

As we shall see, some of these reforms were successful (the move to produce whole-grain bread and sweet ciders, for example), while others were not (notably the campaign to reduce alcohol consumption). Food quality in many instances deteriorated with the militarization of the economy, as shelf lives lengthened and synthetic substitutes flooded the market. Food habits changed in the Nazi era, but not always in directions favorable to health and well-being—especially for persons judged unfit or undeserving.

RESISTING THE ARTIFICIAL LIFE

Nazi leaders paid a great deal of attention to what they ate and drank—and what the rest of the nation was supposed to be eating and drinking. If the health of the German state rested on the health of the German body, then the self-appointed guardians of the nation's health had to be careful about what was fed that body. What would make it healthy? What would corrupt it? Here as elsewhere in Nazi ideology, the liberal distinction between public and private spheres was abandoned. As one Hitler Youth health manual put it: "Nutrition is not a private matter!"⁶ The body of the German citizen, after all, was supposed to be the material property of the German state. And since the state was identified with the Führer, it followed that your body belonged to the Führer—as was routinely announced on propaganda posters (*Dein Körper gehört dem Führer!*). The state thereby acquired a stake in the maintenance of the individual body—whether it was healthy or poisoned, exercised or abused, and so forth. Nazi philosophers and politicians contrasted this notion of "health as a duty" (officially embraced as a national slogan in 1939) with the purportedly "Marxist" notion of health as "the right to do whatever you want with your own body."⁷

One common theme of Nazi food rhetoric was the need to return to a more natural diet free of artificial colorings and preservatives. Foods were to be low in fat and high in fiber, while stimulants like coffee, alcohol, and tobacco were to be either avoided or used in

moderation. Meat eating was to be minimized, and fresh foods were to be chosen over preserved foods in tins.

Erwin Liek had formulated many of these arguments in his 1932 and 1934 books on cancer (see chapter 1), and his was the lead followed by many Nazi food philosophers. Like his American contemporary, the insurance agent Frederick Hoffman, Liek maintained that cancer and other modern maladies were caused by improper eating. The human diet was becoming increasingly artificial—laced with preservatives, colorings, and other adulterations designed to achieve a superficial salability. Foods were being overcooked, which destroyed important vitamins; people were eating too much salt and protein and not enough vital minerals and hormones. The frantic pace of modern life was partly to blame, as more and more people preferred opening a can to foods prepared fresh. Equally lamentable was the "senseless swallowing of drugs" (*sinnlose Medikamentenschluckerei*) encouraged by doctors in the pocket of the pharmaceutical industry. Overmedication was a "pathology of therapy" caused by uncritical addiction to scientific medicine.⁸

Franz G. M. Wirz, a dermatologist and member of the Nazi party's Committee on Public Health, was one of many who followed Liek in criticizing the "unnatural directions" taken in the history of German eating. In a 1938 book, *Healthy and Secure Nutrition*, he noted that the German diet had taken a dramatic turn for the worse in the past century or so. Germans in the early nineteenth century had eaten 14 kilograms of meat and 250 kilograms of grain in any given year; by the mid-1930s, however, they were eating 56 kilos of meat and only 86 kilos of grain. This change from high-calorie "power foods" (*Betriebsstoffen*) to high-protein "structural foods" (*Aufbaustoffen*) had been accompanied by a dramatic increase in the consumption of fats and sugars. Per capita consumption of fat had increased by about a quarter from 1912 to 1936 (to 103 grams per day), and annual sugar consumption had soared from 4 to 24 kilograms per person over the past century or so.⁹ The consequence was not just an increase in dental cavities ("fully unknown prior to 4,000 years ago") but also a wave of nervous ailments, infertility, stomach and digestive disorders (including