



The German Resistance

One of the most widely read books on the Holocaust, Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, located the willingness of millions of ordinary Germans to take part in, or turn a blind eye to, extermination in a uniquely German brand of "eliminationist anti-semitism", which in turn was rooted in German culture and the national psyche. Eliminationist persecution, he argued, "failed to mobilize ... working-class resistance to the Nazis", and it barely rates a mention in a book running to over 600 pages.

The only widely known resistance within Germany remains the aristocratic military opposition around Claus von Stauffenberg, whose bomb at the Wolf's Lair in July 1944 narrowly failed to kill Hitler. Expanding on their contributions in *Treason: Rebel Warriors and Internationalist Traitors* (reviewed in last November's Briefing), Marilyn Moos and Steve Cushion have gone a long way to redress the balance in this survey of both working class resistance within Nazi Germany and German volunteers in the French resistance.

The enormity of the crimes of the Holocaust has obscured the fact that for the early years of Nazi rule terror was directed principally against the German workers' movement. Their first act was to ban the Communists, then the trade unions and the Social Democrats. Up to 200,000 political opponents were detained in 1933, while over 50,000 went into exile; 2,000 Communists were murdered in 1933-4. By 1945, about 200,000 leftists had been killed.

Marilyn Moos, herself the daughter of KPD exiles who escaped to Britain, is

Richard Price reviews *Anti-Nazi Germans* by Marilyn Moos and Steve Cushion, Community Languages / Socialist History Society, £10.

unsparing in her criticism of the KPD's policies prior to the Nazi seizure of power, when it claimed that the

SPD, not the Nazis, were the main enemy. In addition, the KPD leadership was unprepared for illegality and within days much of it had been arrested or murdered. Perversely, it claimed that Nazi rule would be merely a temporary phase that prepared the way for revolution. Of the many anti-fascists who fled to the Soviet Union, some 15,000 were imprisoned in 1937, thousands shot, and hundreds handed back to the Gestapo during the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Yet despite this terrible toll, she catalogues a remarkable range of opposition carried out by anti-fascists underground, from strikes and sabotage, factory cells, distributing illegal papers and leaflets to youth work in apparently innocuous groups, much of it autonomous from any external leadership. Although KPD members were the largest group engaged in active opposition, she details the underground work of a wide number of other groups, including the KPO, the SAP, Trotskyists, anarcho-syndicalists, the street kids of the Edelweiss Pirates, the Friends of Nature, forced labourers, sports and

climbing groups and many more.

For decades the international character of the French resistance was air-brushed from history. In August 1944, De Gaulle had inaugurated the national myth of Paris "liberated by itself, liberated by its people with the help of the French armies, with the support and the help of all France". Only recently has the role of Spanish Republicans been fully acknowledged. It was a myth that had even less room for German volunteers.

In the second part of the book, Steve Cushion uncovers the many strands of German anti-fascism in France – survivors from the International Brigades, anti-Nazi conscripts in the Wehrmacht, deserters from the Wehrmacht including many non-Germans, economic migrants, political exiles and German Jews. The variety of the forms of resistance is impressive, encompassing infiltration of the German administration, fraternisation with and building cells among rank and file soldiers. The story of resisters in both Germany and France is moving and often tragic, although many did survive. As the authors sum up: "The most important lesson we can learn from the history of their struggles is that resistance is always possible, even under the most grim of circumstances."

The launch of *Anti-Nazi Germans* had to be postponed because of the Covid-19 crisis. It can however be ordered online from: s.cushion23@gmail.com

