

SD Report to the Party Chancellery on “Basic Questions Regarding the Mood and Attitude of the German People” (November 29, 1943)

Abstract

Since the Nazi regime regarded the civilian population's will to war as the crucial precondition for a final victory, various party and police authorities were involved in monitoring the general public mood. The extent to which the home front was controlled and surveyed can be seen in this November 29, 1943, report by the Security Service (SD) of the SS.

Source

[...]

The first serious shocks occurred with the *reverses* of the last two winters of the war *in Russia*. It was then that for the first time doubts emerged about whether the leadership was fully capable of grasping the enormous problems created by the war and of mastering them. In the course of this year's developments the question has been raised more frequently as to whether the leadership really 'made the right decisions' both in terms of military operations and as far as measures at home were concerned.

In such deliberations the population makes a clear *distinction between the Führer and the other leading figures*. Whereas a loss of trust in individual leading personalities or leading agencies occurs comparatively frequently, faith in the Führer is virtually unshaken. While it has certainly been subjected to various serious stresses, above all after the fall of Stalingrad, nevertheless recent months have seen a strengthening of trust in the Führer despite the setbacks on all fronts. Recently it reached a high point with the *freeing of Mussolini* and the *Führer speech* on the night before 9 November. 'Here the German people believed they were seeing the Führer once more in all his greatness.' Faith in him has been so steeled by the painful crises of the fourth year of the war that it can now hardly be shaken even by unfavorable political or military developments. Many people see in the Führer the only *guarantee of a successful conclusion of the war*. For our compatriots the idea that anything could happen to the Führer is unthinkable.

Thus, while the Führer is the only person who is considered capable of mastering the present situation and future problems, the *remaining leadership of the Reich* is no longer trusted unconditionally. In particular, the failure of *promises and prophecies* to be fulfilled has seriously undermined trust in individual leaders as far as many compatriots are concerned.

[...]

Above all, there is a marked *reduction in trust in the media*. The attempt from time to time to disguise the true picture when the situation was serious or to play down ominous military developments, for example 'by portraying withdrawal as a success' or 'portraying territory which previously was described as valuable as now being not so important after all' or 'thinking that periods of delay or quiet have to be filled up with flannel-type reports about events in India or plutocratic excesses in England or America', have largely undermined trust in the press and radio which previously existed.

Thus, in their desire for objectivity and openness and their dislike of attempts to portray things as better

than they are the population has gradually begun to read between the lines and, in particular, increasingly to turn to the news *from neutral and enemy states*.

A further factor leading to expressions of mistrust in the leadership is the *behavior of individual local leading figures* in the state and Party at the lower and middle levels. Although the measures of the Reich Government are basically approved of, much of what they see being done by the executive organs of the state and Party gives compatriots cause for thought. Thus, for example, the population notes that *barter and illicit trading* keep spreading or that the *total war* propagated by the leadership is not being fairly implemented (e.g. in the case of the deployment of women, the question of housemaids, the allocation of housing and, above all, in the granting of reserved worker status) and that some of the leading figures of the state and Party are not being fully affected by the restrictions which are imposed on everybody else. The observation that leading personalities are *buying up agricultural land* during the war or were able to *expand* their villas and country houses despite the shortage of building materials, as well as providing themselves with private air raid shelters and, finally, the *sparing of members* of the middle ranks or top leadership who have committed offenses, through the dismissal of court cases or their postponement for several months, which has allegedly occurred in individual cases, have led many to believe that the leadership does not always take its share of the nation's sacrifices. There are 'double standards' and 'they preach water but drink wine'.

Poor behavior by individual persons in authority in public life often damaged trust in the top leadership at the local level.

Workers' trust in the leadership of their plants, in the DAF and other organizations and authorities is also often subject to particular strain. Many workers are once more beginning to *think in terms of classes* and talk of classes [*Schichten und Ständen*] who would 'exploit' them.

As far as the *Wehrmacht* is concerned, the population is convinced of the professional and personal qualities of the German military leadership. [...] However, the excesses in the *bases* and to some extent in the home garrisons have been the subject of growing criticism. This culminates in the statement that the First World War conditions are being surpassed by the present situation. Reference is made, in particular, to the *alleged growing gap between the officers and men* among the troops behind the front and at home (special provisions for the messes, use of spirits, shopping trips to the occupied territories, the inappropriate use of soldiers who are capable of front-line service in messes, offices etc.).

To sum up, the reports reveal the following:

1. The population makes *a distinction between the Führer and the rest of the leadership* in its assessment of professional performance and personal behavior.
2. The *criticism of individual leading figures* and of measures ordered by leading agencies, which in some cases comes not just from opponents or the usual grumblers, but from wide circles of the population, indicates a certain reduction in trust in the leadership.
3. *Fairness and the equal distribution of the burdens of war will determine the degree of trust in the leadership*. This trust is shaken above all if measures are not applied equally or totally and when exceptions are made and when there are 'back doors' and when action is not taken irrespective of the person affected.

Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes, ed., *Nazism, 1919-1945*, Vol. 4: *The German Home Front in World War II*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, pp. 550-51.

Source of original German text: Bericht an die Parteikanzlei vom 29. November 1943; reprinted in Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich. Die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS 1938-1945*. Vol. 15, Herrsching: Pawlak, 1984, pp. 6064-66.

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