

Chart. 50 | The National Socialist Organisation “Strength through Joy”

The National Socialist organisation “Strength through Joy” (KdF) was founded at the end of November 1933 in Berlin as an organisation of the German Labour Front (DAF). It was led by Bodo Lafferentz and modelled on the Italian leisure time organisation “Dopolavoro”, though later critical-distant voices arose against this organisation. KdF was meant to organise and control the entire sphere of leisure time – from holiday, to the leisure time activities up to company-facilitated sports activities. KdF was also in charge of special duties and projects such as the “beautification” of the companies and the construction of the KdF wagon. In order to prove the need for an organisation such as KdF during the start up period, a survey on the leisure time habits of the staff was made at Siemens in Berlin. The results showed that only a third of the employees had made trips lasting several days. The quota of those who had participated in cultural or sport activities also turned out very low. For the German Labour Front, the sphere of leisure time activities was suitable to gain popularity and compensate for its little influence on work- and social law concerns.

Most of the leading people of the Nazi-regime experienced the November Revolution 1918 as a trauma and saw the military defeat as a result of the homeland’s treachery. Under no circumstance was this to repeat in a future war. That’s why KdF was meant to look after the mental disposition of the “People’s Comrades”. Hitler put this concern as the following: “I want that the worker is accorded sufficient holiday and that everything is done so this holiday, as well as the other leisure time, is a time of pure recreation. I demand this because I want a people with strong nerves. Only with a people, that keeps its nerves we make real big policies.” This quote shows the instrumental character of KdF within the framework of war preparations. Also people who did not participate in the view were meant to believe in the illusion of a social advancement and the levelling of social differences. The equalisation in the leisure time activities and the increased participation of the workers in cultural and sportive activities were supposed to prove this. At the same time these measurements aimed at performance enhancement and an improvement of the people’s health.

The image cultivation and the effect of the KdF-activities were very successful: The organisation became the most popular organisation of the Nazi-regime and arranged for stability of the system. Some of the myths connected to the KdF-journeys still exist and take effect in the present.



1. Advertisement showing, vigorous, happy people, 1938.

Federal Archive Berlin

2. Confiscated building used as a headquarter. Seat of the NS- organisation “Strength through Joy”, situated in the former building of the SPD (Social Democratic Party) magazine “Vorwärts”, in the Lindenstrasse Berlin- Charlottenburg, 1936.

German Historical Museum, photo: Willy Römer

. Vaudeville for the workers at the Community Storage.

Otto Marrenbach (Hg.), Fundamentals of the German Social Order, 1942.

4 . Success Message regarding the number of participants that have attended KdF events in 1936. Annual Report of the DAF, 1936.

Federal Archive Berlin

z1 Against the "Frail Nerves".

The greatest of States men cannot carry out politics with a Folk that has frail nerves. The defeat in the Great War should have driven this message home for all eternity. Our enemy, due to their superiority in number, could give their forces the necessary rest and recuperation, whereas the Germans were forced to endure the ceaseless nerve racking onslaught. Therefore, the enemy could reach the fatherland via the imposed hunger blockade.

We lost the war because we lost our nerves.

Therefore the Führer wants the national socialist state to always have this realization in front of its eyes; that the nerves of the people remain strong and healthy.

"After Work". The Great „Fire Work Evening“ of the German Front. Arbeitertum, 1933

z2 „Nerves“ for the War

We are not sending them out into the world for their own amusement. I have not founded the travel agency, „Strength through Joy“, in order to start a leisure club, that is something I strictly reject. Or to have people discover Italy or Portugal, that is laughable and something I feel complete indifference towards. No, its purpose is to ensure that they have the nerves and strength so that when the Führer decides to answer the final question, 80 Million people will be at the height of their potential to fulfill this.

A speech by the Reich's Organisational Leader Dr. Ley on the 11th of July 1938, on the KdF Ship „Wilhelm Gustloff“.

z3 The „Overhaul“ of the Workforce

We did not send our workers on holiday or built gigantic sea side resorts for the sheer fun of it. We did it in order to allow the workforce to regain its strength, so that he can return to his workplace with increased vigour. KdF overhauls its workforce every now and then, just as you change the motor in one's car after a number of kilometres have been travelled. Sports, Beauty of Work, Firm Concerts and such are unimportant on their own, seeing as their function is served by ensuring that the German Folk improves on all levels.

Gerhard Starcke, The German Labour Front, 1940

z4 Influence and Control even during Leisure Time- Report by the SPD from July 1935

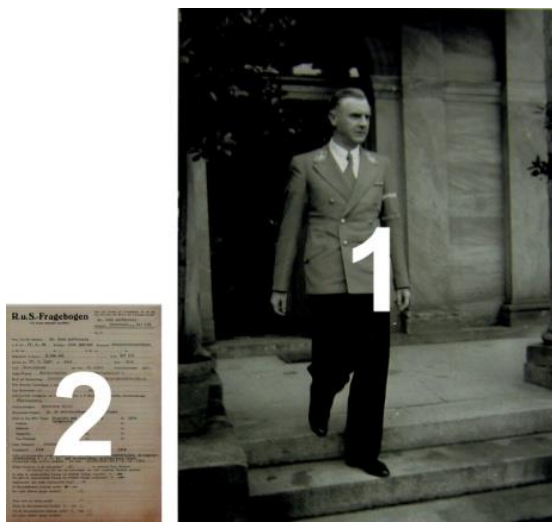
The reports that have been coming in during the last couple of months regarding, „Strength through Joy“ show that this organisation has expanded its field of activity. It is not only trying to become a travel agency but also trying to fulfill all the potential desires and wishes of the masses. The political purpose is as follows: the worker, the employers and the executive are not only meant to be under the influence of the National Socialist Organisation, but are also constantly supposed to be surrounded by it influences at all times.

Germany Reports of the Social Democratic Party of Germany 1934-1940, 1980.

Chart. 51 | Bodo Lafferentz – a Biography

Bodo Lafferentz was born in 1897 in Kiel as the son of a civil engineering entrepreneur. In 1914 he volunteered for the sappers. After returning from British captivity in 1920 he studied political science at the universities Berlin and Kiel. From 1929 to November 1933, Lafferentz was one of the managers of the Confederation of the German Employers. On the 1st of May 1933 he joined the NSDAP and became the head of the office "Travel, Hiking and Vacancy" of the National Socialist organisation "Strength through Joy" (KdF) in December 1933, at the beginning of 1938 he assumed control over the whole KdF-office. In the same year he received the commission from Ley to prepare the construction of the "Volkswagen" factory and acted as the general manager of the "Volkswagen" factory LLC and as a member of the board of management. Lafferentz was appointed the Reichs-representative for rescue, that is to say, he was in charge of the repatriation of the population from the "threatened" western territories. The SS-Obersturmbannführer (lieutenant colonel) also lead the "Research and Utilisation LLC" that was involved in research projects in concentration camps.

After 1945 Lafferentz lived as a salesman in Nußdorf near the Bodensee. The Spruchkammer (civilian tribunal) of Überlingen categorized Lafferentz in December 1948 as "guilty". The revision in February 1949 lead to the category "less incriminated", conviction did not happen. Lafferentz died in 1974.



1 . Bodo Lafferentz in Bayreuth, 1940

Federal Archive Koblenz, photo: Heinrich Hoffmann

2. Accelerated Career after 1933. Questionnaire for the Race and Settlement ministry of the SS, 25th of September 1941.

Federal Archive Berlin

3. Surrounded by Power. Ley in a discussion with Hitler, between the two is Bodo Lafferentz
Gerhard Starcke, The German Worker's Front, 1940

z1 „Praise to the Community Thought“

The foundation of the new Germany is the social thought, the comradeship with the whole folk. All the differences between groups, that lead to disorder and strife, must be erased. The holiday travels by the NS Organisation “Strength through Joy” is working to attain this goal. The holiday makers are especially prone to this community thinking and it is our main goal, to construct the holiday travels in such a way, that the thoughts of our comrades are made apparent.

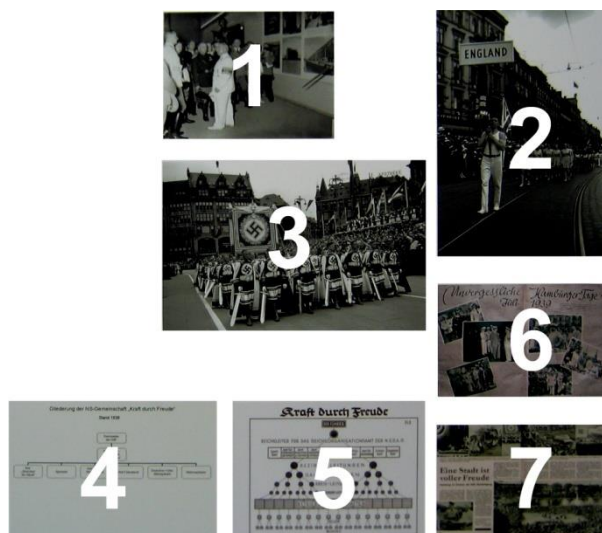
Bodo Lafferentz, Holiday and Recovery Report: World Congress for Freedom and Recovery, Hamburg 1937

Chart. 52 | Structure and Duties of the National Socialist Organisation "Strength through Joy" (KdF)

The territorial structure of the National Socialist community "Strength through Joy" proved to be analogue to the one of the NSDAP. The functional departmentalisation corresponded to the structuring of the administrative top. Numerous offices were subordinated to KdF, which itself was an office of the German Labour Front (DAF). The DAF financially supported KdF with regular subsidies amounting to millions that derived from the former trade union's property and current members' contributions.

Up to the beginning of the war six offices existed: KdF and the subordinated departments, amongst others, were in charge of the organisation of the holiday and the leisure time, of the national education as well as vocational training, of the beautification of the companies and accordingly the "optimisation" of the internal production as well as the advancement of the company-facilitated sports activities. The duties of KdF primarily consisted of control and formation of the employees' daily life and leisure time and aimed at increasing efficiency. Apart from that KdF was responsible for spreading the idea of the "People's Community" respectively and to create loyalty towards the regime. Up to the beginning of the war KdF celebrated itself and its achievements at the annual Reichs-conferences in Hamburg. These expensive, international celebrations that were propagandistically staged were supposed to give – in the country and abroad – the impression of a successful leisure time policy. Also the achievement reports regularly provided on the KdF-anniversaries aimed at positive effects and were reviewed by the synchronised press.

As already mentioned, the KdF staffs primarily acted within the internal company sphere. Many KdF journeys were organised via the companies. The ideological and envisaged practical function of the National Socialist holiday and recreation complex in Prora becomes clear only against the background of the KdF targets and the practical orientation of its offices. That's why the central offices, their duties and their functions will be presented on the following exhibition boards.



1. Opening of the KdF exhibition in the Zoo Exhibition Hall in Hamburg. Reich's Organisation Leader Ley, observing pictures during a tour of the KdF Wagon Factory, 21st of July 1939.

Federal Archive Koblenz

2. International Participation during the KdF- Reich's Convention. Festival Procession during the KdF Convention in Hamburg, 1937.

Regional Media Center Hamburg, photo by Germin (Gerd Mingram)

3. Medieval Masquerade. Festival procession during the KdF Reich's Convention, 1938.

German Historical Museum, photo: Joseph Schorer

4 . Vertical Outline of the KdF, 1940.

Organisational Book of the NSDAP, 1940

5 . Technical Outline of the KdF, chart.

Federal Archive Berlin

6 . Propaganda pictures from the KdF Reich's convention in Hamburg, 1939.

Joy and Labour, 1939

7 . Hamburg, the city of the „KdF Convention“

Arbeitertum, 1938

Chart. 53 | The KdF Office "Beauty of Labour"

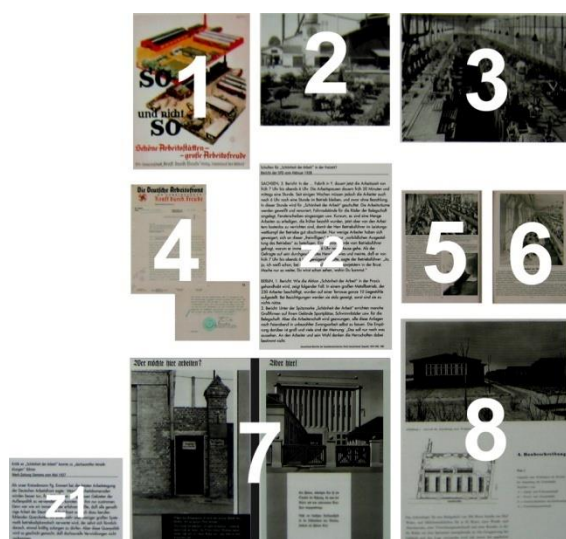
The office "Beauty of Labour" was founded as a self-contained department in November 1933 and was led by Albert Speer. The central aims were to increase satisfaction within the companies and to establish a "clean and comradely atmosphere".

In order to achieve these aims "good and healthy work places" and a "true working community of superiors and inferiors" were to be created. The methods to carry this out were founded on psycho-technical programmes deriving from the time of the Weimar Republic: an optimisation of the operational procedures was supposed to be realised by company-facilitated recreation activities, and the improvement of the work place.

The office was supposed to initiate improvements of the work environment – such as bright workplaces, good aeration and sanitary arrangements. Cleanliness of the workplace, the construction of sports fields, green spaces and old people's homes, were also to be realised by the employees in "voluntary extra work".

The office didn't have any executive authority, though. The pressure was exerted via propaganda, company visits and DAF representatives. Defaulting companies were decried in public, ideal realisations were lauded and awarded with the badge "Ideal Advancement of Strength through Joy".

Beside factory visits the office organised campaigns that were dedicated to different aspects: With mission statements such as "Sun and Green to all Productive People", "Good Light – Good Labour", "Clean People in a Clean Company" people were called on to the construction or reconstruction of washing, bathing rooms or changing rooms or to the improvement of the illumination at the workplaces. The campaign "Warm Meal in the Company" was of particular importance: the number of canteens was supposed to be increased in order to allow for the intensification of work and an extension of working hours. Branch- specific campaigns for the seaborne and inland navigation, tanneries, shoe factories etc. were also mounted. The office also designed lamps, dishes, furniture and model barracks for the "Reichs" motorway camps. The measurements that primarily aimed to increase the performance, were criticized from time to time: Changes were occasionally called the result of the "facade socialism" or were derided as "flower pot romanticism".



1 . A Tidy workplace to increase productivity.

Federal Archive Koblenz

2. Greening in the factory yard.

Factory yard with wall slogans of the DAF („We shall march with you“), inside the plywood factory Ebersberg/Oberbayern, 1937/38.

Picture Archive of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, photo: Heinrich Hoffmann.

3. Daylight at the work place was meant to stimulate higher performance.

Leaflet, „Women at the Factories“, 1940

Federal Archive Berlin

4 . One of the tasks of „The Beauty of Labour“ was the rebuilding of the canteen. A letter from the Regional Advisor of „The Beauty of Labour“ in Berlin, sent to the General Inspector of Berlin, Albert Speer. 13th of July, 1938.

Federal Archive Berlin

5 . A large, breezy working hall inside the Siemens, Werner Factory F, 1932.

Fritz Vebel, Man and Machine, „Siemens- Transactions“, 1932

6 . The safe working hall, 1935 – engrossed by „The Beauty of Labour“

„The Beauty of Labour“, Siemens- Transaction, 1935

7 . Even the renovation of the entrance, was supposed to create „wonders“. Brochure from the „The Beauty of Labour“, 1934.

Federal Archive Berlin

8. Even the renovation of the entrance, was supposed to create „wonders“. Brochure from the „The Beauty of Labour“, 1934.

Federal Archive Berlin

z1 Criticism towards “The Beauty of Labour” can lead to “Dachau- like developments”.

Factory Zine Siemens, May 1937.

“During the last workshop of the German Labour Front, our district chief said, “Some of our work colleagues would be better off using their abilities within the field of foreign affairs”. We could only agree with him. For time and time again we have troublemakers who systematically criticize the German Labour Front and these people are really asking for a beating. However, this sneaky policy is implemented so cleverly, that a Dachau- like situation does not develop. On the contrary, they occur under the guise of an honest man or ‘National Socialist’. Everyone who works in the factories, needs to keep their eyes peeled in order to unmask them. Despite all this cunning, sooner or later one or the other will make a mistake. May then God have mercy on their soul.”

Federal Archive Berlin

z2 Grafting for the „Beauty of Labour“, During Ones Leisure Time?

Report by the SPD from February 1938

“Saxony, 3rd Report”: At the factory at Y., the work time last from 7 in the morning to 6 in the evening. The work breaks are 20 minutes in the morning and a 1-hour lunch break. In the last

couple of weeks, however, the workers must work one hour more and do not get paid extra. In this extended hour the workers graft for the "Beauty of Labour". The working rooms would be whitewashed and renovated, bicycle stands were set up and windows frames fixed and so forth. To sum this all up; earlier this would have been labour for which the workers would have been paid. Now the workers are to do this free of charge, so that our 'Dear Boss' can have a good result in the "efficiency competition". Only a small number of workers refused to "volunteer" in contributing "improvement of the work space". Once the boss asked one of his employees why he always goes home at around 6 o'clock. The worker would point at his sweat drenched shirt and say that he has been working here from 7 in the morning to 6 in the evening and that he was tired. To this the boss replied, "Yes, I see that a Soviet heart still beats inside of you. Just keep that up! You'll soon see where that attitude will get you!".

"Berlin, 1st Report": The way in which the "Beauty of Labour" is handled in practice can be shown by the following example. In a metalwork which employs 250 labourers, 10 deck chairs would be set up on a terrace. They are always proudly displayed during visits, however, they are never really used.

"Berlin, 2nd Report": Under the slogan "The Beauty of Labour", various firms would erect a sports area, swimming pool and so forth, for the employees. However, the employees are forced to erect these things themselves, without receiving any pay. The frustration amongst many of them is very high and many are of the opinion that, "This is all a shallow illusion. No one is really concerned about the welfare and well being of the workers."

Reports from the German Social Democratic Party Germany 1934-1940, 1980

Chart. 54 | The “KdF-Beetle” – Motorisation of the “People’s Comrades”?

The construction and sale of the so called “People’s Car” were supposed to increase the degree of motorisation in Germany. However, in 1934, only one car per 75 inhabitants would be available— whereas in the USA every 5th person had a car, and in France every 22nd. In order to achieve this target Hitler personally supported the plans of the constructor Ferdinand Porsche to build a “People’s car”, a “Volkswagen”. The plans were realized by the National Socialist organisation “Strength through Joy” of the German Labour Front because no agreement on the financing of the vehicle development and the later selling price could be achieved with the automobile industry. As a result of the dispropriation of the former trade unions, the DAF had the necessary means available. At the end of May 1937 the “Society for the Preparation of the GermanVolkswagen” was founded. In February 1938 near Fallersleben the construction of a factory was started and on the 26th of May Hitler laid the foundation stone during a big ceremony. Next to the construction of the production facilities a new town was founded – the town of the “KdF-car”, later called Wolfsburg. In September 1938 a model of the “Volkswagen”, at first called “KdF”-wagon, was introduced to the public. At the end of 1939 with the help of 3000 Italian builders, big parts of the work were finished.

The KdF-organisation used its experience in travel savings and developed its own saving system for the “Volkswagen Beetle”: stamps were sold that could be fixed on saving cards. The target was that the prospective buyers invested about five Reichsmark per week. The local KdF-offices registered and controlled the savers. Before purchasing the wagon, half of the costs were supposed to be accrued. Voluntary staffs, the so called “KdF-wagon” wardens were in charge of the implementation of the saving system. The selling price of the limousine was determined to be 990 Reichsmark, which equates to around 4500 Euro. The prospective buyers stemmed rather from bourgeois society circles, amongst the “KdF car” savers the proportion of workers was only 5 Percent.

None of the 336,000 orders, of which 60,000 had fully paid the car, ever received the “Volkswagen Beetle”. On 1st September 1939 work in civil projects was prohibited. The Wolfsburg factory now primarily produced for the air force and built military versions of the “KdF-car”. The “KdF seaside resort” on Rügen never received any holiday-makers and the “KdF-car” was never built – war and expansion had priority.



1. The discount cards of the KdF were also transferred over to the “KdF-car”.

Volkswagen AG

2. It was advertised with a rather low level of commitment, 1938

Federal Archive Koblenz

3. Deposits were payed till the end. A letter from the “KdF- car” Department, NS Community, sent to Hans Lichtenheldt, 18th of June 1943.

Federal Archive Berlin

4 . A factory was built specifically for the “KdF-Beetle”. Laying of the foundation stone near Fallersleben, 26th of May 1938. A speech by Ley.

Federal Archive Koblenz

5 . The „Führer“ and the „Volkswagen“. Adolf Hitler, Porsche, Ley und Hitler (from left to right)

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

6 . The dream of civilian motorisation would eventually lead to military usage. VW “Kübelwagen”

of the Wehrmacht.

Volkswagen AG

7 . The employment of civilians was still factitious.

Arbeitertum, 1940

8. Praises from the troops.

Arbeitertum, 1942

z1 The Disappearance of the Deposit

Reports from the Reich of German Socialism, 8th of March 1940

Allied Leaflets including the article „German Socialism“: Dr. Ley has indicated that the contribution for the “Volkswagen” must continue to be paid. The factory that is meant to build the “Volkswagen” is not producing ammunition and therefore, no “Volkswagen” can be issued. What has happened to the payments already made and what will happen to payments that are still be sent in? They will “go up in smoke” as grenades, sunken U Boats and shot down airplanes. Dr. Ley’s announcements is a scam used to suck up the last savings of the ‘little man’ in order to invest it into the Nazi War Machine.

Heinz Boberach (Hg.), Reports from the Reich, 1984

z2 Scepticism Amongst the Workers

Report by the SPD from April 1939

“South West Germany”: The “Volkswagen- Action” is something that the workers do not take seriously. Most of them believe that, if a worker would be able to save up enough money to be actually able to afford one of these cars, then he will most likely not be able to have enough money to maintain one. Because of this, a new breed of KdF jokes began to circulate. “The “Volkswagen” cannot drive further than what you hear on the Volks Receiver”.

“Central Germany”: The majority of the workers laugh about the “Volkswagen” situation. “There is hardly enough money for day to day bread, nevermind enough to afford a car”. Some are also outraged about the whole advertisement branch. Other, however, see the “cause as such, not as a bad thing”. One thousand Reichsmarks for a car is a rather tempting price. However, one has to consider the maintenance costs. Who can construct cheap garages in the city? And if one were to park the car in one of the so called ‘Lantern Garage’, which basically means on the open road, the car will eventually fall victim to the elements. Meaning that all the work to save up the money was in vain.

Reports by the Social Democratic Party of Germany 1934-1940, 1980

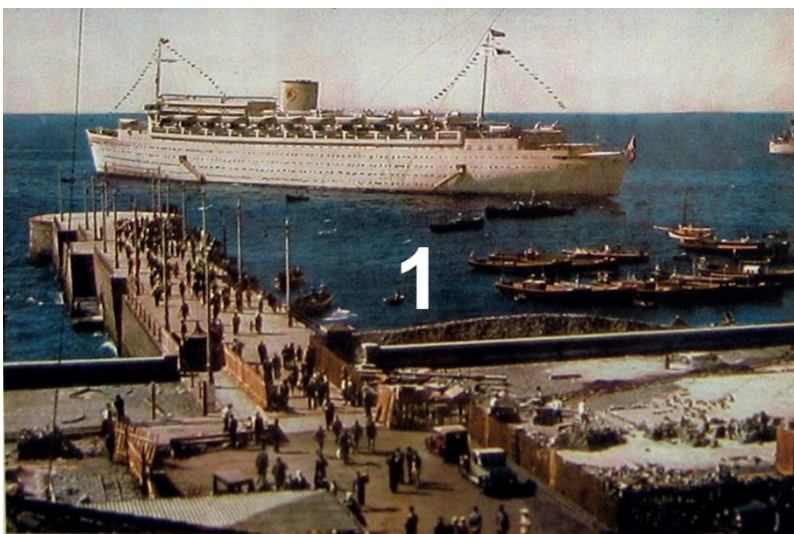
Chart. 55 | “Strength through Joy” as Leisure Time Organisation

The primary task of the National Socialist community “Strength through Joy” was the extensive organisation of leisure time. The activities ranged from after work activities, walking tours, company-facilitated sports activities up to national education. The most important field of activity – because of its value for propagandistic purposes – was the organisation of holiday trips. Within this context, sea passages had a particular significance: Even though only few holiday-makers could participate on these journeys, they were very symbolic and prestigious for KdF and have been used even until today.

KdF organised the leisure time of the people and at the same time anchored state interests and ideology in this field. Leisure time was exploited by KdF; it had to be spent in a “useful” way – KdF itself would guarantee this target. Leisure time activities would no longer be chosen at the people’s own will: Private matters became political. In order to achieve this, aim the former pluralistic clubs and societies were eliminated, leisure time organisations of the trade unions were taken over and private initiatives, such as the Munich Sheep’s Head Players, were incorporated and would compete with the established sport’s associations.

To the opposite of the DAF, the organisations and facilities that gathered under the umbrella of the KdF enjoyed great popularity. Suspiciousness and disregard abated when KdF in co-operation with the companies organised “events free from politics”. Indeed, for the first time broad levels of the population participated in leisure time and cultural offers – particularly in theatre, golf or skiing, which before had been exclusive activities.

A contemporary observer, the social scientist Franz Neumann, describes the meaning of these activities as follows: “The KdF determines in detail the correct methods, duration and content of the leisure time for only one single purpose: to boost up labour productivity.” The leisure time activities and cultural offers were, of course, partly for the benefit of the workers but they “broke down barriers as much as choral societies, orchestras and football teams improved the fate of prisoners.” The primary targets of the KdF leisure time activities was the regeneration of manpower, the increase of motivation, the integration of the workers in the company and the stabilization of the regime. Some of these targets are going to be exemplarily presented.



1. Dream goal Madeira. KdF Ship „Robert Ley“ in the roadstead of Funchal.

Karl Busch (Hg.), To the Dream Islands, 1940

Chart. 56 | The KdF Office “Travel, Hiking, Holiday”

The office “Travel, Hiking, Holiday” managed by Bodo Lafferentz was the most popular KdF-office. According to Robert Ley the rather unpopular DAF had great success with the idea and realisation of leisure time and travel offers. One of the preconditions was the introduction of the paid holiday; only after the standardisation of the labour agreements in 1933, were the majority of the employees entitled to six to twelve days of paid annual leave. The vacation was meant to be spent in a “useful” way: The central interests were the spread of National Socialist thinking and the increase of performance. The state-organized holiday advanced to an instrument of political control and economical calculation which is illustrated in targets such as the direction of consumption, the advancement of the “people’s health”, the imparting of the “love of one’s homeland” and the expansion of tourism.

Within the framework of organised journeys, trips lasting one or several days were offered – offers that had been made before by the associations of the labour movement. About 10 % of the inland trips, including overnight stay, were KdF-trips. Although this was not an insignificant quota, it could not be interpreted as an expression of the “break with bourgeois privileges”, as the propaganda tried to put it. The journeys offered from May 1934 onward developed into propaganda hits. At first ships were chartered, later KdF commissioned the construction of two of their own ships. The ships passed the Atlantic or went to Madeira, later Norway and Tenerifa were also headed for.

From autumn 1937 trips to Italy were offered to operate at full capacity.

Longer trips were mostly not affordable for the average worker or employee. The percentage of workers on KdF-journeys was about 40%; on prestigious journeys the workers’ percentage was not higher than 20%. Even in 1937 – the year with the most German participants – only 2 or 3% of the workers benefited from a KdF-journey. Nevertheless, the propagandistic effect was enormous and contributed to spreading the idea of a classless “People’s community”.

In order to make the journeys more affordable KdF introduced the travel saving: Saving cards and saving stamps for 50 Pfennig were available at banks. On the base of this economic strategy in 1937, the DAF had deposits of 6 Million Reichsmark that no interests were paid on.



1 . Maiden Voyage of the „Robert Ley“ in attendance of Hitler. Hitler and Ley strolling on board the “Robert Ley” during its Maiden Voyage on 4th of April, 1939.

Federal Archive Koblenz

2 . A Living Demonstration of our “People’s Community“.

Joy and Work, 1939

3 . Keel laying of the first KdF Ship at the shipyard Howaldts Werken in Hamburg. Robert Ley with a Jack Hammer, 3rd of May 1936.

Federal Archive Koblenz

4. The „Robert Ley“ after leaving the Docks for its Maiden Voyage, 16th of March 1939.

Federal Archive Koblenz

5. Security personal was always on board.

Federal Archive Berlin

6 . The Mediterranean sun beckons.

Arbeitertum, 1938

7 . This KdF- poster is directed specifically at workers.

Federal Archive Koblenz

8 . Advertising KdF- hikes, 1939.

Federal Archive Koblenz

9 . Battle amongst private competitors.

Federal Archive Berlin

10 . The discount cards also allowed those, who were financially underprivileged members of “People’s Community” to be able to travel.

State and University Library of Hamburg

z1 Not everything works at the KdF

A report concerning the situation of the “Group New Beginning” in Germany from the beginning of september 1935.

“A colleague, who travelled with the KdF, explained that they travelled with a rebuilt IV Class Wagon, which after a 10-hour drive, is most uncomfortable. They wanted to go to Allgäu but arrived at the Bodensee (We only heard of the change in Goal when we were in the train). Quarters were good but the food was lacking. Daily provisions: black coffee in the morning and two buns. In the afternoon we also had very little food. The third and last meal of the day we got around 7 o clock consisting of a sausage and some salad. The participants, even some of the party members, were annoyed at the lack of provisions.

Bernd Stöver, Report about the Situation in Germany, 1996

z2 Strict Monitoring of the Participants

A letter from the Administration of Information from the German Labour Front, to the Main Office of the Security Service from 19.10.1936

Subject: KdF Holiday Travel from the District Main Frankonia, 21- 28.8.36 in Allgäu

Reference: None

In a travel journal regarding the so called KdF Holiday Travel it is stated:

"It is dangerous that information regarding the individual's purchasing habits, can be used to influence the interests of the National Defense. This allows one to obtain, within a few days, more knowledge regarding one's fellow human being than is really necessary. The holiday atmosphere contributes to this, seeing as this contributes to talking more loosely and this is something that is exploited. Therefore, it is necessary to monitor these journeys, in order to protect one from such manipulation.

Federal Archive Berlin

z3 "A new lifestyle, a new approach to life"?

Extracts from the speech of Robert Ley during the ship launch of the "Wilhelm Gustloff" on the 5th of May 1937 in Hamburg

As I started four years ago, you told me, my Führer: Make sure that the German worker has his holiday, so that his nerves remain strong. This was both an order and a path for me. Then we began our work. We created the organisation "Strength through Joy" and the folk assisted me in this, as if it had been waiting hundreds of years for this.

Many believe that "Strength through Joy" would be a form of 'Garden Leaves' Club or a recreational free time organisation. Many said, "let them have form this club but they will not tackle the inner social problems." But they made a mistake. We did concern ourselves with the inner social problems. We focused on settlements, educational and health issues and managed to overcome them.

"Strength through Joy", is possibly the most precise summary of the new German Will. When I am asked what it is that the Führer can most offer his folk, I would reply: He led his folk back to joy. He gave it a new lifestyle, and new approach to life".

Otto Mahrenholz, Fundamentals of Victory, 1940

z4 Lack of Labourers

Report by the Security Services, from January 1939

Regarding the journey of the "Wilhelm Gustloff" from Genua to Venice

28.12.1938- 9.1.1939

From the district of Greater Berlin, 350 vacationers and 60 members of the German broadcast station partook on the travel. The travelers come from all social casts and income levels. However, visually one could see that the actually employees represent a rather small portion of the group. It was noticeable that the well off comrades who participated on this KdF journey, made a big thing of all the clothes that they brought along. This was obvious during the New Year Celebration and the parties held on deck. One could hear numerous comments amongst the labourers and even amongst various party members. Due to this, the question has been raised whether people, who could actually pay for a trip to Italy themselves, should be excluded from the KdF travels.

Federal Archive Berlin

z5 Only for those with higher wages

Report by the Security Service, from the 16th of February 1939

Report on the surveillance of the KdF- ship "Wilhelm Gustloff" journey to Italy.

One look at the distribution of jobs reveals that the so called „workers ship“ cannot be classified as such, due to the number of jobs that do not constitute the definition of a worker.

Federal Archive Berlin

Chart. 57 | The KdF- Office “Leisure Time”

In February 1936 the office “Leisure Time” was founded. At the end of 1937 it was combined with the office “German National Education” and called “Cultural Commune” – the fields of work stayed the same. The “Cultural Commune” had two central spheres of action: Art and entertainment as well as folklore and tradition. The function of the office “Leisure Time”, according to the manager of the umbrella association DAF, Otto Machenbach, was “to re-establish the balance of a healthy and vivid exchange of strengths and values and to lead the “People’s Community” back to the sources of a creative “People’s Storm”.

The office owned several theatres and contracted with other theatres. Furthermore, they ran a travelling theatre, a Reichs-theatre-train, miscellaneous puppet theatres and a Reichs-motorway-stage as well as their own symphony orchestra. The concert programmes got a particularly broad feedback. In the field of plastic arts, the office initiated exhibitions in industrial firms. The office though, mainly organized “evenings of music and entertainment” with cabaret and vaudeville acts. Medium and small towns had to be satisfied with the performance of no-name artists, which with regards to content and entertainment, left much to be desired.

The folklore work mainly contained the maintenance of folk songs, dances, traditional costumes, amateur plays and tradition. Commune evenings in villages and camaraderie-evenings in companies were modelled on these points. The office edited workbooks for the organisation of the “big celebrations of the year” – such as summer solstice or the harvest festival – in large print run. Besides the regular work the office organised several special actions, for example the supervision of the Reichs- motorway camps or leisure time events for invalids, ill and disabled people.

The cultural offers were censored without exception and, in terms of their form and content, corresponded to the National Socialist ideology. During the war the office was mainly in charge of the troops and military hospitals and organised events for the German armed forces, the Weapon SS and the police forces in the country and abroad.



1. Advertisement for the „Folk’s Theatre“- In reality only shallow and superficial entertainment was shown, 1936.

Federal Archive Koblenz

2 . Performance in a Hospital. The clown group, „The Three Fratellinis“, in front of patients in the Horst- Wessel- Hospital in Berlin, o.J.

Federal Archive Koblenz

3 . Also represented in the regional provinces. “After Hours Room“ from „Strength through Joy“ in Worms, 1939.

Federal Archive Koblenz

4 . Art exhibitions inside factories were meant to reduce the work stress. Partition wall at a factory exhibition, o.J.

Federal Archive Koblenz

5 . Even „cultural maintenance“ of the population was under supervision of the KdF. Newsletter from the staff leader of the DAF, Heinrich Simon, directed to the regional chairmen of the DAF, 22nd of March 1937 (including an attachment from Robert Ley, 18th of March, 1937).

Federal Archive Berlin

6 . Even dance events would be monitored. Transcript of a newsletter from the manager of the „Leisure Time“ Ministry, sent to Regional Observatory of the NS Organisation “Strength through Joy”, 29th of October 1936.

Federal Archive Berlin

7 . Factory concerts to motivate and boost performance. The Reich’s Symphony Orchester during a performance in a factory yard, o.J.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

8,9,10 . The Ministry of Leisure Time, concerned itself with caring for the „German Folk and Tradition“. Pictures from a dance event.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

11 . Mobile Theater. KdF-Theater tour.

Federal Archive Koblenz

z1 Regression of Cultural Life in the Province

Reports from the Security Force, 13th of February 1941

“Regarding the cultural situation in the province”

In various regions of the Reich are overlapping reports of inhabitants stating that although they understand the compromises that exist due to the war and appreciate the Cultural Events that are still held, cultural life in general suffered a serious decline.

Nevertheless, a symptom that is apparent in all provincial areas of the Reich, is that the old and traditional way of life that used to be fostered in the towns and villages, is slowly dwindling away. The KdF has with its program of movies, festivals and events, has created an air of passivity as far as created one’s own ideas is concerned.

Heinz Boberach, Reports from the Reich, 1984

Chart. 58 | The “German Center for National Education”

During his programmatic speech on the foundation of “Strength through Joy”, Robert Ley already indicated the creation of an office for education and training. After an organisational restructuring in June 1936 the “German Center for National Education” was founded, lead by Fritz Leutloff. After changing the adult education in 1939, the “Reich’s” Interior Minister gave over this area of education to the Center for National Education.

The places of national education were considered the “heart ventricles” of labour. Among the umbrella institutions were national education groups, company-facilitated places of national education and about 70 music schools. Furthermore, the National Education Center organized people-, company-, KdF-ships-, as well as travelling and motorway-libraries. In addition to the general ideological education of adults, professional skill enhancement and leisure time activities took the Center stage. Within the context of leisure time activities, the aim was to put across ideological-academic-scientific contents and, on the other hand, to organise leisure time. The “ideological education of the “people’s comrades” was not included in the party training courses.

The Center for National Education, mainly the referents and teaching staff, dealt in single lectures, series of lectures and workshops. Race theory, family studies and defence policy were taught, amongst other topics. Furthermore, mathematics, stenography, foreign languages, cultural trips, guided tours and walking tours were part of the programme as well as painting, handicrafts, embroidery, photography, chess, music and collection associations were institutionally embedded.

The maintenance of folklore in the countryside was an important task. In order to face the migration into cities the Center for National Education published “village books” documenting the past and present of the local life in the respective villages. This way the population’s bond with the homeland was meant to be strengthened.

The war also assigned the Center for National Education new duties: The language teachers taught the languages of the conquered countries. They offered German classes for “ethnic Germans” and in the villages wrote “homeland letters” to the soldiers, whose answers were presented at the village community evenings.



1 . War preparations. Spies- Traitors- Saboteurs, 1938

Private Property

2. „ For the handling of folk educational and folk pedagogical tasks ...”

Amtliches Nachrichtenblatt der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 1936

3 . Regenerating the Work Force during Leisure time, 1938.

Federal Archive Koblenz

4. Ideological assimilation of the game Chess. Chess competition with the best players from the Berlin factory circuits.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

5. Painting during leisure time. Painting lessons in the German Volksbildungswerk

Under The Sun Wheel, 1938

6. „Cultural Excursion“ with „folk educating impact“. Participants of the first Cultural Excursion to the tomb of the „Unknown Soldier“ in Paris.

Gerhard Starcke, The German Labour Front, 1940

7 . Painting and sculpting were also part of the program. Exhibition room of the German “Volksbildungswerk” for lay people.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

z1 “Medium for Leadership”

Newsletter from the High School Administration of the Reich’s Organisation Office of the NSDAP. To all School District Administrations of the NSDAP, from the 9th of July 1937.

The result from a speech between the High School Administration and the German Folk Education Group reveals the following guidelines for a cooperation: The delivery method of the German Folk Education Group fits into the framework of the Party. This leads to the German Folk Education Group being under the supervision of the District Administration.

Federal Archive Berlin

z2 Events for the more educated audience

Security Service Report, regarding inland questions, from the 8th of November 1943

From report material in connection with the “German Folk Education Group”, we have a number of perspectives to take into consideration:

1. The social and mental structuring of the German Folk Education members, is in general different from those who come from the KdF- organisation. Whereas the KdF- events tend to attract visitors who had a need for entertainment and relaxation, the German Folk Education audience tends to be socially more diverse in class and with specific interests.

Heinz Boberach, Reports from the Reich, 1984

Chart. 59 | The KdF- Sports Office

Sport courses were one of “Strength Through Joy’s” first facilities. They were offered from April 1934 onwards. The “Reich’s-Sports Leader” Hans von Tschammer was commissioned by Ley to lead the KdF-sports office. On the 30th of May 1939 he withdrew from this position and left control to the hitherto representative Karl Lorch. The propagandistic effort and an obvious interest of the population, lead to a quick extension of the offer.

The frame work of the sport courses was intentionally kept informal – people were meant to come together and to enjoy sport in the community. One dispensed with conventions and statutes that were actually common in organized sport. “Happy callisthenics and games”, “general physical education” and preparatory classes for the Reich’s sports badge were the most popular activities. These courses were also offered on KdF-ships or in seaside resorts. Besides the sports office offered several special courses such as athletics, boxing, Jiu-Jitsu or cycling. The access to ‘exclusive’ sports – for example horseback riding, golf or hockey – was made possible to broader social stratus. Particularly popular were skiing courses; KdF offered ski equipment for 35 RM.

An order from the Reich’s sports leader on the 16th of December on the future duties of the sports office documents the change: The interest is now focussed on company-facilitated sports activities. Ley considered the company-facilitated sports ground as the “drill ground of the company-community”; every larger KdF company, in his opinion, should have its own training ground. The “sports appeal of the companies” started in 1938, called on every company to participate and took on the character of a competition.

During the Second World War KdF- sports had the task to mobilize “positive forces” – for example courage to face life and acceptance of life – in order to stabilize the inner front. The increasing influence of the SA on the KdF-sport caused the change of the “sports appeal” to military education. In the last phases of the war, company-facilitated sport only existed as fitness sport. It was meant to make work not only more bearable but primarily more effective.

Jews were categorically excluded from KdF-sports, even before the Nuremberg Laws.



1 . For a handful of participants, exclusive sport activities were available, such as sailing.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

2 . Company facilitated sports activity was being directed in particular towards elderly workers. Employees of a Berlin factory going for a run.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

3. During skiing trips, the KdF would supply their own equipment. A skiing course in Kleinen Walsertal.

Federal Archive Koblenz

4 . Demanding exercises for the young employees. Doing outside gymnastics in front of a factory.

Federal Archive Koblenz

5 . The KdF Ministry of Sport was also active in various Baths. Gymnastics lesson in the Beach Bath near Wannsee, 24th April 1937.

Federal Archive Koblenz

6 . A complete human being is someone who is healthy, strong and able bodied".

Arbeitertum, 1940

7. KdF created its own gym equipment

Arbeitertum, 1937

8. Company facilitated sport activities during War. Introduction of the company leader of Messerschmitt GmbH Regensburg, 10th of June 1941.

Federal Archive Berlin

9 . Advertisement for the KdF- Company Sport, 1935.

Federal Archive Koblenz

10 . "Ready for work at all times, in service of the community". The „Strength through Joy“-Athletic Director, 1939

Federal Archive Berlin

11. Inspection of the Sport courses. Confidential Newsletter of the KdF Reich's Ministry of Sport, directed at all regional consultants of the NS organisation „Strength through Joy“, 17th of October 1936.

Federal Archive Berlin

z1 Negative Acceptance of the Factory's Sport Appeal

Reports from the Reich of Security Service, 5th of October 1942

Comments from the work force, regarding the acceptance of the Sport Appeal

After reports from the Reich have come in one can see that the workforces' reactions towards the Factory's Sport Appeal tend to be negative. While these events are warmly accepted by those who enjoy sports, the majority of those who participated had a uninterested attitude, assuming that they were unable to leave work earlier. Many workers who chose not to participate use the argument that long working hours and insufficient food, does not allow for

one to practice sport effectively. Many claimed that 30 minutes of sport, does more damaged to an untrained body than good. In particular, there is a lot of criticism towards the propaganda posters stating that all must participate, regardless of age.

The factory security offices are also disliked. For example, in one of the bigger factories in the district of Halle, the security office was given the order to let nobody leave without having completed their physical exercise. Checkpoint inspection results in negative reactions and are often ignored by the workers. Seeing as it was impossible to stop the multitude of workers leaving, an order was issued that the names of those who leave without fulfilling their sport commitments, should be written down.

Heinz Boberach, Reports from the Reich, 1938

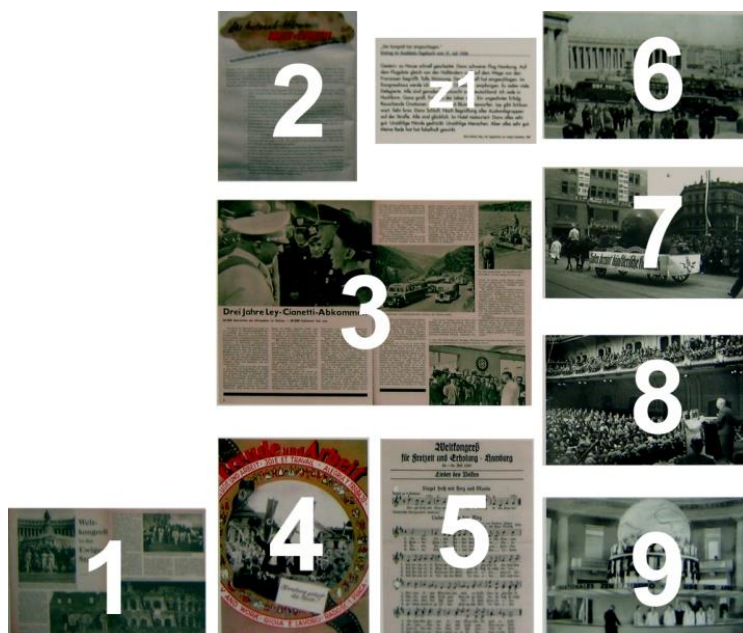
Chart. 60 | Relations to Italy – International Activities of KdF

Geared to the Italian leisure time organisation, founded in 1925, “Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro” (OND), Ley presented the concept for a German “After work” organisation, as it was initially named, on the 17th of November 1933. During the official act of founding the KdF on the 27th of November 1933, Ley criticized the structure of “Dopolavoro” and thus detracting that the Italian organisation was the real inspiration for KdF: The office “Beauty of Labour”, for example, was based on the model of already existing Italian projects. The umbrella organisation DAF from 1935 onwards tried to introduce their model of leisure time policy to an international public, in order to gain influence on the international employment market. The political interest focussed on discrediting the international employment center in Genf, to recruit foreign collaborators and to do anti-Bolshevik agitation. Concerning work policy, these activities aimed at the accession of manpower from southern and south-eastern Europe.

In 1936 KdF organised in Hamburg a “World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation”, in which delegates from more than 60 countries participated. The congress formed the overture to further international activities of the DAF within the field of leisure time policy. Immediately after this, the DAF founded the “International Central Office ‘Joy and Labour’” (IZB) in Berlin and claimed leadership for this institution.

In 1936 an approach between OND and KdF happened and in June 1937 Ley made an agreement with Tuillio Cianetti, president of the Fascist industrial worker’s federation. Within the Framework of the agreed exchange of holiday makers, more Italian foreign workers were also supposed to come to Germany. The International Leisure Time Congress taking place in Rome in July 1938 was themed an anti-Bolshevik “Internationale”. The topical spectrum was extended and a change of strategy indicated: The main focus was not just leisure time in itself but also the topics labour and increased efficiency.

The “International Central Office ‘Joy and Labour’” shifted its activities to the South-East-European area. A travelling exhibition “Joy and Labour” was presented to the respective countries in May 1938. Furthermore, representations were founded in Rome, Athena, Prague and Belgrade. This kind of enthusiasm caused protests from the Italian co-operation partner whose interests were marginalized.



1 . The World Congress in Rome

Arbeitertum, 1938

2 . The Basic Agreement

Joy and Work, 1937

3 . Drawing a balance from the agreement.

Arbeitertum, 1939

4 . „Joy and Work“ appears in many foreign languages.

Joy and Work, 1937

5 . Songs from the „World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation in Hamburg.

Private Ownership

6 . German Tourist in front of the national memorial in Rome.

Under the Sun Wheel, 1938

7 . Procession during the „World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation“ in Hamburg, 1936.

Regional Media Center Hamburg

8 . Opening of the „World Congress for Leisure Time and Recreation“ in the Music Hall Hamburg. Ley's Speech on the 23rd of July 1936.

Federal Archive Koblenz

9 . The international central bureau for „Joy and Work“ at the Leipzig Spring Time Convention, 1937.

Joy and Work, 1937

z1 The Congress was a Success

Entry in Goebbels Diary, 31st of July 1936

Yesterday: Worked quickly at home. Then had a difficult flight to Hamburg. At the airport I was greeted by the Dutch and the French. Great atmosphere. The Congress was a great success. At the Congress Hall, I am welcomed with standing ovations. Many delegates speak. All are ecstatic in regards to Germany. I am on the top of my game, while giving my speech. I speak freely, without restraints. An unexpected success. Standing ovation. I am showered with flowers. Ley has the final word. Then it was over. I shake hands with the rest of the foreign groups on the street. All are happy. I dine at the hotel. I shake more hands, meet more people. Everything is excellent. My speech has worked wonderfully.

Elke Fröhlich, The Diary of Joseph Goebbels, 1987

Chart. 61 | “Strength through Joy” During the War

The National Socialist community’s duty to increase efficiency by providing recreation facilities or restructuring at the workplaces, and to indoctrinate the workers, were tightened during the war: KdF was meant to raise the resistance of the “inner front” and to give the soldiers new strength to fight.

Particularly the office “Travel, Hiking, Holiday” had to make restrictions, when the war started. Already in August 1939 all journeys were stopped. From now on “KdF-ships” served as transport or military hospital ships. On the 30th of January 1945 the “Wilhelm Gustloff” was torpedoed by a Russian submarine at Stolpmünde and sank. Only 1252 of the 10,000 refugees aboard survived. The construction of the the “KdF-seaside resort” was ceased. As a compensation the office organized activities such as hiking on foot or on bicycle and – with the support of the “Reich’s recreation organisation” – sent workers of the armament on holiday.

The office “After Work” became particularly involved with the troop support and organised “cultural programmes” on all theatres of war. The civil sphere was limited as only a few staff members were available and the Wehrmacht confiscated places. As compensation the office intensified its “after work” activities – during the war folklore became very important.

In 1943 the head office of the DAF took over the management of the “German National Center for Education”. The restructuring was meant to guarantee a more targeted ideological training. During the war the office offered lectures and readings at the front and in the military hospitals. Language courses for foreign workers and German courses for “ethnic Germans” gained in importance.

Also the office of sports started taking over military tasks and was dedicated to the support of the injured. The advancement of company facilitated sports activities was one of the main measurements in the civil sector.

Generally, KdF shared in a series of special actions, for example in the evacuation of civilians from war areas. In 1940 KdF took over the organisation of the Bayreuth War Festival.

On 1st September 1944 the troop support was ceased, KdF now only rarely appeared in companies and camps.



1 . Making reference to Greek heroes- Art was used as an „Ally for Victory“.

Federal Archive Koblenz.

2 . KdF was already carrying out „military interventions“ before the war. The “KdF- ship” was bringing troops from the “Condor Legion” back to Hamburg, end of mMay 1939.

Willi Beutler, National Media Center Hamburg

3 . Quick reconstruction of a ship into a sickbay.

Arbeitertum, 1940

4 . KdF-Event in the Ukraine. A letter from the representative of the District Leader, Wolhynien Podolien, to the regional administration of the NSDAP of the Ukraine, 19th of May 1943.

Federal Archive Berlin

5 . “KdF- Ships” would be transformed into a hospital ship. “KdF- ship” “Wilhelm Gustloff” at the bastion of Stettin, Pre- War photograph.

Federal Archive Koblenz

6 . Troop supervision by the KdF.

Joy and Work, 1940

7. Bayreuth is dominated by uniforms.

Joy and Work, 1940

8,9 . Parole in the Troop Supervision- a Thank You Letter from the front. Comrades at the Front- We Thank YOU, 1943.

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