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# SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAZI LEISURE TIME PROGRAM

BY ERNEST HAMBURGER

As plenipotentiary for the total war effort of Germany, Paul Joseph Goebbels found it necessary, even before the Third Reich was annihilated by the Allied armies, to start with his own hands the liquidation of some of his most cherished propagandistic institutions. In order to drain the last reserves of manpower for military needs, he had to dissolve institutions of the Nazi party itself. To this necessity the leisure time organization known as "Strength through Joy" became a victim. The termination of its last remaining activities was announced in August 1944, and the organization appears to have been disbanded in October of that year. Thus after less than eleven years of existence one of the most conspicuous creations of Nazism disappeared, thereby providing another annotation to the proclamation of a Nazi millennium, and ending a life shorter than that which even the institutions of the Weimar republic had achieved.

## *Organization and Background*

The Strength through Joy organization (*Kraft durch Freude*) was created in November 1933 as an affiliate of the German Labor Front.<sup>1</sup> It was modeled after Mussolini's *Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro*, which Hitler had ordered to be studied in 1933, and for the first weeks of its existence was even referred to by the same name in German: *Nach der Arbeit*. It soon outstripped its fascist predecessor, however, largely because of the range of its activities and the masses of people that it reached. Increasing year by year, it was hailed by the Nazis as a unique phenomenon.

<sup>1</sup> See the author's article, "The German Labor Front," in *Monthly Labor Review* (November 1944) pp. 932-44 (reprinted as Serial No. R. 1706, U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics).

In 1936, on the occasion of the Olympic games in Berlin, when representatives of leisure time associations of most nations met and founded an international leisure time organization, with its office in Berlin and under complete Nazi control, Strength through Joy reached its highest point of international attention and consideration.

Strength through Joy had no members, but was merely an office organization. Throughout the years it tended toward an ever closer connection with the German Labor Front, and finally became one of its departments in 1938. Of the 59 subdivisions of the Labor Front, 6 were branches of Strength through Joy. Its importance was so highly rated that Robert Ley, Nazi Party Chief of Staff and Reich Leader of the Labor Front, took over Strength through Joy in addition to his other duties—the only Labor Front affiliate or department to be directed by him personally. In 1942, because of the strain imposed on manpower and civilian life by war reverses, Labor Front activities had to be sharply reduced and only 10 subdivisions survived, but Strength through Joy was one of them, although its activities were sharply curtailed and were concentrated mainly on maintaining the morale of the army. Of the 36,000 paid Labor Front officials, almost 6,000 were in the service of Strength through Joy, and of the 2,000,000 unpaid petty functionaries, between 200,000 and 300,000 worked for Strength through Joy, compensated by prestige and small favors. The organization was represented on all regional and local staffs of the Labor Front, and also on the staffs of the chief stewards of plants and shops.

Hitler proclaimed as the primary aim of the leisure time organization the strengthening of the body and soul of the German people: "I can make policy only with a people who do not lose their calm." To attain its purposes, Strength through Joy was to serve not labor alone, but the entire nation: first, those individually organized in the Labor Front (employers, employees and the urban middle class); second, the "collective Labor Front members" (persons organized in other associations who were

admitted to Strength through Joy by agreements with the Labor Front); and finally, wives and other household members. Nobody was forgotten. Among the associations whose members were admitted on the basis of special agreements were the National Food Estate, the professions, the civil servants and even the "National Association of Hard-of-Hearing Germans."<sup>2</sup> About 20 million "individual" Labor Front members, 5 million "collective" members, and about 12 million household associates—altogether 37 million persons—were the potential beneficiaries of Strength through Joy in Germany proper. Including the "Greater German" territory their number may have amounted to between 40 and 45 million in 1939.

As an affiliate and later a department of the German Labor Front, Strength through Joy was organizationally and administratively subordinate to the Nazi party; moreover, only party members could become officials. Thus its prestige and achievements redounded to the party's credit. Officials of government agencies, such as the Ministry of Labor or others, had no supervision or control over the leisure time organization, and no rights in regard to it. The Nazis considered Strength through Joy one of their most important accomplishments for the "leadership of man," and the party jealously monopolized it. By lavishly offering benefits to the masses, Strength through Joy was one of the main instruments for obtaining their adherence to the Nazi party in its fight for totalitarian control over the other powers of the Nazi regime: army, bureaucracy, great landowners and heavy industry.

The offerings of Strength through Joy can be classified in several broad categories, which will be discussed presently at greater length. The activities designated as "Beauty of Labor" were concerned with the work place in the factory, its surroundings, and the promotion of healthy and clean working conditions by shop improvements. This part of the program was extended in the

<sup>2</sup> Kraft durch Freude (Saxony), *Monatsprogrammhefte* (July 1938) third cover page.

direction of leisure activities through the installation and organization of "work community" rooms, stadia and plant swimming pools. Among the leisure activities proper, sports and all kinds of games played an important part, including even such sports as lawn tennis and horseback riding, which had always been regarded as expensive diversions for the upper classes only. Another part of the organization concerned itself with adult education, including courses and lectures on various subjects presented from the point of view of Nazi doctrine. Still another provided "cultural" performances and other forms of evening entertainment: operas, theater performances, concerts, movies and the like. This division of the organization had cars and trains to bring performances to rural districts. It also organized visits to museums and to expositions, promoted folk dances and similar reminiscences of the Germanic past, and beautified hamlets as "model villages." A further type of activity was the weekend and vacation trips; hiking, boating, skating and swimming excursions of several days were organized, and longer trips of from one to three weeks. The latest offering of the organization, the Strength through Joy automobile, was introduced in 1937 as Hitler's own idea, and was intended, according to its originators, to become the vehicle of the German masses.

In view of this variety and scope of activities, it might be expected that the expenditures of the Strength through Joy department were very great. But although its turnover exceeded 2 billion marks yearly, the department itself contributed a very small amount to the work of the organization, varying between 15 and 20 million in addition to about 25 million for the salary of the officials, both amounts coming from the dues of the Labor Front members, totaling 400 to 500 million marks. Only the devices of government in a totalitarian society furnish the clue to the enigma of these figures. The administrative buildings and offices were "taken over" from the unions. The staffs of the Labor Front shop stewards had to be housed in decent office rooms by the entrepreneurs. "Roll calls," held at short intervals in

the plants under the chairmanship of the chief stewards and in the presence of the entire work community, and compulsory meetings of the cells and blocs in factories and apartment houses, offered innumerable occasions for verbal propaganda. Powerful channels of written propaganda were the Labor Front periodicals; most of these were distributed free of charge, and some were subscribed to by Labor Front officials for the entire work community and paid for by deductions from pay checks. No expenditure was involved in all this.

To finance the activities themselves, corporations were urged to provide in their budgets for yearly contributions to *Strength through Joy*, and they complied with such requests; it was a test of their loyalty to the regime and a condition for obtaining government orders. Officers of *Beauty of Labor*, carrying the weight of Nazi authority, toured the big and medium-size factories, planning with employers and shop stewards shop improvements and their financing. The costs of material, at least, had to be borne by the entrepreneurs; often all or part of the labor was done by the workers, through unpaid overtime work. For Labor Front sports, favored in spare time between working hours and devoted not to record achievements but to improving the health and vigor of the average man and woman, sports teachers were made available through the offices of the Nazi sports leader. Concerts, intended to awaken a military spirit and enthusiasm for the restored German army, were given by military bands.

When members had to pay for trips organized by *Strength through Joy*, or for operas, theater performances and the like, great and successful efforts were made to bring prices down to a level within the reach of the masses. Through organizations of theatergoers *Strength through Joy* guaranteed the theaters a sure though not very remunerative mass public. Negotiations with railroads, which were public property, and with associations of hotel proprietors in resorts, enabled *Strength through Joy* to offer excursions far below the price for individual trips. Savings books and stamps, attesting deductions from paychecks by the

personnel offices of the plants, facilitated the accumulation, in two to five years, of the amount necessary for a trip. Efficient and politically reliable workers could even hope to obtain grants from their employers, supplemented from funds of the Labor Front, for one of the more costly trips—a shrewd combination of political control, work incentive and reward. And finally, when clever devices and persuasion did not suffice, compulsion did its part. As late as 1937, when the first violent antagonisms between employers and Labor Front had abated and “social peace” had been established in conformity with Hitler’s watchword of 1936, the entire press headlined the case of an employer sent to a concentration camp because he did not comply with Beauty of Labor requirements.

In all this the Nazi regime showed that it understood the great importance of leisure activities in a period of drastic economic and political change. At the same time, however, it did not work in empty space but followed the national and international trend of leisure activities in our time. To a considerable extent it merely continued earlier activities on a larger scale, concentrating, bureaucratizing and Nazifying them. Germany had great numbers of sport associations before the Nazi period, founded by young and old, men and women, middle class and labor, Protestants and Catholics. For a long time the state governments, city councils and private associations had promoted hiking and swimming, had built youth hostels and playgrounds, outdoor and indoor swimming pools, and had organized resort centers for the underprivileged.” Berlin has more recreational activities for the poor man with a family than any large city I know of,” wrote a reporter of the *New York Sun* in 1932, and two years earlier another American observer, a high ranking official in the National Recreation Association, asserted that “while in Berlin I visited numerous playgrounds, gymnasias, outdoor and indoor swimming baths, stadia and other recreational grounds. Never have I seen any better, or for that matter as well laid out, equipped and supervised, and even more important than this, never have I seen boys

and girls happier or more physically fit or taking more joy and pleasure in their exercise and play.”<sup>3</sup>

Theatergoers' associations were more than forty years old when Hitler took power. In 1929 the oldest organization, alone, included 284 associations with 500,000 members, filled 5 or 6 million theater seats annually which would otherwise have been left vacant, and provided for 1,400 performances in 250 localities which were without regular theaters. All big and medium-size town governments had created adult educational classes and libraries. Similarly, trade unions of all orientations had strongly encouraged cultural and recreational activities, and had built rest and relaxation houses and organized inexpensive trips. In 1933, in one of the last surveys of trade union activities under the republic, Theodor Leipart, leader of the German free trade unions, stressed the work of the unions in promoting a worthy use of the increased leisure time gained through shorter working hours: “Through libraries and periodicals, numerous performances of every kind, lectures, concerts and theatrical performances, the unions opened to the worker access to the intellectual world of the German nation.”<sup>4</sup> In this field collective action, traditionally cherished in Germany, received a strong incentive from the impoverishment of the middle class by the lost war and the runaway inflation, and from the republican government's concern for the wellbeing of the workers, who needed guidance and lacked individual means for a rewarding and healthy use of leisure time.

Nazism came to power in a period when this transformation of social life was in full swing, when new masses had begun to enter the cultural and recreational life of the nation and had adopted new collective devices for doing so. Thus Strength through Joy activities have to be understood not only as a development peculiar to Nazism but also as a forceful continuation of trends

<sup>3</sup> Gustavus T. Kirby, “Recreation in Germany,” in *Playground and Recreation* (October 1930) p. 408.

<sup>4</sup> Theodor Leipart, “Leistungen der Gewerkschaften für Volk und Staat,” in *Soziale Praxis*, February 23, 1933, p. 230.



already existing in Germany. This dual character has been obscured by the Nazi insistence on the originality of all Strength through Joy accomplishments; and it has been obscured also by the attitude of sincere anti-Nazis who deny any links between pre-Nazi and Nazi Germanys and any social value of Strength through Joy activities.

### *Specific Activities*

One of the most publicized activities of Strength through Joy was the weekend excursions and collective vacation arrangements, intended to enable workers to get away from home, relax, and become acquainted with their country. Persons who had never left their place of birth, or who had no knowledge of any place except the town in which they worked, were shown the beautiful countryside, the beaches, and the forests. Fishermen visited the mountains, mountain folk went to the bathing places; romantic cruises were made to the Portuguese Azores and the Norwegian fjords, to Italy and her African colonies, and elsewhere; life on board ship gave the workers a pleasant sense of leisure and forgetfulness. Politically, the trips to Italy, which became the most frequent of all cruises, were intended to "pave the way to a great friendship between the folk forces of two young nations," united against "the old, rotten, liberal, democratic Europe."<sup>5</sup>

About 10 million members of the Labor Front were said by the Strength through Joy propagandists to have been sent on trips in 1937 and in 1938. According to a detailed account published retrospectively in 1940, in an official publication of the Labor Front,<sup>6</sup> the number of trips and hiking excursions during 1934-38 was as shown below (in thousands). No later figures have been published. It is certain, however, that the peak was reached in 1938. At the outbreak of the war, in September 1939, trips and excursions were suspended in order to relieve the railroads.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See *Arbeitertum*, November 1, 1937, pp. 6-9, April 15, 1938, pp. 11-14, August 1, 1939, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> Deutsche Arbeitsfront, *Fundamente des Seiges* (Berlin 1940) p. 355.

<sup>7</sup> Deutsche Arbeitsfront, *Die deutsche Arbeitsfront im Kriege* (Berlin 1940) p. 31.

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	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Vacation trips				1,372	1,447
Voyages	61	120	118	130	131
Short trips	2,120	5,737	6,488	6,819	6,811
Hiking excursions	99	403	1,065	1,605	1,937

The Strength through Joy ships were used as hospital ships, as transports to occupied Norway and for the transfer of German settlers from the Baltic countries; the resorts were reserved for sick and wounded soldiers. In 1940 only unimportant remainders of the work of the office "Hiking, Trips, Vacations" were left, and in 1941 even these disappeared.

The quoted figures, around 10 million for 1937 and for 1938, must, however, be taken with caution. Another official Labor Front publication, issued in the same year, claims for 1938 "10 million, which means an increase of 50 percent over 1937,"<sup>8</sup> thus implying for the latter year a figure of less than 7 million travelers. But even according to the higher estimates, in both 1937 and 1938 it was the "short trips," which were actually normal or prolonged weekend excursions of two to four days, and were sometimes listed as such in regional Strength through Joy surveys, which constituted, together with hiking, the vast majority of the trips—no less than 85 percent of the total. And such excursions, while they may have been more numerous and more organized than they were in pre-Hitler days, did not constitute anything unusual. Hiking excursions had been indulged in for years by all youth organizations, and had been given strong moral and financial support by the state and municipal governments.

According to the figures presented above, those who made vacation trips of seven or more days (including cruises) numbered 1.5 million in 1937 and less than 1.6 million in 1938; this relatively small proportion of real vacation trips is reflected also in the reports of individual districts. In republican Germany, however, such longer trips for workers, arranged by the trade unions, had hardly exceeded the stage of planning; the number of such

<sup>8</sup> Deutsche Arbeitsfront, *Kalender der deutschen Arbeit* (Berlin 1940) p. 53.

trips organized by the unions was insignificant, the period following World War I being unfavorable to large projects of this kind. Thus tens of thousands of wage-earners owed to Strength through Joy the enjoyable experience of their first vacation trip; according to regional statistics wage-earners constituted between 30 and 42 percent of all participants in these longer journeys.<sup>9</sup> But the others were salaried employees, public officials, soldiers, shopkeepers, and their wives—not only persons in the lowest income brackets but also those in middle brackets—and many of the latter can be assumed to have made pleasure trips before the Hitler period. For them the organization worked as a successful mass travel agency but not, as was claimed, as an introduction to a new way of life.

The figures indicate that the number of manual workers participating in the longer trips was something over 500,000 both in 1937 and in 1938. In comparison with earlier conditions this is a remarkably high figure; in comparison with the total of about 16 million manual workers it is not so arresting. It means that the average wage-earner had the prospect of making a vacation trip in every thirtieth year, while the average salaried employee (totaling 4 million) could expect such a trip in every tenth year. The chance of a wage-earner's participating in one of the spectacular trips to foreign countries was too slight to be expressed in a number of years in the range of a man's life; between 1934 and 1939 hardly more than 1 percent of manual labor obtained the privilege of making a cruise.

It should not be overlooked, however, that there was an important subjective effect in the mere existence of a possibility which

<sup>9</sup> Kraft durch Freude (Rhein-Main), *Vier Jahre Kraft durch Freude* (1938) p. 73 gives the figure as 42.4 percent for Hessen; *N.S. Sozialpolitik* (Berlin) June 25, 1938, p. 272, mentions 39 percent for Berlin; Kraft durch Freude (Saxony), *Monatsprogrammhefte* (December 1936) mentions 32.01 percent for the state of Saxony; Deutsche Arbeitsfront (Auslandsorganisation), *Der Deutsche im Ausland* (Hamburg 1938) p. 212, mentions 30 percent in reference to a trip to Madeira. The 58 percent of manual workers claimed by the Labor Front (*Soziale Praxis*, August 1, 1939, p. 911) refers to all trips, including weekend excursions, in which manual workers had always been strongly represented.

had hitherto seemed inconceivable to any member of the working class. This is evidenced by the propaganda value attributed to it. The Labor Front periodicals dwelled upon the vacation trips and cruises more than on any other topic of social policy; and since the Labor Front propagandists based their work on careful observations, gathered in the small units of cells and blocs, these trips must have remarkably impressed labor and far exceeded the effect of other Strength through Joy work.<sup>10</sup>

The "Evening Leisure" office of Strength through Joy organized a wide variety of activities whose purpose was primarily propagandistic, with a gloss of general entertainment. Operas and operettas, plays and concerts, cabaret performances and movies were presented to large audiences. Popular music and guided trips through museums were offered. Often people gathered for an evening entertainment of dancing, shows, recitals and a short speech.

These latter meetings were organized by employers anxious to prove their loyalty to the regime and their socialist and comradesly spirit toward their employees. Along with Labor Front officials and functionaries they addressed the workers, telling them of the performances of the Hitler regime and the duties of the work communities. On these and other occasions old costumes and rituals of the former guilds were sometimes shown;<sup>11</sup> folk dances were performed, and in rural districts presentations of the old peasant life were given. The meetings of the work communities were easiest to organize and had the largest attendance: the employees were frequently compelled to be present, and in any case they customarily attended, as absence led to embarrassing questions if not serious troubles. Expressed in figures of attendance, these meetings constituted one-fourth of the activities of the "Evening Leisure" office, and in some districts even more;

<sup>10</sup> On the propaganda of the Labor Front and of Strength through Joy see the author's article, "German Labor Front Press: A Nazi Propaganda Experiment," in *Journalism Quarterly* (September 1944) pp. 243-55.

<sup>11</sup> The meetings of this kind are therefore classified as "folkdom performances" in certain surveys; in others they are listed separately.

in the state of Saxony the proportion was one-third, and in Silesia one-half.<sup>12</sup>

According to official figures<sup>13</sup> the number of performances presented by the Evening Leisure office in 1938, the last full pre-war year, and the number of attendants were as shown below.

	<i>Performances</i>	<i>Attendants</i>
Folkdom performances	54,813	13,666,015
Concerts	5,291	2,515,598
Operas, operettas	12,407	6,639,067
Plays	19,523	7,478,633
Cabarets	7,921	3,518,033
Varieties	10,983	4,462,140
Movies	3,586	857,402
Exhibitions	555	1,595,516
Guided tours (museums)	676	58,472
Miscellaneous	15,084	11,118,636
Entertainments for highway workers	13,589	2,658,155
	144,428	54,567,667

The figures are certainly not wholly reliable, for another official Labor Front source mentions only 44 million attendants.<sup>14</sup> But even the larger figures mean that potential Strength through Joy patrons could have attended, on the average, only slightly more than one performance during the year. In reality, of course, each person was counted as many times as he attended, and thus many did not attend at all. The 14 million attendants at operas and plays may actually have been 1.5 to 2 million persons who attended performances seven to ten times in the year; certainly the few hundred thousands who were busy at the "Hitler highways" were entertained several times. Thus the figures, impressive as they seem, indicate that Strength through Joy did not succeed in interesting the entire adult population even in this part of its

<sup>12</sup> *Fundamente des Sieges* (cited above) p. 325; Kraft durch Freude (Saxony), *Monatsprogrammhefte* (December 1938) pp. 7-9; Ernst Obst, "Die N.S. Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude," in *Schlesische Monatshefte* (December 1937) p. 446.

<sup>13</sup> *Fundamente des Sieges* (cited above) pp. 334-35.

<sup>14</sup> *Kalender der deutschen Arbeit* (cited above) p. 53.

activities: many millions remained indifferent and stayed away, while other millions were satisfied to take part in only one work community meeting or one of the miscellaneous entertainments. In regard to the other categories of Evening Leisure activities, it seems safe to say that probably a minority of Labor Front members and their wives attended once, and only a very small minority attended more than once. Attendance at operas and plays may have doubled in 1938 in comparison to 1929, but possibly or even probably it would have come near to that if the work of the free theater organizations had continued normally.

The character of the performances was determined not by the inclinations of the individuals or by their educational aspirations but, in general, by bureaucratic decisions. Thus the figures prove nothing regarding the receptivity, appreciation or enthusiasm of the patrons. To give an example, in Silesia 462 concerts given in 1936, with 51,000 attendants, increased in the following year to 819, with 316,000 attendants,<sup>15</sup> but the striking increase was due mainly to an agreement reached between the Labor Front and the army, concerning concerts to be given by military bands in Silesian plants; 445 such concerts were given before 144,000 workers.

In regard to the "Beauty of Labor" activities of Strength through Joy, it should be pointed out that shop improvements were not new in Germany when Hitler took power. They had been made first for health and safety, then for recreational purposes. The resistance of many employers to such expenditures had been softened under the influence of progressing social thinking and the fight of the trade unions. Thus the Beauty of Labor office, which was under the chairmanship of Albert Speer, Minister of Armament and Ammunition from 1942, found it necessary to explain to labor what was new in its work. "Sanitary installations, stadia, lawns, etc., are demands of before yesterday, we do not contest it." But a new feature, it was explained, was the spirit in which Beauty of Labor worked; it was inspired not by the

<sup>15</sup> Obst, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

desire to make the worker "feel better" or to help him "earn more money," but by the idea of the work community, without which Beauty of Labor would be a ridiculous utopia.<sup>16</sup> Actually the "work community," an outgrowth of the Nazi dictatorship, was nothing but a fiction created and maintained by orders of the Labor Front bureaucracy, and it remained a utopia during the Nazi regime.

The number of Beauty of Labor operations during 1934–38, and the expenditures on them, have been summarized in three Labor Front publications, all issued at the beginning of the war or shortly before; these rather contradictory sets of figures are shown below.<sup>17</sup> Discrepancies in the figures of Source 3 may be

	Source 1	Source 2	Source 3
Factory inspections	67,000	almost 40,000	59,503
Workroom improvements	26,000	23,000	20,741
Lawns, factory courtyards, etc.	17,000	10,000	13,122
Washrooms and dressing rooms	24,000	15,000	20,455
Restrooms and lunchrooms	18,000	19,000	15,595
Sport installations	3,000	2,200	2,107
Comrade houses	?	1,200	2,557
Total expenditures	900,000,000 RM.	over 600,000,000 RM.	780,799,732 RM.

partly ascribed to the fact that that publication covers only the period through June 1938, while the others extend through the end of that year; on most items, however, the figures in Source 3 are not the lowest of the three reports. The discrepancies become still more striking when these figures are compared with those in other no less official sources<sup>18</sup>—further evidence of the lack of reliability of all Labor Front statistics.

But even if reliable figures of this sort were available, their significance would still be uncertain. They include not only new installations but also improvements and normal repair work. The

<sup>16</sup> Kraft durch Freude (Saxony), *Monatsprogrammhefte* (August 1936) p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Source 1: *Fundamente des Sieges* (cited above) p. 325; Source 2: *Kalender der deutschen Arbeit* (cited above) p. 53; Source 3: Anatol v. Hübbenet, *Die N.S. Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude* (Berlin 1939) p. 28.

<sup>18</sup> See the generally lower figures of Gerhard Starcke, "Die deutsche Arbeitsfront," in Karl Pöppel, *Deutsche Arbeitskunde* (Leipzig 1940) p. 183; Starcke was a leading Labor Front propagandist.

extension of shop improvements under the Hitler regime—certainly attributable partly to the inspections by Beauty of Labor officials, the pressure exerted by them, and the higher earnings of the corporations as a result of the armament boom—cannot be checked against or compared with former accomplishments in this field.

The reports of the companies, which are more reliable than those of the Labor Front, have always been reluctant to disclose the expenditures for social work, and they are fully silent with regard to the details of such expenses—a fact continuously complained of by the magazine *Soziale Praxis*, which for a long time preserved a relatively high standing even under the Nazi regime. Thus investigation of these sources does not reveal very much. Moreover, they include not only the normal contributions to retired, needy or sick workers, to vacation homes and worker settlements, to work libraries and Strength through Joy, but also the contributions to activities of the party or its affiliates, to families of servicemen and to other such causes.<sup>19</sup> Such voluntary expenditures, at times strongly promoted by the Labor Front, amounted in some large companies to an average of 6 percent of the total amount of wages, and were much lower or even insignificant in medium and small companies. Within these sums the amounts spent for Beauty of Labor may be estimated at fractions of 1 percent of the total amount of wages in large corporations. Such amounts do not stand out conspicuously in comparison with expenditures for similar purposes in former boom periods in Germany or other industrial countries.

In combination or singly the activities described above doubtless contributed to overcoming the distrust of large sections of German labor regarding Hitler's economic aims—aims that had been branded as reactionary by the German Left during his fight for power. But this work had its failures too. The greatest

<sup>19</sup> See Deutsche Arbeitsfront, *Zusätzliche Gefolgschaftsversorgung* (Berlin 1938) pp. 4-9, and the numerous analyses of company reports in *Soziale Praxis* between 1935 and 1939.



failures were the attempt to organize adult education, and the launching of the so-called people's automobile.

Counting all lectures ever held by Nazi party and Labor Front bosses in plants and shops, the propagandists could boast of impressive successes in the field of adult education. They claimed about 70,000 performances with 4 million attendants in 1937, and more than 100,000 with 6.3 million attendants in 1938.<sup>20</sup> There is no doubt that Nazi lecturers were busy traveling, and that no negligible number of workers were detained for an hour after work, or complied with a request that they remain, in order that they might hear an evening lecture on a racial, political or economic problem presented in the light of the Nazi doctrine. There is reason to believe, however, that the unwillingness of the workers to read Labor Front newspapers, which was in the sharpest contrast to the skyrocketing circulation of these journals, applied also to the cascade of verbal propaganda.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast with such compulsory or quasi-compulsory participation, the voluntary attendance at adult education classes was poor. In 1933 and 1934 the Nazis destroyed the municipal adult educational institutions (*Volkshochschulen*) which had flourished under the Weimar republic and which they deeply distrusted because of the democratic spirit which had prevailed in such organizations. They considered it necessary to exercise the closest possible watch over adult education, and to make it subject to the party itself. Therefore they created the institution known as "German Popular Education" (*Deutsches Volksbildungswerk*), and made it a section of Strength through Joy. This assured the party's control of all adult education without excluding the cooperation of the Ministry of Education and the municipalities, though these bodies were confined to a secondary position. As late as 1937 a high Labor Front official declared it to be "a terrible judgment" on the former educational system "that we still lack teachers who

<sup>20</sup> *Kalender der deutschen Arbeit* (cited above) p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> See this writer's article, "German Labor Front Press" (cited above) pp. 250, 251, 254.

would be able to educate our youth in the spirit of National Socialism without making concessions to the past." This significant statement sufficiently explains the complete incorporation of adult education into the party's orbit.<sup>22</sup>

But the number of persons enrolled in popular educational classes was far from impressive: 221,000 in 1937 and 205,000 in 1938.<sup>23</sup> This is not only a decrease in one year, but also a steep decline in comparison with the earlier successes of municipal and private teaching institutions and with the classes organized by trade unions and educational associations. The decline from the pre-Hitler period was particularly important in the ranks of wage-earners, of whom 40,000 were enrolled in 1937 and 42,000 in 1938, meaning that in every 400 wage-earners only one attended Nazi adult classes. Among salaried employees, with an attendance record of 58,000 and 72,000 for the two years, the response was stronger.

The failure of Nazi adult education is strikingly exemplified by figures on the district of Silesia, where there had been flourishing institutions in this field before the Hitler period and where the trade unions had organized important educational work. In Silesia, with more than 4.5 million inhabitants, only 31,701 students were enrolled in 1937. The various vocational groups constituted the following percentages of the total: <sup>24</sup> wage-earners 21, salaried employees 31, public officials 14, shopkeepers 7, independent craftsmen 14, others 13. The subjects taught in the classes were mainly political history, the National Socialist way of life, racial knowledge, colonial policy, military and civilian defense, health protection, economics, and technology. In view of the fact that the Hitler doctrine was common to all instruction and was stressed in all classes, the poor showing disclosed by the figures of attendance may be considered one of the few encourag-

<sup>22</sup> Quotation from Gerhard Starcke, in *Arbeitertum*, April 15, 1937, p. 4. See also *Soziale Praxis*, April 15, 1938, pp. 493-98; Heinrich Guthmann, "Krieg und Kultur im neuen Deutschland," in *Geist der Zeit* (May 1940) p. 263.

<sup>23</sup> *Fundamente des Sieges* (cited above) p. 343.

<sup>24</sup> Obst, *op. cit.*, p. 447.

ing factors to contemplate with regard to the shaping of Germany's future.

In 1937, in a sensational proclamation, Hitler promised the German people that he would make available to them a technically excellent automobile (the *Volkswagen*) which the working population and the lower middle class could afford. At that time there were only 1.1 million passenger cars in Germany, which means 1.6 cars to every 100 inhabitants, a proportion far behind that of Great Britain and France, not to mention the United States. It was estimated that 6 or 7 million persons would acquire the new folk automobile in the near future.

The Labor Front built the *Volkswagenwerk* in Fallersleben, near Brunswick, with a capital of 200 million marks taken from its funds, and it put the Strength through Joy organization in charge of the propaganda and sale of the car. The price was fixed at 990 marks, about half the price of the next cheapest car, and it could be paid in instalments. The purpose was threefold: to speed up Germany's motorization in preparation for the planned war; to show that technological progress could best be exploited by Nazi devices of production and distribution; and to enable the masses to acquire a car, previously an opportunity only for the upper classes. Here again is evidence of the way in which the Nazis interrelated their social measures and their preparation for war. In the Nazi propaganda the car was hailed as a "socialist and technical miracle" and a proof that socialism had been achieved in Nazi Germany.<sup>25</sup> Nothing is more revealing of the distortion of traditional notions by Nazi propaganda than this playing up of the Strength through Joy car as a socialist accomplishment.

Soon, however, the jokers began to become evident. It was made clear that the instalments had to be paid in advance and not, as announced previously, after delivery. Then the buyers

<sup>25</sup> *Arbeitertum*, June 15, 1938, pp. 5-7, and September 1, 1938, pp. 5-9; *Soziale Praxis*, June 15, 1938, pp. 731-32; *Deutscher Volkswirt*, June 3, 1938, pp. 1733-34, August 4, 1939, pp. 2171-72, and August 11, 1939, p. 2244; Justus Wilhelm Hedemann, *Deutsches Wirtschaftsrecht* (Berlin 1939) p. 402.

were informed that some hundred more marks had to be paid in advance for liability, fire and theft insurance to cover the first two years, and for delivery of the car. The costs of a garage, of gasoline, repairs and the like, began to be discussed, and it was estimated that they would be higher than the weekly instalment payments. Strength through Joy offered no solution to this problem, and it became doubtful that the masses of purchasers would be financially able to use the car, once they had bought it. Of the 250,000 buyers listed in the summer of 1939, about 150,000 were paying in weekly instalments; they would have had to wait five years before acquiring their cars. Only the remaining 100,000—mostly party and Labor Front officials, who were in a position to pay at once the whole or the greater part of the amount—could hope to obtain the car in 1939.

The outbreak of the war relieved Strength through Joy of the necessity of confessing one of its biggest failures and frauds. Delivery was then postponed for the duration of the war, but nobody was entitled to cease his instalment payments. From the point of view of war preparation, however, the Strength through Joy plant and car were a success; the car “renders excellent service at the front.”<sup>26</sup> The final revelation on all this was made recently by the British: “In the middle of June [1944] our agents discovered that the famous people’s car or *Volkswagen* factory near Hanover was, in fact, one of the main assembly plants for the flying bomb. Our bombers were sent out and the factory was totally destroyed.”<sup>27</sup>

After the outbreak of war Strength through Joy changed its character and became a war agency, like the whole Labor Front. Its traditional activities rapidly declined. For reasons already mentioned, arrangements for trips and excursions ceased, though several beach, mountain and forest resorts were maintained, for workers needing rest and recuperation. The heavy strain of

<sup>26</sup> *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft*, January 1, 1942.

<sup>27</sup> British Information Service, New York, *Report on the Flying Bomb* (September 1944) p. 11.

longer working hours and exhausting working methods put an end to the organization of evening leisure activities, for "leisure time in the evening must be left free for the working man and his family";<sup>28</sup> offerings of plays, concerts and the like declined slightly in the first years of the war, then heavily, after the reverses suffered in the Russian campaign in 1942. Beauty of Labor had to be suspended because of shortage of material. Adult education concentrated on German classes in the French, Polish and Czech territories incorporated into "Greater Germany." For some time sports activities successfully resisted any sharp curtailment,<sup>29</sup> but in 1943 they too were generally ended. Robert Ley's "plan of war organization of the German Labor Front," of January 1942, declared that "henceforth Strength through Joy must carry on only tasks that are necessary to the war effort," and that its whole work must be made subject to the principle that "a social policy with a peacetime orientation would be senseless and even prejudicial at present. It is impossible to allow trains to run carrying workers on vacations, and so it is with all other branches. The German Labor Front is now undergoing its baptism by fire, and it faces its members not as a giving but as a demanding agency."<sup>30</sup>

Thus in the last years of its life Strength through Joy devoted itself mainly to the army. By agreement with the German High Command it took over "the whole cultural care of the army, with the exception of motion pictures," and in 1940 entertainments for the army amounted to 80 percent, in 1941 to almost 90 percent, of its total activities.<sup>31</sup> Strength through Joy followed the army everywhere to the occupied countries. For 1940 it reported 180,000 performances for the armed forces, with 50 million attendants, and for 1941, 500,000 with 167 million. It also worked in the hospitals, introduced sports for convalescents and sent theater trains and orchestras to impress the population of the

<sup>28</sup> *Deutscher Volkswirt*, May 1, 1942, p. 1004.

<sup>29</sup> *Völkischer Beobachter*, April 14, 1942.

<sup>30</sup> *Deutscher Volkswirt*, No. 26, 1942, p. 843.

<sup>31</sup> *Arbeitertum*, December 15, 1940, p. 2; *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft*, January 1, 1942; *Deutscher Volkswirt*, No. 26, 1942, p. 843.

occupied countries. Another aspect of its wartime activities was its work in the camps of foreign workers, such camps numbering 8,000 in 1943, under the charge of the Labor Front; libraries were established, excursions were organized in the neighborhood, and the usual performances were shown.

### *Conclusions*

In five years Strength through Joy was stripped of one after the other of its original features. But what, in an overall view, did it bring to the German people?

The Nazi regime did not do away with all former social accomplishments, as has been suggested by those who have confused the Nazis with reactionaries of the old school. The Nazis were well aware that in an industrialized society their aims could not be fulfilled unless they maintained certain social standards and satisfied certain social aspirations. Full employment, arrived at by total war preparation, and leisure time accomplishments, made possible by means of totalitarian government, were twin outgrowths of Nazi labor policy. They were conceived not in the interest of the individual, but as indispensable political and social factors in a successful execution of the militarist policy of the regime.

The trips sponsored by Strength through Joy, and especially the vacation cruises, were a new and highly appreciated achievement of the Nazi leisure time organization. Also a new development was the Strength through Joy automobile, which, however, did not materialize. Sports, excursions, shop improvements and evening activities, which had been highly developed before the Hitler regime, were developed still further under the Nazis; sports were particularly stressed, and activities in this field were considerably superior to earlier accomplishments. Adult education, on the other hand, retrogressed considerably. The scope of all these activities, however, seems to have been smaller than is generally assumed. The Nazi statistics are distorted and greatly exaggerated. But even according to the published figures the

number of persons actually reached by Strength through Joy was less impressive than appears on the surface.

Under the sociological conditions that prevailed in Germany before and after World War I, new masses of adults had entered the educational and recreational life of the nation, through free associations of their own. By means that are inimical and abhorrent to a free society—by a combination of mass organizational devices, pressure and one-party rule—Strength through Joy was able to overcome inertia or reluctance and thus to attract additional masses. These masses can be supposed to have been strongly impressed by Strength through Joy and by the easy opportunities offered to them. While it is open to question whether they were as firmly won to educational and recreational activities as were those who came as free members of free associations, it is certain that among them many simple people will in Germany's dark days to come look back at Strength through Joy performances as outstanding happy events in their lives. But even with all the pressure and propaganda, many millions stayed outside of Strength through Joy, and many other millions paid only a token attention to its activities. Thus no generalization is possible about the ultimate psychological effects of the organization. And certainly it would be useless to try to predict the currents and cross currents of public opinion which will develop among the German people from the lessons of this war, and which will affect all their thinking about the Hitler regime.

Strength through Joy Nazified recreation. In superseding all other associations working in this field, and destroying their exemplary achievements and their democratic basis, it put an end to the variety and richness of earlier leisure time activities. It annihilated all individual and organizational initiative, condemned the consumer to a completely passive role, and centralized and bureaucratized all recreation under the Nazi party's command. Nazi propaganda was the by-product of all and the main product of many of these activities. Such propaganda, accompanied by an offering of pleasant experiences, may well have

exercised a stronger and more lasting effect than that produced by purely political propaganda. The lack of active response to the less diluted servings of propaganda is evident, however, from the failure of Nazi adult education.

No quantitative achievements can outweigh the appalling moral and political decay of the German people to which this propagandistic character of Strength through Joy contributed. It is especially deplorable that the high standards of the free labor movement were destroyed and replaced by planned recreational devices saturated with a philosophy of subservience and hatred. This fact would make it extremely perilous to use organizational machinery established by Strength through Joy for future leisure activities. When the time comes, Germany will have to rebuild her leisure activities on an entirely new foundation.

*(Institute of World Affairs)*