

Candidate 3 evidence

“How widespread was opposition and resistance to Nazism, 1933-1939?”

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Introduction

After World War One, Germany became a democracy for the first time in its history in the shape of the Weimar Republic. However, this period was unsuccessful and short-lived, being replaced in 1933 by the authoritarian Nazi regime. Despite the totalitarian nature of Nazism, there was resistance to it and its policies within Germany. In fact, in the Reichstag election of March 1933 a majority of Germans (56.1%) voted for parties other than the NSDAP¹. Therefore, from the start of the Nazis' rule, there was a large base from which resistance could spring. Some of the sections of society where there was resistance were among women and youth, religious organisations and the military. Particular examples of resistance include the Oster Conspiracy and the consistent refusal to comply from Jehovah's Witnesses - even smoking was defined as an act of resistance, or at least protest, due to Nazi efforts to clamp down on it. Nevertheless, the extent of opposition and resistance that occurred from 1933 to 1939 is the subject of much debate. Kershaw argued there was no substantial resistance to Nazism and that many sections of society were actively opposed to resistance:

Resistance and opposition to Hitler acted without the active mass support of the population. Large proportions of the population did not even passively support the

¹Evans, D. and Jenkins, J. (1999) *Years of the Weimar republic and the Third Reich*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.p107.

*resistance but rather, widely condemned it. Resistance was fragmented, atomised and isolated from any possibility of mass support.*²

In contrast, Housden has argued that resistance to the Nazi regime is not always given the credit it deserves: "*The diversity and vigour of opposition in the Third Reich is readily overlooked*"³

Furthermore, he says that Kershaw is too strict with his definition of resistance, saying "Kershaw's criteria are very exacting indeed."⁴ Nevertheless, here Housden does not state that the 'extent' or 'amount' of resistance and opposition is understated, rather using more abstract terms as "vigour". In order to properly assess the extent of resistance to Nazism, different forms of resistance must be considered individually. Subsequently, it could be proposed that opposition and resistance to the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1939 was widespread, even if it was not particularly effective.

² Kershaw, I. (1985) 'The Hitler Myth', *History Today*, 35(11).

³ Housden, M. (1998) 'The Diversity and Vigour of Opposition in the Third Reich is readily Overlooked', *New Perspective - The Advanced Magazine for Modern History Students*, Vol. 3.(No. 3), pp. 27-30.

⁴ *Ibid.*