

Epilogue

The Hotel Kaiserhof in 1932 stood at the center of the fight for control of Germany and its capital. On the one side of this contest was a liberal vision of commercial hospitality and urbanism that prized, and profited from, access for all – even its enemies – and on the other side was an anti-liberal vision that seized the opportunity to expunge, publicly and with impunity, an enemy-minority from the very house that had decided to keep its doors open to Hitler.¹ In the fateful days and nights before his assumption of power on January 30, 1933, Hitler used rooms at the Kaiserhof as his Berlin base and home. But by the mid-1930s, his propagandists were using the Kaiserhof for another purpose, as a site of mythmaking about the origins of the regime.² In 1935, the Central Press of the Nazi Party published Joseph Goebbels's alleged diary entries for the period January 1, 1932, to May 1, 1933, and titled it *Vom Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei* (From the Kaiserhof to the Chancellery).

The Kaiserhof was the first elite, cosmopolitan institution to fall to the Nazis and exclude Jewish guests. In 1932, Hitler and his SA henchmen had accomplished this in an informal way, for they had yet to attain power. The approach reflected the Nazis' wider practices of threat-making and incitements to violence. These practices had already turned several of Berlin's neighborhoods into battlegrounds and marked

¹ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2–7.

² On mythmaking, see Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 662; Ian Kershaw, *The "Hitler Myth": Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 11–12.

the experience of the city center for many Berliners by September 1932. The expulsion of Jews from the Kaiserhof, which did not come to violence but depended on the context of widespread violence elsewhere and the threat of violence to come, began a process whereby the Nazis, once they were in power at the end of January 1933, took control of the city center. First, they installed the Gestapo in Friedrichstadt and tortured victims there. The cries permeated the district and were audible to passersby and neighbors.³ Second, they used violence and the threat of violence to clear Friedrichstadt of undesirable elements: Jews, homosexuals, Socialists, Communists, and bohemians and other types of nonconformists.⁴

But once the movement became a regime, neither violence nor the threat of violence fit with its deepening commitment, popular among Germans, to the restoration and preservation of order.⁵ In other words, by late 1933, running amok in the city center no longer served Nazi priorities. Hence, the city center was transformed from a battleground to an arena for the realization of an ethnic-fundamentalist vision. Friedrichstadt would need to be remade to reflect and support the greatness of the ethnic collective, the *Volksgemeinschaft* or community of the folk. That meant promising Berliners a restoration of dignity, prosperity, and peace – in a word, normalcy.⁶ Yet, as Berlin's grand hoteliers learned the hard way in the 1930s and '40s, this was an empty promise.⁷

It took a few years for the disappointments to pile up. After the first year of Nazi rule, and for the first time in a generation, the business reports of Aschinger's Incorporated found reason to praise the state. "The strong [*kraftvoll*] initiatives of the National Socialist government ... have finally halted the years-long, enfeebling [*zermürbend*] decline in all sectors of the economy."⁸ With words like "strong" for the Nazi regime and "enfeebling" for the Weimar period, the report's writers set up a familiar opposition, associating Weimar with weakness

³ See Helmut Bräutigam and Oliver C. Gleich, "Nationalsozialistische Zwangslager in Berlin I: Die 'wilden' Konzentrationslager und Folterkeller, 1933/34," in *Berlin-Forschungen*, ed. Wolfgang Ribbe (Berlin: Colloquium, 1987), 2:141–78.

⁴ See David Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York: Basic, 2000), 300–301.

⁵ On the Nazis' efforts to seem like a party of law and order, see Bessel, "Political Violence," 11–15; Loberg, *Struggle for the Streets*, 201.

⁶ Large, *Berlin*, 300; Kristin Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany: Tourism to the Third Reich* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 95.

⁷ Loberg, *Struggle for the Streets*, 193–201.

⁸ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1933, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 406.

and even femininity, the Nazi regime with progress and potency.⁹ The following year's report, drafted in 1935, went so far as to announce that the economy, "revivified," had taken a "flying leap" (*Wirtschaftsschwung*).¹⁰ That report and the report of the following year, 1935 (drafted in 1936), used the term "purposeful" (*zielbewußt*) to describe the new leadership.¹¹ The drop in unemployment did indeed improve business at the corporation's fast food concessions, if only modestly. The hotels, however, tell a different story, the sad facts of which the board was at pains to minimize.

Berlin's grand hotels continued to suffer shortfalls of custom and revenue well into the Nazi period. In 1934, the board of Aschinger's admitted in its annual report that conditions were still "unfavorable" to the business, though the report's drafters were now careful not to name any of those conditions or, of course, lay blame with a regime that did not endear itself to prospective tourists, who continued to read articles about Nazi terror in Berlin.¹² Unable or unwilling to blame the present regime, the board of Aschinger's referred shareholders to the mistakes of the previous one.¹³ Yet by 1936, this explanation made less and less sense. A republic dormant for almost three and a half years could not be held responsible for present difficulties. The Nazis were failing to draw visitors to Berlin in numbers that might sustain the city's luxury hospitality industry.¹⁴

Tourism to Berlin improved in the mid-1930s, after the chaos of the late Weimar era, but the hospitality industry under the Nazis never saw the levels of demand it had enjoyed in the period of Weimar's relative stability. The Hotel Management Corporation registered the shortfall in its 1934/35 annual report, which nonetheless began with the customary offering of thanks for the "improvement [with respect to] tourism to Berlin." Such improvement fell far short of what the Nazis had promised: the reinvigoration of all sectors of the German economy. In fiscal year

⁹ See Eleanor Hancock, "'Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value': Ernst Röhm, Masculinity, and Male Homosexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8 (1998), 617.

¹⁰ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1934, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 405.

¹¹ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1935, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 404.

¹² Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1933.

¹³ On blaming the Weimar Republic in the Nazi period, see Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. Richard Deveson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 57.

¹⁴ On tourism in the Third Reich and the regime's failures, see Semmens, *Seeing Hitler's Germany*, 95.

1934/35, Berlin's hoteliers saw four-fifths the number of visitors they had seen in 1930/31, near the height of the Great Depression. The problem in 1935 was threefold. First, the length of stay, a key indicator of profits for hoteliers, was as short as it had ever been. Second, the number of registrations by German nationals was too low, at a value far below what it had been in 1930/31. Third, and most worrying, the number of registrations by foreign nationals at Berlin hotels was abysmally low, just a little over half the figure in 1929/30.¹⁵ Foreigners were staying away from Hitler's capital.

The result was that revenues missed the mark right down to the start of World War II. Although sales and rents at Aschinger's Incorporated went up 13 percent in 1933, 17 percent in 1934, 8 percent in 1935, and 11 percent in 1936, those figures belied the situation at the company's hotels and the hotels of the Hotel Management Corporation, of which Aschinger's still held the controlling shares.¹⁶ In July 1933, the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* ran the headline "Hotel Business Without Dividends Again," a familiar refrain for the Hotel Management Corporation, the subject of the article.¹⁷ Board members of the parent company struck an apologetic tone in the annual report for 1933, drafted in October 1934. "The unfavorable situation for the hotels of the Hotel Management Corporation," as well as the "poor condition of our own hotels" caused the parent corporation a net loss for 1933. The 17 percent increase in revenues from other parts of the business did not even produce enough to cover the shortfall. An additional 1.95 million reichsmarks had to come out of the fund for renovations and new equipment.¹⁸ In August 1935, Aschinger's sold the second largest of its three hotels, the Palast-Hotel, and the following year, offloaded its shares in the Hotel Management Corporation, removing from its portfolio all but one grand hotel, the Fürstenhof.¹⁹

As municipal and Reich authorities prepared for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, the city's grand hoteliers hoped to offset some of the year's losses with full occupancy for a few weeks; they were disappointed when they received orders from Goebbels himself a little less than a year before the games. A price decree (*Preisdiktat*) delivered to the Trade Association of

¹⁵ Annual report of the Hotel Management Corporation for 1934/35.

¹⁶ Annual reports of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1933, 1934, and 1935; annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1936, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 403.

¹⁷ "Hotelbetrieb wieder dividendlos," *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, July 18, 1933.

¹⁸ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1933.

¹⁹ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1935.

the Restaurant and Hospitality Industry (Wirtschaftsgruppe Gaststätten- und Beherbergungsgewerbe Gau Berlin) compelled the leadership of that organization to communicate to hoteliers that they would have four room rates from which guests could choose: 4, 6, 9, and 15 reichsmarks.²⁰ Yet the normal rate for the finest rooms, where profit margins were highest, was actually 30 reichsmarks. Goebbels was forcing Berlin's grand hoteliers to operate at a loss during the Olympics. Although a city official promised to forward the hoteliers' protest, the price decree came into force on August 1, 1936, and would not lift until the end of the games.²¹

As with the Olympics, Berlin's grand hoteliers also missed out on the benefits of the proposed redevelopment of the capital. Six months after the games, Albert Speer became the General Building Inspector (Generalbauinspektor) of Berlin and started in earnest on a new city plan. Out of this draft would eventually come the architectural model of the renamed city, Germania, the so-called "world capital" (*Welthauptstadt*), which so fascinated the Führer.²² Yet Speer executed little of the plan. Before the outbreak of war on September 1, 1939, only a few changes, some of them in fact a function of earlier plans, were realized. In 1938, the Victory Column moved from in front of the Reichstag to the Tiergarten's Großer Stern traffic circle, its radial roads now much wider. In the same year, the new Reichsbank building opened across from the Friedrichswerder Church. A few other projects began, too, and early in 1939, Hitler and members of the diplomatic corps were able to celebrate the opening of his new chancellery building. The last large prewar infrastructure project in Berlin, the subterranean S-Bahn line, opened two of its stations and a tiny stretch of track between Anhalt Station and Potsdamer Platz roughly five weeks after the invasion of Poland. Speer hoped to marshal this new north-south S-Bahn line for service along the so-called Prachtallee (Avenue of Splendor), which was projected to extend south from an intersection with the even grander East-West Axis near the Adlon.²³ That hotel would have

²⁰ Managing directors of the Hotel Management Corporation to Hans Lohnert, May 17, 1935, in LAB A Rep. 225-01, Nr. 82.

²¹ David Clay Large has shown that managers of some of the smaller hotels ignored the price controls. In the case of Berlin's grand hotels, however, I found no evidence of subversion. See Large, *Nazi Games: The Olympics of 1936* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 115-16.

²² See Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook, 2009), 311-29.

²³ Martin Kitchen, *Speer: Hitler's Architect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 65-71.

to be torn down, anyway, to make room for public buildings of cruel proportions in heavy granite.

In summer 1941, plans materialized for a gargantuan hotel project, and Fritz Aschinger was hoping to build it. Although Aschinger's had mostly withdrawn from the hotel scene in Berlin, the hotel scene in Germania, "world capital," presented an altogether different opportunity. The cost of construction would come in at 70 million reichsmarks. The scale would be commensurate with the other "monumental structures on the North South Axis," the initial permit application read.²⁴ There would be an enormous garden, café, and department store. The complex would be composed of two or three ten-story buildings, behind which would rise two towers of thirty floors each. One tower would house a restaurant for 1,000 diners on its twenty-eighth floor, the other would have a roof garden. In addition to a theater, there would be multiple dance halls, restaurants, cafés, and shops in the cavernous cellars. Farther below would be an air-raid shelter for 4,000 (not even half the hotel's projected occupancy).²⁵ Neither the air-raid shelter nor the hotel complex materialized.

Early in the morning of September 1, 1939, Berliners listening to the radio learned of the outbreak of war with Poland. By all accounts, there was little public reaction and perhaps less public discussion.²⁶ In fact, the word "war" appears only a few times in the corporate records of Aschinger's Incorporated and the Hotel Management Corporation before the massive death tolls of 1942 and 1943.²⁷ Nevertheless, state intervention into the supply of food, clothes, and certain raw materials intensified immediately after the outbreak of World War II. On October 12, 1939, Fritz Aschinger himself admonished Paul Arpé, manager of the Fürstenhof, to make certain that prices on the menus did not exceed 1936 levels. When in doubt, Aschinger wrote, lower the price: "Even careless errors, no matter how small, can bring the gravest of consequences."²⁸ In this way, the regime's terroristic threats filtered down through the corporate chain of command.²⁹ By December 1939, Arpé was sending

²⁴ Initial application for a permit to build a hotel on the North–South Axis, May 7, 1941, in LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030-07, Nr. 1056.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 62.

²⁷ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1940, written in November 1941, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 399.

²⁸ Fritz Aschinger to Paul Arpé, October 12, 1939, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 369.

²⁹ On terror, conformity, privacy, and institutions, see Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 236–42.

weekly price reports to the managing directors. He concluded each with the declaration, "I hereby confirm that I have checked the prices on the menus and find everything to be in order."³⁰

Again, as in World War I and its aftermath, mounting shortages placed extraordinary upward pressure on prices, which the regime tried to counteract with price controls and rationing.³¹ But even as early as November 1939, what variety there was on the shelves of Aschinger's fast-food counters began to disappear. If we must serve "crispy *Maultaschen*" every day for a week, then at least change the side dish or the description, Aschinger instructed.³² Even at the Fürstenhof, standards slipped considerably.³³ The hotel restaurant had been loading its menus with organ meat as early as January 1940, when three gentlemen sat down and ordered calf's liver. Two of them produced the ration coupons required for 100 g of meat, while the third produced only half the coupons but requested the same portion as the others. The headwaiter refused. Regulations were taken very seriously at the Fürstenhof, he said, and one of the three might be an undercover agent. "The gentlemen were very amused by this," the headwaiter reported, "and explained to me that I was actually dealing with gentlemen from the Price Commissariat. They proved it by producing a document and told me, 'You got lucky.'"³⁴

Germany's fortunes changed on the Eastern Front in early 1942. In January alone there were somewhere near 44,200 soldiers killed and an additional 10,100 missing.³⁵ Annual reports of Aschinger's Incorporated began to list the dead: "We remember with deep gratitude our coworkers-in-arms who died on the field of honor for the Führer and the Reich."³⁶ Hoteliers had already established relief funds and benefit societies for workers and employees, "especially [their] widows and orphaned children."³⁷ Hitler had made a particularly spirited call for donations to the

³⁰ Correspondence of Paul Arpé, 1939–1945, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 369.

³¹ On price-setting to combat inflation in Nazi Germany, see Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, 108, 142, 231, 260, 494–95, and 642–44.

³² Fritz Aschinger, "Gestaltung der Speisekarte," memo of November 24, 1939, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 369.

³³ Fritz Aschinger to Paul Spethmann, March 25, 1941, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 369.

³⁴ Headwaiter to the management of the Fürstenhof and its parent company (letter and report), February 4, 1940, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 369.

³⁵ Statistisches Bundesamt, ed. *Statistisches Jahrbuch für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1960* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960), 78.

³⁶ Annual report of Aschinger's Incorporated for 1940, written in November 1941.

³⁷ Louis Adlon to the District Court of Berlin-Charlottenburg (Amtsgericht Berlin-Charlottenburg), October 20, 1941, in LAB B Rep. 042, Nr. 28200.

regime's own charity, the Winter Relief Campaign (Winterhilfswerk), on September 12, 1941, as the Royal Air Force began to refine its ability to bomb Berlin by night.³⁸

Air raids did not arrive in full strength until early 1943. More planes carrying more and heavier bombs arrived at shorter intervals than ever before. On January 17, 1943, more than 250 British bombers dropped 700 tons of ordnance. In February, Goebbels rallied a rattled public around the cause of total war. Children as young as fifteen had already been enlisted as air force assistants (*Luftwaffenhelfer*) to operate searchlights and acoustic locators while the bombs rained down. Attacks continued, increasing in intensity. On March 2, 1943, blockbusters and firebombs destroyed or badly damaged several landmarks in Friedrichstadt, rendered 35,000 people homeless, and killed 711. Amid renewed bombing campaigns in August, the authorities began a partial evacuation of Berlin.³⁹

The city's grand hotels were still largely intact in autumn 1943, when the building authority began its precautionary inspections for faulty ventilation systems. That initiative appears to have been suspended as, bit by bit, aerial bombardment destroyed Friedrichstadt.⁴⁰ Between November 18 and December 3, 1943, the Royal Air Force carried out five extensive attacks.⁴¹ The Fürstenhof took direct hits on two consecutive nights in November but remained in business with a small fraction of its rooms available for use; the Kaiserhof took several direct hits and burned down for the second time in its history (Figure E.1).⁴²

The Bristol was lost to fire, too. A married couple already bombed out of their home in the Tiergarten district took the opportunity to steal some of the hotel's blankets and sheets.⁴³ (By the end of 1943, some 400,000 Berliners had lost their homes.⁴⁴) The raids worsened

³⁸ Laurenz Demps, ed. *Luftangriffe auf Berlin: Die Berichte der Hauptluftschutzstelle, 1940–1945* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2012), 36.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15, 25, 27, 35–39, 56–58, 73, 85, 98, 103, 108, 126–27, 138, 142, 153–55, 164, 235, 289.

⁴⁰ Office of the City President (Stadtpräsident) to the Executive Office of the Building Police (Baupolizei-Hauptabteilung), September 27, 1943, in LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030-07, Nr. 420, f. 4.

⁴¹ Demps, *Luftangriffe*, 37–39, 87, 289 (Table 4).

⁴² Damage report of February 24, 1945, in LAB A Rep. 225, Nr. 1257.

⁴³ Statement by the witness Adelheid Steglich, March 9, 1944, in LAB A Rep. 358-02, Nr. 13401, f. 2.

⁴⁴ Demps, *Luftangriffe*, 287–89.



FIGURE E.1 The Kaiserhof in ruins, 1946
Image credit: Landesarchiv Berlin

in the new year, with massive bombings happening throughout January 1944.⁴⁵ On the night of January 2, even more of the Fürstenhof was knocked out of commission, along with parts of other hotels in the vicinity.⁴⁶ In March 1944, American bombers joined the melee in full force.

It is difficult to find details on conditions in Berlin's grand hotels after spring 1944. Little survives beyond a few postcards sent by bombed out Berliners, a few reports by the authorities, one police investigation of looting, and dozens of photographs taken shortly after the end of the war. It is clear, nonetheless, that by autumn of 1944, nothing resembling grand hotel life survived anywhere in Berlin. Guests who chose to stay at a grand hotel were opting to rough it in partial ruins that could not even be used after nightfall and now, quite often, not even during the day, since daytime attacks were happening with increasing frequency. But because Berlin's grand hotels were destroyed by degrees, through several raids over the course of several months, sometimes years, hoteliers managed to accommodate guests until the end.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Damage report of February 24, 1945.

The end came for the Fürstenhof on February 3, 1945, in the largest attack yet by the US Army Air Force, which killed at least 2,600 people.⁴⁷ To assess the damage, a representative from the Building Council (Stadt- und Oberbaurat) roamed the site and took notes. The facades, he later reported, had been disfigured by shrapnel and other projectiles. The marble stair with its bronze trim had been smashed to pieces. The elevator shafts had collapsed. Blast forces had dislodged most of the walls. Only thirty percent of the doors could be salvaged. All the windows were ripped out by the frame. The roof would soon collapse.⁴⁸

* * *

A century earlier, investors, hoteliers, designers, and architects saw great opportunity in Berlin's grand hotel scene, yet the enterprises, in the end, succumbed to tensions both internal and external to the industry. Some of the internal tensions were visible on the surface, such as that between cosmopolitan and nationalist cultural imperatives. The other, more pressing internal tensions of the imperial period resided within liberalism itself. Liberalism, the creed of freedom, relegated workers to dismal cellars and fetid attics where class animosities seethed and eventually exploded after World War I. Like other liberals, Berlin's grand hoteliers prized mobility and free trade, while at the same time impeding workers' advancement and locking them in place.

The external tensions, primarily with the state, developed in the Weimar period, when successive republican governments took actions against free enterprise, as Berlin's grand hoteliers saw it. Price and wage controls, however limited and temporary, as well as high taxes, offended hoteliers' liberal sensibilities. Even as controls eased and business improved, complaints persisted. The hyperinflation of 1923 had convinced hoteliers that the republic was bad for business. Their complaints then intensified after 1929, as Germany's problems appeared to defy liberal solutions. In face of the Great Depression, right-radical nationalism, and the ever-expanding role of the state in the economy, hoteliers leaned toward what they thought would be best for business: the anti-republican right. Businessmen, even the Jewish ones, scarcely knew what was good for them until it was too late. They let Hitler stay. Twelve years later, the grand hotels lay in ruins. They had fallen in the fiery consequences of a plot hatched in and around the Kaiserhof during the Weimar Republic's very last autumn.

⁴⁷ Demps, *Luftangriffe*, 40, 96–98, 137, 331.

⁴⁸ Damage report of February 24, 1945.