

# Jokes in the Third Reich (1933-1945)

## Abstract

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Telling a joke may seem a simple and easy act to disregard. But the content of a joke and the social and political climate in which it is told can be very revealing of the emotions, opinions, and issues of importance in a community. The jokes presented below were written and told at different times during the Third Reich. These “whisper jokes” [*Flüsterwitze*], as they were later dubbed, poked fun at the nature of German society under the Nazis, the public personas of leading Nazi figures, like Adolf Hitler, Hermann Goering, and Joseph Goebbels, the creation of concentration camps, and the increasing demands placed on workers as war preparation ramped up. The difficulty for historians is deciding what to make of these jokes. It is perhaps obvious that to tell an anti-regime joke was risky. But what does telling a joke reveal about Germans’ opinions of the regime? Does telling a whisper joke constitute an act of political resistance? Or were these jokes a reflection of life in a dictatorship where plenty of people felt comfortable to critique the regime via a humorous statement as long as they did not translate those words into actual dissent? Were the jokes about concentration camps and the collapse of the regime ways of coping with the violence and erosion of the rule of law that occurred on a daily basis?

## Source

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An Englishman is asked after his visit to Germany how he found the Germans. He replies: “Oh, I like them very much, they are honest, intelligent and National Socialist. It’s just a pity that these three qualities never coincide. A German always has only two of them. Either he is honest and intelligent, in which case he is not National Socialist, or he is intelligent and National Socialist, in which case he is not honest, or he is honest and National Socialist, but then he is not intelligent.”

Goering says to Goebbels: “I have noticed that people no longer greet each other with ‘Heil Hitler.’ How about propagating ‘Guten Tag’ again for a change?” To which Goebbels replies, “Out of the question, as long as our beloved Führer is alive, there will be no more good days!”

In the concentration camp, two old acquaintances meet. “Why are you here?” “I said on May 5: ‘Hess is crazy.’ “And you?” “I said on May 15: ‘Hess is not crazy’.”

Adolf Hitler visits the Friedrichsberg State Hospital, which used to be called an insane asylum. The patients are lined up in a closed block and, following long instructions, greet their head of state very nicely with the German salute. Adolf sees, however, that some arms do not rise to give the Hitler salute. Astonished, he asks, “Why don’t you salute?” To which he receives the reply, “My Führer, we are not crazy; we are the guards!”

The popular mood in 1942. Hitler wants to find out for himself what the people think about him. He gets himself a wig, cuts off his beard and goes out into the street. The first person he meets he asks, “What do you think of the Führer?” The man whispers, “I can’t tell you here on the street,” and leads Hitler into a side alley, enters a hotel with him, takes him to a room, looks under the bed, locks the door, checks the cabinets, and covers the telephone with a pillow. Then he approaches Hitler and whispers in his ear, “I sympathize with the Führer.”

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Hitler to Mussolini: "Italy is to be envied. The sun is always smiling at you."

Mussolini replies, "What does that matter? The whole world laughs at Germany!"

The Nazi rule is over. The verdicts are in. Hitler, Goering and Goebbels hang on the gallows.

Goering turns to Goebbels one last time in his know-it-all manner and gasps to him: "I always told you: the matter will be decided in the air!"

After the Gleichschaltung of the Länder, we are one people; there are no more Prussians, Bavarians, Thuringians and Saxons. There are only Braun-Schweiger. [brown silent people, trans.]

Hitler asks a worker: How long do you work every day?

Eight hours.

Well, and if you were sent to work in an armaments factory, how long then?

Sixteen hours.

And if you were to work for our party?

Then, of course, 24 hours.

Very good! What do you do you anyway?

I'm a gravedigger!

When new concentration camps are established now, they will build them on mountain tops!

Why?

One expects that the prisoners turn brown faster there!

In Switzerland, a Nazi official inquires about the purpose of an imposing public building. "This is our Ministry of the Navy," the Swiss explains. To which the Nazi sneers, "You with your few ships. What do you need a Ministry of the Navy for?" To which the Swiss replies, "Well, and you? What do you need a Ministry of Justice for?"

A new Ufa film was shown in Germany. Its title is "A Man Wants to Go to Germany." Whereas previously there had been a yawning emptiness in the cinemas, when this film opened, they were literally overcrowded. The visitors wanted to see the man who wanted to go to Germany.

Since it was claimed abroad that the Nazis were humorless, Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels organized a contest for the best political jokes.

The following prizes were provided:

First prize: Five years in prison.

Second prize: Three years in Dachau concentration camp.

Third prize: A visit to the basement of the Gestapo headquarters on Prinz Albrecht Strasse, followed by interrogation.

Two men were sentenced to death in the regional court for spreading rumors. At the last moment, however, they are pardoned, but given the urgent warning never to tell rumors again.

No sooner are they outside the gate than one says to the other:

Do you know why they pardoned us?

No. Why?

Because they ran out of rope to hang us with.

Which stew is most common in Germany?

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Steamed tongue.

Hitler to Göring: How long will our food supply last?

Goering: About seven years.

Hitler responded delightedly: Oh, splendid. I will announce that to the people right away.

Goering: For God's sake, don't do that. I meant only for the two of us.

Source of original German texts 1-7: Hans-Jochen Gamm, *Der Flüsterwitz im Dritten Reich*. München: List Verlag, 1990. Texts 8-16: Franz Danimann, *Flüsterwitze und Spottgedichte unterm Hakenkreuz*. Vienna: Böhlau, 1983, pp. 91-101.

Translation: Insa Kummer

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