

René Haase

'Suddenly', 'Unexpectedly', 'Senseless'? Dresden during National Socialism

Plotting the historical genesis of National Socialism in Dresden demands rather a lot of effort. While there is a plethora of publications about allied air raids on Dresden,¹ a comprehensive description of the history of National Socialism in Dresden² is lacking because up till now only specific individual aspects have been examined. 'Dresden was not a historical exception,' writes Dirk Hilbert³ and thus any description of Dresden before and during National Socialism must attempt to show a historical reality that runs counter to the pervasive myth of it being an 'innocent city of art and culture'.

In the early 1920s Dresden was not a classic Nazi capital. At that time the Saxon strongholds were still Chemnitz, Zwickau and Plauen.⁴ But it is clear that Saxony played a key role in the rise in the numbers of National Socialists. As early as 1925, with over 80 local NSDAP⁵ groups it became the strongest NS *Gau* (Nazi provincial organisation) of the Weimar Republic.⁶ That, of course, had a significant effect on the *Gau* capital. The final electoral successes of the NSDAP showed that Dresden had also developed into a stronghold: the NSDAP got 134,333 votes in the Reichstag election on the 6 November 1932. Although the election that was held on the 5 March 1933 after they had seized power on the 30 of January cannot be regarded as a free election, there was nevertheless a choice and it brought the NSDAP a further 53,000 votes. This brought their share of the votes up to 42,27% and with that, Dresden lay

1 The book by Götz Bergander, *Dresden im Luftkrieg. Vorgeschichte – Zerstörung – Folgen*, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1994, (first published in 1977) is the most important work which exposes the myths surrounding the depiction of the allied air raids on Dresden. It is also worth mentioning the monograph by Frederick Taylor, *Dresden, Dienstag, 13. Februar 1945. Militärische Logik oder blanker Terror?*, München: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2004, which is oriented on Bergander.

2 Gunnar Schubert, *Die kollektive Unschuld. Wie der Dresden-Schwindel zum nationalen Opfermythos wurde*, Hamburg: KVV konkret, 2009, p. 33. In this connection Schubert names the anthology edited by Reiner Pommerin, *Dresden unterm Hakenkreuz*, Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1998, as the only counter example though it, too, only deals with partial aspects. Taylor's (above-mentioned) monograph also lacks a complete and comprehensive depiction. Further individual aspects concerning Dresden and its surroundings can be found in Clemens Vollnhals (ed.), *Sachsen in der NS-Zeit*, Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag GmbH, 2002.

3 Dirk Hilbert, *Dresden war keine Ausnahme der Geschichte*, in: Christine Pieper/Mike Schmeitzner/Gerhard Naser (ed.), *Braune Karrieren. Dresdner Täter und Akteure im Nationalsozialismus*, Dresden: Sandstein Verlag, 2012, 9.

4 Christine Pieper/Mike Schmeitzner, *Täter und Akteure im Nationalsozialismus, Ein forschungsgeschichtlicher Überblick*, in: Christine Pieper et al. (ed.), op. cit. 13–19.

5 Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei = National Socialist German Workers' Party = Nazi party

6 Benjamin Lapp, *Der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus in Sachsen*, in: Reiner Pommerin (ed.), *Dresden unterm Hakenkreuz*, Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1998, 2.

within striking distance of the average.⁷ By this time persecution, disfranchisement and revocation of rights, oppression and terror were daily occurrences. One can not assume, therefore, that in Saxony in general or Dresden in particular there was a pronounced aversion to National Socialism. Thus it is essential here to understand the historical position of Dresden before and during National Socialism.

At the end of the nineteenth century Saxony was already a densely populated and highly industrialised free state that could show a robust economic structure and exceptionally high employment in craft and industrial enterprises. However, the severe depression as a result of the *Gründerkrise*⁸ ['founder crisis'] in the 1870s left its mark and, above all, unsettled the middle classes: a strong and distinctive strain of anti-Semitism began to spread.⁹ This made Saxony at the end of the nineteenth century a centre of anti-Semitism and greater Dresden an anti-Semitic stronghold.¹⁰ It is therefore not surprising that in 1882 the first international 'Anti-Jewish Congress' was held in Dresden.¹¹ In other words, in the city 'in which politics was under the control of a coalition of conservative and anti-Semitic "reformers" until the fall of the monarchy'¹². During this period anti-Semitism and conservatism underwent what can be called a veritable fusion which de facto represented 'a reaction to a profound crisis of modernisation'¹³.

What became clear once again was the extremely pronounced political polarisation that already existed in Saxony between, on the one hand, strong middle class nationalism and anti-Semitism that had set the tone during the monarchy and, on the other, a robust workers' movement with a long tradition that had been radicalised by the defeat of the First World War and the November Revolution.¹⁴ Even a strong and radicalised social democracy was unable to counteract the ambivalence created by the prevailing conditions during these years. In the 'exemplary little land of reactionaries'¹⁵ social democracy had to administer a heavy burden inherited under Weimar conditions. Considering the almost negligible proportion of the overall population that Jews represented, the resonance anti-Semitism had in monarchist Saxony was astounding enough but it was given further impetus by the *Dolchstoß* [knife in

7 Ibid. p 32.

8 In Germany and Austria the *Gründerzeit* frequently refers to the period 1850–1870 which was marked by stability and towards the end of the period a boom. This was followed by the stock market crash in 1873 and a long depression, the *Gründerkrise*.

9 Clemens Vollnhals, *Der gespaltene Freistaat: Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Sachsen*, in: op. cit. *Sachsen in der NS-Zeit*, Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag GmbH, 2002, 9–40.

10 Gerald Kolditz, *Zur Entwicklung des Antisemitismus in Dresden während des Kaiserreichs*, in: Dresdner Geschichtsverein (ed): *Zwischen Integration und Vernichtung. Jüdisches Leben in Dresden im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Dresdner Hefte 45 (1996), 37–45.

11 Vollnhals, op. cit. 10.

12 Ibid.

13 op. cit. 11.

14 See: op. cit. 11.

15 Ibid.

the back] fable which potentiated anti-Semitic and anti-communist propaganda. The alleged betrayal of social democrats – ‘in the interests of international financial capital’¹⁶ – that they had brought about with the ‘dagger in the back’ and then doubled with the Treaty of Versailles, marked the main thrust of *Deutschvölkische*¹⁷ and National Socialist propaganda during the Weimar Republic. Thus it was ‘the nationalist/*völkisch* milieu there that [...] produced the very first Nazi activists’.¹⁸

It was in 1921, in this right-wing Saxon bog that the first NSDAP local group outside of Bavaria was formed in Zwickau.¹⁹ Forerunner and ‘kernel of the Nazi movement’²⁰ was the radically anti-Semitic, *Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund* [German Nationalist Protection and Defiance Federation]. Martin Mutschmann, a textile industrialist from Plauen, was active in it from 1922 on. He was one of the most fanatical anti-Semites and also the among the most authoritarian figures in the Nazi movement in Saxony. A close relationship with Hitler and a ‘brutal instinct for power’²¹ secured his rapid rise within the party: in 1925 Hitler appointed him to the post of *Gauleiter* [provincial head] of the Saxony NSDAP and in 1933 to *Reichsstatthalter* [Governor].²²

As of the crisis year 1923 there was a steady economic and political downturn, also, and especially, in Saxony. The heavy burden inherited from the Weimar Republic, in particular for the social democrats, markedly continued and which remained unchanged even with the formal ban on the NSDAP party in March of that year. In retrospect, the *Reichsexekution*²³ against Saxony in October 1923 can be considered as a watershed,²⁴ followed by a re-consolidation phase for the NSDAP from 1925 on. The result was that it ‘achieved a hegemony of the right wing and regularly obtained exceptionally good election results’.²⁵

16 Lapp, op. cit. 21.

17 *Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei*, or DVFP = German Völkisch Freedom Party. A right wing and anti-Semitic party founded on the Völkish movement. There is no direct translation for the term in English but it combines populist notions of ‘folksy’ and ‘people-based’ includes a strong ‘ethno-nationalist or racist component and is based on emotional appeal.

18 Vollnhals, op. cit. 12.

19 Ibid. 9.

20 Ibid.

21 Mike Schmeitzner, *Martin Mutschmann und Manfred von Killinger. Die “Führer der Provinz”*, in: Christine Pieper et al. (ed.), *Braune Karrieren*, 2012, op. cit. 25.

22 Ibid. 27.

23 A *Reichsexekution* was intended as a legal decree issued against a state by the federal president in defence of the federal constitution. Military force could be used and a state of emergency declared. In this case it was used against a legally elected government consisting of socialists and communists.

24 See: Vollnhals, op. cit. 13.

25 Henning Fischer, *‘Erinnerung’ an und für Deutschland. Dresden und der 13. Februar 1945 im Gedächtnis der Berliner Republik*, Münster: Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2011, 61.

The inexorable rise of the NSDAP in Saxony began, at the latest, in autumn of 1926 when two members were sent to the provincial parliament²⁶ for the first time. The NSDAP became a mass party at the same time as the democratic middle class party system gradually disintegrated. Because of its high level of industrialisation, Saxony – extremely polarised and in any case weakened – suffered especially severely from the consequences of the world economic crisis of 1929/30.²⁷ This provided fertile soil for the impressive Nazi election campaign in June of 1930 for the provincial government which brought them the definitive breakthrough: with fourteen seats they became the second largest parliamentary group in the Saxony assembly.²⁸ The beginning of the 1930 also marked the final fall of the Weimar Republic and circumstances in Saxony provided the benchmark. The outstanding election results of 1930 and the Reichstag [Federal Parliament] elections of 1932²⁹ turned the NSDAP into the leading party in Saxony; a Nazi Germany should follow from a Nazi Saxony.³⁰

The cultural and intellectual climate was dominated by a nationalist conservative and *völkisch* ideology which was almost in perfect harmony with the 'creeping Nazification of civil society'.³¹ Thus the Nazi party newspaper, *Der Freiheitskampf*, founded in August 1930 by Mutschmann, became the largest circulation Dresden newspaper – an edition of 107,000 daily – until the end of 1932.³² It also found a dangerous level of acceptance at the universities and, in 1932, the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* [National Socialist German Student Association] won the absolute majority in the student elections at Dresden Technical College. There was also prominent support from the professors: eleven of the forty-eight German and Austrian professors who, in July 1932, called for the Nazis to seize power were on the staff of the technical college.³³ 'The colleges all operated under the Nazi banner'³⁴, so it was not surprising that on the 8 March 1933, after that after seizing power, Nazi students and the SA [storm troopers] carried out the first book burnings in the country in Dresden's Wettiner Square. The

26 Vollnhals, op. cit. 20.

27 In 1939, for example, there were almost 400,000 unemployed and by summer of 1932 it had risen to 725,000, which was 12% of the unemployment across the whole country. op.cit. p. 25; cf. Lapp, op.cit. 14.

28 Vollnhals, op.cit. p. 25ff. What is remarkable is that in the run up to the elections there were reports of around 2,000 election meetings in the short space of 3 weeks. This shows with absolute clarity the methodical Nazi energy for agitation and propaganda in comparison to the middle class parties. See: Lapp, op.cit. 9.

29 The NSDAP received 41,2 % of the vote in Saxony and 37,7 %, in Dresden. The countrywide average was 37,3 %; ibid. 23.

30 Ibid. 22ff.

31 Vollnhals, op.cit. 31.

32 Ralf Krüger, *Presse unter Druck. Differenzierte Berichterstattung trotz nationalsozialistischer Presselenkungsmaßnahmen. Die liberalen Dresdner Neueste Nachrichten und das NSDAP-Organ Der Freiheitskampf im Vergleich*, in: Pommerin (ed.), op. cit. 43–66.

33 Vollnhals, op. cit. 9–40.

34 Michael Parak, *Hochschule und Wissenschaft: Nationalsozialistische Hochschul- und Wissenschaftspolitik in Sachsen 1933–1945*, in: Vollnhals (ed.), op. cit. pp. 118–132.

publishing house of the Social Democrats which was situated there was stormed by the SA and the contents of the in-house library were burned on a pyre.³⁵ On the very same day the Saxon SA opened one of the early concentration camps in the former Jugendburg Hohnstein in the Sächsische Schweiz. By August 1933 the number of prisoners there was around 300; torture was the order of the day. When, on the 20 May 1933, *Gauleiter* and, in the meantime, *Reichsstatthalter* Martin Mutschmann visited the 'detention camp' with leaders of the Saxony NSDAP, they were witness to a ceremony of ritual humiliation involving Hermann Liebmann, the former SPD³⁶ Minister of the Interior for Saxony and a Jew. He was so badly mistreated in the process that he died shortly thereafter.³⁷

Incidents of this nature, which were usually without consequences for the perpetrators, were typical and at the same time symptomatic of conditions in Saxony. At the very latest by the beginning of March 1933 the 'breaking of the dam' was noticeable as far as daily terror on the streets was concerned: as a consequence of the 'Presidential Decree for the Protection of People and the State' of 28 February which declared a permanent state of emergency. The Nazis made full use of it. Plundering, robbery, arrests, pogrom-like violence and murder were the order of the day; the Saxony police lost control of the streets. The SA and Political Police worked hand in hand.³⁸ Thus on the 2 March the Ministry of the Interior for Saxony introduced an auxiliary police force which, within a few days, was dominated by SA, SS and the members of rightwing 'defence' forces. When, on the 8 March, Hitler gave SA leader Manfred von Killinger³⁹ the post of Police Commissioner for Saxony, he was investing power in precisely those who were responsible for creating the civil war-like conditions – using their organisations – to now re-establish law and order. After the forced resignation of the ruling government under Walther Schieck on the 10 March, Hitler even appointed Killinger to the office of *Reichskommissar* [Governor] thus making him Prime Minister of Saxony.⁴⁰ A power struggle characteristic for the Nazi movement then took place between Killinger and Mutschmann in which the latter continuously undermined Killinger's efforts to stabilise the situation and contain the uncontrolled violence of the SA and SS. Mutschmann, well-known for his harsh style of leadership and his radical anti-Semitism was only too happy to act on his own initiative: together with Julius Streicher he organised a boycott of Jewish businesses throughout

35 Werner Treß, *Wider den undeutschen Geist! Bücherverbrennung 1933*, Berlin: vorwärts buch Verlag, 2008, 55ff.

36 German Social Democratic Party

37 Marcus Gryglewski, *Zur Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung in Dresden 1933–1945*, in: Norbert Haase/Stefi Jersch-Wenzel/Hermann Simon (eds.), *Die Erinnerung hat ein Gesicht. Fotografien und Dokumente zur nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung in Dresden 1933–1945*, Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag GmbH, 1998, 87–150.

38 Carsten Schreiber, *Täter und Opfer: Der Verfolgungsapparat im NS-Staat*, in: Vollnhals (ed.), op. cit. 172.

39 On Killinger's career see: Schmeitzner, *Martin Mutschmann und Manfred von Killinger*, 2012, op. cit. 22–31.

40 Andreas Wagner, *Partei und Staat. Das Verhältnis von NSDAP und innerer Verwaltung im Freistaat Sachsen 1933–1945*, in: Vollnhals (ed.), Sachsen, op. cit. pp 41–56.

the *Gau* [province] which they set for 1 April 1933. In the same vein, it was on Mutschmann's initiative that the City of Dresden administration issued a directive that all those belonging to the 'Jewish race' were to be immediately dismissed.⁴¹ This was on the 31 March, a week before the passing of the 'Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums' [Law for the Reconstruction of a Professional Civil Service] on the 7 April 1933.

In July 1933, as a consequence of the institutionalisation of political persecution of opponents, the Political Police were transformed into the Office of the Saxon *Geheime Staatspolizei* with offices in Wienerstraße in Dresden. By 1935, the Saxony Gestapo was able to achieve the almost complete suppression of all opposition groups and trade unions and, therefore, any form of organised resistance. Terror and mass arrests favoured this enterprise which ended in 1935 with a final wave of mass arrests involving 2,000 prisoners.⁴² During this process the Gestapo, which was really quite undermanned, could count on the support of the population of Saxony and rely on the denunciations that had become a mass phenomenon.⁴³

There is no doubt that along with the consolidation of power at a political level the saturation of the intellectual and cultural spheres played an exceptionally central role. Dresden, the metropole with a wealth of cultural tradition, maintained its position under the Nazis though admittedly under a completely different banner: on the 23 September 1933 one of the first exhibitions of 'what had been denounced as "degenerate" art' was opened.⁴⁴ Among others, the range of genres and styles of the exhibits in the show included Expressionism, Dadaism and Constructivism. It was the expression of the Nazi contempt for modern art and its protagonists. The Dresden exhibition *Entartete Kunst* [Degenerate Art] was the most frequently visited of the numerous forerunners of the famous 1937 Munich show to which it not only lent it its name but over the next four years it, too, toured twelve further cities. A visit by the Führer and other prominent party members such as Goebbels and Göring also underscored the great significance of this exhibition as a test run for the Munich version four years later.⁴⁵ A further proof of the city's role as a Nazi cultural stronghold is the planning and alignment of the first *Reichs-Theaterfestwoche* [Reich Theatre Festival Week] 1934. One of the 'most representative theatre events of the Third Reich',⁴⁶ it was intended to take place annually and began in Dresden. The programme includ-

41 Grylewski, op. cit. 101f.

42 Schreiber, op. cit. pp. 174–179; cf. Grylewski, op. cit. 103.

43 Schreiber, *ibid.* 177.

44 Fischer, op. cit. 63.

45 See: Christoph Zuschlag, *Die Dresdner Ausstellung "Entartete Kunst" 1933–1937*, in: Dresdner Geschichtsverein (ed): *Die Ausstellung 'Entartete Kunst' und der Beginn der NS-Kulturbarbarei in Dresden*, *Dresdner Hefte* 77 (2004), 17–25.

46 Hansjörg Schneider, *Die I. Reichs-Theaterfestwoche 1934 in Dresden*, in: Dresdner Geschichtsverein (ed.), *ibid.* 70.

ed music, plays and opera but the entire city was involved. It was intended to showcase the splendour of its artistic wealth and historical buildings and numerous exhibitions and other events supplemented the programme – all completely in line with Nazi ideology, of course. Once again the presence of highly prominent party members such as Hitler and Goebbels was foregrounded for propaganda and political purposes. Together with numerous events and processions as demonstrations of Nazi power and loyalty to the Führer, chief propagandist Goebbels held a number of speeches affirming ‘belief in the National Socialist state and German art’⁴⁷. The great success of the Dresden Festival Week and the positive press coverage both at home and abroad succeeded in countering the widespread accusation of the ‘collapse of art in the Third Reich’⁴⁸. From then on till the outbreak of war the festival was held annually in various cities.⁴⁹

Dresden was also able to draw on and continue a long tradition of health policies: ‘Dresden – Stadt der Volksgesundheit’ [City of People’s Health] was the honorary title awarded by the presiding mayor, Ernst Zörner, at the inauguration of the Rudolf-Heß-Krankenhauses [Rudolf Hess Hospital] in Johannstadt in June 1934. It was both the solution to, and the concept behind, the Nazi ‘health and race policies’. The *Deutsche Hygiene Museum* [German Museum of Hygiene] – originally founded in 1913 as the *Sozialhygienische Volksbildungsanstalt* [People’s Educational Institute for Social Hygiene],⁵⁰ – the *Rudolf-Heß-Krankenhaus* and *Hygiene Institute* at the *Dresden Technical College* (founded in 1894) to name only three examples, were used in the Nazi ‘Stadt der Volksgesundheit’ specific and focussed research into ‘social and race hygiene’⁵¹, health education, health maintenance and basic research.⁵² There were no institutions in which people classified as *lebensunwertes leben* [unworthy of life]⁵³ were killed in Dresden itself but *Schloss Sonnenstein* in Pirna, a traditional mental hospital, was not far away. And the path from health policy ideology to the two gas chambers in Pirna was even shorter. At the end of 1939 the mental hospital was closed down and, pursuant to the countrywide *Aktion T4*, two gas chambers were built into the empty buildings at the beginning of 1940. From June of that year till summer 1941 more than 13,000 mental and psychiatric patients were murdered there.⁵⁴

47 Ibid. 72.

48 Loc. cit. 74.

49 Loc. cit. 70–76.

50 Peter Fäßler, *Sozialhygiene – Rassenhygiene – Euthanasie: “Volksgesundheitspflege” im Raum Dresden*, in: Pommerin (ed.), op. cit. 198.

51 Ibid. 199.

52 Loc. cit. 193 and 198f.

53 Loc. cit. 194.

54 Ibid. also 204ff.

In the years 1933–35 the anti-Semitism that was so strongly anchored in Saxony in general and Dresden in particular led to ‘numerous unofficial and spontaneous riots’⁵⁵ directed against Jews. Thus, on the 20 July 1935 Jewish citizens were mistreated in Prager Straße.⁵⁶ As part of a countrywide anti-Semitic campaign in the summer of 1935, the *Der Freiheitskampf* praised the local NSDAP group in Johannstadt, Dresden, for painting slogans on the lamp posts of entire streets: *Die Juden sind unser Unglück* [Jews are our misfortune] or *Wer beim Juden kauft, ist ein Volksverräter* [Anyone buying in a Jewish shop betrays the people.] Ultimately, initiatives of this sort undertaken by grassroots party members combined with the above-mentioned ideologically racist (health) policies and led to the passing of the Nuremberg Racial Laws only a few weeks later in November.⁵⁷ After they had come into force the end of 1935 there were repeated cases of arrest for ‘racial defilement’ in Dresden. Henceforth there would be repeated ‘educational campaigns’, not infrequently instigated and organised by Mutschmann. Along with a ‘race policy week’ in November 1937 and the touring exhibition that was to be seen at the *Deutsches Hygiene Museum* in Dresden in January and February 1938 with the title *Reichsschau Ewiges Volk* [National Eternal Folk Exhibition], Mutschmann held a keynote speech—the title ‘The Jews are our Misfortune’⁵⁸— on the 31 January 1938 in favour of ‘de-Jewing’ of the *Weißer Hirsch* district of the city. In March of the same year Saxony was flooded by a wave of anti-Semitic events with a title selected by Mutschmann: *Völkerfrieden oder Judendiktatur?* [Peace for the People or a Jewish Dictatorship?]. In Dresden alone on the 4 March 1938 there were an estimated 110 anti-Semitic mass meetings.⁵⁹ During the rest of the year anti-Semitic outbursts became more frequent and more brutal: the Reichsführer-SS⁶⁰ and the head of the German police ordered for the 27 October the arrest and deportation of all Polish national Jews that could be found. From the Dresden administrative district alone 724 people were deported. Their journey to occupied Poland not infrequently ended in the ghettos and extermination camps.⁶¹

The systematic stripping of rights, the harassment and the prohibitions led to Jewish citizens being deprived of the means of existence reached a dramatic turning point on the night of the 9–10 Novem-

55 Gryglewski, op. cit. 104.

56 Steffen Held, *Von der Entrechtung zur Deportation: Die Juden in Sachsen*, in: Vollnhals (ed.), op. cit. 214.

57 Gryglewski, op. cit. 105f.

58 Loc. cit. p. 106; cf. Fischer, op. cit. 63.

59 Nora Goldenbogen, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Dresden seit 1938 – ein Überblick*, *Dresdner Hefte*, 45, 1996, p. 76; cf. Gryglewski op. cit. 107.

60 The highest rank in the SS, occupied by Heinrich Himmler from 1929–1945.

61 Goldenbogen, op. cit. 78.

ber 1938: it was the transition to 'open anti-Jewish terror'⁶². In Dresden the *Semper Synagogue* was set on fire after Jewish businesses had been plundered and destroyed and Jewish citizens physically abused. Many other buildings were set on fire and burned down.⁶³ During the *Pogromnacht*, 151 Jews (including the entire board of the Dresden Jewish Community) were taken to the *Pogromsonderlager* [Special Pogrom Camp] Buchenwald though some of them were sent to the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. The ruins of the synagogue were demolished on the 12 November. Perfidiously, the Jewish Community was made responsible for paying the costs.⁶⁴ The following months were characterised by a process of ghettoisation⁶⁵ which also resulted in isolation, exclusion and identification measures. For example, aided by the Gesetz(es) über Mietverhältnisse mit Juden [law relating to rentals and leases with Jews], passed on the 30 April 1939, all tenant protection provisions were revoked and from autumn of that year an order was made under which the Jewish population was concentrated in so-called *Judenhäuser* [Jew houses]. In the end there were thirty-two of these *Judenhäuser* in Dresden. The alleged aim of this concentration was 'the avoidance of disturbances to public peace and security'⁶⁶. Since Jews were also officially classified as 'troublemakers' for the purposes of the property lease law, they were compelled to move into these habitations by 1 April 1940. The result was a high percentage of homelessness and severely cramped and degrading living conditions. In short: 'the brutality and suffering of isolation in the midst of Dresden's everyday life'⁶⁷. A further important point was the insignia of identification, that not only appeared as a 'J' on the food ration cards but as an armband. This had the effect of a public branding. Furthermore, from August 1940 on, Dresden Jews who had to work as forced labour were also made to wear a yellow armband. In September 1941 the law requiring the general identification of all Jews – the wearing of a yellow star – came into force.⁶⁸

At this point in time approximately 1265 Jews lived in Dresden. Over 400 of them were forced to work in the Goehle factory of Zeiss Ikon AG.⁶⁹ From January 1942 further deportations were carried out: on the 21 January 1942, 224 people were deported from Dresden Neustadt railway station to the Riga ghetto. Children, munitions workers and people in so-called mixed marriages were excepted. Many of those who were deported became victims of mass shootings. From July 1942 deportees from Dresden

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Gryglewski, op. cit. 107ff.

⁶⁴ Goldenbogen, op. cit. 78; cf. Gryglewski op. cit. 108.

⁶⁵ Goldenbogen, ibid.

⁶⁶ Goldenbogen op. cit. 79ff.

⁶⁷ Goldenbogen op. cit. 80; cf. Gryglewski, op. cit. 110–113.

⁶⁸ Held, op. cit. 218f.

⁶⁹ Goldenbogen, op. cit. 80; cf. Held, op. cit. 220.

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were sent to Theresienstadt. By January 1944 there had been at least 250 people deported there in ten transports.⁷⁰ Those not sent to Riga or Theresienstadt were interned in November 1942 in the specially established *Judenlager Hellerberg* [Hellerberg Camp for Jews] in the former *Dr. Todt Straße*. This was opened as a joint project involving the NSDAP, Gestapo and representatives of the Zeiss Ikon company. Around 300 Jews were herded together in the worst possible conditions in this camp, the majority of them were employed in the nearby Goehle factory producing armaments. On the 3/4 March of the same year the camp was cleared and all internees were deported to Auschwitz from Dresden Neustadt where a horrifying death awaited most.⁷¹ On the 10 June 1943, as a result of the nationwide dissolution of Jewish Communities and the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* [Cleansing of the German State of Jews], all 'non-protected' Jews were deported to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. This also applied to Dresden so that from that date on only Jews living in mixed marriages and so-called 'half-breeds' continued to live in the city.⁷² At the beginning of 1945 there were still 174 Jews; a final deportation of the *Arbeitseinsatzfähige* [able-bodied] was prevented by allied air raids. This saved the lives of an unknown number of them.⁷³ One must also keep in mind the death marches that passed through Dresden. As late as April 1945 they were being sent towards Theresienstadt and numerous people lost their lives in the process.⁷⁴

If the above-mentioned aspects show that Dresden's role was that of a typical large Nazi city, the city was also enormously important because of its civil and military infrastructure. As a central railway junction, Dresden became especially important for the deportations to extermination camps in Eastern Europe.⁷⁵ Along with the transport of troops, materials and deportees, the railway also brought supplies for the armament and mining activities in the area surrounding Dresden such as Freital.⁷⁶ Dresden was also the site of a *Reichsbahnausbesserungswerk* [National Railway Heavy Maintenance Works] which was responsible for maintaining the infrastructure in the surrounding area and keeping the railway

⁷⁰ Fischer, op. cit. 67; cf. Gryglewski, op. cit. 118ff.

⁷¹ Fischer, op. cit. 68f.; cf. Goldenbogen, op. cit. 81f.

⁷² With the exception of the 5,000 concentration camp inmates (2,000 of whom were Jewish) who were brought to Dresden at the end of 1944/beginning of 1945 under the *Vernichtung durch Arbeit* [Work to Death] programme and for armament production. See: Goldenbogen, op. cit. 83.

⁷³ Gryglewski, op. cit. 142ff.

⁷⁴ Goldenbogen, op. cit. p. 83; cf. *Auschwitz auf der Straße, Todesmärsche in Dresden*, in: *audioscript zur Verfolgung und Vernichtung der Jüdinnen und Juden in Dresden 1933-1945*, URL: http://www.audioscript.net/de/1_10.html (accessed 10 August 2012).

⁷⁵ Fischer, op. cit. 64; cf. Goldenbogen, op. cit. 80-83.

⁷⁶ Alexander Fischer, *Ideologie und Sachzwang. Kriegswirtschaft und "Ausländereinsatz" im südostsächsischen Elbtalgebiet*, in: Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Leipzig (ed.), *Fremd- und Zwangsarbeit in Sachsen 1939-1945*, Halle/Saale: mdv Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2002, 12-26.

René Haase: 'Suddenly', 'Unexpectedly', 'Senseless'? - Dresden during National Socialism, in: *Abolish Commemoration - A Critique of the Discourse relating to the Bombing of Dresden in 1945*, online at <http://www.abolishcommemoration.org/haase.html>

junction itself running by using enormous numbers of foreign nationals and forced labourers.⁷⁷ Towards then end of the war the city was part of the only intact corridor between the east and west fronts, the last open railway line connecting Berlin and Prague.⁷⁸

Another focal point is the local armament industry: as a flourishing site of armament production for the German Reich, the optics industry and mechanical engineering firms were especially prominent. This made the city a central node for air force armaments. Characteristic for the greater Dresden area was its industrial diversity. This was incorporated into the war effort little by little.⁷⁹ Furthermore, during the war there were over 500,000 forced labourers in Saxony as a whole, most from Eastern Europe. These were employed in armament production and the war economy in general.⁸⁰ In Dresden's immediate surroundings there were around 240 businesses involved in the armament industry and more than 781 companies employed foreign forced labour. In Dresden alone these numbered 30,873. In addition there were 5,000 concentration camp inmates who, at the end of 1944, were being used in the ten satellite camps of KZ Flossenbürg that were located in Dresden.⁸¹ Even after the allied air raids 'Dresden's industrial substance'⁸² continued to function: carrying out pre-assembly preparation for tanks, for example. In Freital oil and fuel continued to be produced while the typical Dresden fine mechanical and optical industries – indispensable for new artillery and munitions–also remained operative.⁸³

Although the City of Dresden's strategic relevance to the war is more than clear, the alleged military inconsequence of this so-called 'Florence on the Elbe' is an important component of the 'Dresden' myth.

Furthermore, 'it is unquestionable that, Dresden, as the last intact garrison city of the Third Reich [...] was of considerable importance'.⁸⁴ In 1926, with the transfer of the *Infanterieschule der Reichswehr* [National Armed Forces Infantry School] from Munich to Dresden the city once again became one of the largest garrisons in Germany. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the garrison consisted on 20,000 soldiers, including units of the army, navy and air force. In addition to the biggest army school,

77 Op. cit. p. 15.

78 Bergander, op. cit. 249ff.

79 Fischer, op. cit. 14.

80 Forced labourers were prisoners of war, foreign civil workers and concentration camp inmates. See: Jürgen Rainer Wolf, *Vorwort*, in: Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Leipzig (ed.), op. cit. 5.

81 Fischer, *Erinnerung*, 2011, op. cit. 65; Fischer, *Ideologie und Sachzwang*, 2002, op. cit. 12; Schubert, *Die kollektive Unschuld*, 2009, op. cit. 34 und Goldenbogen, op. cit. 83.

82 Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Die militärische Bedeutung Dresdens im Frühjahr 1945 und die Auswirkungen der alliierten Luftangriffe*, in: Rolf-Dieter Müller/Nicole Schönherr/Thomas Widerra (eds.), *Die Zerstörung Dresdens 13. bis 15. Februar 1945. Gutachten und Ergebnisse der Dresdner Historikerkommission zur Ermittlung der Opferzahlen*, Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2010, 75–100.

83 Ibid.

84 Loc. cit. 75.

René Haase: 'Suddenly', 'Unexpectedly', 'Senseless'? - Dresden during National Socialism, in: Abolish Commemoration – A Critique of the Discourse relating to the Bombing of Dresden in 1945, online at <http://www.abolishcommemoration.org/haase.html>

Dresden was also the location of the headquarters of *Wehrkreis IV* [Military District IV – Saxony], GHQ for the 4th Army Corps and diverse offices of military administration as well as the base for the 'Pioniersturmbann [Pioneer Battalion] of the *SS-Verfügungstruppe*, a precursor to the *Waffen-SS*'.⁸⁵ During the war reinforcement units were trained in the numerous barracks in the city and the biggest military hospital in Germany was located here too.⁸⁶ From the military strategy point of view Dresden was capable of fulfilling a number of functions such as 'securing the flanks for the capital city' and 'guaranteeing the strategically important Elbe crossing'. At the same time the city served as an 'important junction for moving troops and as a nexus for various strands of communication'. It was thus 'indispensable for the defence of the Reich towards the east and the south'.⁸⁷

This certainly played a factor when, on the 1 January 1945, the Army GHQ ordered that a *Verteidigungsbereich Dresden* [Dresden Defensive Area] was to be established. Dresden was to become a 'stronghold'.⁸⁸ From Hamburg to Prague, the Elbe was to act as the last German line of defence against the advancing Red Army. It was, above all, intended to hold up the sheer mass of Soviet tanks by using the most modern bazookas. Almost all of the plans relating to the defence area were directed at gaining time because there was always the hope that the anti-Hitler coalition would fall apart, literally at the last minute. In keeping with that scenario, an appeal was made by Mutschmann in the *Der Freiheitskampf* on the 16 April (i.e. after the allied air raids on the 13–15 February) to the people of Dresden. It was headlined: 'Dresden will be defended to the last and by all available means.'⁸⁹ During the following days there were direct instructions to the people.⁹⁰ The HQ of the *Verteidigungsbereich Dresden* could count on a total of around 20,000 men, women and children, 'a motley group of troops and units from the army, SS, police, Volkssturm and Hitler Youth' that were to defend the city to the last.⁹¹ Even after the fall of Berlin on 2 May 1945, the war continued in Dresden. *Verteidigungsbereich Dresden* was only evacuated on the 6 May and the Red Army, which entered the city on 7 and 8 May still encountered scattered pockets of resistance.⁹² Thus war continued to be waged in Dresden right to the last minute.

⁸⁵ Manfred Beyer, *Dresden als Keimzelle des militärischen Widerstands – die Garnison in der NS-Zeit*, in: Dresdner Geschichtsverein (ed.), *Dresden als Garnisonsstadt*, Dresdner Hefte 53 (1998), 52–59. The work should be treated with a certain reserve and critical distance. In Dresden contacts were made that took on form around the 20 July 1944, but to talk of a kernel of military resistance is historically inaccurate. Indeed: 'Stauffenberg found no support in Dresden for his attempted coup d'état'. (Müller, op. cit. 77).

⁸⁶ Beyer, op. cit. pp. 54–57; cf. Fischer, (2011), op. cit. 64.

⁸⁷ Müller, op. cit. 76.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Quotation from Hermann Rahne, *Die "Festung Dresden" von 1945*, in: Dresdner Geschichtsverein (ed.): *Dresden – Das Jahr 1945*, Dresdner Hefte 41 (1995), 19–31.

⁹⁰ Loc. cit. 19f.

⁹¹ Op. cit. 25ff.; quote 26.

⁹² Op. cit. 29f.

In the face of these historical facts any assertion that Dresden could not have been a historical exception is both factually correct but nevertheless lacking. As has been shown Dresden, as a Nazi regional capital, took on a special or exemplary role in some areas so that the fairy story of the 'innocent' metropole on the Elbe that was 'insignificant in its contribution to the war effort' was, and continues to be, completely untenable. However, the official recognition of responsibility for the Nazi barbarity that has been evident in recent years in the Dresden memorialisation discourse also continues to make use of half truths, set phrases and clichés. So, for example, there is talk of the war having originated in Germany, only to come home to it (and thus also to Dresden) once again, a war which claimed countless German civilian victims. The implication is that the latter are in contrast to their imaginary opposites – 'the Nazis'.

In the final analysis this ends in a relativisation of guilt and, ultimately, in the universalisation of suffering. What is forgotten and covered up in the process is that Nazi Germany began and prosecuted the war as a war of extermination and that Dresden was an integral component of that right from the beginning. Thus what should be noted is that whoever refuses to talk about Nazism should also be silent about Dresden.

Translated by: Tim Sharp

ABOLISH COMMEMORATION

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