

# The Rise of Fascism in Germany and Its Causes

---

REINHARD KÜHNEL

*Translated by Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann*

## INTRODUCTION

Why are we concerned with events that have taken place long ago? Why are we engaged in the science of writing history? A very influential point of view claims that historical events do not repeat themselves and that nothing can be learned from history. If this were the case, the study of history would be mere indulgence in the drama and diversity of historical events, and one might just as well spend the time reading a thrilling adventure story.

UNESCO, on the other hand, has a more sophisticated definition of science. According to it, science endeavors "to recognize and control relationships of causality" and "to benefit from the understanding of processes and phenomena occurring in nature and society"--for the welfare of humankind.<sup>1</sup> Science, then, is anything but a purposeless activity. Rather, it is a form within which human beings deal with objective reality in order to subject this reality to reason and to purposely employ it according to human needs. Science is here understood to be a form of useful human labor, a part of human beings' practical life activity. This understanding corresponds to that of Bert Brecht, who says in "Galilei" that the purpose of science is to "ease the drudgery of human existence."

The science of history is therefore concerned with events of the past mainly because we wish to appropriate the experience of earlier generations in order to learn how we can better manage our own current and future problems. Just as individuals can learn from previous life experience (although the events, of course, never repeat themselves in exactly the same manner), so humankind can learn from the experience of its history. History is not only of interest because of its practical value in

mastering concrete problems. It is of value also because--and this is closely related to what has just been said--it allows us to appropriate the results of previous generations' creative activity (for example, in literature and architecture and in the production of tools and scientific theories) in order to enrich our mental and spiritual existence and to stimulate our own creative potential. However, the practical reason for engaging in the science of history is certainly more important.

On account of its potential and real consequences for humanity, fascism, in particular, requires urgent scientific examination. In the areas of terror and mass annihilation, it has developed a potency hitherto unknown in human history. Furthermore, it has enmeshed the world in a war in which 50 million people lost their lives, 30 million emerged as cripples, and in which--particularly in Europe--large areas were left with little but ruins. Although in the summer of 1945 the major fascist powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) were crushed by the common effort of peoples of the world, fascism as a possibility and threat has not been defeated once and for all. Fascist tendencies exist in almost all developed capitalist states and threaten to become stronger and more aggressive especially during periods of crises. And in areas peripheral to the capitalist world, parliamentary-democratic systems have been liquidated by radically anti-democratic forces and replaced with dictatorial terror systems in a number of countries (Greece 1967, Chile 1973, Argentina 1975-76, Turkey 1980, and other countries in Latin America and Southeast Asia). Admittedly, these forces and systems contain partial fascist elements. However, they can all be classified in that group of right-wing radically antidemocratic forces that were also responsible for the destruction of the Weimar Republic after 1930. It is, therefore, of pressing concern to closely investigate the problem of fascism. In doing so, however, it is insufficient to give only a factual account of events. This would be a prescientific mode of analysis that would not correspond to the UNESCO definition of science, since it would not be concerned with relationships of causality and would not attempt to determine the conditions that could have led to the success of fascism. Given the frightening potential for destruction that has been concentrated in today's military technology, the prevention of such systems of domination has become a matter of survival for the whole of humanity.

German fascism was that form of fascist domination which to date has brought about the greatest amount of terrorist potency and mass annihilation. This investigation is concerned with its causes and perpetuating forces. This study can only be sketchy and it will therefore only be possible to refer to a limited amount of empirical material. It must, however, be pointed out, that there exists a huge amount of available documentary evidence and that, on the basis of this material, fundamental questions can be answered clearly and conclusively.<sup>2</sup> (The truth, unfortunately, does not penetrate society easily, for the forces

which supported and carried out German fascism have done everything possible to prevent the discovery of its real connections. These forces have promoted instead the dissemination of a host of myths; and since they were again very influential during the cold war, they had considerable success in doing so).

In combination, there were a number of factors that made German fascism victorious. Three factors, however, were of particular importance:

1. the behavior of the ruling strata of big business, military and the bureaucracy
2. the growth of the fascist movement, and
3. the failure on the part of anti-fascist forces.

In the following sections, only the first two factors will be dealt with in some detail, since they were of primary importance in the active promotion of the fascisation process.

#### THE RULING CLASS

Research on fascism has established a far-reaching consensus that fascism in Germany or elsewhere could not seize political power on its own.<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, it depended on the support of the leadership strata from industry, banking, the military, and the state bureaucracy, that is, from the forces known as "social elites" or "societal leadership strata" (by bourgeois historians and social scientists) or as the "ruling class" by Marxist scholars.<sup>4</sup> The decisive role of these forces in establishing the fascist dictatorship, as well as in the planning and execution of its policies, was well demonstrated as early as the international military tribunal of 1945-46. And because of the role these forces played, leading representatives of the economy and the military, in addition to leaders of the fascist party, were accused of war crimes. Research which has been done since has repeatedly confirmed this judgment.<sup>5</sup> The question must therefore be asked as to what goals and interests determined the behavior of the ruling class and how did they assert themselves?

It is important to note that the behavior of the German ruling class, although different from other European ruling classes in some important respects, nevertheless reflected tendencies that generally characterized capitalistic countries during this period. By the second half of the nineteenth century, capitalism in the advanced countries had become powerful enough so that it began to burst national boundaries in order to conquer new markets and areas with natural resources and to find new spheres for investment and cheap labor. To realize this expansion, the state made its political and military means available. This

increased international capitalist competition, this transition to an imperialist strategy, quickly lead to a partitioning of the world, particularly in Africa and Asia, which had not yet been colonially occupied. Ideologically, the transition to imperialism was also reflected in the emergence of racist ideologies and their proliferation among the masses. These ideologies distinguished between superior and inferior races, thereby reducing the capitalist countries' domination over colored peoples to nature's will.

In comparison with the general development of capitalist countries, the German Reich had two characteristics that in combination have generally come to be known as the "extreme aggressiveness of German imperialism." This aggressiveness found its expression in the monumental plans for conquest implemented during the First and Second World Wars.

The first characteristic consisted of the fact that, in contrast to other advanced countries, German capitalistic development was delayed. This was mainly the case because Germany--as Italy--became economically peripheral after America and the seaway to India were discovered, resulting in a shift to overseas trade and stagnation in the development of German cities and the German bourgeoisie. The delayed capitalist development was also caused by the fact that the large feudal landlords' power remained unbroken as the revolt of peasants and plebeian city dwellers was crushed in 1525-29. Lastly, the delay was due to the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which mainly took place on German territory, decimating the population by one-third, causing tremendous destruction, and thus throwing the country far back economically. The peace treaty resulted in splintering Germany into some two thousand "independent" political units, further hindering economic development.<sup>6</sup>

Only in the course of the nineteenth century, particularly after 1871 when a unified Reich (Reichseinheit) was created, could the country catch up and could capitalism fully develop. It soon became apparent that huge resources were available, which made rapid development possible. By the end of the nineteenth century, the German Reich was leading Europe in industrial production. At this point, however, German capitalism's expansion began to encounter stubborn barriers, since the imperialistic partitioning of the world had already taken place. German capitalism's main problem was the discrepancy between a strong potential and drive for expansion on the one hand and the lack of real possibilities for expansion on the other hand. The data in Table 6.1 illustrates this tension.<sup>7</sup>

Table 6.1

Population, Industrial Output, and Distribution of Colonial Lands

Population (in millions)

	Germany	Britain	France
1870	41	31	37
1910	65	45	40

Share of the World's Industrial Output (in percentages)

	Germany	Britain	France
1870	13	32	10
1913	16	14	6

The Distribution of Colonial Lands in 1914

	Area (million km <sup>2</sup> )	Inhabitants (millions)
Germany	2.9	12.3
France	10.6	55.5
Britain	33.5	393.5

Because of this discrepancy, German capitalism developed its demand for a new partitioning of the world, which it was also willing to realize with force. The difference between the German Reich and other capitalistic states, then, was not between being imperialistic or peace loving, but between being disadvantaged, hungry, and bent on change (and therefore being aggressive) on the one hand, and being relatively saturated (and therefore defensive) and bent on maintaining the status quo on the other. This aggressiveness of German imperialism was the main structural cause of the First World War. And the Second World War was essentially a new attempt with even more effective means (and in alliance with other similarly disadvantaged imperialistic powers like Italy and Japan) to realize a new partitioning of the world, even if the first attempt had failed in 1918.

The second characteristic of the German Reich consisted in the fact that the bourgeois revolution was not victorious and that its ideas of enlightenment and human rights did not get realized. That the revolution did not take place was due to the economic backwardness described above, as a result of which the bourgeoisie remained politically weak. The large landholders' social power and the political power of the authoritarian ruler-state remained unbroken until the beginning of the twentieth century. (Thus it also sustained the ideological dominance of the Prussian

military caste, its codex of virtues--discipline, duty, obedience and authority, which finally was also accepted by the bourgeoisie.) The bourgeoisie renounced its political ideals of freedom and tolerance in favor of great economic advantages, which it was granted by the emperor and his state. These included a standardized economic realm after the creation of a unified Reich (Reichseinheit) in 1871, the political and military support for its expansionary goals, and the suppression of its main enemy--the worker movement--which grew rapidly in the 1860s and threatened not only the maximization of profit but also bourgeois property relations.

As a result of this uninterrupted tradition of the ruler-state and of Prussian militarism, the transition to an imperialist policy and ideology could occur with relative ease and could assume particularly vicious forms.<sup>3</sup> German capitalism's unique position and direction of expansion implied, however, that other European people had to be defined as inferior in relation to the German master race. This was especially true for the Slavic peoples who inhabited the Eastern sphere--the main direction of the expansionary thrust--and who were defined as "subhuman." In moderated form, this applied also to West European peoples, who were competitors in the fight for domination in Europe. They were thus defined as traders (in comparison to German "heroes") and as "petty merchants" (in comparison to German "warriors"). All this took place before 1913, that is, long before the rise of fascism. Social and natural scientists (particularly those writing in the social Darwinist tradition) and writers (such as Nietzsche) supplied the theoretical legitimation for this tendency.

The radical form of the master-race ideology and the extremely brutal way in which it was politically realized in the First World War, and even more obviously in the Second World War was, of course, also tied to the tremendous importance given to the conquering of non-German territories. If the goal was to suppress all peoples from eastern France to deep into Russia (First World War) and even from the Atlantic to the Urals (Second World War)--and in the case of the Slavic peoples to transform them into work-slaves for the German economy--no means other than those ranging from the most extreme brutality to mass annihilation could realize the stated goal. Only these means were "adequate."

From this position, the ruling class systematically pursued two main goals--although with different means, depending on the circumstances given--from the Kaiserreich through the Weimar Republic to the fascist rule. Domestically, it worked to solidify or re-establish an authoritarian form of domination in order to guarantee capitalist private property relations and the expansionary power of capital and to hold back those political forces that pushed for a democratization of society and hindered the pursuit of the conquest policy. Externally, it worked to

prepare and to realize the above-mentioned expansionary policy, which required the concentration of all economic, political, and ideological resources for military and war purposes.

The first attempt to realize this policy failed in November 1918 when the German Reich was defeated and the ruling class simultaneously lost the emperor and his state apparatus as its instrument of power. During the November revolution, the worker movement succeeded in toppling the Prussian military monarchy and replaced it with a parliamentary-democratic state. However, it did not succeed in appropriating the ruling class's basis of power. The economy, the life-blood of the whole society, remained just as much in the hands of the ruling class as did the military, the judicial system, the bureaucracies, and a significant portion of the ideological power apparatus, ranging from the press to the universities and churches.<sup>9</sup>

Because of this, the imperialist forces, although weakened by the military defeat and the November revolution, had not lost the source of their power. After a defensive phase, during which social and political concessions had to be made to the worker movement, and after a consolidation of economic, political, ideological, and military power was accomplished, they remained strong enough to pursue the two goals already established before 1918. These goals consisted in undermining and reducing the social and democratic rights instituted in 1918 and in moving toward an authoritarian state, as well as in commencing a renewed expansionist policy. The latter was perceived to be particularly necessary since, after the mid-1920s, German capitalism was again confronted with the same dilemma it faced before World War I and which was then a major cause of its extreme aggressiveness. Again, the dilemma consisted in German capitalism's enormous potential for expansion--it had once more become Europe's leading industrial producer--and the very limited real possibilities for expansion, which had become even more limited as a result of the loss of colonies and the conditions imposed by the Versailles treaty.

An investigation of the documentary material shows that, after 1918, decisive segments of big business and big banking, the military, large landowners, and leading civil servants had always aimed for the realization of both goals. They were neither willing to accept the military defeat nor the parliamentary democratic form of government, particularly not with the democratic and social rights guaranteed to the working class. Differences between the various factions were mainly limited to strategy and method. Until 1929, the differences turned around the question of whether or not the democratic constitution should be abolished in one sweep (which after the Kapp Putsch of 1920 found only a minority of supporters) or through "legal ways," ("Reichsreform" a slow undermining of the constitution). A further point of contention was whether or not the worker movement should be suppressed with open means of terror (a strategy favored by a



majority of new industries, including firms in the chemical and electrical sector) or integrated with certain social concessions while suppressing only radical (revolutionary) segments of the working class. As to foreign policy, the differences concerned the extent to which the shackles of the Versailles treaty--which inhibited expansion--could be thrown off by negotiations with Western powers in combination with illegal rearmament or whether freedom from the Versailles limitations could only be achieved by open confrontation.

Once the Great Depression of 1929 had set in, there soon was an understanding that parliamentary democracy would have to go and be replaced by a more effective, authoritarian system. Several factors favored such a development. First, the bourgeois parties of the center and the moderate right--through whose help the ruling class had hitherto been able to realize its interests in parliament and the government--lost the great bulk of its supporters and the votes received by these parties fell from 40 million to 10 million from 1929-1932. Thus, it was extremely urgent and necessary that the ruling class realize its long-held plans to establish a firm domination, which was no longer dependent on elections and parliamentary majorities. Second, the depression limited the number of social concessions that could be made to the working population and induced capital to impose the burden of the crisis on the masses (through lowering real wages and social expenditures) in order to maintain capital's international capacity to invest, expand, and compete. Because of these developments, a dominating force was necessary, which could assert itself even against the needs and demands of the masses. Third, the crisis represented an opportunity to actively exploit the fears and uncertainties of the population by denouncing parliamentary democracy as weak and unfit to solve complicated problems and by propagating the strong state as the solution to present difficulties. As a consequence, a whole set of dictatorship notions were developed and entertained. They aimed not only at burdening the population with the crisis in the short run (and preparing the political ground for doing so), but at finding the proper form of government capable of also meeting the imperialist, expansionist, long-term interests. In its internal debates, the ruling class was now only concerned with the form the authoritarian state should take and with the extent to which repression against the left was necessary. The majority, particularly firms in the chemical and electrical sectors, were in favor of an authoritarian presidential regime like the one which was in power from 1930 to January 1933. This regime based itself primarily on the state power apparatus and the emergency powers of the president and was relatively independent of elections, parties, and parliamentary majorities. However, it left parliamentary forms and procedures intact insofar as all parties and unions could voice their opinions and had opportunities for mobilization. On the other hand, strong forces located in heavy industry and among large landowners pushed for a radical change in the form of government, for an open dictatorship, and for a



complete suppression of the democratic and socialist forces. Since the military coup of 1920 showed that an isolated military intervention without mass support was of little promise (the coup was defeated by a general strike), the problem of obtaining the necessary mass support assumed decisive importance. In this regard, several dictatorship models were developed of which the Schleicher government at the end of 1932<sup>10</sup> (involving an alliance of defense associations from the nationalist Stahlhelm to the fascist SA and the right wing of the unions and the SPD) and that of the 1933 Hitler government were the most important. In discussions among big business and the military (as well as among the producers of ideology in right-wing mass media and theoreticians of state law), fascist Italy (which assumed power in 1922) served as a role model. However, the final decision opting for the Hitler dictatorship model was only made after all other models had proven to be insufficient or unrealizable. The presidential regime proved to be inadequate because it could neither solve the economic crisis nor prevent the left from engaging in a class struggle; because it could neither acquire a basis in mass support nor create the necessary preconditions for a new expansionary policy. After facing the Great Depression, the breakdown of world trade, and the growing protectionism of various countries that increased tariffs and introduced import barriers, an expansionary policy became particularly important. However, a military dictatorship and the Schleicher government plan for mass support also proved to be unrealizable (because in the final analysis the unions, SPD, and NSDAP could not be split).

After the election results of November 6, 1932--the last free elections held during the Weimar Republic--agreement among the various factions came about more quickly. First, it was evident that the bourgeois parties that carried the Papen presidential regime remained without mass basis (despite big business's strong financial support). Second, the anticapitalist tendencies in the country increased again (the KPD's vote increased from 14.6 percent to 16.9 percent and was now almost as strong as the SPD, which carried 20.4 percent of the votes). Third, the NSDAP had peaked and was on the decline (it lost 2 million votes; its share dropped from 37.4 percent to 33.1 percent). As a result, the ruling class feared that its last dictatorship model, based on the Nazi party, might become unrealizable. The Nazi party, therefore, had to be quickly brought to power in order to stabilize it and its power base and in order to create an accomplished fact. Von Schroeder, the banker in whose house the decisive negotiations with Hitler took place in January 1933, spoke to this issue when he was called as witness by the U.S. accusatory body in 1945: "When the NSDAP suffered its first defeat on November 6, 1932, the German economy's support was particularly urgent."<sup>11</sup> In this way, the dictatorship model, which since 1929-30 had been favored by only a minority of factions, came to be realized in January 1933. The Hitler model provided the following key advantages: First, on the key questions of the destruction of democracy and the worker movement,

establishing a dictatorship, and embarking on an expansionary foreign policy, the party's leadership fully agreed with the ruling class. Second, the Nazi leadership had proven itself capable of gaining mass support for such policies--a capability that big business and the military did not have and which the right-wing bourgeois parties had lost in the course of the Great Depression.

#### THE FASCIST MASS MOVEMENT

It is clear from what has been said thus far that the rise and victory of fascism cannot be understood to be the result of an autonomous movement as has been proposed over and over by many adherents of "middle class theories" (Mittelstandstheorien).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the strength of the fascist movement was of great importance in liquidating democracy. It is therefore necessary to investigate the causes and initiatives that led to this movement's success.

Immediately after World War I, fascist movements arose in several countries. They mobilized parts of those groups that became fanatic adherents to nationalist and militarist ideologies during the war and those who, as a result of the war, had become derailed in their professional and civil life. The war's brutality had turned them into uncivilized, crude (verroht) individuals whose integration into society was made even more difficult in the post-war crisis. They were often members of armed groups such as free-corps citizen defense leagues and defense associations. These groups were generally used by the ruling class to terrorize and destroy the revolutionary worker movement, which, encouraged by the victorious Russian October revolution, had mushroomed in many countries after the war. In Italy, this development led to the creation of a fascist dictatorship in 1922. In Germany, it led to a considerable increase of support for the NSDAP and similar groups as well as to coup attempts in 1920 and 1923 in which parts of the Reichswehr and its leadership were implicated (in preparations, mutinies, and in refusing to oppose the groups involved in the coups). In 1923 the same Reichswehr, however, destroyed the last attempts by the left to overcome capitalism and to fight for a socialist social order. In Hamburg it fought against the communist uprising, and in Saxony and Thuringia it liquidated the legally formed worker government. With the help of such acts, the bourgeois republic was stabilized. These events, together with the beginning of economic stabilization in 1924 (with the help of U.S. dollar loans) alleviated reasons to join fascist and radical right-wing groups. The ruling class also found fewer reasons to support and employ such movements; as a result, they lost significant political strength and importance.

With the coming of the Great Depression in 1929, a fundamental change took place. Mass unemployment and wage cuts threw significant portions of the non-self-employed work force into

social misery (in 1932, only 33 percent were still fully employed, over 44 percent were unemployed, and over 22 percent were on a shortened work week), and the proletarianization of the self-employed increased. People were gripped by fear and uncertainty; they lost their confidence in parties that sat in parliament and obviously had no solution and in parliamentary democracy, which obviously proved incapable of putting an end to misery. With increased intensity, they searched for a way out, for a real alternative. The forces on the political stage began to move. Within four years, the bourgeois parties of the center and the right lost almost three-fourths of its voters. At the same time, the NSDAP grew from a splinter party (2.6 percent of the vote) to the strongest party (37.4 percent). Large changes occurred also within the worker movement. The SPD lost almost one-third of its voters to the KPD, which almost reached the size of the SPD. Table 6.2 illustrates the changes between 1923 and 1932.<sup>13</sup>

Table 6.2  
Changes in Voting Patterns from 1923 to 1932

	1928		July 1932	
	<u>Million</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Million</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Worker parties				
SPD and KPD	12.4	40.4	13.24	36.2
Bourgeois parties of the center and the right	11.9	38.7	3.53	9.6
Catholic parties				
Center party and Bavarian People's party	4.7	15.2	5.8	15.7

The origin of the mass support now concentrated in the fascist party can easily be discerned. It came mainly from those who had abandoned the bourgeois parties and from those who had hitherto not taken part in elections but who were activated by the crisis. (Voter participation increased from 75 percent in 1923 to 82 percent in July 1932.) The worker parties not only did not lose any supporters during this time, they actually gained almost one million votes. This indicates, as has been shown by

historical investigations, that NSDAP voters came from the Mittelschicht (small merchants, craftsmen, farmers) and from those non-self-employed who--based on their origin, the type of work, and privileges that they had, as opposed to the workers--considered themselves as part of the "Mittelstand." They, for the most part, were salaried white-collar employees and civil servants.<sup>14</sup> What drove these masses to the fascist party? Why did they particularly believe that the NSDAP would have the solution to their problems? In order to answer this question, it is important to consider the ideologies and propaganda that helped the Nazi party mobilize the masses. Essentially, the ideologies were the same as those that had been disseminated by German imperialism since the end of the nineteenth century in order to legitimize its expansion and the suppression of democracy and the labor movement at home and to mobilize for these goals large segments of the population, the Mittelschichten in particular. The ideologies included nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, militarism, authoritarianism, and--with the growth of the worker movement--anti-Marxism, coupled with promises of a "German socialism." It was precisely this mass consciousness, deeply engrained for decades (in 1913 first largely discredited, but, with the growing political and ideological power of the ruling class after the suppression of socialist endeavors, soon again massively disseminated), which was taken up by many radical right-wing, nationalist and völkisch groups that emerged after 1913 and of which the NSDAP was the most successful.<sup>15</sup>

The NSDAP's success was not due to its ideological tenets (as compared to other nationalist, right-wing, conservative, and militantly anti-communist competitors), but due to the ways in which they were propagated. In contrast to other competitors, these ideas were not propagated through elitist and self-affirming honorary circles, appeals to top leadership circles, and a demonstrated disgust for the masses (as was customary with most right-wing conservative forces from the Herrenklub to the Tatkreis) but by taking over the methods of mass mobilization (such as mass parades and mass gatherings), which had proved successful in the worker movement. By presenting itself as the party of the "small man," as anti-bourgeois and even "revolutionary," and through its extreme simplification and vulgarization of traditional right-wing conservative ideology, and its aggressive posture, the organized terror that the NSDAP displayed in meeting halls and street battles conveyed to its supporters a sense of power and ability to assert itself.

The NSDAP built its agitation essentially around four ideological complexes on the basis of which it promised the desperately searching masses a brighter future:

1. The "annihilation of Marxism," the NSDAP announced, was absolutely essential to enable Germany to recover and rise to its former stature. Under "annihilation of the Marxist pest," it

meant the destruction of the ideas and organization of the worker movement. Based on the thesis, propagated for decades by the dominant ideology, that the Marxist workers' movement was composed of enemies of the state and the people and was controlled by rabble rousers, that is, destructive elements, it concluded that these elements were to be annihilated without hesitation. This thesis appealed to entrepreneurs and small, labor-intensive businesses. For entrepreneurs, the organization of wage and salaried employees represented an increase in costs which meant that--especially during the crisis--big capital's international competitiveness was persistently threatened. For small businesses, the workers' movement represented a direct threat to their social existence. Although the latter's real problems mainly originated in the overwhelming economic power of big capital, in their consciousness, however, the culprits were those who demanded higher wages, better welfare provisions for the workers and white-collar employees and who, in general, demanded the abolition of an economy based on private property, which also was the small entrepreneur's basis of social existence. In addition, the thesis that Marxism must be annihilated appealed to those who, fooled by the nationalist demagoguery propagated since the Kaiserreich, had experienced the First World War as Germany's wrestling for a "place in the sun," who therefore considered the November revolution as a crime against the German people, and who believed the worker movement to be responsible for the November crimes "and the resulting downfall of Germany."

2. The second ideological complex, the "disgrace of Versailles," combined well with the first. Germany would have a secure future only when the "disgrace of Versailles" was eliminated, the shackles of the Versailles treaty thrown off, the political and military discrimination of Germany eliminated, and its leading role guaranteed, to which it was entitled on account of its economic output, population size, and racial quality. The existing social misery was not believed to have been caused by the social system but by the actions of other countries taking advantage of Germany. The solution to the survival problems of those people affected by the Great Depression was therefore not seen to lie in a change of the domestic social system but in the struggle of the "whole German people" against the foreign enemy and finally in the conquest of new "living space," new resource areas, markets for goods, and labor power. This conquest was to be at the expense of other countries; in short, it was suggested that imperialism was the key to solving domestic social problems.

These ideological complexes drew on a tradition of thought pursued by German imperialism up to 1918 and were, despite the defeat of 1918, still seen to be a long-range goal. Although the fascist party justified this goal more heavily from a racist point of view, the substance of the imperialist ideology behind it remained unchanged. In this manner, fascist agitation drew

upon the fears and hopes of those masses touched by the crisis, and by distracting from the crisis's real causes, it lessened the chances for social protest, while channelling the masses in a direction corresponding to the ruling class's expansionary goals.

3. Fascist agitation proposed in its third ideological complex that the saving of Germany necessitated a strong state; a dictatorship that would cleanse the nation of its rabble rousers and the "Marxist pest" and that would be in a position to firmly engage in power politics abroad. Democracy was said to be slow moving, incapable of acting, and unnatural, because it did not distinguish between talents and achievement differences among people and could not solve the great problems relating to the securing of the future. This part of the fascist solution also corresponded to the interests of imperialist forces. In addition, it drew upon Germany's long-standing authoritarian tradition and on the particularly Mittelschicht view that rescue must come from the top and that, especially in times of crisis, only a strong state authority is capable of providing security.

4. All the fascist ideological complexes discussed thus far saw the solution to pressing social problems in a Germany of world-power status. The realization of these promises and predictions lay in the distant future. Creating the precondition for their realization, however, was an immediate domestic task. It involved the creation of a dictatorship and the smashing of democracy and the worker movement, without, however, offering any direct tangible social improvements. Anticapitalism and anti-Semitism served as the ideological complex designed to raise hopes--as well as to compensate for other weaknesses--that fascism would bring about immediate improvements. Anticapitalism and anti-Semitism, although of quite different origin, were thus closely connected functionally.

Fascism's anticapitalism--presenting itself also as German socialism or national socialism--was proof that the idea of socialism attracted the masses and that, particularly after 1913 and again during the Great Depression, significant segments of the Mittelschichten were also influenced by it. The desire for a fundamental change, for a real alternative to the status quo, through which one's own pressing existential problems could be solved, was very widespread. The fascist party, therefore, presented itself as the radical alternative in comparison to the established Reichstag parties, which were all seen to be impotent. However, the fascist party did not only give the impression that it would radically change the existing situation and create something totally new. It gave its sympathizers concrete hopes of being able to recover economically at the expense of the hitherto privileged, big bosses, the "fat bourgeoisie." The small entrepreneurs were led to believe that their social position



would become secured at the expense of big business and that they would be freed from debts and high interest rates. Unemployed white-collar employees (Angestellte) and the mass of SA supporters were attracted by promises that, at the expense of well-situated employees, they would receive secure government positions (as employees or soldiers). These expectations--coupled with the vague idea of Volksgemeinschaft (sharing unity of the people), in which all were to overcome the domestic and foreign enemy in solidarity--constituted national socialism and not, as one might think, the demand for abolishing private ownership of the means of production.<sup>16</sup>

Hopes for "average people's" socioeconomic security at the expense of the hitherto privileged, however, were of potential danger for the rulers, particularly since some segments of the party's following and functionaries took the anticapitalist dimension quite seriously. Therefore, the party had to do something if it was not to risk losing big business's and the military's confidence. The most effective solution was to direct anticapitalist sentiments toward Jews, who were made the symbol of capitalist exploitation. The distinction between Jewish "amassing" capital and German "productive" capital eliminated all fascist anticapitalist elements that could have irritated the ruling class. Already in 1923, point 17 of the 1920 program planning the "collectivization of land for common purposes without compensation" was supplemented with the following: "Since the NSDAP was in agreement with the private ownership of the means of production, it is selfunderstood" that the concern here was with "land which was acquired illegally or which was not used for the welfare of the people. . . . This concerns primarily the Jewish firms speculating in land."<sup>17</sup> In the summer of 1930, the elimination from the party of the circle around Otto Strasser took place. It had resisted this Nazi trend on various points.<sup>18</sup> With some supporters and functionaries, the anticapitalist hopes persisted. After 1933, they threatened to forcefully split the party (they were a Sprengkraft) and were therefore silenced through a mass murder of the SA leadership, called the Röhm affair, in the summer of 1934.<sup>19</sup>

Anticapitalism was thereby made harmless by reducing it to anti-Semitism. This, however, was not the sole function of anti-Semitism. It created--based on experience--scapegoats and diverted social dissatisfaction toward Jews and away from its real causes. The creation of scapegoats and the possibility of not having to articulate one's real aggressions but being able to release them instead in concrete action are common characteristics of all reactionary and fascist forces. Which religious, ethnic, or national minorities are to be treated thusly depends upon the concrete conditions in a particular country. The groups can vary from nonwhites to foreign workers, to others. In Germany, anti-Semitism could take on this function because it had been deeply entrenched in mass consciousness and



had already been used under the emperor to divert social dissatisfaction. In addition, special economic groups saw a certain advantage for themselves in eliminating Jewish competitors, particularly in petty commerce, professions such as medicine and law, and in academia. Without any doubt, there is a connection between this self-interest and the disproportionately high number among these professionals who supported fascism.

Certainly, fascist ideology contains a variety of gaps and contradictions. However, an internal unity cannot be disputed. Particularly, the systematically used biological paradigm of the world and of human beings--which legitimized the economic, political, and domestic domination of a minority and the subjugation and plundering of other peoples--formed a kind of common thread throughout all of the ideological complexes. That the combination of these ideological complexes had such an enormous appeal, turning the NSDAP from the 1923 splinter group into the strongest German party in 1932, can, however, only be explained in conjunction with the prevailing general conditions. They consisted in the fact that all ideological complexes had been developed for decades, had been used to legitimize imperialistic policies under the emperor, and had been propagated again soon after 1918. Therefore, when the Great Depression set in and the desperate and fearful population was searching for a solution, the ground had already been prepared, since these tenets were deeply engrained in mass consciousness. Secondly, it must be mentioned that the fascist party, in its agitation and even in its terrorist activities against the left, was hardly hindered and often was protected and encouraged. Antifascist activities, on the other hand, were often blocked and punished. In cases of conflicts between fascist groups and organizations of the worker movement, police and the judicial system generally punished communists, social democrats, and labor union members, leaving the fascists untouched. This induced a strong feeling of power and readiness to use terror among fascist supporters. Both conditions favoring fascism structurally were the result of the failure in 1918 to expell the ruling class from its instrumental positions in the realm of economic and political power (the judicial system, the civil service apparatus, the military, and the police), so that soon it solidified its ideological power again.

A third condition favoring fascism consisted in the weakness of antifascist forces. The masses, who desperately searched for a solution during the Great Depression, were--despite the conditions advantageous to fascism just described--not pre-disposed toward fascism. The outcome of their search depended significantly on the democratic forces' (particularly those of the worker movement) success in developing a convincing alternative and presenting themselves as a force that was determined to fight for a solution to their problems. As is commonly known, the left failed because neither the communists nor the social

democrats really had an adequate analysis of the depression from which a political strategy could be developed. However, it mainly failed because the worker movement remained split, even in the face of the rising fascist threat. In order to show the causes of this failure, it would be necessary to investigate the history of the German worker movement since the Kaiserreich, which cannot be done here.<sup>20</sup> However, reference should be made to the documents in which both branches of the worker movement analyzed the mistakes and reasons for their defeat. In particular, they are the documents of the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International of 1935 and the Prague Manifesto of the Social Democratic Emigration Council of 1934. In both documents, the worker parties arrived at a fairly realistic analysis of the causes of their defeat.

The worker movement realized the practical consequences of the devastating defeat of 1933 in the spring of 1934 in France and in 1936 in Spain. Common action contained the fascist onslaught in France and in Spain; it would no doubt have defeated France's coup, had it not been for the powerful military intervention on the part of the German and Italian fascist superpowers--favored by the Western powers' declared "neutrality." Finally, the consequences were drawn in the European people's fight against fascist domination during the Second World War which, from Greece to France and from Italy to Yugoslavia, was largely based on the idea of a people's alliance. It follows that the ruling class on the one hand and the fascist movement on the other can be determined as the main forces which purposefully worked toward the liquidation of democracy and which had actively promoted the fascisization process. Politically, however, they became allied only little by little. Although Hitler had aimed at an alliance with the established elites since the refounding of the NSDAP and offered his services to big business over and over<sup>21</sup> in regard to battling Marxism and facilitating the resurrection of Germany, he initially encountered little interest and received little financial support.<sup>22</sup> This changed when the Great Depression set in; when the masses deserted the bourgeois parties; when the NSDAP proved itself capable of gathering the fearful and desperate and began to use them in its terror against the left; and when the urge in the ruling class was to move to authoritarian methods of domination. The ruling-class faction that favored an alliance with the fascist party grew rapidly and became dominant when, at the end of 1932, the other dictatorship models proved to be insufficient or unrealizable. From then on, all significant factions of the ruling class favored the transferral of political power to the leader of the NSDAP. The alliance which was then formed remained fundamental to the structure of domination and the policy of German fascism until its breakdown. It was based on the common interests and goals of the ruling class on the one hand and of the fascist leadership on the other: The destruction of democracy and the worker movement at home and the realization of a new

expansionary policy by rearming with the goal of going to war against foreign countries. As early as February 2 and 20, 1933, the outlines of the program were drawn up in conferences with military and business leaders.<sup>23</sup> Systematically, and using the utmost brutality, the program was realized: The worker movement was smashed and its functionaries jailed, tortured, and murdered by the tens of thousands. (The concentration camps were built for jailed members of the worker movement. Only later, after the beginning of World War II, did Jews increasingly become the main victims of fascist terror.)<sup>24</sup> In the workplace, the dictatorship of capital was again fully restored: The entrepreneur was named the "leader of the workplace," workers and white-collar employees were deprived of all possibilities to articulate their interests, and every move to the contrary was punished as a crime against the state. The almost one-hundred-year-old struggle of the worker movement was liquidated. Fascism realized what it had announced: The extermination of Marxism, the securing of peace at the workplace, the elimination of the class struggle, the creation of a shared unity of the people (Volksgemeinschaft; and with power, political preconditions were established in order to concentrate all efforts toward re-armament and war). This manner of shaping society and the relations between classes is the substance and essential meaning of fascist domination. It has been the method used by all regimes of fascist or similar nature--from Italy to Germany, from Portugal to Spain, from Austria (1934) to Greece (1967) and Chile (1973). Given fascist domination, it is obvious who the victims are. However, it is equally clear who the beneficiaries are.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "Empfehlungen zur Stellung der Wissenschaftlichen Forscher," Eighteenth General Conference of UNESCO, November 23, 1974.
- <sup>2</sup> In addition to the forty-two volumes of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) see also Reinhard Kühnl, Der deutsche Faschismus in Quellen und Dokumenten (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1975); D. Eichholtz and W. Schumann, eds., Anatomie des Krieges: Neue Dokumente über die Rolle des deutschen Monopolkapitals bei der Vorbereitung und Durchführung des zweiten Weltkrieges (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1969); Gerhart Hass and W. Schumann, eds., Anatomie der Aggression: Neue Dokumente zu den Kriegszielen des Faschistischen deutschen Imperialismus im zweiten Weltkrieg (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1972); Wolfgang Schumann and Ludwig Nestler, eds., Weltherrschaft im Visier: Dokumente zu den Europa- und Weltherrschaftsplänen des deutschen Imperialismus von der Jahrhundertwende bis Mai 1945 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1975); Wolfgang Schumann, ed., Griff nach Südosteuropa: Neue Dokumente über die Politik des deutschen Imperialismus und Militarismus gegenüber Südosteuropa im zweiten Weltkrieg (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1973); Reinhard Opitz, ed., Europastrategie des deutschen Kapitals: 1900-1945 (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1977); and Ulrike Hörster-Philipps, ed., Wer war Hitler Wirklich?: Grosskapital und Faschismus, 1913-1945 (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1973).
- <sup>3</sup> The sources are cited in Reinhard Kühnl, Faschismustheorien: Ein Leitfaden (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979), p. 163 ff.
- <sup>4</sup> The differences between these concepts cannot be discussed here. Of course, they are not identical in content since they entail different theoretical perspectives.

<sup>5</sup> For general discussions, see Fritz Fischer, Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914-1918 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1960); Fritz Fischer, Bündnis der Eliten: Zur Kontinuität der Machtstrukturen in Deutschland 1871-1945 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1979); Karl Dietrich Bracher, Die deutsche Diktatur: Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus (Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1976); Wolfgang Ruge, Deutschland von 1917 bis 1933 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1974); and Hans Mommsen et al, eds., Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1974). For a discussion of big industry and banking, see Kurt Gossweiler, Grossbanken, Industriemonopole, Staat: Ökonomie und Politik des staatsmonopolistischen Kapitalismus in Deutschland 1914-1932 (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1971); Bernd Weisbrod, Schwerindustrie in der Weimarer Republik: Interessenpolitik zwischen Stabilisierung und Krise (Wuppertal: P. Hammer, 1978); D. Stegmann, "Zum Verhältnis von Grossindustrie und Nationalsozialismus, 1930-1933," Archiv für Sozialgeschichte XIII, 1973; Georg Wolfgang Felix Hallgarten and U. J. Radkau, Deutsche Industrie und Politik von Bismark bis heute (Frankfurt A.M.: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1974); Joachim Radkau, "Industrie und Faschismus," Neue Politische Literatur, Heft 2, 1973; and Arthur Schweitzer, Big Business in the Third Reich (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964). For a discussion of the military, see Karl Nuss, Militär und Weideraufrüstung in der Weimarer Republik: Zur politischen Rolle und Entwicklung der Reichswehr (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1977); Francis Ludwig Carsten, Reichswehr und Politik, 1918-1933 (Köln: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1964); and Axel Schildt, Militär mit Massenbasis? Die Querfrontkonzeption der Reichswehrführung um General Schleicher am Ende der Weimarer Republik (Frankfurt: Campus, 1931). For a discussion of the judicial system, see Heinrich Hannover, Politische Justiz 1918-1933 (Frankfurt: Fischer Bücherei, 1966); and Ilse Staff, ed., Justiz im Dritten Reich (Frankfurt: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1973). For a discussion of bureaucracy, see Hans Mommsen, Beamtenum im Dritten Reich (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1966). In addition, see the bibliography in my book Faschismustheorien as well as my review of the literature in Reinhard Kühnl, "Neuere Ergebnisse und Tendenzen der Faschismusforschung" Politische Vierteljahresschrift, Heft 1 and 2, 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Among others, see also Hans Mottek, Wirtschaftsgeschichte Deutschlands, Vol. 1 (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1963), p. 238 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Reinhard Kühnl, Der Deutsche Faschismus in Quellen und Dokumenten (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1975), p. 22.

- 8 In regard to the ideological development, see Georg Lukács, Die Zerstörung der Vernunft (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962); and Walter Struve, Elites Against Democracy: Leadership Ideals in Bourgeois Political Thought in Germany, 1890-1933 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
- 9 All countries in which authoritarian systems of domination are debunked, without democratization penetrating to the social foundation and the instrumental positions of power, face this problem. For this reason, the democracies in the Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Spain and Portugal are more threatened by right-wing forces than is the case with democracies with a long-standing democratic-parliamentary tradition.
- 10 See also Axel Schildt, "Querfront"-Die politische Konzeption in der Reichswehrführung um General Kurt von Schleicher am Ende der Weimarer Republic (Frankfurt: Campus, 1931).
- 11 Sworn testimony of Freiherr Kurt von Schroeder given to the U.S. investigation committee. Citation given in Kühnl, Der deutsche Faschismus, p. 172 ff.
- 12 See also chapter entitled "Faschismus als Mittelstandsbewegung," in Kühnl Faschismustheorien p. 39 ff.
- 13 Data reflecting electoral developments during the Weimar Republic are available in Kühnl Der deutsche Faschismus, p. 34 ff.
- 14 See also Theodor Geiger, Die soziale Schichtung des deutschen Volkes (Stuttgart: Enke, 1932); A. Weber, Soziale Merkmale der NSDAP Wähler (Freiburg: University of Freiburg, Dissertation, 1969); Wolfgang Schieder, ed., Faschismus als soziale Bewegung (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1976); Jürgen Kocka, Angestellte zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977); and Heinrich August Winkler, Mittelstand, Demokratie und Nationalsozialismus (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1972).
- 15 Concerning the origins of fascist ideology see, in addition to Lukács, Joachim Petzold, Konservative Theoretiker des deutschen Faschismus: Jungkonservative Ideologen in der Weimarer Republik als geistige Wegbereiter (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1973); Klaus Fritzsche, Politische Romantik und Gegenrevolution: Fluchtwege in der Krise der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft: Das Beispiel des Tat-Kreises (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976); and Ulrike Hörster-Philipps, Konservative Politik in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik: Die Regierung Franz von Papen (Marburg: University of Marburg, Dissertation, 1980).

- 16 For more details, see Reinhard Kühnl, "Waren die deutschen Faschisten Sozialisten?" Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik, Heft 11, 1979.
- 17 Cited in Reinhard Kühnl, Der Deutsche Faschismus, p. 106 f.
- 18 See also Reinhard Kühnl, Die NS-Linke 1925-1930 (Meisenheim: A. Main, 1966).
- 19 See also Charles Bloch, Die SA und die Krise des NS-Regimes 1934 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970); and Arthur Schweitzer, Big Business in the Third Reich.
- 20 See also Georg Fulberth and Jürgen Harrer, Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie 1890-1933 (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974); and Barbel Hebel-Künze, SPD und Faschismus: Zur politischen und organisatorischen Entwicklung der SPD 1932-1935 (Frankfurt: Roderberg-Verlag, 1977).
- 21 See also Hitler's secret memo "Der Weg zum Wiederaufstieg," which he wrote in 1927 at the request of the industrialist Emil Kirdorf and sent to him with the request "to spread these ideas in your circles." The complete text can be found in Henry Ashby Turner, Faschismus und Kapitalismus in Deutschland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972), pp. 41-59. Excerpts can be found in Reinhard Kühnl, Der deutsche Faschismus, p. 116 ff.
- 22 Concerning the development of these contracts, see Kurt Gossweiler, "Hitler und das Kapital 1925-1928," Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik, Heft 7/8, 1973; and D. Stegemann, "Zum Verhältnis von Grossindustrie und Nationalsozialismus."
- 23 Concerning these meetings, see Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 2, 1954, p. 434 f; International Military Tribunal, vol. XXV, p. 42, ff; and Reinhard Kühnl, Der deutsche Faschismus, p. 200 ff. and 207 ff.
- 24 See the empirically sound treatment concerning the development of the persecution of the Jews as discussed in Kurt Pätzold, Faschismus, Rassenwahn, Judenverfolgung: Eine Studie zur politischen Strategie und Taktik des faschistischen deutschen Imperialismus, 1933-1935 (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1975); and Kurt Pätzold, "Von der Vertreibung zum Genozid," in Faschismusforschung: Positionen, Probleme, Polemik, ed. Dietrich Eichholtz and Kurt Gossweiler (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980), p. 181 ff.