

## Human Rights And Resistance In Nazi Germany

by Fred Breinersdorfer

The murderers were very accurate. The protocol of the decapitation of medical student Hans Scholl under the guillotine in Munich February 22<sup>nd</sup> in 1943 states: "Elapsed time from entering the death chamber to the fall of the head - 8 seconds." Thereafter in the category of "special notes" it says:" The delinquent called out: "Long live liberty!"

No, it will never stop. The fight will never be over. The people's fight against political tyranny. The goals resistance fighters are fighting for are very often similar and can be summed up in two words.

Human Rights.

We understand the human rights as the basic guarantee of dignity for every human being, - his freedom as well as - equality before the law, - the inalienability of these rights and their universal validity. In Paris on December 10<sup>th</sup> in 1948, the United Nations proclaimed the key sentence of the Charta of human rights. It says: "All people are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

You all know that the first constitutional Charta, which included a guarantee of the human rights, is the Declaration of Independence of the United States back in 1776.

The concept of human rights evolves around the idea that all people have the same rights - guaranteed by nature. In our belief, all countries have the duty and responsibility to guarantee and respect human rights. The Charta of the United Nations just *states* the human rights, but it does not establish their validity. The

human rights already existed before, and so they did during the Nazi regime and also long before that. They apply universally regardless of the historical situation, which means all around the world.

Human rights apply to all of us no matter of what descent, religion or sex we are. They are inseparable and inalienable. Human dignity is inviolable. The principles of human rights go right along with humanism and then, in the Age of Enlightenment, the idea of the law of nature was developed. That is why they don't need to be legally enforced. They result from the simple fact of being human.

### **The Human Rights Fear**

Dictatorships fear nothing more than the realization of human rights. Because especially the freedom of speech, the right of equality and the ban of discrimination, undermine - in the eyes of those in power- their right of omnipotence. Therefore, human rights are literally beaten down with all forces. This is unfortunately happening right now - in the People's Republic of China, in Iran, Myanmar, North Korea and other countries around the world. Every dictatorship creates massive police forces, surveillance, and intimidation systems to oppress dissidents.

But the fight will never stop. Last year we had to experience that five people being sentenced to death for their leading role in the first protests against the re-election fraud of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in Iran on November 18<sup>th</sup> 2009.

The semi-annual statistics of the "Writers in Prison Committees" of the "International PEN Centre" from January to June 2009 lists 644 cases of persecution of journalists and writers alone, who didn't do anything wrong except exercising their freedom of speech or writing. The national terror against intellectuals in many regions of the world - right at this very moment - ranges from murder to kidnapping, false imprisonment to people simply vanishing. The case list of the PEN centre is a document of barbarity and inhumanity.

Nobody is able to answer the question of how many men and women are persecuted and punished for their fight against oppression and violence. Because they don't hold any popular positions like people in the intelligence, they will never show up in any statistics. Uncounted are the names of those who managed to fight undercover for the implementation of human rights.

### **Differentiation Of Political Resistance From Putsch And Revolt**

But not every attempt to change political affairs deserves to be called resistance. For instance when pursued out of eagerness for power and selfishness. Someone who instigates a revolution just to put himself in power is a rebel not a resistance fighter.

Looking at it this way, the classification of terrorist movements is easy. It doesn't fight for human rights, but explicitly against it, because its only goal is it to continuously install a new terrorist system without any human rights. No freedom of religion exists in a so-called "theocracy" of the Taliban or Al Qaida - and the discrimination against women is a common routine.

### **Human Rights And Nazi Ideology**

The Ideology of Nazi Germany stood in a very extreme contrast to human rights. The quintessence of its inhuman doctrine to create a pure racial "national community" can be summed up as follows:

Destruction of democracy and thus abolishment of all democratic rights and freedoms

Creation of a single party state under a "Führer"

Extensive restrictions of freedom of religion

Replacement of religion with national socialistic ideology with its atheistically driven master race and Führer cult

Elimination of freedom of speech

Elimination of freedom of the press and introduction of censorship

Restriction of freedom to travel

Discrimination of all "non-Germans elements" especially the Jewish people in all aspects of life

Establishment of concentration camps, euthanasia, forced sterilisation and eventually the industrial genocide of the European Jews

What a list of political atrocities!

Between 1933 and 1945, all of these human rights violations were consistently and violently enforced by the Nazis. Those who adapted to the system as so-called “national comrades” and not drawing too much attention didn’t have to worry. Active contribution to the Nazi Ideology and its goals could lead to a fast career, power and influence. Reinhard Heidrich, for instance, one of the architects of the so-called “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” managed to make it from a dishonourable dismissal from the Marines to a SS-General and the absolute head of the German police within five years.

But those who didn’t comply with the Nazis had to expect discrimination, persecution, imprisonment and death. Brutal enforcement against dissidents and so-called “subhuman beings” was literally a part of every-day life. The unbelievable violation of human rights ended in the persecution and killing of the Jewish people, a genocide never seen in history before.

Anti-Semitism, which had a sad tradition in Europe long before Hitler’s party came to power, was prioritized for the first time in the program of a political party. Hitler compared the “Herrenmensch” (*leading race*) of Germanic descent to the “Untermensch” (*subhuman being*), namely Jews, but also to gypsies like the Sinti and Roma and coloured people. In his book “Mein Kampf” he states two ideas that are directly connected. The idea of a higher and a lower race that are in a constant fight with each other and the idea that a so called “mixing of races” would weaken the higher race to the point where it would eventually disappear.

The absurd conspiracy theory of a so-called “World Judaism” played right into this so-called “racial conflict” “Rassenkampf”. Hitler imputed world domination to the Jews when in fact he himself was after the very same thing - to gain power over the entire world. Hitler held the conspiracy of world Judaism responsible for all negative events at the time, such as the First World War, the German defeat in that war, the November Revolution and inflation. In doing so, he identified Judaism with the “financial capital” in the USA as well as with its world political opponent “Bolshevism”. Those theories absolutely electrified the German people, for they felt internationally discriminated against, exploited and broken after their defeat in World War 1, the

“Treaty of Versailles”, the economic depression and inflation. Hitler’s idea of “world Judaism” enabled him to project a perfect enemy to the people.

That is why the so-called “race hygiene” of the Nazis was a highly aggressive element. Hitler wrote: “A country that cares for its best racial elements during an age of racial contamination, must become the leader of the world one day”.

It is obvious that this view of the world implies almost an obsessive reflex to eradicate the alleged enemy, the so-called “subhuman beings”. It is also obvious that such a system leaves no room for human rights. Human rights and Nazism are irreconcilable antagonisms.

Right after the takeover by the national socialists on January 30<sup>th</sup> in 1933 they started to aggressively and systematically eliminate Jewish people from German society. One of their first actions was to pass a new animal protection law, which made kosher butchering illegal. The actions of the NS Regime, with an aggression and consistency never seen before, led to the boycott of Jewish business, doctors, lawyers, scientists and artists to occupational bans, and forced people into migration. Jewish men and women and even children had to wear the infamous yellow star in such a way that it could be seen from afar. What followed were the so-called “Nuremberg Laws” for “Race purification”, the “Kristallnacht” (Night of broken glass), aryanization and ghettos. Those are all words that stand for the nameless pain and agony of innocent people.

Racism has found various disgusting ways to express itself throughout history. But the consistent enforcement of the so-called “racial conflict” towards Jewish people in Nazi Germany stands alone in all of history. The attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 started the organized and industrialized holocaust, the Shoa. It cost six million Jews their lives.

Someone defending human rights, fighting for freedom and equality and against discrimination in a situation like this would be a public enemy just like the Jews.

## **Dictatorships Do Die Too**

However: No dictatorial system has ever existed in the long run, and none without internal resistance.

From 1933 to 1945 Nazi Germany made history as one of the most horrific inhuman regimes in the world. But it was doomed like all dictatorships. No matter how powerful it presented itself it induced internal opposition and went down in a military inferno. And especially because of the enormous proportions of that terror system it is very useful to analyze to what extent human rights played into the development of opposing forces.

Like I said, history holds no example of a dictatorship that persisted in the long run. But nonetheless in 1933, Adolph Hitler announced that the country under his guidance would be a "Third Reich" which would last a "1000 years". But we know that his regime only lasted 13 years. Millions of people lost their lives during this time through Hitler and his accomplices, and to a large degree, because of the German people, who blindly followed his politics. I repeat that, because after 60 years it is still beyond comprehension.

However (!) the Nazi regime didn't persist without internal resistance. Any force generates a counterforce, action causes reaction. That's what physics teaches us. But unlike nature, distribution of power in human history is vastly different and the results are too.

We ask ourselves who were those outstanding personalities, mobilizing all their courage and strength to rise up against this brutal, immoral and insane German killing machine that rolled over all of Europe? It enslaved entire nations sometimes in a matter of weeks with so called "Blitzkrieg". Facing this makes one thing very clear. It implied a deadly danger to fight against this system. A killing machine that smashes entire nations would not hesitate to do the same with any political resistance in its own country.

But still, some Germans stood up against Hitler. But why is that? Why did some rise up against the system while others followed and went along? And why did most of my

parents' generation participate actively in this terror? The motives of those who followed and played along are quite obvious: they expected certain benefits, or at least wanted to keep themselves and their families from disadvantages. But what made one decide to resist? What were the reasons?

### **Georg Elser**

This is the story of resistance fighter Georg Elser from Königsbronn. He is not an intellectual; he is a working-class man. He is born on January 4 in 1903 as the oldest of five siblings. His family lives in a simple home in the region of Swabia in Southwest Germany. He grows up to become a very talented craftsman and cabinet-maker. He is what you would call a local Bohemian and a very social and open person who loves music and charms many girls.

All through his life Elser is proud to be a working-class man. He voted for the communist party, because "they are the only ones who support us workers". Elser is in his mid twenties when the "great depression" literally destroys the social structures and economy of his home region. But then in 1933 circumstances change. National Socialism gradually ends the economic misery. It brings a seemingly new sense of life, and fresh perspectives to Germans, describing them as "members of a master race" who had been humiliated by this crisis. Neither SS nor Gestapo have to show up in Königsbronn to convince people to salute the system and put up the swastika flag. Elser's peers, friends and relatives - among them also the communists - join the Nazi party, although some hesitated for quite a while.

Elser seems to be the only one in his village who realizes the dangers of the Nazi ideology despite its seemingly successful appeal. A simple man who says of himself that he didn't read much throughout his life, sees clearly what millions of his fellow Germans don't. He feels the rising threat of a racist, violent, inhuman regime under Hitler. There are other people who see those dangers, too. But Elser is the first who draws radical conclusions, very early and before everybody else. He already decides in 1938, one year before the beginning of the war, to engage in active resistance in its most radical form, the assassination of a tyrant. He decides to kill the most powerful man in the world at the time all by himself.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1939, a few weeks after the successful occupation of Poland and at the height of Hitler's political powers, a time bomb built with great precision by Elser explodes in the Munich "Bürgerbräukeller". But Hitler had left his annual address to commemorate the victims of the 1923 putsch in Munich unusually early. Just 13 minutes later the bomb detonates and kills 8 people. Elser is caught and arrested in Konstanz while trying to escape across the green border.

The Gestapo questions and tortures him to get the names of his accomplices. Hitler personally gives the order "...someone has got to be able to figure out this man. Let me know about it. Besides, do what ever it takes to make this criminal talk. Have him hypnotized, give him drugs, utilize today's latest technology. I want to know who planned this and who the men behind it are". But Georg Elser is - and always will be -the lone resistance fighter against Hitler and his terrorist regime.

His arrest leads Elser through two concentrations camps always as a priority prisoner with special treatment, because Hitler plans to put him on a show trial after his ultimate victor, the "Endsieg", to expose him as a henchman for the British secret service. When the German front lines collapse in April 1945, Hitler orders the liquidation of Elser. Just 20 days before the liberation of the Dachau concentration camp, Elser is murdered. The Nazis try to call him a victim of the allies' bombings.

### **The "White Rose"**

About three year after Georg Elser's failed attempt, Hitler's luck turns dramatically for the worse. On February 3<sup>rd</sup> 1943 the German forces have to surrender in Stalingrad. 250.000 soldiers end up in Soviet war captivity. For the first time after its continuous military success the regime had to admit heavy defeat. Funeral music is played on the radios for days, theatres and cinemas stay closed. The war is at its turning point. Everyone with a rational understanding can see that the "Endsieg" (ultimate victory) has long been in shambles.

Already in 1942 a few young students and professors around the Sophie and Hans Scholl siblings, and alongside the philosopher Kurt Huber, started discussing how to work against the unbelievable daily terror of the Nazis in Europe. The Scholls' Christian protestant background, Willi Graf's catholic faith, and the philosophic political background of Kurt Huber form a strong ethic base and give the group the moral justification for its fight. During their time at the front lines in 1942 Hans Scholl, Alexander Schmorell and Willi Graf had seen mass killings of Jews at the frontlines - and witnessed the terrible agony in the ghetto in Warsaw, Poland. All of it gave them extra motivation for their fight after their return to Germany.

The students and their professor call themselves the "White Rose" and try to get people in other cities to join them. Secretly they design and print six different political leaflets and spread them very cleverly and with great personal effort in Germany's cities.

They articulate on their flyers what nobody is allowed to say. The "final victory" (Endsieg) is a farce, Hitler and his gang are defeated. The "White Rose" demands the end of the World War 2 terror – and the Holocaust unleashed by Nazi Germany. Stop the horrors and death of millions! All further bloodshed is futile. These theses are necessarily followed by the appeal to abolish the Nazi Regime. And, subsequently express political goals, freedom, democracy, peaceful relations between nations and a unified Europe. One of their strongest key phrases addressing their fellow students but also "all Germans" is: "It's on us, on every single one of us, to fight for our future, freedom, and dignity, and in a political system that is aware of its moral responsibility"

Whoever reads them will find that none of the 6 different leaflets contain the slightest hint of selfishness. Their actions are fuelled simply by their moral standards and their conscience. Just as unselfish as Georg Elser, the simple man of the people; with the only difference that they are able to articulate their thoughts and goals very specifically and precisely.

Unlike Elser, the group does not intend to radically get rid of the evil by ripping out its root literally in one single strike. They count on the solidarity, intelligence and courage of their fellow students and "all Germans". A speculative and bold endeavour

with people who perceived and also defined themselves as subjects not just since the German Wilhelminian era.

Nevertheless, the members of the “White Rose” disseminate their flyers; write their slogans on the walls at night in Munich. Every one of them knows their lives are on the line. This takes a kind of courage we don’t have to come up with - today. And - I repeat -all these efforts for one reason only, the realisation of human rights, morality and human dignity in the dark age of the Nazi terror.

On February 18<sup>th</sup> 1943, on the spur of the moment, Sophie Scholl tosses a pile of leaflets into the interior courtyard of the university in Munich. She and her brother are arrested as are other members of the “White Rose”. On February 22<sup>nd</sup> after a short propaganda trial, Sophie, her brother and their friend Christoph Probst are killed on the guillotine in Munich. Four other friends and conspirators meet the same fate. 13 others receive long prison sentences. – All for nothing else but telling the truth.

### **July 20<sup>th</sup> in 1944**

A second attempt of tyrant assassination occurs about five years after Elser’s attack in the “Bürgerbräu Keller” and about one and a half years after the non-violent act of resistance by the “White Rose”. On July 20<sup>th</sup> in 1944 Klaus Schenk, Graf von Stauffenberg tries to kill the Dictator Hitler with a bomb during a briefing in his headquarters “Wolfsschanze.” Unlike Elser, Stauffenberg is not acting alone. Parties involved in the plot come from nobility, the German military, and administration. It is a large, heterogeneous group consisting even of ministers and war criminals.

Already in 1938, opposition against the war preparations of the NS had already started to build among high rank military officials of the “Wehrmacht.” Over and over again they arrive at conspiracies and even concrete plans of an assault or overthrow. Some proved to be impossible to realize, others failed or had to be postponed while everything had to be kept secret from the Gestapo.

After the devastating defeat in Stalingrad the military situation left no realistic hope for the so-called ultimate victory “Endsieg” anymore. Stauffenberg and a circle of officers and generals decided to take the initiative. Their goal was to get rid of the “military

dilettante” Hitler, and to immediately start peace negotiations with the allies by a new German military government.

Stauffenberg decided to take action. He took his chance on July 20<sup>th</sup> in the Führer head quarters and placed a time bomb in a briefcase close to Hitler. But Hitler survived with only minor injuries, saved by a heavy table top. However, four in the attending crowd were killed.

Stauffenberg managed to get away in time, convinced that Hitler was also among the dead. He took a plane to Berlin, but due to the poor communication lines the whole overthrow, though it took off slowly, seemed to be a success around 6 in the evening. When Hitler called from the “Wolfsschanze” and talked on the radio the entire overthrow collapsed. The very same night Stauffenberg was one of the first officers shoot by a military command in the headlights of a truck.

The Nazis came back with a vengeance (wentschens). It’s estimated that about 1500 arrests and 200 executions took place. A series of propaganda trials at the so called “court of the people” (Volksgerichtshof) followed.

Some of the victims were executed by choking them to death with wire loops.

## **The Reaction**

Needless to say, the Nazi regime did not only use brutal force to break the resistance, but was also smart enough to take advantage of Goebbel’s control over the media when resistance went public. That way the Nazis were able to divert the attempts by the resistant fighters to destabilise the system into the opposite, and managed to achieve a propagandistic stabilisation of the system.

The assassination attempt by Georg Elser was used by the Nazis to spread conspiracy theories, and the people would hail Hitler, who was then on top of his powers even more fanatically.

The short propaganda trial of the “White Rose” and the execution that followed just hours later - the same afternoon, were used as a propagandistic act to demonstrate the unbroken power of the system. This caused additional fear among the people after the defeat of Stalingrad.

After Hitler’s survival of the assault by Stauffenberg in the “Wolfsschanze” he talked of destiny protecting him and his plans. That way he tried to manifest the myth of his invincibility and the crazy idea of the “ultimate victory” (Endsieg), just 9 months before the unconditional surrender of his regime. Additionally the NS propaganda denounced Stauffenberg and his companions as traitors in a new version of the stab-in-the-back legend. They were called cowards who betrayed Germany in times of trouble.

Cynically, the NS falsification of the assassins’ true motives has persisted almost until today. The actual goals of the resistance movements have been blurred and damaged by this for a long time.

Whoever thinks that the resistance fighters would spontaneously be honoured after the war for their courage, resoluteness and sacrifices is wrong. Certainly Germany included a big catalogue of human rights in its constitution in 1949. The young country of course cared a lot about the protection of human rights. But the old thinking was still very present in the minds and hearts of many people.

Too many Germans were still infected by the old NS ideology after 1945. I know that for a fact from my own experience in my family. Many executive positions in the government and justice system were almost naturally filled by former Nazis.

In these times resistance fighters - in terms of Nazi propaganda – were still looked at as cowards and traitors for they were trying to stab the fighting troops in the back.

I was told by Elisabeth Hartnagel, a sister of Sophie Scholl who’s still alive, that after the war her family was discriminated against in their hometown Ulm, because of the resistance fight of Hans and Sophie. It was just like a few years earlier when Jews

would walk down the streets marked with the yellow star and people would change sides so they would not have to engage into any conversation.

The public in post-war Germany also reflects on the old NS propaganda, treating the case of Georg Elser as if he had been a puppet of the allies' secret service. Even worse, protestant pastor Niemöller a former resistance fighter himself, denounced Elser as a member of the SS. Only when in 1964 some of the interrogation protocols of the Gestapo were discovered, Elser's picture in the public eye finally changed. Elser, the lone assassin was rehabilitated. But still, he is only slowly considered the man he truly was by the German historical memory. The only resistance fighter who emerged from the people.

Even overseas the overthrow of July 20<sup>th</sup> in 1944 was sought to be diminished as a morally inferior move - to show Germany, the former enemy, as a breaking monolithic block. Winston Churchill, who was informed of the assassination plans in advance, said in 1944 in the British House of Commons: These are just eradication fights among the Third Reich military command. He further commented that the leading personalities of the Third Reich are now tearing each other apart - and are trying to kill one another - but their days are numbered.

The US just goes right along with Churchill's interpretation. The "New York Times" of August 9<sup>th</sup> 1944 writes that the plot rather looked like a bunch of gangsters trying to get even with each other than behaviour one would normally expect of officers in a cultivated country.

Marion Gräfin Dönhoff journalist and co-editor of the renowned German paper "Die Zeit" pointed out in a rather bitter tone that Stauffenberg's companions were asking for help overseas but would only find a "wall of silence".

In 1946 it was Winston Churchill who uttered the first clear words about what resistance against Hitler was all about - from the moral and humanistic point of view. However he didn't correct his earlier comment about the July plot. He said quote: "There was opposition alive in Germany, which belongs to the greatest and noblest ever seen in the history of politics of all nations. These people fought without any

inner or outer help only driven by the restlessness of their conscience. When they were alive, we couldn't see them because they had to disguise themselves. But in the dead resistance has become visible. Those dead are not able to justify all of what happened in Germany. But their action and sacrifices are the indestructible foundation for a new start."

### **Legitimation Of Resistance Through Human Rights**

"When injustice becomes justice, resistance becomes a duty". These words were written by Berthold Brecht, a German playwright. He raises an important question. What defines justice from injustice in a political system? Whoever is in power holds the right to define what is right and wrong. Political resistance therefore finds itself always outside of law and order. But resistance is still legitimate. It even will become a moral duty if the causes of justice are abandoned by those in power. An important, if not the most important indication for that is whether or not a country respects and protects human rights.

From the Nazi regime's point of view the only justice was the justice legislated by the Führer state. Human rights, which claim peoples' natural law, were relentlessly fought against.

I follow this essential question in my screenplay about "Sophie Scholl" in the fourth dialog of the questioning between Sophie and Robert Mohr - the Gestapo officer. When Mohr asked quote "What am I supposed to go by - if not by the law regardless of who passes it?" Sophie answers quote "Your conscience" and she adds: "Laws will change, but conscience won't."

### **Motives Of Resistance**

The motives for resistance towards the Nazi regime were not homogenous, but often intertwined with each other. Fighting a terrorist regime in all its different facets of injustices naturally needs more than just one concept.

The motives of the three cases I described were different too. Elser saw Hitler as plain evil in person. He acted with the conviction that he had to prevent a monstrous bloodshed. His attempt failed and millions died.

The July plot by Stauffenberg was motivated by the inevitable military defeat of Germany, which could only be avoided by eliminating Hitler - and an immediate peace agreement with the allies. National interests were justification for high treason.

Some historians add more value to the George Elser plot and the "White Rose" leaflet actions at the university of Munich because those had more of a democratic character, whereas Stauffenberg was a monarch. But aren't those just labels?

It's a fact that the horrific eradication of the Jews was the main motivation for 20 of Stauffenberg's co-conspirators to join the plot. So they admitted before the so-called "court of the people".

But the "White Rose" was the only group that clearly and consistently referred on their leaflets to the human right to fight against the Nazi system. It cannot be said any more clearly than with the following slogan from the fifth leaflet: "Freedom of speech, freedom of denomination, protection of the individual citizen from the arbitrariness of a criminal political system. Those are the fundamentals of a new Europe".

### **The Non-Violent Resistance Of The "White Rose"**

Let's not forget one extremely important aspect at this point. The members of the "White Rose" consistently acted in a non-violent manner. That's what sets them apart from Elser and the men around Stauffenberg. In my opinion this makes their fight and efforts so much more honourable not only from a moral point of view. Non-violence is one of the essential principles of human rights. Because of its non-violence the resistance of the "White Rose" legitimized itself also in a legal way.

Let's jump to the present. One of the 644 intellectuals of the - PEN centre list - is Chinese writer Liu Xiaobo. He was sentenced to 11 years in jail on December 24<sup>th</sup> in 2009 in Beijing. One of the so called "crimes" - he was accused of - was to write the

following sentence, I quote: “The greatness of non-violent resistance is when a man even as victim faced with biggest tyranny and its terrible impacts, answers hate with love, prejudice with dignity and violence with rationality.”

### **Resistance Without Consequences In The Nazi Regime**

It is tragic and cruel that many of the resistance fighters paid for their courage with their lives. And it's almost as tragic that none of the resistance actions managed to even get close to any of its aspired goals. The bloodshed at the frontlines and behind just kept going with the same intensity. The monstrous killing machines of the Nazis just kept on destroying countless innocent lives. Millions of allies' soldiers were killed, trying to stop Hitler and his accomplices ('äkomleses) like Mussolini. And the human rights were violated more and more each time over.

My deceased mother-in-law, who was a fellow student of Hans Scholl, told me that the University of Munich felt like an ice box after the execution of the Scholl siblings and Christoph Probst. She said no one would even dare to have a critical thought, let alone verbalizing it. Circumstances were even more dictatorial as before after the trial. The fellow students who had been specifically addressed by the “White Rose” with the sixth and last leaflet were shying away with no exception.

### **The Resistance Gene (dschin)**

But on the other hand none of the accused broke down psychologically in Hitler's propaganda trials - nor were they looking for excuses to save their necks. That applies to all of the accused there. The “White Rose” as well as to the conspirators of July 20th - as well as for Georg Elser who was tortured in the concentration camps by the Gestapo.

It seems as if some people have an indomitable inner strength to fight against injustice and oppression, almost as if there were a kind of “resistance gene” in our body. Those people can obviously only take terror and oppression of their basic

human rights up to a certain physiological and psychological point before they become resistance fighters like Sophie Scholl the student - and Georg Elser the craftsman - and the noble man Stauffenberg.

## **Resistance And Human Suffering**

Resistance fighters had to suffer terrible pains, but inflicted the same kind of pain on their families, friends, innocent victims and their relatives. That was inevitable and is therefore also a very tragic aspect of the problem.

Take for instance the parents of the Scholl siblings. They've lost two of their beloved children. Young and talented students, whose famous leaflets ring through in brilliance and content until today, smart people full of life, who had what it takes to become scientists or political leaders after the end of the terror system in a new democratic Germany. Leaders that were needed so badly in my country - in that Nazi infested post-war period. Robert Scholl, who was Sophie's and Hans Scholl's father, and the relatives of the other members of the "White Rose" didn't just suffer under the burden that was inflicted on them; they were proud of their children's courage and willingness to make sacrifices.

Almost everyone who has seen our movie "Sophie Scholl, the final days" asks himself the same question we did from the very first moment when we started making this movie. What would I have done personally in Sophie Scholl's place? Would I have also given my life for political ideas, which did not stand any chance to be realized, but instead must have seemed almost unthinkable under those circumstances?

We can of course say that we are not in the same situation as people were back then, although the honest answer would probably almost always be "no."

But every generation is presented with the same challenge in a new and different way. Not to look away in the face of injustice, passiveness, fatalism, but to overcome

all fears for morality and conscience, in other words when human rights demand it. Even to the point of life or death.

Would we rise to the streets as Iranians in Teheran to stand up against the Mullahs today? To bring back human rights to a country which has been oppressed for decades, and would we risk to be sentenced to death for it?

I don't know what I would do if it would concern my country.

All I can say is that the fight will never stop. And that there are people out there today who are willing to fight for freedom, equality and human dignity.

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