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Source: *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1965), pp. 399-413

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3020433>

Accessed: 15-04-2020 14:57 UTC

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REVIEW ARTICLE

'MACHTERGREIFUNG' OR 'DUE PROCESS OF HISTORY'

The Historiography of Hitler's Rise to Power

There is still no single acceptable or convincing explanation of the rise of Nazism to preponderant power in Germany and Europe. The most widely read account in the English-speaking world is probably that of William Shirer in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960)¹ which, while commendable for its scope, has undoubtedly reinforced many prejudices. A more careful and scholarly summary of the previous interpretations has been provided up to 1957 by Professor Andrew Whiteside.² Since then all scholars have become deeply indebted to Professor Karl Dietrich Bracher, formerly of Berlin, now of Bonn, for two notable and indispensable studies of the rise of Nazism, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne, 1955), and its equally valuable sequel *Die Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung* (Cologne, 1960). Historians have now been forced to re-examine their previously held theories in the light of the comprehensive accounts here provided of the processes by which Hitler was allowed to rise to supreme power in Germany. Further studies have made their appearance more recently still which suggest that the time has come for a summation of the present views about this important climacteric in German history.

Was there really a *Machtergreifung*? The term is now a commonplace in historical narratives, for both the Nazis themselves described 30 January 1933 as the day of *Machtergreifung* and also many disillusioned democrats dated the demise of democracy in Germany from that inauspicious occasion. But in fact no seizure of power actually took place. Hitler was given power by President Hindenburg without any show of force, and did everything he could to reassure the hesitant majority that his rule would mark no radical break with the past. Many Germans were long to claim that Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor had taken place in a framework of legalism, and represented to many not a total Nazi victory but only another temporary coalition of the 'national opposition'. Only afterwards had the totalitarian nature of the régime become apparent. For this reason, Germans claim they can be exculpated for their inaction in 1933 because they did not realize what was to follow.

The evidence, however, that 30 January 1933 would mark far more than a mere Cabinet reshuffle was already at hand; Hitler's own intentions had been clearly revealed ten years earlier at the time of the attempted *putsch* of 1923. He had already declared in the Leipzig Trial of 1930 that 'heads would roll in the sand' on his achievement of power. Hatred of the Jews was to be matched by actions which had little in common with democratic procedures. And Goebbels could even claim 'It is in fact the greatest spiritual and political revolution of any century'.³ Within a month the Reichstag Fire was used as an excuse for demanding and

¹ For excellent critiques of Shirer's book, see K. Epstein, *Review of Politics*, April 1961, pp. 230-45, and M. Broszat, *Historische Zeitschrift*, CXCVI (1963), 112-23.

² A. Whiteside, 'The Nature and Origins of National Socialism', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, XVII/1 (April 1957), 48-73.

³ J. Goebbels, *Vom Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei* (Munich, 1934), p. 10.

obtaining special powers. By the end of March 1933 the last signs of democratic practices in the government of the country were effectively removed.

So rapid and complete a destruction of the parliamentary structure could not have been achieved without the help of those who assisted in the 'dissolution' of the Weimar Republic, as Professor Bracher has so ably documented. In the light of what is now known of the activities of the political hierarchy in 1932 and 1933, and the part previously played by those who actively fostered Hitler's candidature as chancellor as a deliberate means of destroying the democratic framework altogether, it would be hard to maintain Friedrich Meinecke's apologetic belief that the downfall of the Weimar Republic was the result of unfortunate coincidences, or Stampfer's view that 'the majority had no idea of what was happening to them, Germany slid into Hitler's dictatorship, just as she had slid into war in 1914'.⁴

Yet *Machtergreifung* aptly describes the intention of the Nazi hierarchy. Its current use is so widespread that it would seem best not to seek to abolish it, but to limit it to the immediate events which led up to January 1933. But the various and rival interpretations placed on these events have produced no consensus. The purpose of the present article is to review the theories which are currently being propagated both inside Germany and beyond her borders. It can quickly be seen that these differing interpretations stem from the widely separated political positions or opinions of their authors who have selected for closer scrutiny particular aspects of the situation, such as the political climate, the conduct of individuals, the role of political parties, the behaviour of the army, the attitude of the industrialists and the landed interests, the effect of the world economic crisis, or the disorders of the European consciousness, some or all of which are held to have been determinative in bringing about the rise of Nazism to power.

With the exception of Professor Bracher and his colleagues, present-day West German historians minimize the contribution made by legally established organs in Germany to the rise of Nazism, and seek rather to account for the *Machtergreifung* by stressing the political inexperience of the Germans and the spell-binding nature of Hitler's oratory.⁵ Hans Buchheim in his short essay *The Third Reich: Its Beginning, Its Development, Its End*,⁶ and Hermann Mau and Helmut Krausnick in their introductory study *German History 1933-45*⁷—both of which books have received official West German endorsement—speak of 'a skilfully-fostered national consciousness... characterized as a "national awakening"'.⁸

Only the smallest fraction of the public had enough power of political imagination to be able to foresee the kind of consequences that would follow an elimination of constitutional guarantees and the disbanding of the democratic system... Wide circles of the public unblinkingly accepted actions of national-minded men that, had the same actions being undertaken by Communists, would have been considered alarming violations of justice and order.⁸

⁴ F. Stampfer, *Die ersten vierzehn Jahre der Deutschen Republik* (Offenbach, 1947), p. 670.

⁵ Exactly parallel exculpatory self-justifications are to be found in the explanation given for Germany's defeat in 1945. The examples are too legion to cite. It is surely significant that a series of lectures given on the Nord-deutsche Rundfunk in 1962 and later published in book form, entitled *The Road to Dictatorship 1918-33* (Munich, 1962), with contributions by ten of the leading West German historians, contained no discussion at all of the contribution of the army or of the industrial interests to the *Machtergreifung*.

⁶ Munich, 1961, English ed.

⁷ London, 1962, English ed.

⁸ Buchheim, *op. cit.* pp. 5-6.

Yet even Mau acknowledges the enthusiasm with which the new régime was hailed.⁹ The picture of an ignorant mass swayed by demagoguery and ready to join any successful mass movement also conveniently ignores the responsibility of the previously ruling classes, for, while conservative historians admit that more and more people came to advocate a 'policy of the strong hand' at least for a period of transition, they stress the fact that many also believed that responsibility in office would turn Hitler into a supporter of a state based on justice, law and order. Hitler's support could thus be portrayed as coming from the politically ignorant or the intellectually naïve. It was for this reason that Gerhard Ritter, as one of the most outstanding of the conservative historians, could state his belief that Nazism was a phenomenon of radical chauvinism, which appealed to the masses in the name of egalitarian democracy.

In its name shrewd demagogues and brutal activists could turn the freedom of a sovereign people into total slavery; all they needed to do was to capture the confidence of the masses and to present themselves as the embodiment of their hopes and aspirations....¹⁰

Nazi sympathizers frequently used to argue that Nazism was the only possible alternative to Communism. Many conservative historians, such as Meinecke, K. D. Erdmann, or W. Conze, have sought to exculpate the political hierarchy of the pre-Hitlerian period by adopting this view. By depicting the position of the moderate political parties as being between the Scylla of Nazism and the Charybdis of Communism, they seek to portray the democrats as the victims of inexorable circumstance, forced to choose between two equally distasteful alternatives. Such a view, of course, overlooks the fact that Nazism would never have become an alternative to the established government but for the disloyalty and open opposition to the Republic by the conservative groups, looking back with longing to the 'Obrigkeitsstaat' of the Bismarckian era. It is indisputable that many in high political and wealthy circles gave aid to the Nazis because they believed that here was a pliable political force which could be used to provide popular support for the preservation of the existing social order.

Particular emphasis is given by conservative historians to the difficulties for the incipient Republic caused by the foreign political situation and the obstinacy of Germany's former enemies. For example, Ludwig Zimmermann in his book *Deutsche Aussenpolitik in der Aera der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen, 1958), Ferdinand Friedensburg, one of the earlier historians of the Weimar Republic,¹¹ and even Professor Bracher himself could point to the blows to the internal authority of the Weimar Democracy caused by the policies of foreign powers. Otto Braun, in a famous phrase, characterized the Weimar Republic as caught between Versailles and Moscow. On the other hand, the distinguished German refugee historian,

⁹ Mau and Krausnick, op. cit. pp. 17-18.

¹⁰ Andreas Dorpalen, 'Historiography as History: the Work of Gerhard Ritter', *Journal of Modern History* (March 1962), p. 11. As Kollmann noted, Professor Ritter, as late as 1953 described the meeting of Hitler, Papen and Schroeder in Cologne on 4 Jan. 1933 as a legend, and tried to distract attention away from the part played by Hindenburg and his camarilla, by pinning the responsibility for Hitler's coming to power on 'the shortsighted selfishness of the parties' and on the German people (E. C. Kollmann, 'The Weimar Republic', *Journal of Central European Affairs*, xxi/4, Jan. 1962, p. 439; see also Ritter's chapter in *The Third Reich*, for UNESCO, London, 1955, pp. 386 ff.).

¹¹ F. Friedensburg, *Die Weimarer Republik* (Hanover, 1957), p. 260.

Erich Eyck, ascribed chief responsibility to the world economic crisis and to the earlier German inflation, which had the effect of undermining the German middle-classes' confidence in the effectiveness of the moderate political parties, and induced them to rely increasingly on a party which offered decisive action to remedy their economic distress.

It was these economic causes rather than the inapplicability of their ideas which liberals believed was the basic cause of the seduction of Germans away from democracy. But they were obliged to see with increasing disillusionment by the end of the 1920's the lack of support given to democratic values, while their desire for effective government predisposed them to accept the imposition of presidential rule in 1930. This, the prominent socialist historian Arthur Rosenberg believes, was the crucial turning point in the dissolution of the Weimar Republic. The liberals were obliged to acknowledge sorrowfully the truth of the contention:

The Weimar Republic was not destroyed in those winter months (1932-33)... there were intrigues but they decided nothing... The majority of the German people wanted to be ruled by the people no longer! Freedom had become too much of a burden. It is possible to rule autocratically, tyrannically, absolutely, aristocratically, against the will of the people but it is impossible to rule democratically against the people.¹²

Alternatively, the post-war historians in Western Germany frequently claim that Nazism was only one form of the dynamic force of nationalism, common to all Europeans. All the European states were affected by this popularist movement whose roots went back to the French Revolution. The erosion of the stable political traditions of the past by the rise of modern movements seeking to activate the masses; the systematic provocation of the unthinking populace by every new technical invention; and the pursuit of material goals in the name of radical democracy, were all European, not merely German, phenomena.¹³ This interpretation has naturally been challenged by non-German Western historians, as well as by 'left-wing' historians everywhere. Its suppositions have led to a renewed investigation of the peculiarly German features of the rise of Nazism, and even into the treacherous waters of national psychology.

These conservative interpretations, while preponderant in Western Germany, have not been allowed to go unchallenged. The late Professor Ludwig Dehio was a foremost proponent of German responsibility for Nazism. While recognizing the danger of manufacturing an eclectic gallery of ancestors for Nazism,¹⁴ he argued that Hitler's seizure of power was only part of a process which had led the Germans since the first Great War to seek political domination in the world. It was only a continuation of a process already begun, but now accelerated at a greater speed. The search for greatness was induced by the humiliations of the past which only stimulated the fever of supremacy latent in German hearts.¹⁵ Such a view has

¹² P. Sethe, *Deutsche Geschichte im letzten Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1960), p. 328.

¹³ G. Ritter, *Europa und die deutsche Frage* (Munich, 1948), p. 51.

¹⁴ See E. Vermeil, *Germany's Three Reichs* (London, 1944); Rohan Butler, *The Roots of National Socialism* (London, 1941); or W. M. McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler* (New York, 1941), and P. Viereck, *Metapolitics* (New York, 1941).

¹⁵ Ludwig Dehio in *Deutsche Korrespondenz*, Jan. 1963; the same ideas are to be found in more extended form in his book, *Germany and World Politics in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1959); see also his replies to Professor Ritter: 'Um den deutschen Militarismus', *Historische Zeitschrift*, CLXXX (1955), 43-64, and LXCIV (1962), 130-8.

received considerably more support lately from the writings of the Hamburg Professor Fritz Fischer, who enjoys an increasing reputation especially amongst his younger colleagues. Fischer's comprehensive and critical studies of Germany's political ambitions at the beginning of the century and her later war aims, as expressed in his book *Griff Nach der Weltmacht* (1961), make it clear that he sees a strong continuity in German policies from 1914-33.

Such a view, incriminating the Germans, has long found support from certain of the English-speaking historians. Twenty years ago, it was A. J. P. Taylor's opinion that 'the Third Reich rested solely on German force and German impulse; it owed nothing to alien forces...it was a system which represented the deepest wishes of the German people. In fact it was the only system of German government ever created by popular initiative.'¹⁶ The more conservative of British and American historians, however, have accepted the opinions of their German counterparts and have laid stress on the political inexperience of the German people, their addiction to an authoritarian form of government, and the misguided enthusiasm of the younger generation for the restoration of the 'glories' of Germany.¹⁷ These opinions have received wider acceptance with the almost complete absence of any interpretations from the extreme left-wing point of view. None of the German Marxist histories of the period have been translated into English, and the only American representative of this view, G. W. F. Hallgarten, is studiously moderate in his conclusions. But perhaps because of their unfamiliarity with the complexity of German conditions, English-speaking historians have put more stress on the personal characteristics of Hitler than on the roots of Nazism as a political and social phenomenon. This tendency was accentuated at the Nuremberg Trials and by the subsequent self-justifying memoirs and autobiographies, when Hitler was made out to be a 'charismatic' leader who could absolutely dominate his subordinates by force of personality. Hitler has become the scapegoat of everyone in the Nazi era. This interpretation is convenient for those who wish to unload from Germans, collectively or personally, the burden of moral responsibility. It is also convenient for those, who, like Shirer, seek to dramatise the events of history in terms of the inter-play of dynamic individuals. Even Bullock in his *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (1952) minimized the role of the Nazi Movement or Nazi ideas, and saw Hitler as only a brilliant opportunist, whose strength lay in his own will to power; he has since moderated this view in a later essay.¹⁸ Yet the personal dynamic of Hitler's leadership cannot be denied:

Without Hitler, National Socialism as we know it would not have come to power. The extreme right might have prevailed in 1933, but a Germany led by a Goering (not to mention a Frick or Hugenberg) would have been a very different proposition.¹⁹

Many others have largely accounted for Hitler's dynamic drive by megalomania. But the suspicion cannot be avoided that megalomania is an all-inclusive term used by rational men to explain the inexplicable. For as Professor David Knowles once

¹⁶ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History* (London, 1961 ed.), p. 248.

¹⁷ H. P. Greenwood, *The German Revolution* (London, 1934), p. 41. See also E. J. Passant, *A Short History of Germany* (London, 1949).

¹⁸ A. Bullock, 'The Political ideas of Adolf Hitler', *The Third Reich* (London, 1955), pp. 350 ff.

¹⁹ W. Laqueur, 'Remembering Stalin', *Encounter*, Mar. 1962, p. 21.

said, you do not ordinarily meet in Oxford or in Cambridge a Rasputin or an Adolf Hitler.

A very different account of the rise of Nazism to power has been that put forward by Marxist historians, in seeking to show that:

the German monopoly-capitalists, in the circumstances of the world economic depression deliberately planned and brought about the destruction of the Weimar democracy, the creation of a dictatorship of the most reactionary forces in German imperialism and the preparation of the new war, for all of which Hitler and the Nazis were their tools.²⁰

Despite their obvious political provenance and vast oversimplifications, these theories, as sustained by the unrelenting efforts of the historians of the German Democratic Republic, cannot be ignored. Their accumulation of evidence on particular points is impressive. There can be little doubt that the highly deflationary demands of such groups as the National Federation of German industries or the Chambers of Commerce did not assist the task of Brüning or Papen in meeting the economic blizzards of 1930–32. In the summer of 1931, according to the Nazi press chief, Otto Dietrich, leading industrialists held a series of important negotiations with Hitler.²¹ In October 1931 the industrialists brought direct pressure on Hindenburg to have the Cabinet reshuffled still more in accordance with their wishes.²² As the number of Communist sympathizers continued to rise during 1932, there was ever greater need to purchase the support of a mass party to offset the ‘Bolshevist menace’. After Hitler’s decision to jettison the socialist aspirations of the Nazi party, and their advocate Gregor Strasser with them, in December 1932, the last doubts were removed, and the way cleared for the important meeting of 4 January 1933. Following the ‘elections’ and the passing of the Enabling Law in March 1933, the president of the National Federation of German Industries expressed to Hitler ‘their support for the difficult tasks which the Government had to face’.

The objection to these facts is that they will not support the load of interpretation placed upon them by Marxist historians. Although it is true that the majority of Western historians have drawn a veil of silence over the activities of the industrial-

²⁰ F. Klein, ‘Zur Vorbereitung der faschistischen Diktatur’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 1/4 (1953), 878. Their case was strengthened by such books as F. Thyssen, *I paid Hitler* (London, 1941) or Hjalmar Schacht, *Account Settled* (London, 1948). ‘To substantiate this *a priori* political viewpoint all agencies of historical scholarship have marshalled old and new documentary evidence from the East German *Zentralarchiv* (Potsdam and Merseburg) and *Länder* archives, especially those of Brandenburg and Saxony, put new constructions on printed sources, and wove their literature into an exotic pattern. The D.D.R.’s biggest guns have been three historical reviews: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (Berlin), *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich Schiller Universität Jena*, and the *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg*. The historical institutes linked with the universities of Leipzig, Jena, Halle-Wittenberg, Greifswald and Berlin have been used for the same purpose’ (W. Maehl, ‘Recent Literature on the German Socialists 1891–1932’, *Journal of Modern History*, 33/3, 1961, 30).

²¹ Otto Dietrich, *With Hitler on the Road to Power* (London, 1934), pp. 12–13. Also the account of Walter Funk at Nuremberg: Nuremberg Document EC-440 and 2828-PS. On 19 June, for example, Hitler and Stinnes discussed plans for the extension of German *Lebensraum*, see F. Klein, *Die diplomatischen Beziehungen Deutschlands zur Sowjetunion 1917–32* (Berlin, 1953), p. 179.

²² H. Brüning, a letter in *Deutsche Rundschau*, 7/1947, 6.

ists, there are some who point out that there is no evidence to suggest that Hitler ever saw himself or was willing to see himself as the puppet of large-scale industry—his own character repudiated any such role. The only known exponents of economic policies in the Nazi ranks were Gregor Strasser and Gottfried Feder. The former advocated radical nationalization of private property and the latter campaigned for the abolition of interest charges and of ‘enslavement’ to the institutions of capitalism.²³ The whole of the first decade of Nazism was marked by radical rejection, indeed hostility, against the ruling circles, both industrial and financial, of the capitalist economy.²⁴ And although there were a few amongst the industrialists who deduced from their experiences of the depression years the idea that some form of state-organized corporative syndicalism, along Italian lines, might prove to be the answer to Germany’s economic problems, the majority remained steadfastly sceptical towards such notions, distrusted any form of encroachment by the state, and pointed to the complete lack of experience of such matters in the Nazi party. Even though, following the electoral successes of 1930, the Nazi party received some subventions from industry, these were clearly only an ‘insurance’ policy. The efforts of Hitler during the following two years were certainly tireless in seeking to reach audiences from among the established circles of business and industry and undoubtedly many were impressed by his propaganda attacks on the Weimar Republic, but his chief success now can be seen in his ability to obtain enough ready cash to liquidate the party’s debts of twelve million marks, and to keep alive his private terroristic army of two and a half million men, the S.A. Bullock is right when he maintains that Hitler was careful to dissociate himself from the views of Feder and Strasser, and refused to commit himself on economic policy. As for the meeting with Schroeder and Papen in Cologne on 4 January 1933 it has been correctly assessed by Kurt Stechert in saying that the three segments of conservative opinion, capitalistic, aristocratic and plebiscitary were each scheming to outwit and betray the others, and use them for its own ends.²⁵

English-speaking historians have paid little attention to these activities. Bullock says merely that the bankers and businessmen were too innocent for politics when it was played by a man like Hitler. Shirer accounts for the attitude of the magnates of industry and finance solely by ‘political ineptitude’. The most recent book in English on this subject is A. Schweitzer’s *Big Business in the Third Reich*,²⁶ in which the author claims that in 1933 there was a partnership established in which ‘the power of the Nazi Party was limited to the political sphere while big business was largely in control of economic affairs’.²⁷ Although some of the more intransigent Nazis demanded the application of their counter-revolutionary views to big business as well as to the army or the landowners, these groups used their power to resist and eventually to defeat such plans.²⁸

²³ See G. Feder, *Kampf gegen die Hochfinanz* (Munich, 1932).

²⁴ On 14 Oct. 1930, the Nazi party in the Reichstag introduced a measure designed to limit interest rates to 4 per cent, to nationalize the big banks, and to expropriate the entire property of the ‘bank and stock-exchange magnates’ without compensation. For reasons of political strategy, rather than economic conviction, Hitler demanded the measure’s instant withdrawal.

²⁵ K. Stechert, *Wie war das möglich?* (Stockholm, 1945), p. 367: For Schroeder’s view, see Nuremberg Document PS-3337, printed in E. Wickert, *Dramatische Tage in Hitler’s Reich* (Stuttgart, 1952), pp. 22 ff.

²⁶ Indiana University Press, 1964.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 43.

On the other hand, the Marxist but scholarly account of G. W. F. Hallgarten reaches the moderate conclusion:

Summing up, one might say that the big concerns which supported Hitler's rise to power consisted mainly of these groups which had been hardest hit by the depression and thus hoped for the coming of a 'saviour'... The rest of the big industrial concerns, while welcoming Hitler as an ally against Labor, would have preferred to see him being used as a mere tool in the hands of a Cabinet controlled by industry and Junkers. When this proved not to be feasible, however, they supported Hitler as the lesser of two evils, eager to make the best of his coming to power both politically and economically. In this respect all documentary sources concur.²⁹

Communist historians also include the Junker aristocracy as co-conspirators in the *Machtergreifung*. It was due to their influence and their desire to preserve their impoverished East Prussian estates that they demanded and obtained economic concessions, and brought about the downfall of Brüning. As the closest neighbours to the 'Communist menace', they are supposed to have joined with the capitalist industrialists in encouraging and assisting the rise of Hitler and his fellow Nazis. In fact, however, such a view overlooks two major considerations. In the first place, the social gap between the proud Prussian aristocrats and the upstart Austrian housepainter was never bridged, not even after 1933. In the second place, the economic interests of the Junkers ran exactly contrary to those of the industrialists. The latter wished to make use of their idle plant and reactivate the export trade, in return for which Germany should accept cheaper food imports, to feed her starving population; the former were tireless at insisting on the raising and retention of food tariffs. Indeed, in January 1933 the landowners' association (*Reichslandbund*) could launch a provocative attack against the alleged 'plundering of the farming interest to the advantage of the internationally organized exporting industries and their satellites'.³⁰ It was only this feeling of desperation which led the Junkers to

²⁹ G. W. F. Hallgarten, *Hitler, Reichswehr und Industrie* (Frankfurt, 1955), p. 118, translated in *Journal of Economic History*, xii (summer 1952), 245. Hallgarten is now resident in the United States. Undoubtedly, the present political conditions in Western Germany have deterred historians there from a more thorough examination of this subject.

³⁰ The occasion for this protest by the landed interests was due, according to Wheeler-Bennett, to the political ineptitude of Schleicher, who had sought to purchase the support of the socialists and trade unions by promising them to reactivate Brüning's scheme to resettle landless labourers on the bankrupt estates of the Junkers. The only result was, however, to increase the antagonism of the landlords, and to lose another possible basis of political support. Although, as Bracher points out, no direct connexion can be proved, it is presumed by Eyck, Bullock and others that the landed interests used their well-established connexions with Hindenburg to persuade him to oppose and if necessary to dismiss Schleicher. Wheeler-Bennett maintains that Schleicher sought to compel the Junker interest to withdraw their opposition and to join their military friends in support of his government, by threatening to allow a Reichstag investigation to proceed into the allegations of corruption in the disposition of the *Osthilfe* loans of 1927-28, the purchase of Hindenburg's own estate in East Prussia, and even the sources of the money used to ensure Hindenburg's own re-election. Bullock says the same weapon was used, only this time successfully, by Hitler in a private interview he had with Hindenburg's son on 22 Jan. Oskar von Hindenburg, says Wheeler-Bennett, was the 'weakest link' and the choice was a sign of the 'uncanny psychological insight which Hitler so frequently displayed in personal relations'. Since the accounts differ widely, it is not now possible to determine how far the elder Hindenburg was affected by Hitler's threats or how far the younger Hindenburg was influential in drawing the support of the Junker interest over to the Nazi side. The significant fact is that these interests were no longer willing to accept a government headed by Schleicher.

countenance the rise of Hitler, though they were reluctant to lend their political support to a man and a movement, which had shown no sympathy for their cause.

A most significant recent study is *Das Ende der Parteien 1933*, edited by Erich Matthias and Rudolf Morsey (Cologne, 1959), which has focused attention on the fortunes, or misfortunes, of the political parties in the dissolution of the Weimar Republic, and has succinctly analysed their contributions to the extinction of democracy. Already various writers had directed severe criticism against the Socialist party for its failure to prevent the Nazi acquisition of power,³¹ a view expressed most strongly of all by Marxist writers who accused the Socialists of betraying their fellow-workers into the hands of the Nazis. Such critics, however, conveniently overlook the equally ambiguous role of the Communist party before 1933.³² It is ironical that the Communist party for its part shared the views of the extreme right, that the Nazi Revolution could be used for their purposes. As Maehl noted, the K.P.D. was always prone to mistake the fourth for the ninth month of revolutionary pregnancy. But such views are naturally ignored by the present Marxist historiography of January 1933.

Socialists have, however, also been vigorously criticized by Western observers for their timidity and lack of leadership.³³ All writers on the Weimar period have commented on the crucial part played by the S.P.D., but disagree on whether it was more 'sinned against than sinning'. For his part, Matthias concludes that much of their failure was due to the limited outlook of the Social Democratic leaders, and their entrenched patterns of thought.³⁴ In their defence, Maehl maintained that the S.P.D., essentially a rationalist, cosmopolitan party, found itself in the path of the hurricane of German nationalism.³⁵ Nevertheless, as Maehl asked, 'if we magnify the guilt of the S.P.D., do we not in inverse proportion reduce that of the reactionaries, the Reichswehr, and the Ersatz Monarch, Hindenburg?'³⁶

³¹ J. Berlau, *The German Social Democratic Party 1914-21* (New York, 1949); P. Gay, *The Dilemma of Democratic Socialism* (New York, 1952); C. Schorske, *German Social Democracy 1905-1917* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955). But see the useful article in defence of the S.P.D.: W. H. Maehl, 'Recent Literature on the German Socialists, 1891-1932', *Journal of Modern History* (Sept. 1961), pp. 292-306.

³² See the Western oriented study by O. Flechtheim, *Die Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik* (Offenbach-am-Main, 1948), also R. Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), and John Plamenatz, *German Marxism and Russian Communism* (London, 1954).

³³ Dr Emil Franzel in *Deutsche Korrespondenz*, Dec. 1962; for a sympathetic English study, see E. Anderson, *Hammer or Anvil: The Story of the German Working Class Movement* (London, 1945).

³⁴ Op. cit. pp. 101-2.

³⁵ Op. cit. pp. 305-6.

³⁶ For Hindenburg, the latest studies are F. L. Lucas, *Hindenburg als Reichspräsident* (Bonn, 1959); A. Dorpalen, *Hindenburg and the Weimar Republic* (Princeton, 1965). See also J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Hindenburg, the Wooden Titan* (London, 1936). For a conservative view, see W. Gorlitz, *Hindenburg, ein Lebensbild* (Bonn, 1953); for a Marxist view, see W. Kulischer, *Hindenburg und das Reichspräsidentenamt im 'Nationalen Umbruch' 1932-34* (Berlin, 1957). For Papen, see his *Memoirs* (London, 1952) and his testimony at the Nuremberg Trials, *International Military Tribunal*, xvi, 236 ff., also supporting documents in xl, 548 ff. For Brüning, see R. H. Phelps, *The Crisis of the German Republic 1930-32* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), and his own letter, see n. 22; see also the diary of his assistant, H. Pünder, *Politik in der Reichskanzlei, Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1929-32*, ed. T. Vogelsang (Stuttgart, 1961). For Meissner, see his *Staatssekretär unter Ebert-Hindenburg-Hitler* (Hamburg, 1950), also his appearance at the Nuremberg Trials, see Doc. PS-3309, *International Military Tribunal*, xxxii, 146 ff., and the protocol of the Wilhelmstrasse Trial of 4 May 1948. The book by his relative H. O. Meissner and H. Wildes, *Die Machtergreifung* (Stuttgart, 1958) is superficial. For

Why did the conservative parties not form a sufficient focus of loyalty and a bulwark for democracy? Those who, like Sigmund Neumann, seek to present the conservative cause in its best light, maintain that the conservative groups were caught up in a web of revolutions, of which they understood neither the deeper roots nor the demonic dynamics.³⁷ Rauschnig rightly described the conservative forces as 'spiritual victims', but no serious rebuttal of the charges of incompetence and intrigue as illustrated in Bracher or Wheeler-Bennett has yet been forthcoming. Von Klemperer analysed the thinking of those conservatives who sought to redefine the goals of conservatism after the destruction of the German Empire.³⁸ W. Kaufmann in his study of *Monarchism in the Weimar Republic* could similarly conclude with Rauschnig: 'Sanguine in their superficial judgement, the Monarchistic elements imagined they could easily put Hitler in his place... Their crime, indeed, was the fruit of reckless ignorance; their punishment was ideological, and often physical, destruction.'³⁹ None of these books seeks to defend the actual conduct of the leaders of the conservative groups and parties in the immediate period before the *Machtergreifung*.

All the political parties, as Kollmann noted,⁴⁰ were too rigid both in ideology and organization, and, with the exception of the Centre party, they behaved too much like pressure groups. The pluralism of the German parties and political system could have worked successfully only if all the parties had been held together by some common ideology. The inability to make democracy the common ideology and an integrating force constituted Weimar's major weakness, which proved fatal when the crisis struck.

A similar multiplicity of views has been expressed about the part played by the Reichswehr. The role of the army was undoubtedly crucial. It was natural, especially in the circumstances of the Second World War, that the enemies of Germany should have seen a connexion between the long-suspected and feared source of German militarism and the rise of Hitler. The charges against the army would seem to have received added corroboration from Hitler's own words:

'It is a singular historical circumstance,' he remarked on the first anniversary of the take-over of power, 'that between the forces of the revolution on the one side, and the responsible leaders of the most strictly disciplined Army on the other, such heart-felt unity in service of the people should have been demonstrated as has been the case between the Nazi Party and myself as its leader, and the officers and soldiers of the German Army.'⁴¹

Hugenberg, see *Hugenberg und die Hitler Diktatur* (Detmold, 1949), 2 vols., also his citation at Nuremberg in Doc. PA-87, *International Military Tribunal*, XL, 51-4. See also H. Schlange-Schoeninger, *Am Tage Danach* (Hamburg, 1946), and D. Groener-Geyer, *General Groener, Soldat und Staatsmann* (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1955).

³⁷ S. Neumann in *Germany's New Conservatism* by K. Von Klemperer (Princeton, 1957), p. xv.

³⁸ See also the parallel work, A. Mohler, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-32* (Stuttgart, 1950), with an excellent bibliography.

³⁹ New York, 1953, pp. 238-9.

⁴⁰ Op. cit. p. 445.

⁴¹ Quoted in Bracher, Sauer and Schulz, *Die Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung*, p. 693. See also the published accounts of General Liebmann in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, IV (1954), 397-436. An equally severe indictment has been made about the attitudes of the navy, see D. von Choltitz, *Soldat unter Soldaten* (Constance, 1951), p. 45, quoted in W. Baum, 'Marine, Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, XI (1963), 16 ff.

And East German historians have been particularly eager to establish the connexion between the army and the Nazi party, in order to discredit the present West German Bundeswehr.⁴²

Professor Gerhard Ritter has undertaken to be the chief academic defender of the military leaders. 'There can be no doubt', he maintains, 'that the Weimar Republic was not extinguished by the "militarists" of the Army, but rather, if one can say it, by the militarism of a nationalistic popular movement.'⁴³ But Ritter's full study of this problem during the crucial period before 1933 has not yet appeared, and a more critical and representative view is that of Wolfgang Sauer, who contributed the chapter on the Reichswehr to Professor Bracher's first book, and has since recapitulated his conclusions in the sequel.⁴⁴ Sauer gives an incisive account of the situation and attitudes of the army. It is noteworthy that in almost every point he reaches the same conclusions as the English historian, J. W. Wheeler-Bennett, whose book *Nemesis of Power* (London, 1956) was so sharply attacked by Ritter and others.

Did the generals or did Hitler take the initiative in their relationship? On the one side are those who see the army obliged to watch the acquisition of power by elements in society of which their leaders were deeply suspicious and hostile. On the other side, the advocates of the 'conspiracy' theory can point to Hitler's remark made only eight months after the *Machtergreifung*: 'We all know well that if, in the days of the Revolution, the Army had not stood on our side, then we should not be standing here today.'⁴⁵ Sauer and Wheeler-Bennett confirm that the growing belief that the crisis in the country demanded effective decisions opened the way for infiltration of Nazi ideas into the army, especially after the Leipzig Trial of 1930. At the same time Hitler appeared to offer to the regular army officers better prospects for their professional careers. And the army's continuing demand for rearmament could only be achieved through the political support of a party or movement which could convince the population of the necessity of national preparedness for military service. Undoubtedly many army leaders saw in the S.A., under their control, the raw material, ready-prepared, for their long-range strategy. Since the army was not itself prepared to take over the administration, it was now willing to use the support of a group, which both enjoyed popularity and at the same time endorsed the army's ambitions, as is made clear in the detailed, if somewhat turgid, book by Thilo Vogelsang: *Reichswehr, Staat und NSDAP*.⁴⁶

Schleicher, according to Wheeler-Bennett, was the man whose 'natural vanity and ambition together with his penchant for intrigue, caused him to believe that he could... exploit Nazism for the benefit of the Reichswehr'.⁴⁷ It was he who arranged secretly with the commander of the S.A. that, in an emergency, such as a Communist uprising, or a Polish invasion, the S.A. would be placed under Reichswehr officers. It was he who conspired against the solid front of the Chancellor, the minister of defence, and the chief of staff of the army to have Hitler invited to

⁴² See 'Die Reichswehr Generalitaet in der Weimarer Republik', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, III (1955), 934-9.

⁴³ See his *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk*, I and II (Munich, 1954 and 1960), also his articles in *Historische Zeitschrift*, CLXXVII (1954), 21 ff., and CXCIV (1902), 646-68.

⁴⁴ Hallgarten's book, see n. 29, covers the relations between the army and Hitler only in 1923.

⁴⁵ *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, ed. N. Baynes (Oxford, 1942), II, 556.

⁴⁶ Stuttgart, 1962.

⁴⁷ Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis of Power* (London, 1956), p. 226.

meet the president in October 1931—an interview which was in fact a dismal failure. It was he who, by denying that they enjoyed the confidence of the army, undermined the authority of both Brüning and Papen in 1932, in order to take over power himself. It was he who informed the Cabinet in December 1932, that the army could not be guaranteed to prevent civil strife.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, despite Papen's ineptitude, Schleicher's intrigues and Hindenburg's senility, the real reason for the failure of their plans was, according to Wheeler-Bennett, the refusal of Hitler to accept a presidential government, backed by the army, even if it offered favourable prospects. Hitler's policy was not to provoke a situation which forced the army to take over power openly. He was also driven to this conclusion by his experiences of the 1923 revolt. Sauer and Wheeler-Bennett agree that Hitler deliberately chose to seek power by legal means in order not to offend the army. After his popular victories of 1930, Hitler saw that his most fruitful strategy was to seek to reassure the army of his reliability by stressing the identity of Nazi interests with those of the army, and to make it clear that here was a political force which could hardly be overthrown even if a military government were to be proclaimed. Indeed, by stating that the Nazis were striving for the real interests of the army, Hitler pointed out that the army could only become more unpopular by its support of the bankrupt political system of the day, and that the Nazi party would liberate it in order to allow it to concentrate once again on building up a great army which should rescue Germany from the enslavement of the Peace Treaty.⁴⁹

On the other hand, as Sauer maintained, Hitler was well enough aware that he dare not risk achieving power, even legally, with the army remaining as a potential nucleus for another *putsch*. Hitler drew from the army's support of the presidential government in 1930–32 the conclusion that he must win over the army intact. He therefore rejected all those who counselled that he should oppose the regular army with the dynamic enthusiasm of his own S.A. He was inexorable in his determination to retain control of both the Nazi political and the para-military organizations. In reply to Schleicher's intrigues throughout 1932, trying to attach to the presidential government one or other of these valuable sources of power, Hitler was ruthless. Roehm was brought to heel, Gregor Strasser was stripped of all his offices and power. The support of the Nazi movement could not be gained without taking Hitler too. It was a gamble. It would not have succeeded if Schleicher had been popular enough to win over the active support of the army and at least the passive support of the population. But Sauer and Wheeler-Bennett are in agreement that Hitler's opportunity came through the self-destroying intrigues of revenge and retaliation staged by Papen, Schleicher and the Hindenburg camarilla. Papen's plot on 4 January to purchase the support of the Nazi party in order to get rid of Schleicher, forced the latter into a corner. He could only survive if the army gave him unqualified support. But his previous conduct had destroyed the basis of confidence he had at one time enjoyed, even in the mind of President Hindenburg. Yet the army was strong enough to refuse to agree to the return of Papen. Hindenburg, under the threat of rumours of a military coup against his authority if he

⁴⁸ No attempt has yet been made to write a biography of Schleicher. However, a series of documents have been printed in Vogelsang's book, see note 46; also W. Deist 'Schleicher und die deutsche Abrüstungspolitik' in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, VIII/2, April 1959. Professor Bracher has made use of the unpublished *Schleicher-Nachlass*.

⁴⁹ Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis of Power*, p. 235.

sent for Papen, lost his last reservations against the 'Bohemian Corporal' and sent for Hitler to form a government.⁵⁰

Most of the accounts mentioned above share a 'historicist' view of the *Machtergreifung* and seek to explain this event in the context of German, of Prussian, or even of Teutonic history. But in fact a new emphasis in the accounts and analyses of the rise of Nazism is now to be found in the researches of the political scientist and the sociologist. Professor Bracher and his colleagues are the foremost contributors in this renewed search for the essential character of Nazism. Undoubtedly their researches into the Nazi party, its ideology, its organization, its popular backing and its astonishingly rapid rise to power, above all its relationship to the whole revolutionary and crisis-filled climate of opinion of the post-1914 generation, have taken the whole debate over the *Machtergreifung* in an entirely new direction, supplanting the conventional historical narratives. As Professor Bracher points out, the rise and triumph of Nazism in Germany mark both a revolutionary overthrow of authority in the tradition of previous revolutions and the establishment of a totalitarian autocracy by the manipulation, both political and 'propaganda-ideological', of mass movements of people by new technological methods. Could Hitler's power have been secured over ninety million Germans without the use of the radio and the airplane? Such investigations and studies as Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,⁵¹ or J. L. Talmon's *The Origins of the Totalitarian Democracy*,⁵² raise important issues. Miss Arendt, for instance, sees Nazism as the result of giving in to 'mobocracy'. Nazism demonstrated how irrational and emotional modern man is in the political sphere. She rejects the idea that a handful of men conspired to use all the modern inventions to capture power for themselves. To her, the nihilism of Nazism was a reflexion of the political condition of the masses.

The accent in the newer sociological studies is placed upon those aspects of Nazism which reveal it as probably the most successful of twentieth-century totalitarian régimes. The pre-condition for this success was, as Professor Bracher points out, the enormous increase in population and industrialization in Europe. The victory of technology in all areas included the technical ability to organize the steering of mass movements. The universal system of education or rather half-education, which destroyed the ties of custom and religion had not made men politically conscious or literate, let alone responsible; nor had it provided immunization against unscrupulous political adventurers, whether they came disguised as 'authoritarian' or 'revolutionaries'. Viewed in this light and in the context of the crisis-ridden years after 1917, Germany can be seen as one of the major casualties of an overwhelming political-historical storm which has destroyed the old order in one continent after another and still reverberates today from the Congo to China to Cuba.

But technological developments could not have been responsible for moral disasters. Realization of this has turned the attention in recent writings to an important aspect which up to now has been recognized but not fully examined—namely the malignant and self-destructive dynamism of National Socialism. The

⁵⁰ For Hitler's own account of the final negotiations leading up to January 30th, recorded nine years later, see *Hitler's Table Talk, 21 May 1942* (London, 1953), pp. 495 ff.

⁵¹ New York, 1951.

⁵² London, 1952.

accent on the charismatic leadership of the Nazi Revolution, as noted by Sauer, stresses the continuous nature of this dynamism. It did not seek merely to substitute Nazi rule for democratic government in Germany nor merely Adolf Hitler's personal sway for that of Brüning or Schleicher, but introduced a whole new principle of leadership, based on the continuing dynamic of revolution which, under constant pressure to maintain its character, was bound to reject all previous established norms of rational government, and to substitute agents of the permanent revolution. The traditional institutions were to suffer *Gleichschaltung*, and to be both overridden and caught up in a new dynamic which inevitably was to burst the geographical boundaries of Germany in order to impose a National Socialist Utopia which was to last for a thousand years.

The result was the limitlessness and aimlessness, but at the same time a kind of automatic self-generation of the Nazi dynamic; once set into motion, it ran by itself, and could only be stopped by outside powers. But this also involved the destructive character of the system, since this Utopia was in fact not realizable. The attempt to reach it could only destroy the existing order, replacing it by the fiction of an Utopian reality which was practically impossible. The Nazis however achieved this fiction through their system of spectacular 'successes'. As a magician deceives the public by his sleight of hand, so Hitler confused and excited the Germans through a sudden and apparently successful removal of the most difficult problems and obstacles. But since this magic could only be maintained by further successes in the future, so the situation of the regime, despite the outward brilliance and appearance of overwhelming power, became ever more critical.⁵³

This interpretation rightly recognizes that 30 January 1933 was not merely a power-struggle between rival forces of an equal nature, but rather an introduction of a totally new method of rule in the country. In comparison to the permanent revolution which was loosed by the *Machtergreifung*, the old order still retained a basic adherence to a rational organization of the state power and still saw the role of government as the mediator between different pressure groups within society. The success of Adolf Hitler lay not so much in his manipulation of these groups as in his ability to destroy them in his revolution of nihilism. This was the true totalitarianism.

Too much can be made, however, of the immediate occasions. Popular apologetic still traces too direct a connexion between the economic catastrophe of 1931 and the simultaneous rise of the Nazi party, forgetting that worse economic conditions in the United States had a very different result. Similarly nationalistic resentment against the Versailles Treaty, imperialist appeals to Germany's 'greatness' and racial attacks against the Jews were not the unique causes of the Nazi success. As Professor Bracher rightly points out, it was the conjunction of the social forces and of the historical events, both of which combined to overthrow the pattern of pre-war life and thought, which gave a tremendous dynamic to a radical political movement, which was both free from the past yet appealed to it. Yet these forces would never have been expressed in the concrete shape of the Nazi party if it had not been for the tactical manipulation of the political scene by a man who understood clearly how the situation could be exploited to his advantage. Nazism was not pre-determined but neither was it solely the product of one man's oratory, nor even of post-

⁵³ Sauer, *op. cit.* pp. 690-1.

1919 developments. Even though, after thirty years, the roots of Nazism have been so variously and widely explored, too little attention is given today to the role of accident in Hitler's actual rise to power. One has only to re-read Goebbels' diary of the hectic days of 1932 to realize how critical Hitler's position was, both politically and financially.⁵⁴ Without the financial means to maintain his propaganda machine and his private armies, the Nazi movement might have withered away, especially as economic conditions improved. It is ironic that the up-turn in the economy in 1933 brought about by the previous governments' endeavours should have redounded to the Nazis' credit. But how tragic it was that Germany had no better leader to turn to in its hour of need, no one who could offer the promise of national regeneration without the sinister tools of mob violence and racial hatred.

Calvin Hoover's interesting eyewitness account of how Germany entered the Third Reich stresses how accidental and fortuitous many responsible people regarded Hitler's attainment of power.⁵⁵ The conclusion cannot be avoided that but for the shortsightedness, intrigue and rivalry of the governing classes, the dynamic of popular nationalism might have been contained, avoided and repressed. To be sure, democracy was attacked, betrayed and defeated. But the judgement of history must surely be that Nazism was not the only alternative, nor was Adolf Hitler the only leader the Germans deserved to get.

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OTHER REVIEWS

1. *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution*. By CHRISTOPHER HILL. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965. 45s.

This book asks an interesting and important question: 'For as long as history recorded there had been kings, lords and bishops in England. The thinking of all Englishmen had been dominated by the Established Church. Yet within less than a decade, successful war was levied against the King; bishops and the House of Lords were abolished; and Charles I was executed in the name of his people. How did men get the nerve to do such unheard-of things?' (p. 5). The learning Mr Hill deploys in dealing with this issue is awe-inspiring, as anyone who has tried to pick up a pebble or two on the same beach will recognize; if there is a useful source, however recondite, then Mr Hill has it docketed (with one or two strange exceptions, that is; there is, for instance, no reference to Professor Pocock's invaluable study of the ancient constitution). At the same time, the mass of detail presented, the extensive army of citations and authorities, does seem often to impede a clear statement of the thesis of the book. But, as I understand Mr Hill, his answer to the question posed is that a significant role must be attributed to the changes in scientific and historical thought which were helping to undermine established attitudes to the world of nature and of man. It is further suggested that these new

⁵⁴ J. Goebbels, op. cit.

⁵⁵ *Germany enters the Third Reich* (London, 1933), p. 95.