothing about it.”<sup>87</sup> Sometimes the actions of an individual were manipulated to attain a type of collective achievement, such as in the Henschel aviation works in Berlin, where one worker followed another to

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<sup>79</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 88.

<sup>80</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 100.

<sup>81</sup> Noakes and Pridham, “Nazism and the Working Class,” 372.

<sup>82</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 86.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 87.

<sup>85</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 100. Also see Carsten, *The German Workers*, 87.

<sup>86</sup> Noakes & Pridham, “Nazism and the Working Class,” 373.

<sup>87</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 114.

fight with management for better wages.<sup>88</sup> Sometimes the most effective way a worker could guarantee a hearing for wage changes was to give notice.<sup>89</sup>

Wages certainly did increase. The Defence Industry Inspectorate report from December 1936 notes:

Many firms...have voluntarily raised the wages of skilled workers. Wage increases in firms supplying the army are particularly noticeable... Export industries in particular cannot keep pace with these wage trends, which lead to migrations by skilled workers into armaments firms... [These migrations] create ill-feeling among workers in firms whose commercial position does not allow...wage increases.<sup>90</sup>

There was a greater level of maneuverability than previously available for workers in the rearmament industry after 1936. In consumer industries, however, the majority of workers laboured relentlessly for small, static wages.

The acts of resistance taken by those in arms industries were isolated and sporadic; collective action was contained from factory to factory and industry to industry. Although opposition was, compared to 1933—1934, relatively frequent, it represented no concerted effort to overcome the system of repression—only its demands. One man in 1939 relayed his brother's situation, employed at a metal works in Wittenau creating airplane parts:

[Aviation employees work] up to twelve hours a day now, and they're constantly being forced to increase their output – all for 35 marks a week. And half of that gets deducted for dues, food, and contributions. [He makes] 24 marks a week, but [takes] home only 15. [One] can't live on that.<sup>91</sup>

A 1938 central German SPD report stated many workers “often complain about the fact they earn much less than in...1929 [and] the further one goes

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<sup>88</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 87.

<sup>89</sup> Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 100.

<sup>90</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 111.

<sup>91</sup> Engelmann, *In Hitler's Germany*, 157.

down into the poorer sections the more opposition there is.”<sup>92</sup> Still, this opposition came to no great action on the part of the worker. Forced labour continued well into 1939, with one estimate of almost 1,300,000 workers sent away from their homes. Men obliged to leave the Lower Rhine to Württemberg were unable to send assistance to their families.<sup>93</sup> SPD reports imply a resignation on the part of workers who appreciated employment and harboured no desires to cause regime change.<sup>94</sup> A 1937 Saxony report aptly said “the present attitude of the German worker must be seen as similar to the way the soldier installed himself comfortably in the trenches so as to make that life if possible tolerable [sic].”<sup>95</sup>

As workers entered the spring of 1933, they suddenly found themselves without collective negotiation legal advocates. Through resistance, passive opposition and quiet acceptance, workers lived alongside restrictive control. As rearmament began to affect those employed in munitions industries, a small percentage of workers found themselves in high demand, and willing to use this pressure to generate better conditions. Their requests stopped well short of establishment overthrow. Repressed by police without formal standing, these workers found irregular successes beside utter defeat. Before the outbreak of war in 1939, many saw economic recovery as a ‘miracle’, brought about through Hitlerian genius and some notion of German efficiency. For those affected, the forced labour and wage restrictions of “recovery” often created arduous and demanding hardship.

In the end, National Socialist ‘recovery’ was a complex series of interactions between worker and state, in which the government “oscillated between concession and terror,” and the workers alternated between collective and individual strategy and reconciled tolerance.<sup>96</sup> These dynamics created an

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<sup>92</sup> Noakes and Pridham, “Nazism and the Working Class,” 373.

<sup>93</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 94.

<sup>94</sup> See: Kershaw, *Popular Opinion*, 107-110; Noakes & Pridham, 370-374; and Carsten, 93-95.

<sup>95</sup> Carsten, *The German Workers*, 92.

<sup>96</sup> Gerald D. Feldman, “Review of Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich: Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft, by Tim Mason,” in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 50, No. 3. (Sep., 1978), 553

illusory set of realities, in which recovery and prosperity became manufactured products for consumption.