

severe bouts of stomach pains and suspected—again like his Führer—that this might mean cancer (Himmler's own father died from stomach cancer). The SS supremo was convinced that a balanced diet was crucial for health maintenance; he rejected the single-minded focus on calories as the best measure of nutrition and emphasized instead the value of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and whole foods. He generally abstained from both alcohol and tobacco, allowing himself nonetheless an occasional cigar and glass of red wine. Obesity was anathema to him, and in August of 1940 he launched a campaign with *Sicherheitsdienst* chief Reinhard Heydrich to combat corpulence in the SS.⁵⁴ He urged his Waffen-SS men to be nonsmoking nondrinking vegetarians, though it is unclear how successful his proselytizing was. He did manage to have the SS take over most of Germany's mineral springs, and it was on his orders that many SS barracks and concentration camps planted herbal gardens (see below).⁵⁵ He longed for the time when all Germans would be vegetarians; only then would *Deutschland* return, per his fantasies of ancient Aryans, to its rightful place as dominant among nations.⁵⁶

Himmler's food concerns were not unlike those of others in the Liekist, romantic axis of the Nazi party. He opposed the distribution of artificial honey to the Waffen SS and the adulteration of foods more generally: "The artificial is everywhere; everywhere food is adulterated, filled with ingredients that supposedly make it last longer, or look better, or pass as 'enriched,' or whatever else the industry's admen want us to believe." The root of the problem was that

we are in the hands of the food companies, whose economic clout and advertising make it possible for them to prescribe what we can and cannot eat. City folk, living through the winter largely on canned food, are already at their mercy, but now they attack the countryside with their refined flour, sugar, and white bread. The war has interrupted these proceedings; after the war we shall take energetic steps to prevent the ruin of our people by the food industries.⁵⁷

Asked how he would change the German diet, he gave as an example the state-mandated fixing of a certain minimal percentage

of whole grains in bread. And how would he get people to eat such bread?

we must influence them by propaganda to show the damage caused by refined foods. There's no lack of examples. The wrong diet always plays a decisive part in all the troubles of civilization, from the loss of teeth to chronic constipation and digestive ailments, not to mention bad nerves and defective circulation.⁵⁸

Housewives and mothers were to be the targets of such propaganda, since theirs was the "gigantic responsibility" of preserving health with food. Himmler claimed to have learned the value of proper eating from his experience as a farmer, experience later confirmed by his reading of Max Bircher-Benner and Ragnar Berg, two of the leading natural food advocates of the era (Bircher-Benner is best known today as the inventor of Muesli). The SS Reichsführer was aware of the orthodox medical myopia in such matters ("Our medicines today are injections, our diet tinned food, and most of our doctors accept this without thinking"); he also knew that a full-scale campaign for healthy food—including propaganda films—would probably have to wait until after the war.⁵⁹ Hitler himself told Goebbels (in April 1942) that he would wait until after the war to tackle the issue of vegetarianism; he also confided that Nazism would never have triumphed in Germany if he had insisted on banning all consumption of meat.⁶⁰

Rudolf Hess was another fussy eater. Like Himmler, Hitler's deputy and successor was fond of herbal remedies and homeopathy, and took great care in the foods he ate. He used to bring his own vegetarian food to meetings at the Chancellery, which he would then warm up for dinner. This annoyed Hitler, who complained to Hess, "I have an excellent dietician/cook here. If your doctor has prescribed something special for you, she could certainly prepare it. You cannot bring your own food in here." Hess countered that his food had to contain certain biodynamic ingredients, prompting Hitler to suggest that he (Hess) might prefer to eat at home. Hess was apparently less often invited to lunch with the Führer after that episode.⁶¹