

BERLIN UNDER BOMBING

A Turkish official, caught in Berlin during the Allied blitz, tells how the Germans are taking it, and what they say

BY
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as told to
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I HAVE just come from the inferno made of Berlin by the blitz of the early days of 1944. I was in Germany for nearly three months, attached to the Turkish Trade Mission, and I saw it from the inside—its shattered hotels, ruined embassies, and stricken workers' quarters.

All my previous experience of death and destruction was as nothing compared with the blitz. The air-raid signals always sounded too late, when the bombers were practically overhead. Frequently bombs dropped before people were able to reach a shelter; for the Nazi Air Defense never knows whether the R. A. F. or the American Fortresses are headed for Berlin or near-by Leipzig, Magdeburg, or Hamburg.

On one occasion when the air-raid siren sounded, I ran from my home in Friedenau toward the nearest public shelter, five hundred yards away. Halfway there, I heard a bomb burst with ear-splitting tumult and threw myself behind a tree for protection against flying glass fragments. None of the debris hit me, but I saw fires starting around me, first one, then five, then ten, then so many that I could no longer count them.

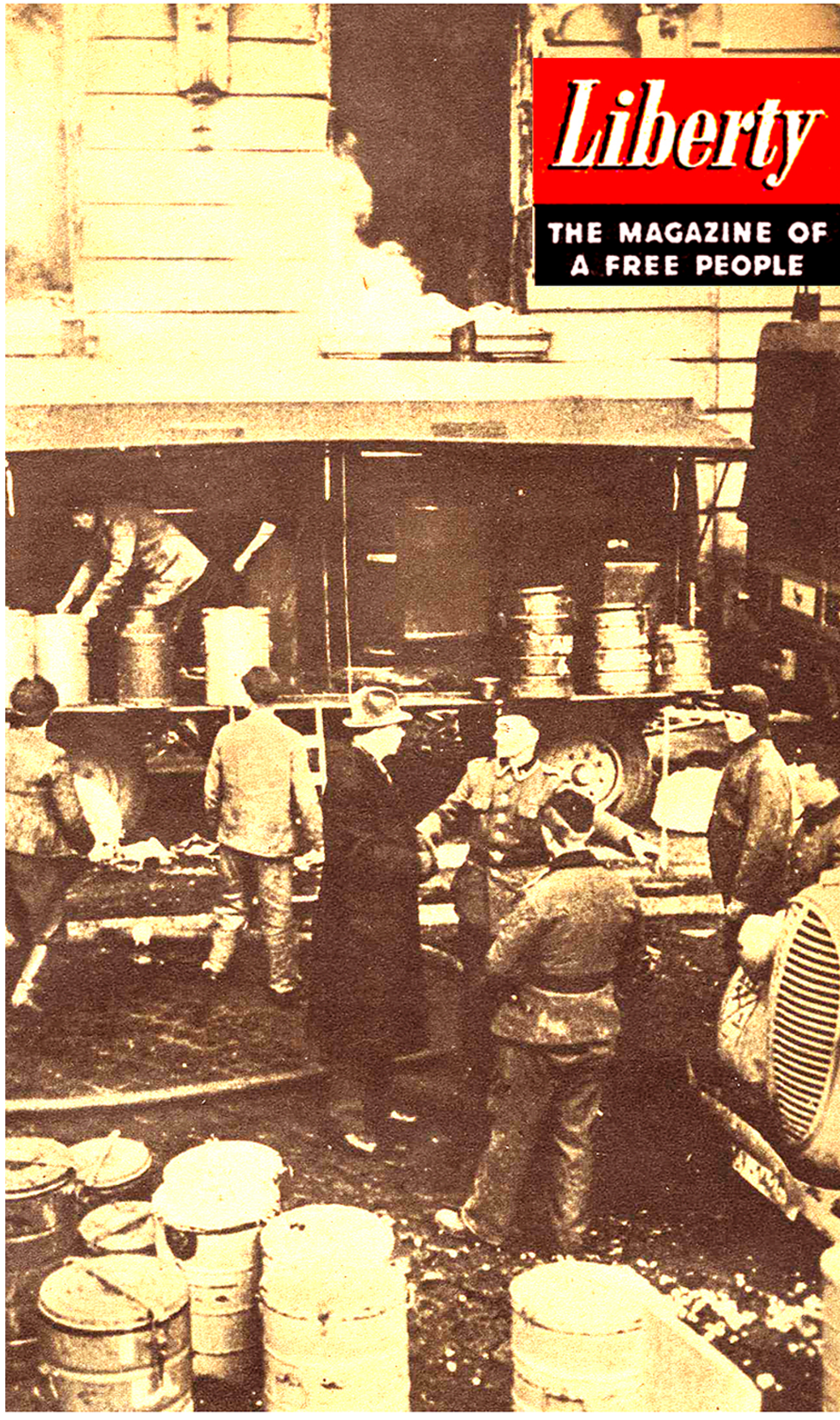
I made another dash for the shelter. Some people were lingering about trying to do something about the fires, but hundreds were running frantically, and soon their numbers swelled to thousands. When the crowd finally reached the shelter, a cordon of police told them there was no more room.

The screaming, hysterical mob plunged on once more in a desperate race for the next shelter—through burning streets, exploding buildings, rain of antiaircraft shrapnel and burning furniture hurtled through space. At the next shelter I was again excluded—no room. There was nothing now but one of the emergency shelters—a pipe line just big enough to crawl into.

I could see and hear everything. After twenty minutes I was paralyzed with cold and painful cramps in my legs. I thought the end had come. I pictured myself struck dead or burned to a cinder. There seemed not the slightest hope of surviving under the terrific impact of the blockbusters. The raid lasted about four hours, and when the all-clear sounded I could hardly stand.

The next day I had reason to rejoice. The representatives of foreign governments were called to an emergency meeting of the Department of Commerce and told that we would be evacuated. While there we exchanged experiences of the night. A member of the Swedish Trade Mission had used the air-raid shelter under the famous Hotel Adlon, and when the bombing was over the Hotel Adlon was gone—vanished. The Swedish Legation had been damaged and Swiss officials badly hurt. All of us were glad to get out

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A FREE PEOPLE

The taste of war—and thin soup—is in the mouths of these bombed-out Berliners.

of this city of disaster, once so boastfully proud.

When I first went to Germany, the people were singing patriotic songs like *Wir fahren, wir fahren gen Engelland*. But nobody sings that song now. There are too many puns on it. Too many Germans on the Russian front have gone to "Engel's Land"—that is, to Angel's Land. The anti-aircraft guns are too noisy for any songs to be heard, anyway. Inside the shelters, even through walls three and four feet thick, all the sounds of disaster can be heard.

No, no songs are sung. Wives and mothers of fallen soldiers are not allowed to wear black and newspapers are restricted to twenty-five obituaries a day, but every one knows there is practically no family without casualties. There isn't a soul in Germany today who remains enthusiastic about the war in the sense that every one was enthusiastic when Hitler had himself photographed in Paris at the foot of the Eiffel Tower.

War weariness is universal. Every one inside Germany is constantly and hopelessly dead tired from long working hours and horrible nights spent in air-raid shelters. There is hardly an item of food that isn't scarce or fantastically priced. It doesn't take long, under such conditions, to realize that the Nazis' vaunted efficiency works only when they can use terror or bribery.

Millions feel hatred for their leaders who have established their wives and mistresses safely in Paris and provided them with luxuries from the occupied countries, while the people of Germany lose everything in the bombings—dear ones, homes, belongings. All this feeling is surely in the air, but the Gestapo's reign of terror is too overwhelming for any organized resistance to develop.

Goebbels' propaganda has done its work, too. It has convinced the average German that he must carry on, since, bad as things are, unconditional surrender will be worse. Goebbels has played that up until the Germans fear they will have to work as slave labor from Alaska to Siberia.

So the bombings haven't created an atmosphere of revolt. The Germans' reactions are a curious mixture of apathy and fury. The apathy is acceptance of the

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inevitable; the fury, a fury of frustration. Each man thinks of only one thing—how to save his life, how to endure until the all-clear signal sounds.

All day long people speculate on which air-raid shelter to pick that night. There are primitive ones and dangerous ones, cold ones and warm ones, lighted and unlighted. And there are those with large entrances and those with small entrances. That's a consideration, for one may get hurt or even killed in the panic.

The large shelters have hospital facilities, because many arrive with burns or with injuries suffered in the rush. Others are sickened by the crowded conditions, and often children need care. Here, as in everything else, foreign laborers—the people of conquered countries—have to wait until the others are taken care of.

The people try to sleep, since they will have to work the next day and absenteeism carries severe punishment. Some play cards—the famous Skat. Hundreds of soldiers fill the public shelters, and move off into the dark corners with their girls. Their conduct shocks many a Berliner; yet, for the majority, moral standards no longer exist.

The air-raid shelters in apartment houses and private dwellings are extremely vulnerable. Hundreds have been leveled by direct hits or by the explosion of gas systems, and people have been drowned in their cellars when a near-by water main was hit.

During these days many people have taken to wearing only their worst clothing. You can't reach a shelter without fighting your way through a mob, and after the raid you must pick your way among burning houses, and the fiery pavement ruins your shoes. Often the soles are scorched through before you reach home. And when you do reach "home" you are lucky to find it still standing.

You see children wildly seeking for their mothers, wives wildly seeking for their husbands. Women carry dead children in their arms and children weep beside their dead mothers.

These were the sights in London, too.

There are some Germans who recognize that and say: "It is the same as we did to London and Amsterdam. It was the same when we were victorious in France." People overheard saying such things have been shot.

Berlin has not been completely knocked out, but certainly half the city has been destroyed. The Berliners call the process "Berlimination."

After the first bombing nobody worked for a week. Nobody shaved and nobody washed. It was nearly impossible to get food, although the German Red Cross did manage to maintain mobile *Gulasch-Kanonen*, where one could get a kind of

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thin stew. Civilians turned fire fighters and firemen from all the surrounding cities were called in. This proved a mistake, because within the next few days the neighboring cities of Leipzig and Magdeburg were bombed in their turn.

The bombings of December, 1943, and January, 1944, disrupted transportation. The Berlin subway did not run for weeks. People hung on the outside of trolley cars, which were thrown completely off schedule. They stood in luggage cars, jammed platforms, and lay on the roofs of the S-Bahn, the suburban railways, in their eagerness to get out of Berlin for the suburbs of Straussberg, Fürstenwalde, Werder, and Erkner. They traveled three and four hours a day to and from work just to avoid spending the night in Berlin.

Hitler's chancellery was badly damaged and the balcony from which he so often had made his rabid speeches was neatly nipped off by a bomb. One bombing caught the Führer himself as he was conferring with Munitions Minister Albert Speer. He dived into a shelter, and the next morning left Berlin by car.

The Foreign Office of Joachim von Ribbentrop—whom Berliners call Ribbensnob—was wrecked. Hermann Göring's Air Ministry was heavily damaged, and people joked grimly about his fifty bathrooms. "Where is he going to get water for his bathtubs?" they asked. The offices of Goebbels and of Alfred Rosenberg, the pagan philosopher and Minister of Eastern Affairs, were destroyed.

The railway stations got the worst beating of all. The Yorkstrasse freight railway station is a complete ruin. Five others, the Stettiner, the Potsdamer, the Lehrter, the Friedrichstrasse, and Charlottenburg, have been severely damaged.

Movies, theaters, and department stores, including the two largest, Wertheim and Kaufhaus des Westens, were burned down. For a short time Berlin even had a jungle scare. Bears from the Berlin zoo padded down Unter den Linden. Troops armed with machine guns hunted leopards, tigers, and lions.

Tens of thousands of people fled the city. For Berliners it was the first taste of what it is like to wheel handcarts and carry bundles. But thousands of others—those who had been evacuated from the Rhineland after the terrific bombing of Cologne and the Ruhr—had been through it before. They knew what it was to lose everything they had just as those people in the countries the Germans had overrun also knew.

NOW there is no longer running water in the houses in Berlin. Water itself is rationed at one pint, and people wait in long lines to get it. They go to pumps and wells which fifty years ago were used for watering horses. There is no means of telephoning within Berlin. It is impossible to get a room without some inducement—such as a food parcel from Turkey or Denmark.

Bitter jokes are made about the housing conditions in Berlin. The situation is referred to as the "Soviet Paradise," an allusion to the anti-Soviet propaganda exhibit which depicted the "deplorable" housing conditions in the Soviet Union.

Workers who have been bombed out are herded together in small allotment centers or in municipally run labor camps

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—some 250,000 people crowded in barracks. There are French, Italian, Dutch, and Norwegians—enforced labor from conquered countries. I visited some of the labor camps and the sanitary conditions were disgusting.

They work at least twelve hours a day. The wages seem high, but after the deductions and numerous “voluntary” collections barely enough is left to live on. Wherever one goes, there is a collection box for the “Winter Help” or the “Evacuation Fund.” Workers in the labor camps who refuse to contribute have their holidays taken away. They are expected to contribute at least two marks a week.

THE foreign laborers, incidentally, are expected to give up their seats to Germans in streetcars, buses, and subways. To fail to do so often precipitates a fight, and there is a statute providing for a penalty of fifteen years’ imprisonment for a foreign worker who fights a German.

The transport workers are men over sixty-five—or women. Women even drive locomotives. The people are resentful of the Nazi overlords who still have their big Mercedes cars.

The prices in the black market are almost incredible. An auto tire and tube costs 1,000 marks, or \$500. Coupons for about two pounds of bread are worth ten marks, or five dollars. Butter coupons go for fifty dollars. These prices are for the coupons *alone*. They don’t include the cost of the bread or butter, which is very high. Two pounds of pork in the black market is worth thirty dollars.

Breakfast is without milk, coffee, or tea, but there is plenty of beer. Strangely enough, that never seems to run out. Berliners have even taken to washing themselves with it.

The paper shortage is so severe that the labor camps keep the same blackout paper up for a year. People have to bring their own paper to public lavatories. Shoes have cardboard soles and even soldiers’ puttees are made of paper. I was offered a secondhand suit of good English cloth—at \$250. Combs, pencils, and fountain pens are not obtainable except on the black market.

When I sought to have my watch fixed, I was told I would have to bring the parts of another watch, and then the repairs would require some six months. The Nazi leaders slip their watches and other articles needing repair into diplomatic pouches and send them to Switzerland or Sweden.

A Danish friend of mine spied an umbrella in a shop window, but when he went in to buy it the shopman said: “Bring me a pound of Danish butter. Then I’ll sell you the umbrella.” The Danes working in Berlin are permitted to receive one food parcel a month, and such a parcel, nominally worth sixteen Danish crowns, or four dollars, can be sold on the black market for \$150.

Only the wealthier Nazis can afford the prices of the black market. From others you hear—guardedly—such remarks as, “In the last war we lived on beets. In this war they feed us like animals on carrot mixtures.”

Widows, incidentally—and there are many of them—are paid well for uniforms. Newspapers carry such ads as the following: “Army colonel wants to buy uniform of dead or wounded colonel. Will pay highest prices.”

Germany is filled with rumors of the wildest sort. Nothing can be learned from the German radio and press, so some of the more daring listen furtively to British, American, and Russian broadcasts to learn of the German losses. Others rely on the *Flüster-Post* (Whispering Post), and the *Flüster-Post* works pretty well.

I KNOW for a certainty that there is an underground movement, a Russian-inspired Communist group, in practically every industrial center. They proceed carefully and wear the Nazi uniform. Their chief task is to transmit secret serv-

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ice information to the Allies.

The leader of the German Communist Party, Ernst Thaelmann, had been imprisoned in Hanover since 1933. In January, 1944, when Hanover was bombed, men from the underground wearing Nazi uniforms entered the prison, while the guards were in a shelter, and liberated Thaelmann. Himmler has announced a reward of \$50,000 for his recapture, but we may well see him next heading the Free Germany Committee in Moscow.

Through all this the Germans persistently hope for miracles. They have underground factories which can continue to produce, and the fact gives them hope that some secret and invincible weapon will come out of them. Countless books of fantastic prophecy appear. The most famous is by one Hans Dominik, and it tells the story of a Nazi who discovers a secret ray which, directed from Berlin, can demolish Rockefeller Center in New York City.

But the truth is that all but the most fervid fear that the war will be lost. Recently even loyal Nazis have found their way to concentration camps. They have become critical, or clearly see that the cause is lost. There is a joke current in Berlin about new Nazi Party regulations:

"Every Nazi who recruits one new member is allowed to leave the Party. A Nazi who can recruit five members will be given a letter stating that he never belonged to the Nazi Party. A Nazi who can recruit ten new members will be given a birth certificate stating that he has a Jewish grandmother."

But not all the remarks are jokes. Perhaps better reflecting the feeling of many Germans that the jig is up is what a charwoman told me. "In 1917, when the stores were stripped of everything, they put Hindenburg's picture in the empty windows. These days they put Hitler's picture in the empty windows. That's the only difference," she said.

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