

Opposition to the Nazis

The Nazis had a **tight grip** on Germany, but some **opposition** remained.

The Political Left opposed Hitler, but was Divided and Weak

- 1) Once in power, the Nazis had **banned** other political parties, including those on the political left, such as the **Communist Party** and the Social Democratic Party (SPD).
- 2) But members of these parties formed **underground groups** to try and organise **industrial unrest** (e.g. **strikes**). These networks were often **infiltrated** by the Gestapo, and party members could be **executed**.
- 3) Their impact was also limited because the different parties of the left were **divided** and **didn't cooperate**.

Some members of the Church Opposed the Nazis

There was **little opposition** to the Nazis in Germany from **Christian groups**. But a number of Church members did **oppose** the Nazis, even though they risked being sent to **concentration camps** (see p.118):

- 1) **Martin Niemöller** was a Protestant pastor, a former U-boat (submarine) captain, and a one-time Nazi supporter. He objected to Nazi interference in the Church, and was one of the founders of the **Confessing Church**. He used a sermon in 1937 to protest against the **persecution of Church members**, and as a result spent several years in concentration camps.
- 2) Another key member of the Confessing Church was **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, a Protestant philosopher and pastor who **opposed** the Nazis from the beginning. He joined the resistance, helped Jews escape from Germany and planned to assassinate Hitler. He was caught and imprisoned, then **executed** just weeks before the fall of the Nazis.
- 3) **Clemens August von Galen** was the Catholic Bishop of Münster, who used his sermons to **protest** against Nazi racial policies and the murder of the disabled. His protests **didn't stop** the killing, but they did force the Nazis to keep them **secret**. Only the need to maintain the support of **German Catholics** stopped the Nazis from **executing** him.

Hitler tried to unite the different Protestant Churches into one **Reich Church**. Some Church members split off in protest at this interference and formed the **Confessing Church**.

The Edelweiss Pirates and Swing Kids were Youth Groups

- 1) The **Edelweiss Pirates** was the name given to groups of rebellious youths who rejected **Nazi values**.
 - They helped **army deserters**, **forced labourers** and escaped concentration camp **prisoners**.
 - At first the Nazis mostly ignored them, but cracked down after they started distributing **anti-Nazi leaflets**. Many members were **arrested**, and several were publicly **hanged**.
- 2) The **Swing Kids** (or Swing Youth) were groups of young people who rebelled against the **tight control** the Nazis had over **culture**, acting in ways considered 'degenerate' by the Nazi regime (e.g. listening to American music and **drinking alcohol**). They were mostly considered a **nuisance** rather than a **threat**, but some members were **arrested** and even sent to **concentration camps**.

Comment and Analysis

German opposition to the Nazis didn't really **threaten** their **dominance**, but it did mean the **Gestapo** was **kept busy** tracking down people who'd distributed anti-Nazi leaflets, held secret meetings, committed acts of sabotage, etc.

Comment and Analysis

Other Germans expressed their dissatisfaction with the Nazi regime in 'low level' ways — e.g. by **grumbling** about the government or **spreading rumours**. Not everyone considers this genuine **opposition**, but even this was probably **risky**.

If you weren't with the Nazis, you were against them...

Some people claim the Nazis faced little opposition from within Germany.
To what extent do you think this claim is true? [18]

