Thinking Beyond The Führer: The Ideological and Structural Evolution of National Socialism, 1919-1934

Athahn Steinback

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THINKING BEYOND THE FÜHRER:
THEIDEOLOGICAL AND STRUCTURAL EVOLUTION OF NATIONAL
SOCIALISM, 1919-1934.

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Social Sciences and Globalization

by
Athahn Steinback
December 2019
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Approved by:

Timothy Pytell, PhD, Committee Chair, History
Steven Childs, PhD, Committee Member, Political Science
ABSTRACT

Much of the discussion of German National Socialism has historically focused on Adolf Hitler as the architect of the Nazi state. While recognizing Hitler's central role in the development of National Socialism, this thesis contends that he was not a lone actor. Much of the ideological and structural development of National Socialism was driven by senior individuals within the party who were able to leverage their influence to institutionalize personal variants of National Socialism within broader party ideology. To explore the role of other ideologues in the development of Nazi ideology, this thesis examines how Hitler’s leadership style perpetuated factionalism, how when and by whom central elements of Nazi ideology were introduced, as well the ideological sources from which these concepts were adapted. After the party’s ultimate rise to power Hitler, always centrally positioned, eliminated internal competition and institutionalized his own variant of National Socialism whilst co-opting the concepts and structures developed by other ideologues that offered useful tools to pursue his goals. Through this analysis, this thesis seeks to demonstrate how the foundational elements of National Socialism took form, even before the party achieved power, and how these elements were subsequently utilized to consolidate Nazi control over the German state. Above all else, this thesis sheds much-needed light on the pivotal role of individuals and the conflict between them that engineered the cataclysm of the Third Reich.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION:

Despite the rich corpus of literature pertaining to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP), insufficient attention has been paid to the role of the ideologues surrounding Hitler in the party’s evolution. This study argues that Nazism began as one of many thin-centered populist parties in 1919 and thickened under the influence of the party’s competing Munich and Strasserite wings until 1933. Once the Nazis entered power, the party’s ideology consolidated around Hitler and became an instrument of his will. Although Hitler’s role in the party’s ideological thickening was crucial, he was not a lone actor in the development of National Socialism and his dominance over the party only became absolute late in its development.

To understand the ideological development of National Socialism from its thin-centered populist origin, this thesis explores the contributions of several actors, both proceeding and surrounding Hitler, who played critical roles its evolution. Only by going back to the beginning of Nazism and tracing its development forward, can we clearly understand how the ideology came to become so single-mindedly militant. Hitler’s Reich was not built in a day, it was the culmination of over a decade of radicalization in the populist *völkisch* movement. The bulk of Chapter 1 is dedicated to the review of literature relevant to the concepts of thin and full ideology, populism, and fascism. The chapter concludes with a brief analysis of Hitler’s personalist and often indirect leadership style that provides a framework for and understanding of his role in the evolution
of Nazi ideology. Chapter 2 explores the revolutionary turn in völkisch populist politics during the early Weimar period that gave birth to the Nazis and examines their rise to dominance over the völkisch movement. Chapter 3 traces the genesis of Nazism’s ideological thickening through the adaptation of racial nationalist, corporatist, and socialist themes found within the party’s early Munich wing. The chapter subsequently examines how the Munich Wing came to focus on racial nationalist concepts to the exclusion of others and, in the process, created the future Third Reich’s penultimate foundational concept of the völkisch state. Chapter 4 analyzes the expansion of Nazism’s socialist and corporatist concepts rooted in the party’s Strasserite wing, as well as the role played by conflict between Munich and the Strasserites in driving the party’s ideological evolution. As a result of this conflict, the Strasserite wing asserted itself as the dominant wing of the party for a time and used this dominion to create a highly organized party apparatus that formed the basis of one of Nazism’s earliest and most potent tools of social control. Chapter 5 examines the central tenants of racial purity, conquest, and economic autarky in Hitler’s personal variant of National Socialism. Finally, Chapter 6 examines how Hitler solidified his grip over the party through a series of purges and institutionalized his own variant of National Socialism in the process; paradoxically, briefly thinning the ideology once again as a result.
CHAPTER ONE:
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Thin-Centered Ideology

The theory of thin-centered ideology originates with Michael Freeden’s efforts to examine the late twentieth-century emergence of ideological movements such as feminism and the Greens, which sprang from single-issue cores and subsequently, expanded by borrowing extensively from other ideologies. Freeden additionally seeks to explain the durability and adaptability of the venerable ideology of nationalism; which, despite its nebulous nature, has either influenced or appeared as a major component in ideologies across the political spectrum for at least two centuries. Full ideologies, such as liberalism or socialism attempt to provide a comprehensive platform addressing all pressing socio-political challenges facing a specific society. Conversely, thin-centered ideologies are constructed around “a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts” that are either incapable of covering the full political spectrum or make no effort to do so.

Thin-centered ideologies can remain thin in the form of single-issue protest parties or as a sub-component within other ideologies, or they can “thicken by ingesting the patterns of other ideologies” and emerge as full

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ideologies in their own right. Because of their restricted core, thin ideologies such as nationalism or populism are able to combine with other thin and full ideologies such as communism, socialism, and ecologism, without difficulty. This process of combination and ingestion of other ideologies is the key to understanding the adaptability of thin ideologies, such as populism globally, and is paramount to evaluating the evolution of National Socialism in particular. The concept of thickening offers a framework for closely analyzing how an ideology develops by reconfiguring concepts scavenged from others. As will be explored in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4, the NSDAP originated as a populist party, and thickened by ingesting concepts from other, ideologies such as nationalism, socialism, and corporatism.

The concept of thickening within a thin-centered ideology presents a promising framework for analyzing the evolution of an ideology such as National Socialism, but there are limitations in the theory as it currently exists that this study seeks to resolve. First, it creates the illusion of unity and linearity in ideological development. Ideologies are not homogeneous entities; they are umbrellas for diverse sets of related ideas and practices centered around core concepts. By focusing excessively on the macroscale development of an ideology, it is easy to miss the fractious internal divisions within it that can lead the evolution of an ideology in any number of unpredictable directions. Second, it

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neglects the crucial role of individuals in driving the thickening process.

Ideologies are the creation of men and women. Attempting to understand how ideologies develop without analyzing the role of the individuals who drive such development is doomed to be incomplete.

The solution to this challenge is not to dispose of the concept of thickening itself, but to refocus it on the role of individuals in an ideology’s development. Ideologies do not develop of their own accord; they develop because of the actions of people. The process of combination and ingestion occurs at the level of the individual. Adherents of an ideology create their own variant of it by incorporating concepts from other ideologies. This is a process of ideological mutation, and most of these mutations exert little influence on the thickening process of an ideology. However, influential individuals such as party leaders, organizational chiefs, theorists, and propagandists, contribute to an ideology’s thickening process by institutionalizing their personal variants. Thus, in order to fully understand an ideology’s thickening process, it is necessary to analyze how core elements of the ideology were introduced, who introduced them, and the sources these concepts were adapted from. Moreover, it is equally important to

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5 Although structuralist perspectives have utility, the leading role of individuals in political decision making and in major historical events should not be underestimated. As the prominent Neorealist scholar Kenneth Waltz explored at length, individual human behavior forms the first “image” of international relations. Political structures are significant, but idiosyncrasies and preferences at the level of the individual drive political decision making. The role of individuals in the process of ideological thickening that I propose in this thesis, is a direct extension of Waltz’s logic into the realm of the history of ideology. For a fuller discussion of the role of individuals in international relations, see Kenneth N. Waltz, Man, the State, and War: A theoretical Analysis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
analyze concepts that were influential during an ideology’s formative years that were subsequently eliminated or altered due to internal factional or personal rivalries. Ideological thickening does not predict a forgone conclusion. Individuals and groups determine the course of this process through their actions and power struggles. The inner workings of this process in the case of National Socialism will be explored at great length in Chapters 3, 4, and 6.

Populism as a Thin-Centered Ideology

Before we can meaningfully analyze the populist origins of the Nazi party, it is necessary to clearly define the frequently imprecisely employed concept of populism. In his 2004 article, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” Cas Mudde laid the foundation for the current consensus of populist studies by applying Freeden’s theory of thin-centered ideology to populism. Mudde argued that due to its thin-center, populism can combine with a wide range of thin and full ideologies across the political spectrum, thus accounting for tremendous variability between individual populist parties. In Mudde’s model, “populism is moralistic rather than programmatic.” The programmatic objectives of populist parties are determined individually in each party by their thickening processes and thus any search for pan-populist programmatic cohesion is a red herring. The core of populism lies in the ideology’s central moralistic discourse pitting the “the pure people” against

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“the corrupt elite” and arguing that politics should express the will of the people. The people are in turn portrayed as a homogeneous group, closely tied to the nation’s “heartland,” which is itself an imagined community wherein a “virtuous and unified population resides.” The implication of the populist discourse is that an entire nation could or would mirror the idealistic heartland without the meddling of ‘the corrupt elite.’ In this narrative, the “corrupt elite” and the established political parties they represent are cast as betrayers of the will of the people. Therefore, the only way to protect the purity of the people and the sanctity of the heartland is to reinstitute the will of the people via radical populist reforms within the system.

Ben Stanley has taken Mudde’s scholarship a step further by defining the fundamental conceptual core elements of populism as:

- The existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: ‘the people’ and ‘the elite.”
- The antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite.
- The idea of popular sovereignty.
- The positive valorization of ‘the people’ and the denigration of ‘the elite.’

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9 Mudde, following the lead of Paul Taggart uses the term heartland; but fatherland, motherland, and homeland can all be used interchangeably to describe the same phenomena in populist discourse. See Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” 545-546.
Stanley argues that these four core elements serve an “ideational rather than structural role in populism.”¹¹ While the structure of a populist movement can assume any number of configurations, these four core elements impart a distinctly populist discourse that underpins all populist parties. If we accept that all manifestations of populism share these core conceptual elements, then what accounts for this fundamental ideological cohesion across populist movements? Unlike full ideologies such as socialism or liberalism, or other thin ideologies such as feminism or nationalism, populism lacks foundational texts along the lines of *Das Kapital* or *The Wealth of Nations*, or even iconic leaders who embody populist thought across the international stage. Stanley argues that the answer lies in the very concept of popular sovereignty itself. Thus, a populist party can legitimate itself in any configuration as long as it is able to successfully portray itself as an executor of the will of the people.

Stanley bases his argument on Margaret Canovan’s principle that the concept of popular sovereignty constitutes the “foundational myth” of modern representative politics, and that democracies are inherently divided between “pragmatic” and “redemptive” faces.¹² The pragmatic face recognizes democracy as a means to peacefully mediate the competing interests of the electorate; while the redemptive face seeks to utilize democratic institutions to lend popular sovereignty a tangible form.¹³ Although these faces frequently clash, their

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presence and interdependence is necessary for the existence of functional democracy. This is why despite the absence of foundational populist texts or thinkers, populism enjoys such prevalence across the democratic West. Populism is endemic to the concept of popular sovereignty itself and only needs a crisis catalyst, or the perception of excessive pragmatism suppressing the will of the people to mobilize it as a political ideology.  

The limitation of this consensus lies in its assumption that populists inherently remain reformist. The model is blind to the prospect of a populist movement becoming revolutionary as part of its thickening process. The possibility that a populist movement could fuse its moralistic discourse and fixation on enforcing popular sovereignty into an anti-democratic ideology is categorically overlooked. This is precisely what occurred in the case of the Nazi party. It began as one of many populist parties in the early Weimar Republic, and ideologically thickened by absorbing diverse elements from existing racist, corporatist, and socialist ideologies to become a totalitarian ideology that continued to perceive itself in populist terms. In Nazism, the will of the party, and ultimately the will of the Führer became conflated with and a proxy for the will of the people. In order to understand how this conflation transpired, it is necessary to turn our attention to the rich field of comparative fascism.

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Historical Perspectives on Fascism and National Socialism

In any exploration of fascism, it is important to begin by noting that, much like populist parties, there is significant variation in the programmatic aims of fascist parties. Unlike Marxist-Leninism, Stalinism, or Maoism that – despite regional variation – ultimately derived from expansions of classical Marxism, fascism was constructed and sustained from a diverse range of ideological trends stemming from both the left and right. Even the fascist parties of Europe themselves proved unable to define “universal fascism” due to irreconcilable ideological differences over racial politics and state structure during the first meeting of the Fascist International in 1934, and this problem has also vexed subsequent generations of historians.¹⁵ John Lukacs has gone so far as to question the validity of applying the umbrella term “fascist” to movements as diverse as the NSDAP, Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), and Action Française.¹⁶ Despite the challenges facing the field, the works of Sternhell, Mosse, Payne, and Weber have served to bring conceptual clarity to the implicit problems of defining fascism. Throughout this study, National Socialism will be regarded as a member of the fascist family, as it clearly satisfied Payne’s

¹⁶ John Lukacs, The Hitler of History, New York: Vintage Books, 1997, 33. Lukacs contends that the unifying thread between Fascist Italy and National Socialist Germany was populism not fascism. Lukacs’s analysis of Hitler as a populist who united concepts of nationalism and the people as a central pillar of his policy and propaganda is insightful as a means to understand how Hitler cultivated his populist mystique in Weimar politics, but it sheds little light on the deeper nature of fascism. Lukacs’s parallel contention that German and Italian fascism were incomparable during the timeframe is unconvincing compared to the deeper treatments of the subject by Weber and Payne. See Lukacs, The Hitler of History, 108, 118.
typological description of fascism discussed below. The specific distinctions between ‘generic’ fascism and National Socialism will be addressed in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

Stanley Payne’s typological description of fascism details thirteen points, divided into five categories - ideology and goals, negations, style, and organization - that constitute the basis of fascism as a political phenomenon. In Payne’s model, the ideology and goals of fascism revolve around the “espousal of an idealist, vitalist, and voluntaristic philosophy” that seeks to “realize a new modern, self-determined, and secular culture.” To achieve these revolutionary goals, fascism attempts to construct a nationalist authoritarian state that rejects traditional models in favor of a corporatist social and economic structure. Furthermore, fascism positively evaluates the use of force both as a means to achieve its domestic aims and on the international stage, as it seeks a “radical change in the nation’s relationship with other powers.” In addition to its revolutionary agenda, fascism views itself as antiliberal, anticommunist, and anticonservative. These negations do not preclude alliances of convenience, but fascism remains hostile to all established political trends nonetheless.

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17 For the original thirteen points, see Stanley G. Payne, A History of Fascism 1914-45 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 7. Payne notes that these thirteen points provide guideline to common characteristics of fascism, but a small degree of divergence should be expected when analyzing specific movements. As with any ideology, individual examples can stray from the model on one or two points, while still conforming to the ideal type. See Payne, A History of Fascism, 6-7.
18 Payne, A History of Fascism, 7.
19 Payne, A History of Fascism, 7.
20 Payne, A History of Fascism, 11.
Finally, fascist movements are characterized by a distinct style and organization, including:

- “Attempted mass mobilization and militarization of political relationships and style”
- “Emphasis on aesthetic structure of meetings, symbols, and political liturgy, stressing emotional and mystical aspects”
- “Extreme stress on the masculine principle and male dominance, while espousing a strongly organic view of society”
- “The exaltation of youth above other phases of life”
- “A specific tendency toward an authoritarian, charismatic, personal style of command”

The influence of style and organization on the political behavior of fascist movements should not be underestimated. Fascist efforts to achieve popular mass mobilization and the appeal to youth mirror those of other revolutionary traditions, particularly Marxist-Leninism. Fascism, however, takes the appeal to youth a step further and exalts youth above all other phases of life, to the point that generational conflict becomes a touchstone of fascist ideology. The primacy placed on the aesthetic structure of meetings and the use of political liturgy and symbols as sacred manifestations of party ideology highlights the undercurrents of “civic religion” that is fundamental to the form and function of

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21 Payne, A History of Fascism, 7.
fascism.\textsuperscript{23} Likewise, the obsession with the militarization of political relationships combined with the lionization of conflict as a tool of both political legitimation and state policy lends fascism a distinctly hyper-militarized political culture. Although the use of violence for the purposes of revolution is not unique to fascism, the concept that perpetual violent struggle is beneficial for the health of society distinguishes fascist political violence from that of prior revolutionary ideologies.\textsuperscript{24} Finally, the authoritarian, personalist nature of the fascist leadership principle serves to create miniature autocracies at all levels of society from the highest military and civilian bureaucracies, to the lowest local administrations.

Payne’s typological approach provides a useful set of heuristics for identifying fascist movements, but to understand fully the ideology, it is imperative to explore its partially left-wing roots. Fascism was not a manifestation of right-wing reactionary politics. Although fascist and reactionary interests frequently ally to challenge existing institutions, these were merely alliances of convenience. Inevitably, whichever faction - be it reactionary or fascist - ultimately prevails either would turn on their erstwhile allies or sideline them into irrelevancy.\textsuperscript{25} For its part, fascism has historically perceived itself as neither left nor right, but as a ‘third way’ between democratic liberalism and Marxist socialism. Fascist movements, therefore, see themselves in revolutionary terms; despite allusions to historical legitimacy, they have no interest in turning back the

\textsuperscript{23} Payne, \textit{A History of Fascism}, 9, 12.
\textsuperscript{24} Payne, \textit{A History of Fascism}, 11.
clock of progress, but rather in the radical socio-political restructuring of society to match an ideological agenda.\textsuperscript{26} In this, the revolutionary ambitions of fascists are no less radical than their Marxist adversaries. Indeed, their aims are so similar because they shared a common ideological genesis.

Zeev Sternhell masterfully identifies fascism as a synthesis of radical nationalism and anti-Marxist socialism.\textsuperscript{27} On one hand, fascist movements define themselves in nationalistic terms and are exceedingly aggressive towards rival foreign states and groups identified as alien within the nation. On the other, they pursue radical social reforms intended to create social peace through the dissolution of all boundaries between citizens of the nation. In essence, fascists adapted traditional socialist precepts of proletarian solidarity redefining them in national terms. This entire ideological endeavor is underscored by four overriding principles:

- That all challenges facing modern society were the result of materialism; and that liberalism, democracy, and Marxism were all irrevocably materialistic.
- The rejection of individualism and the adoption of national collectivism intended to create social harmony through the elimination of social divisions.
- The state as the ultimate expression of the national collective.

\textsuperscript{27} Sternhell, “Fascism,” 55.
• The supremacy of politics over economics.\textsuperscript{28}

In light of these principles, Sternhell argues that fascist ideology is inherently totalitarian, and perhaps the “purest example of a totalitarian ideology” that has ever existed.\textsuperscript{29} In fascism, citizens are not only required to acquiesce to the new order; they are expected to participate enthusiastically and fully internalize the ideology's revolutionary aspirations. The entirety of society must, by necessity, be harmonized into the state collective; there could be no division or intermediary between a citizen and their national identity. In the words of Giovani Gentile and Benito Mussolini, there can be: “no individuals or groups (political parties, cultural associations, economic unions, social classes) outside the State.”\textsuperscript{30} French fascist Marcel Déat further described the objective of this harmonization as, “the total man in the total society, with no clashes, no prostration, no anarchy.”\textsuperscript{31} Despite the ideology's totalizing aspirations, it is worth noting as Payne and Mosse have, that in practice, fascist governments have typically failed to achieve the centralization and bureaucratization necessary to enforce complete totalitarianism within their borders.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{28} Sternhell, “Fascism,” 55-56, 58.
\textsuperscript{29} Sternhell, “Fascism,” 58.
\textsuperscript{30} Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile, \textit{The Doctrine of Fascism} (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1932), 11. Quoted in Sternhell, “Fascism,” 58. The totalitarian aspirations of fascism are apparent throughout \textit{The Doctrine of Fascism}, but are best captured in the following quote; “Fascism, is totalitarian, and the Fascist State - a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values - interprets, develops, and potentates the whole life of a people.” Mussolini and Gentile, 11.
\textsuperscript{31} Marcel Déat, qtd. Sternhell, 58.
On its surface, the unconcealed totalitarianism of fascism may seem so antithetical to Western liberalism as to be beyond understanding. How could the citizens of any society willingly surrender their individual political franchise to partake in a totalitarian system? Why did many citizens of fascist states not see themselves as oppressed? In short, the slide into fascism was far less dramatic than it appears on its surface. As Sternhell deftly explains, fascism emerged from established pre-existing trends within European politics, and its ideological foundations, in fact, predated World War One. Consequently, fascism bases its legitimacy on foundational principles shared in common with its liberal democratic and Marxist socialist rivals. In light of this, it is essential to note that despite its totalitarian foundation, fascism did not reject fundamental Western conceptions of popular sovereignty – instead it created a peculiarly fascist re-imagining of popular sovereignty within a collectivist lens. In order to properly understand this transformation, we must turn to the works of George Mosse.

Like Sternhell, Mosse defined fascism as a revolutionary ideology, intent on finding a “third way” between liberalism and Marxism, enforcing the supremacy of politics over capital, based on a bedrock of romanticized national mystique. To further explore these points, Mosse probed the self-

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33 Sternhell, “Fascism,” 56-57.
34 Viewed through this lens, Canovan’s “foundational myth” of popular sovereignty is just as applicable to fascism as it is to representative democracy. By extension, the foundational myth status of popular sovereignty could also be extended to the Marxist-Leninist concept of ‘People’s Democracies.’ Though these autocratic systems deny individual political franchise, they still conceptualize their power and legitimacy as emerging from the people.
conceptualization of fascist movements and ideology by viewing fascism as a cultural phenomenon building on previous precedents in Western political history.\textsuperscript{36} In Mosse’s estimation, the basis of fascist ideology rested in “the rejection of parliamentary government and representative institutions on behalf of a democracy of the masses in which the people would in theory directly govern themselves.”\textsuperscript{37} This narrative owes a great deal to popular anti-parliamentary traditions of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, but also betrays the populist currents that underpin the ideology as a whole.\textsuperscript{38} It is critical to understand that even while participating in an undeniably autocratic system, fascist true believers did not see themselves as politically disenfranchised or un-free. Instead, the persona of the leader becomes a proxy for the united will of the people.\textsuperscript{39} In the German context, this dynamic was perfectly captured by the common NSDAP slogan “Ein Volk. Ein Reich. Ein Führer,” or “One people, one state, one leader.” In the fascist worldview, there is only one people, one state, and one leader who speaks for all.

This begs the question, how exactly did the fascist conception of popular sovereignty function in practice and how were people immersed within it? The answer is that popular sovereignty was cloven away from the traditional organs of representative democracy and incorporated into a “new secular religion” based

\textsuperscript{36} Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 85, 89.
\textsuperscript{37} Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 63.
\textsuperscript{38} Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 85.
\textsuperscript{39} Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 63.
on the party as a socio-political movement.\footnote{Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 63.} Fascists, much like their Marxist rivals, sought to “substitute modern mass politics for pluralistic and parliamentary government.”\footnote{Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 65.} In the fascist psyche, it matters not if the citizens could not vote, because the organs of parliamentary pluralism are seen by fascists as invalid representatives of the will of the people. Instead, torch light rallies, party days, sacred party artifacts, and the paramilitarization of society served to immerse the population in the mass politics of the party’s new secular religion. Fascism in its many forms did radically restructure the nature of political participation, but it did \textit{not} question the foundational myth of popular sovereignty that underpins modern Western political consciousness.

In their quest to create a collective national community, fascist ideologues consciously sought to fuse culture, spirituality, and politics within a secular religion dedicated to the state and party.\footnote{Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 70.} The state, party, leader, and the people themselves were cast as components of a sacred national collective. Activism became paramount; belief itself was not enough, a proper fascist also had to partake in the initiatives and rituals of the party and state. Even foundational concepts such as individualism, were re-imagined as part of the effort to forge a national collective. Individualism ceased to mean freedom to do whatever one pleases and came to mean self-fulfillment within the context of national collectivism. As Mosse quotes from the prospectus of \textit{Reichsschule}
*Feldating:* “He who can do as he wants is not free, but he is free who does what he should. He who feels himself without chains is not free but enslaved to his passions.”

In a fascist system, there can be no division between culture and politics because all things from science to literature to ethical norms are evaluated based on their compatibility with party orthodoxy. Hence Nazi Germany was able to exalt the pursuit of cutting edge industrial and military technologies, whilst categorically rejecting physics as a “Jewish science.” This phenomenon is why it is so difficult to classify a ‘generic’ fascist ideology, because what may be accepted into a specific fascist party’s secular religion may be anathema to another. For example, in Germany where the NSDAP internalized the concepts of völkisch nationalism since the party’s inception, Jews were persistently targeted as alien and anything (such as physics) associated with them was held in contempt. Meanwhile, the Austrian fascist Vaterländische Front and Italian PNF included Jewish members. The specific ideological evolution of each fascist party and the apparent contradictions therein can only be understood within the historical context of its country of origin – much like contemporary populist parties.

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45 Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 209. Italian Jews remained fully integrated into the party and state until the passage of the Racial Laws of 1938 when the PNF regime began to cave under pressure from their Nazi allies.
Mosse described the fascist assimilation of trends and ideas as the “scavenger” or “amoeba-like” nature of fascism whereby it “attempted to cater to everything people held dear, to give new meaning to daily routine and offer salvation without risk.” He correctly identified the “scavenger” quality of fascism, but his explanation of the cause requires further expansion. Fascism did not merely latch onto whatever proved popular and repurpose it to its own revolutionary ends, the ideology itself was constantly encountering concepts and ideas – both new and old – and reacting to them. Freeden’s framework of ideological thickening provides a more robust tool for analyzing the assimilative behavior of fascist parties. As fascism engaged with other thin and full ideologies around it, it borrowed extensively from them to flesh out its own ideological platform on its path to becoming a ‘full’ ideology. This behavior was hardly original to fascism. Fascism simply proved highly adept at assimilating existing ideological concepts within its historical timeframe.

The crucial distinction between fascism and National Socialism merits closer analysis as well. The differences in policies between conventionally fascist parties such as the Italian PNF, and National Socialism are notable. The extreme anti-Semitism was integral to Nazism’s evolution and as a governing ideology it utilized biologically constructed, Nordicist racial nationalism as an organizing principle. Conversely, the PNF rejected the biological racism of the German

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47 In fascist studies this process of co-optation and adaptation is usually termed the ‘eclectic’ or ‘scavenger’ nature of fascism. Mosse, “Towards a General Theory of Fascism,” 77. See also, Payne, A History of Fascism, 8.
system and welcomed Jewish membership for the first sixteen years of its rule. The PNF’s monopoly of power in Italy was never as complete as the NSDAP in Germany, the Italian monarch remained the titular head of state. The Catholic church survived as an influential force in civil society, political opposition persisted, and the regime’s capacity for political repression was a pale shadow of its German neighbor. In short, the PNF’s revolutionary conquest of state power was never as complete as that of the NSDAP. Furthermore, compared to the NSDAP which metastasized like a cancer within the German state and colonized virtually every aspect of governance, the PNF languished in the shadow of its leader, Mussolini, and failed to exhibit the initiative of its German counterpart. Finally, Italian foreign policy merely pursued a more aggressive variant of pre-existing Italian imperialist and nationalist objectives, whereas Germany sought the total revision of the global geopolitical system.

As valid as these differences are, they are also a distraction. The differences in policy and function of the PNF and NSDAP are a consequence of each party’s unique thickening process and their ability (or failure) to monopolize power effectively in their respective nations. The key to understanding the distinction between fascism and National Socialism rests on not divergence of ideology, but in how power is wielded. Eugen Weber beautifully summarized this concept in Varieties of Fascism in 1964:

48 Until the onset of a series of racial laws spurred in part by Nazi influence in 1938, the PNF was both friendly to Italy’s Jewish citizens and possessed disproportionately high Jewish membership. See Payne, A History of Fascism, 209, 242-243
49 Payne, A History of Fascism, 208-209.
Fascism is pragmatically activist, National Socialism theoretically motivated or, at least, expressed. Both aim to conquer power, and that center of power, which is the modern state. However, in one case, the power will be wielded pragmatically and piecemeal, simply for its own sake, while the party which has been its instrument may gradually be abandoned. In the other, power will be used to realize an anterior plan, or a series of plans inspired by the original doctrine; and then the party may become a Church - a Church and a dynamo.  

Weber does not suggest that fascism is bereft of substance or ideology, merely that fascism values action above ideas. For example, in the case of Italy, Mussolini’s PNF formally recorded the party’s ideological platform in *The Doctrine of Fascism* in 1932; a full decade after the party entered power. Mussolini sought power first and formalized an ideology later. Conversely, in German National Socialism, theory presupposed action; “words and ideas count for him [a National Socialist] as much as actions, and sometimes they replace them.” In German National Socialism, all policies of the state and party had to be legitimized within the context of party ideology – specifically within the party’s fundamental precepts of *völkisch* nationalism. As we shall later see in Chapter 6, once the Nazis entered power the will of Hitler became inexorably merged with

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party ideology. Finally, as a last step before we turn to analyzing the origins of the Nazi party’s völkisch populist origins, and the role of its twin wings, it is imperative to understand the sweeping influence of Hitler’s personal leadership style on the evolution of National Socialism.

Implications of Hitler’s Leadership Style

As in nature the stronger prevails, so I see to it that personalities are able to prevail. I imagine myself to be a gardener, who looks over the fence at his garden and watches as the plants themselves struggle for their place in the light.54

-Adolf Hitler

Hitler’s leadership style played a central role in the thickening process of the Nazism. He believed that if he granted his lieutenants free rein to pursue his goals as they saw fit, then the strongest would naturally rise to the fore.55 To achieve this, he carved off vast swathes of the party and later state, and handed them to loyal oligarchs without specific directions regarding the structure or boundaries of their new dominion.56 Each oligarch was left to rule as a miniature Führer, as long as they remained beholden to Hitler and furthered his goals.

55 Smelser, Robert Ley, 102.
56 Smelser explored the near sovereignty of the various Nazi oligarchs through the example of Robert Ley’s German Labor Front in exquisite detail, see Smelser, Robert Ley, 156; Hugh Trevor-Roper aptly described the oligarchic nature of the Nazis as a “confusion of private empires,” see Hugh Trevor-Roper, The Last Days of Hitler, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 54.
Consequently, the NSDAP was divided among a series of competing bureaucratic vassals who vied to leave their mark on National Socialism and shape party policy in their own image so long as their actions did not directly conflict with Hitler’s goals. The outcome was what Joachim Fest eloquently dubbed “chaos goose stepping in unison.”

Every oligarch was working towards the same goal – National Socialist Revolution – but each was determined to accomplish it in a different way.

Gregor Strasser used his power as the party’s organizational chief to lay the foundations of a corporatist state. Ernst Röhm envisioned using the SA to violently sweep away bourgeoisie society with a violent National Socialist revolution. Robert Ley used his power over Germany’s workers to create a totalitarian social welfare state. While Heinrich Himmler created a National Socialist clone of all core functions of state governance under the umbrella of the Schutzstaffel. Each of these men possessed their own vision of National Socialism and acted to make that vision a reality – often at the expense of their fellow oligarchs. In the process, they facilitated the thickening of National Socialism by contributing their personal mutations of the ideology to it. As his subordinates struggled for influence within the movement, Hitler remained aloof

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61 Longerich, *Himmler*, 123.
from their ideological quarrels. He would intervene only when the struggles of his subordinates created a major crisis, or directly threatened his power. Even after he made up his mind to intervene, he often vacillated between his options and sent mixed signals to his subordinates before acting quickly and decisively after a crisis could no longer be ignored. Consequently, Hitler’s leadership style was characterized by long periods of letting his subordinates operate semi-autonomously in his name, punctuated by decisive and ruthless periods of direct intervention against those whom he believed had deviated from his agenda.

In this system Hitler derived his authority from his role as the ultimate arbitrator in conflicts between his lieutenants and as the source of their political legitimacy. Due to his messiah status within the party, all policies and actions undertaken by his subordinates had to be legitimized as the will of the Führer. This messianic dynamic suited Hitler’s personalist leadership style. He loathed organizing bureaucratic structures and by his own admission, in an ‘ideal’ world, he would have preferred to manage the party and state through propaganda alone. Still, Hitler was pragmatic enough to recognize that bureaucracies were

63 As early as 1924, Röhm observed that conflicts within the party frequently became “dangerous only because he [Hitler] vacillates and procrastinates.” Hitler rarely acted pre-emptively to diffuse internal conflict even when he was warned well in advance. See Ernst Röhm qtd. in Childers, *The Third Reich*, 82. Of the Nazi oligarchs, none were as acutely aware of this problem as Joseph Goebbels, who routinely characterized Hitler as “The procrastinator! Forever putting things off!” in his diary. See Joseph Goebbels, qtd. Childers, *The Third Reich*, 112. The Otto Strasser crisis of 1930 was a typical example of Hitler’s unwillingness to intervene pre-emptively in internal affairs. Hitler promised Goebbels that he would oust Otto and his confederates on five separate occasions but took no action until Otto had already left of his own accord. See Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris* 326.
an inescapable necessity for translating ideas into action; so he set broad goals
determined by his personal variant of National Socialism and left his lieutenants
to create whatever systems or structures they deemed necessary to accomplish
his objectives. The personal mutations of Nazi ideology of his subordinates were
of scant concern to him, so long as they did not directly conflict with his own and
the closer to power the party came, the more draconian Hitler’s opposition to
variants of National Socialism that clashed with his own became. The result was
that Nazism, both as a party and as a governing system, was composed of
numerous different versions of Nazi ideology held in varying degrees of orbit
around Hitler. Thus, in National Socialism, Hitler played the role of the chief
idealist. It was up to others to translate his ideas into state policy and this left
significant room for the party’s wings and leading figures within them to influence
the thickening process of the ideology.  

CHAPTER TWO

RISE OF THE VÖLKISCH MOVEMENT

To analyze the rise of the Nazi party, it is necessary to bear two things in mind. First, the NSDAP emerged as part of the populist völkisch movement, which it gradually absorbed and used as a base for its conquest of the German political right. Second, the Nazi party itself was not a monolithic entity, it was beset by rampant ideological and organizational divisions inherited from the broader völkisch movement. This chapter will analyze the rise of the völkisch movement up to its absorption into the Nazi party in order to establish the historical background of the events, interactions, and ideas that shaped the Munich and Strasserite wings.

The ideological evolution of the Nazi party is particularly insightful as a case study in the thickening of a party from a populist origin to a fascist end. Like other fascist parties, National Socialism constructed a narrative that clove the will of the people away from representative institutions and vested it in the hands of a revolutionary party based on the leader principle. This narrative did not emerge fully fledged however. It originated as a populist narrative of enforcing the ‘pure’ people’s will against the ‘corrupt’ elite and became distinctly fascist over time. The battles within the Nazi party over how the will of the people could be implemented to serve as a powerful reminder that ideological thickening is a chaotic and fractious process in which the ultimate outcome is never a foregone conclusion. This study does not seek to suggest that all populist movements are
predestined to thicken into fascist parties, only that this is what transpired in the case of National Socialism.

From Reaction to Revolution

The völkisch movement was a broad populist movement that formed the bedrock of far-right political opposition to the Weimar Republic. The völkisch movement originated as an ethno-centrist component of German romantic nationalism during the 18th and 19th centuries. Völkisch ideology was based around the concept of volksgemeinschaft, or a homogenous and virtuous national community reflecting the ‘best’ aspects of German culture and undivided by social or economic stratification.66 This idealized conception of a harmonious national community was perceived as inseparably tied to, and in the service of, a greater German fatherland. Such connections between the people and their fatherland were frequently interpreted in semi-mystical terms based on shared cultural or biological heritage. Völkisch ideologies exalted the ‘purity’ of rural communities versus the perceived moral corruption of urban elites. In this narrative, urban elites were constructed as either the product of ‘Roman’ or Jewish culture, and therefore, foreign parasites.67 This conceptual dichotomy was a direct parallel to typical populist narratives of ‘pure’ people versus a ‘corrupt’ elite but articulated in either ethnic or racial terms. Ultimately, this foundational

element of völkisch ideology became the “blood and soil” nationalism of the Munich wing of the Nazi party, and later the Third Reich itself.

Mainstreaming Völkisch Ideology

Völkisch ideologies first gained relevance in German politics with middle and upper-class political pressure groups in the late 19th century. The strongest of these was the Pan-German League, founded in 1890 which exercised persistent influence on state policy and academic culture, during the last decades of the Second Reich and into the Weimar Republic.\textsuperscript{68} The League played a pivotal role in carving out a völkisch foothold in the nation’s political establishment, making the proliferation of völkisch political movements and narratives during the Weimar period possible.\textsuperscript{69} It would not be an exaggeration to identify the Pan-German League as the progenitor of all völkisch movements of the Weimar period.\textsuperscript{70} In addition to the rising influence of völkisch organizations in late Imperial political life, Imperial policy during World War One indirectly facilitated entry of völkisch thought into mainstream political discourse. In 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II formally announced the suspension of all regional, class, as well as religious divisions within the war-time Reich, in order to create a united national front for the prosecution of the war effort. Wilhelm was not operating alone; his actions were part of a larger effort to affect a domestic

\textsuperscript{69} George L. Mosse, \textit{The Crisis of German Ideology}, 225.
political truce, and this initiative was backed with nearly universal support in the Reichstag. Clearly, the Kaiser’s rhetoric and the institution of a broad party truce did not truly abolish divisions within German society, nor were these objectives in and of themselves völkisch in nature. Regardless, the results contributed to a narrative of wartime unity that would be mobilized to great effect by völkisch agitators in the post-war period.

Germany’s defeat in World War One proved profoundly invigorating to the völkisch far-right. Social insecurity stemming from civil unrest, economic collapse, and the humiliation of Versailles provided an ideal environment for radicalization amongst the legions of demobilized soldiers, anxious elites, and the economically marginalized generation of young men who had not served in the war.71 Amongst these demographics, the völkisch narrative that society’s dysfunctions could be solved through the militarization of society and a return to the perceived comradery of the trenches found many eager recipients.72 The rise of the stab in the back legend had left the war unfinished for many returning veterans. Elites feared the threat of Communism, while the young lived in the shadow of unemployment. Above all else, the specter of political violence and the humiliation of Versailles loomed larger over the uncertain future of German politics. Against this uncertainty völkisch demagogues promised a continuation of


72 As previously noted, the concept that the militarization of society could be employed as a cure-all to the ills of modern society was a widely held belief in fascist circles in general. See Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 7. From the perspective of the Nazis themselves, see Gregor Strasser, “From Revolt to Revolution,” in *Nazi Ideology Before 1933*, 98
the 'unfinished' war for veterans, security against Communism for the elites, action for the young, and resistance to Versailles for the nation through the total militarization of society. This radical shift was more than mere sophistry; it was supported and shaped by a network of radical intellectuals. An examination of the ranks of the Nazi party's progenitor, the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP) is particularly enlightening in this regard. The DAP included not only veterans, such as Adolf Hitler and Ernst Röhm, but also radical intellectuals, the likes of Dietrich Eckhardt, Alfred Rosenberg, and Gottfried Feder. Demobilized veterans and their confederates in the bourgeois elite and dispossessed youths represented the driving force behind the völkisch far-right, but their thoughts and actions were shaped by the authoritarian theories developed by their own intellectuals.73 Although the völkisch movement lacked centralized leadership in its early years, its anti-republican ambitions converged with those of established reactionary parties, specifically the Deutschnationale Volkspartei (DNVP). The völkisch movement began as a junior partner to the established right-wing, but in time, supplanted and consumed it.

The DNVP and its allies in the military, government, and paramilitary organizations played a pivotal role in 'mainstreaming' the völkisch far-right. From the perspective of Weimar reactionaries, their world had been turned upside down, first by the loss of the war, and then by the emergence of a democratic

order. In the words of reactionary turned centrist, Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, reactionaries found themselves “without a solid foundation for their thinking and emotions” in the immediate aftermath of World War One. They denied the legitimacy of the Republic and lashed out against its liberal institutions, but unable to dispose of the Republic alone they forged alliances with the fanatical and heavily militarized paramilitary organizations of the völkisch movement to strengthen their political position. Thus, the völkisch movement began its ascent into the mainstream of right-wing politics, first as a paramilitary hammer wielded by reactionary politicians in the form of Freikorps, and then as their own distinct political parties.

The early völkisch organizations and parties, such as the Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund (DVSTB), Deutschsozialistische Partei (DSP), Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei (DVFP), and young NSDAP were too small and disorganized to directly challenge the Republic at the time.

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75 The Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund or German Völkisch Protection and Defiance Federation, was a large völkisch paramilitary and political organization, closely connected to the Pan-German league. The DVSTB was banned in most of the country following the assassination of foreign minister Walther Rathenau in 1922 and many of its members subsequently joined the ranks of the NSDAP.
76 The Deutschsozialistische Partei or German Socialist Party was a small völkisch party based in southern Germany. The DSP was an early rival to the NSDAP, but the party collapsed when one of its leading members, the later infamous Julius Streicher, merged his faction into the NSDAP.
77 The Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei (DVFP) or German Volkisch Freedom Party was a völkisch party primarily active in northern Germany. The party was founded as a splinter group of the DNVP in 1922. During the party’s brief existence, it presented a serious challenge to the Nazis for control of the völkisch movement but was largely subsumed into the Nazi party after the fall of Ludendorff in 1925.
Despite their disorganized origin, their influence grew as the reactionary DNVP consistently failed to deliver the anti-establishment change its electorate desired. Despite being one of the largest parties in the country, the DNVP emphatically refused to participate in coalition governments. It was determined to have total power or no power at all. As a result of this all-or-nothing strategy, the DNVP condemned itself to permanent opposition status, unable to enter power or constructively affect policy through parliamentary means. Due to its ineffectual opposition status, the party’s voters gradually defected to more extreme populist alternatives, ultimately driving much of the political right into the hands of the NSDAP after 1928.

The Völkisch Movement Takes Flight

Due to chronic infighting between and within its organizations, from 1919-1922 the völkisch movement proved itself unable to form stable political parties. Established pre-World War One völkisch organizations, such as the Pan-German, Agrarian, and Reich Hammer Leagues, functioned as political pressure groups and anti-Semitic rabble rousers, but they were not mass-political parties. The movement’s capability to organize collectively was undermined by central ideological tensions between its various proponents. Traditionalist völkisch leadership emphasized the nationalist, agrarian, and ethnic/racial aspects of the

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ideology, particularly its anti-Semitism, but downplayed themes of social revolution. Conversely, the younger generation of völkisch firebrands radicalized during or after the war viewed themselves as part of an emerging revolutionary right and saw their traditionalist forebearers as an extension of the reactionary elite, lacking proper revolutionary consciousness. Despite their internal struggles, both factions needed the other to survive; the traditionalists granted the movement and air of legitimacy and provided connections to the mainstream political right, while the revolutionaries provided fanatical foot soldiers and popular orators such as Adolf Hitler.

Though it remained fraught with internal conflict, the völkisch movement continued to gain influence within the broader political right throughout the early 1920s. The nation’s largest völkisch organization, the DVSTB, boasted 180,000 members nationwide by 1922, and its swelling ranks were complimented by

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80 The Pan-German League was iconic of the traditionalist variants of völkisch ideology. The League embraced the concepts of volksgemeinschaft, anti-Semitism, and racial nationalism, but remained wed to class division. See Björn Hofmeister, “Realms of Leadership and Residues of Social Mobilization,” in The German Political Right in the Weimar Republic, ed. by Larry Eugene Jones (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 136-137.

81 This central tension within the völkisch movement was perfectly captured by the early propaganda and private diary entries of Joseph Goebbels, who regularly attacked traditionalists as an extension of bourgeois reactionaries who lacked proper revolutionary consciousness. Both Hitler and the Strasser brothers displayed similar animosity towards the established völkisch traditionalists and their reactionary allies. See Joseph Goebbels, “The Radicalizing of Socialism,” in Nazi Ideology Before 1933, 79-81. See Gregor Strasser, “From Revolt to Revolution,” 98-99. See Hitler’s fraught relationship with the Pan-German League during the formative years of the Nazi movement, Barry A. Jackisch, “Continuity and Change On the German Right,” in The German Political Right in the Weimar Republic, ed. by Larry Eugene Jones (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 166.

82 Established völkisch leadership understood that the emerging revolutionary right could challenge the socialist parties for influence over the working class, which traditional völkisch agitators had been unable to sway. See the thoughts of Pan-German League leader Heinrich Claß in Jackisch, “Continuity and Change,” 166. See also Hofmeister, “Realms of Leadership and Residues of Social Mobilization,” 139.
active paramilitary and publishing assets. Like a microcosm of the völkisch far-right in general, the DVSTB consisted of a mixture of intellectual leadership drawn from the Pan-German League, and revolutionary paramilitaries recruited from radicalized veterans or dispossessed youths. Even though traditionalist intellectuals set the tenor of the movement, they were gradually marginalized within the DVSTB’s leadership circles by activist revolutionaries who could effectively master the art of modern mass politics.\(^8^3\) As a result of its rapid expansion and penchant for revolutionary violence, the development of the DVSTB was cut short when the party was banned in 1922. Still, the elimination of the DVSTB did little to impede the growth of the völkisch movement itself as many of the party’s members subsequently joined the ranks of its smaller Nazi counterpart.\(^8^4\) For its part, the NSDAP commanded just under 56,000 and the traditionalist Pan-German League reached its record size of 52,000 in 1922/1923.\(^8^5\)

By 1922, the völkisch movement was beginning to crystallize into coherent political organizations. In March of 1923, a formal accord was reached dividing the völkisch movement into two broad camps. The DVFP led by Albrecht von Gräfe was granted supremacy in the north, while the NSDAP dominated the

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\(^8^3\) Hofmeister, “Realms of Leadership and Residues of Social Mobilization,” 140.

\(^8^4\) The DVSTB was banned as a result of its involvement in the assassination of Weimar diplomat Walther Rathenau. See Hofmeister, “Realms of Leadership and Residues of Social Mobilization,” 141.

south.\textsuperscript{86} Behind the entire \textit{völkisch} movement, General Erich Ludendorff emerged as a unifying godfather, not specifically tied to any one party, but involved with all of them. The onset of the cataclysmic 1923 German inflation crisis served to dramatically expedite the pace of \textit{völkisch} agitation.\textsuperscript{87} Energized by its swelling ranks and the precarious economic state of the nation, in 1923 the \textit{völkisch} movement began to flex its political muscle. Emboldened by the magnitude of the crisis the upstart Nazi party attempted to seize power in alliance with Ludendorff and Gräfe during the Beerhall Putsch in November.\textsuperscript{88} Although, the Putsch is subsequently remembered as the dawn of Hitler’s national political career, Ludendorff was the more prominent star of the \textit{völkisch} movement at the time.

Due to his prior military fame and political prominence, Ludendorff embodied the type of militaristic leadership that appealed to \textit{völkisch} traditionalists and revolutionaries alike. Ludendorff was able to briefly establish himself as the figurehead of the \textit{völkisch} movement, but his national political appeal paled in comparison to the darling of the reactionaries, General Paul von Hindenburg. Ludendorff’s efforts to foster alliances between the various \textit{völkisch} parties also failed to win broad electoral support, while his own attempt to run for the presidency in 1925 met with a colossal defeat that effectively terminated his political career.\textsuperscript{89} Ludendorff’s tenure as the leader of the \textit{völkisch} movement had

\textsuperscript{87} Weitz, \textit{Weimar Germany}, 138.
\textsuperscript{89} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler Hubris}, 269.
been short and unsuccessful but it was not politically insignificant. Despite his dismal electoral results, Ludendorff thrust völkisch populism into mainstream political discourse. Ludendorff had failed, but the populism he legitimized proved far more durable. Moreover, he demonstrated that the unification of the fractious völkisch movement was possible, yet he lacked the political flare to solidify these gains.

The völkisch movement had succeeded in bringing itself into the political mainstream, but it still lacked the mass-appeal necessary to market itself to the general electorate. Throughout the period from 1919-1924, the revolutionary right of the völkisch movement was, however, undergoing a transformation that would arm it with the tools it needed to become a viable mass political movement. The German far-right was assembling its own variant of non-Marxist socialism. This transformation did not occur in a vacuum. Mainstream German socialism, especially the SPD, had been absorbing nationalist themes into its socialist platform for decades, and had emerged as the most powerful party in the country as the result. It was logical that if the far-right was ever going to assert itself as a political force with mass appeal, it would need to engineer its own form of socialism. This far-right variant of socialism would be based not on class struggle, but in "socialization through the national people’s community [volksgemeinschaft]," i.e., the creation of socialism rooted in völkisch principles.90

The turning point of this transition originated not from paramilitary personnel or

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90 Eduard Stadtler qtd. in Weitz, Weimar Germany, 98.
völkisch politicians, but from the influential works of far-right literati, with the
works of Dr. Oswald Spengler being the most notable. The ideas of Dr. Spengler
were in turn, quickly adopted by the German far-right, and the völkisch
movement in particular.

Due to the international success of his most famous work, *Decline of the
West*, published in 1918, Spengler was armed with a powerful platform and
mainstream appeal.91 Spengler himself was a nationalist philosopher, but he saw
the creation of right-wing socialism as a necessary precondition for the survival of
the German proletariat and bourgeoisie alike.92 Like the völkisch movement that
eagerly consumed his work, Spengler himself believed that the perceived social
unity and submersion of social divisions brought about by World War One had to
be perpetuated indefinitely, even if it meant endless warfare.93 In Spengler’s
mind, ‘true’ socialism, based on a fully militarized society would form the
backbone of future empires bent on world-domination.94 Only through the joint
emergence of militarized socialism, and the rise of an all-powerful dictator, or
“Caesar,” could the forces of materialism be subdued, and global hegemony

93 Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 336-337. In Spengler’s mind, solving conflicts through any means
other than armed confrontation to resolve conflict was inherently counter-intuitive and to be
avoided. Spengler outlines this as a major ‘problem’ of the 19th century, which he critiques as
“poor in great wars – and revolutions.” It was therefore desirable to Spengler, that the 20th century
should be as riddled with military conflict in order to make possible the progress of civilization.
See Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West: Volume II Perspectives of World-History*, trans.
94 Oswald Spengler, *Decline of the West: Volume I Form and Actuality*, trans. Charles F. Atkinson
achieved. Moreover, just like his völkisch readers, Spengler assumed that the Germans were naturally the most militarily proficient ‘race’ to ever exist, and strongly foreshadowed that the synthesis of Caesarism and socialism would be completed in Germany.

To accomplish this objective, democracy, foreign culture, political freedom, and the ultimate evil of materialism – manifest in both its capitalist and Marxist forms, had to be excised from German society. In their place, Spengler advocated the creation of a corporatist social structure, a society based on martial discipline, the protection of national identity, and the implementation of the fascist leader principle – or Caesarism, as Spengler termed it – as the antidote to social turmoil. All of this would be necessary for Germany, and the greater Western world, to survive an inescapable clash of Western civilization against the rest of the world.

Central to Spengler's philosophy was the concept that Prussian order and militarism offered the most organic form of socialism and therefore, by extension, the German people were intrinsically socialist. In contrast to Marxist-socialism, which Spengler dismissed as the “capitalism of the working class,” German

95 Spengler, *Decline of the West volume II*, 432.
96 Spengler, *Decline of the West volume I*, 36. Spengler espoused most völkisch themes of German racial supremacy, but he classified race differently. For Spengler, races were rooted in shared spiritual interconnectivity and cultural bonds that were unique to each race, instead of blood heritage alone. Still, this divergence did not stop Spengler’s works from becoming foundational to revolutionary völkisch activists and ideologues. For a brief synopsis of Spengler’s views on race, see Oswald Spengler, *Prussianism and Socialism*, 22-23.
97 Spengler, *Decline of the West volume II*, 506.
98 Oswald Spengler, *Prussianism and Socialism*, 30-31, 80.
Socialism was supposed to be based on martial discipline, collectivism, and service to the state.\textsuperscript{99} By means of the militarization of society, the submersion of class division through a new social order based on rank and achievement, and a corporatist social structure predicated upon a national network of occupational councils, Spengler argued that Germany could create non-materialist “true socialism.”\textsuperscript{100} Through this argument, Spengler lent ideological structure to the development of a far-right socialism. This socialism would be non-Marxist, anti-materialist, and anti-democratic, based on the concept of strong central leadership, comradery in conflict, and the militarization of society. The result of this transformation would be the creation of nationalist socialism and the direct forebearer of the Strasserite wing of the NSDAP.

The gradual transition to a revolutionary, far-right variant of socialism, led to the demise of the traditionalists that dominated the \textit{völkisch} movement until Ludendorff’s fall. The field was now set for the emergence of a new kind of \textit{völkisch} movement, one that effectively mobilized both the nationalism of the traditional right, and the right-wing socialism of the revolutionaries. \textit{Völkisch} ideology was moving towards fascism by taking its nationalist ideology from the right, and its revolutionary impetus from the left. This synthesis was successfully executed in the NSDAP and as a result the Nazis became Germany’s first \textit{völkisch} party with the potential to monopolize the movement.

\textsuperscript{99} Oswald Spengler, \textit{Prussianism and Socialism}, 66.  
\textsuperscript{100} Oswald Spengler, \textit{Prussianism and Socialism}, 73.
The Nazi Party Monopolizes the Völkisch Movement

Ludendorff’s meteoric fall created a leadership vacuum in the Völkisch movement that was readily filled by Hitler. In the aftermath of the abortive Beerhall Putsch, he became the tub-thumping darling of the movement. The Beerhall Putsch had been an abysmal failure, but the notoriety it generated established Hitler as one of the leading Völkisch agitators in the nation. His bid for mastery of the movement was further enhanced by two crucial factors. During his post-Putsch incarceration until December 1924, he understood that other leaders’ desire to gain his blessing as a Völkisch celebrity to energize their base lent him leverage over the entire movement, and he used this leverage to play his rivals off against each other.¹⁰¹ Even more importantly, unlike other Völkisch leaders such as Gräfe, Hitler avoided closely tying himself to Ludendorff’s campaign. In truth, Hitler already perceived Ludendorff as his chief rival for leadership of the Völkisch movement and desired to see him discredited.¹⁰² Once Ludendorff overplayed his hand and failed catastrophically, Hitler emerged as the sole surviving Völkisch figurehead left unblemished by the electoral defeat of 1925.

Hitler’s celebrity status and knack for intrigue were important components of the NSDAP’s monopolization of the Völkisch movement, but he was not the lone architect of the party’s rise to prominence. Hitler gave the Völkisch

movement a unifying leader, but he did not give it structure. The task of structuring and incorporating the disparate elements of the völkisch movement inside the Nazi party rested in the hands of the party’s two competing wings. The older Munich wing represented a new iteration of traditionalist völkisch ideologies, based in blood and soil nationalism, mixed with strong overtones of racial mysticism. While its rival, the upstart Strasserite Wing, emerged in 1925 as a collection of völkisch revolutionaries pursuing a socialist interpretation of the movement. These wings were hostile to each other, but together they formed a National Socialist catch-all strategy that integrated the bulk of the völkisch movement into the party and then unified it under the banner of Adolf Hitler.

Following Ludendorff’s defeat, the period from spring of 1925 to October 1929 was unfavorable for the development of large populist parties. The economy soared. Employment rose, and a perception of stability reigned supreme. Beneath the seemingly placid surface of Weimar politics, however, two critical shifts were taking place within national politics in general, and the völkisch movement in particular.

In broader national politics, despite the outward appearance of stability, disaffection with established political parties continued to grow and manifested itself in the form of electoral support for small protest parties. With the onset of the Great Depression, many of these voters formed the base of the NSDAP’s first

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103 Despite the improving economic situation of the nation, the Weimar status quo was far less stable than it appeared. By May of 1928, 13.7% of voters threw their support behind tiny protest parties to register their discontent with the established parties. Childers, *The Third Reich*, 100-101.
major electoral breakthrough in 1930. Meanwhile, within the völkisch movement itself, the power vacuum created by the political defeat of 1925, combined with Hitler’s celebrity status, and the NSDAP’s völkisch catch-all strategy consolidated the Nazi’s grip on the remnants of the völkisch movement. The Nazis had not dispelled the divisions within the movement. They simply succeeded in absorbing the entire movement into a single party, rifts and all. Völkisch traditionalists and revolutionaries still struggled ideologically, but instead of forming separate parties, they were now separate wings of the Nazi party. During these wilderness years, many of the foundational elements of National Socialism as a governing ideology took form.
CHAPTER THREE:
THE MUNICH WING

Although the Munich wing originated from völkisch traditionalists, it began to quickly thicken into an eclectic mixture of racial nationalist, corporatist, and semi-mystical elements due to the influence of its founding members. At the time of the DAP’s founding in January 1919, it was merely another populist party. The party’s foundational ideology was based on moralistic discourse and a limited number of highly specific policy proposals, but lacked a comprehensive programmatic platform. In this discourse, the classic populist dichotomy between the ‘pure’ people and ‘corrupt’ elite was conceived along anti-materialist lines. Individuals who were not perceived as creating value such as bankers and speculators were cast as corrupt elites and the root of all society’s ills. Moreover, existing political parties were cast as duplicitous tools of elite social control. Conversely, the DAP construed the ‘pure’ people as a homogeneous collective of all working Germans, locked in a perpetual struggle against usurious elites, to be liberated by restoring the will of the people to the halls of power. At this early juncture, the DAP was still reformist. Although it attacked existing parties as tools of the elite, it did not fundamentally call for the revolutionary restructuring of the German political system. Nor did it call for a total rejection of the international

104 In its discourse, the DAP referred to the elite as “drones.” Often – although not exclusively – these anti-elite sentiments were expressed in anti-Semitic terms. The following excerpt from the DAP’s guidelines summarizes its moralistic discourse. “We fight against the drones in the state; these are mostly Jews; they live a good life, they reap where they have not sown. They control and rule us with their money.” Anton Drexler and Karl Harrer, “Guidelines of the German Workers’ Party,” in Nazi Ideology Before 1933, 10.
system. On the contrary, the party advocated international laws to standardize wages to force nations to compete in production quality, not lower the costs of production. Likewise, they called for international regulations against reporting "false news" as a means to "prevent the kind of incitement of peoples to aggression, which occurred during the World War." While the DAP began as a classic populist movement, with reformist objectives and ideologically thin policy proposals, this was about to change. Behind these populist concepts, Munich ideologues were beginning to distinguish the party from the rest of the völkisch movement and in the process initiated the thickening of Nazi ideology. It was the Munich Wing that led the party’s thickening process from 1919 until the ascendancy of the Strasserites in 1925, and this left an indelible mark on future Nazism as a governing ideology.

Origins of Munich: The Eckart Period, 1919-1923

The Munich Wing emerged alongside the DAP and immediately began to shape the ideology of the party in their own image. The leading figure of the Munich wing was Dietrich Eckart, a völkisch playwright turned journalist who afforded the party much needed connections with local power brokers. Joining Eckart were two close proteges, the racial theorist Alfred Rosenberg and self-proclaimed economist Gottfried Feder. Both men proved crucial in the evolution

105 Clearly, both of these proposals were intrinsically flawed and unattainable, but they were key elements of the DAP’s early thinking and demonstrate its reformist origins. See Anton Drexler and Karl Harrer, “Guidelines of the German Workers’ Party,” 10.
106 Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 155.
of National Socialism; Rosenberg became one of the Nazi’s chief racial ideologues, while Feder emerged as the party’s first economic theorist. Eckart’s periodical, *Auf gut Deutsch* served as their collective mouthpiece and the ideas expressed therein exerted a strong influence on the young DAP and Hitler once he joined the party in fall of 1919.107 Due to their seniority and platform to disseminate their message, the Munich trio were perfectly positioned to institutionalize their own subtly different variants of what soon became National Socialism.

During its formative years under Eckart’s leadership Munich’s ideology developed around three pillars that proved crucial in the thickening process of early National Socialism; anti-materialism, anti-Semitism, and a *völkisch* variant of Christian morality. The first pillar, anti-materialism, represented a direct evolution from the DAP’s moralistic discourse. Materialism was cast as an affliction of the soul, and capitalism was perceived as the most malignant form of materialism. Moreover, Eckart blamed capitalism as the cause of Germany’s defeat during World War One and attacked the democratic institutions of the Weimar Republic as the political manifestation of materialism. Thus, early Munich ideologues argued that Germany could only be ‘saved’ if capitalism was

107 The influence of Eckart and more specifically Rosenberg’s racial and anti-Semitic ideas on Hitler during the party’s formative years was recognized by contemporary members and observers of the Nazi party at the time. Rosenberg in particular had a well-established reputation as the party’s chief philosopher. See Robert Cecil, *The Myth of the Master Race: Alfred Rosenberg an Nazi Ideology* (New York: Dodd Mead & Company, 1972), 45.
dismantled and the economy both nationalized and socialized.\textsuperscript{108} Following the lead of their self-styled economist Feder, the Munich ideologues relentlessly called for the nationalization of banks and the abolition of interest payments, which they identified as the origin of all society’s ills from moral decay to class warfare.\textsuperscript{109} In this, Feder was simply expanding on the anti-materialist sentiments of the DAP’s foundational guidelines, but in the process, began to transform the party’s moralistic discourse into distinct policy goals.

In order to expunge capitalism from Germany, Feder proposed the creation of a corporatist “social-state” as an alternative to parliamentary representation.\textsuperscript{110} Like his Munich colleagues, he believed that parliamentary representation was a pawn of capitalism that exclusively serving the interests of a corrupt political elite; rather than the people. He thus argued that the will of the people could only be safeguarded if politics were completely separated from economics.\textsuperscript{111} To accomplish this, he proposed the creation of two parallel systems of electoral representation. The first would be the House of the People


\textsuperscript{109}Gottfried Feder, “Manifesto for Breaking the Bondage of Interest,” in \textit{Nazi Ideology Before 1933}, 27-29.

\textsuperscript{110}The ideas of Feder, and to an even greater extent, the Strasserites, are consistent with António Costa Pinto’s definition of political corporatism during the inter-war era. Pinto defines political corporatism “as a system of political representation based in an organic-statist view of society in which its organic units (families, local powers, professional associations and interest organizations and institutions) replace the individual-centred electoral model of representation and parliamentary legitimacy.” António Costa Pinto, “Fascism, Corporatism, and the Crafting of Authoritarian Institutions in Inter-War European Dictatorships,” in Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe, ed. by António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 89.

\textsuperscript{111}Gottfried Feder, “The Social State,” in \textit{Nazi Ideology Before 1933}, 34.
based on an ascending hierarchy of elected councils tasked with all political legislation. The second would be a parallel hierarchy of Central Councils based on equal representation for employers and labor drawn from every profession and tasked with the administration of a state-run economy. This state-run economy would be centrally planned and administered by the Central Councils, but it would also retain partial private ownership. Feder’s proposal represented the rough-draft of the hybrid political economy of the future Third Reich and fascinated the young Hitler, who embraced them with considerable zeal. Although Feder’s concept of the social-state was fraught with logical inconsistencies, and his works have been chronically overlooked by historians, his theories were crucial in the development of the Nazi ideology. Importantly, even beyond its personal influence on Hitler, the concept of the social-state represented the genesis of the entire Strasserite wing of National Socialism.

The second core concept of Munich ideology was anti-Semitism. At this early juncture, Munich’s anti-Semitism functioned as an extension of its anti-materialism. Eckart defined ‘Jewishness’ as the uncontrolled embrace of earthly materialism at the expense of godly spirituality that had, according to him, destroyed the Israelites from within and then propagated itself elsewhere in the

115 Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 123.
world.\textsuperscript{118} He conceived ‘Jewishness’ as a materialist demon present in every society, and that a civilization’s worth was determined by their ability to combat their own intrinsic ‘Jewishness.’ At the same time, Eckart argued that ‘Jewishness’ could never be fully dispelled because without it individuals would no longer be able to struggle against it and society would collapse.\textsuperscript{119} This concept of endless struggle between materialism and society was so central to Eckart’s worldview that he believed the world would end if ‘Jewishness’ was eliminated.\textsuperscript{120} In this conceptualization, ‘Jewishness’ functioned as a form of original sin that was always present in every person and nation that had to be overcome by each generation. In short, for Eckart, ‘Jewishness’ was a manifestation of materialism that caused all of society’s ills but could never be completely dispelled. Feder pursued a similar argument, in which Jews themselves were characterized as a symptom of a deeper materialist evil, but not its cause.\textsuperscript{121}

While maintaining the conflation of ‘Jewishness’ and materialism, Rosenberg lent primacy to the racial and anti-Bolshevist dimensions of Munich’s anti-Semitism. For Rosenberg, Jews were a distinct race, not a manifestation of materialism, and their foreign racial status rendered them as corrupting to the homogeneity of the nations in which they lived, thus sapping the capability of

\textsuperscript{118} Dietrich Eckart, “Jewishness in and around us,” in \textit{Nazi Ideology Before 1933}, 20, 22-23.
\textsuperscript{119} Eckart, “Jewishness in and around us,” 25.
\textsuperscript{120} Eckart, “Jewishness in and around us,” 24.
\textsuperscript{121} Tyrell, “Gottfried Feder,” 31.
these nations to sustain themselves. To illustrate this ‘threat,’ Rosenberg wove dire literary portraits of the destruction of his Russian homeland by the Red Revolution and claimed that the same horrors would befall Germany if radical action was not taken. This synthesis of anti-Semitism and anti-Bolshevism found an eager recipient in Hitler, who rapidly internalized Rosenberg’s theories as a core element of his own beliefs. Beyond his specific fixation on Russia, Rosenberg latched onto all manner of conspiracy theories that unified Munich’s strident anti-materialism and seething anti-Semitism. For him, capitalism and internationalism in any form were sinister tools of a global “Jewish financial dictatorship” that was determined to debase the racial purity of nation-states. This institutionalized anti-Semitic paranoia played a central role in the formative stages of Nazi ideology. These conspiracy theories allowed the Nazis to construct a pervasive siege mentality in which every foreign nation, international organization, democratic institution, capitalist business, and competing ideology were seen as potentially compromised by ‘Jewish’ interests and therefore, a threat to German national security. Within this mindset Rosenberg and his colleagues argued that Germany could only be safe if it was racially pure. This

was *the penultimate* pillar of Munich ideology, and it was already established before Hitler rose to the fore of the Nazi movement.

The third and final core concept was comprised of mysticism conjoined with a *völkisch* version of religious nationalism. This spiritual dynamic enabled National Socialism to function as a political religion wherein service to the Nazi party was perceived as a holy mission in the service of the German nation. In addition to its intimate relationship with the wing’s earliest concepts of anti-Semitism, this spiritual element of Munich ideology lent itself to the belief that Germany would be saved from its materialist degeneration by a messiah who embodied the spiritual heart of the nation.\(^{127}\) The Munich ideologues found their long-awaited messiah in the figure of Adolf Hitler. Aided by his support and personalist leadership style, this messianic veneration paired with the concept of the leader principle borrowed from other fascist movements laid the foundation of the infamous Führer cult after 1922.\(^{128}\)

The Nazi Platform Emerges: 1920

Hitler rose to prominence in the party in 1920 and his subsequent seizure of power within further empowered the Munich Wing.\(^{129}\) First and foremost,

\(^{127}\) Dietrich Eckart, “Men!” in *Nazi ideology Before 1933*, 3-4.

\(^{128}\) The concept of a German political messiah was integral to the Munich wing from its inception, but these messianic longings in Nazi ideology consolidated into the concept of the Führer after Mussolini’s coup d’état in Italy in 1922. See Ulrich, *Hitler: Ascent*, 125.

\(^{129}\) In June of 1921, Hitler resigned from the NSDAP to protest a proposed merger with the DSP. After a month of acrimonious separation, partially mediated by Eckart, Hitler agreed to return to the party on the condition that he be granted “dictatorial powers” over the party. See Ulrich, *Hitler: Ascent*, 111-113.
Hitler’s demagogic talents lent the Nazis regional prominence and provided Munich’s ideas greater public exposure. Secondly, he presented the kind of messianic leader whom the Munich ideologues were seeking. Moreover, his infatuation with racial nationalism and anti-Semitism reinforced the ideological transition already underway in the wing, and he integrated their ideas with his own. Finally, the concept of living space that shaped every aspect of Hitler’s world-view was swiftly incorporated into Munich ideology and contributed a crucial new plank to the party’s thickening ideological framework in the process.¹³⁰ In summary, the Munich Wing enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with Hitler. In conjunction with Hitler, Munich created much of the Nazi party’s racial ideological dogma, but without him, they were bereft of a public platform to propagate it beyond the völkisch movement.

Following the reorganization of the DAP as the NSDAP, in February of 1920, Nazi ideology thickened into the party’s first formal platform - the Twenty-Five Point Program. The creation of this program was a decisive step in Nazism’s transition away from thin-centered populism towards the creation of a fuller ideology. The Twenty-Five points are a clear example of how personal ideological mutations become institutionalized due to the influence of specific actors. Functionally, the Twenty-Five Points constituted a compilation of personal

¹³⁰ The concept of living space in the context of German politics originated with the general, academic, and geopolitician, Dr. Karl Haushofer. Hitler became familiar with the concept of living space through one of his closest confidants, Rudolf Hess, who was a former aide and student of Haushofer. See Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2013), 82-83.
variations of Nazi ideology espoused by the Munich ideologues combined with new elements introduced by Hitler. Racial nationalist themes were omnipresent throughout. Citizenship was conceived in strictly racial terms, all individuals not of German ‘blood’ were regarded as foreigners and Jews were specifically barred from citizenship. The Points advocated a ban on all foreign immigration and, in the event of national hardship, the expulsion of non-Germans as well. Above all else, the Points maintained that the purpose of the state was to protect the livelihood of all ethnic Germans and to create legal equality between them, regardless of class origin, and at the expense of non-Germans. These racial nationalist motifs emerged from Munich’s collective obsession with purity and were subsequently developed into the concept of the völkisch state that undergirded the entire governing system of the Third Reich.

In addition to the Point’s racial nationalism, the document strongly reflected Munich’s embryonic corporatist tendencies and somewhat nebulous socialism. Feder’s influence was particularly strongly felt here, as many of the economic concepts utilized in the Points were drawn directly from his theories. Although the economic proposals of the Points included several measures to reduce the fiscal burden on the middle class, their primary objective was to strengthen the economic power of the central government at the expense of

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131 Points 4-6. See Adolf Hitler, Dietrich Eckart, Gottfried Feder, et. al., “The Program of the NSDAP,” in Nazi Ideology Before 1933, 41.
private industry. The Points called for the nationalization of all corporate trusts, profit sharing with workers in large corporations, and the introduction of law allowing the government to nationalize land without compensation for private interests. Moreover, in a clear shot at the capitalist class, the Points demanded the abolition of all income unearned by labor, including interest payments and land speculation. While these elements were tailored to degrade the influence of Germany’s capitalist class, they were also designed as tools to control the working classes. Point 10 specifically mandated that it was the primary duty of all citizens to work physically and mentally for the greater good the state. This was an early display of the inherent totalitarianism of Nazi ideology; the Nazis would only tolerate private endeavors as long as they were aligned with state objectives. Finally, in order to execute the party’s proposals, the document advocated the creation of a strong central parliament and the creation of corporatist chambers at the regional level, along the lines of Feder’s Central Councils, to fully enforce the state’s will across the country.

133 Points 15, 16, and 17 outlined several proposals primarily intended to ease the fiscal burden on the middle class. Among these was an extension of old-age insurance, preferential treatment for small businesses in government contracts, the communalization of large department stores followed by leasing these stores out to small businessmen, and the abolition of land taxes. See Hitler, et. al., “The Program of the NSDAP,” 42.


135 Point 10. Despite the Nazi’s rhetoric of protecting small businessmen and the middle class, they were only sincerely concerned with the defense of private interests as long as these interests did not conflict with the priorities of the state. See Hitler, et. al., “The Program of the NSDAP,” 41.

136 Point 25. Although borrowing Feder’s concept of occupational councils for regional governance outlined in “The Social State,” the demand for a unitary central parliament with unlimited national reach likely emerged from Hitler’s thinking at the time. Hitler subsequently expanded on this concept further in Mein Kampf, see Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 845.
True to Munich form, the entire program was clothed in anti-materialist and anti-Semitic terms. The existing legal system of the Weimar Republic was dismissed as a tool of “a materialistic world order,” and in its place, the party demanded the creation of German Common Law based on reciprocity, ethnic solidarity, and harsh punishments. Likewise, echoing the mystical themes of Eckart and Rosenberg, the program exalted non-denominational “positive Christianity” as an antidote to the “Jewish materialistic spirit within and around us.” In time, the Nazi’s anti-materialist sentiments would lose most of their overtly Christian overtones in favor of a mystification of the party and Führer, but the effect remained the same. Like other fascist ideologies, National Socialism functioned as a civic religion, in the case of the Nazis, the spiritual concepts that underpinned these mystical elements originated in the Munich Wing.

Finally, in the realm of foreign policy, the Points repeated the typical völkisch calls for a Pan-German state and repudiation of the treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain. Additionally, in a clear demonstration of Hitler’s influence, the document also included a demand for living space to support the expansion of the German population. Up to this point, the Munich Wing had remained fixated on domestic affairs, but Hitler was lending the ideology a distinctly expansionist agenda.

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137 Points 18 and 19. The Nazis regarded the Weimar Republic’s “Roman Law” as a puppet of a “materialistic world order.” See Hitler, et. al., “The Program of the NSDAP,” 43. Like other fascist movements, the Nazis advocated a new legal code based on simple rules and harsh penalties as part of their plans to engineer ‘social harmony.’ In practice these revised legal codes functioned as organized terror states.

The Twenty-Five Points represented Munich’s most enduring legacy in the Nazi movement. The Points soldiered as the formal program of the Nazi party throughout its entire existence, despite widespread popular confusion regarding the points and efforts within the party to clarify or reform them.\textsuperscript{139} Nazism was thickening, but still far from a full ideology, and the Points left many details unanswered. These voids created ample opportunities for ideologues and functionaries to struggle amongst themselves to influence the course of party ideology.

\textbf{Rise and Fall of the Esser Clique: 1921-1924}

With the party’s foundational ideology established, the Munich Wing turned its attention to strengthening the Nazi’s foothold in the \textit{völkisch} movement. The Twenty-Five Points established the broad outline of Nazi ideology, but the Munich Wing now set about to continue codifying Nazi ideology in their own terms through propaganda.\textsuperscript{140} Eckart facilitated the Nazi’s acquisition of their first official party newspaper, the \textit{Völkischer Beobachter} in December 1920, and a year later he became its chief editor.\textsuperscript{141} This heightened focus on propaganda heralded a turning-point in the evolution of the Munich Wing. The influence of its original ideologues declined in favor of more capable propagandists, rising from

\textsuperscript{139} The Twenty-Five Points were a frequent point of confusion amongst the Nazis themselves and the general public. Hitler’s refusal to officially revise the Points complicated the situation further and deeply aggravated the party’s campaign managers who were faced with a persistent barrage of clarifying questions from the public. See Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 115.

\textsuperscript{140} Cecil, \textit{The Myth of the Master Race}, 44.

\textsuperscript{141} Ulrich, \textit{Hitler: Ascent}, 106.
the ranks of the party. Munich continued to operate as a wing of the party, but its leadership and priorities shifted.

As the Munich Wing devoted their efforts to propaganda, the anti-Semitic and racial nationalist elements of their ideology continued to thicken, but the economic themes did not. Despite his senior role in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Eckart was pushed away from the center of the party and his personal relationship with Hitler cooled.\(^\text{142}\) Likewise, Feder became isolated as his corporatist concepts lost their prime position within Nazi ideology. Among the original ideologues, Rosenberg was unique in that the transition to an entirely racial nationalist platform solidified his position as the party’s leading ‘philosopher’ and amplified his influence. As a sign of his growing prominence, in 1923 Rosenberg displaced his former mentor Eckart at the helm of the party’s prized *Völkischer Beobachter*.\(^\text{143}\)

Although Rosenberg remained the ideological spirit of the Munich Wing, he lacked the administrative acumen to translate his influence into power within the party or lend Munich’s concepts popular appeal. The task of popularizing Munich’s ideas was left to a new generation of propagandists. The new leading men in Munich were the anti-Semitic journalist Hermann Esser, party publisher Max Amann, and the anti-Semitic zealot Julius Streicher. Of this trio, Esser was the most powerful. In fall of 1920, he established a reputation as an adept rabble-


rouser and the party’s then most talented speaker behind Hitler. In 1923, his burgeoning notoriety and personal favor with Hitler earned him a formal position as the party’s first propaganda chief. Max Amann, a wartime colleague of Hitler, carved out a smaller sphere of influence at the head of the party’s publishing house in 1922. The same year, the notorious anti-Semitic agitator Julius Streicher rose to prominence by leading his followers into the Nazi movement and precipitating the fall of the rival DSP in the process. In 1923 Streicher consolidated his influence by founding the salacious anti-Semitic tabloid Der Stürmer, as his own private venture aligned with party interests. The new clique led by Esser was obsessed with racial nationalism and pursued racial themes to the exclusion of all others. The rise of the Esser clique was a classic example of how individuals drive ideological development. The pivot to propaganda strongly favored adept rabble-rousers, and the fanatical racial nationalists of the Esser clique proved highly capable of marginalizing their predecessors and thickening the racial nationalist themes already present in the ideology in the process.

This fixation on race, combined with relentless harassment of their colleagues solidified Munich’s dominance in the Nazi’s Bavarian homeland, but simultaneously sowed the seeds of the wing’s downfall. The Nazis had secured a fanatical racial nationalist base in the south, but they were poorly equipped to

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expand their appeal amongst the socialist and corporatist elements of the völkisch movement that permeated Germany’s heavily industrialized north and west. Regardless, in 1923, the DVFP in northern Germany was still too powerful to challenge; the Nazis would remain confined to the south for the foreseeable future. As long as Hitler remained unchallenged as the leader of the party, the Munich wing remained the uncontested masters of Nazi ideological development as their racial politics were synchronized with his own. Yet, despite their symbiotic relationship with Hitler, the dominion of Munich would not last for long.

The failure of the Beerhall Putsch in November 1923 cast the Nazi movement and the Munich Wing, in particular, into complete disarray. Although the subsequent media coverage of the trial made Hitler and the Nazis celebrities in völkisch circles, the more immediate consequences of the Putsch nearly destroyed the NSDAP. The Nazis already lacked any central organizational structure beyond the Munich Wing, and Munich was decapitated. The NSDAP was banned, its operations forced underground, and its properties, including the crucial Völkischer Beobachter, were seized by state authorities. Esser temporarily fled to Austria, Amann was imprisoned, and Eckart died of a heart attack in December. Of the senior leadership of Munich, only Streicher and Rosenberg remained at large. In an effort to retain continuity, Hitler appointed Rosenberg as the party’s leader in his absence. With Hitler temporarily

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148 Despite subsequent claims that Hitler appointed Rosenberg as a weak puppet to hold the party over during Hitler’s incarceration, this claim is based on a purely teleological reading of
removed from the political stage first by his trial, and then by his disinclination to become embroiled in party politics until his release in December 1924, the period between November 1923 and February 1925 became a Nazi interregnum that temporarily disrupted ideological thickening due to internal instability. As a result of this period of transition, Munich lost control of Nazi ideology in favor of challengers from the north, and in the process, National Socialism entered a period of socialist and corporatist ideological thickening.

In the aftermath of Hitler’s apparent demise, the initiative in the völkisch movement shifted away from the Nazis in favor of the then stronger DVFP. Although popular support for the Nazis was still growing, without active political leadership this growth could not be sustained. Drastic steps were necessary if the Nazis were going to remain politically relevant. Working in conjunction with the rising party organizer Gregor Strasser, Rosenberg brought the remnants of the Nazi party into a makeshift electoral alliance with other völkisch parties called the Völkischer Block for the May 1924 elections. The proposed pivot to electoral politics proved highly divisive because it contravened Hitler’s pre-Putsch assertions that the Nazis would never enter electoral politics. For his part, Hitler remained ambivalent towards participating in the Block. He was keenly

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150 Because the NSDAP was banned, Rosenberg temporarily resurrected it as the *Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft* or GVG. See Ulrich, *Hitler: Ascent*, 170.
aware that it threatened his personal political power, but his incarceration left him unable to oppose it effectively. Simultaneously, he had no desire to alienate his loyalist fanatics by taking responsibility for the decision to enter electoral politics. Instead, he played both sides by formally leaving the final electoral decision to Rosenberg while secretly working behind the scenes through Esser and Streicher to oppose the party’s participation in the Block. The party’s first experiment with a policy of legality would go ahead without Hitler. Unsurprisingly, given the fractious and unstable nature of the party at the time, Rosenberg’s decision to collaborate with the Block ignited a crisis.

In June, following significant gains for the Block in Bavarian regional elections and modest gains on the national scale, Ludendorff and Gräfe unilaterally attempted to merge the Nazis into the DVFP. Hitler responded by immediately disavowing the merger and then banned any member of the party from issuing statements in his name, thereby terminating Rosenberg’s status as interim party leader. Upon his dismissal, Rosenberg requested Gregor Strasser be appointed the new interim leader, but Hitler preferred to leave the position vacant. In the absence of clear leadership, Streicher and Esser, seized the opportunity to resurrect the Esser clique. Rosenberg was removed from Munich’s leadership circle and reverted to his role as the party’s chief philosopher. Despite

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154 In Bavaria the Völkischer Bloc won 17.1% of the vote, immediately establishing it as the third largest political force in the region. At the national level, the völkisch parties earned 6.5% of the vote and a total of 32 seats. Of these 32, only 10 were Nazis. See Ulrich, *Hitler: Ascent*, 170-171.
his defeat by the Esser clique, he soon resurfaced with his most crucial
collection to Nazi ideological development, the concept of the völkisch state.

The Concept of the Völkisch State Takes Form: 1924

Although stripped of formal power, Rosenberg retained significant
influence as the party’s chief philosopher. While Hitler was writing Mein Kampf in
Landsberg Prison, Rosenberg was refining Munich’s ideology into a single, all-
compassing concept, the völkisch state. The völkisch state was the most
crucial element of Nazi ideology produced by the Munich wing because it served
as the organizing principle of Nazism as a governing ideology. Every aspect of
policy and state structure in the future Third Reich would be based on the
völkisch state. By Rosenberg’s definition, the völkisch state consisted of three
pillars: the promotion of racial purity as state ideology, the implementation of
‘social justice,’ and National Socialism as an epoch-making revolution in world
history.

According to Rosenberg, the promotion and protection of racial purity was
the first and foremost purpose of the völkisch state. Consistent with Munich’s
increasing emphasis on racial themes, the völkisch state sought the total
synchronization of race and state. Citizenship would be determined entirely by
racial ancestry. Thus, enabling the state to claim sovereignty over ethnic

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156 In Rosenberg’s words, “the protection of people and race appears as the beginning and end of
any German idea of state, as the first prerequisite of a future free Germany.” See Alfred
Germans all over the continent, whilst excluding anyone deemed Jewish or foreign from civil society. Regional and sectarian identities would be dissolved in favor of a homogeneous national racial identity as well. For example, there would be no room for Bavarians or Protestants; only Germans from Bavaria and Germans who practiced Protestantism.\textsuperscript{157} Likewise, all ideologies not based on race were also targeted for elimination. Marxism, capitalism, monarchism, nationalist conservatism, and even Italian Fascism were all slated for elimination on the grounds that they were either materialist or internationalist and thus antithetical to a \textit{völkisch} state.\textsuperscript{158} To perpetuate the \textit{völkisch} state, Rosenberg advocated the creation of a new national spirituality based on the veneration of German racial heritage. By creating a race-based spirituality, he believed materialism in all its forms could be prevented from taking root in the population.\textsuperscript{159} To accomplish this, the country’s legal and educational systems would be redesigned as tools to inculcate the racial and anti-materialist precepts of national spirituality in each succeeding generation.\textsuperscript{160} This new national spirituality would in turn root all political and cultural aspects of society in the racial nationalism of the \textit{völkisch} state. Following the lead of Eckart before him, Rosenberg initially attempted to base his new spirituality in a “positive

\textsuperscript{157} Rosenber, “The Folkish Idea of State,” 70.
\textsuperscript{158} Rosenberg praised the Italian Fascist party for building a centralized state, but attacked them for their disinterest in anti-Semitism, lack of ideological depth, and overreliance on Mussolini as the only unifying factor in the Italian Fascist party. See Rosenberg, “The Folkish Idea of State,” 64-65, 70.
\textsuperscript{159} Cecil, \textit{The Myth of the Master Race}, 85.
\textsuperscript{160} Rosenberg, “The Folkish Idea of State,” 67-68.
Christianity," but he gradually abandoned it in favor of ‘German’ Nordic neopagan themes that he deemed more inherently German and less susceptible to external influence.

The second pillar was the implementation of “social justice.” In this case, social justice included a wide range of social and institutional reforms intended to create totalitarian social harmony. All internal social divisions – save those of race – were regarded as obsolete materialist constructs due to be dismantled at the earliest opportunity.¹⁶¹ To secure this concept of social justice, the völkisch state would necessarily have to create its own form of “state socialism.” Although like his fellow Munich ideologues, Rosenberg failed to develop the specifics of his socialist principles, the broad themes were clear. This state socialism would be based on a reciprocal relationship between the state providing material benefits to its citizens, and citizens in turn owing the state a debt of duty to defend its racial hierarchy.¹⁶² Following this logic, Rosenberg argued that as long as the state guaranteed the material and physical security of individuals, then individuals would buy into the völkisch concept of state.¹⁶³ Events subsequently proved him correct. Once given tangible form through the corporatist concepts and organization of the Strasserites, this reciprocal relationship proved crucial to

¹⁶² Rosenberg described this reciprocal relationship as follows. “A feeling of duty to the state on the part of the individual citizen may only be demanded if the state also recognizes and carries out its duty to every individual citizen. In other words, the idea of state socialism must take the place of the Marxist idea.” See Rosenberg, “The Folkish Idea of State,” 62.
the Nazis’ efforts to secure social control after attaining power in 1933 through the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront*.

The third and final pillar of the *völkisch* state was the creation of a new world order in opposition to the “internationalism” of capitalism and Marxism.\(^\text{164}\) It was not enough for the National Socialism to merely create a *völkisch* state in Germany. On the contrary, Rosenberg argued that the *völkisch* state was a revolutionary concept that had to be exported to every European country, by force if necessary. In Rosenberg’s mind, it was the destiny of the Nazis to usher in a new era of human history by eliminating capitalist and Marxist systems all over Europe and erecting *völkisch* states in their stead.\(^\text{165}\) Thus, the Nazi revolution would not be complete until it created a new world order rooted in Germany as its metropole of revolution. The concept of the *völkisch* state as an epoch-making idea was subsequently embraced to devastating effect by Heinrich Himmler as the paramount objective of the *Schutzstaffel*.\(^\text{166}\)

The *völkisch* state represented the consolidation of Munich’s obsession with racial purity into a race-based conceptualization of the state, but it was not the end of Nazi ideological thickening. The socialist elements of National Socialism remained thin. Expanding the ideology’s socialist principles was necessary to both fully conquer the *völkisch* movement, and to extend the party’s

\(^{166}\) Himmler believed that so-called “Nordic blood” was dying out and needed to be preserved through the creation of an expansionist *völkisch* super state. He further argued that this *völkisch* state would serve as the protagonist in an apocalyptic struggle with Bolshevism that would either result in a German world order or the end of civilization. Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 123.
influence into the general population. However, this task eluded the Munich wing. The wing’s leading Esser Clique was primarily concerned with propagating racial nationalist propaganda, and Rosenberg lacked the organizational acumen to extend National Socialism’s grip over the broader völkisch movement. As prominent as Munich’s racial ideas subsequently became during the Third Reich, in 1924 they were preaching to the already converted. If National Socialism was going to extend its grip beyond the racial elements of the völkisch movement, then it needed to follow Spengler’s lead and articulate its own vision of right-wing socialism.

Rebellion in the North: 1924-1925

At first glance, it appeared that the resurgence of the Esser Clique marked the restoration of Munich’s pre-Putsch power. In truth, however, Munich was losing its grip on power as the Nazi movement expanded across the country. Throughout 1924, the growing national notoriety of the Nazis stemming from Hitler’s trial, and the upsurge of popular support for the völkisch movement bolstered the party’s ranks. Moreover, Rosenberg’s decision to participate in elections combined with Hitler’s personal publicity vastly expanded the Nazis’ largesse within the larger völkisch movement. In the latter half of 1924 and well into 1925, the DVFP’s young and radical members abandoned it in favor of the more revolutionary Nazis. As the DVFP declined the Munich Wing attempted

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to centralize its control over the Nazi's new northern chapters, but their efforts were futile. The handful of Munich advocates in the north who formed a loyalist 'Directorate' were consistently outnumbered and outmaneuvered by their local rivals. Moreover, the meddling of Munich was met with open hostility in the north, and the brusque leadership styles of the Esser clique did little to ameliorate the regional divide. Instead, the DVFP defectors found a different source of leadership in the form of the emerging Nazi organizer, Gregor Strasser. Unlike the Munich leadership, Strasser possessed a vast network of contacts in the north and west, parliamentary experience, and exceptional administrative acumen. The Nazis' new northern chapters were loyal to Hitler as their figure-head and Strasser as their operational chief, but they did not answer to Munich. In February of 1925, Hitler granted Strasser full organizational control over the NSDAP in northern and western Germany and in the process confirmed Munich's loss of control in the north. Strasser wasted no time in appointing his own colleagues to senior posts and consolidating his position at the expense of the Munich leadership – particularly Esser and Streicher, who were almost universally despised in the

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168 Beyond the general hostility towards the Munich Wing in the north, their local allies in the northern 'Directorate' were poorly led and politically naïve. Instead of taking the initiative and attempting to build networks within the existing northern völkisch parties to sustain themselves as Strasser did, the Directorate insisted on waiting for explicit directions from Hitler that never came. Throughout 1924, Hitler showed remarkably little interest in events outside of Bavaria and only supported the operations of the Directorate with platitudes. See Kershaw, Hitler:Hubris, 232.
171 Childers, The Third Reich, 83.
north. Munich was defeated, and although it remained politically relevant in Bavaria, it never recovered its leading position in the movement. The ideological impetus behind National Socialism passed to Strasser and his colleagues. The period of ideological interregnum was over, and the board was set for a period of ideological experimentation and the expansion of National Socialism’s corporatist and socialist elements.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE STRASSERITE WING

We are socialists, enemies, mortal enemies of the present capitalist economic system with its exploitation of the economically weak, its injustice in wages, with its immoral evaluation of individuals according to wealth and money instead of responsibility and achievement, and we are determined under all circumstances to abolish this system!\textsuperscript{173}

- Gregor Strasser

Hitler's decision to empower Strasser as the leader of the Nazi party in northern Germany marked a crucial turning point in the evolution of National Socialism. The empowerment of Strasser confirmed the north-south split and guaranteed the creation of a new wing in the north under the semi-autonomous leadership of Strasser. Even more importantly, the creation of this new wing from the disparate elements of the northern völkisch movements and the rise of Strasser touched off a period of experimentation in the party's ideological thickening. Unlike Hitler, Strasser assumed that the Nazis would have to cooperate with other political groups to achieve their objectives and as a result his wing was not impermeable to ideas originating beyond völkisch circles.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{173} Gregor Strasser, "Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future," in Nazi Ideology Before 1933, 89.

\textsuperscript{174} In Gregor Strasser's own words, shared after his retirement from politics, his goal was: "The coming together of all constructive-minded people, no matter where they come from, on the basis
development of the Strasserite wing can be divided into two broad periods. The first was the formative Elberfeld Period (1924-1926), during which Strasser led a broad network of socialist ideologues dedicated to expanding on Feder’s ideas to create a socialist and corporatist party platform. The second was the Strasserite Period (1926-1932), wherein the wing became synonymous with Gregor Strasser’s political empire and lent structural form to early Nazi governance.

Across his career, Strasser was more successful than any other ideologue in introducing new ideas and concepts to the party’s ‘mainstream.’ Consequently, with the exception of Hitler himself, Strasser was the best example in the Nazi party of how an individual’s seniority and influence within a movement can decisively shape the direction of ideological development.

In Gregor’s view, Hitler was the embodiment of the movement, but he served as its chief political organizer and strategist. Strasser was one of an extremely small cadre of senior Nazi leaders who did not subscribe to the führer cult. He regularly battled with the Munich wing over the direction of party ideology and erroneously believed that Hitler could be won over to his vision of National Socialism. To further these objectives, Strasser surrounded himself

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175 Lane and Rupp, Nazi Ideology Before 1933, xvii.
177 Among the NSDAP’s leaders who could be considered part of Hitler’s ‘inner circle,’ Gregor Strasser and Ernst Röhm were unique in that they were willing to publicly challenge Hitler and often operated independently within the movement. Childers, The Third Reich, 83.
with a network of ideologues adhering to socialist interpretations of the movement, including his brother Otto Strasser, labor agitator Reinhold Muchow, and most infamously Joseph Goebbels. While Hitler basked in the limelight as the party’s charismatic leader, Strasser extended the NSDAP’s reach beyond Bavaria, built a national network of contacts within and beyond the party, and served as its most outspoken advocate in the Reichstag. Before his downfall in December of 1932, Gregor Strasser was the second man in the NSDAP. His eponymous wing a force to be reckoned with, both for other party ideologues and potentially for Hitler himself. Although Gregor Strasser’s influence upon the party was vast, his autonomy would ultimately lead to his downfall. Hitler would brook no equal; Strasser’s efforts to structure the movement, as well as its ideology, and facilitate the Nazis’ ascension to power through existing power-networks threatened Hitler’s dominance.

The central difference between the Strasserites and their Munich rivals rested in their differing emphases on anti-materialism and racial nationalism. Like Eckart and Feder in the early days of Munich, the Strasserites widely employed anti-Semitic themes, but they did so as a supporting element of their anti-materialism, not as the central focus of their ideology. To quote Goebbels, anti-Semitism was “the beginning of our knowledge. But it still is not everything” and he characterized the racial musings of Munich as a “race Nordification fart.”

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179 Kershaw also explores the attraction of many early Strasserites, including Goebbels to national bolshevism, see Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, 271-272.
'Jewishness' was depicted as inseparable from capitalism and, therefore, antithetical to the economic and social objectives of Strasserite National Socialism. However, they regarded the racial ideas that permeated the Munich wing, particularly the works of Rosenberg, with suspicion and sometimes open hostility. Unlike their Munich rivals, who by 1924 viewed racial purity as the central tenet of their ideology, Gregor Strasser observed that "blood tests, Nordicization, and so forth...appear to my practical mind somewhat dubious." Goebbels reinforced these sentiments by publicly attacking the "primitive" anti-Semitism of the broader völkisch movement as a fig-leaf intended to conceal the complicity of Germany's capitalist and bourgeoisie classes in the exploitation of labor. Still, the Strasserite Wing remained rabidly anti-Semitic, routinely blamed Jews for the growth of both capitalism as well as Marxism, and called for their legal exclusion from German society. The crucial difference was in the ideological motivation behind the exclusion; while Munich based its anti-Semitism on racial nationalism, the Strasserites based it on anti-materialism.

The Elberfeld Period and the "Mecca of German Socialism:" 1925-1926

The roots of the Strasserite wing are inexorably intertwined with the career of its leader, Gregor Strasser. Strasser participated in the Beerhall Putsch, but

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181 Gregor Strasser, "Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future," in Nazi Ideology Before 1933, 91.
survived the debacle with nothing more than a few weeks in jail and a small fine. Consequently, while Hitler’s courtroom theatrics catapulted him to stardom and provided a national stage for NSDAP propaganda, and Munich struggled to fill the power vacuum, Strasser remained at large to capitalize on the Nazis’ sudden national recognition and the commensurate decline of the DVFP. While remaining affiliated with the banned NSDAP, Strasser became a nationally recognized figure in the broader völkisch movement as well. During 1924, he became the leader of the Völkischer Block in the Bavarian Landtag and a prominent Reichstag representative of the national völkisch umbrella organization, the Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung. Unlike his rivals in Munich, who either stubbornly refused to participate in electoral politics or restricted themselves to exclusively working inside the Nazi party, Strasser was connected to all of the major völkisch political factions. While Hitler remained confined to Landsberg Prison until December of 1924, and then banned from public speaking in most states until 1927-1928, Gregor Strasser emerged as the de-facto organizational chief of the Nazi movement outside of Bavaria. Once Hitler formally empowered Strasser to lead the fledgling NSDAP in the fertile

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184 The Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung, or National Socialist Freedom Movement. The NSFB functioned as a national umbrella organization for all Ludendorff-aligned völkisch interests in the Reichstag. Its ranks primarily included NSDAP and DVFP members. Stachura, Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism, 34.

185 Hitler’s speaking bans were handled on a state by state basis. Saxony was the first state to lift the ban in January of 1927, Bavaria followed suit in March. By the end of 1928 Hitler’s speaking ban had been lifted in all German states. See Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 292-293.
political landscape of northern Germany in February of 1925, Strasser’s rise to prominence as the second man in the Nazi party was virtually assured.\textsuperscript{186}

Strasser was unleashed. Armed with considerable organizational acumen and a network of connections amongst national \textit{völkisch} organizations and the Reichstag, he engineered the rapid expansion of the party in northern Germany from 71 chapters in 1923 to a commanding 272 by the end of 1925.\textsuperscript{187} While Hitler secluded himself in Berchtesgaden writing the second volume of \textit{Mein Kampf}, Strasser represented the party on the national political stage with frequent speeches in the Reichstag and at gatherings across the country.\textsuperscript{188}

Thus, following the party’s re-establishment in the aftermath of the Beerhall Putsch, it was Strasser, not Hitler, who was responsible for organizing the day-to-day affairs of the party’s expansion. National expansion represented numerous practical and ideological challenges for the nascent Nazi party. First and foremost, until Hitler’s trial showered the party with attention in the media, the NSDAP had been virtually unknown outside of Bavaria, and its rural \textit{völkisch} agenda was ill-suited for the urban politics of north and western Germany. Second, the party had proliferated across the nation as a series of largely disconnected local chapters, and beyond Bavaria the party establishment exercised little economic or ideological control. If the NSDAP was to distinguish

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{186}] Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 79, 82-83.
\item[\textsuperscript{187}] Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 83.
\item[\textsuperscript{188}] Hitler’s seclusion in Bavaria throughout 1925 was so extreme that many leading members of the party in northern Germany had never met him and openly questioned whether Hitler truly understood their interests. See Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 83.
\end{itemize}
itself from the plethora of fleeting Weimar populist parties, it required organization and central leadership. Recognizing the necessity of centralized control, Strasser focused on hammering the disparate regional chapters into a cohesive national movement, and in the process sought to institutionalize his socialist conception of the ideology.

Strasser’s efforts to rationalize the movement advanced on two broad fronts, the first was ideological and the second organizational. In pursuit of these goals, he collected a network of northern and western Nazi activists and ideologues based in Elberfeld whose primary objective was to supplant the Munich wing as the heart of National Socialism.\(^{189}\) Throughout 1925, ideological objectives took precedent. Building on the example of previous socialist movements, Strasser deduced that ideological structure and consistency was necessary to create a national movement. To this end, he furnished Elberfeld with a series of newspapers, and periodicals intended to target all levels of society, from the working proletariat to the intellectual classes. Strasser intended to publish “a political and academic newspaper, like the socialist monthlies...which clarifies and explains problems of National Socialist foreign, domestic and economic policy independent of any official influences.”\(^{190}\) The goals of this endeavor were two-fold. The first was propagandistic and intended to broaden the party’s public appeal. The second was intended to strengthen


Elberfeld’s influence against Munich by establishing official party press controlled exclusively by Elberfeld devotees. The leader of Elberfeld’s budding publishing empire would be Gregor’s brother and veteran socialist agitator, Dr. Otto Strasser.  

Otto’s mission was clear; to bring intellectual cohesion to the NSDAP’s message, root it in a socialist variant of the ideology, and relentlessly attack the party establishment in Munich.  

In this endeavor, Otto would be assisted by one of the movement’s most vociferous socialist firebrands, the young Dr. Joseph Goebbels, who rapidly rose to prominence for his ascorbic wit, as well as his anti-bourgeoisie and pro-Russian sentiments. Despite a failed effort to recruit the intellectual godfather of German right-wing socialism, Oswald Spengler, as the head of a new party newspaper, Strasser’s publishing plans greatly strengthened Elberfeld’s position within the party.  

However, the Elberfeld offensive had not yet reached its crescendo. Simultaneous to their efforts to create an Elberfeld controlled party press, Strasser and his allies began overtly to challenge the political dominance of Munich. On September 10, “Working Community North West” was constituted from north and western Gauleiter with the objective of replacing the official Twenty-Five Point program. The new platform was produced by gathering the

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192 Moreau, “Otto Strasser: Nationalist Socialism,” 237; See also, Smelser, Robert Ley, 40.


194 Gauleiter were regional party officials within the NSDAP. The specific duties of each Gauleiter varied significantly, but in the Nazis’ pre-power years they typically acted as de-facto regional party bosses.
policy proposals of Elberfeld’s Gauleiter and leading members, debating their merit amongst their peers and then incorporating these suggestions in the draft. Unsurprisingly, the process was beset by personal rivalries, and the completed draft was at times contradictory. Despite these challenges, it did serve to clarify the central socialist and corporatist overtones of Elberfeld ideology and revealed a significant degree of collective decision making that would prove antithetical to Hitler.

Despite friction between its members, the Working Community represented a significant step towards solidifying the party’s platform around Elberfeld’s ideology at the expense of Munich. The Working Community formally announced their intention to work in Hitler’s name and duly notified him of their efforts but did not specifically solicit his blessing for their actions. Although the Working Community was openly hostile towards Munich, Hitler characteristically stood aloof from the ideological infighting of his subordinates. He offered his (unsolicited) approval of the Working Community as a routine reaffirmation of authority over party affairs but took no overt action against the Community.

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197 Read, *The Devil’s Disciples*, 145; There is no evidence that the Working Community consciously intended to challenge Hitler’s leading position within the movement, although members of the Group did criticize his leadership capabilities. Still, the fact that a self-organized group within the party had taken it upon itself to overhaul party ideology at all seriously undermined Hitler’s personalist leadership style. See also Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, 273.
Hitler did not yet appreciate the implicit threat the Community’s very existence posed to his leadership.

**Elberfeld’s Corporatist Reich: 1925**

In November of 1925, Strasser disseminated a draft of the new party platform as prepared by him and other Elberfeld representatives. The document was an overt example of an attempt to combine the personal mutations of Nazism of the Elberfeld ideologues and institutionalize them in a new party platform. The draft platform expanded upon many of the original Twenty-Five Points, but also sought to define a corporatist state structure and expand the scope of the party’s foreign and domestic policies. Although far from a polished and concise document, the new platform represented a major step forward in the ideological thickening of the wing. In foreign affairs, the document endorsed revanchist causes, including the reclamation of Imperial Germany’s 1914 borders as well as its central African colonial empire. Even more curiously, it also advocated the creation of a United States of Europe complete with a uniform system of measure and common currency. This United States of Europe would be created and dominated by a Greater German Reich composed of all ethnic German populations serving as the military, economic, and ideological hegemon of the new continental order. Not content with regional dominance, the new United States of Europe would in turn serve as the foundation for an alliance with
the Soviet Union in opposition to the capitalist powers. The last of these proposals strongly reflected the influence of Otto Strasser and Goebbels, both of whom saw a cataclysmic struggle with capitalism as the chief aim of the National Socialist movement. As is evident in this eclectic collection of foreign proposals, Elberfeld’s foreign policy was composed of a mixture of nationalist revanchism, pan-Europeanism, and socialist anti-capitalism.

The platform also proposed a concrete governing system for National Socialism for the first time in the form of a corporatist semi-presidential republic. The Reichspresident would be jointly elected by the National Council and Reich Chamber of Corporations and would serve a seven-year term as the head of state. The Reichspresident would possess the power to designate state presidents and appoint ministers, in addition to shaping the state’s foreign policy in conjunction with the Reichsministry. The first Reichspresident – presumably Hitler – would also serve as dictator, although the document did not elaborate what specific special powers would be invested in the dictator. Day to day affairs of national government would be handled by the Reichsministry, led by the Reichschancellor as head of government. The legislative bodies of government would be a National Council and a Chamber of Corporations serving roughly analogous roles to upper and lower houses of parliament. The National Council

would consist of twelve to fourteen state presidents, joined by the five chairmen of occupational chambers of the Reich Chamber of Corporations, and the Reichspresident serving as the Council’s chairman. Finally, the Reich Chamber of Corporations would consist of 100 representatives evenly drawn from the five occupational chambers, plus another ten named directly by the Reichspresident. In essence, the proposed state reflected an authoritarian reimagining of the government of the Weimar Republic along distinctly corporatist lines.

Much like its foreign policy, the platform’s economic and social proposals reflected a similar blend of nationalist and socialist thought. Private property rights would be preserved, but control over the means of production would be transferred to the state. The proposed result retained characteristics of capitalist private ownership and Leninist command economy, complete with partial collectivization. Free trade was perceived as a threat to the organic nature of society and was due to be eliminated where feasible. All economic activity would be overseen by regional, state, and Reich level Chambers of Corporations. These chambers were envisioned as administrative and regulatory bodies designed to observe and control economic life. Additionally, they would possess powers to investigate economic complaints and advise officials in economic

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matters. All businesses employing more than twenty employees were due to be converted to joint-stock corporations. The state would control a majority share in all essential industries, and a strong minority share in all non-essential industries. Likewise, employees in each joint-stock corporation would be grouped into a worker’s union with a ten-percent share of the company to guarantee labor a seat at the table. Large agricultural estates were due to be broken up entirely, but small-hold hereditary farmers were afforded legal and financial protections from the state. Although this proposed economic system deliberately favored small-businesses, it was far from a petite bourgeoisie paradise. These reforms were intended to enhance the power of the state as the central actor in a corporatist society. To reinforce state control, the direct sale of produce would be banned and small businesses as well as farmers were due to be integrated into compulsory – state organized – guilds or agricultural cooperatives at a local and regional level.

In the realm of cultural policy, the platform underscored the subtle distinction between the anti-Semitism of Elberfeld and Munich. Jews were specifically barred from citizenship, but unlike their Munich rivals, in cases of

204 The state would possess a 51% share in all essential industries such as armaments, banks, chemical, and electrical firms. The state’s share in non-essential industries would still be a strong 49%; See Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nordwest, “Draft of a Comprehensive Program of National Socialism,” 84-85.
mixed ancestry the heritage of the father determined an individual’s citizenship eligibility.\textsuperscript{207} Thus, according to the proposed platform, an individual born to a ‘German’ father and a ‘Jewish’ mother would still be considered a German citizen. Regardless, although less rabid than Munich, Elberfeld remained obsessively anti-Semitic. Legal protections would be provided to both Catholic and Protestant churches as well as denominational schools. Although access to at least one non-denominational school per locality would be mandated by law. Additionally, for citizens, access to education would be free at all levels, combined with state subsidies for educational materials. As with industry, the press would be subject to heavy state control, and official announcements would only be printed in official newspapers. Private newspapers were free to remain if they were entirely owned and edited by German citizens.\textsuperscript{208} Finally, the national legal system was due to be extensively overhauled with an emphasis on strict enforcement and anti-materialism.\textsuperscript{209} Although primarily focused on codifying the foundations of National Socialism, the platform was also keenly focused on improving propaganda. The platform suggested that propaganda efforts should be synchronized in message and form to the greatest degree possible through the creation of uniform propaganda organization and tools, as well as the

\textsuperscript{207} Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nordwest, “Draft of a Comprehensive Program of National Socialism,” 85-86.

\textsuperscript{208} Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nordwest, “Draft of a Comprehensive Program of National Socialism,” 87.

\textsuperscript{209} Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nordwest, “Draft of a Comprehensive Program of National Socialism,” 87.
exchange of party speakers across the country.\textsuperscript{210} If the new National Socialist state was to take root, the people would have to be ceaselessly immersed in its ideology.

In January of 1926, the twenty-five member Working Community convened to review the proposed draft and vote on whether to forward it to party headquarters.\textsuperscript{211} With the exception of the Munich loyalists Robert Ley and Feder, the latter of which had arrived as Hitler’s personal emissary, the Community voted to accept the draft.\textsuperscript{212} In addition to approving the draft, the Community also attempted to pursue a series of political gains at the expense of their Munich rivals. On the electoral front, the Community unanimously voted to support the KPD led plebiscite to expropriate the property of Germany’s princes without compensation as a means to burnish the party’s socialist credentials.\textsuperscript{213} Meanwhile, they were also prepared to strike directly at Munich’s power base. Despite rumblings of discontent with Hitler’s leadership, the Community reiterated their belief that they possessed no viable alternative to Hitler, but they did not extend this olive branch to the Munich Wing. In order to diminish the power of Munich, the Community stipulated that Gregor Strasser should be promoted to a senior office in the party’s national headquarters. To reinforce Strasser’s position, the Community also demanded that another Elberfeld

\textsuperscript{210}Kissenkoetter, “Gregor Strasser: Nazi Party Organizer,” 227.
\textsuperscript{211}Longerich, Goebbels, 65-66.
\textsuperscript{212}Longerich, Goebbels, 65; See also, Smelser, Robert Ley, 40. Feder appeared at the meeting uninvited, having obtained a copy of the draft proposal shortly beforehand and been enraged by its proposed revisions of his economic policies as articulated in the original Twenty-Five Points.
\textsuperscript{213}Longerich, Goebbels, 66.
disciple, Franz Pfeffer von Salomon, should assume command of the party's paramilitary organization, the Sturmabteilung (SA).\textsuperscript{214}

Strasser and his Elberfeld allies made their demands clear. All that remained to be seen was how exactly Hitler would handle the challenge, and whether he would support Strasser in the battle against Munich as he had a year prior. After engaging in a fierce rhetorical battle with the Working Community for having the audacity to question the Twenty-Five Points, Feder promptly sought out Hitler to expound upon the threat posed by the Community's very existence.\textsuperscript{215} In an ironic twist of fate, Feder was attacking the very same wing of the party that was attempting to expand on his ideas – even if they had excluded him from the process. For his part, Hitler had not seen a draft of the proposed program at the time of the January meeting, and, judging by his response the following month, it appears unlikely that he had familiarized himself with its contents before Feder's intervention. Hitler responded by convening a party meeting on February 14, 1926, in the Munich wing stronghold of Bamberg to address “important questions” facing the party.\textsuperscript{216}

Heading into Bamberg, Elberfeld’s leadership believed that they stood poised to smash Munich and reshape the party platform in their own image. In the words of Goebbels, all they had to do was “act the part of the prudish beauty and lure Hitler on to our territory.” Once they had Hitler on board, their victory

\textsuperscript{214} Noakes, “Conflict and Development in the NSDAP 1924-1927,” 28.
\textsuperscript{215} Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 275.
\textsuperscript{216} Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 274-275.
was assured.\textsuperscript{217} With Munich defeated, Elberfeld could become “the Mecca of German socialism.”\textsuperscript{218} What the Elberfeld leadership did not realize was that Hitler harbored no interest in clarifying the ideological chaos of the National Socialist platform; he drew his strength from his position as the ultimate arbiter of the party’s chaotic infighting. Bamberg would rapidly set in motion the end of the Elberfeld period for the Strasserite wing.

**Hitler Intervenes: 1926**

At Bamberg, the objectives of Hitler’s rebuke of the draft platform were twofold. First, he sought to strengthen his personalist leadership by preventing collaborative decision making from becoming normalized in the party because it threatened to infringe on his personal power. Second, he was determined to purge any concepts that directly conflicted with his core beliefs. In Hitler’s estimation, alliances were purely tactical not permanent entanglements as envisioned by the Elberfeld ideologues. Furthermore, he dismissed any alliance with Russia on the grounds that it would lead to the fatal “political bolshevization of Germany” and that it was necessary to “smash Bolshevism” due to its alleged status as a “Jewish creation.”\textsuperscript{219} Likewise, he added that the living space of the coming Reich would need to be won by conquest in eastern Europe, not the renewed colonization of Africa or indirect domination of the continent by

\textsuperscript{217} Joseph Goebbels, *The Early Goebbels Diaries*, 66.
\textsuperscript{218} Goebbels, *The Early Goebbels Diaries*, 66.
\textsuperscript{219} Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, 275; See also, Goebbels, *The Early Goebbels Diaries*, 67.
controlling a United States of Europe. In the realm of domestic affairs, Hitler largely remained silent on the specific provisions of the draft except to dismiss its proposed legal protections for Christian religious institutions as irrelevant and disavow cooperation with the Communist’s expropriation plebiscite on the grounds that it dangerously fanned the flames of class conflict.\textsuperscript{220} Finally, Hitler mandated that the existing Twenty-Five Point program was sufficient to meet the party’s needs and required no revision.\textsuperscript{221} Having been caught completely unprepared by Hitler’s rejection of the platform, Gregor Strasser and Joseph Goebbels folded with minimal resistance.

Although Elberfeld had suffered a defeat at Bamberg, the prevailing zeitgeist in the wing remained in the words of Goebbels, “get strong and fight for socialism.”\textsuperscript{222} Gregor concluded that Elberfeld had failed to articulate their socialist vision clearly enough to sway Hitler to their side. Thus, he concluded that Elberfeld’s final victory over Munich was still possible if they further developed their socialist vision. Strasser had fundamentally misinterpreted the causes of Hitler’s opposition to the draft platform. The problem was not that the Elberfeld ideologues had failed to articulate their worldview. The problem was that they had challenged foundational elements of Hitler’s personal ideology, specifically regarding foreign policy. So long as Strasser and his colleagues

\textsuperscript{220} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: Hubris}, 275.
\textsuperscript{221} Goebbels, \textit{The Early Goebbels Diaries}, 67.
\textsuperscript{222} Joseph Goebbels, qtd. in Stachura, \textit{Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism}, 50.
avoided trespassing on the central pillars of Hitler’s ideology, they were free to propose or do almost anything; but they did not yet understand this.

While eviscerating the draft platform, Hitler was careful to avoid personally attacking either Gregor Strasser or Goebbels. In the aftermath of Bamberg, he systematically brought Elberfeld under his authority through a combination of coercion, charm, and personal diplomacy. Hitler’s intentions at this juncture were not to purge the Elberfeld ideologues, but to reaffirm his central position within the movement. The formation of working communities within or between individual Gaus was banned and the Twenty-Five Point program was declared “immutable.”\(^{223}\) That the Twenty-Five Point program was notoriously ambiguous as a platform and in desperate need of further clarification was inconsequential to Hitler. As he observed, “The New Testament is also full of contradictions, but that hasn’t prevented the spread of Christianity,” National Socialism would be no different.\(^{224}\) The movement would be predicated upon on its leader, not programmatic clarity and specific policy proposals.

Having reinforced his personalist leadership style, Hitler turned his sights on securing the continued loyalty of the Elberfeld’s most prominent proponents. Specifically, he undertook a campaign to personally sway Goebbels to his side.\(^{225}\) Goebbels, who already idolized Hitler as “half plebian, half god” proved

\(^{223}\) Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, 275, 278.
\(^{225}\) Longerich, *Goebbels: A Biography*, 68. Hitler had already begun to cultivate a closer connection with Goebbels as early as Christmas 1925, but he notably redoubled his efforts following Bamberg. See Longerich, *Goebbels*, 64.
an easy mark for the future Führer. Over the course of the year Goebbels gradually articulated his socialist tendencies along increasingly racial lines and completely abandoned his Soviet sympathies. By the end of 1926, Goebbels was completely separated from his former Elberfeld allies. Likewise, other leading members of Elberfeld’s leadership were re-assigned elsewhere, co-opted, or reprimanded. Hitler eliminated the immediate threat to his power represented by the Working Community, but in the process, promoted Elberfeld’s leaders into even higher offices, which would come back to haunt him later.

The Working Community had failed to achieve its policy-making objectives, but as a pressure group, it succeeded in maneuvering Elberfeld ideologues into leading positions in the party’s national leadership. In keeping with the Working Community’s demands, Hitler deposed Esser from his position as propaganda chief and handed the office to Gregor. Likewise, Pfeffer von Salomon was promoted to chief of the (SA) and held the office until he was sacked over conflicts with Hitler about the SA’s political role in the party in 1930. Elberfeld’s efforts to gain control of the party’s platform had failed, but

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227 Childers, *The Third Reich*, 87.
229 Hitler offered Gregor the position of Reichspropagandaleiter in March, but a serious car accident prevented Gregor from formally assuming the office until September. See Childers, *The Third Reich*, 89.
230 Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism*, 50. Pfeffer von Salomon was sacked following the SA’s Stennes Rebellion in August 1930. During the rebellion, SA personnel in Berlin stormed party offices to protest Hitler’s policy of legality, register their discontent with their subordination to the political arm of the party, and demand seats on the party’s electoral ballot for SA leaders. Despite initial difficulties, the rebellion was crushed, and the SA was handed back to Ernst Röhm who subsequently became a direct challenger to Hitler. See also Childers, *The Third Reich*, 116.
their leaders, specifically Gregor Strasser, had entered the highest levels of NSDAP decision making. Despite the defeat at Bamberg, Gregor Strasser’s influence within the party continued to grow and the socialist vision of the movement consolidated around him.

**Elberfeld Becomes the Strasserite Wing: 1926**

With the other former Elberfeld leaders dispersed, or, as in Goebbels case, ‘converted,’ the Strasser brothers, especially Gregor, enjoyed greater control over the ideological development of their wing than ever before. This new phase in the evolution for the socialist variant of the movement may be deemed the Strasserite period. In the aftermath of Bamberg, both Strasser brothers remained influential members of the NSDAP. Gregor secured national prominence in the party as its propaganda chief. Meanwhile, Otto continued to preside over the former Elberfeld media outlets and held significant influence over the party in Berlin.

The first challenge facing the Strasser brothers was ideological. In order to “get strong and fight for socialism,” the socialist platform had to be adjusted to account for Hitler’s opposition at Bamberg. In the summer of 1926, Gregor set about to delineate the broad strokes or “spirits” of his new economic, social, and cultural conceptualization of National Socialism. Service to the state was exalted. Opposition to capitalism was redoubled, and the quest for a new fascist conception of morality was embraced. Moreover, all discussions of foreign policy that had so aggravated Hitler at Bamberg were jettisoned.
In the Strasserite model, an individual’s standing in society would be determined by the degree of their service to the state. Like other Nazi ideologues, Strasser rejected the concept of the universal equality of man and argued that individuals were born fundamentally unequal and should therefore possess unequal rights and duties.²³¹ It was the task of the state to create a system of natural selection to identify the strongest members of the racial community and facilitate their entry into power. In this regard, Strasser’s goals were identical to his Munich rivals, but he eschewed their concepts of blood tests or race Nordicization in favor of a system of unequal electoral power determined by national service.²³² All citizens would be required to serve the state for one year in a state labor service, during which they would also be taught a trade. Upon completing their national service these citizens would receive the right to vote.²³³ Meanwhile, military service would be open to volunteers only and would represent the most prestigious form of state service. Only veterans would be eligible to hold major state offices or positions within the civil service. In addition to access to high office, veterans would be rewarded with ten votes as opposed to the common citizen’s one.²³⁴ This system would extend to women as well, and

²³¹ Gregor Strasser, “Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future,” 90-91. Otto Strasser reiterates this concept more concisely, see also, Otto Strasser, “National Socialism and the State,” in Nazi Ideology Before 1933, 102.
²³² Strasser’s thinking was still inherently racist. But unlike his Munich rivals he believed that his voluntary military service scheme would serve as a form of racial natural selection of the fittest candidates for leadership. See Gregor Strasser, “Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future,” 91.
²³³ Gregor Strasser, “Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future,” 91.
²³⁴ Gregor Strasser, “Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future,” 91, 92.
wedded motherhood would be rewarded with the same voting benefits as military
service.\textsuperscript{235}

Opposition to capitalism was redoubled in favor of anti-materialist
socialism organized along staunchly corporatist lines. Capitalism was seen as
reducing the value of individuals to their accumulated wealth, instead of their
contribution to society.\textsuperscript{236} In Gregor’s mind, the destruction of the capitalist
system and the creation of a new social order based on national service would
naturally lay the foundations for a new economic system based on profit and
property sharing for the nation’s workers.\textsuperscript{237} Otto expanded on this concept
further by advocating the formation of self-governing occupational guilds to
oversee each administrative, economic, legal, and cultural profession in the
Reich.\textsuperscript{238} Although ‘self-governing’ in their internal operations, these guilds would
be directed at a national level by a centralized corporatist state. The occupational
guilds would function as administrative and regulatory units within their
respective occupations, provide an additional system for training new leaders,
and serve as the primary link between the average citizen and the state.
Previous “indirect” connections between citizen and state such as party affiliation
and provincial governments would be rendered obsolete.\textsuperscript{239} In essence, Otto
simply recycled the thinking behind the Chambers of Corporations of the old draft

\textsuperscript{235} Gregor Strasser, “Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future,” 92.
\textsuperscript{236} Gregor Strasser, “Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future,” 89-90.
\textsuperscript{237} Gregor Strasser, “Thoughts About the Tasks of the Future,” 90.
\textsuperscript{238} Otto Strasser, “National Socialism and the State,” 102.
\textsuperscript{239} Otto Strasser, “National Socialism and the State,” 102-103.
platform, but his motivations for doing so demand further analysis. Otto identified the Italian fascist state as too authoritarian and overly reliant on “orders from above.” Simultaneously, he chided both Italian fascism and Soviet Communism for excessively fixating on fostering idolatry toward the state.  

Given the nearly unlimited exaltation of the state in Strasserite thinking, such contentions were clearly hypocritical in the extreme, but they still served a purpose. In the Strasserite model, this combination of occupational self-governance and centralized Reich level decision making was seen as a means to lend individual citizens a tangible stake in the corporatist system.

The implicitly illiberal electoral politics of Strasserite thinking and its sharp critique of Italian fascism highlights a subtle but crucial point of interest in the development of National Socialism after Bamberg. Beyond consolidating his personal power, Hitler had taken no steps to clarify the structure of a theoretical Nazi state. Even the concept of the Führer cult and its doppelganger, the leader principle, so essential to the shape and form of the future Third Reich, were still not fully formed until 1927. The fundamental ambiguity of the party’s platform that led Gregor Strasser to form the northern Working Community in the first place remained undiminished. Banning working communities solidified Hitler’s power, but the Strasser brothers simply continued to flesh-out their interpretation

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241 Childers, The Third Reich, 95.
of the movement through other means. A future crisis with Hitler was unavoidable.

Building a National Party Structure: 1926-1928

Hitler’s appointment of Gregor Strasser as the party’s propaganda chief was typical of his leadership style. Hitler possessed an excellent understanding of how propaganda should function, but he would leave it to others to lend these ideas organizational form.242 Gregor Strasser’s tenure as the party’s propaganda chief from September of 1926 to January 1928 coordinated the gradual consolidation of the NSDAP’s national party structure, and the standardization of its most successful forms of propaganda. From his position as propaganda chief Gregor aggressively pursued the centralization and standardization of national propaganda efforts. A vertical command structure was introduced for propaganda, connecting local propaganda sections to the office of the national propaganda chief. Speaking tours by the party’s most potent speakers were planned and prepared well in advance to maximize the national exposure of a comparatively small pool of personnel.243 With the structure of a coherent national propaganda network in place, Gregor attempted to use his new position to enforce his socialist platform on party propaganda policy nationwide. Unsurprisingly, Gregor’s ideological initiatives were met with stiff resistance from his Munich rivals; consequently, the party’s ideology remained blurred and

242 Childers, The Third Reich, 90.
Characteristically, Hitler stood aloof from the ongoing feud between the Strasserite national propaganda leadership and the Munich party establishment.

Despite Gregor’s persistent struggle with the Munich establishment over ideological content, he oversaw the standardization of the forms of propaganda for which the NSDAP would become infamous. In 1927, Strasser’s propaganda office published its first standardized propaganda handbook for use by party officials across the country. Regardless of what ideological message an individual Gauleiter desired to convey, the form of propaganda would be the same. Strasser’s handbook delineated official formats for party meetings, festivals, celebrations, demonstrations, and rituals. It dictated specific guidelines for event organization, advertisement, and security. Finally, the handbook outlined specific sacred National Socialist dates, including the anniversary of the Beerhall Putsch and Hitler’s birthday. The foremost priority of Strasser’s propaganda department was to create an alternative National Socialist reality steeped in ritual, portraying Hitler as a political messiah. The foundational ideas behind this alternate reality originated with Hitler, but Gregor Strasser was the man who gave them organizational form. Due to the party’s fragile financial state, shortage of manpower, and its reliance on the whims of individual

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244 Childers, *The Third Reich*, 92.
245 Childers, *The Third Reich*, 93-94.
246 Childers, *The Third Reich*, 93, 96.
Gauleiter at the local level, it would take time for the new structure to take effect in all regions, but definitive steps towards a uniformity had been achieved.²⁴⁷

By the end of 1927, the NSDAP’s propaganda machine had been vastly improved, but the party’s organizational structure remained chaotic. Individual Gauleiter enjoyed virtual autonomy and forwarded membership dues paid to their Gaus to party headquarters in Munich infrequently.²⁴⁸ Moreover, Gau boundaries did not correspond to Reichstag electoral districts, leading to infighting between Gauleiter and needless duplication of effort during election campaigns. Party headquarters lacked concrete mechanisms to enforce its will on the Gaus and the party was chronically short on funds at the national level. Although the NSDAP was still a small fringe party, it was blatantly obvious that it required comprehensive restructuring before it could evolve into a serious national movement. With the elections of May 1928 looming on the horizon, Hitler decided that it was time to act. In January of 1928, Gregor Strasser was transferred to the role of Reichsorganisationsleiter, the de-facto general secretary of the NSDAP.

Strasser’s victory in Gau reform represented a watershed moment in the evolution of National Socialism. The NSDAP was no longer a party of semi-autonomous local chapters united only by zealous devotion to a charismatic leader; it was in the process of becoming a centralized national political party. From 1929 to 1930, Gregor solidified his grip over the party through a series of

²⁴⁷ Childers, The Third Reich, 89.
reforms designed to centralize authority around his office of organizational chief or Reichsorganisationsleiter (ROL). A coherent national command structure with clearly defined jurisdictions at every level was created, alongside new regulations to force personnel to follow proper channels to register complaints, requests, and suggestions. Even more importantly, the new command structure strengthened the party’s fiscal control over its constituent Gaus, vastly strengthening the party’s hand at the national level. During the winter of 1929 Strasser solidified his reforms with the creation nine senior departments with sweeping power to shape and regulate party policy across the nation. Department I functioned as the party’s main office, under the direct control of Gregor. Department II was charged with formulating the structures and policies of the future National Socialist state. Department III oversaw education and the national press office, Department IV the economy, Department V agriculture, Department VI the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization (NSBO), Department VII Civil Servants, Department VIII Women’s Affairs, and finally Department IX Care of War Victims.

The new party structure was designed to function as a shadow state. In these reforms, nearly every aspect of the Republic, save the military, possessed a direct corollary under Strasser’s control. Department II is particularly revealing

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249 Gregor Strasser’s formal title was Reichsorganisationsleiter (ROL) meaning National Organization Leader.
in this regard. To quote its mission statement, as recommended by Gregor Strasser, Department II was tasked with “collating, studying, and clarifying all matters concerning the development of the movement and the National Socialist concept of state.”\textsuperscript{252} The Department was further divided into a panoply of sub-departments tasked with formulating legal, social, and economic policies for the future National Socialist state. As part of its efforts to construct the edifices of the future Reich, Department II actively cultivated ties with specialists and politicians outside the NSDAP – Strasser’s influence increasingly extended far beyond the confines of the Nazi party.\textsuperscript{253} The same logic was applied to the NSBO in Department VI, which openly recruited non-party members into its ranks and which became a stronghold of socialist activism within the party until it was purged in 1934. The formation of Department II, and the deliberate efforts to cultivate ties to powerbrokers beyond the party represented a crucial breakthrough for Gregor Strasser. Through Department II, he successfully circumvented Hitler’s ban on Working Communities by forming a new one protected by the aegis of the party organization. While he and the rest of the Nazi party feverishly worked to destroy the Weimar Republic, Gregor Strasser was laying the foundation for a new state built in his own ideological image.

Gregor’s comprehensive restructuring of the NSDAP establishment coincided with the party’s entry onto the center-stage of national politics as a

\textsuperscript{252} Kissenkoetter, “Gregor Strasser: Nazi Party Organizer,” 228.
\textsuperscript{253} Kissenkoetter, “Gregor Strasser: Nazi Party Organizer,” 229.
result of the Great Depression. Following the stock market collapse in October 1929, the NSDAP grew at an unprecedented rate, and the newly re-organized Nazi party establishment was well equipped to handle the sudden influx of new members. As the party approached real power, old rivalries returned to the fore. Otto Strasser was headed for a direct confrontation with Hitler as well as Goebbels, and the fallout threatened to expose the rifts of Bamberg once again.

The Otto Strasser Crisis: 1930

The roots of the Otto's dissent were two-fold. The first was a matter of ideological conflict between Otto and Hitler, and the second was a practical struggle over power in Berlin between Otto and Goebbels. On the ideological front, Otto had been a thorn in Hitler's side for years. In the aftermath of Bamberg, he remained un-swayed and continued to publicly agitate for reform of the party program, despite the formal injunctions against questioning the 'immutable' Twenty-Five Points.254 Furthermore, Otto was the more radical socialist of the two Strasser brothers. He possessed close ties to the revolutionary left and had always viewed Hitler as a means to a revolutionary end. In Otto's view, the new Reich could only be created by converting their German Marxist cousins to the National Socialist cause. From this perspective, Hitler's policy of Legality was seen as betraying the socialist vision in favor of bourgeois reaction.255 Like his elder brother, Otto never sycophantically

embraced the Führer cult, but unlike Gregor he was willing to publicly defy Hitler and even criticize him using the party’s own Kampf Verlag – which he controlled. Consequently, Otto’s dissent and the platform he possessed to propagate it represented a potential ideological threat to Hitler and a direct challenge to his legitimacy as leader.

Thus, separating the Strasser brothers and isolating Otto became a matter of political importance to Hitler. He struck his first blow in June of 1926, by replacing Otto Strasser’s close ally and Gauleiter of Berlin Ernst Schlange with Joseph Goebbels. Consequently, Goebbels and Otto remained locked in a battle for influence over the city for the next four years. In 1928, Hitler ratcheted up the pressure on Otto further by purging his remaining allies among the ranks of the Gauleiter en masse. Yet, despite repeatedly promising Goebbels that Otto would be expelled, Hitler hesitated to take decisive action against Otto himself. During the summer of 1930, as the party’s membership exploded across the nation and Gregor’s reforms established a centralized national party, the Otto Strasser crisis finally reached its crescendo. Using Kampf Verlag as his platform, Otto openly admonished Hitler’s retreat from the right-wing coalition against the Young Plan in defiance of a direct order from the Führer. Once again, Hitler threatened to expel Otto, but once again he did nothing. Instead, it was Otto who seized the initiative. In July, he confidently proclaimed, “the socialists are

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256 Childers, *The Third Reich*, 111.
258 Childers, *The Third Reich*, 112.
leaving the NSDAP” and left to form his own splinter party, taking his publishing assets with him.260 In the aftermath of Otto’s departure, Gregor hastily distanced himself from his brother’s actions, re-affirmed his loyalty to Hitler and carried on in his role as ROL unimpeded.261 Despite determined efforts by Goebbels to convince Hitler to dispose of Gregor, Hitler took no actions against his powerful ROL.

Zenith and Confrontation with Hitler: 1930-1932

It may be tempting to declare that the departure of Otto Strasser represented the death of the socialist variant of Nazism, but this would be inaccurate in the extreme. Otto and his confederates had left, but Gregor Strasser had firmly established himself as the second man in the party, with sweeping power over the movement’s ideology and structure. The Strasserite wing of the movement and Gregor Strasser’s political sphere of influence, became one in the same. Moreover, unlike Hitler, who abhorred cooperation beyond the NSDAP, Gregor’s influence would be felt far beyond the confines of the party, and it would be precisely this that would ultimately lead to his downfall and death.

260 Otto Strasser, qtd. Moreau, “Otto Strasser: Nationalist Socialism,” 238. After leaving the NSDAP Otto Strasser formed a competing party known as the Kampfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten (KGRNS) or Combat League of Revolutionary National Socialists dedicated to a radical socialist interpretation of National Socialism. Otto’s new party was rocked by tensions between national socialist and national bolshevist factions and was never able to mount a credible challenge to the NSDAP.

261 Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 328.
Following the Otto Strasser crisis, Gregor’s power continued to grow unabated. Over the next two years, he expanded the reach of the ROL and further centralized its chain of command around himself. National inspections were introduced to ensure that individual Gaus complied with the policies set by Strasser’s party organization. State inspectors were appointed with sweeping regulatory powers over the Gaus assigned to them. Standing above the state inspectors were a pair of national inspectors; a close personal ally, Paul Schultz, in the north and east and staunch Munich loyalist, Robert Ley, in the south and west. Finally, Gregor Strasser functioned as the penultimate bureaucratic authority in the party. Gregor was now unambiguously second only to Hitler himself. Given the Führer’s chronic disinterest in organizational affairs, Strasser effectively functioned as the sole manager of the party’s daily operations. His growing monopoly on organizational power was most evident in his tight control of legislative proposals. All proposed legislation from the local level all the way to the Reichstag was required to be submitted for Gregor’s personal review and approval before these could be deployed. Moreover, a special office was set up within the ROL to draft national legislation and manage the party’s Reichstag delegation by assigning specialists from the ROL to specific representatives. Finally, individual party functionaries were banned from unilaterally drafting

262 Smelser, Robert Ley, 92-93. See also Kissenkoetter, “Gregor Strasser: Nazi Party Organizer,” 229.
propaganda or discussing economic policy with the press without the consent of Strasser’s party organization.263

Strasser’s growing influence was felt in virtually every aspect of the party. As his power grew, he carefully positioned himself to shape any potential transition from party establishment to national government. To support this goal, Gregor commissioned the creation of official papers published by each of the ROL’s senior departments to serve as propaganda outlets directly under his control. Likewise, a myriad of party-run leagues, associations, and social clubs were created as tools to gradually integrate all aspects of society into a corporatist state structure following the party’s rise to power.264 The greatest breakthrough in Strasser’s campaign to create a corporatist regime in waiting came from his subordinates in the party’s labor union, the Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation (NSBO) led by Reinhold Muchow. By emulating communist factory cell organization and mixing it with the ideological framework of Strasserite corporatism, the NSBO made tangible inroads into the socialist strongholds of the working class. The NSBO’s objectives as part of the Strasserite wing were twofold. First, the NSBO sought to “reshape the extraordinarily complicated social-political machinery of the state and economy according to our National Socialist ideology.”265 Second, they endeavored to “chain them [the German people] to our organization so that they can really

264 Smelser, Robert Ley, 105-106.
265 Reinhold Muchow, qtd. in Smelser, Robert Ley, 127.
become agents of our will." The NSBO formed the revolutionary vanguard of Strasserite National Socialism, and the organization was aware of where its allegiances resided; Gregor Strasser and not Hitler was its idol. The first step in enmeshing Germany’s workers into a National Socialist corporatist state was well underway, and it answered to Strasser. While the NSBO served as a Strasserite vanguard in German society, Strasser’s sprawling network of connections within government, trade unions, and the economy stemming from Senior Department II and influence in the Reichstag, rendered him a key power broker in national politics.

With his position within the party thoroughly solidified, Strasser turned his attention to the Nazi’s final, and seemingly most impermeable obstacle – gaining power. The Weimar system was teetering on the brink of collapse, but the powerful reactionary-right in German politics remained wary of Hitler’s objectives. In March, Hitler’s bid for the presidency was decisively defeated by Hindenburg. In July, the NSDAP swept Reichstag elections and established itself as the largest party in the nation, but Hitler’s subsequent effort to demand the office of Chancellor from Hindenburg was met with outright rejection. The NSDAP had arrived at the edge of power, but it could not complete the conquest of the state alone – it needed allies. Specifically, it needed to sway the reactionary or center-

266 Reinhold Muchow, qtd. in Smelser, Robert Ley, 128.
268 Early in 1932, Strasser solidified his grip on Senior Department II even further by absorbing it into the main office of the ROL. See Kissenkoetter, “Gregor Strasser: Nazi Party Organizer,” 229.
right to its side. By fall of 1932, it had become apparent that Hitler’s zealous refusal to co-operate with any other party had driven the NSDAP into crisis. Popular support was falling rapidly. The propaganda machine teetered on the brink of collapse, and die-hard revolutionaries within the SA called for the rejection of the policy of legality in favor of violent revolution.\textsuperscript{269} Hitler had played his hand and failed to achieve victory. The NSDAP required new tactics if it was to conquer the state without outside assistance. Regardless, faced with this precarious political situation, Hitler clung to the hope that the fanatical devotion of the movement’s true-believers and relentless propaganda alone would carry the party to power.\textsuperscript{270} As the shortcomings of Hitler’s all or nothing policy became apparent, Strasser seized the initiative and attempted to bring the party into power through his vast network of political connections beyond the NSDAP. In his efforts to bring the party into power, Strasser’s autonomy was met with suspicion and hostility from Hitler and his inner circle. Still, Strasser remained convinced that the growing rift was entirely the work of Hitler’s entourage, and that he could win Hitler over in time. Strasser was repeating the same mistakes that had led to his defeat at Bamberg in 1925, he failed to understand that Hitler would never share power.

Early in the spring of 1932, Strasser used his monopoly over the party’s organization to extend his influence over Nazi economic policy. Harnessing the

\textsuperscript{269} Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 182.
\textsuperscript{270} Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 198.
theories and proposals of his extensive network of contacts originating from Senior Department II, the Reichstag, as well as the grassroots support of the NSBO, he began to formulate the specifics of a national economic recovery program and made his new policies binding on the party establishment. His economic platform was Keynesian in its form and function. The primary objective was to jump-start the economy through extensive public works projects intended to shift citizens off unemployment benefits back into the labor market; thereby resuscitating consumption and catalyzing economic growth. This undertaking would be financed by a combination of reducing unemployment payments by returning citizens to work, taxing income, payments from beneficiaries of public works, and most importantly, a strong central bank advancing credit to underwrite economic recovery. None of these concepts were original to Strasser. He had adapted them from the recommendations of his panels of experts, and this underscored the central difference between Hitler and Strasser’s leadership strategies. Strasser adapted the proposals of specialists and incorporated them into his political program – even if those specialists originated outside the party. Conversely, Hitler valued ideological zeal and personal allegiance to himself above all technical qualifications. Strasser first deployed his new economic platform as an integral part of the Nazi parliamentary victory of July 1932. Then, following on the heels of Hitler’s failure to secure the Chancellery from

Hindenburg in August, Strasser explored the possibility of a coalition with center-right Zentrum, using his economic platform as the central policy plank of the alliance. Zentrum leadership was receptive to the idea, and Strasser offered to “throw himself into the breach” of government if Hitler was unwilling to do it himself.²⁷³ Still, Hitler remained wed to his all-or-nothing strategy – there would be no parliamentary coalition compromise. With the parliamentary path to power blocked, the rift between Strasser and Hitler became increasingly acrimonious. The tension between the two men was further enflamed by Hitler’s dramatic reversal regarding Strasser’s economic policy. In September, Hitler dissolved the political economy section of the party organization and banned the distribution of the party’s Strasserite Economic Emergency Program, owing to personal disagreements regarding its conciliatory rhetoric regarding labor unions.²⁷⁴

Hitler and Strasser were both ardent National Socialists, but their divergent perspectives as to how the movement should enter power and radically different views on the party’s place in broader German politics were irreconcilable. Strasser predicted that if coalition solutions predicated on a strong NSDAP-led economic policy were not pursued, popular support for the party would soon decline.²⁷⁵ His fears were widely shared among the party’s rank and file. As early as August, internal reports from Goebbels’ propaganda office identified Hitler’s refusal to enter government as a major source of disaffection

²⁷⁴ Kershaw, Hitler:Hubris, 398.
²⁷⁵ Childers, The Third Reich, 176.
among party members.\textsuperscript{276} The NSDAP’s sharp reversal during the November 1932 Reichstag election lent credence to predictions of the party’s impending decline. The devastating loss of 40% of the NSDAP’s electoral share in Thuringian state elections the following month seemed to further confirm the magnitude of the crisis.\textsuperscript{277} Popular opinion was turning against the Nazis, and Strasser’s reward for correctly predicting the reversals of November was his exclusion from Hitler’s inner decision making circle.\textsuperscript{278} As the party approached ruin, tensions between Hitler and Strasser reached a breaking point. The NSDAP was nearly bankrupt. Its support was waning. Morale was plummeting, and Hitler offered no clear plan to achieve victory. Under his all-or-nothing policy, the NSDAP was following the same path that had broken the back of the DNVP. In the face of this crisis, Strasser identified what he believed to be the movement’s last best chance to seize power. He proposed to enter government as the primary parliamentary support for a Reichswehr backed authoritarian regime led by the incoming Chancellor, General Kurt von Schleicher.

Although General Schleicher maneuvered in reactionary circles surrounding President Hindenburg, he was a pragmatic power-seeker, not a reactionary. Schleicher espoused a strongly corporatist world view predicated upon combining the forces of industry, labor, and the military to form an authoritarian “third-way” government. The key difference between Strasser and

\textsuperscript{276} Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 180, 190-191.  
\textsuperscript{277} Smelser, \textit{Robert Ley}, 94.  
\textsuperscript{278} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler:Hubris}, 398.
Schleicher rested in their motives. Strasser believed Schleicher’s regime presented an opportunity for the Nazis to demonstrate their governing credentials and re-center the political mainstream on the party.\(^{279}\) In short, Strasser was proposing a revolution from inside the system. Schleicher secretly believed he could divide and conquer the Nazi party by splitting it and incorporating the Strasserite faction within his new regime, whilst marginalizing Hitler in the process.\(^{280}\) Schleicher’s new authoritarian government would be founded upon Strasser’s economic platform, the Nazi party’s popular support, labor unions, and the coercive power of the army. Despite the NSDAP’s precarious situation, Hitler characteristically refused to compromise or to enter government to attempt to subvert the regime from within. Instead, he regarded Strasser’s actions as tantamount to treason. In his analysis of the Schleicher-Strasser negotiations, Hitler wildly misjudged the motivations of his ROL.

Regardless of Schleicher’s objectives, there is no credible evidence that Strasser intended to split the party. Had this been his intention, then he logically would have done so when handed a golden opportunity by Hitler during the ensuing showdown between the two men precipitated by the negotiations. When Schleicher was prepared to seal the deal, he offered the vice-chancellorship to Strasser, who in turn immediately sought Hitler’s approval.\(^{281}\) With upwards of

\(^{279}\) To quote Strasser reflecting on the events of 1932 after his retirement, “We had to participate in the running of the state and appeal to the people with deeds rather than words.” Gregor Strasser, qtd. Childers, *The Third Reich*, 214.


one-hundred NSDAP Reichstag representatives and twelve Gauleiter backing him, on December 5th Strasser made one final effort to sway Hitler. When that failed, he tendered his resignation, implored his colleagues within the party not to follow him out, and then retired from politics.282 Hitler accused Strasser of treason and responded to his organizational chief’s resignation by threatening to commit suicide for fear that Strasser’s departure would precipitate the party’s collapse.283 In the wake of Strasser’s departure, his empire was divided between Robert Ley and Rudolf Hess. The network of national party inspectors disbanded, and the party organization was reshuffled to favor Hitler loyalists.284 Elements of Strasserite ideology and organizational structure persisted into the nascent Nazi state, but Strasserites had lost their previously considerable influence in the party. To quote Strasser, Germany was “in the hands of an Austrian [Hitler] who is a congenital liar, a former officer [Röhm] who is a pervert, and a clubfoot [Goebbels]” whom he described as “Satan in human form.”285 While Strasser remained disengaged from politics, Hitler and his inner circle obsessed over conspiracy theories involving supposed Strasserite plots to destabilize the party.286 Gregor Strasser had become National Socialism’s Leon Trotsky, and Hitler was haunted by the prospect that sometime, somehow, his former organizational chief might topple him.

283 Smelser, Robert Ley, 94-95.
284 Childers, The Third Reich, 211.
285 Gregor Strasser, qtd. in John Toland, Adolf Hitler: Volume I, 295
286 Childers, The Third Reich, 211.
Strasser’s resignation played a crucial, albeit, indirect role in delivering the Nazis to power just six weeks later. The failure of Schleicher’s bid to split the Nazi party left the chancellor vulnerable to his arch-rival, Franz von Papen. At the same time, the only politician in Germany who could offer Papen the base he needed to completely topple Schleicher was Hitler, and an arrangement was hastily reached to bring Hitler into government as chancellor with Papen as vice chancellor. Thus, the Nazis came into government without a secure parliamentary majority as senior partners in a tenuous coalition with Papen and his reactionary allies. The sudden and initially incomplete nature of the Nazi ascent raised more questions than answers about how to accomplish total ‘synchronization’ of society with the party. While the SA unleashed a reign of terror across the country designed to quash political opposition, the Nazis still lacked a clear vision of how to engineer their new state. The only consensus was that the German people and state should be made to merge with Nazism and not the other way around. National Socialism possessed a collection of concepts and policies, but how these might coalesce into a governing system remained unclear. The ambiguity of the moment primarily favored Hitler, enabling his

287 Schleicher hoped that Strasser could integrate the nation’s labor unions into a corporatist authoritarian regime backed by the army, which he controlled personally. The failure to bring Strasser into governance effectively doomed Schleicher’s corporatist plan and guaranteed his demise at the hands of his former reactionary allies. See Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 398.
288 The NSDAP held 196 out of 584 seats in the Reichstag at the time of the party’s rise to power. Meanwhile, Papen and his allies lacked significant parliamentary backing, but enjoyed the support of President Hindenburg.
289 The formal term for the process was gleichschaltung meaning synchronization or coordination.
lieutenants to carve the state into bureaucratic fiefdoms pursuing his ‘vision’ in their own distinct ways, but the chaos also empowered other National Socialist agendas in conflict with the newly minted Führer. To firmly grasp the importance of Hitler’s growing hegemony over the party’s ideology, it is necessary to examine Hitler’s personal variant of National Socialism and its profound implications for German politics and society once it became fully institutionalized.
CHAPTER FIVE:
CORE PRINCIPLES OF HITLER’S IDEOLOGY

“If I can accept a divine commandment, it’s this one: ‘Thou shalt preserve the species.’”\(^{290}\) - Adolf Hitler

The core of Hitler’s personal variant of National Socialism was based on three intertwined principles: conquering new living space, maintaining racial purity, and achieving economic autarky. For Hitler, life was an endless struggle between races over finite resources. Consequently, he conceived races as unitary entities struggling for survival like beasts in the wilderness, and the price of failure was extinction.\(^ {291}\) This radically Darwinian worldview shaped every aspect of his personal ideology. In his mind, politics was nothing more than the art of a race’s struggle for survival. Foreign policy was the art of securing living space through warfare and alliance building in order to facilitate conquest. Domestic policy was entirely devoted to providing the racially pure manpower and ideological indoctrination to wage war to procure living space.\(^ {292}\) Hitler’s economic policies were an extension of this thinking. He sought autarky to ensure self-sufficiency in weapon and food production to prosecute his wars.\(^ {293}\) In his mind, the battle for racial survival through conquest and the maintenance


\(^{291}\) Snyder, *Black Earth*, 1.


\(^{293}\) Snyder, *Black Earth*, 10-11.
of racial purity were one in the same. States were only strong as long as they were racially homogeneous; the moment purity was lost, the capability to conquer new living space and, therefore, support a growing population would be lost as well. Weapons, technology, and training were of tertiary importance compared to the maintenance of racial purity.\textsuperscript{294} This fixation on purity also surfaced in his quest for autarky. At a pragmatic level, autarky promised to enable Hitler to create an industrial engine to prosecute his wars for living space. While at an ideological level, Hitler simultaneously argued that capitalist free trade was a front for a “peaceful economic war” waged by Britain, and that Germany should close itself off from the international system as a means to preserve racial purity.\textsuperscript{295}

Understanding these concepts is the key to analyzing Hitler’s role in shaping the Third Reich. While the Strasserites and, to a lesser extent, the early Munich wing sought to create an ideology with which to govern, Hitler desired to create an ideology to facilitate conquest. He remained entirely focused upon the acquisition of living space, racial purification, and autarky. How his oligarchs implemented his wishes was of no concern to him, as long as they did not deviate from these core goals. Thus, Hitler’s personal variant of National Socialism remained “thin” in that it was based on a restricted core of highly specific goals, but it was by no means simple or inconsequential. On the

\textsuperscript{294} Hitler, \textit{Hitler’s Second Book}, 29, 31-33.  
\textsuperscript{295} For a discussion of Hitler’s views on Britain’s role in the world economy, see Snyder, \textit{Black Earth}, 12. For Hitler’s own perspective on the alleged weaknesses of capitalism and internationalism, see Hitler, \textit{Hitler’s Second Book}, 25-26, 36.
contrary, the thin core of Hitler’s National Socialism shaped much of the behavior of National Socialism in power.

To support his core principles of conquest, purity, and autarky, he adapted a range of ideas drawn from both traditional and socialist völkisch trends within his personal ideology. From traditional völkisch ideologues Hitler adapted his conceptualizations of racial nationalism, anti-Semitism, Slavophobia, anti-Internationalism, and agrarian romanticism. Moreover, he demonstrated significant ideological overlap with Munich’s concept of the völkisch state in his conceptualization of German identity and citizenship. He conceptualized membership in the German volkschgemeinschaft as exclusively based on blood, so no racial outsider could be assimilated.296 Therefore, non-ethnic German elements within society were deemed alien and targeted for isolation or expulsion.297 Building on his antipathy for perceived foreign influence, he lashed out against Jews, Marxists, and even Catholics as symbols of internationalism. To Hitler, any community that crossed national boundaries, be it an ethnic group, ideology, or religion, constituted an international conspiracy aimed at debasing German racial purity.298 Following the lead of many völkisch traditionalists, he extended this obsession with purity to rural versus urban life. He regarded

296 Hitler, Mein Kampf, 588-589.
298 Hitler constructed or embraced a myriad of conspiracy theories that targeted groups as diverse as the Habsburg dynasty, Catholic Zentrum, ethnic Slavs, as well as all manner of Marxist and Capitalist ideologies just to name a handful. Despite the staggering diversity of Hitler’s conspiracy theories, almost all of them were to some degree rooted in a paranoid fear of a so-called ‘international Jewish conspiracy.’ See Hitler, Hitler’s Second Book, 63, 232, 238. See also Snyder, Black Earth, 5.
agrarian life as inherently pure and cities as hotbeds of vice, race-mixing, pacifism, and Jewish habitation – all of which he regarded as threats to a nation’s ability to conquer new living space.\(^{299}\) Thus, a Reich could only remain successful if it ‘returned’ the bulk of its people to a pure agrarian lifestyle. In this worldview, expanding Germany’s peasantry was necessary for exploiting newly conquered living space and safeguarding his empire against Jews, whom he believed were incapable of productive labor, and therefore, unable to sustain themselves in agricultural life.\(^{300}\)

Meanwhile, Hitler simultaneously borrowed right-wing socialist elements of völkisch ideology, but he invariably modified these concepts to suit his racial nationalist agenda. Moreover, Hitler’s adaptation of right-wing socialist elements displays a distinct lack of Strasserite influence; his socialist elements were entirely derived from pre-Strasserite völkisch socialists. Among the themes he adapted from völkisch socialists were anti-capitalism, military socialism, and a variety of anti-bourgeois sentiments. Although he embraced industrialization as a tool to produce weapons of war, he staunchly opposed capitalism itself as an internationalist blight upon society. He argued that capitalism undermined a nation’s willingness to wage wars of expansion and facilitated race-mixing through international trade.\(^{301}\) He was not intrinsically opposed to private enterprise, as evinced by his symbiotic relationship with military industrialists, but

\(^{299}\) Hitler, *Hitler’s Second Book*, 27.  
\(^{300}\) Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 416, 419.  
\(^{301}\) Hitler, *Hitler’s Second Book*, 16.
he was only willing to tolerate private industry when it served his autarkic economic goals. At the same time, he was by no means wed to private enterprise. He had no qualms about allowing virtually all civilian industries to be brought under state supervision through the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (German Labor Front, or DAF), and allowed the creation of gargantuan state industries in elements of the defense establishment as part of his quest for autarky.\(^{302}\)

Additionally, Hitler accepted Spengler’s narrative that the German military of the Second Reich functioned as an anti-materialist, non-Marxist, socialist institution based on military merit, thus providing a model for the future Reich. He combined this right-wing socialist interpretation of the role of the military with his racial nationalism and argued that if applied to society as a whole, military meritocracy would immunize Germany against both the privations of capitalism and so-called “Jewish dangers.”\(^{303}\) Building on this narrative, he characterized himself as a socialist based on shared racial identity, instead of class identity.\(^{304}\) He embraced the concepts of right-wing socialism, but he did so exclusively through a racial nationalist lens. In his mind, the concept of class was itself fleeting and irrelevant; racial identity and racial collectivism were all that mattered.\(^{305}\) As a part of his campaign to socialize Germany along racial lines,


\(^{304}\) Hitler, *Hitler’s Second Book*, 49.

\(^{305}\) Snyder, *Black Earth*, 2.
the bourgeoisie would necessarily be cast out of power and marginalized. For Hitler, the bourgeoisie were an antagonistic force tainted by racial miscegenation and excessive materialism.\textsuperscript{306} Even nationalist bourgeois politicians were considered by Hitler to be stooges of capitalism and therefore, incapable of understanding the necessity of conquering new living space.\textsuperscript{307} For all the attention that has been lavished on Hitler’s courtship of the bourgeois far-right as part of his policy of legality, he never trusted nor admired them. They offered a means to an end, and he was willing to tone down his rhetoric against them for electoral purposes from 1928-1932, but once the Nazi regime was firmly established, he turned on them without hesitation.

\textsuperscript{306} Hitler, \textit{Hitler’s Second Book}, 46, 53.  
\textsuperscript{307} Hitler, \textit{Hitler’s Second Book}, 49-50.
CHAPTER SIX:
RISE TO POWER AND THE HITLER PERIOD

The party’s ascent to power had the effect of centralizing Nazi ideology around Hitler and providing him with an unparalleled platform to institutionalize his variant of National Socialism. Until 1933, the NSDAP’s thickening process was driven by Munich and Strasserite ideologues pursuing their own competing versions of the ideology. After 1933, this changed. From this point forward the idea that party ideology and policies should be based on making Hitler’s worldview a reality became the bedrock of National Socialism. Concepts developed during the Munich and Strasserite periods were not abandoned, but their application within governance was shaped by their compatibility with Hitler’s preferences. This process was not instantaneous, however. Before Hitler could consolidate personal hegemony over Nazi ideology, the party would have to be purged of any elements espousing variations of National Socialism that conflicted with his own.

The Ideological Foundation of the Third Reich

The ideological foundation of the Third Reich was based on four core concepts. First, the völkisch state, which underpinned all governing institutions

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308 In 1934, the State Secretary of the Prussian Agriculture Ministry, Werner Willikens, concisely summarized the new ideological paradigm of the Nazi party. "It is the duty of every single person to attempt, in the spirit of the Führer, to work towards him. Anyone making mistakes will come to notice soon enough. But the one who works correctly towards the Führer along his lines and toward his aims will in future as previously have the finest reward of one day suddenly attaining the legal confirmation of his work." Werner Willikens, qtd. in Kershaw, Hitler 1936-1945: Nemesis (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 529-530.
and imbued policy making with racial nationalist themes at all levels. The second was an adapted variant of Strasserite corporatism stripped of its overtly Strasserite rhetoric and critically articulated in a form fully compatible with the völkisch state. The third was the concept of the Führer principle, which was recapitulated across society from the factory floor to Hitler himself. These first three concepts configured the structure and operation of the state. This Nazi state was race-based, it used corporatist structures, and with all decision making based on the Führer principle. The fourth and final core concept was that all policies should serve to further Hitler's conjoined concepts of racial purity, conquest, and autarky. After the purges of 1933 and 1934, the implementation of Hitler's personal ideology became the overarching goal of Nazi state policy. In early 1933 however, Hitler's monopoly over the party's ideology was not yet absolute, and he still needed to eliminate his remaining internal rivals before the state could be completely harnessed towards achieving his objectives. Due to their ideological proximity, the Munich wing posed no challenge to Hitler, but the remaining Strasserites and revolutionary elements of the SA entertaining socialist aspirations posed very real competitors.

Strasserite Hold-Outs and the Genesis of Synthesis

The remnants of the Strasserite wing lacked a unifying leader, but its constituent elements remained influential. Strasserite functionaries pervaded the party's organizational structure and strongly influenced the Reich's early economic planning. These Strasserites however, posed little threat to Hitler, as
their interests were technocratic and their economic proposals complimented his re-armament ambitions. These technocrats devised the twin “Reinhardt Programs” that jump-started the German economy through a work creation and infrastructure development program structurally akin to the American New Deal.\(^309\) The Reinhardt Programs were based on plans developed a year prior by a combination of Strasser’s economic proposals, industrialists, trade unionists, and political-economy technocrats in the party organization.\(^310\) With domestic economic stability secured by the Reinhardt Programs, Hitler was free to embark on a series of massive rearmament campaigns that further revitalized the German economy.\(^311\) In an ironic twist of fate, Strasser had helped create the economic policies that played a decisive role in stabilizing the Nazi state that subsequently destroyed him.

Not all Strasserites in the party organization could be easily pacified. The expansive and fiercely socialist NSBO continued to agitate for the total re-ordering of German society along Strasserite corporatist lines and in his efforts to solidify the party’s grip on the nation, Hitler indirectly empowered his internal rivals in the NSBO. In May of 1933, Hitler dissolved the country’s labor unions and transferred their assets to a new party-run _Deutsche Arbeitsfront_ (DAF) led

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\(^310\) Kissenkoetter, “Gregor Strasser,” in _The Nazi Elite_, 231.

\(^311\) Once the domestic economy, and particularly unemployment, was stabilized by the Reinhardt plans, Hitler turned his attention to the execution of a state-run Four-Year Plan aimed at achieving autarky for the specific purpose of waging war for living space in the east. See Braun, _The German Economy_, 86-88.
by Robert Ley, who simultaneously functioned as the party’s post-Strasser organizational chief. The labor unions were gone, but what would follow in their wake, and how labor would be integrated into the new regime remained unclear. Neither Hitler nor Ley possessed a clear plan as to the form or function of the new DAF – only that "the former form of worker representation could not be maintained in the future."  

In lieu of any clear plan the course of events turned in favor of NSBO leadership who attempted to harness the newly created DAF as a tool to create a Strasserite corporatist state. Under the auspices of the DAF, all unions, their membership rosters, and publishing assets were subsumed into the NSBO. The former unions were further grouped into five pillars representing different aspects of German economic life with each pillar administered by an NSBO commissar. The DAF presided over this corporatist super-organization, but its senior personnel were overwhelmingly drawn from the NSBO. In total, the DAF’s bureaucracy comprised 13 state, 361 regional or local labor offices, as well as a number of attendant bureaucracies to oversee a panoply of integrated education, leadership training, youth, propaganda, and economic organizations.  

In the view of NSBO leadership, the DAF would serve as a nation-wide umbrella organization with which to make the German people “agents of our will.” Ley further extended the role of the DAF by empowering it to preside over social

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313 Smelser, Robert Ley, 134-136.  
314 Reinhold Muchow, qtd. in Smelser, Robert Ley, 128.
policy as well; there would be no walk of life left beyond the umbrella of the DAF.\textsuperscript{315} With a few crucial amendments discussed later in this chapter, this corporatist structure subsequently became one of the preeminent institutions of the Nazi system until the outbreak of World War Two – although not all of its founders lived to see it.

Despite Ley’s active involvement in NSBO initiatives and his efforts to direct its activities as the head of the DAF, the situation rapidly spiraled out of his control. At the national level of the DAF, officials began issuing directives on all manner of socio-economic policies ranging from equal pay for female workers to vacation and wage policy.\textsuperscript{316} This inundation of executive labor decrees burnished the party’s socialist credentials to the masses, but they were uncoordinated and proved unsettling to conservative elites whom the party could not yet push aside. Meanwhile, at the local level NSBO personnel disrupted the operation of government bureaucracies, extorted employers, and flouted orders from party officials. Even more troubling to the party’s elites, banned Communist and Social Democratic labor unions were using the NSBO’s open recruitment policy as camouflage for continuing their independent organizations.\textsuperscript{317} In an effort to assert control over the situation, the NSBO’s leader, Muchow, responded by expelling 100,000 members from the organization and issuing a number of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{315} Smelser, \textit{Robert Ley}, 136.
\item \textsuperscript{316} Smelser, \textit{Robert Ley}, 137, 139.
\item \textsuperscript{317} Smelser, \textit{Robert Ley}, 137-138.
\end{itemize}
decrees designed to inhibit free-lance activism by the organization’s rank and file.  

The confusion surrounding the early actions of the DAF/NSBO was typical of the first year of Nazi governance more generally. Similar dynamics unfolded within the paramilitary SA, but in the case of the SA, the oligarch presiding over the process (Ernst Röhm) was willing and able to challenge Hitler. Across the party, zealots and opportunists took it upon themselves to settle scores, forcefully usurp the reigns of governance, and influence the policies of the new state in the name of ‘synchronization.’ Meanwhile, Hitler’s lieutenants, such as Ley in the case of the DAF, fashioned these grassroots efforts into National Socialist institutions and jealously guarded them as private political fiefdoms against encroachment by other Nazis. Moreover, the party’s revolutionary aspirations were further complicated by the persistence of the Weimar bureaucracy and the party’s continued reliance on the acquiescence of traditional elites. Amidst this administrative chaos, all manner of competing factions and actors within the NSDAP vied to shape the emerging state, and it remained to be seen how the ‘final’ form of Nazi governance would operate. During the first year of the Third Reich, the Strasserite NSBO simply proved more effective at implementing its version of National Socialism than most of its competitors. All of this would,  

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318 Smelser, Robert Ley, 137.
however, soon change; the NSBO was pushing an agenda that directly conflicted with Hitler.

The Muchow Purge: September 1933

In an effort to stabilize the regime by restoring a sense of political normality in the wake of the tumultuous transition of power, Hitler declared that the National Socialist revolution was “over” in June of 1933. The announcement pushed tensions between the NSBO and Hitler beyond the breaking point. NSBO personnel across the country retaliated by occupying factories, harassing businessmen, fighting with Hitler loyalists, and fomenting labor unrest to agitate for a more total revolution.\footnote{Smelser, Robert Ley, 142.} Simply gaining power was not enough; the NSBO desired to see German society reforged along Strasserite corporatist lines, and the NSBO was not alone in opposition to the perceived slow pace of Hitler’s revolution. The SA, led by their charismatic Chief of Staff Ernst Röhm, publicly despised Hitler’s policy of legality and called for an immediate, “second revolution” to sweep away bourgeois society.\footnote{Fischer, “Ernst Julius Röhm,” in The Nazi Elite, 178. See also Longerich, Heinrich Himmler, 156.} Although not a Strasserite organization in a formal sense, the SA shared the NSBO’s opposition to bourgeois society, frequently involved itself in labor unrest, called for the nationalization of industry, and felt the party establishment around Hitler had betrayed the party’s revolutionary ambitions.\footnote{Fischer, “Ernst Julius Röhm,” in The Nazi Elite, 178-179.} Moreover, just like the NSBO, the
SA possessed an open recruitment policy that brought many socialist and ex-communist recruits into its ranks.\textsuperscript{323} In short, the NSBO and SA could not be completely synchronized with Hitler’s plans, and they represented an alternative version of National Socialism that disrupted the Führer’s control.

Hitler responded to the joint challenge of the NSBO and SA labor unrest by initiating a nationwide purge of the two organizations over the following months. Although the SA’s leadership remained too strong to confront directly, SA personnel across the country were expelled and some entire units were disbanded. The NSBO was purged more thoroughly, and its most senior ranks were directly targeted. The NSBO’s leading Strasserites were either ousted from their positions or, in the case of, Reinhold Muchow, murdered under suspicious circumstances during the purge.\textsuperscript{324} Once NSBO leadership was decapitated, it was up to Ley to fashion something compatible with Hitler’s worldview out of the corpse.

\textbf{The Deutsche Arbeitsfront and the Completion of Munich-Strasserite Synthesis}

Ley synchronized the efforts of the NSBO with Hitler’s worldview by rearticulating the organization’s Strasserite corporatism in terms of Munich’s concept of the \textit{völkisch} state. The result was a racial-nationalist corporatist super-organization in the form of the DAF, which presided over virtually every


\textsuperscript{324} Smelser, \textit{Robert Ley}, 142.
aspect of civilian life in the pre-World War Two Reich. Instead of five pillars representing different aspects of German economic life, there would only be one pillar for all ethnic Germans, regardless of profession or class origin. Class divisions between Germans were due to be dissolved, at least rhetorically, but non-ethnic Germans were excluded from the socio-economic fabric of society entirely. The DAF’s operation was based on an ascending hierarchy of führers, each exercising nearly unlimited authority over their subordinates, from the lowest betriebsführer on the factory floor to Robert Ley himself. Armed with the personal blessing of Hitler, Ley set about to use the myriad of departments and organizations designed by Strasser to absorb civil society into a corporatist state structure to gradually envelope German society in the DAF’s organizational maw.325 In this endeavor, he was largely successful; by 1939, the DAF encompassed 87% of the German workforce and possessed an annual income three times higher than the NSDAP itself.326 Among DAF’s myriad of assets were banks, insurance companies, newspapers, supermarkets, cruise ships, think-tanks, and state industries such as Volkswagen.327 At all levels of this gargantuan super-organization, DAF representatives were empowered to requisition labor friendly renovations or policies as well as extensive punitive powers to persecute workers or industrialists who were ideologically uncommitted to National Socialism. Both citizens and private industry would be

325 Smelser, Robert Ley, 101, 106.
326 Smelser, Robert Ley, 155, 161.
327 Smelser, Robert Ley, 165.
compelled to articulate their demands through the umbrella of the DAF. Although expansive, the DAF’s reach was somewhat circumscribed by Hitler’s autarkic economic ambitions. The DAF was free to enforce its will on all manner of civilian industries, but Hitler actively shielded the private armaments industries due to their centrality to his re-armament and expansion ambitions. Instead of being fully subjected to the DAF, the armaments industries were synchronized with the regime’s plans through a traditional system of informal intimidation and economic incentives.\textsuperscript{328}

Despite the exclusion of the armaments industries from the DAF’s umbrella, the organization still possessed sweeping power over civil and economic life in the Third Reich. In the DAF, the Nazis possessed an institution designed to quietly re-engineer society in the image of National Socialism.\textsuperscript{329} The DAF wielded the carrot of material benefits in the form of low-interest loans, cheap consumer goods, subsidized vacations, and improved labor conditions that Ley argued were “the most concise formula for introducing the broad masses to National Socialism.”\textsuperscript{330} In this regard, he was absolutely correct. Over the next six years the DAF showered Germany’s workers in material benefits to ensure

\textsuperscript{328} Industrialists in security sensitive fields who towed the party line were rewarded with preferential contracts and state support, while those who protested the regime’s economic policies or attempted to organize against it were subjected to blackmail and coercion. See Overy, \textit{Goering the ‘Iron Man.’} 65.

\textsuperscript{329} In the words of Ley, “our state is an educational state, a pedagogue…and so we begin already with the child of three years. As soon as it begins to think, it gets a little flag to carry. Then there follows school, Hitler youth, SA, military service. We don’t let go of the person; and when all this is finished, then the Labor Front comes and picks him up and doesn’t let him go until he dies, even if he resists it.” Robert Ley, qtd. in Smelser, \textit{Robert Ley}, 100.

\textsuperscript{330} Robert Ley, qtd. in Ulrich, \textit{Hitler: Ascent}, 537.
their loyalty to the regime while it also wielded the stick of constant state surveillance and demanded uncompromising ideological devotion to the Nazi party.\textsuperscript{331} By synthesizing the structures and concepts of Strasserite corporatism with the racial nationalism of the \textit{völkisch} state, Ley created the crown jewel of Nazi social control; a social engineering apparatus of nearly unparalleled scope.

The Night of the Long Knives and the Consolidation of Hitler’s Hegemony: 1934

The decapitation of the NSBO removed the weaker of two internal challengers to Hitler’s hegemony over the party. The SA’s autonomous leadership and 4.5 million members, on the other hand, remained a force to be reckoned with.\textsuperscript{332} Whereas the NSBO had been an auxiliary organization, despite its disproportionate impact on the Reich’s subsequent social structure, the SA was a different creature entirely. During the first year in power the SA’s reign of terror enabled the party to conquer Germany through the unrestrained murder, torture, and intimidation of perceived rivals. After the regime began to solidify in early 1934, the SA’s penchant for revolutionary violence became a liability. On the national stage, the public grew wary of the SA’s unchecked violence, and the Nazi’s reactionary partners and the military prevailed upon President Hindenburg to pressure Hitler to reign in the SA. The possibility of a counter-revolution

\textsuperscript{331} As a tool for seducing the population into National Socialism, the initiatives of the DAF were extremely effective. By 1939 the constituent programs of the DAF had constructed tens of thousands of factory green spaces and leisure rooms, doubled the number of vacation days, subsidized traditionally upper-class leisure activities for workers, and subsidized vacations for two-thirds of the population on DAF cruise ships. See Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 310.

\textsuperscript{332} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: Hubris}, 502.
against the Nazis led by the military and backed by the president was not off the

333 As long as Hitler needed the SA to conquer the state, he did not care

about the repercussions of their actions; but once the regime was established,

the SA’s lawlessness courted disaster.

In addition to the threat of the SA sparking a direct confrontation with the

military and president, the organization challenged Hitler from within the party.

The SA itself was an ideologically heterogeneous organization that was strongly

characterized by socialist elements, including numerous ex-communists, national

bolshevists, and social democrats who often mixed their socialist beliefs with the

Nazis’ racial nationalism.334 Due to its massive size the SA lacked a unitary

ideology, but its leadership around Röhm did espouse a series of guiding

demands around which the organization’s calls for a ‘second revolution’ revolved.

First and foremost, Röhm categorically rejected the supremacy of the party’s

political leadership, including Hitler, over the SA.335 This dynamic alone called

Hitler’s leading position into question, but this challenge was further complicated

by the SA’s additional demands. Second, Röhm and the SA continued to publicly

advocate a second, more complete revolution. Although the SA’s demands were

ideologically thin compared to the Strasserites in the NSBO, their ambitions were


334 Open socialists within the SA were common, especially after the Nazi’s rise to power and were

referred to as “beefsteaks” by their colleagues because they were “brown outside, red inside.” For a

further discussion of the prevalence of socialist elements in the SA see Fischer, Stormtroopers, 146-147. For an

analysis of the anti-Semitic and racial nationalist overtones of the SA, see Fischer, Stormtroopers, 149.

335 Ulrich, Hitler: Ascent, 458.
still extensive. Röhm’s overarching goal was the destruction of bourgeois society and its replacement with a form of hyper-militarized right-wing socialism typical of Spengler’s völkisch adherents.\textsuperscript{336} To impose these revolutionary concepts on broader society, Röhm and his confederates demanded the creation of a formal SA ministry, sweeping power over the nation’s police forces, and civil administration.\textsuperscript{337} Above all else, Röhm called for the abolition of the army and its replacement with a national people’s militia as the core of his proposed hyper-militarized society.\textsuperscript{338}

By January 1934, it was obvious that the tenuous balance between Röhm’s SA and Hitler could not be maintained for long. The SA’s leadership eyed Hitler’s burgeoning ties to the traditional army with skepticism and were incensed by the lack of SA representation in national offices. Likewise, the SA’s rank and file offered an ideal audience for their leaders’ calls for renewed revolution. Despite the nation’s improving economic situation on the macroscale, average SA personnel remained financially insecure and underemployed.\textsuperscript{339} The SA was both armed and organized, and Röhm’s own formidable personality cult largely eclipsed Hitler within its ranks.\textsuperscript{340} Privately Röhm excoriated both Hitler

\textsuperscript{336} In the words of Röhm, his goal was to establish a society where “the old, divisive contradictions of estate, occupation, class and confession have been eliminated.” Like Spengler and to a certain extent Gregor Strasser, he sought to accomplish this by creating a classless meritocracy based entirely on military promotion. See Conan Fischer, \textit{Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic, and Ideological Analysis: 1929-1935} (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 144.

\textsuperscript{337} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: Hubris}, 502.

\textsuperscript{338} Fischer, “Ernst Julius Röhm,” in \textit{The Nazi Elite}, 178.

\textsuperscript{339} Fischer, “Ernst Julius Röhm,” in \textit{The Nazi Elite}, 180.

\textsuperscript{340} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: Hubris}, 503.
and his policy of legality, while publicly he used the party’s media outlets to call for a second revolution with or without the participation of the political leadership. To quote Röhm, the SA would “carry on our struggle. If they [Hitler and his allies] finally grasp what it is about, with them! If they are not willing, without them! And if it has to be: against them!” It had become readily apparent that Röhm and his colleagues were willing to turn the SA’s reign of terror against Hitler if they deemed it necessary. Röhm saw himself as serving a National Socialist revolution, not as serving the person of Hitler. As long as Röhm lived, he presented a potential competitor for leadership of National Socialism.

Despite the looming struggle between the SA and Hitler, Röhm’s powerful position made him a difficult target to simply dismiss. During the spring of 1934, Hitler ordered the SS and Gestapo to begin secretly gathering incriminating evidence against Röhm but he refrained from taking direct action. In classic Hitler style, he would let the situation simmer until he took decisive action only after events left him no other choice. While the SS and Gestapo worked in secret to investigate Röhm, relations between the SA, Hitler, and the regime’s temporary reactionary allies continued to disintegrate. The SA’s growing weapons stockpiles, revolutionary aspirations, and openly antagonistic rhetoric towards the army was pushing the state towards crisis. In response, the army

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342 When the investigation was initiated the Gestapo was under the control of Hermann Göring, but in April it was transferred to the control of Himmler’s chief lieutenant, Reinhard Heydrich, specifically as a means of consolidating the anti-SA investigation. Thus, the efforts to crush the SA indirectly laid the foundation of the future centralization of the SS police state. See Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris*, 505-506.
made it readily apparent that the SA’s plans for a people’s militia or any kind of SA state would be a red line that would precipitate an immediate military confrontation with the Nazi regime. Moreover, Hitler was aware that his expansionist agenda required a fully professional, modern army, not a fanatical people’s militia. The SA’s proposed militia state did not serve his interests.343 In an effort to stabilize the worsening situation, Hitler sought to buy time by compelling the army and SA to sign an agreement specifically delineating their distinct roles. The army would serve as the sole bearers of arms in the Reich, while the SA would patrol the borders, provide pre-military training, and serve at the pleasure of the party’s political arm.344

This episode served to only further harden Röhm’s opposition to Hitler. In his mind, the agreement was a final confirmation that Hitler had ‘deserted’ the movement’s revolutionary aspirations. To quote Röhm, “What that ridiculous corporal says means nothing to me…Hitler is a traitor and at the very least must go on leave.”345 The break between the two men was inevitable, and unlike Gregor Strasser, it seemed unlikely that Röhm would be content with quietly slipping away into retirement. Röhm and Hitler’s dueling conceptions of National Socialism were incompatible, and a showdown between them was inevitable. All that remained was to see exactly how their confrontation would unfold and who would emerge victorious.

343 Kershaw, Hitler: Hubris, 505.
344 Childers, The Third Reich, 276.
345 Ernst Röhm, qtd. in Childers, The Third Reich, 277.
As events unfolded the spark that ignited this powder keg came from neither Hitler nor Röhm but the from the army. On June 7, 1934, Röhm sent the SA on leave for a month to rest and recuperate for the first time since the Nazis rose to power. What precisely the SA would do upon returning from their period of rest remained entirely unclear, but the army was not inclined to sit idly by and wait. On June 22, the army issued an ultimatum to Hitler demanding that the SA be brought under control, and its talk of a second revolution terminated permanently. Failure to comply would precipitate a military coup backed by the ailing President Hindenburg. At the same time, after a year of inaction, the reactionaries surrounding Vice Chancellor Papen finally found a spine and were organizing against the regime in opposition to the SA’s revolutionary rhetoric.\(^\text{346}\)

Hitler’s inaction regarding Röhm had delivered the Nazis to a singularly remarkable crisis and at the time it was entirely unclear how the events of June might unfold. If Hitler did nothing, then every likely outcome worked against him. If the army’s coup succeeded, Hitler would likely be deposed in favor of a Papen government backed by President Hindenburg. If the coup was inconclusive, then a SA-Army civil war could see Hitler marginalized. Finally, if the coup failed and the SA initiated its own second revolution Röhm could emerge as the new leading figure in National Socialism. Hitler had backed himself into a corner. His only viable option was to act ruthlessly and decisively to purge the SA.

The planning for what subsequently came to be known as the Night of the Long Knives was hastily organized. After months of investigating Röhm on June 25, the SS produced a dossier detailing numerous alleged treasons. The dossier claimed that a SA Putsch was imminent, and that Röhm was conspiring with Gregor Strasser, General Schleicher, and the French government to topple the Nazi regime.\textsuperscript{347} The allegations of Strasser’s involvement were dubious and the charges of a French connection were completely fabricated.\textsuperscript{348} Although, considering Röhm’s previous rhetoric, the possibility that some form of action or provocation had at least been discussed in senior SA circles was credible. In truth, Hitler cared little for the veracity of the document. He simply required a justification to initiate a purge against the SA. Over the following days, arms were secretly transferred from the army to the SS for the purposes of executing a purge and party officials issued a series of public condemnations of second revolution rhetoric. Finally, Hitler ordered Röhm to convene a retreat of SA leadership at the Bad Wiessee in Bavaria on June 30 and announced his intention to address the assembled SA officers personally. Röhm did as instructed, and the trap was complete.

Mere hours before the purge was due to commence, a troop of three-thousand disgruntled SA personnel took to the streets of Munich bellowing “The

\textsuperscript{347} Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 280.
\textsuperscript{348} Specifically, the dossier claimed that the French government bribed Röhm to arrest and assassinate Hitler. There is no credible evidence to support this claim. See Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 284.
Führer is against us; the Army is against us. SA men, out into the streets!"  

Upon hearing of the march, Hitler, who had arrived in Munich to personally lead the purge, flew into a fit of hysterical rage, and ordered the two ranking SA officers in Munich executed on the spot. He subsequently launched the raid on Bad Wiessee ahead of schedule without waiting for SS reinforcements. Thus, began the final action in Hitler’s effort to assert total control over the party. The SA’s senior leadership were summarily rounded up and executed. After initial hesitation Hitler decided that Röhm posed too great a threat to be left alive and ordered him executed as well. Likewise, Gregor Strasser was dragged out of retirement, arrested and killed. In one fell swoop the SA was incapacitated and the phantom of a Strasserite resurgence that so troubled Hitler was eliminated completely. There was no longer a source of internal dissent or room for alternative perspectives within the Nazi party; Hitler emerged from the Night of the Long Knives as the uncontested master of National Socialism.

**Conclusion**

In addition to achieving its primary goal of purging the SA and eliminating Gregor Strasser, the Night of the Long Knives also terminated organized reactionary and conservative opposition to the Nazis. Papen’s inner circle was purged and Papen himself was placed under house arrest. General Schleicher was murdered. Conservative ministers were arrested or executed, and the last

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prominent Catholic politicians were killed.\footnote{351} After the Night of the Long Knives, the Third Reich became indistinguishable from the Nazi party, and the Nazi party was inseparable from Hitler.\footnote{352}

The elimination of Röhm, the senior leadership of the SA, and Gregor Strasser marked the point at which Hitler’s variant of National Socialism became fully institutionalized. There was no longer any force within the party or its immediate orbit that could challenge him or present an alternative ideological pole. The Reich was carved up between a plethora of oligarchs great and small, but all of them were bound to a single central tenant – to serve Hitler and make his ideas a reality. Paradoxically, Nazism initially thinned as a result of Hitler’s acquisition of ideological hegemony due to the total elimination of the socialist and Strasserite variants of the movement. But it would be a mistake to declare the Night of the Long Knives the end of Nazi ideological development. The formative years of National Socialism were over, but its ideological thickening was not. Hitler’s dominance marked the beginning of a new ideological paradigm centered on the pursuit of his core ideas. Nazi ideology was now inseparable from Hitler and no variant of National Socialism that was not rooted in Hitler’s concepts was deemed acceptable. Instead, his lieutenants created their own variants of Hitler’s National Socialism and thickened it by adding their own

\footnote{351}{The purge also targeted former political and personal rivals of the party who were no longer of political relevance, such as the former Minister-President of Bavaria at the time of the Beerhall Putsch, Gustav Ritter von Kahr. See Childers, \textit{The Third Reich}, 284.}

\footnote{352}{After the Night of the Long Knives, the last relevant independent organization in Germany was, paradoxically, the military, which subsequently lost its autonomy as a result of the Blomberg-Fritsch Affair in 1938. See Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: Nemesis}, 59-60.}
elements. Hitler had not ended the thickening of National Socialism; he defined himself as the ideology’s new baseline.

What began as just another unremarkable populist movement born amidst the chaos of the early Weimar era in 1919 had completed its development as a totalitarian party devoted to executing and elaborating the whims of one man. But this process was not simple. Over the course of the party’s development, Hitler’s hegemony over National Socialism had been far from guaranteed. Despite his successful efforts to bind the party to his will, Hitler was never the sole architect of its ideology. After its populist inception, under the tutelage of the Munich wing National Socialism developed inchoate socialist and strongly racial nationalist themes that culminated in a racial conception of governance in the völkisch state. Hitler was obsessed with racial purity, but it was the concept of the völkisch state that allowed these obsessions to achieve tangible form. As Munich proved incapable of leading the movement on the national stage, the onus of ideological development shifted to the Strasserites, who thickened the party’s socialist ideas and merged them with corporatist structures. Hitler’s oratory talents were considerable, but it was the Strasserite party organization that allowed the Nazis to extend their tendrils to every corner of Germany. Moreover, it was Strasserite institutions re-imagined along völkisch lines by Robert Ley, that came to envelop every aspect of socio-economic life in Germany under the party’s umbrella. Given Hitler’s notorious disdain for organizational affairs, it is nearly impossible to envision how a Nazi state could have been constructed or perpetuated without
the ideological and structural contributions of Munich and the Strasserites.
Likewise, without Hitler, the Nazis would likely have never risen above the myriad of other völkisch populist parties.

Ideological development is never a purely theoretical or structural process. Ideologies are created and thickened by individuals, and National Socialism was no exception. The development of Nazism was not guided by irreversible historical processes; it was driven by the ideological variations of powerful individuals in the movement and the numerous conflicts between them. The ultimate outcome of these internal conflicts was that Hitler was able to marginalize or eliminate his rivals and institutionalize his personal variant of National Socialism, but this result was never guaranteed. Hitler did not create Nazi ideology alone. Much like the leader of a messianic religious cult, he cultivated the idea of himself as the image or spirit of National Socialism and in so doing, he came to define and personify the ideology in a way that no other architect ever could. This dynamic was key to binding both the ideology and surviving Nazi ideologues to himself. Once the party gained power, his fanatical adherents attempted to pursue their interpretations of his vision without requiring specific instructions. From that moment on, Hitler’s lieutenants branched out across Germany like dark apostles, intent on re-engineering every aspect of society in the service of his whims. The concepts and structures created by Munich, and the Strasserites became the arsenal with which to accomplish this goal. Those who failed to fall into line behind their twisted messiah or espoused
alternative perspectives of National Socialism were ostracized and annihilated. In the Third Reich, there would be room only for Hitler and those ideologues who adhered to variants of his vision. In the Nazis’ dogmatic pursuit of their master’s will they marched blindly into the greatest calamity in their nation’s history.


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