Stormtroopers and Crisis in the Nazi Movement

Activism, ideology and dissolution

Thomas D. Grant

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Hitler's seizure of power in January 1933, in the eyes of some historians, was the culmination of an unstoppable march. Yet through the final months of the Weimar Republic, the Nazis were sliding ever deeper into trouble. In particular, the *Sturmabteilung* or SA – activist heart of the Nazi movement – was showing signs of breakage. The stormtroopers who filled its ranks, increasingly angered with party leadership, swerved from the party agenda, and fell to dispute and violence at odds with Hitler's cultivated image as herald of a "new order."

Stormtroopers and Crisis in the Nazi Movement casts fresh light on the crisis that beset Nazism during the final months of Germany's first republic. The book scrutinizes two sets of hitherto understudied records. SA morale reports in the US National Archives show what Nazi leaders themselves knew about their radical paramilitary wing. Police reports on the stormtroopers, from the former DDR state archive in Potsdam, show what Republican authorities knew.

This book will be of essential interest to advanced students and researchers of Modern European History, Modern German History and Nazism.

Thomas D. Grant is an international lawyer with interests in foreign policy, politics and history. He is a Fellow of Wolfson College and the Lauterpacht Research Centre for International Law at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *Recognition of States* (1999) and a forthcoming book on Chechnya.

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Abbreviations

CEH	*Central European History*
DDP	*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*
DNVP	*Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei*
DVFP	*Deutsche Völkisch Freiheits Partei*
DVP	*Deutsche Volkspartei*
DZa	*Deutsches Zentralarchiv, Potsdam*
HJ	*Hitler Jugend*
JCH	*Journal of Contemporary History*
JMH	*Journal of Modern History*
KPD	*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*
NA	National Archives, Washington, DC
NSDAP	*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*
RFB	*Roter Frontkämpferbund*
RMdI	*Reichs Ministerium des Innern*
SA	*Sturmabteilung*
SPD	*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*
SS	*Schutzstaffel*
USPD	*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*
VB	*Völkische Beobachter*
VfZ	*Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*

Preface

One way in which the historian may contribute to understanding of the past is to describe the circumstances decision-makers faced at pivotal moments. A clear picture of those circumstances helps to piece together the events that ensued. If we can learn from historical research what choices were available, as well as what choices were *perceived* to be available, we are also better equipped to assess the actions of individual human beings – and perhaps, if so inclined, to assign credit for beneficial developments or blame for disaster. The historian must address a pair of preliminary questions before beginning the descriptive exercise: whom among the millions of human beings in some way shaping a given course of events should the historian study? And what junctures in time merit that intensity of inspection reserved for our most profound, vital, or disturbing concerns?

Since it ended more than a half-century ago amidst the shattered remains of Berlin, the Third Reich has received exhaustive study and reflection. Historians have been joined in this by scholars of virtually every discipline, from sociologists and other obvious allies of the historian to representatives of more distant fields such as lawyers and medical doctors.[1] The general public, informed by media ranging from academic monographs to cinema and television, have also taken great interest in the subject. But the period immediately preceding the twelve-year disaster of National Socialist dictatorship, though occupying historians, does not engross other scholars or the wider public as have the events that followed. The orientation of general interest is not surprising. The Third Reich put the most culturally, technologically, and economically developed state of Europe at the command of a band of murderers. In furtherance of an ideology at odds with the better developments of the civilization from which it sprang, Hitler and his supporters caused the worst war in recorded history and perpetrated crimes against humanity of a scope and quality which, it is to be hoped, will never lose their capacity to shock and dismay. The Nazi seizure of power, however, deserves no less scrutiny than the events that followed.

Henry Ashby Turner, Jr. describes Berlin in January 1933 – the place and time at which Hitler became chancellor of Germany – as a pivot point in world history.[2] Not all scholars of human events agree. If the advent of the National Socialist regime is taken to have been inevitable, then the last thirty days of the first German republic deserve incidental treatment rather than meticulous study. Perhaps, as A.J.P. Taylor

did, the historian concerned about the Third Reich ought instead to focus on the abortive democratic revolution of 1848, or even on earlier phenomena, like the Teutonic Order or Protestant Reformation. Or, like historians of a Marxist perspective, perhaps one should focus on purported contradictions arising from the capitalist economic system. Where historians differ in placing scrutiny may have little to do, then, with which chapters of human affairs they judge to demand explanation or thought. Few disagree that the Third Reich demands both. Their differences often seem rather to depend on which antecedent moments the historians judge to mark turning points beyond which a particular series of events could not have ended but the way it did. Conceptions of inevitability guide inquiry into the past.

Assuming a certain consensus as to which episodes are key, the locus of historians' debate is identifying the antecedents that set events irreversibly down the path to a particular episode. Various features of the German past, many long before Hitler, conspired to make Nazism and the seizure of power possible. Nonetheless, Hitler's assumption of the chancellorship on January 30, 1933 brought the world a radical step closer to the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust. To be sure, even after 1933 opportunities presented themselves to circumscribe the crimes Nazism was perpetrating. The well-known history of appeasement testifies to this. The advent of a Nazi State must nonetheless be recorded as an unhappy milestone, beyond which the impediments facing Hitler in the implementation of his hateful vision were fewer and the means at his disposal more formidable.

Taking as a vital turning point the seizure of power (*Machtergreifung* in German), it becomes important to describe as fully as the record allows the circumstances surrounding that event. Did Hindenburg, president of the Republic and "ultimate arbiter of power,"[3] have a choice when he appointed Hitler chancellor? Could the decision at least have been put off? And what difference would delay have made for the Nazis' prospects? Turner and others have marshaled evidence to show that, in fact, the appointment was not forced by events beyond the control of the president and his inner circle. Hitler's elevation to the head of the German government resulted from decisions freely taken by leaders who could have chosen otherwise. Alternative party blocs could have received presidential blessing; the Nazis, even with their reluctant German Nationalist fellow travelers, did not command a parliamentary majority and thus scarcely were predetermined as the "logical" constitutional choice. Or the Republic might have carried on with the status quo; if the broadly unpopular Papen cabinet had survived six months, why not the Schleicher cabinet? As much as these factors may have militated against installing Hitler as chancellor, however, others worked in his favor. The Party despite setbacks in November 1932 still commanded a Reichstag plurality; it maintained an activist dynamism lacking in any other party but the KPD; and the right-wing component of its ideology allowed the men surrounding President Hindenburg to regard the NSDAP as a possible partner in governance. If the decisions of January 1933 were as important as Turner convincingly portrays them to have been, then the shape of Nazism at that time itself deserves yet closer examination. The voluntary element in Hitler's appointment as chancellor makes critical the contemporary position of his movement and its trajectory.

The importance of the position and trajectory of Nazism in the final months of the Weimar Republic helps answer the other preliminary question: once it has been determined that a certain moment deserves scrutiny, which participants in the events of the moment ought the historian most carefully examine? To understand the state of Hitler's movement during the months it stood at the threshold to power, it is essential to understand the state of the institutions making up the movement. Perhaps first among institutions defining the public image and internal dynamic of Nazism was the *Sturmabteilung* – known more often by its abbreviation, SA. No institution more benefited the movement by its activism than the SA, and no institution more threatened the movement with centrifugal and violent tendencies. The state of the SA and its membership on the eve of the *Machtergreifung* is the subject of this book.

Historians attempting a detailed treatment of the Third Reich or its origins are forced into familiarity with the vocabulary of the Nazi movement. Nazis referred to themselves numerous ways. Though some common references were roughly synonymous with their general meaning, others were not, and the content of a term such as "movement" (*Bewegung*) may have differed, depending on who was using it. Three terms in particular, their variants, and associated lexicon require a brief analysis if one is to discuss the pre-*Machtergreifung* situation in Nazism intelligibly. The remainder of this preface therefore examines, in their Nazi usage and origin, the words "party," "SA," and "movement."

The term "Party" refers to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers' Party).[4] The Party name was abbreviated NSDAP. Members of the NSDAP called themselves National Socialists or, in contracted form, Nazis. Their political outlook was called National Socialism or Nazism.

The organization that would later call itself the National Socialist German Workers' Party was founded on January 5, 1919 in Munich. The principal movers behind this "German Workers' Party,"[5] as it at first was known, were skilled laborers in the Munich railroad workshops. Their leader, Anton Drexler, was a toolmaker.[6] Adolf Hitler, a combat veteran of the Great War, was serving at the time in Munich as a *Reichswehr* political investigator, and he joined the Party a short time after its founding. By September 1919, Hitler belonged to the fledgling movement's executive committee.[7] Early in 1920, the Party changed its name to *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*. Eventually, adherents to the NSDAP cause would be better known as Nazis.

The Nazis early began to attract members beyond Munich and environs. Dortmund is recorded as the first city outside Bavaria to have given rise to a Nazi Party cell (established in 1920). By 1922, members were registered in Hattingen (near Dortmund in the Ruhr), Hagen (also in the Ruhr), and Hanover (in Lower Saxony). Chapters sprung up before November 1923 in Göttingen and Bremen as well.[8]

The Nazis presented themselves as a non-Marxist answer to disenchanted and disgruntled members of the working and lower middle classes. A vague program for the Party had been issued February 24, 1920. Penned by several Nazi leaders, including Drexler and Hitler, the so-called Feder Program was named after the

Nazis' chief economist, crank academic Gottfried Feder. The Program targeted the middle class (*Mittelstand*) with promises to protect interests believed imperiled by the organized proletariat on the one hand and the capitalist elite on the other. Prominent in the Program were denunciation of the Versailles Treaty; a proposal to expel all non-Germans who had arrived in the country later than August 2, 1914 and to ban all further immigration; and a racist and anti-Semitic definition of German citizenship.

Two Party leaders in particular seem to have added to the early Nazi theories formulated by Hitler, Drexler, and Feder. One of these, Dietrich Eckart, also served as a link between the Nazis and Munich high society. The other was Alfred Rosenberg. An émigré from the Baltic German community of Tsarist Russia, Rosenberg had studied engineering in Moscow but soon distinguished himself within Nazi circles as a philosopher. A pseudo-intellectual of much the same ilk as the economist Feder, Rosenberg gained notoriety with an Aryan supremacist tract, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*.[9]

Little in Nazi ideology was unique. The fringes of post-World War I German politics contained a profusion of small, extreme-right parties similar to the NSDAP, and many of these espoused vaguely collectivist economic theories and explicit racism (see Chapter 1). That Nazi beliefs were an amalgam, drawn from various sources and shared by competing parties, would lead many observers to underestimate the role of ideology in the movement. That the NSDAP lacked concise guiding texts further contributed to the view that Nazism lacked meaningful ideological content.

Its coherence as a system of thought aside, Nazism in Bavaria at any rate established a modest but firm footing. By January 1921, Party ranks included some 3,000 members, and the official newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter* or *VB* for short, had 11,000 subscribers. Critical to the movement's early growth was its leadership. Hitler had become one of the Party's principal drawing cards. A gifted public speaker, Hitler (it seems at times) was the sole reason people came to National Socialist gatherings. The Austrian immigrant was able to use his importance to the NSDAP as leverage against other Party leaders when they did not wish to follow his preferred course. Early on, the majority of the NSDAP inner circle announced that they would amalgamate the NSDAP with other parties of the *völkisch* right. Hitler rejected the plan. By threatening to resign from the Party, he forced his colleagues to renounce amalgamation. Moreover, during the same test of wills, Hitler forced them to vest in him dictatorial powers over the Party. This maneuver took place at the end of July 1921 and established the future form of Party central leadership.

The form of the Party at its local and regional levels took shape at this time as well. A three-tiered division described the Nazi hierarchy. The Party was headed by a *Reichsleitung*, or national leadership. The national leadership of the NSDAP had its headquarters in Munich, where, once finances allowed, Party officers occupied a brownstone mansion dubbed the "Brown House." The most important subsidiary Party entities were called *Gaue*. The *Gaue* eventually numbered thirty-six, and they included the non-German territory of Danzig, a League of Nations Free City.

Austria and the Sudetenland eventually constituted *Gaue* as well. *Gau* administrations received directives from Munich and in theory played the role of executors of Party policy at provincial level. They were particularly important as recruiting agencies for new Party members and as propaganda organs. The *Gauleiter* (leaders of the Gaue) oversaw the activity of local *Ortsgruppen*.[10] The *Ortsgruppen* formed the bottom tier of the Party structure. Though Hitler tried to enforce through this structure conformity to central command, certain factors insured a notable degree of local autonomy.[11]

The Nazis made no effort in their earliest years to gain power through the electoral process. They aimed instead to seize hold of the State by coup.[12] The culmination and failure of the Nazis' early strategy of violent assault on the Republic took place in November 1923. Party leaders observed popular discontent within the young Republic. Hyperinflation had erased the personal savings of millions and the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr (starting January 1922) was widely viewed as a national disgrace. The time was judged opportune for a move against republican institutions. A coalition of *völkisch* parties, led by Hitler and General Erich Ludendorf, gathered a mob of activists in Munich, where they set out from the Bürgerbräu beer hall on November 9 with the goal of commandeering control of Bavaria and then marching on Berlin. The so-called Beer Hall Putsch ended in failure for the Nazis, earned Hitler a jail sentence, and left the NSDAP disorganized and demoralized.[13] The Nazis needed a new approach.

The new approach, chosen by Hitler, was to concentrate on winning electoral victories wherever possible. This became known as the "legal way." The Republic, however, was becoming less ripe for Nazi politics. Economic recovery was building steam, and disaffection correspondingly dwindled. On the far right, where the Nazis seemed at first most likely to capture votes, *völkisch* parties such as the NSDAP fared poorly. A loose *völkisch* bloc had campaigned for the Reichstag election of May 4, 1924 but won only 6.5 percent of the vote. The right and far right that year were dominated by the comparatively mainstream *Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei* (DNVP) or German National People's Party, which earned 19.5 percent of the vote, making it second only to the SPD. Economic conditions improved a great deal in the next four years, so much so that in the May 1928 Reichstag election the Nazis struck their all-time low – taking only twelve seats in a parliament with over 500 deputies. (The December 1924 vote had given the Nazis 3.0 percent – fourteen seats.) The NSDAP from 1925 to 1928 was confined, as Richard Bessel puts it, to "the political ghetto of the völkisch movement."[14] Or, in the words of Thomas Childers, "[T]he National Socialists saw themselves relegated to the status of a minor curiosity on the radical fringes of German politics."[15] The political culture of the Republic, though in a time of stress liable to support radical parties, readily reverted to a more moderate orientation when conditions improved.

Distinct from the Party was the SA. The *Sturmabteilung* or Storm Section was a semi-autonomous paramilitary league that in principle did the Party's bidding in matters requiring armed force. Members of the SA were known as stormtroopers, SA-men, or, after their uniforms, "brownshirts." SA activities included terrorizing

political opponents and guarding Party speakers at rallies and other public engagements. At Nazi events, the SA also served the Party by roughing up hecklers, and, conversely, stormtroopers would sometimes disrupt events of opposing parties.

The SA was scarcely a humble and obedient servant to the NSDAP. Socially, politically, and administratively distinct from the Party, the SA frequently struck out on its own. When the SA asserted its independence, questions arose whether it was serving Party interests or pursuing a separate agenda. Local SA unit leaders, *Sturmbannführer*, sometimes found themselves at odds against their corresponding local Party administrators, the *Gauleiter*. *Sturmbannführer* and *Gauleiter* competed for subsidies from the national Party leadership, and they also could come into conflict over policy.

In face of their differences, SA and Party aimed to form part of a single entity. The Nazi – or Hitler – movement, as the broadest formation of Nazism can be called, consisted of the Party, the SA, the SS,[16] and all other affiliated organizations. The Nazis sometimes construed the movement to include anyone who voted NSDAP, but most who voted for the Party did not consider themselves Nazis. The better view is that the movement included all of the organizations that were expressly National Socialist and all of the members of those organizations. One among many affiliated Party organizations was the NSBO, the National Socialist League of Organizations. The NSBO served as an umbrella organization for Nazi labor unions. Another prominent affiliated organization was the Hitler Youth or HJ (for *Hitler Jugend*). The brown-shirted youth corps later became the spearhead of Nazi political indoctrination. And a welter of Nazi Party clubs and professional organizations added to the complexity of the National Socialist network.[17] Membership in one or another Party organization did not presuppose membership in the Party. Many stormtroopers were not NSDAP members – Detlef Mühlberger estimates that little over half of the SA belonged to the NSDAP[18] – and young people enrolled in the HJ were not old enough for Party membership. Conflicts arose over Party membership and SA membership, as individual *Gauleiter* attempted periodically to enforce Party enrollment on stormtroopers. *Gauleiter* had a financial stake in increasing the number of people enrolled in local Party cells, for each Party member owed monthly dues, recorded with colored coupons in a personal Party book meant to be carried by the member. SA leaders, on the other hand, generally opposed such recruitment, on the grounds that it eroded SA autonomy.

Though its parts were varied and sometimes disputatious, the Nazi movement was tied together by its members' general acceptance of Adolf Hitler as supreme leader and by the common identification by outsiders of all members of the movement as Nazis. The challenge for Nazi leaders was to translate this thread of unity into effective political action.

Of the components of the movement, the SA probably exhibited greatest autonomy. Indeed, the *Sturmabteilung* had its own hierarchy, independent of Party structures, and this equipped the brownshirts to function as an organization distinct from the NSDAP. A police situation report from Stuttgart in December 1931 outlined the *Sturmabteilung* organization. The report was intended to inform the Interior Ministry at Berlin of local political matters. Echoing the common

contemporary conception of the Nazi stormtroopers, the report referred to the SA as "the 'Wehrmacht' of the NSDAP." Indeed, in the report, the organization's paramilitary character and origins were clearly illustrated. A hierarchical arrangement paralleled the organization of an army, with multiple, subordinate, smaller units constituting a single larger unit. The paramountcy of one leader over each unit and the subordination of all men under a leader's command were further features which identified the SA as the Party army.[19]

The smallest unit of the SA was called the *Schar*. The word *Schar*, meaning "bunch" or "gang," implied the character of this SA unit. The *Schar* relied on ties of acquaintance, friendship, professional fellowship, or general neighborliness. Unlike any other SA unit, the *Schar* had no schematic appointment of rank within it, though a single member usually commanded special respect, on account of age or charisma. Its personal bonds and tightly knit texture were intended to make the *Schar* an organic entity. Ideally, its members had been closely acquainted before they joined the SA. With only four to twelve men, a *Schar* might have consisted of all the mechanics at an automobile repair shop, or of neighbors who customarily gathered after work at the local tavern to play cards, drink, and converse. Carrying no appointed unit numeral, a *Schar* usually called itself by a name derived from the background shared by its members, from an action or deed to which it was party, or from the neighborhood or street where its members lived. This basic "bunch" of SA-men was rooted to a particular place, and its members were tied to each other as much by amity as by politics.

The next largest SA grouping, after the *Schar*, was the *Trupp*. An SA *Trupp* consisted of between three and six *Scharen*. Generally, between twenty and sixty men composed a *Trupp*. The chief officer of a *Trupp*, the *Truppführer*, was usually the eldest and most respected of the informal leaders of the *Trupp*'s component *Scharen*. The chief role of the *Trupp* was to band together the *Scharen* into administratively significant groups.

Above the *Trupp* lay the most important division of the SA, the *Sturm*.[20] The word *Sturm*, meaning "storm" or "onrush," conveyed the aggressiveness that stormtroopers liked to attribute to themselves. Each *Sturm* possessed its own Arabic numeral designation. Each member of a *Sturm* wore the *Sturm*'s numeral on the right-hand collar of his SA shirt. In addition to the assigned numeric designation, a *Sturm* usually adopted a name, most often derived from the *Sturm*'s environs. For the individual SA-man, his most important affiliation within the SA hierarchy was with his *Sturm*. A *Sturmführer* commanded each *Sturm*. In charge of a body considerably larger than a single *Trupp*, yet rarely in excess of a few hundred men, the *Sturmführer* was the quintessential SA leader of Nazi propaganda. He was portrayed as commanding the respect of his men, while also enjoying their comradeship. It was this aspect of the leadership of a *Sturm* – familiarity and respect – that prompted the police observer to compare the *Sturmführer* to the *Kompagniechef* of the old Imperial Army.

Between two and six *Stürme* were grouped under a *Sturmbann* ("*Sturm* jurisdiction"). The *Sturmbann* was led by a *Sturmbannführer*, and each such unit had a Roman numeral designation. *Sturmbann* members wore their unit's Roman numeral on their left collars.

Three or more *Sturmbanne* were grouped together in a *Standarte*. The *Standarte* was the largest unit independent from the national SA chief-of-staff in selection of its leadership, and it was the smallest SA unit to possess its own permanent staff. Each *Standarte* held a special Roman numeral designation, assigned by the Supreme SA Leader (*Oberste SA-Führer*). Rank-and-file *Standarte* members did not wear the *Standarte* number on their uniforms; only members of the command did so. This differentiation of insignia underscored the heightened bureaucratization of the SA at its superior instances, and it suggested the question whether, in such a large military organization, a gulf might arise between officers and the "enlisted" ranks.

The *Standarten* of one or as many as three Nazi *Gaue* (Party districts) lay under a single *Untergruppe* or "subgroup." Because an *Untergruppe* ordinarily corresponded geographically to a *Gau* or *Gaue*, this SA unit was often known as a *Gausturm*. The Stuttgart report, for example, notes that the *Untergruppe* headquartered there called itself *Gausturm* Württemberg, after the federal state and Nazi *Gau* of which Stuttgart was the capital. The *Untergruppenführer* or *Gausturmführer* at the helm of the SA subgroup most often hailed from a professional military background and typically had served in World War I as an army officer. At this level of the SA hierarchy, the differentiation between rank-and-file and command intensified.

The final SA unit beneath the unified Supreme SA leadership was the *Gruppe*, or simply "SA group." Several subgroups constituted each *Gruppe*. Approximately 15,000 men belonged to a single *Gruppe*. The *Gruppenführer* commanded a formidable bureaucracy, and he was appointed by the national SA leadership. The *Gruppenführer* had a staff of his own, and this was directed by a separate *Stabsleiter* (staff leader).

At the apex of the SA hierarchy resided the Supreme SA leadership – *Oberste SA-Führung*. The Supreme SA Leader possessed a very large staff, including inspectors, a special *Generalinspikteur*, doctors, secretaries, drivers, and other assistants. The OSAF, as the Supreme SA Leader or his staff were known in abbreviation, had a deputy (*Stellvertreter*) who also possessed a large staff. The Supreme SA leadership was housed in NSDAP headquarters in Munich. The *Oberste SA-Führer* occupied a prestigious space on the second floor (*erste Rang*) of the Brown House in Room 49, near Hitler's office, and also in close proximity to the offices of other Party functionaries.[21] At its apex the SA appeared to be every bit a smoothly cooperating part of the Party bureaucracy.

Introduction

Debating the *Machtergreifung*

The Nazi seizure of power, in its seeming paradoxes, has been for generations the object of dismayed wonderment. A totalitarian and nihilistic movement, relying at least in measure upon mechanisms of representative democracy, came to head a nation belonging to the first rank of collective contributors to civilization. So disturbing was a Nazi Germany to contemplate, that discussion of how such a disaster might come about began even before Hitler's installment as chancellor on January 30, 1933. Representative of the air of speculation, one observer, writing two months earlier, offered the following analysis:

> Every political organization has basically only three ways to translate its political program into reality. The first is to seize power in the state the revolutionary way; the second leads to this goal through the attainment of a 51 percent majority by the ballot; the third is the penetration of the state apparatus, in order to approach revolutionary goals in a step by step fashion. The Hitler party has now totally rejected the first possibility.[1]

Many contemporaries agreed by late 1932 that the Nazis had given up on seizing power through revolutionary means. The Munich Putsch of November 1923 had failed miserably, and the police and army had easily suppressed a revolt of Nazi stormtroopers in August 1932. The second means, a victory at the polls, seemed ever less likely as the year drew to a close. The Nazis had entertained hopes in summer 1932 that a free election would place them in power, but the November Reichstag vote registered a drop in their electoral following.[2] Indeed, so dim did the Party's prospects for democratic victory appear, that champions of the Republic believed the Nazi threat largely to have passed.[3] The only remaining means for the Nazis to seize power – the "third way" – was to enter a national cabinet on terms set by the governing elite, and this Hitler had twice refused to do – once after the July 31 election and again after the November 6 election. Repeatedly denied its objective, the Hitler movement finally seemed to have seen its drive for power stall. That this impasse for the Nazis was also the twilight of the Republic would be evident in hindsight alone.

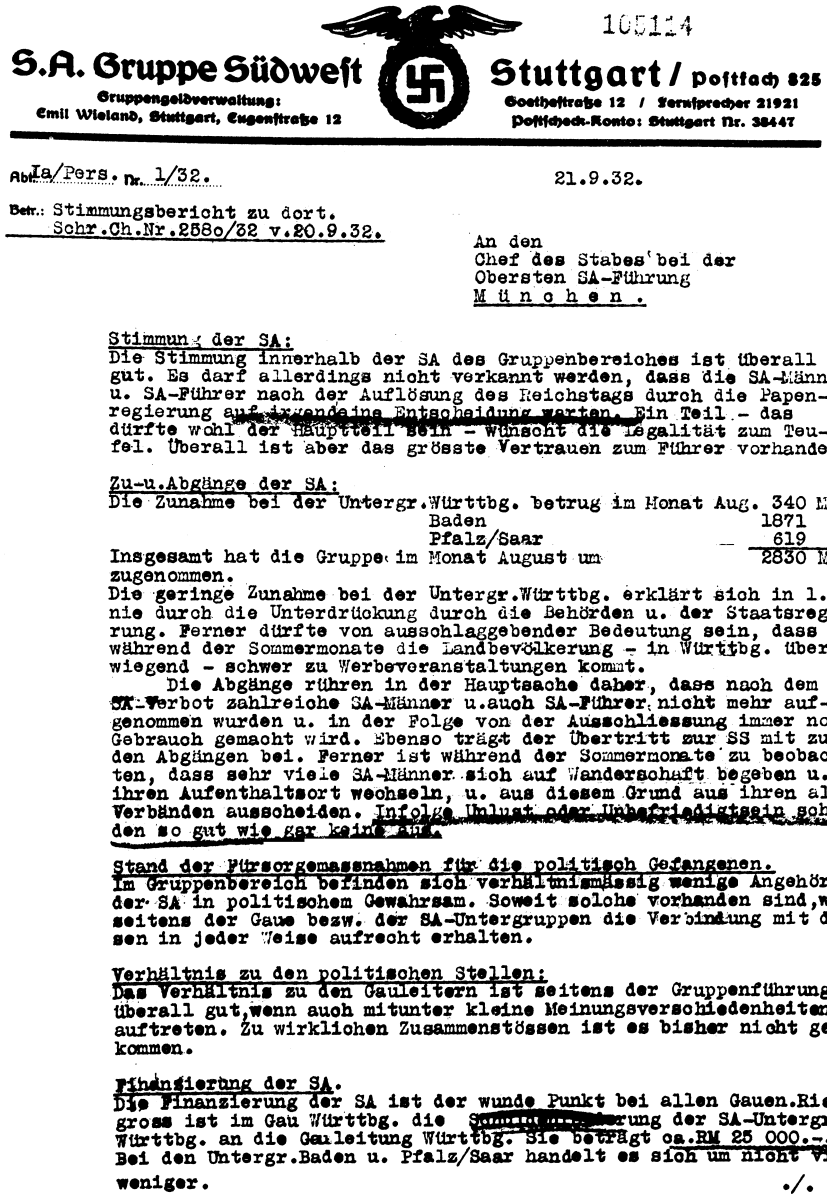
The following chapters aim to depict the general state of crisis within Nazism on the eve of Hitler's seizure of power, and, in particular, the troubles which

plagued one part of the movement, the SA. It has been noted well that National Socialism on the eve of the *Machtergreifung* faced an internal crisis. What may not be so clear from the more general literature on the subject is that Nazism by that time in fact came to be dominated by crisis. This book adds to the view a focused assessment of the final months of the Republic, with special reference to three interrelated problems in particular that beset the Nazis: distraction of stormtrooper energies away from the Nazi political project; contradictions between professed ideology and Party conduct; and a decay and dissolution of the movement's activist constituency.

This study draws on observations made both by Nazis and by their non-Nazi contemporaries. SA Supreme Command and the NSDAP political offices ordered SA leaders to prepare morale reports in September 1932. A set of these survived the Third Reich and will be referred to throughout the following chapters.[4] In the reports (*Stimmungsberichte*), the SA respondents presented an overview of SA morale, attitude, and activity on the eve of the *Machtergreifung*. Conveying an impression of the actual state of the SA, these reports are just as valuable in another respect: they informed the perceptions of the leaders of the Nazi movement and thus tell us what the Nazi leaders knew about their own organization. To obtain a complete picture of the context of the seizure of power, the perceptions of the principal actors in that context must be described and understood. The morale reports, valuable in providing a portrait of things as they were, are equally valuable in illustrating how things were perceived (Figure 1).

Police reports gathered for the Reich Ministry of Interior constitute another important source for piecing together contemporary perceptions of the state of National Socialism. The republican police, on the local and national levels, kept the Nazi movement under surveillance, the SA, as the rowdy paramilitary wing of the movement, a target of special attention. The Reich Ministry of Interior, under Freiherr von Gayl from June 1932 until December 1932, received a volume of reports from police observers in all parts of the country.[5] These situation reports (*Lageberichte*) contained a number of types of material: newspaper clippings (taken representatively from across the political spectrum and assembled by topic); Nazi Party documents and edicts (sometimes acquired by subterfuge); transcripts of public and secret Party assemblies; and evaluative commentary on Nazi activities. The situation reports gave officials of the Republic a window on the inner workings of the Nazi movement. Thus, as the *Stimmungsberichte* played a role in defining Nazi self-perception, the *Lageberichte* played a corresponding role in defining the government's perception of the Nazis.

To supplement SA and Ministry of the Interior reports, I have consulted memoirs, diaries, and compendia of primary documents. Where the scope of this book has required, such sources have been employed to fill in narrative detail, always, of course, with the caution that must attend reference to after-the-fact accounts by interested parties.[6] Finally, a number of secondary sources – books, articles, transcripts of scholarly consortia, and the like – have been consulted. This book looks to these in particular to convey a sense of the historiographic debate surrounding the issues at hand.



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S.A. Gruppe Südwest — **Stuttgart / Postfach 825**

Gruppengeldverwaltung: Emil Wieland, Stuttgart, Eugenstraße 12

Goethestraße 12 / Fernsprecher 21921
Postscheck-Konto: Stuttgart Nr. 38447

Abt. Ia/Pers. Nr. 1/32. 21.9.32.

Betr.: Stimmungsbericht zu dort.
Schr.Ch.Nr.2580/32 v.20.9.32.

An den
Chef des Stabes bei der
Obersten SA-Führung
München.

Stimmung der SA:
Die Stimmung innerhalb der SA des Gruppenbereiches ist überall gut. Es darf allerdings nicht verkannt werden, dass die SA-Männer u. SA-Führer nach der Auflösung des Reichstags durch die Papenregierung auf irgendeine Entscheidung warten. Ein Teil - das dürfte wohl der Hauptteil sein - wünscht die Legalität zum Teufel. Überall ist aber das grösste Vertrauen zum Führer vorhanden.

Zu-u.Abgänge der SA:
Die Zunahme bei der Untergr.Württbg. betrug im Monat Aug. 340 Mann
Baden 1871 "
Pfalz/Saar 619 "
Insgesamt hat die Gruppe im Monat August um 2830 Mann zugenommen.
Die geringe Zunahme bei der Untergr.Württbg. erklärt sich in 1.Linie durch die Unterdrückung durch die Behörden u. der Staatsregierung. Ferner dürfte von ausschlaggebender Bedeutung sein, dass während der Sommermonate die Landbevölkerung - in Württbg. überwiegend - schwer zu Werbeveranstaltungen kommt.
Die Abgänge rühren in der Hauptsache daher, dass nach dem SA-Verbot zahlreiche SA-Männer u.auch SA-Führer nicht mehr aufgenommen wurden u. in der Folge von der Aussohliessung immer noch Gebrauch gemacht wird. Ebenso trägt der Übertritt zur SS mit zu den Abgängen bei. Ferner ist während der Sommermonate zu beobachten, dass sehr viele SA-Männer sich auf Wanderschaft begeben u. ihren Aufenthaltsort wechseln, u. aus diesem Grund aus ihren alten Verbänden ausscheiden. Infolge Unlust oder Unbefriedigtsein scheiden so gut wie gar keine aus.

Stand der Fürsorgemassnahmen für die politisch Gefangenen.
Im Gruppenbereich befinden sich verhältnismässig wenige Angehörige der SA in politischem Gewahrsam. Soweit solche vorhanden sind, wird seitens der Gaue bezw. der SA-Untergruppen die Verbindung mit diesen in jeder Weise aufrecht erhalten.

Verhältnis zu den politischen Stellen:
Das Verhältnis zu den Gauleitern ist seitens der Gruppenführung überall gut, wenn auch mitunter kleine Meinungsverschiedenheiten auftreten. Zu wirklichen Zusammenstössen ist es bisher nicht gekommen.

Finanzierung der SA.
Die Finanzierung der SA ist der wunde Punkt bei allen Gauen. Riesengross ist im Gau Württbg. die Schuldenlast der SA-Untergr. Württbg. an die Gauleitung Württbg. Sie beträgt ca. RM 25 000.-. Bei den Untergr. Baden u. Pfalz/Saar handelt es sich um nicht viel weniger. ./.

Figure 1 SA morale report.

Differing conceptions have arisen as to the historical context in which the Nazis came to power.[7] Indeed, so numerous are the antecedents to which historians have attributed Nazism, that one commentator marvels at a "surfeit of explanatory attempts."[8] Events immediately prior to the seizure of power have received intense scrutiny. Writers who take the view that immediate antecedents were the most

important emphasize in particular the economic crisis of the world depression – a crisis they attribute to a more generalized "crisis in capitalism." Other historians accord more attention to longer-term developments or to the political-institutional, rather than economic, shortcomings of the Weimar republican system. Jürgen Kocka, Heinrich August Winkler, Wolfgang Sauer, Martin Broszat, and Hans-Jürgen Puhle number among the historians who, broadly, emphasize the more remote precedents and influences from the German past. The German past, they maintain, albeit with many nuances and distinctions of interpretation, was the critical factor behind the seizure of power. A clash in Germany between the remnants of a pre-industrial or feudal political tradition and the intensifying pressures of a modern economy conspired, in this view, to destabilize a nascent republic. The interpretation draws attention in particular to backwardness in German political culture and the lateness of Germany's arrival as a major political and economic player on the European stage and identifies these factors as major causes of the disaster of National Socialism. Jürgen Kocka explains that modern, liberalizing forces were weaker in Germany than in Britain or the United States and that what little impetus toward political modernity German society did contain was overwhelmed by an atavistic conservatism:

> German society was never truly a bourgeois society. . . . Bourgeois virtues like individual responsibility, risk taking, the rational settlement of differences, tolerance, and the pursuit of individual and collective freedoms . . . [were] less developed than in Western Europe and the USA. . . . [T]he great power of the Junkers in industrial Germany and the feudalizing tendencies in the haute bourgeoisie; the extraordinary power of the bureaucracy and the army in a state that had never experienced a successful bourgeois revolution and that was unified from above; the social and political alliance of the rising bourgeoisie and the ever-resilient agrarian nobility against the sharply demarcated proletariat; the closely related antiparliamentarian, anti-democratic, and anti-liberal alignment of large parts of the German ruling strata . . . [and in general a] powerful persistence of pre-industrial, pre-capitalist traditions [were the crucial causes of the success in Germany of right-wing extremism].[9]

Kocka summarizes that the crisis in Germany stemmed from a "deficit in some essential ingredients of a modern bourgeois or civil society that was closely but inversely related to the strength of Germany's preindustrial, precapitalist, and prebourgeois traditions."[10] The origins of Hitler's dictatorship, according to Kocka and others who broadly share his view that earlier German history led to Germany's modern catastrophe, lay not in the immediate context of the *Machtergreifung* but in the "deep context" of German state and society. It was the lingering but pervasive pre-modernism of German political culture that allowed such an antidemocratic structure as Hindenburg's cabinet of Junker barons and generals to play a guiding role in a twentieth century industrial nation. Historians of this view find scarce surprise in a radical right-wing movement seizing power through manipulation of the denizens of Germany's pre-modern and authoritarian milieu.[11]

While an important school of historians emphasizes the importance of pre-industrial influences on German politics and economics, Karl Dietrich Bracher and others argue that the leading cause of the Weimar political crisis was structural inadequacy of the Republic. Anti-republican ideology and errors by the framers of the Weimar constitution, in this interpretation, engendered a political structure prone to dictatorship:

> [A] restorationist counter-ideology [pervasive in German politics] found a sheet-anchor at the highest level of the republic in the position and functions of the Reich president. A perfectionist effort, to which even Hugo Preuss and Max Weber had contributed, had been made to synthesize the Anglo-American and French forms of government and the result had been the elevation of the president to the status of counterweight to parliamentary democracy with potentially dictatorial powers; it was only too easy to regard him as a "substitute Kaiser" [*Ersatz Kaiser*] and turn him into the focus of anti-parliamentary authoritarian tendencies. With so symbolic a pre-republican figure as Hindenburg in this position there was permanent risk of a relapse into the concept of non-democratic official politics, unfavorably contrasted with "sheer" party politics.[12]

It follows from Bracher's interpretation as much as from Kocka's that the "third way to power" was not just the means which Hitler found available in January 1933 but also an explanation and cause of Nazism's success. According to Bracher, neither a free election nor an armed uprising were likely to deliver the State to Hitler. Rather it was the behind-the-scenes machinations and camarilla politics of the Hindenburg circle that were responsible, in the final instance, for the Nazi seizure of power.

Kocka and Bracher are referred to here not so much as leaders of doctrinaire groups as representatives of broad orientations of interpretive viewpoint. Both nonetheless share an emphasis on the role of anti-democratic forces and deep structural flaws. A third group, including Geoff Eley and Franz Neumann, emphasizes economics. These historians, like Bracher, focus on the immediate context of the seizure of power, but in identifying features of modern economics as the predominant cause of Nazism they differ from the two schools discussed above. Eley and Neumann, among others, characterize the *Machtergreifung* as the foreseeable, and perhaps even historically inevitable, outcome of a crisis in capitalism, and they attribute that crisis to a modern phenomenon – the clash between labor and capitalist employers. The ascent of Hitler, in this interpretation, was due not to stubborn remnants of feudalism in German political culture or flaws in the Weimar constitution, but to the inherent contradictions of the capitalist system. The economic view of the rise of Hitler places its primary emphasis on the immediate context of the *Machtergreifung*. "If we are truly to understand the problem," writes Geoff Eley, "we must begin by theorizing fascism in terms of the political crisis that produced it."[13]

One of the most controversial iterations of the thesis that Nazism stemmed from a crisis in capitalism was David Abraham's treatment of the fall of the Weimar

Republic. Abraham noted that an alliance of modern industry and aristocratic agrarians – the alliance of iron and rye – had dominated German politics prior to World War I. Modernizing trends in economics and politics had gradually reduced the viability of the Junker agrarian elite as a ruling partner, and the collapse of the Second Reich in 1918 gave these trends a sudden impetus. Though the revolutionary atmosphere of the immediate postwar period (until 1923) alienated the forces of industrial capital from organized labor, by the mid-1920s, an uneasy new alliance had displaced the old one of iron and rye: an alliance between organized labor (primarily represented in parliamentary politics by the SPD) and capitalist industry (represented by the bourgeois (*bürgerliche*) parties, especially the DVP). This alliance, Abraham argued, was a typically modern and capitalist one – hardly an artifact of pre-industrial traditions.[14] And it was an alliance bound to fail. Abraham summarized his interpretation of the fall of the Weimar system and the rise of Nazism:

> Conflicts among the dominant class fractions and between them and the organized working class provided the chief impetus for German politics between 1924 and the end of 1932. Under the specific conditions of the period, these conflicts contributed first to the creation of a tenuous capital–labor compromise and political stability from roughly 1924 through the end of 1929, and then, as conditions changed, these same conflicts contributed to the demise of the Republic. . . . On the basis of their production and political desiderata, and in the context of shifting political and ideological coalitions, the dominant class fractions adopted different postures toward organized labor and its demands, toward trade, commercial and fiscal policy, and toward reparations. Ultimately, however, attempts to overcome the consequent contradictions within the framework of the democratic Weimar state failed. . . . [T]n the specific circumstances of the [1920s], the democratic political structures of the Weimar Republic produced no acceptable balance among the interests of the dominant class fractions and between them and the subordinate classes and strata.[15]

The conflicts inherent in the capitalist system, argued Abraham, destroyed the Republic and placed Adolf Hitler in power. Serious questions about Abraham's work notwithstanding,[16] it remains a concise – and strong-form – iteration of a view that structural economic crisis played the larger part in Hitler's ascendance.

The major schools in the debate over the *Machtergreifung* have all contributed to our understanding of the event. Each has also spurred criticism. Economic explanations of Nazism, perhaps among the most controversial, have unmistakable explanatory value. As Peter D. Stachura remarks in a discussion of the historiographic debate surrounding the *Machtergreifung*, "the success of National Socialism would have been inconceivable without the economic depression."[17] The economic state of the country in the early 1930s indeed played an instrumental role in the Nazi seizure of power. Historians who interpret Nazism as a crisis in capitalism, however, have not always answered alternative viewpoints convincingly. Geoff Eley critiques the premodern thesis. He refers to the following proposition of Jürgen Kocka, in Kocka's *White Collar Workers in America*:

> The uneasy coexistence of social structures that originated in different eras, the tense overlaying of industrial capitalist social conflicts with preindustrial, precapitalist social constellations – the "contemporaneity of the uncontemporary" – defined Germany's path to an industrial society.[18]

Eley responds:

> To single out the primacy of preindustrial traditions seems arbitrary, not least because some of the major German particularities in Kocka's list – for example, the rise of the Social Democratic party (SPD) or the constitution of *Angestellten* (low-status public employees and employees in the private sector) as a separate social category by the interventionist state – are formed during industrialization rather than before it.[19]

Eley seems rather to miss Kocka's point, however. The centerpiece of Kocka's thesis is that the German social and political system was out of step; and that it was out of step for the very reason that many structures unique to industrialization had come into existence amidst stubborn political and social leftovers of a prior age. Indeed, the things with which Germany's feudal remnants were in discord were things "formed during industrialization" – without industrialization, a purely feudal Germany would have experienced no clashes between its past and present; only continued medieval torpor. The problem was that industrialization had brought much that was modern to Germany, while not clearing out all that was pre-modern. Kocka explains this concept memorably with the phrase "contemporaneity of the uncontemporary." He does not deny that phenomena such as labor unions and social democracy played a role in the collapse of the Weimar Republic. Rather, Kocka posits that it was the "uneasy coexistence" of these modern developments with remnants of another age which engendered, to borrow a phrase from Karl Dietrich Bracher, a "German dilemma." The Junker elite, a "feudalized" haute bourgeoisie, obedient Prussian bureaucrats, and the tradition-bound armed forces clashed with the emerging features of modern society, and the Republic could not survive the resultant strain. Eley criticizes Kocka for denying that certain phenomena responsible for Nazism originated during and after the industrial revolution, yet it is these modern features in German society that lie at the crux of Kocka's thesis. To Kocka, it was the advent of modern features in German society that made pre-modern leftovers dangerously incongruous.

The crisis-in-capitalism thesis, if over-applied, can obscure the role in German politics and society of remnants from a more distant, feudal past. Eley accurately observes that Nazi success at the polls was inseparable from a general economic-political crisis:

> While . . . radical nationalism definitely appealed to a certain type of patriotic intellectual or activist . . . the ideology could achieve only a limited popular appeal in times of relative social and political stability. But in times of crisis, which brought the domestic unity, foreign mission, and territorial integrity of the

> nation all into question, this might easily change. The dramatic conjuncture of war and revolution between 1914 and 1923 produced exactly a crisis of this kind.[20]

The world depression must be taken into account when analyzing the Nazi movement, but it is a mistake to ignore equally important factors, highlighted in the feudal remnants thesis and Bracher's thesis of structural flaws. Those theses, too, must be put in proper perspective and their nuances acknowledged.

At least two points in this connection deserve note. First, the feudal remnants thesis does not, in its more nuanced form, propose that the electoral upsurge of the Nazi Party stemmed solely or even in larger part from pre-industrial political impulses. Stubborn holdovers in German politics and society well may have prepared the ground for Hitler and provided some part of the core of his constituency. Economic crisis, however, gave the NSDAP a mass following. Second, neither Bracher nor those emphasizing remote antecedents propose that it was by votes alone that Hitler became chancellor. Indeed, nobody plausibly can propose this, because Hitler never gained sufficient votes to do so. Hitler became chancellor by presidential appointment, and in this resides the anomaly that the feudal remnants thesis so well explains. The decisive role of Germany's archaic political structures was not in winning votes for Hitler; it was in perpetuating a traditional system of personal politics – epitomized in the Hindenburg camarilla. That system of politics, jarringly out of time with a modern industrial nation in which far more sophisticated mechanisms for achieving consensus and implementing its results should have developed, presented an opening for Hitler. To pass through, however, he still needed the keys. And these Hitler finally acquired, in the form of an impressive parliamentary representation – something he could not have attained absent the economic crisis. But absent Germany's Byzantine presidential circle, the keys furnished by a large parliamentary bloc would not necessarily have opened Hitler any doors. The archaic aspects of German politics, though not sufficient to put Hitler in power, were necessary.

As the economics thesis may oversimplify the picture, so too did earlier versions of the feudal remnants thesis. In particular, some historians who emphasized the distant antecedents of Nazism neglected the role of capitalist crisis as background to the *Machtergreifung*. Rohan D'O. Butler and A.J.P. Taylor referred to pre-industrial aspects of German political culture to explain the rise of Hitler. Butler emphasized cultural and political antecedents as remote as Martin Luther and Frederick-William I. Luther, noted Butler, declared that "revolt is never just, however just may be the motive" and Frederick-William created a military caste of lasting political influence. "German thinkers," Butler proposed in explaining Nazism, ". . . were in the main not primarily concerned with defining and safeguarding the position of the individual in society." In summary, he explained Nazism as the result of a failure of German liberalism:

> [German liberals] have been relatively few and ineffective. We have seen how German liberalism failed in 1848, in the eighteen-sixties, and again after 1918; how it gradually became alien to the ordinary German outlook.[21]

A.J.P. Taylor took this line of interpretation even further. In *The Course of German History*, Taylor proposed that Nazism was the logical outgrowth of an ancient German predilection for solving internal problems by committing genocide against external foes. "[N]o other people," wrote Taylor, "has pursued extermination as a permanent policy from generation to generation for a thousand years; and it is foolish to suppose that they have done so without adding something permanent to their national tradition."[22] Similar to Butler, Taylor also attributed Nazism in part to an historical failure to support liberalism. In a rightly renowned passage, Taylor described how Germany missed the chance to join the rest of Western Europe on the road to democracy and how the resultant course determined the German future:

> 1848 was the decisive year of German, and so of European, history: it recapitulated Germany's past and anticipated Germany's future. Echoes of the Holy Roman Empire merged into a prelude of the Nazi "New Order"; the doctrines of Rousseau and the doctrines of Marx, the shade of Luther and the shadow of Hitler, jostled each other in bewildering succession. Never has there been a revolution so inspired by a limitless faith in the power of ideas; never has a revolution so discredited the power of ideas in its result. . . . After it, nothing remained but the idea of Force, and this idea stood at the helm of German history from then on. For the first time since [Martin Luther], the German people stepped on to the centre of the German stage only to miss their cues once more. German history reached its turning-point and failed to turn.[23]

Earlier historians such as Taylor and Butler attributed too much of the disaster of the Weimar Republic to Germany's lingering pre-industrial precedents and too little of it to the features of capitalist crisis. But in a more refined form, the feudal remnants thesis indeed gives ample consideration to the impact of the great depression on German politics. Some critics of that thesis, then, in effect target a straw man. Historians who underscore the importance of Germany's feudal past do not propose that the old, deep-seated authoritarian impulses in German political life alone created Nazism or made it inevitable. Rather, they propose that those phenomena made Nazism *possible*. Political archaism does not explain how the NSDAP became the largest party in parliament, thus presenting the possibility of a Nazi cabinet, but it does explain how an opaque and authoritarian presidential circle could hold the power of final decision over formation of national cabinets. It was the woeful misapplication of that power that eventually installed Germany's most anti-democratic party at the helm of the Republic.

Nazism may best be understood as a movement based on electoral politics but dependent on an impetus from outside the realm of electoral politics to take its decisive step to power. The movement reached the maximum extent of its mass appeal around the middle of 1932, yet the NSDAP had to subsist as a party out of power for over half a year beyond that high point. In seeking to identify the proximate cause of the Nazi seizure of power, a critical question is whether the NSDAP could have remained a candidate for power much beyond January 1933. If

the movement could have lasted an appreciable time longer without the benefits of office, then the advent of the Hitler regime may well have had more to do with barely resistible mass trends in the economy, society, and political system than in the decisions of individual actors. If, however, the historical record illustrates a movement that had lost its momentum, then the proximate cause of Hitler's seizure of power must be sought elsewhere. It is overly simplistic to describe the debate over the seizure of power as one between those who believe the disaster was inevitable and those who believe it was completely contingent upon narrow circumstances. These two poles nonetheless describe general competing orientations of a substantial cross-section of scholarship. To contrast a more from a less deterministic view is very much to contrast notions of collective from individual responsibility.

It is a central task here to describe in as much detail as possible what Nazism looked like on the eve of the *Machtergreifung*. As reflected by its most activist constituency, the SA, the condition of Hitler's movement during the months of uncertainty between its greatest success at the polls and the appointment of Hitler as chancellor is the principal focus of this study. The goal in this is to cast further light on the long-pondered question and its corollaries: what would have happened had Hitler's party failed to enter government when it did?

The condition of Nazism during the final months of the Republic is explored here in five chapters. To set the stage, Chapter 1 describes developments that took place in the fourteen years following the end of World War I. The origins of Hitler's movement and its activist constituency are discussed, as are tensions that brewed for some time among rival groups of National Socialists. The chapter also describes the DNVP and KPD, the other principal anti-republican parties of the right and left respectively. Chapter 1 approaches the former and its *völkisch* political milieu – common to the DNVP and the NSDAP – with an eye to general features and relationships which may give hints about the durability of the NSDAP in crisis. The chapter rounds out the picture with a sketch of the failure of the middle class parties and the volatile street politics of the paramilitary culture.

Chapter 2 depicts how the July 31, 1932 Reichstag election effected the Nazi movement and in particular the stormtroopers. The radical activist Nazis perhaps had never reconciled themselves completely to the so-called 'legal way' – the seeking of power by democratic process rather than violence. When elections began to indicate that Nazi popularity alone was not enough to bring about a Nazi government, the SA revolted, and Party leaders had to exercise their faculties of persuasion to keep discontent from undoing the movement. The unrest that the election precipitated identifies July 31 as a closure – the end of Nazi electoral success.

Chapter 3 investigates whether the SA possessed the unity and direction of purpose which Nazi propaganda portrayed. While the NSDAP did not put forward such a coherent political program as, for example, the SPD, it nevertheless had a clear project demanding the directed effort and enthusiasm of its members. The Nazi project, at a bare minimum, was to establish a one-party State. The role of the SA in this project was expressly neither military nor secretive, and the official mission of the SA was to devote its every action toward pushing the Party toward power. The SA, it will be argued, however, hardly pursued this mission with single

mind. Stormtroopers engaged in activities that, at best, were parochial SA concerns, and, at worst, drains on the strength and reputation of the NSDAP.

Chapter 4 will argue that the opportunism and cynicism of prominent National Socialists, while giving the movement a useful flexibility, also exacted a toll. National Socialist ideology was perhaps vague and ill defined, but it was not taken lightly by adherents to the Nazi cause. Nazi opportunism, it will be seen, seeded disillusionment in the ranks. The fifth and final chapter will discuss how the electoral stagnation that set in during summer 1932 gave way to outright crisis in the autumn. A decay of the SA and Party constituency worsened the electoral crisis, and, in turn, the electoral crisis accelerated the decay. In spite of increases in the number of activists in some areas, the efficacy of the Nazi constituency was diminishing in the last months of 1932.

Without the opening provided by General Schleicher, Franz von Papen, and other members of the inner circle surrounding the president of the Republic, what would have been the prospects for the Hitler movement after January 1933? The chapters which follow examine the *Sturmabteilung* and Nazism on the eve of the seizure of power; and inquire whether the movement was heading toward victory or, rather, beginning a decline from which only fortuity could rescue it.

1 The landscape

Parties, paramilitaries, and the pitfalls of Weimar politics

The landscape of public life under the first German Republic was complex, violent, and changeable. A seeming incapacity of the polity to organize itself into broad-based political organizations produced a surfeit of parties, reflecting fine gradations of the political spectrum and too narrowly constituted to oversee any of the coalition-building and compromise which, in a typical two- or three-party system, simplifies the work of the legislature. As Ralf Dahrendorf has noted, virtually every division in German society was projected onto the floor of the Reichstag by a system unable to reach preliminary compromises within party structures.[1] The resultant disagreements could bring parliamentary process to a standstill. They were sometimes carried over into the streets. Political terror was consequently a recurrent feature of public life in the Republic, with particularly severe spasms seizing the country in the first five years after World War I and again during the economic depression prior to the *Machtergreifung*. Though some of the violence might have been the work of individual radicals, it was in large part institutionalized. The rise and persistence of paramilitary formations, some affiliated with political parties and others independent, was one of the most serious problems to vex the Republic.

Constituents in their allegiance to parties and paramilitaries were mercurial. The great diversity of political organizations may have been to blame for the constant splintering and migration of constituents. If not pleased with their affiliation, people could – and often did – transfer allegiance to a competing movement. There were plenty to choose from. Or it may have been the fugacious tendency of the German polity that sustained such a multifarious political system in the first place. Whether the multiplicity of potential affiliations produced constituents ready to change allegiance or vice versa, the result was a nearly unmanageable political system and a persistent popular frustration with public life.

It was as part of this landscape that the Hitler movement competed for support.

The parties and the struggle for allegiance

From the initial reorganization of party politics in 1918 to the end of the Republic in 1933, various parties confronted the challenge of Germany's fluid political situation. Especially at the extremes of the spectrum, the experience of a number of these is

instructive when considering the condition of National Socialism in the final months of its drive to seize control of the State.

German Democrats, German Nationalists, and the fractious polity of the new Republic

A signal failure of the Weimar political system was its inability to sustain a viable centrist party. A reshuffling of constituencies after World War I produced both the German Democrats and the German Nationalists, but aspirations of the former to constitute a solid middle would quickly be frustrated. The latter would have a momentary success in assembling diverse forces of the right, but fractious tendencies similar to those crippling the Democrats would limit the Nationalists' coalition-building as well. The experiences of these two parties begin to illustrate how difficult it was to hold together any but the narrowest constituency.

It is axiomatic that millions of Germans failed to make the mental transition from subjects of an empire to citizens of a republic. November 1918 and its immediate aftermath was a period of acute political disorientation, as familiar signposts of public life disappeared and economic crisis descended on the country. Military triumph, promised for over four years and in fact largely achieved in the East, seemed to turn almost instantaneously into defeat. The old order gave way to a political vacuum. No "new order" emerged in Germany after the war, but instead a period of indirection exacerbated by the material and psychological shocks of the Versailles settlement and hyperinflation. The constituent forces of German society, to be sure, were more familiar with parliamentary democracy than those of Russia or Turkey – other great empires to disappear at the end of World War I. The Reichstag had functioned for decades in the Wilhelmian empire and had accumulated substantial authority. A highly developed party system was also in place. The Imperial government, though perhaps high-handed and arbitrary by the standards of France, Britain, or the United States, belonged to a class substantially more representative than the true autocracies that endured elsewhere into the early twentieth century. The German parliament was nonetheless circumscribed by a militarized aristocracy and the alliance that that aristocracy forged with heavy industry. Moreover, largely under the direction of General Erich Ludendorff, a virtual military dictatorship had displaced many parliamentary competences from the middle of the war onwards. The sudden advent in 1918 of fully representative government was a shock in itself for which the polity was ill prepared. Military collapse, anticipated by few, made the crisis a double catastrophe. Not only had the old political order suddenly given way to a democratic republic, but also the most vaunted institution of the Second Reich – the armed forces – had been dealt a mortal blow.

In the unusual climate following military defeat and the birth of the Republic, many individuals felt displaced from their accustomed political categories and therefore began to search for new niches. Some eventually with varying enthusiasm aligned themselves with new political parties.

Choosing new parties was in fact a necessity for a large segment of the public.

With barely two exceptions, the parties that had dominated the imperial Reichstag did not survive the war. The only parties to enter the republican period more or less intact were the Social Democratic Party and Catholic Center. The SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) profited from a concisely defined social base, the organized proletariat, and from its immediate prewar electoral success. The 1912 Reichstag election had awarded the SPD a pronounced plurality in the parliament – much to the alarm and dismay of its conservative foes. The Center Party, like the SPD, benefited from an explicitly defined and faithful block of constituents, in its case, Germany's Catholics. The Catholics retained a strong sense of confessional community that Bismarck's campaign against Catholicism, the *Kulturkampf*, had imbued in the 1870s. Thus the only two parties that largely retained their prewar forms shared two traits: a positive identity deriving from unambiguously defined constituencies (organized labor and Catholics) and a negative identity deriving from clear-cut external opposition (the Socialists from conservatives and business management, the Catholics from the Protestant majority and the Bismarckian state).[2]

On parts of the political spectrum where constituencies were not so clearly defined, political organization all but collapsed and new parties arose in attempts to fill the void. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers had only recently joined the Social Democratic camp, and many of them lacked attachment to the SPD. This poorly integrated part of the SPD constituency became increasingly displeased with SPD leaders' willingness to negotiate and cooperate with conservatives. SPD chairman Friedrich Ebert reached a deal in autumn 1918 with the *Reichswehr* commander, General Groener, and the so-called Ebert–Groener Pact epitomized SPD willingness to come to terms with right-wing counterparts. The Pact impelled the flight of many workers into a new, radicalized proletarian party – the USPD (*Unabhängige Sozial Demokratische Partei Deutschlands*).[3] Organized and led by the arch-radicals Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht, the Independent Social Democrats provided the basis for the KPD (*Kommunistiche Partei Deutschlands*), the Communist Party of Germany. The KPD, as the party of the extreme left, was founded late in December 1918 and soon became one of the most noticeable new fixtures on the German political scene.[4]

The reshuffling which gave rise to a new extreme left party occurred across the political spectrum, but it was most pronounced amidst the middle and the right. Social splintering made it difficult for the German middle class to organize itself as effectively as the unionized laboring class.[5] One effort to organize the middle class into an effective political block resulted in the foundation of the German Democratic Party, the DDP (*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*). The DDP leader, Friedrich Naumann, had long envisioned a middle class, liberal party that might form a working coalition with the SPD. His 1906 work *Die Erneuerung der Liberalismus: Ein politischer Weckruf* was an early attempt to clarify his goal. Naumann's efforts toward "the renewal of liberalism" culminated at the close of World War I, when, together with members of the nearly defunct Progressive Party and some National Liberals, Naumann established the DDP. The objective of Naumann and his fellow Democrats was "the consolidation of the German bourgeoisie in a highly organized, class-conscious

liberal party capable of collaborating with the Social Democrats on the basis of complete parity." Toward this end, the DDP launched campaign appeals to win working class votes and conducted negotiations to cement alliances with the SPD. Efforts to link the DDP to the proletariat, however, confused the party program, alienated much of the middle class, and in the end defeated Naumann's principal purpose of establishing bourgeois unity.[6]

The establishment in early 1919 of a new middle class party, in competition with but to the right of the DDP, highlighted the German Democrats' weakness and the fractious nature of the political middle. Gustav Stresemann, a young and dynamic politician, had led the National Liberal party through the end of World War I. Stresemann, along with other National Liberals during the war, endorsed extensive territorial annexations, and, also like many Liberals, he remained loyal to the monarchy even after its demise in November 1918. Some members of the new DDP came from the National Liberal party, but many of these were suspicious from the start about Friedrich Naumann's efforts to cooperate with the proletarian left. Stresemann was among the former National Liberals who looked warily upon left-wing alliances. Many middle class Germans agreed with Stresemann, and they became staunchly opposed to trafficking with the SPD after the abortive but bloody communist uprisings of autumn 1918 and winter 1918–1919. In early 1919, Stresemann led a break from Naumann and the fledgling DDP. With a following of many of the more conservative middle class constituents, Stresemann established the German People's Party, the DVP (*Deutsche Volkspartei*).[7] According to Larry Eugene Jones, the break between the DVP and DDP "severely frustrated the legitimation of Germany's new republican order."[8]

The breakaway of the DVP from the DDP was not the full extent of the fracturing of the German middle. Before long, Stresemann faced a split within the ranks of his own party, as the DVP developed into two mutually antagonistic camps. The first several years of the Republic brought many prominent industrialists to the DVP, so many, in fact, that the party became associated with the notion that "what is good for industry is good for the nation."[9] Stresemann feared that his hopes of making the DVP "the centre of a vital and realistic liberalism" would be unattainable if the right wing of the organization became too strong.[10] Though a significant block within the party endorsed Stresemann's decision in 1923 to enter a coalition that included the SPD, the right wing did not.

If his cooperation with the SPD convinced DVP industrialists such as Stinnes, Vögler, and Kalle that Stresemann lay too far to the left, Stresemann's diplomatic victory at Locarno in 1925 alienated many other rightists.[11] At Locarno, Stresemann (as foreign minister) promised to respect as final the western frontiers demarcated at Versailles. In return, he obtained from France an implicit recognition of Germany's interest in redrawing the frontier with Poland. The right wing of the DVP failed to recognize Locarno as the diplomatic victory that it was,[12] and accused Stresemann of renouncing his own nationalist convictions.[13] Stresemann's pragmatic compromises alienated those who wished to ally the DVP with the right-most elements in parliament, and his efforts to reconcile right-wing DVPers with his policies doubtless fatigued Stresemann. The struggle between the DVP factions, in conjunction with a

grueling intra-party disagreement over whether to support the Müller cabinet, may have contributed to Stresemann's premature death in October 1929. The hotly contested Young Plan, which moderated the reparation payments schedule, contributed further to tensions in the DVP. Absent Stresemann's moderating influence, the DVP, after October 3, 1929 (the day of Stresemann's death), became intractably opposed to appropriating funds to the National Workers' Insurance Agency (*Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsversicherung*). The Müller cabinet soon collapsed on the question of workers' insurance, and the period of presidential cabinets began. It was not until January 30, 1933 that a cabinet again would be created with any meaningful active parliamentary support.[14]

The right wing of the DVP, while it ultimately barred the way to prolonged cooperation with the Social Democrats, served as a bridge to the DNVP. Like the Nazi Party, the DNVP represented an unstable amalgam of right-wing interests. The NSDAP, while unique in many respects, shared at least one important characteristic with the DNVP: both parties attempted to rely for their support on a motley assortment of disputatious elements, gathered from across the conservative and radical right wing of German politics. A brief survey of the origins and development of the DNVP illustrates that the popular bases on which that organization rested were in some respects similar to those of the NSDAP. The nationalist and pro-business sentiments of the DVP right were in accord with certain strands in the German Nationalist party. While German Nationalists and right-wing members of the People's party found that they held many ideas in common, at least two aspects of the DNVP's background and subsequent development distinguished it from the DVP.

First, the DNVP arose from the remnants of the parties that had lain furthest to the right on the Wilhelmian political spectrum. Whereas the DVP reconstituted National Liberals and even some Progressives, the DNVP formed from a reamalgamation of Christian Socialists (*Christlichsoziale*), Free Conservatives (*Freikonservative*), German Conservatives (*Deutschkonservative*), and the most right-wing National Liberals.[15] The DNVP, much more decisively than the DVP, was a party of the right.

Second, while both the middle class parties, the DDP and DVP, consisted of disputatious right and left wings, the DNVP embodied so many factions and evinced so many irreconcilable policies, that its character must be described as deeply fractured and inherently contradictory.

Unlike the middle class parties, the DNVP collected under its wing a welter of extra-parliamentary organizations. Known together within the party as the *Deutschvölkische*, these groups espoused a hypertrophied nationalism, often coupled with various combinations of Aryan supremacist theory and anti-Semitism. The wartime *Vaterlandspartei*, set up in 1917 by Wolfgang Kapp, Traub, and the retired Admiral Tirpitz to counter calls for a peace resolution, sent most of its members to the DNVP. The German Socialist Party – DSP (*Deutschsozialistische Partei*) belied in its name its extreme anti-Marxism, and the German Reform Party hardly intended reform of the republican variety. Both groups migrated to the DNVP. The Pan-German League (*Alldeutscher Verband*), the Colonial League, and the *Reichslandbund*

(an organization of farmers' leagues) also joined the Nationalist cause. The staunchly anti-socialist German National Union of Commercial Employees (*Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfenverband*) and the *Stahlhelm*, the paramilitary organization of former front soldiers, also added their members to the ranks of the DNVP. The right-most elements of the Lutheran church rounded out this political assortment. On the face of things, it may have appeared that the German Nationalist movement had gathered up the proper constituency to fulfill its founding goal, to close the ranks of the far right so as to defend the powers and privileges its constituents had enjoyed under the Kaiser.[16]

In fact, any appearance of far right unity was illusory. The major prewar parties that contributed most of their memberships to the DNVP – the German Conservatives, the Free Conservatives, and the Christian Socialists – shared a vague sense that they preferred the old conservative, monarchical political order to the new republican one, but salient differences of interest generally overwhelmed common sentiment.

The majority of Conservatives had been readers of the press organ of the East Elbean Junker elite, the *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, popularly known as the *Kreuzzeitung*, after the iron cross featured in its masthead. The Conservative constituency rested on the traditional triad of Prussian politics: the agricultural nobility, the civil service, and the army. The mostly Protestant members of the Conservative party professed nationalism, monarchism, and a Prussified, Lutheran Christianity.[17] On April 13, 1919, the *Kreuzzeitung* urged its Conservative readers to transfer their allegiance to the new Nationalist party.[18]

The Free Conservatives had broken off from the German Conservatives, so as to give an independent voice to a more modern wing of the Prussian right. Nevertheless devoted to an authoritarian order, the Free Conservatives were more likely than their Conservative counterparts to endorse a constitutional – as distinguished from autocratic – monarchy. Many of them came from intellectual and academic ranks, or represented the more enlightened part of the officer corps. Some industrialists were attracted to the Free Conservatives, as well.[19] If this group of the electorate had found cause to break ranks with the German Conservatives during the reassuringly stable days of the *Kaiserreich*, their new alliance under the DNVP would be severely strained during a time of republican uncertainty.

The third major prewar party whose members gravitated to the Nationalists held markedly different economic and social views than the rest of the far right. The Christian Socialists came to constitute a "very active left wing" of the DNVP. Established during the 1880s, the Christian Socialist movement was the creation of Adolf Stöcker, an anti-Semitic Evangelical pastor and convincing orator. Stöcker hoped to save Germany from a bleak communist future foretold in an alarmist tract by one Rudolf Todt. (Todt's book was entitled *Der radikale deutsche Sozialismus und die christliche Gesellschaft*.) Stöcker's strategy was to recruit the working class into a party that endorsed patriotism, Christianity, and state socialism; and thereby, in theory, to deflate the appeal and numbers of the SPD. Though the Christian Socialists met with mediocre electoral results, they were a noticeable presence on the far right and stood distinct from the Junker aristocrats who dominated the Conservative Party.

Forebodingly, the Christian Socialist party was also distinct from other right-wing parties in its reliance on dynamic oratory and anti-Semitism. In this, the party was arguably rooted in the same demagogic tradition that would later develop into a hallmark of the radical right.[20]

Lewis Hertzman describes the characteristics which this assortment of parties carried from the pre-1914 period into the DNVP: a "lack of generosity in dealing with rivals," "an unwillingness to accept timely compromise," and "a refusal to lose graciously."[21] Some voices in the DNVP called for pragmatic moderation, but these finally were overcome by the extremist components of the movement.[22] The first chairman of the DNVP was Oskar Hergt, a little known Prussian civil servant. Hergt and his supporters, with a policy of total opposition to the Republic, held sway from the foundation of the party during the November Revolution of 1918 until the acceptance of the Dawes Plan in 1924. The DNVP appeared to reconcile itself to normal participation in parliamentary life, under the chairmanship of Hergt's successor, Kuno Graf von Westarp, a Prussian aristocrat and, by DNVP standards, a moderate. Westarp's tenure ended amidst an intra-party war and with his quitting of the DNVP in 1928. Alfred Hugenberg, a multimillionaire press and film baron often described as a rabid nationalist, seized the party's reins in 1928 and led it to a fateful alliance with Hitler.[23] Larry Eugene Jones has called this change in DNVP leadership "a genuine turning point in the history of the Weimar Republic."[24]

Stanley G. Payne describes the prevailing attitude among German Nationalists:

> The conservative authoritarian right was only anti-conservative in the very limited sense of having broken with the parliamentary forms of moderate parliamentary conservatism. It wished . . . to avoid radical breaks in legal continuity if at all possible, and normally proposed only a partial transformation of the system in a more authoritarian direction.[25]

Notwithstanding their generally more moderate tone, many DNVP members were likely to find kindred spirits among Nazi racists and anti-Semites. More extreme German Nationalists might have found appealing the revolutionary ideology and proclivity toward violence of National Socialism. On the *völkisch* extreme of the DNVP, the constituency in fact blended rather naturally with Nazism.

The leading *völkisch* voices in the DNVP were Ferdinand Werner-Hersfeld, Wilhelm Bruhn, and Albrecht von Gräfe. They agitated against the more cautious stance of party leadership, and their activism began early on to cause trouble. An important point of contention was the admission of Germans of Jewish ancestry into the party. The radical German Nationalists began to demand that all such Germans be barred from the party rolls. Party chairman Hergt was subjected to personal attack for accepting donations from Jews and for suggesting that "patriotic" Jews (as demonstrated, for example, by outstanding records in the armed forces) be welcomed into the DNVP. The *völkisch* block of the DNVP cost the party in prestige and respectability when its anti-Semitic agitation drove from the movement's ranks the celebrated jurist Otto von Gierke.[26]

Purging those whom they opposed was not enough for the more radical *völkisch*

constituents. Some of them began leaving themselves. As early as spring 1920, parts of the racist wing began to express their disaffection by seceding from the movement. A group calling itself the *Deutschvölkischer Arbeitsring* declared in early 1920 that the country needed a united *völkisch* front, drawing on the laboring classes; and that the DNVP program was beholden to reactionary Junkers and thus incapable of implementing the radical changes desired by the ultra-rightists.[27] The DNVP gathered together a multivalent constituency, but holding it together would prove nearly impossible. The fractious conduct of the breakaway *Deutschvölkischer Arbeitsring* merely signaled more trouble to come. A large part of the Nationalists' *völkisch* block, including many former members of the German Socialist Party, the Reform Party, and the Fatherland Party, left the DNVP in 1922 to establish the German Racial Freedom party – the DVFP (*Deutsche Völkisch Freiheits Partei*).[28] The DNVP crisis of group secessions, internal antagonisms, and individual withdrawals cast doubt on whether a stable party could exist on the far right.

Instability in the composition of its ranks was one result of the disputatious constituency of the DNVP. The polymorphous ideology of DNVP members also translated into an ill-defined and contradictory party program. Attila Chanady explains:

> Although common idealistic objectives could transcend political and economic group affiliations in some instances, fragmentation was and remained a dominant feature of the DNVP. This was reflected in the hotchpotch character of the program and party organization.[29]

The party stitched together an agenda that made promises to mutually antagonistic groups. Though it kept its promises vague in an effort to gloss over conflicts among its constituents, the DNVP could not long hide that its platform was rife with contradiction. The DNVP promised short workdays to the Christian socialist labor unions, while assuring industrialists that the party would promote an economy unimpeded by regulation. The price of food would surely escalate if farmers obtained the price supports and protective tariffs that the DNVP advocated, yet the party promised urban workers and the lower middle class that it would fight to lower the cost of basic necessities. Junker estates, if their proprietors and managers implemented new agrarian technologies and produced efficiently, tended to overtake and eventually to buy out small, indebted, and inefficient farmsteads; yet the DNVP swore to defend and promote the interests of small and large farmers alike.[30] Cleavages within the DNVP prevented the party from formulating a coherent and consistent program.

The conflict among the antagonistic components of the DNVP crystallized around the question of joining parliamentary coalitions. Three groups favored entering cabinets with other parties. First, young conservatives who had come of political age at the end of the war accepted the Republic as a fait accompli, and they decided that the party had to learn to function within republican guidelines. Second, many civil servants inherited from their tenures in the Bismarckian bureaucracy a loyalty to the German State, and they believed it their duty to participate responsibly

in that State, regardless of whether it was a monarchy or republic. Third, Christian trade unionists, agricultural barons, and industrial bosses desired to parlay their party's parliamentary seats into political power so that they could use the State to further their particular economic interests. Arrayed against these elements however were *völkisch* rightists, Pan-Germans, and paramilitary activists – especially of the *Stahlhelm*. Alfred Hugenberg, Axel von Freytag-Loringhaven, Paul Bang, and Gottfried Gok led the charge against coalition government.[31]

Several test cases demonstrated that the dominant party of the far right could barely hold together when offered the chance to participate in parliamentary rule. August 1924 witnessed debate over the Dawes Plan. The Plan had emerged in spring 1924 from the report of a group of American financial experts who had studied the German fiscal crisis and reparations schedules. The Plan terminated French exploitation of the industrial Ruhr and forbade future sanctions except in the event of flagrant violations of the Versailles settlement. It also allowed foreign creditors to lend to Germany and made the reparations schedule less onerous.[32] The DNVP adopted the view that the Plan confirmed the Versailles *Diktat* and was thus treasonous. DNVP opposition notwithstanding, the Reichstag approved the Plan. On the occasion of parliamentary ratification, Erich Ludendorff attacked its sponsor, Stresemann, with invective typical of the *völkisch* right: "This," the retired Quarter-Master General yelled, "is a disgrace to Germany! Ten years ago I won the battle of Tannenberg. Today you have made a Jewish Tannenberg!"[33] However, not all Nationalists followed Ludendorff. Many members of the *Reichsverband der deutschen industrie*, the Landbund, and the Christian socialist trade unions recognized that the Dawes Plan served their own interests and was probably in the national interest as well. The DNVP Reichstag bloc did not vote in unison on the Plan, and this division prefigured still wider rifts. By 1925, moderated by Count Westarp's pragmatism, the party had joined a cabinet. Chancellor Hans Luther's government contained three DNVP ministers, and the German Nationalists threw their weight behind the government effort to ratify the Locarno Treaty in October 1925.[34] Stresemann, as foreign minister, had won a sizeable diplomatic victory at Locarno, obtaining recognition of Germany's interest in an adjustment of the eastern frontier and admittance of the country to the League of Nations. Renouncing claims to Alsace-Lorraine under the Treaty was also useful, as it stabilized relations with France. Yet their support of the government earned the DNVP cabinet members the enmity of their rightist fellow Nationalists.[35]

Count Westarp realized that trying to reconcile the DNVP right with the necessities of parliamentary life was a perilous business. When the party joined the second Wilhelm Marx cabinet in January 1927, Westarp explained the decision. The DNVP, he said, had a patriotic duty to enter the government even if the government was in some ways objectionable – the national interest demanded constructive participation. And, Westarp guaranteed, parliamentary participation and even cabinet membership did not contradict the DNVP's anti-republican ideals. The leader's reassurances, though, could not cure fundamental infirmities. Mutually antagonistic elements within the DNVP were incapable of reconciling themselves to one another or to pragmatic parliamentary maneuvering, and the

decision to enter the second Marx cabinet made it extremely difficult for the leadership to manage the party's radical wing. Westarp subsequently endorsed a two-year extension of Article 23 of the constitution – a provision barring the former Kaiser from returning to Germany. This compromise with the coalition "weakened [Westarp's] position as leader beyond redemption."[36]

The May 1928 Reichstag election took thirty seats from the German Nationalists, thus severely eroding the DNVP bloc. The party now had little with which to bargain its way into government, so the moderate faction led by Westarp no longer had the political capital to vindicate its policy of cooperation. When the DNVP bloc had been large enough to force the leading parties to consider it a coalition partner, the policy of constructive participation in the republic could be defended. Lacking such an appreciable parliamentary fraction, the DNVP lurched toward the right-most part of its political terrain. Indeed, the 1928 election cleared the way for the radicals to take command. In October, Alfred Hugenberg replaced Westarp as first chairman. By that time owner of *Scherl Verlag* (a major press) and Ufa (the country's leading film studio), Hugenberg made his stance clear in a letter to Westarp dated September 1927:

> Whoever believes theoretically in the necessity of a complete innovation and reconstruction of our public life, whoever hates today's state yet builds his personal fortune and future on his collaboration with the parliamentary system, is a moral cripple.[37]

Hugenberg's refusal to cooperate with the Republic soon accelerated the fracturing of his party. In addition to adopting a new policy of non-cooperation, Hugenberg sought to impose his will on the DNVP in other matters. Mimicking Hitler's *Führerprinzip*, Hugenberg stated that only a single will could shape the party's destiny, and that it was his will alone which would prevent the Nationalists from turning into an amorphous "mash." Instead of becoming a party of compromise, the DNVP would be a solid "bloc." By April 1929, Hugenberg had established a personal dictatorship over the party.[38]

Hugenberg's inflexibility soon alienated many DNVP constituents. Already in 1928, the argument over the Kaiser (Article 23) had alienated the tradesmen unionists. Walter Lambach, leader of the *Handlungsgehilfenverband*, suggested that Hohenzollern restoration was an unrealistic goal and that the DNVP should declare in favor of the Republic. Lambach's pragmatism had earned him expulsion from the party, and many members of his organization followed.[39] In 1929, Hugenberg initiated his fateful liaison with the Nazis. He aligned the party with the campaign against the Young Plan and, in so doing, expressed disloyalty toward President von Hindenburg. These steps led to a full-scale exodus of unionists by the end of the year. Christian socialists and many "young conservatives" could conscience neither disloyalty toward the beloved Field Marshal Hindenburg nor intercourse with the suspect corporal Hitler. By year's end, a Christian People's Service (*Christliche Volksdienst*) had emerged as a new party, independent of the increasingly dictatorial DNVP.[40]

The spring and summer of 1930 brought further disintegration to the Nationalist party. The Brüning cabinet sought parliamentary approval for an aid program to East Elbean farmers. Hugenberg, above protests from the Junkers – long a linchpin of the DNVP – announced the party's opposition to the *Osthilfe*. It was only a short time before a new Christian National Farmer's party drew upon a stream of agriculturalists quitting the DNVP. Finally, suspicious of Hugenberg's cooperation with the unsettlingly left-wing National Socialists and angry over his opposition to such economically beneficial initiatives as the Young Plan, a significant bloc of business people and industrialists fled the party. Many of them joined yet another new right-wing party, a *Konservative Volkspartei* established by Count Westarp and his associate and fellow former Nationalist, Gottfried Treviranus.[41]

In his discussion of the disintegration of the DNVP, Attilla Chanady recognizes a similarity between the Nationalists and the National Socialists:

> The horizon of [Hugenberg and his followers] was limited by their hate of the "system," and they just could not see beyond the immediate task of destroying it. In this respect they were not far from the National Socialists. Their propaganda was demagogic and emotional, and their arguments, or rather polemics, in both public and private matters lacked objectivity.[42]

But more fundamental than this parallel was the underlying difficulty of binding together for any length of time a multifarious collection of far right forces. The founding aim of the German National People's Party was to close the ranks of the German right, and the outcome of this experiment in far right unity is informative. Only if the party refrained from parliamentary participation could it hold itself together, and then only on a much-eroded basis. Under Hergt, until 1924, the party vehemently opposed the Republic and therefore never exposed itself to the challenges of government participation. But once DNVP deputies joined a government and clear stands had to be taken on the Dawes Plan, Article 23, and other clear-cut questions which could not be glossed over with rhetoric, the DNVP fell into crisis. With the advent of Hugenberg's dictatorship over the party, many members realized that the DNVP had become inimical to their interests. The free and open field of republican politics allowed these factions to flee Hugenberg's ineffective grip and establish their own parties. Only a national dictatorship by the DNVP could have preserved Hugenberg's hold over such an unruly constituency.

The unsettled völkisch *right: the Nazi core in context*

A peculiar feature of politics in the first German republic was the so-called *völkisch* movement. Translated often simply as "racist," *völkisch* denoted an amalgam of ideas clustered around a concept of ethnic chauvinism. The movement seems to have been driven by a combination of economic frustration and racial hatred. It has been noted that it was difficult to distinguish the ideologies of the various *völkisch* groups. Many, especially in the early 1920s, had a monarchist tendency that distinguished them from the less conventional Nazi movement, but acknowledging that difference,

the core ideology of most of the radical right-wing parties was substantively uniform. Their cornerstone was a loosely defined *völkisch* ideology. The *völkisch* system of beliefs was no hard-and-fast doctrine, like Marxism, but, rather, a vague complex of tendencies. Principal among *völkisch* beliefs was a racially oriented populism, consisting of anti-Semitism, exclusive and intolerant nationalism, and a rejection of modern society and economics. The NSDAP ultimately harnessed the *völkisch* idea best, but, for a time, it was but one among many competitors for the allegiance of far right activists.[43]

In such an environment, it was an accomplishment merely to survive. Historians have noted that nothing at the outset identified the Nazi Party as particularly advantaged in the competition among *völkisch* contenders. Stanley Payne explains that the Nazis were not predetermined to rise to the top of radical nationalist politics in Germany:

> National Socialism developed as the most radical branch of a multiform patriotic movement that first mushroomed in the wake of German defeat in 1918. More than one hundred different nationalist parties, groups, and societies have been identified. A few of them paralleled the national socialist aspirations of the Nazis but most were distinctly to their right. For as long as ten years, some of them were also much stronger and more numerous.[44]

Jeremy Noakes and Geofrey Pridham remark that "[t]he Nazi Party was merely one of a number of similar *völkisch* groups which sprang up all over Germany during 1919," and Dietrich Orlow emphasizes that the Bavarian far right at the point the Nazis arrived was "crowded and confused."[45] Harold Gordon, discussing the prelude to the Munich Putsch, explains that the Nazis, though apparently gaining steam, were not secure:

> While the National Socialist Party was the most active and rapidly growing element in the Racist Movement . . . those elements of the movement outside the NSDAP were much more numerous than those within it, and before the Putsch it was far from clear that the NSDAP would be able to dominate even the left wing, let alone the entire movement.[46]

The Nazi Party was perhaps beginning to display the dynamism and opportunism which would prove assets throughout its existence, but as of 1923 the road to dominance, even over one small part of the political spectrum, was strewn with obstacles.

The greatest barrier in the path to power within the *völkisch* movement was the uncompromising and disputatious nature of the groups that Hitler hoped to meld into the NSDAP. Remarks from two contemporary observers hinted at the challenges of dealing with *völkisch* activists. Ernst Röhm wrote about the divisiveness reigning within *völkisch* circles:

> The entire völkisch movement lay in a deep crisis, disunited, divided, faction

> against faction, defense league against party, leader against leader, a picture of disaffection and unrest.[47]

Gustav von Kahr, monarchist party chief in Bavaria and writing in his monarchist organ *Das bayrische Vaterland*, decried the profusion of would-be conquerors within the *völkisch* right:

> Every one of these parties, every one of these tiny groups has its own leader . . . each of these leaders intrigues and spins his web against the other. Dozens of Napoleons and just as many Bismarcks![48]

Persistence and luck in equal portion were prerequisites for making a party's message heard amidst the *völkisch* din.

Hitler recognized the precariousness of the Nazi position within the *völkisch* movement, and it was only with great care that he allowed other groups from the *völkisch* right to join the NSDAP. Not only might indiscriminate expansion have eroded the distinctions between Nazism and its rivals. A sudden infusion of unfamiliar and uncontrolled activists might have threatened Hitler's grip on his own party. Two examples, in particular, illustrated Hitler's guardedness in associating the NSDAP with similar organizations.

Julius Streicher of Nürnberg and Dr. Otto Dickel of Augsburg were leaders of separate *völkisch* camps with whom Hitler came in contact. Streicher and Dickel commanded considerable personal followings, and their constituencies and prestige were at once a potential prize for the Nazis to capture and a potential obstacle to overcome.

Dr. Dickel gained notoriety as a racist politician and writer. Leading several *völkisch* organizations, including an Augsburg-based *Deutsche Werk-Gemeinschaft* and an *Abendländischer Bund*, Dickel became a problem for the Nazis in summer 1921. Dickel and his followers had achieved prominence in Augsburg *völkisch* circles, and Anton Drexler, founder of the Nazi Party, invited Dickel to bring his entire constituency into the NSDAP. Drexler proposed that the Dickel group retain its own administration and receive special privileges within the Nazi Party. Hitler, however, had already condemned offering NSDAP membership on special terms. Letting a competing party enter the Nazi movement with its own structures intact, Hitler feared, would fissure the NSDAP. Drexler extended the offer of amalgamation to Dickel while Hitler was away in Berlin.

After learning of Drexler's proposed deal with Dickel, on July 11, 1921 Hitler threatened to resign from the Nazi Party. Recognizing that Hitler's skills as an orator were the Party's greatest asset, the Nazi executive committee capitulated when Hitler issued a list of demands upon which he conditioned his continued membership in the NSDAP. Hitler was to receive complete personal control over the Party, and no further amalgamations were to take place. While Hitler's move in July 1921 was a personal coup (he became unrivaled dictator within the NSDAP), it reflected the Nazis' weakness in face of *völkisch* competitors. On the racist right, it was critical to distinguish one's party from the many others struggling for the

allegiance of fickle constituents. The closing of his ultimatum to Drexler reiterated Hitler's view:

> All further attempts at such a fusion between the National Socialist German Workers' Party and the movement which unjustifiably calls itself the German National Socialist Party must in the future cease. The Party can never agree to a fusion with those who wish to make contact with us; they must join the Party. Reciprocal gestures on our part are out of the question.[49]

In other words, individual members of rival groups were encouraged to join the Nazis, but not the groups themselves. Hitler struggled to increase the Party rolls, so as to prevent the NSDAP from shrinking into complete obscurity, but he apprehended loss of cohesion if the Party became a confederation of semi-autonomous *völkisch* organizations.

July 1921 was not the last occasion when the Nazis would cross paths with Dr. Dickel. In August 1920, the leaders of the DSP and the NSDAP had met in Salzburg and decided to divide Germany into two parts. Germany north of the Main would be reserved for the DSP, south of the Main for the Nazis. Julius Streicher, publisher of a vulgar anti-Semitic newspaper (*Deutsche Sozialist*, later to gain infamy under the title *Der Stürmer*), possessed a certain constituency in and around Nürnberg. While largely autonomous, Streicher casually associated with the DSP, counting himself a party member. Nürnberg, which lies south of the Main, by the terms reached at Salzburg ought to have been an area of Nazi influence, but Streicher proved recalcitrant. The Nürnberg racist leader fended off Nazi efforts to win over his personal followers, and he turned down offers for himself to join the NSDAP. Perhaps sensing that the Nazis had met a blockade in Streicher, Dr. Dickel, ever the *völkisch* activist, decided to endeavor to unite the entire *völkisch* movement under his own aegis. In November 1921, Dickel established a *Deutsch Werk-Gemeinschaft*, and convinced Streicher to leave the DSP and join the new group, along with his substantial Franconian following.[50]

The Streicher press, its paper renamed the *Deutscher Volkswille*, kicked off the campaign for *völkisch* unity with anti-Semitic diatribes. Extreme even by *völkisch* standards and laden with sexual innuendo, the content of the *Deutscher Volkswille* embarrassed Dickel, who began to doubt the wisdom of associating with Streicher.[51] Perhaps perceiving in Streicher's journalism a kindred spirit and fearing a dynamic *völkisch* competitor, Hitler made his move against Dickel. Hitler learned that tensions had arisen between Dickel and Streicher and that Streicher's newspaper lay deeply in debt. Exploiting these weaknesses, Hitler invited Streicher to abandon Dickel's movement and join the NSDAP. Hitler induced Streicher further by promising to liquidate the debt of the newspaper and to make Streicher the *Gauleiter* of Franconia. Streicher accepted the offer and joined the NSDAP in October 1922. Many of his followers imitated his example at the same time.[52] As for the DSP, it dissolved itself in August 1922, and most of its members joined the NSDAP.[53]

The nullification of the Dickel threat and absorption of Streicher and his followers into the Party hardly meant final victory in the fight for *völkisch* primacy. A number

of far right organizations in Bavaria effectively resisted the Nazi advance. The *Deutschvölkischer Schutz- und Trutzbund*, the *Bund Bayern und Reich*, the *Bund Oberland*, and the *Reichskriegsflagge* were some of a number of like organizations, stemming from the *Freikorps* and from which Hitler's recruiters could not attract any meaningful number of activists into the NSDAP.[54] So small a dent did the Nazis put in these *völkisch* competitors that, when agitation mounted within the Munich radical right for a coup attempt, Hitler's hand was forced: despite his disavowal of "fusion" with other parties, Hitler was pressured to commit his party and its SA to the putsch attempt of November 9, 1923. Sitting out the putsch might well have surrendered the political initiative to rival parties.[55] Though the trial following the putsch made Hitler the most recognized *völkisch* leader, he would, after 1923, redouble his emphasis on keeping the NSDAP separate and distinct from other radical right-wing parties and their projects.

During his brief incarceration at Landsberg for attempting to overthrow the Republic, Hitler continued his policy against amalgamation. After the coup attempt, the state and national governments banned the NSDAP, and the Nazis therefore had to operate under front organizations. Hitler appointed Alfred Rosenberg chief of the NSDAP's successor organizations. Rosenberg devoted most of his time to pseudo-philosophy and took a place more as the Party's official ideologue than as leader or manager. By placing a lackluster steward over the movement, Hitler seemed to intend to avoid any major initiatives in his absence. When Rosenberg timidly suggested that the DVFP and several *Wehrverbände* be allowed to merge their organizations with the NSDAP, Hitler emphatically vetoed the proposition.[56] In short, the Nazi foothold in *völkisch* politics remained tenuous, and Hitler, so long as his hand was away from the helm of the Party, perceived momentary stagnation a safer policy than attempted progress.

After his jail term, Hitler continued to proceed carefully. A coalition of *völkisch* parties had performed abysmally in the December 1924 Reichstag election,[57] and an additional defeat threatened to reshuffle the order of prestige within the restless racist realm. Faced with an unfavorable national political climate and a hyper-competitive environment within the *völkisch* right, Hitler decided to concentrate on building a tight-knit, intensive organization, rather than on expanding. Pursuant to the cautious goal of consolidation, Hitler made the requirements for Party membership from May 1926 on stricter than before.[58] The mechanisms for acquiring and retaining NSDAP membership were clarified and made stricter still after a crisis involving the *Stahlhelm* in Thuringia. Hitler visited Weimar in October 1926, in order to eke out an alliance with some Thuringian radical rightists. In particular, Hitler hoped to win individual converts from the *Stahlhelm* and *Wehrwolf* paramilitary organizations. These two groups and a number of *völkisch* parties had recently established the *Völkischer Führerring Thüringen* (VFTh) in preparation for a state election to be held in January 1927. When he was snubbed by the VFTh and realized that the Nazis ran the risk of being overshadowed by the group, Hitler denounced the Thuringian *völkisch* alliance and declared that Nazis were not to associate with the VFTh in any way.[59]

While Nazi activity in *völkisch* politics might appear to have been largely defensive, the Nazis did not merely keep the Party afloat. In addition to struggling to show how the NSDAP was not like other parties, the Nazis also distinguished themselves

affirmatively. When Hitler praised the SA for its violent ways, he was continuing the effort to distinguish Nazism in a crowded field of political contestants:

> The NSDAP [Hitler said] has recently been described as a savage, brutal horde, unafraid of using any means. I am very happy to hear this, since I expect that this will make my aims and my Party feared and known.[60]

Hitler's characteristic bravado did not change political reality: making the NSDAP known, let alone feared, would be no easy task. Dozens of like movements peppered the German political landscape, and mere survival was often in doubt. J.E. Farquharson, discussing the NSDAP in Lower Saxony, summarizes the nature of the Nazis' initial success:

> What was important in the long run was the gradual elimination of rivals like the DSP, so that the relative slowness in the growth of the NSDAP is perhaps less significant than it might appear at first sight. The proliferation of right-wing splinter groups was beginning to sort itself out by 1926, as the National Socialist party slowly asserted primacy over the DVFP and similar bodies, a necessary stage on its road to gradual absorption of the radical Right in general; this occurred largely after the onset of the great economic depression in 1929, but the essential groundwork had already been laid in 1926.[61]

By a combination of persistence, skill, and luck, the Nazis did rise to dominance on the *völkisch* fringe. But the nature of that part of the political spectrum left its mark on the subsequent development of the NSDAP. The Nazi core constituency was a disputatious rabble of racist fanatics. In its early years, the Party was one of a plethora of grasping and ephemeral groups, and, in all of these, in-fighting, desertion, and dissolution were endemic. The Nazis fought a decade-long battle, just to win primacy over the *völkisch* fringe. Yet the history of that political sector was full of brief alliances, prone to collapse in defeat, disillusionment, or mutual enmity. While it was an accomplishment to survive and prosper in the forbidding *völkisch* climate, the fact remained: the NSDAP, though enjoying a peculiar asset in its leader, at root was a *völkisch* alliance. To be sure, the NSDAP had been strengthened by Hitler's charisma and fanatic insistence against "fusion" with other parties. But the NSDAP's quantum stuff – its members and their ideological tendencies – nonetheless had much in common with that of a failed multitude of radical nationalist parties. The NSDAP would grow far beyond its *völkisch* core, yet the constituency Hitler assembled in the 1920s remained the activist heart of the Nazi movement. The unstable nature of Nazism's early political context thus must be borne in mind when describing the state of the movement at later stages in its development.

The KPD

As noted previously, it was amidst the tumult of military defeat in November 1918 that the Second Reich gave way to the first German republic. The capital was a hotbed of far left politics. Soviets (*Räte*) were established in most Berlin factories, and

the workers issued demands for reform. The more radical proletarian elements called for revolution. At the center of the agenda for radical change were the Lampl or Hamburg Points. The Points were the rallying cry of the far left and focus of anxiety among the officer corps. Along with other changes, the Lampl Points called for a restructuring of the armed services so as to end the monopoly of the aristocracy over military power. General Groener, Ludendorff and Hindenburg's successor as army chief-of-staff, had communicated by telephone with Friedrich Ebert, briefly *Reichskanzler*, co-chairman of the coalition cabinet (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*), leader of the ruling Social Democrats, and later President of the Republic.[62] In their conversation Ebert agreed to oppose the Lampl Points, the chief-of-staff agreeing in return to support the SPD government. Thus the SPD suppressed the most radical demands of the *Räte* in exchange for the armed support of the army. The far left believed itself betrayed by SPD leadership, and defection from the party ensued. Workers who perceived counter-revolutionary aims in Ebert's deal with Groener formed the core of a radical party, the USPD (Independent Social Democrats).

The leaders of the radical left were Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Liebknecht had been expelled from the SPD in 1916 for having opposed the policies put forward by party leadership. Joining Luxemburg shortly afterward, Liebknecht established the *Spartacusbund*. The Spartacasts aired their program on May Day, 1916, when they held a war protest calling for the toppling of the Kaiser and establishment of a communist state. The USPD itself, a splinter of the SPD, had been established early in the war to protest the SPD's support of the government, but the Spartacus League stood to the left even within the USPD. This fracturing of the left-wing polity contributed to the turmoil of the last months of 1918.

By January 1919, the Spartacast left had grown impatient with its parent party. Led by Liebknecht and Luxemburg, Spartacasts broke off from the USPD to form the new Communist Party of Germany – the KPD.[63] Virtually from its inception, the KPD engaged itself in a violent struggle against the Republic. This met a response of equal or greater vigor from the right. Groups of former front soldiers formed *Freikorps*, paramilitary units not officially controlled by the army or any other authority, though often secretly funded by the government, and these units combated left wing workers, whom many former officers of the Imperial Army perceived as a danger to public order. The *Freikorps* crushed a KPD-led revolt in early 1919. Liebknecht and Luxemburg were shot on January 15, 1919 by *Freikorps* troops and their bodies thrown in a Berlin canal.

More or less independent of Berlin communist activities, a group of far left activists seized control of Munich and set up an independent *Räterrepublik Bayern*. Under the leadership of Kurt Eisner, a Marxist politician-intellectual, the brief Bavarian communist experiment was a failure. Munich in the days of the short-lived Eisner regime ranged from disorderly to dangerous. Eisner was assassinated shortly after the establishment of the communist state, and the "Soviet Republic of Bavaria" began its hasty demise. *Freikorps* in northern Germany, by spring 1919, had ended the most substantial left wing revolts and were thus now free to turn their counter-revolutionary attention toward Munich. The Bavarian far left was quickly and violently subdued.[64] Unlike the Nazis, however, the communists would endeavor more than once to seize power by dint of arms.

The chance for another leftist uprising came in March 1920 by way of the right. A number of reactionary figures adopted Wolfgang Kapp, East Prussian *General-landschaftsdirektor*, as their figurehead leader and launched an ill-conceived coup attempt. The so-called Kapp Putsch had the backing of a group of army officers and *Freikorps* extremists. The putschists managed to seize Berlin on March 12 and met no opposition from the armed forces. The SPD leadership, however, though discredited on the left by their complicity in the suppression of the 1918–1919 revolution, still commanded respect among working class Germans. Friedrich Ebert and his cabinet, in a desperate attempt to defeat the coup, issued orders for a general strike. Enough laborers joined the strike to immobilize the country, and the "Kappists" had no choice but to capitulate.[65]

With Kapp and his patrons defeated, communist militiamen in the Ruhr and Central Germany judged the moment ripe for completing the work that had been stymied in 1918–1919. The militiamen agitated for a soviet state and refused to relinquish control of the factories they had occupied pursuant to the strike. As Hagen Schulze describes it, the strikers saw themselves not merely fending off a right-wing challenge to republicanism but as forming the vanguard of "the masses' own power."[66] SPD leaders, fearing backlash from their more moderate partisans and from the middle-of-the-road parties with which they had to cooperate to maintain a functioning government, rejected the radical demands of the communists. As in 1919, the SPD demanded a return to normality in the Ruhr and elsewhere, and, finally, the party put teeth in its demands by unleashing the *Freikorps*. The rightist paramilitaries under the auspices of the moderate left once again crushed the radical left. Within two months, the second major leftist uprising had been extinguished by force.[67]

The KPD launched one last attempt at revolution. In 1921, KPD cells revolted in Berlin, Hamburg, Central Germany, and the Ruhr. The Army and *Freikorps*, now practiced in counter-revolution, put an end to this revolt as well.[68]

Political violence would subsequently be relegated for the most part to KPD rhetoric. In practice, the Communist Party now endeavored to win electoral coups instead of military ones. The KPD, especially starting with the two national elections of 1924, sought to gain representation in the Reichstag. Any seats they gained the communists intended to use "for obstructionist and propagandistic purposes," not for leverage toward winning portfolios in state or national cabinets. The party retained its radical anti-republican objectives, while unmistakably moderating its tactics.[69]

Three figures by 1928 dominated the KPD. Ernst Thälmann, Hermann Remmele, and Heinz Neumann in effect formed a ruling triumvirate within the party central committee. Thälmann came from a lower middle class family of the Hamburg waterfront and was the official leader of the party. The logical choice to head the party's presidential tickets, the charismatic Thälmann encouraged a Stalinesque personality cult. Remmele, standing out as the party's best parliamentarian, headed the KPD Reichstag delegation. And Heinz Neumann was the youngest and most extreme of the three leaders. Having spent some years in the Soviet Union, Neumann was more highly placed in the Comintern than any other German communist. Among his exploits on behalf of world communism, Neumann had

served as the Comintern's representative in an abortive coup attempt in Canton, China. Owing to his personal relationship with Stalin and other leaders of the International, Neumann, more than any other KPD luminary, was capable of tactical flexibility.[70] He would soon learn, however, that a truly independent policy was out of the question.

It became clear in the months spanning 1928–1929 that the Comintern intended to exercise direct control of the KPD. A "united front" strategy had hitherto guided the party. Under the united front strategy, the KPD was permitted to cooperate with other workers' parties, most importantly with the SPD. From 1928 to 1929, however, the united front policy was condemned by the International, and, upon Moscow's edict, it was finally replaced by the so-called ultra-left course. The new strategy banned cooperation with any republican party. The theory behind this political isolationism was that the republic and the social welfare legislation of the republic's chief party (the SPD) tended to placate the proletariat and thereby steer the workers off the revolutionary track. To ultra-left partisans, the SPD were "'social fascists' who sought to preserve bourgeois rule and obstruct the approach of proletarian revolution."[71] In practical terms, the ultra-left course meant abandoning the struggle against the Nazis and the far right and concentrating against the moderate left.

After NSDAP electoral gains in September 1930 and July 1932 made conceivable the appointment of a Nazi cabinet, ultra-left theory was modified by a new corollary. The rise of Nazism, communist strategists posited, was a prerequisite to communist power. Horst Duhnke explains: "[The] new theory . . . actually made the coming revolution conditional upon the previous attainment of the highest stage of capitalist development . . . fascism."[72] The paradox of ultra-left revolutionaries awaiting keenly the advent of Hitler's dictatorship is resolvable only in light of the communists' confidence that history was playing itself out in deterministic phases, each promoting society in lock step closer to the "pure socialist" state. As a practical matter, the KPD's ultra-left course and belief that Hitler marked the end point of capitalism meant that the German Communist Party had backed itself into a tactical corner out of which few functioning political strategies could be recovered.

The politics of the street and its practitioners

The *Sturmabteilung* was not alone in the Republic. A political system seemingly unable to accommodate millions of demobilized soldiers after November 1918 spawned an array of paramilitary organizations, and this in turn produced a culture of political violence – a politics of the street as it were – which marred public life for the duration of the Republic. The origins of these varied groups and their interactions with one another and with political parties form a critical feature of the pre-*Machtergreifung* context.

Emergence of a paramilitary culture

Armed formations were a prominent feature of politics in Weimar Germany, and Hitler's party was not atypical in having a "party army." The significance of

paramilitary organizations outside the Nazi sphere is unmistakable. Not only did the SA do battle, form alliances, and sometimes simply coexist with other armed groups, but also the *Sturmabteilung* was only one of numerous like organizations, and, thus, can be fully understood only in the context of a wide-spread paramilitary culture. Peter H. Merkl in a landmark study emphasized that the SA was very much part of a wider phenomenon:

> The stormtroopers of the years 1930–1932 did not spring fully grown from Hitler's head. They had been nurtured by a full decade of parliamentary politics, and often came directly from other, similar organizations.[73]

Many of the paramilitary groups proliferating after World War I competed with the SA, but they also set the tone for an important part of the political milieu and even produced stormtrooper recruits. Most prominent among the non-Nazi paramilitaries were the socialist *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold*, the communist RFB, and the right-wing *Stahlhelm*.

The violent conditions prevailing at the advent of the Republic spawned the paramilitary formations that would prove a bane of its existence. The Armistice of November 11, 1918 arrived amidst collapse of military order on the Western Front, and soldiers returned to Germany like a mob rather than a proper army. The country to which the veterans returned in 1918 was also unfamiliar in many respects. The confident and conservative Germany of 1914 had given way to doubt and tumult. Communist insurgency threatened several parts of the country, and the symbols of the old regime were gone. The majority of soldiers set about adjusting to civilian life in the new Germany. But others did not.[74] The men who could not find a place in postwar society provided the seeds for a paramilitary culture and in this form plagued German politics for the next fourteen years.

It seems that the ex-soldiers least able to adjust to civilian life were those who had belonged to the fighting elite. The Imperial Army command had sought ways to break the stalemate of trench warfare. One attempted solution was to constitute special storm battalions. Introduced at the Somme in October 1916, the first storm battalions had been a success. The Army organized more units along these lines and deployed them along the entire front for the remainder of the war. Personnel for a storm battalion were selected for alertness and physical condition. Stormtroopers, as the members of the special units would be known, were equipped with modern light rifles, machine guns, and hand grenades. Stormtroopers were also given more comfortable accommodation and better rations than members of regular units. A number of further privileges not available to the regular army were enjoyed in stormtrooper battalions. Billeted well behind the lines, stormtroopers were transported up to the forward-most trenches only when they were to engage the enemy. The purpose of the storm battalions was to punch holes through the enemy entrenchments and thus open the way for regular army units to finish the offensive. The special function and privileges of the stormtroopers contributed to a sense of cohesiveness and elitism:

> Concessions of all sorts were made to the Storm Troops and they were encouraged to look upon themselves as an elite [unit]. Special uniforms and insignia were designed for them – they were even authorized to wear the coveted silver death's head, previously worn only by the aristocratic Cavalry. They were given the best food, the best equipment and were authorized to wear pistols, previously issued only to officers.[75]

Former stormtroopers appear to have experienced the greatest difficulty in readjusting to civilian life; many of them returned home and formed the basis of the *Freikorps*.

The *Freikorps* were military units gathered up under popular officers. Partly under the aegis of Gustav Noske,[76] partly on their own initiative, *Freikorps* units violently suppressed each of the series of left-wing uprisings that occurred in the early months of the Republic.[77] The "Volunteers," as members of the *Freiwilligen Korps* called themselves, named their units after well-known military leaders or the places at which the units were formed. The Ehrhardt Brigade; The Haase Free Corps; Maercker's Volunteer Rifles; The Hindenburg Free Corps; Free Corps Baltikum; Free Corps Riga; and Free Corps Lettland were representative of the dozens of *Freikorps* that had mushroomed across the Reich by spring 1919.[78]

Freikorps troops, once described as "men who could never demobilize psychologically," turned their martial inclinations against domestic foes, in particular the far left. The randomness and anarchic quality of *Freikorps* violence stemmed in part from the independence of the units. When on behalf of the Ebert-Scheidemann cabinet Noske had called for individual commanders to organize military formations, the main government objective was to mobilize a force capable of suppressing revolt as rapidly as possible. Little thought appears to have been given as to how the government would control the units in the long run.[79] The first major *Freikorps* action within Germany's borders took place in Berlin, in January 1919. The socialist government had panicked when the radical left gained the allegiance of much of the Berlin working class. The SPD hardly shared the conservatism of former Imperial Army officers, but SPD leaders nonetheless wished to avoid nation-wide communist insurgency. By early January 1919, however, left-wing agitation in Berlin had gotten out of control, and a full-scale revolt by the Spartacast faction threatened chaos. The SPD government turned to army leaders to end the "red menace." On January 10, Colonel Wilhelm Reinhard received the go-ahead from Reich Chancellor Scheidemann to stem by force the rising tide of radicalized workers. It took little more than a week to extinguish the nascent revolution. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the leading figures in German Communism, eventually numbered among the many left-wing dead.[80] The chief instrument of the suppression of the Spartacast revolt was the *Freikorps* movement.

The *Freikorps* extinguished a number of subsequent Communist-led flair-ups through the late winter and early spring. Revolts in Bremen, Mühlheim, and Halle were suppressed. In Magdeburg, recently constituted *Stahlhelm* units joined the *Freikorps* in halting communist forces. In mid-April, Dresden was rested from communist rebels, and Leipzig shortly thereafter. The *Freikorps* dealt with a renewed KPD strike in Berlin in March in the accustomed manner, killing yet more

communists. And, in one of the most brutal *Freikorps* victories, the Bavarian Soviet Republic was crushed and its leaders shot. At the same time, in the newly independent Baltic States, other *Freikorps* were busy liquidating non-German communists.[81]

After suppressing the initial communist revolts, the *Freikorps* went briefly on the offensive themselves. The first serious attempt by right-wing forces to take over the State was the Kapp Putsch of March 1920, and *Freikorps* units were the main participants.[82] President Ebert called a general strike to derail the putschists. The Kapp Putsch was thus derailed, but the strike escalated into a second communist revolt. Centered in the Ruhr, the revolt, like the earlier leftist uprising, scared moderate SPD leadership. In an ironic reversal, the Social Democrats requested the aide of the *Freikorps*. The *Freikorps* men heeded the call and marched on Germany's industrial heartland. Again, a communist uprising was violently suppressed and many of its leaders killed.[83]

The government proceeded, in summer 1920, to attempt to dissolve the mutinous volunteer units, now outlived their usefulness.[84] Though the government ceased to pay *Freikorps* men after May 1920, the militant inclinations of the Volunteers remained undiminished. The soldiers of World War I who had found an escape from civilian life in the *Freikorps* formed the basis of the paramilitary culture. Hagen Schulze saw in the *Freikorps* a cadre engaged in military or paramilitary activity for a long period – 1914 through the early 1920s – and so acculturated that they scarcely could have been expected to adapt to the sudden advent of republicanism and democracy or, for that matter, to the *Rechtsstaat*.[85]

They were not, however, the only raw material for the culture of political violence that emerged in the early days of the Republic. The postwar generation – youth born after 1901 and who had not served in the war – also provided eager recruits for the new paramilitaries. Postwar youth were motivated by sentiments resembling those associated with the pre-1914 youth movement, but disillusionment brought on by the loss of the war and the decay of political life added a volatile element lacking in their precursors. Wilhelm Hedemann, an educator at the time, summarized "the psychological tone of Germany's postwar youth":

> The state? All one could see was ruins. Faith? All one could hear was the hate-filled wrangling over who was "guilty" for the lost war. Fatherland? All one could feel was insulting disgrace at the sight of silent guns and humiliation at the acceptance of Versailles. . . . To be sure there was a state, but party politics seemed to dominate it completely. Besides it completely lacked the visible brilliancy which is so essential to winning the hearts of youth. . . . A wave of pessimism engulfed the youth.[86]

The former *Freikorps* men provided to many young Germans the assertiveness and "visible brilliancy" they apparently wanted. Conservative estimates have put the total number of *Freikorps* troops at between 50,000 and 70,000. Thus, Germany had more than enough potential paramilitary leaders to recruit and organize disaffected youth into paramilitary organizations. The groundwork was set for the paramilitary organizations of the 1920s and early 1930s.[87]

An abundance of suitable human material was not the only reason that a paramilitary culture took root. The leaders of the major political parties quickly discovered that they needed private forces for personal security. Political violence was endemic for the first several years of the 1920s, and this claimed the lives of many politicians. Most prominent among the victims of political murder were Mathias Erzberger (targeted for his role as the chief of the German diplomatic delegation at Versailles) and Walter Rathenau (targeted because he was Jewish and had gained notoriety as foreign minister). The climate of insecurity led to the establishment of three of the four largest paramilitary groups. Their purpose, in theory, was to protect prominent party officials and speakers. The SA, the RFB, and the *Reichsbanner* started out as party defense organizations.

Reichsbanner *and RFB: armies of the left*

The *Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold* contained fewer former *Freikorps* men than the *Sturmabteilung* or *Stahlhelm*. Depending on part-time working-class volunteers, the *Reichsbanner* cut the least martial profile of all the groups, at least at first. Faced with escalating violence, however, the Social Democratic party leadership adopted a new approach toward their party army. The SPD executive committee decided to hire Karl Hoeltermann, a war veteran and expert military advisor, to professionalize the SPD force. Hoeltermann established an elite corps within the *Reichsbanner*. The *Schufo*, as this was known, consisted of younger and more aggressive *Reichsbanner* members. The SPD issued distinctive uniforms to the new corps. With green shirts, blue caps, black breaches, and military leather wear, the uniforms reflected the aim of the new *Schufo* to be as threatening as any paramilitary force in the streets.[88] Adding substance to their new appearance, the *Schufo* adopted the tactics of paramilitary street fighters as well. They actively sought confrontation with the SA, marching into Nazi neighborhoods, drawing arrows over swastikas, and tearing down posters of Adolf Hitler. One *Schufo* propaganda theme was that the swastika was "an Indian homosexual symbol."[89]

Though the unemployment crisis increased the ranks of the *Reichsbanner* to over one-quarter of a million by 1932, only the minority of these belonging to the *Schufo* could be counted as devoted party soldiers. The bulk of *Reichsbanner* membership was not of the street fighter caliber of the typical Nazi stormtrooper. Though the elite section of the SPD paramilitary was inclined to meet its NSDAP or KPD counterparts with force, Social Democratic leaders discouraged political violence. SPD leaders seem to have feared that, if let resort to unrestrained street warfare, the *Schufo* might degenerate into a band of rowdies, difficult to control and inimical to party interests. Hoeltermann was eventually commanded to rein in the *Reichsbanner*. He curtailed the aggressive physical and propaganda assaults which his instinct suggested be directed against the National Socialist camp, and the elite fighters of the moderate left were retired to duty as party body guards. Thus restrained, the *Schufo* ceased to belong to the most militant strain of German paramilitary culture, and moreover, the one earnest republican effort to beat the Nazis at their own paramilitary game came to an abrupt and inconclusive end.[90]

The Communist Party's fighting force, the *Rote Frontkämpferbund* (RFB), drew its recruits from much the same proletarian well as the *Reichsbanner*. It has been estimated that 80 to 90 percent of *Reichsbanner* members in the Ruhr were unemployed workers.[91] The RFB is believed to have contained a similar percentage of unemployed. As the composition of the RFB paralleled that of its socialist counterpart, so did its relationship to its parent party. The *Rote Frontkämpferbund* fomented at least as much controversy in the KPD as had the *Reichsbanner* within SPD ranks. Of the three leading figures in the Communist Party, it was Heinz Neumann who most advocated political violence. The other members of the KPD triumvirate, however, opposed Neumann's aggressive tactics. Much as SPD leadership had pulled in the reins on Haeltermann's development of the *Schufo*, Communist leadership decided in November 1931 to curb "tactics of individual terror." This policy meant that the *Rote Frontkämpferbund* would no longer be allowed the broad scope for street violence that Nazi leaders allowed their *Sturmabteilung* and that the *Stahlhelm* also enjoyed.

Neumann recognized that the KPD had to allow its fighting cells to combat their right-wing foes independent of central committee orders. Nazi tactics, in particular, had taken on a form that clearly recommended delegation of initiative to individual RFB cells. A group of SA-men would invade a communist neighborhood or drinking establishment, and then terrorize communist targets. A classic example of this tactic unfolded on August 22, 1929. Horst Wessel and SA-Sturm 5, which he commanded, marched into Kreuzberg, a working class district of Berlin, known for its KPD allegiance, and attacked two taverns frequented by KPD members.[92] Neumann realized that this diffuse sort of terror could not be answered effectively by a centralized system of command. He therefore advocated according local KPD cells broad discretion to reply to SA attacks in kind, without consulting higher instances in the party. Neumann thus revived a motto that the KPD had used in 1924 *vis-à-vis* the *Stahlhelm*: "*Schlagt die Fascisten, wo Ihr sie trefft!*" ("Hit the fascists wherever you meet them!"). Blanketing the front pages of *Die Rote Fahne* (the KPD organ edited by Neumann), the slogan was enthusiastically implemented by the rank-and-file.[93] Members of the Central Committee and Comintern, however, took a different view.

The Central Committee, meeting in November 1931 at Moscow with the Comintern, passed a resolution, over the protests of Neumann and others, to ban "acts of individual terror." The official position was that individual terror would diffuse the communist effort and lead to underestimation of the degree of discipline needed within the proletariat to achieve ultimate victory.[94] Hitting the fascists wherever one met them might stymie individual members of the class enemy, but in the long term it would mean missing the fascist forest for its SA trees.

Also informing the KPD decision to restrain the communist street fighters was the possibility that individual SA-men might be persuaded to defect to the Communist Party and its RFB. Indeed, restraint toward the brownshirts was consistent with a major KPD campaign intended to win the favor of nationalistic workers. Horst Duhnke explains the KPD strategy:

> The German Communists saw quite correctly that the Nazis had attracted many unemployed workers with their demagogic mixture of nationalism and socialism.

> To meet this threat they determined to appeal to the potentially socialist element in the Nazi party by out-doing the Nazis with grandiose nationalist appeals.[95]

The Communist plan to "take the wind out of the sails of the nationalist propaganda of the Nazis" was launched on August 24, 1930 with a new "Program for the National and Social Liberation of the German People." Nationalist propaganda emanating from the party of the Comintern rang hollow however. Duhnke concludes that this KPD effort to strike roots in hitherto Nazi soil was "so obviously insincere . . . that it must [have] helped the Nazis more than it hindered them."[96] A drive by the RFB and the Communist Youth League (KJVD) to win recruits from Nazi rural strongholds failed even worse. Despite articles prominently placed in the communist press about rural converts from the SA to the RFB – articles with titles such as "*Vom Hakenkreuz zum Sowjetstern*" and "*Vom Braunen Haus zur roten Fahne*" – very little progress was made in recruiting farmers or rural youth.[97]

Efforts by the KPD to penetrate such a right-wing stronghold as the rural farm community seem bound to have failed. A paramilitary could poach membership from a rival only if it could convince its targets that it shared principles with their group and, moreover, was truer to those principles – or at least more effective in implementing them. The RFB, then, in order to win over stormtroopers, would have to demonstrate similarities between itself and the SA. At the same time, it would also have to point out differences which the SA-man might have believed merited his leaving the Nazi camp for the communist one. In short, the RFB, to win SA recruits, faced the task of convincing stormtroopers that it could serve their interests better than the *Sturmabteilung*.

Differences in the make-up of the two organizations and the inclinations of their members would seem to have made inducing stormtrooper defection an uphill battle. The SA was inseparable from its paramilitary context, and much of the pull it exerted on its members derived from that context. The organization was dominated by commanders whose formative experience was in the World War I storm battalions and the *Freikorps*. Its younger rank-and-file belonged to a strain of German youth culture similar to the prewar *Wandervogel* movement. The SA marched in step with the German paramilitary culture upon which it drew its human raw material. The RFB, by contrast, drew chiefly on factory workers and union leaders, as opposed to war veterans and *Freikorps* fighters. Only with difficulty could the RFB draw into its ranks the type of young people who were attracted to the paramilitary culture of which the SA was undoubtedly part. The pronounced left-wing bias of many stormtroopers nonetheless presented the possibility that RFB efforts to win the allegiance of Nazi street fighters might pay off. Whether a Nazi movement under strain might provide good pickings for red recruitment would be tested in the months prior to the seizure of power.[98]

The Stahlhelm*: SA friend or foe?*

At the same time, it would be erroneous to minimize the right-wing aspect of SA politics. Aside from any distinct political agenda, the military milieu from which the

SA arose must also be kept in mind. Though its leftist persuasion exposed the SA to erosion from KPD/RFB recruitment, its rightist and military aspects gave the organization much in common with the paramilitaries of the right. Though perhaps providing a degree of immunization from left-wing competitors, this equated to a potentially equally potent threat to SA solidity. Some political scholars have argued that the groups that perceive the most mutual threat are not the ones entirely dissimilar, but the ones whose purposes, origins, and fundamental characters are most alike. The values at the heart of the SA were those of the paramilitary milieu and the youth culture. Groups sharing these may have found common cause with the *Sturmabteilung*, but they also competed for the allegiance of the same constituents.

Ernst Röhm, the supreme commander of the SA, complained that the *Stahlhelm* was a source of trouble. The *Stahlhelm* espoused an extreme form of patriotism. Known also as the *Bund der Frontsoldaten*, it consisted originally of former front soldiers, but later began taking in younger recruits. To accommodate its expansion, the *Stahlhelm* established special units for non-veterans. Two wings of the organization emerged, largely out of the distinction between veterans and recruits from the postwar generation. The Fighting *Stahlhelm* (*Wehrstahlhelm*) consisted principally of men who had been too young to serve in the trenches, whereas members of the Core *Stahlhelm* (*Kernstahlhelm*) mostly belonged to the war generation. It was probably the *Wehrstahlhelm* that worried Ernst Röhm. Younger, more dynamic, and activist, that branch of the organization had, after all, built itself up by bringing in new recruits. What was to prevent it from poaching off the SA? Röhm complained that new *Stahlhelmers* included "many obvious opponents of the NSDAP: Freemasons, half-Jews and similar elements. . . . [P]articularly in rural areas [the new *Stahlhelm* units] were becoming reservoirs for discontented elements."[99] That Röhm complained so vehemently about the *Stahlhelm* might well be taken as evidence that the SA leader perceived a threat.

The *Stahlhelm* and the SA were cut from similar cloth, and their common background may have made it easy for members of one to switch to the other. The circumstances of the formation of the two competing paramilitaries were the same: the political disorder following World War I. Communist rebellion in Central Germany spawned a number of right-wing fighting groups. Left-wing agitation was particularly conspicuous in the Halle-Merseburg area and in the city of Magdeburg, and it spurred right wing forces to organize into counter-revolutionary groups. There and elsewhere militant veterans of World War I banded together to establish the *Stahlhelm*. Much like the contemporary *Freikorps*, the *Stahlhelm* played an active role in suppressing communist uprisings. Indeed, the *Stahlhelm* cooperated with numerous like groups, including the *Kyffhäuserbund* League of Veterans and various *Freikorps* units.

While most of the *Freikorps* dissolved after the "Red threat" had dissipated, the *Stahlhelm* remained prominent through the decade that followed. In fact, this league of veterans rapidly increased in size, stature, and political power. Peter Merkl explains the identity that distinguished the *Stahlhelm* from other like orders:

> [A]mong the multitude of traditional right-wing and veterans' organizations of

> the Weimar republic, the Stahlhelm stands out as the purest embodiment of the glories of the imperial army and of the militaristic spirit of the war effort.[100]

The *Stahlhelm* actively embraced monarchism, aggressively attacked republicanism and revolution, championed veterans' interests, and, in response to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in summer 1919, adopted an ultra-nationalistic politics with *völkisch* overtones.[101]

The two leading figures in the *Stahlhelm* cut different profiles, but together accurately reflected their organization. Franz Seldte operated a small manufacturing concern in Magdeburg and had served with distinction as a reserve officer in the trenches. Crippled in the course of duty, the highly decorated veteran followed many of his fellow National Liberals to the new German People's Party (DVP) after 1918. "His Stahlhelm career," Merkl writes, "represents both a moderate, bourgeois strain and the perversion of bourgeois values in the empire and, eventually, in the hands of Hitler." Theodor Düsterberg, the other leading *Stahlhelm* light, hailed from a traditional Prussian military background. A product of the Potsdam corps of cadets, Düsterberg had led a successful military career as a staff officer both before and during the war. Alarmed by the social foment of postwar Germany, he joined the DNVP in Halle and entered the *Stahlhelm* shortly thereafter. He rose quickly to prominence in the league of front soldiers. Düsterberg personified "an uncompromising voelkisch extremism and a total lack of understanding for the great changes that had overcome German society in 1918." Together, Düsterberg and Seldte mirrored "the dominant features of respectable prewar German society that had been hardened by the war and set to an unrelenting vendetta against the Weimar republic."[102]

The "unrelenting vendetta" did not mean that the *Stahlhelm* joined reactionary projects indiscriminately. It took no sides in the right-wing Kapp Putsch of March 1920. It however did assist the *Freikorps* in extinguishing the subsequent leftist uprising in the Ruhr.[103] Instead of engaging in active projects to overthrow the Republic, the *Stahlhelm* intensified its effort to recruit men susceptible to the paramilitary culture. Soon the league of front soldiers represented an amalgam of former *Freikorps* men, *Einwohnerwehr* activists, and most of the former members of the banned *Orgesch.*[104]

This gathering up of varied paramilitary activists may have been consistent with the *Stahlhelm*'s effort to build its numeric strength as an anti-republican force, but what the *Stahlhelm* gained in numbers it began to lose in cohesiveness. "The heterogeneous impulses and origins of many of the new recruits made for considerable confusion, and for complex interrelationships with other groups."[105]

The most notable development in the *Stahlhelm*'s growth in numbers was its recruiting of young men who had not served in the war. Though initially strictly a veterans' organization, the *Stahlhelm* began conspicuously to resemble the party armies, such as the SA, with their constituencies of both war generation fighting men from the *Freikorps* and postwar generation youth. The *Stahlhelm* established a pair of subsidiary youth corps, called the Scharnhorst League and *Wehrwolf.* The *Jungstahlhelm* at first accommodated non-veterans, and these activist younger members led in

establishing the distinction between the "Fighting" and the "Core" branches of the *Stahlhelm*. The *Kernstahlhelm* consisted of the older, veteran element and was less given to raucous political demonstration, while the violence-prone younger activists filled the ranks of the *Wehrstahlhelm*. No longer was the organization strictly a league of veterans. By 1923, at least in its paramilitary aspect, the *Stahlhelm* resembled party armies such as the SA.[106]

As in the SA, many local units of the *Stahlhelm* "were seething with an activist fervor" that the more mild (or politic) leadership had trouble restraining. *Stahlhelm* chiefs had learned the price of excessive violence. The 1922 assassination of Walter Rathenau and the Stahlhelm's circumstantial links to that crime had led the governments of Saxony and Prussia to ban the front soldiers' league. After the bans had ended late in 1923, Seldte tried to steer the *Stahlhelm* onto a more cautious course. The organization officially rejected all future putsch plans and renounced its association with the radical anti-republican *Deutsche Völkisch Freiheits Partei*. But, however prudent this official distancing of the *Stahlhelm* from the radical fringes of Weimar politics, the cautious leadership could not long suppress the inherent *völkisch* tendencies of their most activist members. An increasingly vociferous anti-Catholicism cost the *Stahlhelm* support in Bavaria. Anti-Semitism emerged in Halle around 1922 and grew until the exclusion of Jews was made *Stahlhelm* policy in 1924.[107] When it was publicized that Theodor Düsterberg had a Jewish grandfather, a crisis erupted, with many of Düsterberg's former comrades leveling scorn and derision upon the distinguished war veteran.[108] Ironically, the *Stahlhelm*'s advocacy of Düsterberg as a presidential candidate mirrored further radicalization. Düsterberg, as candidate, opposed the incumbent president, Hindenburg. Hindenburg was an idolized war hero and himself a *Stahlhelm* member. Erich Eyck, not only an historian of Weimar but also a first person participant, noted, "Everybody in Germany knew that he [Hindenburg] was not only an honorary member of the Stahlhelm but also a vigorous protector of the organisation."[109] Evidently, however, Hindenburg's association with conservative industrialists and agriculturalists was enough to discredit him in the eyes of the increasingly radicalized front soldiers' league.

The cardinal fact in the rise of a contentious SA–*Stahlhelm* relationship was this radicalization of the *Stahlhelm* rank-and-file. The younger, more aggressive *Stahlhelmers* began to drift away from their older commanders. The nostalgia of many *Kernstahlhelmer* for the *Kaiserreich* and its conservatism began to appear quaint and irrelevant to younger activists. Merkl explains the growing gulf between rank-and-file and their leadership:

> While the strong emotions and the political naiveté of the "frontsoldier generation" were unlikely to produce anything very profound or lasting, there was a general turning against the Wilhelminian past, often expressed with the abrasive bitterness of a growing generation gap. The young veterans, and even more the nonveterans of the *Jungstahlhelm*, began to look at their elders and superior officers with scorn.[110]

The *Stahlhelm* had reached 260,000 members by 1924. Though the growth of the SA

was slow in the several years immediately following the failed Munich Putsch, once its growth accelerated with the Great Depression, the radicalized portion of the *Stahlhelm* was a reservoir of potential SA recruits. In fact, by the Harzburg Front rally in October 1931, a mass assembly of right-wing party and paramilitary forces organized by Alfred Hugenberg, tensions between the *Stahlhelm* and SA had grown acute. *Stahlhelm* leaders excoriated Hitler for luring their more activist fighters into the stormtrooper ranks.[111]

The radicalized part of the *Stahlhelm* did not defect in whole however. Though many young *Stahlhelmers* were inclined to leave the organization, others stayed behind and pushed it deeper into *völkisch* politics. Official adoption of an anti-Semitic exclusionary clause in 1924 was one indicator of the radicals' influence. The subsequent alignment of the league with Hugenberg's radicalized DNVP further accentuated the shift toward the *völkisch* end of the political spectrum.

Its radicalized tendencies made the *Stahlhelm* a logical partner of the SA, while closer association with Nazi stormtroopers brought to the surface the inherent conflict between the two groups.

There were certainly inducements for the Nazis to seek *Stahlhelm* cooperation. At the time the *Stahlhelm* issued its "declaration of hatred" against the republic, the *Stahlhelm* exercised influence over an appreciable block in parliament. Fifty-one of the seventy-three DNVP delegates in the early Weimar Reichstag belonged to the *Stahlhelm*; nine of forty-five DVP delegates, and a further five delegates from other parties.[112] The "declaration of hatred" alienated moderate bourgeois leaders, exemplified by Gustav Stresemann, who assessed it to mark "the foundation of a fascist party." Stresemann urged members of his People's Party (the DVP) to sever any ties they might have with the *Stahlhelm*.[113] Mutual antipathy toward the republic was a major piece of common ground between the SA and *Stahlhelm*, and the parliamentary influence of the latter must have been attractive to the fighters of an as yet marginal party.

While the radicalization of the *Stahlhelm* alienated moderates, it increased the possibilities for alliance with the Nazis. Yet the radicalism of the *Stahlhelm* and its DNVP allies was not the sole inducement for the Nazis to associate more closely with the league and its kindred party. Though violently anti-republican, the *Stahlhelm* retained, through its veterans' element, a nostalgic attachment to the Wilhelmian past, and, through its sheer numbers, a respectability attractive to many bourgeois Germans. As a consequence, writes Merkl, "[b]eing associated with the respectable, financially puissant Hugenberg and the huge and prestigious Stahlhelm gave the NSDAP a new respectability that opened many bourgeois doors and helped it to attract new members."[114]

At least one notorious project resulted from Nazi–*Stahlhelm* cooperation. Germany's republican leaders had negotiated a package of debt and reparations relief from the Allies. Known as the Young Plan, this represented the most favorable legal revision of the Versailles Treaty that Germany had obtained to date. The work of an international board headed by the American banker Owen D. Young, the plan was submitted to a Great Powers conference at The Hague in August 1928. Gustav Stresemann struggled to promote the plan to legislators, as it offered Germany even

more relief from Versailles than the Dawes Plan had brought five years earlier. But his efforts earned Stresemann only enmity from the ultra-nationalists. Heinrich Class, leader of the Pan-German League, called Stresemann "the essence of all the dangerous tendencies of our nation [whose] psychic degeneracy is clearly derived from his political decadence." Class, Franz Seldte and Theodor Düsterberg, Hugenberg of the DNVP, Fritz Thyssen of the *Reichsverband der deutschen Industrie*, and, upon Hugenberg's invitation, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis, joined ranks by the end of the summer to oppose the Young Plan and excoriate its republican architects.[115]

The foes of the Young Plan organized themselves as a "National Committee for the German Referendum." The outcome of this Nazi–*Stahlhelm* joint effort boded ill for the future of the two groups' tactical alliance. The German Referendum failed disastrously in its goal of derailing the Young Plan. The law proposed by the Referendum called for complete repudiation of the War Guilt Clause of the Versailles Treaty, immediate evacuation of all occupied areas of the country, and the branding as traitors any German statesmen who incurred further obligations tied to presumptions of German war guilt. Though its sponsors gathered 4,135,000 signatures – enough to place the Referendum before the Reichstag and make it the subject of a national plebiscite – the Referendum mustered only 5.8 million votes when it was put to the nation on December 22, 1929 – far short of the 21 million needed to make it law. On the floor of the Reichstag, fewer than one hundred deputies voted in favor of the bill. Illustrating that even the right wing itself did not wholly endorse the project, part of the DNVP delegation voted against the anti-Young Plan proposal.[116]

To the more traditional right-wing advocates of the Referendum, the campaign had failed, but to Adolf Hitler, it had afforded an excellent public relations opportunity, largely at his allies' expense. The embracing of Hitler and the Nazis by a figure so clearly part of the conservative establishment as the millionaire press baron Alfred Hugenberg earned the NSDAP new respectability. Erich Eyck remarked that

> when the Stahlhelm patriots, who could count President Hindenburg among their honorary members, paraded publicly in the company of Hitler's Brown Shirts and their swastikas, peaceful citizens might well conclude that it was safe to forget their earlier suspicions.[117]

Hitler would seize one more opportunity to parade his stormtroopers side-by-side with *Stahlhelm* men, but a long-term alliance between SA and *Stahlhelm* would prove impossible. It had been Alfred Hugenberg's idea to forge a united front by gathering together a panoply of German right-wing forces in a grand meeting at Bad Harzburg. The meeting took place at a well-known spa town in central Germany, close to the city of Braunschweig. Though the meeting was designed to unite the far right, its quarrelsome participants were not about to surrender the political power they derived from their particular constituencies. The Harzburg rally convened on October 11, 1931, just two days after General Schleicher, the minister of war, had presented Adolf Hitler to President Hindenburg as a potential coalition leader. Hindenburg had rejected Schleicher's advance, and, in preference to dealing with the Nazis, the Reichspräsident, on October 10, reshuffled the Brüning cabinet. The

denizens of the German far right opened the Harzburg rally with noisy denunciations of the newly reconstituted government.[118]

Among the anti-republican forces at the rally were an assortment of Hohenzollern princes, including a son and grandson of the last Kaiser. Retired officers, under Colonel-General Hans von Seeckt (Chief of the Army Command, 1920–1926), joined the Front. Seeckt was a DVP Reichstag deputy, and a number of his *Deutsche Volkspartei* colleagues joined him in what they hoped would be a right-wing display of force. Adding an air of dignity and academic authority, Dr. Hjalmer Schacht, the former Reichsbank President and celebrated economist, gave a speech at the rally in which he declared that State finances were in dire straits. The DNVP, with Hugenberg at its helm, was a leading presence at the rally, and the *Stahlhelm*, which by the end of 1930 had numbered an impressive half-million members,[119] showed up in force. The most notable addition to this mélange of rightists were the Nazis. Eyck recalls, "The greatest impression made by the Harzburg rally on the general public was that the National Socialists had now apparently united completely with what was usually called the more 'honorable' members of the opposition." But, as Eyck goes on to write, "[i]n point of fact . . . this firm alliance was a complete mirage."[120]

Though many different rivalries among its participants may have doomed the Harzburg Front to failure, rivalry between the SA and *Stahlhelm* was one of the more serious obstacles to pan-rightist unity. The meeting crystallized latent tensions between the two paramilitary formations. Some months before the rally, Nazi leaders had banned their rank-and-file from membership in the *Stahlhelm*, and, at Bad Harzburg, *Stahlhelm* leaders accused the SA of luring *Stahlhelm* men into the brownshirt ranks. Hitler, however, rushed to curb this recruiting. He seems to have believed that a mistake before the Beer Hall Putsch had been to associate with various right-wing veterans' groups. Hitler did not want to bind the NSDAP again to the likes of the *Stahlhelm*. When it came time at the end of the rally for a military parade of all the paramilitary and veterans' groups, Hitler withdrew the *Sturmabteilung* from the festivities. In an affront to Hugenberg and *Stahlhelm* leaders Seldte and Düsterberg, the SA staged a massive parade in nearby Braunschweig.[121] Conan Fischer, examining *Stahlhelm Lageberichte*, found that "the ordinary Stahlhelmer were less anti-Nazi than their leaders, suggesting that the more radical SA was attractive to some of them."[122] So, while leaders of the right like Hugenberg "complained that, in spite of the Harzburg meeting, the National Socialist agitation was being directed sharply against the German Nationalists throughout Germany,"[123] DNVP and *Stahlhelm* rank-and-file were discovering their affinity for the more radical, left-oriented nationalism offered by the Nazis.

Merkl examines why the SA was attractive to the *Stahlhelm*. "Hitler's unrestrained political radicalism," Merkl writes, "made the Stahlhelm look like a marching-and-chowder society that lacked the will to power."[124] The SA must have struck those *Stahlhelm* rank-and-file who became brownshirts as just the opposite – a dynamic and exciting movement bound someday to control the State. Merkl remarks further that "clients of all radical movements are attracted and retained only by . . . hectic activity, and tend to drop out as soon as the action lags."[125] Max Weber wrote similarly about the dynamics of groups led by charismatic figures. The leader had

continuously to generate action, and his charisma, in turn, spurred the rank-and-file on to yet more action. If action waned, then charismatic power waned as well, and without the charismatic leader and excitement of violence and success, followers would leave the movement or become disinterested in the leader's projects. "Many local units of the [Stahlhelm] . . . were seething with an activist fervor that Seldte could hardly contain,"[126] and these were apparently natural converts to Nazism. Bored and perhaps exposed to the socialism or *völkisch* anti-Semitism which Merkl suggests were "[t]he most likely facilitators of conversion from the Stahlhelm,"[127] many *Stahlhelmer* seem to have parted ranks with the veterans' league and joined the Nazi SA.

The scope and nature of this migration from *Stahlhelm* to SA remains uncertain. Conan Fischer finds that the largest part of the new converts to the SA came from left-wing backgrounds. "With the exception of former Freikorps members who formed the original base of the SA," Fischer writes, "most converts were from the left, with ex-Communists prominent." But, among the nevertheless appreciable bloc of right-wing converts, "ex-Stahlhelmer formed the largest single group of activists overall." The distinction between converts from the left and from the right was easily blurred by the fact that some 58 percent of the former *Stahlhelm* men and 51 percent of former *Freikorps* men came from working class backgrounds.[128] Relying on the records at the Berlin Document Center, Fischer examined the backgrounds of SA-men who had had political experience as paramilitary activists prior to joining the SA. He found that an overwhelming majority of these activist converts hailed from right-wing backgrounds, with the *Stahlhelm* prominent among them.[129] Activist converts arguably constituted the most important addition to SA ranks; their penchant for violence and political activity probably adding to the dynamism of the organization. Accordingly, the substantial numerical weight of *Stahlhelm* converts to the SA may not tell the whole story of their significance.

Peter Merkl's review of the SA-men of the Abel sample reinforces Fischer's observations of the Berlin Document Center SA contingent. The Abel SA files illustrate that many stormtroopers in the East Elbean provinces had belonged to the *Stahlhelm*, the DNVP, or both, but, in the face of the agricultural crisis, became radicalized, grew impatient with those organizations, and eventually converted to the SA. In some cases, units of the *Wehrwolf*, *Jungdo*, and other *völkisch* groups defected en masse. Over 50 percent of the Abel Collection SA-men prior to joining the SA had belonged to a *Freikorp*, *Einwohnerwehr*, or veterans' group, and the *Stahlhelm* was the largest source among this last category.[130]

This apparent Nazi success may have had a flip-side however. If the *Stahlhelm* could lose its dynamic appeal or cease to interest newly radicalized members, then a tempering of Nazi radicalism or a series of NSDAP political setbacks might equally disenchant National Socialist followers. Radicalism had guided many men away from the *Stahlhelm* and into the SA, but, if the SA appeared to such men to have slowed down, they might just as readily leave the Nazi fold. The fickle character of radical paramilitary enthusiasts was a problem for the *Stahlhelm,* and, when the *Stahlhelm* lost individual recruits to the Nazis, it was just as much exporting this problem.

Walter Stennes, the leader of the East Elbean SA, furnishes a case in point.

Becoming increasingly impatient with Nazism but enjoying the respect of many left-oriented stormtroopers, Stennes was viewed by Party leaders as an epicenter of disaffection. The Stennes faction, as his followers were collectively known, were noticeably unhappy with the movement by May 1930, and they predominated in Berlin, Pomerania, Mecklenburg, and Silesia. The Stennes faction also had bridgeheads in other parts of Germany. Despite orders to the contrary, Stennes had forged ties to the DNVP and *Stahlhelm*. Stennes overtly criticized aspects of Nazism that he perceived to be unrevolutionary. Characteristically, he excoriated Hitler for spending too much on the Brown House, the NSDAP headquarters in Munich. When Stennes' enemy Ernst Röhm returned from Bolivia to take back the helm of the SA in January 1931, Stennes finally quit the SA and the NSDAP. He proceeded to establish his own organization. The group which followed Stennes, though in professed ideology quite similar to the Nazi movement, avowed staunch opposition to the NSDAP. The chief assets of Stennes' National Socialist *Kämpfer Bund* (NSKB) were Stennes' own ties to various right-wing forces. These included the DNVP and *Stahlhelm*, and, in particular, Otto Straßer, a fellow errant Nazi, and Captain Ehrhardt, leader of the then-defunct *Wiking Bund*. Stennes rallied around himself some 500 Berlin SA-men, 1,200 SA-men from other parts of the country, and approximately 2,000 militant followers of Ehrhardt. Together, the leaders of this group signed a document expressing the following protest:

> We have come to the realization that the NSDAP has abandoned the revolutionary course of true national socialism toward Germany's freedom and started on the reactionary road toward becoming just another coalition party.[131]

Hitler had vowed to attain power through peaceful means, but, as the Stennes defections illustrated, the mechanics of ordinary politics could alienate critical constituents of the Nazi movement. Activist Nazis, as Fischer and Merkl suggest, were often converts from other movements, and thus perhaps more prone to political migration than run-of-the-mill voters. The chosen policy of the Nazi movement did not appeal to the activist rank-and-file to begin with, and the nature of that rank-and-file heightened the risks. The Stennes Revolt of early 1931 seems to have stemmed from a systemic problem with the SA constituency. Similar circumstances – growth in perception that the leaders of the movement were compromising radical principles, slow-down in the march toward power – would raise the specter of further discontent and defection.

Whether SA defectors were drawn to the *Stahlhelm* deserves assessment. Peter Longerich notes a flow of recruits from *Wehrverbände* generally *into* SA ranks.[132] It has been noted that Stennes enjoyed good relations with the DNVP and *Stahlhelm*. SA defectors and the *Stahlhelm* may therefore have been linked with comparative ease. At least one material inducement could have drawn SA-men into the former front-soldiers' league. The SA, as will be discussed in detail later, was usually in financial straits, but at no time more severely than autumn 1932; a sharpened fiscal crisis coincided with a political slow-down of the NSDAP which alone might well have driven SA-men out of the Nazi ranks.[133] An SA leader reported on January 8, 1931

from Tilsit in East Prussia: "The difficulties confronting our unemployed party members and SA comrades . . . are especially severe this winter, a large number receiving no unemployment benefit whatsoever."[134] Financial pressure caused enough trouble to merit this pointed complaint in a *Lagebericht* at a time when Party fortunes at the polls were on the upswing. What would happen if Nazi electoral energies flagged? The depression, no doubt, hit the *Stahlhelm* hard, too, and, indeed, *Stahlhelm* chiefs in 1931 began complaining about lack of funds. But, unlike the SA, the *Stahlhelm* enjoyed high-level ties and good relations with the army. At its origin a veterans' league, the *Stahlhelm* would find in the army a critical helpmate. General Groener and other army commanders, on the stated grounds that a poor *Stahlhelm* would become politically radicalized, forwarded large sums of money to the organization for non-political activities. Such army appropriations served to fund team sports, gymnastics, nature outings, and motor clubs.[135] This type of activity, though perhaps insufficient on its own to retain every young activist, may have assuaged enough of the rank-and-file to defuse a potentially dangerous situation. In any event, the financial and institutional support of the army, if it was available at all to the *Sturmabteilung*, was available in less quantity and quality than it was to the *Stahlhelm*.

Stormtroopers and their Party

Perhaps the cardinal fact of relations between the SA and the Nazi movement as a whole was the divergent social composition of the two formations. "[I]t seems clear," Conan Fischer writes,

> that the NSDAP had developed a paramilitary wing which contrasted socially with the parent party. The independent *Mittelstand* who provided the party with almost a third of its membership were largely absent among the rank-and-file of stormtroopers.[136]

Fischer also notes that middle class representation in the SA was reduced even further by a stormtrooper Reserve formation. Established by an order of March 28, 1929, the Reserve SA demanded minimal requirements of its members, thus making it a better choice than the Active SA for working middle class Nazis. The only requirements for a Reserve SA-man were that he attend a weekly three-hour inspection and participate in a fortnightly three-hour military exercise. The Reserve branch came to have "a more explicitly right-wing background than the Active SA's membership" and, by November 1931, constituted 21.1 percent of the total *Sturmabteilung*. This part-time stormtrooper formation effectively extracted the bulk of the middle class contingent from the Active SA.[137] Left behind seems to have been a markedly radicalized organization, consisting of Germans very much from the ranks of "societal losers" identified by Alistair Hamilton as the quintessential Nazi constituency.[138]

That the Reserve SA drew off a large proportion of middle class stormtroopers may in part account for the observed prevalence in the Active SA of proletarians

and unemployed. Lawrence Stokes' study of the north German town of Eutin, for example, showed that more than two of every five SA-men came from a working class background. This ratio contrasted with the corresponding ratio for the party as a whole: fewer than one out of five members (17 percent) were workers.[139] An insignificant number of SA-men in that town could accurately have called themselves middle class. "The 'proletarian' character of the SA in Eutin," Stokes concludes, "seems indisputable."[140]

SA-men also tended to be younger than their Party comrades. While some 35 percent of Party members were under 25 years of age, over 60 percent of SA-men fell into that age category. "Within an already youthful party, the SA constituted both the youngest and the most dynamic element."[141] The paramilitary vocation of the *Sturmabteilung* doubtless contributed to this age bias; older activists would be less attracted than their younger colleagues to war-gaming, marching, and other typical SA activities. Regardless of the cause of the disparate age composition, the fact that the majority of the SA were young in turn probably contributed to the radical tenor of that segment of the Nazi movement.

The portrait of the SA as predominantly young and disproportionately proletarian may explain in part why the organization did not cooperate smoothly with the older, more rightist Party rank-and-file – which even included a cross-section of the upper class, a constituency almost wholly absent from the SA.[142] Detlef Mühlberger's study suggests that nearly a majority of SA never joined the NSDAP.[143] Such a discontinuity in membership well could have opened the way to divergences in interest and conduct. It does not explain, however, why the SA itself experienced internal tensions. A more detailed examination of SA composition suggests possible sources for intramural conflict. The occupational backgrounds of SA-men varied widely, and their perceived interests were sufficiently at variance with one another that friction within stormtrooper ranks was common. Fischer found, for the period from 1929 to 1930, the following division of employment among stormtroopers:

Unskilled workers	13.4 percent
Semi-skilled workers	43.8 percent
Salaried manual laborers	5.4 percent
Salaried white collar workers	16.7 percent
Civil servants	1.5 percent
Master craftsmen	0.7 percent
Independent proprietors	2.4 percent
Farmers	3.4 percent
Assisting family members	0.1 percent
Professionals; persons independently employed	2.8 percent
University students	8.0 percent
Miscellaneous	1.8 percent

In assessing these labor statistics, it must be borne in mind that the unemployed were a chief SA constituency. Therefore, for many stormtroopers, their occupational categories did not necessarily reflect much about their day-to-day activities. Though

internal divisions may have stemmed in part from differences in labor background, position in the work force might not have been a particularly salient feature of a stormtrooper's outlook.

Stormtrooper unemployment itself marked another key divide between the SA and the movement at large. Michael Kater finds that between 60 and 70 percent of the SA were unemployed.[144] Considering that the Reserve SA contained the lion's share of employed stormtroopers, the unemployment rate in the Active SA must have been overwhelming. In the most activist part of the organization, unemployment seems to have been the norm and SA membership the primary occupation.

Indeed, unemployment seems to have been a critical impetus to SA enlistment. Interviews with SA-men (conducted by Theodore Abel) suggest that the forced idleness brought on by the Depression drove many stormtrooper recruits to sign up, if for no other reason than to take part in a seemingly useful activity. Indeed, growth of the SA corresponded closely to worsening macroeconomic indicators. According to Wolfgang Horn, the SA grew from 60,000 men in the autumn of 1930, to 170,000 the following September, to one-quarter of a million just three months later in December, to 470,000 in late summer 1932, and to nearly three-quarters of a million by January 1933.[145] The rising political fortunes of the NSDAP probably spurred recruitment to a point, but, as will be discussed later, autumn 1932 brought political reversal. Despite the downturn of the Party at the polls in November 1932, SA growth continued, it would seem, unabated. Unemployment seems to have been the main force driving individuals into the SA. Without unemployment, the *Sturmabteilung* would have lacked the pool of idle men prerequisite to such growth.

That the SA drew its recruits from a growing mass of unemployed shaped lines of conflict within the organization. The growth of the SA demanded more officers to lead the ranks, and the costs of officer training demanded more contributions from the ranks. The average stormtrooper however had little or no income and could thus not afford to support the needed increase in the officer corps. Ernst Röhm, shortly after returning from a spell as a military advisor in South America, established a Reich Leadership School for training SA officers. The school, with its regional branches, received small subsidies from the NSDAP central organization as well as from the local *Gaue*, but the bulk of the burden of tuition costs fell on the individual SA student or his unit. The cost of sending men to the leadership schools was prohibitive for many units, and also for most individual stormtroopers. High costs tended to weed out proletarian and unemployed elements from the leadership course, and, correspondingly, from the SA officer corps.[146] As there arose a social division within the Nazi movement between Party and SA, so too did there arise a division within the *Sturmabteilung* between officers and men. SA morale reports from September 1932 record the efforts of local SA commanders to scare up funds to send men to the leadership schools. The reports also record that the men became disaffected when money proved too scarce to support such training. A gulf grew between a better-off officer corps and the overwhelmingly proletarian and unemployed rank-and-file.

A second result of recruitment from the ranks of the unemployed was the

radicalization and criminalization of the *Sturmabteilung*.[147] Like other postwar paramilitary organizations, the SA consisted at first mostly of veterans. But, by 1932, the veteran contingent had been overwhelmed by newcomers. Prevalent among these were economic victims of the Depression. The non-veteran elements introduced a less disciplined and more radical atmosphere to the SA. After 1930 – the starting point of accelerated growth in SA numbers – the organization began espousing anew the terror tactics it had endorsed before 1923. It also took on a more left-wing tenor. Nazism may have benefited from this change in several ways. First, renewed violence made the SA the constant target for centrist and left-wing press attacks. These attacks amounted to free publicity for Hitler. Second, the evident activism of the SA served as an inducement to the activists of other parties, or to men with activist inclinations but who belonged to no party, to join the SA. The "explicit avowal of violence" became, in a manner, a self-fulfilling prophecy and a self-continuing cycle. Declarations of activism and violence attracted persons prone to these, and their effect on the organization, in turn, attracted like-minded recruits.[148] Third, the radicalization of the SA may have added credence to the Nazi Party claim to be socialist as well as nationalist.

Though the new stormtrooper contingent may have helped the Nazi movement in certain ways, it brought complications. The new unemployed members were difficult to control. Violent, radical, and rebellious, they could embarrass the Party and alienate the middle class upon which Hitler so heavily relied. And, not least troublesome to the Nazis, the SA had begun to acquire "some members with clearly criminal backgrounds."[149] The SA, increasingly difficult to control and socially and politically divergent from the NSDAP as a whole, became a locus of conflict within National Socialism.[150]

A paradox in Hitler's conception of the SA made it inevitable that the organization would engender strife. On the one hand, Hitler encouraged among stormtroopers a growing dynamism and disregard for law. Speeches to stormtroopers communicated that the SA should be a rough-and-ready outfit, prepared to terrorize its enemies, while noisily broadcasting the Party platform. The problem with this conception of the SA mission is that it contradicted Hitler's vision of a dictatorial political movement. Virtually from the day he joined the fledgling party in 1919, Hitler aimed to assert iron-fisted control over it. Having early outmaneuvered his *völkisch* colleagues, Hitler may have appeared to have achieved this. But his call for the SA to act as an unruly and violent adjunct to the Party ran contrary to an obsession with order and obedience. To act in the way Hitler called on it to act, the SA was bound to be unruly and little amenable to political command. Hitler recognized the usefulness of the stormtroopers as violent activists, but their nature as such seemed likely to lead them to greater independence than Hitler would be ready to tolerate. Much of the SA wanted to serve as a genuine revolutionary army. The SA did not envision itself as a uniformed cheerleading squad, and resistance would be difficult to avoid, if Hitler tried to relegate it to such a role.[151] The dynamic character of the SA, combined with colliding perceptions of its role, raised possibilities for conflict.

If conflict were to arise between Party and SA, mediation would be required. Yet

mediation the Nazi style was singularly ill-disposed to provide. Hitler resisted developing a systematic means to intervene between feuding elements of his movement, and much Nazi dispute resolution therefore remained *ad hoc*. Donald M. McKale explores the chief example of institutionalized mediation within the Nazi movement, the Party courts. McKale's analysis of the courts reveals that the *Sturmabteilung* found itself at the heart of the movement's most difficult arguments and jurisdictional conflicts.

The Party courts – *Parteigerichte* – were intended to regulate Party activity and to mediate disputes. "They were to protect the Nazi party by disciplining or expelling disobedient party members, by mediating dissension in the movement, and by banning from entrance into the party its sworn enemies such as Jews, Communists, and 'liberals'."[152] The courts were intended to serve their purpose, not as objective and independent entities, but as adjuncts to Hitler's personal, "unofficial" methods of dispute resolution. McKale explains how the Party courts were intended to serve the Führer:

> Above all, the *Parteigerichte* provided due process and appeal opportunities for all National Socialists, and the tribunals . . . operated according to strict investigation and trial procedures. However, the presence of good procedures did not guarantee that the courts would rule fairly or equitably. They were mainly bureaucratic instruments of control that were designed to manage (or suppress where necessary) conflict to the advantage of Hitler and the party's leaders. . . .
>
> [U]nder the authority of prestigious judicial bodies, the Nazi leader was particularly able to enforce numerous decisions that were unpopular in the NSDAP while simultaneously maintaining a remarkable anonymity. . . . This carefully veiled power prevented his unpopular rulings from affecting adversely his greatest personal asset – his image as the unchallenged, "superman" Führer-figure of the Nazi party.[153]

If an unpopular decision had to be enforced, Hitler could appear to defer to the Party courts. The image cultivated of these courts was one of independence and objectivity. Thus they could be imagined as separate from the Leader's will. This pseudo-judiciary protected Hitler from rank-and-file protest over unpopular measures, as Nazi followers who felt slighted by a particular policy would direct their scorn at the *Parteigerichte* rather than Hitler.

The Nazi internal judiciary was established in July 1921. Simple and loosely organized at first, the court system consisted principally of *ad-hoc* committees set up to deal with particular questions and disputes. Hitler called a general meeting of the NSDAP at Munich on May 22, 1926 in order to codify a structure for the Party courts. The courts were called "investigation and conciliation committees" – *Untersuchungs- und Schlichtungsauschüsse*. Abbreviated *Uschla*, the Party courts were divided into a four-tier hierarchy. The highest court presided in Munich. This *Reichs-Uschla* was chaired for most of its history (from 1927 to 1945) by Walter Buch, an early Party member from Baden.[154] Immediately beneath the *Reichs-Uschla* lay the *Gau-Uschlas*. By October 1930, there was constituted one *Gau-Uschla* for each of the

thirty-five Party districts. Subordinate to the *Gau-Uschlas* were a series of *Kreis-Uschlas*. These bodies served to link each *Gau*-level court to the lowest judicial instance, the *Orts-Uschlas*. The *Orts-Uschlas* numbered approximately one hundred in every *Gau*.[155] This hierarchy describes the Party court system at its full development.

The *Parteigerichte* repeatedly proved useful to Hitler. Sources of strife were numerous within the disputatious National Socialist ranks. As McKale notes, "a major problem for Hitler became one of harnessing together and uniting [the] mass conglomeration of subleaders and members" who constituted his movement, and the Nazi leader's penchant for letting other people do his bidding made the courts a natural recourse. Pettiness, insecurity, egoism, and ambition among Party leaders subordinate to Hitler engendered incessant conflict. Arguments over political philosophy were commonplace in a movement embracing followers of divergent political persuasions. Tensions also arose from "the sharp socioeconomic and political heterogeneity of the movement." The *Parteigerichte*, though perhaps inadequate to address the full range of difficulties that the heterogeneous movement would experience, were Hitler's chief helpmates in ironing out disputes.

The stormtroopers disliked the *Uschlas* from the start. A systematized and hierarchical institution based (if only theoretically) on rule of law impinged upon the stormtroopers' freewheeling autonomy. Both Captain von Pfeffer and his successor as SA chief-of-staff, Ernst Röhm, opposed extending *Uschla* jurisdiction over the SA. This struggle for SA autonomy from NSDAP organs gave rise to personal antagonisms. Pfeffer and Röhm both professed to hate leading *Uschla* personnel, especially Walter Buch, the Nazi supreme justice, and Bruno Heinemann, a former army general and *Reichs-Uschla* chairman. Antagonism constantly simmered between SA chiefs and Party courts. The worst flair-ups of this occurred in cases where individual SA-men committed infractions falling under *Uschla* jurisdiction. "Any encroachment by an Uschla into the quasi-military affairs of the SA," McKale writes, ". . . only added to the inherent ill will that existed between the political and military branches."[156]

One particularly heated incident illustrating the SA–*Uschla* conflict took place in January 1930. An SA man had been disciplined before an *Orts-Uschla* in Plauen, in *Gau* Saxony. The malefactor's commanding officer, however, disagreed with the court ruling and maintained that a Party agency outside the SA lacked jurisdiction over SA affairs. The officer refused to abide by the *Uschla* order to expel the defendant from the *Sturmabteilung*. A heated debate ensued. This case from Plauen made it evident that a *modus vivendi* had to be reached if Party cohesion were to be maintained.[157]

An attempt to iron out the relationship between Party courts and the SA was made in May 1930. GRUSA VIII (*Grundsätzliche Anordnungen der SA*) declared that "SA affairs" did not fall under the purview of the *Uschla*. The *Uschla* could intervene in cases involving SA-men only where the conduct of an SA-man clearly did serious harm to the interests of the NSDAP and where it was agreed by the SA-man's commanding officer that serious harm was done. The order did not define "SA affairs," so whether a particular case ought to have been heard by an *Uschla* was always open to debate. In the absence of a binding definition of "SA affairs," such

debate was usually fruitless.[158] This amounted to a unilateral SA right to deny jurisdiction, and GRUSA VIII failed in its purpose of smoothing out the relationship between SA and Party administration.

When Ernst Röhm became SA chief-of-staff on January 1, 1931, the SA was in deadlock with the Party courts. Röhm opened negotiations with Buch, in an attempt to improve the SA–*Uschla* relationship. The attempted Röhm–Buch rapprochement ended however when the Party judiciary was confronted by its most difficult test, the Stennes Revolt.

Joseph Goebbels, Party propaganda chief and *Gauleiter* of Berlin, had begun to argue with Walter Stennes in September 1930. Stennes had accused Goebbels of withholding funds earmarked for the SA. Unemployment was sending an increasingly radical element into the Berlin SA, and lack of funds was damaging the morale of Stennes' men. Goebbels gave preference to local SS detachments, and this added heat to an already incendiary situation. The result of the tensions between the Berlin SA and *Gau* administration was an SA strike. Goebbels, at one point, had to call the Berlin police to rid his offices of rebellious SA-men. Such a fiasco could only have damaged the public image of the NSDAP. Hitler finally decided to expel Stennes from the movement, and an order to this effect was issued on April 2, 1931. Typical of any effective SA leader, however, Stennes had surrounded himself with a coterie of staunch supporters, and when he was forced to leave the Party and the SA, Stennes took a significant number of fellow SA commanders. The *Gaue* Brandenburg, Silesia, Pomerania, and Ostmark experienced the most significant defections. Though the Stennes Revolt never built up enough steam to overcome Party efforts to quell it, Hitler and Goebbels were made sufficiently insecure by the revolt that they were afraid to discipline individual Stennes sympathizers who remained Nazis. Instead, they deferred to the *Uschlas*. The *Uschlas* proceeded through the late spring and early summer to expel the remaining Stennes loyalists and guarantee that the persons who replaced them harbored no Stennes sympathies.[159]

Though the *Uschlas* seemed to have served their purpose in the immediate aftermath of the Stennes revolt, the disciplining of Stennes and his followers in the long run stoked SA animosity toward the Party courts. Indeed, it was soon the case that Party leaders could no longer rely on the *Uschlas* to mediate disputes relating to the SA. A *Gau-Verordnungsblatt* issued on September 21, 1932 ordered all *Gau* leaders to familiarize themselves "in broad outline" with *Uschla* directives. The Party hoped that *Gau* leaders would become sufficiently fluent in Party law, especially as it pertained to SA relations, that cases could be kept out of the courts. Perhaps to let SA tempers cool, Nazi leaders suspended operation of the courts for two months. The upcoming November Reichstag election promised to worsen intra-Nazi strife, and Party leaders evidently judged the *Uschlas* incapable of handling the extra friction produced by campaigning. "Throughout the campaign for the election of 6 November . . . the party's courts ceased to function completely, in the hope that this would lessen the mounting tension in the movement."[160] Hitler's approach to mediating tensions was always *ad hoc*, personal, and arbitrary. When confronted with an unruly SA, the Party unsurprisingly found institutional forms of conflict resolution either inadequate or unsuitable.

The SA, prior to the Munich Putsch, was unaccustomed to following Party directives. In fact, it was in large part the will of the SA that led Adolf Hitler to embark on what he may have sensed was a foolhardy venture. Inspired by the recent success of Benito Mussolini's March on Rome, the SA in early autumn 1923 pressured the rest of the movement for a "March on Berlin." Hitler feared that a failure on his part to ride the wave of popular revolutionary sentiment might cost him the allegiance of the movement.[161] Thus he endorsed a putsch attempt, success of which was wildly improbable, and which, in its eventual failure, left the Party in disarray and Hitler in jail. From the putsch, Hitler seems to have learned that "armed illegality" was hopeless as a means to take over the country, and he further realized that he would have to enforce stricter discipline over that branch of the movement – the *Sturmabteilung* – which had agitated for political violence.

After the Munich Putsch attempt, the governments of most of the German states banned the SA. Ernst Röhm attempted to continue the NSDAP's paramilitary activities under cover, but this posed organizational problems again reflecting the unruly nature of the paramilitary rank-and-file. A *Frontbann* acted as a cover for the activity of former SA units. In the loose and confused atmosphere following Hitler's internment at Landsberg Prison, Röhm discovered that the *Frontbann* was virtually unmanageable. Amidst dissolution of Nazi cells and personal in-fighting, Röhm quit as *Frontbann* leader and, in a murky air of scandal, left Germany for South America. Thus, when Hitler returned to lead his movement early in 1925, he confronted a paramilitary wing in considerable disorder.

As soon as the bans on paramilitary leagues expired and he was out of jail, Hitler ordered local activists to form new SA units. One detail was emphasized to the new SA: it was to obey the Party. But it quickly became apparent that the SA would not subordinate itself to the NSDAP without a struggle. Joseph Nyomarkay writes of the would-be hierarchical relationship of Party over fighting league:

> The principle of absolute subordination of the SA to the party leadership in political matters was too simple to work. This principle, which guided the SA–party relation after 1925, mistakenly assumed the limits and the nature of the "political" to be ascertainable.[162]

Primacy of the NSDAP over its Party army, and even primacy of national SA leaders over local units, proved an elusive objective.

It was not until October 1926 that Hitler issued orders defining a national SA hierarchy. These orders created the structure described in the preface. The *Sturmabteilung* would be headed by a Supreme SA Leader – the *Oberste SA-Führer* (OSAF). Franz Pfeffer von Salomon, a former army captain, occupied this post. Hitler bid Pfeffer reorganize the SA along lines that would make it a tool of the NSDAP, an episode in SA institutional politics discussed by Peter Longerich in some detail.[163] Explicitly, the SA was not to be developed as an independent-minded army. Hitler wrote to Pfeffer on November 1, 1926:

> The formation of the SA does not follow a military standpoint but what is

> expedient to the Party. In so far as its members are trained physically the emphasis should not be on military exercises but sporting activities. Boxing and ju-jitsu have always seemed more important to me than any bad, semi-training in shooting. . . . What we need are not one or two hundred daring conspirators but a hundred thousand, indeed a hundred thousand fighters for our ideology. The work should be carried on not in secret conventicles but in mighty mass processions; not through the dagger and poison or the pistol can the way be opened for the movement but through the conquest of the streets. We have to teach Marxism that the future master of the streets is National Socialism just as one day it will be the master of the State.[164]

Hitler did not wish to let the SA force his hand again as it had done in 1923. So he called on its leader to assure its obedience to Party directive. But Hitler either missed (or could not do anything about) the larger point of the SA problem: the SA would be bound to cause trouble for the Party so long as it acted as an autonomous organization. Whether the SA trained in shooting or in ju-jitsu was immaterial. The autonomy of the organization – not its exact occupation – was the seed of unruliness. A simple declaration of Party primacy over the SA would not suffice to keep control. Hitler's urging local SA leaders to use individual initiative to build up the organization seems to have guaranteed an increase in the autonomy of the SA, and thus, in the tensions between it and the Party.

A successful SA leader, working within Hitler's orders to strengthen his local unit, became a powerful, semi-autonomous force unto himself. Nyomarkay discusses the growth of SA autonomy and the danger that it posed to the Party:

> The more successful and viable the SA became, the greater its *esprit de corps* and the greater the psychological distance between it and the party organization. Consequently, the most successful and able of its leaders were the greatest potential threats to party unity, regardless of their own convictions and aspirations. . . .
>
> The local SA leaders were not just commanders acting under and receiving the allegiance of their subordinates because of their status in the hierarchy; they were also charismatic leaders who attracted comrades on the basis of personal loyalties and who managed to establish strongly disciplined groups of fanatical fighters. Although this solved the problem of discipline on the local level . . . it seriously impaired the authority of the central leadership over the local organizations.[165]

SA independence was the source of the utility of the organization. Yet it made the organization a threat to the Nazi movement as a whole. If Hitler wished to profit from SA dynamism, he could not curb SA autonomy.

The independence and local origins of most SA units led to political heterodoxy. This made the stormtroopers yet more of a problem for the movement. Party and SA leadership delegated political indoctrination to local SA leaders, and this policy of leaving pedagogical functions to local instances increased the variations in

stormtrooper politics. Karl Dietrich Bracher notes that leaving indoctrination to local leaders advanced the cohesiveness of local SA groups and elevated the position of the local SA leader, but it had adverse effects on the cohesion of Nazism on a national level. Nationalism, socialism, anti-Semitism, racism, conservatism, and various brands of *völkisch* philosophy formed the amalgam of SA ideology, and these strands represented the bulk of SA thinking.[166] The politics of most units could be described more or less completely by reference to some combination of these strands. However, no universal code or doctrinal edict offered a consolidated expression of Nazi politics as, for example, Marxism provided an expression of the KPD philosophy to the SA's foes in the RFB. The path was open to ideological divergence.

Economic recovery after 1923 made holding the SA together even more difficult, whether in an ideological or institutional sense. Many of the veterans with professional skills who had joined the SA early on left for better opportunities in the job market. SA composition changed, especially after 1926, and the organization came to contain fewer war veterans and more of a variegated assemblage of drifters, criminals, and idle adventure-seekers of the postwar generation. When SA membership again began to increase (with the economic collapse and consequent unemployment brought on by the Depression), barely one-quarter of the SA consisted of professional soldiers of the war generation and *Freikorps*.[167]

Pfeffer, as *Oberste SA-Führer*, found the motley assemblage constituting the new SA difficult to administer. His relationship with Party superiors proved taxing as well. Efforts by Pfeffer and his staff in Munich to discipline wayward SA leaders elsewhere in Germany often merely provoked angry rebuttals and more misbehavior. Eventually, Pfeffer learned that overly persistent criticism could provoke secession of whole SA units. The answer to the lack of SA discipline, it seemed clear to the former army officer, was to make the SA more militaristic both in its outward form and in its internal structure. But returning the SA to a military model similar to that which had characterized it before 1923 flew in the face of Hitler's initial order to prevent the SA from becoming an independent army. Whereas Pfeffer perceived the future of the *Sturmabteilung* to depend on militarization, Hitler persistently pushed for the SA to become a political adjunct to the NSDAP. Conflict erupted between Hitler and Pfeffer on the question of the character of the SA. Their differences proved irreconcilable when Pfeffer insisted that SA discipline could not be maintained without militarization. Pfeffer resigned as OSAF on August 29, 1930.[168]

Pfeffer's departure left the SA leaderless. With no acceptable substitute on hand (Röhm was still in South America), Hitler on September 2, 1930 assumed the reins of the *Sturmabteilung* himself. Later that month, the NSDAP won its first electoral landslide, and the nation was shocked by the sudden turn in fortunes of the hitherto obscure National Socialists. The September 14, 1930 election increased Nazi Reichstag representation from 12 seats to 107, a startling increase reflecting a gain in the national vote from 2.6 percent to 18.3 percent. This shift of popular support notwithstanding, Hitler was struggling to get the SA under control. It was a great help to Hitler, then, that Röhm finally returned from Bolivia. Röhm commanded

sufficient respect among stormtroopers that his orders would often be obeyed. Hitler put the once and future stormtrooper chief to work disciplining the unruly paramilitary.

But dependence on Röhm was, as it were, a two-edged sword. On the one hand, Röhm did prevent the organization from falling into complete disarray, and he had some success in negotiating the sudden influx of recruits after the September 1930 electoral success. On the other hand, dependence on Röhm meant that Hitler and the Party had at least partially to give in to Röhm's conception of the SA. As he had before 1923, Röhm continued to view the SA as a military organization residing above Party command. Röhm's relationship between SA and Party was, indeed, not unusual: the typical lower-level SA leader, like the OSAF, had the charisma and rapport to command SA respect, but, as such, also possessed an independent conception as to how the SA should be run. Party leaders, and Hitler in particular, had to come to grips with a problematic situation. "To the extent that he [Hitler] wanted to see a powerful SA that could be used for political purposes, he was invariably faced with the rise of strong SA leaders who often developed independent views."[169] And in many cases the strong leaders, though indispensable to Hitler, wanted to make the SA more than a mere appurtenance to the NSDAP.

When Walter Stennes had revolted against the NSDAP in Berlin, he had issued a list of demands to the Party. And, though Stennes was an extreme case, his demands illustrated the type of power that, even if they stopped short of outright defection, strong SA leaders tended to try to extract from the Party. On the ideological front, Stennes demanded strident professions of anti-Catholicism and anti-capitalism. Neither of these concepts could be practically adopted by a party attempting to win as many votes as possible in free elections. Stennes demanded an end to corruption and bureaucratization in the NSDAP. Again, the demand was incapable of fulfillment. One of the largest inducements to Nazi bureaucrats was the promise of easier living at the Party's expense. It was demanded that the *Gauleiter* be stripped of all power over individual SA-men; this would have taken away the Party's last vestige of practical control over the SA. Stennes demanded an administration for the SA completely separate from the Party administration. This, too, NSDAP leaders would have been unlikely to concede, for it would have formalized the independence of the SA from the Party. And, last but not least among his demands, Stennes called for a fixed portion of Party funds to be appropriated to the stormtroopers. In the face of troubled Party finances, it is hard to imagine that the NSDAP leadership could have given in to this demand either. Moreover, conceding a fixed appropriation would have greatly increased SA independence by freeing it from fiscal control.[170]

When Hitler dismissed a leader such as Stennes, he risked weakening the SA. This had been the lesson of the Pfeffer dismissal as well. Yet, in putting the independent and military-minded Röhm in charge, Hitler ran the risk of building an army that little heeded his political dictates. When Röhm officially assumed control of the SA on January 4, 1931, the crisis in SA order may have temporarily abated, but prospects for smooth relations between the SA and the Nazi Party dimmed.

Nazism existed amidst a landscape of fractious and fugacious constituents, where in-fighting could quickly erode party cohesion; and allegiances, noisily professed one day, might shift the next. An ongoing challenge for Nazi leaders was to keep their movement focused on particular political tasks and devoted to Hitler's quest for power.

2 July 31, 1932
Apogee?

People likely to have read the Nazi *Völkische Beobachter* on August 1, 1932 would immediately have discerned in that day's edition a single theme: Germany Victorious. Across the second page, the country's first gold medal at the Los Angeles Olympiad was celebrated in bold headlines. Rudolf Ismaner, the top German middle-weight lifter had just taken first place in his class, with a combined lift of 305 kilograms. And the front page announced an "achievement" for Germany in the political arena. A victory for National Socialism, the reader would probably have understood, in the Nazi lexicon meant a victory for Germany, and the headlines declared that National Socialism had just won a victory of the greatest scope. The German electorate had voted on July 31 for a new Reichstag and, as indicated by the polling stations, awarded the Nazis a total of 229 parliamentary seats (see Figure 2). This would create the biggest NSDAP block to date and the largest bloc – if not yet an absolute majority – in the heavily divided legislature of the Weimar Republic. Hitler issued a statement to mark the day:

> A great victory has been achieved! The National Socialist German Worker Party has now risen [to be] by far the strongest party of the German Reichstag. This development, unique in the history of our people, is the result of an enormous effort, of an ever-steady persistence. In view of this very great success of our movement, for nobody is there a "thank you," but for all of us only the duty, to pick up and continue the struggle again and with increased vigor.[1]

The victory marked a new peak in the NSDAP national electoral effort. It gave the Hitler movement more seats than ever before, and it also marked the first time that the NSDAP constituted a Reichstag plurality.[2] The success might well have augured further gains for National Socialism. Yet, despite the cause it gave the Nazis for celebration, the election of July 31, 1932 marked, above all else, the beginning of a crisis for the NSDAP.

Early summer 1932 witnessed Nazi spirits at their highest. A frenzy of local and state elections in the past eighteen months had delivered NSDAP majorities and pluralities all over the country, and the impending national election promised to cap off previous victories with the long-promised seizure of power. Hitler's strategy was


Stimmzettel zur Reichstagswahl
am 31. Juli 1932
im Wahlkreis Nr. 3 (Potsdam II)

Reichstagswahl 1932

Figure 2 Ballot card, Reichstag election of July 31, 1932.

Source: *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, Band 434 (Frontispiece).

to pursue a takeover of Germany through legal means alone, without recourse to the illegal putsch tactics of 1923. This "legal way," as Nazis called it, appeared to have carried the movement to the very threshold of power.[3] Yet the successes of "legal" Nazism, however formidable they appeared, had not convinced all members of the movement that legality promised ultimate success. The most radical Nazis – especially the SA – protested that any trafficking with the Republic compromised National Socialist ideals. More pragmatically, opponents to the legal way argued that elections alone could never carry the Nazis to the undisputed dominion they sought. It would come as no surprise that among SA-men *Legalität zum Teufel* became a catchphrase.[4] At its apparent apogee in the summer of 1932, National Socialism faced a profound disagreement over political means, a disagreement that, in turn, reflected a gulf over principles.

The tangible prospects for absolute victory seemed so great in the early summer that they quieted underlying disagreements within Nazism. Factional strife and policy disputes subsided beneath unrestrained enthusiasm and lofty aspiration. Whether peace could long prevail, however, remained to be seen.

The leaders of the Party had endeavored for some time to convince their followers that the strategy of seizing power through elections was a promising one, and, as the July 31, 1932 election approached, they assured the movement that the victory hour was about to toll. Goebbels and other high-ranking Nazis insisted in their public pronouncements that the strategy of legal politicking would soon put Hitler in power. Critically, they directed this message not only to the general electorate, but also to activist Nazis who may have doubted the wisdom of giving up on revolutionary tactics. Sooner than later, Party leaders assured the radicals of the movement, an absolute majority of the German electorate would "see the light" and give their votes to the Nazi Party. It required a strenuous propaganda effort, however, to convince those Nazis eager to seize power by violent means that electioneering was effective policy. And, though Nazi leaders were comfortable playing fast and loose with facts, a kernel of reality was needed to sustain the proposition that elections could deliver the state to Nazi hands.

At least during summer 1932, state legislative elections provided the necessary kernel. To advertise their success to voters at large but also to reassure radical Nazis of the wisdom of the legal way, the Nazi leadership noisily celebrated every National Socialist victory at the polls. A recurring theme was that, naysayers notwithstanding, the recent electoral successes spelled certain Nazi takeover of Germany. Foreshadowing its 1939–1945 wartime propaganda, the NSDAP portrayed itself as an inexorable electoral juggernaut. Goebbels wrote in his newspaper *Der Angriff* that a state election in Oldenburg augured the future of electoral politics in Germany. The state election of May 30, 1932 had delivered the Nazis twenty-four seats in the Oldenburg Landtag. (The assembly had a total of forty-six seats.) This was the first time the Party had won an absolute majority in a federal state. For the first time, then, the Nazis were able to establish a state government, unimpeded by coalition politics. Goebbels insisted that the outcome of the Oldenburg campaign marked the start of a nation-wide trend, and the *Gauleiter* of Berlin and future propaganda chief of Nazi Germany celebrated the event with characteristic sarcasm:

> We can imagine that the noble gentlemen in the editorial offices and the bureaucracy are trembling in fear because of this. They have hitherto talked their way out of it, by saying that the effective radius of the NSDAP finds its limit at forty percent, that a fifty-one percent majority of the German people wants no Hitler regime, and that therefore, it would be possible if all other parties stuck together, to exclude the NSDAP from seizing power. We find it curious to see now, what these sign-interpreters have to say. Probably, they will explain that Oldenburg is not a conclusive proof, that this state offers us the most favorable conditions, and that what is achievable there will remain unachievable in the rest of the Reich forever.
>
> [This is] a cheap excuse, which sounds all the more stupid . . . and more

> frivolous if one considers, on the one hand, that the Oldenburg state was always a step ahead of the movement on the national level, and on the other hand, that the nation regularly caught up with [Oldenburg] in the time frame of two or three months. . . .
>
> The Party stands before difficult and conclusively decisive battles. We are deeply convinced that we will win them. Oldenburg is a winning sign for the entire Reich. We are ascending! Absolute majority for Hitler and his Party is our goal. The German people are ascending![5]

The point of Goebbel's message was not only that there would soon be a Nazi Germany, but also that the Party intended to reach its objective through legal – that is to say, electoral – means. Left-wing Nazis and, above all, the SA however continued to advocate an illegal or revolutionary course. Reverting to the violent, putsch-oriented strategy of the early years of Nazism continued to exert a pull on the imagination of a segment of the movement, even though that strategy had led the Party to near ruin in November 1923. Goebbels and the rest of Nazi political leadership struggled to maintain the legal strategy, and the key weapon in their struggle was the evidence provided by recent elections that a national vote would soon install a Nazi government in Germany.

In an address some months prior to the Oldenburg election, Goebbels had emphasized that the movement rested on legal rather than revolutionary foundations. Speaking before an assembly of Party faithful in Hamburg on January 7, 1932, Goebbels implicitly reminded his fellow National Socialists that violence and illegality were fruitless and that they must channel their energies toward electoral politics. With disingenuous pledges to respect the republican constitution, Goebbels explained that the NSDAP, whatever mission the German people assigned it, would take the mantle of power at popular behest:

> The National Socialist movement is and remains legal. It has never played with coup-means and declares openly, that it will exercise power according to the will of the people. The acquisition of power takes place from the people, and he who gives the mandate dictates the way in which power should be used. If we are instructed to proceed mildly against those who brought us through ten years of poverty and deprivation, we will follow these instructions, grinding our teeth. Were we to be given the opposite instructions, then we would be forced by the Weimar Constitution to act accordingly, because there it is written, that the people and not the party is of prime importance.[6]

Implicit in Goebbels' message was that the electorate would freely deliver power to the NSDAP. More explicitly, Goebbels urged the Party to keep calm even when provoked – to follow the rules of electoral politics, no matter how distasteful those might be.

In his allusions to popular will, Goebbels seems to have attempted to link the "legal way" with the original elements of the Nazi canon. The Nazis claimed their movement to stand apart from other parties because, they alleged, it represented the

German *Volk* rather than partisan factions. In his January 1932 Hamburg speech, Goebbels associated Nazi ideology to the constitutional requirement that governments reflect popular will; both the Party ideal and the constitution demanded that the NSDAP act according to the command of the German people – not to sectional interest. The Party's chief propagandist suggested, then, that pursuing power through elections was both practical and principled. It was practical, because it could produce a Nazi State; it was principled, because the legal requirement that the government reflect popular will was consonant with Nazi *völkisch* – as well as Weimar republican – belief. Straining to keep the movement on course for the July Reichstag election, Nazi leadership promoted the "legal way" with whatever arguments they could conjure.

As July 31 drew near, the Party intensified its insistence that the present campaign marked the final ascent of the NSDAP to national power. The propaganda served the purpose of keeping Party activists within legal lines, but it also led them to expect nothing short of absolute victory. Hitler issued an *Aufruf des Führers* in a Sunday special edition of the *Völkische Beobachter*. That June 26 message both stoked the fires of expectation and enthusiasm and mirrored them:

> The year 1932 will one day live on in the history of the movement as the year of the heaviest sacrifices and struggles but also as the year of the biggest victories and successes. Ten election campaigns are behind us. Ten times we fought against a front of adversaries. Ten times we have obtained unprecedented victories! The fact that the NSDAP is Germany's biggest party cannot be denied any longer by anyone. God willing, on August 1, we will have created the premise for governments . . . which will be able to do justice to the historical tradition, as well as to solve the gigantic tasks of the present time.[7]

Soon, Hitler confidently assured, the Nazi Party would possess the mandate that its followers had long awaited. Holding the levers of power, the NSDAP would finally be unhindered in "solv[ing]" those unspecified tasks to which Hitler alluded. Even more important than the optimism of Nazi political expectations in the early summer of 1932 was the all-or-nothing tone in which they were expressed, the absoluteness of the Nazis' hopes and goals that season reflecting a cardinal trait of the Hitler movement: its inability to compromise. Partial victory, to the Nazis, was an oxymoron; the only worthy goal was conquest; and anything short – compromise – was tantamount to defeat. It followed from this general attitude that if the national election failed to deliver an absolute majority of the popular vote, then the election would amount to total failure. The nature of their political objectives precluded the Nazis from accepting middle-of-the-road results. The movement was bound either to rise or fall; it could not achieve an enduring *modus vivendi* with the Republic or any other party. The propaganda promising absolute victory in the July election reaffirmed and amplified extremist tendencies in evidence from the start.

The republican police were well aware that the more volatile members of the Nazi movement envisioned themselves the beneficiaries of an absolute victory rather than partners in a coalition government. The police reported:

> In the minds of the SS people was created and preserved the opinion that they would one day form the police-power or that they would at least constitute the greatest number in the police service; and the SA was of the opinion that the future national army would be filled up by the ranks of the SA.[8]

To be sure, all parties in the Republic promised rewards to their supporters, but, in most, the activists' expectations were moderated by the assumption that power would be shared among multiple parties. Even if they imagined forming a single-party cabinet, the conventional parties assumed that their ability to mete out rewards to their members at any rate would be constrained by a combination of the rule of law and the requirements of normal politics. Only a party seeking absolute and unfettered control of the State could promise its activists the utter domination of the State apparatus envisioned by the SA and SS. The paramilitary formations revealed in the scope of their intentions and aspirations the scope of the ambition of the movement as a whole. The Nazis' goal was nothing short of conquering the German State.

As the July election approached, Nazi leaders pumped the activists full to bursting with promises that their hegemonic goal lay close at hand. Though this may have spurred Nazi followers to campaign more energetically, the expectant attitude produced a dangerous dynamic. To activists prone to thinking in absolute terms, summer 1932 was pronounced the moment of victory. Among such activists any result, short of conquest, would produce a political fall-out potentially catastrophic for the movement.

Even when they did not face the strains of a Reichstag election campaign, Nazi leaders found it difficult to keep all factions of the movement committed to the legal path. Maintaining decorum all the while was increasing in importance. Political illegality had become endemic in Germany, with paramilitary groups of several parties perpetrating widespread disorder. In 1931, the cabinet issued a series of emergency decrees to cope with the crisis. The cabinet specifically intended the decrees as punitive measures against the groups most responsible for erosion of civic order. The government unambiguously communicated that it was serious about curtailing SA violence, and the threat of various sanctions put pressure on SA leaders to control their ranks. *Sturmabteilung* leadership realized that if misbehavior got out of hand, the resultant official wrath could cripple the organization. It became a priority to head off SA disturbances before they attracted State attention. The comparatively calm periods between election campaigns might have afforded the movement respite from fractious stormtrooper behavior, but the Nazis confronted in the SA a singularly uncontrollable institution.

As leaders of the Nazi movement apprehended, SA misconduct could provoke the hand of the State.

An extraordinary conference of the ministers of interior of the German *Länder* convened behind closed doors on the morning of March 18, 1931. In attendance were most of the state ministers of interior and their national counterpart, Dr. Wirth. After the reading of a letter from the Badenese minister of interior, the theme of the meeting was set by Severing, the interior minister from Prussia:

> The Prussian state government takes the stand that legal regulations alone are not enough and that the enactment of special regulations is necessary. It is true that the worst months are over, but the danger was not eliminated, for a very large number of workers will remain unemployed in the coming months.[9]

His fellow ministers in all likelihood understood right away what Severing was driving at. Uniformed political armies had gotten out of control and posed a threat to civil security, and only emergency measures could curb their illegal activities. If anyone listening in wondered what group in particular Severing and the others ministers had in mind, a pair of empty places in the conference room dispelled any uncertainty. The coalition governments of Thuringia and Braunschweig included Nazi ministers, and, in both states, Nazis held the interior portfolios. Neither the interior minister from Thuringia nor his counterpart from Braunschweig had been included in the conference. Wirth evidently knew better than to invite Nazis to a meeting where he and his colleagues intended to solve the Nazi problem.[10]

A general agreement emerged over Nazi paramilitary violence. The state president of Württemberg, Bolz, Prussian minister of interior Severing, and Severing's Hessian counterpart Leuschner spear-headed the decision to declare a national state of emergency. Local measures, they concluded, had thus far proven insufficient to curb the violence, and the crisis had assumed national proportions. To curb the paramilitary threat, the ministers prescribed a sweeping Emergency Decree (*Notverordnung*). The Decree mandated a general ban on paramilitary uniforms, a ban on side arms and propaganda trucks, and a cessation of all political demonstrations not approved in advance by local police authorities. Those who contravened the Emergency Decree were to receive jail sentences of not less than three months.[11] The Decree made the normal activities of the SA punishable offences, and vigorous prosecution under the Decree would have put many of the Nazis' most ardent activists behind bars.

The Emergency Decree became effective on March 28, 1931 and immediately elicited outbursts from the Nazi press. The front page of the *Völkischer Beobachter* on March 31, 1931 was plastered with the headline: "The Meaning of the new Emergency Order: Death of the NSDAP." A "Brüning-Wirth-Gröner-v.Hindenburg cabal," the lead article declared, conspired to destroy National Socialism. The Nazi journalists termed the tactics of the Brüning cabinet deceitful and promised that they would, in the end, be repaid.[12]

Initial public threats aside, Hitler and his confederates showed a cautious face when setting actual policy in response to the Emergency Decree. Hitler responded publicly to the *Notverordnung* in the *VB* on March 31. Retreating from the initial propaganda attacks, he urged Nazis to exercise restraint and obey the Decree:

> In these days, only one desire dominates the longing of the enemies of Germany: would it only work out, that the National Socialists get agitated, so that their masses loose their nerves and break the laws. . . . The Emergency Decree must be obeyed by all Party Comrades and Party officials, SA and SS-people in the most precise and thorough way.[13]

In a Directive (*Anordnung*) dated March 30, the Führer set down authoritatively that the NSDAP would follow a policy of strict compliance with the law. A preamble to the March 30 Directive explained that the Party would soon present before the Supreme Court a complaint arguing unconstitutionality of the Emergency Decree. The preamble assured its audience (SA commanders and higher political functionaries) that, before the Court, the illegality of the Decree would be readily exposed. The "legal way" apparently included manipulation of the judiciary of the Republic as well as pursuit of electoral victory.[14]

In the mean time, before going to court, Hitler ordered strict adherence to the law: "In the interest of the movement as a whole, I ordain that the rules of the Emergency Decree of March 28 be followed."[15] The Nazis thus demonstrated that, despite their diatribes against government policy and excoriation of Germany's leaders, they hardly wished a test of arms. To confront State power in the streets Nazi leadership apprehended was beyond the means of the movement. Fearful that the government was determined and able to quell the civil disturbances plaguing the country, Hitler ordered rowdier Nazi elements to behave.

Declaring restraint and enforcing it were very different matters however. Turning Hitler's pronouncements into a functioning policy indeed proved problematic. Calming the SA was imperative if the movement was to continue its legal politicking, and guaranteeing that legal politicking could deliver power was imperative if the SA was to accept the approach. Stormtrooper tolerance for legality was purchased with the assurance that absolute victory lay right around the corner. The deal rested on the assumption that very shortly a Nazi State would be born of the popular vote. As such, the deal carried an obvious risk. If the Party failed soon to win power by election, then radical Nazis might lose patience with their leaders' assurance.

In the fifteen months between the March 1931 Emergency Decree and the July 1932 national election, electoral results in state elections gave Nazis reason to believe that their leaders were correct. The popular mandate appeared to be drifting in favor of the NSDAP. But, over the course of these same months when electoral prospects were brightening, the determination of the State to curb SA excesses seemed to intensify. A government order of September 17, 1931 banned "anti-Semitic incitement" (*antisemitische Verhetzung*). A reinforcement of the general ban on uniforms (*allgemeines Univormverbot*) followed shortly thereafter.[16] Agitation was reported to be growing within SA ranks for a putsch attempt. It is impossible to measure precisely the sentiment in favor of a coup, but some indication of the extent of radical thinking is provided by the response of Nazi leadership to stormtrooper talk of violence against the Republic. The leadership moved rapidly to convince the activists that a paramilitary coup would be folly. Writing in the *VB* on September 23, 1931, Von Corswant, a leading Party spokesman, argued against a coup:

> Why should we risk the success of our cause through a coup? From election to election, the number of National Socialist votes is increasing. It is only a question of time when, through this slower but therefore safer way, we will achieve our goal of the seizure of unshared power.[17]

It is possible that statements such as this were aimed at the general public to assuage fears of Nazi radicalism. However, reference to the totalistic nature of Nazi ambition – "our goal of the seizure of unshared power" – would seem to have run contrary to an objective of calming the nerves of suspicious voters. Von Corswant was speaking to elements within the Nazi movement itself. Especially the unruly SA, growing more impatient every day the NSDAP adhered to the "legal way," required reminders from Nazi leadership that political violence could reverse the Nazi advance.

Corswant, though addressing primarily the most radical core activists, possibly needed to remind other dedicated Nazis as well that adherence to legality was Party policy. Evidence seems to show that a rift was growing in the Party over the question of whether to adhere to legality or resort to political violence. A government councilor, one Kuntze, presented a report on December 14, 1931 to the Interior Ministry. Entitled "On the question of the legality or illegality of the NSDAP," the report drew on quotations from various Nazi sources, and it illustrated a contradiction. Some statements would seem to indicate that the Nazis were dedicated to legality, while others suggested a tendency toward political violence. As witness on behalf of a group of stormtroopers standing trial on criminal charges, Hitler testified that the NSDAP embraced only legal tactics and sought to gain power solely through parliamentary process. The Interior Ministry report catalogued further instances when Nazi personages publicly committed the movement to democratic means. Frick addressed a conference at Harzburg and assured that the Party stood by the "legal way." Goebbels communicated a similar message at a gathering in Braunschweig on June 13, 1931 and also through an article in *Der Angriff* on November 3 the same year. Sauckel had assured the Thuringian Landtag on February 10, 1931 that the Nazis eschewed illegality. The government councilor Kuntze cited yet other Nazi figures to the same effect. These included Frank at a criminal trial, Gregor Straßer at a gathering in Saxony, Corswant in his *VB* article, and Bangert in the *National Socialist Yearbook*. One highly placed Nazi source asserted to an audience: "Everyone realizes that the Party will achieve its goal through legal, constitutional means" (Bangert). Even members of the left-wing "opposition" within the NSDAP could be found to advocate legality. Stennes, the recalcitrant eastern SA leader, announced that the Party was *system-freundlich* (friendly to the system). He further asserted, "About Hitler's legal will and legal intentions, there is nothing to doubt." Kuntze did not hazard a guess as to whether Stennes intended this remark as a compliment or a critique. In the Nazi lexicon, *system-freundlich* could be a derisive phrase, connoting sympathy with the Republic. But, regardless of Stennes' meaning, the pattern of high-ranking Nazis publicly declaring the commitment of the Party to legal methods suggests a policy behind the pronouncements. Nazi leadership was eager to impress upon the public – and upon the ranks of the movement too – that legality was the Nazi way.

The *Regierungsrat*'s report amply noted, however, that within Nazi ranks some opposed the official "legal way." The report qualified that it was only in the undercurrents of the Party (*der Partei Unterströmungen*) that illegal means were favored, yet the report also cited statements from several prominent Nazis as evidence that the

Party still harbored illegal impulses. Nieland, the Foreign Section Leader (*Auslandsabteilung Leiter*) speaking at Flensburg on March 19, 1931, left no doubt where he stood on the question of legality: "We are not legal! We are so only because we are too clever [for our own good]." The *Reichspropaganda* Leader Franke, at Kiel on August 14, explained that legality was at most a temporary expedient: "We are legal only so long as we must be, not a minute longer." And even Goebbels sent a mixed signal on his commitment to legality. At a meeting of *Gau* functionaries in Berlin on March 4, 1931, Goebbels left open the possibility that the NSDAP still considered illegal means part of its political arsenal:

> The National Socialist Movement stands today closer to power than ever before. How we will achieve it, I am able and desire here to express no special faith in the legality of the past.

The government councilor who compiled the report on Nazi legality concluded that a "difference of opinion" existed within the NSDAP (*Verschiedenheit der Meinungen*) but offered scant additional analysis.

Goebbels' March 4 remark in particular suggests that intra-Party conflict over legality brewed behind a façade not even itself completely stable. Nazi leaders seemed of opinion that reversion to the putsch tactics of 1923 could very well nullify the hard-fought gains of the last several years. Violence would alienate voters yet not topple the Republic. The Nazis had pragmatic grounds for eschewing illegality. However, forces internal to the movement – especially within the SA – exerted a pull toward the very violence that political calculation demanded be repudiated. Dedicated to a strain of National Socialism seemingly incapable even of tactical moderation, the stormtroopers as a group reacted in hostile fashion toward demands by the leadership for political normality. The stormtroopers appeared unwilling to coexist with the Republic even as a means to destroy it, and, perhaps owing to their nature as street fighters and political hooligans, they seem almost to have viewed political violence as an end unto itself. The stormtrooper vision of Nazi political progress was not to act within the framework of Weimar democracy but, rather, to fight the Republic, destroy it, and set up their own, radically conceived New Order over the wreckage. This revolutionary vision of politics embarrassed a Party that staked its future on manipulating the institutions of democracy to attain its goals. The source of that vision could not be easily repudiated; and thus repudiating the vision itself was difficult. Calls for a reversion to political violence emanated from the most activist, dynamic, and, in many ways, the most valuable section of the Nazi movement. The SA's proclivity for violence had to be curbed, if the Nazis hoped to preserve their chances of electoral victory, but they could not endeavor with too much vigor to suppress that proclivity, either. To let the SA run amuck would alienate voters, but to insist too firmly on adhering to "the system" would alienate the SA.

A tug-of-war, then, played itself out within the NSDAP. On the one hand, Party leaders promoted legal, parliamentary means as the path to power. On the other, radicals called for a reversion to political violence. The difference of viewpoint did

not merely divide factions within the movement. Even individual leaders, as evidenced by Goebbels, straddled a fence on the question of legality. A Nazi was compelled by political circumstances in the nation to urge restraint, while the persuasions of members of his movement compelled him at least to imply that violence remained a possibility.

The tangible outcome of Nazi parliamentary competition to date – victories at the polls – provided the best argument for continued adherence to the legal way. Up to July 31 at any rate, electioneering had one quality that enabled its advocates to keep radical Nazis and their preference for political violence at bay: electioneering worked. So long as electioneering appeared to be carrying Nazism closer to the absolute goals its core activists desired, Party leadership could defend legality.

Nevertheless, even while electioneering was apparently vindicating legality, eschewal of political violence did not go unchallenged. The NSDAP rode a wave of state electoral victories from September 1930 onward. Yet during the period in which Nazi fortunes were rising at the polls, the SA persistently agitated for violence. And the SA did not merely campaign within the Party for a departure from legal means. An abundance of national emergency measures targeting the stormtroopers testifies that the SA continued to resort to the street fight and other forms of intimidation even at the high-water mark of Nazi electioneering. If the SA rank-and-file remained unconvinced of the wisdom of legality while election results confirmed it, no amount of Party persuasion would restrain them in the absence of polling station success. The SA predictably indulged in all the more violence when the electoral juggernaut slowed or stalled.

March and April 1932 were critical months for the "legal way." Paul von Hindenburg's first term as President of the Republic was drawing to a close, and a national election would either give the aging war hero a second term or choose his successor. A simple majority of the popular vote was required to select a winner, and the first national polling (in March) failed to give any one candidate the necessary edge. The April run-off resulted in the re-election of Hindenburg. In both elections, the Nazis had campaigned fanatically for their candidate, Adolf Hitler. Both elections failed to put Hitler in office. True enough, the presidential polling delivered the NSDAP a higher percentage of the national vote than it had ever before received. The NSDAP had reached its previous high-water mark with the September 1930 Reichstag election – the Party's shocking initial breakthrough on the national level. In that election, the NSDAP list received 18.3 percent of the popular vote. The presidential election gave Hitler 30.1 percent in the first round (March 13) and an even more impressive 36.8 percent in the second round (April 10) (see Table 1).

Though Nazi leaders subsequently redoubled their assurances that the next election would yield final victory, SA violence escalated after the April national vote. In response to the political violence, a presidential edict was issued to curb the SA and other paramilitary formations. The SA ban of April 13, 1932 was followed by police raids, some of which reportedly uncovered stormtrooper plans for armed rebellion.[18] A *Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten gegen politische Ausschreitungen* of June 16

Table 1 The presidential elections of 1932

First ballot, March 13	
Candidate	*Percentage of popular vote*
Düsterberg	6.8
von Hindenburg	49.6
Hitler	30.1
Thälman	13.2
Winter	0.3
Second Ballot, April 10	
Candidate	*Percentage of popular vote*
von Hindenburg	53.0
Hitler	36.8
Thälman	10.2

Source: data adapted from "XX. Wahlen und Abstimmungen," *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich: 1932*, 51st edition, 546–547.

granted local police the power to dissolve any open-air assembly that they judged to threaten public security. Further, the order restricted the publication of political periodicals. Following up on the June 16 measures, the Reich Ministry of Interior circulated a note (*Schnellbrief*) to the state governments. Dated June 28, the *Schnellbrief* instructed local police agencies to be watchful of all political groups, especially of groups posing under false façades as apolitical societies.[19] It was a well-known Nazi tactic, adopted in the days after the Munich Putsch, to reorganize under the umbrella of singing societies, sports clubs, and other overtly innocuous formations in order to escape police surveillance or dispersal (see Chapter 1). The emergency measures' drafters took account of this stratagem. The recently installed chancellor, Franz von Papen, and his interior minister, Freiherr von Gayl, aimed to leave no doubt about their policy toward the paramilitaries. Indeed, it appears that the Papen cabinet early staked its reputation on a project to end the violence troubling the German political process. This had profound constitutional implications. The *Preußenschlag* of July 20, 1932, making Papen *Reichskommissar* for Prussia, effectively extinguished self-government in the largest federal state, in the name of quelling partisan unrest.[20] To the SA, this confirmed and magnified radical suspicions long held: "the system" was dedicated to destroying National Socialism. In the face of what stormtroopers perceived to be a concerted government effort against their movement, escalation of violence must have been an attractive possibility.

The mood prevailing prior to July 31 made it difficult for Nazi leaders to justify continued coexistence with the Republic. Only if such coexistence manifestly brought the Party closer to the absolute victory its activists wanted could the movement be kept on the "legal way."[21] If results short of absolute victory had precipitated an increase in SA violence after April 1932, then similar results in July

were bound to bring on a serious outbreak. In early summer 1932, the SA was more certain than ever before that legality was hopeless. The system in which the "legal way" acquiesced had now explicitly committed itself against the SA. In their anti-paramilitary policy, the reactionary barons of the Papen cabinet confirmed their hostility beyond a stormtrooper doubt. SA radicals were losing patience with a seeming contradiction in the policy of their Party. The "system," in stormtrooper eyes, aimed to eradicate Nazism, yet Nazism chose a strategy tending to confirm the legitimacy of the "system." By summer 1932, the SA's impatience with the electoral strategy could be suppressed only through the vindication of that strategy. Failure in the upcoming election had the potential to shake the NSDAP to its foundations. Hitler counted on July 31, 1932 to generate spectacular results.

Preparations in the weeks before the election were elaborate and frenzied. Adding heat to the atmosphere among Nazi campaigners, a number of state elections formed a run-up to July 31. Each successful state election the Nazi propaganda machine employed as fuel for the national race. For example, a successful and highly publicized campaign, ending on May 29, 1932, as mentioned earlier gave the Nazis twenty-four of forty-six seats in the Oldenburg Landtag. The Nazi press reported the victory with blaring headlines:

> ABSOLUTE MAJORITY FOR THE NSDAP IN OLDENBURGER LANDTAG!

The ensuing news analysis pulled no punches in interpreting the significance of Oldenburg. Text in the article explained that that one Landtag race was the model for further victories: "And now comes Mecklenburg and Hesse into the ranks. Here too must the Swastika banner be raised high: Germany's last but strongest hope!"[22] The week following, the Nazi press covered appearances by Hitler at Rostock and Wismar in exhaustive detail. Finally, with another state election ending favorably for the NSDAP, *Der Angriff*'s headlines screamed, "Mecklenburg-Schwerin is Ours!"[23] An *Angriff* reporter in an article on June 20 summarized the message Nazis were to draw from the state electoral victories:

> The electoral triumph of the NSDAP has smashed the last hope for the Black-Red foes, and cleared the way for the German freedom movement [to take power nationally]. The voting results make clear the direction that political developments in Germany will take in the next weeks.[24]

Campaigns in lesser races were thus used as an adjunct to the impending national contest. Reportage on campaign appearances by the Führer served not only to help carry votes in towns where he spoke but also to create a sense of excitement on a national scale over Nazi political fortunes. But as much as the frantic (and expensive) campaigning was targeted at the general electorate, it also had to reach the inner core of Nazi activists. If the activist core refused to tolerate the electoral strategy, the movement would be in jeopardy. Consistent with the need to quiet SA stirrings for a resort to political violence, Nazi leaders amplified their assurances that legal methods – a strategy of elections rather than coups – was on the verge of absolute success.

The more the Nazi press advertized state election successes as auguries of national victory, the more the NSDAP needed actually to score that victory on July 31, but predicting success could dull the National Socialist campaign machine. The summer 1932 campaign strategy therefore carried risks. It may have been a perception of these risks that prompted Hitler to issue a set of "Guidelines for the Reichstag Election Campaign." Distributed to all *Gauleiter*, the Guidelines tried to set the tone for the summer election campaign. Perhaps reflecting concern that the predictions of success might have gone too far, the Guidelines simultaneously displayed the aggressiveness appealing to Nazi activists and a certain caution:

> The Reichstag election campaign which stands before us will surpass in large extent in its hardness and difficulties all that [has stood before us] so far. For our part, the election campaign is to be conducted under the motto: We and the others! Basically, every other party is to be considered as an adversary, and it is to be treated accordingly. That this requires a certain nuanced feeling is obvious. In any case, every local Party office chief must know today how to confront adversaries in his territory.[25]

Hitler prepared the lower instances for a tough fight, suggesting that he may have harbored trepidation about the upcoming election. He had staked a great deal on the July 31 vote and may have realized the danger posed by falling short of final victory. If the election did not unfold perfectly and State power continued to elude the NSDAP, the movement would enter a new period of crisis. Accordingly, Hitler ordered that the campaign be carried out vigorously.

Elsewhere in the order, however, Hitler tempered the call for enthusiasm with a reminder that the NSDAP must remain a party committed to constitutional norms. The Nazi chief provided a careful list of the provisions of the Emergency Decrees, so as to make certain that every local Nazi leader understood how to conduct himself and the campaign.[26] Pleas for adherence to the "legal way" were in tension with the call for fanatical campaigning, and the possibility of falling short of the desired simple majority presented the specter of an activist core no longer capable of being restrained by such pleas.

The last stage in preparation for the election was an airborne tour of Germany by the Führer. As more than one Nazi newspaper meticulously noted, Hitler began the tour on July 17 at Tilsit, in East Prussia, aboard a three-engine Rohrbach-Roland, identification number D 1720. On the next day, the *VB* heralded the start of "Adolf Hitler's last storm-flight over Germany" and "[t]he last great struggle in Germany's liberation."[27] Christened the *Deutschlandflüge* by Nazi propagandists, Hitler's whirlwind of campaigning in the days leading up to July 31 took the Party leader to virtually every major town in the country. Each day leading to July 31, the Nazi press repeated one message: the present campaign presaged the dawn of a Nazi Germany.

Out of context, the result of the July 31 Reichstag election was impressive enough. The NSDAP took 37.3 percent of the national vote, more than doubling its

parliamentary representation. The September 14, 1930 election, in which the Party had won 18.3 percent, had sent 107 Nazi deputies to the Reichstag; the July 31 election sent 230. Deputies of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, as of the first sitting of the new Reichstag, would outnumber all others.[28] The SPD, the Nazis' nearest competitor, retained an anemic 133 seats. The KPD, though strengthened in the latest election, remained a comparatively minor presence – rendered all the less important by the facts that a large block of Germans found KPD politics anathema and the KPD itself resolutely refused to consider coalition rule with the Socialists. Nonetheless, however impressive in relative terms the Nazi position had become after July 31, it fell short of what the leadership had promised. The radical activists of the movement were not interested in achieving a plurality. They had envisioned – and had been assured – an absolute Nazi majority. The promises of the past 22 months, promises necessary to keep quiet the potentially suicidal stormtrooper din, now were cast against a harsh reality. The NSDAP lay 75 seats short of the promised parliamentary dominance. Coalition government might now be a possibility, but those in the movement who all along had insisted that electioneering was folly wanted monopoly over the German State. The insistence of Party leadership that the "legal way" could attain Nazism's totalistic goals now rang hollow. A desperate propaganda offensive was required to soften the blow of failed expectations.

In the August 2 *Angriff*, Goebbels wrote in glowing terms of the results of July 31:

> Today, every National Socialist can be proud of this sweeping victory. . . . National Socialism stands before the door to power, and there remains now no other choice, except to open it and let [National Socialism] through.[29]

Goebbels, of course, evaded the point. The Nazi propaganda machine had projected for months that the next national election would deliver power to the movement. The last several weeks had brought a paroxysm of propaganda. And the underlying theme in much of this was that the final payoff for nine years of patience with the "legal way" had arrived. Goebbels, on August 2, celebrated standing at the door to power; but the SA had been conditioned to expect nothing less than marching across the threshold.

The immediate fall-out from the dashed hopes of July 31 was as severe as it was obvious. The SA revolted in East Prussia, and this was just the worst of many instances of unrest precipitated by the election results. Several historians have documented the violence surrounding the July 31 election. Gordon Craig notes that in the weeks leading up to the election, there occurred more than five hundred SA-instigated brawls in Prussia alone.[30] The violence was mere preamble to events in wake of the election. An outburst of SA attacks swept East Prussia on August 1. Unprecedented in scope and simultaneity, this embroiled every important town in the region, with the provincial seat, Königsberg, experiencing conditions close to civil insurrection as SA bands brawled with their foes. Prominent officials, Social Democrats, communists, and members of the Jewish community were harassed and beaten. Some were shot. The towns of Norgau, Tilsit, Lötzen, Lyck, Marienburg,

Osterode, Johannisburg, and Elbing by August 3 were awash in SA violence. It became evident that a full-scale SA revolt was underway. Local police, though in some places able to quell the violence, felt compelled elsewhere to call in the army.[31] Together, the police and *Reichswehr* eventually brought the crisis under control, but the SA revolt in East Prussia demonstrated the depth of disaffection in the activist ranks. The unrequited electoral hopes of July 31 had ignited into brownshirt fury, and the possibility that this would hamper the electoral project of the Nazi movement was becoming plain to see.

To dissidents within the movement, the failure of the election was a signal to return to political violence. Leaders of the breakaway left wing of the SA seemed electrified by July 31. To Nazi radicals, the election was proof-positive that legality could not do the work of revolution. On August 21, Otto Straßer's newspaper, *Die Schwarze Front*, evaluated the outcome of the election. The headlines, printed in large block letters and colored red, posed "Legal National Socialism at its End, Revolutionary National Socialism at its Beginning: SA – What is the Way?" The feature article declared electoral politics a failure and called on all Nazis to join a revolutionary march:

> July 31, 1932 has a very special meaning for the development of German matters and, in particular, for the development of the German revolutionary movement of the NSDAP: July 31, 1932 has proven to the most trusting SA man that the way of legality, that is to say, the way through the ballot-box, can never lead to the National Socialist seizure of power. . . . Despite the deployment of the last reserves, the Hitler party managed to obtain only 37.3 percent of the votes and therefore increased its share above the results of the second Reich Presidential elections and state elections of April 24 only insignificantly . . .
>
> The NSDAP has suffered for the first time in its history actual losses in many big cities and industrial districts. . . . With this, our position . . . is totally and clearly confirmed: The legal way cannot and will not ever lead to the National Socialist seizure of power. On the contrary, it inevitably will lead to the marsh of compromise in the mud of coalitions!
>
> To the Führer . . . the brothers . . . the old comrades . . . and, above all, to the unknown SA-man: What is the Way? . . . Only through Revolutionary National Socialism is the victory of the German Revolution certain.[32]

The radical branch of the movement sent a clear message: the July election was a failure, and it proved the futility of normal politics.

Insurrection in East Prussia and the propaganda of the Straßer wing were only the most evident incidents of Nazi crisis after July 31. Observers outside the movement began to note more subtle problems. Not surprisingly, an upheaval as obvious as the East Prussian revolt attracted public attention, but police spies and journalists, by the early autumn of 1932, began to note underlying signs of distress. Munich police offered some particularly instructive observations in a secret situation report. Dated October 20, 1932, the report noted that the Nazis no longer appeared to be on the offensive, but, rather, now fought a holding action and fought it desperately:

> The Party, now once again in the midst of an election campaign [this referred to the impending November Reichstag election], no longer possesses unshakeable confidence in final victory; on the contrary, it fights for the preservation of what was [already] won, without itself having a hope of achieving [final victory].[33]

The report offered a spot analysis of the social and political causes of the Nazi slow-down:

> The propaganda in the last election seized all those population segments which could at all be seized by pure propaganda and promises. Another absorption of bourgeois circles, who also want to see action, or a further penetration in the Marxist quarters, given the current political situation, [is] virtually out of the question.

Though no statistics were provided to corroborate this proposition, the impression was clear to the police: the Nazi electoral constituency was as big as it would ever get. Impressionistic, the survey nevertheless was telling. The experienced Nazi-watchers in the Munich police could see that the NSDAP had passed its high-water mark. Outward displays of disaffection and inward signs of exhaustion lost the movement the driving quality from which it had profited in the past.

The electoral prospects for National Socialism had dimmed, and reports were emerging that the movement was beset by internal troubles. The Munich situation report of October 20 noted in particular that difficulties with the SA were mounting. These would have to be contained, or else the Nazi cause would likely be dealt further setbacks, not least of all at the hands of the State. The Papen cabinet issued new emergency decrees in the wake of the August SA violence, and these subjected the SA to close scrutiny and restrictions. SA leaders knew that it was crucial now to keep their rambunctious and impatient stormtroopers under control, so as to deny public authorities justification for punitive measures under provisions of the emergency decrees. A crackdown on the movement in its weakened state was recognized as a grave threat. But keeping the stormtroopers in line, notwithstanding the logic of keeping a low profile in such a sensitive period, would not be easy. The Munich police report noted that SA rank-and-file did not share their leaders' perspicacity:

> The SA leadership makes it an absolute duty to observe the ban on political activities during training. This . . . was not mentioned in the [*VB*], but in the circles of the SA-people, it has caused head-shaking.

And the SA hardly rested content with head-shaking. Stormtroopers perpetrated a spate of violence in early autumn, and, soon, various sources were noting that the uncontrollable *Sturmabteilung* had begun to alienate support from Hitler. The *Münchener Post*, on October 10, reported on SA matters in Munich. The paper indicated that Ernst Röhm had begun actively promoting a return to putschist tactics:

> Röhm is driving more and more towards radicalism and he is trying to move Hitler to abandon the so called legality theory. He substantiates his urge to illegality by pointing out that the SA and SS, in the present way, are not possible to control. In the SA roll-call, a stronger and stronger lack of discipline is catching on. Military discipline is, in many cases, only an external concept now. Forty to fifty percent of the people do not show up at the roll-calls.[34]

In wake of electoral setback, it became difficult to control the SA and even to maintain outward signs of order.

Putsch-leanings and political violence added to other problems confronting Party leaders. Party finances, scarcely ever on a firm footing, entered dire straits after July 31. The October 20 situation report from Munich discussed fiscal developments in the NSDAP. These were ominous. The massive propaganda drive prior to July 31, while failing to deliver the absolute majority which the Party faithful had been promised, drained the Party coffers dry. The month-long campaign, the report emphasized, left the *Gau* offices particularly indigent and forced them to plead for cash to the Party head office – itself verging on bankruptcy. Most serious for the future fiscal condition of the movement, the summer campaign had relied on loans. In the aftermath of the national vote, the NSDAP was cash-strapped at all levels and saddled with debt. Money had been an indispensable fuel for the Nazi vote-getting machine, so, with the money gone, the task of winning new constituents was rendered much harder, if not impossible.

The problem did not stop at curtailment of the possibilities for electoral growth. A police situation report from Nürnberg discussed perhaps the most serious aspect of the post-July crisis. Taken on October 21, the report noted that the escalating pattern of stormtrooper violence had begun to alienate one-time supporters of the Hitler movement. The Nürnberg report noted that the citizenry had begun to grow weary of brownshirt misconduct:

> The election campaign beginning after the dissolution of the Reichstag of 1930, which the NSDAP itself perceived as a fateful struggle, brought the use of the Brownshirts in such an intensity that [they] caused, in the end, a certain aversion among the rural population.[35]

Not only did the NSDAP appear to have exhausted its supply of potential new constituents and run out of the money needed, at any rate, to win more, but also the increasingly disorderly SA had begun to alienate previous devotees.

The Party strained to project an optimistic image in face of the negative turn of events. NSDAP leadership first aimed to obscure its setbacks. Dynamism and forward motion were stressed as if the July 31 election results were in no way a disappointment. In the days immediately following the vote, the Party press trumpeted the vote as a great victory. Especially emphasized was the new status of the NSDAP as plurality party. One characteristic piece celebrated the opening of the new Reichstag on August 30. The article capitalized on the image of unity and purpose which marching ranks of Nazis had perfected conveying:

> The seating of the [National Socialist] Fraction gives a picture of Iron Discipline – Loyalty to the Führer. "Heil Hitler" rang one-thousand-fold over the Wilhelmplatz, in the offices of the Wilhelmstraße, in the ministries, and in the Reich Chancellory, signalling and warning: fourteen million Germans have sent these two-hundred and thirty! Adolf Hitler stands in front of the door to power! The new Germany forces its entrance![36]

To inflate the election results, it was critical for Nazi propaganda to focus on the millions of voters who chose the NSDAP, rather than the millions by whom the NSDAP fell short a majority. The Nazi press alluded threateningly to the 14 million Germans whom the new NSDAP bloc represented, apparently in the hope that Nazi readers would relish the new-found weapon which their Party could brandish against republican and other foes. The NSDAP in Berlin indeed represented a formidable segment of the country – larger than any other party. But SA-men and other Nazi activists were not impressed with pluralities, nor interested in coalition government. If the size of the new Nazi bloc was to shore up morale within the movement, it would have to be used in a display of power against the Republic.

Opportunity arose very shortly for such a display. On the last day of August, the new Reichstag selected its president (an officer equivalent to the speaker of the house). Göring won 367 votes, unseating the incumbent president, the senior SPD deputy Löbe, and defeating a communist candidate, Torgler. A September 1 *VB* article described the assumption by Göring of this prestigious office. Perhaps to remind Nazi readers that seizing the speaker's post did not lessen the Party's opposition to the Republic, the article dripped with sarcasm and venom:

> An historic moment: draft-dodger Löbe must vacate his place for the front soldier Göring. An historic moment: an equally feeble and criminal Moscow agentesse is carried away from the president's seat by two womanly members of the KPD. The social democrat and pacifist Löbe, completely confused by his double defeat, stands helpless beside them.[37]

The Nazi press showered practiced disdain on its opponents and gloated to highlight a success. There was little doubt that the Nazis excelled at such denigration of foes and self-heralding of victories, real or fabricated. But whether the Nazi press could salvage enthusiasm from the wreckage of the unrealized promises of the latest election was another matter. Despite the exultant tone and a brutal triumphalism in Nazi press coverage immediately after the election, a subtle retrenchment soon became apparent in the Party's public pronouncements.

The retrenchment assumed two forms. First, the highest Party organs amplified the radicalism of the Nazi message. Sensing loss of enthusiasm among the most activist Nazis, many of whom leaned to the political left, NSDAP leadership heightened its attacks against conservative forces. Special targets included the Papen cabinet and the *Stahlhelm*. The *VB*, in October, derided Papen's attempt to set up a State-sponsored *Wehrverband* to compete with the party paramilitaries. "The German youth," an article stated, "rushed in masses under the flags of the SA, because their

leader is Adolf Hitler. But who is going to put himself under the flags of Herr von Papen or Herr von Gayl [the interior minister]?"[38] On September 15, Goebbels in *Der Angriff* carried the theme that the conservative Papen cabinet, with its reliance on presidential decree, had no legitimacy. The "cabinet of barons," as Papen's government was known, had no popular mandate and, as such, hardly even deserved attention:

> The von Papen cabinet has no backing with the people. It bases itself only on a very thin upper class who has no contact with the masses and is in the end unable to show any understanding for the necessities of the people. The phrases used by the noble cavaliers of the ruling class as reasons and apologies are so little profound that it is not important any more to critically analyze them at all. The final revelation of the people's will took place on July 31. This alone is relevant for the formation of a government that reflects the opinion of the majority in Germany.[39]

Prominent in Goebbels' broadside against the Papen cabinet were allusions to its aristocratic composition. The cabinet, to be sure, provided ample grist for the propaganda mill. All but two of Papen's ministers held aristocratic rank equal or higher than baron. The social position of the chancellor himself was denoted by the "von" in his surname.[40] Hagen Schulze goes so far as to write that Germany under Papen was a modern state ruled by a cabinet that seemed to originate in the era of Metternich.[41] A wide swath of opinion indeed disdained the cabinet. Encouraging this, much of the press – not just those journals aligned with anti-republican parties – promoted the view that Papen and his colleagues governed with no concern for ordinary Germans.

The policy of attacking the cabinet of barons was not however risk-free. A representative cross-section of opinion disfavored the Papen regime, but active opposition was far from universal. The cabinet did find some support, or at least tolerance, in the continuing public respect for Prussian aristocratic tradition. At least away from the left-most end of the political spectrum, there existed a readiness to let Papen govern. This may have reflected anxiety over what type of cabinet would replace Papen's, rather than approval for the existing government. At any rate, few of the many Germans who placed themselves at the center or right of Weimar politics would have advocated violence against the cabinet of barons, or even its obstruction in parliament. A party endeavoring to win favor with conservative Germans, then, had to take care in the way it treated the contemporary government. The Nazi press after July 31, however, rhetorically bludgeoned Papen and his ministers. This was the dominant post-July policy, and its adoption put the Party between two irreconcilable considerations. The Party needed to retain the votes of "respectable" Germans (and to win more if possible); but it also had to convince its radical activists that it shared their animosity toward the conservative government. Attacks against Papen were part of a Nazi effort to convince radicals of the NSDAP's left-wing credentials. Left-leaning anti-conservativism was always an aspect of Nazism, but after July 1932, Party leaders found themselves cornered into accentuating this

more than many Nazi voters would tolerate. The cracks that appeared in the Nazi edifice after July 31 threatened to break the indispensable activist core from the Party. The remedial measures necessary to placate the radicals who predominated in that core, however, were bound to alienate a large segment of the Nazi-voting public.

A week before his anti-Papen piece, Goebbels had attacked the *Stahlhelm*, the indefatigably conservative pillar of pre-1918 military tradition:

> Stahlhelm flags bow in front of Papen!
>
> Now they bow their flags and standards in front of the Papen cabinet. Now they believe that their hour has definitely come. This sounds very nice and tempting, as long as the new regime is still young and unspent. But once the Sunday is over and the working day of politics begins, we are again in the dust of political discussions, and autumn arrives with misery and horror and unemployment, and the cabinet of Papen, completely without sympathy in the people, is massively assaulted from all sides.[42]

The effort of Harzburg to unite National Socialism with the conservative right-wing tradition could not have been more resolutely repudiated.[43] The tensions of electoral malaise pushed the NSDAP into a leftward turn.

The second aspect of post-July retrenchment was more subtle than the leftward shift in politics. Party rhetoric assumed a tinge of defensiveness much in contrast to its earlier brazen enthusiasm. The new tone in places bordered on desperation. A police situation report from Dresden related a talk delivered by Goebbels to *Gau* leaders at Chemnitz on October 9:

> Dr. Goebbels declared . . . that [the Party] will work in the coming weeks with every means that the Party has at its disposal. Then, he discussed several details of the propaganda and, finally, expressed the conviction that the NSDAP, after all the battles of the last years, would finally take power in its hands, despite all obstacles, because the movement is destined to one day rule Germany.

Unlike the summer addresses, in which July 31 was identified as the day of victory, the Nazis' autumn propaganda withheld specific predications of NSDAP success. Vague notions of destiny replaced concrete numbers, poll results, and target dates. As related by the Dresden police account, the Nazis had switched from a language of victorious advance to one of preserving what they already had and alluding to gains in some indeterminate future.

There were other signs that the Nazis were on the defensive. NSDAP propaganda in the run-up to July 31 had concentrated on predictions of the dawn of a Nazi Germany. Now by contrast it was devoted to dispelling rumors of crisis in the Party. On October 4, 1932, for instance, *Der Angriff* responded with unusual vehemence to claims by the *Stahlhelm* that a low-level Nazi official in Eutin was of partially Jewish descent. "They lie, they lie!," the headline frantically declared.[44] Though the Nazi press frequently resorted to hyperbole, in autumn 1932 it did so even in response to minor provocation. This was further indicative of the defensive mind set which had

taken hold over the movement. In his October 9 Chemnitz speech, Goebbels had implied that a long battle lay ahead; every means and every Party member would have to be mustered and the end, though still promised to be triumphant, was not necessarily in sight. Digging in, not setting forth, seems to have become the Nazis' expectation and theme.

While a State crackdown on political violence and the angry disappointment of its own activists had pushed the NSDAP toward a defensive stance, financial scarcity left the movement little choice. Even had the mood run high within the activist core and the general political climate been more favorable, the next Reichstag election campaign would by fiscal necessity have been much more restrained than the last. The propaganda preparations for the impending November Reichstag election were conservative and sparing. As noteworthy as the constricted scope of the new campaign was its orientation.

The Munich police report of October 20 described the message conveyed at a national propaganda conference, held in the Bavarian capital from October 5 through October 7. The conference included the entire national Party leadership (*Reichsleitung*), every *Gauleiter*, the top SA and SS representatives, and various other Party officials. The purpose of the conference was to instruct the Party on the conduct of propaganda during the campaign for the November 6 election. Frick, after giving an "enthusiastic overview of the development [of the Party] in Germany over the preceding months," confirmed the leftward shift of the NSDAP. He urged that the Party concentrate its recruitment efforts on voters in the farming and industrial classes. Especially, Frick continued, Nazi organizations should go "directly to the working class" (*direkt zur Arbeiterschaft*). ("Nazi organizations" referred to the NSDAP's wide array of associated groups and clubs.) Hitler spelled out the political line, in case Frick's message was unclear. The propaganda "must in the first place attack the Papen regime." There was no need to treat Hindenburg with respect, Hitler informed. "[D]o not neglect attacking the SPD; relentlessly accuse the Catholic Center of a year-long cooperation with the communists." Hitler summarized, "In general the heaviest weight of spoken propaganda must fall on the workers." The Nazi leader further suggested, consistent with the plan to court left-wing voters, that the KPD should be spared the brunt of the propaganda. The full force of Nazi diatribe in the run-up to November 6 would thus fall on capitalism and the aristocratic Papen cabinet. Hitler, as reported by a police spy, concluded with "lofty words" about impending victory.[45]

The acute shortfall of money, however, put distance between the Party's ambitions and its abilities. The Munich police observed a second propaganda conference on October 15. This meeting included the leaders of *Gau* München-Oberbayern, and its topics were campaign tactics and finance. Money, the police reported it was said, was exceedingly tight. In response, the *Gau* leaders urged campaign organizers to exercise conscious sparing on propaganda. Only a few broadsheets would be posted in each neighborhood. The local organization would not produce as many picture posters as it had before the July 31 election. The leaders emphasized that "small work" (*Kleinarbeit*) would have to take precedence over splashy propaganda events. Big Party rallies had probably contributed substantially

to the popular enthusiasm attending the last national election campaign, but the dire financial situation simply would not permit a repeat of the massive public displays of the summer. The organizers of the Munich *Gau* meeting elaborated on the concept of "small work": "Each Party comrade must single out one definite circle, which he [must] steadfastly cultivate." It was further said that personal letters ought to be delivered to acquaintances who held political outlooks other than National Socialism; and that the SA must set out into the streets in uniformed, disciplined ranks, and go from house to house to solicit – politely but firmly – the electoral support of non-Nazis.[46] The NSDAP was remarkably efficient in mobilizing its grass-roots activists, and it would be a mistake to underestimate how much this profited the movement. Awake not only to the benefit of colorful mass meetings, Hitler recognized that votes were also won by personal political campaigning, door-to-door solicitation, and neighborhood activism in general.[47] As effective as such methods may have been in recruiting voters, however, the qualitative and quantitative differences between July and October were striking. Local "small work," declared the centerpiece of the year's second Reichstag campaign, was a far cry from the welter of colorful posters, the flurry of handbills, and the *Deutschlandflüge* of July.

The movement faced less propitious circumstances after July 31 than before. Nazi leaders themselves would find that truth hard to deny. However, evaluations of the position of the NSDAP were not unanimously pessimistic in the aftermath of the summer election. A handful of reports from early autumn 1932 suggested that the SA had retained its cohesion and, in fact, was more disciplined than ever. One *Lageberich*t to the Reich Ministry of Interior, dated October 15, suggested that reports of disobedience in the SA did not accurately portray the overall situation:

> The aforementioned cases [of desertion] are said to be merely isolated occurrences, and the SA, like the SS too, are firmly in the hands of the Führer. The friction present at the beginning in the SA circles, [stemming from] the renewed postponement of the seizure of power by Hitler, is said to have been overcome.[48]

Another situation report discussed defections from the SA but concluded that these did not amount to numerically important events. Police in Hamburg wrote on October 15:

> The former leader of an SA brigade in Hamburg, Paul Ellerhusen, born on April 25, 1897, who held a leading SA position, has now finally left the SA and switched to the Stennes-Straßer movement, for which he gave a speech some days ago, attended by only fifteen people.[49]

The results of the July 31 election rattled the Nazi movement but not severely enough to crack its foundations. The impending November 6 election however was an open question. Whether the movement could tolerate the strains of two deferrals of power in as many seasons would soon be tested.

3 Political warfare and cigarettes

The introduction to the Service-Order of the SA cast the *Sturmabteilung* in a light of heroic and self-abnegating unity:

> Out of hundreds of thousands of individuals it must forge one united, disciplined, mighty organization.
>
> In the age of democracy, the authority of the Leader, in the period of unbridled freedom, iron discipline must be the foundation of the SA.[1]

Nazi propagandists intended these and similar phrases to impart a sense of dedication of both form and purpose. Party leadership wanted the stormtroopers to stand together in tightly closed ranks as an integral part of the Nazi movement and restlessly to pursue the aims of the National Socialist Party. Even if the brownshirts did not always conform to the ideal, Nazi leadership at least wanted the general public to get the impression that they did. The most draconian law-and-order party of the century could scarcely afford its strong-arm wing to look like a dissentious mob.

A gulf was widening, however, between the florid rhetoric and a harsh reality. The SA, by the second half of 1932, had drifted from its professed mission. It is a matter of speculation whether the stormtroopers at any point gave their leader exclusive devotion or directed their energy completely toward attainment of his political goals. Evidence suggests ever-present differences between SA and Party. However, differences – of social composition, of rhetoric, of preferred political tactics – were one thing. Disintegration was another. Competing allegiances and enthusiasms had begun to threaten the very cohesion of the SA organization, and the extent of the crisis was becoming too great to hide.

Two pursuits in particular diverted the SA from its primary vocation: the quest for finances and engagement in paramilitary activity. SA fundraising threatened to waste vital energies, by diverting the organization from its political purpose and by tiring the stormtroopers in internal squabbles over money. As will be suggested later, it went so far as to overwhelm the political purpose of the organization. As a result partly of the national economic depression, partly of the composition of its ranks, the SA seems to have entered the gray area where legitimate small urban business overlaps with the criminal underworld. A threat to its carefully cultivated

image was that the quest for finances was turning the SA into a gang of cigarette salesmen and extortionists.

The other diversion, paramilitary activity, likewise threatened to pull the SA away from its party-building mission – and, even more perilously from the Nazi perspective, away from its allegiance to the Movement. Before the Nazi Party took control of the German State and thereby gained access to the resources of a modern army, the paramilitary inclinations of the stormtrooper ranks posed a risk. The Party had only limited means, as a party without state power, to finance and organize the martial activities in which stormtroopers were eager to engage. Assignments as bodyguards at rallies and marching units in parades were insufficient to satisfy the military appetite of the *Sturmabteilung*, but they were the limit of what the Party could offer. Full-scale exercises or intensive training – and moreover the materiél these required – the Party simply could not deliver.

The *Reichswehr*, however, could. Political leaders of the Republic, cognizant of Germany's obligations under the Versailles Treaty, banned SA–army collaboration. The Nazis, worried about divided allegiances, were ambivalent about it. Professed desire to rearm Germany to prewar levels confronted the need to keep the *Sturmabteilung* on track and in harness. Thus, a certain conformity of view prevailed between Republican and Nazi hierarchy on the question of liaison between the armed forces and the Party paramilitary. However, despite official impediments to such cooperation, army leaders actively promoted ties between the army and the SA, and SA leaders in cases were more than ready to take advantage of this. The stormtroopers' ties to the army represented a challenge to their party allegiance and potentially a test of the theory that the SA was an integral part of the Nazi movement. Together, the pursuit of finances and engagement in paramilitary activity threatened to erode the SA's intended primary allegiance to Hitler and enthusiasm for the Nazi political program.[2]

Pitfalls of paramilitarism

While the quest for finances stemmed from a need common to all political groups – the need for money – the pull on the SA's attentions exerted by paramilitary activity originated in traits especially characteristic of the SA. The SA was a paramilitary army, and, as such, found much of its self-definition in paramilitary activities. Though valuable to Nazism in certain ways, these activities threatened to weaken the ties that bound the SA to the Nazi movement.

The agenda of the SA was not well defined, but, as time wore on, it became apparent that the SA did possess an agenda of its own, distinct from that of the Nazi movement as a whole. Insofar as the SA concerned itself with influencing the composition of Nazi ideology, the SA political program aimed to radicalize the NSDAP. Correspondingly, the politics of the SA was more left wing than that of the Party proper. This was noted by contemporaries and has been documented since.[3] Political radicalism reached a pitch in SA ranks sufficient at times to splinter the organization. The secession from the SA of the Stennes-Straßer faction in 1930–1931, for example, has been explained in essence as a left-wing protest.[4] A locus of

heterodox politics inside Nazism, the SA caused breaches in the façade of a movement that was anxious to portray itself as a monolith.

However strong the pull of left-wing conviction, the pursuit of paramilitary activities constituted a more important part of the distinctive SA agenda than politics. At first blush, it might seem that a martial inclination would have been easy for the Nazi movement to accommodate on the part of any of its constituent units. Yet this was far from the case. The paramilitarism of the SA arguably posed a threat to Nazi unity and the aims of the movement greater than the leftwing ideology of particular Nazis.

Stormtrooper paramilitarism could in its way serve the movement, by presenting a spectacle of martial vigor that may have attracted voters. The paramilitary image of the SA was an infamously effective element of early Nazism, the drawbacks of SA paramilitarism at first less readily apparent than its benefits. A parade of uniformed SA-battalions was a crowd-pleaser. The stormtroopers wore khaki military uniforms, including Nazi swastika armbands and medals. Their vanguards were resplendent with colorful banners, pennants, and ensigns. To Germans who yearned nostalgically for the days before 1918 when the Kaiser's troops goose-stepped down Unter den Linden in full military regalia, the SA struck a responsive chord. To Germans who were too young to feel nostalgic for the Kaiserreich (a German born in 1905 was 27 years old in 1932, and thus a potential Nazi political recruit, but World War I had ended before he had turned 14), the marching SA radiated a martial dynamism singularly lacking in the mainstream republican parties.[5] William Sheridan Allen, among other historians, has noted the value of the SA as a tool in electoral politics. Paramilitary displays by the stormtroopers in Northeim (the town Allen studied) captivated people, attracted amusement-seekers to political rallies (entry to which commanded a fee of up to one mark, a hefty amount at the time), and may even have helped convince some people to fill in the circle next to the National Socialist list on election days.[6] It is easy to understand how the paramilitary quality of the SA helped Nazism. A dynamic, martial organization, apparently always on the march and filled with the élan of the front soldier, the SA contributed to the popular perception of Nazism as a forward-moving, energetic phenomenon. Nazi propagandists wished to create the perception that their party consisted of men of action, in contradistinction against the slow-acting thinkers who, it was supposed, had engendered a dusty, ineffectual, and now moribund republic. For such an image-building plan, the SA was the ideal mechanism. From nowhere else in the movement – or, for that matter, nowhere else in contemporary German politics – was the dynamic, paramilitary image better projected than from the *Sturmabteilung*.

But the very same stormtrooping impulses that helped the NSDAP by lending the movement its famous air of purpose and inexorability could in turn do harm to Hitler's cause. The revolt of the SA in East Prussia that followed the July 31 election has already been mentioned. On the eve of the election, Party leaders, anxious to avert a revolutionary groundswell just when democratic process appeared to be on the verge of handing power to the NSDAP, struggled to suppress the stormtroopers' activist fervor. Notwithstanding efforts to moderate, SA activism escalated at the

beginning of August and resulted in a paroxysm of violence. The August revolt demonstrated that the energy that made the SA valuable was also inherently dangerous. Yet attempting to contain it presented pitfalls of its own. Too much control threatened to deflate the SA as a political tool, since much of the *Sturmabteilung*'s efficacy stemmed from its grass-roots activists and autonomous fervor; too little control raised the specter of a revolutionary army run amuck. When the SA went unreined – that is, when its violent impulses eclipsed political calculation – the stormtroopers were no longer an advertisement urging citizens to vote NSDAP; they were a revelation of the Nazis' true colors, and, as such, a warning against the Hitler party. Such was one drawback to paramilitary ardor.[7]

SA paramilitarism could undo the movement's efforts by degenerating into civil violence and scaring away potential voters. More subtle, but potentially just as insidious to the movement, was the way in which SA paramilitarism turned the stormtroopers from general political activities and inward, toward their own, exclusively paramilitary ones. Insofar as paramilitary display impressed people, it served a purpose, but it could also absorb stormtrooper attentions and divert the SA from promoting the general interests of Nazism. Paramilitarism was to the stormtroopers so much an end unto itself that it endangered Nazism's internal cohesion and external image alike. In fact, after the Reichstag election of July 31, 1932 signs multiplied that the SA was engrossed by paramilitary activities, to the diminishment of its broader role in the movement.[8]

SA paramilitary maneuvers, even when they did not lead to shop-burning rampages which alienated the law-abiding citizen, embroiled the NSDAP in trouble with the police, army, and potentially, even foreign powers. The SA devoted a great deal of time to various types of military drill. In fact, reflecting its ambition someday to supplant the *Reichswehr* as the chief military formation in Germany, the SA adopted a regimen resembling that of a regular army. To be sure, a busy schedule served a useful purpose by keeping stormtroopers from unfocused and unsavory activity not supportive of Party interests. If occupied with maneuvers and generally playing soldier, the rank-and-file were not agitating for left-wing programs or burning synagogues. A police report from Stuttgart, dated March 5, 1932, outlined the hourly and daily training regimen for *Sturmführer* of the SA. Training activities included field maneuvers, map-reading, weapons handling, military history classes, orienteering, first aid instruction, and lessons in engine mechanics.[9] The training schedule however bore ominous portents. The SA intended to shape itself into a full-fledged army. Stormtroopers were preparing for combat at the same time NSDAP leadership was refusing to revert to the putschist tactics of November 1923. Whatever the interests of the Party may have dictated, the SA was becoming equipped – and was already inclined – to get up and march on its own.

In late August 1932, a small part of the SA did just that. Stormtroopers were ever more suspicious of normal politics, the July 31 Reichstag election having vindicated their belief that electioneering could not deliver the State to the NSDAP. Convinced that the "legal way" was pointless, some SA-men decided to put their military lessons into practice. Under "the strictest silence," SA units from Stettin set out for the Polish frontier. On August 23, a number of *Stoßtruppe* from Stettin under the command of a

local SA-Führer, Rinke, planned to join other eastern SA units at the border. There, the stormtroopers conducted "secret observations about possible hostile intentions of the Polish people against the SA." The stormtroopers – disguised as agricultural workers – were to be accommodated on properties near the frontier, from whence they would conduct reconnaissance of Polish territory.[10]

It is not known whether any difficulties arose at the border, but the risks inherent in such SA activity were obvious. The stormtroopers had conducted an unauthorized mobilization and deployment against a neighboring State. It is difficult to imagine how such war games could have aided the Nazi movement. For one thing, the operation was avowedly covert; the SA could not have played its customary propaganda role in this case. Neither would defending some Pomeranian farmers' estates have promoted the interests of the movement. Farm populations had already demonstrated a marked proclivity toward the Nazi Party, and any farmer who was willing to billet stormtroopers on his property was probably already a confirmed Nazi; such a person hardly needed further cultivation.[11] It is difficult to figure how this SA adventure – sending armed men into a situation where they could easily have come to blows with the authorities of a foreign power – would have served the interests of National Socialism. While such activity would hardly have helped the Nazi movement, it risked spurring republican authorities to act more decisively against the NSDAP. Burdened at home with the consequences of economic depression and intermittently engaged in complex negotiations with foreign powers on diplomatic and reparations issues, the government had little tolerance for people who unnecessarily complicated the conduct of foreign relations.[12] SA mock war exercises and military surveillance missions were doing no identifiable service to the movement but did threaten injurious friction. Moreover, the misdirection of energy and enthusiasm inherent in this type of paramilitary activity jeopardized the SA's commitment to the Nazi political purpose.

When the SA went out to play soldier, it inevitably came in contact with the real army. The SA's relationship with the *Reichswehr* added another complicated dimension to the role of stormtroopers in the Nazi movement.

A series of SA morale reports (*Stimmungsberichte*) provide a revealing source of information about the SA's relationship to the *Reichswehr* in the final months of the Republic. A questionnaire pertaining to morale and eight other matters was issued in September 1932 by Rudolf Hess and Ernst Röhm to all SA units. The leader of each SA unit returned a typed or handwritten response to these questions, in the form of a morale report. Through the completed reports, Nazi chiefs obtained a nation-wide portrait of the *Stürmabteilung* as it stood in September 1932. A particularly useful source of information about the SA's relationship with the *Reichswehr* are the answers to the eighth question, which requested a summary description of transactions between that institution and each stormtrooper unit.

Records remain of the responses from thirty-seven SA units. Most of the respondents held the rank of *Untergruppenführer*, though a handful were of other ranks, both higher (*Gruppe* leaders) and lower (*Standarte* leaders).[13] Thirty-one of the thirty-seven respondents answered the query about relations with the national army.[14] A survey of the information in these morale reports cannot be held to be

scientific or statistically exacting. The reports represent only a handful of larger SA units, and an analysis of these must therefore remain partly impressionistic. Nevertheless, the extant reports do survey a broad, almost complete, swathe of Germany, and a careful examination of their contents reveals certain definite patterns.

Virtually every SA respondent reported good relations with the *Reichswehr*. A small handful contradicted the majority, but even among the exceptions, a pattern emerges. In the few places where it was reported that rapport between the SA and *Reichswehr* was poor, the respondents made a common remark: the officers of the army harbored anti-Nazi sentiments, while the enlisted men got along with the SA quite well. Such was reported to be the case in *Untergruppe* Middle Silesia South. There, the relationship was reportedly good, but complicated by "a few officers [who] are democrats or reactionaries."[15] Another respondent, from Hannover, explained that he felt only slight reservations about an otherwise smooth relationship. His reservations, he wrote, were the consequence of "negative influences [on the *Reichswehr*] from above." In two subgroups where excellent relations were reported (Pomerania West and Württemberg), it was noted that older officers exhibited embarrassment when publicly greeted by SA-men, and that these officers moved cautiously in building ties with stormtroopers.

Several factors may explain why higher-ranking officers hesitated to avow close ties to the SA. Though historians in the 1970s began to suggest that a trend had begun under Weimar toward a broadening of the social base,[16] the officers of the republican *Reichswehr* remained a not wholly unfaithful mirror of the social structure of the Kaiser's army. They epitomized the aristocratic Prussian military caste, with its traditions and etiquette,[17] so it should come as little surprise that *Reichswehr* officers regarded the SA – radical, upstart and impolite – with jaundiced eye. Contemporary political uncertainty could only have heightened their antipathy and increased their detachment. Rumor was rife that Hitler was close to a pact with Papen. Then it was heard that negotiations were in progress between the Nazis and the President himself (the first of these failed on August 13, 1932). Finally, reports circulated that secret plans were afoot between Ernst Röhm and General von Schleicher, the shadowy and scheming army chief. In short, it was a time of flux, and no prudent commander would have committed himself to either side of the political fence. Care and flexibility were the order of the day. Indeed, SA respondents from Breslau, Pomerania West, Stuttgart, and Württemberg agreed that many army officers seemed "cautious" in their approach to the SA. The Stuttgart respondent added that the *Reichswehr* officers appeared constrained, because they were always awaiting "orders from the top that never arrive[d]." Consistent with observations that army officers were ambivalent toward the SA, the subgroup leader of Swabia noted that, though relations with the *Reichswehr* at present were excellent, "Let us not be mistaken; these people [the army officers] will in the end obey their leaders, even if it goes against their feelings."[18] The *Reichswehr* officers were perceived as friends of the SA, but as friends who ultimately identified themselves as outside the Nazi camp.

Ambivalence of some officers notwithstanding, stormtrooper respondents declared that mutual amity prevailed in SA–army relations. These relations, however, were much more complex than simple acquaintanceship. The SA's

relations with the army in fact created the potential for a crisis of allegiance among the stormtroopers.

The army presented itself to the SA as a powerful helpmate in the SA's paramilitary endeavors, and through the course of various military exercises a series of ties arose between the two institutions. As has already been discussed, the SA devoted much of its time and energy to paramilitary activities. But the SA was always urgently short of resources, and this fact limited the scope of SA soldiering. Too little cash, too few commanders, and too many eager stormtroopers produced an institution starved for competent military assistance. A modicum of systematic effort seemed likely to court the SA into closer ties with the army. Enterprising army officers needed only offer the SA assistance in its paramilitary training and exercises and the stormtroopers were bound to respond wholeheartedly. A calculated and sustained effort might even have broken the ties between SA and Nazi political leadership.

It was of moment that a clever general aimed to do just that. Kurt von Schleicher was chief of the political section of the Defense Ministry and, later, minister of defense. Known better for intrigues and back room dealing than for his military mind and widely viewed as secretive and duplicitous, Schleicher played important behind-the-scenes roles in the resignation of General Groener from the Ministry of the Interior, in the fall of the Brüning cabinet, and in the installation and subsequent removal of Franz von Papen from the Reich chancellery. Uncharacteristically stepping into the public light, Schleicher maneuvered himself into the chancellership itself, taking the reins of government on December 2, 1932.[19] Though Schleicher's ambitions ultimately exceeded his grasp – he would be killed in the Night of the Long Knives in summer 1934 – his position as one of the most influential yet least publicly visible members of the camarilla surrounding President von Hindenburg gave Schleicher the resources and flexibility with which to pursue his schemes.

One of the most ambitious of these was to fuse the burgeoning *Sturmabteilung* with the *Reichswehr*. Schleicher envisioned such a merger returning the German army to the size, prestige, and ability it had enjoyed in its glory days under the Second Reich. And, not incidentally, he envisioned himself at the command of this great SA-based legion.[20] It is a matter of conjecture whether Schleicher's plan would have worked. He well may have overestimated his own abilities as intriguer and political mover, while underestimating the skill of others.[21] Whatever the potentials for a fusion between the army and Germany's largest armed party formation, Schleicher's overtures did have an important effect. Army courtship of the SA strained the stormtroopers' primary ties to the Nazi movement.

If Hitler and his henchmen hoped that the SA would give exclusive allegiance to Nazism, the army's courtship of the SA frustrated this. The SA had a demonstrated tendency to divert itself in paramilitary pursuits, and it needed a partner better equipped than the Nazi Party to further those pursuits. The morale reports give some indication that Schleicher's scheme to attract the SA to the *Reichswehr* produced a new set of allegiances among the stormtroopers. Ties between the *Sturmabteilung* and army appear to have been both professional and personal. A number of reports represent that staff liaisons were initiated between the two organizations for the

purpose of conducting particular joint military exercises. In addition to these more or less *ad-hoc* ties, the stormtrooper respondents described personal rapport and friendships which SA–*Reichswehr* collaboration engendered. The personal and professional elements conceivably reinforced one another.

Signs of cooperation were clear, and the SA relished the chance to cooperate with its skillful and better-financed colleagues in the army. The morale reports reveal that stormtroopers in late summer 1932 joined army maneuvers in several parts of the country. The leader of Group Silesia gave a glowing report of his group's relations with the army and wrote that those relations peaked with fall army maneuvers, during which "SA brownshirts took part in many events." Several other SA leaders called joint maneuvers a "fortunate opportunity" to engender mutual respect between the SA and army. The SA respondents, perhaps cautious because of the government bar against armed forces collaboration, declined to describe the exact content of joint activities, but the morale reports are sufficiently consistent in their accounts of good rapport arising out of such activities that it is difficult to picture much less than fairly close cooperation. The Göttingen SA respondent characterized his unit's relation to the army with the phrase "could not be better." He went on to report that army maneuvers demonstrated the amity between SA and army. The report from *Gausturm* Munich/Upper Bavaria likewise referred, if a little obliquely, to SA participation in army exercises: "Where the SA and *Reichswehr* get together [the respondent reported], there exists a mutual unity. This was seen during the maneuvers this fall at Reichenhall and Trostberg." The Lower Silesian subgroup leader further testified to SA participation in army exercises. His summary of encounters with army personnel suggests good rapport and high professional regard:

> They [the *Reichswehr* or RW officers] appreciate the hard work of the SA. The group leader of the Lower Silesian Group [the respondent] has had the opportunity to meet RW officers of higher ranks during their four-day maneuvers. A sincere mutual appreciation for each other has developed.[22]

These reports illustrate that the SA and its command structure joined the army in numerous military exercises and that good working relationships resulted from the collaboration.

The army appears to have extended its hand to the SA not only in special maneuvers but also in regular training exercises. In these as well the SA capitalized upon the opportunity to cultivate ties with the army and to improve its own military skills. The National SA-leadership School at Munich (Independent *Standarte* 8) reported that its men "gratefully accepted" weapons instruction from the *Reichswehr*. The Subgroup Upper Palatinate/Lower Bavaria (Oberpfalz-Niederbayern, headquartered in Regensburg) reported that the army's instructional courses in the use of weapons were "good and practical."[23] Though it is impossible to gauge from the morale reports the exact nature and extent of their cooperation, the reports make it evident that, in the course of regular training as in special maneuvers, the army and SA enjoyed a cordial and professional relationship.

In greater evidence than outright army–SA collaboration were personal friendships

between SA-men and officers and their army counterparts. Complementing the generally positive tone of virtually every response, many SA commanders cited comradeship with army personnel. Of thirty-seven respondents, eleven specifically cited comradely ties between themselves and army personnel. Several other reports did not specifically mention friendships, but accounts of the success of joint military maneuvers in these reports implied that relations were good. Subgroup Leine, for example, reported, "RW members are sympathetic to our movement." And the respondent added, "As I can report, relations between individual SA-men and RW members are good and comradely." The leader of Subgroup Pomerania West also reported promising relations between the two institutions: *Reichswehr* soldiers, he wrote, were frequenting SA taverns and had become friendly with SA-men. "I am friendly," the respondent added, "with a captain of the district staff whose moral attitude leans toward National Socialism." Similar reports of SA–army cordiality came from Franconia, Lower Saxony, Saxony, Chemnitz, and Brunswick.[24]

Though the SA and army appeared in general to get along amicably, there were exceptions. A number of factors may explain cases of friction. The conservative traditionalism of *Reichswehr* officers has already been mentioned. Their ultimate commander, President Hindenburg, as a product of the army himself, may have instinctually opposed politicizing a military that historically had remained obedient to the State. An additional source of ambivalence was the *Reichs* chancellor, who had a stake in deterring ties between the SA and army. Chancellor von Papen needed to retain the unqualified support of the army for his own political survival. Though Germany lacked the tradition of praetorianism of some Latin American countries, the political influence of the army was not negligible, and the Weimar years witnessed a quiet growth in the army's political influence.[25] The Papen cabinet, resting as it did only on presidential prerogative, needed the support of extra-parliamentary forces to keep itself in power, and the army was the most crucial of these. After the Reichstag delivered an overwhelming vote of no confidence against the cabinet of barons in late August 1932, Papen depended all the more on extra-parliamentary support.[26]

Despite his lack of popular electoral support, Papen endeavored to take the political initiative. By announcing a set of policies anathema to the leaders of the legislature, however, Papen further weakened his already untenable position in parliament – and correspondingly increased his dependence on the army. The chancellor surprised his detractors, who had written him off as incapable of entertaining any aggressive political schemes, when he proposed the replacement of the Weimar constitution with an ultra-conservative document of his own creation. Papen's proposed "New State" would have subordinated the interests of workers, peasants, and the middle and liberal classes, to those of the landed aristocracy and industrial magnates. In short, Papen sought a return to the social-political order of the *Kaiserreich*.[27] The only hope of success for such a radical plan was the army.[28] His own goal of a constitutional *coup d'état* may have led Papen to take steps to prevent the army from tightening its relationship with the Nazis.

Another reason that Papen needed to keep the army at a distance from the Hitler movement was the perceived threat that the Nazis might attempt a coup of their

own. It was only nine years since the SA had led the Munich Putsch. In 1932, the stormtrooper ranks were far larger and better equipped than they had been in 1923. As evidenced by the SA morale reports, some army officers harbored Nazi sympathies, increasing the grounds for concern. As plain as the threat may have been, defining a coherent plan to alleviate it proved difficult. Divergences between Papen and Schleicher well may have complicated the matter.

Papen, at the urging of General von Schleicher, had secured the parliamentary acquiescence of the NSDAP in June 1932 by lifting a ban on the SA which Brüning, the previous chancellor, had put in place after outbreaks of political violence. (The ban was formally lifted on June 16.) It is far from clear that this liberalizing measure did Papen much good. Though beneficial to the SA, lifting the ban hardly endeared the aristocratic Papen to stormtroopers. At most, it kept the SA-men temporarily at bay and won a momentary calm in the Reichstag. Any such gain was counterbalanced by serious liabilities. Lifting the ban left Papen ultimately even more politically exposed than before. Unleashing the SA seemed to increase the Nazi coup threat and thus increased Papen's reliance on the army. Moreover, Papen's decision to end the SA-*Verbot* galvanized the republican parties in their resolve against the chancellor and damaged his relations with the governments of the federal states.[29] Urged on him as a means to reinforce a weak chancellorship, lifting the ban instead did little more than complete Papen's political isolation. The need to retain army loyalty thus was likely more strongly felt than ever before.

It is not clear whether the Papen cabinet encouraged the army to develop closer relations with the SA. It is well known, as noted by Conan Fischer, that the army did assist the SA with training.[30] The extent to which this reflected high-level policy is hard to gauge. A review of the national budget for 1932 reveals no appropriations for tendering military aid to the stormtroopers, and nowhere in the documents of the Papen cabinet itself did orders appear for Schleicher to initiate close ties to the SA.[31] Explicit reference to what would have been an illegal collaboration probably would have escaped official records. The records do suggest a contrary intent – that is, to keep the military away from the Nazi rabble or, at least, to keep the SA from approximating an auxiliary national army. In a meeting of June 11, Papen's minister of the interior, Freiherr von Gayl, assured the minister presidents of the states that the army and the *Schutzpolizei* would be the only organizations permitted to have weapons. The SA, it was made clear, would be allowed to go on parade, as was its members' constitutional right to do, but not to bear arms in public.[32] Upper Silesian SA-men, like many elsewhere, had participated in army training courses, but, by the time the Upper Silesian unit leader issued his morale report, the cordial ties had declined to a much more distant relationship – if not to outright dislike.

The SA–army relationship was a changeable thing, lacking the solidity which might have been expected had official policy been to foster it. Assistance tendered to the SA by the army does not seem to have been the policy of the Papen cabinet nor of the army as an institution. Insofar as it formed part of any plan at higher levels of the government, army liaison with the SA instead might have been a component in Schleicher's clandestine plan to create for himself a power base, free from party or cabinet controls and founded on a newly enlarged German army.

Supposing that Schleicher was in fact pursuing such a plan, what were its effects on the National Socialist movement as a whole? For the plan to have succeeded, Schleicher would have had to detach the SA from the Nazi Party. Otherwise, he would have remained to a large degree dependent on the NSDAP and been denied the independent base that it was his object to establish. It is widely recounted that in January 1933 Schleicher endeavored to assemble an independent parliamentary bloc by detaching the left wing of the Nazi Party from Hitler and using it as the basis for a new coalition.[33] It may be that Schleicher had a similar scheme in mind, as regarded the SA.

One of the September SA morale reports gives a glimpse of *Reichswehr* officers doing just what such a scheme would have required: trying to break stormtroopers from their Nazi allegiance. A report from SA Subgroup Upper Silesia (based in Oppeln) pictured the *Reichswehr* endeavoring to court the SA – and to discourage the stormtroopers' affiliation with Nazism. This was the only report that expressed unqualified disfavor toward the army. Members of the subgroup had accepted training from the army until September 1932, but after that, the respondent wrote, the SA-men were leaving the army courses in disgust. "Their reason," he elaborated, "is that the directors of the school are really against the NSDAP."[34] The complaint from Upper Silesia was not that the army school director was opposed to the SA. Such a complaint would have been surprising. The director, after all, was sufficiently comfortable with the stormtroopers to let them take part in military training courses at his school. The complaint was that the army officer opposed the Nazi *Party*. Moreover, in many places where they testified to good individual rapport with the army, respondents indicated that it was the Nazi affiliation of the SA – not the SA itself – that deterred army personnel from enjoying better ties with their stormtrooper counterparts. Members of the armed forces liked the SA and wanted to cultivate ties to it, but they remained suspicious of the stormtroopers' Nazi identity.

As consonant as efforts to break the SA from the NSDAP would have been with a plan by Schleicher to create his own expanded army, it is not altogether clear that the army's conduct was part of a broader plan. *Reichswehr* suspicions about Nazism did not necessarily require stoking from high command. An army man, raised in the Prussian tradition, could perceive two parts in every stormtrooper: on the one hand, a Nazi radical, but on the other, a potential comrade-in-arms. In view of the army's ambivalence toward the SA, it is difficult to assess to what degree army discouragement of the SA bond to Nazism flowed from a possible plan by General von Schleicher to establish a party-free power base. Army officers, of their own initiative, well may have tried to woo SA-men from the National Socialist fold. Though such courtship may have occurred independently of any plans pursued by Schleicher – it was certainly independent of professed government policy – it nevertheless would have served such plans. In any event, the effect on the Nazi movement was potentially disintegrative.

Their relations to the army, on the whole, could only pull the stormtroopers away from the Nazi movement. Even if most stormtroopers, such as those in Upper Silesia, did not take the bait and disavow their Nazi ties, a subtle constellation of personal allegiances and friendships was developing between army personnel and

stormtroopers. This, as much as formal linkages, represented a threat to the Nazi movement. Would all SA units in the future react like the Upper Silesian one when confronted with the choice between *Reichswehr* and NSDAP? Or would the strength of their army ties carry the SA-men away from the Nazi fold? Even if the SA never divorced itself overtly and officially from the Party, the fact remained that a set of non-Nazi allegiances tugged at the stormtroopers' attention. If the movement was to remain focused on its primary purpose – putting Hitler in power – then its most dynamic component had to march, if not in perfect step with the Party, then at least on the same parade ground. The army tie, whether spontaneous or the result of the private policy of elements in the cabinet and armed forces, threatened to drive the SA astray.

Fundraising and cigarettes

The other diversion from the SA's primary enthusiasm and allegiance was the pursuit of finances. Any political movement needs money and aggressive activists. Lacking these, the movement will be unable to convey its message to a broad audience. The Nazi movement was unexceptional in this regard. It needed enthusiastic people, and it needed cash to fund activities conducted by those people on its behalf.

The task of acquiring fiscal means however carried a risk. If not properly regulated, the task could come to overshadow the very political ends that it was intended to serve. The pursuit of finances would indeed become all-absorbing for the Nazis, and, when finances were in critically short supply and demanded substantial efforts to acquire, factions within the Nazi movement fell to squabbling and money-grasping. Factional competition for a piece of the fiscal pie diverted time and energy from the promotion of the movement's aims to the outside world.

A rupture between an SA leader from Gunzenhausen and Nuremburg *Gauleiter* Julius Streicher provided evidence of money-driven factionalism,[35] but the money problem involved individual Nazis as well as factions. Only the thinnest line distinguished party activists from opportunists, and the opportunists in the movement were bound to gravitate toward sources of money. Many of the most effective activists of the Nazi movement embarked on their political careers for reasons both political and economic. The biographies of Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels, to cite the chief examples, illustrate that they had hardly enjoyed promising careers in non-political life. Even those Nazis, such as Göring, who had led successful careers outside the movement exploited their positions in the NSDAP to personal material advantage. Thus opportunism – the pursuit of personal aims without regard for the movement's collective welfare – abounded. This could aid the cause by attracting able personalities to the NSDAP. But opportunism, generalized, carried to extremes, and publicized, could stall the Nazi drive for power.

The Nazis faced financial crises throughout the years preceding the *Machtergreifung*, but the situation immediately after the July 1932 Reichstag election was particularly acute. As discussed in Chapter 2, the NSDAP had pulled out all the stops in its latest election campaign. Though the days leading up to July 31 witnessed Goebbels' propaganda mechanism at its most effective, the Herculean publicity

effort carried many *Gaue* to bankruptcy and left the national Party headquarters in debt.[36] The movement thus awoke in August to a fiscal hangover at least as severe as its political depression. It was a movement-wide funding problem which framed the SA's own financial crisis in autumn 1932. And it was that problem, too, which framed the stormtroopers' enterprising response. The SA entered the cigarette business.

The SA often complained about lack of money. In the September 1932 morale reports, the complaints were nearly universal. Only one respondent – the Dresden subgroup leader – reported sufficient finances, and even his report cited "unfounded complaints" about fiscal shortfalls. Many unit leaders noted a correlation between lack of money and worsening morale. The leader of Subgroup Lower Franconia wrote characteristically: "[The] mood [of the men is] depressed because their actions are never rewarded. . . . Leaders too are depressed for lack of funds."[37]

A report from Essen was even more pessimistic with respect to the collection of funds: "The results are pitiful and getting worse."[38] The reports confirmed that the July elections had extracted a fiscal toll on the SA. All three respondents from Silesia noted that the election campaigns sapped their units of cash. "The many elections this year together with the propaganda work . . . has financially broken the Subgroup Middle Silesia South," reported one *Untergruppenführer*. The reports from Lower Silesia (Liegnitz) and Upper Silesia (Oppeln) confirmed that the election debt was a burden.[39] The Subgroup Pomerania West offered the most explicit complaint about debts. Its leader explained that he had reached a financial impasse:

> Presently, my hands are tied, since I have the following debts:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Old debts of the service | 13,496.48 Rm |
> | Propaganda debts | 24,525.41 Rm |
> | Total debt | 38,021.89 Rm |
>
> There is no way we can pay for these from the budget we have.[40]

Consistent with other complaints about the election debt, *Gruppe* Ostsee, at Stettin, explained that the *Gau*'s debt relief fund consumed one-half the SA group's budget. As far as can be learned from the reports, the SA financial picture was unrelievedly bleak.

One apparent hope on this grim fiscal landscape was the campaign to sell cigarettes. But the cigarette sales scheme, if Nazis saw it as a cure-all for the money problem, was a mirage. In fact, cigarette sales became a source of internal friction and in this diverted SA energies away from the overall Nazi political program. Moreover, the sale of cigarettes exerted a major pull on stormtrooper enthusiasm and in this too jeopardized the utility of the SA as a mechanism for promoting the interests of the NSDAP.

The SA as early as 1927 had engaged in sales enterprises to augment its income. The products which the SA sold seem to have varied, though stormtroopers at first concentrated on selling articles directly relevant to their career as political street

brawlers. These ranged from the accoutrements of urban thugs in general – brass knuckles, daggers, and first-aid kits – to paraphernalia of Nazi stormtroopers in particular – swastika armbands, brown shirts, and military caps. Later, the SA entered into commodity franchise agreements with the producers of assorted consumer products. The SA would lend its endorsement to a product, and, in return, the producer would forward to the SA, usually in the form of coupons, a percentage of the profit from sales. SA endorsement appears to have included permission for the factory to emblazon Nazi symbols and slogans on the product packaging. It may well have been understood by the manufacturer that the stormtroopers for their part would undertake a more direct "promotional" campaign as well. Margarine and razor blades numbered among the first products the SA endorsed under the franchise agreements. Reportedly, by far the most lucrative agreement was for a certain brand of cigarettes. The manufacturer was the Sturm Zigarettenfabrik, Dressler, GmbH, of Dresden. Official SA promotion of "Sturm" brand cigarettes began in 1929 and was intensified by a subsequent edict of the SA. By that edict, stormtroopers were to smoke only Sturm. Moreover, the edict promoted the brand by urging SA-men to "show a little energy" in preventing tavern owners from selling competing brands. Stormtroopers who purchased Sturm cigarettes received coupons, redeemable for SA equipment through the SA National Quartermaster Agency (*Reichszeugmeisterei*). Local SA units received cash incentive bonuses based on quantity of the cigarettes sold in their districts.[41]

The morale reports reflect that the cigarette campaign was almost unanimously well received. A report from Stuttgart indicated, representatively, that cigarette sales yielded the unit's biggest and most dependable source of income. The prospects for even further growth in sales, the Subgroup Baden reported, were "in every way auspicious." The *Untergruppe* Pomerania West concurred with the report from Baden. "The financial possibility is extraordinarily favorable and expandable," judged the West Pomeranian respondent. Subgroup Hamburg declared that its offices were "[v]ery grateful in such a difficult financial situation to have this contribution [from the cigarettes]," and *Gruppe* West reported that rebates and commissions from cigarette sales had "become an essential component of SA finances." Subgroup Dresden was even more enthusiastic about the cigarettes; the Sturm factory was located in Dresden, and it gave much-needed work to otherwise unemployed SA-men and Party members. The Dresden leader urged all SA personnel to promote the cigarettes vigorously. "The SA and unemployed," he instructed – the two groups were often one and the same – "must be told how important the factory is."[42] Succinctly capturing the consensus, *Gruppe* Ostsee (Stettin) responded to the query on cigarette sales: "a totally extraordinary help" (*eine ganz ausserordentliche Unterstützung*). The SA was in dire need of money, and the cigarette campaign presented a way to earn it. The impression the morale reports convey is that the business relationship between the *Sturmabteilung* and Sturm was a much-welcomed development.

The stormtroopers seem to have been looking to make the relationship long term. Many respondents noted that sales were increasing monthly. No fewer than ten respondents (Leine, Lower Rhein, Düsseldorf, Franconia, Palatinate-Saar, Württemberg, Middle Silesia South, a Breslau *Standarte*, Munich/Upper Bavaria,

and the Independent *Standarte* 8 (Munich, *Reichsführerschule*)) reported that sales were increasing. Nowhere was it reported that sales declined. *Untergruppe* Upper Palatinate/Lower Bavaria indicated that sales had increased tenfold since January yet that the *Gau* trailed in its increased sales behind neighboring *Gaue*. The Silesian group leader postulated that, thanks to greatly increased sales in his unit's area, "many an SA leader could make a living as a representative of the [Sturm Cigarette] factory."[43] The reports conveyed that the cigarettes were an appreciated fiscal resource and that their importance increased as time went on.

The respondents did not forward to Munich any systematic accounting of sales or proceeds, but a handful of unit leaders declared, in Reichsmarks, the amounts the cigarettes had recently generated. For the most part, amounts were declared on a monthly basis. A typical SA subgroup appears to have earned several hundred Reichsmarks per month from the sale of Sturm cigarettes. On the high end of the spectrum, Subgroup Lower Silesia reported proceeds of 1,200 Rm for August, while, at the lower end, Oberpfalz-Niederbayern reported that it earned "circa Rm 100 per month" from the cigarettes. The importance of these contributions may be better gauged by the enthusiastic approval of the unit leaders than by the apparently rather spotty SA accounting system. In any case, almost all the SA respondents agreed that this income constituted a vital (and increasing) fiscal resource for their units in a time of financial need.

The SA appreciated Sturm cigarettes for reasons other than their role in providing vital supplementary income. The September morale reports, for example, indicated almost unanimously that the Dresden Sturm factory was a most agreeable business partner. Subgroup Hamburg commended the cigarette firm for delivering the reimbursements "promptly." Subgroup Leine commented that the Sturm company "is well-liked." The leader of Subgroup Pomerania West mentioned that he personally got along very well with a Sturm factory representative named Kolb.[44] A host of other SA respondents stated, variously, that the Sturm representatives were easy to deal with (Group Saxony), that cooperation with the factory was good (Group Silesia), and that a new factory representative was hard-working (Subgroup Württemberg). The respondent for *Gruppe* Ostsee tersely captured the overall tone of approval: "Sales agency and SA relations run frictionlessly." As far as the record shows, it was an article of consensus among SA respondents that the sales arrangement with Sturm benefited the SA; the level of profits would seem to have guaranteed at least this much. Perhaps not following directly from profitability, words of praise for the relationship between stormtroopers and factory agents prevailed in the reports as well. The sale and promotion of cigarettes had become a crucial part of SA activities, and the stormtroopers indulged in it with enthusiasm.

The reports, as seen, were fairly specific as to the positive upshot of the cigarette campaign. They furnished far less detail as to the exact means by which the SA "promoted" the sale of cigarettes. Henry Turner has suggested that the SA promoted its products through coercion. The morale reports are vague on this matter, but they do offer some evidence that the SA may have used criminal violence in the promotion of cigarettes. Subgroup Hamburg gave perhaps the most direct indication that coercion was employed to augment cigarette sales. "Sales," the

subgroup leader reported, "[are] heavily propagandized and forced [*sehr propagiert und forciert*]." The Hamburg report did not describe what was meant by the term "forced," but a distinction seems to have been intended between "force" and "propaganda." Hypothetically, if a gang of Nazi ruffians presented themselves in front of a shop while an SA cigarette sales representative was instructing the shop owner on the merits of selling Sturm brand, the owner would have been more inclined to grasp the representative's lesson than if the only other supplementary form of promotion had been a newspaper advertisement. The morale reports of September 1932 offer fascinating hints about this little-studied criminal aspect of the *Sturmabteilung*.

Outside sources, however, provide some evidence that the fiscal pursuits of the SA were becoming criminal ones. External observers give clear indications at least of the tendency of the organization toward criminality. Reports taken by police suggest that the SA was experiencing an influx of undesirable elements. One police report, from Munich and dated October 20, 1932, explicitly stated that some SA-men pursued personal interests, to the detriment of the party's aims:

> [C]ertain manifestations of fermentation in the SA and SS are unmistakable. These become understandable, if one considers that a large number of the members do not pursue general political goals, but they stick with the Party for purely personal reasons.[45]

The police respondent neglected to specify the nature of these "personal reasons." Were they criminal? Did some of the "large number of members" not pursuing "general political goals" pursue common (i.e., non-political) criminal aims? Whatever the character of these "personal reasons," the police report made clear that a loss of political concentration was the result. Stormtroopers were failing to pursue the interests of the Party, because their purpose in the SA was not political.

One pattern of complaints in the SA morale reports offers a further intimation that the SA ranks were filling not with men interested in the NSDAP's political program but with opportunists of criminal bent. The second question on the morale report questionnaires of September 1932 requested information about enlistments and withdrawals. A significant number of SA unit leaders (fourteen) reported that many of the withdrawals from their units resulted from an expunging of bad elements. In some cases, the grounds for expelling members of a unit were political, a common complaint being that Marxist or communist sympathizers and agents were infiltrating the SA. Other respondents, however, when describing the men expelled from their units used the term "rubbish" or other derogatory but apolitical language. The leader of *Gruppe* West (based in Koblenz) noted that one section of his group lost a significant number of men, owing to a "purification action" (*Reinigungsaktion*). More specifically, Subgroup Hannover reported that its losses consisted in part of "elements who had not yet secured the idea [of National Socialism]." Hannover East reported expulsions on the grounds of discipline. Most interestingly, the Subgroup Leine respondent complained that he had to get rid of men who had come to the SA from "Marxist circles," but he also mentioned a "purification action," distinct from

his reference to the expulsion of the Marxists. Explaining this action, he wrote, "[It is] essential to have eagerness and earnestness." This report from Leine indicated that some men were expelled because they were not interested in SA activities. The question arises, if these men were uninterested in the SA, then why did their commander have to expel them? Why did they simply not leave on their own? A report from Göttingen, by contrast, indicated that some men left the SA because of "lost interest" (*mangelnden Interesse*) but makes no mention of forced expulsions. The Göttingen men who left the SA evidently did so of their own free will, because of "lost interest"; those in Leine had to be *expelled*. The fact that the Leine SA leader had to expel these "uneager" men, again, implies that they had some reason not simply to leave the SA on their own.

A number of the morale reports and some outside evidence suggest one reason that "uneager" men might have been eager to stay in the SA: they and their comrades were using the *Sturmabteilung* as a basis for profitable criminal activity. Some of the morale reports referred to the issue of "rabble" and opportunistic elements in general terms. Group Lower Rhine cited a "new policy of weeding out the misfits." Württemberg referred to most of its withdrawals and expulsions as "rabble."[46] Lower Silesia also reported expulsions of "rabble." Subgroup Upper Palatinate/Lower Bavaria provided an interesting report on the problem of opportunists. The subgroup leader reported that many newcomers to the SA merely sought easy personal gain, without patience or sacrifice for the cause:

> Of those who left – good riddance. They represent a part that owed to the swelling of the ranks in the second half of 1931. The numbers balance now, and they were the ones who thought they would obtain a post upon entry. They could not stand the test of patience of a true National Socialist. They turned their backs on us.[47]

The respondent for Subgroup Munich/Upper Bavaria commented similarly on the problem of opportunistic newcomers. Many withdrawals and expulsions were people "hoping for a quick . . . profit or some material advantage." The respondent noted that some men were expelled "because of lack of self-discipline or for being uncooperative." Swabia further confirmed that some elements had to be purged from SA ranks, and Lower Saxony repeated this confirmation. These reports neglected to specify how the opportunists sought to gain material advantage from their membership in the SA.[48]

One morale report indicated that SA-men were involving themselves in unsavory activity unrelated to Nazi politics. Subgroup Pomerania West reported a problem with a "group of misfits." The subgroup leader proudly explained that one of his subsidiary *Stürme*, Stettin I, had found a way to curb the injuries caused by the "misfits":

> In Stettin I gathered together a whole group of SA-men who were out of work and formed a special training outfit. These men work closely together every afternoon from 2 p.m. and stay together until advised [to do] otherwise. This way they cannot hang around the taverns.[49]

Semi-organized groups of unemployed thugs hanging around taverns are the premium stuff of organized crime. That the SA had in its ranks an abundance of such people makes intriguing evidence of the SA's affinity and potential for organized criminal activity. It is not inconsequential that many urban SA *Stürme* adopted names such as *Mollenkönig*, *Revolverschnauze*, *Schiessmüller*, *Gummibein*, Robber Sturm, and Dancing Guild – names borrowed directly from the German criminal underworld.[50] The evidence of SA involvement in conventional organized crime is intriguing but, at this stage, circumstantial.

Anecdotal evidence of SA "general criminality" (*allgemeine Kriminalität*) is, by contrast with the documentary record, rather well known. Indeed, an incident that Joseph Goebbels would incorporate prominently into SA mythology the Nazis' political opponents characterized as indicative of the SA's criminal complexion. Horst Wessel, a Berlin SA unit leader, was mortally wounded under uncertain circumstances. Goebbels, sensing an opportunity, paid for radio broadcasts to update listeners on Wessel's condition. The broadcasts portrayed Wessel as a heroic fighter, felled by a KPD opponent. The stormtrooper died, and the Nazi propaganda machine made him a martyr of the movement. It seems not coincidental that shortly before his death Wessel had penned a song about the *Sturmabteilung*. His comrades found the manuscript and libretto in the flat of their newly minted hero, and the "Horst Wessel *Lied*" was adopted as anthem of the Nazi Party.

The non-Nazi version of Wessel's demise, however, is quite another story. According to some, Wessel had been acting as a pimp but made the mistake of infringing on the territory of several competitors in the prostitution business. These seem to have belonged to one of the *Ringvereine* – Berlin's organized crime syndicates. Wessel's killer, one Ali Höhler, had social ties to local communist toughs, but his chief affiliation was with a crime syndicate, and he shot Wessel for reasons of business – not politics.[51] Anecdotal evidence – especially from the political left on the subject of Nazism – must be approached with caution, as Turner has amply illustrated.[52] However, the few hints of SA criminality provided in the documentary record suggest that stories such as that of Horst Wessel's fateful overstepping of underworld lines deserve more study. Conclusive analysis of this little-known aspect of the origins of the Third Reich must await future research.[53]

Uncertainties notwithstanding, at this point it can be posited that the cigarette campaign, like paramilitary links to the *Reichswehr*, posed a threat to Nazi cohesion. Both paramilitarism and cigarettes encouraged ties and enthusiasms to entities outside the immediate control and concern of the Nazi sphere. Non-Nazi affiliations began to develop in the SA through the promotion of cigarettes and relations with the army, and these tended to pull the stormtroopers away from their intended political vocation. The SA had developed cordial working ties to the *Reichswehr*. While such ties may have benefited the SA and the movement by honing the paramilitary skills of the SA, they also exerted a pull on the SA, in competition with the ties that bound the stormtroopers to National Socialism. The clandestine overtures of General von Schleicher were thus similar in effect to the good relations the SA enjoyed with the cigarette factory. The paramilitary diversions of the SA and

the cigarette sales campaign alike eroded the stormtroopers' primary allegiance and enthusiasm. The absorption of the SA in its paramilitary activities and in the cigarette campaign constituted a twofold threat to the Nazi movement. First, these endeavors actually and potentially diverted the SA from its political purpose by occupying stormtroopers with introverted and non-political projects. Second, they gave rise to a network of secondary allegiances and enthusiasms which weakened the primary tie of the SA – that to National Socialism. By September 1932, the image of iron-forged dedication projected by party propaganda was more Nazi myth than SA reality.

4 The price of ideology

> We will never forget that the German people waged wars of religion for 150 years with prodigious devotion, that hundreds of thousands of men once left their plot of land, their property, and their belongings simply for an ideal, simply for a conviction. We will never forget that during these 150 years there was no trace of even an ounce of material interest. Then you will understand how mighty is the force of an idea, of an ideal.[1]

Thus did Adolf Hitler address members of the Düsseldorf Industry Club in January 1932. Hitler's opinion about German history notwithstanding, it was commonly believed during the Third Reich and in its immediate aftermath that ideology was not an important component of the Nazi movement. Karl Dietrich Bracher characteristically dismissed Nazi ideology as "romantic-irrational reveries, devoid of all concrete political reality."[2] The prevalent conception of Nazism's ideological content was that it hardly deserved serious analysis and that phrases such as Bracher's described it as effectively as could political science.

Many historians concurred with Bracher that Nazi ideology was a hollow shell, and, indeed, in the received view, Nazi "belief" was a tool, more akin to propaganda than to program. Werner Maser explained that Hitler disliked the written word, because it "had to be precisely formulated and could therefore be precisely checked."[3] Klaus Vondung, describing Nazism as "political religion," furthered the thesis that Hitler's party essentially lacked concrete program.[4] Alan Bullock and Joachim Fest, whose biographies of Hitler are considered definitive, seem to share the view that the Nazi Führer is better understood as a master political tactician and opportunist than as a thinker or developer of ideological program.[5] In *Anatomie des SS-Staates* the thesis of Nazism as vehicle for opportunists is refined into an explanatory theory of Nazi aggression. The cardinal trait of Nazism was its purchasing of loyalty from a core of activists through ever-increasing material reward, and this – not ideology – produced a dynamic of rapine, starting with the *Gleichschaltung* and ending in the invasion of Russia and the Holocaust. Expansionism and murder, in this view, did not result from an ideological position but from the structure of an organization built for one purpose – seizing power.[6] Among those historians who downplayed the role of ideology, the various Nazi documents which seemed to present a political platform – the Twenty-Five Points

for example – were dismissed as an "innate lie." Nazi statements of political position, in the once-prevailing opinion, offered less insight into the nature of Nazism than did the "exalted prophecies" and "vague, irrational mysticism" of proto-fascist poets.[7]

The political program of Nazism received careful review in the 1970s and after, and scholarship arrived at a significant revision of the thesis that Nazism was programmatically vacuous. Barbara Miller Lane, in 1974, proposed that many early analyses of Nazism were produced with the polemical intent of thwarting the growth of Hitler's appeal, rather than with the social scientific goal of accurately portraying how the movement actually functioned. The early struggle against Nazism promoted in consequence oversimplified views of the phenomenon, and these colored future scholarship. According to Lane, several writers in particular advanced the conception that the avowed Nazi program took a back seat to opportunistic pursuit of power. The writers to whom Lane referred, all writing during the Third Reich, included Frederick L. Schuman, Erich Fromm, and Konrad Heiden.[8] Lane proposed that the "scholarly neglect of the programs and publications of the [early Nazi] period" ought to be remedied.[9] The seminal revision of the study of Nazi ideology arrived with Eberhard Jäckel's *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power*. Jäckel emphasized Nazi foreign policy, thus placing his emphasis on the Nazi State rather than the Nazi struggle for power. Nevertheless, Jäckel's conclusion that Hitler had "combine[d] [his] ideas into a logical synthesis" – a coherent *Weltanschauung* – cast the rise of Nazism, too, in a new light.[10]

In this chapter, it will be shown that in their struggle for control of Germany the Nazis were ready to abandon program for pragmatic reasons; that despite their professions of Spartan asceticism, Nazi leaders were prone to conspicuous displays of power and material resources; but, most importantly, that, for deviations from the expressed aims and values of their movement, the Nazis paid a price. Hypocrisy precipitated disaffection in and desertion from the ranks.

National Socialist cigarettes?

Nazi leaders, as demonstrated by their actual conduct, took a cavalier attitude toward the values professed by the movement. Historians who minimized the importance of the programmatic content of the NSDAP showed that Nazi policy statements and ideological emphases were notoriously malleable and were changed to suit different audiences. Moreover, Party functionaries gained a reputation for self-aggrandizement belying the Nazis' claim to be a party transcending personal interest. There did exist Nazi constituencies, however, which held more or less concrete ideas as to the goals and values of the movement. The stormtroopers were one such constituency. More communally oriented and more hostile toward large capitalist enterprises than many Nazi voters, the SA-men tended to perceive themselves as the vanguard of a revolutionary cause. The wavering of Nazi leadership on key issues and the ostentatious manner of individual Nazis eroded the image of Nazism that had attracted the typical stormtrooper. Discord and discontent took form within the SA as stormtroopers began to have doubts about their role within National Socialism.

As shown in Chapter 3, the SA turned inward, directing energy toward activities that did not promote the movement as a whole. It also engaged in disputes with other Nazis. The SA's interaction with the *Gau* leadership and the SS was plagued by friction and cleavages. Discord between the SA and other Nazi institutions stemmed in large part from the dichotomy between the ideological expectations of Party activists, on the one hand, and the opportunistic abandon with which Party leaders ignored the movement's stated values on the other.

The sale of cigarettes, though reported as a boon to SA finances, became a central focus of ideological and institutional confrontation. Complaints arose that some *Gaue* received more attention in the cigarette sales campaign than others. The leader of Subgroup Hannover East complained, for example, that his rural jurisdiction received a lesser "quantity of provisions" than the nearby urban *Gaue* of Bremen, Hamburg, Hannover, and Brunswick. Though this complaint may not have threatened a major rift, it represented a small part of a storm of discontent that began to brew around the cigarettes. This intensified when a big business rival to the SA's independent *Sturmfabrik* entered the Nazi cigarette game.

It was a founding tenet of National Socialism that large, conglomerate corporations endangered Germany both morally and economically. With a disproportionate following among lower middle class constituents, the NSDAP was behooved to issue invective against the purported conspiracy of "*Trust und Konzern*." According to Nazi conspiracy theory, large conglomerates were aided by a coalition of Jewish financiers and the Republic in a campaign to extinguish small and mid-size enterprise. Nazis explained that the plot that they alleged was designed to allow giant corporations to monopolize crucial industries, exact extortionate prices from consumers, and ultimately enslave the country. Like most paranoiac belief systems enjoying any meaningful popular support, the Nazis' perception of big business rested on some observable facts. Many small tradesmen were indeed failing to withstand the tide of economic modernization. Department stores, benefiting from economies of scale, could offer bargains that attracted shoppers away from the old family store, and large, multifaceted industrial enterprises could subsidize technological rationalization that put the small factory at a disadvantage. It was not surprising that the NSDAP's polemic against big business found resonance among an increasingly obsolescent lower middle class.

Because many Nazi constituents harbored animosity toward big business, it was a risk for the Nazi leadership to deal with Philipp Reemtsma. The owner of Germany's largest cigarette company, Reemtsma epitomized the businessman whom Nazi leaders professed to hate. Reemtsma indeed had built his Hamburg firm in the very manner that the average Nazi small business person feared. He put his smaller competitors out of business. Thanks to mergers and underselling, the Reemtsma *Konzern*, by 1932, produced an estimated two-thirds of Germany's cigarettes. Reemtsma had long participated in politics, and his favorite mode of participation was to give cash to parties and politicians who promised to extend special treatment to his company.

The NSDAP had been staking out anti-*Konzern* ground for at least several years. On December 21, 1929 Franz Stöhr, a Nazi Reichstag delegate, spoke on the floor of

parliament. Stöhr vituperated against Philipp Reemtsma and the Reemtsma company. Indicating his profession as a shop-assistant (*Handlungsgehilfe*), the Nazi delegate belonged to one of the lower middle class professions so important to the Nazi political base.[11] Stöhr addressed charges that the Nazis cooperated with the tobacco monopolists:

> Ladies and Gentlemen! Yesterday it was asserted here that my party has considerable connections to the *Konzerns*, that in general oblige [us] to conduct law making [in their interests]. I have already called to your attention that this [assertion] does not agree with the facts. Evidence is not found for any connections of this kind. Rather, we were the first to bring [the matter of undue influence of the *Konzerns*] to the public attention. . . . I ascertain, that in our press correspondence of September 17 of this year, we elucidated in a detailed article the entire machinations of the Reemtsma-*Konzern*, and called attention to the danger . . . that, with the assistance of the present national government, this *Konzern* desires utterly to annihilate *Konzern*-free industry and the small tobacco trade, and it *will* annihilate them! We wrote at that time: "The internal binding between the Reemtsma-*Konzern* and the national government is incontestable. We are not subject to even the slightest doubt, that Hilferding [the minister of finance] is completely occupied with [enacting] the designs of the Tobacco Monopoly."[12]

The Nazis' stance toward big business in general was concisely summarized in their stance toward the Reemtsma *Konzern* in particular. It was NSDAP policy noisily to distance itself from such businesses and also to attack them on the grounds that they threatened small tradesmen. Despite their explicitly expressed hostility toward him and the business he owned, in 1932 Philipp Reemtsma decided to court the Nazis.[13]

The Nazis – or at least Hitler – were no more enchanted with Reemtsma's personal style than with the type of business he represented. Hitler reflected a decade later on Reemtsma's crass tactics. "If I agree to be photographed with a cigar between my teeth," Hitler said, "I believe Reemtsma would immediately offer me a half a million marks!"[14] The Nazis put both ideology and personal feelings aside, however, when Reemtsma tendered a lucrative deal. The cigarette mogul offered to pay top price to obtain advertising space for his cigarettes in the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and other National Socialist newspapers. Large Reemtsma advertisements began appearing in the *VB* on July 20, 1932 and continued long after. The appearance of Reemtsma ads in the Nazi press elicited a chorus of protest from the Nazi rank-and-file, and above all from the SA.[15]

The explosiveness of the cigarette situation was exemplified by a letter from one Emil Weiss. Weiss was a long-time Party member and, owning and operating a small cigarette and snuff tobacco factory in Landshut, epitomized the small-scale Nazi tradesman. Weiss was angry that Party leaders had allowed a *Konzern* such as the Reemtsma firm to take out advertisements in the *VB*. In a letter of September 12, 1932, Weiss issued a complaint about the Reemtsma matter to the *Reich Uschla*, the national Party court in Munich.[16] An *Uschla* functionary, Grimm, responded by

suggesting that Weiss's criticisms were misguided. In fact, the *Uschla* official told Weiss in a letter dated September 27, that the real problem was a communist-inspired hate-campaign, directed by a man named Tetens:

> The Reich leadership fundamentally rejects an intervention between competing cigarette companies. A [hate] campaign currently is arising against Reemtsma and indirectly against the *Völkischer Beobachter*.
>
> The Reich leadership knows the organizer of this hate campaign well. The fact is unknown to you, apparently, that Tetens is a communist and a co-worker on the communist world stage. He is under investigation by the Reich ministry because of this scandal.
>
> The admission of the Reemtsma ads in the *VB* is as ordered by the Führer after personal consultation with Herr Reemtsma [and] after a thorough investigation took place by the NSDAP advertising control.
>
> Your attacks against the director of the *VB* are not justified.[17]

The reference in this letter to "personal consultation" between Hitler and Reemtsma corresponds to a meeting on July 20 in which the two discussed the possibility that the Reemtsma firm might purchase advertising space in the *Völkischer Beobachter*. It may be inferred by the reference to Tetens that Herr Weiss had cited someone by that name as an authority on the pernicious influence of the Reemtsma *Konzern*. Party leadership dismissed Tetens as an enemy of the movement and thus defended the liaison with the *Konzern*. Whatever the precise source of Emil Weiss's information, Grimm seemed to insinuate that a complaint against Reemtsma came close to giving aid and comfort to the communist foe.

Weiss, it becomes apparent however, was not to be placated by explanations of communist conspiracy and assurances that the Führer had seen to it that everything was all right. Weiss responded to the *Uschla* opinion with a second letter, dated September 30. In this letter, Weiss claimed to refute the charge that his source was a communist; insisted that the Reemtsma *Konzern* was an enemy of National Socialism; and declared that he would cease to take any active role in the Nazi Party if the Reemtsma matter were not satisfactorily resolved:

> I have read your statements and I have, however, a different view from our *Führer* in the "Reemtsma matter." I am a tobacco expert and have a factory warehouse in Munich in which I wholesale tobacco, cigars, and cigarettes. So much is sure, the Firm Reemtsma owes the state a huge amount of back taxes, spent huge sums on gigantic ads, and squandered money in general, in order to take in more money directly and not have to conduct business through dealers. . . . The accusations against Tetens have been withdrawn by the Reich Finance Minister.
>
> In any case, I am surprised that the director of the *VB* is to be bought out by the big *Konzerns* of the economy. The view that [the cigarette industry] will be socialized contradicts many statements from orators during various elections, who clearly and distinctly said that our movement would socialize a business

only when it was important for the common good. How can you honestly say that the cigarette industry serves the common good? It is just another industry and must be guarded so that it is not taken over by large firms, but continues as small businesses. . . . [T]he sincerity of the economic policies of the NSDAP are in doubt.

The matter of Reemtsma is still undecided, and let my opinion depend on how the case goes. Programs and dogma do not count for me when they do not serve the common good. I must lose faith in the movement if things continue the way they do today. I belonged to the movement from the beginning and believe in it still.

. . . For me, a *Konzern* is a *Konzern*, and I resist this kind of monopoly trade . . . as we promised in our movement in the beginning to battle these bloodsuckers. In the orations of the past election, not enough could be said for the middle class, how it was treasured, and now I wonder: do the firms that fell under the pressure of Reemtsma not belong to the middle class? When by Jewish cunning and Jewish assistance a former trader, like Reemtsma, can record a sinister increase in profit which defeats the middle class industrialists, I do not see how our leader could even talk to these people.

I remain as before a follower of the movement because I joined it from an inner conviction; I am no longer in a position, however, to fill any office, since, you see, I can only do that if I can be open and honest and champion what the movement does.

I await the course of events, and, concerning the matter, I hope you can convince me that I was wrong; if I do not gain this conviction, I will withdraw my support from the Party.[18]

Even where institutional rivalries within the movement did not come into play, the cigarette matter could engender individual political crises, and these threatened the solidity of the Party as much as did clashes between Nazi factions. National Socialism could obviously have weathered the loss of one small tradesman, but the case of Emil Weiss was indicative of a larger and chronic problem. The Party, if it wished to retain the active support of its following, had to exercise caution in choosing its partners, yet the Party, at a time of perilous finances, required whatever liaisons to the business community it could forge. A statement or even an intimation of allegiance in the wrong direction could precipitate the desertion of Nazi followers. Emil Weiss, after all, represented a substantial class of Nazis. A great many small tradesmen and owners of mid-size businesses feared the consequences of factors which collectively historians termed "modernity" – and might today term "globalization" – and they joined Hitler's Party because they perceived in its program a defense against social, economic, and political threats to their way of life. Not least among such threats were large capitalist enterprises. Indications that the NSDAP favored a firm such as Reemtsma rekindled the very anxieties that had led Emil Weiss to spurn normal politics and join the NSDAP in the first place.[19]

Discord over cigarettes, spreading well beyond single Party members, permeated the movement. The leader of SA Group Franconia issued a memorandum on

August 29, 1932, in which he declared that *Konzern* brands had seized a substantial piece of the SA's market share:

> A bitter struggle has ensued between the Sturm cigarettes and the other firms. [Sturm] lost forty percent of their usual take last year and are going . . . to contest the *Konzern*'s insistence that the *Konzern* brands are made by German manufacturers and . . . that one should not hesitate to smoke them. The national socialist newspapers are printing ads for payment. The sum is about three million marks. . . . For this reason, a new advertising effort will take place. . . . I make it a duty of all SA leaders to persistently see to it that the cigarettes of the Sturm factory Dressler, Dresden – the brands are Trommler, Alarm, Sturm, and Neue Front – are promoted in very permissible way. In no way should bars or tobacco stores owned by National Socialists not stock Sturm cigarettes.[20]

It might seem remarkable that "bitter struggle" could erupt over a matter as seemingly devoid of ideological import as cigarette sales. Such volatility well may have foreshadowed the totalitarian proclivity of Nazism to politicize even the mundane.

Whatever its later importance, the extreme political sensitivity of Nazi rank-and-file during the crisis preceding the seizure of power jeopardized the cohesion of the movement. Party leadership wished to bring in sorely needed cash by accepting a lucrative advertising contract. The leadership would discover however that even such an expedient move was so charged with political symbolism that it threatened Party order. The agreement with Reemtsma earned the Party money but cost it an increase in discord.

The July 20 meeting between Hitler and Philip Reemtsma hardly marked the beginning of the Nazis' troubles with cigarettes. Friction had arisen when the SS began promoting a rival to the SA's Sturm brand cigarette. The *Kameradschaft-Zigaretten-Speditionsgesellschaft* mbH (Comradeship Cigarette and Transportation Company) had evidently requested Party endorsement sometime before March 8, 1932. On March 8, the Public Relations Office of the NSDAP in Berlin extended its best wishes to Kameradschaft:

> We thank you for the support that you have given *Der Angriff* by placing advertisements [therein]. We hope you have the greatest success in your German undertaking. We happily acknowledge that you have given a great number of unemployed Party members a chance to earn some money by distributing your cigarettes. You may rest assured that the National Socialist SA and SS and all . . . Party members will stand by you to help at any time.[21]

Later, the NSDAP *Bezirk* Gera, where the Kameradschaft Company was based, issued, on NSDAP letterhead, a note describing the enterprise as "a purely German undertaking, whose business partners are Party members." The note, dated May 20, added that the company was making special efforts to hire unemployed Party members, and that Kameradschaft gave every preference to the Nazi movement (see Figure 3). Finally, the note announced that Kameradschaft was introducing four

105155

Nationalsozial. Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei

Bezirk Gera

Geschäftsstelle: Gera, Kaiser Wilhelm Straße 14
Fernruf: Gera 3400

Bankkonto: Geraer Bank e. G. m. b. H., Gera
Postscheckkonto: Bruno Biedermann, Gera
Amt Erfurt 4285

Gera, den 20. Mai 1932.

Innerhalb unserer Ortsgruppe wurde Mitte April ds. Jahres die

„Kameradschaft Zigaretten-Speditionsgesellschaft m.b.H.Gera"

gegründet. Es handelt sich dabei um ein rein deutsches Unternehmen, dessen Gesellschafter Parteigenossen sind. In diesem Betriebe werden grundsätzlich nur Parteigenossen beschäftigt und wir sprechen der Leitung der Kameradschaft Zigaretten-Speditionsgesellschaft m.b.H., insofern unsere besondere Anerkennung aus, als bei ihr zunächst eine Anzahl erwerbslos gewordener Parteigenossen Anstellung fand.

Unsere weiteren Feststellungen ergaben, daß die Kameradschaft Zigaretten-Speditionsgesellschaft m.b.H., bei Vergebung ihrer sämtlichen Aufträge nationalsozialistisch eingestellte Unternehmen bevorzugt und daß die Herstellung der 4 neuen Marken:

„Spielmann", „Kommando", „Staffel" und „Neue Aera"

in dem rein christlichen bezw. rein deutschen, von Parteigenossen geleiteten Zigaretten-Unternehmen Paul Rother erfolgt.

Im letztgenannten Betriebe ist auch eine Betriebszelle vorhanden, welche bei der Eroberung der Geraer Betriebe eine gute Unterstützung gewährleistet.

Nat.-Soz. Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands Gera

Figure 3 Kameradschaft solicits the SA (NA 105155).

new brands of cigarette: Spielmann, Kommando, Staffel, and Neue Aera (see Figure 4), all, it guaranteed, "utterly Christian, utterly German."[22]

The Kameradschaft cigarette firm appeared to know its market and delved headlong into the Nazi tobacco contest. On June 24, 1932, Kameradschaft sent letters from its Gera headquarters to all *Ortsgruppenführer*, urging the Nazi leaders to promote Kameradschaft brands in their districts. The letter was essentially an advertisement for the Kameradschaft label:

Figure 4 Kameradschaft advertisement (NA 105245).

Dear *Ortsgroup* Leaders!

We have struck a deal with the National Socialist Department of Business in Munich, and we take the occasion to inform you of it. The basis is to give us the largest support within the framework of the Party in propagating the *Kameradschaft* cigarettes. . . . In the district now, our representatives are already

> practicing, and we would like you to direct your efforts in supporting them in their propaganda and selling activities. Every Party member should become acquainted with *Kameradschaft* cigarettes, since it gives positive support to the organization and promotes a preference over all other firms of questionable heritage. It remains the duty of all those connected with the business units to smoke *Kameradschaft* cigarettes.
>
> These brands are really high quality . . . and are an advantage because of their redemption coupons. . . .
>
> Thank you very much, dear leaders, for maintaining an interest. Best to you.[23]

Unsurprisingly, this letter precipitated conflict. The exhortation here to promote Kameradschaft cigarettes ran contrary to earlier SA orders giving exclusive sanction to the Sturm label. An intra-Nazi struggle quickly emerged over the rivalry between the Kameradschaft firm of Gera and the *Sturmfabrik*, Dressler of Dresden.

The struggle over cigarette brands broke to the surface when an SA Subgroup leader, Major Steinhoff, circulated a memorandum to all his *Stürme*. Steinhoff, who led the Subgroup Hessen-Nassau-North from Kassel, wrote on August 6:

> Lately, the *Kameradschaft* cigarette factory . . . [has made] a great effort to introduce their cigarettes.
>
> Although it is known that the fight against Trusts and the *Konzern* has been taken up by others . . . *Sturm* factory has taken up the fight . . . [with] consistence in its propaganda work for the SA, as well as [with] payments of twenty pfennings and through the redemption coupons . . .
>
> It is here where the SA discipline will show, while each SA man . . . will only ask for *Sturm* cigarettes and rejects other brands.
>
> The leaders must see to it that the men smoke only *Sturm*, *Trommler*, *Alarm*, and *Neue Front*: in other words, only brands which are useful to us. . . .
>
> In addition to this, I would like you to ponder this! The conduct of a Jewish company, who puts the swastika on its cigarettes, a company who was anything but socialist, wants to do business.
>
> Therefore every SA-man has the duty to toss aside any Spielmann cigarettes [a Kameradschaft brand] adorned with our sacred symbol.
>
> Let all troops be informed of these goings-on immediately, and repeat the order three successive times.[24]

Several weeks earlier, one of Steinhoff's *Standarte* leaders, Heinrich Löwenstein, had already begun to stoke discontent over the Kameradschaft cigarettes. "There is," Löwenstein wrote to his five *Stürme*, "only one National Socialist cigarette factory and that is the one in Dresden which turns over to the SA a . . . percentage of its sales." He continued:

> The SA . . . has an interest in *Sturm* cigarettes . . . and rejects *Kameradschaft* cigarettes for this reason. . . . [A] true SA-man smokes only *Sturm* cigarettes.

> I hereby order, that administrators at three consecutive *Sturm* evenings read aloud and instruct . . . that *Kameradschaft* are not National Socialist cigarettes."[25]

Whether the principals in the Kameradschaft firm were Jewish or not and whether it could even accurately be called a *Konzern* mattered less than the symbolism of these notes. As the correspondence of Emil Weiss would demonstrate, the charge that a business was a *Konzern* or Trust and not National Socialist was a weighty one, invoking as it did to a Nazi audience the chief bugbears of the ideology. The Kameradschaft directors in Gera could hardly let the matter rest with Steinhoff and Löwenstein's accusations.

The Kameradschaft firm responded ten days after Steinhoff's boycott order. In a long letter, the firm appears to have tried to head off SA–SS friction over cigarettes, while guarding the Nazi credentials it claimed for the Kameradschaft brand:

> On the basis of a conference on Sunday with a representative in your district we learned that you issued an order to all the SA-Subgroups that they let it be known that all SA-men are to boycott our product.
>
> We regret your extraordinary measures since they are likely to hurt us economically and not only destroy the existence of our representative there but totally to reduce our trade in these products.
>
> We think you acted too hastily in issuing these orders and were directed by wrongful influences, because in all probability you are not aware that there has existed for some months now a relationship between the National Socialist Business Organization of the Reich and us [similar to] that between the SA and *Sturmfabrik*, and that in numerous cases the same types of agreements exist between SA and SS leaders, and we have offered you the same proposition through our representative Herr Raegener. Your order is in direct conflict with the agreements made by quite a number of SA and SS leaders.
>
> You may rest assured that the NSBO and the SA–SS leaders would never conclude a pact with *Kameradschaft* cigarettes if they themselves were not completely convinced of our title to exist . . .
>
> In any case, we will not hesitate to say that to you the endeavors of *Kameradschaft* cigarettes actually is a purely National Socialist undertaking, which employs only Party members who without exception are old fighters for our movement. The businessmen are also longtime members.
>
> In addition to that, *Kameradschaft* cigarettes has distinguished itself in raising significant sums for the movement, so that not the slightest reason exists to permit one to say it is not a pure National Socialist business. If this is not sufficient proof, then contact Hans Hinkel, the public relations chief in Berlin.
>
> We do not doubt that if you make a detailed objective investigation of our performance, you will arrive at the same conviction as the other leaders; all the more as we make you the same offer as *Sturm*. Quite aside from the monthly allotment from sales, we offer the individual *Sturms* the privilege of cash redemption from the coupons that are included in every pack and higher than any other company.

> We are not trying to displace the *Sturm* cigarette company. That is a false notion. The opposite is true. Our faith is against Jewish and foreign trusts. There is no reason to fight each other. Instead, we should work together to battle the huge market of Jewish cigarette firms and cut their sales.
>
> We would also like to address your objection to our symbol on our product. The permission was granted to use the mark by competent people of the NSDAP when our undertaking began. It is nothing more than the old German rune (of the tangent rays of the sun). It is not the symbol of the SA for which many have died. If you are talking about the misuse of the National Socialist symbol then you surely cannot mean ours.
>
> We hope that the preceding, as a true representation of the facts, will bring you in concert with the other leaders, and that you will rescind your order. A quick intervention for us would be appreciated so that any harm to our business might be avoided.
>
> We recommend a quick response from you.[26]

In a manner similar to that in which an *Uschla* official later attempted to mollify Emil Weiss, the Gera firm attempted to persuade Steinhoff to retract his criticisms. The sale of their cigarettes, the gentlemen from Gera tried to assure the angry major, helped the Nazi movement, and he was simply unaware of the legitimacy and National Socialist credentials of the Kameradschaft company.

Polite notes did not close the case, though. Carl Raegener, who had his office as general representative (*Generalvertreter*) of the Kameradschaft firm in Kassel, wrote across town to the *Gauleiter* of Hessen-Nassau-North on August 17. To add teeth to his note to Steinhoff, Raegener indirectly threatened to sue the irksome subgroup leader:

> As you know, the leader of the SA groups of Hessen-Nassau-North, Major Steinhoff, sent an order to the entire SA company . . . forbidding the consumption of *Kameradschaft* cigarettes.
>
> The contents of this order are so monstrous that I immediately contacted the director of *Kameradschaft Zigaretten-Speditions-gesellschaft m.b.H.* in Gera, who has taken the necessary steps and sent a letter to Major Steinhof, a copy of which you find enclosed and should be held in confidence.
>
> I have been a National Socialist since 1925 (#15510) and I cannot understand how a capable leader could so frivolously treat a matter such as this and with one blow wants to destroy the existence of [Kameradschaft]. I will try every conceivable means to stigmatize the manner in which Herr Steinhof is acting. In the interest of our movement, I am ready to set this matter amicably aside if full satisfaction is given to me.
>
> The matter must be quickly settled. Otherwise, I will not be able to prevent the important sales merchants in Kassel from suing Major Steinhof for damages.[27]

It is not surprising that Raegener invoked Party interest as a reason to avoid conflict;

the invocation gave him moral high ground and thus projected his case in a good light. But, posturing over the "interest of the movement" aside, the exchange of letters, starting with Steinhoff's note of August 6, demonstrated the messy discord in which the SA tended to entangle itself. Nazis threatening civil suits against one another hardly evoked the opening of the Horst Wessel *Lied*: "The ranks are tightly closed."[28]

The September 1932 SA morale reports further evidence the discord which centered around the sale and promotion of cigarettes. A significant number of SA unit leaders indicated that their men disapproved of the Reemtsma advertisements in the Nazi press. The leader of *Gruppe* West (Koblenz) explained that the ads confused his men and should cease: "It is unintelligible to us [he wrote] that our newspapers take up ads of firms which are indirectly negative toward us. The journal *SA-Mann* must be purified." (*Der SA-Mann* was the weekly journal of the SA.) The report from Subgroup Chemnitz indicated similarly: "The SA-man is wondering about the ads in our press placed by the Trust." The subgroup leader of Dresden reported that the Reemtsma ads had raised "great confusion and many doubts." The *Gruppe* leader of Saxony declared that the ads "render a disservice to the movement." The Subgroups Upper Palatinate/Lower Bavaria and Munich/Upper Bavaria, and the Group Hochland added to the complaints about *Konzern* advertisements. On an unusual note, the Subgroup Weser-Ems suggested that even the SA's association with the Sturm factory was of questionable pedigree. The Dresden factory, the report suggested, was hurting family tobacco manufacturers, and, in accordance with the *Parteigrundsätze* demanding the protection of such small enterprises, contact with the factory should be eschewed.[29]

Two reports expressed concern over the promotion of rival cigarette brands by the SS. Middle Silesia South and Munich/Upper Bavaria both complained that the SS promoted Kameradschaft cigarettes, and that this enterprise hindered the sale of Sturm cigarettes.[30] Cigarettes thus exposed and accentuated an incipient institutional conflict within the Nazi movement. The rivalry that would play itself out in the Night of the Long Knives two summers later was already clearly discernible. The form it took prior to the seizure of power illustrated that critical elements of the core activist constituency of Nazism invested a great deal in the ideological content of the movement. Conflict with rival factions and complaint over ties with suspect outsiders seem to have arisen when Party conduct deviated from professed Party belief.

Politicians and stormtroopers

The sale of cigarettes caused individual discontent and catalyzed discord between rival factions in the Nazi movement. Nazi courtship of major cigarette companies cast doubt on the Party leadership's devotion to its professed *völkisch* ideology, and the separate sales arrangements of SA and SS became a flashpoint in the tense relationship between those rival formations. Cigarettes, however, were not the only source of trouble in the movement. A perpetual institutional conflict stirred between the SA and the Party *Gaue*, and this, like the cigarette controversies, could raise into

high relief the disjunction between professed Nazi ideals and actual conduct. Twenty-two of the thirty-seven SA units responding to the September 1932 morale inquiry explicitly reported friction between the SA and *Gau* administrations. Among those reports citing conflict with the *Gaue*, three types of complaints predominated. First, it was complained that *Gau* functionaries inappropriately involved themselves in SA business and that such intrusions by politicians into stormtroopers affairs prevented good relations with the political officers. The second genre of complaint charged that the *Gaue* exhibited favoritism toward the SS to the neglect of the SA. Third, a handful of respondents reported that the *Gau* leadership failed to forward Party funds that should have been allocated directly to the SA. Running as a common thread through these, the SA seems to have lost confidence as to its role within the movement.

The Subgroup leaders of Hessen-Nassau-North, Hannover, and Hannover East complained that their respective *Gau* leaders caused trouble when they meddled in SA business. The subgroup leader of Hannover East wrote, representatively, "One problem: political leaders who mix themselves up in SA matters. Trouble will arise . . . if this mixing gets out of hand." The group leader of Lower Saxony agreed that the political officers caused trouble when they intervened in SA matters. "A problem exists," he wrote, "when the politicians try to interfere with our business." The SA, it has been noted, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from the NSDAP, giving at times the impression that the two were affiliates rather than parts of one integrated unit. The stormtroopers were an oddity on the *völkisch* paramilitary scene, in that they pledged allegiance to an organized political party. The discontent over NSDAP involvement in SA matters was consistent with the stormtrooper character: violent activists seeking escape from the norms of civilian existence. The fact of their association with a political party was unusual, given their antipathy toward politics and non-military organizations. Political interference in their activities predictably aroused resentment.

The competitive and exclusive ethos of the stormtroopers made it similarly predictable that they would react against rival paramilitary formations, within or without the Nazi movement. Their dislike of the *Stahlhelm*, to be touched upon shortly, exemplified the SA reaction against outside groups that had aims and forms similar to their own. SA animosity toward other paramilitary groups was not restricted however to groups outside the Nazi fold. The SS, established in 1929 as a special supplementary body guard for Hitler and his entourage, aroused SA ire. Numerous reports from September 1932 complained that *Gau* leadership gave preferential treatment to the SS, and that some of this treatment was even expressly anti-SA. The respondent for Independent *Standarte* 8, Munich (*Reichsführerschule*) exemplified the stormtroopers' mistrust of *Gau* leaders and suspicion that the Party preferred the SS. "Individual political leaders," the *Standartenführer* wrote, "are standing in strong opposition to the SA leaders. The leaders are working only with the newly drawn up SS formations. The SA feels neglected."[31] Stormtroopers would not suffer intervention of *Gau* leaders into their affairs, on the one hand, but they became angry when "neglected."

SA leaders accused the *Gaue* of complicity in efforts by the SS to seize various SA

resources, including personnel, money, and good will. The leader of Subgroup Lower Franconia sent an angry report to his commanding officer (the group leader of Franconia). He alleged in the report that the SS was endeavoring to usurp the use of an airfield that the SA had won through a cordial relationship with the airfield manager. The *Gauleiter*, the subgroup leader asserted, aided the SS in this design:

> Matter: Sabotage of the SA by *Gau* Administration
>
> I am enclosing a report from the SA leader of the Subgroup Hess in which it is clear that the attitude of *Gau* leader Dr. Hellmuth is noticeably anti-SA. We had a close relationship with Ritter von Greim of the local airport. It was good for us to be there, because we were given a hall to use and we would be given invitations to fly. Dr. Hellmuth hears of it, wants to stop everything, and wants to place the SS in the bed we have made for ourselves. It is said that he is going to get planes for the SS but nothing for us. He probably was baiting the SA leader Hess with this. It would not surprise me if his undermining ruins the whole thing. It is clear that the airport director is pro-SA only. The *Gau* leader is abusing his office by siding with the SS. The SS approached the airport director and he was appalled that the SS and SA were brothers yet were competing. What a nice picture to present to the outside world![32]

The Würzburg subgroup leader expressed a justifiable fear: confrontation within the movement engendered adverse publicity. But such a clash between SA and *Gau* was not limited in its effect to external image. It had an equal or greater impact on the internal structure of Nazism. In-fighting jeopardized the cohesion of the movement. It was dangerous for Party leaders to disregard the principles of comradely equality expressed in their ideology, for it could lead to doubts and divisions among rank-and-file.

The September morale reports and stormtrooper correspondence evidence that friction between SA and the *Gaue* was endemic, and a great deal of this seems to have arisen from the perception that *Gau* leadership favored the SS. The *Untergruppenführer* of Subgroup Lower Franconia wrote from Würzburg to the staff of Group Franconia. With shades of paranoia, he complained that the *Gau* leadership was giving preferential treatment to the *Schutzstaffel*:

> All of Lower Franconia is making a concerted effort against the SA. They love the SS however! . . . SA and SS live against each other instead of with one another. The SS are trying to recruit SA members. They are everywhere.[33]

Institutional rivalry had grown to the point where different components of the Nazi machine were functioning at cross-purposes. Competition for recruitment had degenerated into poaching of SA-men by the SS, and, perhaps more seriously, responses of the *Gaue* to such instances of rivalry led the SA to doubt the neutrality of the political leadership in intra-Nazi affairs. Perhaps, as some commentators have suggested, conflict between the components of Hitler's political machine promoted Nazi designs by preserving the supremacy of the Führer. The theory that

bureaucratic chaos rebounded to the benefit of the leaders of National Socialism presupposes, however, that the NSDAP would not stall in its drive for power. Organizational rivalry may have had utility for Nazism-in-power, but in a period of weakening dedication among core constituents, fiscal crisis, and a likelihood of further deferrals of political victory, the antagonism described in these SA writings could not have been helpful. Moreover, the SA–SS antagonism described in the *Untergruppenführer*'s letter was not merely a problem between two subordinate parts of the movement; it opened a gulf between the SA and the political leadership. It is questionable whether the movement under such strain would have held together much longer without the prize of *Machtergreifung*.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the pursuit of finances was a potential diversion from political purpose. The Nazi fiscal crisis took on an institutional dimension as well. SA leaders issued a rash of complaints against the *Gauleiter* for their handling of finances. Though one respondent, from *Gruppe* Ostsee, neglected to describe the problem in detail, he made clear that fiscal crisis had befallen the *Gruppe* and that blame for this belonged to the *Gau*. In the terse but sometimes obscure style characteristic of the stormtrooper respondents, the *Gruppe* Ostsee leader wrote, "Catastrophic debt of individual *Stürme*, *Sturmbanne*, and *Standarten* because of the extraordinarily bad relationship to the political leadership." He concluded his analysis of the financial situation on a discouraging note: "I do not trust the *Gauleiter*." This report from Stettin represented the trend, not the exception. The respondent for Subgroup Hessen-Nassau-North complained that, despite repeated notices from SA headquarters, the *Gau* lay three months in arrears in its forwarding of fiscal allotments to the SA. Subgroup Hannover noted "irregularity" in the supply of funds and blamed the *Gau* for the problem. Düsseldorf, Upper Palatinate/Lower Bavaria, Pfalz-Saar, Braunschweig (all subgroups), and *Gruppe* Hochland each issued complaints that their respective *Gaue* were delinquent or incompetent in the disbursement of funds. Appropriations were a focal point of institutional conflict within the Nazi movement, and, as long as the total resources available to National Socialism continued to shrink, the conflict was bound to get worse.

If a general malaise and bickering had settled over the relationship between SA units and the *Gaue*, in some places all-out institutional battle had erupted. A case from Franconia provides an informative example of SA–Party relations at their worst. The SA subgroup Lower Franconia fell into conflict with the Franconian *Gau*, and in the September morale report the SA subgroup leader provided a glimpse of the conflict between himself and the *Gauleiter*. In addition to containing the usual complaints about fiscal matters in general, the report made clear that a special animosity existed in Unterfranken:

> The *Gau* leader owes us money from July. He says it is mismanagement on our part! He is trying to stifle our development. He is making slanderous statements and is actively in touch with the *Standarten* leaders trying to drive a wedge between the leader and the group leaders.

The tone of mutual recrimination, suspicion, and animosity conveyed by the morale

report was amplified by a series of angry communications between the SA and *Gau*, as well as among different SA offices.

A Hitler rally had been held in Nürnberg on July 29, 1932, as part of the grandiose propaganda campaign leading up to the election of July 31. Just as the NSDAP at its highest instances had overstretched its fiscal bounds in premature expectation of victory that July, so too had individual SA units spent too much money. Neither the Party leadership nor SA had given sufficient thought to how they would pay off debts and bills, and in the aftermath of the rally and election *Sturmbann* III/13 of Franconia found itself in a fiscal bind. This fomented bickering between the lower instances of the *Sturmbann* and the *Sturmbannführer*, and, ultimately, brought the latter, Karl Bär, into an acrimonious exchange with Julius Streicher, Franconia's infamous *Gauleiter*.

One cause of the fiscal shortfall was the expense of transportation, and paying for transportation became a center of controversy. Individual *Stürme* had contracted various cars and trucks, some from a transportation company, others apparently from private citizens. The vehicles had been needed to convey stormtroopers to Nürnberg for the July 29 rally. The SA did not pay for the vehicles in advance, and, evidently, the month of August expired without their owners receiving reimbursement from the *Stürme*. By early September, one transportation company (Otto Rauenbusch, Spedition of Weissenburg) and a number of private persons were becoming anxious that they might not recover the money the SA owed them. Some of the individuals who had furnished transport to the SA began to threaten legal action against the *Stürme*. Worried about suits and threats of seizure of their personal property, the leaders of the *Stürme* of *Sturmbann* III/13 began sending anxious letters to Bär at his headquarters in Gunzenhausen (about thirty miles southwest of Nürnberg). Karl Sauer, the leader of Sturm number 24 in Berolzheim, wrote to Bär on September 10:

> I urgently request that you send me the money within this time, since I do not otherwise know where to get the cash, lest they seize my property. You can understand the demeaning consequences of this. . . . National Socialism means keeping your word. One should not promise what later cannot be delivered.[34]

Another letter was sent to Bär the same day, signed by one Karl Kress, the Sturm financial administrator (*Sturmgeldverwalter*), and Dürnberger, the *Sturmführer* of *Sturm* 25 in Döckingen. They, too, worried that their personal property lay under threat of seizure so long as the transportation debts were still outstanding.[35] The Sauer and Kress-Dürnberger letters were not isolated complaints. Other SA-men had already sent two nervous letters to *Sturmbann* III/13 headquarters. One of these came from the leader of *Sturm* 23, Heinrich Engelhardt of Heidenheim, and the other, from a *Truppführer* Knoll, representing *Sturm* 22 of Merkendorf. These *Sturm* leaders, like the others, feared the consequences of continued non-payment of the July debts, and they expressed anger that the *Sturmbannführer* should neglect to cover the costs of transportation to a rally that, after all, the *Stürme* had been ordered to attend.[36] It was in the line of SA duty that the *Stürme* had incurred the debts; thus the SA-men

expected that the SA would liquidate the debts.[37] As time wore on, though, they began to have doubts.

Sturmbannführer Bär, it seems, found himself at an impasse. He, too, had no money. Thus, as his subordinates had directed their anxiety and ire at him, Bär now vented his own frustrations on the political leadership. Bär's main target was *Gauleiter* Streicher, described once as "without redeeming qualities" even by Nazi standards.[38] Visiting Streicher's home base in Nürnberg shortly before September 16, Bär found the *Gauleiter* not only unhelpful, but flippant and pompous as well. In a report to his superiors, Bär, barely concealing disgust, described his unsuccessful effort to extract funds from Streicher:

> The result was typical. I told him about the threat of seizure, and he explained in his own way, "Yes, yes, I – that is we – in Nürnberg also have a debt – 70,000 Marks – and are threatened with seizure too." He showed me no way out. When I pressed him further he called the district leader in and said to him, "You take care of this, so that at least the most urgent demands of *Sturmbann* III/13 are covered. How you do it does not matter to me. Maybe you can get a loan."
>
> When leaders like Streicher dismiss an urgent and important matter with a hand gesture, I just cannot [tolerate] it as a leader in this way.[39]

Bär depicted Streicher as a detached politician, unconcerned about the long-term problems or welfare of the SA. To the SA-man, the *Gauleiter* seemed given to facile, off-the-cuff treatment of matters urgent to the SA. This exchange between an SA leader and his political counterpart offers a glimpse at the tension between the SA and the NSDAP's political officers. The September morale reports reflect a general disgruntlement in the SA toward the political leaders; the correspondence over the July rally debts illustrates that specific transactions between SA and *Gaue* were acrimonious.

When political leaders pleaded institutional poverty, stormtroopers suspected the SA was being neglected. When those same politicians seemed to be living well off Party funds, SA anger intensified. Moreover, the SA had an ideological bias against display of rank and social distinction, so, when high-flying Party officials chose to demonstrate their status in dress and bearing, SA–Party relations suffered even more.

It was in part a left-wing class politics that identified the enemies of the SA. As discussed in Chapter 2, for example, attacks against the aristocratic Papen cabinet struck a responsive chord in SA ranks. Another persistent SA target was the *Stahlhelm*, and much of the stormtroopers' opposition to the veterans' league stemmed from antipathy toward the upper class origins of the officers of the league. The class sentiments of the stormtroopers brought them into conflict with outside rivals, and remarks about the *Stahlhelm* are representative. The September morale reports contained a large body of complaint about *Stahlhelm* behavior. The respondents characterized the *Stahlhelm* as pompous, megalomaniacal, and overbearing. From *Obergruppe* II, Hannover, for example, it was reported, "Part of the *Stahlhelm* is very overbearing, arrogant, [and] presumptuous." Many reports denounced the *Stahlhelm* in terms indicating the class-basis of the animosity. The Bochum SA

respondent declared of the *Stahlhelm*, "Their members are Papen's men."[40] (Papen and his cabinet were frequently excoriated by Nazis asserting that the aristocratic background of the ministers rendered them unfit to lead the country.) Other reports described the *Stahlhelm* as snobbish and stuffy. The respondent from Subgroup Braunschweig wrote that, worse still, the whole *Stahlhelm* had recently taken the lead from its officers: "Hitherto, merely the leader was a snob; now some members of the *Stahlhelm* are becoming that way too." In a similar vein, the Subgroup Württemberg leader wrote, "The veterans and calcified active officers set the fashion in the *Stahlhelm*." As some SA officers equated the *Stahlhelm* to the aristocratic Papen cabinet, at least one charged that the *Stahlhelm* men were fellow travelers of the DNVP. The traditionalist and right-wing DNVP (*Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei*) was often associated with wealthy conservatives and aristocrats, and its general secretary, Alfred Hugenberg, was widely regarded as stiff and unimaginative. "The Saxon *Stahlhelm*," the SA leader of Group Saxony wrote, "are a devoted bunch of Hugenbergs."[41]

Stormtrooper attacks on the *Stahlhelm*, it must be noted, stemmed from personal provocations as well as ideology. Numerous SA reports noted that part-time agricultural occupations provided many otherwise unemployed SA-men with a vital source of temporary income. From Göttingen, for example, it was reported that "the largest part of unemployed SA-men can be accommodated by agricultural occupations." It must have caused personal privation when SA-men lost jobs as agricultural laborers. The Group Silesia and the Subgroup Middle Silesia South both reported that landowners with *Stahlhelm* ties actively discriminated against stormtroopers. The subgroup reported, "After recent events, the relationship [with the *Stahlhelm*] has cooled, especially since SA-men in country areas were fired from their jobs by proprietors who belong to the *Stahlhelm*." The Silesian group respondent confirmed his subgroup leader's report, noting that "in the rural areas of Silesia…employers who belong to the *Stahlhelm* circle have dismissed many SA-men."[42] The terms in which SA-men attacked the *Stahlhelm* were class oriented, and *Stahlhelm* conduct, as reported from Silesia at any rate, provided ample incitement to class antagonism. The rural employers who hired semi-employed stormtroopers most likely belonged to a higher socio-economic group than their employees. Thus when a Silesian landowner fired an SA-man on political grounds, the act quite naturally implicated class issues. A current of class antagonism can be detected in the SA's resentment toward the *Stahlhelm*.

While class politics played a substantial part in selecting the external foes of the SA, it also singled out fellow Nazis. As much as some SA resentment was channeled against non-Nazi elites, not all stormtrooper animus found its way to the outside. Especially where rank and privilege became conspicuous within the Party, the SA directed its egalitarian dislike of authority inwards. A number of morale reports charge that *Gauleiter* and other Party officers acted arrogantly with respect to the SA. Echoing charges against the *Stahlhelm*, SA respondents complained that political officers of the NSDAP lorded it over stormtroopers. "An arrogance [*überheblichkeit*] of the political leaders" gave rise to a gulf between the SA and Party-proper, the subgroup leader of Baden noted; and a Breslau *Standarte* leader complained, "The

political figures are too overbearing."[43] Acutely aware of differentiations of rank, whether in military formations or in social standing, the stormtroopers easily developed resentment over the personal bearing of their colleagues and superiors. To accuse a person of "arrogance" or "overbearing" demeanor was a serious accusation for an SA-man. Though responsibilities of command in the SA were rigidly stratified, an underlying ethos of egalitarianism set the tone among brownshirts. An inheritance from the days of the original stormtroopers in the trenches of the Western Front, their egalitarian ethos shaped the perceptions and determined the reactions of the Nazi SA. A seemingly innocuous slight, a misplaced word could induce suspicions and aggravate insecurities.

Often, broad-based dissent within the SA would focus itself on symbolic affronts by the Party. The dismissal of Walter Stennes from command of the Eastern SA occasioned SA resentment and focused SA energies against the Nazi political leadership. The Stennes incident provoked SA units in the East, still favoring the dismissed leader, to attack Party extravagance. In a declaration supporting Stennes, the units complained that the new Party headquarters being built in Munich, the "Brown House," absorbed money more urgently needed by the SA than by Party dignitaries:

> In the person of Captain Stennes the whole SA is being attacked. Munich has forgotten that readiness for sacrifice and simplicity once created the Party and made it strong. Today they build the "Brown House" in Munich at a cost of millions whereas the individual SA-men have not a penny with which to repair their torn boots.[44]

It may well have been the case that promises of material reward kept the political functionaries of the NSDAP faithful to the cause. Expenditures such as those on the Brown House, then, had an institutional purpose. However, the Party also attracted followers through its egalitarian ideology and Spartan image. Rewarding some Nazis with grand trappings carried a risk, in that it could alienate the more austere elements of the movement. Nowhere more than among the stormtroopers did Party extravagance threaten Party cohesion.

To men immersed in the paramilitary milieu, few symbols of rank were more important than their uniforms. The NSDAP had introduced a new set of uniforms for its political officers in the summer of 1932. The new uniforms sharply contrasted with those of the SA and elicited a rash of complaints. The brown shirts that were the SA's namesake had originated in the plain khaki issue of the Imperial German colonial corps of World War I. Supposedly, a Party adjutant had found a warehouse of colonial corps uniforms in Bavaria and arranged for their purchase by the SA. The stormtroopers subsequently commissioned their own tailors to make uniforms. The original colonial design was elaborated upon somewhat, and the trademark SA cap was adopted to heighten the distinction between stormtrooper issue and that of other paramilitary groups. The uniform of the stormtrooper, in comparison, for example, to a Wehrmacht officer's, nonetheless remained modest and simple. The new Party officers' uniforms contrasted even more sharply. The new uniforms for

NSDAP political officers were elaborate and flashy. To the stormtroopers, ever conscious of signs of rank, the imposing new Party suits were a provocation. From Braunschweig came a typical report:

> The [mood] has become very bitter over the new uniforms of the [Party] officials. The SA-men feel degraded by all the gold and silver on their uniforms. Add to this the fact that some young Party members think they are going to be chiefs in the SA![45]

As discussed earlier, intrusion by NSDAP politicians into SA matters was a raw nerve to the stormtroopers. Issuance of fancy uniforms to the political officers added salt to this already sensitive wound.[46] One SA subgroup leader reported the reaction of his men to the new uniforms:

> The sartorially resplendent political functionaries raise the hackles of the SA. The men cannot understand how the simple brown shirt he wears, a symbol of the honor of the activists, can be denigrated in such a way as this.[47]

To what extent was the SA's distress over uniforms and other symbols of superior rank a manifestation of class resentment? It has been established that Party officials, as a group, represented a higher social class than SA rank-and-file.[48] *Prima facie*, the case of the uniforms might be evaluated as an incidence of class conflict. Such an evaluation would maintain that the lower class stormtroopers found a focus for their socio-economic resentments on the object of the uniforms worn by their class superiors. Elsewhere, certainly, class-consciousness determined what groups fell into SA disfavor. For example, as we have seen, the SA's resentment of the *Stahlhelm* can be attributed to class-consciousness. Landowning *Stahlhelm* men, it was reported, were firing landless stormtroopers from farm jobs. It is plausible that class contributed to the SA's animosity toward the *Stahlhelm.* The case of the uniforms, however, seems less certain. Rank-consciousness – as distinct from class-consciousness – is a signature of military organizations. The differentiation in living quarters, segregated officers' clubs, and, not least, the varied uniforms in most armies testify to the importance of rank in military organizations. But whether the distinctions commonly separating enlisted men from officers reflects the broader cleavages present in society at large is another question. German society certainly organized many of its conflicts around class orientation; hence the loyal followings that the KPD, SPD, and even the centrist, non-confessional parties commanded for a time under the Weimar Republic. And the Nazi movement, to an extent far greater than its rival parties, encompassed a cross-section of German society.[49] It would hardly be surprising, if the tensions of the society of which the Nazi movement represented a cross-section – albeit a lop-sided one in some respects – played themselves out inside the movement. Yet concern over rank and privilege is much the special characteristic of military formations in general. Equating the spat over uniforms to class warfare might add complexity to a matter much better explained more simply. The evidence provided by the September morale reports illustrates that resentment

brewed within the SA over the insignia and symbols of rank flaunted by overbearing NSDAP officials. That evidence hardly compels the conclusion that it was class conflict which most threatened the Nazi movement. The SA's anger over uniforms arguably stemmed more from violation of Nazi egalitarian precepts than from class fissures originating in society outside the movement.

That the stormtroopers' complaints toward Party officials were not definite evidence of class conflict between the SA and NSDAP-proper hardly diminished the significance of SA dissatisfaction. If the antagonism between officers and men in an army becomes excessive, the efficacy of the army can decline. And the SA suffered a drawback not shared by a regular army. The SA possessed no special coercive force or official sanction to keep its members in their ranks. Morale problems, even outright hatred of officers for displays of rank and exercise of privilege, might check an army's strength, but the army's very existence is not thus directly threatened. To leave a regular army without the army or the State's consent is to commit the crime of desertion. The State employs its coercive faculties to block or deter desertion, and, thus, even a highly disaffected rank-and-file stays where its officers command. The Nazi movement, before January 30, 1933, did not have the luxury of a monopoly over State power. Because the Nazis thus depended solely on the natural enthusiasm of their stormtroopers, and not on coercion, to keep the SA whole, the rise of a rank-conscious discontent in the SA posed a serious threat to SA cohesion. Quite simply, if a stormtrooper grew tired of in-fighting or found the Party officers' gold-and-silver braid an insult, he could freely leave the movement.

Individual Nazis did indeed desert the movement when they became convinced that abuse of rank and quest for privilege had overwhelmed the NSDAP's egalitarian message. An article appeared in the socialist newspaper *Vorwärts* on August 17, 1932 describing such a desertion. Herr Mainz, according to *Vorwärts*, had helped found the first NSDAP cell in Cologne, and he had remained one of that city's most prominent Nazis. In a letter to the Cologne *Gauleiter* in August, however, Mainz decried the deterioration of the movement's ranks. "[T]he National Socialist movement," he wrote, "has lost its earlier direction. The majority of members are [morally] bankrupt." Personal gain through corruption, the deserting Nazi added, had become the main object of most Nazis' membership in the Party.[50] On October 4, the *Königsberger Volkszeitung* reported a similar desertion, though en masse, rather than individual. A whole unit of Silesian stormtroopers, the paper reported, fled the SA in disgust over pervasive corruption and the "dominance of big-shots" (*Bonzokratie*). "In bigger local groups," the *Volkszeitung* reported, "strong opposition is arising. Here and there, the internal fragmentation of the NSDAP has already grown so much that those unsatisfied with the dominance of big-shots are establishing their own separate 'body of confidants' [*Vertrauensmännerkörper*]."[51]

When the Nazi leadership openly avowed commercial ties to the cigarette baron Philipp Reemtsma, Emil Weiss, the Munich tobacconist, quit the movement. When SA-men or local Nazi dignitaries sensed that the political purposefulness of the movement was waning, they too deserted rather than remain amidst people in whom they saw only cynical opportunists. The Nazis paid a price when they failed to abide by their ideology.

5 Disintegration or victory

Nazism in the final months of the Republic

Summer 1932 drew to a close with the chance for an immediate Nazi seizure of power receding. Stormtroopers believed that repeated denial of the chancellorship to Hitler confirmed their suspicions over the course the Party had taken since 1923. To be sure, Nazi fortunes at the polls had been on the upswing for two years. Even the impressive results of the July Reichstag polling however had not put Hitler at the helm of State. Stormtrooper patience eroded in face of continued refusal by Party leaders to revert to the old "revolutionary" strategy, and the attraction of a movement which had promised eventual access to the public coffers began to fade for the financially hard-pressed rank-and-file. Disaffection permeated the SA.

A morale report from Brunswick expressed the attitude of stormtroopers over continued deferral of a Nazi Germany:

> It cannot be denied [the respondent wrote] that the postponement of the political decision has clearly caused a recognizable unrest in the units, [and] the cloudy present situation increases [the unrest] rather than abates it. The troops are apathetic in spite of the special things done like shooting, bivouac, etc. The most active forces have joined the SA in order to bring about an active decision. But at this moment, it hovers before them, that after five or six years of marching, there is no indication that anything will be accomplished. Even old, reliable SA leaders who have stood the test and exhibited boundless enthusiasm are becoming silent. It is becoming impossible to drag these poor unemployed men around. Fiscal matters create a mountain of paper work that no SA leader could ever complete. I see it like this: If we do not win the coming election, it will be a long winter.[1]

Did this SA leader's dire prediction prove accurate, and what, if anything, justified his pessimistic prognosis in the first place? After all, the Nazi Party after the July 1932 Reichstag election stood at the summit of a dizzying ascent years in the making. From representing only a scattered following of eccentric racists, the NSDAP had come to head a national movement, numbering over a million men and women. From parliamentary negligibility at the fringes of *völkisch* politics, the NSDAP had risen to the status of Germany's plurality party. And where before no one had paid

Hitler or his followers much heed, chancellors and the president of the Reich himself now negotiated with the Nazi Führer about forming national cabinets.

The aura of inexorable ascendance that surrounded the Nazi movement in the summer of 1932 was, however, soon to dissipate in setbacks and disillusionment. The November 6 Reichstag election marked the Nazis' first decline at the polls since their electoral climb had begun in September 1930. Though the NSDAP retained a plurality of Reichstag seats even after November 6, the Nazi electoral fraction appeared unable to win the Party a single portfolio in the national cabinet. Failures in local elections exacerbated the results of the national election; the Party was out of money; and the ranks of the movement were breaking under the strain. In light of the condition his organization had reached by September 1932, the Brunswick SA leader's prediction of impending crisis that winter was justified.

One trend might have appeared to contradict dire prognostications about the state of the SA. The September morale reports indicated in many places that the size of the SA was stabilizing or even increasing (see Table 2). Many groups noted net gains in enlistment during the month of August. Subgroup Pomerania West, for example, reported a gain of approximately 1,300 men. A common pattern was the loss of some men and the acquisition of others. Subgroup Württemberg reported a loss of 118 men and a gain of approximately 400. Without citing specific numbers, Hannover mentioned the withdrawal of disinterested SA-men and the offsetting of such losses by numerous enlistments. A few units dismissed unimpressive recruiting as the result of insufficient propaganda. Dresden, for instance, explained that the ranks grew by only 5 percent over the course of the summer, because of "poor recruitment," but no losses were reported.[2] The leader of Danzig *Standarte* 5 reported an increase of 500 men and, like several of his counterparts in other *Standarte*, expected

Table 2 Stormtrooper enlistments and withdrawals reported for August 1932 (all units are SA subgroups, except where otherwise indicated)

SA unit	*Enlistments*	*Withdrawals*
Danzig Standarte 5	200	
Köln-Aachen		75
Hamburg	1,450	880
Baden	797	
Gruppe Ostsee	2,508	
Pomerania West	1,300	
Essen	300	
Pfalz-Saar	600	
Württemberg	400	118
Breslau Standarte 11	425	
Lower Silesia	1,221	489
Gruppe Hochland	226	
Upper Palatinate/Lower Bavaria	579	447
Gruppe Mitte		150
Chemnitz	304	

Source: National Archives, Record Group 242, T-81, frames 105058–105245.

a further strengthening of ranks once the fall harvest ended, freeing agricultural workers to resume paramilitary and political activity.

The national leadership could view the numbers with guarded optimism at most, for numbers alone did not guarantee a strong organization. The SA morale reports of September 1932 painted a bleak picture as regarded the state of the rank-and-file. Numbers appeared to be increasing, but many individual stormtroopers were too poor, too disillusioned, or insufficiently dedicated to the cause to serve National Socialism effectively. The political quality of masses of new Nazis, as well as of many constituents already in the ranks, was falling. The fact that a large fraction of the movement had become undependable and even subversive of Nazi ends negated the value of any numerical growth the movement may have experienced in the final months before the seizure of power. Reports in autumn 1932 wrote off as ineffective a significant portion of the membership of the movement in general and of the SA in particular. Worse still for Nazi fortunes, some SA-men were reported to be actively damaging the cause.

One measure of the ineffectiveness of the rank-and-file was its inability to pay dues. A survey of the September SA morale reports reveals that a large proportion of Party and SA members could not afford to pay. The leader of Subgroup Köln-Aachen reported, "Day by day, finances [become] tougher, as dues ever poorer." The Subgroup Hamburg leader echoed this complaint. The dues from his unit, he noted, were "insufficient." Of the 4,500 men in the Hamburg SA, 2,600 were unemployed. Of the unemployed, 600 received no relief from the State. Thus an appreciable portion of the SA subgroup could not realistically have been expected to contribute to the SA budget. Moreover, Party members theoretically assigned a quota of their dues to fund the stormtroopers. The Hamburg leader's complaint of insufficient dues implies that remittances from regular Party members were low as well. The report from Danzig *Standarte* 5 expressly described the sorry personal fiscal state of the Party's members. According to the report, 12,000 Danzigers belonged to the NSDAP. Of this outwardly impressive number, over 3,000 were missing red cards in their Party books.[3] This meant that over a quarter of the Danzig Party membership lay in arrears. Moreover, the report added that some 1,000 additional Party members received special dues dispensations on account of personal poverty. The dispensations, freeing their recipients from paying the SA dues quota, worsened the financial situation. Finally, 500 SA-men were exempted entirely from paying dues, on the grounds of poverty. The message from these reports was clear. Long lists of names on Party accounting ledgers alone reflected little about the fiscal strength of the Nazi movement.

While many people who already belonged to the Party failed to contribute to the coffers, financial obligations deterred others from joining in the first place. The Baden SA subgroup leader noted with concern that the "high entry fee and membership dues deter good strong candidates from entering the SA." This complaint from Baden carried a dangerous implication. The quality of Nazi activists was, at best, uncertain, and, more probably, low and declining.

Quality of SA rank-and-file indeed appears to have become a problem. SA unit leaders reported trouble with "rabble" or "undesirable elements," and purges or

"purification actions" (*Reinigungsaktionen*) were necessary to clear out recent low-quality recruits. Several SA units, such as Hannover East, reported the expulsion of men on disciplinary grounds. Prevalence of the unemployed in the rank-and-file hurt morale, *Standarte* 11, Breslau reported: "Sixty percent of the men have been unemployed for years, and it would not fit the facts if I were to say that the morale is especially good."[4] Non-payment of dues, then, was just one symptom of the degeneration of Nazi ranks. SA units required aggressive "cleansings," and the depressed character and dubious make-up of parts of the SA pulled down the general morale of the organization.

Poverty, ineffectiveness, and depression were compounded by another problem. While SA unit leaders complained of "rubbish" and "rabble" in their ranks, they anxiously noted an even more threatening genre of riffraff – political subversives. Over a half-dozen reports stated explicitly that activists from opposing parties had infiltrated the SA and were working to undermine stormtrooper cohesion. One report cited recruiting by members of the Black Front, the errant left-wing faction of the SA, but the threat most commonly identified was communist.[5] From Leine came the complaint that communists endeavored to draw SA-men into the Marxist ranks: "Obstructionists (*Quertreiber*) from Marxist circles come to the SA claiming to promote better social relief. [They] aim to take away SA-men." The propaganda of left-wing foes took its toll on the SA, the Leine report indicated. The low number of new SA enlistments during the month of August (241 total) the report attributed to "Marxist propaganda and related parties of all colors." The *Obergruppe* II (Hannover) warned that many SA-men exhibited "inauspicious favor toward enemy formations." What was meant by this inexact phrase can safely be guessed. SA ranks were wavering between their Nazi loyalties and non-Nazi, perhaps communist, temptation.

Other reports were unambiguous in their claims that the communist foe endeavored to plant seeds of mistrust and draw SA-men out of the Nazi fold. The Subgroup Köln-Aachen reported "[e]fforts by the reds to carry unrest into the SA through subversive papers." The subgroup did not specify the results of the communist effort, but it indicated that new enrolments were few and that net enrolment for August declined by 75. From Braunschweig an SA respondent wrote, "There are some radicals here, who . . . are always trying to stir up trouble in the troops, and they mislead [the men] into something stupid." An SA leader in Hannover complained of a similar problem: "Provocateurs use the barracks and camps as instigation and rabble-rousing headquarters." A respondent from Franconia reported that communist efforts were in fact eroding SA ranks and that the impact had been substantial. Communist subversion in Franconia evidently had achieved its aim – stormtrooper defection had accumulated into a stream of activists from the Nazi movement. "For the first time," wrote the Franconian respondent, "enrolment has dropped noticeably. They are crossing over to the KPD."[6] The SA faced a problem in that many of its men could not contribute to the cause. Still more ominous for the brownshirt organization, persons actively opposed to Nazism had entered SA ranks. A combination of the incapable and the subversive began to promote dissolution of the movement.

Local SA commanders met the crisis in their constituencies with a pair of stopgap

measures. Though response to the mounting problems of recruitment, personnel quality, and defection was in places vigorous, nowhere did it provide a long-term solution. First, SA leaders launched their men into a flurry of paramilitary maneuvers and extra drills; and second, they travelled about to subordinate units, with the aim of rallying the most demoralized ones through speeches and personal presence. As discussed earlier, the morale reports revealed an organization troubled by sinking morale and low-quality recruits. The leadership, strapped for funds and limited by the human resources at their disposal, had few options with which to confront the problems plaguing the SA. Moreover, their faith in the effectiveness of personal influence and antipathy toward institutions as responses to a problem further constrained the SA leaders. The only courses available – and perhaps the only ones that were likely in any event to occur to them – were to immerse their units in a frenzy of busy work and hope that direct exposure to charismatic influence would arrest the fraying of the organization.

The September morale reports reflect that long-term, institutional solutions were lacking in SA leaders' response to the crisis. Seven respondents noted that they were employing drills, maneuvers, and other types of activities in order to increase group cohesion and efficacy. The leader of *Gruppe* Hannover, for example, looked forward to the November election campaign. Once campaign work occupied the listless stormtroopers, he wrote, matters in his unit would "be put back in order." The respondent from Subgroup Mitte complained of dangerously low morale, but then proposed that, through an intensification of activity, the SA would stay enthusiastic and unified: "Assemblies and marches are necessary to prepare the men for the coming election. . . . The intensive training of the SA has buoyed up spirits considerably." The respondent from Breslau *Standarte* 11 reported that that unit's leaders also conducted extra drills, in the interests of "keeping spirits buoyant." And the respondent from Subgroup Middle Silesia South reported that the subgroup leader intended to improve the seriously deficient morale of his unit through increased activity. "The leader," the respondent wrote, "feels a lift in spirit can be kindled by stronger education, sports events, and field exercises. Instruction in weapons use and exercises with them is especially helpful."[7] Other unit leaders implied that participation in *Reichswehr* field maneuvers cheered the brownshirts. Across the sampling of SA units represented by the surviving morale reports, intensification of activity was the chief response to growing malaise and signs of break-up.

An indication of the importance of drills and other time-occupying activities is gleaned from considering what happened when such activities were suspended. Without them, SA cohesion and morale deteriorated even further. The Group Lower Rhine complained that severe "disappointment and unrest" had followed the July 31 elections. More activity, the respondent implied, would potentially improve the depressed morale, but he had to concede, "overcoming this setback [of morale] is even more of a problem since the ban on demonstrations."[8] In prohibiting uniformed political demonstrations (from early 1932), the Brüning cabinet had denied the SA one of its most important crutches.[9] Activity was a critical glue to the *Sturmabteilung*, and without it, the discontents of the rank-and-file worsened.[10]

A police report from Düsseldorf confirmed that the SA was employing extra drill and a strict enforcement of outward signs of unity to compensate for institutional deficiency and to revive flagging enthusiasms:

> [T]he political events of the last months have had an extraordinary paralysing effect on the NSDAP and on its political activities in particular. Impetus and enthusiasm have noticeably decreased in comparison with this spring. In order at least to keep the SA and SS as much as possible in their ranks, paramilitary exercises are conducted within these organizations in increased and expanded amounts.[11]

Reports from police and the SA itself cumulatively suggest that brownshirt leaders in autumn 1932 found it difficult to maintain cohesion and stability in their ranks. SA respondents and police observers alike projected a picture of an organization falling apart and threatening to run out of control; and of its commanders struggling to prevent their men from displaying the sorry state of the SA to the general public. The main way upon which SA leaders seized to preserve unity, image, and sense of purpose was to keep the stormtroopers busy.

It was clear however that parades and busy work alone could not cement together the troubled *Sturmabteilung*. Less clear was what further measures could be taken. SA leaders attempted to apply personal political will to keep their ranks from dissolving. Ten of the September reports expressed the view that leaders, by personally intervening, could calm unruly SA units or buoy up sagging morale. One report, from Pomerania, was typical:

> Hope and calm have returned, especially in places where the leaders were weak, by special appeals. I travel now as much as possible, above all to small units, in order to restore morale by personal influence. I have a warranted hope that these measures will be successful, unless complications arise.[12]

The Pomeranian commander posited a simple theory. Bad leaders engendered low morale, so emergency deployment of charisma is what was needed to get things under control. A flaw lay in his thinking however. The "complications" which the respondent anticipated were bound to arise again. The shortage of cash, dissent within the ranks, and the pressures of external political circumstance were chronic. Charisma would not make them go away, and even if those problems diminished, no organization as large and unruly as the SA would hold together long if bound only by a tie as ethereal as "personal influence." The leader could not be everywhere at once, and, moreover, time spent away from his organizational duties at headquarters doubtless weakened the institutional efficiency of his unit. The Pomeranian SA leader's approach to maintaining cohesion was at root both limited and desperate.

Yet more than one leader attempted to use charismatic influence to cement the weakening bonds of the *Sturmabteiling*. Some came to the belief that local talent in that department did not suffice. The heads of several units called for charismatic

intervention by the highest-ranking Nazis, including by the Führer himself. "The morale of the SA," wrote the commander of Subgroup Munich/Upper Bavaria, "is visibly depressed in the country. Personal contact is more important than ever. The morale went up noticeably when the Führer addressed them in Munich . . . . An appearance by the SA chief of staff would also renew the spirit."[13] The report from Subgroup Württemberg paralleled these remarks. In the Württemberg SA, finances had fallen precariously low, and restless stormtroopers agitated for action. "The Führer," the unit commander prescribed, "must intervene and bring order." The Subgroup Hamburg leader, among his colleagues filing reports, displayed the most conspicuous faith in the power of emergency charismatic intervention to remedy underlying institutional malaise. He boasted that he visited every Sturm in the subgroup, delivering multiple speeches daily for days on end. He catalogued the titles of his addresses: "Endurance," "Faith," "Ruination of the designs of the 'nationalist gentlemen'," "Building up the SA," "Development," "Physical Training," "Schooling." Speeches and other devices to spread personal influence were the resorts of choice for keeping the SA on its feet and marching. Like intensification of parade and drill, they had limits. Where able leaders were lacking and charismatic influence was not aggressively applied, disaffection reigned. Where a local commander did enjoy gifts of persuasion and leadership, these could not dispel completely deeper problems.

Resort to emergency tours and political rallies reflected that Nazi leadership was finding it increasingly difficult to keep the stormtroopers focused on the Party's mission. At the same time, reliance on charisma and personal presence suggested that SA commanders took an over-simplified view of the crisis and its possible solutions. SA command, as its thoughts can be discerned from the morale reports, did not contemplate institutional solutions to address problems which had been growing for some time and which appeared at least in part to have had systemic origin. The tactics that SA leaders formulated to confront the brewing crisis were essentially *ad hoc*. Not surprisingly, the reports indicated that trouble ran unchecked wherever leadership was deficient. From Dresden, it was reported, "Spirits are down because of the political situation. Where the leaders are poor, the matter is worse." A respondent in Hannover wrote, "In *Sturms* whose leaders were not the best, a real crisis approached [after July 31]." And a Saxon respondent added, "The political results of parliament's decision [not to form a Nazi-led coalition cabinet] brought despair to the SA . . . especially where the leaders are unable to make the situation understood."[14] A consistent message emerged: the stormtrooper army could be held together only through the smoke-and-mirror approach of dynamic leadership constantly applied. Any commander who fell short on charisma or oratory lacked one of the few tools in the SA repertoire to arrest the drift toward chaos.[15]

The Nazis were not the first to resort to charisma and intensification of drill to buoy a sinking organization. The attempted solutions to the SA crisis evoke at least two historical antecedents. The case of the Imperial German Navy toward the close of World War I is one. The Kaiser's fleet had lain essentially inactive since the Battle of Jutland in autumn 1916, and, by 1918, naval commanders recognized that

inactivity, meager rations, and left-wing agitation threatened the existence of the navy as a coherent force. The officers intensified the sailors' regimen of exercises and drills, in the hopes of improving morale. This stopgap plan ultimately failed. When the German armed forces broke down in November 1918, the navy led the way in mutiny.[16] Second, there was the case of the Russian army in summer 1917. The army had suffered catastrophic reversals in face of the Central Powers, and after the February Revolution masses of soldiers began deserting. As the crisis in morale deepened, the Russian army neared total disintegration. The response of the Provisional Government was to dispatch its leader – and most charismatic speaker – to the front. Alexander Kerensky, whom many described as a mesmerizing orator, thus spent a large part of his short time as head of government travelling the front trying to shore up a collapsing army.[17] This stratagem produced a deceptive result. Any sector of the front that Kerensky visited would experience a return to order and military effectiveness. The improvement however was ephemeral. Once the uplifting effect of the leader's personal presence wore off, the underlying conditions would again prevail. The long-term truth – that the Russian army's morale was smashed – was not altered by the charismatic influence exerted by Kerensky on his exhausting tours. Emergency deployment of charisma could not rescue an institution eroded as badly as the Russian army in 1917. The situation prevailing in the SA by autumn 1932 resembled that in other military organizations at times of sagging morale. Travelling through their districts and calling in the Party's best speakers to rally dejected men, SA officers could temporarily restore a semblance of order, but such measures could not remedy a systemic crisis. Conditions by autumn 1932 were beyond the ability of the Nazis' personal style to repair. The coherence of the organization was in jeopardy, and SA leaders, relying on make-work and charisma, were doing precisely what history showed commanders to have done when morale had passed the point of resuscitation.

A police situation report from Nürnberg suggested that the marching and drill regimen, intended by SA leaders to lift morale, in fact reached only skin-deep:

> [In spite of] the lack of discipline, rebellions, and disintegration of the Franconian SA, one can see in the public appearance . . . that the discipline and subordination are perfect. But a strong dissatisfaction exists in the SA . . . at the present time.[18]

Drills and marching improved appearances, but they did not cure the dissatisfaction that had taken hold by the last months of 1932. Scrutiny of the organization raised doubts whether the SA could remain a vital force much longer.

The situation of the Nazi movement in national politics made the SA leaders' task of keeping their units together all the more difficult. The impasse reached after the July Reichstag election in particular contributed to SA discontent. One hope had brightened the unsatisfying outcome of the election. The NSDAP's parliamentary fraction – now representing a plurality of the electorate – gave the Party a bargaining chip that might earn it a role in a new cabinet. Expectation that a decade of electoral combat had finally paid off thus momentarily raised spirits. The weeks immediately

following the election, however, defeated whatever expectation had arisen. Negotiations between Hitler and members of the Hindenburg cabinet failed to produce an agreement acceptable to the former, and on August 13, the talks fell apart with the two parties exchanging charges of unreasonableness and double-cross. Leaving his audience with the president in a mood of "icy . . . opposition," Hitler had not only failed to bring home a victory for his Party, but also probably cost himself support amidst the general electorate. Hitler, in his talks with Hindenburg, had refused to renew his guarantee to acquiesce in the Papen cabinet, a guarantee first issued in June in return for Papen's lifting of the SA-*Verbot*. The reversal earned the Nazis widespread criticism. Many Germans seem to have taken the view that Hitler had conducted himself disrespectfully toward the president, and, moreover, it was widely felt that the Nazi leader had failed in a patriotic duty when he ignored Hindenburg's request to support the cabinet.[19] Doubts were raised in the collective mind of the general public whether the Nazis could be trusted to use their new plurality in responsible fashion.

At least until another general election, Hitler did not have to worry about concern in the general public over how he spent Nazi political capital. But Nazi activists also had doubts about the Führer's failure to create a new government, and these he could not ignore even for a moment. The SA was in fact dangerously displeased. Goebbels described the scene in Party headquarters as Nazi leaders worried that the collapse of cabinet-forming talks would cripple the *Sturmabteilung*: "[The SA leaders'] task is the most difficult. Who knows if their units will be able to hold together. . . . The SA chief of staff [Röhm] stays with us for a long time. He is extremely worried about the SA."[20] The September morale reports confirmed that Röhm had reason to worry. From Hamburg it was reported that the failure to win a national majority on July 31 precipitated "a sinking of confidence," but that the worse crisis of morale struck on August 12, when the stormtroopers learned that "Hitler will not become RK [*Reichskanzler*]." *Untergruppe* Lower Silesia (Liegnitz) reported that "disappointment on 14 August" sprung from Hitler's failure to form a cabinet.[21] It was reported from Stettin as well that the "unrealized seizure of power after the election" had caused "disillusionment."

However much the political setbacks of August disillusioned the stormtroopers, worse was to come. The Nazis failed to prevent Papen from dissolving the Reichstag on September 12, and this presented the unfavorable prospect of a new national election. Voting was set for November 6. Goebbels wrote despairingly:

> Now we are in for elections again! One sometimes feels this sort of thing is going on forever. . . . Our adversaries count on our losing morale, and getting tired out. But we know this and will not oblige them. We would be lost and all our work would have been in vain if we gave in now . . . even if the struggle should seem hopeless.[22]

The campaign in the weeks leading up to the November vote, despite Goebbels' plea, began to wear on the tattered movement. Chronic fiscal crisis left the Party machine hamstrung, confirming the stormtroopers' complaints about empty coffers.

A sense of moral fatigue gripped the Nazi movement. In the middle of October, Goebbels complained, "Money is extraordinarily difficult to obtain," and his complaints about the sorry fiscal condition continued to the eve of the election.[23] The pressures of running a national election campaign amidst seemingly hopeless circumstances took its toll on the Party leaders, as well as on their followers. Goebbels wrote at the end of October: "The organization has . . . become . . . on edge through these everlasting elections. It is as jaded as a battalion which has been too long in the trenches, and just as nervy. The numerous difficulties are wearing me out."[24] Kurt Ludecke, a Party functionary, described an encounter with Hitler, after a Hitler Youth rally held in Potsdam shortly before the November election:

> As we stepped into the railway carriage, Brückner, Hitler's adjutant, blocked the way: "Leave him alone," he said. "The man's played out." He was sitting in the corner of the compartment, utterly spent. Hitler motioned weakly to us to come in. He looked for a second into my eyes, clasped my hand feebly, and I left.[25]

Repeated elections followed by repeated deferrals of power exacted a toll on the Nazi movement, exempting, if these reports are taken on face value, neither storm-trooper ranks nor the highest levels of Party leadership.

To be sure, some reports of autumn despair, written later by Nazi leaders and functionaries, may well have been crafted for effect. The high-blown rhetoric of the movement typically attributed providential significance to any forward step. How much more dramatic, the eventual establishment of the Third Reich, if, on the threshold of its achievement, enemies and reversals still pressed in from all sides. The first-person accounts of Nazis, notwithstanding the propaganda slant, still seem useful enough. For one thing, they point in the same direction. Adding to the probative value of this internal consistency, Nazi sources *not* intended for public consumption, along with extramural sources such as police *Lageberichte*, also paint a picture of defeated expectation and depressed morale after the November 1932 national polls. The "played out" demeanour of the Nazi leader in a rail car very much appears accurately to have summated a wider fact.

General circumstances – especially low morale and financial impasse – had boded ill in advance for the November 6 election campaign. Specific decisions by Party leaders seem to have made matters worse still. Complicating the road ahead, the Nazis decided to join a strike of Berlin transport workers. Initiated by the KPD, the transport strike seemed to many a litmus test for socialist credentials. The NSDAP aimed in the upcoming election to capture segments of the left-wing vote that had traditionally gone to the SPD or KPD, and also to retain those on the left whose votes it had already once received. Nazi leaders judged that throwing the weight of the NSDAP behind the transport workers was the way to do this. It was clear enough that labour unrest might alienate middle class voters, but the Party put risks aside and joined the strike.

The gamble backfired. Goebbels reported on November 2, "The entire press is furious with us and calls it Bolshevism."[26] While alienating many conservative

voters, the Nazis' tactical alliance with the communists also seems utterly to have failed to seize any of the KPD constituency. In fact, the biggest winners in the November 6 election were the communists themselves. The KPD share in the national vote rose from 14.3 percent to 16.9 percent, augmenting the KPD Reichstag delegation by eleven seats. This increase gave the communists a hundred seats total – a number exceeded only by the NSDAP and SPD. The second biggest winner was the ultra-conservative DNVP. Attractive to certain Germans in the upper and middle classes, the DNVP evidently picked up right-wing voters whom the transport strike had alienated from the National Socialists. Losing thirty-four seats, the Nazis suffered their first electoral reversal since September 1930. They obtained no identifiable gain from the ill-conceived courtship of left-wing voters and lost some of their former stalwarts (see Table 3). The Hitler movement's boldest foray into proletarian politics had been a two-way failure.

NSDAP propagandists scrambled to patch up the damage done by the election, but mere words to the contrary could not alter the fact that crisis had befallen the Party. Following the November vote, the Nazis grasped onto any vaguely successful state or local election as an augury of national triumph, but Landtag pluralities were a far cry from the absolute power so long promised. In some federal states, the NSDAP was not even achieving the modest successes that its leaders needed as grist for the propaganda mill. At more than one level, the Party was paralleling its national trend and losing electoral ground. The Nazi press found itself defending spurious claims of victory against very real reports of Nazi decline:

> The journal lies! It is fraudulently asserted by Mosse and Ullstein [the prominent pro-republican press houses] that we National Socialists suffered a "catastrophic defeat" in the election in Thuringia. This is not true! The . . . calculations and the numbers alone tell another story. Despite the scanty voter turn-out, the suffering people of Thuringia were once again resolutely determined, and their activist part professed its faith in Hitler. The electoral result requires that ultimately the rudder must be turned about in the Reich, too. Adolf Hitler must achieve power![27]

Table 3 Reichstag elections of 1932

	July 31		*November 6*	
Parties	*Share of vote (%)*	*Parliamentary seats*	*Share of vote (%)*	*Parliamentary seats*
NSDAP	37.3	230	33.1	196
KPD	14.3	89	16.9	100
DNVP	5.9	37	8.3	51
SPD	21.6	133	20.4	121

Source: data adapted from A. Milatz, *Wähler und Wahlen in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1965) 99–114.

In fact, the Thuringian local elections to which Goebbels referred, held on December 3, 1932, were a disaster for the NSDAP. The state-wide election for the Thuringian Landtag of July 31 had given the Nazis 42.5 percent of the vote; the December 3 local elections (*Gemeindewahlen*) cut the Nazi share in many places virtually in half. Other local elections – in Saxony, Lübeck, and Bremen – confirmed that the electoral tide was turning against the NSDAP.[28] The pleas and denials of Goebbels and other Party functionaries were intended to salvage success out of the rubble of November's electoral collapse, but facts overwhelmed the propaganda. The Nazi juggernaut, having shown signs since the summer of stalling, had finally been reversed.

The Nazi electoral collapse was just part of the crisis escalating within the movement on the eve of the seizure of power. After November 6, like after July 31, Hitler declined access to the national cabinet when leaders of the Republic offered him terms less than he desired. Franz von Papen negotiated with the Nazi Führer on November 13, offering Hitler the vice-chancellor's portfolio, but, by November 16, Hitler had adamantly rejected Papen's offer.[29] Nothing short of the chancellorship would suffice. The presidential circle as yet unready to award the Nazis such a prize, the Party could not shore itself up with the patronage power which participation in government would purchase. Through two long seasons of campaigning, Nazi leaders had kept their followers in line with promises of the fruits of victory. With the end of the year approaching, however, the NSDAP still had nothing tangible to offer. The impatient activist ranks clamored more than ever for something more than promises, but the resources that alone could satisfy them still lay out of reach. The campaigns of July and November had delivered none of the material gains that, as time wore on, Nazism could not maintain cohesion without.

And the campaigns cost money. The fiscal depletion noted before November 6 was more severe in the election aftermath. Goebbels wrote on November 11: "Receive a report on the financial situation of the Berlin organization. It is hopeless. Nothing but debts and obligations, together with the complete impossibility of obtaining any reasonable sum of money after this defeat." A month later, Goebbels could report only the same: "The financial situation of the *Gau* Berlin is hopeless." The dearth of finances became so acute that on December 22 Goebbels decided that the salaries of Party functionaries must be reduced: "We must cut down the salaries of our *Gauleiters*, as otherwise we cannot manage to make shift with our finances."[30] In view of the existing state of morale in the movement, lowering salaries of the *Gauleiters* was dangerous. Party functionaries were already angry at denial of the rewards of office. Now they faced pay cuts. The scope of the financial crisis however made austerity a necessity, not a choice.

The cumulative effect of lost elections, Party debt, and failed cabinet politicking finally manifested itself in open revolt. The central personality in the long-simmering crisis was Gregor Straßer. A Munich pharmacist, Straßer was the renowned leader of the left – or "Straßer" – wing of the Nazi Party. One insider called him "the great adversary of Hitler in the NSDAP."[31] Seemingly sincere in his dedication to socialist principles, Straßer despaired of Hitler's power politics. The position that the Party had taken since the July election had brought the Nazis no

closer to their goals and Germany no closer to a resolution of its political and economic depression. Straßer expressed the view from early August that the NSDAP should play a constructive role in parliamentary proceedings and form a coalition with the trade unions and Social Democrats. Straßer's vision for a united front of all left-wing forces was well known, and General von Schleicher soon focused on the leftist Nazi as the possible linchpin of an ambitious scheme. The general believed that Straßer commanded sufficient following to detach the left wing of the NSDAP from Hitler. With that constituency in hand, Schleicher and Straßer could form a coalition with trade unions and possibly parts of the SPD. Under the guidance of Schleicher himself, such a coalition would then restore firm government to the country.[32]

Schleicher set the stage for his alliance with Straßer by unseating the Papen cabinet. On December 1, Papen advised President Hindenburg of his intention to replace the Weimar constitution with the authoritarian "New State" system. Hindenburg accepted Papen's plan, but Schleicher opposed it on the grounds that it would be illegal to suspend and replace the constitution without a national assembly and that the "New State" would precipitate a civil war. Most importantly, Schleicher informed the president and chancellor that he could not guarantee loyalty of the army in the event of revolution. The general then explained his own plan to the presidential circle. Schleicher assured that, by negotiating with Gregor Straßer, he could obtain at least sixty NSDAP Reichstag deputies. With these as a base, he and Straßer would proceed to assemble the envisioned pan-left coalition. The coalition would make a parliamentary majority by a healthy margin, and it would free Hindenburg from the onus of ruling under the prerogatives of Article 48.

Having staked the future of his cabinet on the "New State" and a new constitution, and realizing that he had little chance of generating any new political initiative in the wake of the failed effort to restructure the Republic, Papen resigned as chancellor. Though in its aristocratic credentials and authoritarian ambitions the Papen cabinet made a dubious bulwark for the Republic, its leader at least had enjoyed good personal rapport with the president. That cabinet now gave way to a general widely reported to be disfavored by the aging Hindenburg and, at least as much as Papen, given to overreaching his own political grasp. Schleicher became chancellor on December 2. The same week, Schleicher began talks with Gregor Straßer. Straßer expressed willingness to join in Schleicher's scheme, especially after the Nazis' failure in the Thuringian local elections on December 3. It must have seemed to Straßer – and to other Nazis as well – that Hitler had already let pass the Nazis' best chance for participation in government, and any further delay would simply weaken the bargaining position of the NSDAP all the more. There emerged at the high levels of the Party a battle between Hitler's all-or-nothing philosophy and Straßer's more moderate belief that the NSDAP should conduct itself as a responsible national party and help form a coalition cabinet. On December 8, this battle became a national sensation: Gregor Straßer, rather than engage in a protracted struggle against Hitler, announced his resignation from the Party.[33]

The Straßer resignation rocked the Party to its foundations. A large fraction of the activist constituency admired Straßer, and the leaders of National Socialism feared

wholesale desertion in the wake of his departure. At the Hotel Kaiserhof, Hitler's Berlin base, Goebbels recorded desperation:

> In the evening the Leader comes to us. It is difficult to be cheerful. We are all rather downcast, in view of the danger of the whole Party falling to pieces and all our work being in vain. We are confronted with the great test. . . . Phone call from Ley [chief of the Nazi labor unions]. The situation in the Party is getting worse from hour to hour. The leader must immediately return to the Kaiserhof. . . . Treachery, treachery, treachery! For hours the Leader paces up and down the room in the hotel. Suddenly he stops and says: "If the Party once falls to pieces, I shall shoot myself without more ado!"[34]

Gregor Straßer was viewed as commanding a constituency sufficient to make his departure a mortal threat to Nazism. If Straßer were to set up an opposition bloc outside the Party, the projected loss of NSDAP rank-and-file would have been debilitating. Recognizing this, Hitler, not for the last time in his career, promised to go down with the sinking Nazi ship.

The importance of Gregor Straßer as the recognized leader of a large Nazi faction gave Hitler and Goebbels reason to apprehend danger in Straßer's resignation, but Straßer's personal power and position alone do not explain the Nazi leaders' despair in reaction to his departure. Hitler and Goebbels despaired upon Straßer's resignation not solely because they feared losing that figure's particular group of followers. The resignation also threatened to bring to a head an ongoing process of desertion and defection which had begun at the beginning of autumn and showed no sign of letting up in the year ahead. The inauspicious climate in which the resignation took place multiplied its impact on the morale of Party leaders, and in turn, the resignation threatened to worsen the specific trends that created that climate.

The Straßer resignation was only the latest and most sensational manifestation of a crisis that had been mounting since August. Individual and, as the autumn wore on, mass desertions were eroding the general Nazi constituency and, perhaps more importantly, the activist core. Evidence from numerous sources suggests that the flight of its activists had begun to threaten the very structure and cohesion of the National Socialist movement. Of particular note are the profusion of reports and anecdotal accounts that prominent Nazis and individual rank-and-file activists were deserting the movement. More inauspicious than mere desertion, some deserters appear to have been joining the Nazis' enemies. A police situation report from Plauen, a small industrial city in southwestern Saxony, described one such defection. The police observer, reporting to the Reichs Ministry of Interior, indicated that a 29-year-old SS-man named Erich Richter had quit the NSDAP and joined the Communist Party. "Still dressed in his SS-uniform," Richter addressed a KPD rally on November 25 at Plauen. The defector explained that "[the NSDAP] could never represent the rights of the workers."[35] Another police report from Plauen cited the publicized abandonment of Nazism by one Franz Beer, the 55-year-old proprietor of a cement block company. Beer had run in municipal elections on the NSDAP list – at the top of the list, moreover – only weeks before he finally gave up on National Socialism.[36]

A theme among prominent individual deserters was that they retained personal faith in Hitler but could no longer countenance a movement they perceived as corrupt, weighted down by disreputable characters, and in decline. Wilhelm Stegmann, the leader of *Gruppe* Franken, pulled his formation out of the SA to form an independent "*Freikorps* Franken." It has been noted that Stegmann's defection was more a protest against Julius Streicher than Hitler.[37] The *Deutsche Zeitung* on October 23 carried "A letter to Hitler" from the president of the Bremen city government and member of the city parliament. Upset over Hitler's break with the conservative right and over corruption in the movement, Dr. Backhaus announced his resignation from the NSDAP, even as he continued to express respect for the Nazi leader.[38]

Defectors, whether or not they professed to admire Hitler, received little mercy from the National Socialist media. *Der Angriff* responded to the Backhaus letter the day after its publication. The denunciations were characteristically sarcastic and *ad hominem*. "He wished," the Nazi editorialists wrote, "brotherly unity with the Gentlemen's Club."[39] Subsequent articles elsewhere in the Nazi press identified Backhaus as Jewish or having Jewish ties and alleged that he had been an opportunist from the start, joining the NSDAP only after the September 14, 1930 electoral breakthrough.[40] Racist invective, denying that a loss occurred, and characterizing losses as victories were forming a familiar Nazi pattern. Distinguished members of the movement were beginning to abandon Nazism, so the Nazi press applauded the development as a purge of unwanted elements. Blustery dismissal of evidence of crisis notwithstanding, Goebbels and other members of the inner circle now communicated a sense of desolation. Keeping up appearances was increasingly difficult.

Another police report gave evidence of individual desertions. From Hannover, a report was conveyed to the Prussian Ministry of the Interior and to the national Ministry of the Interior on November 9. Apparently, a circle of former Nazis had established a "Fighting Organization of Revolutionary National Socialists" (*Kampfgemeinschaft revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten*). One of the deserters had served as an SA *Sturmführer*, until a feud with a *Gauleiter* precipitated his withdrawal from the movement. Another member of the "oppositional circle," as the police referred to it, had been a Hitler Youth leader and an *Ortsgruppen* leader in Hannover. Finally, one Walter Hartrich, a former SA-man – the police did not specify his rank – worked for the Otto-Straßer Group in Hannover, and his activities were reported to include recruiting current SA-men to defect from the Nazi movement.[41] The evidence reflects that individual Nazis had grown disaffected with a movement that had come to a standstill in the summer and now was in retreat.

The number and geographic dispersal of accounts seem to indicate that individual desertions and defections were not an anomaly but a trend. Reports proliferated in autumn 1932 that the Nazi Party was dissolving. Not limited to isolated police or media sources, such reports came in from around the country. As early as late summer, police observers in Stettin noted severe disaffection in the SA ranks of that Baltic city. The report cited a meeting among SA-men on August 25, at which "a mass fleeing from the SA . . . is said to have been discussed." A "notable unrest" had permeated the SA in Stettin, and "manifestations of fermentation" had spread to subordinate SA officers, dissatisfied with "the position of the higher leaders." The

disaffected stormtroopers even accused their leaders of "having made common cause with the adversaries of the movement."[42] Reports from the press and police indicated exodus from the Nazi Party in general and from the SA in particular – an outflow gaining strength since the end of summer. An article in the September 23 *Tägliche Rundschau* reported that splinter groups had separated themselves from the SA throughout Germany. It cited the establishment by deserting SA-men in Berlin of a "German Socialist Workers' Party" and the rise in Hamburg of a "Popular Socialist Freedom Movement" containing similar elements. Oldenburg SA defectors, the journal reported, called themselves the "German Revolutionary Freedom Party." Fermentation within SA ranks, the article added, engendered such worry among SA leaders that they expelled masses of stormtroopers whom they did not deem trustworthy.[43]

Desertions seem to have multiplied after the Nazi setbacks in the November Reichstag election and subsequent local elections. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* reported on December 18 that the SA in Hesse-Darmstadt suffered serious losses through desertion. In excess of 1,600 men left over the course of a month, while over the same time span merely 220 new recruits entered the ranks. Among the defectors, it was reported, were a *Gauleiter* (named Lenz), a *Standarte* leader, and the Hessean *Untergruppe* staff leader.[44] The *Vossische Zeitung* printed an article on November 22 indicating that a full scale revolt had broken out at the SA Leadership School in Schwerin at Bad Steuer am Plauer See (the school was the Mecklenburg SA training center). Bankruptcy of the *Gau* in Hannover, according to a December 17 report in *Vorwärts*, precipitated a housing crisis and, later, revolt of an SA garrison. And in Kassel, misappropriation of *Winterhilfe* funds by a *Sturmbannführer* triggered a mass flight of SA-men in the middle of December, according, separately, to the *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vorwärts*.[45]

If desertion from the Nazi movement had in truth reached the proportions described by the press and police, then it stands to reason that individual Nazi formations would have begun disintegrating. A flurry of reports indicated that National Socialist groups were indeed finding it impossible to continue operating in any meaningful way. The *Berliner Tageblatt* had reported as early as August 25 that whole SA units in Hamburg were dissolving into thin air, as their members went over to either communist cells or rival "national socialist" groups. "In the worker district Barmbeck in Hamburg, strong opposition groups, particularly of the SA, have formed themselves," the *Tageblatt* reported. In Insterburg, East Prussia, *Der Jungdeutsche* reported on October 22 that an entire Nazi *Ortsgruppe* had left the NSDAP, on the urging of its chief, a former propaganda leader. The Insterburg defection, the paper described, took place after a comical incident involving a Nazi assembly in the Insterberg public hall. Evidently, the errant propaganda chief, one Neumann, concealed himself in an airshaft leading to the public hall in which the Nazi gathering was taking place. From his echoing perch, Neumann proceeded to disrupt the assembly with shouts of "Help Hitler!" Though with less colorful detail, *Demokratischer Zeitungsdienst* noted a similar mass defection in the Landkreis Delitzsch, where around October 22 an entire Nazi *Ortsgruppe* dissolved.[46]

The press was not the sole observer reporting Nazi dissolution. A situation report

from the provincial president of East Prussia in Königsberg reported crisis among SA *Sturms*. Strife there in the local SA appears to have led to open brawls between the SA-men and their leaders. Friction became so severe in two parts of the city, Steindamm and Sackheim, that it could no longer be said that *Sturms* as such existed. "The members [of the riotous *Sturms*]," the report noted, "do not show up anymore to be on duty, and they do not make any secret of their disaffection from the leader." Two of the Königsberger *Sturms*, the police concluded, had effectively ceased to exist.[47]

The erosion of the SA was not confined to any one part of Germany, nor did it show any signs of reversing itself as 1932 drew to a close and the new year began. The decline was headlong and accelerating, and even in January 1933, when the NSDAP stood only weeks from gaining power, deterioration continued unabated. Non-Nazi press reports of a collapsing SA were ubiquitous by the last month of the Republic. Under titles such as "*Schwerer Konflikt in der SA*" and "*Revolte in der fränkischen SA: Blutiger Kampf um das Nürnberger Hitler-Haus*," the press painted a picture of Nazis in despair.[48] The *Tägliche Rundschau* reported an SA revolt in Franconia on January 12, and one week later, the *Vossische Zeitung* reported that the dissolution of the Franconian SA was complete. Other articles throughout the month of January reported similar dissolutions in the Ruhr, Kassel, and elsewhere.[49] An official source, the Braunschweig police, again confirmed the impression conveyed by the press. In a secret situation report to the Ministry of the Interior dated January 15, 1933, the police indicated that oppositional cells of Revolutionary National Socialists were active and SA units were dissolving.[50]

Nazi leadership responded to the crisis of late 1932 in the usual manner. They denied anything was wrong. The police in Dresden noted by October 21, 1932 that the Nazis had added a special agency to their regional headquarters: a "warding off of lies section" (*Lügenabwehrstelle*). This office, the police reported, was a special adjunct to the Nazi staff and had the sole purpose of rebutting attacks by other parties and the press.[51] The Nazi propaganda mechanism remained agile and aggressive, but the money to keep that machine running was gone, and the public sentiment to produce the election results that alone could lend reality to the Nazi message of triumph was diminishing. Characterizing truthful reports of Nazi crisis as lies was the only response available now that reality so disfavoured the movement. "The Red Lies Set Right: our electoral victory on the sixth of November is the Victory of the Awakened Proletariat!" trumpeted the *Völkischer Beobachter* on November 5 – rebutting communist predictions of Nazi electoral failure in proletarian districts. In response to reports in *Vorwärts* on December 17 that an SA garrison in Hannover had dissolved, *Der Angriff* plastered its front page on December 30 with the words, "They lie, they lie!"[52] If more frantic than usual, it was nevertheless the archetypal Nazi reaction to crisis. But crisis now went uninterrupted by true success. Nazi propaganda after November 6 no longer heralded victories for Germany and the movement. It issued a stream of denials.

The resignation of Gregor Straßer on December 8, then, was a pointed blow in the midst of general malaise. The shock that it caused Nazi leadership can only be understood in the context of overall disintegration that prevailed during the final

months before the *Machtergreifung*. Hitler and his henchmen probably would not have despaired at the loss of one person, even if an important figure in the movement. The loss of Gregor Straßer however accentuated a trend which had begun months before his resignation – and which gave no signs of improving after December 8.

Hitler's response to the crisis after Straßer's resignation was twofold. First, he insisted, against the facts, that the Nazi movement continued on the ascent; and, second, he endeavored to generate a real sign of electoral recovery.

From mid-December, Hitler addressed a series of closed meetings of Party functionaries in Dresden, Leipzig, and Chemnitz. Police agents recorded the speech he delivered at one of those meetings. It epitomized the Nazi leader's portrayal of events as continuing to favour the NSDAP:

> The Party has always come out from every test stronger. If one thinks that the Party has suffered a setback in the last year of struggle, then one states that one can accuse [the NSDAP] of only one thing: to have been unwilling to join a government. The other parties needed the name, the strength, and the power of the NSDAP. They could have it, but the NSDAP demands power, step by step. The current government, the government without a people [the Schleicher cabinet] is similar to a besieged fortress. Surely, the NSDAP has lost thirty seats [in the November 6 Reichstag election], but the adversaries, meanwhile, have lost two governments [the Brüning cabinet and the Papen cabinet]. The new cabinet will not last long. The NSDAP will gain back the thirty seats, for our pool of potential recruits exceeds that of the adversary. On January 2, the truce is over, and on January 3, the NSDAP will be back in the battle.[53]

Hitler downplayed electoral reversal and steered Party attention toward other indicators of the political situation.

Those reversals that simply could not be ignored Hitler confidently assured would soon be repaired. The second prong to Hitler's crisis strategy therefore was to produce an actual election win. He doubtless recognized that denials of manifest reversal would begin to ring hollow without some event to suggest that the Nazi campaign machine had recovered momentum. With the goal of securing an outward sign of success, the Nazis thus directed every ounce of their remaining resources to a single Landtag election. Franz von Papen rightly described the Principality of Lippe-Detmold as "a small and unimportant area [where] . . . the vote would normally have been without significance."[54] But upon the Lippe-Detmold race of January 15, 1933, the Nazis were staking their future. The NSDAP brought its entire campaign mechanism to bear on the small north German state, and, consequently, the 90,000 voters of Lippe-Detmold experienced a degree of saturation campaigning unlike any which even the NSDAP had delivered upon a constituency before. Headquartering themselves at the castle of a local baron, von Oeynhausen, the Nazis unleashed their full roster of orators and personalities on the tiny state for a week of campaigning.[55]

The result of the election was unimpressive. The Nazis won 39.5 percent of the vote, in what Joachim Fest wrote should have been viewed at best as a "marginal

event."[56] Indeed, though the NSDAP received more of the Lippe vote on January 15 than it had in the Reichstag polling there on November 6, the Landtag results still did not match the Lippe Nazi vote of July 31.[57] The Nazi propaganda mechanism, however, strained to compensate for shortcomings in the election results. The National Socialist press and Party spokesmen characterized the Lippe election as a great victory. Not all Germans saw through the ruse. To be sure, some recognized it as "a cheap propaganda triumph of no real significance."[58] President Hindenburg himself and many others who should have known better however were impressed with the alleged Nazi revival at the polls.[59] How long appearances could have been maintained must be left to conjecture. Less than three weeks later, Hitler was chancellor, and the days of parliamentary crisis ended in Nazi victory. Adolf Hitler became chancellor on January 30, 1933 amidst outright dissolution in his movement. The Nazi *Machtergreifung* did not happen at the apex of an inexorable trajectory but at a moment of potentially terminal crisis.

Conclusion

Less than a month after the *Machtergreifung*, Adolf Hitler attributed the success of National Socialism to the failure of the Weimar Republic. "If those who have been in power during the last fourteen years," he said, "had not governed so unspeakably badly, this development would never have been possible. We are the result of the distress for which the others are responsible."[1] Hitler indeed correctly identified one aspect of his rise to power. The Nazi Party, if it had never broken out of the confines of the *völkisch* fringe, would never have been considered a viable basis for a national cabinet. Though the eccentric ultra-right remained an indispensable part of the activist core of the movement, Nazism from 1930 onwards recruited widely from German society. Broadened support enabled the Party to obtain its first nation-wide plurality in July 1932 and to retain it, albeit at diminished level, in November. Holding first place in parliament made Hitler a candidate for appointment as *Reichskanzler*, and it was the "distress" to which the Nazi Führer alluded that drove over a third of the electorate to vote NSDAP.

Attributing the Hitler chancellorship to Nazi success at the polls confronts however a pair of paradoxes. First, Hitler, unlike every chancellor between Philipp Scheidemann and Heinrich Brüning, did not ride to cabinet leadership by election and majority coalition. The Hitler cabinet, though shored up by representation in parliament greater than any of his three immediate predecessors, was a presidential cabinet nonetheless. Moreover, unlike the presidential cabinet of Brüning that had enjoyed the acquiescence of a large Reichstag bloc, Hitler's NSDAP-DNVP government aroused parliamentary opposition from almost every quarter. Second, the electoral advance that put Hitler in the running for chancellorship had essentially ceased by the end of 1932. In fact, in some *Länder* and localities and, most importantly, at the national level, it had been reversed. Thus, though there was an undeniable electoral impetus behind the *Machtergreifung*, the final step to a Nazi cabinet required the counter-majoritarian institution of presidential appointment and took place against the flow of a manifest decline in popular support.

These paradoxes are not mere curiosities. They are the critical factors surrounding Hitler's assumption of the chancellorship. Accordingly, the historian must scrutinize the immediate background to the events of January 1933. The month leading to Hitler's appointment as chancellor and the machinations of the people surrounding the *Reichs* president now, thanks to Turner, can be understood much

better than before.[2] It has been the aim of the preceding chapters to describe in more detail the condition of Hitler's movement as it approached the fateful hour of the Republic. In particular, it has been attempted here to paint a picture of the dissent and disintegration that were overtaking the *Sturmabteilung*, the most volatile part of the Nazi movement, and that threatened to undermine Hitler as a political force.

Factors in Germany at large and within the movement more narrowly began in 1932 to interact in ways deleterious to Hitler. For one, economic improvement changed voters' attitude. The 1932 upturn in economic fortunes has been documented well. Historians have argued whether Weimar Germany's political and economic woes stemmed from the immediate antecedents to the Third Reich – the presidential cabinets of Brüning, Papen, and Schleicher – or from an entire decade of developments.[3] Near consensus prevails, however, that the unemployment that befell Germany after 1929 radicalized German politics, and that the most significant manifestation of that radicalization was the rise of the NSDAP.[4] The de-radicalization or recentering of politics may have been a slower process, but evidence suggests the documented improvement in economic indicators by autumn 1932 already had set it in train. The atmosphere that had suited the Nazis best had been one of external emergency – and economic recovery was dispersing the clouds over the German economic outlook.

Within the movement, another dynamic was at play. Despite promises of victory at the polls, Nazi party leaders had yet to deliver their radical activists a Nazi State. Deferral of power exacted a growing toll. A prolonged season of election campaigns drained finances, stripping party leaders of the cash to induce good behavior, while frustration in SA ranks grew over the continued outsider status of the movement. SA violence increased commensurately. Earlier SA outbursts such as the Stennes revolt – culmination of 1930–1931 Berlin SA–Party frictions – demonstrated the damaging impact of public displays of indiscipline. The Potempa murder, only hours after entry into force of anti-terrorism decrees that most Germans would have assumed aimed to quell communist agitation, well cast doubt on the Nazi assertion that it was their party to which Germany ought turn for renewed stability.[5] Declining general support delayed power; delayed power heightened SA radicalism; and heightened SA radicalism forced even further declines in popular support.

Deferral of power caused trouble within the SA – and trouble within the SA made the SA more troublesome for the Movement. But deferral of power was not the only factor causing trouble in the SA. The economic upturn changed the complexion of the activist core. Economic woes had driven men into the ranks. Unemployment has been correctly termed the "decisive impetus" behind enlistment in the *Sturmabteilung*.[6] Conversely, an improvement in the economy would be expected to have subtracted from the impetus to join the Nazi movement.[7] The July 31, 1932 Reichstag election, which gave the Nazis their best returns before the *Machtergreifung*, took place at a time when 38.7 percent of the labor force in consumer goods industries was unemployed. This level of unemployment marked a plateau. The January 1932 unemployment figures in the consumer economy had been roughly the same (37.3 percent), and there had been only slight fluctuations in between. However, by the end of October – the eve of the November 6 Reichstag election –

unemployment in the consumer goods sector had registered its first appreciable drop since the beginning of the economic crisis. Unemployment stood at 35.3 percent at the end of October, and it continued to drop, reaching 34.9 percent by the end of November. This was the lowest unemployment level in twelve months.[8] The capacity of the Nazi Party to win votes reached its limit at the same time unemployment reached its height. When unemployment took its first downturn in a year, the NSDAP suffered at the polls. (See Table 3.) Casual "members" of the movement – people who simply voted NSDAP and likely would not have called themselves Nazis – began to withdraw their support. Fewer people prone to activism joined. And, as comparative moderates lost interest, the residuum of Nazis included an ever-larger proportion of fanatics and radicals. Thus, just as the public at large was taking on a somewhat softer edge, the Nazi core was becoming even less compromising. Alienation of potential voters was inevitable. Economic improvement dried up the well for Nazi support, and many of the most visible remaining activists detracted from Nazi appeal.

Thomas Childers' careful assessment of unemployment and Nazi voting patterns also suggests a movement toward a more radically Nazi constituency. Childers found that Nazi "solicitation of the middle-class vote in a period of deepening social conflict may have substantially reduced its potential appeal to dissatisfied workers in the major industrial and mining sectors of the economy."[9] Working class support for the Nazis in fact was negatively correlated to unemployment in Childers' research. The working class segment that remained indeed increasingly must have been an inveterate Nazi core.

When the electoral position of Nazism began to erode on and after November 6, the simmering crisis in the movement passed the boiling point. As early as September 1932, SA leaders reported that their task of buoying up morale was becoming increasingly difficult, bordering on fruitless. The stormtrooper officer corps resorted to stopgap measures, principally busy work and charismatic exhortation. The financial disposition of the SA as well as of the Party proper was abysmal. Personal and institutional indebtedness left the movement hamstrung, and, by Nazi leaders' own testimony, the NSDAP was hardly poised for success on the eve of the November 6 election. Once the worst expectations proved correct – the Nazis lost almost three dozen parliamentary seats – the movement began to splinter.[10] While the disappointment of July 31 sparked outbreaks of violence and long-time opponents of the "legal strategy" told Party leaders, "We told you so," the outright reversal of fortunes at the polls on November 6 precipitated another response. The activist ranks exhibited deflation of vigor as well as outbursts of opposition. The evidence suggests that enthusiasm for the Hitler movement was waning.

It was, then, in a general context of malaise that the Nazi Party confronted a string of specific crises at the end of 1932. Among the stormtroopers, desertion, the loss of activists to competing organizations, and amplified calls for a return to revolutionary action composed the overall situation. The string of specific crises began with a rash of failures in local elections. The Nazi electoral position reached its post-July nadir with major losses in the Thuringian *Gemeindewahlen* of December 3. The crisis at the polls, in turn, helped touch off one of the most damaging of the setbacks of 1932, the

desertion of Gregor Straßer. The despair that overcame Goebbels and other Nazi leaders in the immediate aftermath of Straßer's abandonment of the NSDAP is best understood in the context of ongoing crises plaguing Nazism. Electoral reversal and dissolution of whole SA units framed the loss and gave it more ominous import. And amidst all of these problems was the fact, completely outside Hitler's control, that the fuel for Nazi growth – economic despair – had at last begun to diminish.

While economic improvement and electoral setbacks promised a difficult future, internal problems could only have reduced the movement's resilience in the face of these unfavorable external conditions. A particularly difficult internal problem was the absorption of the SA in a morass of activities unrelated to the National Socialist cause. Stormtroopers aided Nazism when they presented themselves to the public in impressive parades and drills, but the preoccupation of the SA with purely military matters ran contrary to the expressed purpose of the organization. It distracted the SA from its role of political display, and it scared off potential NSDAP voters when it led to conduct disruptive of public order. Turning again to the role of the people surrounding President Hindenburg, it is worth inquiring whether their repeated bans on paramilitary activity did Hitler an unintended favor. Franklin L. Ford, who studied political violence extensively,[11] once suggested that the Papen government's crackdown on acts of political terror in August 1932 may have quelled behavior which, if gone much longer unchecked, would have fractured the Nazi movement and cost serious setback in NSDAP electoral standing.[12] Papen's August 9 decree was not the first time the Republic had taken measures that in their result well may have helped Hitler by containing the violent and disputatious Nazi core.[13] After the second round of presidential balloting in April, for example, police reportedly discovered plans for a stormtrooper revolt. Police intervention preempted what in all likelihood would have been a hopeless exercise capable only of antagonizing those Nazi voters who lay closer to the political center than the stormtroopers.[14] Such crackdowns accomplished something which Hitler needed to do – but could not. Hitler needed to prevent the stormtroopers from running amuck, but imposing restrictions risked arousing SA ire. The *Sturmabteilung* became ambivalent toward Party political officers when the "legal way" upon which they insisted failed to produce a Nazi State. SA ambivalence could readily have turned to hostility if Nazi leaders had themselves taken the initiative in disciplining the rowdy Party army. Chancellor von Papen and other authorities in the late Republic stepped in and did what the NSDAP itself could not.

Paramilitary activity also undermined Hitler by engendering a set of competing SA allegiances. The national army developed a certain rapport at least with individual stormtroopers, and this tugged the SA away from its Nazi affiliation. If in fact as some evidence suggests, General Schleicher was maneuvering to win stormtroopers over from the Nazi camp, then favorable SA–army relations posed an even greater threat to the movement: the drift of the *Sturmabteilung* toward the *Reichswehr* might have conspired with State action to divorce the SA from the NSDAP entirely.

The friendly ties which almost all SA leaders reported between their organizations and the army raises however an as yet unanswered question. The future of SA–army relations was not to follow the pattern of amity noted in so many of the

September 1932 morale reports. By the second year of the Nazi regime, the army threatened to withdraw its support from the government if Hitler failed to curb the SA. The SA reciprocated with public denunciations of the army. On the eve of the Röhm purge, Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist observed that "a dangerous state of tension [had] developed in the garrisons between [the army] and the local SA," and rumors circulated that the SA was planning a coup against the army.[15] How good relations as reported by the SA in September 1932 degenerated into enmity on the eve of the Night of the Long Knives demands more thorough examination.

The second diversion from their appointed role was the stormtroopers' cigarette sales campaign. The campaign sowed dissension and institutional conflict in stormtrooper ranks, and it sufficiently captured SA enthusiasm to begin overshadowing the organization's political function. Coercion in promoting *Sturm* brand cigarettes further underlined the drift from political purpose and even hinted at underworld tactics. In this connection, the cigarette sales campaign raises a most intriguing question: was the SA becoming a criminal organization in the general, in addition to the political, sense? Recent times have familiarized us with how organizations initially dedicated to a political cause can drift into a shadowy borderland between political violence and organized crime. From drug-dealing Protestant paramilitaries and the IRA in Ulster; to the Mafia-compromised Red Brigades in Italy; to kidnapping and extortion rackets of ANC splinter groups in South Africa, economic crime has been seen to sprout from organizations, the violent practices of which were at one time connected with a political agenda. Circumstantial evidence implies that the SA (or at least many of its urban sections) was assuming certain aspects of an organized criminal gang. An investigation of general criminality – *allgemeine Kriminalität* – would be a worthwhile project for scholars of Nazism and the *Machtergreifung*.[16]

Another source of internal crisis in the SA and Nazi movement was the contradiction between the Party's professed ideology and its actions. While scholarship since the early 1980s has rectified the prior neglect of Nazi ideology – Eberhard Jäckel contributed greatly in this regard – what toll tension between Nazi opportunism and Nazi ideals exacted from the movement has been little queried. Here I have argued that, however amorphous and intangible much of the Nazi canon may have been, the ideological tenets of National Socialism carried enough weight for many of Hitler's adherents that the Party's deviation from them precipitated resignations, protest, and dissent. The SA's animosity toward "big-shots," while perhaps a thin basis for a worldview, determined SA attitudes toward Party leaders such as the Nürnberg *Gauleiter* Julius Streicher. And when the stormtroopers' anti-big-shot principles were flouted by elegant Party officer uniforms or cavalier treatment of SA grievances, the stormtroopers became resentful and questioned their ties to the NSDAP.

Internal pressures, coupled with external reversals, cumulatively evidenced that the Nazi movement had entered a decline. Yet it was in the midst of decline that the Nazis seized – or, more precisely, were given – the entry into government on January 30, 1933 that they needed to survive. Few events as disastrous as Hitler's appointment to the chancellorship have hinged on the decisions of so few people. To

understand the choice made by President Hindenburg and his advisors in January 1933, it is imperative to understand how those individuals perceived the circumstances around them. It is in the task of reconstructing the perceptions of the people who made Hitler chancellor that the reports of numerous police respondents greatly assist us. The police – the eyes and ears of the republican authorities – conveyed the impression as autumn 1932 wore on that the NSDAP and its "storm section," if not doomed to extinction, were headed for a much-diminished position on the political landscape. The reports of SA leaders themselves suggested in September that a difficult season lay ahead for the Hitler movement. Once the final hour of the Republic began to toll in January 1933, Germany's leaders did not confront the NSDAP as an ascendant force. Rather, the evidence was almost unanimous that the Nazis were loosing ground and were, quite probably, anxious to strike a deal before they lost even more. The fanatic, last-ditch effort to turn the insignificant Lippe Landtag election into a signal of National Socialist victory, in its broader context, could only have shown the Nazi leaders' desperation.

Some have suggested that Nazi propaganda and traces of success such as Lippe fooled Hindenburg and his colleagues. The view holds that, convinced of the continuing vitality of the Nazi movement, the presidential circle gave in and conceded Hitler the prize he had held out for since first his Party had become a contender for the national cabinet.[17] But this thesis contradicts the evidence of Nazi decline reflected not only in the Nazis' own morale reports, but also in the intelligences communicated to the Republic's leaders by their own sources. Historians who study the role of intelligence have tended to focus, perhaps by predilection, on how information-gathering has influenced the conduct of wars.[18] The impact of intelligence on political decision outside the context of armed conflict has received far less attention. Yet the leaders of the Weimar Republic could draw upon a wealth of reports and analyses of the domestic situation, and the Nazi movement was a particular subject of surveillance. Perhaps the most remarkable thing illustrated by the police *Lageberichte* is that republican officialdom, in the last months before making Hitler chancellor, was receiving a steady stream of information that Nazism was failing. The police assembled hoards of carefully clipped newspaper articles; wrote summaries of secretly audited Nazi gatherings; and composed knowledgeable-sounding analyses of the Nazi situation. All of this added up to a gloomy forecast for Hitler and his followers. And, most critically, this information was meant to be relied upon by the people ruling Germany. We probably can never know the extent to which reports of Nazi decline contributed to the decisions of the leaders of the Republic. But there do exist grounds for speculation.

It has been suggested that the instatement of Hitler as head of government ironically was precipitated more by signs of Nazi faltering than by imaginings of Nazi strength. Two factors may have urged the Hindenburg circle to award office to what they knew to be a disintegrating NSDAP.

First, the Nazi movement may have appeared more susceptible to taming in its weakened condition. Kurt von Schleicher, Franz von Papen, Oscar von Hindenburg, Otto Meisner,[19] and Alfred Hugenberg may have assessed Hitler at that stage to be controllable. The thesis was long accepted almost as doctrine by historians on

the left that conservative forces conspired to make Hitler chancellor. As Turner has shown, this view ignores a great deal of contrary evidence.[20] Hagen Schulze, noting that "whole libraries" have been filled with works attributing the rise of the NSDAP to industrialists, bankers, and large agriculture, concludes that these represent an obsolete theory.[21] At the same time, it is conceivable that the decision to appoint Hitler was conditioned by the belief that he could be controlled in a way consistent with the interests of such groups, even if they earlier had done little to help or influence him.[22]

Second, the leaders of the Republic may have feared collapse of the NSDAP more than they feared a Hitler chancellorship. Nazism was a bulwark against the far left in several respects. Most obviously, Nazi propaganda vilified the KPD. But perhaps even more effectively, Nazi stormtroopers suppressed communist political activity; and the Nazi movement absorbed great numbers of radical anti-republican constituents, at least some of whom might otherwise have joined the ranks of the far left. When radical Berlin stormtroopers revolted against Joseph Goebbels in December 1932 – only weeks before Hitler's appointment as chancellor – republican leaders were made to ponder what the political landscape would look like without the Nazi "bulwark."[23] The NSDAP chiefs, if not the type of people Prussian aristocrats liked to deal with, seemed preferable in the minds of Hindenburg and his circle to Ernst Thälmann and the KPD. If the Nazi movement collapsed, its constituency would be dispersed. When the NSDAP declined in the November Reichstag election, the KPD grew in strength. The Hindenburg circle perhaps feared that wholesale dislocation from the Nazi movement would provide enough unattached voters – not to mention paramilitary activists – to make the communist ranks burgeon. As Conan Fischer notes, the broader threat of Nazi-fueled anarchy loomed large as the autumn wore on.[24] The decision to appoint a Nazi cabinet may have been reached on the apprehension that the far left would boom should Hitler falter.

A party in opposition enjoys freedom from responsibility. The public has little by which to guess how it would perform in office and is often scarcely inclined even to scrutinize its promises. A party in opposition labors however under a disability. Denied access to government, the party lacks the resource of patronage to reward its activist core for their support. Prospects ranging from the Foreign Ministry portfolio to local forestry posts persuade activists to continue devoting time and effort to the party cause, but if power is deferred too long, the expectation of reward may become too distant and activist fervor wane. Moreover, the party out of power may find that differences among its activists are difficult to manage. A chief source of party discipline is control over appointments, but, apart from its own bureaucracy, a party out of power has no appointments to make. These problems are amplified when the party out of power perceives politics as an all-or-nothing game. When its goals are totalitarian, the party is likely to attract activists who expect even more out of victory than do their counterparts in moderate political organizations. To followers of a party that aims not so much to administer as to conquer the State, deferral of power means deferral of a vast cornucopia of political and material spoils.

The Nazi movement, in its professed goals, was totalitarian. Hitler clearly did not aim to establish a conventional national cabinet but to conquer the German State. This his activist followers knew, and many of them remained devoted to his cause out of the expectation that they would some day share in mastery of the country. To them, repeated deferrals of power from 1930 onwards were a challenge to Nazi allegiance. Until July 1932, however, they could derive solace from the observation that Nazi electoral strategy was bringing the movement seemingly ever closer to power.

The remainder of the year would not leave Nazi confidence in the coming of a Hitler State intact. The impressive results of July – a plurality in the heavily divided Reichstag – failed to deliver power. Negotiations for cabinet offices ended in rancor. Local and state elections began suggesting a Nazi slow-down, and the November Reichstag election demonstrated national-level retreat. Party finances were depleted. Stormtrooper disaffection was turning into outright revolt. The distractions of fundraising and the perils of paramilitarism reduced the efficacy of the stormtrooper core as a political army, while ideological division between the Party and SA posed problems of its own. Finally, the primary impetus behind Hitler's electoral advances, economic distress, was weakening. In short, the Nazi movement was in parlous condition and showed every sign of getting worse. In summer 1932 the forces that had made Hitler a presence on the German political scene had proven capable only of bringing him to the threshold of power; electoral support and economic hardship were insufficient to carry him across. By the end of the year, Nazism was weaker than in July. How long it would have been before no realistically conceivable reversal of fortune could have saved Hitler's movement must remain a subject for conjecture.

Notes

Preface

1 See, e.g., Jay Katz, *Human Sacrifice and Human Experimentation: Reflections at Nuremberg*, Yale Law School Occasional Papers, second series, no. 2 (New Haven, CT, 1997). Professor Katz, on the anniversary of the Nazi doctors' trial at Nürnberg, approaches human experimentation during the Third Reich from the standpoint of both law and medicine.
2 Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996) 176.
3 Turner, *Thirty Days*, 95.
4 Throughout this study, "Party" in reference to the NSDAP will appear with an initial capital. The word, when referring to parties other than Hitler's, will not be capitalized.
5 Deutsche Arbeiterpartei or DAP.
6 Michael H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 20.
7 Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) 44.
8 Kater, *The Nazi Party*, 20.
9 Childers, *The Nazi Voter*, 45–46.
10 Ibid., 46–47 and 122–123.
11 See Chapter 1.
12 The word "State" will appear with an initial capital letter when referring to the series of institutions and individuals composing the central authority of a country. This usage is to distinguish State from "state" – the latter referring to the constituent units of the German federation, such as Bavaria or Thuringia. For a rationale behind capitalizing State in a related but slightly different context, see James Crawford, *Creation of States in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) ix.
13 Childers, *The Nazi Voter*, 48–49.
14 Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany 1925–1934* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984) 17.
15 Childers, *The Nazi Voter*, 124.
16 The SS, or *Schutzstaffel*, was an elite defense section created separately from the *Sturmabteilung*.
17 A police situation report recorded some eleven Nazi professional groups in Stuttgart alone by late 1931. Elsewhere, police reported groups such as a Nazi Druggists' League and a League of National Socialist Agriculturalists. A Nazi *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* also had multiple chapters. DZa 15.01, Reichs Ministerium des Innern (RMdI) 26058, *Lageberichte*, December 20, 1931, pp. 29–31. For an examination of the role of the *Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur* in the final stages of Hitler's drive for power (1930–1933), see Alan E. Steinweis, "Weimar Culture and the Rise of National Socialism: The Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur," 24(4) *Central European History* (*CEH*) (1991): 402–423. Steinweis provides an interesting occupational survey of KfDK membership. Ibid. at 422–423.

18 Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers: Studies in the Sociology of the Nazi Movement* (London: Routledge, 1991), 170–171, 178–179.
19 When referring to the SA as a party army, however, it must be borne in mind that controversy brewed within the Nazi movement over the exact purpose of the SA. On the one hand, SA leaders such as Pfeffer von Saloman and Ernst Röhm continually emphasized the military aspect of the SA. Party leaders, having learned the folly of armed coup attempts in November 1923, insisted on the SA playing less of a military role, and more of a political and propagandistic one. SA officers often complained that the Party wished to relegate the *Sturmabteilung* to political cheerleading, a role stormtroopers thought ignominious and obscure.
20 The Stuttgart *Lageberichte* calls the *Sturm* "Die Wichtigste Einheit der SA."
21 All material pertaining to the SA organizational hierarchy was derived from a Stuttgart police *Lageberichte* (situation report), composed for the information of the Reichsministerium des Innern (the federal Ministry of the Interior). DZa 15.01, RMdI 26058, December 20, 1931. Floor plan of the Brown House found in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26068, p. 92.

Introduction: debating the *Machtergreifung*

1 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26070, NSDAP. Putsche, Unruhen, Anschläge. Bd 2 Dez. 1932 – Febr. 1933, p. 3. *Der deutsche Weg* (no. 73, December 2, 1932).
2 The previous election, held in July of the same year, had awarded the NSDAP 37.3 percent of the national vote, which equated to 230 seats in parliament. The November election witnessed the Nazi bloc decline to 33.1 percent of the vote – or 196 Reichstag seats. A. Milatz, *Wähler und Wahlen in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1965) 109.
3 See Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996) 1–2, quoting *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *Vossische Zeitung*, *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, and *Berliner Tageblatt* on January 1, 1933.
4 These morale reports were assembled by the United States Government at Weinberg, in West Germany in 1956. Listed under "Provenance: Oberste SA-Führung," they were originally reviewed by Ernst Röhm and Rudolf Hess. They reside currently in the National Archives, Washington, DC, under Record Group 242, on Reel 81, frames 105058 through 105245. All subsequent citations to documents in NA Record Group 242, Reel 81, will consist simply of the abbreviation NA, followed by the pertinent frame numbers.
5 Many of these reports (*Lageberichte*) were assembled at the Zentralarchiv der DDR, Potsdam, under the heading Reichsministerium des Innern – abbreviated RMdI. Because the Potsdam archive was known as the Deutsche Zentralarchiv at the time that the RMdI documents were assembled there, all citations to *Lageberichte* will be abbreviated DZa 15.01 – the designation under which they were filed at Potsdam. The Potsdam archive since 1990 has been integrated into the Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde.
6 One example of a first person account which is useful but must be treated with caution is Franz von Papen's *Memoirs*, trans. Brian Connell (London: André Deutsch, 1952). Gordon Craig, reviewing the work shortly after its publication, warned of "convenient lapses of memory" in Papen's exposition. Gordon A. Craig, "Review of *Memoirs*, by Franz von Papen," 67(4) *Political Science Quarterly* (1952): 614–616.
7 A concise and thorough exposition of the various explanations for the Nazi seizure of power is contained in Peter D. Stachura's introduction, entitled "Weimar, National Socialism and Historians," in Stachura (ed.) *The Nazi Machtergreifung* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 1–14.
8 Detlev Junker, "Die letzte Alternative zu Hitler: Verfassungsbruch und Militärdiktatur. Die machtpolitische Situation in Deutschland im Jahre 1932," in Christoph Gradmann and Oliver von Mengersen (eds) *Das Ende der Weimarer Republik und die Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung* (Heidelberg: Manutius Verlag, 1994) 67, 69.

9 Jürgen Kocka, "Ursachen des Nationalsozialismus," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (June 21, 1980): 9–13.
10 Jürgen Kocka, *White Collar Workers in America, 1890–1940: A Social-political History in International Perspective*, trans. Maura Kealey (London: Sage, 1980) 266.
11 Heinrich August Winkler posits this thesis quite boldly. See Heinrich August Winkler, "Die 'neue Linke' und der Faschismus: Zur Kritik neomarxistischer Theorien über den Nationalsozialismus,' in his *Revolution, Staat, Faschismus: Zur Revision der historische Materialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978) 83–116. The Nazi seizure of power, explains Winkler, had "less to do with the course of the crisis itself than with the different preindustrial histories of these countries. The conditions for the rise of fascism have at least as much to do with feudalism and absolutism as with capitalism." Other works that posit or discuss the "feudal remnants" thesis include the following: Martin Broszat, *Der National-sozialismus: Weltanschauung, Programm und Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1960); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979); Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1965); Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967); Wolfgang Sauer, "National Socialism: Totalitarianism or Fascism?" 73 *American Historical Review* (1967): 404–424 and "Das Problem des Deutschen Nationalstaats," in Hans Ulrich Wehler (ed.) *Moderne Deutsche Sozialgeschichte* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1968) 407–436.
12 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dilemma: The Relationship of State and Democracy*, trans. Richard Barry (New York: Praeger, 1975) 16.
13 Geoff Eley, "What Produces Fascism: Preindustrial Traditions or a Crisis of a Capitalist State," 12(1) *Politics and Society* (1983): 53–82. The work of Eley and Abraham represents a renovation of the Marxist thesis which has its origins in the work of Gerschenkron and Rosenberg. See, e.g., Alexander Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1943); Hans Rosenberg, *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen: Studien zur neueren deutschen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978).
14 David Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981) 3–11.
15 Ibid., 9.
16 See Gerald D. Feldman, "A Collapse in Weimar Scholarship," 17 *CEH* (1984): 158–177; David Abraham, "A Reply to Gerald Feldman," 17 *CEH* (1984): 178–244; Colin Campbell, "A Quarrel over Weimar Book," *The New York Times*, December 23, 1984: 1.
17 Stachura, "Weimar, National Socialism and Historians," in Stachura (ed.) *The Nazi Machtergreifung* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 9.
18 Jürgen Kocka, *White Collar Workers*, 281–282. Quoted in Eley, 67.
19 Eley, 62.
20 Ibid., 71. Eley here alludes to the influence of foreign policy on the collapse of German democracy, but some in this connection have questioned the importance of the country's international reversals. Andreas Hillgruber, a historian of foreign policy, attributes a limited role to external matters in the Weimar domestic crisis. Andreas Hillgruber, "Unter dem Schatten von Versailles – die aussenpolitische Belastung der Weimarer Republik," in Karl Dietrich Erdmann and Hagen Schulze (eds) *Weimar: Selbstpreisgabe einer Demokratie; Eine Bilanz Heute* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1980).
21 Rohan D'O Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1942) 10, 13, 18, and 278.
22 A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of German History since 1815* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945) 2.
23 Ibid., 69.

1 The landscape: parties, paramilitaries, and the pitfalls of Weimar politics

1 See Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967) (noting the fractured nature of German society and its adverse effect on political stability). This proposition has also been advanced by Professor Peter Baldwin (University of California, Los Angeles) and M. Rainer Lepsius. See also Figure 2, a ballot card from July 31, 1932 Reichstag election, listing thirty-eight parties in contention for seats, on p. 66.

2 Attila Chanady writes of the SPD and Center: "Both of these . . . were in a sense exclusive and held together by forces that transcended pure politics. One was a 'class party,' the other a 'confessional community.'" Attila Chanady, "The Disintegration of the German National People's Party, 1924–1930," *Journal of Modern History* (*JMH*) (March 1967) 65.

3 David McKibben examines the origins of the USPD through a case study of wartime splintering in the SPD. David McKibben, "Who Were the German Independent Socialists? The Leipzig City Council Election of 6 December 1917," 25 *CEH* (1992): 425–444.

4 See pp. 35–38 this chapter.

5 Larry Eugen Jones, "The 'Dying Middle': Weimar Germany and the Fragmentation of Bourgeois Politics," 5(1) *CEH* (1972): 23–54.

6 Ibid., pp. 30–31.

7 Ibid., p. 30.

8 Larry Eugene Jones, *German Liberalism and the Dissolution of the Weimar Party System, 1918–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 476.

9 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republic: Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*, 2nd edn (Stuttgart, 1957) 297.

10 Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866–1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) 505.

11 Industrial rightists actually tended to favor diplomatic initiatives which normalized Germany's external relations and thus opened overseas markets back up to their products.

12 But see Jonathan Wright, "Stresemann and Locarno," 4 *Contemporary European History* (1995) 109 (challenging the prevailing view that Stresemann's foreign policy leading to Locarno was sensible).

13 Craig, 511–512.

14 Craig, 528–533. The succeeding three cabinets – those of Brüning, Papen, and Schleicher – rested on the emergency powers of the Reich President, as vested in him by Article 48.

15 Chanady, 66; Craig, 506.

16 Chanady, 66–67.

17 Lewis Hertzman, *DNVP: Right-wing Opposition in the Weimar Republic, 1918–1924* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1963) 10–11; Chanady, 66–67.

18 Chanady, 66.

19 Ibid., 66–67.

20 Craig, 152–156. On the postwar relationship between the Christian trade union movement and the *völkisch* right, see William L. Patch, Jr., *Christian Trade Unions in the Weimar Republic, 1918–1933: The Failure of "Corporate Pluralism"* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) 188–227.

21 Hertzman, 9.

22 On the failure of the DNVP to stake out moderate ground, see Robert P. Grathwol, *Stresemann and the DNVP: Reconciliation or Revenge in German Foreign Policy, 1924–1928* (Lawrence, KS: Regent's Press of Kansas, 1980).

23 Ibid., 4. On the origin and scope of Hugenberg's media empire, see John A. Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg: The Radical Nationalist Campaign against the Weimar Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977) 11–20.

24 Larry Eugene Jones, "'The Greatest Stupidity of My Life,' Alfred Hugenberg and the Formation of the Hitler Cabinet, January 1933," 27(1) *Journal of Contemporary History* (*JCH*) (1992) 63, 64.
25 Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) 17–18.
26 Hertzman, 124–130. Gierke's wife was Jewish, and publicization of this prompted attacks on him. The loss of Frau Gierke was itself a blow to the party: she enjoyed a wide appeal among women for her outspoken yet right-wing feminism and her social work as chairwoman of the DNVP Women's Committee.
27 Ibid., 94.
28 Chanady, 67.
29 Ibid., 68–69.
30 Ibid., 69–70.
31 Chanady, 71–72.
32 Craig, 514.
33 Gustav Stresemann, *Vermächtnis* (vol. i) (H. Bernhard, ed.) (Berlin: 1932–1933) 524.
34 The three members of the DNVP in the Luther cabinet were Martin Schiele (interior), Neuhaus (economics), and Schlieben (finance).
35 Chanady, 73–74.
36 Ibid., 78–80.
37 Andreas Dorpalen, *Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964) 129.
38 Chanady, 81–84.
39 Bracher, 313–315.
40 Chanady, 87–88.
41 Ibid., 88–91. A small part of the DNVP business and industrialist constituency joined the Wirtschaftspartei des deutschen Mittelstandes (later known as the Reichspartei), but this new party derived more support from voters fleeing the collapsing DDP and DVP than from DNVP refugees. See Jones, 5(1) *CEH* at 35.
42 Chanady, 72.
43 Johnpeter Horst Grill, *The Nazi Movement in Baden, 1920–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) 29 and 39.
44 Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987) 61.
45 Jeremy Noakes and Geofrey Pridham (eds) *Nazism 1919–1945: Vol. I, The Rise to Power 1919–1934. A Documentary Reader* (Exeter Studies in History, University of Exeter, 1983) 9. Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party, 1919–1945* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969) 11.
46 Harold J. Gordon, Jr., *Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972) 88.
47 Ernst Röhm, *Die Geschichte eines Hochverräters*, 5th edn (Munich, 1934) 335.
48 An edition of *Das bayrische Vaterland*, quoted in Robert G.L. Waite's *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952) 260.
49 Hitler's ultimatum of July 1921 to the NSDAP central committee. In Noakes and Pridham, 20–21.
50 Eric G. Reiche, *The Development of the SA in Nürnberg, 1922–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 17.
51 Dennis E. Showalter provides an exhaustive account of Streicher's journalistic style. See Dennis E. Showalter, *Little Man, What Now? Der Stürmer in the Weimar Republic* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1982).
52 Ibid., 18–19.
53 J.E. Farquharson, "The NSDAP in Hanover and Lower Saxony," 8(4) *JCH* (1973) 103, 116.

54 Donald M. McKale, *The Nazi Party Courts: Hitler's Management of Conflict in his Movement, 1921–1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1974) 13.
55 Gordon, 270–271.
56 Orlow, 62.
57 Falk Wiesemann discusses efforts to build a *völkisch* bloc for the 1924 election and their results. Falk Wiesemann, *Die Vorgeschichte der nationalsozialistischen Machtübernahme in Bayern 1932–1933* (Berlin: Ducker & Humblot, 1975) 78.
58 Farquharson, 118–119.
59 Orlow, 97–99.
60 Andreas Werner, "SA und NSDAP. SA: 'Wehrverband,' 'Parteitruppe' oder "Revolutionsarmee"? Studien zur Geschichte der SA und NSDAP 1920–1933." Inaugural dissertation, University of Erlangen, 1964, 25–26.
61 Farquharson.
62 On the highly unsettled institutional politics of the months after the abdication of the Kaiser, see Henry Friedlander, *The German Revolution of 1918* (New York: Garland, 1992), 105, 181–185.
63 Eva Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929–1933* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 2. The founding of the KPD is usually put at December 30–31, 1918.
64 Freya Eisner re-evaluates the role of Kurt Eisner and challenges the view common among historians of the workers' movement that the Bavarian revolutionary was "an eccentric fringe figure of party history." Freya Eisner, "Kurt Eisners Ort in der Sozialistischen Bewegung," 45 *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (*VfZ*) (1995) 407.
65 A thorough synopsis of the revolution of 1918–1919, the Kapp Putsch, and subsequent communist uprisings is offered by Gordon Craig in "From Kiel to Kapp: The Aborted Revolution 1918–1920," Chapter XI in *Germany, 1866–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). Sebastian Hafner provides an interesting, if somewhat polemical, discussion of the role of the SPD in halting the communist uprisings. See Sebastian Hafner, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918–1919*, trans. Georg Rapp (Chicago: Banner Press, 1986). See also Hagen Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik, 1918–1920* (Boppard-am-Rhein, 1969) 244–304.
66 Hagen Schulze, *Weimar: Deutschland 1917–1933* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1982), 218.
67 Rosenhaft, 2.
68 Ibid., 2–3.
69 James J. Ward, "'Smash the Fascists . . .' German Communist Efforts to Counter the Nazis, 1930–31," 14(1) *CEH* (1981) 33.
70 Horst G. Duhnke, *German Communism in the Nazi Era* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1978) 4–6.
71 Ward, 33.
72 Duhnke, 13.
73 Peter H. Merkl, *The Making of a Stormtrooper* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980) 30.
74 Robert G.L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism: The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952) 29.
75 Ibid., 23–24.
76 Noske had made a name for himself before the war as chief military expert of the SPD and, owing to his rightist leanings, was the first SPD deputy to be invited to inspect an imperial navy warship. As *Reichswehrminister* to the government of Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann, Noske earned a reputation for intolerance toward radicalism. See Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar, 1918–1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1993) 58–61; Peter D. Stachura, *Political Leaders in Weimar Germany: A Biographical Study* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993) 128–129.
77 See pp. 35–38.

78 Waite, 34–35, The Ehrhardt Brigade, which was formed out of a naval unit under a *Korvettenkapitän*, Hermann Ehrhardt, was particularly active, seeing service in Braunschweig and Munich. See Hagen Schulze, *Weimar: Deutschland 1917–1933* (Berlin: Severin and Siedler, 1982) 213–214.
79 Ibid., 49–50.
80 Ibid., 58–64.
81 Ibid., 66–67, 71, 79–85, and 109 ff. See also Dominique Venner, *Les Corps-francs allemands de la Baltique: la naissance du nazisme* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1978) 152–155. Venner gives vent to a flight of comparative historical fancy when she equates the *Freikorps* actions in the Baltic to the thirteenth century Teutonic knights' battles against Slavs and Mongols.
82 Venner, 140–141.
83 Ibid., 172–175.
84 Ibid., 182.
85 Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*, 328–329.
86 Wilhelm Hedemann, "Die geistigen Strömungen in der heutigen deutschen Studentenschaft," in Michael Doeberl, Otto Scheel *et al.* (eds) *Akademisches Deutschland* (4 vols) (Berlin, 1930–1931) vol. III, 387–388. Quoted in Waite, 207–208.
87 More realistic figures on the number of Volunteers in all the *Freikorps* approach one-half million men. Waite, 39.
88 Karl Rohe, *Das Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1966) 372–375.
89 Ibid., 403.
90 Ibid., 411.
91 Ibid., 270–271.
92 Rosenhaft, 64.
93 Ibid., 64.
94 Ibid., 82. It has been proposed that there was a Soviet foreign policy calculus behind the ban on acts of individual terror. Stalin desired a stable international situation, because his industrialization campaign had not yet strengthened Russia enough to allow the risk of war. Ordering the German communists to conduct themselves peaceably salved a possible irritant in Russo-German relations and thus stabilized relations with Germany. Kevin McDermott, "Stalin and the Comintern during the 'Third Period,' 1928–33," 25 *European History Quarterly* (1995) 409, 411–412, 426.
95 Horst G. Duhnke, *German Communism in the Nazi Era* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1978) 6–7.
96 Ibid., 6.
97 Ward, 48–49.
98 A succinct treatment of the Reichsbanner and RFB is provided by James M. Diehl, "Leftist Combat Leagues," in his *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977) 244–258.
99 Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis, 1929–1935* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 187–188.
100 Merkl, 39.
101 Ibid., 40.
102 Ibid., 40–41.
103 On the *Freikorps* role, see Schulze, *Freikorps und Republik*, 304–318.
104 The Orgesch, short for "Organisation Escherich," consisted of veterans and other right-wing elements and had led the anti-republican paramilitary effort in Bavaria.
105 Merkl, 42.
106 Ibid., 42.
107 Ibid., 42–45.
108 Volker R. Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1966) 239–243.

109 Erich Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963) 370.
110 Merkl, 46.
111 Berghahn, 181–187.
112 Merkl, 47.
113 Berghahn, 111–112.
114 Merkl, 72.
115 Craig, 526–527.
116 Eyck, vol. 2, 224; Craig, 527–528. See also Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg*, 55–67.
117 Eyck, vol. 2, 219–220.
118 Ibid., 331–332.
119 Merkl, 72.
120 Eyck, vol. 2, 333.
121 Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party, 1919–1945* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969) 235–236. See also Leopold, *Alfred Hugenburg*, 97–106.
122 Fischer, 187.
123 Eyck, vol. 2, 335.
124 Merkl, 73.
125 Ibid., 171.
126 Ibid., 43–44.
127 Ibid., 94.
128 Fischer, 56–58.
129 Ibid., 62–63. Fischer reports that only 2 of the 107 SA-men who had converted from other paramilitary formations converted from groups not part of the "extreme right wing." The following represents the distribution of converts from right-wing organizations: *Freikorps*, 45; DNVP formations, 6; *Stahlhelm*, 28; and other right-wing *Verbände*, 26.
130 Merkl, 92–93. Merkl points out that this 50 percent figure excludes converts from *völkisch* groups that were not clearly paramilitary in character. As many as one-fifth of the converts came from groups such as these, including the Schutz- und Trutzbund and Deutsch-Soziale Partei (DSP).
131 Ibid., 178–180. Stennes' petition quote taken from the Munich *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, Fa 88 Hauptarchiv Fasz. 83.
132 Peter Longerich, *Braunen Bataillone: Geschichte der SA* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1989) 65–72.
133 Chapter 5 focuses on Hitler's electoral setbacks in the last months before the *Machtergreifung*.
134 Fischer, 46.
135 Merkl, 74.
136 Fischer, 67.
137 Ibid., 63.
138 Alistair Hamilton, *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism, 1919–1945* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) 102–103.
139 On the working class Nazi constituency, see Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 105–120.
140 Lawrence D. Stokes, "The Social Composition of the Nazi Party in Eutin, 1925–1932," 23(1) *International Review of Social History* (Netherlands) (1978) 27–28.
141 Ibid., 28.
142 On upper class representation in the NSDAP, see Joachim Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, trans. Michael Bullock (New York, Pantheon, 1970) 435.
143 Detlef Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers: Studies in the Sociology of the Nazi Movement* (London: Routledge, 1991) 166–180.
144 Michael H. Kater, "Zum gegenseitigen Verhältnis von SA und SS in der Sozialgeschichte

des Nationalsozialismus von 1925–1939," 62(3) *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1975) 361–362.
145 Wolfgang Horn, *Führerideologie und Parteiorganisation in der NSDAP 1919–1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1972) 394–395.
146 Ibid., 289–292.
147 The term "criminalization" might ring peculiar in reference to an organization which avowed from its start such transparently criminal aims as destruction of the Republic and persecution of Jews. How could such an organization become *more* criminal? The term is not used here however in the sense of the political criminality for which the SA is infamous. Rather, it is used in the sense of economic or general criminality. "Criminalization of the SA" postulates the induction into SA ranks of conventional criminals, of the type associated with typical urban crime, ranging from illegal gambling to extortion.
148 Erich G. Reiche, *The Development of the SA in Nürnberg, 1922–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 29.
149 Ibid., xiv.
150 Hermann Mau proposed that the divergent sociological origins of the SA and Party-proper made a gulf between the two inevitable. Hermann Mau, "Die 'Zweite Revolution' – der 30 Juni 1934," I *VfZ* (April 1953) 119–136.
151 Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, 305.
152 Donald M. McKale, *The Nazi Party Courts: Hitler's Management of Conflict in his Movement, 1921–1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1974) vii.
153 Ibid., 2–3.
154 Ibid., viii.
155 Ibid., 22.
156 Ibid., 81–82.
157 Ibid., 84.
158 Ibid., 83–84.
159 Ibid., 87–91. McKale reports that purging Stennes sympathizers extended to the Hitler Youth and the Nazi Student Association in the University of Berlin. Ibid., 94.
160 Ibid., 101–102.
161 Ibid., 14–15.
162 Joseph Nyomarkay, *Charisma and Factionalism in the Nazi Party* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1967) 110.
163 Longerich, *Braunen Bataillone*, 52–59.
164 Quoted by Geoffrey Pridham in *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923–1933* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1973) 54–55. Taken from a letter from Hitler to Franz von Pfeffer, November 1, 1926, Schumacher Sammlung/403, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.
165 Nyomarkay, 110–111, 112–113.
166 Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer and Gerhard Schulz, *Die Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung: Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933–34* (Cologne: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1960) 841–842.
167 Nyomarkay, 114.
168 Ibid., 115–116.
169 Ibid., 118.
170 Nyomarkay lists the demands that Stennes issued to the NSDAP Reichsleitung: 117.

2 July 31, 1932: apogee?

1 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, 326. Excerpt from the *VB*, August 1, 1932.
2 The term "plurality" here refers to the largest bloc in a group lacking a simple majority.
3 See pp. 148–155.
4 Peter Longerich, *Braunen Bataillone: Geschichte der SA* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1989) 160.

5 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, 252. Excerpt from *Der Angriff* (no. 110), May 31, 1932: "Absolute Mehrheit der NSDAP."
6 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26068, NSDAP, Bewegung, Entstehung, Ziele, und Mittel. Bd 4 Jan.–Dez. 1932. p. 35. Versammlungsbericht. Hamburg. Goebbels, on January 7, 1932. Bei IAN 2100 b-1/January 14, 1932. The appeal in this address for the Party to adhere strictly to a policy of mirroring the masses contradicted other Nazi pronouncements. Hitler, for example, tediously insisted that great events are shaped only by the will of a small elite led by a great man, and this hardly dovetailed with Goebbels' remarks here about electoral politics. But such inconsistencies were numerous in Nazi pronouncements.
7 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, 286. Excerpt from *Der Sonntags Beobachter*, June 26, 1932 "Ein Aufruf des Führers."
8 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26057, Allgemeine Angelegenheiten der inneren Politik. Lageberichte. Bd 3. Febr. 1930–Dez. 1932. *Lageberichte* from Munich, October 20, 1932. L.Nr.112a.
9 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26031, March 1931–Febr. 1933. Minutes of the conference of the ministers of interior of the German states of March 18, 1931, p. 1a.
10 The ban on Nazi ministers at the March 18 meeting was reported in the *Völkische Beobachter* on March 21, 1931 (no. 80). The *VB* maintained that Wirth was a petty man who had a personal vendetta against Frick and Franzen, the two Nazi ministers in question, and that Wirth's grudge – not a legitimate security interest – had barred the two Nazis from the meeting.
11 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26031, pp. 3–4, 49.
12 March 31, 1931 *VB* (no. 91) excerpted in RMdI 26031, p. 42.
13 Ibid., 52 (of RMdI book).
14 A comprehensive study of how the Nazis used the judicial apparatus of the Weimar Republic would be enlightening. It has been amply noted that the right-wing bias of pre-1918 judicial appointees served the Nazis well in the early 1920s, but in that context, the bias protected the Nazis (and others) by softening the impact of government prosecution. The promise in the March 30 Directive Preamble to *initiate* proceedings represents another facet of the Nazi relationship with republican law: Nazi proactive resort to the courts in furtherance of anti-republican ends. The phenomenon of Nazis-as-plaintiffs would seem to have bearing on the postwar Federal constitutional order. In the German Federal Republic, otherwise vigorous personal rights protections are curtailed where these would serve anti-democratic ends. Post-1945 Germany has taken steps to prevent legal rights from being manipulated to anti-democratic ends. The story of how the Nazis actively sought recourse to the courts to promote their cause would elucidate not only a peculiar aspect of the destruction of Weimar but also of the creation of the BRD.
15 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26031, p. 54. *Anordnung* of Adolf Hitler from Munich.
16 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26031, pp. 151, 158.
17 *VB*, September 23, 1931 (no. 266). Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26068, NSDAP, Bewegung, Entstehung, Ziele und Mittel. Bd 4 Jan.–Dez. 1932, p. 6.
18 Dietrich Orlow, *Weimar Prussia, 1925–1933: The Illusion of Strength* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991) 194–195.
19 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26031, Reichsgesetzblatt Teil I June 16, 1931 Nr. 36. Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten gegen politische Ausschreitungen, p. 242, and June 28, 1932 Schnellbrief to the *Länder* governments from the RMdI on "Bekämpfung politischer Ausschreitungen," 258.
20 Papen's takeover of the Prussian state government has been interpreted as part of an effort to restore political calm and thus garner popular support for the isolated cabinet. Whatever its intended effect, the federalization of Prussia is widely believed to have further acclimatized the German polity to erosion of democratic institutions. Thus the advent of presidential cabinets with Heinrich Brüning's appointment as chancellor on March 30, 1930 began a string of anti-republican measures paving the way for the March 5, 1933 Reichstag elections, the March 23 Ermächtigungsgesetz, and finally Nazi *Gleichschaltung*. On the federalization of Germany's largest Land in summer 1932, see

Orlow, "The Coup of July 20, 1932" in his *Weimar Prussia, 1925–1933*, at 225–246; Joachim Petzold, "Der <Preußenschlag>," in *Franz von Papen: Ein deutsches Verhängnis* (Munich: Buchverlag Union, 1995) 89–98; Schulze, *Weimar*, 378–382.

21 The Nazi leadership in fact had just secured a lifting of Brüning's SA-Verbot – the outright ban on SA activities – by promising the Papen cabinet tacit support in parliament.

22 *VB*, May 31, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 255.

23 *Der Angriff*, June 6, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 263.

24 Ibid., Article of June 20, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 276.

25 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, NSDAP Rundschreiben Nr. 32/32. To Gau Württemberg/Hohenzollern. Received in Stuttgart July 1, 1932, 292–299.

26 Particularly emphasized were the provisions of the Notverordnung mandating advance notification of police before outdoor gatherings and the presentation of all propaganda to the police for approval prior to its posting or distribution.

27 *VB*, special July 17/18, 1932 edition. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, p. 311.

28 See Hagen Schulze, *Weimar: Deutschland 1917–1933* (Berlin: Severin and Siedler, 1982) 346, 382.

29 *Der Angriff*, August 2, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 327.

30 Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1864–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 561.

31 Richard Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany 1925–1934* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984) 89.

32 *Die Schwarze Front*, August 21, 1932 (no. 27). Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26068, NSDAP, Bewegung, Enstehung, Ziele und Mittel. Bd 4. 258.

33 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26057, Allgemeine Angelegenheiten der inneren Politik. Bd 3. Feb. 1930–Dez. 1932. *Lageberichte* from Munich, October 20, 1932. L.Nr. 112a.

34 "Ein Riß durchs Braune Haus," *Münchener Post*, October 10, 1932 (no. 205). DZa 15.01, RMdI 26071/b. NSDAP Streitigkeiten in der Partei. Bd 1 II. Teil. Juni 1930 – Febr. 1933, p. 336.

35 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 335, *Lagebericht*, Nürnberg, October 21, 1932.

36 *VB*, August 31, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 330.

37 "Ein historischer Augenblick," *VB*, September 1, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 331. For an unadorned account of the Nazis' undignified treatment of Paul Löbe (at 75 years of age, the oldest and also one of the most respected members of parliament), see *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, Band 454 VI. Wahlperiode 1932, 7–8.

38 Excerpted in the October 20 Munich *Lagebericht.*

39 *Der Angriff*, September 15, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 358.

40 The only three cabinet ministers without "von" in their names were the Reichsjustizminister, Franz Gürtner; Reichswirtschaftsminister, Hermann Warmbold; and Reichsarbeitsminister, Hugo Schäffer. See Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar: 1918–1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1993).

41 Schulze, *Weimar: Deutschland 1917–1933* (1983) 374.

42 "Stahlhelmfahnen neigen sich vor Papen," Joseph Goebbels in *Der Angriff*, September 6, 1932. Excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26068, Bewegung, Entstehung, Ziele und Mittel. Bd 4 Jan.–Dez. 1932, p. 283.

43 A mass meeting and rally had been held on October 11, 1931 at Bad Harzburg, a Central German spa town in the Harz mountains. The purpose of the event was to bind together various right-wing parties and paramilitary leagues. Though Hitler participated, the alliance that he declared at Harzburg with "respectable" right-wingers was short-lived. See Chapter 1. The Harzburg Front is discussed in John A. Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg: The Radical Nationalist Campaign against the Weimar Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977) 97–106.

44 "Sie lügen, Sie lügen!" *Der Angriff* (no. 201), October 4, 1932, p. 316 of RMdI 26068, NSDAP Bewegung, Entstehung, Ziele, und Mittel.
45 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26057, Allgemeine Angelegenheiten der inneren Politik, Bd 3. Feb. 1930–Dez. 1932. *Lageberichte* from Munich, October 20, 1932. L.Nr. 112a.
46 DZa 15.01. RMdI 26057. Allgemeine Angellegenheiten der inneren Politik (*Lageberichte*). Bd 3 Febr. 1930–Dez. 1932. Munich *Lagebericht*, October 20, 1932, pp. 2–3 (of report).
47 Henry Ashby Turner, Jr. discusses at length the role of grass-roots volunteerism in sustaining the Nazis' intensive political campaigns. Turner questions the proposition that wealthy individual capitalists sustained Nazi electoral campaigns. Focusing on the campaign for the September 1930 Reichstag election (the election in which the NSDAP made its first significant gains at the national level), Turner observes that the "fanatic dedication of many of the party's followers" could often compensate for lack of funds. Artistically inclined Party members would provide posters and music free of charge. Printing-houses owned by Party members would lend their presses to the NSDAP after hours; vehicles might be placed at the disposal of the Party during campaigns. The SA further enhanced this grass-roots potential. The parading brownshirts (so long as they behaved and did not alienate people with rowdiness) advertised for National Socialism and made the movement seem dynamic and exciting. Turner, *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 115–116.
48 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26071/b, NSDAP Streitigkeiten in der Partei, Bd 1 II. Teil. Juni 1930–Febr. 1933, 354. *Lagebericht*, October 15, 1932.
49 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26082, Bd 1. Okt. 1930–Apr. 1934, *Lagebericht*, Okt 15, 1932, 262.

3 Political warfare and cigarettes

1 "Introduction to the Service-Order [*Dienstvorschrift*] of the SA," in Manfred von Killinger, *Die SA. in Wort und Bild* (Leipzig: Kittler Verlag, 1933) 95.
2 Having explicitly disavowed military uses of the SA after the failed Munich Putsch of November 1923, Hitler intended the stormtroopers mainly to complement the political campaign work of regular Party activists. In a letter to Pfeffer von Salomon (chief of the SA at the time), Hitler expressed his intentions with regard to the stormtroopers. A subsequent SA order, Order 111, enumerated the standards of conduct expected of SA-men. Political activism was emphasized.
3 See Conan Fischer's detailed discussion, "Ideology and Politics of the SA," chapter in his *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis, 1929–1935* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 143–169.
4 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, trans. Jean Steinberg, with an introduction by Peter Gay (New York: Praeger, 1971) 180–181.
5 Though not necessarily for want of trying. Peter Longerich notes that the *Wehrverbände* stressed parade appearance for effect and for competitive advantage over rival marching formations. Longerich, *Braunen Bataillone: Geschichte der SA* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1989) 116–117.
6 William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town 1922–1945*, revised edn (New York: Franklin Watts, 1984) 35, 123, 132. Henry Ashby Turner, Jr. discusses the role of political rallies in raising funds for the Nazi Party. He notes that the Nazis were unique among Weimar parties in the rather high entrance fees that their rallies commanded. A Prussian police report conservatively calculated that the Nazis' rallies could have generated an annual income in 1930 of 1.75 million marks. It is not clear whether this was an all-German figure or an estimate of receipts from rallies in the state of Prussia. Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 118–119.
7 Paramilitary excess proved not to be the only SA fault that scared voters. The politics of the SA struck many potential Nazi voters as odious. The nationalization of key financial

and manufacturing enterprises, espoused by the SA, sounded to many people like a medicine worse than the economic illness it was proposed to cure. And, to a general public in which anti-Semitism had far less resonance than among stormtroopers, periodic SA outbursts against Jewish Germans were a deterrent. A test case of popular anti-Semitism presented itself shortly after the *Machtergreifung*. On the urging of SA leaders and in response to SA rank-and-file agitation, the Nazi government declared April 1, 1933 a day to boycott all Jewish-owned businesses. The public response was "lukewarm at best." Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens not Darken? The "Final Solution" in History*, first paperback edn (New York: Pantheon, 1990) 133.

8 SA rank-and-file contained many who joined the movement simply because they wanted to belong to a paramilitary organization. Thus, on the surface, it does not appear surprising that the SA was prone to absorption in paramilitary activities. Scholars however have noted various impetuses behind the average stormtrooper's participation in the Nazi movement. Studies of the Abel SA collection, assembled by Theodor Abel and catalogued at the Hoover Institute at Stanford, CA, have suggested that SA-men possessed differing motivations for participation. Some of them had had political experiences which prompted them, either immediately or by twists and turns, to become stormtroopers. Such men tended to constitute the further left factions of the movement. Other stormtroopers were found to have joined out of interest in paramilitary affairs. Thus it is difficult to state with precision a single *raison d'être* behind individual membership in the SA, and, correspondingly, the paramilitary obsession of that organization was not entirely predetermined by its make-up. Peter H. Merkl, *The Making of a Stormtrooper* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980) 7–10, 66–71, 138–144, 190. Theodore Abel, *Why Hitler Came into Power: An Answer Based on the Original Life Stories of Six Hundred of his Followers* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1938).

9 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26058, Allgemeine Angelegenheiten der inneren Politik (*Lageberichte*) Bd 4 Nov. 1931–Nov. 1933. *Geheimbericht*, Stuttgart. March 5, 1932. "Stundenplan des Sturmführer-Lehrgangs," 62–75.

10 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26068, Bericht from the Stettin police on Stettin disturbances. September 24, 1932 to the Prussian minister of the interior. 289.

11 Michael H. Kater discusses the success of the NSDAP in rural areas. He cites Pomerania and Silesia, where crop failures had sowed economic distress in 1931, as regions particularly responsive to the Nazi rural message. Michael H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 57–59.

12 Another case of SA paramilitary activity in fact led to a border incident. A stormtrooper from Saxony was arrested by Czechoslovakian border police after his unit had crossed over into the Sudetenland. Illustrating its intolerance for such activity, the German government evidently did nothing to help the SA-man, and his commander had to report that "efforts to free him have failed." NA, RG 242, T-81, 105203.

13 The Nazi Party and SA hierarchies are discussed in the Preface.

14 The six units which offered no information on *Reichswehr* relations were a Standarte from Danzig (a League of Nations Free City), the several units located in the demilitarized Western zone (Subgroups Baden, Palatinate-Saar, and Group Lower Rhine), and Braunschweig and Köln-Aachen. Four of the six non-responsive units were thus located outside *Reichswehr* operational areas and accordingly had minimal opportunity to deal with the regular army.

15 National Archives, Record Group 242, T-81, 91/105174. This report nicely encapsulates the SA brand of radicalism – anti-republican *and* anti-conservative.

16 Harold J. Gordon, Jr., *The Reichswehr and the German Republic 1919–1926* (London: Kennikat Press, 1972), 55. Gordon, while documenting a "watering down" of the aristocratic element, acknowledges that monarchism and aristocratic origins continued to run strong in the army under the Republic. Michael Geyer examined the Weimar armed forces from the standpoint of institutional politics and concluded that the generals did not

aim to perpetuate the old Prussian tradition as much as they aimed to transform the army into a modern interest group honed to compete for resources with other interest groups. This led the army, according to Geyer, to engage as it never had before in foreign policy and domestic politics. Michael Geyer, *Aufrüstung oder Sicherhiet: Die Reichswehr in der Krise der Machtpolitik 1924–1936* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1980).

17 According to Gordon Craig, the constitution of the republican *Reichswehr* officer corps under General Hans von Seeckt (the mastermind of Germany's clandestine rearmament in the 1920s) closely paralleled that of the Imperial Army. Few members of the urban liberal classes or of the lower classes belonged, and the bulk of the corps was aristocratic. Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) 393–394. See also John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918–1945* (London: Macmillan, 1953) 98–99. Whether or not a trend had begun toward a broadening of the social base, the composition of the armed forces seems to have remained socially distinctive from Germany as a whole.

18 NA 105114, 105200.

19 Franz von Papen, *Memoirs*, trans. Brian Connell (London: André Deutsch, 1952) 148–153, 217–219. See also Peter Hayes, "'A Question Mark with Epaulettes'? Kurt von Schleicher and Weimar Politics," 52 *JMH* (1980) 35–65. Henry Turner provides a succinct summary of Schleicher's background but notes that no definitive biography has yet been produced of this critical figure: Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996) 19–21, 195.

20 On Schleicher's scheming with respect to the SA, see Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 441–454.

21 This, at any rate, has been suggested by some historians, including Turner. See Turner, *Thirty Days*, 169–170.

22 NA 105184.

23 NA 105195.

24 NA 105097–105108.

25 Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 382.

26 The vote of no confidence produced one of the infamous scenes in the demise of the Weimar Republic. With Hermann Göring presiding over the Reichstag for the first time since his election to its presidency on August 30, 1932, the communists requested that the vote be held. This, the first motion of the day, was postponed by a thirty-minute recess (requested by the Nazi deputy, Frick). During the recess, the Nazis decided to join the Communists and other parties in voting against the Papen cabinet, but Papen got wind of the plan and dispatched a messenger to fetch orders for the dissolution of the Reichstag. (Papen evidently had the orders waiting in case of emergency.) When the session resumed, Göring immediately called for a vote on the no confidence motion. Papen advanced to the president's chair to announce the dissolution of parliament, but Göring, with a theatrical turn to the other side of the room, pretended not to notice the chancellor and went on with the vote count. The result, though later officially voided, was 513 votes against Papen, to a mere 32 in favor. Papen, *Memoirs*, 208–209. See also *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*, Band 454. VI.Wahlperiode 1932. 2. Sitzung. Monday September 12, 1932, p. 15.

27 Werner E. Braatz, "Two Neo-Conservative Myths in Germany 1919–1932: The 'Third Reich' and the 'New State'," 32(4) *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1971) 569–584; Braatz, "Franz von Papen and the Preussenschlag, 20 July 1932: a move by the 'New State' towards Reichs reform," 3(2) *European Studies Review* (1973) 157–180.

28 As events would run their course, Schleicher unseated Papen before Papen could attempt to implement the planned "New State." Schleicher convinced President von Hindenburg that the *Reichswehr* could not be depended upon to fight a civil war on behalf of the cabinet of barons, and, thus, that the Papen cabinet had either to face parliament or resign. Schleicher's supposition, probably justified, was that the proposed Papen constitution would prove unenforceable without resort to armed coercion. Papen, *Memoirs*, 218–219.

Critically, however, even proposing the New State weakened Papen and thus made him more reliant upon the army.

29 The minister presidents of the German states were outraged that Papen should allow the stormtroopers free rein in the streets once again. They expressed their sharp disapproval of the lifting of the ban, at a meeting with Papen on June 11, 1932. See "Besprechung mit Ministerpräsidenten, Finanzministern, und sonstigen Vertretern der Länder," *Akten der Reichskanzlei* Nr. 18. Edited by the Historical Commission of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, Karl Dietrich Erdmann (ed.) and Hans Booms (Bundesarchiv representative) (Boppard am Rhein: Harold Boldt Verlag, 1989) 52–59.

30 Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 132.

31 *Reichshaushaltsplan* 1932 (Band I), Haushalt des Reichswehrministeriums (Berlin: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1932) VIII 1–222; *Akten der Reichskanzlei* (1932) *passim*.

32 *Akten der Reichskanzlei*, 58.

33 This project failed when Gregor Straßer, Schleicher's key Nazi contact and the leader of the NSDAP left, quit the Party rather than enter into a personal battle against Hitler.

34 NA 105186.

35 See Chapter 4.

36 It is worth speculating why the Nazi leadership committed so many resources to the July campaign. Not only did the Party empty its own coffers, but also it mortgaged its financial future by relying on loans. The fact that the NSDAP threw fiscal caution to the wind in the weeks before July 31 is informative in evaluating Nazi expectations at the time. It is plausible that Party leadership at the national level believed their own propaganda. They may have thought that after July 31 the prodigal propaganda effort would pay off, and they would never again have to spend a Party dime on posters, handbills, or airplanes; all future efforts – and past debts – would be covered by a Nazi State. The extravagant manner in which the Nazi Party funded the July campaign suggests its leaders believed that that election would finally put the NSDAP in power.

37 NA 105106.

38 NA 105104.

39 NA 105174, 105184, 105186.

40 NA 105196.

41 Turner, *Hitler's Thirty Days*, 117.

42 NA 105206.

43 NA 105178.

44 NA 105096.

45 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26057, Inhaltsverzeichnis zu l. Nr. 112a. Munich October 20, 1932 (Vertraulich!) pp. 337 ff.

46 NA 105117.

47 NA 105195.

48 NA 105198, 105200, 105201.

49 NA 105096.

50 Peter H. Merkl, *The Making of a Stormtrooper* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980) 174.

51 Eva Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929–1933* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 22–24. An examination of the *Ringvereine* and other aspects of Berlin organized crime is provided by Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970) 144–149.

52 Turner, *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler*.

53 New archival resources in Russia have become available since the end of the Cold War, and some of these suggest a possible course for research into general criminality and the SA. George C. Browder reports that the Osoby (Special) Archive in Moscow contains a substantial quantity of German police records, including records from the republican period. The records, spread among some half-dozen document classes, cover the

Polizeipräsidium of Berlin for the period 1854 to 1947; the Polizeipräsidium of Stettin for the period 1914 to 1940; the German Police Agencies in Germany and Occupied Territories for the period 1841 to 1945; and similar records for unspecified periods from Gladbach-Reydt, Essen, and Teplitz-Schoenau. If these documents include arrest and detention records, names which appear in them could be cross-checked against the readily accessible SA rosters formerly housed in the American Document Center in Berlin (now in custody of the Bundesarchiv). Such comparison would produce an unprecedentedly thorough profile of criminal activity in the SA. See George C. Browder, "Scholarly Note: Captured German and Other Nations' Documents in the Osoby (Special) Archive, Moscow," 24 *CEH* (1991) 424–445.

4 The price of ideology

1 Adolf Hitler, "Address to the Düsseldorf Industry Club," January 1932, in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds) *Documents on Nazism, 1919–1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1975) 124.
2 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, trans. Jean Steinberg, with an introduction by Peter Gay (New York: Praeger, 1971) 143.
3 Werner Maser, *Hitler's Mein Kampf: An Analysis*, trans. R.H. Barry (London: Faber & Faber, 1970) 169–178, 170.
4 Klaus Vondung, *Magie und Manipulation: Ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1971) *passim*.
5 Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* revised edn (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1974).
6 Helmut Krausnick, Hans Buchheim, Martin Broszat, and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Anatomie des SS-Staates*. Further evidence has been adduced since *Anatomie des SS-Staates* as to the rapacious tendency of Nazism. Gareth Shaw and Tim Coles, for example, examine how the *Gleichschaltung* affected publishers of town directories. The Nazis, in addition to purging Jewish Germans from directory publishing, vigorously suppressed a once-brisk trade in pirated copies of the volumes. Arguably, the object of these policies was to guarantee Nazi directory publishers a monopoly of a profitable commerce. Gareth Shaw and Tim Coles, "Directories as Elements of Town Life: The Case of National Socialist Germany," 161(3) *The Geographical Journal* (1995) 296–306.
7 Bracher, *German Dictatorship*, 147, 144 (referring to the poet Stefan George as representative of Nazism's vague ideology).
8 Frederick L. Schuman, "The Political Theory of German Fascism," 28(2) *American Political Science Review* (1934) 210–232; Schuman, *The Nazi Dictatorship* (New York: Knopf, 1935); Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941); Konrad Heiden, *History of National Socialism* (New York: Knopf, 1935).
9 Barbara Miller Lane, "Nazi Ideology: Some Unfinished Business," 3(1) *CEH* (1974) 3–7. Lane, it should be noted, was not the first historian to propose a careful review of Nazi program. Andrew G. Whiteside, writing in 1957, suggested that it was a mistake to analyze Nazism as if it had an "exclusive preoccupation with getting and holding power." Andrew G. Whiteside, "The Nature and Origins of National Socialism," 18(1) *Journal of Central European Affairs* (1957) 48, 54.
10 Recently reiterating the view that Hitler's ideology has explanatory value for the historian, Ian Kershaw reviews a new compendium of Kampfzeit speeches, writings, and orders of the Nazi leader. Ian Kershaw, "Ideologe und Propagandist: Hitler im Lichte seiner Reden, Schriften, und Anordnungen 1925–1928," 40 *VfZ* (1992) 263. Reviewing *Hitler: Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen. Februar 1925 bis Januar 1933*. Band I: "Die Wiedergründung der NSDAP. Februar 1925–Juni 1926" (Clemens Vollnhals, ed.); Band II: "Vom Weimarer Parteitag bis zur Reichstagswahl. Juli 1926–Mai 1928" (Bärbel Dusik, ed.) (Munich, 1992).

11 *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs*, Band 372. Die Wahlen zum Reichstag am 20. Mai 1928 (Vierte Wahlperiode) pp. I, 51–52. Wahlkreis Nr. 11 (Merseburg).

12 *Verhandlungen des Reichstags*. IV. Wahlperiode. Band 426, pp. 3790–3791. December 21, 1929. 122.Sitzung. Stöhr, incidentally, subsequently led the first official contact between the German Protestant churches and the NSDAP, in a March 4, 1931 meeting. See Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich, Band 1: Vorgeschichte und Zeit der Illusionen 1918–1934* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1977) 241.

13 Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 268.

14 Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941–1944*, trans. N. Cameron and R.H. Stevens, with an introductory essay on the mind of Adolf Hitler by H.R. Trevor-Roper (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1953) 145.

15 Turner, *German Big Business*, 268–269. The exact amount of money that the NSDAP earned by selling advertising space to Reemtsma is uncertain. One SA report, complaining of the cooperation between the Nazi Party and the Reemtsma Konzern, cited a figure of 3 million marks. Given the not infrequent resort of stormtroopers to hyperbole, this might have been an exaggeration.

16 The USCHLA (abbreviation for "Untersuchungs- und Schichtungsausshüsse") was established in 1926 to mediate within Party ranks. See Donald M. McKale, *The Nazi Party Courts: Hitler's Management of Conflict in his Movement, 1921–1945* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1974).

17 NA 105163.

18 NA 105164. Where Weiss referred to the Nazis' pledge to socialize only industries critical to the public good, he may have recalled a published statement by Adolf Hitler to Otto Straßer:

> [I]t is essential to realize that [the term socialism] does not mean that these businesses must be socialized; it means only that they can be socialized if they offend against the interests of the nation. As long as they do not do that, it would be simply a crime to destroy business life.

Discussion between Hitler and Otto Straßer on May 22, 1930. In *Hitler, The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922–August 1939*, ed. and trans. Norman H. Baynes, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969) 111–112.

19 The case of Emil Weiss was not an isolated incident, and similar fallings-out over Party ties to business did not go unnoticed by contemporary observers. Indeed, a conundrum arose. The Party's dealings with wealthy supporters – dealings obvious to the public – seemed to contradict its ideological commitment to the lower middle class – a commitment expressly stated in the Twenty-Five Points. In attempting to reconcile SA animosity toward the privileged classes and the necessity of the NSDAP to cooperate with at least some upper middle and upper class Germans, Nazi leadership found itself between a rock and a hard place. The stormtroopers gave little ground, and wealthy Party members were similarly intransigent. A Munich police situation report of October 1932 offers some insight into the irreconcilability of Nazi constituents:

> There is no telling yet, how the Party [wants to deal with] this protection of National Socialist employees against those Party-members who are at the same time employers. [The Party's policy] is said to have already [sparked] protests from National Socialist industrialists.

RMdI 26057, Allgemeine Angelegenheiten der inneren Politik. Bd 3. Vertraulich! *Lagebericht*. Munich October 20, 1932. L.Nr. 112a. The Party faced in this a catch-22: alienating potential donors sacrificed the chance for desperately needed funds; embracing such persons sacrificed the allegiance of large segments of the rank-and-file.

20 NA 105123–105124.
21 NA 105152.
22 NA 105151.
23 NA 105153.
24 NA 105146.
25 NA 105144.
26 NA 105149. Letter dated August 16, 1932.
27 NA 105147.
28 It is unclear how the dispute between Major Steinhoff and *Kameradschaft-Zigaretten-Speditionsgesellschaft* ended. The *Gauleiter* for the area in question, Weinreich, evidently corresponded with Steinhoff shortly after Raegener. Steinhoff wrote back to Weinreich on August 25. In his August 25 letter Steinhoff wrote that he was still compelled by his agreement with the Dresden firm to promote Sturm cigarettes exclusively, but, on the other hand, he suggested that the matter had to be decided by superior SA instances. Steinhoff went on to try to allay any fears the Gauleiter might have harbored about damage to intra-Nazi relations. He assured Weinreich that the *Standartenführer* Löwenstein could "scarcely make an impression" with the note to the *Stürme* in which he (Löwenstein) had disparaged Kameradschaft cigarettes. The message was that any damage to Kameradschaft interests could only have been slight. Steinhoff's letter of August 25 conveys the impression that the subgroup leader was insulating himself from potential subsequent backlash: he deferred to SA superiors; downplayed the seriousness of the matter; and intimated that in any case it had been Löwenstein who had instigated the fight.
29 NA 105208, 105206, 105203.
30 NA 105174, 105198.
31 NA 105191.
32 NA 105119. From the leader of *Untergruppe* Unterfranken, Würzburg, to *Gruppe* Franken.
33 NA 105119.
34 NA 105132. Karl Sauer, September 10, 1932, *Sturmführer* of 24/13 to Bär.
35 NA 105133.
36 NA 105130. Letter of September 8, 1932. From Merkendorff to Gunzenhausen, III/13. Letter of September 4, 1932. From *Sturmführer* 23/13 Heinrich Engelhardt to Gunzenhausen, *Sturmbannführer* III/13.
37 The fact is noteworthy in itself that the people who had provided transportation to the SA angrily demanded cash remuneration for their service. Henry Turner proposes that voluntary provision of services and equipment by Party members or sympathizers, gratis, lowered the cost of the Nazis' election campaigns. Argues Turner, work that would have cost any other party large sums of cash cost the NSDAP little, because it could rely on the unpaid helping hands of its activists and outside supporters. The case here at hand contradicts the description of grass-roots assistance that Turner proposes. ("Those who owned automobiles or trucks placed these at the disposal of the party in the evening or on weekends, when campaigning became especially intense," *German Big Business*, 116). Here are seen SA-men being threatened with legal action by the very type of small business people who Turner suggests strengthened the movement by donating services free of charge. Far from gratuitously and selflessly contributing their resources to the stormtroopers, the persons who had provided transportation for the Gunzenhausen SA threatened legal suit when they did not receive cash payment for services rendered.
38 Dennis E. Showalter, *Little Man, What Now? Der Stürmer in the Weimar Republic* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1982) 20.
39 NA 105126. Letter of September 16, 1932. From Karl Bär, Führer des *Sturmbannes* III/13. Gunzenhausen.
40 NA 105111.
41 NA 105171, 105117, 105203.
42 NA 105174, 105178.

43 NA 105182.
44 Declaration of SA units loyal to Walter Stennes, Spring 1931, in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds) *Documents on Nazism, 1919–1945* (New York: Viking Press, 1975) 121.
45 NA 105171.
46 If the uniforms are taken as part of a whole genre of supposed symbolic insults associated with rank, then other things salted this SA wound, too. The Subgroup Chemnitz respondent complained that his men became disillusioned when they heard that "[l]uxury cars are sent to Munich." NA 105208. Emblems of the privilege of higher-ups in the movement, whether worn or driven, aroused SA ire.
47 NA 105198.
48 Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis, 1929–1935* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 58–68.
49 This cross-section was not proportionally representative of society at large, but, unlike the many parties which were unable ever to command much more than a single, narrow class or interest-group following, the NSDAP earned the votes and allegiances of people from every social strata. Two historians in particular argue this point: Thomas Childers, "The Social Bases of the National Socialist Vote," 11(4) *JCH* (1976) 17–42; Richard F. Hamilton, *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982).
50 *Vorwärts*, August 17, 1932 (no. 185) excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26071/b, NSDAP Streitigkeiten in der Partei, Juni 1930–Feb. 1933, p. 332.
51 "Schwamm im Braunen Haus . . . Korruption unter Nazibonzen," *Königsberger Volkszeitung* (October 4, 1932, no. 200) excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26073, 198–199.

5 Disintegration or victory: Nazism in the final months of the Republic

1 NA 105171.
2 NA 105206.
3 A Party book was supposed to be carried by every Nazi as documentation of Party membership. Like a passport, the book contained pages with spaces for official seals. Seals of various colors were awarded to Party members who had paid their dues. The members then affixed the seals on pages in their books as evidence of faithful support for Hitler.
4 NA 105182.
5 *Standarte* 11, Breslau reported that the Silesian Black Front leader Kurt Kremser was circulating through Breslau and that he spread subversion among loyal SA-men, NA 105182.
6 NA 105171, 105108.
7 NA 105174.
8 NA 105102.
9 On republican response to paramilitary violence, see Chapter 2.
10 The importance to the SA of continuous activity reveals the significance of Papen's lifting of the SA ban in June, and it also offers insight into why Hitler was willing to trade a lifting of the ban for his support of the unpopular Papen cabinet: the political cost of trafficking with Papen was judged to be worth the benefit of ending the impediment to stormtrooper activism.
11 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26071/b, p. 365, Police *Lagebericht* Düsseldorf, October 29, 1932.
12 NA 105096.
13 NA 105198.
14 NA, 206, 203.
15 Hitler's own views as to how institutions worked reflected – and probably amplified – the Nazi aversion to non-personal solutions. Hitler analyzed the SA in a bizarre but telling conversation with Otto Wagener, chief of the NSDAP Economic Policy Section (Wegener held the post until June 1933). Wagener was relating to Hitler a theory formulated in the nineteenth century by a pseudo-scientist. Something called "odic rays,"

Wagener explained the theory to posit, are emitted at varying wavelengths and intensities by different people and are especially strong in the young. People emitting similar wavelengths tend to fraternize best with one another. Hitler extrapolated from this:

> And that is the reason for the solidarity among . . . a storm-troop division – because the whole forms an Odic community. . . . Wagener, the mystery of political organization and the organization of the SA has been solved! It is not racially determined, it's grounded in this [Odic] problem! . . . With the stormtroopers I have the feeling that all the wavelengths must be the same. . . . And when I think: the wavelength of the SA is that of the supreme commander [Pfeffer von Salomon, who had just resigned]. Supposing I had a different wave? Then the SA either has to become estranged from me or fall apart. Both are still a danger now – or I have to put in new leaders.

Otto Wagener, *Hitler – Memoirs of a Confidant*, ed. Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., and trans. Ruth Hein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) 35–37. Aside from Hitler's attraction to the fringes of European thought, this statement reflects his apprehensions over the *Sturmabteilung*.

16 Sebastian Haffner offers an interesting interpretation of the events which took place at the naval yards of Wilhelmshaven and Kiel in the second week of November 1918. Sebastian Haffner, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918–1919*, trans. Georg Rapp (Chicago: Banner Press, 1986) 51–68.

17 See Leonard Schapiro, *1917: The Russian Revolutions and the Origins of Present-day Communism* (New York: Penguin, 1984) 98–99:

> Kerensky was genuinely committed to fulfilling Russia's pledge to the Allies to start an offensive in support of their attack in the West, but he was a civilian who understood little of the factors which determine an army's morale, and he suffered from an excessive reliance on his powers of oratory – which could, indeed, achieve short-lived results when exercised on the troops.

18 DZa 15.01, RMdI 26073, p. 201. Police *Lagebericht* Nürnberg, October 31, 1932.

19 Franz von Papen, *Memoirs*, trans. Brian Connell (London: André Deutsch, 1952) 197–198.

20 Joseph Goebbels, *My Part in Germany's Fight*, trans. Kurt Fiedler (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1935) 139–140 (originally *Von Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei*. Munich, 1934).

21 NA 105108.

22 Goebbels, *My Part*, 157.

23 Ibid., 172, 182.

24 Ibid., 171–172.

25 Kurt Ludecke, *I Knew Hitler: The Story of a Nazi Who Escaped the Blood Purge* (London: Jarrolds, 1938) 478–479.

26 Goebbels also wrote that, despite charges from the "entire press" that Nazi participation in the strike amounted to "Bolshevism," it was crucial for the NSDAP to try to reassert itself before the proletarian electorate. Goebbels, *My Part*, 181. This was not the first time that the Nazis tried to ingratiate themselves to radicals, while risking losses among conservatives and the middle class. On August 22, 1932, Adolf Hitler had publicly testified on behalf of a band of SA-men who had brutally murdered a communist miner at Potempa in Silesia. While convincing the radical stormtroopers that he was behind them all the way, Hitler's public defense of the Potempa murderers cost the Nazis credibility in the eyes of the many Germans who had voted NSDAP because of its law-and-order promises.

27 "Die Wahl in Thüringen," *Der Angriff* (December 5, 1932, no. 253), excerpted in DZa 15.01, RMdI 26093, NSDAP-Wahlen, p. 391.

28 *Frankfurter Zeitung* (December 7, 1932). Cited in Peter D. Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 108, 105.
29 Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, revised edn (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 231–232.
30 Goebbels, *My Part*, 189, 209, 214.
31 Hermann Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler* (Vienna, 1973) 153, cited by Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 3.
32 Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 99–102.
33 Bullock, *Hitler*, 235–239; Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 103. Stachura reproduces Straßer's letter of resignation (113–114).
34 Goebbels, *My Part*, 206.
35 RMdI 26068, *Lagebericht*, November 25, 1932, Plauen, p. 355.
36 RMdI 26071/b, p. 374, *Lagebericht*, November 25, 1932, Plauen.
37 See Falk Wiesemann, *Die Vorgeschichte der nation*alsozialistischen *Machtübernahme in Bayern 1932–1933* (Berlin: Ducker & Humblot, 1975) 103.
38 "Ein Brief an Hitler," *Deutsche Zeitung*, October 23, 1932 (no. 250a), in RMdI 26071/b, p. 359.
39 "Ein Mißgriff wieder gutgemacht," *Der Angriff*, October 24, 1932, in RMdI 26071/b, p. 361. *Herrenklub* was the Nazis' derogatory term for the conservative right, especially for the Papen cabinet. It referred to the exclusive Berlin Gentlemen's Club to which Papen and many other aristocrats belonged.
40 *VB* October 25, 1932, RMdI 26071/b, p. 362, and *VB* October 27, 1932, RMdI 26071/b, p. 363. The attack on Dr. Backhaus contains signature themes of Nazi political reportage. First, there was the attribution of Jewish origin to an individual, regardless of his ethnic or religious background, who had fallen into disfavor with the movement; terming enemies Jewish in turn formed part of the Nazis' vilification of Jews as individuals and a group. Second, there was the characterization of an individual's Nazi allegiance on the basis of the duration of his Nazi affiliation. This second theme supported the mythology of the "Alte Kämpfer," Nazis who had been fighting for the cause since its inception. The pervasiveness of the first theme throughout the Nazi period explains the concern occasioned in February 1997 when *Frankfürter Allgemeine Zeitung* described the foreign minister of Great Britain as "der Jude Rifkind." See "Rifkind kritisiert den BSE-Bericht des Europäischen Parlaments: 'Vertiefung der EU gleicht Entmachtung des Volkes,'" 20 Februar. 1997, Nr. 43, p. 2.
41 RMdI 26071/b, Abschrift IAN.2100a 2/9.11. Der Preußische Minister des Innern. Berlin, November 9, 1932. Directed to Reichsminister des Innern and Polizeipräsident Berlin: Betreff: Absplitterungsbestrebungen innerhalb der NSDAP.
42 RMdI 26073, p. 196. Aus IAN.2100 a 1/September 24, 1932, *Lagebericht*, Stettin.
43 "Der Weg der Nationalsozialistischen Partei," *Tägliche Rundschau* (no. 224), September 23, 1932, RMdI 26068, p. 302.
44 *Frankfurter Zeitung*, December 18, 1932 (no. 945), RMdI 26071/b, p. 382.
45 RMdI 26073, p. 204, *Vossische Zeitung* (no. 558) November 22, 1932, p. 206, *Vorwärts* (no. 594) December 17, 1932, p. 208. *Berliner Tageblatt* (no. 600) December 19, 1932.
46 RMdI 26073, Zwistigkeiten in der NSDAP. Streitigkeiten und Auflehnungen der SA. SS der NSDAP. Bd 1 April 1931–February 1932, p. 195, *Berliner Tageblatt* (no. 402) August 25, 1932. "Krach in der Hamburger SA"; RMdI 26071/b, p. 358. *Der Jungdeutsche* (no. 249), October 22, 1932, and p. 357 *Demokratischer Zeitungsdienst*, October 22, 1932, "Nationalsozialistische Ortsgruppe aufgelöst."
47 RMdI 26073, p. 197. *Lagebericht* to *Preußische Minister des Innern* from the *Regierungspräsident*, Königsberg, October 3, 1932.
48 RMdI 26073, *Vossische Zeitung* and *Vorwärts*, both January 12, 1932.
49 The RMdI document book 26073 catalogues this string of newspaper reports, pp. 212–242.
50 RMdI 26082, *Lagebericht* from Braunschweig to RMdI, January 15, 1933, p. 289.

51 RMdI 26068, *Lageberichte*, Dresden, October 21, 1932, pp. 332–341. Some of the most conspicuous features of Nazi electioneering would come to be the norm in modern American political campaigns after World War II. The use of aircraft to enable key party figures to make appearances throughout the country during a last-minute frenzy of stumping is probably the most familiar today. Less conspicuous but nonetheless important is the systematic, point-for-point, and institutionalized rebuttal of challenges raised by opponents. The Nazis were aggressive practitioners of what might today be called spin control.
52 RMdI 26068, p. 347, *VB* November 5, 1932. "Die roten Lügen erledigt: Unser Wahlsieg am 6. November ist der Sieg der erwachenden Arbeiterschaft!"; and RMdI 26073, p. 207, *Der Angriff* (no. 274) December 30, 1932. "Sie lügen, Sie lügen!"
53 RMdI 26031, Dresden, January 22, 1933. Bericht über die politische Lage im Freistaate Sachsen. Address by Hitler, December 11, 1932.
54 Papen, *Memoirs*, 233–234.
55 Turner provides a detailed description of the Lippe campaign, its circumstances, and results. See Turner, *Thirty Days*, 53–78.
56 Fest, *Hitler*, 360.
57 Turner, *Thirty Days*, 64.
58 Ibid., *Thirty Days*, 75.
59 Bullock, *Hitler*, 245.

Conclusion

1 Adolf Hitler, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler, April 1922–August 1939*, ed. and trans. Norman H. Baynes (New York: Howard Fertig, 1969) 251–252.
2 See Turner, *Thirty Days*, *passim*.
3 Historians debate whether the economic crisis of the early 1930s was caused by the stringent deflationary policy of the Brüning cabinet (March 1930–June 1932) or by the Weimar fiscal and economic policy of the 1920s boom years. Knut Borchardt argues that the fiscal crisis that confronted the Brüning cabinet was largely prefigured by six years of excessive consumption, economic overgrowth, and irresponsible borrowing. Brüning, Borchardt argues, had little choice in the context he inherited but to adhere to a strict deflationary policy. Knut Borchardt, "Zwangslagen und Handlungsspielräume in der großen Weltwirtschaftskrise der frühen dreißiger Jahre: Zur Revision des überlieferten Geschichtsbildes," *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Jahrbuch 1979*, Munich 1979. See also Dietmar Petzina, "Was there a Crisis Before the Crisis? The State of the German Economy in the 1920s," in Jürgen Baron von Kruedener (ed.) *Economic Crisis and Political Collapse: The Weimar Republic 1924–1933* (New York: Berg, 1990) 1–19.
4 Harold James, *The German Slump: Politics and Economics, 1924–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 8.
5 The murder of Konrad Pietzuch by SA-men in Silesia in the early morning of August 10, 1932 is well described and placed in political context by Richard Bessel, "The Potempa Murder," 10(3) *CEH* (1977) 241–254. The sentence in the murderers' trial appears in Paul Kluke, "Der Fall Potempa," 5(3) *Vierteljahrhefte für Zeitgeschichte* (1957) 279–297.
6 Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers: A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis, 1929–1935* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 82–83.
7 Michael H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 53.
8 "Arbeitslosigkeit und Kurzarbeit in den einzelnen Gewerben," *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* (1933 volume) 308; *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* (1932 volume) 304.
9 Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter: The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany, 1919–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) 185. See also Jürgen W. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1991); Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (eds) *Reevaluating the Third Reich* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993).

10 See Thomas Childers, "The Limits of National Socialist Mobilisation: The Elections of 6 November 1932 and the Fragmentation of the Nazi Constituency," in Childers (ed.) *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency, 1919–1933* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) 232.
11 See Franklin L. Ford, *Political Murder: From Tyrannicide to Terrorism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).
12 Professor Ford suggested this in his remarks on the original version of this book. Franklin L. Ford, comments on T.D. Grant undergraduate thesis, April 8, 1991. On file with author.
13 See *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 1932, 1: 389. The Emergency Decree established special courts to try offenses related to political terror and established the death penalty for those convicted of political murder.
14 See Dietrich Orlow, *Weimar Prussia, 1925–1933: The Illusion of Strength* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 1991) 194–195.
15 Noakes and Pridham, *Documents on Nazism*, 211–212.
16 One possible starting point for an investigation of general criminality in the SA would be to compare the rolls of SA-men contained in the Berlin Document Center to criminal records in the Berlin police files. Dr. Hermann Blei, professor of criminal law and director of the Berlin Free University Institut für Straf- und Strafprozeß Rechts, indicated that police criminal case records from the early 1930s still reside under the jurisdiction of the Berlin Police President. Though criminal records in Germany are generally not open to the public, arrangements, Blei suggested, might be made with the Berlin Police President to allow a systematic scholarly survey of the relevant documents (Dr. Hermann Blei, in conversation with author, at Berlin-Zehlendorf, August 24, 1990). The opening of former Soviet archives might also provide an avenue for such research. See Chapter 3, note 50 (discussing George C. Browder, "Scholarly Note: Captured German and Other Nations' Documents in the Osoby (Special) Archive, Moscow," 24 *CEH* (1991) 424–445). A study of the SA's engagement in general criminal activities, such as theft, protection rackets, prostitution rings, and the like, would offer new insights into the distinction between political and non-political crime.
17 Bullock writes that the Lippe election on January 15, 1933 impressed the members of the president's circle "even against their own better judgement." Bullock, *Hitler*, 245. It would be interesting to examine Bullock's sources for this. Franz von Papen, in his *Memoirs* (233–234), depicts the Lippe election as an impressive propaganda victory. It must be borne in mind, however, that by depicting the Nazis in his memoirs as an ascendant force, Papen indirectly removed blame from himself. "The Nazis," the internal logic of Papen's apologia reads, "were a force unto themselves, destined by their own successes to seize power; my colleagues and I did not put Hitler in power." Such a presentation of events is dubious.
18 That most historians of intelligence are military historians may explain this. See, e.g., Christopher M. Andrew and Jeremy Noakes (eds) *Intelligence and International Relations, 1900–1945* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1987); Ralph Bennett, *ULTRA and Mediterranean Strategy 1941–1945* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989); F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, abridged edn (London: HMSO, 1993).
19 The presidential chief-of-staff and critical go-between. See Turner, *Thirty Days*, 113–114.
20 See Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Turner, *Thirty Days*, illustration following page 130, political cartoon from *Vorwärts*, February 1, 1933 (#53) depicting Hugenberg assuring Papen that they would retain real control over Hitler.
21 Hagen Schulze, *Weimar: Deutschland 1917–1933* (Berlin: Severin and Siedler, 1982), 344–346.
22 Turner acknowledges this. See *Thirty Days*, 117.
23 Larry Eugene Jones, ""The Greatest Stupidity of My Life," Alfred Hugenberg and the Formation of the Hitler Cabinet, January 1933," 27(1) *JCH* (1992) 63, 69–70.
24 Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 133.

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