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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Against Fascist Terror: War and Genocide, 1933–45

The Weimar Republic's brutal destruction in 1933 gave hope and strength to the ultra-right throughout Europe, while it awoke the left to very real danger of fascism. A year after flames had leapt from the Reichstag, signaling the death of freedom in Germany, a movement from across the Rhine arose with the same ideas. On February 6, 1934, war veterans and right-wing extremists descended on central Paris nominally to complain about government corruption. It seems likely that many came to do fundamental damage to parliamentary government. The demonstration quickly turned into a riot as police fought back wave after wave of assaults on the French Parliament. Over a dozen were killed and hundreds wounded. The next day, the center-left government resigned. Although there was no clear blueprint for a *coup d'état*, this served as the start, not the end, of a fascist march to power. The ultra-right forced one leftist government to resign, and their repeated extra-parliamentary tactics destabilized every subsequent Parliament elected until the German occupation in 1940.¹

In the United Kingdom, Sir Oswald Mosley formed the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1932. Supported early on by the *Daily Mail*² and claiming 50 thousand members,³ the BUF never really gathered much electoral support and is mainly noted for well-crafted rallies and street fighting with left-wingers and Jews. When war came, the government easily interned their leaders and core supporters. In the other major Anglo-Saxon power, across the Atlantic, pro-Nazi groups had thousands of supporters, and help from industrialist Henry Ford and aviation legend Charles Lindbergh. At one point, they filled New York City's Madison Square Garden for a Nazi-style rally.⁴ Of course, this does not even consider the vast and powerful, native fascist Ku Klux Klan that held sway in so much of the southern US. It would seem that fascism was on the march worldwide.

These developments did not go on unnoticed. In spring 1934, following the fascist attack on Parliament, the French Communist Party (PCF) proposed a Popular Front against Fascism. The left had previously

discussed and, on occasion, entered into "United Fronts" between left, working-class parties. The Popular Front was different in that it included not just leftists but liberals and even, at times, conservatives, as long as the parties were committed to fighting fascism. It was a cross-class, multiple ideological grouping, rather than a clear program based on parties of the working people. The Popular Front policy was supported, many say initiated, by the Communist International and the Soviet Union. Another clear source of support for this new coalition was the pressure from below, as average Europeans, and most of all workers, wanted unity in face of the rising fascist threat. Of course, many have argued that the average people wanted labor unity, not an alliance with capitalist interests who would tie their hands in the fight against fascism. Trotsky, for one, believed that a united front without bourgeois allies was the only road to victory over the extreme right.⁵

In any case, after tough negotiations, the PCF and the Socialist Party joined the center-left Radicals while the previously splintered French trade union movement achieved some significant level of unity. On July 14, 1935, Bastille Day, the Popular Front was proclaimed, with a rather moderate social democratic program. This timid approach resulted from both PCF leaders and the Socialists not wishing to frighten middle-class allies or would-be supporters. The following year, in May 1936, the Popular Front was victorious at the polls and a government led by socialist Léon Blum took office. This victory sparked off a seemingly spontaneous workers' movement, with shop-floor militants organizing strikes and factory occupations. The strikes were unplanned, joyful and completely illegal. This was not only a response to the Popular Front victory, but also the release of pent-up anger over half a decade of lowered wages, employer indifference and terrible working conditions.⁶ Although the strikes began in the provinces, they quickly reached the capital.

The largest and most profitable factories were the first hit by these unarmed workers' rebellions. Estimates say between 1,500,000 and 1,950,000 strikers walked out and that there were, literally, thousands of factory occupations. This peaceful uprising from below was democratically organized through average worker militants at the plant level. Unprepared or unwilling to make a push for revolution, the Communists and their Socialist allies decided to restrain the strike wave and then end it completely. But the workers did not come out of this empty handed. The agreement ending the strike recognized unions and their right to strike. Workers gained wage increases of at least 7 percent and in some cases gains were as high as 25 percent. In tandem, the Blum government legalized

collective bargaining, set two-week paid vacation standards and a 40-hour workweek, among other concessions.

The French Popular Front also impacted intellectuals and cultural workers. New cultural organizations were established with direct government funding. Communist leaders argued that culture should become one with politics; they believed that art, plays and concerts should be presented to the public as social services.⁷ Among others, composers were rapidly involved in this politicized process, which was aided by Communist-funded cultural organizations and an interest in the Soviet cultural model.⁸ Moreover, Paris became a magnet for many talented anti-fascists after the Nazi seizure of power in Germany. German leftists who fled to France produced Popular Front propaganda, much of it of an innovative nature.⁹ Of course, the fascist regime in Berlin was likewise attempting to use culture to consolidate its power. It even tried to create a new "German" style of dance.¹⁰

French film was not exempt from the impact of the 1936 strike wave or the initial enthusiasm generated by the Blum government. By the 1930s, film had become the most popular form of entertainment and France produced over a hundred films yearly. Although not always a direct result of the Popular Front upsurge, it is interesting that a couple of films released in 1936 reflected the "aspirations of the urban working class as well as the political tumult linked to the rise of fascism and the threat of war in Europe."¹¹ Moreover, young filmmakers, often independent of and hostile to the "commercial film industry, produced films for the emerging Left culture."¹² For leftists in the film industry, a unifying issue was the overtly political bias of film censorship. That censorship protected the French populace from the subversion of Soviet films such as *Potemkin*, *Mother* and *The End of St. Petersburg* was a constant source of anger for the left. This frustration and anger was not limited to PCF supporters. Particularly galling was that, at the same time, commercial newsreels of current events were solidly right wing and untouched by censorship.¹³

Of far more immediate and concrete importance for the French common people was the Popular Front's promotion of paid vacations. One not very sympathetic historian has argued the Popular Front "became the birthplace of the weekend, not of revolution."¹⁴ On June 21, 1936, a bill was passed into law granting a two-week paid vacation. This was part of the government's policy of establishing the right to a vacation for workers. It is interesting that in the summers of 1936 and 1937, the left-wing press reported extensively on the Spanish Civil War, but alternated this coverage "with articles recommending seaside and country resorts and featuring

French provincial towns worth visiting.”¹⁵ Union papers began to shift from reporting purely on political and economic matters to discussing sports and radio, and publishing “women’s sections.” The Communist press emphasized that vacations allowed the family to have time to get to know each other. The PCF daily, *L’Humanité*, even got into this “family feel good” trend by featuring a story on the home life of Lenin and his family.¹⁶ The French left hoped that by promoting popular tourism, workers could seize control of participant sports and cultural activities, and in the process free themselves from bourgeois paternalism.¹⁷

The Popular Front government failed to both follow up on their early success and consolidate their popular support. As a result, by 1938, the Popular Front had collapsed. A new right-wing member of the Radical Party became prime minister and supported a counter-attack by big business against the workers’ recent gains. Workers reacted with strikes and factory occupations and in response, the new government engaged in the most brutal strike suppression of the inter-war period. Hundreds were arrested and tens of thousands were fired, while just under a million workers lost the protection of a union contract and were forced to be rehired in non-union plants. The 40-hour week was replaced by a 45-hour week, as militants found themselves blacklisted from their profession. Despite these losses in 1938, the dreams of 1936 remained alive in the memory of the people. The Popular Front, workers’ strikes and occupation, combined with major reforms, had given the French common people an expanded sense of what life could be like.

Increasingly, life for average Europeans included the consumption of spectator sports. The industrial revolution had destroyed traditional popular culture to a large extent. With the growth of organized labor, more and more workers had the time and money to participate in sports. This increasingly led to not just playing sports but to watching them. The mass popularity of sports as a leisure-time activity is such that one scholar could reasonably comment that “Marx might well have been nearer the mark had he referred to sport rather than religion as the opium of the masses.”¹⁸ In an attempt to come to grips with this reality, left-wing workers’ groups attempted to establish independent working-class sporting events in an attempt to compete with the bourgeois culture promoted by commercial sports. By 1928, there were two workers’ sports Internationals, one Socialist and the other Communist, which “counted well over two million members, making the sport movement by far the largest working class cultural movement.”¹⁹ In 1931, the socialist-affiliated workers’ sports movement met in Vienna with tens of thousands of worker athletes. On the

last day, a quarter of a million people watched the festive march of 100,000 men and women from 26 nations. The same day, 65,000 watched the soccer championship game and 12,000 watched the cycling finals.²⁰

Of course, the fascist movement had long understood the power sports had for the average European. Upon coming to power, the Nazis found Germany committed to hosting an international event that grated on their ultra-nationalist passions, the 1936 Olympics.²¹ They cleverly turned the Berlin Olympics into a propaganda event by projecting the image of Nazi Germany as powerful but peaceful.²² The fascist propaganda orgy that was 1936 Berlin was magnified and preserved by Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia*.²³ The workers' sports movement planned to hold counter-Olympics in Barcelona, but these plans had to be abandoned once the Spanish Army rose in revolt against the elected Popular Front government. Still, in 1937, a third (and final) Workers' Olympiad was convened in Antwerp. Not as impressive as 1936 Barcelona had hoped to be, it still drew 27,000 worker participants, both male and female, from 17 nations along with hundreds of thousands of spectators.²⁴ However, if it proved difficult to compete with fascist sport spectacles, it seemed near impossible to overcome the advantages of commercial sports. The power of bourgeois sport culture was shown, for example, in the Soccer World Cup held throughout France in June 1938.²⁵

The appeal of forming a Popular Front against the rising surge of fascism was not limited to France. In Greece, the All People Front, an alliance of the Communist Party and other leftists, won 9.6 percent of the vote in the 1935 election. The following year, the Front won a smaller percentage but elected 15 MPs. This was but the electoral tip of a broad movement that hoped to ultimately topple the monarchy and the conservative parliamentary government. Worried about a possible decline of British power in the Aegean, the British ambassador encouraged General Metaxas to make a preemptive strike. When the general seized power, the new right-wing dictatorship was warmly, if somewhat discreetly, welcomed by the UK's rulers.²⁶ The most well-known and significant Popular Front movement would, however, take place far to the west of Athens.

The Spanish Popular Front government that won the February 1936 elections was a loose coalition of liberal republicans, socialists and various flavors of communists, both pro- and anti-Moscow. Though the name "Popular Front" was attached to this coalition, it was not formed mainly by the policy of the Comintern. The Spanish alliance and its component parts began to come together early in 1934 and owe more to internal dynamics than external exhortations.²⁷ In fall 1934, a revolt by Asturian

miners united middle-class reformers and working-class militants; it was this unity that later would take on the name "Popular Front." The defeat of the miners using troops from Africa was accompanied by brutal reprisals against strikers, press censorship and the arrest of thousands of political opponents who had had nothing to do with the events in Asturias.²⁸

The 1936 elections gave a clear victory to the left, who won in all cities of over 200,000 people. The extreme right made accusations of vote fraud, later using this as a justification for military uprising. Despite these claims, the vote counting included all parties and even the rightist press at the time analyzed the results in terms of issues and emotions, but not fraud. From the beginning, the new government had to deal with pent-up frustrations on the part of many sections of the common people, particularly anarchists and leftist socialists. From the start, monarchists and other rightists openly plotted against the elected government. In July, the military rose up in an attempted *coup d'état* to restore the old order. Although they had some success, Franco and his generals faced unanticipated resistance. The quick military strike bogged down in the face of massive resistance by leftist militias and the Spanish counter-revolution became the Spanish Civil War.

From the start, the Popular Front government was crippled by lack of trained officers and supplies, and was riven by ideological conflicts among its base. The then-aspiring dictator Franco and his apologists pointed to the murder of priests, monks and other religious personnel as proving the Satanic evil of the elected government. Particularly useful for the fascist propaganda machine was that in many places the bodies of saints, priests and others were dug up and put on display. Not only was this universally opposed by the elected government, it was part of a tradition of bitter anti-clericalism that had appeared before, in 1834, 1868, 1909 and 1931.²⁹ This was not so much an attack on religion per se as an assault on the Spanish Church as an institution, which was seen by the poor as protecting the wealthy and powerful.³⁰ In any event, there is no denying that supporters of the Republic did commit crimes, especially during the initial fury provoked by the military uprising. The fact must also be remembered that what the pro-fascist military did was thousands of times worse. Moreover, crimes in Republican areas were *in defiance* of governmental policy whereas the bloody outrages committed by the so-called "Nationalists" *were a matter of policy*.

The defeat of the military rising was not merely a ratification of the existing parliamentary government. The example of the vital Catalan city of Barcelona was a very significant example. The victory over the fascist rebels also "represented the critical moment when power was transferred

to the streets—in other words, when the popular movement took effective control of Barcelona.”³¹ These were people who didn't believe the revolution had to wait until an unknowable future. The anarchists among these people also wished to end the oppression of Spanish working-class women. They hoped to do this by ending formal marriage, eliminating prostitution, and providing training programs and medical care for women.³² However, anarchist men did little to try and realize these programs. Using excuses like female illiteracy³³ or the influence of priests among women, the anarchists seemed as little anxious to make fundamental changes in gender relations as more moderate Popular Front supporters. Because of this, the traditional relationship between men and women was carried over into revolutionary Spain, despite the obvious contradiction to stated beliefs.³⁴

By May 1937, there was bloody fighting between the Popular Front government, which was backed by the Communists, and popular power in Catalonia, which was backed by anarchists and other anti-Stalinist leftists. From the start, the division was between those who thought that republican legality must be maintained so as to not alienate the middle class or foreign powers, and those who believed that the revolution should not be postponed to some future date. This ultimately led to the brutal suppression of the far left by the very government that spoke in their name. Further, the Popular Front government was assisted by Soviet agents who wielded great power, partially by virtue of their control over Soviet military aid.³⁵ Regardless of one's position on this dispute, it is hard not to see the tragedy of Spanish jails being crammed with populist revolutionaries at a time when the people were supposedly in power via the Popular Front government. For many, May 1937 marks the end of the Popular Front in any meaningful sense of its original purpose.³⁶

Still, it is necessary to recognize that the Spanish Republic had been betrayed by the Western so-called democracies. While Mussolini, and later Hitler, poured troops and military resources into the camp of Spanish fascism, the British, French and American governments refused to even sell arms to the elected government. The conventional apology for this behavior is that London was afraid of war, Paris was afraid of war without Britain, and Washington didn't care about Europe. There is some truth in these assertions but they miss the larger picture. Fearing a lurch to the left, the British government aggressively promoted the abandonment of Spanish democracy. While the Spanish Communists were weak, and before the Soviet Union had gained any real influence, London was already pre-disposed towards the right as a barrier to “Bolshevism.” After the Spanish generals' revolt, the British leaders were clear that Franco and

friends were preferable to elected leftists. One senior official even got carried away and suggested it “is not inconceivable that before long it may pay us to throw in our lot with Germany and Italy.”³⁷ Shortly after the start of the Civil War, the British consul general wrote that if the Popular Front suppressed the revolt, “some form of bolshevism” could be expected. The consul despaired that the Popular Front was “a government sold for long time past to [the] proletariat.”³⁸ So, as early as August 1936, it is undeniable that “Whitehall clearly believed that republican Spain was better dead than red.”³⁹

Most of those in republican Spain dissented from the viewpoint of the British government. Though neighboring governments would not help the Republic, tens of thousands of ordinary people did. Foreign volunteers, mainly German, French, Italian and American, came to Spain in late 1936 to fight fascism.⁴⁰ Ideology was certainly a big factor, but many joined out of impulse or opportunity. Of course, for anti-fascist Germans and Italians living in exile, the International Brigade offered a chance to actually fight fascism rather than merely talk about fighting it. As one German veteran noted, political work in exile seemed “too conventional, too small.”⁴¹ In memoirs, many former Internationals talk about the importance of their political beliefs, but also highlight the significant role emotions and nostalgia played. In the face of boredom, the desire for adventure, and a desire to escape leftist political and individual personal circumstances, foreign volunteers found meaning. Especially for exiled anti-fascists, there was often a yearning for a meaningful, active masculinity.⁴² Regardless of differing motivations, they fought bravely until fall 1938, when the Internationals were withdrawn from battle in the vain hope of receiving help from the Western powers. The courage of the Spanish people fighting the fascist “nationalist” army is legendary.

In the end, even those who thought the Republic held the moral high ground had to admit that ideals alone were no match for fascist steel. On March 28, 1939, the Spanish military entered the capital, Madrid. For generations, the crimes and true motivations of the Spanish fascists have been overlooked and excused. A close look at what transpired shows that Franco and his followers were every bit as murderous and fascist as their sponsors in Berlin. At his Victory Day celebration on May 19, 1939, General Franco declared: “Let us not deceive ourselves: the Jewish spirit, which permitted the alliance of big capital with Marxism and which was behind so many pacts with the anti-Spanish revolution, cannot be extirpated in a day and still beats in the hearts of many.”⁴³ Nazi anti-Semitic laws were held up

as examples to Spain, while the notion of a Jewish-Marxist conspiracy was expanded to include freemasons.

Nor should it be thought that Spanish fascism used words alone against their enemies. A common misconception is that the dead in Spain were purely the result of the Civil War. In reality, once the Spanish far right assumed power, they continued to murder, jail and torture in much the same way as Italian or German fascists. More people died from repression after the fall of the Republic than during the actual Civil War. Many were jailed and denied trial, while those who were given the pretense of a trial were accused of the most fanciful things. One man was charged, post-execution, with, among other things, wearing a red tie. The accused was convicted, though dead, and the man's widow was forced to pay a 500-pesetas fine.⁴⁴ Often overlooked is how the military rebels concentrated their wrath on liberal and left-wing women. Not only were they murdered like their male counterparts but, in addition, rape and other forms of sexual abuse were used as a generalized punishment for embracing gender equality. The opportunity to rape was even promoted as an implicit recruiting tool by Franco.⁴⁵ Statistics alone can never tell the depth of emotional, physical and psychological damage done to those women who survived fascist abuse. While respect for women was a part of the Popular Front's reform program, hatred for female independence was part of the right-wing program.⁴⁶ Women were even persecuted for having married in a civil, rather than Catholic, ceremony.⁴⁷

A victory for Republican Spain might have changed what we now know as World War II. It might have served as a warning to the Nazi and fascist aggressors.⁴⁸ Moreover, the impact within Germany is hard to determine. It may well have revitalized the anti-Nazi underground among the working class. It might have even given courage to the cowards of the allegedly anti-Nazi wing of the German Wehrmacht's officer corps. One must question how this group of highly decorated professional soldiers with access to the Nazi leadership and presumably knowledge of firearms and explosives, could not pull off a decisive assassination or two—a task that would not have been too challenging for most Chicago gangsters. But then again, no one could accuse either the German aristocracy or bourgeoisie of being premature anti-fascists.

While the tragedy of Spain played out to the west, Stalin was embarking on a series of murderous purges that weakened Soviet society from the Red Army to the factory floor.⁴⁹ Just two years of Stalin's purges, 1937 and 1938, account for 85 percent of all death sentences ordered from 1921 until 1953. According to recently available data from the Soviet archives,

“790,665 [1937] and 554,258 people [1938] were indicted respectively for political crimes. Of them, 353,074 and 328,618 were sentenced to be shot.”⁵⁰ The political elite were disproportionately represented among the victims but ordinary citizens remained the bulk of those arrested. Historians still debate the reasons behind such a massive, and apparently senseless, bloodbath. Some sort of perverse chivalry appears to have spared many women, who apparently were less than 4 percent of the executed, at least in major urban areas.⁵¹ These horrific mass murders disoriented the left and anti-fascist movements, many of whom had thought of the Soviet Union as a workers’ state. One should remember that, in spite of attempts by the right to say Stalinism was as bad, or worse, than fascism, the Soviet purges killed far fewer people than Mussolini and Franco combined, and certainly fewer than the German Nazi death machine that gave the world the Holocaust. To say Stalinism and fascism were identical, as opposed to stating both were evil, is intellectually lazy and dishonest.⁵²

As if the purges were not bad enough, in 1939 Stalin again did the unthinkable. On August 23, 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed a non-aggression pact. This treaty had a secret protocol that divided Eastern Europe between Germany and Russia. It gave the green light to the Nazi war machine to invade Poland, an act they undertook on September 1 of the same year. Apologists for this pact have argued that the USSR needed to play for time to prepare for the inevitable Nazi invasion. Interestingly enough, this argument was absent at the time and was not used until after the Nazi invasion of 1941.⁵³ Moreover, evidence shows that it was the German fascist regime, not the Soviets, who used the extra time to best advantage.⁵⁴ What the so-called “Hitler-Stalin Pact” did do was disorient those who were fighting against fascism.

The French PCF, then the largest Communist movement in the West, was confused, sometimes angry, and a number of members quit in disgust. With the PCF press banned as a result of the Pact, the party found itself unable to even communicate effectively with many members and supporters. The party leadership was largely paralyzed and the non-Communist left pulled away from Communist militants in fury.⁵⁵ The exiled Italian, Giorgio Amendola, argues that the non-aggression treaty completed the break between Communists and other anti-fascists. He went on to say the “German-Soviet pact aggravated the existing antagonisms and the confusion within the organized anti-Fascist movement.”⁵⁶ The impact was, if anything, greater among the German anti-Nazi ranks. A young Communist, Franz Loeser, recalls being furious upon hearing the news. The anti-Nazi militant exploded: “How could an anti-Fascist stay out of the

war? Should I wait until the Fascists had killed my family? Should I watch the Nazis land in England and send me to a concentration camp? What kind of anti-Fascists were these who didn't want to fight with the Fascists?"⁵⁷ By fall 1939, fighting fascism increasingly became not a matter of choice, but of self-survival. As Brecht put it:

ON THE WALL IN CHALK IS WRITTEN:

They want war.

He who wrote it

Has already fallen.⁵⁸

World War II was the largest tragedy in European history.⁵⁹ It lasted almost six years and resulted in some 60,000,000 deaths and untold suffering on the part of countless millions who didn't die. The physical and economic damage is difficult to comprehend. The military history of the conflict has been documented in almost mind-numbing detail. Thus, there is little need to visit debates about the quality of Axis versus Allied strategic bombers, the quality of German tanks versus those of the Soviets, the impact of fascist submarines versus Allied naval prowess, or the importance of Nazi Werner Von Braun's missile program. Those matters can safely be left to military historians who have felled whole forests to produce books, articles and essays, while any number of specialized television stations can be counted on to produce 24-hour visual accounts of the war.

Still, it is important to remember that this was not just a war that took place on distant battlefields. This was a war of extermination by the fascists against all their enemies, both real and imagined. The unthinkable "final solution" meant the cold-blooded murder of millions of Europeans of Jewish lineage.⁶⁰ In addition to this genocidal attempt to destroy European Jews,⁶¹ the Roma and Sinti (often called Gypsies) were exterminated simply because of their heritage.⁶² Other targeted groups included the mentally challenged, the physically disabled, and, despite their earlier importance in the Storm Trooper faction of the Nazi movement, homosexuals.⁶³ Jehovah's Witnesses, a group termed "bible students," were also sent to the camps. Often forgotten is the fact that the first targets of Hitler's murderous wrath were his political opponents, be they Communists, social democrats, trade unionists, or anti-fascists. While not all political prisoners were marked for execution per se, they were subject to forced labor with the intention that they be "annihilated by work." Thus, many prisoners died of hunger, disease, violence from guards, or accidents. Located just outside Berlin in 1936, Sachsenhausen is a good example of a political camp, although

it later contained “racial criminals” and was used for the mass murder of Soviet POWs.⁶⁴

Discussed here is the struggle of Europeans against fascism, whether they were motivated by ideology, nationalism, or the simple instinct to survive. While leaders like Winston Churchill were fighting to save the British Empire, and Stalin to preserve his dictatorship, most people were not fighting for empire—they were fighting for themselves.⁶⁵ Space will not permit but a few selected examples of this resistance but they are vital to a more complete understanding. It can even be argued that the Nazi decision to begin the war before their military was at full strength represents constraints imposed by the passive resistance of German workers and fear of a popular rebellion.⁶⁶ Even later, anti-Hitler conspiracies within the German High Command were often motivated by a belief that only the Nazis “violent overthrow could prevent the danger of a social revolution from below.”⁶⁷ That this revolution did not take place is at least partially due to Allied policy as shall be seen. In the popular culture, anti-fascist resistance is often told as stories of heroic men.

Yet the resistance, be it small or great, was a movement across all of Europe. There were exceptional individuals, but to focus exclusively on them overlooks the bulk of anti-fascists, particularly women. While it may be exciting to hear about shoot-outs between anti-fascists and the Gestapo, most resistance work was much more routine. One Dutch woman, who was a courier for the resistance, remembered her work as “going for ration books ... all kinds of things, the whole lot—take it away, get it, and take it to a contact address ... and carrying arms, of course.”⁶⁸ Resistance could also be of a more spontaneous nature. One Italian female anti-fascist told how a female comrade decided on a risky individual act. The woman named Giglioia was eating at a restaurant when she noticed a German officer had hung his coat and sidearm on a clothes hook. Thinking quickly, she covered his coat with hers. She quickly finished eating before the Nazi, retrieved her coat and slipped his gun into her purse and quietly left.⁶⁹ Certainly, traditional gender roles predominated within the resistance but even women who did not enter the underground struggle with a feminist consciousness often developed an awareness of gender oppression as result of their activities.⁷⁰

Women participated in at least parts of the French resistance in traditional ways. By fall 1941, French Communists had begun systematically undermining the morale of German occupation troops. It was young German or Austrian female exiles, or other women who could speak German, who established contact with these troops. They distributed

a printed newspaper called *Soldat im Westen*, later subtitled *Organ der soldaten komitee im Frankreich*. It passed on stories of brutal officers, unfair treatment of enlisted men and sought to promote internationalism instead of the fascist nationalism. While the importance of this work should not be overemphasized, it is noteworthy that in some Wehrmacht units, loud complaints were made after agitation about food and treatment by officers. Anti-Nazi propaganda was brought back to friends in the Third Reich and many Germans used "safe conduct passes" given to them by the French to facilitate their desertion to the Soviets, once posted to the Eastern Front.⁷¹

In the Balkans, the armed anti-fascist movement of Yugoslavia and Greece was a real military problem for the Nazi occupiers.⁷² Although supposedly blood brothers according to Nazi mythology, Denmark saw little support for the fascist occupiers while Danish anti-fascists were able to smuggle almost all of the country's Jewish population to neutral Sweden. In 1942, Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto organized armed self-defense units despite little or no help from the Polish nationalist "home army." When the Nazis began the liquidation of the ghetto in order to deport the inhabitants to death camps, the lightly armed Jewish resistance shocked the Nazi forces by driving them back. Although the Warsaw Ghetto fighters had no chance of military success, some resisters fought on for a month.

In a certain sense, the strangest act of resistance came from within the heart of the Third Reich, in central Berlin. Early in 1943, Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Party leader for Berlin, decided to make the capital "Jew free" as a present to Hitler before his birthday in April. Jews previously given exemption were to be rounded up and sent to camps including around 2,000 who had "Aryan" wives. These men were sent to a provisional collecting center on Rosenstrasse 2-4 in the heart of Berlin. As word of the arrests spread, the German spouses of the arrested men gathered by the hundreds at the gate of the detention center and a cry broke out: "Give us back our husbands!" Armed guards threatened the women ordering them to clear the streets or they'd shoot. Women would run for cover only to return and continue their protest. This continued for days. Finally, the elite Nazi SS aimed their machine guns on the women but instead of fleeing, the almost completely female crowd just hurled abuse at the Nazis. Goebbels could have had the women mowed down, but he feared the average Berliner's reaction to the mass slaughter of unarmed women in the middle of the capital. He remembered the 1918 revolution. This women's action on Rosenstrasse was remarkable and shows what could have been, if more Germans had risen up like these women.⁷³ Why didn't they? For that matter, what about the French? How about the Italians?

Historians have correctly pointed to how twentieth-century technology helped fascist regimes crush any sign of dissent.⁷⁴ Not often discussed is how the Allies' conduct played a major part in preventing revolution from below against fascism. It is often noted, and at times even condemned,⁷⁵ that the British and Americans rained death from the sky onto European civilians. Thus, something like 600,000 German non-combatants had their lives terminated, not to mention the bombing deaths by "friendly fire" of 58,000 French citizens.⁷⁶ In fascist Italy, "only" about 60,000 civilians are documented as victims of the air war.⁷⁷ In addition, there is evidence that Anglo-American bombing raids killed an undetermined, but very large, number of foreign slave workers and POWs in the Third Reich.⁷⁸

Although many of these dead were the unintentional victims of the bombing of military targets, most lost their lives because the Allies, most particularly the British, chose a policy of indiscriminate terror bombing. Bomber Harris, of the British Royal Air Force, bragged that he wanted to bomb the German working class out of their homes. The Americans generally aimed for actual military targets, but often engaged in carpet-bombing as well. Rather than hasten the end of war, this bombing diverted considerable resources to wanton butchery; these resources could have been used more effectively to actually fight fascist armies.⁷⁹ While the aerial slaughter may certainly have reduced fascist morale, it also preempted popular anti-fascist resistance. In May 1943, in the vital French port city of Marseilles, a cut in the bread ration provoked a series of strikes. As the struggle spread and a general strike broke out, the Nazis and their French collaborators were forced to confront a massive, popular uprising. An eyewitness tells what happened next:

American planes filled the skies and emptied their bombs on the population which was contesting control of the streets with the occupier! The working-class districts were hit first ... more than ten thousand homes hit; some five thousand victims under the rubble. No enemy operation suffered even a scratch.⁸⁰

Within Germany and Austria, even those anti-Nazi groups that supported the Anglo-American bombing found that this tactic made it more difficult to organize resistance. In Catholic Cologne, anti-fascists from the Catholic Center Party claimed the air raids were so severe that the population did little but try to stay alive. Meanwhile, the Communist and Socialist resistance groups in Hannover stressed that much of their time was taken up finding lost comrades and helping bombed-out workers find a place to

stay and something to eat. Austrian resistance movement members, who had managed to escape to neutral territory, protested the bombing of Vienna. While evidence shows that most people understood, and resistance groups generally supported, air assaults on industrial targets, they felt betrayed and alienated by the carpet-bombing of working-class residential areas.⁸¹ In May 1945, the war in Europe ended, not with the bang of popular revolution but with the whimper of conventional military victory.