

SOPADE Report: No War Enthusiasm (September-October 1939).

Abstract

When it was outlawed in June of 1933, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) leadership went into exile and worked with underground supporters within Germany to report on life within the Third Reich. Known as the SOPADE (the Exile Organisation of the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany), they operated in Prague from 1933 to 1938, from 1938 to 1940 in Paris, and until 1945 in London. Although their reports tended to emphasize discontent and resistance, they nonetheless represent a valuable insight into public knowledge and activity during the Third Reich. In this report, we learn of a general disinterest among Germans towards the idea of a pending war. While Germans were generally enthusiastic about regaining lands they felt had a clear tie to German heritage, they wished for such processes to be undertaken peacefully. The report reveals the degree of naiveté among the general population of Germany.

Source

On the basis of our reports, we have been able to ascertain time and again up to the last period that the overwhelming majority of the German people did not want war. If the Nazis finally succeeded in creating a mood for war against Poland in wide circles, it was only because this war was not taken seriously and most people, in view of the experience with Czechoslovakia, did not want to believe that action against Poland would inevitably result in a confrontation with the Western powers. Hence the widespread naive idea that there could be peace quickly after the Polish campaign. (Hitler's "peace offensive" was largely motivated by domestic politics with this notion in mind). The following reports unanimously reveal this war weariness.

Bavaria: A substantial part of the population still hopes that the French will not join the war after all and that the matter will therefore soon come to an end. However, it is mostly the uncritical who still blindly believe everything that is in the newspaper or that is being told to them by a Nazi speaker. The politically minded, on the other hand, reckon that England and France will defeat Germany, even if Russia were to intervene in the war on Germany's side.

Southwest Germany, 1st report: The Nazi circles, especially the SS and SA, are systematically spreading rumors, apparently on the instructions of the party leadership, that the French allegedly do not want to fight. That was why the French government would not let them attack the Siegfried Line [*Westwall*] near Weil am Rhein, the French had put up a big banner saying: "German brothers don't shoot, we won't shoot for England either." Or another tale: Frenchmen would swim to the middle of the Rhine. There they would talk to the bathing German soldiers and tell them that they would rather shoot at the English than at the Germans. The French government had been forced to withdraw the French troops from the Rhine, and now only Blacks were posted there.

2nd report: the blackout, which is ordered all the time, is causing a lot of bad blood because it is seen as harassment. People used to read in the newspapers that approaching warplanes would be heard early enough to leave enough time to sound the alarm, and now they have to black out night after night. This is strictly controlled, and in every police report one can read one or more charges of insufficiently carried out blackout. On Sunday, September 24, the first air raid alarm was sounded when French planes attacked Friedrichshafen. There was a terrible confusion in the district town of X. Incidentally, the same

thing was reported from other towns. Many inhabitants refused to go into the air-raid shelters, and the police and auxiliary police literally raced around town, sometimes like mad, to force people into the basement shelters. People said, we have no intention to go along with this monkey business all the time. Even officials refused to go into the shelters. The most stupid and the most obedient were, of course, the proletarians. They followed everything faithfully. Many simply went to bed, so that in various houses the block guards had to threaten to report them to the police. The most agitated were the so-called auxiliary policemen, of whom there are a vast number. They are mostly older businessmen who have served in the military. They stick them in the old green gendarmerie uniforms and give them a yellow armband.

On September 26, the wildest rumors were going around about the bombing of Friedrichshafen. In X. they wanted to have heard both shooting and the impact of bombs. The next day the whole thing was denied in the newspaper and the “stupid” gossips were threatened with imprisonment.

[...]

Source of original German text: Bernd Söseman, *Propaganda. Medien und Öffentlichkeit in der NS-Diktatur*. Bd. 2. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011, p. 1042.

Translation: Insa Kummer

Recommended Citation: SOPADE Report: No War Enthusiasm (September-October 1939)., published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-5166>> [March 20, 2025].