

Dear class,

I hope you enjoyed your sunny Easter holidays! Unfortunately we will not see each other too soon. That's why we cannot check and compare all the previous tasks so I'd like to collect some results from before the Easter holidays. For the following students please send me the respective tasks via email (rue@gymnasiumaspel.de). Preferably you can take a photo of your exercise book and change the format on your computer to pdf so that I can write into the document and send it back to you:

- Tasks week 14 (30th March-3rd April): **Ian, Nicolas**
- Tasks week 13 (23rd March- 27th March): **Jan-Luca, Joyce**
- Tasks week 12 (16th March-20th March): **Joana, Sofia**

This week (20th April -24th April) you will deal with the topic of opposition and resistance in the Third Reich.

Here are your tasks on the basis of the text on the next two pages:

- 1.) Read the introduction on *Definition and Obstacles* (see next page) and explain the term "*resistance*" in your own words.
- 2.) Explain why there was no large-scale¹ opposition to Hitler in Germany. List up the reasons.
- 3.) Choose one of the persons mentioned in the text and do a research on his/her oppositional actions. After describing what he/she/ the group did, assess to which extent the resistance was successful.

I will tell you next Monday whose tasks I'd like to read next.

Keep fit and healthy!

S. Rütter

¹ large-scale: groß, groß angelegt

Opposition and Resistance in Germany

Definition and Obstacles

The definition of the terms "opposition" and "resistance" is still controversial, but most historians use the term "opposition" to describe all acts of public defiance² such as listening to the BBC, refusing to join the Hitler Youth or helping victims of persecution. The term "resistance" is usually reserved for the smaller group of people who made an organized attempt to undermine³ or even overthrow⁴ the Nazi regime by force.

Many Germans accepted National Socialism and this did not change until the end of the war. It was not destroyed by a popular uprising from within Germany but by the military effort of the Allies. Nevertheless, there were some courageous groups and individuals who made attempts to oppose Hitler and end his rule. They came from all walks of life, represented different classes of German society, but hardly worked together. Different political attitudes and ideas of a future Germany hampered the development of a unified resistance movement. However all opponents shared one common conviction: They advocated human dignity as the highest political principle and contested the right of the state to rule over the lives and consciences of its citizens.

Opposition against a regime of terror required courage and strong determination. The risk of imprisonment or even death was always present. Most Germans, blinded by Hitler's political successes, regarded opponents as traitors and refused to support them. On the contrary many "loyal" Germans even helped the Gestapo track down opponents. This lack of popular backing and the repressive⁵ nature of Nazi rule made it extremely difficult to organize coordinated resistance. To make matters worse, the Allies were unwilling to recognize that there was any opposition to the Nazis. They demanded "unconditional surrender" from Germany and were not prepared to help or even negotiate⁶ with members of the German opposition.

Opposition Groups

Many Communists and Social Democrats went underground after 1933. Despite persecution, regional party contacts were organized, leaflets⁷ were secretly distributed, and brochures were smuggled into Germany from abroad. The Communist group "Red Orchestra" ("Rote Kapelle") supplied the Soviets with intelligence⁸ and carried out acts of sabotage. Former labour unionists like Wilhelm Leuschner or the Socialist Julius Leber joined a group called the "Kreisau Circle", who wrote a plan for a constitution of a democratic post-war Germany.

Also individual representatives of Protestant and Catholic churches expressed opposition to the regime and its inhumane policies. Churchmen like Bishop von Galen, Reverend Martin Niemöller, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Alfred Delp considered Christianity incompatible with National Socialism, spoke out against it in public or became active members of the resistance.

Another example of young people who organized themselves against the Nazis was a group of students in Munich, known as the "White Rose" and led by Hans and Sophie Scholl. They printed and distributed leaflets urging people to resist Hitler while criticizing the

² defiance – offener Ungehorsam

³ undermine – untergraben

⁴ overthrow – stürzen, umstürzen

⁵ repressive - unterdrückerisch

⁶ negotiate - verhandeln

⁷ leaflet - Flugblatt

⁸ intelligence – hier: Geheimdienstinformationen

lawlessness of the regime and the futile⁹, criminal war. They also painted slogans and crossed-out swastikas on walls. However, their attempts to rouse public opposition and connect with other resistance groups to weaken the regime, were not successful. In February 1943, they were seen dropping leaflets in the university building and arrested by the Gestapo. A few days later they were sentenced to death.

Another resistance group consisted of people who had once been prepared to tolerate the Nazis but who had become disillusioned with Hitler's policies, above all with the war. Members of the conservative elites - diplomats, civil servants and army officers - formed a complex network of conspirators determined to overthrow the Nazi regime. Ludwig Beck, a former general, and Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, former mayor of Leipzig, became the leading figures. They wanted Hitler replaced not by a parliamentary democracy but by an authoritarian regime based on tolerance and the rule of law. Their opposition to the Nazis started in 1938, but it took several years of military setbacks and the murder of millions before the group finally set up a detailed plan for military and political action to overthrow Hitler's regime and kill the dictator.

Assassination Attempt on Hitler's Life

There were many attempts to kill Hitler, but he escaped from them all, either because of his extraordinary good fortune or technical failures. Few people ever came into contact with Hitler, who hardly appeared in public after 1939, but stayed in the Chancellery in Berlin, in his heavily guarded mountain residence in Berchtesgaden or in his remote military headquarters, the "Wolf's Lair" ("Wolfschanze"), in East Prussia. Since the highest-ranking German generals refused to participate in a plot¹⁰ against Hitler, 37-year-old Colonel Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg was left to take the decisive step. On 20 July 1944 he attended a meeting with Hitler at his headquarters in East Prussia.

Despite great difficulties, Stauffenberg planted an armed bomb under a table near Hitler, left the room without being noticed and observed the detonation from a safe distance. Unfortunate circumstances¹¹ prevented the attempt from succeeding, and Hitler survived with minor injuries. Still, Stauffenberg was convinced that his assassination attempt had been successful, but in the confusion that followed in Berlin the plotters¹² did not carry out their plans quickly enough. The radio announcement of Hitler's survival doomed the conspiracy¹³. Von Stauffenberg was arrested and executed the same night. Gestapo investigations exposed most of the others involved in the plot. They were brought to trial before the People's Court, sentenced to death, and executed. Only a few succeeded in going underground or hiding their relations with the conspirators. The total number of arrests and death sentences remains unknown to this day.

Had Stauffenberg been successful, the final phase of the war would certainly have gone differently. A German surrender in summer 1944 could have saved many lives and many cities from destruction. The fact remains that more people died between the July assassination attempt and the end of the war than in the prior four and a-half years.

⁹ futile - sinnlos

¹⁰ plot - Verschwörung

¹¹ circumstance - Umstand

¹² plotters - Verschwörer

¹³ conspiracy – vgl. plot