

Opposition in Nazi Germany

- Church
- Youth Groups

You should assess the following slides and decide how serious a threat to the Nazi ideology these groups were. Remember to justify your thoughts.

Remember:

Conformity – Going along with something
Resistance – Going against something
Opposition – Trying to destroy something





Church Opposition:

Protestant Opposition:

Niemoller's PEL opposed:

- The joining of regional churches into one national German Christian Church
- Nazi attempts to stop Jews becoming Christians and banning the Jewish teachings from the Old Testament
- 6000 Protestants joined Niemoller's Confessional Church, 2000 remained in Hitler's Reich Church
- 800 Pastors were arrested and sent to camps, including Niemoller

Catholic Opposition:



Some Catholic priests spoke out against the Nazi ideas

- 400 were sent to the 'Priest's Block' at Dachau Concentration Camp
- There were big attendances at Catholic services, but this was a muted opposition as not many were brave enough to publicly oppose the Nazi regime
- The Pope's 'Burning Anxiety' letter was read out in Catholic churches, this just angered Hitler more leading to more aggressive policies eg: removing crucifix from schools

Interpretation 1

From *The Nazi Dictatorship*, by Ian Kershaw published in 1985.

The Churches offered less than fundamental resistance to Nazism. Their energies were used in opposing Nazi interference with their traditional practices. This was not matched by equally vigorous denunciation of Nazi inhumanity and barbarism.

What is the view of this interpretation and do you agree?

Youth Opposition:

Conformity – Going along with something
Resistance – Going against something
Opposition – Trying to destroy something

As we've seen, most young people conformed, however a lot didn't...

Source C

A young man describing the activities and atmosphere at a Hitler Youth camp in 1938.

We hardly had any free time. Everything was done in a military way, from reveille (early morning bugle call), first parade, raising the flag, morning sport and ablutions, through breakfast to the 'scouting games', lunch and so on into the evening. Several participants left the camp because the whole slog was too stupid for them... Comradeship was very poor, and everything was done for command and obedience.

What are the grievances this young man is discussing

Other youngsters objected to:

- Everything being for the benefit of the state
- No freedom of choice
- Industry, education and agriculture all being Nazi ideology

Youth opposition groups:

Edelweiss Pirates 1938 onwards

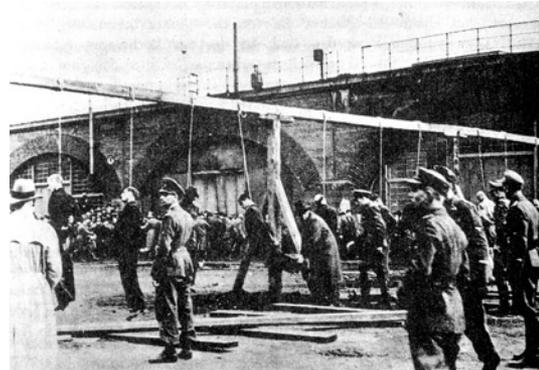
The Swing Youth



Youth Opposition: Edelweiss Pirates 1938 onwards



- A group of teenagers, boys and girls, but mainly boys
- Resented military discipline of the Nazi youth groups
- Longer hair and American style fashion (white checked shirts and white socks)
- Hung around on street corners
- Sometimes attacked Hitler Youth members travelling to or from their meeting
- Went on long hikes in the countryside, singing anti Nazi songs and telling jokes



The Edelweiss Pirates

Not all young people accepted Nazi attempts to convert them to their ideas through education and youth movements. By the end of the 1930's a number of gangs emerged who opposed Nazi attempts to control all aspects of their lives.

These included the *Travelling Dudes* from Essen and the *Navajos* from Cologne.

As the war developed the gangs began to organise opposition to the war itself.

Many of these gangs became part of the national resistance group called the *Edelweiss Pirates* - (named after the edelweiss flower which they used as an emblem. At weekends they would go on hikes, meet other groups and hope to beat up a Hitler Youth patrol

"Every child knows who the Pirates are. They are everywhere. And they know each other, they beat up the Hitler Youth patrols. The don't agree with anything. They don't go to work either. "
A report by a mining instructor in 1941

Edelweiss Pirate song
We march by banks of Ruhr
and Rhine
And smash the Hitler Youth
in twain
Our song is freedom, love
and life
We're the Pirates of the
Edelweiss



The edelweiss flowers was a symbol of opposition by many groups of working class youths. They included girls and boys.

Some of the Edelweiss Pirates got involved in direct opposition to the Nazis. In Cologne the Navajos sheltered army deserters and concentration camp escapees and attacked military targets and Nazi officials.

Before the war the Edelweiss Pirates were seen as an irritant by the Nazis, but when war broke out they were accused of collecting British anti-Nazi propaganda leaflets dropped by Bomber Command and posting them through people's letterboxes.

In July 1943 party leaders in Dusseldorf said they believed the Edelweiss Pirates were responsible for anti-Nazi graffiti. A group of young people between 12-17 were rounded up and their punishment was to have their heads shaved. This changed their appearance to a more military-looking one.

The Pirates came to the attention of Himmler who decided they should be dealt with severely and sent to concentration camps for 2-3 years.



The public execution of a group of *Edelweisspiraten* in Cologne, 1944.

A group of Pirates killed the head of the Cologne Gestapo and 13 of them were executed in November 1944

The Swing Youth

Middle class youths who wanted to dance and listen to swing music which was a blend of black jazz (banned under Hitler) and white dance-band music. During the war "swing clubs" sprang up in most German cities where members met in cafes and night-clubs.

They wore English-style clothes, especially sports jackets and girls wore make-up (rare in the 1940's). Also Jews were accepted into their groups.

The Nazis were furious and tried to stamp out such behaviour. Some young people were harshly punished - such as Hasso Schutzendorff, who in October 1942 was sent to a concentration camp. He had his hair cut off, was thrashed with an iron bar and forced to push barrows full of earth uphill for a fortnight.

A common greeting at these clubs was "Heil Benny", after the band leader Benny Goodman.



One of the "Swing youths" summed up their aim in a letter: "Make sure you're really casual, swinging or whistling English hits all the time, absolutely smashed and always surrounded by really amazing women".

What was "swing"?

A joyful explosion of dance and music that marked the start of the 1940's. But in Germany the repressive fascist government of Hitler kept all new and exciting things like this away from the German people.

The Nazis thought that anything related to black Jazz music was dangerous as its roots were in immoral black "Jungle music" and may lead to indiscriminate sex.

The Nazis said that Swing was invented by Jewish media men in America and was designed to make the German youth revert to its more primitive African-inspired behaviour.

"Swing girls" wore make-up which the Nazis hated. They thought of this as Jewish inspired Hollywood culture and no decent German women would wear lipstick.



A Hitler Youth report from 1940 on a Swing festival: "The dance music was all English and American. Only swing dancing and jitterbugging took place. The dancers made an appalling sight ... Long hair flopping into the face, they dragged themselves round practically on their knees".

Youth Opposition: **The Swing Youth**



- Teenagers from wealthy middle class families
- Admired American culture (clothes, films and music)
- Illegally imported records from America
- Drank alcohol, danced & smoked
- Set up illegal dances attended by 6000 people
- Loved jazz, probably as Himmler said any young people who listened to jazz should be beaten and severely punished.



Opposition or resistance: Read the following points and describe the danger level of these groups

- Both the Pirates and the Swing Youth's actions were limited; they told the odd anti Nazi joke, or anti Nazi graffiti and sometimes attacked Hitler Youth members. It was only after WW2 broke out in 1939 where the Pirates began to physically attack the government.
- The motivation for these groups was mostly cultural, they weren't political in their opposition.
- By 1939, the Pirates had about 2000 members, the Hitler Youth had 8 million

What it does show is a minority of German youth remained unconvinced, that had potential to disrupt the Nazi's plans for the youth of Germany, but they posed no threat to Hitler

Summary

- Most Germans supported Hitler and the Nazis, or at least conformed to Nazi expectations.
- Resistance and opposition were limited because of Nazi propaganda and the Nazi police state, which prevented criticism of the Nazis, and because of Nazi successes in areas such as foreign policy and employment.
- However, there was some resistance and opposition.
- Opposition came from elements amongst political groups, trade unions, the army, the Churches and youth groups.
- Some Church leaders opposed the Nazis, but they were in a minority and were punished.
- Some young people set up alternatives to Nazi youth groups, but, although they defied the Nazis, they never really opposed them before 1939.
- Those who disapproved of the Nazis resisted Nazi expectations and sometimes voiced disapproval, but very few people were brave enough to oppose Hitler and the Nazis openly.

Checkpoint

Strengthen

- S1** Explain what conformity, resistance and opposition are.
- S2** Describe the support and conformity the Nazis enjoyed in the 1930s.
- S3** Describe the opposition to the Nazis amongst political groups, trade unions and the army.
- S4** What opposition was there against the Nazis by Church leaders?
- S5** What opposition was there against the Nazis by German youth groups?

Challenge

- C1** Weigh up the relative amounts of support, conformity, resistance and opposition to Hitler and the Nazis in the 1930s.
- C2** Explain why the amount of resistance and opposition was so limited.