

# Hashude - An Experiment in Nazi 'Asocial' Policy

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The Nazis' desire to create a perfect and 'pure' 'national community' meant the exclusion not only of the 'racially alien', but also of a heterogeneous group of people – largely of German ethnicity – who were described as 'asocial' or 'socially unfit'. The term 'asocial' was used to categorise marginal groups of the German population that deviated from the norms of society (and is referred to throughout this article as implying a specific concept of Nazi ideology, as are terms like 'national community'. For ease of reading, however, inverted commas have been dispensed with beyond the initial mention). Asocials were portrayed as the dregs of society, whose inferiority was marked by traits such as 'weakness of character', 'lack of restraint', 'loose morals', 'disinterest in contemporary events', 'idleness' and 'poverty of mind'. The term was applied in an elastic manner also, to include gypsies, vagabonds, persons of no fixed abode, prostitutes, alcoholics, unmarried mothers, homosexuals, large, 'inferior' families, criminals, 'idlers', 'good for nothings', 'wastrels', 'grumblers' and 'grouchers', as well as any one else who did not, could not or would not perform their duties to the national community. Persecution of such groups was relatively easy, since they were in any case the objects of popular disapproval.

During the Weimar Republic, there had already been considerable concern about the future of the German population, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. Indeed, such concerns were not unique to Germany. It was feared that the decrease in the birth rate would result in first the ageing and, ultimately, the 'death of the nation'. Additionally, there were anxieties that the proliferation of the ill and unfit was leading to a decline in the health and productivity of the population. There were calls from eugenicists for a rational management of the population, in order to change these trends. Eugenics began to be seriously considered as a 'scientific' solution to social and welfare problems and as a means of arresting the decline of the nation. Professional self-aggrandisement and class prejudice played a key role here, as the majority of the eugenicists were of middle-class origin, and sought to preserve their class from biological extinction. Hence, the term 'fit' was applied almost exclusively to the educated and 'socially valuable' elements in society. Essentially, performance and success in social life were the yardsticks by which the value of individuals and families were measured.

Indeed, by 1931, Germany's dire financial situation meant that rationalisation and the efficient use of welfare resources had become key preoccupations. The notion of reducing the number of 'hereditarily-ill' individuals by means of negative eugenic solutions became quite widely accepted, beyond the circle of eugenicists. In 1932, a draft sterilisation law was put forward by the Prussian Health Council, allowing for the voluntary sterilisation only of certain classes of allegedly hereditarily-ill individuals. The proposal was welcomed by a number of medical organisations, but due to prevailing political problems, the draft law was never passed.

The Nazi seizure of power brought more drastic solutions regarding the 'elimination' of the hereditarily-ill and the asocial. Two new laws were passed which had a considerable impact upon the asocial and criminal elements of society. The first was the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring of July 14th, 1933. This legislation was introduced to prevent individuals with certain specific 'hereditary diseases' from reproducing, although the hereditary character of some of these diseases was dubious. Although asociality was not specified in the law, many asocials were compulsorily sterilised because their social or sexual behaviour deviated from National Socialist norms. The second measure was the Law Against Dangerous Habitual Criminals of November 24th, 1935. Asocial individuals could henceforth be kept in 'unlimited preventive detention' if they had two or more criminal convictions. Certain grades of 'racial-biological criminals', especially sex offenders, could also be compulsorily castrated under the terms of this law.

Other early measures against asocials included the persecution of tramps, vagrants and the 'work-shy'. From July 1933 onwards, Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda, called for a nationwide swoop on beggars drastically to cleanse urban environments and to focus public charity upon the Party's own charitable agencies. Raids during 'Beggars Week', from September 18th-25th, 1933, resulted in the detention of some 100,000 beggars and vagrants

in police 'protective custody". However, the majority of them were released within a few days, as the existing prison system had no room for them. Despite this fiasco, the regime's determination to take a stand against asocials, meant that from 1934 onwards, measures against them became increasingly harsh. The provisions of the Criminal Code dealing with beggars and vagrants were made much tougher. For example, homeless people had to carry Vagrants' Registration Books, which recorded their stays in approved overnight shelters. If they did not have such a book, they were categorised as 'disorderly wanderers' and could be arrested and imprisoned.

The impetus for the persecution of asocials often came from below, by means of local initiatives, rather than as the result of national high-level policy decisions. Welfare authorities wished to off-load costs and ordinary householders wished to be rid of transient nuisance neighbours. The creation of ad hoc camps for gypsies in various locations throughout Germany in the mid-1930s, such as Marzahn in Berlin, was one example of this combination of forces. Another local enterprise was a slum clearance scheme in Hamburg, in 1934-35, by means of which whole areas of the city populated with criminals, prostitutes, Communists and other asocials were demolished. The criminal geography of the city showed a high incidence of crime, fights, juvenile delinquency and sexual deviance within vicinities inhabited by those defined as asocials. The physical destruction of the hereditary properties of these asocials put an end to this. Hashude, the experimental asocial colony set up in Bremen in October 1936, was another initiative of this kind, focusing upon families in the shadier reaches of the lumpenproletariat.

The issue of whether or not asocial families were able to be rehabilitated for life within society was the subject of much controversy. Some of those involved in dealing with the 'asocial problem' believed that it was possible to educate asocial families, by means of discipline, into a position from which they could be re-integrated into society, whilst others firmly maintained that this was out of the question because of the innate, inferior characteristics of asocials. The concept of a closed asocial colony in which asocial families could be socially engineered into 'valuable' members of the national community through the imposition of strict control and surveillance, was seen as a possible solution, hence, the setting up of Hashude.

Advocates of the asocial colony, such as Otto Wetzel, the Mayor of Heidelberg, clearly believed that it could be a useful and effective method of dealing with the asocial problem, offering the possibility of maintaining family units, separating them from the rest of a city's inhabitants, guaranteeing clean, cheap and durable housing and exerting educational influences and constant surveillance over asocial families. The idea of an asocial colony also seemed favourable because, apart from hereditary factors, the milieu in which a child grew up was considered to have some bearing on its nature. Nazi 'criminal-biological experts' maintained that children who grew up in atrocious tenement housing or led a wandering lifestyle were reared as thieves, beggars or vagabonds. Such children saw that work was of no value or importance to their parents. Their tendency towards asociality because of their biological make-up, was exacerbated by an 'asocial environment'. It was felt that satisfactory educational influence could minimise these trends. 'Educational influence' entailed compulsory work and surveillance for the men-, observation, leadership and control of the work of the women; control of the household in which the family lived; and training and supervision of the children.

In addition, from a purely financial point of view, there was a rational motive for the asocial colony – to reduce public expenditure on asocials. Following an initial outlay, the Bremen authorities would be able to cut down their expenditure on these groups. For example, henceforth, they would not have to pay out welfare benefits, rent and outstanding rent which often dated back over many years. However, a bitter debate continued between those who favoured the asocial colony as a cost-effective solution and those who considered it to be too expensive, wasting resources that could be put to better use.

Hashude, termed a 'welfare housing institution', but, in effect, a kind of prison, was set up by SS member Hans Haltermann, the Senator for Employment, Technology and Welfare and was the most significant experiment in the area of housing asocials. It was a unique institution, representing a halfway point between a municipal housing estate and a concentration camp along the lines of those set up elsewhere by the National Socialist regime. The separation of 'deviant', proletarian groups from the rest of society through internment per se was in no way the

brainchild of the National Socialists. This idea had its precursors in the compulsory work-houses first set up in sixteenth-century England and Holland, which were used to discipline similarly poor sectors of the population. What was new, however, was the use of the asocial colony as a testing ground for the 'fitness' of asocials, to see whether or not they could be engineered into valuable individuals. This meant, in the first place, discovering the extent of the 'waywardness' of the families interned; whether they could be deemed capable of 'improvement', or irredeemably diagnosed as dangerous to the community or nation. If they could demonstrate improvement, these families were released into normal society, but if they could not, they might well end their days in a concentration camp. Consequently, Hashude was seen as a completely new kind of way to deal with the asocial problem giving so-called asocial families a last chance – based on 'education' and draconian compulsory measures – to become integrated into the national community.

Hashude consisted of eighty-four family houses, an administration building, a bathing area and a children's home. Its total building cost was approximately 600,000 RM. The architectural and organisational model for Hashude was a controlled housing estate in The Hague in the Netherlands, set up in 1923, which consisted of a central observation point, with five rows of housing emerging radially from it, in the style of the Benthamite panoptic prison of the nineteenth century. Gerd Offenberg, the building director of Bremen, accompanied Haltermann to The Hague to visit its model housing estate which he termed 'a dreadful structure!'. His plan, therefore, was to build an institution that did not look so much like a prison. Instead of the traditional panoptic style, Offenberg planned two rows of houses, meeting to form an L-shape. The administration building, complete with observation cabin, lay at this meeting point. In addition, the gate of the administration building was the only point of entry and exit on the estate.

Panoptic control at Hashude was optimised beyond that of the Dutch system, allowing the front entrances of two-thirds of the houses to be in the field of vision of the observation point. There were no back doors in the houses – only front doors, so that all comings and goings could be observed. In addition, whilst the institution in The Hague had no system of 'admission' – poor and homeless families themselves had to decide if they would trade off having a roof over their heads for being subjected to constant surveillance – asocial families in Bremen were sent to Hashude without any choice in the matter. Indeed, the involvement of the police was often required for those families that did not undertake to enter Hashude voluntarily.

The criteria for being admitted included: 'unwillingness to work', 'refusal to work', 'lack of thrift', 'lack of restraint', 'drinking', 'peddling', 'begging', as well as 'disturbing community life' and 'neglect of children'. Haltermann believed that the asocial colony was 'correct', according to National Socialism, and that through it, there was the possibility of improving public life, 'raising the quality of the population' and decreasing crime. The legal basis upon which Hashude's system of admission operated was essentially Paragraph 1 of the Decree for the Protection of the Nation and State, of February 28th, 1933, under which, asocials were described as representing a danger to 'the entire nation'. This threat could be averted by placing, such families compulsorily in a closed institution.

Families were sent to Hashude at the behest of the local welfare authority. For example, it was proposed that the widow S. and her four children – two of whom had already been sterilised and one of whom was born illegitimately – should be placed in the institution, because of their 'asocial behaviour'. The family needed help 'to stop being a danger to society'. Friedrich K. was sent to Hashude for being 'very asocial'. Not only did he avoid regular employment, but he had relationships with prostitutes, was an alcoholic and had been repeatedly sentenced for theft, fraud, misappropriation and other similar offences. It was claimed that the behaviour of the entire K. family was coloured by Friedrich's activities and character, which were 'a danger to the national community and especially to his children'. Hence, a spell in Hashude was considered 'urgently necessary' for him.

Two case studies demonstrate the type of reasons for which families were interned. In May 1936, the welfare authorities proposed that the family of Friederike N. should be admitted to Hashude. On May 9th, 1936, his wife wrote to Senator Haltermann to request that the family should not be forced to go there. She included the

information that her husband had been a member of the SA since November 1933 and that all her children were members of the Nazi youth groups. However, Haltermann's enquiries into the history of the family led him to the conclusion that it was necessary for them to be sent to Hashude. The main reason for this was that Friederike N. 'had not paid one penny in rent' for an entire year. He was described as a completely 'wilful debtor' and 'asocial renter'. In addition, the concepts of 'order and cleanliness' were 'unknown to N'. Hence, his wife's appeal was rejected.

On October 27th, 1938, Heinrich H. wrote to the Mayor of Bremen from Hashude, appealing for the release of his family which had already been there for two years. He claimed that he should never have been sent there in the first place, because he had never neglected his family, never spent his wages on alcohol, nor been a member of a Marxist party – which had been the reasons for his admission. He claimed to have been in employment permanently since 1933, working 'from early in the morning until late at night ... as a decent family father should'. Because of his internment in Hashude, his colleagues at work treated him 'like a convict' and noticeably ignored him. Both he and his wife, as 'decent national comrades' felt demeaned at being treated as 'second rate'. However, reports about Heinrich H. contradicted his statements. For example, Gestapo records showed that he was formerly a member of the German Communist Party. In addition, he had rarely worked and had only taken his current position to avoid being sent to Hashude. At one former place of employment he was guilty of 'purely Marxist wheelings and dealings'. As a whole, Heinrich H. was considered to be 'completely asocial, dangerous to the community, an alcoholic and a rabble-rouser'. Hence, his application for his family's release was refused on the grounds that the details with which he justified his request did 'not correspond with the facts' about him.

In general, a family's stay at Hashude lasted a year, which was divided into two six-month stages. For the first six months, the family was housed in a single family house. New inmates were likely to be 'wasteful', 'cantankerous' and 'contradictory'. They were not allowed any contact with other families. During this first phase, they were 'educated' to change their behaviour in such a way that after six months they would be able to lead a compatible life with neighbouring families. This entailed, at the very least, the family father going to work and the mother maintaining a clean and orderly house-hold. If they did not 'improve', their stay at the first stage could be lengthened, or if they were deemed completely ineducatable, they were re-housed in barracks elsewhere in the town. If improvement was demonstrated, the family moved on to the second stage, into terraced housing, with greater freedom, where harmonious community living was encouraged as a means of preparing for life outside Hashude.

As soon as the colony's leader was convinced that a family no longer represented a threat to the national community, he made a report to the Welfare Authority, which then sought suitable accommodation for the family upon its 'release'. The family could only leave Hashude if suitable housing was available and if the family father had a job, otherwise it was feared that the beneficial results would be immediately endangered by prospects of homelessness or unemployment, leading the family back into its old habits. Information was kept on the names of the inhabitants of each house, the number of male and female children in each house- hold and their ages, and the father's employment position. These typed notes were further annotated with hand-written remarks, such as 'household dirty', 'husband alcoholic' or 'wife brazen', clearly revealing the desired normative values of the colony.

The institution's staff totalled twelve, of whom the most important were the leader of the colony, the welfare workers, the children's home attendants and the guards. The leader was responsible for the entire institution and for the maintenance of house rules, regarding living and working at Hashude. The welfare workers inspected the households of the individual families on a daily basis, for cleanliness and orderliness, gave simple, practical instruction to the female inmates on domestic tasks and looked after the families, in terms of their health care needs. The children's home was staffed by three women, whose job was to look after small children, aged two to six, from 9 am until midday, after which the children returned to their mothers. They also had to supervise school children in the children's home after school, further training them in physical education and hygiene. The policing of inmates was the responsibility of guards, who worked in three shifts: from 5.30 am (half an hour before gates were opened) until 5 pm; from 9.30 am until 7 pm; and from 2.30 pm until midnight. This meant that at the most busy and important times of the day, especially when family members were at leisure, there were always two guards on duty.

One of the main objectives at Hashude was to make the family father get a job, in order to support his family and pay his rent. He was helped to find work by an overseer, who acted in co-operation with near- by employers, employment offices and the Bremen authorities. The majority of the men had jobs, but those without employment undertook gardening activities and other maintenance work within the institution. Strict living and working rules applied to the inmates. Before admission to Hashude, family members had to undergo a medical examination and had to disinfect all their clothes and furniture; entry into and involvement in the Nazi youth groups, the 'Hitler Youth' and the 'League of German Girls' was mandatory for all children; the houses had to be cleaned by 11 am at the latest, for daily inspection; alcohol was completely prohibited. As Hashude was an 'educational' institution, welfare workers had right of entry into the houses at any time, for purposes of observation or instruction.

Punishment ensued for the breaking of any of the institution's rules. This took the form of partial or complete withdrawal of payment for work, the allocation of special tasks, extra drills, or being locked up in a dark cell for up to three days with little or no food. Inmates continually or repeatedly guilty of 'awkward behaviour' or 'idleness' were sent to Teufelsmoor, a forced labour camp outside Bremen. Often the threat of this had the desired 'moral effect', but for serious and continual deviance, transfer ensued. The length of stay at Teufelsmoor was six months, or twelve months in 'difficult' cases.

At worst, serious and repeated flouting of the house rules could lead to being placed in concentration camps by the police – with men serving at Esterwegen and women at Moringen. Just being detained in custody for a protracted period of time was not considered an effective deterrent, for no useful work could be done by the inmate, who might misbehave at Hashude deliberately, with the specific purpose of having a 'pleasant change' from his usual tasks. Concentration camp was also the fate of those inmates guilty of spreading 'political contamination' in Hashude. In many cases, the threat of a permanent sentence in a concentration camp served as a highly effective deterrent.

Hashude was closed in July 1940. Primarily, its closure was the result of the intensification of the shortage of housing in Bremen – especially lower and middle price range homes – in which families could be accommodated after their time in Hashude. In addition, the exacerbating effect of the war on the housing market meant that Hashude had to be closed so that large 'valuable', 'hereditarily healthy' families could move into the homes on the estate. The former institution was turned into a normal housing estate. The iron gate and fencing were taken down, allowing for free movement in and out of the main entrance. Former inmates could remain there if they proved themselves to be 'valuable', whilst the incorrigible ones were re-housed in barrack-type accommodation.

After Hashude had closed, the debate still continued between supporters and opponents of this type of asocial policy. On the positive side, a table showing the situation of the last inmates indicated that out of eighty-four households, eighteen families were completely unimproved, seven had improved somewhat and could stay on once it became an open estate, and the remaining improved fifty-nine would be housed outside, of which twelve especially, were considered 'good families'. If this table was accurate, then Hashude could claim some success in its 'education' and social engineering. Despite its short-lived existence, its founders claimed that the colony had had a 'very durable' influence on countless families.

However, as a result of the prevailing opinion amongst both municipal authorities and Nazi eugenicists that asocial characteristics were hereditary and essentially irreversible, Hashude was generally regarded as a costly failure. Nature triumphed over nurture. A report of November 18th, 1940, described what had subsequently happened to the last inmates. These included Herr D. who had resumed drinking and beating his wife, and Frau W. and Frau 'S. who were seen in the ill-reputed parts of the city. After its closure, Hashude was described as an 'extraordinarily costly' solution to the asocial problem by its opponents, who claimed that its results were 'dubious'.

Other big cities comparable in size to Bremen did not, on the whole, undertake the building of institutions like Hashude, especially because they did not have the extensive means for providing housing even for hereditarily healthy families that were 'worth' sponsoring. In Bremen too, many 'valuable' families lived in bad conditions, in unhygienic or unsuitable accommodation. Hence, it was concluded that the 600,000 RM. spent on the building of Hashude could have been better spent on providing homes for these deserving families and that similar experiments

were only to be carried out when there was nothing left to do in terms of welfare for the 'healthy' sectors of society.

Instead of other positive measures towards asocials being introduced, policies against asocials became increasingly draconian, as this sub-stratum of society was effectively criminalized in Nazi Germany. The radical solution of housing asocials in barracks of a really primitive nature continued to be regarded as advantageous, after the Hashude experiment had been abandoned. Here, it was believed, the gradual eradication of asocials would occur as a result of their own auto-destruction and mutual decimation.

Even before Hashude was shut down, Himmler was advocating much more radical 'solutions' to the asocial question. For example, in December 1937, he decreed that individuals who would 'not adapt themselves to the natural discipline of a National Socialist state, e.g. beggars, tramps, (gypsies), whores, alcoholics with contagious diseases' were 'asocial' and could be taken into 'preventive custody'. This meant that people were interned in concentration camps just for being classed asocial, rather than for committing a specific criminal offence. Such people constituted part of the compulsory labour force in the economic enterprises of the SS's second generation of concentration camps such as Flossenburg and Mauthausen.

In June 1938, Himmler and Heydrich ordered a wave of arrests known as 'Reich Campaign Against the Work-shy', in which some 11,000 individuals were rounded up and sent to concentration camps, where many of them died. There were also a number of attempts to formulate a law against asocials or 'Community Aliens' from 1940 onwards, but due to disputes over areas of competence between the various agencies and individuals concerned, such a law was never passed. However, asocials continued to be discriminated against, persecuted and even eliminated throughout the Third Reich by means of a series of ongoing, ad hoc solutions – implemented widely and thoroughly – without the need for any further formal legislation.

Hashude, as an experiment on a local level had been unsuccessful and discredited. However, its very conception formed a significant part of Nazi policy, as one of the many attempts – escalating in harshness between 1933 and 1945 – formulated to deal with the 'asocial problem'.