

THE PATH TO DICTATORSHIP:
A STUDY IN HISTORICAL CAUSATION

by

Ruth Diane Roebke

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND ORGANIZATION OF MATERIAL . .	1
The Problem	2
Statement of the problem	2
Significance of the study	2
Present status of the problem	3
Organization of Material	5
Preview of organization of thesis	5
Statement of sources of data	5
Treatment of findings	6
II. ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE RISE OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM . . .	7
A Marxist Interpretation of National Socialism	8
Fascism: the end result of monopolistic capitalism . .	9
The pluralistic nature of German society	10
The World Economic Crisis and the Rise of National Socialism	14
III. NATIONAL SOCIALISM: A CONTINUATION OF GERMAN HISTORY . .	20
The Authoritarian Political Tradition of the Nineteenth Century	20
The influence of the Prussian state system and Bismarck	21
The role of militarism in the rise of National Socialism	30

CHAPTER

PAGE

The Intellectual Climate of Germany in the Nineteenth Century	37
The Romantic movement in Germany	38
The influence of romanticism upon the nationalist movement	42
Pan-German nationalism and neo-nationalism	44
Intellectual influences upon National Socialist ideology	46
IV. NATIONAL SOCIALISM: THE RESULT OF DEMOCRATIC RADICALISM .	49
Mass Democracy and the Totalitarian State	50
Rousseauian democracy and National Socialism	51
The decline of parliamentary democracy	54
Development of mass democracy	57
National Socialism and the Conservative Revolution	63
The failure of conservative leadership	64
Reaction, Nihilism, and National Socialism	67
V. NATIONAL SOCIALISM: A REACTION TO THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC . .	69
Political Revolution of 1918 not accompanied by a Social Revolution	70
The socialist-conservative bargain	71
Conservative political action in the Weimar period . . .	74
The Role of International Relations in the Weimar Republic	76
The legacy of the First World War	77

CHAPTER

PAGE

German foreign policy in the Weimar era	79
Foreign policy and National Socialist propaganda . . .	82
The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy, 1930-1932	83
The collapse of the Grand Coalition government	84
Rule by presidential decree	88
The role of the Social Democratic party	89
The Threat of Communism in the Weimar Republic	92
The German Communist party in the Weimar Republic . .	93
VI. NATIONAL SOCIALISM CAUSED BY A POWER STRUGGLE AMONG VESTED INTEREST GROUPS	99
The Guilt of the Reichswehr Officers' Corps	100
The role of the army in the Weimar Republic	100
The policies of Kurt von Schleicher	104
The Guilt of the Politicians	113
The power struggle to the elections of July, 1932 . .	114
The power struggle after November, 1932	117
From Schleicher to Hitler	120
The Guilt of the Industrialists	127
The policy of German industry to 1931	128
The policy of German industry after 1931	129
The policy of German industry after November, 1932 to January, 1933	134

CHAPTER	PAGE
VII. NATIONAL SOCIALISM: A UNIQUE PHENOMENON	138
The Influence of Adolf Hitler	140
Psychological motivation in the personality of Adolf Hitler	140
The character of Adolf Hitler	144
The Political Ideology of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Movement	149
The Nazi Weltanschauung	150
The role of anti-Semitism in National Socialist ideology	153
Techniques and Organization of the National Socialist Party	155
The seizure of power technique	155
The structure of the National Socialist party	158
The tactics and techniques of propaganda and terrorism	161
VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	166
Major Interpretations of the National Socialist Movement	167
The Role of the Economic Crisis in the Success of the National Socialist Movement	179

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND ORGANIZATION OF MATERIAL

Few historians will argue with the fact that the National Socialist movement which led to the founding of the Third Reich in Germany was responsible for the greatest period of destruction and chaos known in the history of civilization. The seizure of power by the Nazis in 1933 destroyed the vestiges of democratic rule and eventually led to the outbreak of the most destructive war in history. The National Socialist government was the cause of the physical destruction and moral bankruptcy of Germany, a nation which, stripped of its military power and political prestige, was destined to become the pawn of conflicting ideologies in the resultant Cold War. The question of historical causation has always intrigued scholars and becomes even more significant when directed to the origins of the National Socialist movement. If the Germans as one of the most civilized and technically advanced nations in the modern world could become captivated by Nazi ideology, what would prevent another nation or people from experiencing a similar fate? What forces, people, or events were responsible for the rise to power of Adolf Hitler?

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It is the purpose of this study (1) to determine the important historical interpretations concerning the rise of the National Socialist party to power in 1933; (2) to summarize the main points of the many historical interpretations related to the success of the National Socialist movement; (3) to critically analyze and determine the significance of these interpretations.

Significance of this study. The attempts by historians to discover the reasons for the success of the National Socialist party with the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany in January of 1933 have produced a variety of interpretations. Each of the historical accounts of this period in German history has assigned a specific cause to explain Hitler's rise to power. In validating claims of single causation, these interpretations have neglected conflicting evidence concerning additional causes. Through an analysis of these various interpretations, this study will emphasize the most significant factors which explain the success of the National Socialist movement. Since there are many historical interpretations in existence, this study will consider only those explanations which, by virtue of scholar research and original thought, add fresh insight into the problem of causation.

Present status of the problem. Over three decades have passed since Adolf Hitler was appointed German Chancellor in 1933; nevertheless, there exists no complete and authoritative study of the causes of this momentous event. Several studies which present the more important views of historians concerning this period have been attempted for the benefit of students in the paperback editions of the European Problem Studies edition of Hitler and Nazi Germany, edited by Robert G. L. Waite, and the Problems of European Civilization Series, The Nazi Revolution, Germany's Guilt or Germany's Fate, edited by John L. Snell.¹ These books represent excerpts of varying interpretations by major historians and include excellent introductions to the problem by the respective editors as well as highly selective bibliographies. No attempt has been made by the editors to arrive at a conclusive answer to the causes behind Hitler's rise to power.

Collections of essays concerning the origins of National Socialism are to be found in German History: Some New German Views, edited by Hans Kohn; The Third Reich, edited by Maurice Baumont and others; and The Road to Dictatorship, Germany 1918 to 1933.² These

¹Robert G. L. Waite, ed., Hitler and Nazi Germany (European Problem Studies, ed. by Henry Bertram Hill. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); John L. Snell, ed., The Nazi Revolution, Germany's Guilt or Germany's Fate (Problems in European Civilization, ed. by Ralph W. Greenlaw and Dwight E. Lee. Boston: D. C. Heath, 1959).

²Hans Kohn, ed., German History: Some New German Views (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1954); Maurice Baumont, et al., The Third Reich (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955); The Road to Dictatorship, Germany 1918 to 1933, trans. by Lawrence Wilson (London: Oswald Wolff, 1964).

works are particularly useful, since they include interpretive studies by many European scholars which previously have not been published in this country or have not been available in English translation. Many of the views expressed by the authors of these essays have been used in this study. As in the collections of Robert G. L. Waite and John L. Snell, the editors of these works have made no attempt to analyze the significance of the interpretations included in the volumes.

Two excellent bibliographical essays concerning this problem have been written by Eric C. Kollman, "Reinterpreting Modern German History: The Weimar Republic," in The Journal of Central European Affairs, and by Andrew G. Whiteside, "The Nature and Origins of National Socialism," also in The Journal of Central European Affairs.³ The essay by Kollman includes an analysis of historical interpretations rooted in the period of the Weimar Republic and a summary of the new trends being followed by historians concerned with the period 1918-1933. The author stresses the events connected with the German Revolution of 1918 rather than the period directly preceding Hitler's accession to power in 1933. No evaluation of existing interpretations of the Weimar period is given in this study. The essay by Andrew Whiteside represents the best summary of the various interpretations, although the author

³Eric C. Kollman, "Reinterpreting Modern German History: The Weimar Republic," The Journal of Central European Affairs, XXI (January, 1962), 434-451; Andrew G. Whiteside, "The Nature and Origins of National Socialism," The Journal of Central European Affairs, XVII, No. 1 (April, 1957), 48-73.

makes but a limited attempt to evaluate the views of historians concerned with the success of the National Socialist party in 1933. This thesis will attempt to review the main interpretations and analyze their importance.

II. THE ORGANIZATION OF MATERIAL

Preview of organization of the thesis. The many historical works reviewed in this study are grouped according to their central themes, although the studies differ in points of emphases:

- II. Economic Factors in the Rise of National Socialism
- III. National Socialism: A Continuation of German History
- IV. National Socialism: The Result of Democratic Radicalism
- V. National Socialism: A Reaction to the Weimar Republic
- VI. National Socialism Caused by a Power Struggle Among Vested Interest Groups
- VII. National Socialism: A Unique Phenomenon in German History
- VIII. Summary and Conclusions.

Statement of sources of data. The summaries and analyses presented in this study are based upon the major works of European and American historians. In most instances, the German and French texts have been translated into English, and this versions have been used for this study. Since this paper represents an analysis of interpretive studies of National Socialism, the sources used in this

study are considered primary source materials. No distinction is made in the bibliography between primary and secondary sources, and the materials listed in the bibliography are grouped in sections according to the following headings: books; publications of the government; essays, articles in collections, and periodicals.

Treatment of findings. Summaries of the interpretations presented in this study are followed by criticisms of these interpretations made by other historians and analysis and interpretation by this writer. A summary of the historical views presented in this thesis and an analysis of the salient points are contained in the final chapter of this paper.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE RISE OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

One view of the origins of National Socialism is based upon the Marxist dialectic which states that the free-enterprise stage of capitalism evolves into a higher stage characterized by the growth of monopolies, concentration of capital, and economic imperialism. Monopolistic capitalists, faced with the problem of declining profits and lowered wages as capitalistic production outruns competition, find it necessary to locate new markets and raw materials to avoid social revolution from the masses. Marxists define fascism as the transition from the capitalist to the socialist political and economic system. Marxist and non-Marxist historians accept this theory because of its plausibility and because it provides for a variety of events.¹ Histories of the German fascist movement based upon this Marxist interpretation include an early account written by an American historian, Frederick L. Schuman; an analysis of the economic structure of National Socialism written by an East German

¹Whiteside, "The Nature and Origins of National Socialism," p. 49.

scholar, Jürgen Kuczynski; and an excellent, comprehensive study of National Socialism by another German historian, Franz Neumann.²

Many non-Marxist historians have been concerned with the economic factors which account for the success of National Socialism in 1933; the inflation of the 1920's, the consolidation of large-scale industry after 1924, and the great economic crisis between 1929-1932.³ These historians have not attempted to give one single explanation of causes, but they do stress the interdependence of economic factors with other intellectual, sociological, and political forces which were responsible for the rise of National Socialism.

I. A MARXIST INTERPRETATION OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

In the late nineteenth century, capitalism entered into a new phase of development which Marxist historians term monopolistic capitalism. Monopolistic capitalism is characterized by the concentration of capital, elimination of small businesses, and the formation

²Frederick L. Schuman, The Nazi Dictatorship. A Study in Social Pathology and the Politics of Fascism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1935); Jürgen Kuczynski, Germany: Economic and Labour Conditions under Fascism (New York: International Publishers, 1945); Franz Neumann, Behemoth. The Structure and Practice of National Socialism (2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1944).

³Louis R. Franck, "An Economic and Social Diagnosis of National Socialism," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 539-575; Friedrich Lütge, "An Explanation of the Economic Conditions which Contributed to the Victory of National Socialism," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 417-437.

of monopolies in large industries. Since the Marxist dialectic dictates that monopolistic production tends to exceed mass consumption, this phase of capitalism is denoted by a search for new markets and new sources of raw materials, or a policy of imperialistic expansion. Thus the political system of monopolistic capitalism, in the Marxist view, is fascism.

Fascism: the end result of monopolistic capitalism. Strictly adhering to the Marxist dialectic in his study of German fascism, Frederick Schuman believes that fascism represents the "social philosophy and the state-form of the bourgeoisie in the monopolistic epoch of late capitalism."⁴ Fascism emerges in industrial societies which are suffering from a lack of markets accompanied by economic deprivation. Trusts, monopolies, and cartels are the features of industrial organization in this late phase of capitalism. Even before 1914, these industrial combinations were becoming as powerful as the government and were assuming state functions. Following the German defeat in 1918, the state bureaucracy, the General Staff, heavy industry, and the landed nobility became closely integrated and were forced to rule through a parliamentary government for which they had little respect.⁵ The periods of inflation and economic depression, which occurred under the republican Weimar government during the 1920's,

⁴Schuman, The Nazi Dictatorship, p. 480.

⁵Ibid., pp. 480-481.

weakened the loyalty of the masses who turned to support the N.S.D.A.P. (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei - the National Socialist party). The depression threatened heavy industry and the financial interests; and demands were made for more government aid, new foreign markets, and protective tariffs.⁶ When the government failed to meet the demands of heavy industry, the monopolistic capitalists subsidized the National Socialist party with Thyssen and Krupp, Schröder and Schacht constituting the liaison with the Nazi party. Without this alliance, says Schuman, the National Socialists would never have achieved power.⁷ Thus "monopolistic capitalism, aided by Junker militarism and nationalist reaction, placed Hitler in power in January of 1933."⁸

The pluralistic nature of German society. Franz Neumann and Jürgen Kuczynski believe that fascism has its basis in monopolistic capitalism; however, they deny that fascism is the necessary final phase of a capitalist industrial society. Certain historical circumstances must first be present for the development of fascism, state these historians. The Weimar Republic represented a "pluralistic" society in which antagonistic interests were hidden behind a parliamentary structure, states Neumann, and compromise among the various

⁶Ibid., pp. 481-482.

⁷Ibid., p. 482.

⁸Ibid., p. 223; See infra, pp. 127-136 for the view that Hitler and the National Socialist party received financial contributions from the industrialists, and this aid helped the N.S.D.A.P. to attain power on January 30, 1933.

social and political groups was necessary to insure the success of the democratic experiment. Thus the new Weimar Republic represented a compromise between the vested interests which controlled the wealth of the country and the working class. Since the many social groups were never integrated into the society on the basis of common interests, it was inevitable that the "pluralistic" society would collapse.⁹

Among the conflicting social groups that compromised the Weimar system, the greatest opposition to parliamentary democracy came from the large industrialists. The inflation of the 1920's permitted the formation of gigantic economic empires at the expense of the middle and working classes. Foreign loans after 1924 gave German industry the capital it needed for expansion. Some of the largest trusts in Germany's history were formed during the Weimar Republic: the United Steel Works (Vereinigte Stahlwerke), the United Upper Silesian Mills (Vereinigte Oberschlesische Huttenwerke), and the German Dye Trust (I. G. Farbenindustrie). The productive capacities of these large industries were never fully utilized, says Neumann. With the depression, the gap between actual production and potential capacity necessitated government assistance in the form of subsidies, tariffs, and the formation of cartels.¹⁰ The monopolistic capitalists feared the

⁹ Neumann, *Behemoth*, pp. 10-11; Kuczynski, *Germany: Economic and Labour Conditions under Fascism*, p. 13; See *infra*, pp. 70-76, for the interpretation that the political revolution of 1918 was not followed by a distribution of economic and political power to the masses.

¹⁰ Neumann, *Behemoth*, p. 16.

socialization of their industries and with the assistance of other reactionary elements in the society, namely the army, the judiciary, and the large landowners, determined to rid Germany of the weak parliamentary system. It was believed that the economic problems could be solved only by a return to imperialist expansion under a strong authoritarian government.¹¹ Caught between the anti-monopolistic sentiments of the masses who had suffered during the economic crisis and their own personal economic losses, the large industrialists turned to the National Socialist party.¹²

While stressing the increasing opposition to the Weimar democracy by the monopolistic capitalists and other reactionary forces, Neumann and Kuczynski believe that the progressive forces within the Weimar system experienced a decline in force. The policies of gradualism and reformism followed by the Social Democratic party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands - S.P.D.) and the trade unions were conditioned by the Marxist belief that "trustification" of industry was inevitable in the transition from a capitalist to a socialist economy.¹³ The middle and lower classes and the peasants were demoralized by the economic inflation of the 1920's and the

¹¹Ibid., p. 16, p. 34.

¹²Kuczynski, Germany: Economic and Labour Conditions under Fascism, p. 18.

¹³Ibid., p. 16; Neumann, Behemoth, pp. 17-20; See infra, pp. 83-92, for the interpretation which states that the National Socialist movement grew out of the weakness of the parliamentary parties under the Weimar system.

economic crisis of the 1930's and turned from support of the democratic parliamentary system to National Socialism.¹⁴

Marxist historians are united in the belief that German fascism represented the highest level of capitalistic economic organization. The large industrialists, who were authoritarian, anti-democratic, and anti-Marxist, desired to return to an autocratic system of government to combat the growing power of the masses. The economic inflation of 1922 and 1923, followed by the economic upswing after 1924, facilitated the growth of all reactionary elements in society, particularly the growth of large-scale industry. Consequently, the solution to the economic crisis of the 1930's took the form of imperialistic expansion under a fascist dictatorship. Although Marxist historians are careful to note that the National Socialist movement gained mass support from the middle and lower classes, they attribute this development to the economic crises rather than to any defect in German national character. The techniques of National Socialist propaganda used to gain the support of the discontented masses are given little credit in the Marxist economic interpretation. German fascism in the form of National Socialism represented the final stage in the transition of a monopolistic capitalist economy.

¹⁴ Kuczynski, Germany: Economic and Labour Conditions under Fascism, pp. 16-17.

II. THE WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE RISE OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Economic factors working in conjunction with social, political, and intellectual forces were responsible for the success of the National Socialist movement, state Friedrich Lütge and Louis R. Franck. The world economic crisis was the decisive economic factor leading to the victory of National Socialism, says Lütge; however, Germany would not have succumbed to the crisis had the economic difficulties of the 1920's not prepared the way for fascism.¹⁵ Improper financing of World War One, loss of territories and markets, reparation payments, and the occupation of the Ruhr district were responsible for the great inflationary period of 1922-1923. The depreciation of German currency in these years has no precedent in history. By the end of November, 1923, the height of the inflation, one dollar was worth 4,200 billion marks. The major effect of the inflation was the eradication of classes with small- and medium-sized estates which held wealth in the form of savings bank deposits, mortgages, and securities. The economic reserves of the middle class were lost and they had to rely upon income from labor. This process of "proletarianization" was one of the most important factors responsible for the victory of National Socialism. The economic losses suffered by these groups generated anti-democratic sentiment and prepared the

¹⁵Lütge, "An Explanation of the Economic Conditions," pp. 417-418.

middle class for a radical movement which would overthrow the hated system responsible for their losses.¹⁶

The inflation which ruined the middle class benefited the great industrialists who were able to pay off loans, hire cheap labor, expand their plants, and invest in up-to-date equipment. Inflation had been desired by industry for the purpose of increasing exports as decreased costs enabled German industry to recapture trade in world markets. A government policy concerning taxation and tariffs favorable to industry hastened the return of economic prosperity after 1924.¹⁷ The tendency toward monopolistic organization in banking and industry continued after 1924, as a comparatively small number of industrial business magnates controlled all branches of economic activity. These "captains of industry" were the leaders of a renewed Germany.¹⁸ A small group of persons controlled great wealth while the masses were left without property or economic reserves. This unhealthy distribution of income added to the anti-capitalist feeling, and the people gravitated toward a movement which described

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 424; Franck, "An Economic and Social Diagnosis," p. 341.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 548-549; In the instances in which a footnote refers to two sources as in footnote number 16, the succeeding footnote using the form *ibid.* always refers to the latter source; thus, footnote number 17 refers to Franck, "An Economic and Social Diagnosis."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 548-549; Lütge, "An Explanation of the Economic Conditions," p. 429.

itself as socialist but was definitely anti-Marxist, and which joined with its socialism the password of nationalism.¹⁹

Much of the expansion of industry and economic prosperity was based upon the influx of foreign capital. Between 1924 and July, 1931, the beginning of the Hoover moratorium, Germany received twenty billion reichsmarks in public and private loans and five billion reichsmarks in direct capital investment. These loans provided the funds from which reparations were paid, but enough was left for the capital investment which made the economic upswing possible. German reparations before 1924 were paid from assets while the payments made after 1924 were made from credit. The soundness of an economic policy based upon foreign credit must be questioned, says Lütge, especially after the world economic crisis caused the withdrawal of foreign capital from Germany.²⁰

The world economic crisis which began in the United States with the collapse of the New York Stock Exchange in October of 1929 soon spread to almost the entire world. American financiers withdrew capital from Europe and particularly Germany. This withdrawal of capital caused a banking crisis to occur in Germany as short-term foreign loans were recalled and the gold and currency reserves of

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 424-425.

²⁰Ibid., p. 425, pp. 428-429; Franck, "An Economic and Social Diagnosis," p. 541.

German banks were quickly exhausted. After the threatened collapse of the Austrian Kreditanstalt in May, 1931 and the German Darmstadter und National Bank on July 13, 1931, the German government declared a bank holiday to prevent the collapse of the entire currency system. At this point, the German government should have taken steps to allay the banking crisis by effecting a monetary depreciation which could be accomplished by going off the gold standard as Britain did a few months later.²¹ The Reichsbank was required to cover forty per cent of its issued notes with gold. By maintaining the old reserve requirements, banks were forced to withdraw credits from industry, and the banking crisis was transformed into a general economic crisis. Industry relied upon short-term loans for long-term capital investment. As the banks withdrew their loans, industry attempted to dispose of stocks of merchandise to obtain the needed funds. When the internal markets could not rapidly absorb the goods, industry reduced production and dismissed workers, and the purchasing power for industrial and agricultural goods declined even more.²²

The deflationary measures of the Brüning government were designed toward the recovery of the export market. To effect a monetary deflation, Chancellor Brüning ordered cuts in the salaries

²¹Lüttge, "An Explanation of the Economic Conditions," pp. 431-432.

²²Ibid., p. 432.

of civil employees, unemployment assistance, prices, and interest rates. These measures did tend to increase exports and an export surplus was achieved; however, the deflationary measures were mitigated to some extent by the depreciation of currency in countries such as Great Britain and the protectionist policy followed by the United States.²³ Too little was done to strengthen the internal market. By November, 1932, there were six million registered unemployed workers, another one million who were unemployed but were not registered, and a large group of partially employed workers.²⁴

The unpopularity of the deflationary policy increased dissatisfaction toward the Brüning cabinet and parliamentary government. Anti-democratic and anti-capitalist sentiment among the middle class was reawakened by the financial crisis. Lacking the economic reserves to withstand further deprivation, the middle and lower classes readily turned to support the socialist program of the left wing of the Nazi party, led by Gregor Strasser.²⁵ The great industrialists, who were anti-Marxist and anti-democratic, turned to National Socialism as the party of the Right. Hitler's sympathies were always with large-scale capitalism, and the right wing of the N.S.D.A.P. was concerned during

²³Ibid., pp. 434-435.

²⁴Ibid., p. 434; Franck, "An Economic and Social Diagnosis," p. 550.

²⁵Ibid., p. 553; Arthur Schweitzer, in his essay "The Nazification of the Lower Middle Class and Peasants," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 576-594, states that Nazi propaganda developed a program of "Middle-Class Socialism" to meet the economic demands of the middle and lower classes; See infra, p.59.

the economic crisis with effecting a rapprochement with the leaders of industry.²⁶ The National Socialist party propaganda, aided by divergent views within the Party, used the economic crisis to achieve power in January of 1933.

Economic historians believe that the world economic crisis was the decisive factor in Hitler's succession to power. Additional economic factors - the great inflation and reparations policy - represented little danger during economic prosperity but became significant when the deflationary policy aimed at countering the effects of the depression destroyed confidence in what had been rebuilt. Social and intellectual forces in the form of National Socialist propaganda which marshalled the support of the middle class and the great industrialists combined with the economic factors to destroy the parliamentary system.

²⁶Franck, "An Economic and Social Diagnosis," pp. 556-557; See *infra*, pp. 127-136, for the view that Hitler's rise to power was given impetus by the financial contributions and prestige of German industrialists.

CHAPTER III

NATIONAL SOCIALISM: A CONTINUATION OF GERMAN HISTORY

Many experts warn against an over-simplification of the historical situation at the time of the development of the National Socialist movement. Instead of stressing the significance of the economic crisis of the 1930's, these scholars look to German history for the roots and origins of the fascist movement. There is but little concern with the dim German past, and few contemporary scholars insist that an innate and unchangeable German national character made Nazism inevitable. Certain historical developments - the militaristic character of nineteenth-century German nationalism; the unique intellectual development as manifested in the philosophic and religious ideas of the Romantic movement; the neo-nationalist movement of the early twentieth century - did influence the German spirit and were important factors in the success of the National Socialist movement.

I. THE AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL TRADITION OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Western liberal historians concerned with the origins of National Socialism have stressed various political, economic, and social handicaps from which Germany suffered during its development as a national state in the nineteenth century. These historians

emphasize (1) the influence of the Prussian state system; (2) the work of Bismarck; and (3) the role of militarism in German history. The Prussian state system frustrated liberal attempts toward democratic government in 1819, 1848, 1862, and 1918. The centralized, authoritarian government created by the power politics of Bismarck was responsible for a lack of freedom-mindedness among the German people, particularly among the liberals who desired a democratic, Western-style government. Bismarck's policies paralyzed the liberal element that would have pursued a course of moderation in both domestic and foreign affairs, and the Bismarckian Reich constituted a reactionary, nationalist government which relied upon militaristic power. With the defeat of Germany in 1918 and the establishment of a liberal, democratic republic, the conservative and reactionary forces in Germany - adherents to the Bismarck system of power politics - were willing to support the program of the National Socialists to avoid liberal and democratic rule under the Weimar system.

The influence of the Prussian state system and Bismarck.

Criticism of the Prussian authoritarian tradition by liberal historians was revived with the collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945. These historians have called for a thorough rethinking of German history from the time of the founding of the German Reich of Bismarck to the present to avoid another experience such as the Third Reich.

They seek to avoid criticism of the democratic Weimar government as preparing the way for National Socialism. The roots of the movement extend back into German history, state these scholars who believe that the method of unification accomplished by Bismarck around the Prussian state was responsible for a tradition of authoritarianism and power politics in German life. Among the critics of the Prussian state system and its founder, Otto von Bismarck, are some of the foremost German, American, and English historians: Friederich Meinecke, Erich Eyck, S. William Halperin, Hajo Holborn, Alfred von Martin, A. J. P. Taylor, Franz Schnabel, and Andreas Dorpalen.¹

Friederich Meinecke, the late, noted German historian, attributes the rise of National Socialism to the failure of Germany to reconcile the two major movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: bourgeois nationalism and socialism. The democratic ideals of the French Revolution created a desire for political freedom which originally demanded individual rights and then national

¹Friederich Meinecke, The German Catastrophe, Reflections and Recollections, trans. by Sidney E. Fay (Boston, Mass.: The Beacon Press, 1950); Erich Eyck, "Bismarck After Fifty Years," No. 8, General Series, The Historical Association (London: George Philip and Son, 1948); S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, A Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933 (Hamden, Conn.: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1946); Hajo Holborn, "Misfortune and Moral Decisions in German History," German History: Some New German Views, ed. by Hans Kohn (Boston, Mass.: The Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 206-212; Alfred von Martin, "Bismarck and Ourselves," German History: Some New German Views, ed. by Hans Kohn (Boston, Mass.: The Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 94-101; A. J. P. Taylor, Bismarck, The Man and The Statesman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); Franz Schnabel, "The Bismarck Problem," German History: Some New German Views, ed. by Hans Kohn (Boston, Mass.: The Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 65-93; Andreas Dorpalen, "The German Historians and Bismarck," The Review of Politics, XV (January, 1953), 53-67.

political power. Industrialization created a desire for a higher standard of living among the working class and gave impetus to the socialist movement.² In Germany, the nationalist wave created a bourgeois middle class that preferred power to individual freedom. Civilian life was dominated by the narrow intellectual and political outlook of the middle class who supported the Prussian militaristic state system. Socialism could be achieved only through peaceful evolution as the working class gained in strength, or through revolution if the working class failed to achieve a higher standard of living and political rights.³ According to Meinecke, it was necessary to unite the two forces of bourgeois nationalism and proletarian socialism to prevent chaos. When the German liberals attempted to preserve the cultural heritage of the Goethe period and at the same time support the demands of the new masses, their efforts were doomed because of the influence of the Prussian state system.⁴ The nationalist program turned more to the direction of power politics, and the national unification movement in the hands of Bismarck bore the Prussian militarist stamp. The methods of mass Machiavellianism used by Bismarck were overlooked because of the proof of power in the service of national unity, and the break with the Goethe period and its ideal of humanity became quite sharp.⁵

²Meinecke, The German Catastrophe, pp. 2-6.

³Ibid., pp. 14-16.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

⁵Ibid., pp. 55-56.

The critics of Bismarck believe that the creation of an authoritarian state based upon power politics prepared the way for National Socialism. Erich Eyck, a German émigré to England, comments that the Prussian state gave the ruler too much power, the parliament too little power to restrain the ruler, and the people too little independence of mind.⁶ The German state could have been unified in conformity with the liberal movement of the nineteenth century, declares Eyck, who deplores Bismarck's work as a reversal of the evolutionary development of liberal and humanitarian forces in Germany.⁷ S. William Halperin, an American scholar, believes that the Prussian state system was a primary influence behind the rise of National Socialism. Bismarck's goal in uniting Germany was simply the creation of a greater Prussian power in the Bundesrat. Bismarck regarded absolute monarchy as the ideal form of government and only created the Reichstag to satisfy the liberals who had supported his efforts toward unification. The powers of the Hohenzollern king and his Prime Minister were many and Prussia easily dictated the policy of the German Reich.⁸

The establishment of authoritarian government under Bismarck was not the only method of unifying Germany, states the German scholar Hajo Holborn. Greater unity between cultural and political life would have been achieved had the liberals not accepted Bismarck's system of

⁶Eyck, "Bismarck After Fifty Years," passim, pp. 1-19.

⁷Ibid., pp. 13-16.

⁸Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, pp. 2-3.

power politics and attempted to philosophically justify the loss of individual political liberty. At fault are the German people who chose to accept the establishment of an authoritarian German Reich.⁹ Another German historian, Alfred von Martin, views Bismarck as a true revolutionary because his use of power politics deliberately stifled the revolutionary and nationalist passions of the people.¹⁰ The nationalist movement of the nineteenth century was shaped and directed by Bismarck's use of power politics, and the creation of the German Empire halted the evolution of the liberal, democratic tradition within Prussia. Martin believes that Bismarck alone cannot be held responsible for the course of events, since he was supported by the liberals who betrayed their freedom for the idea of "unity." The authoritarian state created by Bismarck inculcated a lack of civic responsibility among the German people; yet, sole blame cannot be placed upon the state system because the German people have always tended to worship force as proof of increased strength. The Germans are "always impressed by the cavalryman's boot and a fist banged upon the table," declares Martin, and the German people are responsible for giving first Bismarck and later Hitler their opportunities.¹¹

A. J. P. Taylor, the famed English historian, is of the opinion that the liberals learned not to criticize authority and

⁹Holborn, "Misfortune and Moral Decisions," pp. 208-211.

¹⁰Martin, "Bismarck and Ourselves," p. 96.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 99-100.

accepted the results of Realpolitik up to the time of the First World War. According to Taylor, the defeat of 1918 caused Germans to question the validity of Bismarck's work. The German universities, however, upheld Bismarck's system, stating that his methods of practical diplomacy were the only ones by which lasting peace could be obtained. Thus the universities became "schools of nationalism," where all attempts at reconciliation to the Western powers following 1918 were denounced.¹² The validity of Bismarck's methods was held to be applicable in the period of the Weimar Republic. Liberal and democratic government and conciliatory diplomacy counted for little as criticism was heaped upon the Versailles settlement, reparations, and restrictions on the military.¹³ The theory of the reactionary, nationalist power-state continued after Bismarck's fall from power and produced disastrous results in the hands of less qualified and unscrupulous statesmen, leaving Germany prey to the methods and techniques of National Socialist propaganda.¹⁴ Thus the transformation of spirit and mentality of the German people through the tactics of power politics represents the legacy of Otto von Bismarck.¹⁵

In contrast to the widely held view that the Bismarck system of power politics created an authoritarian tradition is the interpretation

¹²Taylor, Bismarck. The Man and The Statesman, pp. 268-269.

¹³Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁴Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, p. 4.

¹⁵Eyck, "Bismarck After Fifty Years," p. 17.

of Franz Schnabel, an apologist of Bismarck. It is not correct to trace a line from Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor, to Hitler and the National Socialist policy of violence, says Schnabel. Such oversimplification does not take into account the popular and revolutionary forces at work in Germany during the nineteenth century. Historians should not attempt to justify or to villify Bismarck, but should concentrate upon assigning to Bismarck his correct place in history.¹⁶ Bismarck's policy represented the end product of old-style European statecraft in which the people's wishes played no part. The German national state was created within the framework of the old system and with the old methods of power politics. These methods were derived from the policy of European governments who saw power as the proper purpose of the state. Bismarck never hesitated to use acts of deceit and of violence, since his task was the completion of the Prussian state by any useful method.¹⁷ In creating the German Reich around the Prussian state, Bismarck utilized the awakening force of nationalism among the German people and checked the nationalistic ambitions of the Pan-Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe. Had Bismarck created a federative form of government to include the minority peoples of Eastern Europe, the struggles in territories with mixed nationalistic groups might have been avoided. Such a federation

¹⁶Schnabel, "The Bismarck Problem," p. 67.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 77-81.

could not have been carried out by Austria, notes Schnabel, since Austrian leadership in the nineteenth century represented only reactionary policies. Bismarck's background and character prevented him from unifying Germany according to a federative system. Acting in the manner of the classic European diplomat, Bismarck created the Reich "from above"; and the revolutionary nationalism which had forced its way up from below was suppressed.¹⁸ Revolutionary nationalism and the practice of power politics developed by Bismarck served as a model for the form of diplomacy practiced in the twentieth century.

Andreas Dorpalen disagrees with Schnabel's thesis that Bismarck erred by failing to create a Central European federative government which would have included non-German minority groups of the Austrian Empire. Dorpalen doubts whether it would have been possible to convince Wilhelm I of Prussia to accept Prussia's merger into a Central European Confederation without any increase in Prussia's power and possibly even at the price of some sacrifice in sovereignty. Furthermore, assuming that such a federation could have been created, it would have had to develop such a concentration of military power to withstand potential pressures from the east and west that it might have provoked Russia and France to use vigorous countermeasures. A weak nation-state would have provided a tempting target to Napoleon III or to the Pan-Slav movement. Only a strong nation-state could preserve the status

¹⁸Ibid., p. 86.

quo of European politics in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ Professor Dorpalen is also critical of the liberal historians who believe that German unification should have been achieved by the liberal movement. The annexation of all areas settled by Germans within the Austrian and Russian Empires, desired by the German liberals of 1848, was a far less moderate aim than the creation of the German Reich around the Prussian state accomplished by the conservative Junker, Bismarck. Furthermore, the foreign powers viewed the Frankfurt Assembly with apprehension; a liberal unification of Germany would have upset the Concert of Europe and would have inaugurated changes in the existing order.²⁰ Bismarck's restraint made German unification possible without serious repercussions in the non-German world.

According to Dorpalen, the question of confederation versus authoritarian rule will continue to be debated; however, the fundamental problem is not simply the statesmanship of Bismarck, but the complex nationality situation in Central Europe. Was it justifiable to apply the national ideals of Western Europe composed of homogeneous populations to Central Europe with its mixture of nationality groups? Nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe led to political and territorial atomization, asserts Dorpalen.²¹ Bismarck's foreign and

¹⁹Dorpalen, "German Historians and Bismarck," p. 59.

²⁰Ibid., p. 55; Professor Schnabel believes that a successful kleindeutsch liberal movement would have gone beyond the original program and would have involved the nation in Pan-German expansion or a general European war, "The Bismarck Problem," pp. 6-8.

²¹Dorpalen, "German Historians and Bismarck," p. 60.

domestic policies were in keeping with his background, political traditions, and religious convictions, and it is futile for contemporary historians to expect any alternative solution to the problem of German unification. Bismarck did betray certain moral responsibilities, for by resorting to Machiavellian practices in foreign and domestic affairs, he gave strong impetus to the deterioration of the country's political mores. While Bismarck would have opposed everything concerned with National Socialism, he helped to set into motion forces which ultimately paved the way for Nazism.²²

The role of militarism in the rise of National Socialism. The criticism of liberal historians has been aimed at the emphasis on militarism in the Prussian state system. The highly effective war machine developed by the Nazis has caused the Germans to be attacked for their military aggressiveness. Several analyses of the influence of militarism in German life have been written by J. J. Shokking, Robert G. L. Waite, Gordon Craig, Hans Herzfeld, and Gerhard Ritter.²³

²²Ibid., pp. 66-67.

²³J. J. Shokking, "Nazism's Way to Success," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 479-503; Robert G. L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918-1923 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952); Gordon Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); Hans Herzfeld, "Militarism in Modern German History," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 108-121; Gerhard Ritter, "The Military and Politics in Germany," The Journal of Central European Affairs, XVII (October, 1957), 259-271.

J. J. Shokking, a German historian, has analyzed the effects of militarization on German thought and social processes and sees in militarism a significant force in the rise of the National Socialist movement. Prussian militarism was based upon a professional standing army which was politically indifferent and owed allegiance only to the supreme commander. When conscription was introduced, all segments of the non-democratic German society absorbed this Prussian militaristic thinking. War was seen as the destiny of mankind; the army represented the nation's core; and the supreme commander represented the collective will of the nation.²⁴ This militaristic attitude pervaded all social and political institutions as well as attitudes toward life, and the Germans believed that the idea of nationhood depended entirely upon the will of the emperor as war-lord, head-of-state, and embodiment of the nation-at-arms.²⁵ When the German army was defeated in 1918, the disintegration of the entire society occurred. The Weimar government represented only an external change, since the ties between the army and the socio-political order remained unchanged. The Prussian tradition and the popular military ideology still existed in the minds of the people.²⁶ Militarism had become a way of life for many individuals, and the collapse of Germany deprived them of their beliefs and community. The structure of Weimar democracy represented a strange society to these people who felt isolated because of their militaristic background.²⁷

²⁴Shokking, "Nazism's Way to Success," pp. 482-483.

²⁵Ibid., p. 484.

²⁶Ibid., p. 486.

²⁷Ibid.

Robert G. L. Waite, an American historian, supports Shokking's militaristic interpretation and believes that the defeat of Germany in 1918 left a generation of man "bewildered, embittered, and filled" with a terrible hatred against the world which had betrayed them.²⁸ Many of the ex-officers and soldiers became members of the Free Corps units which were founded in the early post-war days. In the Free Corps, the volunteers found the comradeship and security of the military life to which they had grown accustomed in wartime. The Free Corps gave the volunteers the opportunity of identification with a movement which promised everything they lacked as individuals: "the opportunity for dramatic action and power."²⁹ Although the Free Corps were fighting units, they retained their non-political character and did not interfere with the operation of the Weimar government. The importance of the Free Corps lies in their legacy of militarism. The National Socialists spread the militaristic doctrine to include not only ex-army officers, but all segments of German society to create a powerful nation-at-arms, a people living only for war. This armed society would encompass all territory where Germans lived and would necessitate the destruction of the republican regime.³⁰ The National Socialists usurped the militaristic spirit of the Germans and promised a new social-political order.

²⁸ Waite, The Free Corps Movement, pp. 41-43.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁰ Shokking, "Nazism's Way to Success," p. 487.

Gordon Craig, an American historian, and Hans Herzfeld, a German scholar, agree that militarism influenced German life, but they attribute German militarism to the defeat of the democratic forces in the constitutional struggle of the nineteenth century by conservative forces; specifically, to the role played by the Prussian army. Beginning with the defeat at Jena and Auerstedt in 1806, an attempt was made to break down the rigidity of the professional army and give it a civilian spirit; but the reaction to liberalism in 1815 maintained the special position of the army. The popular revolution of 1848 in Prussia was suppressed by the crown and the army. In the 1860's, army reforms were instituted, among these universal military service; but the traditional preponderance of professional officers was retained.³¹ The liberals sought to restrict the prerogatives of the crown and lay the groundwork for a parliamentary democracy during the constitutional struggle of the 1860's, but the army defied the right of the parliament to influence matters of military organization. After 1871, the parliament insisted upon the right to make the Minister of War responsible to the Reichstag, but the army leaders stripped that official of his power and delegated authority to various army agencies.³² The army thus developed into an independent political body, capable of interfering in matters of foreign policy.

³¹ Herzfeld, "Militarism in Modern German History," p. 112.

³² Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. xv.

During the years of unification, military and civilian leaders often differed over policy decisions, even though Bismarck usually maintained the authority of the civilian leaders. The conflict was not resolved, however, and in successive years, the military usurped the authority of the diplomats. By 1914, the last remnants of civilian authority in foreign affairs disappeared. According to Craig, the General Staff military organization was an autonomous agency during the period 1914-1918, responsible only to the crown, and directed all matters of policy affecting both domestic and foreign affairs.³³ The General Staff, by disregarding political considerations - namely the use of the Schlieffen plan which called for the invasion of neutral Belgium and helped to bring Britain into the war, as well as the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare which brought the United States into the war - was responsible for the tragedy of German defeat in 1918. Following the defeat, the monarchical system was abolished; and it was expected that the army would be subservient to civilian authority. The army was able to avoid parliamentary control; however, because the Weimar government was dependent upon the army to quell revolutionary disturbances. Since the army recognized no allegiance to the Weimar Republic, the regime in power was placed in the position of relying for protection upon an army which was perhaps the most dissident of all groups within the country.³⁴ The knowledge that the army played

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xviii.

a decisive role in determining the political future of the nation guided Hitler's policy before 1933. The National Socialist program promised an expanded military establishment, and Hitler's attacks upon the republican government found sympathetic response within the officers' corps.³⁵

Gerhard Ritter, an eminent German scholar, agrees with Herzfeld and Craig that militarism has always had an importance in German life. Prussia's geographic position in Europe necessitated a strong military armament; and Prussia alone of all the German states developed a strong military armament, a fact which was resented by other German states. Prussian militarism, however, was no more militant than that of the other European powers, declares Ritter. In fact, the French had the reputation of a militaristic power starting with the Wars of Louis XIV through the period of the French Revolution. Prussia's military efforts during the Wars of Liberation, 1813-1815, caused the German states to look to Prussia for political leadership in the movement for national unity.³⁶ Professor Ritter discounts the legend that Bismarck was a militarist and sees him as a type of "cabinet politician" to whom war was a final means of diplomatic activity. After 1871, Bismarck played the role of peacekeeper of European policy for two decades.³⁷ Ritter does admit that a form of

³⁵ Ibid., p. xviii.

³⁶ Ritter, "The Military and Politics in Germany," pp. 263-264.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 264-265.

militaristic thinking was developed in the new German Reich, but attributes this to the practice of universal military conscription in effect after 1867. The increase of military potential was also facilitated by the tremendous industrial expansion of Germany after unification.³⁸ Ritter disagrees with the statement by Herzfeld and Craig that the military influenced foreign policy. Even in 1914, the action of Moltke in urging a rapid mobilization was not prompted by a desire for war but simply represented a defensive measure. The "German military never undertook to determine the course of German foreign policy," says Ritter.³⁹

Hitler's rise to power cannot be attributed to political activity on the part of the military, even though there was sympathy toward the rearmament program promised by Hitler. National Socialism was supported by a people's political movement in an effort to bridge the gap between the forces of the Left - socialist advocates of welfare and reconciliation - and forces of the Right - followers of nationalist fight slogans. National Socialism was viewed by the German people as a movement which would provide a unity in the German community and an increase of German prestige throughout the world.⁴⁰ Thus in the search for the origins of the National Socialist movement, Professor

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 269; See *infra*, pp. 57-63, for Ritter's argument that National Socialism was a form of democratic radicalism which developed after the war.

Ritter discounts Bismarck's role as a militarist and the predominant role of the army in German life.

The German historian, Hans Kohn, agrees with other liberal scholars that German history after 1812 developed apart from Western civilization and that the Germany that collapsed in 1945 represented not the short-lived Hitler regime but the collapse of Bismarckian Germany.⁴¹ Kohn believes, however, that the critics of Bismarck's statesmanship and Prussian militarism have directed altogether too much attention to the political history of the German Reich. More consideration of the intellectual and moral climate of Germany is needed to explain the appearance of the National Socialist movement.⁴²

II. THE INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE OF GERMANY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Can the origin of National Socialism be traced to the intellectual movement of nineteenth-century Germany? Many historians note that German history has shown trends dissimilar to the rest of European civilization. A. J. P. Taylor views the development of German nationalism from the Reich of Charlemagne to the Third Reich of Hitler as alien to the culture of Western civilization.⁴³ The German "break with the West" is represented not only by the militaristic Prussian

⁴¹Hans Kohn, "Rethinking Recent German History," German History: Some New German Views, ed. by Hans Kohn (Boston, Mass.: The Beacon Press, 1954), p. 27.

⁴²Ibid., passim. pp. 24-43.

⁴³A. J. P. Taylor, The Course of German History (New York: Coward-McCann, 1946), pp. 8-9.

spirit but also by a separation of German from European thought. In the eighteenth century the conflict of intellectual and political ideas created a state of flux in European society. The trend of Western humanism had its political and social outcome in the French Revolution. On the other hand, German thought as represented by the Romantic movement was opposed to the rationalism of the eighteenth century. Conditioned by the nationalistic spirit of the age, German romanticists looked back to the Middle Ages during which the traditional customs representative of the true folk-spirit (Volkgeist) of the German people were most evident. The nationalist movement was affected by elements of German romanticism and, consequently, developed in a manner dissimilar to the nationalist movements in other European countries. Edmond Vermeil, Andrew O. Lovejoy, and Hans Kohn are concerned with the influence of the German Romantic movement upon the rise of German nationalism.⁴⁴

The Romantic movement in Germany. Romanticism developed as a result of the cultural crisis produced by the French Revolution. Germany had acquired the habits of particularism over the centuries,

⁴⁴Edmond Vermeil, "The Origin, Nature and Development of German Nationalist Ideology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 3-111; Andrew O. Lovejoy, "The Meaning of Romanticism for the History of Ideas," The Journal of the History of Ideas, II, No. 3 (June, 1941), 257-278; Hans Kohn, "Romanticism and the Rise of German Nationalism" Review of Politics, XII (October, 1950), 443-472.

and romanticism offered the best ideological means of drawing together the diverse elements.⁴⁵ The rational and humanitarian ideas of the French Revolution were believed to have corrupted Western civilization. German romanticism was an interpretation of life, nature, and history which opposed the rational spirit of the eighteenth century and "mobilized the fascination of the past to fight against the principles of 1789."⁴⁶ Thus the intellectual climate of nineteenth century Germany developed in a dissimilar manner to the thought of other European countries.

Although historians do not agree upon all of the aspects of the German Romantic movement, three general characteristics have been noted by Professor Lovejoy: (1) organicism, (2) voluntarism, and (3) diversitarianism. The concept of organicism states that the individual is unique and not the representative of the universal order. The individual, however, is not an isolated creature. A community of like-minded individuals represents the organic unity of the whole. The idea of an organic community was modified in Germany to mean the idea of a political state.⁴⁷ Another characteristic of romanticism

⁴⁵Eugene N. Anderson, "German Romanticism as an Ideology of Cultural Crisis, Journal of the History of Ideas, VI, No. 3 (June, 1945), 301-317; Professor Anderson believes that romanticism died out after 1815 and had little influence on the development of German nationalism. He does state, however, that romantic theory reappeared whenever a crisis occurred in Germany, as happened in 1932.

⁴⁶Kohn, "Romanticism and the Rise of German Nationalism," p. 443.

⁴⁷Lovejoy, "The Meaning of Romanticism," p. 273.

is the idea of voluntarism or dynamism which describes the process of streben or continuous struggle. Although the idea originally meant struggle for an individual, it was converted into a political idea. The individual, as an organism of the state, strives for the state, which takes upon itself expansionist tendencies.⁴⁸ The third characteristic of romanticism is the idea of diversitarianism which asserts the value of diversity of human opinion, action, and culture. Diversitarianism represented a revolutionary concept since it opposed the idea of uniformitarianism - the idea that what is significant exists in all men and cultures or that human nature everywhere is rational and uniform. By exalting diversity on a national or racial basis, the concept became a conviction of superiority of what is distinctive in one's own people - its Volksgeist - and of its right to dominate other lesser peoples.⁴⁹ Romanticism developed the idea of a state in which members are used for its own vaster ends, a state which is dedicated to a perpetual power-struggle and self-enlargement, and a state which is animated by its duty of emphasizing its unique culture and characteristics while disparaging any "foreign" elements.⁵⁰ Although it never developed a practical program for a modern political state, German romanticism became concerned with the political life of the nation. The Romantic movement, by defining

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 275.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 277.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 278.

the relationship between the state and its members, not only prepared the intellectual climate for the acceptance of National Socialism, but developed a political theory which was incorporated into Nazi ideology.⁵¹

Hans Kohn has stressed many of the same concepts expressed by Professor Lovejoy in defining the characteristics of the Romantic movement. Kohn states that the German romantic emphasized the uniqueness of the individual and society. The concept of individuality was transferred from the individual to the state. The state no longer represented a legal society of individuals united on general principles for mutual gain, but represented an original phenomenon in history, leading its own life. When the national individuality grew and attempted to expand and achieve power, it appeared as though it had been given a divine mission to fulfill.⁵²

⁵¹Cf. Professor Lovejoy's argument that German romanticism provided the intellectual basis for National Socialism with the interpretation given by Leo Spitzer, "Geistesgeschichte versus the History of Ideas as Applied to Hitlerism," Journal of the History of Ideas, V, No. 2 (April, 1944), 191-203, in which Professor Spitzer recognizes the validity of the concepts of organicism, voluntarism, and diversitarianism in German romanticism, but does not see in these ideas any factor which produced National Socialism. Spitzer emphasizes the differences between German romanticism and National Socialism by stating that the universities based their teaching upon the classics of the eighteenth century, and the German intellectuals viewed the Nazi seizure of power as something alien to German civilization. National Socialism is interpreted by Spitzer as "pagan-collectivism," a German variant of a worldwide phenomena, in which there is a closer connection between Hitler's philosophy and the ideas of Marx, Lenin, and even Hegel than with the German romanticists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁵²Kohn, "Romanticism and the Rise of German Nationalism," p. 446; The ideas of the German romanticists Novalis, Johannes Miller, August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich von der Hagen, and August Zeune are summarized in Kohn's essay.

German romanticism was concerned with religious as well as philosophical ideas, states Edmond Vermeil, a French critic of the nineteenth-century intellectual development in Germany. Fichte, Hegel, Novalis, Schlegel, and G rres applied the religious theme of decline and regeneration to the political scene. Regeneration in German life would occur through the rediscovery of pronounced national characteristics which were best exemplified in the spiritual unity of the Middle Ages. Germany's divine mission would be the regeneration of the decadent nations of Europe.⁵³ By stressing the uniqueness of the individual and society and the doctrine of decadence and regeneration, German romanticists developed a tradition of anti-liberal and anti-Western thought which became the basis for the nationalist movement in Germany.

The influence of romanticism upon the nationalist movement.

How did the ideas of the German romanticists influence the nationalist movement in Germany? Since romanticism demanded that individuals unite within a strong community, the Germans looked toward the strongest of their states - militaristic Prussia. The German historians of the mid-nineteenth century were impressed with the exploits of Prussia and presented the nationalist movement to the people as a phenomenon

⁵³Vermeil, "German Nationalist Ideology," p. 33; An excellent summary of the religious and philosophical ideas of Fichte, Novalis, Hegel, Schlegel, and G rres is given by Professor Vermeil in this essay, pp. 28-37.

of peculiarly German origin, not as an evolutionary movement toward the Western style of democracy.⁵⁴ The liberal, democratic evolution of German nationalism was suppressed in favor of Bismarck's plan for German unification around the strongest of the German states. Bismarck followed a "little Germany" (kleindeutsch) policy in which Prussia would take control of Germany and turn her into the dominant power in Europe. Any attempt at German unification which would include additional nationalities would be viewed as a threat by other European powers. In unifying Germany, Bismarck attempted only the possible, remarks Professor Vermeil.⁵⁵ Opposition to Bismarck's kleindeutsch policy took the form of a religious Pan-Germanism or Weltanschauung which insisted upon Germany's "divine mission" for continental conquest and colonial empire, as expressed in the writings of Paul de Lagarde and Constantine Frantz.⁵⁶

After 1890, under the influence of Wilhelm II, imperialistic nationalism emerged in every conceivable form. It made full use of geography, German history, the natural sciences, and concluded with the racial theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Pseudo-scientific

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 49-54; Vermeil has included in his essay a survey of the ideas of the historians Ranke, Curtius, Mommsen, and Treitschke to show the influence of romanticism on the nationalist movement.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 54-59; Cf. Vermeil's summarization of the ideas of Frantz and Lagarde with the essay written by Jean-Jacques Anstett, "Paul de Lagarde," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 148-202.

arguments attempted to define the so-called "living-space" needed by the Reich and the "racial cohesion" that must be acquired by Germany.⁵⁷ Pan-Germanic nationalism evolved a plan for continental conquest and colonial expansion which culminated in the First World War. Throughout these theories and dreams is the mainstream of German romantic thought which would be revived again after the catastrophe of 1918.⁵⁸

Pan-German nationalism and neo-nationalism. Between the nationalist movement of the Wilhelmian era and the rise of the National Socialist movement occurs a transitional period of neo-nationalism, which drew its supporters from among the defeated and disillusioned bourgeois elite. Despite Germany's defeat in 1918, none of the essential claims of the imperialistic nationalists were rejected by the neo-nationalists of the Weimar period, notes Professor Vexnell.⁵⁹ Writers such as Walter Rathenau, Thomas Mann, and Count Keyserling were the heirs to the classical and romantic traditions of the nineteenth century; and they demanded that Germany experience a spiritual purge to rid itself of false intellectualism and excessive mechanization. Rathenau visualized a synthesis between culture and industrialization, or the creation of a national community in which the economic and spiritual world would be balanced. The wealth of society would be

⁵⁷ The imperialist ideas of Ratzel, Arthur Dix, Klaus Wagner, General von Dornhardi, Albert Wirth, and the racial theories of Wüster, Woltmann, Driesmann, and Chamberlain are summarized by Vexnell, "German Nationalist Ideology," pp. 60-70.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 72-83.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

controlled, in the best interests of all, by a highly cultured and technically trained intellectual elite. A regenerated Germany could affect a cure among the decadent nations of Europe.⁶⁰ Despite the disastrous defeat of 1918, the doctrines of regeneration and predestination have survived.

The historian-philosopher, Oswald Spengler, concentrated on elaborate syntheses which began with humanity and ended with a privileged nation. The cultured and progressive peoples are represented as those in which individuals are bound by a common destiny and a clearly defined culture. The highest expression of Western culture is believed by Spengler to be in the center of the European continent--Germany. Through the revival of the Prussian tradition, a true German revolution could be accomplished.⁶¹ Moeller van den Bruck believed that Germany as the "middle country" represented the only solid foundation for a balanced Europe. The fusion of the Prussian tradition with the German spirit would accomplish the regeneration not only of Germany but of Europe. Well-known themes in Moeller van den Bruck's writings include the concept of the overpopulated nation, the idea that the war to be declared would be a Holy War, and the belief that Germany's mission is to rule Europe in the framework of a planned economy.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91; Cf. Vermell's interpretation of Moeller van den Bruck with the essay written by Roy Pascal, "Revolutionary Conservatism: Moeller van den Bruck," *The Third Reich*, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 316-349.

The neo-nationalist desired an authoritarian state, a planned economy, a clear break with the economic liberalism of the West, and an expansionist drive in Central Europe. The reliance of neo-nationalistic ideas upon German romanticism and Pan-German nationalism of the earlier period is obvious. National Socialist ideology fell heir to the philosophical and religious ideas of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Intellectual influences upon National Socialist ideology.

Pan-Germanism did not become a mass movement until the Weimar era when Hitler formed the National Socialist party. National Socialism revived the Pan-Germanic movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and added elements of anti-Semitism and racialism. The idea of a German national religion had been expressed in the writings of Fichte and Hegel, of Constantine Frantz and Paul de Lagarde. Aryanism would replace traditional Christianity with its stress upon humanism and liberalism and permit the development of German nationalism to be imposed on all of Germany, Europe, and the world. Alfred Rosenberg, writing in Myth of the Twentieth Century, developed the concept of a German national religion based upon Nordic racial theory and Pan-Germanic nationalism.⁶³ Pre-war Pan-Germanism and the neo-nationalism of the Weimar period had been the work of the intellectual elite and had little influence upon the masses.

⁶³Vermeil, "German Nationalist Ideology," pp. 94-99.

National Socialist ideology which stressed the absolute power of the authoritarian state, the glorification of war, belief in the Aryans as the master race, hatred of the Jewish and Slavic peoples, and contempt for democratic institutions represented a simplified and undeveloped interpretation of the intellectual thought of the nineteenth century. "National Socialist ideology was worked out by mediocre men to meet the needs of mediocre men," comments Vermeil.⁶⁴ Nazi ideology relied not only upon the heritage of the nineteenth century but upon the ability of the National Socialist "philosophers" to interpret the desires of the masses.

Nazism revived the Pan-Germanic tradition, added elements of racialism and anti-Semitism, stressed continental rather than colonial expansion, and reinforced these ideas with a powerful propaganda machine. The success of the National Socialist movement can be attributed to the anti-humanist and anti-liberal trends which emphasized the unique aspects of German culture and a nationalist movement which bore the stamp of the Prussian militarist tradition and Bismarckian power politics. The National Socialist movement was the direct heir to these nineteenth-century developments and represented a logical outgrowth of German history.

Attempts to excuse the acceptance of National Socialism by Germans are viewed with alarm by most liberal historians. A major

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 93; See *infra*, pp. 149-155, for an account of the role of National Socialist ideology in the rise to power of Hitler.

re-analysis of all aspects of German history is called for in an attempt to reconcile German cultural and political institutions with those of Western culture. Only through a re-interpretation of the historical foundations which formed the basis of National Socialist ideology can Germany once again take its place among the nations of Western civilization.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Kohn, "Rethinking Recent German History," *passim*, pp. 24-43.

CHAPTER IV

NATIONAL SOCIALISM: THE RESULT OF DEMOCRATIC RADICALISM

Another group of scholars believes that National Socialism was a form of democratic radicalism which led to the rise of the totalitarian state.¹ These conservative historians attempt to defend German political thought against the charge of liberal historians that it failed to further civic responsibility, that it inculcated attitudes in the nineteenth century that led to terrorism and dictatorship in the twentieth century, and that it turned nationalism into a doctrine of imperialistic expansion.² They do not view the rise of National Socialism as appearing out of the German past, nor do they ascribe the acceptance of Hitler to any peculiarity in the German mentality. They object to the identification of National Socialism with conservative institutions, classes, or ideas. Nationalist ambitions, militarism, racial pride, and anti-democratic tendencies could

¹Gerhard Ritter, "The Historical Foundations of the Rise of National Socialism," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 381-416; Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1951); Sigmund Neumann, Permanent Revolution (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965); Arthur Schweitzer, "The Nazification of the Lower Middle Class and Peasants," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 576-594; Robert G. L. Waite, Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918-1923 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952); Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany. Its History and Civilization (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966).

²Whiteside, "Nature and Origins," p. 70.

be found among any European people, states Gerhard Ritter, a leading proponent of the conservative school.³ National Socialism arose out of the decline of the weak parliamentary system, the disintegration of the existing class structure, and the support of the masses of a dictatorship based upon a Rousseauian concept of Democracy.

I. MASS DEMOCRACY AND THE TOTALITARIAN STATE

Could the ideas of humanitarianism and liberalism developed in the French Enlightenment period have had any influence upon the evolution and acceptance of National Socialist ideology? Most Western liberal historians view the German intellectual movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an aberration of the ideas expressed by the philosophes, and National Socialism is believed to represent a direct contradiction to the values of Western civilization. The concept that the masses possess political sovereignty, outlined by the philosophes, was never fully realized under the political and social conditions which prevailed in the nineteenth century. The old system of privilege and class restricted political power to the middle and upper classes, and political participation by the lower classes was limited by the difficulties incurred in the transition to an industrialized economy. With improved living standards caused by the

³Ritter, "The Historical Foundations," p. 386.

techniques of mass production, political involvement of the masses increased in the twentieth century. Political sovereignty of the masses, or mass democracy, now represented a radical new development in political theory. Fundamental to the concept of political sovereignty of the masses is the idea of direct control of the "will of the people." In the modern era, direct control can be achieved through the use of mass communications media. During the 1920's in Germany, newspapers, pamphlets, and radio were used to spread political ideas to the masses. Candidates for political office utilized the roads and airways of a rapid transport system to disseminate political ideas. The political candidate who was able through mass media to gain the allegiance of the masses gained direct control of the will of the people. The transition from mass democracy to the totalitarian system of National Socialism was accomplished by the one individual who claimed to represent the will of the people - Adolf Hitler.

Rousseauian democracy and National Socialism. Democratic radicalism is generally traced to the writings of the French Enlightenment philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who conceived of a society which could achieve the ultimate in human freedom. This freedom would consist of the voluntary submission of all individuals into a sovereign political community which would be governed by the general will of the majority of individuals. No individual or group could

oppose the majority will since it represented the general good of the state.⁴ Government would exist only to carry out the expressed will of the people; thus, the sovereign would have no interest contrary to that of the people.⁵ In this manner, Rousseau justified revolution against constituted government when it failed to perform its functions and outlined the modern concept of complete democratic sovereignty with the will of the majority becoming the will of all people. National Socialist ideologists seized upon the ideas defined by Rousseau to criticize the liberal form of democracy practiced by the Weimar government with its multiplicity of political parties, lack of clear-cut decisions, and compromising attitudes toward nationalistic goals.

Representative of the Nazi theorists is the noted German jurist, Carl Schmitt, who denounced the Weimar government as a weak and unsatisfactory political system. Schmitt saw that the competing political parties, the attitude of neutrality between genuine nationals and alien racial elements, and the lack of national goals of the Weimar government endangered the life of the German state.⁶ Schmitt lauded the creation of the one-party state under National Socialism, which

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Du Contrat Social, ed. by C. E. Vaughan (University of Manchester Press, 1955), Book I, chapter 6, pp. 12-15.

⁵ Ibid., Book I, chapter 7, pp. 15-17.

⁶ Jürgen Fijalkowski, Die Wendung zum Führerstaat. Ideologische Komponenten in der politischen Philosophie Carl Schmitts (Köln und Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1958), pp. 168-169.

united the goals of the people and the state. Under National Socialism, the Leader could understand and interpret the wishes of the people. Tyranny would be prevented, since the Leader and the people came from the same mold and shared the same wishes for the national state.⁷ Thus we note the influence of Rousseau's concept of the general will of the people as interpreted by the sovereign or leader as an integral part of National Socialist ideology. National Socialism would provide Germany with a strong and undivided state instead of the weak, divisive system provided by the Weimar constitution. That the people would be unanimously desirous of the Nazi program is obviously assumed by this Nazi philosopher who expresses contempt for minority opinion.

Adolf Hitler was frequently contemptuous of the parliamentary system of the Weimar government. He believed that the parliamentary structure was weak because of the many competing political parties and the lack of a single leader holding office for a sufficient period of time to carry out politics to benefit the state. After he had become Chancellor, Hitler stated:

. . . At the moment at which we banished forever from our midst the democratic poison of perpetual disunion and intrigue, there came to our leadership this stability, this internal security. . . . Thus there arose this wonderful indestructible community between the highest leader, his collaborators, and the body of their followers.⁸

⁷Ibid., pp. 166-167.

⁸Adolf Hitler, speaking at Weimar on July 3, 1936, at the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Parteitag held in that city, The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April, 1922-August, 1939, Vol. I, ed. by Norman H. Baynes (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 204.

The creation of the totalitarian state would end divided responsibility and class struggle, since the leader of the state would represent the embodiment of the will of the German people. Thus the National Socialists distinguished between the Western liberal democracy as represented by the Weimar system and the "higher form" of democracy as represented by a National Socialist dictatorship.

The decline of parliamentary democracy. Historians are by no means in agreement with the Nazi ideologists in tracing the roots of National Socialism to the ideas of Rousseau or the French Revolution. Western liberal historians discount National Socialism as a form of democratic radicalism as they search for the origins of the movement in nineteenth-century German political and intellectual history. Many conservative historians who do not share the view that Hitler represents an outgrowth of German history agree that the Nazi explanation of the movement is technically correct. Gerhard Ritter further elaborates the relationship between National Socialist ideology and Rousseauian democracy and explains the development of democratic radicalism. The best form of democracy occurs when the general will of the people is directly expressed in, for example, a town meeting of a small political unit. In a large country where direct democracy is not possible, the techniques of plebiscite and referendum supplementing normal parliamentary machinery can express the will of the people. What if the legislative machinery does not operate effectively? asks Professor

Ritter; then the will of the people is transferred to one man who claims to speak for the people and who gains control through bureaucratic pressure and military success. A period of social chaos and political distress will facilitate the transference of power to one man. As a result, parliamentary democracy becomes democratic radicalism.⁹

The success of National Socialism can be traced to the decline in liberal political ideals and the chaos of the parliamentary system, which created the desire for a strong regime. What factors were responsible for the decline of the liberal parliamentary regime? Ritter notes that four tendencies were in operation: (1) changes in the social and economic structure were responsible for the transition from the traditional bourgeois society to an industrialized mass society, and the political party structure necessarily changed from one of idealistic men guiding the fortunes of a small group to one of a practical-minded party bureaucracy leading a mass party organization; (2) nineteenth-century political purposes that emphasized national unity and liberty guaranteed by a constitution changed to materialistic economic considerations in the twentieth-century industrialized world; (3) emphasis upon biological and materialist philosophic beliefs rather than the traditional religious views occurred among the populace of industrialized

⁹Ritter, "The Historical Foundations," pp. 395-396.

urban areas; and (4) new technical facilities for political propaganda were produced after 1918; thus, through the devices of mass media, a greater majority of the people could become familiar with the ideas of a political figure, and the concept of sovereignty of the people could be directly transferred to one man.¹⁰ Sigmund Neumann, a noted German-American political scientist, supports Ritter's belief in the decline of parliamentary democracy by insisting that rapid changes caused by industrialization could not be met by the existing democratic institutions. A dictatorial government, unhampered by democratic control, appeared to the masses who were ready to surrender personal freedom for economic security to be more efficient in handling crises.¹¹

What accounts for the success of the National Socialist movement in the years 1930-1933? Ritter believes that it was the masses that brought Hitler to power, but emphasizes that it was the disintegration of republican parliamentary life in the Weimar Republic that was directly responsible for Hitler's success. Political liberalism assumes that conflicting interests will be resolved by compromise, and compromise was difficult in the Weimar government, states Ritter. The parties of the Right, nationalist in character and desirous of expansion through conquest, vied for power with the parties of the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 390-394.

¹¹ Neumann, *Permanent Revolution*, p. 35.

Left, the Social-Democrats, who desired to maintain peaceful coexistence. The difficulties in parliamentary government were increased by Germany's lack of success in foreign relations, the economic crisis of 1929, and the constant threat of the Communist party. The National Socialist program promised to resolve the disagreements of the political parties and to create a new order with a closely unified country; therefore, the enthusiasm of the masses for Hitler's program was responsible for the success of 1933.¹²

Development of mass democracy. When a society experiences the conditions as outlined by Professor Ritter, the class structure disintegrates into an unstructured mob which will heed the call of any strong leader. Hannah Arendt discusses the breakdown of the class structure and the resultant decline of the parliamentary political system in a slightly different perspective than does Ritter. She believes that the competitiveness and isolation caused by contemporary technological life creates a situation in which the social classes break up into an "atomized and individualized mass" rather than an unstructured mob.¹³ The disintegration of the class structure meant the breakdown of the party system, since political parties could no longer represent class interests. Professor Arendt believes

¹²Ritter, "The Historical Foundations," pp. 409-411.

¹³Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarian Revolution, pp. 310-312.

that democracy functions only when all the citizens are represented by groups or form a social or political hierarchy. She refutes the premise that all people are actually represented in a democracy and notes that the great mass of people are too indifferent or inarticulate to support a particular political party. The political parties represent special interest groups and rely upon the silent consent of the masses to form a political program.¹⁴

What are the factors that account for the evolution of mass democracy? Arendt states that the Industrial Revolution created a competitive and acquisitive society which demanded political power. The competitive life of the bourgeoisie left little time for political duties; thus, the middle class welcomed a "strong man" who took responsibility for public affairs.¹⁵ The triumph of National Socialism was in its ability to gain the support of the masses.

Koppel S. Pinson, an American scholar who agrees with Professor Arendt, notes that the success of the National Socialist movement was caused by the support of "millions of people who represented a true cross-section of the German population."¹⁶ In assessing the significance of the anti-democratic sentiments represented by the German people, it is important to note that the Nazi party gained 37.4 per cent of the votes in the election of July, 1932, and the Communist party gained

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 305-306.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁶Pinson, Modern Germany, pp. 491-492.

a total of 14.6 per cent of the votes. The number of votes cast against the liberal and democratic Weimar government numbered 52 per cent, thus giving credence to the arguments set forth by Ritter and Arendt that the great majority of German people were against the liberal Weimar government. It must also be remembered, however, that the summer of 1932 represented the worst period of the depression in Germany.

Who were the people that gave the National Socialist party 37.4 per cent of the votes in July, 1932? Although Arendt, Ritter, and Pinson describe the National Socialist supporters as either a structureless mass or an individualized group, other historians are more specific in describing the supporters of the Nazi movement. Arthur Schweitzer, a German historian, believes that Nazism was supported specifically by the small merchants, clerical workers, artisans, and peasants.¹⁷ The economic depression threatened the occupations and professions of this lower-middle class, giving rise to anti-monopolistic sentiments and animosity to democratic institutions. "Middle-class Socialism," a feature of Nazi ideology, was developed from the social and economic demands of the lower-middle and peasant classes. Individuals within these groups desired a return to an idealistic pre-capitalist era which would honor the

¹⁷Schweitzer, "The Nazification of the Lower Middle Class and Peasants," p. 576.

peasants and small businessmen as the most productive elements in society.¹⁸ The anti-monopolistic and anti-democratic feelings of the lower-middle class were seized upon by National Socialist ideologists for the political support needed to achieve power.

Although Arendt would agree with Schweitzer as to the role played by the bourgeois and working class, she believes that many adherents of National Socialism came from the intellectual elite of German society. She attributes the attraction of the elite to National Socialism to their disenchantment with the middle-class ideals of the pre-war society. This elite welcomed the war which broke out in 1914, since they desired to see the ruin of the culture which had become permeated with bourgeois ideological outlook and moral standards. The elite achieved anonymity by participation in war, the "great equalizer." When this elite returned from the war, genuine national feeling had been eliminated among the participants, and it was more important to be a member of the "generation of the trenches" than to be a Frenchman or a German. This front-line generation returned from the war filled with contempt for the bourgeois culture. The activism and terrorism of National Socialism attracted this intellectual elite who delighted in violence as a means of destroying the middle-class society.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 377.

¹⁹ Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarian Revolution, pp. 322-323.

Concern for the "generation of the trenches" has also been expressed by Robert G. L. Waite in his study of the Free Corps movement of the post-World-War-One period. The Free Corps movement attracted veterans who viewed the Weimar Republic as a feeble government of pacifists. These soldiers believed that the parliamentary government had betrayed the army. Weimar society could never understand the experience of the "front-line soldier"; but in the Free Corps, the veteran found comradeship and security in the military life that he had learned to love.²⁰ Not only was the war generation influenced by the militaristic spirit of the war, says Waite, but the post-war generation of youths of all classes brought up on the moral right of Germany's cause were stunned by defeat. Idealists, they urged dramatic action to save the fatherland. They felt cheated of their right to fight for their country and the Free Corps movement gave them another chance.²¹ The importance of the Free Corps movement, declares Waite, "lies in the brutality of spirit and in the exaltation of power which the men of the Free Corps movement bequeathed to the Third Reich."²² Sigismund Neumann believes that this post-war generation, ignorant of the pre-war era and the experience of the war, was a generation living in a world "lacking absolute bounds and preconceptions, where everything was possible and nothing impossible."²³

²⁰ Waite, The Free Corps Movement, pp. 41-42.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 42-43.

²² Ibid., p. 281.

²³ Neumann, Permanent Revolution, pp. 242-243.

Desirous of a better society, yet lacking experience and leadership, they represented "material for any political revolution"; and it was the Nazi movement which united the war generation with the post-war youth into a political and social revolutionary movement.²⁴

Historians of the conservative school attribute the rise of National Socialism to a weak, liberal parliamentary system which failed to solve the economic problems of Germany; as a result, the masses of people turned to a form of democratic radicalism, based upon a totalitarian interpretation of Rousseau's philosophy. National Socialist ideology appealed to the social and economic demands of the lower-middle class and peasants. The militaristic dynamism of the Nazi movement was attractive to the intellectual elite who desired the downfall of the mediocre bourgeois society, to the war generation who had become acclimated to the militaristic life, and to the post-war revolutionary youth of all classes. These scholars insist that there were no historical foundations for the National Socialist movement. Intellectual tendencies such as racism, romanticism, a tradition of militarism, and undemocratic thought are said to play minor roles in the formation of the fascist movement and could be found in any European country. Even the weakness of the liberal parliamentary system, which is noted as an underlying factor in the period of the Weimar government, was caused by modern factors such as the develop-

²⁴ Ibid., p. 243.

ment of new techniques of communication, the financial crisis, and the phenomenon of the mass man. In fact, says Professor Ritter, nineteenth-century German life was characterized by a great liberal movement under the system of constitutional monarchy which lasted until 1918; at no time did Germany experience the type of revolution which overthrew governments in France.²⁵

National Socialism can in no sense be considered an outgrowth of Germany's history; nor can innate factors in the German mentality explain the acceptance of Adolf Hitler, state these conservative historians. In consideration of this interpretation, it is interesting to note that new techniques in technology and communication, economic disruption in the 1920's and 1930's, decline of moral and spiritual values were experienced by countries which did not foster a fascist movement. Nor does the conservative interpretation account for the particular brutality which characterized the National Socialist movement. The conditions that influenced contemporary life in the post-World-War-One era, however, did play a significant role in the development of a mass society which adopted a radical form of democracy in the totalitarian National Socialist movement.

II. NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND THE CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION

Interest in the development of mass democracy has been shown by conservative historians who believe that National Socialism was able to

²⁵Ritter, "The Historical Foundations," pp. 388-389.

assess the needs and desires of the lower-middle and peasant classes and the feelings of the war generation and mobilize these groups in support of the dynamic Nazi movement. The traditional ruling classes - the old aristocracy, the monarchists, the militarists, the Junkers - appear to have done little to halt the growing strength of the Nazi movement among the masses of people. What position did these historic ruling classes take following the defeat of 1918? Did they support the parliamentary government; were they too ineffectual to halt the rise of National Socialism; or did these conservative leaders actually assist the National Socialist party in its drive for power? Klemens von Klemperer and Hermann Rauschning are concerned with the lack of conservative leadership during the Weimar period.²⁶

The failure of conservative leadership. The failure of Germany to achieve social and political reforms was due not to a lack of liberalness, states Klemens von Klemperer, but resulted from the lack of conservative leadership during the period following World War One. Prior to 1914, German conservatism was reactionary and attempted to preserve the status quo of aristocratic privilege. The war experience and the defeat of 1918 destroyed the monarchy and the aristocracy. All former institutions of authority were weakened and

²⁶ Klemens von Klemperer, Germany's New Conservatism, Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century (Princeton University Press, 1957); Hermann Rauschning, Revolution of Nihilism, trans. by E. W. Dickes (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1939).

an intellectual movement called the "conservative revolution" sought to restore tradition and order to the society. Restoration of the monarchy was no longer an issue to the conservatives, declares Klemperer, as they decided whether to support the Weimar Republic or some form of dictatorship.²⁷

This conservative movement was at first led by the "elders," men such as Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Walter Rathenau, Frederick Naumann, and Thomas Mann. They had a direct influence on the Weimar constitution and advocated the federal structure and a strong presidency based upon popular election. The strong presidency would prevent a purely parliamentary government and would insure the selection of a new ruling elite. Unfortunately, says Klemperer, the ideas of the elders were academic and idealistic and were never comprehensible to the masses. Furthermore, Naumann, Troeltsch, and Weber died, and Rathenau was killed, thus ending their contribution to the creation of a new conservative program.²⁸

The younger conservatives looked upon the elders as nineteenth-century men and began to explore new possibilities for conservative policy. Characteristics of this neo-conservative movement were an anti-bourgeois attitude, distrust of the Weimar Republic, and a call for a new type of socialist order. The neo-conservatives were

²⁷Klemperer, Germany's New Conservatism, pp. 7-13.

²⁸ibid., p. 123.

nationalistic, anti-Western, and interested in Russian Marxism. Humanitarianism and Christianity were hollow concepts to the neo-conservative intelligentsia. Neo-conservative advocates of a new order were men like Moeller van den Bruck, Oswald Spengler, and Ernst Jünger who attempted to overcome the separation between intellectual thought and politics under the Weimar system.²⁹ The extremism of various schemes advanced by the neo-conservatives prevented the practical implementation of any constructive conservative program. The National Socialists, lacking an ideology or binding program, seized upon many of the ideas of the neo-conservatives and succeeded in convincing the masses of the righteousness of their cause. Sectarian strife, a confusing and extremist ideology, and the failure to win over the masses marked the failure of the neo-conservative movement. The neo-conservatives believed that National Socialism was but one expression of their movement; they never directly supported National Socialism; nor did they fight against it. With the rise of the National Socialists to power in the years 1930-1933, the neo-conservatives believed they could control the Nazi movement, an error which soon became apparent after Hitler had been appointed Chancellor. The neo-conservatives

²⁹Klemperer summarizes the neo-conservative ideology of Spengler, Jünger, and Moeller van den Bruck in his book, *ibid.*, pp. 153-188; Cf. the interpretation of neo-conservative ideas related by Klemperer with the account by Vermeil, "German Nationalist Ideology," pp. 84-92; See *supra*, pp. 44-46.

never formed an alliance with the National Socialists, but their criticism of the Weimar system prepared the way for the National Socialist takeover.³⁰

Reaction, Nihilism, and National Socialism. A former member of the Nazi party, writing in 1939, blames the reactionary policies of the traditional ruling classes for the National Socialist power-seizure. Hermann Rauschning believes that the proper function of conservative leadership should be the "preservance of historic continuity in state and society, and the replacement of this tradition by ideas connected with power and the protection of interests."³¹ Genuine conservatism ceased to exist in German during the unification period. The older conservatives became narrowly nationalistic in their support of Bismarck's methods of power politics. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ruling classes - the aristocrats, monarchists, nationalists, and intellectuals - suffered from complete skepticism as to the relevance of spiritual and moral forces to practical politics. The old faith in traditions declined as the new faith in materialism and power grew. In the absense of a genuine conservatism, the ruling classes turned toward nihilism, states Rauschning.³² Under the Weimar government, the younger

³⁰Klemperer, Germany's New Conservatism, pp. 191-201.

³¹Rauschning, Revolution of Nihilism, p. 103.

³²Ibid., pp. 100-101.

conservative intellectuals who were the products of war and defeat, never attained effective existence and easily fell sway to the chauvinism of National Socialism. The old ruling classes, instead of maintaining and restoring the traditional order, became reactionary and concerned only with protecting their own interests. In the mistaken belief that they could control the burgeoning National Socialist movement these nationalists and monarchists entered into an alliance with the National Socialist party. Thus the "conservative revolution" became the "revolution of nihilism."³³

Klemens von Klemperer and Hermann Rauschning believe that parliamentary democracy established by the Weimar constitution could not possibly succeed because of the conservative groups which were opposed to the republican form of government. These conservative elements - monarchists, neo-conservative intelligentsia, Junkers, army, government bureaucracy, nationalists, aristocracy - aligned themselves against democratic government and were willing to allow the National Socialists to achieve power.

³³Ibid., pp. 109-110; pp. 112-113.

CHAPTER V

NATIONAL SOCIALISM: A REACTION TO THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

Weaknesses inherent in the structure of Weimar democracy were responsible for the success of the National Socialist party in 1933. This is the viewpoint taken by liberal historians of this period who are concerned with the position of the Weimar era in the course of German history. Should the Weimar period be considered as an outgrowth of the Bismarckian era, a prologue to the Third Reich, or a significant experiment in democracy?¹ By and large, present-day historians of this period have stressed the continuity of the imperial period, the Weimar era, and the modern Federal Republic, and regard the reign of the National Socialists in the period 1933-1945 as an aberration in German history.² The period 1918-1933 is treated in a less deterministic manner by modern historians, and there is greater appreciation for the existence of genuine choices and alternatives of action by individuals and organizations within the Weimar era. The majority of historians

¹Eric C. Kollman, "Reinterpreting Modern German History: The Weimar Republic," The Journal of Central European Affairs, XXI (January, 1962), 434-451. This bibliographical essay contains an excellent analysis of historical interpretations relating to the Weimar period and a complete bibliography of German and English literature for the period 1918-1933.

²Ibid., pp. 434-439.

disagree with interpretations stating that there is a "straight line from Noske to Hitler," or from Social Democracy to National Socialism,³ and insist that the institutions and personnel of the Weimar period did not automatically prepare the way for National Socialism. Little concern is shown by modern historians for issues which were highly controversial in the period prior to 1933: the stab-in-the-back legend, the war-guilt question, and monarchical restoration. These topics have been relegated to a position of minor importance as the result of greater historical distance and the experience of Germany under the Third Reich.⁴

Certain topics have been stressed to explain the weakness of the liberal parliamentary system within the Weimar period: the failure of the political revolution of 1918 to be followed by a social revolution, the failure of the Weimar government in foreign relations, the crisis of parliamentary democracy in 1930, and the threat of communism during the post-war period. Perhaps an analysis of these interpretations will explain the failure of the Weimar government to prevent National Socialism from gaining support in German life.

I. POLITICAL REVOLUTION OF 1918 NOT ACCOMPANIED BY A SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Many historians of the Weimar period are convinced that the weakness of the Weimar Republic can be traced to the failure of the

³William Ebenstein, *The German Record, A Political Portrait* (New York and Toronto: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1945), p. 196.

⁴Kellman, "Reinterpreting Modern German History," p. 436.

political revolution of 1918 to be followed by changes in the political, economic, or social structure.⁵ The Social Democratic party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands - S.P.D.) compromised its socialist and democratic principles by striking a bargain with the conservatives, which represented the upper classes of Junkers, Prussian militarists, and industrialists; consequently, no real shift of power to the lower classes occurred. The monarchical-feudal institutions of the imperial period and the herrschschaftlich traditions of the masses were not dissolved when the Weimar Republic was formed.⁶ Throughout the fourteen-year course of Weimar democracy, the parliamentary system represented politics based upon narrow middle- and upper-class interests.

The socialist-conservative bargain. With the collapse of Imperial Germany in 1918, the task of constituting a government fell to the Social Democratic party. Having declared a republican form of government for Germany, what prevented the S.P.D. from implementing its principles of democracy and socialism? Carl Schorske, in tracing

⁵Theodor Eschenburg, "The Collapse of Democratic Regimes between the First and Second World Wars," The Road to Dictatorship, Germany 1918-1933, trans. by Lawrence Wilson (London: Oswald Wolff, 1964), pp. 7-24; Carl E. Schorske, German Social Democracy, 1905-1917 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955); Rudolf Coper, Failure of a Revolution: Germany in 1918-1919 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Walter H. Kaufman, Monarchism in the Weimar Republic (New York: Record Press, 1953); Richard N. Hunt, German Social Democracy, 1918-1933 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964).

⁶Eschenburg, "Collapse of Democratic Regimes," pp. 10-11.

the history of the S.P.D., believes that constitutional agitation and trade union reformism had been practiced by the Social Democrats up until 1918 in the belief that the imperial government could be brought to see the need for reform in the social order. The Social Democrats accepted the Marxist formula that the capitalist world was moving gradually toward socialism and waited for the emergence of social forces to make Germany ready for socialism.⁷ As a result of this policy, the S.P.D. had no clearcut view as to how to seize power in the event that the imperial forces would be defeated and the monarchy would collapse. Kollman notes that the lack of oppression by the imperial government permitted the S.P.D. to develop a large bureaucratic organization without relinquishing Marxist principles.⁸ The left wing of the S.P.D., which included those who desired socialist reform and the radical Spartacists who desired to establish a proletarian dictatorship, had split from the S.P.D. in 1917 to establish the Independent Social Democratic party (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands or U.S.P.D.).⁹

The aims of the U.S.P.D. were based upon the theory of the "spontaneous revolution" or belief that the masses would automatically

⁷Schorke, German Social Democracy, pp. 322-323.

⁸Kollman, "Reinterpreting Modern German History," pp. 449-450.

⁹A further split in the U.S.P.D. occurred December 30, 1919 when the Spartacists established an independent German Communist party. The remnants of the U.S.P.D. rejoined the Social Democratic party in 1922.

gain power; consequently, it is apparent why the U.S.P.D. failed to develop the necessary organization dedicated to seizing power.¹⁰

The revolution of 1918 was essentially a battle between the S.P.D. and the U.S.P.D. to gain the support of the working class. The Social Democrats fought to maintain the bourgeois-parliamentary character of society, to preserve at least temporarily the capitalist economy, and to prevent the establishment of a communist government. The S.P.D. believed that any radical socialization of industry would completely disrupt the economic order and force the working-class masses to Bolshevism. When control of the masses by peaceful means failed, the S.P.D. combatted the ideas of social reform through the assistance of the army and the Free Corps units.¹¹ With power still in the hands of the conservative classes, true democracy under the Weimar Republic was impossible.

The S.P.D. failed to accomplish democratic and socialist aims because its policy was molded by excessive bureaucratization, trade

¹⁰ Schorske, German Social Democracy, p. 323.

¹¹ Ibid.; The alliance between the Social Democratic politicians and the military forces was the result of the so-called "deal" made by Ebert and Gröner of the Supreme High Command, and it is believed that this agreement doomed the Weimar Republic from its start. See the interpretations by S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, pp. 99-100; Rudolf Coper, Failure of a Revolution, p. ix; John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Genesis of Power. The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954), p. 21; Robert G. L. Waite, in his book Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918-1923, p. 2, has challenged this interpretation by saying that all Ebert did in the famed initial telephone conversation to Gröner was to promise to combat Bolshevism in return for the support of the High Command.

union practice, and revisionist theory, states Schorske, who evidently believes that the U.S.P.D. policy designed to socialize major industries and establish agrarian reforms was better suited to achieve democratic reform than the policy of alliance with elements of the old regime, as practiced by the Social Democrats.¹² Whether the reforms advocated by the left wing radicals would have achieved representative democracy or led to the establishment of a communist dictatorship is a question that has been widely debated by historians.¹³ Klaus Epstein believes that the Social Democratic party could not have achieved democracy under any circumstances. The problems confronting the German socialists were insolvable, and it did not matter whether the S.P.D. acted as radicals or moderates, since they would not achieve their objective by either course of action, declares Epstein. "Impersonal forces and conditions" are responsible for the failure of the S.P.D. to effect social and political reform.¹⁴

Conservative political action in the Weimar period. Walter H. Kaufmann accepts the interpretation that social and economic changes did not follow the creation of the Weimar Republic and that conflicting

¹²Schorske, German Social Democracy, p. 323.

¹³See *infra*, pp. 92-98, for the view that communism represented a direct threat to the parliamentary government.

¹⁴Klaus Epstein, "Three American Studies of German Socialism," World Politics, XI, No. 4 (July, 1959), pp. 650-651.

class interests weakened the parliamentary government. Rather than to criticize the S.P.D. for its failure to initiate social reform, Kaufmann blames the conservative-monarchist class for the growth of National Socialism in the Weimar Republic.¹⁵ Under Weimar democracy, the conservative upper class desired a restoration of either an absolute or constitutional monarchy and opposed any form of republican government. The German People's party and the German Nationalist party contained many people interested in restoring the monarchical system. The National Socialists, by emphasizing nationalism over monarchism, competed with the right wing parties for the support of the monarchists. Anxious to destroy the detested Weimar Republic, the monarchists were willing to bargain with the National Socialists in the hope of using them in a later attempt to restore the monarchy. The middle-class economic and professional groups who had traditionally supported the monarchy and the working classes supported the parliamentary experiment until these groups were "proletarized" by the economic crisis. When the Weimar government failed to resolve the economic problems, the middle and lower classes began to support the National Socialists as the party of the Right.¹⁶ Monarchism represented the outworn class structure of the nineteenth century, social democracy failed to resolve the economic problems, and communism was

¹⁵ Kaufmann, Monarchism in the Weimar Republic, pp. 229-239.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 229-237.

considered by the working classes to represent a radical lower-class movement; consequently, the monarchists helped the National Socialists to attain power by clinging to an outworn class system that did not recognize the political aspirations of the masses.¹⁷

Historians concerned with the early years of the Weimar period are convinced that parliamentary democracy established by the Weimar constitution could not possibly succeed because of conservative groups which were opposed to a republican form of government. Reactionary elements were not dismissed from the civil service, judiciary, or army. The large industries were not nationalized, nor were Junker estates broken up for the benefit of agrarian reform. Inherently antagonistic to the Weimar Republic, these conservative social and political groups became principle enemies of democratic parliamentary government and contributed "more than a little to the downfall of the Weimar Republic in 1933."¹⁸

II. THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

International politics and specifically the treaty drawn up at Versailles in 1919 are frequently noted as causes for the rise of National Socialism in Germany. Instead of assisting the democratic experiment of the Weimar politicians, the victorious Allies followed

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 238-239; See *supra*, pp. 63-68, for a survey of conservative intellectual thought in the period of the Weimar Republic.

¹⁸Hunt, German Social Democracy, p. 32.

a vindictive policy toward Germany throughout the period of the Weimar Republic and unwittingly aided the Nazis. The National Socialists were able to make use of the grievances against the treaty settlement and the reparations policy to gain the support of the masses in their bid for power.

The legacy of the First World War. Many historians believe that the policies followed by the Western Allies after the German defeat in 1918 weakened Weimar democracy at its start.¹⁹ The Allies refused to recognize that they were dealing not with the authoritarian monarchy that had waged the war but a new democracy born out of the political revolution of 1918. The individuals who made up the political parties of the Weimar Coalition were staunch believers in Wilsonian idealism and from the beginning were placed on the defensive by the retaliatory policies of the Allies.²⁰ The provisions of the Versailles treaty not only weakened the power of the nation, but also deprived Germany of its prestige, attacked its traditions, and was regarded as a threat to the social values held by the vast majority of Germans.

¹⁹ S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, A Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933 (Hamden, Conn.: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1946); Theodore Abel, The Nazi Movement, Why Hitler Came To Power, (New York: Atherton Press, 1966); Hajo Holborn, "Diplomats And Diplomacy in the Early Weimar Republic," The Diplomats, 1919-1939, ed. by Gordon A. Craig and Felix Gilbert (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 123-171; Maurice Baumont, "The Role of Foreign Policy in the Success of the National Socialist Party," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 436-478.

²⁰ Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, p. 152.

Theodore Abel is representative of many historians who believe that the Versailles treaty was the "primary factor in the debacle of democracy in Germany."²¹ The Allies refused to recognize that a strong democratic government in Germany would be the first pre-requisite to guaranteeing European and world peace. Millions of Germans who had supported the republican form of government in the belief that democracy would protect them against communism and foreign nationalism turned in disillusionment from democracy to reactionary nationalist groups when the harsh terms of the peace treaty became known. The widespread resentment to the Versailles treaty had a direct bearing upon the national elections of 1920. The Democratic party, the Social Democrats, and the Center - all of which originally supported the Versailles Treaty - lost millions of votes which were given to the right wing Nationalist party and People's party or to the left wing Independent Socialist party or the Communist party - all of which had voted against acceptance of the peace treaty.²²

The provision of the Versailles treaty which was universally despised by all Germans, irrespective of their political viewpoint, was the famous war-guilt clause of Article 231, which fixed responsibility for the war upon Germany and its allies and established the

²¹ Abel, The Nazi Movement, p. 31.

²² Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, pp. 194-195; Holborn, "Diplomats and Diplomacy," p. 143.

principle of reparation payments for the damages caused to the Western powers. This clause was not originally meant to represent a judgment against a guilty nation but was intended to establish a legal basis for reparation payments.²³ By rendering a whole nation guilty, Article 231 became "the rock on which the whole treaty was ultimately shipwrecked."²⁴ The war-guilt clause made it necessary for Germans to defend their national past, and shifting foreign policy was dedicated to the revision of the harsh terms of the Versailles treaty.

German foreign policy in the Weimar era. Could German foreign policy have prevented the rise of National Socialism and the accession of Hitler to power? Historians of the Weimar period fail to agree on this question as they analyze the actions of the diplomats and politicians.²⁵ The German foreign service under the Weimar government had acquired a somewhat broader social and political basis, but the greater

²³ Ibid., pp. 142-144; In this essay, Holborn gives an interesting account of the negotiations relating to Article 231 and the subsequent interpretations of the clause.

²⁴ Baumont, "The Role of Foreign Policy," p. 467.

²⁵ Holborn, "Diplomats and Diplomacy," pp. 148 ff.; Ludwig Dehio, "Germany and the Epoch of World Wars," German History: Some New German Views, ed. by Hans Kohn (Boston, Mass.: The Beacon Press, 1954), pp. 122-140; Wolfgang J. Wellich, "Between Stresemann and Hitler, The Foreign Policy of the Brüning Government," World Politics, XII, No. 1 (October, 1939), 24-44; Baumont, "The Role of Foreign Policy," pp. 456-478; Paul Seabury, The Wilhelmstrasse. A Study of German Diplomats Under the Nazi Regime (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1934); Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany. Its History and Civilization (New York: Macmillan Co., 1966), pp. 411-445; A. J. P. Taylor, The Course of German History (New York: Coward-McCann, 1946), pp. 207 ff.

majority of diplomats represented conservative, reactionary beliefs and were hostile to the republican government, states Holborn.²⁶ Although many diplomats supported the new and liberal Germany, the majority of civil servants "yearned for the authoritarian, constitutional arrangements of the past and deplored the absence of unitary direction and nationalistic vigor which alone could break asunder the shackles restraining German 'greatness'."²⁷ The background and beliefs of the individuals within the foreign service did little to prepare diplomats for service to the republican government.

Koppel S. Pinson believes that the Versailles treaty was responsible for causing a chauvinistic foreign policy which contributed to the isolation of Germany from the Western Allies when a continental democratic policy should have been developed.²⁸ An extremely critical view of German foreign policy has been advanced by Ludwig Dehio, who believes that Germany's sole aim in foreign policy was to establish world hegemony. The First World War occurred when Germany, as the strongest continental power, threatened England's position as a major sea power through a program of German naval expansion.²⁹ The defeat of 1918 did not destroy Germany's desire for leadership and sense of national strength. Unable to recognize her

²⁶Holborn, "Diplomats and Diplomacy," pp. 151-154.

²⁷Seabury, The Wilhelmsstrasse, p. 21.

²⁸Pinson, Modern Germany, p. 445.

²⁹Dehio, "Germany and the Epoch of World Wars," p. 125.

responsibility for the previous war, Germany felt betrayed and dreamed of revenge; consequently, foreign policy was concerned with the revision of the terms of the Versailles treaty in an effort to restore German hegemony.³⁰

Revision of the peace treaty was the policy followed by Gustav Stresemann, who desired to win concessions through a conciliatory policy, states another critic of German foreign policy, A. J. P. Taylor. Although Stresemann's foreign policy attempted to reconcile Germany to its former enemies, Chancellor Brüning attempted to commit international blackmail to gain revision of the treaty. The Allies had to grant concessions to the Weimar politicians, declares Taylor, if they did not wish to deal with the National Socialists.³¹

Wolfgang Helbig agrees with Taylor's interpretation that the economic crisis and the growth of Nazism were used by Brüning as threats to the Western Allies; Brüning considered the solution of the reparations question more important than an immediate recuperation of the economy or an energetic curtailment of radicalism.³² Helbig is convinced that Brüning's policy represented a middle course between the conciliatory policy of Stresemann and the policy of unrelenting opposition to the Western powers later urged by Hitler. The downward revision of the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

³¹ Taylor, The Course of German History, pp. 207-208.

³² Helbig, "Between Stresemann and Hitler," p. 32.

reparations schedule at Lausanne in July of 1932 proved the success of Brüning's foreign policy; however, the political parties and Hindenburg were unwilling to follow the unpopular and cautious middle course, and Brüning was forced to resign before reaping the benefits of his foreign policy.³³ Although Brüning's foreign policy was as successful as could be reasonably expected, Helbich raises the question of whether the economic deprivation that accompanied Brüning's reparations policy added to the course of radicalism in Germany, making the rise of the National Socialists to power inevitable.³⁴

Foreign policy and National Socialist propaganda. Maurice Baumont is concerned not with the faults of the Versailles system, but with the exploitation by the National Socialists of nationalistic sentiment caused by the Versailles treaty, the reparations question, and the occupation of the Ruhr district. The diplomats attempted to block the growth of National Socialism by adopting some of the propaganda of the Nazis, and the Lausanne Agreement of 1932, which for all practical purposes ended reparations payments, represented an attempt to gain success in the field of foreign relations to combat the rising tide of Nazism.³⁵ The success of Lausanne came too late, says Baumont, for by this time considerations of foreign policy ceased to be a factor

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³⁵ Baumont, "The Role of Foreign Policy," pp. 476-477.

in the rise of National Socialism. The masses as a result of the economic crisis were more concerned with domestic problems. By emphasizing the socialistic elements of his program and talking less about the humiliation of Versailles, Hitler took advantage of the economic crisis. The people were convinced that the Nazis had waged the most successful effort in denouncing the terms of Versailles and could restore Germany's prestige among nations.³⁶ German foreign policy in the Weimar period has been both applauded and denounced by historians concerned with diplomatic history, and a definitive answer is yet to be reached.

III. THE CRISIS OF PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY, 1930-1932

Historians concerned with the Weimar period have described the failure of the political revolution of 1918 to be followed by any significant changes in social or economic power, the failure of Weimar diplomats to achieve an important success in foreign relations, and the methods by which Nazi propagandists used these omissions to their advantage in the bid for power. Despite these failures, certain constructive measures were attempted by the parliamentary politicians to counteract the adverse effects of the economic crisis of 1930. The appointment of Hitler as German Chancellor in January of 1933 proves, however, that the parliamentary parties were unable to join

³⁶Ibid., pp. 477-478; Taylor, The Course of German History, p. 208.

in a concerted and unified effort to counter the effects of the depression and prevent the masses from being alienated to the republican system of government. Historians of the 1930-1932 period are concerned with the role of the political parties during this crisis of parliamentary democracy.³⁷

The collapse of the "Grand Coalition" government. The only political party in the Weimar Republic to champion the cause of parliamentary democracy in Germany and to maintain uncompromising opposition to the rising National Socialist threat was the Social Democratic party. As a consequence, the failure of the S.P.D. to effect a compromise over the issue of financial reform with the parties that made up the "Grand Coalition" government has been criticized for weakening parliamentary democracy.³⁸ The crisis which brought about the collapse of the Müller Coalition was caused by economic difficulties brought about by reparations and high government expenditures. During the economic crisis,

³⁷Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, Vol. II, trans. by Harlan P. Hanson and Robert G. L. Waite (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); Arthur Rosenberg, History of the Weimar Republic, trans. by Ian F. D. Morr and L. Marie Sieveking (London: Methuen and Co., 1936); Erich Matthias, "Social Democracy and the Power in the State," The Road to Dictatorship, Germany 1918 to 1933, trans. by Lawrence Wilson (London: Oswald Wolff, 1964), pp. 59-73; Andreas Dorpalen, Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964); Koppel S. Pinson, Modern Germany, Its History and Civilization (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966); Gerhard Brauns, "The German Free Trade Unions During the Rise of Nazism," The Journal of Central European Affairs, XV, No. 4 (January, 1956), 339-353; Eric C. Kollman, "Reinterpreting Modern German History: The Weimar Republic," The Journal of Central European Affairs, XXI (January, 1962), 434-451.

³⁸Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 226 ff.

government income from taxes decreased while expenditures for unemployment relief benefits increased. The government found it necessary to subsidize the unemployment relief operation, and all parties in the government recognized the necessity of making the unemployment service independent, either by decreasing payments to the unemployed or by increasing contributions from the workers and employers.³⁹ The issue of unemployment relief represented but one facet of the larger problem of national finance. Unfortunately for the cause of parliamentary democracy, the political parties represented in the Müller government were motivated by narrow class interests. The largest parties of the coalition were the People's party (Deutsche Volkspartei), which represented German business and industry, and the Social Democratic party, which was concerned with the interests of the trade unions and the working class. The S.P.D. regarded lower relief payments as both an injustice to the employed and a dangerous temptation to businessmen to lower the wages of those who still held jobs. The People's party maintained that higher contributions to the unemployment fund by employers was impossible because of poor business conditions.

On March 24, 1930, Paul Molderhauer, Minister of Finance and a member of the People's party, proposed a finance program which authorized an increase in the contribution rate from three and one

³⁹For an account of the controversy over the unemployment service reform, see Eyck, *ibid.*, II, pp. 226-250.

half per cent to four per cent for the unemployment service. All of the parties found this plan acceptable, except the People's party, even though Molderhauer was one of its members. A compromise plan by Oscar Meyer of the Democratic party and Heinrich Brüning of the Center party proposed that the national government grant an annual subsidy to the unemployment service. If the subsidy should not prove sufficient, the unemployment service would be obligated to cut expenses; but the contribution of workers and employers would be raised to three and three quarter per cent. All of the government parties accepted this new plan except the small Bavarian People's party and the Social Democratic party. The S.P.D. yielded to the demands of the labor unions that the compromise plan threatened the entire future of unemployment insurance.⁴⁰ The rejection of the compromise plan was done in the full knowledge that the refusal would lead to the resignation of the cabinet and the formation of a new government in which the S.P.D. would not be represented.⁴¹ The break-up of the "Grand Coalition" was a decisive turning point, says the German historian Erich Matthias, "in that it represented an act of self-exclusion by the parties which brought the chronic structural crisis of the party state into the open and initiated the visible dissolution of the democratic system."⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 245-246.

⁴¹Dorpalen, Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic, p. 167.

⁴²Matthias, "Social Democracy and the Power in the State," p. 62.

Only when the political parties accepted the loss of power and gave up any serious attempt to revive parliamentary democracy did the dissolution of the democratic system become inevitable.

The collapse of the Miller Coalition resulted from the failure of the S.P.D. to reach a compromise with the other governmental parties over the question of government finance. The fault of the Social Democrats lies in their failure to reach a compromise at a time when the solution to the problem could only have been reached by compromise, and the S.P.D. should have realized that the fall of the Miller government would result in rule by presidential decrees.⁴³ The meeting of Brüning and President Hindenburg on March 11, 1930, for the ostensible purpose of discussing financial reform, had been reported in the Center party paper in Berlin. According to Germania, Hindenburg had declared that he would

'make use of all constitutional means' to execute reform and then the paper commented that 'If the German parliament cannot accomplish this task, then the President will . . . assume whatever powers are appropriate and necessary . . . The dissolution of the Reichstag, or Article 48, or both, stand ready for service if the parties fail.'⁴⁴

From this report, it should have been perfectly evident to the S.P.D. that the Miller Coalition would be followed by a cabinet headed by Brüning who would rule through the use of presidential emergency decrees if the support of the political parties in the Reichstag could not be obtained.

⁴³Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, p. 248.

⁴⁴As quoted by Eyck, ibid., II, pp. 239-240.

Rule by presidential decree. As had been predicted, a cabinet formed by Brüning followed the Müller Coalition. When Brüning's financial proposals designed to cut national expenditures were defeated by the Reichstag, he placed them in effect by use of the emergency powers granted to the President by Article 48 of the Weimar constitution. These emergency powers were used by Brüning throughout his ministry. Article 48 had been intended for use only in cases of armed revolt, declares Rosenberg, not for purposes of economic and fiscal legislation. The Social Democrats followed a policy of toleration toward the unconstitutional decrees and allowed the dictatorship of Brüning, thus dealing a death blow to the Weimar democracy.⁴⁵ The S.P.D. was convinced that the socialist workers were too weak for open warfare and hoped that the crisis would run its course. They hoped that the Chancellor could contain the growing menace of National Socialism and that circumstances would permit the continuance of the Weimar system. Because the S.P.D. failed to unite in tactics or political ideas, the majority of the working class became dissatisfied and turned to support National Socialism.⁴⁶

On July 20, 1932, Franz von Papen, who had succeeded Brüning as Chancellor and continued to rule through use of presidential decree, ousted the Social Democratic Braun-Severing government of Prussia on

⁴⁵Rosenberg, History of the Weimar Republic, pp. 303-306.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 306-309.

the pretext that the S.P.D. was not capable of maintaining order. The dismissal of the Social Democratic Prussian government was part of a preconceived plan to eliminate the last vestige of democratic administration that stood in the way of nation control of the Reich, notes Pinson.⁴⁷ The Social Democrats and their associated trade unions could have called a general strike in protest to the Coup of July 20. At this critical time, however, no action in the form of a strike call or even token demonstration was taken by the S.P.D. or the trade unions. Gerhard Braunthal believes that the workers would have struck had the move been called for by the trade unions or the Social Democratic party.⁴⁸ The lack of action by the Social Democrats and trade unions to maintain the last stronghold of Social Democracy illustrates the weakness of parliamentary democracy.

The role of the Social Democratic party. In answer to the many criticisms leveled against the S.P.D. in the last days of the Weimar Republic, several historians have come to the defense of the Social Democrats by pointing out the weakness of the entire parliamentary system. Regarding the question of the compromise measure that caused the fall of the Müller government, Eric Kollman says that the problem of unemployment contributions was not the real issue.

⁴⁷ Pinson, Modern Germany, p. 475; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, p. 411.

⁴⁸ Braunthal, "The German Free Trade Unions," p. 342.

The crisis of parliamentary democracy in 1930 was based upon the question of just distributions of burdens during the depression, and the issue of unemployment contributions brought into sharp focus the structural weakness of the Weimar system of mass parties which had never been able to integrate their bureaucratic and military basis. Furthermore, says Kollman, long before the fall of the Müller cabinet, various groups had wanted to move away from parliamentary democracy; and support of the republican system had never been universal.⁴⁹

Erich Matthias believes that the abandonment of Müller's government by the Social Democrats was not in itself a political mistake; the real failure of the S.P.D. lay in the fact that they had no political plan for themselves either in power or in opposition. This attitude was determined by the revolutionary and socialist character of the party in its developmental period under imperial rule. Lacking a realistic relationship to power prior to 1918, the Social Democratic party had never learned to use its potential power in the political realm.⁵⁰

Pinson takes a more lenient stand in analyzing the role of the Social Democratic party and believes that the S.P.D. acted with responsibility in yielding to the demands of the Brüning cabinet and rule by presidential decree. The reforms instituted by Brüning cut

⁴⁹Kollman, "Reinterpreting German History," p. 447.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 448.

down on social services which were popular with the socialist workers. Actually, says Pinson, the S.P.D. had no alternative: either tolerate the Brüning government or risk the collapse of the Weimar Republic and National Socialist dictatorship.⁵¹ Kollman agrees with Pinson by stating that it was necessary to achieve compromise between "potentially and often antagonistic groups," and the Social Democrats saw the necessity of compromise and made the unavoidable sacrifice.⁵² Moreover, the S.P.D. and the trade unions should not be criticized for their lack of action following the dissolution of the Prussian government on July 20, 1932. The depression had demoralized the labor movement, and the workers were divided as to the proper course of political action. The Prussian police force was not strong enough to resist the Reichswehr and contained many Nazi party members who would not have answered Severing's call to resist the Reich government. The stress of German nationalism had replaced the emphasis on socialism among the leaders of the S.P.D. and the trade unions, and a call for a general strike against the national government was unthinkable. The S.P.D. would not have been able to count on the support of the other political parties in resisting the Reich government.⁵³ However justified

⁵¹Pinson, Modern Germany, pp. 471-472.

⁵²Kollman, "Reinterpreting German History," p. 448.

⁵³Braunthal, "The German Free Trade Unions," p. 353; Pinson, Modern Germany, pp. 475-476; Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, pp. 493-494.

the action taken by the Social Democrats, the ease with which the last obstacles to dictatorial government were removed attests to the depressing weakness of the parliamentary system of republican Germany. Lack of constructive action by the trade unions at the time of the Papen Coup, during the negotiations with the Schleicher regime, and at the time of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor was responsible for the success of the National Socialist movement, declares Braunthal, but not until the democratic structure was weakened from within and the labor movement no longer had the strength of will to combat the fascist movement.⁵⁴

IV. THE THREAT OF COMMUNISM IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

All of the political parties in the Weimar Republic bear responsibility for the weakness of parliamentary democracy which arose from policies representing narrow class interests. The Social Democrats, despite their lack of action in resisting dictatorial government, were concerned with preserving the republican structure of government in Germany. This is certainly more than can be said for another one of the political parties after 1929 - the German Communist party (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or K.P.D.). How significant was the threat of communism in the Weimar Republic? The fear of a communist takeover during the political revolution of

⁵⁴ Braunthal, "The German Free Trade Unions," p. 353.

a middle course after 1925 and concentrated on opposition in the parliaments, on the elections, and trade union policy. Fletchtheim believes that despite its Leninist ideology, the K.P.D. acted as a "loyal opposition party."⁵⁷ Between 1925 and 1929, the policy of the K.P.D. resembled the spirit of compromise evident in the New Economic Policy and concessions to the kulaks carried out in Russia during this same period.⁵⁸

The year 1929 marked a regrouping of forces in Russia. Stalin began a new leftist phase and forced through the so-called "Socialist Construction" under the Five Year Plan. In Germany, this meant that the conciliatory policy toward the Social Democrats and trade unions would have to end as the German Communist party followed the Soviet swerve to the Left.⁵⁹ The Third International developed the theory that World Capitalism had entered its final crisis, and this would drive the masses to communism. The Social Democrats and the bourgeoisie were seen to be drifting further to the Right as a result of the economic crisis. Differences between the old bourgeois parties, the S.P.D. and the Fascists, were disappearing and a united fascist front was believed to be forming, says Fletchtheim.⁶⁰ Arthur Rosenberg also believes that the policies of the K.P.D. were motivated by the

⁵⁷Fletchtheim, "The Role of the Communist Party," p. 106.

⁵⁸Bullock, "The German Communists," p. 506; Fletchtheim, "The Role of the Communist Party," pp. 107-107.

⁵⁹Bullock, "The German Communists," p. 506.

⁶⁰Fletchtheim, "The Role of the Communist Party," p. 107.

belief that the Social Democrats had assumed fascist ideas and were the allies of world capitalism.⁶¹ A united fascist front could be defeated only through a united proletarian front under purely Communist party leadership, and party policy after 1929 represented only unrelenting opposition to all parliamentary parties.⁶²

Alan Bullock believes that the policy of the K.P.D. was designed to undermine the strength of all democratic institutions and parties which were holding up the transition from disguised fascism to the open dictatorship of the Nazis. Following the theory of Marxist determinism, the K.P.D. believed that Nazi fascist rule would hasten the proletarian revolution. Destruction of the Weimar government would end the façade of democracy that had deceived large numbers of the working class; the masses would rise behind the leadership of the K.P.D. to establish the proletarian revolution.⁶³ Ruth Fischer, a former member of the German Communist party and a delegate to the Reichstag in 1924, declares that the K.P.D. was directed by the Kremlin to follow a policy of silent agreement with the National Socialists. Furthermore, Moscow dictated that the K.P.D. should follow a policy of virulent opposition to the Social Democrats who were denounced as worse than fascists and who were stigmatized as

⁶¹Rosenberg, A History of Bolshevism, p. 232.

⁶²Fletcher, "The Role of the Communist Party," p. 107.

⁶³Bullock, "The German Communists," pp. 508-509.

the most dangerous enemy of communism.⁶⁴

Whether the policy of the K.P.D. was designed merely to avoid the support of a democratic and capitalistic government or to actively assist the National Socialist movement as representing the last phase of capitalism which would precede the proletarian revolution has not been clarified in the accounts given. It is certain, however, that the policies pursued by the K.P.D. between 1929 and 1932 were intended to undermine parliamentary government. The K.P.D. agitated for the removal of the Prussian government composed of a coalition of Social Democrats and Center party representatives; and on June 3, 1932, the K.P.D., with the support of the Nazis, passed a no-confidence vote to remove the government. In November of 1932, the K.P.D. again collaborated with the Nazis in support of the Berlin transport workers' strike against the trade unions who had refused to recognize the strike. Moreover, the K.P.D. resisted all calls for assistance from the Social Democratic leaders to stem the rising Nazi influence. By January of 1933, the goal of the German Communist party had been achieved, comments Bullock, for Hitler was appointed Chancellor.⁶⁵

The communists believed that undisguised class war would break out when the National Socialists achieved power, and the masses would rally behind the K.P.D. The anticipated proletarian revolution, however,

⁶⁴Fischer, Stalin and German Communism, p. 655.

⁶⁵Bullock, "The German Communists," pp. 512-513.

did not occur. What had gone wrong? The K.P.D. had underestimated the strength of the National Socialist movement in gaining mass support as a revolutionary party, and the spontaneous rising of the masses did not occur. Furthermore, the K.P.D. had made no preparations for the revolution; no arms or military organization were available to seize power.⁶⁶ How did the mistakes of the K.P.D. contribute to the success of National Socialism? The K.P.D. was never politically strong enough to represent a serious threat to the Weimar Republic. It was never more than just strong enough to serve as a scapegoat for the rightists and National Socialists in their attack upon democracy,, declares Fletcherheim.⁶⁷ By claiming to be an anti-Marxist party, the N.S.D.A.P. won support when the democratic government failed to deal decisively with the Bolshevik threat. By its policy of resistance rather than cooperation with the Social Democrats, the Communist party weakened the only political group which could have prevented the destruction of parliamentary government.⁶⁸

National Socialism became a potent political force in the Weimar Republic because conservative groups - monarchists, industrialists, Junkers, militarists - refused to relinquish power to the parliamentary government. The Social Democratic party was the only political organization that consistently supported the republican system of government,

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 516-518.

⁶⁷Fletcherheim, "The Role of the Communist Party," p. 109.

⁶⁸Mayer, They Thought They Were Free, pp. 95-97; Bullock, "The German Communists," p. 519.

and they were unable to achieve a workable democracy because the conservative groups followed reactionary policies based upon class interests. The Western Allies weakened the cause of democratic government by the Versailles system which was despised by all Germans. National Socialist propaganda denounced the injustice of the peace treaty and stressed the threat of communism in order to undermine Social Democracy. Democracy in the Weimar Republic was never allowed the opportunity to function properly, and the beneficiary of the failure of the parliamentary system was the National Socialist party.

CHAPTER VI

NATIONAL SOCIALISM CAUSED BY A POWER STRUGGLE AMONG VESTED INTEREST GROUPS

Most liberal historians, while noting the influence of historical and sociological causes, prefer to explain the success of the National Socialist movement by means of political analysis. Through a study of the events which preceded Hitler's accession to power in 1933, these historians hope to avoid dangerous generalizations inherent in comprehensive historical and sociological interpretations. Study of the complicated political history of the years 1929 to 1932 has led these scholars to believe that the National Socialists did not seize power in 1933, but that various vested interest groups with conflicting purposes actually assisted the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in the mistaken belief that they could control Hitler while pursuing their own goals. The opposition to the weak parliamentary government by reactionary groups has already been noted by these historians. The events directly preceding the collapse of the Weimar Republic clearly illustrate the role played by the officers' corps of the Reichswehr, the Weimar politicians, and the leaders of large-scale industry in establishing the Nazi dictatorship.

I. THE GUILT OF THE REICHSWEHR OFFICERS' CORPS

The influence of militarism in Germany during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries has been noted by J. J. Shokking, Gordon Craig, Hans Herzfeld, Robert G. L. Waite, and Gerhard Ritter.¹ The effects of militarization upon German thought and social processes had a significant influence upon the actions of the Reichswehr during the Weimar period. By glorifying the imperial past, disregarding the republican present, and advocating a military future, the army prepared the way for National Socialism, declares Hans Ernst Fried.² Gordon Craig and John Wheeler-Bennett have studied the relationship of the officers' corps of the Reichswehr to the government of the Weimar Republic and have concluded that the policy of political intrigue followed by the High Command of the army was directly responsible for Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January of 1933.³

The role of the army in the Weimar Republic. Following the military disaster of 1918, it was natural to expect that the new rulers of Germany would attempt to place effective constitutional controls

¹See supra, pp. 30-37, for a discussion of the role of militarism in German life.

²Hans Ernst Fried, The Guilt of the German Army (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1942), p. 252.

³Gordon Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism: The Policy of Wilhelm Groener, 1929-1932," Political Science Quarterly, LXIII, No. 2, 194-227; Gordon Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); John W. Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954).

upon the military and insist henceforth that the army represent no more than an instrument of civilian political authority. From the beginning, however, the government was forced to rely upon the army to quell revolutionary disturbances. The famous agreement between President Ebert and Wilhelm Gröner, in which army support was promised the Social Democrats on the condition that they suppress Bolshevism in Germany, assured the right of the army to define national interest, and the army retained its position of autonomy in the state.

In a speech to military officers of the High Command in May of 1919, General Gröner defined the position of the army as being above political factions (Hebeparteilichkeit) in order to restrain their excesses and protect the state. The army represented one of the few stable elements in German life during this period.⁴ The disorders caused by the November Revolution, the inevitable economic dislocation caused by the terms of the peace treaty, and the development of a political party system which, in the view of the army, would be subject to factional strife and would present a threat to national unity apparently justified the position taken by the army. Gröner never had any confidence in the parliamentary system of the Weimar government nor in the political parties that competed for power. He believed that the new republic should be governed by professional

⁴Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism" pp. 197-198.

administrators standing above party strife. Since this ideal was not possible, Gröner relied upon the army to protect the national interest.⁵

The reliance of the government upon the army to suppress disorders permitted the officers to retain their positions, even though most of the officers' corps owed its loyalty to the old imperial regime rather than to the new government. The delegates to the Weimar National Assembly recognized the need for democratic control of the military establishment. The law which created the Provisional Reichswehr called for an army which would be built on a democratic basis and created the position of Minister of Defense who would be responsible to the Reichstag. The delegates also recognized the need for an army strong enough to restore order and protect the frontiers; consequently, the internal administration of the army was left to the old officers' corps.⁶ The privileges and traditions of the officers' corps of imperial Germany were preserved under the constitutional arrangements of the Weimar Republic.

The Reichswehr and the Free Corps units had been quick to suppress revolutionary disorders from the Left. Would the Provisional Reichswehr, made up of the same officers and Free Corps units, protect the republic against revolution from the Right? When the Weimar

⁵Ibid., p. 199.

⁶Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, pp. 361-362.

government accepted the Versailles treaty, which provided for the reduction of the army to 100,000 men and the evacuation of eastern territory, reactionary and nationalist sentiments were voiced by the officers' corps. As a result, the abortive Kapp Putsch of March, 1920, was designed to overthrow the Weimar Republic and establish a military dictatorship. When Minister of Defense Noske called upon the Reichswehr to crush the rebellion, the officers under the leadership of Hans von Seeckt, the Chief of Staff, refused to use the Reichswehr against officers who had participated in the putsch. The ill-planned rebellion was suppressed, not by the Reichswehr, whose duty it was to protect the republic against civil turmoil, but by a general strike of the Social Democratic trade unions in Berlin.⁷ Nor was any disciplinary action taken against the Reichswehr for their failure to act, since the government believed that the support of the army would be required to prevent insurgency from the communists. Not only did Seeckt succeed in preserving the structure of the old army, but President Ebert appointed him as Commander-in-Chief of all military forces in the Reich.⁸

Between the years 1920 and 1926, Hans von Seeckt, with the collaboration of Otto Gessler, Minister of Defense, reorganized the Reichswehr into an efficient and well-disciplined unit which held a position of growing prestige in the state. To prevent another putsch

⁷Ibid., pp. 376-379.

⁸Ibid., pp. 380-381

and to insure the future reliability of the army to its leaders, Seeckt prohibited the officers from direct participation in political affairs. In Seeckt's view, the army owed its allegiance to the permanent entity of the German Reich rather than to a republican government which might prove transitory. The army would maintain an autonomous position in Germany; it would be a state within a state. Although Seeckt insisted that individual officers abstain from political activity, he never doubted that the army had the right to intervene in domestic and foreign policies when the interests of the permanent state were not protected by the government.⁹ The policy of Heberparteilichkeit preserved the officers' corps as a separate entity in the Weimar Republic; yet this policy also prevented the officers from making some sign of allegiance to the parliamentary system. The danger of this policy became readily apparent as soon as demagogues appeared who were shrewd enough to exploit the grievances of the army, particularly when these leaders appeared to represent "national" rather than republican interests.¹⁰

The policies of Kurt von Schleicher. The policy of Heberparteilichkeit, enunciated by Gröner and Seeckt, kept the Reichswehr from participating in party politics. After 1928, however, the Reichswehr abandoned this policy and played a significant role in the political

⁹ Ibid., pp. 385-389; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 96-102.

¹⁰ Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism," p. 200.

events which preceded Hitler's appointment as Chancellor. This reversal of policy can be directly traced to the ambitions and intrigue of Kurt von Schleicher. His influence had been limited in army circles under Seeckt's administration, but had grown with the appointment of Heye as Chief-of-Staff in 1926. Schleicher had been primarily responsible for Gröner's appointment as Reichswehrminister.¹¹ General Gröner repaid the favor by appointing Schleicher as head of a new division of the Reichswehrministerium, which acted as a liaison body between the armed services and the other Reichstag ministries and political parties. In this position, Schleicher was able to extend the scope and influence of his activities. Gröner relied heavily upon the political intelligence of Schleicher as a go-between in negotiations with party leaders - he was Gröner's "Cardinal in Politics."¹² In his official capacity and as a personal friend of the Hindenburg family, General Schleicher was able to exercise considerable influence in the Reichswehr and in the political life of the country, without the responsibility of a political office.

The depression inspired increased radicalism among the people as the moderate parliamentary parties lost members to the National Socialist and Communist parties. To avoid the threat of internal

¹¹For the details concerning Gröner's appointment, see Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism," pp. 201-203, and Wheeler-Bennett, The Menace of Power, pp. 194-197.

¹²Wheeler-Bennett, The Menace of Power, p. 199.

chaos and civil war in which the Reichswehr would be expected to subdue revolutionary turmoil, Schleicher conceived of a plan which would abolish the ineffectual parliamentary government and create an authoritarian government which could solve the economic and social problems of the country. Schleicher wanted to form a cabinet of men who would be unhampered by any narrow conception of party loyalty and would govern from the standpoint of national interest alone, relying for its authority upon the support of the President and the Reichswehr. All that was needed to complete the plan was a Chancellor who would be acceptable to President Hindenburg and the Reichswehr; then the Reichstag could be dissolved and the country governed according to Article 48 until such time that the constitution could be amended to insure authoritarian government in the Reich.¹³ The success of General Schleicher's plan was practically guaranteed when Heinrich Brüning was appointed Chancellor after the fall of the Müller government on March 30, 1930.¹⁴ The inevitable failure of Brüning to achieve a majority in the Reichstag was circumvented by invoking Article 48, an eventuality which Schleicher had anticipated. Through his participation and manipulation of the political scene, Schleicher abdicated

¹³Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism" pp. 208-209; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 432-433.

¹⁴For the role played by General Schleicher in undermining Müller's position with President Hindenburg and the details surrounding Brüning's appointment as Chancellor, see Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 200-202.

the position of Heberparteilichkeit held by the army - a policy which would have dire consequences in the future.¹⁵

Chancellor Brüning hoped to counteract the effects of the economic crisis through a diplomatic revision of the Versailles treaty. A success in the field of foreign relations would enable the government to survive the economic crisis, and Brüning and Gröner could then take action against the growing threat of Nazism. In January, 1930, Gröner issued a general order to the army which warned that the attempts of the National Socialists to destroy the political system would bring about a civil war.¹⁶ Gröner realized that the Reichswehr could be fatally attracted to any group which claimed to represent the so-called "national idea." He feared that unless the leaders of the Reichswehr took a decided stand against the threat of National Socialism, the army might succumb to the promises of Hitler and the Nazi movement. Gröner was particularly concerned with the existence of the S.A. (Sturmabteilungen or Storm Sections), which he regarded as a danger to the state and to the Reichswehr. Gröner decided to delay action against the S.A. until Brüning had achieved support for his government through Allied concessions to Germany's armament policy. Furthermore, Gröner was encouraged in this passive policy toward the S.A. by Schleicher, who was already involved in negotiations with the Nazis to an extent unknown by his chief.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 201-202.

¹⁶Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism," pp. 205-206.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 211-219.

From the winter of 1930-1931 onward, the army feared a double putsch from the Nazis and Communist party. Undoubtedly, this attitude influenced the thinking of General Schleicher who opened negotiations with the National Socialists toward the end of 1930. Schleicher contacted Erich R hm, who had just been recalled by Hitler to reorganize the S.A. In the discussions, R hm denied that the Nazis intended to infiltrate the Reichswehr and declared that he intended to purge the radical elements within the S.A. General Schleicher was able to convince Gr ner of R hm's sincerity, and on January 2, 1931, the Reichswehr rescinded the order which barred contact between the army and the National Socialist party.¹⁸ Unknown to Gr ner or to Hitler, the next meeting between R hm and Schleicher took place in March of 1931. Schleicher promised R hm that the S.A. would come under the control of the Reichswehr officers in the event of a rising by the communists. Based upon this promise, R hm organized the S.A. on parallel lines to the army. Through this ruse, Schleicher hoped that the Reichswehr would not be confronted with simultaneous risings from the Right and Left. Schleicher's negotiations had the effect of splitting the influence of the army - Gr ner supported the Br nning policy and Schleicher collaborated with the Nazis. Gr ner's ignorance of Schleicher's secret pact with R hm was evident in Gr ner's outspoken hostility to the S.A.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 226-227.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 228-229.

Grüner was finally forced to take action against the S.A. when a series of raids by the Prussian police on Nazi headquarters revealed plans for an S.A. seizure of power in the event that Hitler won a victory at the polls. Confident that he represented the interests of the Reichswehr, Grüner obtained the necessary authorization from President Hindenburg to ban the S.A. on April 14, 1931.²⁰ Unknown to Grüner, Schleicher had undermined his position in the circles of the officers' corps. On the day following the declaration of the decree which prohibited the S.A., Schleicher informed Grüner that the Reichswehr Ministry and the army as a whole disapproved of the ban. General Grüner was not aware that Schleicher hoped to gain the allegiance of the S.A. in support of the Reichswehr. In the weeks that followed, Schleicher weakened Grüner's position with President Hindenburg and circulated a vicious smear campaign throughout the Reichswehr Ministry. By the beginning of May, Grüner's position was untenable, and he resigned his office in the hope that his sacrifice would permit Brüning time to gain the needed success in foreign policy. Schleicher and Hindenburg did not permit Brüning to reap the benefits of diplomacy, however, for Brüning was summarily dismissed at the end of May.²¹

Throughout these weeks, Schleicher had been playing a double role. He negotiated not only with Brüning but with Count von Helldorf,

²⁰Craig, "Reichswehr and National Socialism," pp. 219-222.

²¹Ibid., pp. 223-226; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 241-243.

the S.A. leader of Berlin, and other Nazi officials. On May 8, 1931, a meeting with Hitler, Meißner, and Oskar von Hindenburg was held at Schleicher's home. At this meeting, Schleicher outlined his plan to bring down the entire Brüning government piecemeal: first Brüner, then Chancellor Brüning. The new government would consist only of a presidential cabinet in which the Reichstag would be dissolved and the decrees against the para-military formations would be removed.²²

What were Schleicher's motives in the destruction of the Brüning government? Schleicher's goal, like that of Seeckt and Brüner, was the "greater glory of the German army," declares Wheeler-Bennett. Schleicher intended to free Germany from the anarchy of party politics, and Brüning had not provided authoritarian leadership in this goal. In Schleicher's opinion, Brüning had become a pawn of the Social Democrats. The action taken by Brüning and Brüner in banning the S.A. could only benefit the S.P.D., and their pacifist view of military matters would benefit neither the army nor the Reich.²³ Schleicher was determined to repeat the experiment of 1930 in forming a new political combination which would derive its powers from President Hindenburg and govern by decree. This new government would reduce the power of the Social Democrats so that when the time came to act against the Nazis, no one could doubt that such action was being taken for the national interest rather than for the benefit of the Left.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

²³ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, p. 453.

Schleicher fully intended to deal with the Nazis and was confident that he would be able to split the party. After the disposal of the National Socialists, Schleicher planned a fundamental reform of the constitution to end parliamentary confusion.²⁴

General Schleicher's policies had the effect of continuously involving the army in politics, and the prestige and discipline of the officers' corps declined accordingly. It was Schleicher who urged the appointment of Franz von Papen upon President Hindenburg, who nominated most of the members of Papen's cabinet, and who conducted the negotiations designed to win Nazi approval of the new government.²⁵ Throughout the tortuous course of intrigue followed during the months up to the end of January, 1933, Schleicher claimed to speak in the name of the army. Never did he hesitate to stake the reputation of the army upon the success of his plan to establish a presidential dictatorship backed by the Reichswehr. In this manner, Schleicher made a mockery of Seeckt's admonition to the army to stand above party strife in the interests of the national cause.

Taking exception to the arguments presented by Gordon Craig and John Wheeler-Bennett are A. J. P. Taylor and Gerhard Ritter who believe that it was not the desire of the officers' corps of the

²⁴Ibid., p. 454; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, p. 245.

²⁵Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 455; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 246-248.

Reichswehr to overthrow the Weimar Republic and establish a military regime.²⁶ Hitler's rise to power cannot be attributed to any political activity on the part of the military, declares Ritter. There were officers who sympathized with Hitler because of his promises of rearmament, but many of the highest leaders of the Reichswehr despised the National Socialist movement. As an example, in January of 1933, General Hammerstein, the Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr, protested the selection of Hitler as Chancellor to President Hindenburg. The Weimar Republic was not "steam-rolled" by army militarists, says Ritter.²⁷ A. J. P. Taylor believes that the officers's corps would have attempted to overthrow the parliamentary government if the republican politicians had permanently accepted Germany's disarmament dictated by the Versailles treaty, which they never did. The generals wanted stable government; they feared that the limited size of the Reichswehr could not put down a civil war. They did not care if the form of government was a presidential monarchy or a dictatorship. They were solely concerned with keeping the army out of politics. The success of the National Socialist movement in January of 1933, notes Taylor, can only be attributed to a group of politicians, without ideas or principles, who believed that they could strike a bargain with Hitler.²⁸

²⁶ Gerhard Ritter, "The Military and Politics in Germany," The Journal of Central European Affairs, XVII (October, 1957), 259-271; A. J. P. Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," The Third Reich, Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 523-535.

²⁷ Ritter, "The Military and Politics in Germany," p. 269.

²⁸ Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 524; p. 535.

II. THE GUILT OF THE POLITICIANS

No greater fraud has ever been perpetrated to explain an event in history than the legend that on January 30, 1933, Adolf Hitler seized power. Hitler did not seize power, says Taylor; it was handed to him.²⁹ The greatest responsibility rests with those politicians who allowed and even desired Hitler's appointment as Chancellor of the German Reich. The path of intrigue followed by these unscrupulous and capricious men during the period following the fall of Brüning's government in May of 1932 up to Hitler's appointment on January 30, 1933 has been described by Erich Eyck, S. William Halperin, Gordon Craig, John Wheeler-Bennett, and A. J. P. Taylor.³⁰ Throughout the negotiations which accompanied the schemes of the politicians who envisioned the establishment of effective government in the Reich, several patterns emerge: (1) the politicians attempted to establish a coalition government in which the National Socialists would participate, yet be held in check; no attempt was made to eliminate the menace of National Socialism; (2) in the almost

²⁹ Ibid., p. 523.

³⁰ Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, trans. by Harlan P. Hanson and Robert G. L. Waite, Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948); S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy, A Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933 (Hamden, Conn.: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1946); Gordon Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945 (London: Oxford University Press, 1955); John Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954); A. J. P. Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 523-535.

certain event that the politicians would fail to receive the support of the parliamentary parties, plans to establish either a military or presidential dictatorship were considered as a solution to the political situation; and (3) the men who exerted the greatest influence upon the course of events were often motivated by personal ambition, lust for power, and personal rancour. Frequently, conflicting policies were followed by these men. The beneficiary to their actions was Adolf Hitler. As noted by Taylor, "the answer to the question of how Hitler came to power is therefore to be found more in the actions of the German politicians who were not National Socialists than in those of Hitler himself. He waited; they decided."³¹

The power struggle to the elections of July, 1932. Franz von Papen, who assumed the office of German Chancellor on June 1, 1932 without the support of any major party in the Reichstag, depended solely upon the authority of the President and the protection of the Reichswehr for support. Papen was viewed by General Schleicher as a puppet whose movements could be controlled at will - a suitable leader for Schleicher's experiment in authoritarian government. Only the N.S.D.A.P. stood in the way of a Papen government. Their support had been gained by Schleicher who promised that the ban on the S.A. would be rescinded, the Reichstag dissolved, and new elections held. Both parties stood to gain from this arrangement; Hitler desired to

³¹Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 523.

increase the representation of his party in the Reichstag, and Papen and Schleicher would gain time to bring about certain reforms, after which they could deal with the Nazis.³²

A wave of terror and violence caused by the National Socialists and Communists resulted when the ban on the S.A. was lifted. Schleicher and Papen seized the opportunity to crush the Social Democrats. The Prussian government was charged with laxness in its dealings with the Communist party; the Braun-Severing government was ousted on July 20, 1932 and replaced with a Reich Commissioner. The action was supported by the Reichswehr and was not contested by the S.P.D. or the trade unions. With the loss of the Social Democratic stronghold in Prussia, Germany lost the support of the last political party that was concerned with retaining the system of parliamentary government. It was the intention of Papen and Schleicher to utilize anti-republican sentiment in the forthcoming election campaign against the Nazis, but the July election proved that the July 20 Coup represented an empty victory.³³

The national elections which were held on July 31, 1932 were significant in that the Nazis doubled their power by winning a total of 230 out of 608 seats in the Reichstag. The Communist party increased

³² Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 246-249; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 400-401.

³³ Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 252-255; Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, pp. 456-457; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 410-417; See supra, pp. 89-92, for a summary of events concerning the dissolution of the S.P.D. Prussian government on July 20, 1932.

their representation to 89 seats, the Catholic Bloc increased their representation from 87 to 97 seats, and the Social Democrats dropped slightly from 143 to 133 seats. The gains achieved by the Nazis and Communists resulted from losses by the Nationalists and German People's party, which had supported Papen's government; consequently, the government could count on the support of only 44 seats in the Reichstag. The electorate may have been divided on what they wanted, but the returns clearly revealed that they did not want the Papen government.³⁴ Nevertheless, Papen planned to remain head of the government, take the Nazis into his cabinet, and proceed with the structural reorganization of the Reich into a presidential dictatorship.

The Nazi gains in the July election caused Schleicher to lose faith in Papen's ability to control the Hitler movement. Furthermore, Papen had developed an irritating habit of making up his own mind on important issues and was supplanting Schleicher in the affections of the Hindenburgs.³⁵ As a consequence, Schleicher opened negotiations with the Nazis on his own authority; on August 5, Schleicher met with Hitler. The Nazis were impressed with the gains made by their party in the national elections and Hitler demanded the Chancellorship, stating that he could form a majority in the Reichstag.

³⁴Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, p. 257; Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 457; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 425-426.

³⁵Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 458.

Schleicher was delighted with the prospect of a majority government and readily agreed to Hitler's proposal. President Hindenburg, however, did not share Schleicher's opinion of the "Bohemian Corporal," refused to name Hitler Chancellor in the meeting of August 13, and gave the Nazi leader a stern rebuke for the conduct of the N.S.D.A.P. during the election campaign.³⁶ Hitler had believed Schleicher's promises and was bitterly disappointed at President Hindenburg's refusal to make him Chancellor. An opportunity for reprisal quickly presented itself when, at the first meeting of the new Reichstag, Papen was defeated on the first vote of confidence by the Nazis and Communists, the Reichstag was dissolved, and new elections called for November of 1932.³⁷

The power struggle after November, 1932. The November election was responsible for the loss of two million votes and thirty-four seats in the Reichstag to the National Socialists. Reaction to the Nazi reversal had the effect of splitting the alliance which had existed between Schleicher and Papen. Papen had developed a love for public office and believed that he could retain the Chancellorship by either gaining the support of other political parties to gain a parliamentary majority or, in the event of failure, by taking Hitler into the government as Vice-Chancellor in the hope that public office would make the

³⁶ Wheeler-Bennett, The Menace of Power, pp. 258-259; Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 329.

³⁷ Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 428-432.

Nazi leader responsible for government policy. Papen felt certain that Hitler would not be satisfied with anything less than full power and would not offer the job of Chancellor unless Hitler could produce a parliamentary majority. Papen believed that Hitler could not find the necessary support; then a new presidential government, based upon the authority of Article 48, could be formed under Papen's leadership.³⁸ It soon became apparent that no party in the Reichstag would support or enter Papen's government; so on November 17, Papen and his cabinet resigned so that Hindenburg could conduct negotiations with Hitler. The Nazi leader was offered the position of Vice-Chancellor in a Papen government or the job of Chancellor if he could form a parliamentary majority. Out of necessity, the future German Führer rejected both offers. An attempt by the leaders of the Center party to form a majority was equally unsuccessful, and Papen's plan progressed according to schedule.³⁹

Herr von Papen failed to realize that General Schleicher had lost confidence in his methods of dealing with the Nazis. The spokesman for the officers' corps feared that a civil war, led by the Nazis and Communists, was eminent; and that the Reichswehr would be called into action to suppress the S.A. Schleicher resolved to put into effect his plan to split the N.S.D.A.P. and attach part of the movement in

³⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, p. 261; Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 530.

³⁹ Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, p. 262.

support of the Reichswehr. Schleicher had been negotiating with Gregor Strasser who favored a truce with the government and would enter a cabinet if it were not headed by Papen. Consequently, when Papen proposed that he be entrusted with the formation of a second presidential cabinet in which the Reichstag would be pro-roqued indefinitely and all political parties and trade unions be dissolved with the assistance of the Reichswehr, the General countered with one of the famous "Schleicher torpedoes."⁴⁰ Schleicher stated that Papen's plan represented a flagrant breach of the constitution, and he assured the President that a government could be formed which would command a parliamentary majority by splitting the National Socialist party. He suggested that he be entrusted with the negotiations to form this new government. President Hindenburg doubted whether the efforts to split the Nazi party would be successful, rejected the General's proposals, and enjoined Papen to proceed in the formation of a government under the outlined plan. Schleicher was not daunted by this rejection; and the very next day, December 2, Schleicher openly opposed Papen's plan at a meeting of the Interim Cabinet. The General stated that the lack of parliamentary support for a second Papen government would be met by a simultaneous rising from the National Socialist and Communist parties and a general strike

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 262-263.

from the trade unions. Furthermore, the civil disturbances occasioned by this rising would represent an invitation for a Polish invasion of East Prussia. Schleicher told the cabinet that he was doubtful whether the Reichswehr could suppress both a civil war and a foreign invasion. The frightened cabinet voted immediately for rejection of Papen's proposed plan to form a new government.⁴¹ Without a doubt, the admission by Schleicher was an inglorious confession of the weakness of the Reichswehr which Gröner and Seeckt had tried to keep out of politics. Faced with the situation in which the army and the cabinet had declared lack of confidence in Papen, President Hindenburg resigned himself to the loss of Papen and that evening appointed General Kurt von Schleicher as the new Chancellor of Germany.⁴²

From Schleicher to Hitler. The Schleicher government marked the highest point of army participation in the political life of the country. As such, it should have represented one of the strongest governments in the history of the Weimar Republic, for the government was headed by the President of the Reich and the Supreme Commander of the Reichswehr. Schleicher held the position of German Chancellor, Reich Commissioner of Prussia and Minister of Defense. In reality, this government held office for the least period of time and represented

⁴¹Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 530; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 263-266; Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, pp. 459-460; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 443-445.

⁴²Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, p. 266; Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, p. 261.

one of the weakest governments in German history. In defense of General Schleicher, it must be stated that he did not desire the position of Chancellor. The General always preferred to work behind the scenes; however, President Hindenburg left no alternative to Schleicher who was forced to attempt to form a new parliamentary majority without benefit of rule by presidential decree.

Several factors favored the success of Schleicher's government: the political parties believed that further elections would only result in more gains for the Communist party and might support Schleicher's attempts to form a parliamentary majority; furthermore, the Nazi reverses in the November election had severely drained the finances of the party to the point of bankruptcy.⁴³ On December 3, 1932, Schleicher prepared to gain the necessary support for his government by proceeding to split the National Socialist party. Gregor Strasser was offered the Vice-Chancellorship and Premiership of Prussia. Strasser believed that new elections would be disastrous for the N.S.D.A.P., and that the time had arrived for a policy of cooperation with the government. Schleicher had not counted upon the genius of Adolf Hitler in moments of crisis. Hitler vetoed Strasser's policy, accused him of trying to replace the Führer, and threatened suicide. Strasser resigned from the Nazi party; but instead of resisting Hitler and splitting the party as Schleicher had hoped, Strasser took leave of the whole business and went with his family

⁴³ Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 268-269.

on a vacation to Italy.⁴⁴

Having failed to split the Nazi party, Schleicher had no recourse but to make the rounds of the political parties in the vain hope of achieving a majority. The Social Democrats recalled the Prussian Coup and rejected Schleicher's plea for assistance. Moreover, they scorned Schleicher's promises which concerned unemployment benefits and land reform schemes in the eastern provinces. Word of Schleicher's proposed agrarian reforms angered the conservative forces, and the Nationalist party withdrew its support from the government on January 20. Considerable support within the army itself was lost to Schleicher as a result of the land reform scheme, since the officers' corps was still recruited from the families which would suffer most from the execution of any agrarian reform program.⁴⁵ With less parliamentary backing than even Papen had enjoyed, Schleicher was forced to approach Hindenburg with precisely the same request that Papen had made on December 1. The situation was exactly the same as it had been at that time except that the positions of Schleicher and Papen were reversed. Papen had desired strong measures to meet the emergency and Schleicher had opposed him; now as Chancellor, Schleicher was ready to take strong measures against the Nazis and desired the indefinite suspension of the Reichstag and

⁴⁴Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, pp. 269-270; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 450-451; Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 531.

⁴⁵Craig, Politics of the Prussian Army, pp. 462-463; Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 532.

the establishment of a military dictatorship under presidential authority. Still under the influence of Papen, President Hindenburg was not willing to give the decree of dissolution to Schleicher and ordered him to return to the hopeless task of obtaining a parliamentary majority.⁴⁶

Franz von Papen was not resigned to political oblivion and had devised a scheme to take revenge upon Schleicher and return to public life under a reconstituted government. Even though Papen believed that the power of the Nazis was waning, he realized that he needed the support of Hitler. On January 4, 1933, at the home of the Cologne banker Kurt von Schröder, Papen met with Hitler and some of the leading industrialists of Germany. According to Schröder, Papen proposed a concentration of all conservative forces in one cabinet to be headed co-equally by Hitler and Papen. Papen counted upon Hitler's support for his scheme out of gratitude for badly needed funds to assist the Nazi party. The industrialists who were present at this meeting evidently found favor with Papen's proposal, and the reversal of Nazi-party fortunes dates from this time.⁴⁷ Papen had not yet decided whether he would form an alliance with Hugenburg and the Nationalists or with Hitler and the National

⁴⁶Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, p. 277; Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 532.

⁴⁷Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 464-468; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 271-274; See *infra*, pp. 134-135, for an account of the Cologne meeting of Papen, Hitler, and the industrialists.

Socialists. Papen planned to be Chancellor in the new government which would constitute a presidential dictatorship.⁴⁸

Chancellor Schleicher realized that his government would fall in a matter of days and was concerned chiefly with the choice of his successor. He feared that popular opposition to a Papen-Hugenburg government would inevitably result in civil war which would involve the Reichswehr. On January 28, Schleicher's cabinet unanimously decided to resign unless the decree for dissolution of the Reichstag was not granted by President Hindenburg. Inevitably, the Marshall refused to grant the decree to Schleicher, and the man who had toppled Brüning, Brüning, and Papen experienced a comparable fall from power.⁴⁹ Prior to his resignation, Schleicher had sent General von Hammerstein to see the President and warn him that a Papen-Hugenburg government would result in civil war. Although Hammerstein was received with coldness by the Marshall, he was informed by Hindenburg that Hitler would not be taken into the government.⁵⁰

The opposition of the Reichswehr to a Papen-Hugenburg government convinced Papen that it was impossible to form a government without the assistance of the Nazis, and he opened negotiations for

⁴⁸ Wheeler-Bennett, The Mimesis of Power, p. 278.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 279-280; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 478-479.

⁵⁰ Wheeler-Bennett, The Mimesis of Power, p. 280; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 477-478.

the formation of a Hitler-Papen-Hugenburg-Seldte government. Papen realized that President Hindenburg had to be convinced of the conservative nature of the next cabinet to obtain his consent to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor. As Vice-Chancellor, Papen would act as the liaison between the Chancellor and the President and would be in a position to control the actions of Hitler. Schleicher would be stripped of all power, and General von Blomberg was recalled from the Geneva Disarmament Conference to assume the duties of the Defense Ministry. With the help of Oskar von Hindenburg, Papen was able to convince the President that the inclusion of the National Socialists in the new government was inevitable.⁵¹

Schleicher was furious when he learned that Blomberg had been recalled and would be made the new Minister of Defense. Schleicher still held the position of Interim Chancellor and could have declared a state emergency, instituted martial law, and created a military dictatorship. The question of whether the army actually planned a putsch has not been answered. Eyck and Wheeler-Bennett feel reasonably confident that a projected putsch was never planned by the High Command. The generals opposed only the threat of a Papen-Hugenburg government and believed that civil war would be averted if the Nazis were taken into the new coalition.⁵²

⁵¹Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 475-476, pp. 480-481.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 482-483; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 282-283.

Whether or not Schleicher and Hammerstein planned a putsch, rumors of such a coup circulated freely throughout the government section of Berlin on the night of January 29. Papen evidently believed that the generals had planned a putsch to keep the Nazis out of the government and called a meeting for Monday morning, January 30, to inform Dösterberg and Seldte, the Stahlhelm leaders, and Hugenburg of the Nationalist party that the Reichswehr intended to establish a military dictatorship.⁵³ The only obstacle blocking Hitler's appointment at this time was the question of whether the new cabinet should be given the power to dissolve the Reichstag and call new elections. A national election would give the N.S.D.A.P. a majority in the Reichstag, and Hitler would not be forced to rely upon presidential authority. Hugenburg opposed such an election since his Nationalist party had achieved major gains in the last election. By 11:15 a.m., January 30, Hugenburg had abandoned his objections, and the new cabinet was sworn into office by President Hindenburg. By the evening of January 30, news of Hitler's appointment spread throughout Berlin; and an endless line of supporters marched through the Wilhelmstrasse and waved torches in delight.⁵⁴

The issue of Hitler's appointment had depended upon which of the politicians could gain the favor of the National Socialists. Would Hitler be made captive of the Reichswehr or would he fall under

⁵³ Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 482-483; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, p. 284.

⁵⁴ Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 484-486.

the control of the conservative Right? Both Schleicher and Papen believed that Hitler and the National Socialist movement could be controlled. Their delusion would be dispelled once Hitler gained control of the Reichstag and passed the Enabling Act which established the Nazi dictatorship. In payment for their efforts on Hitler's behalf, Papen would be cast aside and Schleicher would meet an assassin's bullet.

III. THE GUILT OF THE INDUSTRIALISTS

The leaders of German industry displayed little interest in the National Socialist movement during the period of economic prosperity between 1925-1929. The economic depression caused not only the desperate middle class to turn to the support of the National Socialist party, but it also caused leading industrialists to support Hitler as a means of solving their economic problems. The financial contributions and prestige lent by certain individuals and groups connected with German industry to the Nazi party played a significant part in the success of the movement in 1933. Although German industrialists did not "make" the movement, says the American historian George Hallgarten, their influence played a major role in Hitler's appointment as German Chancellor in January of 1933.⁵⁵

⁵⁵George W. F. Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry, 1931-1933," Journal of Economic History, XII (Summer, 1952), 222-246.

Based upon the testimony given at the Nuremberg trials, wherein the Allies attempted to prove the complicity of German industry in support of the National Socialist movement, Hallgarten's essay represents the only comprehensive study of the relationship of German heavy industry to the Nazi movement in the period prior to 1933. Additional sources concerned with the role of German industry include the works of John Wheeler-Bennett, Alan Bullock, Fritz Thyssen, and Erich Eyck.⁵⁶

The policy of German industry to 1931. German bankers and industrialists followed a policy of cooperation with the German trade unions and the Social Democratic party up until 1931 in the belief that the combined action of the trade unions and S.P.D. could halt the spread of communism in Germany. Hitler, as the head of an insignificant south-German nationalist party could not hope to change the basic line followed by the Ruhr industrialists. The Young Plan crisis provided the National Socialists with an issue by which they gained recognition from conservative and industrial circles. The industrialists and the German Nationalist party had opposed the negotiations which led to the signing of the Young Plan and opposed the ratification of the plan in the Reichstag. Hugenburg of the Nationalists obtained the support of the Nazis to campaign against the acceptance of the

⁵⁶ John Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power. The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954); Alan Bullock, Hitler. A Study in Tyranny (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Fritz Thyssen, I Paid Hitler (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1941); Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, trans. by Harlan P. Hanson and Robert G. L. Waite, Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948).

plan, and Hitler received money from Hugenburg and the industrialists which he used to re-equip and expand the S.A.⁵⁷

Up until 1929, Nazi party revenue consisted of membership dues, the sale of party literature, admission charges and collections at large meetings, and individual gifts, mainly from south-German producers; but there were also additional subsidies from interested supporters. Fritz Thyssen made a sizeable donation to the party in 1923; and the support of Emil Kirdorf, a leader of German heavy industry, opened access to the funds of Bergbaulicher Verein and the Federation Eisen Nord West.⁵⁸ These donations, however, remained far behind the expenditures of the party which rose to between seventy and ninety million reichsmarcks by 1933. What was significant, says Hallgarten, was that these sums were donated by prominent industrialists, proving to the supporters of the Nazi movement that Hitler knew the "right" kind of people.⁵⁹

The policy of German industry after 1931. An anti-depression program which called for reductions of public expenses, unemployment subsidies, and salaries was formulated by the Reich Federation of German Industry in the autumn of 1931. The inability of the Brüning government to halt the depression was attacked by industrial circles;

⁵⁷ Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 209-210.

⁵⁸ Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," p. 224.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

and the nationalist meeting in Harzburg in October, 1931, in which Hugenburg and Hitler participated, represented a large segment of industrial interests, with men like Hjalmar Schacht, the Hamburg shipbuilder Blohm, the steel merchant Ravens, and the United Steel head Ernst Poensgen in attendance.⁶⁰ Hitler recognized that the socialist economic program of his party met with disapproval from the industrialists and replaced Gottfried Feder, who had formulated the economic program, with Walther Funk, who had been recommended by Hjalmar Schacht. This appointment symbolized the growing interest of industrial leaders in National Socialism.⁶¹ Funk operated as the liaison between the Nazi party and certain industrial and business interests and was expected to influence the economic policy of the National Socialist party. For a time, Funk ran the Wirtschafts-politischer Pressedienst, an economic press and information service controlled by Dr. Wagener who headed the N.S.D.A.P. Economic Policy Department. There were only sixty subscribers to this agency, but their contributions were reported by Funk to be substantial.⁶² Funk and Schacht were responsible for placing Hitler in contact with a group of coal and steel producers from the Rhineland and Westphalia. In addition to Emil Kirdorf of the Ruhr coal industry and Fritz Thyssen and Albert Voegler of the United Steel Works, Hitler met

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

⁶¹ Ibid.; Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, p. 172.

⁶² Ibid.

Ernest Kuskuhl and H. G. Knepper of the Gelsenkirchen Mine, E. G. von Stauss of the Deutsch Bank, Stein and Schröder of the Stein Bank of Cologne, Hilgard of the Allianz Insurance Corporation, Curt Schmitt of the Munich Reinsurance Corporation, and two additional bankers, Otto Christian Fischer and Friedrich Reinhart, as well as Lubert of the Verkehrswesen, Ltd.⁶³

By December of 1931, Hitler decided to capitalize upon the support which had been offered by these industrialists. He instructed Wilhelm Keppler, an industrialist who was an early supporter of the N.S.D.A.P. and one of Hitler's chief economic advisors, to organize several economic leaders who would assist Hitler when the party came to power. This was the beginning of the "Circle of Friends"; an organization that represented the opening wedge of the Nazis into the ranks of German heavy industry. Hitler instructed Keppler to include Dr. Schacht and Albert Voegler, the Director General of the United Steel Works, and left the choice of additional individuals up to Keppler.⁶⁴ It is impossible to state how much money was obtained from these sources. In his Nuremberg testimony, Walther Funk gives three different figures. During the elections of 1932, the Nazi party received approximately half a million reichsmarks, says Funk. The second figure of approximately one million reichsmarks was

⁶³Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," p. 226.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 227; Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, p. 174.

supposedly contributed by the Rhenish-Westphalia group in 1931-1932. When asked for a total of the money which the National Socialists received from industry prior to 1933, Funk answered that it was not more than several million reichsmarks.⁶⁵ Alan Bullock believes that it is easy to exaggerate the importance of these contributions; despite the sums received from Thyssen, Kirdorf, and the others, Hitler was neither a political puppet created by the industrialists nor an agent which would serve their interests.⁶⁶

Conservative industrial interests were, however, becoming more interested in the National Socialist movement; and on January 27, 1932, Fritz Thyssen arranged for Hitler to speak to the Industry Club at Düsseldorf to the largest assembly of industrialists that Hitler had ever met. By expressing his dissatisfaction with the Versailles treaty and the democratic system and by declaring his intention to rearm Germany, Hitler succeeded in breaking through the reserve of the west-German industrialists. A number of large contributions by these business leaders reached the treasury of the N.S.D.A.P. after the Düsseldorf meeting.⁶⁷

Two incidents occurred in 1932 which caused the industrialists to rally to the National Socialist movement. These events, occurring

⁶⁵See the statement of Walther Funk during the Nuremberg Trials in Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Vol. V, Document PS-2828 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946-1948), pp. 478-479.

⁶⁶Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, p. 175.

⁶⁷Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," p. 229; Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, pp. 196-199.

under the Brüning and Papen governments, were the Osthilfe scandal, or Eastern-aid scheme which subsidized many landowners and Junkers, and the Gelsenkirchen case in which the Brüning government purchased a controlling interest of Gelsenkirchen shares at 300 per cent above the market value.⁶⁸ The Papen government, as well as the industrial and business concerns involved in these somewhat shady deals, could not afford to bear the criticism of the Social Democrats which news of these transactions would bring without the assistance of the National Socialists. The Nazis recognized the opportunity which the Gelsenkirchen transaction offered them. In granting protection to the leading German steel combine, United Steel Works, the Nazis could count on financial and political support. In addition, these industrialists at United Steel wanted to prevent the Reich from using these Gelsenkirchen share which it had purchased to socialize the industry. By the summer of 1932, the ties between the leading sector of the steel industry and the Nazi party were very strong.⁶⁹ The Gelsenkirchen deal and the Osthilfe scheme provided Hitler with material for political blackmail; but first, Hitler decided to try to convince both the Junkers and industrialists that he would best serve their interests. In September of 1932, Thyssen invited a number of industrialists to his home. Hitler spoke to this group and informed them that if he were

⁶⁸For a summary of the Gelsenkirchen transaction, see Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," pp. 232-239.

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 236-238.

made Chancellor, he would take steps for a restoration of the monarchy.⁷⁰ The monarchist pose by the leader of the Nazi party brought forth an enthusiastic response from the leaders of industry.

The policy of German industry from November, 1932 to January, 1933.

The financial support of the United Steel group enabled the Nazis to survive the numerous elections of 1932. The industrialists associated with this group were responsible for a petition sent to Hindenburg which urged Hitler's appointment as Chancellor. Aside from the United Steel group, few industrialists signed this petition. Most of the independent producers feared the economic dictatorship of United Steel too strongly to fall in with their political wishes. As a whole, heavy industry was content to support the Papen government policy of using the Nazis to frighten the Social Democrats and Communists in the Reichstag.⁷¹

When Schleicher became Chancellor, he was concerned with the creation of a mass base for the increase of the army and turned for assistance to the trade unions, the S.P.D., and the left wing of the N.S.D.A.P., headed by Gregor Strasser. General Schleicher needed the backing of the Social Democrats in the Reichstag; however, a Social Democratic plurality in the Reichstag would deprive industry of the

⁷⁰ Thyssen, I Paid Hitler, p. 110.

⁷¹ Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," pp. 240-242; See the petition of November, 1932 wherein the German industrialists urge President Hindenburg to take Hitler into a presidential cabinet in Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Vol. VI, Document PS-3901 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946-1948), pp. 796-797.

profits they hoped to gain from militarization and might lead to an investigation of the Osthilfe scheme or socialization of heavy industry based upon the Reich's ownership of the Gelsenkirchen shares.⁷² The moderate wing of big business which had backed the Papen government was now ready to listen to the proposals of the Nazis to rid themselves of the Schleicher government. Representing the interests of these industrialists, Franz von Papen met with Hitler at the home of the Cologne banker Kurt von Schröder and reached an agreement to replace the Schleicher cabinet with a new Papen government supported by the Nazis.⁷³ It was the aim of the industrialists to see a strong leader come to power and form a stable government in Germany. Immediately following the Papen-Hitler meeting at Cologne, a group of industrialists, headed by Voegler and Springorum, as well as many members of the "Circle of Friends," deposited one million reichsmarks in the National Socialist account in Schröder's banks for distribution among the S.S. and payment of the party's outstanding election debts.⁷⁴ Faced with bankruptcy and a decline of mass support as shown by the November elections, the National Socialist party was saved from certain extinction by the intervention of the industrialists.

⁷² Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," p. 240.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 242; Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic, II, pp. 464-468; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 271-272.

⁷⁴ Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," pp. 242-243; Wheeler-Bennett, The Nemesis of Power, pp. 283-274.

The industrial concerns which supported Hitler's rise to power were those groups which had been hardest hit by the depression. The large banks, faced with the threat of socialization, were represented by men like Friedrich Reinhardt, Emil Meyer, Emil von Stauus, and Hjalmar Schacht. Industrial support for the movement came from the steel producers and coal mining industry - Thyssen, Voegler, the Tengelmans, Springorum, Knepper, Busckuehl - and from their allies in the insurance business and chemical industry. The old industrial families such as Krupp, Peter Klockner, Paul Reusch (of the Haniel-controlled Gute Hoffnungsschutte), Hugo Stinnes, Jr., and Carl Friedrich von Siemens (head of the Siemens electrical firm) feared Hitler's totalitarianism and would have preferred to see him used as a tool by a government controlled by industrialists and Junkers.⁷⁵

On February 20, 1933, Adolf Hitler held a meeting with the industrialists in Berlin and announced his intention to seize control of the Reich, destroy the parliamentary system, and restore the power of the army. Following this speech, a fund for the forthcoming election amounting to three million reichsmarks was collected from the industrialists, and whatever feeble opposition to National Socialism that had existed within industrialists' ranks was ended.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Hallgarten, "Adolf Hitler and German Heavy Industry," pp. 243-244.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 244-245; See Hitler's speech to the leading members of industry prior to the March, 1933 election in Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression, Vol. VI, Document D-203 (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1946-1948), pp. 1080-1085.

While liberal historians agree that the middle-class masses formed the bulk of the Nazi following, most of them believe that the initiative in building the National Socialist movement came from the big industrialists and landowners, high government officials and officers of the army. The industrialists desired a return to prosperity and an economic monopoly in Europe if their concerns were to survive; Junker landowners wished to prevent the expropriation of their estates and exposure of the Osthilfe scandal; the officer's corps wanted a heavily equipped mass army; and the politicians were motivated by personal ambition and a lust for power. Hitler came to power not by his own independent action but through the machinations of non-Nazi groups.

CHAPTER VII

NATIONAL SOCIALISM: A UNIQUE PHENOMENON

Even historians who stress the significance of intellectual, sociological, economic, or political reasons behind Hitler's rise to power will readily acknowledge the tremendous importance of the part Adolf Hitler played in the growth of the National Socialist movement. What facets of Hitler's personality enabled him to gain the fanatical loyalty of the masses and the support of the ruling cliques? What political techniques were employed that propelled the Nazi party to success in the years 1932-1933? Can the political ideology of the National Socialist party be credited for the success of the movement? Many of these problems have been considered in the excellent biography of Hitler written by Alan Dullock. Erich Fromm, Zevedei Barbu, and Douglas Kelley have approached the problem of Hitler's rise to power from the viewpoint of psychologists concerned with the strengths and weaknesses in Hitler's character and the psychological problems of the German people. A. J. P. Taylor, Konrad Heiden, and Karl Dietrich Bracher have stressed Hitler's unparalleled aptitude as a politician with a genius for correct timing as a primary factor in surmounting the difficulties presented in his bid for power. Nazi ideology with an emphasis on the political ideas of

race and Weltanschauung has been noted as responsible for gaining the allegiance of the masses by William Shirer, Leon Poliakov, and Alan Bullock. Otto Klineberg, Hans Gerth, J. J. Shokking, and Henry M. Pachter have stated that the structural organizational and propaganda techniques employed by the party were primarily responsible for the success of the movement.¹ Although these experts disagree about the degree of importance to attach to Hitler's personality in relation to less personal factors, all agree that the unique genius possessed by Hitler was responsible for the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship.

¹Alan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Douglas M. Kelley, 22 Cells in Murenburg, A Psychiatrist Examines the Nazi Criminals (New York: Greenberg, 1947); Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York and Toronto: Rinehart & Co., 1941); Zevedei Barbu, Democracy and Dictatorship: Their Psychology and Patterns of Life (New York: Grove Press, 1956); A. J. P. Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 523-535; Konrad Heiden, Der Fuehrer, Hitler's Rise to Power, trans. by Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1944); Karl Dietrich Bracher, "The Technique of the National Socialist Seizure of Power," The Road to Dictatorship, trans. by Lawrence Wilson (London: Otto Wolff, 1964), pp. 113-125; William Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960); Leon Poliakov, "The Weapon of Anti-Semitism," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 832-847; Alan Bullock, "The Political Ideas of Adolf Hitler," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 350-378; Otto Klineberg, "Racialism in Nazi Germany," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 852-863; Hans Gerth, "The Nazi Party: Its Leadership and Composition," American Journal of Sociology, XLV, No. 4 (January, 1940), 517-541; J. J. Shokking, "Nazism's Way to Success," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 479-503; Henry M. Pachter, "National Socialist and Nationalist Propaganda for the Conquest of Power," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 710-741.

I. THE INFLUENCE OF ADOLF HITLER

Advocates of the "great man" theory of historical causation, convinced that leading personalities shape history, point to the importance of Adolf Hitler in shaping the character of the National Socialist movement. Never in modern history has one man's personality so completely dominated and controlled a society. Hitler is seen as a master of political opportunism who was driven by personal ambition. Psychological factors in Hitler's personality are noted as responsible for gaining the devoted support of party members as well as attracting the masses to the National Socialist movement. Although psychological interpretations of Hitler's character do not explain why Hitler came to power at a precise moment in history, information concerning the peculiar personality of the Führer is helpful in explaining the success of the movement during the 1930's as well as subsequent events which led to World War Two and the fall of the Third Reich.

Psychological motivation in the personality of Adolf Hitler.

Douglas M. Kelley, a psychiatrist, has diagnosed Hitler as a compulsive neurotic with phobias that had a direct bearing on his success in 1933 and his ultimate failure in 1945. Kelley states that the frustrations suffered by Hitler in his early life gave rise to definite feelings of inferiority throughout his career. In order to overcome these feelings, Hitler developed an over-compensatory attitude which eventually culminated in an actual belief in his own superiority and conviction of

divine mission on earth. Hitler would be classified as a psychoneurotic of the obsessive and hysterical type, says Kelley, and these obsessive and compulsive patterns, coupled with compensatory actions, forced him into situations from which he could not withdraw.² An example of this obsession-compulsion component in operation was Hitler's decision to turn from a fairly successful campaign against Britain to the invasion of Russia which proved to be a hopeless debacle. Hitler feared stomach cancer and believed that he might soon die. Since he was the only one who could successfully fight against communism, Russia was attacked immediately. "It is appalling to realize," exclaims Kelley, "that an entire war was precipitated because of the severe hysterical stomach cramps and obsessive-compulsive fears of a psychoneurotic who happened to be in a position of command."³ In addition, Hitler displayed paranoid or persecution patterns, manifested by his marked suspiciousness and his feelings, both for himself and for the country, that every nation or people was persecuting him. Evidence of Hitler's persecution complex was his projection to others of the blame for anything unfortunate that happened in the Third Reich. Although abnormal and mentally ill, Hitler was able by his drive, intelligence, and his ability to handle people to reach a position where his pathological deviations could disrupt and almost destroy the entire civilized world.⁴

²Kelley, 22 Cells in Laureburg, p. 235.

³Ibid., p. 217.

⁴Ibid., pp. 235-236.

Kelley is concerned only with Hitler's personality and not with his broad social and psychological background. The relationship between Hitler's personality and his appeal to the German people has been described by social psychologists Erich Fromm and Zevedei Barbu. Fromm, an eminent American psychologist, maintains that Hitler possessed a character structure which he terms "authoritarian," and the appeal to the lower-middle class was successful simply because this group shared similar character traits with Hitler.⁵ The essence of the authoritarian character, explains Fromm, is the simultaneous presence of sadistic and masochistic drives. Sadism is understood as a craving for power over men, mixed with destructiveness; and masochism represents the longing for submission to an overwhelmingly strong outside power. Sadistic craving for power is manifested throughout Hitler's writings, says Fromm. Hitler both despised and loved the masses whom he desired to dominate and believed that the masses derived satisfaction from domination. Hitler was very aware of the methods necessary to achieve control of the masses and employed the technique of the evening mass political meeting where the natural resistance of the people was weakened and susceptible to domination by a superior oratorical talent.⁶ While Hitler and the Nazi party leaders derived satisfaction from control of the masses, the masses themselves were not deprived of sadistic satis-

⁵ Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 221.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 222-223.

faction. Political and racial minorities within Germany and eventually other nations became the objects of sadism by the masses.⁷ The masochistic side of Nazi ideology and practice was most obvious with respect to the masses. The individual was told that he was insignificant and should dissolve his personality in a higher power to receive the strength and glory of the greater community. This masochistic longing was found in Hitler himself who had to submit to an overwhelmingly strong power which he termed at various times Fate, God, Necessity, History, or Nature.⁸ Typical of the sado-masochistic character is the love for the powerful and the hatred of the powerless, and this psychological trait explains Hitler's political actions. He hated the Weimar Republic because it was weak, and he admired the industrial and military leaders because they had power.⁹ Nazi ideology was shaped by the sado-masochistic tendencies in Hitler's character; and it was accepted by people who, on account of a similar character structure, became ardent followers and supporters of the man who expressed what they felt.

Zevedei Barbu, a social-psychologist, agrees with Erich Fromm when he asserts that the reasons for the success of National Socialism can be found through a psychological examination of the German people. Hitler succeeded because his movement gave hope to many individuals

⁷ Ibid., p. 225.

⁸ Ibid., p. 226.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 231-232.

that their psychological demands be answered. Defeated by war and broken by inflation, the uprooted, humiliated, and insecure Germans were attracted to Nazism because they felt that their personal problems would be solved by a movement that promised to supply everything they lacked as individuals: dramatic action, a sense of purpose, and a feeling of power.¹⁰ The Nazis recruited their members from a cross-section of Germans, says Barbu, and the National Socialist movement both reflected and responded to the desires of the German people.¹¹

Kelley, Fromm, and Barbu are agreed that particular personality traits in Adolf Hitler and similar traits in the German people were responsible for the rise and ultimate success of National Socialism in 1933. The study of character traits in an individual or a society alone cannot fully explain an historical phenomenon without an examination of the broad social and cultural forces which shaped the personality of Hitler, the character of the Nazi movement, and the techniques of power seizure.

The character of Adolf Hitler. Much literature has been written about the charismatic nature of Hitler's leadership. Perhaps an examination of the forces which molded his character and the techniques employed by this demagogue will explain the success achieved by the National

¹⁰ Barbu, Democracy and Dictatorship, pp. 124-126.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 128-130.

Socialist movement. What were the gifts possessed by Hitler that enabled him to secure and maintain power? Alan Bullock and Robert G. L. Waite have outlined a portrait of the man who for more than a decade was the arbiter of the fate of nations and the peace of the world. According to Bullock, Hitler's physical appearance was certainly not impressive, and he possessed none of the physical characteristics of racial superiority invoked by Nazi ideology. In an otherwise undistinguished face, only Hitler's eyes attracted attention because of their hypnotic quality. His face possessed a certain mobility: an ability to express rapidly changing moods.¹² From this description, it is evident that Hitler's bid for power could not have been based upon physical appearance. Speech was the essential medium of his power over audiences as well as over his own temperament, declares Bullock. Often through talk, Hitler would become convinced of the validity of his own argument. He distrusted argument and criticism, and words to him were not a means of rational communication but simply devices for manipulating emotion. Hitler, as one of the most effective orators in history, excited crowds to the point of hysteria through the spoken word. Although he was often repetitive and verbose and lacked lucidity, the extraordinary impression of force and the intensity of hatred and fury conveyed by the sound of his voice overruled any shortcomings as an orator. One of

¹² Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, p. 372.

the secrets of his mastery over a great audience was his instinctive sensitivity to the mood of the crowd. He had a talent for recognizing the hidden resentments and longings of the people. His power to bewitch an audience is without parallel in modern history, says Bullock.¹³

Hitler was never a rational man and saw himself as a visionary and prophet. The fantastic schemes of a vast empire embracing the Eurasian Heartland of the geopoliticians, the plans for breeding a new elite biologically pre-selected, his design for reducing entire nations to slavery in the formation of his new empire were the products of an imagination influenced by the political romanticism of Richard Wagner and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Unfortunately, Hitler was capable of translating his fantasies into terrible reality as evidenced by the invasion of Russia, the S.S. extermination squads, the planned elimination of the Jewish people, and the treatment of the Slavs. With Hitler, says Bullock, one is uncomfortably aware of never being far from the realm of the irrational.¹⁴ So much has been said of the charismatic nature of Hitler's leadership that it is easy to forget that Hitler was also an astute and cynical politician - it is this mixture of fanaticism and calculation that is the key to the understanding of Hitler's personality.

Hitler was able to exploit his own temperament to accomplish his goals. This capacity for self-dramatization could be used to

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 373-374; Robert G. L. Waite, "Adolf Hitler: A Life Sketch," *Hitler and Nazi Germany*, ed. by Robert G. L. Waite (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), pp. 10-11.

¹⁴ Bullock, *Hitler, A Study in Tyranny*, pp. 374-375.

persuade or win someone over by a display of great charm or, conversely, could be extended to moods of anger in which Hitler worked himself into a frenzy of indignation over some so-called slight. Hitler always gave the impression of concentrated will-power and intelligence with a knowledge of facts that always impressed his generals or ministers. He relied on his remarkable memory to provide the details and figures for his arguments. That the details were often inaccurate mattered little, for his forceful presentation had achieved the desired effect. Hitler was always a skillful actor who was fully absorbed in his role.¹⁵

One supreme advantage that Hitler had over all opponents was his total lack of scruples and inhibitions. He had no roots, no loyalties, was bound by no traditions, and felt respect for neither God nor man. Hitler could seize any advantage that could be gained through cunning, treachery, or unscrupulousness. He trusted no person and never made an uncalculated move. He preserved his position in the party by allowing rivalries to develop among the leaders, and he followed the principle of divide and rule after he became Chancellor to preserve absolute power in his own hands. He distrusted experts and refused to be impressed by the complexity of problems. He had a genius for finding a simple solution for problems, usually through the use or the threat of force, which was generally effective.¹⁶

Hitler's entire career was dominated by his lust for power and his craving for domination over other people. This will-to-power was

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 376-377.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 380-382.

the most important principle of Nazi ideology. Hitler identified his own power with the recovery of Germany's position in the world; but when the interests of Germany began to diverge from those of Hitler, from 1943 onward, it became evident that Hitler would willingly sacrifice Germany since it represented only a vehicle for his own power. Bullock believes that this will-to-power can be traced back to Hitler's Vienna and Munich days when the compelling urge to revenge himself upon a world that had slighted and ignored him directed the way for the formation of a new political movement. Revenge and hatred characterized his feelings toward the Jews, Marxists, Czechs, Poles, and the French. He felt only contempt for the intellectuals and the educated middle class which had once rejected him and which he was determined to destroy. Hatred and cynicism marked Hitler's attitude toward the world, but stopped short of his own person. He came to believe that he had a divine mission and was exempt from the ordinary rules of human conduct. Marked by Providence, Hitler believed that he could reawaken Germany to greatness. It was by such dreams that he sustained the ruthlessness of character and determination of will. So long as this sense of mission was balanced by the cold calculations of the politician, it represented a source of strength to Hitler. But when half of Europe was conquered, all need of restraint was removed and Hitler abandoned himself to megalomania. He became convinced of his own infallibility and became blinded to actual events. Belief in his own genius caused Hitler to be guilty of the sin of overweening

pride, says Bullock, and no man was ever more surely destroyed by the image he had created than Adolf Hitler.¹⁷

II. THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF ADOLF HITLER AND THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

The political ideas evolved by Adolf Hitler constituted the ideology of the National Socialist party. The extent to which Hitler was influenced by nineteenth-century writers - Hegel, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Wagner - or by the early twentieth-century racist proponents - Gobineau or Houston Stewart Chamberlain - is not known.¹⁸ His "great ideas" were acquired during his Vienna years (1907-1913). The political ideas and program that Hitler absorbed were entirely unoriginal; they were borrowed from writers of radical and Pan-German gutter politics. The originality came out of Hitler's grasp of how to create a mass-movement and secure power on the basis of these ideas. Without an understanding of the ideas that formed the basis for Nazi ideology, it cannot be possible to appreciate the extent to which this movement represented not only a seizure of power but a violent revolution against all liberal and Christian institutions of Western civilization. What were the political ideas which enabled Hitler to gain control over the masses and the leadership of Germany in 1933?

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 383-385.

¹⁸See supra, pp. 37-48, for a discussion of the influence of German romanticism and Pan-German nationalist ideology upon Nazi thought.

The Nazi Weltanschauung. Alan Bullock defines three principles in Nazi political ideology: struggle, race, and individuality. Hitler's concept of struggle was based upon a crude form of Social Darwinism that proclaimed that struggle is not only the sole condition upon which man preserves his life, but it is also the basis for all of his achievements. All of man's virtues and accomplishments are nourished by competition. Without the difficulties which man is forced to overcome in order to survive, he would sink back to the level of the herd and achieve nothing. Consequently, force and power would be the determining factors in the struggle. Hitler stated that this power was to be found in self-reliance and not in help from others or by an appeal to man's natural rights. Only strength could gain justice for the individual and the nation. This interpretation shows a brilliant psychological appreciation of the state of mind of many Germans who had lived through the period of inflation, reparations, and economic depression, notes Bullock.¹⁹

The second principle of the Nazi Weltanschauung was the stress on Volk, or the community of people or life of the nation. Nazi ideology stressed that all institutions and individuals were but a part of the Volk and shared the responsibility for the preservation and protection of the life of the nation. By this principle, Hitler justified the unscrupulous campaign by which the hated Weimar Republic was overthrown.

¹⁹ Bullock, "The Political Ideas of Adolf Hitler," pp. 352-354; Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, pp. 80-89.

Hitler believed that the republican government had committed treason against the German people. The loyalty of the Nazis was to the Volk and not to the republican state. The relationship of the individual to the community represented a mystical community in which the interests of the individual were subordinate to the higher interests of the Volk. Subjection of the individual will to the Volk gave to all a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Truth, justice, economics, and politics were dependent upon the overriding claims of the Volk and its preservation. The community created by common blood possessed a spirit which would be rooted in the national history and character of the country. This spirit of the people could be falsified and misled; nevertheless, it remained in the subconsciousness of the people until it could be evoked by a Leader who represented the incarnation of this spirit of the people. This Führerprinzip provided the rational justification for Hitler's dictatorship. The exaltation of the Volk was based upon Hitler's belief in inequality of peoples, since Volk was founded upon a racial and not a democratic basis. Nazi ideology stated that inequality was inherent among different peoples, just as individuals and groups within each Volk were not equal; therefore, the positions of leadership within the community would be given to those individuals who exemplified the best racial qualities. This belief justified the function of the Nazi movement to recruit the elite and provide leadership. Thus the function of the party leadership was

the education of the people in the Nazi Weltanschauung as the element of unity and cohesion for the German people.²⁰

The insistence upon race is the most characteristic feature of the Nazi Weltanschauung, says Bullock. Race had little to do with biological science and its real role was one of myth. Nazi ideology stated that the Aryan race was responsible for every creative achievement of man. Because the Aryan neglected to maintain his own racial stock, the racial mixture resulted in the loss of cultural creativeness. Racial deterioration was responsible for the decline of the ancient civilizations. The identity of these superior Aryans and the period in history when the mixture of races occurred as well as the geographical location is not noted in any of the ideological writings of the National Socialist movement. Although Hitler frequently spoke as though the whole German nation represented pure Aryan stock, he really believed that only a part of any nation could be regarded as Aryan. This elite had the responsibility of stamping its ideas upon the nation as a whole. Hitler used his views on race to justify the right to dominate "inferior" peoples, like the Slavs and French, and the right of the Nazis to rule over the German people.²¹

A New Order, based upon race, was outlined in National Socialist ideology. All Germans, including those living outside the Reich borders,

²⁰Bullock, "The Political Ideas of Adolf Hitler," pp. 360-374.

²¹Ibid., pp. 358-359.

were to be a part of this New Order. Nazi ideology stressed the expansion of the Reich to the east to gain Lebensraum for the establishment of the Volkish nation, a primitive tribal community based upon blood and soil, ruled by the absolute domination of the Leader.²²

The role of anti-Semitism in National Socialist ideology.

Antagonism to the Jews had long been a factor in European life. Many scholars agree with Bullock that race was an important part of the Nazi Weltanschauung. National Socialist ideology used anti-Semitic sentiments as a technique to unify the German people around the banner of Nazism. German ethnocentrism was strengthened by the presence of this "enemy" in their midst. Because of their belief in racial supremacy, Germans developed feelings of self-confidence as a part of the elite Aryan race. No matter how much they as individuals may have failed, they could take comfort from the fact that the laws of biology destined them to prevail over others. This was important to a people who had lost a world war and gone through an economic crisis, who were assured that the fault could not be theirs since they were part of the elite class. Acceptance of racialist philosophy had practical economic gains, since the Jews occupied many high positions in administrative and political life under the Weimar government, and the exploitation and elimination of the Jews made these jobs and property available to the dispossessed elite.²³

²² Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, pp. 80-89.

²³ Klineberg, "Racialism in Nazi Germany," pp. 862-863.

The Nazis exploited anti-Semitism as a technique to gain power. The Jew was represented by Nazi ideology as the incarnation of evil. Democracy, Bolshevism, Social Democracy, parliamentarianism, and freedom of the press; liberalism and internationalism; anti-militarism and class war; prostitution and miscegenation - all were instruments devised by the Jew to subdue the Aryan people.²⁴ Nazi ideologists attempted to give racialism a scientific basis by an appeal to pseudo-Darwinism in the glorification of the Nordic type. Since most of the Nazi leaders fell short of the ideal blond, tall, dolichocephalic type, it was impossible to carry out any consistent racial philosophy. It was easier to forget about physical type and speak of "blood" and "soil."²⁵ The National Socialists exploited the human emotions through their anti-Semitic appeal. Individual inadequacies were forgotten as the German people projected their fears and hatred onto the Jewish people. Particularly did the Nazis make a systematic appeal to sexual emotions by relating stories of race violation, sadistic murders, and stories of rape which were attributed to the Jewish people.²⁶ Finally, the consistent use of terror applied by the S.A. against the Jews and other political opponents produced an atmosphere of fear and terror which weakened

²⁴Bullock, "The Political Ideas of Adolf Hitler," pp. 376-377.

²⁵Klineberg, "Racialism in Nazi Germany," pp. 838-839; Poliakov, "The Weapon of Anti-Semitism," p. 839.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 839-840.

the fabric of German life in the period prior to 1933.²⁷ After the Nazis came to power, they pushed their anti-Semitic program to its ultimate conclusion - the total elimination of the Jewish people - for the purpose of gaining world supremacy for the master race. Thus the charismatic leadership of Adolf Hitler, combined with the political ideology of race and Weltanschauung, brought the Nazi movement to power in 1933.

III. TECHNIQUES AND ORGANIZATION OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY

Many historians believe that the growth of National Socialism and its ultimate success in January of 1933 can be attributed to the tactics and techniques employed by the Nazi party and its leaders. Hitler was always a political opportunist and was able to seize every advantage to defeat his opponents. The emphasis upon legality in the power struggle prior to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor; the propaganda techniques, coupled with terrorist tactics; and the organizational structure and operational methods of the Nazi party enabled Hitler to establish the Nazi dictatorship.

The seizure of power technique. One of Hitler's earliest biographers, Konrad Heiden, calls the Nazi leader by the term "Adolphe Legalite," in reference to Hitler's insistence upon preserving the forms of legality in the struggle for power, rather than resorting to

²⁷ Ibid., p. 841.

violent revolution.²⁸ Through this technique, Adolf Hitler gained the confidence of the ruling classes, whom he intended to destroy. Hitler followed the principle of legalism even in the face of impatient revolutionaries in the National Socialist party and in the S.A. In 1932, he insisted upon holding out for the Chancellorship when he could have obtained a lesser post in a government cabinet, even when the loss of votes after the November election appeared to signal a decline of party influence and support.²⁹ The path followed by Hitler was the way of intrigue - he would become Chancellor as the leader of a minority party and would then use the power of the state to establish his dictatorship.³⁰

The stress upon legalism determined the phases and circumstances that made the seizure of power so seductive; and all legal, political, and intellectual opposition practically impossible, says the German scholar Karl Dietrich Bracher in an analysis of the political methods employed by the Nazis.³¹ The German people had an aversion to open revolution, deeply rooted after the experiences of 1848 and 1918. The abortive Munich Putsch of 1923 convinced Hitler that a direct assault on the existing order was doomed to failure. Legalism marked the path for the re-formed N.S.D.A.P. after 1925, even though

²⁸ Heiden, Der Fuehrer, p. 411.

²⁹ Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, pp. 377-378.

³⁰ Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," p. 523.

³¹ Bracher, "The Technique of the National Socialist Seizure of Power," p. 116.

the future of the party appeared to be bleak by the rules of parliamentary democracy. Hitler saw that power could be gained by legal means, and the effort of the Nazis to gain votes in successive elections witnessed Hitler's belief that National Socialism would eventually triumph. The Weimar Constitution did not prevent constitutional means from being used to undermine and eventually destroy its very existence. Even at the time of its greatest expansion in the summer of 1932, the N.S.D.A.P. did not gain more than one-third of the parliamentary seats; consequently, the legal path to dictatorship appeared blocked to Hitler.³² A weakness in the Weimar system offered a way out of the dilemma posed by the policy of legality. This was the possibility of a presidentially-appointed government without the support of the parliament. The emergency powers granted to the President under Article 48 of the Weimar constitution were designed to safeguard the democratic order, but were used by Papen and Schleicher as a convenient escape from political responsibility. Throughout the negotiations which characterize the months prior to Hitler's appointment, the basic demand remained unchanged: Hitler as Chancellor must have the emergency powers of Article 48. By stressing legality, Hitler made his way into the government, not as the leader of a working parliamentary majority coalition, but through the authoritarian gap in the Weimar constitution, claims Bracher.³³

³²Ibid., pp. 117-118.

³³Ibid., pp. 118-119.

The actual seizure of power did not begin until Hitler had been appointed Chancellor. The tactics of legality were combined with the strategy of "national revolution" to regiment all safeguards to democratic government and eliminate all opposition. The passage of the Enabling Act on March 23, 1933, witnessed the transfer of the full legislative power of the Reichstag to the government.³⁴ By the summer of 1933, the collapse of the political parties and ideologies which had lost the will to defend themselves were evidence to the success of the National Socialist Revolution.

The structure of the National Socialist party. The leadership provided by Adolf Hitler and the tactics of power seizure were successful because of the organizational and operational methods used by the Nazi party. The sociologist Hans Gerth believes that National Socialism came to power because of the successful fusion of charismatic domination and bureaucratic totalitarianism. The charismatic claim to leadership meant that no status on the basis of specialized achievement could be given without the approval of the Leader. Hitler delegated powers to his faithful followers, the "inner circle." All power emanated from the Leader. The charismatic claim to leadership was based upon the infallibility of the Leader who created an order not based upon any previously existing standards.³⁵ The bureaucratic

³⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

³⁵ Gerth, "The Nazi Party: Its Leadership and Composition," pp. 517-520.

nature of the National Socialist movement attracted people with bureaucratic backgrounds like the civil-service employees and teachers who became party functionaries. The great mass of Nazi followers came from a disadvantaged class which represented unsuccessful persons from every sphere of life. This disadvantaged class supported the N.S.D.A.P. in the hope that the party would change the existing order.³⁶

Youth was attracted to the party because of its early emphasis on revolutionary tactics. The leader-follower relationship and the techniques of violence appealed to the youth of the nation, especially to those who had been members of the private post-war armies. The percentage of party members between eighteen and thirty-years of age was 42.2 per cent just before the party came to power. After the conquest of power and stabilization and bureaucratization, youth no longer played the same role in the party and "experienced men" joined the party in great numbers.³⁷

The party developed an organizational hierarchy as early as 1920 when Hitler became the head of the N.S.D.A.P., states Shokking. Tasks were confided to special departments which, with the growth of the party, took on aspects of shadow governments for local governmental authorities. Although there was overlapping of authority, all departments and party organizations were responsible to Hitler who resolved the conflicts. In this manner, Hitler was able to keep absolute power

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 524-529.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 529-530.

in his own hands.³⁸ The hierarchal pyramid of party organization appealed to the German need for a completion of the German community united in the spiritual and political spheres. The Nazi hierarchy promised a romanticized and spiritualized nationalism which was readily accepted as an alternative to the weak parliamentary system which produced no social or political unity. The absense of any consistent political philosophy permitted the propaganda of the party to appeal to widely divergent interests. Since only Hitler could interpret National Socialist ideology, he could manipulate its ideas to suit the needs of the occasion.³⁹

The National Socialist attempt to appeal to the national consciousness was best expressed by its symbols - the swastika of the Free Corps movement, the red color of revolutionary socialism, and the Roman salute. This symbolism served as a constant reminder of the promises of national unity in contrast to the economic distress and political problems of the Weimar Republic.⁴⁰ The Nazi party became an organization of uncompromising hatred for all of the outside world. Members of the party severed their connection with family ties and with accepted traditions and customs; consequently, the party members were irrevocably bound to the party. Since no escape was possible, the fate of the individual members was tied to the fate of the party.⁴¹

³⁸Shokking, "Nazism's Way to Success," p. 409.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 490-494.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 495.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 499.

In part, this explains the fanatical devotion of the party members to the Leader and to National Socialist ideology.

The tactics and techniques of propaganda and terrorism. The techniques of propaganda and terrorism used by the Nazi party were mainly responsible for the success of the National Socialist movement, says Henry M. Pachter. Totalitarian propaganda as a form of violence was used for the purpose conquering power.⁴² Alan Bullock believes that Hitler was a master of mass emotion and recognized the potential power of a combination of propaganda and terrorism.⁴³ The device of the mass meeting was used to capture support, and every trick of the theater was used to heighten emotional intensity: the music of massed bands, the forest of standards and flags, the vast perspective of the stadium, the smoking torches, the dome of searchlights - all created a sense of power and unity that was irresistible. Mass meetings were held in the evening when the resistance of the people was lowered after the work of the day, and night was the traditional time for spiritual experiences. The speaker gained complete authority over the inert crowd which took on the aspect of a unified community that excluded all other loyalties. Personal identity was lost in the mass meeting as the crowd identified completely with the Leader. The mass meeting was not held for the purpose of argument or program but

⁴²Pachter, "National Socialist and Nationalist Propaganda," p. 710.

⁴³Bullock, "The Political Ideas of Adolf Hitler," p. 379.

represented a purely emotional experience.⁴⁴

National Socialist propaganda was aimed at tearing down the existing order. The party attacked all the social evils that the Weimar Republic had failed to solve; party propaganda dwelt on the anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist sentiments of the masses. The party supplied the complete imagery of rebellion: the abolition of the parliamentary system, the tearing up of treaties, the removal of "traitors" in their midst, and the liquidation of the Jews. The Nazi party was anti-republican, anti-monarchial, anti-labor, anti-Semitic, anti-clerical - they could be anti-everything at the same time, declares Pachter.⁴⁵ The party was against everything and it mattered little what they were for and consequently could make conflicting promises. Nazism never made a responsible contribution to the solving of any problem, and the followers of the movement never expected any responsible action from the party. Hitler's goal was to make use of the discontent to completely overthrow the parliamentary system, and his followers merely waited for total change.⁴⁶

The Nazi Revolution denied the values of civilization, attempted to overthrow the existing order of things, and assumed war as the natural condition of man for the purpose of the overthrow of the existing system. Nazi propaganda manipulated all forms of everyday life in

⁴⁴Ibid.; Pachter, "National Socialist and Nationalist Propaganda," pp. 711-715.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 718.

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 718-720.

the image of war. Thus war-like attitudes applied to all civilian and political matters. A war-like organization and war-like phraseology gave the Nazi movement its revolutionary flavor and dynamism, says Pachter.⁴⁷ Since the Nazi movement was not formed on any specific program, Hitler rejected the validity of ideas and reasoned argument. Imagery and symbolism suggestive of dynamism replaced ideas. By their refusal to match ideas with facts, they could undermine the values of their opponents. The Nazis attacked the symbol of civilized debate - the parliament - did their best to make it unworkable, and then accused the representative assembly of inefficiency. After the conquest of power, the National Socialists controlled publicity and information and never took any chances with freedom of debate. By their failure to respect the reasoning power of the audience, the Nazis failed to face the real issues. Their lies were neither more skillful nor more effective than the propaganda of their opponents. Their appeal was directed neither to interest nor to insight, but to duty and faith in the Leader. For this reason, National Socialism appeared to cut across all other parties which represented group interests.⁴⁸

According to Pachter, Nazi propaganda used only one basic device - unconquered minds were placed under the spell of the party's symbols of power as though their choice were already a foregone conclusion - thus the entire nation became a "captive audience." Free choice

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 721-725.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 726-728.

cannot be made by such an audience. Consequently, Nazi propaganda had the task of first becoming conspicuous, then of arousing curiosity, and finally of being omni-present in the minds of the public at large. Terrorist tactics presented the Nazi party as a threat to the masses, and salvation could be obtained only through participation in the movement.⁴⁹

Fascist propaganda operated on three levels, says Pachter: to indoctrinate followers, to paralyze and mislead adversaries, and to win over the undecided. There was never any secret doctrine for fascist propaganda, since the propaganda used by the Nazis appealed to the emotions and was adapted to the intellectual level of the lowest mentality. Nazi propaganda was effective because it chose a few striking points and reiterated them constantly. The Nazis also used the technique of the "big truth" combined with the "big lie." Pachter explains this technique as propaganda which exposes the weaknesses of parties opposing National Socialism and frankness in stating the ultimate aim of eradicating all political opposition. Whether lie or truth, change had to be avoided, and the same lies or truths were constantly repeated to the masses.⁵⁰

All totalitarian propaganda requires an arch-enemy which can be depicted as the total embodiment of evil, as universal and existing everywhere. Nazi propaganda depicted the Jew as the arch-enemy with

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 729-732.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 732-735.

whom other enemies were allied. The Nazis made anti-Semitism the cornerstone of their propaganda. By recognizing that the common man needed to attribute his frustrations to some irrational cause, anti-Semitism became a technique of mass domination designed to divert hate away from the ruling class and attribute it to some mythical symbol of "otherness." The so-called Jewish World Conspiracy provided the excuse for the masses to support National Socialism, which was vehemently opposed to Jewish world government, and provided the rationalization for Nazi conquest of power.⁵¹

Once a movement of this type is in power, it can cause things to happen according to its own predictions and create propaganda facts at home and even abroad. Real events and facts, as well as decisions, are viewed only as they fit into the pattern of propaganda. Eventually, the propagandists and the all-powerful leader lose grip on reality and end by chasing their own fantasies, as occurred in Nazi Germany after 1943.⁵²

National Socialism represented a unique phenomenon in history. The charismatic nature of Hitler's personality enabled him to transform National Socialism into a mass movement. The ideas of race and Weltanschauung in Nazi ideology corresponded to the psychological needs of the German people. Nazi theory was popularized through the use of effective propaganda techniques and through a tightly organized party structure under the absolute control of the Führer, who was able to correctly assess the political climate in his bid for power.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 736-737.

⁵²Ibid., pp. 739-741.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Few historical questions invite such a degree of interpretation as the phenomenon of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist movement. National Socialism represented a political and social movement of unprecedented barbarism which did not occur in the dim past of man's history but in the twentieth century in one of the most civilized nations of the world. Why did the Germans allow the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in 1933? Were other nations in some way responsible for the success of the National Socialist movement? Could Nazism happen again in Germany or elsewhere? Friederick Meinecke has predicted that the question of deeper causes of the frightful catastrophe which burst upon Germany will occupy the coming centuries.¹

Historians concerned with the origins of the National Socialist movement have examined the evidence in an attempt to arrive at a definitive explanation of the success of Adolf Hitler in January, 1933. The striking characteristics of the movement have been generally recognized by scholars: rule by one man or by a narrow group; economic coordination; international aggression; the use of terror tactics; a complete amorality.

¹Friederick Meinecke, The German Catastrophe, Reflections and Recollections, trans. by Sidney B. Fay (Boston, Mass.: The Beacon Press, 1963), p. 1.

Yet these attributes do not fully explain the complex nature of the National Socialist movement. To what extent did ideas shape the Nazi movement? Was National Socialism a unique occurrence or did it have its roots in German or European history? Could revolutionary action by conservatives or popular demands of the masses create a totalitarian movement? Many plausible causes have been cited to explain the German fascist movement; however, each interpretation seeks to expound a particular view rather than to bring out the truth. While the individual studies are valuable, no comprehensive account of the National Socialist movement has yet been attempted by a leading scholar. Nor have historians been able to agree as to whether the National Socialist movement was primarily a political, economic, or sociological phenomenon. Perhaps a summary of the central problems relating to the rise of Hitler will offer an answer to this intriguing problem.

I. MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

Was National Socialism the logical continuation of German history? Many Western liberal historians believe that the German people developed certain "national characteristics" throughout the course of their history which were important factors in the success of the National Socialist movement. Many of the historians who view National Socialism as a continuation of German history are German scholars who see a need for a re-evaluation of the German past if the

country hopes to avoid a catastrophe similar to that of the Nazi dictatorship of 1933-1945.

This explanation contends that the German spirit was influenced by the authoritarian political tradition which resulted from the militaristic "blood and iron" policies employed by Bismarck during the years of unification. The nationalist cause was also conditioned by an intellectual movement which looked for inspiration to the Middle Ages in which the traditional folk customs and unity of the German people were most evident. The belief in liberal and democratic ideals, spread throughout Europe during the French Revolution, were rejected in favor of a romanticized German *Weltanschauung* that emphasized Germany's mission for continental conquest and colonial empire. The system of absolute power in an authoritarian state, the glorification of war, the belief in a master race, contempt for Jewish and Slavic peoples, and disdain for democratic institutions characterize German intellectual thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and represent a "break with the West." Edmond Vermeil, a leading proponent of this interpretation, declares that Hitler would never have gained power in 1933 had the party not attacked Western humanism and popularized Pan-Germanic imperialism as a *Weltanschauung* to be imposed on Germany, Europe, and the world.² According to this

²Edmond Vermeil, "The Origin, Nature and Development of German Nationalist Ideology in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p. 95.

interpretation, democracy never won success in Germany before the First World War. The Weimar Republic was artificially installed by the victorious Allies in 1918 and was never rooted in the historical experience of the German people. Authoritarianism and nationalistic craving for power lay dormant within the German people, making possible the easy acceptance of National Socialism. Consequently, National Socialism represents the inevitable outgrowth of German history.

The view that the National Socialist movement has its origins in German history has been attacked by scholars both within and outside of Germany. They believe that it is not correct to equate the conservative authoritarianism of the Hohenzollerns, Bismarck, the Junkers, and the army with National Socialist authoritarianism. These conservatives practiced authoritarianism as a means of preserving their social, economic, and political status, a status quite different from that of Nazism. A study of German history shows that a large percentage of Germans opposed authoritarianism and militarism and preferred the ideals of freedom, say these historians. Furthermore, the German tradition contained democratic as well as authoritarian thought. According to Gerhard Ritter, "nineteenth-century Germany was characterized by a great liberal movement . . . and the energetic establishment of constitutional institutions,"³ The Frankfurt Assembly of 1848 attempted to

³Gerhard Ritter, "The Historical Foundations of the Rise of National Socialism," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), pp. 388-389.

create a democratic state structured on a federative form. Although the Revolution of 1848 failed to achieve a government responsible to the people, many Germans fought against militarism and anti-Semitism, worked to extend the suffrage, and grew in numbers during the first decade of this century. A large majority of German people voted for the creation of a democratic republic, and the Weimar Republic was established in 1919. The charge that the German intellectual tradition fostered an anti-humanist and anti-liberal spirit which paved the way for National Socialism is patently false, state these conservative historians. The love of military glory, foundness for abstract principles, and alleged patriarchalism are to be found in the literature of Britain, France, Italy, and Spain during certain periods of their history.⁴ Clearly, the attempt by liberal historians to trace National Socialism to an authoritarian spirit unique to the German people must be questioned in the light of these facts. Hitler's system was in no sense a continuation; it was a contradiction of tradition.

National Socialist theorists claimed that their movement represented a higher form of democracy as they distinguished between the Western form of liberal democracy and the voluntarist form of National Socialism. They saw the general will of the people expressed through the will of a single man, whose clear-cut decisions contrasted with the compromises necessary under a parliamentary political system.

⁴Robert H. Lowie, Toward Understanding Germany (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 354-356.

Most liberal historians denounce Nazi claims to democracy as a sham and say that concepts derived from Rousseau cannot be used to justify the establishment of a totalitarian system. The important question is not whether National Socialism was democratic but rather whether it was produced by democracy. Conservative historians, seeking to defend traditional thought and institutions from the liberals' charge that it failed to further political responsibility, believe that the Nazi claim is technically correct. National Socialism was a form of democratic radicalism which arises whenever the masses become aware of their interests and seek to establish popular sovereignty without the restraints of constitutional limitations or the leadership of a political elite. Mass democracy develops whenever the traditional class structure has been weakened by a materialistic philosophy which has replaced traditional religious belief, when there is a declining belief in liberal democracy, and when new technical facilities are developed for the dispersal of political propaganda. Political parties representing class interests can no longer function as the social classes break up into an individualized mass who will heed the call of any strong leader. The enthusiasm of the masses for Hitler's program was responsible for the success of 1933, declares Ritter.⁵ Without doubt, the traditional class structure had been weakened during the Weimar period, and the National Socialist movement had followers representing a wide cross-

⁵Ritter, "The Historical Foundations," p. 410.

section of German society. Yet the changes in the social and economic structure which caused the development of democratic radicalism could be found in other European nations in the post-war period where fascist movements did not evolve. The appearance of the mass man and the corresponding development of democratic radicalism occurred among all Western industrialized nations in the twentieth century, and this interpretation does not fully explain why Germany succumbed to fascism in 1933.

Another major interpretation looks outside of Germany to discover the origins of the National Socialist movement and attributes the Nazi success to the harsh policies followed by the victorious Allies after World War One. The Versailles treaty limited the German armed forces, leaving Germany with an army of only 100,000 men and no reserves. Germany lost 25,000 square miles of territory in Europe and was stripped of all its colonies. A large percentage of Germany's industrial resources went to her European neighbors. Germany was forced to promise full restitution for the costs of the war, and in 1921, the Reparations Commission set the total reparations bill at one hundred and thirty-two billion reichsmarks to be paid in money or goods. The Nazis were able to capitalize on the resentment that the treaty had created against the West. They pointed to the treaty as proof that Germany was surrounded by hostile powers and could only rise again by rearming under a strong leader. The Versailles treaty, reparations, and the occupation of the Ruhr provided excellent material for a nationalism which condemned the humiliation and injustice of which Germany was regarded as the victim, comments Maurice Baumont.⁶

⁶Maurice Baumont, "The Role of Foreign Policy in the Success of the National Socialist Party," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p. 456.

Nevertheless, the Treaty of Versailles had been greatly modified through the diplomacy of Gustav Stresemann and Heinrich Brüning. The burden of reparations had been scaled downward under the Dawes Plan of 1924 and the Young Plan of 1929 and was almost entirely abolished by the Lausanne agreement of July, 1932. At the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1932, the Allied powers agreed in principle to German equality of rights in armaments. Although resentment of the Versailles system constitutes an important factor in the growth of the National Socialist movement, this interpretation does not explain why Hitler came to power at a precise time.

An important interpretation of National Socialism states that reactionary groups failed to support the republican government and failed to provide the conservative leadership necessary to maintain the traditional social order and achieve a viable political system. The political revolution of 1918 which replaced the imperial monarchy with a republican government was not accompanied by a shift in political or economic power to the masses. The Social Democratic party found it necessary to rely upon the army to suppress revolutionary disturbances from the Left and made a bargain with the conservative elements of the Right which preserved the traditional class structure. Thus the former ruling classes - the landowning Junkers, the monarchists, the officers' corps of the army, the civil service, the great industrialists - retained their privileged position in the Weimar Republic. These reactionary groups were antagonistic to the republican form of government and followed

policies designed to protect their own interests. They sympathized with a popular totalitarian movement, and their nationalism and craving for power induced them to take a chance on Hitler.⁷

Adherents of this view believe that the explanation for the sudden rise to power of the National Socialists in 1932 and 1933 can be found by analyzing the events which directly preceded Hitler's appointment as Chancellor. The officers' corps of the Reichswehr was concerned with the threat of civil war and foreign invasion and desired an expanded army to combat these threats. The generals made an alliance with the forces of the Right - the H.S.D.A.P. and the Nationalist party - to forestall destruction from the Left - the S.P.D. and the Communist party. The traditional view that the army should retain a position above the realm of politics was abandoned in favor of political participation. The political parties under the parliamentary system represented class interests rather than concern for the welfare of the whole nation. Their failure to compromise on issues which threatened their own vested interests and willingness to support a presidential dictatorship irrevocably weakened the cause of parliamentary democracy and made Hitler's appointment possible.

Special mention is made of the politicians who were motivated by personal ambition and lust for power in their attempt to capture the National Socialist party in a coalition government. The success

⁷Eugene N. Anderson, "Freedom and Authoritarianism in German History," The Struggle for Democracy in Germany, ed. by Gabriel A. Almond, et al. (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), pp. 31-32.

of National Socialism was also desired by the industrialists who feared the socialization of their industries under Social Democracy and desired a strong national government which could open new markets throughout Europe and the world. The Junker class of Prussian landlords hoped to prevent the disclosure of the Osthilfe scheme from investigation by the Social Democrats and desired an end to the weak parliamentary system. There was no seizure of power, declares the English historian A. J. P. Taylor, it was handed to him by unscrupulous politicians.⁸

Yet the question still remains, why did Hitler achieve power? Why did these vested interest groups chance an alliance with an unknown political leader in a coalition government? Hitler and his party never received a majority of votes in any election. It is true that the political parties were atomized and ineffective and their political leadership inept, but weak as they were, they could have stopped Hitler had they summoned the will to resist. Instead they sought to accommodate him. Other factors must be stated to explain the success of the Nazi movement.

Several historians have stated that the fear of communism and anti-Semitism were the reasons behind the success of the National Socialist movement. The Nazis adopted anti-Semitism as a propaganda technique

⁸ A. J. P. Taylor, "The Seizure of Power," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p. 523.

because they believed that the Germans had an inborn antipathy to the Jewish people, and national and economic ills could be blamed upon a convenient scapegoat. Anti-Semitism was one of the most powerful weapons used by the Nazis in achieving and maintaining power, says Otto Klineberg.⁹ This explanation, however, does not take into account the fact that anti-Semitism could be found in other European countries - France, Austria, Russia - and the virulent form of German anti-Semitism was more the result than the cause of National Socialism.

The fear of communism has been cited as a significant factor in the rise of National Socialism. The German Communists were the largest party in Europe outside the Soviet Union. The K.P.D. drew support from the working class and was greatly feared by the conservative classes. The Communist party must bear some of the guilt for the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship since, under orders from Moscow, the party worked to discredit the parliamentary regime after 1929. It was mistakenly believed that a fascist dictatorship would lead to a proletarian revolution. Yet it must be noted that the K.P.D. supported the Social Democratic party and the trade union policies until 1929. Furthermore, the K.P.D. never developed the organization necessary to seize power during a period

⁹ Otto Klineberg, "Racialism in Nazi Germany," The Third Reich, ed. by Maurice Baumont, et al. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p. 863.

of economic chaos and social unrest. Clearly, the threat of communism was exaggerated by Nazi propagandists to gain the support of vested interest groups.

Hitler's personality, his leadership ability, and his skill as a propagandist are cited by many historians as the crucial factor in explaining the success of the National Socialist movement. Hitler was a master demagogue. His speeches were not based upon rational argument, but were calculated to sway the emotions of his listeners. The carefully staged theatrics of the evening mass meeting, the bright red flags, the uniformed troopers, and martial music enhanced the impact of Hitler's appeals to the German people. All Germans would be included in a New Order - a community created by common blood and possessed of a spirit rooted in national history and character - led by a man who was the embodiment of this spirit. Eastward expansion of the Reich frontiers was necessary to gain Lebensraum for this Volkish nation. The Nazi Weltanschauung appealed to the national yearnings of the German people. National Socialist ideology answered the psychological demands of the German people who desired dramatic action, a sense of purpose, and a feeling of power. Hitler was a master of political opportunism. The emphasis upon legality in the struggle for power, the organizational structure of the Nazi party, and the propaganda techniques enabled Hitler to establish the Nazi

dictatorship. Alan Bullock believes that the foundation for Hitler's success was his own energy and ability as a political leader.¹⁰

It is not enough, however, to stress the charismatic nature of Hitler's personality or the role of ideology and propaganda in determining the Nazi success of 1933. The Nazi movement and leader possessed these same characteristics in 1929, but were repudiated by the great majority of the German people. The Nazis won only 2.6 per cent of the national vote and 12 seats in the Reichstag in the election of 1928. In this same election, 10.6 per cent of the people voted for the Communist party. The moderate parties, ranging from the Social Democrats to the People's party, received 58 per cent of the votes. With economic prosperity and a relatively successful foreign policy, the majority of the German voters supported the democratic parliamentary system.

This suggests that something is lacking in all of the interpretations of National Socialism that have been outlined thus far. All of the factors noted were already present in 1928 - the so-called democratic radicalism; the German spirit influenced by the authoritarian political tradition; reactionary groups opposed to republican government; unscrupulous politicians, generals, and industrialists seeking to gain personal advantage; the fear of communism; the existence of anti-Semitic attitudes - but they did not spell success for the National Socialist movement in

¹⁰ Alan Bullock, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny, (rev. ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 61.

1928. They cannot sufficiently explain the Nazi success in 1933.

II. THE ROLE OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN THE SUCCESS OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

Hitler and the National Socialist movement stood at the brink of success in 1928. In the election of 1930, the National Socialists seated 107 deputies in the Reichstag. As the result of the July, 1932 election, they increased their representation to 230 seats and gained 37 per cent of the German vote. In the closing months of 1932, the politicians vied with one another to gain National Socialist support, and even the objections of President Hindenburg were overcome as Hitler was appointed Chancellor on January 30, 1933. What had happened since 1928 that made this sudden rise to power occur? What had happened was not uniquely German. Germany in 1930 succumbed to the economic crisis that befell the entire Western world. This factor, more than anything else, brought Hitler the support of the German people and placed him in power in January, 1933.

The depression made the German people desperate in their political and economic thinking. Millions of Germans who had supported the democratic parties in 1928 now found them incapable of coping with the economic crisis. Unemployment was a major factor which turned the masses from the support of parliamentary democracy to National Socialism. Before the Nazis came to power, the number of unemployed in Germany amounted to twenty to twenty-five per cent of the work force. By the

end of 1932, the number of registered unemployed workers was over six million. In addition to the unemployed were their families who suffered correspondingly as well as the many partially employed persons whose income had been drastically cut. The financial reserves of the middle and lower classes had been wiped out during the earlier inflationary period; economic deprivation and desperation turned the masses to National Socialism.

The Reichswehr officers' corps, fearing civil war and believing that they could use Hitler to rearm the country, were ready to see him become Chancellor. The political parties believed that Hitler would be tamed by political responsibility or shown as a total failure in office. The Communist party believed that a fascist dictatorship was necessary before the proletarian revolution could occur in Germany. The Social Democratic trade unions, which had resisted the rightist Kapp Putsch of 1920 by means of a general strike, were demoralized by the depression and the fact that six million unemployed were ready to fill any vacancies caused by a general strike. The Nazis never received a majority of votes; yet enough people were ready to turn in desperation to National Socialism. Once Hitler had been appointed German Chancellor, he was readily able to establish the Nazi dictatorship which ultimately led to the catastrophe of World War Two.

Thus the answer to the success of the National Socialist party lies within the economic chaos created by the Great Depression. But this seemingly simple answer is not completely sufficient to explain

this broad historical event. In the United States in 1932, there was approximately the same percentage of unemployed workers as in Germany. Great Britain did not escape the adverse effects of the economic crisis. Yet in neither country did a fascist movement develop. Each nation had a long tradition of democratic government and had not developed a militant nationalism as the result of defeat in war. Consequently, it is not possible to ignore any of the main factors stressed as offering by itself an explanation to the National Socialist movement. As in other broad developments in history, each factor played its role; and a multiple-factor analysis is required to explain the success of the National Socialist movement. Without the depression, a radical change would not have been called for by the German people. Once the depression occurred, however, the people demanded a change in the existing political and economic structure; and Germany's historical background, conditioned by the authoritarian political tradition, the development of mass democracy, the nationalistic resentment against the Versailles system, the narrow class interests pursued by competing groups, and Hitler's unique talent as a party leader and propagandist combined to determine that the Germans would chose National Socialism.

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