

## Fascism as a Mass-Movement (1934)

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### Abstract

Arthur Rosenberg's remarkable essay, first published in 1934, was probably the most incisive historical analysis of the origins of fascism to emerge from the revolutionary Left in the interwar years. In contrast to the official Comintern line that fascism embodied the power of finance-capital, Rosenberg saw fascism as a descendant of the reactionary mass-movements of the late-nineteenth century. Those movements encompassed a new breed of nationalism that was ultra-patriotic, racist and violently opposed to the Left, and prefigured fascism in all these ways. What was distinctive about the fascists in Italy and Germany was not so much their ideology (a pastiche of motifs that drew on those earlier traditions of the conservative and radical Right) as the use of stormtroopers to wage the struggle against democracy in more decisive and lethal ways. After the broad historical sweep of its first part, the essay looks at the factors that were peculiar to the Italian and German situations respectively, highlighting both the rôle of the existing authorities in encouraging the fascists and the wider class-appeal of the fascist parties themselves, beyond any supposed restriction to the middle-class or 'petty bourgeoisie'.

### Keywords

nationalism, antisemitism, Fascist Italy, Weimar Germany, theories of fascism

### I. Forerunners and pogroms

The touching story of Hitler and his first six disciples, the story of how jointly they founded the party and how after that these seven men became first a million, and then 6 million, and then 30 million, 40 million, the whole German people, belongs to the permanent inventory of National Socialist speeches. Behind Mussolini there is a similar story. But just as the *Duce's* grand and imposing qualities surpassed those of his jaded imitation, the Führer, so did the founding of his party outstrip that of Hitler's in sheer stateliness. There were no fewer than 145 participants at the First Congress of the Italian Fascists that assembled on the premises of the commercial school in Milan on 23 March 1919. Yet here too the ascent was utterly dizzying: from those 145 individuals to as many thousands, then to millions and finally, if you believe the official spokespersons and statisticians, the entire Italian nation.

This expansion from tiny handfuls to a mass-movement of millions overrunning entire nations is indeed puzzling. Not only the supporters of fascism but even many of its opponents felt that they were confronting a riddle. Many of those who would write about fascism had

heard something, at one time or another, about sociology or about the 'class-theory' of Marxism. Thus began the search for that class, or, more vaguely, for that layer of people, that made this miracle possible. Unfortunately, the theory of social classes is not quite as simple as it appears at first glance. Anyone seated in front of a piano can start thumping the keys, but that does not make him a musician. Likewise, juggling around with social classes does not amount to a social analysis, and least of all to a Marxist one. Sociological dilettantes generally came to the conclusion that the mysterious class that helped Hitler and Mussolini to power was the petty bourgeoisie. The greengrocer Fritz Schulz became a truly demonic power. With one hand he kept the working class in check and, with the other, capitalism. Schulz is the very epitome of Germany and master of the new century. Now as a person Schulz may well be a true hero, he may well have won all possible distinctions of war through his rôle in the trenches, and could well be the champ in his borough. But here we are not dealing with Schulz as a person, but with Schulz the greengrocer, the petty bourgeois. It is really remarkable that the petty bourgeoisie as a class should have overrun Germany, Italy, Poland, Austria and half a dozen other countries, and that the rest of the world was likewise threatened by the prospect of going 'petty bourgeois'.

There was a period in the history of Europe when the petty bourgeoisie as a class, that is, master-craftsmen and small traders organised in their respective guilds, actually did play a major rôle in economic life and production. This was the case during the later middle ages. At that time there existed neither a proletariat nor capitalism in the modern sense. This was the golden age of the guild-master. But not once in those days, when the guild-masters had all the trumps in their hand, economically and ideologically, could they succeed in governing any of the large European nations. In Germany, it is true, the guilds did wield power in a number of cities, but on the national scale they lived in wretched submission to the nobles of the countryside. And wherever the cities themselves emerged as real political and military powers, as in the Hansa, there the leadership lay not in the hands of master-craftsmen but in those of the big merchants. Starting in the sixteenth century, every new generation of Europe saw a further reduction in the social weight of the petty bourgeoisie. Thus five-hundred years ago when craft-production encountered fertile soil and unmechanised manual labour formed the chief source of all values, the petty bourgeoisie was, even then, too weak to capture political power. And today, in the age of assembly-line production, aircraft and electricity, how has this petty bourgeois suddenly become insuperable simply because he puts on a brown shirt or a black one, and Hitler and Mussolini scream out at him? You may as well say that a properly-lit wax-candle gives more light than the most powerful electric lamp.

But several contemporary writers see the causes of fascism not in the petty bourgeoisie so much as in the youth, or even in both at once. The theory of the youth as the basis of fascism is even more remarkable than the one about the petty bourgeoisie. The distinction between young persons and the older generation has existed for as long as humanity itself, and will continue to do so as long as beings of our constitution inhabit the planet. Yet youth as such has never formed itself into a political movement; for, all the specific forms in which mankind as such is divided within itself are likewise forms that divide the youth. Is it conceivable that there will come a time when the sons of bank-directors will decide to unite with the sons of engineering workers to jointly smash all the privileges enjoyed by the bank-directors and all the organisations of engineering workers, and, on their ruins, establish the brilliant fascist 'League of Youth'?

The debate about theories of fascism is not simply a pastime for people who sit at desks and speculate about sociology. In reality, it is a bitter and serious affair of extraordinary practical and political importance for the working class. If you want to smash your enemy, you must first have a precise knowledge of him. The fantastic and utterly illogical explanations that circulate regarding fascism have created the strange conviction among democrats and socialists that there is something quite irrational about their main enemy – something that defies argument. The emergence of fascism is then comparable to a natural phenomenon, for example, to an earthquake, a sort of elemental power that bursts from the hearts of humans and tolerates no resistance. And often enough the fascists themselves promote such conceptions, especially in Germany, where they proclaim that the reign of reason and of mechanical logic has now finished, that today the emotions and primal instincts of the nation are again supreme. Sometimes socialists and democrats feel they have finished with political opponents of the usual sort, but they despair of ever stemming the onslaught of this ‘new religion’. Desperately, people search for the means by which the fascist offensive can be fought back. People break their heads thinking up ways of winning over or at least neutralising this petty bourgeois, who has suddenly become the arbiter of the fate of whole nations. Others want to adapt the level of their own party or movement to that of the youth. In spite of all that, sometimes these people doubt whether it is at all possible to withstand the new political cataclysm. The fascists cunningly exploit this mood of panic, as they did particularly when it appeared among the democratic and socialist supporters following the German elections of 1933. Such demoralisation is designed to make it possible for any more-or-less bankrupt reactionary politician to overthrow the most deeply-rooted conceptions of freedom and the most solid workers’ organisations simply by donning a coloured shirt, training a band of immature youth, and dishing out public speeches on the ‘rights of youth’ and on ‘national redemption’.

Today it is more necessary than ever for workers *not* to let themselves become confused and demoralised. When the fog that fascism creates in all countries clears away, behind it one sees an all-too-familiar figure. This character is, of course, neither marvellous nor mysterious, he brings no new religion and certainly no golden age. He comes neither from the ranks of the youth nor from the mass of the petty bourgeoisie, even if he is an expert at deceiving both these groups. He is the counter-revolutionary capitalist, the born enemy of all class-conscious workers. Fascism is nothing but a modern form of the bourgeois-capitalist counter-revolution wearing a popular mask. Strictly speaking, it is not entirely correct to apply the same term ‘fascism’ to movements as disparate in character as Mussolini’s party in Italy and Hitler’s party in Germany. To see this one has only to recall that the very cornerstone of Nazi ideology, the Jewish and racial question, are very largely ignored by Italian fascism. However, the usual political terminology of today calls all capitalist counter-revolutionary movements ‘fascist’, once they acquire a mass-character and simultaneously rely on an active party-force specifically trained for civil war.

Ever since the modern form of production emerged, capitalism has dominated all civilised countries. However, it is not difficult to see that the capitalist class was never in a position to force its will on the mass of the people directly through any violence of its own. It is a comical idea to imagine factory-owners and bankers taking to arms and subjugating the rest of the population with rifles and sabres! The old feudal aristocracy could still govern by relying on its own physical power. In the middle ages, knights in

heavy armour were actually superior to the other classes of the population in terms of military strength. So too in a country where power lies in the hands of the mass of workers or peasants, the exercise of physical force will lie directly in the hands of the ruling class.

By contrast, the capitalists are compelled to rule indirectly. Just as they do not hammer and forge their own commodities, and do not stand behind the counter and sell those commodities to their customers, so they cannot themselves constitute their own army, police and electorate. They need assistants and servants to produce, to sell and to govern. In every country the capitalists rule only so long as decisive sectors of the population feel at one with their system, are ready to work for them, to vote for them, to shoot others on their behalf, all in the conviction that their own interests demand the preservation of the capitalist economic order.

The assistants and servants who, consciously or otherwise, work on behalf of capitalism in Europe today are as numerous as they are variegated. In the first place, in almost all countries where the capitalist system prevails, it has, in one form or another, put up with representatives of the traditional, pre-capitalistic, feudal order. Monarchy and nobility, church and army, and the upper bureaucracy have all evolved from the feudal period into modern capitalist times. At first, of course, the bourgeoisie had to establish its claim to power against the aristocracy in a revolutionary way. It came forward as the representative of the entire nation in the latter's struggle against a privileged feudal minority. It united all of the middle and lower strata around its banner and in this way forced the feudal lords to capitulate. But as soon as victory was won in this struggle, the capitalists quickly sought a compromise with the feudal elements, so as to present a joint front with them against the democratic and even socialist aspirations of the mass of the poor. From the feudal tradition there sprang the ideologies of authority, discipline, and of military virtues and forms of life, which are so crucial to the understanding of fascism.

Likewise, the estate of the intellectuals emerged out of the old feudal order into the modern bourgeois period. It resigned itself to the new form of society exactly as it had earlier to the aristocracy. But because the intellectual does not stand directly within the process of production, does not himself create surplus-value, but only lives off surplus-value, and that, too, indirectly, he retains a special position [*Sonderstellung*] even under capitalism. In general he is quite convinced that he represents not the commercial interests of the capitalists, but the general interests of the nation. However, because 'unfortunately' private property is essential to the prosperity of 'the nation', the average European intellectual finds himself compelled to support capitalism and reject socialism – reluctantly, of course. Because the intellectual estate is professionally involved in representing 'general' interests and 'general' conceptions, it is especially well positioned to extract the sweet pap of national self-sacrifice from the bitter reality of the class-struggle.

Finally, below the capitalists in the social pyramid come the peasants and craftsmen. Their social weight varies from country to country depending on the special conditions of development. Even lower in the scale, at the bottom, comes the enormous army of wage-earners. They are all more-or-less vulnerable to the enticements of capital. This is true not simply of the peasants and craftsmen. In Germany, even before Hitler's rise to power, a significant proportion of wage-employees [*Arbeitnehmer*] voted for the bourgeois parties, and in England even today a substantial section of the working class supports the Conservatives. It follows that the political dynamics of the capitalist countries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has always been a hugely complicated affair. The

peculiar equilibrium of capitalist society has always depended on a multiplicity of distinct and seemingly opposed forces.

The great bourgeois mass-movements of more recent European history belong to two specific types – the liberal and the anti-liberal. *Fascism is the most recent example of this second category of anti-liberal bourgeois mass-movements.* The bourgeois liberalism of the nineteenth century was founded on free competition. It demanded freedom and peace. In domestic politics, ‘freedom’ meant the removal of state-compulsion, above all, a wide-ranging economic autonomy that delegated to the state the notorious rôle of night-watchman. Free trade and peace were the complements of this system in foreign policy. They promised humanity a golden age where, for the first time, the free play of economic forces could unfold without hindrance, throughout the face of the globe. This liberal gospel of ‘Freedom, Free Trade and Peace’ inspired the popular masses, the middle-classes and often even the workers. In England, Liberalism was dominant in the years following the electoral reform of 1832 – at first without challenge, or almost so, up to 1866, then down to the World-War, both alternating and competing with a restructured Conservative Party. In Germany it attracted the mass of people from 1848 to about 1878 – thereafter, down to the War, it commanded the support of a minority. Clearly, in Germany liberalism could never flourish quite as smoothly as it did in England. Its brief dominance was never founded on its own strength; on the contrary, it had to be satisfied with the crumbs of political power thrown to it by the feudal monarchy. In France, the liberal era lasted from 1830 to 1848, under the bourgeois monarch Louis Philippe. Then came the period of the dictatorship of Napoleon III, which lasted until 1870 and was followed once again by the liberal Republic, which clearly found it hard to keep itself going against the onslaughts of the anti-liberal movements of the decades preceding the War. From its inception, the Italian monarchy bore the appearance of a liberal state, although behind this façade all manner of other, far-from-liberal forces lay concealed. In Russia, in the period before the War, the bourgeoisie likewise professed liberalism. Obviously, under Tsarism its political power was even more tenuous than the influence enjoyed by its counterparts in Germany.

In all the major European countries mentioned above, liberalism encountered other tendencies that naturally shared with it its firm support for the capitalist form of economy, but wanted to have nothing at all to do with liberal principles. These tendencies rejected the purely ‘night-watchman’ rôle of the state and demanded in its place strong intervention from the public authority in economic life. To liberal free trade they contraposed protectionism, to liberal pacifism, an aggressive imperialism. They cared little for international harmony, and put the ‘nation’ above everything else. They rejected democratic notions of equality and instead put the main emphasis on traditional forms of hierarchy. They aspired to being purely indigenous [*bodenständig*] and sought to restore respect for authority.

The economic background to this change from liberalism to a new, authoritarian, conservatism is, as was understood quite some time back, an internal transformation in the capitalist process of production. Capitalism evolved from the period of free competition to the new era of massively concentrated giant enterprises with their drive to monopoly. This new monopolistic capitalism insulates its national economic sphere by protective tariffs. It uses violence and territorial expansion to try and win new countries for further exploitation. It finds the sedate, pacifistic ideology of the liberal era quite useless for its purposes. It demands *authority, centralism and violence.*

It is precisely the biggest and most powerful capitalists, the owners of giant monopolistic enterprises and of the financial institutions linked to them who were the first to abandon the hackneyed soil of liberalism and turn to the new imperialist methods. The vast majority of middling and small capitalists remained faithful to the liberal tradition for much longer. To capture state-power, the capitalists opposed to liberalism are compelled to enlist allies in other sectors of the population. The most astute leaders of the new imperialism manage to outdo even the liberals and the bourgeois democrats in their demagoguery. Sometimes, under the slogan of national defence of the poor, they even fight the 'narrow-minded monied interests' of liberalism. There is scarcely any doubt that *modern fascism belongs with this type, and that it has developed the nationalist propaganda characteristic of this kind of politics to perfection.*

In England it was the Conservative Party, renovated by Benjamin Disraeli on imperialist foundations, that gave the franchise to urban workers in 1867, to draw them away from liberalism. The result was that in 1874 the Conservatives for the first time won a majority in the House of Commons, thanks to the electoral support they received from workers. In England under Disraeli, and later, under Chamberlain, the Tories were supported by the bulk of the aristocracy, the big City financiers, the owners of heavy industry, the great mass of the intelligentsia, and major sections of the industrial working class. All these elements were brought together behind the slogan of 'national greatness'. On the other hand, broad strata of the middle and small capitalists, the petty bourgeoisie and even the countryside remained faithful to liberal ideals. In France the right-wing was financed, after 1871, by the big banks and by heavy industry. The French 'national Right' proclaimed revanchism – the idea of a victorious war of revenge against Germany for the restoration of France's 'national honour' lost at the battle of Sedan. A general attempt was made to revive the militaristic and monarchist traditions of the past. Nobility and church enlisted in the service of this patriotic movement. The liberal Republic was denounced as 'cowardly' and 'unpatriotic', and there was a longing for the dictatorship of a national redeemer. In the 1880s this rôle devolved on General Boulanger, who, as the voting-patterns would show, did temporarily enjoy the support of the majority of the French people. Around the turn of the century the French Republic was again seriously confronted by the threat of a military *coup d'état* which had some popular backing. The French Right based itself on the upper classes of French society, on sections of the petty bourgeoisie and on groups of workers who had been duped by them, whereas the socialist workers and large masses of the petty bourgeoisie fought passionately for republicanism and democracy.

In Germany, after 1878, the old-style liberals lost their majority in the Reichstag. Heavy industry turned to protectionism and evolved a programme of colonial, military and naval expansion in league with the aristocracy. The intelligentsia drew its inspiration from military discipline and the Prussian spirit. Democracy was a despicable 'un-Germanic' intrusion. The bourgeois *Lebensideal* was modelled on the figure of the reserve-officer. After 1878, in the Protestant areas of Germany, the rural masses were followers of the Conservative Party (DKP). Likewise, significant sections of the petty bourgeoisie swung to the Right. Heavy industry and its intellectual lackeys transformed the old National Liberals so radically that, of 'liberalism', only the name survived. The liberal banner was bequeathed to the tired hands of the pure liberals. In the Reichstag elections of 1887, under Bismarck's leadership, the Conservatives and the National Liberals bound up with heavy industry together won the majority. Of course, Social Democracy expanded rapidly under

Wilhelm II, but the old-style liberalism was so emasculated by now that in the Reichstag the Conservatives, together with the National Liberals and the Catholic Centre Party, controlled a secure majority. And so, in Germany too, as in England and in France, the last third of the nineteenth century and the early-twentieth century saw the retreat of a traditional liberalism and its displacement by newer, nationalist/imperialist forces. In Germany, too, the imperialists formed an alliance with the army, the church and the intelligentsia. However, prior to 1914, Germany did not see any grand or unified nationalist mass-movement; the different wings of German nationalism remained divided. The reason for this is not hard to understand. The Kaiser's régime was so strong that it could survive *without* the support of popular votes and parliamentary majorities. It sufficed if national imperialism [*der nationale Imperialismus*] in Germany could control the Imperial régime – on that basis it could get whatever it wanted, and it could afford to dispense with the bother of demagogic campaigns to win votes and so on. The ruling classes of Imperial Germany did not need the expedient [*die Mittel*] of democracy to the same degree as the upper classes of France and England clearly did in those years. Court-chaplain Stöcker's attempt to assemble a populist, anti-liberal and anti-socialist mass-movement in the towns and cities was discouraged by the Imperial government itself. For any movement of this kind would have forced the ruling circles in Germany to make definite concessions to the 'greedy masses', and they had no inclination to this sort of policy. The Kaiser and big capital felt safer with the protection afforded by the Potsdam Guard than with the good graces of Stöcker's mass-congregations.

This interplay of liberal and anti-liberal bourgeois forces that largely shaped the development of England, France and Germany from 1871 to 1914 appears to be missing in the corresponding period of Italian history. But this is merely a semblance. The various tendencies described earlier were present here as well. Here, too, liberalism of the old style was gradually pushed back by the imperialism of big capital [*großkapitalistischen Imperialismus*], which, in the decade preceding the War, led directly to the Tripolitan War of 1911–12 and to active involvement in the Balkans. A drummed-up nationalism directed its sharpest attacks against Austria, demanded the emancipation of its 'unredeemed' Italian brothers in Trento (Trentino) and Trieste, and used every conceivable means to catch up with the more prosperous superpowers in Northern Europe. However, the official party-politics of Italy was completely immersed in the swamp of semi-feudal corruption, with its breeding-ground in the backward districts of the central and southern parts of the peninsula. The truly active social forces of the country found in its parliamentary system either no expression at all or only the most imperfect one. In Russia too, in the period just before the World-War, the big bourgeoisie deserted to imperialism and geared itself for the conquest of Constantinople and other rapacious projects formulated by the Tsar's ministers. These were also years when the Tsar's police-agents attempted to create a mass-movement loyal to the Tsar as a counterweight to the Revolution. They bought up the dregs of the *lumpen* proletariat with liquor and money, and created 'true Russian' trade-unions led by the police, as alternatives to the banned socialist unions. Yet, Russia did witness a significant mass-movement, the Union of 'True Russian Peoples' or 'Black Hundreds', which showered itself in glory with the pogroms it conducted.

In both parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it was liberalism that initially dominated the Constitution of 1867. The so-called 'liberals' of Hungary clearly belonged to a category apart. They came from the landed aristocracy and monied bourgeoisie, and they suppressed

the broad mass of people with unsurpassed violence. Thus Hungarian liberalism did not, strictly speaking, need to accomplish a transition to specifically imperialist methods. Hungary's brutal political régime came wrapped in the cloak of a wildly over-excited Magyar nationalism.

At first, in the decade following 1867, Austria was dominated by a liberalism of the usual kind, comparable to contemporary German liberalism. But towards the end of the 1870s, this regnant liberalism collapsed in Austria as well. Indeed, down to the very end, Hapsburg feudalism got along excellently with the capitalists in heavy industry and finance. The firms that supplied the Danube monarchy with weapons and financial loans were unconditionally loyal to the Emperor, and sufficiently powerful as long as they used the necessary backstairs in Vienna. The influence of the middling liberal bourgeoisie of German extraction was systematically pushed back in Austria. Supported by a small and monarchist middle-class and by the Catholic Church, Lueger founded the mass-party of Christian Socialism. He was a first-rate agitator and mass-organiser. He captured a majority in Vienna, allowed himself to be elected mayor of the Imperial capital and would eventually become leader of the strongest faction in the Austrian parliament, one on which the Imperial régime was permanently dependent. Lueger was a leader of the 'common man' [*der kleinen Leute*]. Finance-capital had no direct connections with his party. But in the later part of his life Lueger became a key supporter of the Hapsburg monarchy, whose existence was in turn decisive to the fortunes of big business. It was a game with a clear allocation of rôles – Lueger and his populist party, the Kaiser and his aristocratic ministers, and the big Vienna bankers all basically shared the same goals.

The German intellectuals who lived in Austria, especially the younger ones, were deeply dissatisfied with their social position in the generation before the War. Longingly, they looked across the borders into Imperial Germany where, under Hohenzollern dominance, young students had come to have a stake in Germany's drive to become a world-power. In Austria, however, the régime generally favoured Slavs to the detriment of ethnic Germans. Moreover, the Christian intelligentsia felt threatened by the lively competition of the considerable number of Jewish intellectuals. Austria's German youth would only too willingly have placed themselves in the service of a big-power 'national' imperialism, but the régime had no use for them. The Austrian régime was anything but German-nationalist [*deutschnational*] and Austrian high finance even less so. Thus young people of German extraction who lived in Austria began to develop feelings of neglect and exclusion; at least some sections of them. Their German nationalism and their hatred of anything non-German was all the more virulent. The remarkable phenomenon of a whole layer of young German academics who, in the years leading up to 1914, felt part of a subjugated and oppressed nationality was, of course, inconceivable in Wilhelmine Germany, with its student-clubs and reserve-officers. But this 'type' existed in Austria in the Pan-German and German-nationalist student-circles. Their ethnic romanticism and their sour racial resentments rubbed off on to sections of middle- and working-class youth. It was from this background that Adolf Hitler came over to Germany, and in the new conditions that prevailed there after 1918 he certainly needed no lessons in nationalism.

A demagogic nationalism spontaneously seeks an object through which it can daily demonstrate its own superiority and onto which it can release the delirium of its racial frenzy. Poor white people in the southern states of America hated the blacks. But at the same time they needed them, because without their persecution of black people they



could not develop their own instincts. The same was true of the Turks in the period of Abdul Hamid's maltreatment of the Armenian population. The German youth of Bohemia stood in a position of equal strength vis-à-vis the Czechs, and the young Czech nationalists repaid the German nationalists in the same coin. However, a specially useful and convenient object for such racism were the Jews. In the anti-liberal and nationalist mass-movements of prewar Europe described above, the Jewish Question played an extraordinarily important rôle. The Russian *lumpen* proletariat could be as easily incited against the Jews as some of the intellectuals and middle-class elements in Central Europe.

The Union of True Russian Peoples basically survived on Jew-baiting. Lueger built his Christian Social Party in the first instance by using antisemitic propaganda. When Reverend Stöcker wanted to arouse a monarchist and Christian mass-movement in Berlin, it was the Jews he attacked. French nationalism around the turn of the century was likewise sharply antisemitic. Here a contributory factor was the quite accidental circumstance that the struggle between different parties was passionately fought over the question of the guilt or otherwise of the Jewish captain, Dreyfus. One can therefore conclude that already before the War, in at least four of the six major countries of Europe, nationalist mass-movements opposed to liberalism were bound up with hostility to the Jews. Moreover, in Austria the German nationalists and Christian Socialists vied with each other in their hatred for the Jews. By contrast, in prewar Hungary no strong antisemitic mass-movement ever developed: the wealthy Budapest Jews were friends of the ruling oligarchy. In Italy, where the number of Jews has never been significant, it was precisely Jewish families who were among the most active supporters of modern imperialism. Here, as in England, there was no purely political antisemitism.

Concerning the form of state, the reactionary mass-movements of Russia, Austria, Hungary and Germany were unconditionally for the defence of the existing authoritarian monarchies and of all the values bound up with them. In France the Right was opposed to democracy, and at best put up with the Republic as an unavoidable evil. The most extreme groups of French nationalism longed for a *coup d'état*, and therefore either for a military dictatorship or for a restoration of the monarchy itself. In Italy the constitutional question was never actually posed prior to 1914. In England the vast mass of workers and of the middle-class were unconditional supporters of the parliamentary order. Here any political group that toyed with the idea of a dictatorship would have met with immediate political extinction. The Conservative Party was thus compelled to work within the parliamentary framework. Men such as Disraeli and Chamberlain were actually proud of winning parliamentary majorities.

As you can see, *the ideology which is today called 'fascist' was already fairly widespread throughout Europe before the War*, and exerted a strong influence on the masses. However, with one exception, what was missing then was the peculiar tactic of using stormtroopers which is thoroughly characteristic of modern fascism. The sole exception was formed by the Black Hundreds of Tsarist Russia and their ability to stage pogroms. The stormtrooper-tactic peculiar to fascism is really quite a curious social phenomenon. It appears to contradict all political logic. Of course, the use of violence by ruling classes against the classes they rule over is as old as the history of human civilisation itself. In particular, the capitalist classes of Europe never hesitated to use the utmost harshness and mass-bloodshed whenever their position of power was threatened by socialism or even just by popular movements for democracy. In 1848 and again in 1871, the French capitalist

class suppressed the Parisian workers with a series of bloody massacres. From 1878 to 1890 Bismarck kept the German workers' movement shackled by his anti-socialist laws. Now, it goes without saying that the ruling class uses its state-apparatus for the exercise of force, for the state-apparatus is there precisely for that purpose – the authorities, police and judicial administration are there to combat subversion, and when those do not suffice, the army is brought in. In special emergencies the ruling class can reinforce its state-power by calling in volunteer-forces or mercenaries, but even in those cases it is the official state-power itself that struggles directly against the revolution with its own weaponry and laws. When the oppressed masses are weak, they put up either no resistance at all or weak resistance to the ruling class and state-violence. When they feel stronger, then they too take up arms and a civil war results. Popular uprisings disrupt the normal functioning of the state-apparatus – both sides take to arms and struggle to the very end. The picture is familiar from the English Revolution of the seventeenth century, the French Revolution of the eighteenth century, and the Russian Revolution in our own century.

Stormtroopers of the fascist kind appear to match none of the normal permutations of the political struggle. Their very existence signifies that normal conditions no longer prevail. On the other hand, they do not form part of a state of open civil war either. Rather, political opponents of the government have become disagreeable to the authorities but are not strong enough to pose the question of power in a frontal assault. The government and the ruling groups do not deploy the standard or regular state-authorities against the opposition, but volunteer-corps are recruited from the mass of the population to handle this job. They attack, ill-treat or murder all persons who have become unpopular, destroy or plunder their property, and unleash a wave of persecution and terror calculated to drown all opposition. The activities of stormtroopers of the fascist type are in complete violation of the laws. Legally, the stormtroopers *should* be tried and sentenced to jail. But in fact nothing of the sort happens to them. Their conviction in the courts is pure show – either they do not serve their sentence, or they are soon pardoned. In this way the ruling class shows its stormtrooper-heroes how grateful and sympathetic it is.

Now, under what conditions is the political activity of stormtroopers possible? In the more recent history of Europe the pogroms conducted by the 'Black Hundreds' in Russia in October 1905 form the first clear and significant example of this phenomenon, which is today so familiar to us. The first condition of their appearance is a complete disintegration of the normal state-power. As a rule, the ruling class does all it can to strengthen the official authority of the state. In its view the state forms an embodiment of the general, public interest. The judiciary is an expression of 'impartial' justice. Respect for the state and its authorities, belief in the power of law, is one of the strongest weapons in the hands of the ruling class. It is only when a country is totally shaken by a crisis of revolutionary proportions, and when the ruling groups can no longer hope to survive with the help of the law and police-administration alone, that they begin to look around for other means.

The government and authorities themselves avoid any direct attack on the revolutionaries, democrats, socialists and Jews. But one day the 'anger of the people' explodes, the upright citizen who still believes in God, King and Country emerges, smashes the wicked rebels and restores the power of legitimate authority. Yet if the anger of the people had been real, there would never have been a crisis. Thus *the rage of the patriotic masses has to be manufactured*. In October 1905, faced with a powerful revolutionary upsurge of the masses, the Russian government did not dare to assemble its police and Cossack forces

and order them to liquidate the Jews and the socialists. On the other hand, with police-help, a popular movement of a patriotic, anti-liberal, antisemitic nature was created, and these stormtroopers were then let loose on Jews and revolutionaries. In this way a certain division of labour emerged: the Tsarist régime was not directly and officially responsible for the shameful actions of the pogroms' heroes. One could thus retain a certain distance, at least in the image projected abroad and in the press, even as many officials and police-chiefs openly defended the Black Hundreds. On the other side, there were many straightforward conservative supporters of the Tsar who wanted nothing to do with the pogroms. There were officials and even ministers who took a clear stand against the pogroms.

It is by no means necessary that at any given moment the entire ruling class has to accept the stormtroopers and their methods of struggle. As a rule, there will be differences of opinion. The liberal bourgeoisie and certain fastidiously authoritarian conservatives will condemn the stormtroopers and the methods of fascism. But it would be a disastrous mistake for the working class to suppose that such differences mean very much. Despite all tactical differences, the fascist stormtroopers belong with the ruling capitalists and feudal landlords as the flesh of their flesh. It is not true that in such periods there are three distinct forces in the state – ruling capitalists, fascists, and socialists who stand for democracy. Rather, there are always only two forces – the capitalists and the fascists on one side, the democrats and socialists on the other. One damaging drawback of the theory of a 'petty-bourgeois' fascism is that it obscures this simple fact in the eyes of workers. For then the world looks like this: first there are the capitalists in power, next there is the petty-bourgeois fascist opposition, finally, there is the proletarian socialist opposition. With this threefold division, every conceivable trick and manoeuvre becomes possible, for example, an alliance of socialists with fascists against the ruling bourgeoisie, or a coalition of socialists with the liberal and upright conservative capitalists against the fascists, or some other soap-bubble of this kind. Illusions of this sort have been disastrous for the working classes of Germany, Italy and other countries.

In 1909 Trotsky wrote about the pogrom-mobilisations of October 1905:

For this crusade the Russian government had enlisted its troops in every conceivable nook and cranny, from liquor-joints to brothels. Here you saw the petty shopkeeper and the tramp, the publican and his regulars, the house-servant and the police-spy, professional crooks and casual thieves, small craftsmen and brothel-attendants, and the starving and intellectually desolate small peasant who had perhaps abandoned his home-village only yesterday and whose head had been thoroughly confused by the din of factory-machines.

Initially, at the start of the Russo-Japanese War, the police had undertaken trial-mobilisations of obscure masses, and these staged street-demonstrations in favour of the government's war-policy. Trotsky continues:

From this time onwards the consciously planned and organised mobilisation of the scum of society witnessed an extraordinary development, and even if the greater mass of participants in the pogroms – if one can speak of 'mass' here – remained a more-or-less fluctuating element, the core of this army was formed

on a disciplined and organised military basis. This hardcore received its slogans and watchwords from above, and passed them on into the ranks below. It was also this core that decided the timing and the scale of any murderous action that had to be organised.

Here it is sufficient to draw out only those features of the Russian pogroms and the Black Hundreds that are relevant to a history of fascism. The Black Hundreds prepared their actions by first circulating their newspaper in the localities they hit upon. This was soon followed by the 'experts' turning up on the scene, sent there from other cities. Now the crucial rumours would start circulating – the Jews are planning an attack on all law-abiding Christians, the socialists have desecrated a holy image, the students have torn a picture of the Tsar to shreds. Then proscription-lists would be posted up, with the names of individuals and the homes earmarked for plunder and demolition on a priority-basis. On the notified day the Black Hundreds would assemble, initially at the churches for some special service. This would be followed by a procession of fluttering national flags, during the whole of which a military band would play patriotic tunes without interruption. Slowly the first window-panes would be smashed, the first passers-by manhandled. Then some shots would ring out, supposedly fired by the socialists or Jews on 'peace-loving' national demonstrators. A cry for revenge would resound loudly at this point, and a mayhem of unrestrained looting, assault and murder would then erupt.

The police are there, but they remain passive and are in no position to defend the victims of the 'people's' pogrom. But as soon as the Jews or the socialist workers mount an organised resistance, the police move into action immediately, and, if they think it is required, even the army intervenes. Every attempt by workers to defend themselves is crushed, and the pogrom can continue. In the autumn of 1905 the Black Hundreds committed some 4,000 murders in hundreds of Russian towns, to say nothing of all their other crimes. As far as its scale is concerned, this movement of the 'true Russian peoples' can certainly be compared with the more recent actions of the Blackshirts and Brownshirts. At a time of enormous revolutionary tension, when millions of workers were on strike in Russia, when in innumerable villages there were peasant-rebellions, and the soldiers and sailors were starting to mutiny, it was still possible for the ruling class to enlist hundreds of thousands of impoverished elements as stormtroopers of the counter-revolution. Hatred of Jews, a stupid, fanatical nationalism, bribery and alcohol all combined to draw together such masses of the petty bourgeoisie, *lumpen* proletariat and occasionally even the right-wing workers. The possibility of stealing and plundering with total impunity drove hordes of professional criminals into the storm-troops. However, there was an additional factor – the powerful temptation for all impoverished individuals who had come down in the world to join the stormtroopers, for as members of these fascist bands that were tolerated by the authorities they were suddenly wrenched from being non-entities to becoming powerful elements in whose hands lay the fate of their fellow human beings. On this point, too, Trotsky writes with fine psychological insight:

Now this man without shoes has become king. An hour ago he was a trembling slave hounded by the police and by hunger. Now he feels like an absolute despot, he can do anything he likes, everything will pass, he is master of life and death. If he feels the urge to do so, he throws an old woman from the window of the

third floor to the pavements below, he smashes the skull of a baby with a chair, he rapes a small girl in front of a crowd of people. He shrinks from none of the tortures which only a brain driven mad with liquor and frenzy could contrive. For he can do anything he likes, everything will pass. God bless the Tsar!

Once the counter-revolution triumphed in Russia, the pogroms became unnecessary, and the ruling class returned to 'law and order'. But the Russian example shows us that a ruling class or a régime that can only keep itself alive through the terror spread by the storm-troops is finally doomed to extinction. The systematic destruction of all existing notions of justice, order and legality that the pogroms and stormtroopers bring about is something no-one can forget. The next revolutionary wave brings with it a ruthless collapse and retaliation. After that bloody autumn of 1905, Nicholas II was no longer Tsar of all Russians 'by God's grace'. He was only the dirty little chieftain of the Black Hundreds. The heroes of bygone pogroms could not save Tsarism.

In no other European big power outside of Russia had the disintegration of state-power, prior to 1914, advanced to such a degree that the nationalist, anti-liberal movements would actually want to promote stormtrooper-terrorism. It was the impact of the World-War and the general social crisis that dominated its aftermath in Europe that finally secured renewed space for the methods of the pogrom.

## II. Italy

Throughout Europe, at first, the World-War signified a triumph of national authority. The parties of the prewar period disappeared in the shadows of a civil truce. The censor took care to establish a complete unity of what the papers carried and of public opinion. Scientists, artists, associations and groups were all, without exception, pressed into the service of the 'national cause'. Above all, a wave of economic centralisation swept through the countries of Europe as the War imposed its own demands on the economy. Capital, organised in trusts, took over control of state-policy and those companies imposed their stranglehold over the production of whole branches of industry. All the belligerent big powers were now transformed into 'total' states [*'totale' Staaten*].

It is easy to see that everywhere the anti-liberal, nationalist tendencies gained the upper hand. In Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia, at least in the early part of the War, the autocracy stood more solid than ever. In the coalition-régimes that led the war-effort, the Conservatives in England, and the parties of the Right in France, soon came to occupy the leading position. In Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia, the key decisions that led to war were made by the ruling monarchs and their counsellors, ministers and General Staff. The masses were not asked how they felt about the War, they simply had to obey and to show the expected national enthusiasm. In these circumstances, in July 1914 the big powers that lived under autocracies were under no compulsion to promote a policy of war by using nationalist mass-hysteria. As for France, she had to put up with a war that Germany had declared on her. In England, finally, the House of Commons debated the question openly and decided in favour of war by a free vote.

The course of development was quite different in Italy. Here the régime itself and the majority of the people were initially in favour of neutrality, and it was only the nationalist

mass-movement that actually drove Italy into the War in 1915. The methods by which Italy was hustled into the War are of extraordinary interest. The Italian war-movement of 1915 – whose most popular leader, already, was Mussolini – is the historical link between the anti-liberal mass-movements of the prewar period and the fascism, strictly so-called, of the 1920s. The prospects of those who supported Italian involvement in the War appeared bleak in the autumn of 1914 and even early the following year. Italy's national interest could obviously be served just as well by preserving a stance of neutrality, as long as she could extract a good price for it from the belligerent powers. The socialist workers were for peace, so too were the Catholics and the traditional liberals. The great mass of the middle-class and the rural population simply wanted to be left alone. They had no special yearning for blood-stained laurels. Even the large majority of professional officers were against this war, because their sympathies lay with Germany and they were quite reluctant to become involved on the side of the Entente. In spite of all this, the big capitalists who were bent on imperialist expansion tied up with the younger intellectuals and succeeded in pushing Italy into war. Monarchy, government and the parliamentary system had scarcely any weight in Italy, even when combined. The state-apparatus was weak and no match for a stormy mass-movement, even if the movement started only with a minority of the population.

The events of 1915 and Mussolini's subsequent capture of power both have their roots in the peculiar history of Italy in the nineteenth century. The country was divided, economically and socially, into two parts, which, apart from their common Italian nationality, had little to do with each other. The North was dominated by a modern bourgeois culture, represented chiefly by the cities of Turin, Milan and Genoa. In terms of education and economic activity, the provinces of the North were comparable to the countries of Central Europe. By contrast, in Central and Southern Italy, in the area previously controlled by the church and in the ex-kingdom of Naples, the prevailing relations were still almost medieval in character. Here the mass of the population consisted of petty producers and impoverished peasants who could neither read nor write, and who were deeply sunk in superstition. The unification of Italy found its point of departure in the advanced North. But the great liberal statesman Cavour, who laid the cornerstone of Italian unification, intended originally to embrace only the Northern provinces. He had no inclination to incorporate Central and Southern Italy directly into the unified state. Cavour was perfectly aware that the North was in no position to be able to digest the South.

However, the patriotic youth of Italy, full of bourgeois ideas of freedom and national greatness, cared nothing for Cavour's moderation. Cavour was Prime Minister of the North-Italian state of Piedmont, which has been described as the Prussia of Italy. In fact, the small and weak political apparatus of Piedmont was scarcely comparable with the powerful war-machine of Prussia. There is no battle of Königgrätz or of Sedan in the history of Piedmont. The Piedmontese dynasty had won the royal throne of Italy not through its military strength, but simply through skilful exploitation of the circumstances. When Bismarck founded his German Empire, the German bourgeoisie could rely on the enormous power of the Prussian army and Hohenzollern autocracy. The Italian bourgeoisie could expect no help whatsoever from the Piedmontese dynasty and its officer-corps.

So the nationalist youth of Italy did not rely on the military services of Piedmont. On the contrary, they formed her volunteer-corps [*Freikorps*] which moved into action independently to defeat the King of Naples and the Pope. In Garibaldi this volunteer-corps

of Redshirts found its perfect leader. In a celebrated campaign, Garibaldi threw the feudal monarchy of Naples on the rubbish-heap. The Redshirts had triumphed where the official national State of Piedmont had simply vacillated nervously.

In a certain sense one might say that Garibaldi's Redshirts were the forerunners of Mussolini's Blackshirts. Yet one could never describe Garibaldi's following as fascist. For Garibaldi himself was a sincere national democrat, and his supporters never staged any pogroms. They never beat up defenceless people behind police-protection. On the contrary, they enlisted voluntarily in the battle against Italy's foreign enemy. They took up the tasks before which the official, 'national' government of Italy shrank back. Garibaldi's Redshirts were recruited from the best and most self-sacrificing section of the country's bourgeois youth. The Garibaldini were of course inspired enough to succeed in uprooting the feudal régimes of Central and Southern Italy and could thus accomplish the country's unification. But they could not change the real social forces within Italy. 1870 represented the first stage in the national unification of Italy. But this Italy looked completely different from the one Garibaldi and his fighters had dreamed of.

In the decades that followed, the bourgeoisie of the North proved incapable of assimilating the feudal South. The dominant social groups of the South were formed by the big landowners who ruled over an impoverished mass of small tenants, by the priests and by secret societies composed of corrupt political cliques. Milan and Turin were too weak to drain the marshlands of the Mafia and Camorra. Meanwhile, in the last third of the nineteenth century, Italian history would witness not a dramatic struggle between North and South, but a wretched compromise. The so-called 'liberal' politicians of the North reached an understanding with the ruling groups of the South. While the Northern ministers left the South alone, the country south of Rome supplied them with a couple of hundred thoroughly pliant deputies to vote down any possible opposition. In the South the traditional barbarism thus managed to survive. Whenever the half-starved and illiterate peasantry rebelled against the landlords, the gendarmerie of the 'liberal' state intervened and shot them down. In the parliamentary elections the local authorities colluded with the landowners. But in Rome the persons whom the masses elected in this way belonged to the 'liberal' or even to the 'radical' camp.

So Italy's parliamentary democracy was a dismal comedy, a mask for semi-feudal barbarism and repression. The first person to take charge of this new system was the Prime Minister Crispi, himself a southerner. His more intelligent successor, Giolitti, came from the North, it is true, but he dominated the Southern machinery of voting and corruption with exemplary skill. Under these conditions, it is not difficult to see that the country's revenues were in the first instance used to finance purely local interests, that the state was incapable of pursuing a consistent policy aimed at cultural and economic development, and that, compared with the other big powers, Italy remained both poor and backward. In the period before the War the Socialist Party of Italy fought courageously against these conditions and the general state of exploitation, but its base was formed by only a small minority of the population.

It is also not hard to see that this rut of self-styled 'liberalism' that Italy had got itself into scarcely appealed to the modern big capitalists of Turin and Milan. They wanted an overhaul of the country that would enable her, finally, to catch up with the more advanced countries of the West. The young intelligentsia was likewise seething. Still immersed in the traditions of Garibaldi, they longed for a strong, superior and prosperous Italy and fought

the politicians of the day. There was a whole host of patriotic youth-organisations, which were designed basically to help the ‘unredeemed brothers’, viz. Italian nationals who lived in Trento and Trieste under Austrian domination. When these young students became somewhat older and entered paid positions in the state-bureaucracy, their nationalist fervour cooled down. However, the patriotic traditions of the Garibaldini that characterised the youth of Italy’s upper classes survived and continued to penetrate newer generations at school and university. Sometimes out of disappointment with the shortcomings of the monarchy, this patriotic youth inclined towards republicanism. In the years leading up to the War the rulers of Italy lived in a constant double fear – on the one hand, they feared the prospect of revolutionary action by the radical workers, syndicalists, anarchists and socialists, on the other, the possibility of a putsch by the radical nationalists. Of course, the ruling groups enjoyed the confidence of the King and could rely on a parliamentary majority. But this hardly mattered, because the obedient electoral mass was composed of a stolid peasantry and petty bourgeoisie that could in any case never rush to the help of the government if any radical activists moved into action in the bigger cities. Moreover, it was doubtful whether one could rely completely on the troops themselves.

These peculiar social conditions made it possible, precisely in Italy, for the imperialistic big bourgeoisie to appear in a certain sense revolutionary. They made it possible for the ruling parties with their half-bourgeois, half-feudal support, to declare war and for ‘the people’ to be incited against parliament and, if it came to that, against the King. As I said earlier, the growing weight of modern imperialism in Italian politics is clearly discernible in the decade before the World-War. The outbreak of the World-War formed the litmus-test of the strength of imperialism in Italy. That was when the radical Socialist Mussolini abandoned his old party and put himself at the head of the pro-war movement. In her biography of Mussolini, Margherita Sarfatti gives a vivid description of the mass-movement that swept through Italy at the time:

‘Down with Austria/ And with Germany,/ And with Turkey/ In their Company!’. Bands of youth sang these lines, arm in arm, with slow, rhythmic passion and the resounding beat of marches. A strange instinct had united them in such serious, war-like discipline for the first time. These words formed the *leitmotiv* of the Interventionists [supporters of Italian intervention in the War]. The Interventionists overflowed through all the streets and piazzas of Milan and slowly this flood drained across the whole of Italy, embodiment of the inflexible will of a nation that would no longer tolerate limits to its heroism. The thick-set worker with fluttering scarf, the small, bespectacled government-official who had outgrown his jacket, the lanky athletic student with his collars turned up – now all of them lined up together as one fraternising mass. They were the youth pure and simple, the eternal youth, idealists. It was to these young elements from the factories and high schools, young in years and in spirit, that the editor of *Popolo d’Italia* [Mussolini’s new newspaper] hurled forth his summons with unerring instinct. They burned to make history, these young elements whom Mussolini later, in the years of nascent fascism, again gathered around himself with the cry ‘*A noi!*’

If you discount its official fascist flourish, this description is a nice reflection of the ideology of the Italian war-movement of 1915. Young intellectuals supported the war-programme of



the big bourgeoisie, because they longed to ‘make history’, that is, to establish through struggle both their own greatness and the greatness of the fatherland. Youth from the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie and, to some extent, even from the working class managed to break loose from their own background. In the Italy of 1915 the so-called ‘Garibaldi tradition’ exerted an especially confusing influence. One really did seem to stand before a struggle for ‘fatherland and freedom’, as their forefathers had in 1848–9 and 1859–60.

The youthful fervour of the interventionists filled the streets of the major cities of Italy, assisted by the money of Italian capitalists and of the Entente. The din was so deafening that the liberal peace-camp was forced into retreat, despite the support of the Catholic Church and of the Socialists. This is not the place to describe all the diplomatic manoeuvring that preceded Italy’s entry into the War. The foreign minister Sonnino, personally an honest man but a resolute imperialist, lobbied for war. Still, as late as the middle of May, old Giolitti’s influence seemed to have secured the prospects of peace once more. At that time Mussolini wrote:

As for me, every day I become more firmly convinced than ever that the salvation of Italy demands that we shoot a dozen or so deputies, shoot them in the back, I say, and throw a couple of ex-ministers into jail. I have become thoroughly convinced that parliament in Italy is a plague-boil that poisons the blood of the country. We have to cut it out. The honour and the future of our fatherland are in danger, the fatherland stands at the most terrible juncture in its history. People, the word lies with you – either war or a Republic.

The danger of peace breaking out soon passed, however, and the Italian imperialists saw their dream of war fulfilled towards the end of May. In Italy this formed the first real triumph of those ideas and that class-combination [*der Klassenkombination*] that would later be called ‘fascist’. Both the term ‘fascist’ and an organisation of Fascists were already in existence in the movement of 1915. Mussolini founded a league of radical supporters of involvement in the War. Their individual local groupings were called *Fasci di azione rivoluzionaria* [combat-groups for revolutionary action]. However, in January 1915 they had only five thousand members throughout Italy, and the pogrom-type stormtrooper-tactic that would later characterise fascism had still to be developed. The first *Fasci* confined their goals to dragging the country into the War. When that objective was achieved, they were dissolved. Only in 1919 was the Fascist organisation re-established.

Mussolini went to the front as a war-volunteer, but he and the other interventionists were destined to have quite remarkable experiences in the trenches. By this I mean not the usual hardships of soldiers in modern warfare, but disappointments of a quite different nature. In the editorial office, the popular mass-meeting, the street-demonstrations, early in 1915, Mussolini had put himself at the head of enthused masses. But in the trenches he and his political collaborators experienced the bitter hatred of the great mass of their fellows against the war-instigators, and many active officers thought exactly like the men under them. Now it was time for the other side of the coin to show itself. In the demonstrations in the big cities, tens of thousands of impassioned young patriots could palm themselves off as ‘the’ nation. But in the trenches they found the real people. The trenches had brought together the great masses from the countryside and small towns, as

well as the organised working class of the big cities, and all of them hated the War. Mussolini's most enthusiastic collaborator in conducting war-propaganda had been an ex-syndicalist, [Filippo] Corridoni. Corridoni had likewise gone to the front. But there he died. Mussolini later recounted how he got news of his friend's death:

I'd just knocked off from labour-duty and was resting a while, when some chap came up to me and asked, 'Are you Mussolini?'. I said, 'yes'. 'Good,' said the other fellow, 'I have some good news for you – Corridoni has kicked the bucket! Serves him right, if you ask me! To hell with all you interventionists!'

As a people the Italians are at least as brave, resolute and self-respecting as the other peoples of Europe. The extraordinary mediocrity of the Italian army during the World-War is therefore all the more remarkable. After three whole years the Italians still could not defeat a mere section of the Austrian army, and when some German divisions mounted an offensive, it entered a complete crisis and could only be propped up by urgently dispatched English and French auxiliary troops. The history of Italy's performance in the War only makes sense when you consider that the great majority of the Italian soldiers hated the War and put up passive resistance to the army-leadership. This example could be of the greatest significance, should any of the present-day fascist countries again become involved in war.

While the Germans, French and English entered the War of 1914 convinced that their very existence was at stake, and while in those countries at least ninety per cent of the people consciously and firmly demanded involvement, Italy fought the War in a style that was already fascist, that is, the War was forced on its people by a noisy, well-organised minority. It is inevitable that a fascist state at war will be a state in crisis, because modern warfare can only be carried on with the cooperation of the entire people. In war the fascist régime has to appeal precisely to people whom it has trampled under foot, and it is bound to encounter their passive (and later also their active) resistance.

The imperialist government of Italy linked with the name of Sonnino would have collapsed miserably in the winter of 1917–18 without the help given to it by the Allied powers. Thanks to the efforts of the American, British and French bourgeoisies, Italy would likewise belong to the victorious camp at the close of 1918, and in the peace it obtained roughly the goals for which it had entered the conflict. But the Italian people were not happy with their victory – for three-and-a-half years they had suffered the absolute wretchedness of life in the trenches and deprivations at home. Now, on top of that, there was the mass-unemployment bound up with the transition from a war-economy to a peacetime economy. Italy's economic structure, inherently precarious, simply could not take the shattering blows of the crisis. The spectre of inflation spread through the country, and impoverished masses watched as profiteers speculated shamelessly in currencies and commodities.

In the year 1919 the overwhelming majority of the Italian people were filled with savage hatred against the policy of war and everything connected with it. On this question workers, peasants and the middle-class all thought absolutely alike. The nationalist intoxication of 1915 passed into its hangover. True, Trento and Trieste had been forcibly taken and were now part of Italy. But what use was that compared with all the suffering and sacrifice that the people had had to put up with? The mood in the country was such

that the pro-imperialist faction lost its grip on the government-machinery and the liberals of the prewar period returned to power. Thus the irrepressible Giolitti re-emerged from decline. When Mussolini went to the front in 1915 he had left behind the bluster of a triumphalist mass-movement. When he returned with the rank of an under officer (he was destined to obtain no higher position in the army, so great was the aversion of his superiors to the interventionists), he was alone and despised. In 1919 he continued to come out with his paper in Milan but no-one ever took him or his tendency seriously at the time.

The bitter hatred of the vast majority of Italians against the policy of war, and against its instigators and beneficiaries, produced an extraordinary strengthening of socialism. For the Socialist Party of Italy (PSI) had consistently opposed Italian participation in the War, and in its aftermath this position appeared totally justified. In the elections of 1919 the Socialists won over 150 seats. The number of Left-voters was far greater than the size of the industrial working class in the country. Indeed, a very substantial part of the urban petty bourgeoisie came around to supporting the Socialist movement, and, something of even greater significance, possibly, socialism even gained a foothold among the peasantry and tenants of the South. Next to the Socialist deputies in numbers came the representatives of a large Democratic-Catholic party, while the leftovers of the old liberal or conservative groups watched the future with anxiety.

In the years 1919 and 1920, Italy appeared to stand on the brink of a proletarian revolution. The PSI decided to join the Third International. Strikes and demonstrations were a daily occurrence. In hundreds of municipalities, the PSI won a majority and took over the local administration. The influence of the trade-unions increased. Poor peasants no longer submitted to the authority of their landlords. The high-point of this whole revolutionary movement was formed by the famous factory-occupations in the autumn of 1920, when workers in all the major cities and industrial areas took over the factories and ran them for some time.

In fact, if there *had* been a determined revolutionary party to unify the movements of workers and poor peasants, a successful proletarian revolution may well have occurred in Italy at that time. Such a party could have given the masses leadership in the decisive battles. Given the mood of the people and the extraordinary weakness of the so-called liberal government, the armed forces would not have put up any substantial resistance. However, the great majority of Italian Socialists were not serious about revolution; they simply lacked the will. The working masses had no previous experience of revolutionary struggle, and most of their leaders had no idea what they should do in this critical conjuncture. Moreover, the socialist movement was internally disunited and torn by divisions, and in 1920 it dissolved into three distinct tendencies that engaged in a sharp mutual fight. In this situation, the Italian Socialists chose the worst possible course: they projected the appearance of being revolutionary without actually being so. They appeared radical enough to inject panic-stricken terror into the ruling and propertied classes, but they were not radical enough to deliver the really decisive blow. The two years 1919 and 1920 passed without the Socialists either taking power or doing anything of any significance. The revolution, however, is not something you can put into cold-storage. When the proletariat let the most favourable period pass, it made itself the sacrificial lamb of its enemy.

In March 1919 Mussolini had refounded the organisation of the different *Fasci di combattimento* that had existed in 1915. He began with a couple of hundred supporters. At that time his radical-nationalist programme was about as unpopular as you could get. In the parliamentary elections of that year the Fascists suffered a complete rout. The mass of soldiers had returned from the front full of bitterness against the war-instigators, but the prevailing mood against the War, shared by the liberal government, sometimes took the wrong forms. Hardly any care was taken of those disabled in the War and, more generally, of those who had participated in the War. Sometimes it happened that officers were beaten up simply because they had uniforms on, or a furious popular mob would strip veterans of their decorations. None of this would have had much importance if the socialist revolution really had developed out of the revulsion against the War. But the revolution did not come, and the many thousands of now-unemployed veterans felt neglected and betrayed. This was true both of the rank-and-file elements of the former army and of the demobilised officer-corps, which felt completely deracinated. Slowly, in precisely these circles, the old activist nationalism now gained a new lease of life. However, its first prophet was not Mussolini but the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio.

In the huge nervous tension that the Italians lived through in the years 1919–21, not only did they experience economic hardships, but they came to feel that their former allies had done them down in the peace-treaties. Ignoring the advantages and possessions that the peace had brought Italy, attention tended to focus on the little that Italy had *not* succeeded in getting. Thus Fiume, an Adriatic seaport inhabited by Italian nationals, had not been allotted to Italy as part of the peace-treaties. Many Italians got excited over the fate of Fiume. D'Annunzio assembled a volunteer-corps, transgressed national boundaries against the will of the government and occupied Fiume. The poet had acted in the manner of Garibaldi. While the government dithered, D'Annunzio had gathered the patriotic youth and marched at their head.

Mussolini realised the extraordinary significance of this expedition to Fiume. He mobilised his party for the action and did everything he could to sustain the propaganda for D'Annunzio. This was the first time national stormtroopers were again deployed against the socialist and pacifist wave that swept through Italy in those years. Gradually, Mussolini's own stormtroopers attracted the largest following, and by 1921 fascism had again become a major political force in Italy. The party expanded thanks less to the standard methods used by political movements than to the violent offensive opened by the stormtroopers, this time not against an external enemy, as under Garibaldi and D'Annunzio, but against the enemy at home, the organised socialists and communists.

The liberal government felt the ground shaking under its feet. The workers and poor peasants rejected the ruling system, yet even among the capitalists of the North and the powerful Southern landowners there was growing disillusionment with the régime for doing nothing about the Red Flag. The so-called 'liberal' governments of the prewar epoch had kept themselves alive through electoral manipulation in the central and southern parts of Italy, where the local administrations had colluded with the landowners and political cliques of the area in mobilising votes for the Right. These breezy days of the old-style liberalism were now over: since the World-War it had simply melted in the heat of the class-struggle. The liberals returned to power in 1919 only because the mass of the population hated the imperialists, while the Socialists, on the other hand, were not

powerful enough as yet to take over the government. The liberal prime ministers of 1919–22 were mere stop-gaps in whom no-one put any confidence at all. For this reason they made no daring decisions during their term of office and wished to preserve good relations with all parties and classes.

Mussolini again appealed to the younger intellectuals and, in particular, to the veterans to rally around himself. The liberal prime ministers and the Socialists had ruined the victory, they had pushed the country into disaster, they had insulted and neglected the soldiers, veterans and the war-disabled. Now fascism would draw the necessary conclusions from the victory and build a new, proud and prosperous Italy. The unemployed students, traders and workers whom the Socialists had not been able to help came to Mussolini. When his stormtroopers won their first skirmishes, demolished union-offices, beat up militants, sometimes assassinated them, the capitalists realised that a new star was rising for them. The industrialists now began to finance fascism, and even the landowners willingly joined the new movement to suppress the small tenants under their control. The Fascist punitive expeditions moved outwards into the villages where, by violence and murder, they completely smashed the local organisations of agricultural workers and small peasants. The landowner could again sleep safely at last.

In the course of 1921 Mussolini became the much-admired protagonist of the bourgeoisie and big landowners. The younger intellectuals and the veterans rushed to him *en masse*. Everywhere the Italian workers put up the most courageous resistance to the Fascists and their terror-squads. Of course, there was no nationally coordinated campaign of defence against the white terror, one that mobilised the full strength of workers throughout the country. But in all places the workers fought the terror-squads with heroism, even if from isolated and losing positions. If one looks closely at the history of the Italian working class in the years 1921–2, at the endlessly long series of essentially similar events – arson, assaults, demolitions, murders – one comes to the conclusion that despite all the unfavourable circumstances, the working class *would* have destroyed fascism if the state-power had shown even the slightest element of neutrality or objectivity. But wherever the proletariat successfully resisted fascism, the state-gendarmerie or the army immediately intervened. The workers may well have been a match for the Fascist stormtroopers, but they were no match for the organised armed power of the state. The police simply shot the actively fighting workers, or jailed them, and the Fascists would then re-emerge to complete their work of destruction in triumph.

The Italian experience repeated a pattern discernible in the Russian pogroms. *The terrorist-squads succeeded because they could always count on the state.* The liberal politicians of 1919–20 had not dared to provoke the workers in those years. When the socialist wave ran high and they had to reckon with the coming proletarian revolution, the liberal government had proclaimed a sort of political neutrality vis-à-vis the different classes in struggle. Even during the occupation of the factories, in the autumn of 1920, the government had withheld permission to fire on the workers, and contented itself with diplomatic interventions. But once Mussolini began his re-emergence, the bourgeoisie recovered its nerve, and the new mood now infected the bureaucracy, the police-chiefs and the army-officers. When the Fascists showed such bravado in attacking the Red trouble-makers, the police could hardly hold themselves back. The remarkable contradictions in Italian society in 1919–20 had undermined the legal administration of the state so profoundly that no respect was left for it any longer. In a purely technical sense, the regular army and police were still vastly stronger than the Fascist gangs. But the

Fascists had the uncompromising will to smash the workers' organisations. It was always the Fascists who launched the attacks, and only then would the state move into action with its massive machinery of repression, tailing after them. If the situation became critical, the state would take on the main job and the Fascists would take the credit for the victory.

Imagine a fight where there are five people on one side, armed only with sticks, and a group of ten persons on the other, each carrying a revolver. At first, these ten persons do not dare to use their revolvers. The five people with sticks can laugh at them with impunity. Suddenly a young fellow turns up and rushes on the five of them with a loud cry. Only now does the group of ten draw its revolvers and shoot down its five defenceless opponents. In this analogy the young chap who runs out shouting is fascism, and the ten armed individuals are the bourgeoisie and their legal state-power. The five people with sticks represent the organised working class. In short, the emergence of fascism never alters the real balance of class-forces between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. If the proletariat were really stronger than the bourgeoisie, it would win, with or without fascism. However, if the capitalist class is objectively the stronger force, then the emergence of fascism can bring about the collapse of the workers' movement.

In Central and Southern Italy Mussolini protected the landowners from an agrarian revolution and they became his closest friends after 1921. The mass of the small peasantry fell back into submission, as before, once the peasant-leagues had been demolished. They kept quiet and obeyed, but they were not active Fascists. To the petty bourgeoisie of Central and Southern Italy, moreover, fascism remained something quite external. In Northern Italy, on the other hand, in the modern, advanced parts of the country, fascism became, after 1921, a real mass-movement. It is true that the large mass of organised industrial workers remained true to their earlier convictions. But here, in the North, apart from the capitalists who financed him, apart from the students, unemployed veterans and adventurers who flocked to his storm-troops, Mussolini gradually won the active support of the urban middle-class. In the parliamentary elections of May 1921 he won an astonishing proportion of votes, chiefly in Milan, Pavia, Bologna, and Ferrara. He entered parliament at the head of 33 deputies.

It has often been argued that the modern middle-classes have a profound, fanatical hatred of the working class, that given the slightest chance they would take to arms and slaughter the proletariat. The middle-class [*Mittelstand*] lives in fear of its own proletarianisation, and out of the sense of anguish created by this prospect it loathes the workers and attempts to trample them under foot. This is a strange theory. Is it conceivable that the small artisans and traders should harbour such murderous hatred against workers who are often their best customers, and, in the working-class districts at least, the only people from whom they make any sort of living? Is it likely that the white-collar employees should harbour secret desires of betraying their blue-collar colleagues in the company? Is it likely that the students at school and university would actually be waiting for the chance to shoot their thoroughly oppressed comrades from the masses? One has only to recall the quite banal truth that in today's conditions there are innumerable and imperceptible gradations between the lower middle-class [*dem kleinen Mittelstand*] and the proletariat, that often in the same family one brother is a bricklayer, the second a small clerk, the third a master-craftsman, while one of them has a son who, through the collective efforts of the entire family, actually attends high school. This notion of the inveterate hatred of the middle-class against workers as the underlying *leitmotiv* of fascism is one of

the clichéd illusions of a self-styled ‘sociology’. There are many cases where the middle-strata have sided politically *with* the workers, and many others where they have opposed them as a hostile force. But in all cases the decisive factor has been the political situation of the moment, and certainly not the ‘tactics’ of the parties concerned. The general dogma clarifies absolutely nothing.

In periods of deep social crisis the middle-strata [*die Mittelschichten*] will side with the workers, *if* the party of socialism resolutely shows the road to salvation and to the construction of a new society. If, however, the socialist movement itself vacillates and lacks certainty, and shrinks from the tasks of revolution and social reconstruction, it is bound to lose the support of the middle-classes. In 1919 the Italian middle-classes [*Mittelschichten*] were as ready to participate in a socialist revolution as the German middle-classes [*Mittelklassen*] were after 9 November. When, in both situations, the socialists showed themselves incapable of carrying through their tasks, the middle-strata once more swung away from them. To this we should add a series of special factors. As I said earlier, in the years 1919–20 the Socialists in Italy had won a majority in many municipalities. There they and their local supporters came to occupy the leading positions. This was perfectly correct, and the new Socialist councillors worked at least as well as the earlier bourgeois ones had. However, if, at a time such as this, the masses are expecting a revolution from the Socialists and this does not come, if the misery of the unemployed and the hardships of the middle-class find no relief at all, and, on the contrary, one sees the Socialist councillors peacefully holding office in comparatively well-paid posts, then disappointment, disillusionment, and, finally, hatred are inevitable. These moods were of crucial importance in Germany as well, in the years leading up to the National Socialist capture of power.

The socialist functionaries who sat in paid positions on the town-councils, in the trade-unions and so on, were, in their overwhelming majority, incorruptible types who fulfilled their duties to the working class and the public at large with a true sense of loyalty. This was so both in Italy and in Germany. But in times of crisis much more was expected from them than this routine performance of duties. The middle-classes and many workers became progressively more enraged at the new socialist bureaucracy that had created comfortable positions for itself by using the class-movement of the poorest groups.

To all of this we must add certain tactical mistakes that were made in the organisation of strikes, especially in sectors of vital importance to everyday life. When transport-services or gas and water-services shut down, this creates numerous inconveniences for the bulk of the population, including other workers and the middle-class. Now if the strikers could show people that their cause is a justified one, that they have to go on strike to defend basic living conditions for themselves and their children, then the majority of people would understand the reasons for the strike and put up with the hardships caused by it. However, in the sort of situations that Germany and Italy lived through in the years 1919 and 1920, the activity of the working class would dissolve only too easily into minor struggles over wages, instead of the important political movements. The masses will support strikes as links in the chain of a major revolutionary offensive, but when the political movement is itself crumbling, isolated wage-struggles are not likely to elicit much support from the public, especially when those struggles proceed from the better-paid groups of workers and inflict severe hardship on the rest of the population.

In 1919–20 the Italian middle-classes were expecting a socialist revolution, but it never came. Consequently, the economic crisis only worsened and the mass of people sank

deeper into poverty. Yet, at this precise moment, the Socialist leaders occupied well-paid positions, and the transport-workers and workers of other public services were paralysing the life of the cities to push their wage-levels higher. The middle-class now lost the sense of feeling that it must fight side-by-side with the workers against the capitalists and profiteers. On the contrary, it came to see in the organised working class a self-seeking oligarchy that looked only to itself and its leadership, and was bent on extorting higher and higher wages, that too at the cost of the public at large, of the tax-payers and above all of the middle-class itself. This is why the Italian intelligentsia, commercial businesses, government-employees and artisans slowly came around to believing that the socialist organisations were the real traitors to the people. That is how there emerged a general rage against the 'big-shots' [*die 'Bonzen'*], as they would come to be called in Germany, and against the 'strike-specialists'. This is when the middle-strata developed a positive feeling of pleasure in strike-breaking and the will to wreak vengeance on the Red Flag. A section of the middle-class joined Mussolini's stormtroopers and the rest helped the Fascists by voting for them.

Margherita Sarfatti writes, in her malicious but psychologically interesting book on Mussolini,

Then began a strike of workers in the water-supply department, the railways came to a standstill, the electricity went off, public transport, the pride of punctual Milan, became a pure disaster, and the unplanned creation of municipalities with the enormous number of bureaucrats they brought into being, weighed down on the tax-payers. Once dustmen started drawing ministerial salaries, the normally clean streets became perpetually dirty, and in winter one could hardly walk through them due to the snow, so that Milan started cursing. On these unswept streets, on this snow, Karl Marx was destined to die in Italy.

It is far from obvious that Marx ever supported the idea of garbage piling up on the roads, and under the then-Socialist municipal administration even the brave Milan street-sweepers would not exactly have received 'ministerial salaries'. But this passage does reflect, in a superbly clear form, the general mood of the Milanese middle-classes during the rise of fascism: Marxism = strikes and filth, fascism = a return to order and cleanliness! Here is Sarfatti's eulogy of the strike-breakers:

In August a new general strike that spread across the entire country assumed the fancy name of a 'legal strike'. Fascism sprang on this strike and castrated it. Engineers, people from all professions and future ministers took the place of the skilled employees on strike and brought the factories and means of transport back into motion. At that time one saw students courageously performing factory-labour for 10 to 12 hours, or running trains through the rebellious parts of the city and working as conductors with unusual politeness.

At the Third Congress of the Fascist Party of Italy, the leadership released the results of a survey it had conducted among some 151,000 party-members regarding their particular occupation. The result is deeply significant, and worth considering, even if objections are possible to some of the numbers claimed. The statistics comprised:



Merchants, traders, shopkeepers	14,000
Factory-owners	4,000
Landowners	18,000
Students and teachers	21,000
Members of the liberal professions	10,000
Civil servants	7,000
White-collar workers	15,000
Industrial workers and sailors	25,000
Agricultural workers	37,000
	151,000

The very large number of agricultural workers who figure in this list consisted for the most part of ‘members’ who had joined under compulsion – in places where the Fascists had destroyed the existing organisations of agricultural workers and incorporated their former membership into their own organisations. Such forced membership would also, to some extent, apply to the category of ‘industrial workers’. Moreover, the statistics make no distinction between employed and unemployed. Again, under the category ‘merchants/traders’ [*Kaufmann*] almost anything can pass, from large entrepreneurs down to unemployed commercial agents. Under ‘factory-owners’ a certain number of independent master-craftsmen are included. Surprising, but thoroughly consistent with the history of fascism, is *the extraordinarily large number of students and intellectuals in the party*. A specifically petty-bourgeois tendency of fascism [*kleinbürgerliche Tendenz des Faschismus*] does *not* emerge from these figures. Rather, towards the close of 1921, Mussolini became the leader of a typically bourgeois party [*eine typisch-bürgerliche Partei*], with a particularly strong dash of intellectuals and academics, and a certain following [*gewissen Anhang*] among workers.

In the years from 1919 to 1922 the programme of Fascism underwent an extraordinarily rapid and fundamental transformation. To Mussolini, the tactics of seizing power were everything. Questions of programme were, compared to this, quite secondary. In 1919, at the inception of the Fascist movement, when all of Italy had moved far to the Left and the capitalists were not particularly bothered about Mussolini, he had drafted a left-radical programme. He intended to win working-class votes through a kind of nationalistic socialism. At that time, among other things, he supported a people’s government [*eine Volksherrschaft*], based on a general and equal franchise, with the right to vote for both women and men; the proclamation of a Republic in Italy; the dissolution of all industrial and financial joint-stock companies; the restructuring of production on corporatist lines with direct profit-sharing by all the workers of the enterprise; and several other nice things. But when the big industrialists and large landowners began to put their sympathies and their bank-accounts at the Fascists’ disposal, Mussolini’s programme changed rapidly. In November 1921, at the above-mentioned third congress of his party, he assured them that while he was of course opposed to liberalism in the political sense, he was unconditionally in favour of economic liberalism: ‘If possible, I would even be inclined to hand the railways and post and telegraph back to private enterprise in order to relieve the state of economic

functions that are really quite uneconomical'. In this way fascism finally returned to an unconditional defence of private capitalism.

Mussolini gave whole-hearted support to the landowners of Southern Italy in their struggle to forestall an agrarian revolution, yet he was never quite disposed to restoring to these semi-feudal bosses the decisive influence they had wielded in the so-called 'liberal' period of Italian history. Fascism was and remained the party of the advanced North. Mussolini once compared his own work with that of the Turkish leader, Kemal Atatürk, who, from Ankara, sought to create a new bourgeois state in opposition to the feudal Constantinople of the Sultanate. Precisely in this sense, Mussolini projected the reassuring image of himself as leader of Milan, Italy's Ankara, waging a struggle against Rome, the Italian Constantinople. Indeed, Italian fascism always fought on two fronts. This naturally does not refer to the quite fictitious 'two fronts' of the petty bourgeoisie which, supposedly, struggles simultaneously against capitalism and the proletariat. As manifold and variable as Mussolini's successive programmes were, none of them show any specific interest in the petty bourgeoisie [*das Kleinbürgertum*], and the fascist form of activity in Italy was quite unlike a petty-bourgeois one.

In 1921–2, through its daily assaults and violence, fascism defeated the organised socialist working class. Yet at the same time, it broke the dominance of the backward feudal cliques of Central and Southern Italy. To the landowners and the local power-élites of the South, it was at that time a question of choosing the lesser evil – not unreasonably, they perceived the agrarian revolution from the Left as the greater evil, and therefore went over to fascism. But at the very same time they were aware that with the victory of the Fascists their former dominance was doomed. Of course, they retained their landed estates and other possessions, but they could no longer hope to exert *political* influence with the help of the 'liberal' politicians. Mussolini was the leader of the modern Italian North, with its bourgeoisie and its intelligentsia. That is the secret of his comparatively lasting success. Mussolini has now (1933) been in power in Italy for 12 years, and for the moment the end of fascism in Italy is not yet a real prospect. Had Mussolini really been a leader of the petty bourgeoisie, he would not have lasted even twelve months.

In 1922 fascism emerged as the great 'united front' of all the active bourgeois and anti-socialist forces in the country. Behind Mussolini stood the capitalist class, the middle-classes and the intellectuals, landowners (who had mixed feelings), a major part of the unemployed, who would find a source of income and something to do in the storm-troops, and even individual groups of workers [*einzelne Arbeitergruppen*]. The Socialist and Communist organisations were demolished completely, and the old bourgeois parties seized by a rapid process of dissolution. The state-bureaucracy had got so used to seeing Mussolini as the true leader of the nation that neither the army nor the police ever seriously contemplated a struggle against the Fascists. Even the King of Italy slowly came around to seeing that the liberal-feudal period was over, and quickly made his peace with the *Duce*. Under these conditions, it was a pure formality when Mussolini chased the last helpless 'liberal' ministers from parliament and put himself in their place.

In Italy the industrial proletariat is only a minority of the population. A victory of the Socialists thus depended crucially, after 1919, on a democratic coalition of the workers with the peasants and the middle-strata. In 1919 and 1920 hopeful beginnings were made in the direction of such a coalition. However, this coalition was shattered before it could be

consolidated. Within the vacillating mass of the petty bourgeoisie, the Fascists forcibly suppressed the rural half, and won over, to their side, the urban half. Both these processes, the destruction of the left-wing organisations in the countryside as well as the renewed division between the urban middle-class and the proletariat, were only possible due to the serious mistakes committed by the Italian Socialists. Once these processes were accomplished, however, the bulk of the propertied class was again unified, this time under the new banner of Fascism. The working class now faced a completely new situation. Prior to 1914 the modern bourgeoisie had never really exercised power in Italy. In this sense it still had a historical task to make up for.

So the celebrated slogan about the trains now running on time has its deeper significance. Obviously, this is not to be taken in the sense of wondering whether the train-services really did improve under Mussolini, or really were that bad before his rise to power. The basic fact is that there was a real problem for Italy. In England, America, France and Germany the railway-system is naturally the most modern in the world. But in semi-feudal countries, such as Russia and Italy were down to the War, this was far from self-evident. Here the task of adapting these countries to the latest bourgeois technology still had to be accomplished.

Fascism ended the exaction of tribute by the Mafia and Camorra. The public funds that were formerly intercepted by the local cliques were now entirely subordinated to the interests of modern capitalism. The state-capitalist concentration of the country in the so-called 'corporatist system' facilitated control of the country by the most efficient groups of capitalists. Heavy industry, chemicals, automobiles, aircraft, and shipping were all systematically developed. Where in all this is the 'petty-bourgeois' spirit that is supposed to form the essence of fascism? Here I am not concerned with taking up positions for or against, but with historical facts: it is a fact that the productive forces of the country *were* developed further by Italian fascism, at least down to the beginning of the great world-crisis. Because of this, Mussolini gained the prestige of a successful politician, and Fascism gained a mass-following in the propertied strata [*bürgerlichen Massen*]. Mussolini himself had sufficient authority to be able to convert the stormtroopers into a sort of auxiliary police-force of the newly-consolidated bourgeois state, once their terrorist methods became superfluous.

Of course, Mussolini has not been able to solve the agrarian question in Italy. The expansion of capitalism *post* 1922 has in fact only increased the weight of the working class. In the next major crisis, the Italian capitalists will face renewed opposition from the mass of workers and poor peasants. At that stage it will no longer be possible to deflect the social revolution with the notion that the task of building a fully capitalist society must first be accomplished. In the 12 years of Mussolini's régime, Italy has roughly come up to the level of the countries north of the Alps. Consequently, no special path now remains open by which it can avoid the general European forms in which the class-struggle will be settled.

### III. Germany

The decisive difference between Italy and Germany lies in the quite different occupational structures of their respective populations. It follows that in Germany fascism was forced

to take a different tactical path to the seizure of power. It is not quite as easy to clarify the occupational co-ordinates of the voting patterns in Germany. The two sets of figures, those relating to occupations and those to votes cast, do not cover the same groupings. Many German citizens who can vote, for example, housewives, are not included in the occupational census. On the other hand, youth under the age of 20 have no voting rights, even when they have some form of employment. Nonetheless, it is necessary to form some idea of the class-composition of the German electorate, for only on this basis will it become possible to grasp the political movement of the masses after 1919 and the rise of National Socialism.

The occupational data relating to Germany for 1925 give a total economically active population of just under 36 million persons from a total overall population of over 62 million. In that year there were, in Germany, 5½ million ‘self-employed’ persons [*Selbständige*]. This category includes both owners of enterprises, for example, industrialists, master-craftsmen, farmers, etc., as well as business-executives, directors, and top bureaucrats. The number of family-members helping out was roughly as large. On the other hand, the census showed 14½ million workers, just under 5½ million white-collar employees [*Angestellte*] and civil servants [*Beamte*], and roughly 5 million domestic employees and persons without any occupation. A tiny fraction of the so-called ‘persons without occupation’ are capitalist rentiers, but the vast majority are people who were once employed and were now drawing social-security benefits, old-age pensions, and so on. The unemployed are not classified separately in these figures, but counted under their original occupation. The point of all this is to establish, from these figures, the specific relation of forces between the propertied elements of the population and the proletariat. In making this calculation we also have to include family-members not classified as having any occupation. In the case of family-farms and small-scale enterprises, wives and older children almost regularly appear as ‘family-members who help out’ (co-workers). In the case of all households other than the ‘self-employed’, however, wives are only counted when they themselves practise some occupation of their own. Among the rural and middle-class households, roughly two-thirds appear in the statistics as ‘self-employed’ or as ‘co-workers’. In proletarian households, this proportion is roughly half, in contrast. Applying these criteria, it turns out that in Germany in 1925 there were *c.* 17 million persons in households with property, substantial or otherwise [*des großen und des kleinen Bürgertums*], and 45 million persons in families of paid employees and proletarians in the broadest sense.

One can see that an impressive majority of the German population belonged to households dependent on wage-employment [*Arbeitnehmerschaft*]. Even if the whole of the self-employed petty bourgeoisie and all peasant-households down to the smallest are included in the category of propertied classes, the latter would still account for barely one quarter of the total population. Marx’s predictions about the future social evolution of the advanced industrial countries have been decisively confirmed. However, it is important to avoid a misunderstanding. Germany has an overwhelming majority of people in some form of paid employment, but not a majority of *industrial workers* in the strict sense of the word. As the figures cited earlier suggest, within the proletarian camp, over against the 14½ million workers, there are also 10½ million government-employees, office-workers, pensioners, house-maids, etc. Moreover, under those 14½ million workers we have to include 2½ million agricultural workers as well as apprentices in craft-enterprises. It is

difficult to draw any very clear line between a 'craft-enterprise' based on manual labour and a 'factory', but, even so, the number of craft-apprentices would amount to at least one million. It follows that of the total of 25 million paid employees and proletarians in the broadest sense of the word, at most only 11 million were factory-workers in the true sense, whereas 14 million comprised other categories.

These figures can be presented more graphically in roughly the following way: in 1925, out of every hundred German citizens (family-members included, naturally), about 28 belonged to the propertied classes (in the broadest sense of the term) and 72 to paid employees and proletarians (also in the broadest sense). However, in the latter group, only 32 were factory-workers in the strict sense, whereas 40 were employed outside the factory-sector. Doubtless this calculation is a precarious one, but its sole aim is to present a superficial overview of the actual relationships. During the Reichstag elections of the Weimar period, the 28% formed by owners of property were in the habit of voting almost exclusively for the bourgeois parties, and the 32% formed by the factory-workers would vote, in their vast majority, for the Social Democrats or the Communists. On the other hand, of the remaining 40% formed by the general mass of paid employees excluding the factory-workers, only a minority supported the Social Democrats, while the majority – white-collar workers, government-employees, agricultural workers, apprentices, etc. – supported the bourgeois parties. This explains the fact that after the Revolution of 1918 elections in Germany always yielded a bourgeois majority. However, in Germany the sheer weight of the vast mass of the population composed of the unemployed and of wage-earners is so compelling that no German government has been able to ignore it completely.

At the end of the War and beginning of the Republic, the war-weary masses of Germany were in a decidedly socialist and democratic frame of mind. Not only did the entire mass of Germany's wage-earning groups [*Arbeitnehmerschaft*] declare allegiance to the Republic, and want to have nothing to do with the domination of the nobility, the officer-corps and the big bourgeoisie, but large sections of the middle-class stood with the Revolution.

In the elections to the National Assembly in January 1919, the Republican camp consisted of the following parties: the SPD, the USPD, the Centre Party, dominated at that time by the Christian-Democratic trade-unions, and the German Democratic Party (DDP) that drew its support from white-collar workers, civil servants and sections of the middle-class. The landowners and capitalists were represented by the German National Party (DNP) and the German National People's Party (DNVP). 30 million votes were cast in the 1919 elections. Of these the Republican parties received 25½ million, and the parties of the Right 4½ million! Of the 30 million voters there would have been roughly 8 million property-owners and 22 million wage-earners in the broad sense. The result of this election shows that, at that time, the wage-earning population of Germany supported the Republic and democracy almost down to a man. Likewise, almost half the middle-class declared its support for the new political system. This popular mood was simultaneously the cause and the result of 9 November. If this mood had persisted, we should never have seen either fascism or the Hitler régime in Germany.

But this huge democratic-Republican majority soon crumbled, in part from the pressure of objective conditions, but also as a consequence of the profound mistakes of the Republican camp. Capitalism survived, unreplaced by a socialist form of society, and even any genuine democracy failed to materialise, in so far as the army, the administration, the

judiciary and the educational system remained almost entirely in the hands of the old bureaucracy. The labour-movement was not united, rather, its individual tendencies stood on opposite sides in the civil war. The middle-strata, large sections of the white-collar and government-employees who had greeted the Republic in November with enthusiasm, would soon stand aloof from it in sheer disappointment. The leadership of the German Republic was accused of not fulfilling its promises. On the contrary, the general feeling was that the new constitution had only created hardship and poverty, inflation and civil war. On top of this, the Republic was loaded with responsibility for Germany's desperate position thanks to the Versailles Treaty. This is how the preconditions were established for the growth of an anti-republican, nationalistic mass-movement that regrouped the estate-owners, the capitalists and the middle-classes.

I noted earlier that the ruling classes of Imperial Germany had no desire to be especially popular. Of course, whenever the Reichstag elections came around, the Conservative Party drove the subaltern masses in the countryside to the poll-booths, and in the towns a certain percentage of the petty bourgeoisie voted Conservative. But no-one thought of creating a conservative or nationalist (for example, Pan-German), *mass*-movement in the big cities and industrial areas to compete with the Social Democrats. In the large urban centres one generally left bourgeois agitation to the Liberals and the Centre Party. Prior to 1914, the Conservatives never thought of trying to win a majority in the Reichstag on their own resources. They were quite content to shape Reichstag policies through a coalition with the Centre Party and the National Liberals. When a member of the clergy, Stöcker, sought to build a conservative, urban-based mass-party, his work was deliberately sabotaged, first by Bismarck and later by Wilhelm II. If the aristocracy were serious about winning votes among the urban masses, they would have to descend to the level of the masses, agitate in popular meetings and newspapers, and agree to their general demands. In the Imperial epoch all this seemed to be a pure waste of time, because the estate-owners already exercised power without recourse to demagogic manoeuvres.

But after 9 November the earlier forms of class-dominance fell to pieces, and the Red Flag flooded the bulwarks of traditional property and inherited authority. Now the aristocrats were compelled to go to the people to save whatever there was left to save. From the very first days of its existence, the DNVP [the leading party of the German conservatives] began to speak a totally new language. The old, reactionary slogans of 'monarchy', 'militarism', and 'defence of bourgeois and feudal property' were cleverly disguised in nationalist clichés and sentimental promises: 'Every true patriot chooses the black, white and red flag!', or, 'Germany's on fire! Vote Laverrenz' (so said the chief DNVP candidate in Berlin) – one heard this kind of stuff as early as 1919.

DNVP pamphlets promised a return to the 'Germany of Luther, Bismarck and Hindenburg'. Often they carried pictures of these and other 'heroes', and juxtaposed them with caricatures of Republican and socialist leaders. The capital of popular trust that the German Republic had started off with in January 1919 was largely used up barely a year later. The Reichstag elections of June 1920 showed a completely different picture: this time, of the total of 28 million votes cast, the pro-Weimar parties got only 18 million votes and the various anti-democratic, monarchist and nationalist parties of the Right 10 million. When one looks at the occupational breakdown to interpret this result, it shows that by the summer of 1920 the reactionary, right-wing movement had already won back the overwhelming mass of the propertied middle-class [*des besitzenden Mittelstandes*] and

made a substantial dent in the wage-earners' front. The depressing process of absorption of ever-larger masses of people by the nationalist Right can be tracked from one election to the next. This development was not in the remotest sense the work of Adolf Hitler. Hitler and the Nazis only reaped what others had sown before them.

To take only one typical election in the period before the main expansion of the Nazis, viz. the elections to the post of *Reichspräsident* in March 1925: in these the parties of the Right put up a common candidate, the aristocrat Jarres. The latter possessed no special qualities that would in any sense have made him popular. He was nothing but a safe representative of the black-red-and-white nationalism. Yet he received 10½ million votes from a total of 27 million. Apart from Jarres, there were two other candidates representing forces opposed to the Republic. Held, on behalf of the federalist Bavarian People's Party (BVP), polled 1 million votes, and the National Socialists' rival-candidate, Ludendorff, just under 300,000. In 1932, the vast majority of those who voted for Jarres would go over to Hitler, even if, in the meantime, Ludendorff himself had abandoned the Nazis. The Nazis could *never* have made such substantial electoral gains *post* 1930 without the preparatory work the other parties of the Right had successfully pulled off in the years following 1919. The fundamental features of the nationalist and anti-republican ideology of the right-wing parties of Germany remained basically unchanged after 1919, even if they were inflected rather differently according to the economic conjuncture and the international situation.

The right-wing parties as a whole polled 12 million votes in the elections of March 1925, and parties that could in a broad sense be called 'Left' – the SPD, KPD, Centre Party, and DDP – 15 million. Of the 27 million voters who participated in the presidential elections, roughly 7 million may have been property-owners, and, of those, perhaps 6 million voted for the Right and 1 million for the Centre Party and DDP. In that case, of the general mass of wage-earners (defining this group, again, in the broadest possible way), 6 million would have voted for a Right opposed to democracy and 14 million for the Left. So one can see how substantially the percentage of the salaried or wage-earning population that was *opposed* to the Revolution had increased since 1920.

It is well known that in the second round of the presidential elections held in April 1925, all the right-wing groups united around Hindenburg, whose votes totalled over 14½ million, signifying a gain of 2½ million votes for the Right compared to the first round. Yet Hindenburg attracted many voters largely by the authority of his name, from sectors of the electorate that were otherwise indifferent, so one cannot form an accurate assessment of the strength of the German Right simply by using these figures. In fact, in *all* the elections that would take place in Germany down to 1933, the Social Democrats, together with the Communists and the Centre, obtained an absolute majority, even if the margin was a narrow one. This majority was composed, sociologically, of the greater part of the industrial working class, a significant share of other salaried or wage-earning groups, and sections of the Catholic peasantry and petty bourgeoisie. Despite all the mistakes of the pro-Weimar parties, despite their internal divisions and the catastrophic nature of the period, the pro-capitalist nationalist Right could still not win power by legal parliamentary means. To the very end what ruled that out was the sheer strength, in numbers, of the workers and other wage-earners who supported the Marxists and the Catholic Centre. To succeed, the counter-revolution was compelled to take recourse to extra-parliamentary methods. Ideological fascism had to be supplemented by the terrorist fascism of the storm-troops.

Stormtrooper-fascism in Germany developed out of the *Freikorps*, which had to be installed by the government of the German Republic as early as 1919, and much against its will. The ruling majority that supported the Republic had to defend itself, at that time, against the attacks of small, ultra-left groups of workers. However, the Republic was incapable of forming an army recruited from the more trustworthy democrats and socialists, but once again confided its fate to the Imperial officer-corps. Demobilised officers then collected together other similarly unemployed veteran-elements. It was these squads that suppressed the so-called Spartacist uprisings of 1919–20. In a formal sense, the officers were deployed to defend the Republic. However, most of them were in their heart of hearts supporters of the old régime. They fought the radical wing of the workers' movement and looked forward to the time when they could wreak vengeance on the authors of the November Revolution. In strictly objective terms, this triumphal march of the *Freikorps* disarmed the labour-movement and signified a re-arming of the counter-revolution. Those elements of the bourgeoisie who were opposed to the Republic and hostile to the workers' movement soon grasped the new elements in the situation and established contact with the *Freikorps*.

The *Freikorps* was not content with the services it rendered to the German Republic in 1919, but fought its own private war in the Baltic. There it struggled initially against Bolshevism, then against the Latvians and Estonians, formed an alliance with the Russian White Guards, and transformed the Baltic into the central theatre of the German counter-revolution. The Baltic adventure had roughly the same significance for German fascism as the Fiume episode had had for the Italian Fascists. When, under Entente pressure, the *Freikorps* was forced to evacuate the Baltic, it decided immediately on a *coup d'état* in Germany. The Kapp Putsch of 1920 was smashed by the resistance of the working class, but also floundered on the disunity that plagued the German counter-revolutionary forces. Elements closest to the *Freikorps* had rushed into battle before unifying completely with the major capitalist parties and movements. So from the very first days of the Kapp Putsch, the front of counter-revolutionaries splintered, and there was no means of patching it up. Only Bavaria showed a well-planned conspiracy and an effective collaboration between the illegal armed organisations and the perfectly legal bourgeois political parties. In Bavaria the conspirators seized power in 1920, and legalised their coup with the help of the bourgeois majority in the state-government [*Landtag*]. When in the rest of the country Kapp's retreat was followed by a renewed consolidation of the Republican government, the Bavarian counter-revolution gave the appearance of once more adapting to the constitutional framework. From that time on, German fascism found its legal basis in Munich. All conspirators who could not stay in other parts of the country found a cordial reception in Bavaria, and it was in Munich that preparations could proceed, without hindrance, for further assaults on democracy in Germany.

The defeat of the Kapp Putsch did not bring about any real strengthening of the democratic Republic in Germany. When the government established the official *Reichswehr*, part of the *Freikorps* stayed outside the ranks of the regular army. On paper the *Freikorps* had been dissolved, in reality it continued to exist, in all possible disguises. Apart from this organisation, there was a whole mass of other organisations – 'leagues' and 'associations' – that recruited students and other activist elements of the German counter-revolution. Definite links persisted between the officers in the regular army and their comrades in the



so-called 'Defence Associations'. The attacks on the Poles in Upper Silesia soon provided a further occasion for the mobilisation of the *Freikorps*. When in 1923 the government of big capital, headed by Cuno, initiated military operations against the French troops in occupation of the Ruhr, it formed a regular reserve-force called the 'Black Army', with the help of the *Freikorps*. Instead of the official policy of passive resistance, individual groups of *Freikorps*-elements started active resistance against the French. Other elements of the *Freikorps* made attempts to assassinate prominent leaders of the Weimar Republic. Erzberger and Rathenau became victims of this campaign of assassination. Over the same years, 1923–4, the *Freikorps* and various Army Leagues developed the habit of trying and executing real or imaginary traitors.

Down to the end of 1923 the German Republic lived in constant fear of a new counter-revolutionary coup by the *Freikorps*, the veterans' leagues and their supporters. Moreover, at that time there was a whole series of government-officials, especially in the army, who maintained close contact with the *Freikorps* and the counter-revolutionaries. The German democratic Republic was completely undermined and destroyed by the power of big capital, the large estate-owners and all the friends of the old régime in the army, judiciary and civil administration. However, the illusory appearance [*der Schein*] of a democratic and parliamentary Republic was always maintained, and so the German fascists could even play the convenient rôle of revolutionaries who were working for the day when the 'German people' would punish the 'November criminals'.

The *völkisch* [racist] movement arose after 1919 as a product of the active collaboration of the *Freikorps* with the student-youth. As early as 1919, *the vast majority of German students were already advocating the ideology which is today called National Socialist* – this at a time when, in most German universities, Adolf Hitler was a complete non-entity. The well-known leader of the Baltic expedition, Graf von der Goltz would later write an important essay on the 'patriotic leagues' in Germany, in which he discusses the possibility of seizing power on the basis of the *völkisch* action-groups, but does not deem it necessary to say even a single word about Hitler and the SA. That was in 1928. In the Reichstag elections of that year, the National Socialists polled a total of only 800,000 votes in the whole of Germany. They were an insignificant splinter-group in the country's massive Right. In 1928 it seemed much more likely that the *Stahlhelm* would unite all the German army-leagues and establish a *völkisch* state.

About the students, Goltz wrote at the time:

When German youth came home from the trenches and the storms of steel, when they found that this homeland of theirs bore not the least resemblance to their ideals – ideals for which they had shed blood in other countries – when, with this terrible sense of deception, they joined the universities in Germany, there this whole war-generation of German students united with the sworn purpose of propagating in peace-time the very ideas and ideals that could not be realised in the war. From this awareness there arose the *Deutscher Hochschulring*, [a university-based association] which established local branches in all the universities. They accomplished their first serious action when they forcibly stopped the surrender of flags and standards won by Germany in her epoch of greatness, when they removed these from the arsenal and burnt them at the foot of the statue of the King of Prussia, singing of the God who detested slavery. But

propaganda was not enough, they brought into being the working student who finances his own studies through the work he does, who has no pride of place, who stands shoulder to shoulder with workers, as he did in the trenches. The committees established by the new government to attract the support of the mass of students were soon captured by those students who carried the idea of freedom deep in their heart. The university-circles work for a unified German race that would draw together all the forces who, from a sense of their own common descent, history and culture, yearn for a German community of the German masses [*die deutsche Volksgemeinschaft aller Deutschen*] and thereby a re-establishment of the power of our people and our fatherland. It does not recognise the new boundaries and works jointly with German students in German Austria, Sudetenland and Danzig. It refuses to recognise distinctions among students, and repudiates only those who are enemies of the people.

On the programme common to all the German *völkisch* groups, army-leagues and former *Freikorps*, Goltz states the following:

The enemies of the patriotic associations are twofold – the Social Democrats who are disposed to subversion and closely related to the Bolsheviks, and among whom, in times of crisis, precisely the radical elements gain the upper hand; and the materialistic, international, pacifist, destructive stock-exchange Speculators, who lack all ideals and have not the slightest feeling for the homeland, for indigenous values, blood-relationship, history, race, religion and the spiritual, psychological and moral uplift of the people. These two enemies are kindred souls, they almost always work together politically and in terms of party-politics. Both draw their spiritual and financial leadership from the Jews, a race whose sense of belonging stems purely from its rootlessness and its dispersion across the face of the earth, a history that spans two thousand years. Due to the massive immigration of the Eastern Jews since 1918, Jewry has become a danger to the state, as even the more intelligent and earlier Germanised ‘conservative’ Jews openly admit. It is quite deplorable that that other supranational power, Rome’s Ultramontanism, collaborates with these subversive forces, even though they are its lethal enemies. But the supranational idea of stopping the national, racial and military rise of Greater Germany appears to be the stronger one. For this reason the dominant black-red-gold International is a threat to the future of the German people. From this flows the crucial task of insulating our people, especially the workers, from the influence of these circles. One day the time will come when the worker will see that it’s not the German entrepreneur but the big capitalists of the Entente and imperialism who are his true exploiters and the ones really responsible for his miserable economic condition. The worker will then acknowledge us, his German comrades, bound to him by national and racial bonds, as his true friends and saviours.

All you need in this passage are the words ‘Führer’ and ‘National Socialism’ and you have here, already in 1928, the whole of Hitler’s programme of 1933. Indeed, in his campaign against the German mother-tongue the *völkisch* Graf came to form a good intellectual companion of the Führer. A national mass-movement is inconceivable without an ideology

peculiar to it. This is why the forces of the German counter-revolution, the capitalists and their lackeys, were compelled to forge an appropriate *Weltanschauung*, once they went to the masses after 1919. In bourgeois society the intellectuals have the specific function of elaborating the *Weltanschauung* necessary for the survival of capitalism, and the German academic intelligentsia has always devoted itself to this task with complete integrity. To this end they returned to the forms and conceptions of the prewar epoch, so far as these were usable under the new relationships.

German academics came of age, in the years after 1871, with a truly pious sense of devotion to Prussian militarism. The successive victories of the Prussian army in 1864, 1866, and 1870–1, were decisive blows that defeated German liberalism forever. Bismarck broke the backbone of the German bourgeoisie. Sections of this class now began to look on their liberal or democratic past with a sense of shame, and to look for a new way of life [*Lebensform*] that would blend service and obedience with an overbearing nationalism. One owed service as well as obedience to the authorities that ruled the nation. Thus even the relations of civilian life began to be reflected through the prism of ‘superiors’ and ‘subordinates’. The men in uniform were the superiors [*der Vorgesetzte*] of anyone out of uniform, of all ordinary people. The government-official behind the counter was the superior of the public, the entrepreneur the superior of his workers and office-staff. The Prussian officer-corps became the model to which the younger elements of the propertied and educated bourgeoisie aspired. Whoever could not become an active officer would at least join the war-colleges or become a reserve-officer.

This readiness to render obedience to superiors, regardless of who they happened to be, found its complement in a crude nationalist arrogance, a hatred of everything that was not of German origin. For an arrogant and counterfeit aristocracy of this kind, hatred of the Jews is a perfectly apt pursuit. For in the Jew one comes to see the opposite of oneself, and the permanent delusion of Jewish ‘inferiority’ only reinforces the sense of one’s own ‘superiority’. In fact, the new German academic élites saw in ‘the’ Jew an image of all those qualities which they condemned. The Jew was perceived as a typical modern liberal, as the kind of person incapable of blind obedience, who would form his own ideas, who would not genuflect before authority, but use his capacities for rational thought. Antisemitism began to gain ground in the universities of Germany roughly after 1878, precisely in the years when the political defeat of German liberalism became obvious. Professor von Treitschke, based in Berlin, became the prophet of this racist-academic aristocracy.

For reasons cited earlier, in the Imperial epoch this academic antisemitism was as little capable of evolving into a political mass-movement as Stöcker’s more petty-bourgeois and working-class tendency. Nevertheless, down to the War, racial antisemitism preserved its full vigour in the German universities and in German academic circles of Christian descent. Again, it was a Berlin professor, Gustav Röhde, who became the most celebrated representative of this type of thinking later in the reign of Wilhelm II. After 1919, as the German intelligentsia sought desperately to counterpose to democracy and socialism a new, national [*volkstümliche*] outlook, this prewar antisemitism gained a new lease of life. Now it was not enough just to be nationalist; rather, the youth of Germany had to develop populist-racist [*völkisch*] feelings, and endorse purity of race and rejection of the foreign Jewish element.

German heavy industry and big capital, which gained huge profits in the period of inflation, were from the start zealous promoters of *völkisch* ideas. They saw in them a

means of eradicating the hateful trade-unions and, more widely, the influence of socialism over the masses. The inventory of *völkisch* ideas included the slogan of a 'true national community' [*Volksgemeinschaft*], to which, generously, workers too would be admitted, as long as they abjured the destructive and false theory of class-struggle. If the movement could gather momentum only because it supplemented its attacks on the 'Reds' with attacks on Jewish capital, so be it, at least the Christian and 'Germanic' heavy industrialists and bankers were not in the least bothered. On the contrary, *völkisch* and antisemitic slogans gave them a brilliant chance to replicate on German soil a manoeuvre notoriously characteristic of populist nationalisms worldwide – namely, instigating a movement that serves the interests of big capital but *appears* anti-capitalist at public meetings. The *völkisch* agitators found they could best take the wind out of the socialist sail with thunderous speeches against Jewish usurers' capital and calls for the destruction of 'interest-slavery'.

At first, in the period after 1919, the *völkisch* movement in Germany was not linked to any specific political party. On the contrary, it permeated *all* parties, organisations, legal and illegal associations of the bourgeois, anti-democratic Right. When the Kapp putschists and Baltic adventurers marched into Berlin in 1920, under the leadership of Captain Ehrhardt, they carried the *völkisch* swastika on their steel-helmets. Of the several million voters who supported the bourgeois Right in the various elections from 1919 to 1928, the majority were more-or-less infected by *völkisch* ideas. Above all, to the German intelligentsia of this period *völkisch* theory formed the gospel of the new Germany, the coming 'Third Reich'. Adolf Hitler himself was not the author of any of this, yet, due to a special configuration of circumstances, he could later exploit it to his and his party's advantage.

On 9 November 1918 the socialist labour-movement in Germany appeared to have all the trumps in its hand. But its influence declined rapidly after that. By 1920, due to the mistakes made and the disunity among workers, it was already a spent force, and the Centre Party had to take over leadership of the national government. The chancellors who came from this party, namely, Fehrenbach and Wirth, tried to save of German democracy whatever there was to be saved. Yet within two years their reserves were likewise spent. The government of the German Republic then fell into the hands of open representatives of big capital: Cuno's government of 1923 was, if you like, already the victory of legal fascism. The terrible crisis of 1923, which brought the German state and economy to the brink of collapse, found the German working class split and incapable of action. Towards the close of that year, it seemed as if the death-agony of German capitalism would be followed not by a socialist revolution, but, on the contrary, by a fascist dictatorship. In the country as a whole and in the individual states, the parliaments were reduced to defenceless empty forms. The executive lay in the hands of the army-generals. Attempted resistance by workers in Hamburg, Saxony and Thuringia rapidly fell to pieces. Yet in the spring of 1924 the military state of emergency [*Ausnahmezustand*] came to a bloodless and quiet end, and peace-time parliamentary democracy celebrated its return to life. Now started the longest spell of a firm, secure existence that the German Republic was ever destined to live through – the years from 1924 to 1929. But as the world-economic crisis swept across Germany in 1929, the evolution of German fascism resumed from roughly the point at which it had ceased at the end of 1923.

The astonishing revival of the constitutional Republic that set in after 1924 was not the work of the Democrats and Social Democrats, quite the contrary, the true Republican

forces had been completely routed and reduced to impotence by the end of 1923. The shift was in fact a product of foreign intervention. World-capital, and chiefly the big American banks, were favourable to the idea of investing their surplus-billions in Germany. The so-called settlement of the reparations-issue that followed around this time formed the basis for this gigantic influx of capital. Now if the Americans were going to invest their money in Germany, they desired an undisturbed and peaceful democracy there. By the end of 1923 the leading German capitalists had come to realise that they would have to liquidate the adventure in the Ruhr. Passive resistance was therefore called off, and negotiations begun with world-capital. As a result, the prospect of an open fascist dictatorship in Germany was likewise called off, and the ruling powers, the big industrialists and bankers, the General Staff of the army and the top echelons of the bureaucracy, swung back to legality in a U-turn that was as sudden as it was elegant. Individual groups of nationalist conspirators and *Freikorps*-elements who did not grasp this turn fast enough were brought to heel with bullets. Hitler and the National Socialists in Munich were among the several forces stranded by this sudden swing back to democracy.

The origins of the Nazi Party back in 1920 are worth noting. As the name National Socialist 'Workers' Party' already shows, the original aim of the party was the creation of a new national workers' movement that could form an alternative pole of attraction – opposed to the Communists and Social Democrats. The famous programme of 24 February 1920 clearly contained many petty-bourgeois confusions, but side-by-side with these there were some distinctly socialist measures, for example, Point 13 relating to the nationalisation of all enterprises that lacked any significant private ownership. If Hitler had put Point 13 of the programme into actual practice on coming to power, then Germany really would have become a socialist state. That Hitler had not the remotest intention of carrying through his own party-programme is another matter. Moreover, serious propaganda for the programme as a whole would from the very start have put the Nazis into principled opposition to all the groupings of the *völkisch* counter-revolution. But Hitler and his cadre rapidly fell back into the usual rut of the *völkisch* movement. The party which they formed in Munich and the surrounding areas over the years 1920–3 was a typical *völkisch Freikorps*-party with its usual share of academics, dilettantes, adventurist officers and soldiers, its capitalist financiers and petty-bourgeois camp-followers. They had the necessary contacts in the army, and the SA was originally nothing more than the Munich branch of the Black Army. Thus, even in those years, Hitler's entire propaganda-campaign was pursued with the overt connivance of the counter-revolutionary elements in the Bavarian government.

The number of actual industrial workers who joined the Nazis in the first few years was negligible, percentage-wise no higher than the proportion of workers derailed into the other racist organisations in Germany. Nevertheless, the socialist elements of the Nazi programme were of extraordinary significance in the later years. While they obviously failed to do so in 1923, in the next major crisis to affect the country's economy and society the Nazis could successfully project themselves, to dispossessed masses, as the true socialists in Germany. The Nazis played a double rôle, one which none of the other *völkisch* organisations in Germany were able to play. When the *Stahlhelm* or Captain Ehrhardt assured the working class that the German worker was their fraternal comrade, this made scarcely any impression on the proletarian masses. The Nazis, in contrast, relying on their

socialistic propaganda, made much more rapid headway in the impoverished and immiserised sectors of the population. But at the same time, the Nazi leadership would tell their financial backers among the big capitalists whatever the latter wished to hear. This dual character of the Nazi movement [*Dieser Doppelcharakter der Nazibewegung*] would speed up Hitler's seizure of power in precisely the way that afterwards it contributed to the disintegration of his party and political base.

Apart from their influence on workers, the radical and partly socialist elements of the Nazi programme had one further important result. The *Freikorps*-leaders and all the adventurist types who play a rôle in the German fascist counter-revolution are reliable auxiliaries of the capitalists and of the ruling powers more generally, in their struggle against Marxism and the trade-unions. However, they are not satisfied with merely refortifying the old order; rather, they themselves aspire to power. They do not eradicate the Marxists so that the General Staff of the regular army, the higher bureaucracy and its legal experts, the big landowners and the industrialists can rest in peace again. On the contrary, these adventurers and professional revolutionaries want power for themselves. They want to become generals themselves, or police-superintendents or all-powerful chiefs of some new organisation. Legal fascism [*Der legale Faschismus*] is of no use to them, because then the old power-holders remain in their respective positions. They need a violent revolution, or at least the appearance of one, because they personally cannot come to power by any other means. To give an ideological underpinning to their opposition to the established authorities, these fascist professional revolutionaries incline to the greatest possible radicalism in their formulations. They profess National Socialism not because they actually want to bring about any such thing, but because this is the slogan under which they can successfully fight for their share of power and of worldly goods.

The socialist side of the Nazi programme played no significant rôle during the crisis of 1923. However, when the German big bourgeoisie made its sudden turn to legality towards the end of that year, some of the radical *Freikorps*-groups pushed on independently. In Northern Germany there was the action of the Black Army led by Major Buchrucker. In Munich the group of politicians led by Kahr immediately sought contacts with North German big capital and its new course. Independently, Hitler and the SA attempted to bring about the programme of 'national revolution' on their own and were easily suppressed by the Bavarian army.

In the years 1924–9 the German Republic appeared to be about as solid as the political systems of France or the USA: Germany basked in the radiant warmth of dollars, the Mark was stable, and foreign loans inundated the country. Suddenly, the big capitalists and the agrarians were supporters of democracy and of the rule of law, and consequently the leaders of the DNVP and DVP were likewise in favour of positive co-operation within the constitutional framework. The governments of the bourgeois bloc exercised power in the country in conditions defined by peace and legality, and the Social Democrats likewise formed a peaceful and legal opposition down to 1928. After that the Social Democrats re-entered the national government in coalition with the bourgeois parties in the centre [*den bürgerlichen Mittelparteien*]. Because the leading layers of German capitalism now favoured legality, former *Freikorps*-elements were often quite badly handled, rather like poor relatives one is now ashamed of. The small Nazi Party no longer received funds from industrialists, and the judiciary began to convict in cases involving political executions [*die Fememörder*]. At public hearings these heroes of the *völkisch* movement were tried in the

same way as ordinary murderers, and the official prosecutors from the army could not recall ever having had anything to do with the *Freikorps*-people on trial. True, no death-sentences were handed down for such assassinations – that was reserved for Hitler to do in 1934 (Heine and others) – but they received long sentences in jail (when they were caught) and were glad if they got out on general political amnesties.

In spite of everything, the stability of the German democratic Republic in the years 1924–9 was a pure illusion. The Weimar constitution remained firm as long as the loans came in from America. Once the flow of dollars ceased, it collapsed. In those years, the Social Democrats and centrist parties made no new moral gains. Compared to 1924, the percentage of Marxist votes in the national elections showed no perceptible increase. Within the bourgeois camp, the German Democratic Party (DDP) sank into pure insignificance, and within the Centre Party the truly democratic wing continuously lost ground. Apart from the Catholic bourgeoisie and landowners, even the influential Christian trade-union leaders developed an aversion to democracy: they collaborated with the DNVP within the various coalitions dominated by the bourgeois bloc, and were not averse to participating in experiments in fascism when the situation changed.

While democracy was losing its power of attraction over the workers organised behind the Centre Party, the millions of voters who generally supported the various right-wing parties retained their basic political and social conceptions. The great masses of the Protestant middle-class, the right-wing office-employees [*Angestellten*], civil servants and so on remained racist [*völkisch*] and antisemitic. They loathed the black-red-gold Republic and the Marxist 'big-shots' and longed for the time when the spirit of King Frederic and the black-white-red flag would once more rule Germany. The leaderships of the DNVP and DVP, with their Republican *Realpolitik*, were deluded about the real mood and feelings of their own electoral base. It is true that the average Protestant, including those who owned farms or worked in offices, voted for the DNVP, DVP or *Wirtschaftspartei* [Economic Party] over the years from 1924 to the Depression; but only as long as their material circumstances were tolerable and as long as these various parties appeared to guarantee the continued possibility of earning an income. But as soon as a new crisis emerged, the groundswell of *völkisch* anti-Republican sentiment re-exploded among sections of the electorate who voted for the Right. And of course, the leading German capitalists were at best 'Republicans by convenience'. Whenever it seemed necessary, they were always ready to re-extend support to dictatorship and fascism. As the storm of the Great Depression (1929–30) broke over Germany, the six peaceful years of the constitutional Republic were suddenly wiped out, and Germany reverted to the situation that had prevailed at the end of 1923.

In these six years, the German labour-movement had stagnated both in numbers and in terms of actual energy. True, the Social Democrats would increase their support at the Communists' expense, but only because the economic situation had visibly improved. The actual course of development appeared to contradict the gloomy forecasts of the Communists. The legal methods pursued by Social Democracy thus appeared perfectly justified. On this basis, the SPD could win votes in the national elections and retain its dominance in the individual states and districts. The unions made important practical gains for the organised workers. But even given all this, the socialist movement became the prisoner of Republican legality, and knew no other solution once a new revolutionary situation re-emerged after 1929. Over those very same years the KPD for its part wound up

in total dependence on Stalin's Russian diplomacy. The independent life of the party was stifled from the top. One could attract a few million votes in Germany with empty, radical slogan-mongering and by exploiting the authority of the Russian Revolution. But as far as any real, proletarian-revolutionary action was concerned, the official KPD was totally useless.

The various *völkisch* groupings, the *Stahlhelm*, the Pan-German League, the leagues of officers and students, and all the other bigger and smaller organisations of the Right, did their best to survive the (for them) bleak years of the mid-1920s and to keep their message alive. However, they were all more-or-less dependent on the much bigger DNVP and were in some sense co-responsible for that party's legal opportunism. When the turning-point of 1924 came, it became clear, to everyone's surprise, how much the authority and control of these older organisations over the *völkisch* masses had actually declined. An independent German-*völkisch* political party that was founded in North Germany in these years went into dissolution almost immediately. On the other hand, Hitler succeeded in keeping the National Socialist Party alive, even if on a minuscule scale. Ever since November 1923, the National Socialists had broken their links with the army, the big bourgeoisie and the ruling bureaucracy. Therefore it was now free – undeterred by any obstacles – to launch the sharpest attacks on the existing régime and on all parties connected to it in any way, from the DNVP itself down to the Social Democrats. Of course, as long as the economic situation showed some stability, the Nazis made no significant electoral gains. Thus, in the Reichstag elections of 1928 Hitler obtained only 800,000 votes. But the mere existence of his party had the same impact on the millions of *völkisch* voters behind the DNVP that the tiny Spartacus League had had on the millions who supported the USPD in 1919 and 1920.

Starting in 1929, the economic crisis would create in Germany all the objective conditions [*alle objektiven Möglichkeiten*] for a decisive upsurge of revolutionary socialism. Although neither the SPD nor the KPD were capable of turning the situation to their own advantage, the capitalists were profoundly uneasy as they confronted an army of millions of unemployed and the growing impoverishment of the middle-class. To continue to rely on the methods of democracy in such times was too dangerous for the capitalist class. In short, it took a decisive turn in support of dictatorship. The coalition between Social Democracy and the bourgeois centre fell to pieces, and in 1930 the new national Chancellor Brüning formed the first of several régimes that were now strictly authoritarian dictatorships. In the national elections of that year, the Nazis' share of the vote increased, at one go, from 800,000 (in 1928) to 6.4 million.

In fact, the voting patterns describe the rise of the fascist mass-movement in Germany better than any words could. A comparison of the four Reichstag elections of 1928, 1930, July 1932 and March 1933 leads to the following conclusions. The total number of votes cast (in millions) during those four elections were: 30.7, 34.9, 37, and finally 39.3. As you can see, in these five years (1928–33) and under the pressure of the crisis, the politicisation of the German masses showed an extraordinary advance. The total number of voters increased by roughly 8½ million. The new voters comprised both apathetic layers who had been drawn into the political vortex, and youth who had come of voting age. The table below summarises the results, grouping the SPD, KPD and smaller socialist splinters under 'Marxist', and the Centre Party and the German Democratic Party under 'Democrats':



(millions of votes)	1928	1930	July 1932	March 1933
Marxists	12.6	13.2	13.3	12.0
Democrats	5.3	5.4	5.0	4.7
The Right, including Nazis	12.7	16.2	18.3	22.5
Nazis only	0.8	6.4	13.7	17.3

As the reader can see, the Marxists and the old Republican parties made no progress. The politicisation of newer layers was of no special use to them. What they may have gained in terms of new voters, they lost with the older ones. As against this, compare the expansion of the right-wing parties. In a political landslide without precedent, the total number of votes cast in favour of parties of the Right that were opposed to democracy almost doubled over five years. They alone were the beneficiaries of the huge influx of new masses into the electorate. Apart from which, they captured a significant share of the votes that had traditionally gone to the Left and centrist parties. Excluding the Nazis, the Right-parties obtained the followings totals: 11.9 million, 9.8 million, 4.4 million, and 5.2 million. It follows that in this period of five years, almost 7 million long-standing supporters of the *völkisch* Right cast their votes for Hitler. The curve of Nazi expansion is perceptible in the figures given in the last row above. The 16½ million *new* votes that the Nazis won over these five years might be broken up roughly as follows: 7 million traditional right-wing voters, 8½ million completely new voters, 1 million former Left-voters. In reality, the number of former Left-voters who went over to Hitler was almost certainly higher than that, since a corresponding number of new voters would have supported the Left.

In the last relatively free national elections to be held in Germany, on 5 March 1933, the Nazis won a total of 17.3 million votes, the other right-wing parties (including the Bavarian People's Party (BVP), counted here, as always, with the Right) 5.2 million. The Marxists won 12 million votes, the Centre and the Democrats 4.7 million. It may be hazardous to try and correlate these figures with the break-up by occupational groups that I cited earlier, viz., the distinction between self-employed + family-members (28%), industrial workers (32%), other wage-earners/employees (40%). Because industrial workers in the strict sense formed barely a third of the total number of voters, it follows that, despite all the unfavourable factors of these years, *almost the entire factory-based working class, including the greater part of the unemployed, remained true to their earlier convictions*. The following table is purely tentative, and may well contain major errors as far as details go. But taken as a whole, it gives a useful picture of the situation:

(voting for, in millions)	Marxists	Parties of the Right	Centre Party & Democrats
Workers	10.0	1.0	2.0
Property-owners	0	10.0	1.0
Other wage-earners	2.0	11.5	1.7

In particular, the older factory-workers remained true to their class-consciousness at a time when the terror of the Brownshirts swept through Germany. The same is true of the vast majority of the unemployed. Moreover, not many of the workers organised in the Christian trade-unions fell for the bombastic propaganda of Nazism. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of white-collar workers, of government-employees, and of jobless middle-class elements [*Berufslosen*] swung over to the Nazis. The electoral results from Berlin show that the suggested correlation between voting patterns and social class must, broadly speaking, be correct. In the district of Wedding, a stronghold of the industrial working class and the unemployed, as late as March 1933 the Marxists could win as many as 147,000 votes, and the Nazis a mere 62,000. The DNVP and DVP together polled just 16,000 votes. In the district of Zehlendorf, where the propertied bourgeoisie predominated, the Nazis got 18,000 votes, the Marxists 11,000, and the DNVP and DVP together 12,000. In the district of Steglitz, a residential area typified by white-collar and government-employees, the Nazis got 63,000, the Marxists 34,000, and the DNVP + DVP 31,000. *So even as late as March 1933 the vast majority of industrial workers stood behind the Marxist parties*, whereas a strong turnout for the Nazis and the Nationalists (DNVP) actually reflected the low proportion of working-class families in those districts. The Nazis obtained their best results in areas dominated, socially, by white-collar and government-employees [*die Angestellten und Beamten*]. However, where the affluent bourgeois element was more conspicuous, the DNVP did better.

All of which shows that Marxist socialism failed to have any traction with the masses in Germany precisely at a time of the most frightful economic misery and of strong mass-interest in politics. Neither the SPD nor the KPD had any programme for the revival of Germany that the masses could find credible. To the vast majority of the German people the Communists came across as unreliable phrase-mongers, while the Social Democrats appeared as part-responsible for the Weimar Republic and its capitalist order. That the older generation of workers remained faithful to the Red Flag is hugely to their credit and inspires one with considerable hope for the future. But in 1933 this loyalty could not alter Germany's fate. The various strata of the wage-earning population whose class-consciousness was less firmly established, less tried and tested – the younger elements, apathetic layers, white-collar workers, the lower civil servants, craft-apprentices, agricultural workers – *all* rushed to the Swastika.

In the years when the Nazis were weak and capital could dispense with them, the German industrialists cared little for them. But when Hitler suddenly came to control some 6 million votes, contacts between big capital and the Swastika were re-established at the level they had reached in 1923. Leading big industrialists and bankers funded the growing financial needs of the Brown House (the Nazi headquarters). This section of the German big bourgeoisie welcomed the coming National-Socialist dictatorship and was prepared to accept the possibility that the Nazis would absorb all the other parties of the German bourgeoisie. The socialistic phrase-mongering used by Nazi agitators at public meetings scarcely bothered the pro-Nazi capitalists. They knew this was only a theatre-show for fools. What mattered most was Hitler's drive to destroy Marxism and ward off a Bolshevik revolution in Germany. But another section of German capitalists, as well as the big landowners, remained more pensive. For all the trust one might place in Hitler himself, the day-to-day agitation of the Nazis stirred up such strong anti-capitalist feelings that this section thought some bulwark was necessary against the left or radical wing of the Nazi

Party. This explains why powerful figures in German economic life and their political friends were unwilling to join the Nazis, but on the contrary sought to keep the DNVP alive, side-by-side with Hitler's party.

That is why even after 1930, initially two forms of German fascism persisted: on the one hand, the Nazis themselves, with their peculiar, historically rooted, double character [*Doppelcharakter*] which simultaneously promised both a renewal of German capitalism and the creation of German socialism; on the other hand, the old German conservatives in the DNVP, who were having trouble keeping the remnants of a once-substantial party together and sought to prop themselves up with the *Stahlhelm*, which was itself in sharp decline. This second tendency wanted absolutely nothing to do with socialism, and stood unambiguously and unconditionally for bourgeois private property. Next to and apart from these, there was yet a third form of German fascism that possessed no significant following either among the masses or in the top layers of the bourgeoisie, but happened to be able to exercise power in Germany in 1930–2 by exploiting a favourable conjuncture. They were the so-called 'Popular Conservatives' [*die Volkskonservativen*], or the Brüning tendency. It is true that Chancellor Brüning himself came ultimately from the ranks of the Centre Party, but his politics had nothing in common with the traditions of the Centre Party. He borrowed his ideas about government from a group of former *deutschnationale* politicians who styled themselves 'Popular Conservatives'.

The Popular Conservatives were unquestioned opponents of the Republic's democracy. They wanted an authoritarian government that would serve the interests of capital and of the ruling powers. Brüning based his government on emergency-decrees that were issued by the *Reichspräsident*, which the Reichstag would subsequently *have* to ratify. Brüning and the Popular Conservatives sought to throw the whole burden of the crisis onto the shoulders of wage-earners and of the unemployed, with the help of so-called 'austerity'-measures from which the big capitalists and agrarians were totally exempt. Any resistance to this dictatorial régime was suppressed with military and police-force. However, the *Volkskonservativen* distinguished themselves from the Nazis and the DNVP by their desire to avoid any dramatic transformation in Germany and to preserve the traditional forms as far as that was possible. Perhaps even the existing trade-unions could have been allowed to survive in the new authoritarian political dispensation they envisaged, in a suitably shackled form. As I said earlier, a leading group of Christian trade-unionists had already distanced itself considerably from democracy and veered over to fascist theories. By relying specifically on these elements, Brüning forced the Centre Party and the Catholic unions to support him. At the same time, using pure blackmail-tactics, he forced the Social Democrats to go along with his emergency-decrees. He played on the threat of a Nazi government, suggesting it was inevitable if they did not support him as the lesser evil.

The Nazis and the German conservatives were, of course, basically in agreement with Brüning's nationalist positions and his economic methods. What they rejected was his policy of a slow, carefully executed absorption of the Centre Party and the Social Democrats. They yearned for an immediate and open establishment of the *völkisch* state and a total destruction of Marxism and the Catholic parties. That is why Brüning could not carry through the compromise with the Nazis which he himself strongly favoured. Hitler was given the invaluable chance of playing the opposition for two more years. Brüning's austerity-measures only made the economic position of Germany worse than it already was. The number of unemployed and of the impoverished middle-classes grew from one

month to the next. Brüning's terrible policies could actually appear as the line of the German Republic, thanks to the concurrence of the Centre Party and of the Social Democrats. The last remnants of any sympathy the Weimar Republic may still have had among the broad mass of people evaporated in the two years of his régime. Yet the Nazis struck a real chord in the deep sense of despair among the people with their relentless attacks on Brüning's policies. At the same time, the big capitalists and great estate-owners also came around to rejecting Brüning's tactics. When it turned out that in fact the Chancellor had no support of any note in any section of the people, the *Reichspräsident* dismissed him. And with Brüning there ended the whole sordid episode of *Volkskonservatismus* that was such a disaster for the broad mass of wage-earners. After the two short intervals of the chancellorships of Papen and Schleicher, the two remaining factions of German fascism jointly took over power: Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich, and agreed to have the leaders of the DNVP and the *Stahlhelm* in his cabinet.

The massive expansion of the Nazis after 1929 ushered in the heyday of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA). The old *Freikorps*-leaders, demobilised officers and academics who thirsted for civil war witnessed an influx of hundreds of thousands into the storm-troops which they controlled. It was chiefly the unemployed of all categories that joined the SA. Precisely because the stormtroopers attracted those who had been thrown out of work and were feeling quite desperate by now, *the proletarian element was more strongly represented in the SA than in Hitler's general electoral base*. Following a model Mussolini had established, the SA started a pogrom-style guerrilla-war against the Marxists, under Brüning's chancellorship. In fact Brüning's government, externally at least, had many points of resemblance with the last liberal governments of Italy. Like them, it was suspended in a political void and had no support among the masses. Like them, it promised justice to all sections, but could not stop the police and the judiciary from aiding and abetting the fascists when they attacked the workers. Brüning himself and the other Popular Conservatives in the cabinet would never have sanctioned pogroms against the Left on their own initiative. But German capital and the bulk of the intelligentsia were jubilant when the SA took decisive action against the 'Marxist traitors', and this mood permeated the police, the judiciary and other organs of the state. Wherever individual Social-Democrat ministers still held office in the individual states, their potential influence was paralysed by the situation prevailing in the country as a whole. The workers defended themselves against the attacks of the stormtroopers as well as they possibly could. Even as late as 1933, they would certainly have defeated the SA, if the police had remained truly neutral. In fact, whenever the workers took to armed struggle against the stormtroopers, they regularly had to face police-squads that were heavily armed and specially trained for civil warfare. Moreover, it was common knowledge that behind the SA and the police there stood the army, as the final and strongest reserve-force of capitalism. From the very beginning this awareness paralysed the power of resistance of the German working class, and led to the tragic (though, in the given circumstances, perfectly explicable) destruction of its movement in the year 1933.

The SA perpetrated the worst acts of violence against organised labour. It embodied a form of fascist terror that specially targeted Marxists and Jews. Yet, at the same time, it constituted the most proletarian element within the Nazi movement. Within its ranks one saw a fusion of the older professional revolutionaries who had come straight out of the *Freikorps* and of those unemployed workers who had become embittered and demoralised

and were thoroughly confused about Marxism. Admittedly, in 1929–30 the SA fought the battles German capitalism wanted fought, but it was never a merely pliant tool of the bourgeoisie. Even for Hitler it formed a permanent threat, once he professed his open support for capitalism and was keen on demonstrating that with acts that would please the employers and large landowners. Obviously as long as the ‘national revolution’ was still unfinished and they had to settle accounts with ‘the system’, the Nazi Party stormed ahead, unified and resolute. The problems only came later.

Is it possible to describe the National Socialists as a ‘petty-bourgeois party’? It is perfectly true that in 1933, the German middle-classes were almost solidly pro-Hitler. And yet, *any bourgeois party that aspires to become a mass-movement must win over the middle-class*. That peasants and craftsmen, office-staff and small rentiers generally voted for Hitler is not enough to transform the Nazis into a petty-bourgeois movement. For this a further condition is required – that the party should basically represent the interests of the petty bourgeoisie vis-à-vis the other classes. Before seizing power, the Nazis made far-reaching promises to the middle-class groups, just as, in fact, they promised every section of the people whatever they wanted to hear. At the very least, a truly middle-class party [*eine echte Mittelstandspartei*] would have had to close down the department-stores and consumer-cooperatives, especially if it came to power in a revolutionary way. But this did not happen. A truly peasant-party would have had to create room for the resettlement of the impoverished rural households through a redivision of the large estates. But this too failed to occur. A party of rentiers and those with savings would have had to take up the question of revaluation once more. And this, too, is something Hitler had no plans for. Finally, Nazi labour-law nowhere shows any sort of discrimination in favour of white-collar as opposed to production-line workers.

Indeed, under the German Republic, a whole series of truly petty-bourgeois movements did emerge on the political scene: there was the Economic Party of the Middle-Class, the Revaluation Party, the various peasant-leagues, and so on. One has only to compare the type of activity of these truly petty-bourgeois parties with the Nazis to be struck by the difference immediately. It is not typical of the petty bourgeoisie to enter the political fray as an independent force, in open opposition both to capitalism and to the proletariat. Rather, the petty bourgeoisie tends either to attach itself to one of the two basic social forces or to vacillate between them according to the situation. But supposing the petty bourgeoisie really does summon up the courage to play an independent political rôle, then it drags the whole baggage of petty grievances that stem from this or that professional sector onto the battlefield and raises innumerable demands of a particularistic kind. The Nazis’ tactics and forms of functioning were completely different. They have never described themselves as a middle-class party, although they lay considerable emphasis on winning over the peasantry and heap every conceivable flattery on this social layer [*Stand*], true representatives of ‘blood and soil’. Indeed, they have always courted workers and youth with as much zeal. It is precisely the worker, the peasant and the academic that they project as the three pillars of their power over the masses. Moreover, the ‘productive’, ‘creative’ factory-owner and entrepreneur are certainly an intrinsic part of the economic structure of the Third Reich.

The leading idea of Nazi propaganda is national renewal, a restoration of the former (*pre-1914*) dominance of the German Reich. Viewed socially, it was the big bourgeoisie that formed the chief bearer of this nationalist conception of German power in the decades

leading up to 1914. It was Krupp & Co., and not some middling firm of bakers, that made money out of the German Empire. Likewise, today, too, it is Krupp and his closest colleagues who stand behind Hitler. The *völkisch* movement was a legacy of bourgeois nationalism. Obviously, to capture an industrialised Germany, it had to win over large masses of wage-earners too. The army-officers and the intelligentsia formed the connecting link between capital and labour. The petty bourgeoisie were fellow-travellers, but they never determined either the character or the true destiny of the movement. Mussolini's fascism is, in a certain sense, the party of a capitalism still capable of expansion. That is why the Italian fascists could openly support private property. Mussolini's radical programme of 1919 was of purely episodic significance, without any consequence for the subsequent fate of the movement. The Nazis, by contrast, are the party of a moribund capitalism, and to gain a foothold in proletarian Germany they are compelled to hide their capitalist character from the masses. That is why, from the very start, Hitler's dictatorship was burdened with insoluble inner contradictions that did not exist for Mussolini.

