

Reinhard Heydrich, “The Enemy in Disguise” (May 22, 1935)

Abstract

In this short essay, Reinhard Heydrich (1904–1942) writes about an alleged conspiracy working clandestinely to undermine both the state and the National Socialist movement more generally. He never specifically identifies these supposed internal enemies—“the enemy in disguise”—relying instead on provocative language and the passive voice to describe their activities in nebulous terms. This strategy of using vague language to refer to enemies was a key element of Heydrich’s (and the NSDAP’s) attempts to convince the population that a broad-based, powerful conspiracy not only existed but also represented a constant existential threat to the National Socialist movement and to the safety and security of the *Volksgemeinschaft* itself.

The category “internal enemy” accommodated an ever-longer list of so-called enemies: Jews, Roma, Communists, Social Democrats, trade unionists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, people with physical and intellectual disabilities, “asocials,” etc. It is important to note that Heydrich refers not only to conspiratorial elements that actively sought to undermine the government but also to elements of the population that, owing to “personal weaknesses” [*persönlichen Schwächen*], could be subconsciously swayed to undermine the state. This second category—again, left deliberately vague—was central to the Third Reich’s internal enemy leitmotif. Individuals placed into that category may not have been guilty of consciously conspiratorial behavior, but they weakened the state nonetheless.

Source

In contrast to the visible enemy, the enemy in disguise *remains intangible within the organized framework of society*. As he works undercover, we could perhaps call him the hidden apparatus behind the truly great enemies we have already identified. His aim is to destroy the unity of state and party leadership in order to preempt any possibility for fulfilling the ideological tasks of National Socialism. The *Volk* is to become distrustful and skeptical of leadership, and the leaders are to become nervous and distrustful of one another.

To this end, a network has been devised with points of intersection reaching into every aspect of the state apparatus, public life, and the movement. On the one hand, this network acts to inform the enemy of what dangers lie in store for him. He is thus forewarned about state-sponsored measures, decrees, and laws well in advance. But the same canal system, on the other hand, allows the enemy to begin preparing precautionary countermeasures.

Various organs within this system operate on a *consciously* traitorous level, while others consist of personal weaknesses that are being *subconsciously* manipulated.

The major pillars of this consciously traitorous enemy activity are *hostile elements still remaining within the state apparatus* who, with grandiose feigned enthusiasm, immediately committed themselves *100 percent* to National Socialism. They fell through the cracks in the Civil Service Law. Because we believed in the authenticity of the heartfelt ring of conviction in their professions of loyalty, they were allowed to retain their positions *as experts* within the state structure.

Whereas we, as National Socialists, understand bureaucracy in the best sense of the term to include

precision perfected to facilitate the excellent and flawless operation of a business and administrative apparatus, these heartless and hostile elements manipulate that same bureaucracy as a means to hinder, hamper, and derail our National Socialist aims.

This network is atrociously intricate. It would be impossible to provide a seamless listing of all its branches here. The branches are apparent to the layman only in their ramifications:

Over here, attempts are being made to unhinge legislative measures.

Over there, attempts at throttling financial support in various areas that are essential to the life of the movement and the state are under way.

At the *universities*, attempts are being made to apply a “strictly scientific and factual” approach to skew National Socialist ideas in favor of liberalism.

In the *field of prehistoric research*, attempts are under way to slip one-sided, *unvölkische* elements into the hands of excavation directors, so that the contention that our ancestors were “lacking in culture” can be safely maintained.

Attempts at playing politics with anti-National Socialist *hiring policies* are aimed at regaining control of significant key positions in the state so that, whenever National Socialist legislation is passed, its execution is sabotaged and loopholes are created by manipulating the provisions for its fulfillment. Furthermore, attempts are made to exert influence on sincerely National Socialist men using the network of social connections (invitations to parties, clubs, etc.). In their attempts to turn these National Socialist men against the movement, they misconstrue the fervent desire on the part of high-ranking National Socialist superiors to adapt German legislation and German administrative structures to suit the nature and sensibilities of the *Volk*.

In order to undermine some measure of the Führer or one of his agents, or as a way of toppling some organization within the movement or the state that is troublesome or threatening to them, they do not hesitate to employ systematic rumormongering and to foment slanderous attack campaigns in the press. Leaks flow through thousands upon thousands of channels directly to the authoritative sources, recounting the supposed “dangers” posed by the Führer’s policies or by these organizations. At the same time, a whole wave of complaints comes flooding in. *And the broad range of these complaints is often an immediate sign that the channels of the enemy’s network are operative.*

The command is given by the Swiss Freemason or “German” emigre newspapers, and the systematic onslaught is orchestrated in a series of articles filled with the most baneful lies. At precisely the same time, the apparatus for exploiting the character weaknesses of the individual is mobilized. Man is all too inclined to lend more credibility to spurious, implausible rumors than to the hard cold facts. In full cognizance of these weaknesses and of the human penchant for scandalmongering, the rumors are then circulated to certain select personalities who are either sympathetic to or ill-disposed toward these organizations and who thus put a positive or negative spin on them and of their own volition see to it that they are spread further.

Before you know it, a sort of prefabricated public opinion has been formed that paves the way for achieving whatever goals the enemy has in mind at that particular moment.

This is how they are seeking to gradually dissolve the fabric of the state and to drive a wedge between the leadership and its subjects. By underscoring the tasks that have yet to be fulfilled, they seek to obliterate what has been done and accomplished in the past two years and to gradually strip the Führer and his confidants of the basis for every form of political work—to wrench from them the public trust.

We must recognize what the enemy's tactics are and what he is up to so that we can counteract him.

The following sentence taken from a secret enemy report is illustrative of the way the enemy views the situation in Germany and the course of action he thinks is the right one to take: "The situation in Germany is marked by an attempt on the part of the bureaucracy and other clandestine enemies of National Socialism to gain control of the NSDAP."

Source of English translation: Reinhard Heydrich, "The Enemy in Disguise," in Anson Rabinbach and Sander Gilman, eds., *The Third Reich Sourcebook*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013, pp. 341–42. Republished with permission.

Source of original German text: Reinhard Heydrich, "Der getarnte Gegner," *Das Schwarze Korps*, May 22, 1935, p. 36.

Recommended Citation: Reinhard Heydrich, "The Enemy in Disguise" (May 22, 1935), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5106>> [July 09, 2025].