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# They thought they were free--Hitler in real-time

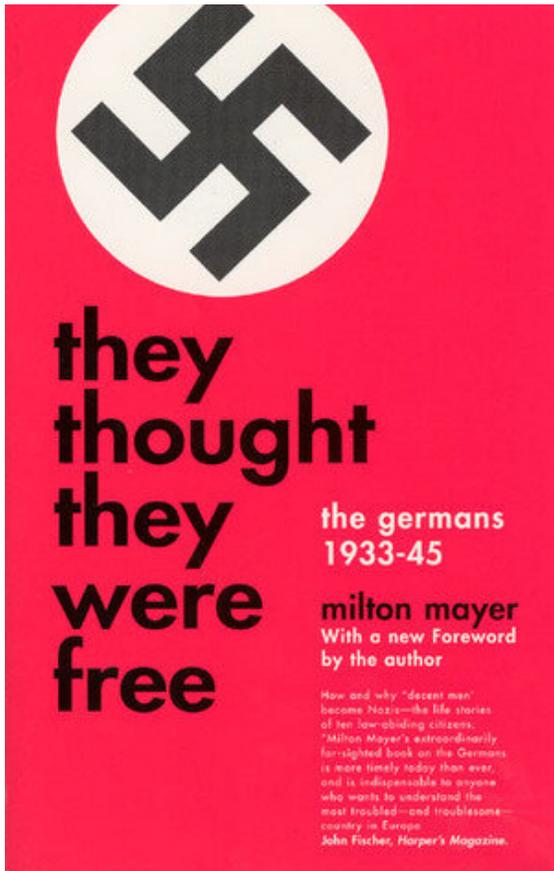
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I used to wonder how Germans felt as they watched Hitler destroy their country. While I'm sure many supported him, there were many more who did not.

Living in America in 2020, I now understand exactly how those citizens that didn't support the regime felt: helpless.

Here is an excerpt from Milton Mayer's *They Thought They Were Free: The Germans, 1933-45*, which if you look back over the last three years, you will see:

*Each act, each occasion, is worse than the last, but only a little worse. You wait for the next and the next. You wait for one great shocking occasion, thinking that others, when such a shock comes, will join with you in resisting somehow. You don't want to act, or even talk, alone; you don't want to 'go out of your way to make trouble.' Why not?-Well, you are not in the habit of doing it. And it is not just fear, fear of*



*standing alone, that restrains you; it is also genuine uncertainty. Uncertainty is a very important factor, and, instead of decreasing as time goes on, it grows. Outside, in the streets, in the general community, 'everyone' is happy. One hears no protest, and certainly sees none. You know, in France or Italy there would be slogans against the government*

*painted on walls and fences; in Germany, outside the great cities, perhaps, there is not even this. In the university community, in your own community, you speak privately to your colleagues, some of whom certainly feel as you do; but what do they say? They say, 'It's not so bad' or 'You're seeing things' or 'You're an alarmist.'*

*And you are an alarmist. You are saying that this must lead to this, and you can't prove it. These are the beginnings, yes; but how do you know for sure when you don't know the end, and how do you know, or even surmise, the end? On the one hand, your enemies, the law, the regime, the Party, intimidate you. On the other, your colleagues pooh-pooh you as*

*pessimistic or even neurotic. You are left with your close friends, who are, naturally, people who have always thought as you have....*

*But the one great shocking occasion, when tens or hundreds or thousands will join with you, never comes. That's the difficulty. If the last and worst act of the whole regime had come immediately after the first and smallest, thousands, yes, millions would have been sufficiently shocked-if, let us say, the gassing of the Jews in '43 had come immediately after the 'German Firm' stickers on the windows of non-Jewish shops in '33. But of course this isn't the way it happens. In between come all the hundreds of little steps, some of them imperceptible, each of them preparing you not to be shocked by the next. Step C is not so much worse than Step B, and, if you did not make a stand at Step B, why should you at Step C? And so on to Step D....*

And now we're at Step D and the downward spiral will pick up speed.

If you want to know the future, look behind you. It's coming at a frightening pace.

There is hope, as well. Nothing lasts forever. Even the angels die. We just won't know how many until it's over.

My heart breaks for the country I've lost, but I won't stop fighting to get it back.