

## Web 5.5

### Case Study 5.4: An example of a complete set of posts (Group 2)

#### Esher 2 proposal

Esher Group 2 – Wednesday, 11 May 2005, 03:58 PM

In answering this question it is important to evaluate the concept of 'basic consent'. It appears from source 2 that Peukert's interpretation of consent is 'passive participation', on these grounds consent does not mean that the third Reich had popular support, but people generally went along with the Nazi regime as it fulfilled the basic needs of 'work and bread' which before Hitler came to power were not available.

An examination of the plebiscites taken during Hitler's reign suggests that the population supported the policies of the Nazi regime. For example following Hitler's assumption of head of state after Hindenburg's death, People were asked if they approved of the merger of the offices of chancellor and president 90% approved. However, it was Hitler's foreign policies that attracted the largest amount of support from the general population. Historian Detlev Peukert claims that Hitler's foreign policy 'won considerable support even amongst members of the erstwhile labour movement'. It is important to realise that before Hitler came to power Germany was in the middle of an economic crisis and had been humiliated by the war guilt clause and reparation payment imposed upon it by the treaty of Versailles. It is because of this that the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the Anschluss of Austria and Germany's withdrawal of the league of nations received over 90% support from the general population in the plebiscite that followed each event.

It is also important to examine what groups in society supported the Nazi party. They were popular amongst workers as they demanded a transformation from the profit motivated economy to one that would benefit all German workers. An example of this popularity can be seen in the picture of workers in the Hamburg shipyard giving the Nazi salute. Small producers and traders also supported the Nazis since the Nazis blamed big businesses and Marxism for these people's misfortunes and claim they would get rid of them.

Historian Detlev Peukert identifies national socialist domestic policy as a key instrument for the Nazi support due to its "promise to create order". The Gestapo was essentially a reactive institution dependent on the willing cooperation of the Germans. The flood of denunciations contributed to a radicalisation of the Gestapo's actions. Even active terror was awarded positive verdicts, on the grounds that they showed that order would be reinforced with a firm hand. Only 15% of Gestapo convictions were made by the Gestapo's own staff. Most were due to the participation of the German public.

The Fuhrer myth, created by an excellent propaganda run by Goebbels, further increased the popularity of the Nazi regime to such an extent that

members of the German public claimed "The Fuhrer appears in my dreams" (Source 5 letters to the German public).

When assessing the Nazi state it may be considered a terroristic government in which laws were forced upon the people with nasty repercussions if not followed in the form of the concentration camps. In source 6 it is clear that the people of Wurttemberg felt they were living under a controlled environment in which 'one cannot say what one thinks in public'. In responding to the argument that the plebiscites demonstrate consent, one must evaluate the time at which the plebiscites took place. It is clear that the opinion polls were taken at times when the Nazis were confident that they would be positive for example the 1936 plebiscite soon after the reoccupation of the Rhineland 99.9% voted for the Nazis, however, there are no figures to confirm the turnout to this vote. The concentration camps were used as a form of terror and forced the population to conform to the ideologies of the Nazi party whether they agreed or not for fear of death; this obviously shows that consent was forced. Propaganda was used extensively and the Nazi party would be aware of anyone not voting for them by the Swastika badge on the arm and on the day of the vote 1933 uniformed SA guards were used for intimidation and created an atmosphere of terror in the polling halls. Therefore demonstrates that terror was used to force a Nazi government into power and people were intimidated into consenting to the Nazi government. Even if people voted against the Nazi party it was clear that there was a possibility of being put in a concentration camp, and furthermore the results of the vote were corrupt from the start. From source 6 a SOPADE report there is a clear example of terror in which people felt 'one cannot say what one thinks in public it is better to stay within one's own four walls' and so people were fearful of voicing an opinion in public. In source one it shows a strong racial policy shown by the boycott of the Jewish shops April 1933. The Reichstag fire was used as an excuse to destroy opposition parties especially the communists and other individual critics of the NSDAP.

It makes perfect sense that the German population rallied behind the Nazi regime. The previous Weimar government had put the country into a deep hole of discontent and mass unemployment had caused the people of Germany to look for an alternative form of government. The Nazis had successfully eliminated all other threats in the race for power, this was not done using a the basic consent of the people, Nazi propaganda and ideology served to label Marxism as an evil Jewish attempt to control Europe and though many people supported the Communists most left wing politicians and party members were eliminated and after the Reichstag fire the threat had vanished. However, once the Nazis had gained control of the state, consent for the regime dramatically increased. This was a result of the false image the Nazis portrayed throughout their rule, Preparing for War, the Autobahn and the extermination of Jews from the workforce all contributed to the reduction in unemployment, which in essence won Hitler the support of the hungry masses.

## **Re: Esher2 proposal**

Truro Group 2 – Wednesday, 18 May 2005, 10:25 AM

The naturally oppressive aspects of Nazism allowed degrees of control over most of the German population. However, although highly effective, this control was neither omnipresent nor omniscient. Much of the success generated by both Nazi terror and revival was due to an inherent and mass conformity by the population as a whole. Those who did not support Nazism appeased themselves to the ideal due to fear or frustration.

The rapid consolidation of Nazi government between 1933 and 1935 allowed them to not only gain a permanent legality to their dictatorial reign but also enabled them to annihilate political and ideological opposition. The main tool used in gaining legality was the Enabling Act of 1933. Hitler used this relic of Weimar government to manipulate both the courts and country to grant himself dictatorial powers after the Reichstag Fire as outlined in source one. This somewhat coincidental accident gave Hitler both reason and opportunity to instigate a purge of political competitors and potential subversive elements almost immediately after his gain of power. Using the NSDAP's already set up bodies of control (SA and SS), as well as rapidly Nazifying the police force to round up political usurpers and send to Dachau (set up summer of 1933) as well as beginning anti-Semitic pogroms against the Jewish population. This somewhat in-humane act was justified by leading Nazis as cleansing a weak bourgeois state from its enemies and was legally justified by not only the German constitution but also the electorate itself. This would have added another level of restraint on those who would have been outraged immediately by this instigation of overtly martial law. Therefore, the speed with which Hitler and the Nazis gained hold of Germany was so pre-eminent proper resistance had no time to manifest itself, as well as the probable mass view that the Nazis were finally ridding Germany of its long-held weak elements of society.

Source two adopts another important approach that outlines another important factor supportive of Detlev Peukert's judgment. It is suggested that a level of conformity to the Nazi regime was reliant upon the overall domestic and foreign successes of the Party throughout the country. The early foreign successes not only helped to legitimise but also created overall approval from Germany's "erstwhile" working masses whereas the social and more importantly economic policies helped to appease the majority of the disgruntled population already present from the failures of Weimar policies. This new revitalised Germany would have helped bring about the indisposed masses to Nazi leadership through the economic miracle and desecration of Versailles. However, this seemingly sensational turn-around in Germany's political climate was perplexed by the economic down-turn of 1937 in the guns and butter crisis. Nevertheless, Nazi leadership was too well established to be seriously affected by the crisis. Such devices as the Fuhrer myth, the SS and their subsequent established tough policies on security and social holds was enough to continue the disillusionment that already had a grasp over the masses. Therein, although the government was not affected by

this recession it is evidence that people were willing to tolerate a bad economy in conjunction with a secure and eventually prosperous Germany, or so they were told. Source three supports this premise, with the majority conforming with Nazism, while just a very small minority were still at ideological odds or could not bring themselves to support Hitler and the regime.

On the other hand, this minority may not have been as small as first thought. Source four highlights the anti-Semitic activities of the Nazis as well as alluding to the anti-Socialist and anti-Nationalist reformations within the regime. These groups were quickly targeted and rapidly suppressed for the enhancement of Germany. This also meant that no coherent opposition could be organised or put into action against the Nazi machine. And yet, this brutal attack on libertarian values was welcomed by the consensus. This is supported by source 7, the account given by this indoctrinated German shows that a majority saw the concentration camps as not only a necessity but a good thing. It was seen as annihilating the subversive elements that had plagued Germany throughout the Weimar Republic.

A key area to the afore point is the crucial role of Hitler himself. Goebbels' brilliance in the creation of the Fuhrer myth not only ensured party conformity but also mass conformity to such an extent that even in the collapse of the Third Reich at the end of World War Two much of the population was still at odds in the belief that their misfortunes were a sole consequence of Hitler's actions. "He who serves the Fuhrer serves Germany and he who serves Germany serves God".

One of the main successes of Nazism was the re-instigation of traditional values and lifestyle. No more prominent than the re-vitalisation of small town community festivals amalgamating Nazi strength with Germanic traditions. This was key for two reasons, the first being that they gained mass party support by bringing back traditional values after the disaster of Weimar as well as bringing people into the party line by Nazifying back-water towns e.g. "from the grass roots up".

In conclusion although the harsh terror of the Nazi regime was needed to keep an extremist regime in place but due to the incoherent nature of Nazi bureaus, no such totalitarianism could have been enforced effectively. In fact much of the Gestapo's time was taken up with minor political tasks, or outrageously over the top assignments. Using this force as well as a Neolithic police force to control the population some large amount of coherent consent must have been present from the masses. It is not possible to maintain power of a country where the population dislikes your leadership to a great extent. Devices that would have helped this consent would have been the speed of the regime to split opposition, so that no strong platform could be initiated within Germany pre-consolidation. As well as the terror imposed by the Gestapo which was however ineffective in reality, was present enough to seem all seeing and knowing, in many cases fear of something is more powerful than it actually happening. Hitler may have enslaved the masses but not only did Germany allow it to happen, they consented to it if not consciously then by conformity.

## **Reply to Esher group 2**

Truro Group 2 – Tuesday, 24 May 2005, 11:35 AM

In general, we agree with your answer. However, some of your arguments could have been developed more and we feel some points have been missed. For example, no reference is made to the depression as a whole; other countries were in crisis, like Germany, and so this is not the only argument for Hitler coming to power. Similarly, there is no reference to the Nazification of the workers' front which greatly impinged on the idealistic liberal platforms of the workers. Although we agree with your view of the Gestapo's ineffective nature and the reliance on public denunciations, there is little shown on the harsher aspects of terror although a percentage would have seen this as a good idea, those in a target group or in close relation to one of these target groups e.g. The Nuremberg laws on marriage those who would have built a home and life with a Jewish partner would have had their homes shattered, as well as ideologically opposed members of the community like priests or clergy. Many of these people would have resisted, a point you did not address much. You have addressed well the idea of differing levels of support, from those who worshipped Hitler to many who simply consented, but perhaps a little more could have been said about resistance.

However, you have not even come close to showing the strength of the Fuhrer Myth. The power created by Goebbels' myth insured that Hitler was not only in high regard at good times, (e.g., Anschluss), but also in times of turmoil, (e.g. 1944).

On the whole, we found your essay was a well-written, articulate piece but that many of your arguments could have been developed. In addition, did you use all the sources... ??? In general though, well done!

## **Esher 2 conclusion**

Esher Group 2 – Wednesday, 25 May 2005, 11:57 AM

In conclusion to your arguments regarding consent in the Nazi State, we would have to say that it seems we have reached an agreement concerning the age old ubiquitous question of terror vs. consent. However, there are certain points that we feel require clarification, not least your conclusion which states the speed of the regime in its consolidation was a factor that can be attributed to the consent side of the wrangle. Surely the regimes speed in its annihilation of opposition should be mentioned in the case for the terror side of the debate and not (as you have tried to argue) the consent side.

You mentioned in your argument that conformity to the Nazi regime was based upon "The overall domestic and foreign successes of the party." This statement we largely agree with however we feel that your examination of the various policies implemented by the Nazi regime was not wholly complete. It is true that the plebiscites conducted after each major foreign policy decision showed a large amount of support for the party's actions but it is necessary to take the domestic policies into account and how they contributed to the consolidation of Nazi power. The setting up of the Hitler youth (not mentioned in your argument) was perhaps the crucial Nazi

domestic policy as it moulded the youth (the future of Germany) into an army that was proud to fight for the existence of National Socialism.

It is strange that you have argued the same side of the debate as us but yet have left out opposition groups (although you do mention them briefly in your terror debate). It is important when arguing for the consent side of the debate that you acknowledge the various *widerstand*, opposition and *resistenz* groups that all resented Nazi policies. These groups included SPD, KPD and high-ranking officers (*widerstand*). Jehovah's witnesses and the Catholic Church (opposition) and industrial workers and trade unions (*resistenz*). The important thing to realize is that in spite of these groups spreading anti-Nazi propaganda, holding anti-Nazi speeches in the case of the Catholic Church and even planning an assassination of Hitler, the population still widely consented to Nazi rule. Showing that perhaps this consent was more deep rooted than you may previously have realized.

## Judgement Debate 2

Gareth Pritchard – Wednesday, 1 June 2005, 10:26 AM

Both sides in the second debate present very similar cases. Both groups, whilst acknowledging the important role of terror in maintaining Nazi rule, stress the degree to which the Nazis enjoyed genuine popularity. Though both groups make a number of good points, there are also certain weaknesses in the cases that they present.

The Esher group, for example, does not always exercise due caution in its use of evidence. Esher 2 places quite a lot of weight on the results of Hitler's various plebiscites, but, given the political circumstances in Germany in the 1930s, I think it is rather dangerous simply to assume that the results of the plebiscites give an accurate reflection of public opinion. Similarly, the Esher group uses the photo of the Hamburg shipyard workers as evidence of working-class enthusiasm for the Nazis. Again, this is rather a dangerous assumption to make, given the great pressure that was placed on individuals to conform. It is possible that these shipyard workers were indeed supporters of the regime. But it is equally possible that many of the workers in the photograph are giving the Nazi salute for fear of the consequences of *not* giving the salute. What the photograph tells us is not necessarily that workers supported the Nazis, but that workers who publicly demonstrated their opposition to the Nazis were few and far between.

The Truro group, though presenting a similar case, makes more of an effort to engage with the sources provided by the lecturers. However, Truro's case is also, in places, rather difficult to follow. Key points are not made with sufficient clarity, in part because of the overly elaborate (and not always accurate) prose. Some of the points made by Truro, for example that the Nazis revived 'traditional values and lifestyle', are very debatable.

On the whole, this was an interesting debate in which both teams arrived at sensible and plausible conclusions. I found the case developed by Esher to be more convincing, largely because it is more coherent than that of Truro. Esher 2 is thus the winner of the second debate.

GP