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The Myth of Nazi Gun Control

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A commonly heard argument against gun control is that the National Socialists of Germany (the Nazis) used it in their ascent to and maintenance of power. A corollary argument is sometimes made that had the Jews (and presumably the other targeted groups) been armed, they could have fought off Nazi tyranny. This tract seeks to counter these misassumptions about Nazi gun control.

Gun control, the Law on Firearms and Ammunition, was introduced to Germany in 1928 under the Weimar regime (there was no Right to Arms in the Constitution of 1919) in large part to disarm the nascent private armies, e.g. the Nazi SA (aka "the brownshirts"). The Weimar government was attempting to bring some stability to German society and politics (a classic "law and order" position). Violent extremist movements (of both the Left and Right) were actively attacking the young, and very fragile, democratic state. A government that cannot maintain some degree of public order cannot sustain its legitimacy. Nor was the German citizenry well grounded in Constitutional, republican government (as was evidenced in their choices at the ballot box). Gun control was not initiated at the behest or on behalf of the Nazis - it was in fact designed to keep them, or others of the same ilk, from executing a revolution against the lawful government. In the strictest sense, the law succeeded - the Nazis did not stage an armed coup.

The 1928 law was subsequently extended in 1938 under the Third Reich (this action being the principal point in support of the contention that the Nazis were advocates of gun control). However, the Nazis were firmly in control of Germany at the time the Weapons Law of 1938 was created. Further, this law was not passed by a legislative body, but was promulgated under the dictatorial power granted Hitler in 1933. Obviously, the Nazis did not need gun control to attain power as they already (in 1938) possessed supreme and unlimited power in Germany. The only feasible argument that gun control favored the Nazis would be that the 1928 law deprived private armies of a means to defeat them. The basic flaw with this argument is that the Nazis did not seize power by force of arms, but through their success at the ballot box (and the political cunning of Hitler himself). Secondary considerations that arise are that gun ownership was not that widespread to begin with, and, even imagining such ubiquity the German people, Jews in particular, were not predisposed to violent resistance to their government.

The Third Reich did not need gun control (in 1938 or at any time thereafter) to maintain their power. The success of Nazi programs (restoring the economy, dispelling socio-political chaos) and the misappropriation of justice by the apparatus of terror (the Gestapo) assured the compliance of the German people. Arguing otherwise assumes a resistance to Nazi rule that did not exist. Further, supposing the existence of an armed resistance also requires the acceptance that the German people would have rallied to the rebellion. This argument requires a total suspension of disbelief given everything we know about 1930s Germany. Why then did the Nazis introduce this program? As with most of their actions (including the formation of the Third Reich itself), they desired to effect a facade of legalism around the exercise of naked power. It is unreasonable to treat this as a normal part of lawful governance, as the rule of law had been entirely demolished in the Third Reich. Any direct

quotations, of which there are several, that pronounce some beneficence to the Weapons Law should be considered in the same manner as all other Nazi pronouncements - absolute lies. (See [Bogus Gun Control Quotes](#) and endnote [1].)

A more farfetched question is the hypothetical proposition of armed Jewish resistance. First, they were not commonly armed even prior to the 1928 Law. Second, Jews had seen pogroms before and had survived them, though not without suffering. They would expect that this one would, as had the past ones, eventually subside and permit a return to normalcy. Many considered themselves "patriotic Germans" for their service in the first World War. These simply were not people prepared to stage violent resistance. Nor were they alone in this mode of appeasement. The defiance of "never again" is not so much a warning to potential oppressors as it is a challenge to Jews to reject the passive response to pogrom. Third, it hardly seems conceivable that armed resistance by Jews (or any other target group) would have led to any weakening of Nazi rule, let alone a full scale popular rebellion; on the contrary, it seems more likely it would have strengthened the support the Nazis already had. Their foul lies about Jewish perfidy would have been given a grain of substance. To project backward and speculate thus is to fail to learn the lesson history has so painfully provided.

The simple conclusion is that there are no lessons about the efficacy of gun control to be learned from the Germany of the first half of this century. It is all too easy to forget the seductive allure that fascism presented to all the West, bogged down in economic and social morass. What must be remembered is that the Nazis were master manipulators of popular emotion and sentiment, and were disdainful of people thinking for themselves. There is the danger to which we should pay great heed. Not fanciful stories about Nazi's seizing guns.

Sources:

Shirer, William L., The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich.

Jay Simkin, Aaron Zelman and Alan Rice, Lethal Laws.

[International Constitutional Law](#)

Endnote:

[1]. This is not to say Hitler did not value gun control. After having occupied Russian territory Hitler said:

Der größte Unsinn, den man in den besetzten Ostgebieten machen könnte, sei der, den unterworfenen Völkern Waffen zu geben. Die Geschichte lehre, daß alle Herrenvölker untergegangen seien, nachdem sie den von ihnen unterworfenen Völkern Waffen bewilligt hatten.

[The most foolish mistake we could possibly make would be to permit the conquered Eastern peoples to have arms. History teaches that all conquerors who have allowed their subject races to carry arms have prepared their own downfall by doing so.]

--- Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), April 11, 1942, quoted in Hitlers Tischegesprache Im Fuehrerhauptquartier 1941-1942.

[Hitler's Table-Talk at the Fuehrer's Headquarters 1941-1942], Dr. Henry Picker, ed. (Athenaum-Verlag, Bonn, 1951)

GunCite does not have the German version, but Hitler continues, "Indeed I would go so far as to say that the underdog is a *sine qua non* for the overthrow of any sovereignty. So let's not have any native militia or police. German troops alone will bear the sole responsibility for the maintenance of law and order."

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