

OTHER NATIONS

northern province of Eritrea. As long as Ethiopia is *seen* as a Soviet puppet, the Arab regimes backing the Eritreans are unlikely to press them to accept the regional autonomy Mengistu may be willing to offer. And the rebellion will continue to drain Ethiopian resources.

On Strike in Nazi Germany

"The Workers' Opposition in Nazi Germany" by Tim Mason, in *History Workshop Journal* (Spring 1981), P.O. Box 69, Oxford OX2 7XA, United Kingdom.

Although the Nazis brutally smashed German labor unions after coming to power in 1933, worker unrest—in the form of strikes, slowdowns, absenteeism, and assorted goldbricking—became so widespread that it hindered Germany's rearmament drive until the outbreak of World War II. So relates Mason, a *History Workshop Journal* editor.

Mass unemployment during the early years of Hitler's rule enabled the Nazis to keep German workers in line with threats of dismissal and police intervention. But by 1939, Hitler's massive war preparations had created one million new jobs. Employers found themselves at the mercy of laborers, who began changing jobs, on average, once every 12 months. Many employees were simply exploiting their new market value for better pay and benefits. But workers also resented the constant harassment from bosses under pressure to meet ambitious Nazi production targets.

Despite police intimidation, strikes became common in Germany after 1935. Nazi archives reveal 192 strikes and "strike-like" protests between February 1936 and July 1937. Most involved fewer than 50 workers, and the Gestapo's arrival held the majority to under a day. But they so worried Berlin that, in 1936, the Nazi press was forbidden to print reports of French strikes. Work slowdowns were also frequent, and, as late as September 1939, when Nazi tanks rolled into Poland, 20 percent of Berlin's armaments workers were taking off each day after payday.

Many employers responded with major concessions. From 1936 to 1939, average weekly blue-collar earnings jumped 17 percent. Firms began offering health insurance and even installment payments on Volkswagens. Nothing worked. Beginning in June 1938, as world tensions mounted, Berlin abolished the eight-hour day, cut wages, and started conscripting workers for priority projects. But workers' protests in September 1939 forced the government to relent. Only by turning to slave labor in the early 1940s did Hitler solve his manpower problems.

German workers' actions were not overtly political, writes Mason, nor were they demonstrably antiwar protests. But they indicate that many laborers were unwilling to fully subordinate themselves to the demands of the Nazi system. And they show Hitler's failure to mold a classless Germany, bound tightly by superpatriotism.