

scale" (*Massenexperimente*), but they also show that physicians were willing to protest the sale of carcinogens to the highest levels of the Nazi health apparatus—in this case to Paul Rostock, the right-hand man of Karl Brandt and a man who, after the war, faced charges of having helped to organize murderous human experiments in concentration camps.

What is most remarkable about this campaign against the false blinding of butter, again, is the fact that influential Nazi physicians saw themselves as duty-bound to eliminate life-threatening contaminants from German foods. The campaign against coal tar dyes is only one example: lead-lined toothpaste tubes were banned fifty years prior to a similar move in the United States, and in 1937, Reich Health Office president Hans Reiter banned the bleaching of flour. Efforts were made to improve water quality¹⁷³ and to curtail the use of artificial sweeteners such as saccharine (some said this was a carcinogen!).¹⁷⁴ By the 1940s, few nations were as conscious of, and willing to root out, hazards in the healthy citizen's food, air, and water.

IDEOLOGY AND REALITY

It is difficult to assess the overall impact of Nazi food reforms, difficult to separate boasts from facts, ideology from reality. There are biases that have to be reckoned with: Nazi-era scientific literature is not always to be trusted, since there was often a desire to highlight good news and suppress bad. Even the bad news cannot always be trusted, though, since apocalyptic prognoses were a regular feature of Nazi rhetoric before and after 1933—part of the ongoing Nazi "revolution." There is bias even in the accounts by émigrés like Martin Gumpert, who painted a dismal but probably exaggerated picture of declining health, rising hunger, and degraded intellectual life in the Thousand Year Reich prior even to 1940.¹⁷⁵

One thing we must never forget, though, is that Nazi food reforms have a dark and sinister side, accompanied as they were by efforts to eliminate "useless eaters" from German society. Hitler at

the start of the war declared that "the food supply does not allow for the incurably ill to be dragged through the war"¹⁷⁶—the implication being that something would have to happen to make them stop eating. Prior even to the onset of "active euthanasia," patients at psychiatric hospitals had been placed on near-starvation diets: at the Eichberg asylum near Wiesbaden, for example, patients were living (and dying) primarily on root vegetables.¹⁷⁷ Food became a political lever, forcing some into starvation while keeping others alive and happy. Bavaria's "starvation diet decree" of November 1942 made this explicit, allowing patients capable of performing useful work to be given higher rations. No one knows exactly how many people were deliberately starved to death; the total number of those "euthanized" (a large portion by starvation) is close to 200,000.¹⁷⁸

There is also evidence, though, that certain kinds of food deteriorated even for the large majority of ordinary Germans outside the camps or "euthanasia" institutions. Martin Gumpert in his 1940 *Heil Hunger!* pointed out that infant mortality in 1937 was 40 percent higher in Germany than in neighboring Holland. Many diseases were on the rise, among them rickets and dysentery, linked to malnutrition and contaminated food, respectively. Gumpert argued that the increase in such diseases stemmed from the stockpiling of food for use in the event of war; stockpiles would be sold just prior to spoilage, flooding markets with a lot of inferior food. His conclusion: Hitler's program of health restoration was "a crime against the health of 80 million people in the heart of Europe, a crime against the civilization of our world." He also predicted that the Nazi machine might continue for a time "to register high performance under pressure" but that "one day it will be nothing but a heap of scrap iron."¹⁷⁹

Gumpert obviously could not comment on the impact of the war, but some of his predictions do appear to have come true. Food rationing started on August 28, 1939, only four days prior to the invasion of Poland.¹⁸⁰ The variety of foods was reduced (a single *Einheitsmargarine* replaced the three different grades of butter substitutes previously available, for example), and Jews were allowed only a fraction of the food given to non-Jews. Food rations