

## Web 5.7

### Case Study 5.6: An example of a complete initial post with responses (Esher 6)

#### Esher 6 – Proposal

Esher Group 6 – Monday, 9 May 2005, 02:49 PM

There is great historical debate surrounding the issue of whether the strategy of the Nazi regime was based on terror or consent. Through our research and the information provided it is evident that, contrary to Detlev Peukert's view, terror was the principal tactic employed by the Nazis. This is evident from such events as the elimination of the Reichstag, the "fear and intimidation", the Gestapo and of course the existence of the concentration camps themselves. Many examples of terror tactics are outlined in the extract from "Topography of Terror: A Documentation". The comparison of the number of examples of terror tactics mentioned in this source with the number of examples based on consent mentioned in Peukert's source shows exclusively that terror was for more widely used than consent.

There is a lot of evidence that indicates that the Nazis used terror to keep the German people in order between the years 1933–39. Source 1 gives us lots of information that would back up the view that the Nazis used terror tactics. It mentions the use of the SA and the SS to eliminate and intimidate all opposing parties.

The Reichstag fire is also a classic example of terror that the Nazis used. Through making it seem it was the Communists who started the fire they were able to pass the emergency laws which enabled them to have full emergency powers over Germany. From this they arrested many Communists and Social Democrats as well as critics of the NSDAP and put a stop to all of their activities. Source 1 actually refers to this period as a 'reign of terror'. It also mentions how the Nazis used terror in everyday life to influence the people of Germany in the workplace and in public and in sending people to the concentration camps. The 'Boycott of Jewish Shops' and the anti Semitic laws passed are a big example of terror being used in Germany to discriminate the Jews. Although at the time many Germans weren't opposed to these laws it is still terror because the truth about the Jewish community was being manipulated by Goebbels and his propaganda campaigns. Source 4 also backs up the view that the Nazis ruled by terror. In the source we see a Communist being arrested and cleaned up. This tells us that the Communists had their rights taken from them and were made to be seen as 'evil'. Once again source 6 backs this view up by saying in 1937 everything had been coordinated in German life by the Nazis and that there was no point in conducting local meetings to make group decisions. Although source 7 says that Mettelmann at the time had

no objection to the anti-Reich people going to the concentration camps, the sheer fact that there were concentration camps indicates an element of terror used in Nazi Germany. For many of these points I have mentioned, at the actual point in time in Germany the people weren't too against all of these bad things that were happening which would indicate consent. However, due to the fact that the German people didn't know the full truth about what was actually happening this period is clearly one where terror was predominantly used to rule the country.

However, it is often argued that without the consent of the people, the Nazi state would have failed. To an extent this is true, particularly when looking at the actions and methods of the Gestapo. It is often believed that there was only one Gestapo officer for every 10,000 Germans, meaning that there is no way Hitler's secret police could have intimidated the entire population of Germany. Moreover, more than 80% of the Gestapo's investigations resulted from public denunciations. That is, the organisation relied solely upon tip-offs from the German people due to them being so understaffed and profligate. Therefore, it appears that Hitler's pillar of terror would not have succeeded in its objectives of suppressing Communists and Jews if it had not been for the complete support and consent of the public. However, the fact that such a well-known secret police force existed and functioned in Nazi Germany shows that the state was one of terror. Indeed, the objective of a terroristic state is to inject fear into its population, subduing views deemed by the government to be offensive, through force. And this is what the Gestapo did, albeit via the help of the public.

Another issue regarding the subject of consent in Nazi Germany arises when looking at the plebiscites. A form of referendum, the Nazis appeared to ask for public consent regarding issues such as re-occupation of the Rhineland and Anschluss with Austria. In each case, the public were overwhelmingly in favour of Nazi policy, perhaps suggesting that the government had a political mandate for German aggression and expansion. However, these plebiscites were nothing more than another example of propaganda. Each poll was worded very carefully so as to raise issues such as nationalism, and the restoration of Germany to a great nation once more, which most Germans would vote in favour of – hence why it appeared that 95%+ of the population were approving of Hitler's extreme policies. Because the plebiscites were meddled with so much by the state, they therefore cannot be a clear example of consent. Moreover, they highlight an element of terror, especially seeing as SS guards were present at the polling stations, influencing the votes and opinions of Germans.

In conclusion, it is evident from the sources and our own knowledge that Nazi Germany was a state run by terror. Although there are many respected arguments for consent, such as the public appearing to support concentration camps, it is clear through research that the public knowledge surrounding the true facts about the events that occurred in concentration camps and in other aspects was minimal and they therefore drew false conclusions. A state that employed concentration camps, secret police, S.S.

and S.A. clearly relied on terror to enforce their power. The fact that the Nazis manipulated the Reichstag through fear, by surrounding the hall with the S.A., to release power to Hitler and his party showed that this basis of Nazi power was terror. It is common sense to realise that Nazi Germany in the years of 1933–1939 was a totalitarian state.

**Re: Esher 6 – Proposal**

Truro Group 6 – Thursday, 12 May 2005, 12:01 PM

The Nazi reaction to the Reichstag fire could not be terroristic as they did not have the power within Germany at the time to use organized terror. The emergency decrees resulting from the Reichstag fire could have allowed the Nazis to implement a terroristic regime but at the time they did not as they did not have the level of support within the country to allow a campaign of terror.

You say that “There is a lot of evidence that indicates that the Nazis used terror to keep the German people in order between the years 1933–39” but the majority of the examples you use only show terror to religious and political minorities, and surely if the German people were kept under control by terror then why have you not got any evidence for the terrorising of the ordinary German, and as you probably know less than one percent of the German population was Jewish.

How can a “well known secret police force” work? If it is secret can it also be well known surely this is a contradiction.

Also you contradict your previous argument by saying that the population consented to a widespread terror.

**Re: Esher 6 – Proposal**

Esher Group 6 – Monday, 16 May 2005, 05:07 PM

Political power is not needed to start a fire, the fire itself may not have been an act of terror however our point is the fire was used by the Nazis as an excuse to pass acts which made terror in Germany possible.

Your other point that they did not have sufficient support to allow a campaign of terror is also incorrect. The point of using terror to consolidate power is because they did not have support which is why they needed terror.

The meaning of a secret police force is that the knowledge of its existence is not secret but the actions, numbers and location are. This does therefore not mean that here small numbers were any less intimidating.

It is impossible to define what an ordinary German was. As already mentioned, although only 1% of the population may have been Jewish, there were other groups that were persecuted.