

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND AND UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS



Beyond Hitlerism: Ultranationalist Perceptions of Italian Fascism in the German-Speaking World, 1919-1938

J. Teresa van der Kraan (Teresa van der Kraan)

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Abstract

Italian Fascism exercised a powerful influence upon the imaginations of ultranationalists in the interwar German-speaking world. Recent advances in transnational historiography foreground processes of transfer and ideological entanglement, allowing historians to explore the “travelling potential” of fascism through the appeal of the Italian model, or elements thereof, in international contexts. Building on this trend, this thesis investigates the intellectual reception and use of Fascism in five German-speaking, non-Hitlerian ultranationalist groups: the Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus (GSF); the Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten; the National Bolsheviki, in particular Ernst Niekisch’s *Widerstand* circle; the Strasser circle; and the Spann circle in Austria. These groups all proved receptive to Italian Fascism and can therefore be said to inhabit the “fascist sphere.”

The ways in which the groups interpreted Italian Fascism — a discursive, subjective exercise by nature — resulted in each of the groups internalising features of Fascist ideology, whether actively or passively. This was achieved through two principal vectors, or “ideological emissaries”: the concept of the “fascist war veteran” and corporatism. The fascist war veteran appealed to broader trends of soldierly nationalism, which had a strong presence in German Conservative Revolutionary circles. Corporatism, the praxis of which emerged by degrees in Italy over the interwar period, likewise had broad intellectual, international precedents. Fascism found fertile ground for entry into the Germanic ultranationalist imagination, and its emissaries interacted in a mutually supportive manner, particularly after years of perceived success of the Fascist system. For example, for the Stahlhelm, enthusiasm for the fascist war veteran encouraged the adoption of corporatism; for the Spann circle, the reverse was true. Thus, through the vehicles of the fascist war veteran and corporatism, the ultranationalist movements became *more fascist* over time. Perpetuating associations with soldierly nationalism and corporatism with fascism, the groups also contributed to an intellectual synthesis of the concepts, further entrenching associations with fascism as a generalist political ideology.

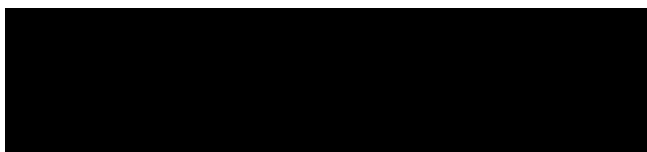
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This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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List of Abbreviations and Translations

AG – Arbeitsgemeinschaft der nord- und westdeutschen Gaue der NSDAP (Work Community of the north-west German Regions of the NSDAP)

ASPD – Alte Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Old Social Democratic Party of Germany)

BOWS – Bund für die organische Wirtschafts- und Staatsaufbau (Organisation for Organic Economic and State-building)

DAP – Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (German Workers' Party)

DNSAP – Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei (German National Socialist Workers' Party)

DNVP – Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party)

DSKB – Deutsche sozialistische Kampfbewegung (German Socialist Combat Movement)

DVP – Deutsche Volkspartei (German People's Party)

GKSD – Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division (Guard Cavalry Protection Division)

GSF – Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus (Society for the Study of Fascism)

GSRN – Gruppe Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalisten (Group of Social Revolutionary Nationalists)

KAPD – Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Workers' Party)

KB – Kameradschaftsbund (Comradeship Association)

KGDR – Kampfgemeinschaft Deutscher Revolutionäre (Fighting Community of German Revolutionaries)

KGRNS – Kampfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten (Fighting Community of Revolutionary National Socialists)

KPD – Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)

NK – Nationaler Klub (National Club)

NLP – Nationalliberale Partei (National Liberal Party)

NSAG – Nationalsozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (National Socialist Workers' Community)

NSDAP – Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei (National Socialist German Workers Party / Nazi Party)

NSDFB – Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Frontsoldaten-Bund (National Socialist German Frontline Soldiers' League)

NSFB – Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung (National Socialist Freedom Movement)

NSKD – Nationalsozialistische Kampfbewegung Deutschlands (National-Socialist Fighting Community of Germany)

NSRB – Nationalsozialistischer Rechtswahrerbund (National Socialist Lawkeepers Association)

SA – Sturmabteilung ('Storm Division')

SD – Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS (Security Service of the Reichsführer SS)

SDAPÖ – Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Österreichs (Social Democratic Party of Austria)

SdP – Sudetendeutsche Partei (Sudeten German Party)

SHF – Sudeten-deutsche Heimatfront (Sudeten Home Front)

SPD – Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)

SS – Schutzstaffel ('Protection Squadron')

Stas – Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe (Stahlhelm Self-Help)

USPD – Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)

VNS – Verband nationalgesinnter Soldaten (Union of Nationalist Soldiers)

VVVD – Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände Deutschlands (United German Fatherland Associations)

Introduction: *Transfer and Entanglement: Interwar Impressions of Italy as “Transformative” History*

On 9 February, 1933, Waldemar Pabst, the executive chairman of an organisation known as the Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus (GSF), wrote a letter discussing how best to transmit Italian Fascist ideas to Germany.¹ He encouraged GSF members to attend an event organised by the nationalistic Fichte-Gesellschaft, at which Dr Guido Bortolotto, a jurist visiting from the University of Rome, was to give a lecture. Bortolotto was promoting his most recent book, which had appeared in German translation the previous year, and would be speaking about its key theme: the construction of an authentic “national state.”² Bortolotto’s lecture marked just one of the recommendations that Pabst promoted to his followers. In the same letter, he mentioned that the publishers of the Austrian periodical *Ständisches Leben* (*Corporate Life*) had informed him that the next issue was set to feature articles on Fascism by Benito Mussolini and the journal’s editor and founder, the conservative intellectual Professor Othmar Spann. Pabst anticipated that this issue was likely to require a larger order than the GSF usually placed, due to the increased demand that Mussolini’s name would generate.³

The GSF remains a little-known and apparently inconsequential historical group, never numbering more than a few hundred members.⁴ Yet this snapshot reveals that it represented an ultranationalist nexus, fostering connections with and between different organisations and interest groups. Many GSF members held dual membership in movements across the German-speaking world, including the Nazi Party, the veterans’ organisation the Stahlhelm, and even circles associated with National Bolshevism. Additionally, while the GSF’s members might have been few in number, a high percentage of them were influential men. The GSF counted among its ranks prominent business leaders and representatives, like future Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht, and industrialists Friedrich Minoux and Fritz Thyssen. What united

¹ Waldemar Pabst, letter, February 9, 1933, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Justus H. Ulbricht, “Völkische Erwachsenenbildung: Intentionen, Programme und Institutionen zwischen Jahrhundertwende und Weimarer Republik,” in *Handbuch zur “Völkischen Bewegung” 1871-1918*, ed. Uwe Puschner, Walter Schmitz and Justus H. Ulbricht (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1996), 269.

² Pabst, February 9, 1933, R 72/280. See also Guido Bortolotto, *Faschismus und Nation: Der Geist der korporativen Verfassung*, trans. Albert Mirgeler and Paula Mirgeler (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932).

³ Pabst, February 9, 1933, R 72/280.

⁴ “Mitglieder der GSF, 1932-1933,” in Manfred Wichmann *Waldemar Pabst und die Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus* (Berlin: Bulletin für Faschismus- und Weltkriegsforschung, Band 8, 2013), 223-240.

them was a shared admiration for Italian Fascism. So too was Italian Fascism the primary link whereby the GSF cultivated connections with other ultranationalist groups.

While the GSF itself existed for a mere two years, it harnessed sentiments that were felt broadly within Germanic ultranationalist circles. Even in the midst of the Nazi takeover, the group envisioned a Third Reich modelled explicitly on the Italian corporate system and attempted to disseminate this vision through various social events. In the early 1930s, the idea of Italian Fascism had come to exercise great pulling power over the imaginations of Germanic ultranationalists and Conservative Revolutionaries, bolstered by the perceived good health in which the Italian system seemed to weather the Great Depression. This thesis seeks to trace the nature and development of that pulling power, through the examination of five non-Hitlerian Germanic ultranationalist movements active between 1919 and 1938: the GSF, the Stahlhelm, National Bolshevism, the Strasser circle, and the Spann circle in Vienna.

Historians feel obligated to explain history's big questions, and none are bigger than Nazism and the Holocaust. This in part accounts for the overwhelming focus on Nazism in German historiography, particularly studies of the interwar period. One unintentional cumulative effect of this dominance, however, has been to disguise the broader set of alternative fascisms that populated the German-speaking world, and to elevate Nazism to singular and monolithic importance, thereby replicating the Nazis' own understanding of their historical role. Unavoidably, much of the literature upon which this thesis stands is also centred around Nazism, and the following investigation cannot help but have implications for the ways in which Nazism is conceptualised. Nonetheless, diversifying focus away from Nazism (and, within Nazi circles, away from its dominant variant, Hitlerism) not only enriches inquiry into fascism in German-speaking regions but also augments understandings of Nazism by placing it in a pluralised context: as one of a variety of German fascisms.⁵

Italian Fascism, having appeared on the political landscape in the early 1920s, formed a natural reference point not only for the Nazis but for thinkers throughout the fascist sphere. The term "fascist sphere" is used here to denote not only fascist movements/regimes proper but movements and interest groups that were ideologically *receptive* (and often sympathetic) to fascism; namely those which were, so to speak, in tune with the fascist message, or at least important elements thereof. The five nationalist movements considered in the following pages

⁵ The thesis uses uppercase "Fascism" when referring to Italian Fascism, and lowercase "fascism" to denote the generic variety, and/or to emphasise discursive elements.

exhibit a variety of ideologies, but all inhabit this intellectual anteroom. Each of them also fell foul of Hitlerian Nazism, being either integrated into the Third Reich, banned, exiled, liquidated or, at best, permitted to drift into anonymity.

The ability of Italian Fascism to influence foreign movements is part of a phenomenon that has been referred to as the “travelling capacity” of fascism. Such re-evaluations of fascism’s influence and appeal have been undertaken by Federico Finchelstein, Aristotle Kallis, and Matteo Pasetti as part of the shift towards transnational history.⁶ Transnationalism has seen scholars moving away from the intuitive inclination to view different fascisms as products of their respective domestic contexts. The concept of “fascistisation” — the process of becoming fascist — fits comfortably within the transnational paradigm. Finchelstein, for instance, characterised fascism as a “travelling political universe,” the various permutations of which could not be understood without reference to Italian Fascism.⁷ A broader methodological implication of transnationalism is that history, as Kallis argues, becomes “a dynamic process of circulation, unpredictable interaction and intersection, multiple transfer, and hybrid, ever-mutating outcomes.”⁸

While this thesis concerns itself with the intellectual outcomes of these entanglements, it is important to note that no such entanglements would have been possible were it not for the unprecedented level of physical mobility enjoyed by many in the interwar period. This manifested, firstly, in the increased capacity of individuals to travel – for instance, in Bortolotto's physical capacity to deliver his lecture to his GSF audience. Additional figures discussed below—including Stahlhelm Bundesführer Franz Seldte, Professor Othmar Spann and his sons, Hermann Göring, and key writers like the Stahlhelm’s Helmut Franke and *Widerstand*’s Fritz Berger—all undertook journeys to Italy. They reported being impressed by the Fascism regime, often translating tactile experiences into written form. Relatedly, the

⁶ Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe, “Introduction,” in *Fascism Without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945*, ed. Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 1; Federico Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism: Ideology, Violence, and the Sacred in Argentina and Italy, 1919-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 6; Aristotle Kallis, “Transnational Fascism: The Fascist New Order, Violence, and Creative Destruction,” in *Fascism Without Borders*, ed. Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, 39. See also Kallis’ recent article on the transmission of Italian Fascist ideas in Greece: Aristotle Kallis, “International Fascism and the Allure of the ‘Third Way’,” *Fascism* 11 (November 2022): 187-210; Matteo Pasetti, “Corporatist Connections: The Transnational Rise of the Fascist Model in Interwar Europe,” in *Fascism without Borders*, ed. Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, 67. For an overview of the impact of transnational history on fascist studies, see Ángel Alcalde, “The Transnational Consensus: Fascism and Nazism in Current Research,” *Contemporary European History* 29, no. 2 (May 2020): 243-245.

⁷ Finchelstein, *Transatlantic Fascism*, 6.

⁸ Kallis, “Transnational Fascism,” 39.

interwar period saw increased production, mobility, dissemination, and translation of literature, both popular and academic. The German-Jewish journalist Emil Ludwig — known for his widely-translated interviews with and biographies of history's "great men" — interviewed Mussolini in 1929.⁹ The subsequent book, appearing in 1932, was one of a number of publications to present the *Duce*, and the Italian Fascist system in general, in a positive, romanticised manner, often quite removed from the realities of the Fascist system.¹⁰

Among the groups considered below, a comparable segment, entitled "Reports from Rome," featured in the Stahlhelm-backed journal the *Standarte*, edited by Helmut Franke.¹¹ The relationship between German intellectuals and Fascism was, of course, reciprocal; Fascist representatives were active participants in the process. This was evinced by the presence of Italian emissaries abroad, such as Bortolotto, who reflected the interest that Mussolini's regime took in cultivating sympathetic foreign ultranationalist movements abroad. Particularly important was the Italian liaison to Germany, Guiseppe Renzetti, for the active role he played in disseminating Fascist ideas amongst German ultranationalists.¹² Among the groups considered below, Renzetti collaborated directly with both the Stahlhelm and the GSF, liaising with the former in both Germany and Italy, and lecturing for the latter.

The idealisation of Fascist Italy was pronounced in ultranationalist circles, despite the ambivalent, if not negative attitudes that many Germans held towards Italy.¹³ Some perceived it as a treacherous and morally weak nation, compounded by its role in the First World War and subsequent occupation of South Tyrol. Yet, whether lauded or condemned, Mussolini and Italy were, during the 1920s and early 1930s, perceived as the sole exemplar of fascism; or at least of a novel political alternative to liberal democracy and socialism. As Wolfgang Schieder and Hans-Ulrich Thamer have shown, many German-speaking ultranationalists gravitated towards the two-pronged strategy whereby Mussolini attained and consolidated power: a combination of violent insurrection and apparently orderly political activity.¹⁴ The somewhat paradoxical appeal of violence on the one hand and order on the other is reflected in the

⁹ See Emil Ludwig, *Mussolinis Gespräche mit Emil Ludwig* (Berlin: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1932).

¹⁰ Christian Goeschel, "German Intellectuals and Italian Fascism," *The German Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 354.

¹¹ Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 175.

¹² Wolfgang Schieder, *Der italienische Faschismus*, 2nd ed. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2025), 56-57.

¹³ Christian Goeschel, "A Parellel History? Rethinking the Relationship between Italy and Germany, ca. 1860-1945," *The Journal of Modern History* 88, no. 3 (September 2016): 612, 615.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26547340>.

¹⁴ Schieder, *Italienische Faschismus*, 1; Hans-Ulrich Thamer, *Die NSDAP: Von der Grundung bis zum Ende des Dritten Reiches* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2020), 21.

particular aspects of Italian Fascism that proved to be most influential for the groups considered in this thesis. One of the principal findings of the present work is that certain elements of Italian Fascism resonated more strongly than others and thereby functioned as “ideological emissaries”, making other aspects of fascism more appealing by association. Italian Fascism’s success as an ideological export can be largely attributed to the appeal of two vectors: the construct of the “fascist war veteran” (violent insurrection) and corporatism (orderly political consolidation). These elements became apparent progressively in the five non-Hitlerian groups over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, forming part of a process of radicalisation which saw the groups draw closer to Fascism in aims and outlook.

Considered as a mode to trace the dispersion of fascist ideas, soldierly nationalism has been most comprehensively explored by Ángel Alcalde.¹⁵ Soldierly nationalism signifies an aggressively “egalitarian” form of nationalism bound up inextricably in the First World War, and the subsequent mythologisation of the frontline experience. It manifested in diverse ways, including in the writings and philosophies of influential ultranationalist writers like Ernst von Salomon and Ernst Jünger (the latter of whom collaborated with most of the groups discussed in the present thesis); and in a political impetus towards the construction of a unitarian “soldier’s state.” For Italian Fascists, it coalesced into the construct of the “fascist war veteran.”¹⁶ This was a largely idealised product of Fascist imagination and propaganda: a symbolic appropriation, rather than an accurate representation of specific veterans’ interests.¹⁷ The fascist war veteran was a personification of the perceived virtues of the frontline experience: order, masculinity, willingness for violent action, and loyalty to the nation above all else.

Alcalde argues that the fascist war veteran not only acted as a consolidating factor in the construction of Fascist ideology, but provided the seed whereby fascism transformed from a specific (uppercase) into a generic (lowercase) political entity.¹⁸ The fascist war veteran acted

¹⁵ Alcalde explores and develops this concept across numerous works. See his full-length book: Ángel Alcalde *War Veterans and Fascism in Interwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See also the following articles: Ángel Alcalde “Towards Transnational Fascism: German Perceptions of Mussolini’s Fascists and the Early NSDAP,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19, no. 2 (2018): 176-195, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2018.1449109>; Ángel Alcalde “War Veterans and the Transnational Origins of Italian Fascism,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 21, no. 4 (September 2016): 565-583, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2016.1207317>.

¹⁶ It is worth noting that, across Europe, different countries developed their own interpretations of soldierly nationalism and the significance of the “war veteran.” In Germany, the domestic view of the war veteran as a reactionary agent was largely precipitated by the counterrevolutionary actions of Freikorps in 1918-1919 – events that pre-dated Italian Fascism.

¹⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 93-94.

¹⁸ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 93.

as a vehicle through which (e.g.) the Stahlhelm, and a number of other groups across Europe (including the NSDAP) “became fascist.”¹⁹ It functioned as shorthand for important components of Fascist ideology: the elevation of “action” into a core political value; dialectical idealism and anti-materialism; concepts of total mobilisation, in which a war-footing permeated all elements of ordinary life; and the amalgamation of militarism and politics, in which the army was viewed as a prospective model for federal organisation. Soldierly nationalism also manifested in aesthetic qualities such as clothing, architecture, and violent rhetoric and war metaphors (“fighting language”).

From the mid-1920s, Fascist Italy undertook corporatist political reforms. Particularly during the Great Depression, when faith in free market capitalism and liberalism was severely shaken, corporatism gained in popularity across Europe, traversing political movements and emerging in different institutional settings.²⁰ “Corporatism” denotes a political, economic, and organisational system in which different sectors of the economy and society (i.e. industry, agriculture, the arts) are amalgamated into respective interest groups that exercise direct representation in the government. Because corporatism was sufficiently malleable to appeal to a variety of political viewpoints, some historians have suggested that it ought to be analysed primarily in terms of organisation.²¹ Others have made distinctions between social and political corporatism, with the former being seen as organisational, and the latter as containing an additional philosophical/ideological dimension.²² For the purposes of analysing Germanic impressions of Italian Fascism, it is difficult, indeed undesirable, to separate organisational corporatism from ideological justifications.

Even though the Italian Fascists had a monopoly neither on soldierly nationalism nor corporatism, the association of these features with Mussolini’s Italy established firm connections with fascism as a political philosophy. As Alessio Gagliardi notes, thinkers in the fascist sphere were singularly successful in establishing theoretical bridges between

¹⁹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 183-184. See the following article, in which Alcalde argues that the NSDAP transformed into a fascist movement in the early 1920s, in response to Italian Fascism: Alcalde, “German Perceptions,” 179. See also Alcalde’s more general work on veterans’ internationalism: Ángel Alcalde, “War Veterans as Transnational Actors: Politics, Alliances and Networks in the Interwar Period,” *European Review of History* 25, no. 3-4 (July 2018): 499, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2018.1439889>.

²⁰ Alessio Gagliardi, *Fascist Italy in the Age of Corporatism: Searching for a Third Way* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), 1-2. Interest in corporatism and in Italian Fascism more broadly also experienced a further uptick in German ultranationalist circles after the electoral breakthrough of the Nazis in September 1930. This suggests that many also seized upon Mussolini’s image from pragmatism, seeking to establish an “alternative” to Hitler.

²¹ António Costa Pinto, “Corporatism and 'Organic Representation' in European Dictatorships,” in *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe*, ed. António Costa Pinto (London: Routledge, 2017), 5.

²² Pinto, “Corporatism,” 5.

corporatism and fascist ideological preconditions.²³ At the theoretical level, fascists and proto-fascists saw ideal political organisation as a reflection of “organic” society: the corporate model offered the potential to construct a system in which various interests all served a national purpose by harmonising into a mighty, one-party state. Even so, corporatist theorists often disagreed on issues such as whether the composition of corporate estates should be determined by “grassroots,” decentralised selection, or by business cartels and monopoly capitalism.²⁴ These debates were, however, consistently informed by, and measured against, the example of Fascist Italy.

In 2017, Pasetti explored Italian corporatism as a specific way to trace the “travelling potential” of Fascism.²⁵ This concept was further fleshed out in the volume *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe* (published in the same year), in which Pasetti and the other contributors analysed not only the transnational, but the *transformative* appeal of corporatism in the interwar period.²⁶ The authors concluded that Italian Fascism acted as “the protagonist in the re-formulation and popularisation of corporatism as an optimal third-way alternative.”²⁷ This perspective is borne out in the present thesis. Not only was Fascism a key element in the popularisation of corporatism, but the reverse was also true: corporatism increased the appeal of (lowercase) fascism. In addition, considering that Italy’s corporatist laws were not formalised until the latter 1920s and 1930s, the diffusion of corporatism provides insight into how changing impressions of Italian Fascism reflected the real-existing development of the Fascist state.

Through the identification of the fascist sphere and core elements of fascist ideology, the reader is thus invited to view fascism as a process of ideological and intellectual transfer, rather than as an outcome contingent on the presence or realisation of a “checklist” of characteristics. Even movements that did not “achieve” fascism can be incorporated into discourses around fascism through their adoption of fascistic features, often with explicit reference to Italy. This

²³ Gagliardi, *Age of Corporatism*, 1-2.

²⁴ This debate can be seen, for example, within the Spann circle. Thinkers like Walter Heinrich were highly sympathetic to the cartel model, whereas others, like Emanuel Hugo Vogel, favoured an anticapitalist interpretation of corporatism. See Walter Heinrich, *Das Ständewesen, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der wirtschaftlichen Selbstverwaltung* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1932), 146; Emanuel Hugo Vogel, “Neue Wege einer organischen Eingliederung des Bank- und Kreditwesens in den Bau der Volkswirtschaft,” *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 1 (1933): 20-21.

²⁵ Pasetti, “Corporatist Connections,” 67.

²⁶ Matteo Pasetti, “The Fascist Labour Charter and its Transnational Spread,” in *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe*, ed. António Costa Pinto (London: Routledge, 2017), 72.

²⁷ Aristotle Kallis, “Conclusion: The ‘Corporatist Moment’ in Interwar Europe,” in *Corporatism and Fascism*, ed. Pinto, 294.

processual view contains implications for the broader understanding of fascism. As a “generic” ideology, fascism possessed certain definable parameters, originally established by Italy, that render it distinct. Nonetheless, it was very much informed by the other major political ideologies of its time. Too often, ideologies are presented as too disparate in their values and aims to find political or intellectual common ground. Ubiquitous political labels such as “left-wing,” “right-wing,” “centrist,” etc. have contributed to this compartmentalisation through propagating a linear view of ideologies, with communism at the far-left extreme, and fascism at the distant right. Ideological demarcation lines have been far more porous than such designations imply. Scholars such as Timothy Brown and Conan Fischer have highlighted the existence of propagandistic overlaps and the use of common motifs between the Nazis and communists during the Weimar Republic.²⁸ Further, Brown has argued that the blurring of these lines ran deeper than aesthetic or “totalitarian” impulses, demonstrating a process of “social radicalisation” in which competing groups radicalised in a kind of dialectical exchange, trying to outdo each other and encroach on each other’s support bases.²⁹

In the 1990s, in a research cluster on *Austauschdiskurse* (discourses of exchange) during the interwar period, French and German scholars engaged with ideological cross-fertilisation from an intellectual history perspective.³⁰ Associated with scholarly re-evaluations of the Weimar Republic, historians such as Manfred Gangl, Gérard Raulet, Wolfgang Bialas, and Georg G. Iggers stressed the importance of understanding contemporary thinkers in their historical contexts, without aligning them uncritically with fixed ideological positions.³¹ The tendency to saddle intellectuals with labels such as “progressive,” “reactionary,” “modern,” “antimodern,” and so on fails to capture the pervasiveness of ideology to life in the Weimar Republic.³² Trying to diagnose where one ideology ended and the next began obfuscates the bigger picture: the problems with which Weimar intellectuals grappled were informed by theoretical and conceptual commonalities.³³ Recognising that traditional historiographical

²⁸ Timothy S. Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 14-16; Conan Fischer, *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 110-112.

²⁹ Brown, *Weimar Radicals*, 15-17.

³⁰ Manfred Gangl and Gérard Raulet, “Einleitung,” in *Intellektuellendiskurse in der Weimarer Republik: Zur politischen Kultur einer Gemengelage*, ed. Manfred Gangl and Gérard Raulet (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 27-28.

³¹ Gangl and Raulet, “Einleitung,” 27.

³² Manfred Gangl, “Interdiskursivität und chassés-croisés. Zur Problematik der Intellektuellendiskurse in der Weimarer Republik,” in *Schriftsteller als Intellektuelle*, ed. Sven Hanuschek, Therese Hörnigk and Christine Malende (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000), 43.

³³ Wolfgang Bialas and Georg G. Iggers, eds., *Intellektuelle in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 16-17.

compartmentalisation on the basis of left/right allegiances does not convey such intellectual entanglement and ideological fluidity, Gangl and Raulet characterised Weimar intellectuals as being involved in a constant theoretical “oscillation process.”³⁴ To reflect the complexities of this oscillation process, the present thesis avoids left/right shorthand and does not attempt to pass judgment on whether each group met the “minimum” benchmark for being “fascist” or not (fascism itself, to quote Roger Eatwell, can be best approached as a “spectrum-syncretic ideology”).³⁵ More important is that each group adopted certain ideological qualities with reference to Italian Fascism and *grew closer to fascism* in outlook and aims over the course of the 1920s and 1930s.

Fascism’s success in sponsoring international radicalisation thus cannot be measured solely by concrete means, such as direct funding or contact, but extended into discursive intellectual adaptations. Accordingly, this thesis does not try to analyse reciprocal relations between Germany and Italy. Rather, it aims to assess how Germanic ultranationalists interpreted, responded to, and used Italian Fascism in the development of their own ideologies and movements. By definition, “impressions” are subjective. “Germanic impressions of Italian Fascism” reveals little about the reality of the Italian regime, but much about the mindsets of German-speaking interpreters, whose views were coloured inevitably by individual biases, and different political backgrounds and methodological approaches. In addition to synthesising Alcalde and Pasetti’s observations, my thesis emphasises the pivotal role of Fascist Italy’s image in the radicalisation of the five chosen Germanic, non-Hitlerian ultranationalist movements.

Transnational and Transformative Fascism

One cannot study fascism without encountering the historiographical shift from nation-based history to comparative history and, more recently, to transnational history. In the nation-based model, fascism was conceived of as a series of independently occurring phenomena, in which structural factors merged with individual countries’ national paths.³⁶ As Alcalde has noted, this model is not well-equipped to account for exchanges between fascist movements and

³⁴ Gangl and Raulet, “Einleitung,” 34.

³⁵ Roger Eatwell, “Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4, no. 2 (April 1992): 189, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951692892004002003>.

³⁶ Alcalde, “German Perceptions,” 177.

regimes.³⁷ The concept of fascist internationalism — self-conscious collaboration between fascist movements and regimes — seemed an awkward addendum to the view that individual fascisms can only be understood through their respective domestic contexts.³⁸ Beginning in the 1970s, the nation-based model came under increasing pressure from comparative history, which was defined by an emphasis on measuring similarities and contrasts.³⁹ The first excursions into examining fascist internationalism were made within this framework, usually comparing and contrasting the objectives, ideologies, and socioeconomic contexts of Germany and Italy.⁴⁰ As such, early comparative studies made inroads into examining fascist collaboration, but were not overly concerned with transnationalism or transformation. Despite the novel focus on international exchange, the “respective individual histories” approach persisted fundamentally unchallenged.⁴¹ Through an overwhelming focus on regime-stage fascism — the epicentres of the Third Reich and Fascist Italy — comparative studies also tended to downplay by omission the numerous fascist movements across Europe and (Latin) America.

Beginning in the 1990s, the comparative approach started to undergo a methodological shift to incorporate notions of transfers, entanglements, and *histoire croisée*.⁴² In 1994, Micheal Espagne posited the novel concept of “transfer,” suggesting that national histories can only be understood fully by analysing the influences of foreign, as well as indigenous, elements.⁴³ Some notable works to incorporate such ideas into the study of fascism are the 2017 anthology *Fascism without Borders*; numerous works by Roger Griffin; and the 2010 volume, *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*.⁴⁴ The inclusion and synthesis of these

³⁷ Alcalde, “German Perceptions,” 177.

³⁸ Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, “Introduction,” 1. For examples of historians who have argued against “international” fascism, see Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 218; Jerzy W. Borejsza, “Die Rivalität zwischen Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus in Ostmitteleuropa,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 29 (October 1981): 607; Wolfgang Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen: Studien zu Italien und Deutschland* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 16.

³⁹ Hartmut Kaelble, “Between Comparison and Transfers – And What Now? A French-German Debate,” in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, ed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 33.

⁴⁰ For definitions and discussion about comparative history as a methodological approach, see Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, “Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope, and Perspectives of Comparative History,” in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, ed. Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 2-10.

⁴¹ Kaelble, “Comparison and Transfers,” 33.

⁴² Kaelble, “Comparison and Transfers,” 33.

⁴³ For an in-depth discussion of the development of these different methodological approaches, see Kaelble, “Comparison and Transfers,” 33-37.

⁴⁴ See the authors’ introduction. Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, “Introduction,” 1-38. See in particular the following works by Griffin: Roger Griffin “The Concept that Came out of the Cold: The Progressive

different historiographical paradigms have helped to diversify comparative studies, and to incorporate the many aborted fascist movements across Europe, thus moving beyond the bipolarity of focus on Italy and Germany in their regime stages, while also introducing a new emphasis on change.⁴⁵ Whether seen as an outgrowth of or as a departure from comparative studies, transnational history seeks to transcend the internalist perspectives common to the nationalist and comparative paradigms.⁴⁶ As an emerging field, transnational perspectives are altering concepts of societies, economies, cultures, religions, and so forth, encouraging an emphasis on process and transformation in place of comparison.

In addition to the abovementioned works of Alcalde and Pasetti, studies that have adopted transformative transnationalism as a dominant analytical category include Julie Thorpe's work on "Austrofascism" and Pan-Germanism; Michael Mann's transnational history, *Fascists*; Ricky W. Law's exploration of mutual influence and entanglements between Germany and Japan prior to the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936; and Robert Gerwarth's examinations of interwar paramilitarism.⁴⁷ Thorpe and Mann's works illuminate not only the existence of understudied fascist movements, but also home in on the internationally transformative capacity of ideology itself: its ability to influence foreign movements, regardless of whether those movements can be characterised as strictly "fascist" or not. For example, Thorpe's answer to the question of whether or not Austrofascism should be considered "true fascism" lies in accepting the importance of intention over outcome. She demonstrated that the Fatherland Front, taking Fascist Italy as its inspiration, was committed to the fascistisation of Austria, but was unable to bring its designs to completion due to real world constraints.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, its ambition to *become* fascist places it firmly within the fascist sphere.

Historicization of Generic Fascism and its New Relevance to Teaching Twentieth Century History," *History Compass* 1, no. 1 (December 2003): 1-41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-0542.039>; Roger Griffin "Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies," *Fascism* 4 (November 2015): 103-118. For an overview of the content of "Comparative Fascist Studies," see the editor's introduction: Constantin Iordachi, "Comparative Fascist Studies: An Introduction," in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (London: Routledge, 2010), 1-50.

⁴⁵ Bauerkämper and Rossoliński-Liebe, "Introduction," 2; Griffin, "Decentering," 107.

⁴⁶ Philipp Ther, "Comparisons, Cultural Transfers and the Study of Networks: Towards a Transnational History of Europe," in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, ed. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 204.

⁴⁷ Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Julie Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism and the Austrofascist State: 1933-38* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011); Ricky W. Law, *Transnational Nazism: Ideology and Culture in German-Japanese Relations, 1919-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1-2. On the more incorporation of Japan into the dynamics of radicalisation, see also Daniel Hedinger, *Dis Asche Berlin – Rom – Tokio 1919-1946* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2021); Robert Gerwarth, "The Central European Counter-Revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War," *Past & Present* 200, no. 1 (August 2008), 178-180, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtm046>.

⁴⁸ Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 4.

Gerwarth's work also emphasises the importance of contemporary actors' self-perceptions. He posits that transnationalism was not only inherent to the conformation of reactionary paramilitary groups active in central Europe after the First World War, but also formed an important element in individuals' conceptions of their own activities and identities, for example via the formation of an ultra-militant, hyper-masculine, transnational sub-culture arising from the common experience and mythologisation of the Great War.⁴⁹ An intersection between transnationalism and intellectual history, those active within the fascist sphere therefore often viewed their actions as being not only of national, but of *international* significance.

Other valuable studies have used Italian language sources to trace the other side of this exchange. Beate Scholz and Monica Fioravanzo, for example, examined the ways in which Fascist Italy promoted itself, self-consciously and implicitly, as an export article.⁵⁰ A recent chapter by Pedro Ramos Pinto also sheds light on Fascist transnational influence through the emerging lens of authoritarian conceptions of social justice. Pinto argues that social justice, as understood and enacted under the corporatist government of Salazar's Portugal and authoritarian regimes in Latin America, was based largely on the Italian model, and indeed constituted a factor in the international legitimisation and replication of Italian Fascist ideology.⁵¹ The transference of Fascist social justice is less applicable to movement-stage fascism or to the German-speaking context, which possessed more advanced welfare systems than those in Italy or Iberia; nevertheless, Pinto's work illuminates the presence of additional ideological emissaries, beyond those considered in these pages.⁵² In German historiography, historians have made equally significant inroads by examining the transference of fascist influence through the spectacle of power. Christian Goeschel has analysed the imaginative and processual aspects of Nazi propaganda, focusing on the subjective use of the past to "create" the Third Reich, and the importance of imagery in Italian-German relations.⁵³ Elsewhere, he drew upon the public display of "friendship" between Mussolini and Hitler as an example of

⁴⁹ Gerwarth, "Central European Counter-Revolution," 207-208.

⁵⁰ Beate Scholz, "Italien Faschismus als "Export-Artikel" (1927-1935): Ideologische und organisatorische Ansätze zur Verbreitung des Faschismus im Ausland" (PhD diss., Universität Trier, 2001); Monica Fioravanzo, *Fascist Europe: From Italian Supremacy to Subsistence to the Reich (1932-1943)* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2024), 54.

⁵¹ Pedro Ramos Pinto, "A Fascist Social Justice? Hierarchy, Order, and Equity in Southern European Corporatism," in *Social Justice in Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Martin Conway and Camilo Erlichman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 98-99.

⁵² Pinto, "Fascist Social Justice?" 97-98.

⁵³ Christian Goeschel, "January 30, 1933, in the Nazi Historical Imaginary," *Central European History* 56 (September 2023), 398, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938922001376>; Christian Goeschel, "Mussolini, Munich and the Italian People," in *International, Transnational and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Julie V. Gottlieb, Daniel Hucker and Richard Toye (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 153-170.

how individuals, and — importantly — *impressions* of individuals, operated in tandem with social forces to shape historical events.⁵⁴

The shift from comparative to transnational history also manifests in the microcosm of Germanic impressions of Italian Fascism. While the relationship between Italian Fascism and Germany has long been dominated by comparative regime-based studies, a number of — overwhelmingly German-language — works have commented on the reception of Italian Fascism within Germany. Klaus-Peter Hoepke's 1968 book, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus* (*The German Right and Italian Fascism*) focuses on the reception of Italian Fascism among German ultranationalists.⁵⁵ In 1972, Jens Petersen described the various ways in which Germans understood Italian Fascism as a parallel to their own domestic context.⁵⁶ More recently, Matthias Damm's 2013 PhD thesis *Die Rezeption des italienischen Faschismus in der Weimarer Republik* (*The Reception of Italian Fascism in the Weimar Republic*) described the ways in which Italian Fascism was perceived by proponents of different ideologies in the Weimar Republic, including communists and Social Democrats.⁵⁷ Damm thus illuminated the depth and scope of Fascist Italy's image during the Weimar Republic; his research indicates that the groups analysed below were not isolated in their use of Italian Fascism, but can be seen as “enthusiastic” examples of a pervasive discourse spanning across the German political spectrum.⁵⁸ Another historian to examine Fascism's image in Germany is Wolfgang Schieder. As a historian primarily of Italy, Schieder explores Italy's propagandistic targeting of German groups, including its influence on Adolf Hitler's personal ideology.⁵⁹

While some of abovementioned works comment on the groups considered below (most specifically Hoepke), they do not highlight the intellectually transformative capacity of Italian

⁵⁴ Christian Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler: The Forging of the Fascist Alliance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 5-6.

⁵⁵ I have provided English translations for key German titles and names of groups wherever possible throughout the thesis. Exceptions include some texts/groups whose names are difficult to translate or verify. Klaus-Peter Hoepke, *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1968).

⁵⁶ Jens Petersen, “Der italienische Faschismus aus der Sicht der Weimarer Republik: Einige deutsche Interpretationen,” *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Bibliotheken und Archiven*, vol. 55/56 (Rome: German Historical Institute, 1972): 316.

⁵⁷ Matthias Damm, *Die Rezeption des italienischen Faschismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013).

⁵⁸ Damm, *Rezeption des italienischen Faschismus*, 279-281.

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Schieder, *Mythos Mussolini: Deutsche in Audienz beim Duce* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013); Wolfgang Schieder, *Adolf Hitler – Politischer Zauberlehrling Mussolinis* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 73; Wolfgang Schieder, “Faschismus im politischen Transfer: Guiseppe Renzetti als faschistischer Propagandist und Geheimagent in Berlin 1922-1941,” in *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland: Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, ed. Sven Reichardt und Armin Nolzen (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), 28, 31.

Fascism, nor do they unpack the disproportionate significance of corporatism and the fascist war veteran as transformative agents. Schieder ascribes a certain weight to processual elements, but employs principally a comparative perspective, looking at mutual Italian-German exchange and the transformative elements resulting therefrom. Damm highlights the breadth and complexities of Fascist Italy's image, noting that it offered political expediency in a variety of contexts. The strength of the research lies in its broadness, but this does not leave room for in-depth examinations of how thinkers and groups in the Weimar Republic altered their views in response to their impressions of Italian Fascism. The result is that the abovementioned studies tend to focus more on the situational usages of Italian Fascism, rather than intellectual, intrinsic, or "intentional" factors (that is, the *desire* to become fascist). Such studies can be supplemented by the examinations of the specific groups undertaken in the present work, incorporating awareness of recent developments in transnational history. Highlighting the subjectivity and variability of the perspectives of non-Hitlerian Germanic ultranationalists shows that Italian Fascism was interpreted in a variety of contexts; a process which was not only situationally, but intellectually motivated. This sheds further light upon the process of fascistisation.

Foundations of Fascism

Italian Fascism was equally subject to the transformative features outlined above. It was constrained neither by intellectual nor geographical borders, but was an amalgamation of features, adapting and changing over time. This developmental complexity and ideological cross-fertilisation can best be illustrated through the phenomenon of nationalism. If any claim can be made with absolute confidence it is that fascism is nationalistic. Yet this is often where the consensus ends. There has been seemingly endless debate about precisely what nationalism is, about the ways in which nation-building has functioned as a historical force, and about how the internal and external organisation of nation states should be conceptualised. It would be impossible to do justice to the breadth of these intra- and multidisciplinary debates here, but it is important to outline some of the major ways that nationalism has been theorised, as differing concepts have great impact on historians' characterisations of fascism.

In 1969, Anthony D. Smith, one of the most prolific scholars on nationalism, stated: "Theories of nationalism may be divided into those which affirm a significant causal relationship between

nationalism and modernisation and those which, explicitly or implicitly, deny it.”⁶⁰ This maxim still holds true. While the idea of the nation (and the nation state) as a deliberately constructed “imagined community,” to use Benedict Anderson’s oft-cited phrase, has gained general currency, arguments for anti-modern branches of nationalism still persist.⁶¹ For example, influential political theorists from Hannah Arendt in the 1950s to Zeev Sternhell in the 2010s, have presented “imperialist nationalism” as the result of a nationalist schism.⁶² In this view, a divisive break occurred between the progressive national awakening of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, and regressive patriotism based on racism and exclusion, which found expression in slavery, ethnic cleansing, and fascism. This divide can be summarised as the separation of civic nationalism from ethnic nationalism.⁶³ This is often presented as the result of a historical vanishing point, where “bad” ethnic nationalism broke away from the “good” civic nationalism of democratic enfranchisement and minority emancipation. For Arendt, nationalism itself was bound up in a perversion of the function of the enlightened monarchy, and “tribal” nationalism was a separate entity responsible for continental imperialism; for Sternhell, it was the result of a Herderian “revolt against the Enlightenment,” which “nipped [civic nationalism] in the bud.”⁶⁴ This reasoning led Sternhell to locate the genesis of fascism in France in the late nineteenth century in the nationalist ideas of the Boulangists.⁶⁵

The civic-ethnic divide invites a decidedly anti-modern reading of fascism and ultranationalism, and while it may be comforting to make clear distinctions between fascistic nationalism and positive nationalism, they offer limited explanatory power. After all, countries that seemingly manifested traits of positive nationalism, such as Britain and America in the 1700s and 1800s, simultaneously engaged in negative manifestations like slavery, and racial theorising and policy-making. At the very least, this suggests that it is worthwhile to take a

⁶⁰ Anthony D. Smith, “Theories and Types of Nationalism,” *European Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1969): 119.

⁶¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983): 5-6.

⁶² Roger Eatwell discusses these limitations. See Roger Eatwell “On Defining the “Fascist Minimum”: The Centrality of Ideology,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1, no. 3 (October 1996): 303-319; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Books, 2017; first published 1951), 299; Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 274.

⁶³ As David Brown noted, ethnic nationalism appears under many different labels, i.e. “organic,” “integral,” “exclusive,” “racial,” etc. David Brown, *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural and Multicultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 49. The separations of different typologies of nationalism proved very popular during the “cultural turn.” For an example see Julia Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁶⁴ Arendt, *Origins*, 299-301; Sternhell, *Anti-Enlightenment*, 274.

⁶⁵ Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3; Dave Renton, “The Prison of Ideas,” in *Fascism: Critical Concepts in Political Science, Volume 1: The Nature of Fascism*, ed. Roger Griffin and Matthew Feldman (London: Routledge, 2004), 295.

more integrated view of nationalism. Nationalism, in short, may be seen as a morally ambivalent feature of modernisation and democratisation and, as such, susceptible to positive and negative applications. Scholars like Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, taking a Marxist perspective, and Ernest Gellner, taking a structuralist one, emphasised such commonalities by underscoring nationalism's linkages to the structures of the modern world, including the growth and diffusion of capitalism, political centralisation, and the development of public education infrastructure.⁶⁶ Acknowledging these organisational features, it is unsurprising that nationalism played an important role in *all* modern political ideologies, even in the pragmatic functioning of communism, which was (theoretically, at least) internationalist.⁶⁷ Nationalism, therefore, presents one of the most significant points of conceptual commonality between different political ideologies, as it reflected and shaped the nation states in which political opponents of the early twentieth century drew their battle lines. It formed a common reference point for intellectuals and politicians regardless of ideological persuasion. This also helps to explain why many of the men considered in this thesis sought, early in their careers, to express their nationalism through diverse avenues. Ernst Niekisch, the name most commonly associated with interwar German National Bolshevism; August Winnig, active both in National Bolshevik circles and in the GSF; and Otto Strasser, a prominent member of the NSDAP throughout the 1920s — they all cut their political teeth in the nationalist wing of the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

The nationalist question is inextricably bound up with the equally fraught question of modernity. “Modernity” is unavoidable in terms of plain speech, but it is necessary to be aware of the term's limitations as both a historical reference point and as an analytical concept.⁶⁸ At its most simplistic, understandings of fascism's relationship with modernity can be divided into three camps: the view that fascism was an anti-modern anachronism; the counter-position that it was modern, and that modernity was a morally ambiguous state/process; and the view that it was a synthesis of modern and anti-modern features (reactionary modernism). Here, Fascism and Nazism are not always viewed together. Due to the scale of its apparent deviation from “positive” modernity, Germany has historically been singled out, creating a focal point for

⁶⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 14; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 85.

⁶⁷ Anderson and Hobsbawm both pointed out how nationalism operated within the practice of communism. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1-2; Eric Hobsbawm, “Some Reflections on the Break-up of Britain,” *New Left Review* 105 (September/October 1977): 13.

⁶⁸ Geoff Eley, “What was German Modernity and When?” in *German Modernities from Wilhelm to Weimar: A Contest of Futures*, ed. Geoff Eley, Jennifer L. Jenkins and Tracie Matysik (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 71.

debates about the relationship between war and atrocity and the modern, civilised world.⁶⁹ In the realm of intellectual history, Germany's contentious relationship with modernity manifested in a focus on the ideological reception of democracy in Wilhelmine Germany and the Weimar Republic. Key intellectual histories of the Weimar Republic, such as Kurt Sontheimer's *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (*Anti-Democratic Thought in the Weimar Republic*), foregrounded the prevalence of antidemocratic thought across the political spectrum, suggesting that widespread hostility to democracy — which Sontheimer largely conflated with the values of liberalism — ultimately rendered Germany susceptible to Nazism.⁷⁰ A defender of the exceptionalist *Sonderweg* line — which held that Germany followed a divergent path to modernity which left it prone to authoritarianism — Sontheimer drew a clear distinction between the liberal democratic tradition and radical thought during Weimar, suggesting that conservatives and fascists indeed manifested ethnic nationalism.

Other scholars, like Andreas Wirsching and Riccardo Bavaj, have shone light on an important distinction: ultranationalists may have rejected parliamentarism and liberalism but often held more ambivalent views on democratic values and the processes of democratisation.⁷¹ Liberal democracy was merely one of a slew of interpretations of democracy, and it is important for historians to face these divergent interpretations on their own terms. Conservative Revolutionary thinkers such as Carl Schmitt and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck argued that liberalism and democracy, far from being natural allies, were in fact antagonistic concepts.⁷² Moeller van den Bruck, whose philosophy provided the backbone of Otto Strasser's splinter-group, the Kampfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten (KGRNS), advocated corporatism on the basis of its being more democratic, organically improving "the share which

⁶⁹ I refer here to the *Sonderweg* debate, associated with historians such as Fritz Stern, Fritz Fischer, Jürgen Kocka, Henry Ashby Turner, etc. Placing Germany in contrast to "healthy" models of Western development, the position held that Germany's unique path to modernity, and the "failure" of a bourgeois revolution, had institutionalised a uniquely militaristic, reactionary character. Key works include Fritz Stern, *The Failure of Illiberalism: Essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), 3-25; Henry Ashby Turner, "Fascism and Modernization," in *Reappraisals of Fascism*, ed. Henry Ashby Turner (New York: New Viewpoints, 1975), 133-134; Fritz Fischer, *Hitler war kein Betriebsunfall* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996); Jürgen Kocka, "Ursachen des Nationalsozialismus," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte: Beilage zu "Das Parlament"* 25 (1980): 3-15.

⁷⁰ Kurt Sontheimer, "Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1957): 46. See also Sontheimer's book of the same name: Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1962).

⁷¹ Riccardo Bavaj, "Pluralizing Democracy in Weimar Germany: Historiographical Perspectives and Transatlantic Vistas," in *Transatlantic Democracy in the Twentieth Century: Transfer and Transformation*, ed. Paul Nolte (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2016), 59; Andreas Wirsching, *Deutsche Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Beck 2001), 12-13.

⁷² Bavaj, "Pluralizing Democracy," 55.

the people take in the working of the state.”⁷³ This concept was echoed by Fascist thinkers, including Giovanni Gentile.⁷⁴ The readiness of thinkers in the fascist sphere to construct their own readings of democracy reflects intellectual/ideological entanglements and oscillation processes. Political divides were also narrowed through more pragmatic means. In their introduction to the 2020 volume *Liberalismus und Nationalsozialismus: Eine Beziehungsgeschichte* (*Liberalism and National Socialism: A Relational History*), Ernst Wolfgang Becker, Elke Seefried, Frank Bajohr, and Johannes Hürter reassessed the relationship between Nazism and liberalism, suggesting that nationalism presented a major point of conceptual overlap.⁷⁵ Such processes constitute foundational commonality and, within the fascist sphere, an acceptance of “modernity.” As Eatwell similarly noted, if one seeks to understand fascist ideology, it is fitting to begin with the organisational structures, political imperatives, legal parameters, intellectual orientations, etc. of the Enlightenment: in essence, the birth of the “modern.”⁷⁶

Indeed, in the twenty-first century, the historical consensus is that fascism, both in terms of political praxis and ideology, should be analysed with the awareness that it operated within an industrialised, modern world. Building on the work of Detlev Peukert, Roger Griffin challenged the use of adjectives such as “reactionary” (famously employed by Jeffrey Herf in his 1984 book *Reactionary Modernism*), as they implied that modernism was inherently good, and, ergo, that Nazism was “backward.”⁷⁷ Today, a more commonly employed term is “ambivalence to modernity.”⁷⁸ This encompasses both the acceptance of structural modernisation common to twentieth century political movements, and the dissatisfaction with social modernity felt by many conservatives and ultranationalists. The emphasis, however, has shifted away from characterising such movements as reactionary to recognising that viable fascist and conservative movements fully accepted, if not embraced, modern infrastructure, modes of communication, mass politics, and so on. For instance, Conan Fischer has

⁷³ Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (Berlin: Ring-Verlag, 1923), 107.

⁷⁴ Wirsching, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 12-13.

⁷⁵ Ernst Wolfgang Becker, et al., “Einleitung,” in *Liberalismus und Nationalsozialismus: Eine Beziehungsgeschichte*, ed. Elke Seefried, et al. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2020), 36.

⁷⁶ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Random House, 2003), 4-5.

⁷⁷ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 33; Mark Roseman, “National Socialism and the Limits of Modernity,” in *German Modernities from Wilhelm to Weimar: A Contest of Futures*, ed. Geoff Eley, Jennifer L. Jenkins and Tracie Matysik (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 330. See also Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992).

⁷⁸ Roger Griffin, “Fascism’s Modernist Revolution: A New Paradigm for the Study of Right-Wing Dictatorships,” *Fascism* 5 (October 2016): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00502002>; Mark Antliff, “Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity,” *The Art Bulletin* 84, no. 1 (March 2002): 148-149, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177257>.

demonstrated the ways in which conservatives in the Weimar Republic operated frequently in tandem with their liberal opponents, by “conceding or even pre-empting reforms.”⁷⁹ Stefan Breuer’s history of ideas within German ultranationalist circles between 1871 and 1945 (the subject of several of his key works) also illuminates this interplay, focusing on the different ideologies that fall under radical ultranationalist and Conservative Revolutionary auspices, such as *völkisch* nationalism, fascism, and National Socialism.⁸⁰ Arguing that fascism can be best approached through a Weberian lens, Breuer argued for the significance of an ideal, if abstract, typology based on fascism’s “party” status (rather than the more nebulous status of a “movement”).⁸¹ A unifying element was a common acceptance of modern features, which led him to describe German ultranationalism as “post-conservatism,” a position distinguished by certain conservative social values, bolstered by a foundational integration within modern political and industrial society.⁸²

A similar position was attained via different means by Geoff Eley, whose various works extend Marxist materialist concepts of modernity into the arena of ideas.⁸³ Bavaj’s inquiry into the Nazis’ propagandistic usage of the public space invites further readings of the ways that political ideologies manifested in the real-existing structures of a modern, capitalist state, with its emphasis on mass consumer culture and orientation towards public life.⁸⁴ Eley has dubbed hypothetical extensions of structural modernity “discursive modernity”: an act of “dialectical reciprocity” between the public sphere and “actually existing phenomena.”⁸⁵ Concepts like Eley’s potential modernities capture the imaginative capacity of individuals, without losing

⁷⁹ Conan Fischer, *Europe Between Democracy and Dictatorship, 1890-1945* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 2.

⁸⁰ Stefan Breuer, “Der neue Nationalismus in Weimar und seine Wurzel,” in *Mythos und Nation: Studien zur Entwicklung des kollektiven Bewußtseins in der Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Berding (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 257-272. Stefan Breuer, *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit: Die deutsche Rechte im Widerstreit ihrer Ideen 1871-1945* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001). See also the following review article: Geoff Eley, “Origins, Post-Conservatism and the History of the Right,” *Central European History* 43 (May 2010): 333, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938910000051>.

⁸¹ Stefan Breuer, “Towards an Ideal Type of Fascism,” *Max Weber Studies* 8, no. 1 (January 2008): 16-17, <https://doi.org/10.1353/max.2008.a808881>.

⁸² See Breuer, “Neuer Nationalismus,” 257-272.

⁸³ Eley, “Modernity and When?” 71-72. For a discussion of the political weaponization of the public space, see Riccardo Bavaj, *Der Nationalsozialismus: Entstehung, Aufstieg und Herrschaft* (Berlin: be.bra Verlag, 2016), 21-23.

⁸⁴ Bavaj, *Nationalsozialismus*, 11-12, 26. Additional works to have commented on the use and the importance of the public space, include Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 58-59; focussing specifically on the SA: Richard Bessel, “Violence as Propaganda: The Role of the Stormtroopers in the Rise of National Socialism,” in *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency, 1919-1933*, ed. Thomas Childers (Abingdon: Routledge, 1986), 1-11; and Jacob Berg and Richard Scully, “Cultivating Fear: The Image of SA and the Presence of Propaganda in the late-Weimar *Öffentlichkeit*,” in *Fear in the German-Speaking World, 1600-2000*, ed. Michael Pickering and Thomas J. Kehoe (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 123-164.

⁸⁵ Eley, “Modernity and When?” 71-72.

sight of the material circumstances that informed their cognitive processes.⁸⁶ The other major ideologies (communism, social democracy, liberalism, etc.) belonged to this same discourse, inhabiting the same discursive world as fascism. Indeed, the critiques of modernity and modernisation undertaken by the groups considered in the present thesis were all preconditioned by acceptance of the ubiquitous continuity of the “modern.” They lauded Italian Fascism not because it heralded a rejection of the modern, but because it seemed successfully to harness modern forces in support of values like militarism, authoritarianism, the negation of the free market, and/or the realisation of “authentic” socialism.

Generic Ideology?

The historiography discussed above overlaps with, and has been further shaped and framed by, the question of generic fascism. Simply put, generic fascism constitutes no more, or less, than the notion that fascism is a general political orientation, rather than a specific phenomenon constrained by time and space. In downplaying the extent to which individual fascisms can be understood as the culmination of their respective national histories, transnational and comparative studies tend to favour the generic approach.⁸⁷ Yet the question of generic fascism raises its own, if related, set of considerations, particularly as generic fascism and intellectual history have not always made for comfortable bedfellows. Building upon comparative insights, transnational studies are seeing scholars moving away from earlier theories of generic fascism, many of which held that fascism was a generalist phenomenon that emerged independently in different countries across Europe and the West, whether as a result of common pressures from the Great War, a mass reaction against modernity, “teething problems” associated with modernisation, class struggle, or a reimagining of, and increased emphasis on aesthetics. Many variants of the generic position were products of Marxist, social, or structural history, emphasising the common international economic, social, or modernising elements that sponsored fascist movements and regimes.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Geoff Eley, “Introduction: German Modernities and the Contest of Futures,” in *German Modernities from Wilhelm to Weimar: A Contest of Futures*, ed. Geoff Eley, Jennifer L. Jenkins and Tracie Matysik (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 3-5.

⁸⁷ Kallis, “Transnational Fascism,” 39-40.

⁸⁸ Roger Griffin, “Progressive Historicization,” 4. See also his more recent work: Roger Griffin, *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

The Third International, propagating one of the earliest readings of generic fascism, characterised fascism as an “open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic, and imperialistic elements of finance capital.”⁸⁹ New Left Marxist writings, beginning in the early 1960s, rejected the orthodox, Soviet view of fascism as the highest stage of capitalism. Associated authors made a case for generic fascism through revisiting the works of Marxist theorists such as Leon Trotsky and August Thalheimer, analysing fascism with reference to Bonapartism, and of Antonio Gramsci, who viewed fascism as a result of a crisis of bourgeois hegemony played out in the political superstructure.⁹⁰ Modernisation historians, often supporting reactionary modernisation concepts, emphasised developmental tensions between fascism and the modern world as signifiers of fascism’s generic credentials. Such explanations ranged from Ernst Nolte’s rather abstract view of fascism as an anti-modern “resistance to transcendence,” to the arguments of A. James Gregor and A. F. K. Organski, in which fascism was defined by its antimodern characteristics, namely resistance to industrialisation.⁹¹

In the later twentieth century, sociological interpretations, like that of Seymour Martin Lipset, saw fascism as a product of middle-class radicalism, while George L. Mosse made a case for a modern reading of generic fascism based on mass “brutalisation” from the First World War.⁹² In the 1980s, Eley, along with fellow British historian David Blackbourn, posed serious questions about the Anglo-American normative path to modernity presupposed by earlier generations of historians who had argued for Germany’s (and Nazism’s) singular backwardness.⁹³ The authors suggested that Nazism’s final manifestations could be explained

⁸⁹ Georgi Dimitrov, “The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle of the Working Class Against Fascism: Main report delivered at the seventh world congress of the Communist International,” August, 2 1935, Marxists.org, accessed May 15, 2024, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/08_02.htm.

⁹⁰ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems & Perspectives in Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 29; Robert S. Wistrich, “Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Fascism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 11 (October 1976): 157-158; Martin Kitchen, “August Thalheimer’s Theory of Fascism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34, no. 1 (January/March 1973): 70, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2708944>; Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* (London: New Left Books, 1974), 300. See also the discussion in chapter 1 of Kevin Passmore, *Fascism: A Very Short Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹¹ Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 429; A. James Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* (New York: Free Press, 1969); A. F. K. Organski, “Fascism and Modernization,” in *The Nature of Fascism*, ed. S. J. Woolf (New York: Random House, 1969), 19-20.

⁹² Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 131; George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 159-160.

⁹³ David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 10; Geoff Eley, “How Do We Explain the Rise of Nazism?” in *A Companion to Nazi Germany*, ed. Shelley Baranowski, Armin Nolzen, and Claus-Christian

by an acceleration of international modernisation processes within a narrow timeframe.⁹⁴ Elsewhere, Eley shone a light upon broad factors — such as the brutalising impacts of the First World War, the Russian Revolution, the post-war revolutionary upheavals across Europe, and the dynamics of democratisation — as allowing the fascist phenomenon to manifest in a variety of contexts.⁹⁵ Robert Paxton’s famous “five stages” thesis also emphasised developmental complexities and argued against static “fascist minimum” approaches.⁹⁶ It was necessary, he argued, to apply different analytical parameters to fascism as its various manifestations evinced greater individual difference than those of other movements.⁹⁷ For Paxton, generic fascism was therefore a primarily functional thing, whose character intellectual historians were, at best, inadequately equipped to analyse.⁹⁸

Paxton adopts as a starting point the position that fascism lacked the determinants of a “true” ideology.⁹⁹ Other historians to take this view have used negative determinants, basing their analyses on what fascism is *not*; or suggesting that fascism is generic precisely due to its irrationality. In the twenty-first century alone, claims have been made that “fascism never had a unified set of intellectual forefathers”; that “[fascism] lacks a coherent theoretical core”; that it could be understood as a pathological obsession with death; as a principally aesthetic phenomenon; or as a political religion, adopting the aesthetic and ecstatic qualities of religious worship.¹⁰⁰ Fascists’ own condemnations of the intelligentsia, and claims to represent a

W. Szejmman (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 26; Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 98.

⁹⁴ Blackbourn and Eley, *Peculiarities*, 154.

⁹⁵ Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany 1930-1945* (London: Routledge, 2013), 205; Geoff Eley, “What is Fascism and Where did It Come From?” *History Workshop Journal* 91 (Spring 2021): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbab003>.

⁹⁶ Robert Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism,” *The Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 1 (March 1998): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1086/235001>. See also Paxton’s full-length work *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

⁹⁷ Paxton, “Five Stages,” 5.

⁹⁸ Paxton, “Five Stages,” 21.

⁹⁹ Paxton “Five Stages,” 7.

¹⁰⁰ Scott L. Montgomery and Daniel Chirot, *Four Big Ideas and How They Made the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 295; Daniel Woodley, *Fascism and Political Theory: Critical Perspectives on Fascist Ideology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 2; Mark Neocleous, “Long Live Death! Fascism, Resurrection, Immortality,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 10, no. 1 (February 2005): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1356931052000310272>; Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini’s Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 10. For a study on the aesthetic significance of the “fascist salute,” see: Tilman Allert, *The Hitler Salute: On the Meaning of a Gesture* (London: Picador, 2009). Debates on fascism’s aesthetic qualities or lack of ideology parallel present-day debates about the often ill-defined concept of political populism. For more on placing populism within a political context (including important differentiations from “proper” political ideologies), see Jan-Werner Müller, ““The People Must Be Extracted from Within the People”: Reflections on Populism,” *Constellations* 21, no. 4 (December 2014): 485-486, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12126>; Federico Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 3-9; and Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 544.

philosophy of action, have been used to justify such readings. But arguments which ignore or greatly downplay ideology are susceptible to misuse.¹⁰¹ The most valid criticism of the concept of generic fascism is that, when insufficiently defined, it can be used to encompass any non-communist authoritarian system or regime. Under such loose definitions, military dictatorships of all stripes, fundamentalism, and the presidencies of Donald Trump have all been labelled “fascist.” So diverse are these examples in aims and organisation that to lump them together is to render the concept meaningless.¹⁰²

At the other extreme, some scholars of generic fascism have argued that, as only Germany and Italy produced fully-fledged fascist dictatorships, the concept of generic fascism should be limited to these examples.¹⁰³ A problem with this view is that it once again reduces fascism to an outcome, rendering inconsequential the wealth of international fascist impulses that never solidified into regimes. In an attempt to combat this myopia, volumes by Mann, Breuer, Philip Morgan and Maurizio Bach, as well as the five-volume comparative anthology *Fascism*, edited by Griffin and Matthew Feldman, incorporated movements into their analyses.¹⁰⁴ However, as Andreas Umland, Philipp Ther, and Julie Thorpe have noted, even sophisticated comparative histories often replicate systems-based biases, and retain an emphasis on nation states.¹⁰⁵ This again results in a predisposition towards regime-stage fascism.

On the other side of the debate lie arguments for the rejection of the concept of generic fascism altogether. These have been presented from many different perspectives but are often coloured by an acute awareness of the final manifestation, and singular cruelty, of Nazism. For Karl

¹⁰¹ MacGregor Knox, “Conquest, Foreign and Domestic, in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany,” *The Journal of Modern History* 56, no. 1 (March 1984): 1.

¹⁰² Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 40.

¹⁰³ Kershaw, *Nazi Dictatorship*, 47. See, for example, the discussion in Knox, “Conquest,” 3.

¹⁰⁴ Mann, *Fascists*, 27; Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1; Maurizio Bach and Stefan Breuer, *Faschismus als Bewegung und Regime: Italien und Deutschland im Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 21-22; Roger Griffin with Matthew Feldman (eds.) *Fascism: Critical Concepts in Political Science* 4 vols, (London: Routledge, 2004); Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 6. Griffin argued for an “emerging consensus” in fascist studies, based largely upon the acceptance of culture and, ergo, fascism’s “paligenetic myth.” Roger Griffin, “The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascism Studies,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 1 (January 2002), 41-42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094020370010701>. Griffin and the “new culturalism” he represents have been criticised for “a remarkable neglect of [Italian Fascism’s] corporativist thrust.” David D. Roberts et al., “Comments on Roger Griffin, ‘The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascism Studies,’” *Journal of Contemporary History* 37, no. 2 (April 2002), 261, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220094020370020601>.

¹⁰⁵ Andreas Umland, “Refining the Concept of Generic Fascism,” *European History Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (April 2009): 299-300, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02656914081014>; Philipp Ther, “Beyond the Nation: The Relational Bias of a Comparative History of Germany and Europe,” *Central European History* 36, no. 1 (2003): 45-46; Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 4; Ernst Nolte, *Die Krise des liberalen Systems und die faschistischen Bewegungen* (Munich: Piper, 1968), 385; Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 5.

Dietrich Bracher, including Nazism in conceptions of generic fascism downplayed the uniquely racist, aggressive character of Nazi ideology and trivialised Nazi crimes.¹⁰⁶ The intentionalist school of thought, of which Bracher was a noted proponent, broadly held that Nazism followed a more or less programmatic timeline, with the Second World War and the Holocaust serving as the culmination of long-held ambitions, outlined in the 25-Point Program and Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.¹⁰⁷ This makes it very difficult to make valuable comparisons between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. While the intentionalist school foregrounds ideology, it has come under justified criticism for decontextualising ideas from the undulatory socioeconomic processes that mediate between ideals and reality.¹⁰⁸ A similar, if less programmatic, view of Nazi ideology surfaced in the 1990s, in the wake of the "cultural turn." Scholars such as Thomas Klepsch, focusing on Nazism as movement, and Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, writing about Nazism as regime, argued that virulent antisemitism formed the core of Nazi ideology, acting as a guiding beacon for all cultural and social initiatives of the movement and

¹⁰⁶ Karl Dietrich Bracher, "The Role of Hitler: Perspectives of Interpretation," in *Fascism: A Reader's Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Biography*, ed. Walter Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 215.

¹⁰⁷ In addition to Bracher and Hildebrand, the intentionalist argument enjoyed its share of serious champions in historians such as Eberhard Jäckel, Hans Buchheim, and Andreas Hillgruber, all of whom argued for the centrality of Hitler and Hitler's personal ideology in shaping the Nazi regime. For such scholars — and none more so than Jäckel — Hitler's 1924 *Mein Kampf* functioned as a blueprint for the future foreign policy aims and atrocities of the Third Reich. The intentionalist position is usually contrasted with the "functionalist" or "structuralist" position, which emphasises situational factors, political competition, pressures from below, and the dynamics of cumulative radicalisation and total war in accounting for the Holocaust. See Bracher, "Role of Hitler," 215; Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 74; Hans Buchheim, *Totalitäre Herrschaft: Wesen und Merkmale* (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1965), 122; Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie: Politik und Kriegführung 1940-1941* (Frankfurt: Bernard & Graefe Verlag für Wehrwesen, 1965), 16-21; Klaus Hildebrand, "Nationalsozialismus oder Hitlerismus?" in *Persönlichkeit und Struktur in der Geschichte*, ed. Michael Bosch (Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann 1977), 55-61.

¹⁰⁸ The intentionalist position has enjoyed something of a resurgence in the recent work of Brendan Simms, whose self-stated "global" biography of Adolf Hitler foregrounds the anti-American, anti-capitalist aspects of Hitler's thought as determinants of Nazi policy. Brendan Simms, *Hitler: Only the World was Enough* (London: Allen Lane, 2019). Wolfgang Schieder notes that Simms' approach excluded engagement with the "generic fascism" debate altogether. Wolfgang Schieder, "Der anglo-amerikanische Feind. Hitler in neuer Sicht?," *Neue Politische Literatur* 66 (April 2021): 170, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42520-021-00355-1>. Richard Evans notes that Simms' book misleadingly portrays Hitler as a "socialist." Richard Evans, "Hitler by Brendan Simms and Hitler by Peter Longerich Review — Problematic Portraits," *The Guardian*, September 27, 2019, https://go.gale.com/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T004&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrieveId=a2633578-6049-434c-964b-3a11efa7462e&hitCount=1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CA600945017&docType=Article&sort=RELEVANCE&contentSegment=ZGPN&prodId=ITOF&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CA600945017&searchId=R1&userGroupName=dixon&inPS=true. See also Robert Gellately, "Hitler: Only the World was Enough, by Brendan Simms," *Times Higher Education* (August 29, 2019).

regime.¹⁰⁹ Such positions do take ideology seriously, but are generally hostile to the “relativism” of generic fascism.¹¹⁰

If discussion of fascism in Germany is broadened beyond its common focus on Nazism and Hitler, Nazism itself becomes more amenable to a generic reading. Acknowledging the plurality of Germanic fascisms is particularly important when one considers that other fascistic movements referenced international contexts and often placed themselves in intentional contrast with Hitlerian Nazism. Many studies on conservative and lowercase national socialist politics during the Weimar Republic have made valuable contributions to this diversification. Larry Eugene Jones’ various works on radical nationalist collaboration projects in the Weimar Republic have done much to situate Nazism within the broader context of German ultranationalism. Through examining the multilayered political dynamics that characterised collaborative initiatives such as the Harzburg Front, Jones illuminated common methodologies and conceptual overlaps between Nazism and other movements in the fascist sphere, while emphasising the broadness of interests in these strained and short-lived alliances.¹¹¹ Such studies highlight the existence of common interests among large swathes of the political spectrum, however greater weight is granted to negative politics (i.e. what the groups stood against) than to ideological similarities, and the study does not venture beyond those groups typically included in the German “right.”¹¹²

Within the study of the Nazi movement itself, historians such as Patrick Moreau have researched competing value sets, namely those manifesting in the Strasser circle, thus enriching understanding of the presence and significance of non-Hitlerian variants of National Socialism.¹¹³ Equally significant are broader studies situating fascism in the context of the Conservative Revolution, or as a variant of what is sometimes termed “unorthodox

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Klepsch, *Nationalsozialistische Ideologie: Eine Beschreibung ihrer Struktur vor 1933* (Münster: Lit, 1990); Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2-3.

¹¹⁰ Burleigh and Wippermann, *Racial State*, 2.

¹¹¹ Larry Eugene Jones, *The German Right: 1918-1930: Political Parties, Organized Interests, and Patriotic Associations in the Struggle Against Weimar Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 2. See also Jones’ study of the 1932 presidential election: Larry Eugene Jones, *Hitler versus Hindenburg: The 1932 Presidential Elections and the End of the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹¹² Larry Eugene Jones, “The German Right in the Weimar Republic: New Directions, New Insights, New Challenges,” in *The German Right in the Weimar Republic, Studies in the History of German Conservatism, Nationalism and Antisemitism*, ed. Larry Eugene Jones (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 1.

¹¹³ Patrick Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus von links: Die “Kampfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten” und die “Schwarze Front” Otto Straßers 1930-1935* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1984).

socialism.”¹¹⁴ The Conservative Revolution can be defined as a loose intellectual and political development seeking to combine the practical realities of modernity with certain traditionally conservative social values. Unorthodox socialism refers to a conceptual shift away from historical materialism, towards moral imperatives, dialectical idealism, or increased individual agency. Such studies invite a discursive reading of fascism and play a significant role in the present thesis.

The generic paradigm continues to benefit from advances in transnational history. In the context of genocide studies, Mann has argued that, far from being a unique evil, Nazi atrocities, like radical nationalism more broadly, need to be understood as a potential outcome of mass democratisation.¹¹⁵ Transnational analyses are particularly valuable when anchored in a relativist understanding of the historical contexts, usually beginning with the advent of the first “official” fascist movement in 1919.¹¹⁶ In German historiography, internationalisation and transnationalism have also inspired a number of recent works re-evaluating the relationship between Germany and its neighbours. These include *Germany and “the West,”* edited by Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber, and chapters in the book *Rewriting German History*, edited by Jan Rüger and Nikolaus Wachsmann.¹¹⁷ In the former volume, one of the contributors’ most significant inroads is to evaluate the notion of the “West” as understood historically in Germany itself, unpacking the highly normative assumptions that have so often coloured German historiography.¹¹⁸ This foregrounds cognitive processes — ideas — as significant agents in transnational relations. In their respective works, Thorpe and Mann deconstruct similarly the confinement of ideologies to more-or-less static value sets bound by national parameters, thus also emphasising the imaginative capacity of contemporaries. This means that, as Sven Reichardt pointed out, fascism needs to be approached as a “process-concept.”¹¹⁹ The concept of “fascism” was not only instructive for contemporaries, but, as Fernando Esposito

¹¹⁴ Stefan Wannenwetsch, *Unorthodoxe Sozialisten: Zu den Sozialismuskonzeptionen der Gruppe um Otto Straßer und des Internationalen Sozialistischen Kampfbundes in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010).

¹¹⁵ Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

¹¹⁶ Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller (eds.), *Der Faschismus in Europa: Wege der Forschung* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 7-14.

¹¹⁷ See the introductory chapter: Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber, “Germany and the West: The Vagaries of a Modern Relationship,” in *Germany and the West: The History of a Modern Concept*, ed. Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 1-40. And Geoff Eley, “Crossing the North Sea – Is There a British Approach to German History?” in *Rewriting German History: New Perspectives on Modern Germany*, ed. Jan Rüger and Nikolaus Wachsmann (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 1-18.

¹¹⁸ Bavaj and Steber, “Germany and the West,” 4.

¹¹⁹ Sven Reichardt, “Fascism’s Stages: Imperial Violence, Entanglement, and Processualization,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 82, no. 1 (January 2021): 88, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhi.2021.0004>.

noted, also becomes a heuristic instrument for historians seeking to understand “hybrid political phenomena.”¹²⁰ The intellectual impetus to *become* fascist, whether adopted intentionally by admirers of Fascism or expressed primarily in response to situational pressures, suggests that the concept of generic fascism need not be limited to a set of outcomes, but may also encompass fascist “impulses.”

Methodology

What follows is based upon primary source materials produced by the groups themselves, subsidiary or associated initiatives, and by individual group members. These most commonly take the form of books, journal articles, and pamphlets. I intentionally selected sources that illustrate the development of ideas (contemporary books, journal articles, etc.), and the interaction of these ideas with the broader political context (pamphlets, speeches, etc.). These have been supplemented, where appropriate, with unpublished materials (i.e. internal communications and memoranda) to further illustrate the internal dynamics within the groups, and the currency and transference of ideas associated with fascism. The thesis aims to capture each major stage of the respective groups’ existences (origins, peak, and decline) and to trace how they changed over time. In foregrounding this selection of sources, I seek to emphasise not only how ideas evolved as a result of ideological pollination from Italian Fascism, but also how they interacted with the political climate in interwar Germany and Austria. Some sources are more theoretical in scope and tone, being produced in academic contexts and/or intended for academic audiences. Others are geared towards public consumption, and still others towards specific non-academic readerships (for example, the Stahlhelm or Heimwehr rank-and-file).

The overall approach of the thesis is intended to build upon an ongoing historiographical revitalisation of intellectual history, beginning in the 1990s and initially associated with distinct research clusters in America, Britain, and Germany.¹²¹ The concept of “intellectual history” tends to be contested, being characterised by methodological crossover, and subject to personal

¹²⁰ Fernando Esposito, “Fascism: Concepts and Theories,” *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, August 31, 2017, http://docupedia.de/zg/Esposito_fascism_v1_en_2017. Esposito also argues the significance of viewing Fascist Italy as the epicentre of (generic) fascist ideology, arguing that first Italy, and then Germany from the mid-1930s, were the main ideological reference points for many international ultranationalists.

¹²¹ As Bavaj notes, there was significant disconnect between the American, British, and German pockets of intellectual history, both in terms of subject-specific terminology and in disciplinary and methodological parameters. Riccardo Bavaj, “Intellectual History,” *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, September 9, 2010, http://docupedia.de/zg/bavaj_intellectual_history_v1_en_2010.

and disciplinary hermeneutics. The very distinction and relationship between intellectual history, “the history of ideas” and, sometimes, the history of intellectuals themselves, remains a point of contention for scholars engaging with the area.¹²² While intellectual history may be characterised as a series of “parallel universes” often distanced from one another by disciplinary semantics, methodology, and institutional boundaries, the most severe charges against intellectual history tend to be similar in nature. From at least the mid-1960s, intellectual history came under rigorous criticism, and, to some, was considered old-fashioned at best and unhistorical at worst.¹²³ Often coming from social or Marxist historians, intellectual historians have faced charges of anachronism (taking ideas or individuals out of their historical contexts) and/or granting individuals undue historical agency at the expense of socioeconomic factors.¹²⁴ Intellectual historians John Pocock and Quentin Skinner (whose name remains the leading one in association with the Cambridge school of intellectual history) went some way towards resolving these tensions by focusing on how ideas interacted with historical contexts via contemporary linguistic conventions and rhetoric.¹²⁵ Since then, intellectual history has enjoyed something of a renaissance, often hybridising with other methodological avenues.

Inroads into intellectual history among historians of fascism and Nazism have conceptualised the relationship between thought and action in a number of promising ways. The most recent initiatives include tracing Nazi ideas from vague, *völkisch* concepts to policy actualisation.¹²⁶ Other works that focus on transformational dynamics include, for example, Stefan Breuer’s exploration of the methods whereby German *völkisch* nationalists sought to transform discourse into real-existing politics.¹²⁷ Breuer notes that such groups shared a common predilection for pressure groups and societies in lieu of parliamentary representation. Breuer’s approach draws on Max Weber’s view of ideas as dynamic, “moving” forces underpinning

¹²² Bavaj, “Intellectual History.” See also Daniel Wickberg, “Intellectual History vs. the Social History of Intellectuals,” *Rethinking History* 5, no. 3 (June 2011), 383-837, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642520110078505>.

¹²³ Darrin M. McMahon, “The Return of the History of Ideas?” in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15.

¹²⁴ Intellectual histories of the Weimar Republic, such as Kurt Sontheimer’s early works, have been criticised for overemphasising the role of ideas at the neglect of social factors. See, for instance, the review of a newer edition of Sontheimer’s classic by Stefan Berger, “Habilitationsschrift: Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933,” *The English Historical Review* 110, no. 437 (June 1995): 799.

¹²⁵ Bavaj, “Intellectual History.”

¹²⁶ See, in particular, the section *History of Ideas* in Julien Reitzenstein and Darren M. O’Byrne, ed., *Handbook Ideologies in National Socialism Online* (Munich: De Gruyter, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1515/inso>.

¹²⁷ Breuer, *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit*, 259. See also Breuer’s other works: Stefan Breuer *Anatomie der konservativen Revolution* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993); Stefan Breuer, *Nationalismus und Faschismus: Frankreich, Italien und Deutschland im Vergleich* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005). See also Eley’s discussion of Breuer: Eley, *Nazism as Fascism*, 5-10.

social change.¹²⁸ More recently, Goeschel's investigation into the public display of friendship between the Führer and the Duce highlights the complex interaction between individual actors and their reception (and socially constructed image) in modern society.¹²⁹

A similar mechanisation is explored in Bavaj's investigations into the *Möglichkeitsraum* (realm of possibility) of the Weimar Republic: a public space not just in the literal sense, but also in its ability to act as an arena for the public consumption and transmission of ideas and possibilities.¹³⁰ Bavaj analyses Nazi propaganda as a method to trace the complex workings of this space, noting the ways in which the Nazis altered their image to suit different audiences and situations.¹³¹ In addition, Michael Freeden has noted that (political) ideologies play a central role in the cognitive processes involved in making sense of the world; that is, they form a cornerstone between reality and human interpretation.¹³² Similar attempts at reconciliation between ideas and historical contexts have been made by many of the above-mentioned historians who have approached ideas as part of political, cultural, and also economic processes. Revisionist Marxist studies like Eley's have highlighted, in discursive ways, the dynamics between the economic base and the political superstructure in the Weimar Republic, and have likewise emphasised imagination as a feature of historical change. For Eley, this resulted in the concept of potential modernities: a slew of competing, potential visions for Germany's future.¹³³ Such works all employ intellectual history with the understanding that it seeks to capture historical figures' conjectures about alternative futures.¹³⁴

In short, and for the purposes of this study, the transformative power of ideas is understood as a reflection of the imaginary capacity of individuals, operating in tandem with the dynamics of an industrial, advanced capitalist society. Ultranationalist idealisation of the Italian state as decisive, hierarchical and efficient often contrasted with the reality; the policies of Italian Fascism were frequently ad hoc, incomplete and, at times, contradictory.¹³⁵ What follows is thus grounded in intellectual history insofar as it self-consciously highlights the capacity of

¹²⁸ Bavaj, "Intellectual History."

¹²⁹ Goeschel, *Hitler and Mussolini*, 294.

¹³⁰ Bavaj, *Nationalsozialismus*, 6.

¹³¹ Bavaj, *Nationalsozialismus*, 20-22.

¹³² Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2-3.

¹³³ Eley, Jenkins, and Matysik, "Introduction," 5.

¹³⁴ Richard Whatmore, "Quentin Skinner and the Relevance of Intellectual History," in *A Companion to Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 97-98. See also Rüdiger Graf, *Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik: Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland 1918-1933* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008).

¹³⁵ As will be explored below, Italian corporatism was very much a 'work in progress' during the 1920s and early 1930s.

ideas to act as vectors of change within their political-historical milieux; or, as Richard Whatmore puts it, to “explain why ideas resonated in the past and convinced their advocates.”¹³⁶ Crucially, the thesis contributes to historiographical efforts to place ideas *in situ*, rather than viewing them as free-roaming agents. Fascistic ideas, regardless of whether they reflected reality, owed much of their fecundity to the peculiarities of the interwar period, including socioeconomic pressures, rapid political change, and ever more advanced networks of media and communication. The majority of the books and periodicals which comprise my primary source materials were created for public consumption, and sometimes for explicitly propagandistic purposes. They thus occupy an intersection between ideas and the “lived experience” of the interwar period in the German-speaking world.

Structure of the Thesis

To establish the connection between Italian Fascism and the travelling motifs of the fascist war veteran and corporatism, Chapter One outlines briefly the intellectual development of Italian Fascist ideology and identifies its characteristics. Its goal is to highlight that the formation of Italian Fascism was transnational and transpolitical, corresponding to broader elements of modernisation. The identification of soldierly nationalism and its related concepts, most notably the fascist war veteran, as ideological signifiers underscores the central role that the First World War played in the construction of fascism as a new ideology. Of additional interest is the intersection between unorthodox Marxism and hyper-nationalism as preconditions for the emergence of fascism, establishing branches of ideological continuity between fascism and existing ideologies, theories, and debates. The association of Fascism with corporatism occurred, in contrast, primarily during the regime stage of Italian Fascism, though it was, in many ways, an extension of pre-war national syndicalism. Through a combination of Giovanni Gentile’s formalisation of Italian Fascist doctrine, Italy’s corporatist labour reforms, and the international standing that Fascist Italy already enjoyed, corporatism was soon established as a feature of Fascism. The fascist war veteran and corporatism are granted weight as they provided the two vectors whereby the rest of the thesis traces the appeal of Italian Fascist ideology to ultranationalists in the German-speaking lands. Following this overview, the ensuing chapters

¹³⁶ Richard Whatmore, *What is Intellectual History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), 5-6. See also Whatmore’s work for the *Very Short Introduction* series: Richard Whatmore, *The History of Political Thought: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

are arranged thematically, and each follows a chronological timeline. Specific literature on each group is covered in the introductions to the respective chapters.

As the only movement to attempt a direct, systemic reproduction of Italian Fascism, the GSF forms the subject of Chapter Two. It was founded for the express purpose of “studying” Fascism — in particular, corporatism — as a model for Germany to emulate. While the GSF did not produce its own materials, it conducted lecture evenings at which members and guests disseminated pro-Italian, pro-corporatist messages and materials. Corporatism, particularly in the form of economic cartelisation and its capacity to minimise free trade, appealed to the big business leaders and industrialists that peopled the GSF. The GSF makes a good introduction to the focus groups, as many of its members and collaborators held dual memberships in the groups considered in subsequent chapters, including Friedrich Everling (Stahlhelm), August Winnig (National Bolsheviks), Hermann Göring (NSDAP), and Othmar Spann.

In contrast to the GSF, which emerged more or less fully formed in the early 1930s, the remaining four case studies reveal longer, more dramatic stories of adaptation. Each begins with a discussion and illustration of the respective movements’ origins and initial ideological characteristics. The reason for this is to underscore the extent to which the groups changed and radicalised with reference to Italian Fascism. Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the veterans’ organisation, the Stahlhelm, the subject of Chapter Three. The chapter traces the Stahlhelm’s career as an organisation, from its original pledges of allegiance to the Weimar Republic and the new, democratic system in 1919, to its growing admiration of Mussolini and its eventual development into a self-styled purveyor of non-Hitlerian fascism. Intellectuals within the Stahlhelm seized upon both of the ideological emissaries of Fascism. The Stahlhelm’s status as a veterans’ organisation rendered it particularly amenable to soldierly nationalism, as evidenced by the embracing of the concept of the frontline soldier as the harbinger, and subsequently the leader, of a fascist corporate state. This tendency was particularly pronounced in the Stahlhelm journal *Die Standarte* (*The Standard*), founded by Helmut Franke, Ernst Jünger, and Wilhelm Kleinau in the mid-1920s. While the mainline Stahlhelm did not accept some of the *Standarte*’s more radical positions, the journal acted as part of a dialectic of radicalisation, promoting and refining concepts of soldierly nationalism, often with reference to Italian Fascism. Fascism was equally influential in “advertising” corporatism to the Stahlhelm, and by the early 1930s, the Stahlhelm was advocating a mode of

corporatism in which the army was particularly pronounced, which some Stahlhelms designated “Stahlhelm-Fascism.”¹³⁷

Unlike the GSF and the Stahlhelm, the German National Bolsheviks and Ernst Niekisch’s *Widerstand* circle, the subject of Chapter Four, were often critical of Italian Fascism, and did not suggest that Germany should attempt to replicate the Italian system. Movements falling under the “National Bolshevik” label were marked by hostility towards the West and sympathy for the USSR, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. The chapter begins by outlining varieties of National Bolshevik impulse in early interwar Germany, including in the KPD and the SPD. Doing this underscores the “moving” nature of ideological parameters and the presence of ultranationalism in different political settings. The significance of Marxist thought, and the ways in which it interacted with ultranationalism and views of fascism, illustrates ideological cross-fertilisation within the fascist sphere, and highlights the limitations of the traditional left-right paradigm. *Widerstand* attracted a variety of contributors from the fascist sphere and acts as the primary window through which to trace Italian Fascism’s impact on National Bolshevik thought. While it demonstrated no consensus on Italian Fascism, publishing articles both praising and condemning it, the journal evinces the contributors’ interest in soldierly nationalism and its Italian manifestations. Contributors included the most prominent German theoretical progenitors of soldierly nationalism, Ernst Jünger, Ernst von Salomon, and Friedrich Georg Jünger. In acknowledging the continuity and development of Jüngerian soldierly nationalism between the Stahlhelm and the National Bolsheviks (Jünger wrote for Niekisch shortly after ending his involvement with the Stahlhelm), the chapter contributes to tracing the use of Italian Fascism across multiple contexts.

The National Bolsheviks and Strasser circle are considered in consecutive chapters, as the Strasser circle arguably formed part of the broader history of German National Bolshevism, advocating, like Niekisch, for foreign policy alliances with the USSR. The Strasser circle, the subject of Chapter Five, refers to a loose association of splinter groups and initiatives, affiliated with the brothers Gregor and Otto Strasser, and broadly unified by a desire to establish a variant of Nazism with a greater emphasis on socialism. Considering the Strasser circle in its own chapter allows for a more detailed exploration of the differences in aims and ideology between Strasserism and mainline Nazism, or Hitlerism, and the role that impressions of Italian Fascism played in this dynamic. Significantly, the travelling motif of the fascist war veteran represents

¹³⁷ Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 178.

a point of divergence from Hitlerian Nazism, with Gregor Strasser placing particular emphasis on the role of the soldier in constructing an authoritarian state.¹³⁸ In this respect, Strasserism may be seen as more closely replicating the values of Italian Fascism. For members of the Strasser circle, like other thinkers associated with National Bolshevism, Italian Fascism at once evoked scorn due to its Western-centrism and perceived subservience to capitalism, and sparked admiration as a successful movement of national liberation. An increasingly corporatist tendency also emerged in the Strasser circle with reference to Italian Fascism, enjoying significantly higher proportional representation in the Strasser circle than in the mainline NSDAP. Italian Fascism thus played a role not only in shaping the radicalisation of the Strasser circle, but also in justifying its ideological differences from Hitlerism.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, is the only one to focus on a movement not based in Germany. For this reason, the Spann circle is vital in illuminating the diversity of Conservative Revolutionary thought beyond the borders of the German nation state. The Spann circle was based in its namesake's, Othmar Spann's, home city of Vienna, but quickly extended its influence into other regions, notably Germany, South Tyrol, and the Sudetenland. The Spann circle illuminates, perhaps better than any other group, the bridge between intellectualism and political praxis. Spann's unique philosophy, known as corporate universalism, became a guiding principle for the Austrian state paramilitary, the Heimwehr, and Spann made every effort to transform his philosophy into political reality. An intransigent intellectual, Spann and his dedicated cadre of students proved committed to their own ideology, and thereby more resistant to morphing ideologically as a result of contact with Italian Fascism. Nevertheless, the centrality of corporatism to Spann's philosophy ensured many points of interest, exchange, and integration. Fascism served as a near-constant reference point for the viability of Spann's own corporatist system, even when, as Spannians argued, it required revision to fully align with universalism. The Spann circle increasingly adopted aesthetic elements of soldierly nationalism, acquiring distinctly fascist trappings in an effort to increase its own political appeal. This placed it in the paradoxical position of attempting to reform Italian Fascism, while simultaneously seeking to capitalise on Mussolini's success.

Finally, a short conclusion will reflect on the broader significance of the five groups in relation to fascist studies and intellectual history and touch on possibilities for future research. Within the five groups, soldierly nationalism and corporatism were the key elements accounting for

¹³⁸ Gregor Strasser, "Gedanken über Aufgaben der Zukunft," June 15, 1926, in *Freiheit und Brot: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften eines National-Sozialisten: Teil I: Idee*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Kampf Verlag, 1932), 57-64.

the attraction of Italian Fascism. Demonstrating how the sources specifically linked these concepts to the idea of fascism provides insight into precisely how and why Fascism appealed to foreign ultranationalists, and how these impressions evolved over the interwar period, drawing the groups deeper into the Fascist orbit.

Not only does the identification and exploration of these motifs add nuance to understandings of transnational ideological entanglements, but it also clarifies points of divergence from the use of the same motifs within Hitlerian Nazism. Existing scholarship has engaged with aspects of this transfer process. However, the present thesis aims to make a novel contribution by drawing together disparate strands and deepening understandings of the mechanisms of ideological transfer and radicalisation in specific contexts, while underscoring the broadness of Italian Fascism's appeal. It is novel in its concentration on the combination of two elements — soldierly nationalism and corporatism — as the primary emissaries of Italian Fascist ideology. Some of the groups considered here (the National Bolsheviks and the Spann circle) have not, as yet, been analysed in this context — the others, only partially. By investigating five groups, the thesis seeks simultaneously to illustrate the broadness of the motifs' appeal within Germanic ultranationalist Conservative Revolutionary circles, and to deepen understanding of the diffusion and radicalisation processes that characterised the spread and growth of fascism.

Chapter One: *Ideological Emissaries: The Transnational and Transformational Significance of Italian Fascism*

When Benito Mussolini and his supporters “marched on Rome” in October, 1922, one of the first international responses appeared in a German weekly newspaper called *Das Gewissen* (*The Conscience*). Founded in 1919, the *Gewissen* was the brainchild of a small group known as the Juni Klub (June Club), the limited distribution of which belied its importance to interwar ultranationalist circles. The *Gewissen* published articles by many of the authors involved in the groups considered in this thesis, notably Ernst Jünger and Otto Strasser, as well as followers of Othmar Spann’s philosophy of corporate universalism.¹ The most significant early contributor, however, was Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876-1925).²

Moeller van den Bruck was one of the German architects of the loose intellectual movement known as the “Conservative Revolution” or, less commonly, “post-conservatism.”³ Characterised by the attempt to synthesise traditionally conservative social values and Romantic ideals with the realities of mass political culture and modern infrastructure, Conservative Revolutionaries contributed to theoretical developments like soldierly nationalism and national socialism. They were thus among the most receptive to the events unfolding in Italy. Moeller van den Bruck used the *Gewissen* to comment specifically on the perceived didactic qualities of Mussolini’s actions. In November, 1922, shortly after the March on Rome, he authored an article with the Latin title *Italia docet* (*Italy teaches*).⁴ Reflecting a position that would become common among Conservative Revolutionaries, Moeller van den Bruck stated that the Fascists’ “enthusiastic unity” was the first step necessary for the achievement of true political and ideological unity.⁵ Action, in and of itself, could function

¹ Armin Pfahl-Traughber, *Konservative Revolution und Neue Rechte: Rechtsextremistische Intellektuelle gegen den demokratischen Verfassungsstaat* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998), 80-82.

² Wherever possible, I have provided dates indicating the lifespans of individuals upon the first mention. Exceptions include extremely well-known individuals (i.e. Hitler, Mussolini) and individuals whose dates remain unknown or difficult to verify.

³ Pfahl-Traughber, *Konservative Revolution*, 81. Moeller van den Bruck was a particularly significant figure, as his work would be adopted as the foundational basis of Otto Strasser’s group, the Kampfgemeinschaft revolutionär Nationalsozialisten (KGRNS), in the early 1930s.

⁴ Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, “Italia docet,” *Gewissen* 4, no. 37 (November 1922): 1.

⁵ Moeller van der Bruck, “Italia docet,” 1; Claudia Kemper, *Das “Gewissen” 1919-1925: Kommunikation und Vernetzung der Jungkonservativen* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2011), 390; Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 20. As Goeschel points out, Moeller van den Bruck’s initial enthusiasm for Italian Fascism was admittedly temporary. A few months later, he branded Italian Fascism “reactionary.”

dialectically to resolve contradictions.⁶ For many, including the Italian Fascists themselves, it was seen as the *only* way to resolve contradictions.

Clearly, from the moment it emerged onto the international stage, Italian Fascism captured the imaginations of foreign thinkers sympathetic to its message. Nevertheless, scholarly tendencies persist in segregating fascism from intellectual history, often not looking beyond fascism's self-stated emphasis on action, violence, and anti-intellectualism. In both its movement and regime stages, fascism is commonly seen as having renounced all claim to intellectual coherence, unified only by emotion, aesthetics, sociological conditions, or a glorification of violence.⁷ This view implies that, in order to qualify as a true ideology, a political movement/regime would need to adhere to rigorous empirical, rational, or scientific standards. As Emilio Gentile noted, this is akin to "saying that if a person doesn't think with the rigor of a systemic philosopher, that person doesn't possess a worldview."⁸ Ideology — adapting the less rigid definitions of scholars like Gentile and Michael Freeden — may alternatively be understood as a "reasonably coherent and clear value system" used to inform and guide sociopolitical action.⁹ This allows sufficient flexibility to reconcile ideologies with transnational entanglements and ideological hybridisation, while still furnishing the concept with certain parameters. James A. Gregor, one of the most prolific, if controversial, scholars of Italian Fascism, argued that Fascism should indeed be viewed as a genuine ideology, even when one accepts the rather questionable onus of having to prove its "rationality."¹⁰ Much of Gregor's work thus revolves around tracing the intellectual history of Fascism, and illuminating the importance of its ideological preconditions, particularly syndicalism, Marxism, and idealism.

With this in mind, fascism cannot be read as a historical aberration or negation, but a development situated within the historical and political milieu of its time.¹¹ This milieu

⁶ Moeller van der Bruck, "Italia docet," 1; Kemper, "*Gewissen*," 390.

⁷ Neocleous and Vivarelli represent two established variants of the "anti-ideology" position. Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 13-17; Roberto Vivarelli, "Interpretations of the Origins of Fascism," *The Journal of Modern History* 63, no. 1 (March 1991): 29; Dave Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1999); A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 15; R. J. B. Bosworth, "Introduction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism*, ed. R. J. B. Bosworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 4.

⁸ Emilio Gentile, *The Origins of Fascist Ideology, 1918-1925* (New York: Enigma Books, 2005), xix.

⁹ Gentile, *Origins*, xix; Freeden, *Ideology*, 2-3.

¹⁰ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 30-31.

¹¹ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 30-31. As Roger Griffin noted, Gregor firmly rejected the notion of "generic" fascism, particularly on the basis of establishing similarities between Italian Fascism and Nazism. Roger Griffin, "Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age. From New Consensus to New Wave?" *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 1 (January 2012): 13.

constituted “a complex process of ideological permutation,” and was a ubiquitous presence since the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution.¹² Scholars who emphasise these continuities tend to negate the artificial divide between “civic” and “ethnic” nationalism. As Michael Mann pointed out, fascism was simply a variation of a broader ideal: “authoritarian nation-statism,” itself a structural feature of the modern world.¹³ As such, even fascism’s “irrational” elements were outgrowths of modes of thinking that had emerged with the Enlightenment.

This shift in emphasis, in which fascism is seen not as a repudiation, but as a reinterpretation (and an extension) of preexisting intellectual trends, also helps to account for why Italian Fascism was able to exercise sufficient intellectual appeal to draw other groups into its orbit. Actors throughout the fascist sphere were engaged in similar interpretations of political events, ensuring that, once established as “successful,” Italian Fascism was in a position to command formidable influence. The mythologisation of the frontline experience, resolving into the construct of the fascist war veteran, represented a synthesis of intellectual preconditions with new experiences, and arguably forms the point at which fascism can be said to have become sufficiently distinct to qualify as its own ideology. Rejecting the Marxism around which they had formerly organised their political thought, the practitioners of what would become known as Italian Fascism incorporated the frontline experience into their pre-war socialism, syndicalism, and dialectical idealism, and, somewhat later, applied these principles to social and political corporatism. Constructing the fascist war veteran and mythologising the war experience were acts of intellectualisation, presenting novel extensions of pre-war political theory.¹⁴ It is thus fitting to begin with an overview of fascism’s intellectual preconditions, followed by an evaluation of the impact of the First World War and, as the regime matured, the related theoretical justifications for corporatism.

Intellectual Preconditions

¹² Salvatore Garau, “If Liberalism Steps into the Fascist Synthesis: The Diverging View of Zeev Sternhell and Ishay Landa on the Origins of Fascist Ideology,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19, no. 1 (February 2014): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2013.869453>.

¹³ Mann, *Fascists*, 31.

¹⁴ Hannah Malone, “The Fallen Soldier as Fascist Exemplar: Military Cemeteries and Dead Heroes in Mussolini’s Italy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 64, no. 1 (January 2022): 36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417521000384>. For a detailed account of the development of Mussolini’s ideology, see Gentile, *Origins*, 107-134.

Most historians of fascism do not venture beyond the typical assertion that fascism emerged with Mussolini's movement in 1919. Some, however, have argued that its ideological origins well predated its political manifestations. The most influential scholar to have done so was Zeev Sternhell, who posited that fascist ideology originated in late nineteenth-century France in the nationalist ideas of the Boulangists.¹⁵ Deriving its name from Third Republic nationalist politician Georges Boulanger (1837-1891), and distinguished by opposition to both liberalism and Marxism, Boulangism, according to Sternhell, functioned as the "harbinger of fascism" and the genesis of third way politics.¹⁶ Sternhell suggested that nationalism was transformed into a "coherent political theory" by figures such as Boulangists Henri Rochefort (1831-1913) and Maurice Barrès (1862-1923); Charles Maurras (1868-1952), theoretician of the French nationalist movement Action Française; national syndicalist George Valois (1878-1945); and their Italian equivalent, Enrico Corradini (1865-1931), a leading figure in the Italian Nationalist Association and one of the most influential nationalist politicians of his time.¹⁷ Sternhell cited the convergence of this "coherent nationalism" with the revisionist Marxism of theorists like Georges Sorel (1847-1922) as signifying the birth of fascism proper.¹⁸ While acknowledging fascism's intellectual debt to Marxism, Sternhell nonetheless saw fascism as the result of a historical break from civic nationalism, presenting it as "a systemic rejection of the values inherited from the eighteenth century and the French Revolution."¹⁹ These kinds of interpretations tend to see the Conservative Revolution as reactionary and fundamentally separate from "positive" modernity.

Yet Sternhell's work raises the question — which should engage any historian of ideas — of whether fascism can be said to have arisen *before* the First World War. Sternhell's fascism was of an ideal type, a "platonic fascism," removed from its historical context — which, as Emilio Gentile noted, challenges the concept's historicity.²⁰ Locating the core of fascist ideology primarily in ultranationalism is problematic, moreover, as ultranationalism has its roots in revolutionary nationalism, and revolutionary nationalism continues to resist clear ideological alignment. A cursory glance at the bevy of historical revolutionary nationalist movements — ranging from regional Catalan nationalism in Iberia, to movements of liberation in the colonial

¹⁵ Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 3; Renton, "Prison of Ideas," 295.

¹⁶ Zeev Sternhell, "Paul Déroulède and the Origins of Modern French Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 4 (1971): 47-48; Garau, "Diverging View," 63.

¹⁷ Zeev Sternhell, "Fascism," in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. Constantin Iordachi (London: Routledge, 2010), 55; Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 55; Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 25.

¹⁸ Sternhell, "Fascism," 56; Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 55; Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 25.

¹⁹ Sternhell, "Paul Déroulède," 47-48; Garau, "Diverging View," 63.

²⁰ Gentile, *Origins*, 376.

world — suggests that there are barriers to locating a coherent revolutionary political ideology based principally on nationalism. Perhaps more to the point, applying the “fascist” label before the First World War downplays the centrality of the war itself. The war was not relevant merely in that it created the conditions in which fascism could flourish as a mass movement — it was central to fascism’s theoretical makeup. Had it not been for the war, little would have distinguished the ideas of unorthodox Marxists, ultranationalists and national socialists from the lively debates and ever-evolving promenade of ideas that denoted intellectual life in the long nineteenth century.

To best assess how certain ideas prevalent in the international *Zeitgeist* morphed into fascism, it is necessary to turn to the works of early fascist writers themselves, or, more accurately, writers who *became* Fascists. Their works demonstrate conceptual evolution and, subsequently, how ideas deriving from the Great War synthesised with intellectual preconditions to create a new ideology. Of particular note are the men who originally made up the Italian national syndicalist movement and subsequently became Fascists, including Sergio Panunzio (1886-1944), Angelo Oliviero Olivetti (1874-1931), Paolo Orano (1885-1945), Agostino Lanzillo (1886-1952), Robert Michels (1876-1936) and, of course, the future Duce, Benito Mussolini himself. Additional importance must be ascribed to Fascism’s “official” philosopher and future Education Minister, Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944), who, along with his colleagues, played a key role in formalising Fascist ideology and strengthening intellectual links between Fascism and German idealism. These theorists became fascists in the most literal sense, but their ideas derived from interpretations of earlier generations of political thinkers and have yet to be fully explored in the context of recent transnational historiographical developments.²¹

Fascism had particularly strong roots in the heterodox interpretations of Marxism that underpinned the syndicalist and Futurist movements that were gaining traction in Italy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to the Great War, many future Fascists were concentrated in the Italian syndicalist movement, were proud Marxists, and firm believers in historical materialism. Syndicalism was a form of revolutionary socialism emphasising direct proletarian bargaining power in the form of trade unionism.²² It was sceptical of state socialism and the revolutionary vanguard party of Marxism-Leninism, and particularly hostile toward

²¹ Alcalde, “Transnational Origins,” 567.

²² Ralph Darlington, *Syndicalism and the Transition to Communism: An International Comparative Analysis*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 5.

parliamentarism and socialist reformism. Panunzio, Orano, and Michels were active in the syndicalist movement from the early 1900s, while Olivetti and Mussolini began their political careers as members of the mainline Italian Socialist Party, with Mussolini serving as editor of the party's official newspaper *Avanti!* from 1912 to 1914.²³

Heavily influenced by the German SPD, the Italian Socialists attempted to carve a "respectable" path away from revolutionary Marxism, incorporating elements of liberal democracy into their practice of socialism in the belief that socialism could evolve naturally, without recourse to conflict or violence. Like the SPD, they also underwent a schism over the question of the war.²⁴ Yet whereas the German SPD supported war credits, and the resultant splinter groups, the USPD (Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands), founded in 1917, and Spartakusbund (later rebranded the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands or KPD) opposed them, the Italian Socialists committed themselves to neutrality. The dissidents among them, however, came to view the battlefields of Europe as the site for potential ignition of revolutionary change. The pressure group known as the Interventionists, or Intervention movement, formed to agitate for Italy's entry into the First World War on the Allied side, and was a hodgepodge of diverse elements — syndicalists, Socialists, nationalists, Futurists, conservatives — united in opposition to parliamentary neutralism.²⁵ This, in turn, precipitated the acquisition of more general anti-parliamentarian attitudes.²⁶

The future Italian Fascists' support for the Interventionist movement was anchored in numerous theoretical precedents. Key influences like Sorel, Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Lester Ward (1841-1913), Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), Werner Sombart (1863-1941), Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838-1909), and Gustav Ratzenhofer (1842-1904) represented diverse political and theoretical backgrounds, but were united by the desire to address the major socio-political challenges of their age using modern intellectual tools.²⁷ These included the new field of the social sciences, concerned with the analysis and

²³ G. Gasti, "Report of Inspector-General of Public Security G. Gasti Regarding Mussolini," 1919, in *Mediterranean Fascism, 1919-1945: Selected Documents*, ed. Charles F. Delzell (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 4.

²⁴ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 62.

²⁵ The reasoning for each contributing group varied greatly. For the syndicalists, the war offered an opportunity for true revolution; conservative nationalists viewed it as a means to complete the *Risorgimento*. Giovanna Procacci, "Italy: From Interventionism to Fascism, 1917-1919," *Journal of Contemporary History* 3, no. 4 (October 1968): 155; Alcalde, "Transnational Origins," 568.

²⁶ Alcalde, *War Veterans and Fascism*, 33.

²⁷ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 67; David Roberts, *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), 11.

understanding of mass society and the individual's place within it; the revelations of evolutionary theory, and the convergence of the two in the form of Social Darwinism or human ethnography.²⁸ Although initially accepting historical materialism, the Italian national syndicalists gravitated towards theories that emphasised the importance of individual agents in shaping historical processes. These agents were not the traditional great men of history, but men more easily reconciled with socialist values: men of proletarian origins whose exceptionality was manifest in their moral or spiritual qualities.

The attempt to combine historical materialism with the individual's capacity to express transformative agency was a feature of the divergent interpretations of Marxism already common in the revolutionary syndicalist and Futurist circles in which the future Italian Fascists were active in the pre-war years.²⁹ Mussolini, for example, was heavily influenced by sociologist Le Bon, who posited in 1896 that the psychology of the masses, or "the crowd," was inherently irrational and instinctively subservient, desiring the authority of an exceptional leader who was stirred by "ardent convictions."³⁰ Another thinker shaping the young Mussolini's thought was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), from whom Mussolini adopted the concept of the metaphysical superman, an individual whose exceptional capability permitted him to transcend the conventions binding ordinary individuals.³¹ However, the most significant theoretician upon the development of Fascism was undoubtedly Sorel. Incorporating elements of liberal theory and republicanism and their expression in contemporary America (particularly in the thought of William James [1842-1910]), Sorel stressed the importance of the "heroic" individual in revolutionary, socialist contexts.³² As one of the most prominent theorists of syndicalism, he viewed direct bargaining via syndicates as a heroic act on its own merits, and thus analogous to the transformative agency of the heroic individual.³³ In contrast to traditional Marxism, the Sorelian view further posited that the revolutionary proletariat should not lose its class identity after winning its struggle against the bourgeoisie, but, like the heroic individual, should use the virtues of its class identity to fashion a new morality system.³⁴

²⁸ Morgan, *Fascism in Europe*, 17.

²⁹ Morgan, *Fascism in Europe*, 8-9.

³⁰ Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1896), 118-119.

³¹ Gentile, *Origins*, 5.

³² Vincent K. Steven, "Interpreting Georges Sorel: Defender of Virtue or Apostle of Violence?", *History of European Ideas* 12, no. 2 (1990): 240-241, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599\(90\)90244-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599(90)90244-9).

³³ Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1908, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 130.

³⁴ James H. Meisel, "Georges Sorel's Last Myth," *The Journal of Politics* 12, no. 1 (February 1950): 52.

The fascist conception of the individual, like those of other unorthodox socialists, also drew inspiration from theories advocating economic liberalism. Particularly significant in the Italian context was the thought of economists Pareto and Mosca. Anticipating the Conservative Revolutionaries of the interwar period, Mosca argued that parliamentary democracy was illiberal as it drew its power from a single source, the institution of elections.³⁵ Like Max Weber (1864-1920), Mosca saw the presence of a specific political elite — a bureaucratic caste, for lack of a better term — as a simplified, more workable model, able to safeguard against the tyranny of the majority.³⁶ Pareto, who also had a profound impact upon Mussolini in his formative years, advocated and built upon Mosca's elite theory.³⁷ Pareto developed the thesis of the circulation of elites, in which elites were understood as an unspecified group of individuals with superior capacities in their respective fields or vocations.³⁸ The *governing elite* was a caste of individuals determined not by hereditary rights or by democratic selection, but by an innate and dynamic superiority.³⁹ Although he was a supporter of the Italian syndicalists in 1905, Pareto was hostile to Marxism and socialism, viewing the free market as the best role model for how human nature ought, ideally, to function.⁴⁰ The free market was, for Pareto, the most viable way to realise “naturalism”: the replication of the laws of nature within human society. A true free market was, however, perpetually under threat from political intervention, expressed through democracy and trade unionism — something that made it all the more urgent to install a dynamic, powerful governing elite.⁴¹

Panunzio — who would go on to serve in a variety of positions within the Fascist state and has been credited with giving Italian Fascism its “content and direction” — referred to Pareto in many of his works.⁴² In 1910, he used Pareto's elite theory to claim that “a new aristocracy”

³⁵ Maurice A. Finocchiaro, *Beyond Right and Left: Democratic Elitism in Mosca and Gramsci* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 146.

³⁶ Ferdinand Kolegar, “The Elite and the Ruling Class: Pareto and Mosca Re-Examined,” *The Review of Politics* 29, no. 3 (July 1967): 362.

³⁷ Ishay Landa, *The Apprentice's Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism* (London: Brill, 2010), 45; Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 67; Roberts, *Syndicalist Tradition*, 59.

³⁸ Vilfredo Pareto, “The Circulation of Elites,” in *Theories of Society: Foundations of Modern Sociological Theory, Volume 1*, ed. Talcott Parsons et al. (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 551; John Scott, “Pareto and the Elite,” in *Vilfredo Pareto: Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries*, ed. Joseph F. Femia and Alasdair J. Marshall (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 9-10.

³⁹ Scott, “Pareto and the Elite,” 10-11.

⁴⁰ Landa, *Apprentice's Sorcerer*, 46-47.

⁴¹ Landa, *Apprentice's Sorcerer*, 46-48.

⁴² In addition to his academic roles, Panunzio's positions included acting as a “member of the chamber of deputies, a member of the directorate of the Fascist party, head of the educators' union, undersecretary in the Ministry of Communications, a member of the National Council of Corporations, and a member of the commission for reform of Italian legal codes.” Roberts, *Syndicalist Tradition*, 11-12.

was emerging within the syndicalist movement.⁴³ Panunzio carried over the naturalist elements of Pareto's thought, claiming that authority, far from being an artificial construct, was intrinsic to human relationships.⁴⁴ It was therefore misguided to oppose authority as anarchism did; what was important was to implement laws that reflected organic authority: the authority present in nature. Panunzio did not, however, share Pareto's reverence for a deregulated economy, but instead saw the potential for an ideal type of organic authority in the Italian syndicates, which anticipated a larger "form of institutionalised, corporate self-governance."⁴⁵ Panunzio's thought would, in turn, do much to support the development of corporatism in Fascist Italy.

Fascism would also draw upon similar elements from within the German conservative tradition. Oswald Spengler's (1880-1936) cyclical view of the rise and fall of civilisations, illustrated in his best-known work, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes (The Decline of the Occident)* (1918/22), challenged materialistic positivism and, for the burgeoning Fascist movement, fulfilled a similar theoretical function as Pareto's elite theory.⁴⁶ For Spengler, the truest representation of the power of civilisation was the circulation of money.⁴⁷ Advocating what he called "Prussian socialism," Spengler, like Pareto, embraced the vision of a completely deregulated market, opposed organised labour, and advocated long work days and a low minimum wage.⁴⁸ In Spengler's Prussian socialism, the "money-spirit" would function as a guiding "socialist" principle, supplanting historical materialism.⁴⁹

⁴³ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 66-67.

⁴⁴ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 70. For Panunzio's discussion of the syndicalist view of authority, in contrast to anarchism, see: Sergio Panunzio *Il socialismo giuridico: esposizione critica* (Genova: Libreria Moderna, 1906).

⁴⁵ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 73. For Gregor, upon whose translations this section draws heavily (due both to constraints of scope and my own language limitations), Italian Fascism had, by the mid-1930s, reached ideological maturity. This claim is owing both to Gregor's view of Fascist Italy as a "developmental dictatorship," and, as R. J. B. Bosworth pointed out, to the desire to downplay Fascism's own expansionist aggression and ideological similarities with Nazi Germany (162). For the purposes of this thesis, Gregor's tracing of Fascism's intellectual origins is immensely helpful; nevertheless, one must acknowledge that ideological development and adherent radicalisation did not stop in the 1930s but continued into the 1940s: a reciprocal process in which Nazism increasingly became the senior partner. Furthermore, even before significant contact with Nazism, the internal importance Italian Fascism ascribed to soldierly nationalism, war, and militarism enshrined, at the very least, a deep ideological compatibility with violent expansionism. R. J. B. Bosworth, "Review: Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought by A. James Gregor," *The Historian* 68, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 387.

⁴⁶ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 59; Sternhell, *Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, 343; James Joll, "Two Prophets of the Twentieth Century: Spengler and Toynbee," *Review of International Studies* 11, no. 2 (April 1985): 92-93.

⁴⁷ Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1923), 45-47.

⁴⁸ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, ed. Helmut Werner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 71; Landa, *Apprentice's Sorcerer*, 50, 62-65; R. K. Bolton, "Spengler, Epigenetics and the Idea of 'Race'," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, 44, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2019): 141-142.

⁴⁹ Spengler, *Untergang*, 465-468; Spengler, *Decline of the West*, 26-27.

While Fascism did not adopt wholesale Pareto and Spengler's visions of economic rationalism, the selective use of theories stemming from liberal economics provides an important theoretical link between Fascism and the Enlightenment tradition. In addition, the elitism of Pareto and Spengler was easily reconcilable with other intellectual tendencies prominent in the pre-war period, such as Social Darwinism. Social Darwinism came to the future Fascists' attention via the works of Spencer, Ratzenhofer, and Gumpłowicz, with the last being a particularly noteworthy influence upon the development of Panunzio's philosophy.⁵⁰ In contrast to the kind of Social Darwinism advanced by more infamous writers like Arthur, Comte de Gobineau (1816-1882) and Houston Stuart Chamberlain (1855-1927), Gumpłowicz and Ratzenhofer applied evolutionary theory primarily to *social*, rather than biological, groups.⁵¹ Drawing on this, Panunzio broadened his own understanding of historical materialism to incorporate the struggles of repressed *groups*, rather than the typical Marxist focus on repressed *classes*.⁵² Combined with elite theory and exceptionalist concepts of special individuals' innate "right to rule," Social Darwinian ideas furnished new authoritarian theories with "scientific" credibility.

Although they ventured well beyond the typical reference points for Marxists, the future Italian Fascists remained insistent, prior to the First World War, on the syndicalist movement's capacity to represent "true Marxism."⁵³ Following Sorel, they saw syndicalism as more authentically Marxist than communism or parliamentary socialism, due to its emphasis on direct bargaining in place of political representation.⁵⁴ Nor did they perceive any conflict between the growing national socialism of their movement and the internationalism of classical Marxism.⁵⁵ In his best-known work, 1908's *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel argued that parliamentary socialism — by which he meant the Bernsteinian idea of realising evolutionary

⁵⁰ Some of Spencer's most significant work actually predates Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. Nevertheless, Spencer's belief in the right of the "racially superior" to dominate the inferior has made his reputation synonymous with nineteenth century scientific racism. Ratzenhofer, drawing on Spencer, advocated for a positivist understanding of social change, in which evolutionary science could be applied to social development. Gustav Ratzenhofer, *Die soziologische Erkenntnis: Positive Philosophie des sozialen Lebens* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1898), 3; J. A. Mangan, "Prologue: Legacies," in *Shaping the Superman: The Fascist Body as Political Icon – Aryan Fascism*, ed. J. A. Mangan (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 3.

⁵¹ Ludwig Gumpłowicz, *Der Rassenkampf: Sociologische Untersuchungen* (Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagnerschen Universität Buchhandlung, 1883), 27-32. There is much scholarly debate about the extent to which Italian Fascism embraced social Darwinian racism. The introduction of racial politics drew mixed responses from Italian Fascists. Olivetti was Jewish, and Panunzio consistently opposed the introduction of racial laws in 1938. However, other Fascists such as Paolo Orano and, in particular, Giovanni Preziosi, were notable antisemites. See Paolo Orano's book: *Gli ebrei in Italia* (Rome: Casa editrice Pinciana, 1937). Roberts, *Syndicalist Tradition*, 13, 323-324.

⁵² Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 67.

⁵³ A. James Gregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 25.

⁵⁴ Gregor, *Developmental Dictatorship*, 64.

⁵⁵ Gregor, *Developmental Dictatorship*, 64.

socialism gradually and peacefully through parliamentary democracy and reformism — was a misappropriation of Marxism.⁵⁶ In co-opting the language of Marxism, social democratic intellectuals presented one of the most insidious challenges to true Marxism, as they redirected revolutionary energy into support for bourgeois institutions.⁵⁷ The significance of Sorel for the future Fascists was succinctly encapsulated in a statement from Lanzillo in 1910: “The importance of Sorel in socialist historiography is in my opinion close to that of Marx and Engels.”⁵⁸ Lanzillo corresponded personally with Sorel, and was instrumental in establishing an Italian audience for the French thinker, being the first to translate Sorel’s works into Italian, and authoring the first biography of Sorel in 1910.⁵⁹

Lanzillo was also amongst Sorel’s staunchest defenders against orthodox socialist criticism, which ramped up after Sorel began to collaborate with the French nationalist movement Action Française in 1909.⁶⁰ Supported enthusiastically by his admirers among the Italian syndicalists, Sorel posited that nationalism provided broader unifying potential than class, as it was capable of appealing to people of all classes.⁶¹ Sorel’s shift towards nationalism was accompanied by increasing scepticism about Marxist claims to represent scientific determinism and the validity of historical materialism. Drawing on the philosophy of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), Sorel oversaw a shift away from Marxist classifications into more porous equivalencies, such as “mutualism” instead of “collectivism,” and the “people” instead of the “proletariat.”⁶² In addition to opening the door conceptually for class collaboration, this fluidity presented new avenues to interpret morality. Italian syndicalist Arturo Labriola (1873-1959) and Belgian intellectual Henri De Man (1885-1953) contemporaneously developed theories of “ethical socialism”: a revisionist tendency drawing upon idealism, which would come to set itself in opposition to Marxism (and which, after the war, would find some of its most notorious

⁵⁶ For some of Sorel’s comments on Eduard Bernstein, see Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1908 (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2012), 47-48.

⁵⁷ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1908, 52; Gregor, *Mussolini’s Intellectuals*, 67; Roberts, *Syndicalist Tradition*, 64-65. For an example of the socialism expounded by Eduard Bernstein, see Eduard Bernstein, “Evolutionary Socialism,” 1907, Marxists.org, accessed March 15, 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bernstein/works/1899/evsoc/ch01.htm#a>.

⁵⁸ Agostino Lanzillo, “Giorgio Sorel nella storiografia,” *Il Divenire Sociale* (August 1910): 220.

⁵⁹ Alcalde, “Transnational Origins,” 573; Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 50.

⁶⁰ Robert Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity: Socialism, Nationalism, and National Socialism during French Fin de Siècle* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 150-151; C. Levy, “Lanzillo, Agostino,” in *Biographical Dictionary of European Labor Leaders*, vol. 1, ed. A. Thomas Lane (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), n.d.

⁶¹ Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity*, 150-151.

⁶² Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity*, 149; Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 44.

advocates in thinkers like Spengler).⁶³ De Man understood socialism not as an economic doctrine, but as a “human disposition,” and a “product of personal will,” whose achievement was contingent on altruism and solidarity.⁶⁴

This intellectual shift within the revisionist socialist movement towards idealistic spiritualism did much to sponsor the development of Fascist thought, both before and after the war. Indeed, the Italian syndicalists came to view national solidarity as an ideal reflection of the individual’s moral duty to society. The achievement of collective virtue was, moreover, made possible only in a well-ordered society that channelled each individual’s altruism in a productive direction.⁶⁵ Already in the pre-war years, the Italian syndicalists were receptive to this message which, for them, fit well with the elite theory and exceptionalist notions that they contemporaneously imbibed. The German-born Italian syndicalist and future Fascist Robert Michels (who Italianised his name to “Roberto”) wrote of the significance of “ethical nationalism,” using the term to denote a form of nationalism that both encapsulated individuals’ moral duties and could be weaponised to serve the revolutionary cause.⁶⁶ Yet while the pre-war years established the theoretical merging of syndicalism and nationalism, it was the Great War that truly ignited its ideological potential.

The Great War and the Emergence of the “Fascist War Veteran”

As we have seen, many syndicalists already rejected both internationalism and passivism prior to the outbreak of the First World War. As early as 1910, Orano criticised the antimilitarism common in socialist circles, claiming that war was the “springtime of progress.”⁶⁷ Accelerationist sentiment was not new, having been pre-empted by Sorel. In 1903’s *Introduction à l’économie moderne (Introduction to Modern Economics)*, Sorel had argued in favour of classical liberal economics on the basis that laissez-faire relationships resulted in the

⁶³ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 131.

⁶⁴ Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 132-133.

⁶⁵ A. James Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism: Chapters in the Intellectual History of Radicalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 87-88.

⁶⁶ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 193.

⁶⁷ Paulo Orano, “L’antimilitarismo,” *Il divenire sociale* (September 1910), 3, quoted in Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 162.

polarisation of the classes and thus expediated the cause of emancipatory socialism.⁶⁸ For the Italian syndicalists, Italy's war against the Ottoman Empire of 1911-1912 prompted an uptick of accelerationism. Olivetti, for example, predicated his support for the Italian invasion of Libya on the belief that Italy's establishment as an imperial power would furnish the young nation with the appropriate structural conditions for the transition from capitalism to socialism.⁶⁹ When the First World War erupted in July-August, 1914, the national syndicalists carried forward this rationale, drawing (in methodology, if not in ultimate aims) closer to the nationalism of their interventionist collaborators, most notably the Nationalist movement under Corradini.⁷⁰

That same year, Michels condensed the central ideas of national syndicalism into a key text, *L'imperialismo Italiano (The Italian Imperialism)*.⁷¹ The Great War, he argued, constituted an expression of "proletarian nationalism," a concept which spanned the rhetorical divide between the national syndicalists and the Nationalists.⁷² Like many of his colleagues, Michels' turn towards nationalism was also a result of growing disenchantment with the socialist movement and Socialist policies. Factors like the participation of socialist parties in parliamentary politics and centralised national-based education encouraged the Italian proletariat to identify with nation-based paradigms and institutions, further undermining the viability of socialist internationalism.⁷³ During Italy's period of neutrality between August, 1914, and May, 1915, the young national syndicalist Filippo Corridoni (1887-1915) — who would die in the war, but who would later be celebrated as a herald of Fascist thought by the Italian Fascists — most clearly articulated the case for intervention from the national syndicalist perspective.⁷⁴ Corridoni echoed the pragmatic reasoning of his fellow syndicalists in suggesting that, as Italy had yet to achieve the level of industrialisation that Marx and Engels saw as prerequisite for revolution, cross-class cooperation in service of a great national purpose was necessary.⁷⁵ This

⁶⁸ Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 45. See: Georges Sorel, *Introduction à l'économie moderne*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie G. Jaques, 1903).

⁶⁹ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 201.

⁷⁰ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 97.

⁷¹ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 203. See also Roberto Michels, *L'Imperialismo Italiano*, (Milan: Societa Editrice Libreria, 1914), Internet Archive, accessed March 15, 2024, <https://archive.org/details/LImperialismoItaliano/page/n5/mode/2up>.

⁷² Andrew Bonnell, *Robert Michels, Socialism and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 227.

⁷³ Robert Michels, "Die historische Entwicklung des Vaterlandsgedankens," 1912, in *Verhandlung des 2. Deutschen Soziologentages vom 20. bis 22. Oktober 1912 in Berlin: Reden und Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: Sauer u. Auvermann, 1969), 172-173; Bonnell, *Robert Michels*, 226.

⁷⁴ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 207-208.

⁷⁵ A. James Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 221-222.

line of reasoning had more in common with traditional Marxism than with Leninism, as it accepted that only advanced capitalist societies were ready for the transition to socialism. In contrast to the Bolsheviks, Corridoni and the national syndicalists thus came to support all so-called “revolutionary development[s]” that facilitated the construction of a mature bourgeoisie.⁷⁶

Mussolini himself was initially a hesitant convert to interventionism.⁷⁷ As Sternhell outlined, Mussolini’s pre-war career was marked by a slow, steady, and pragmatic drift away from Marxist orthodoxy, rather than a sudden rupture.⁷⁸ Mussolini had been opposed to the Libyan war and initially, upon the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, supported Italian neutrality.⁷⁹ While still editor of *Avanti!*, he first signalled his opposition to “absolute neutrality” in October, 1914, in favour of “active and committed neutrality” (a shift which was sufficient to see him denounced by the Socialist party leadership).⁸⁰ Upon his resignation from the party mere days later, he threw in his lot with the revolutionary syndicalists and converted to interventionism. Mussolini was expelled formally from the Socialists in November, 1914, for “moral and political unworthiness.”⁸¹ The Interventionists soon benefitted from the power of Mussolini’s passionate polemics, in which he condemned the cowardice of pacifists and his former colleagues in the Socialist Party, and claimed that the war was, in fact, a “people’s war.”⁸² The nationalism in Mussolini’s speeches of this period was interspersed with vociferous appeals to socialism. “The law of solidarity,” he claimed in December, 1914, “does not stop at economic competition; it goes beyond.”⁸³ The initial phase of the Great War endowed the national syndicalists with a sense of historical immediacy, including in their desire to achieve socialism. At the same time, it deepened and soured theoretical divides with the mainstream socialists.

⁷⁶ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 210.

⁷⁷ Paul O’Brian, *Mussolini in the First World War: The Journalist, the Soldier, the Fascist* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005), 31-32.

⁷⁸ Sternhell, *Fascist Ideology*, 207-208.

⁷⁹ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 213.

⁸⁰ Sternhell, *Fascist Ideology*, 205-206; Eugen Weber, “Fascism(s) and Some Harbingers,” *The Journal of Modern History* 54, no. 4 (December 1982): 753.

⁸¹ Benito Mussolini, “Do Not Think that by Taking Away my Membership Card you will Take Away my Faith in the Cause,” November 25, 1914, Milan, in *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches November 1914 – August 1923*, trans. and ed. Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), 4-5; Gasti, “Report,” 4.

⁸² Benito Mussolini, “For the Liberty of Humanity and the Future of Italy,” Parma, December 14, 1914, in *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches (November 1914-August 1923)*, trans. and ed. by Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), 16.

⁸³ Mussolini, “Liberty of Humanity,” 16.

The conditions upon which the national syndicalists predicated their interventionism were not only methodological; they also reflected and encouraged theoretical revaluations of war and violence. Here, too, the national syndicalists found a ready prophet in Sorel. In a vitally important distinction from other variants of revolutionary thought, Sorel argued that dialectical synthesis could *only* be achieved through violence.⁸⁴ Violence was not merely a means to an end, as in revolutionary communism; it was necessary both in order to usher in economic and social revolution, and to endow the revolutionary movement with reinvigorated morality grounded in biological, organic principles. Aversion to, and even criminalisation of violence was symptomatic of limpid, degenerate bourgeois society, as only through violence would a more authentic ethical standard be realised.⁸⁵ Taking up arms in the Great War was therefore imperative not only for economic reasons, but for moral, *spiritual* ones. Sorel's observations on the ethical benefits of violence were seized upon enthusiastically by the national syndicalists, apparently complementing their idealist and exceptionalist tendencies. Michels soon proclaimed that the war would inspire the proletariat with the passion and vigour necessary for revolution.⁸⁶ Corridoni also underscored the significance of human agency. He tempered his belief in Marxism with substantial criticism of the "stages" view of historical development, and hence of historical materialism, which he saw as too deterministic. He argued that state intervention in the Italian economy had derailed the "laws of capitalist development" and stymied Italy's capacity for socialist revolution.⁸⁷ By the same token, human agency could act as a positive force in the restoration of progress by asserting itself in the form of war.⁸⁸ For the burgeoning Fascist movement, the ethical and historical value of violence fundamentally called into question, as Sorel cynically phrased it, "the admiration of our contemporaries for gentle methods."⁸⁹

What lingering sympathy the national syndicalists may have felt for orthodox socialism was further shaken by the collapse of the Second International in 1914 over the question of the Great War. The fact that international solidarity, for so long a fulcrum of socialism, had so swiftly splintered into nationalist factionalism seemingly justified the national syndicalists' belief in the indispensability of the nation and nationalism — not least to the socialist cause itself. Indeed, despite the huge liberties they had taken with Marxist doctrine, the national

⁸⁴ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 57-58.

⁸⁵ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 202, 211-214.

⁸⁶ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 206.

⁸⁷ Gregor, *Marxism, Fascism and Totalitarianism*, 208-209.

⁸⁸ Sternhell, *Fascist Ideology*, 33.

⁸⁹ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 176.

syndicalists remained staunch during the early war years in their support for what they saw as the core values of Marxism.⁹⁰ Their support for nationalism was, they claimed, born of necessity. By the end of 1914, Mussolini proclaimed that he was still a socialist, “although an exasperated one,” and stressed the importance of the nation as the only remaining organisational conduit for revolution: “The treachery of the [Socialist] Germans forced the Socialists of the other countries to fall back upon the basis of nationality and the necessity of national defence.”⁹¹

Nationalism had emerged as a key feature of their thought, of comparable importance to other elements; but the movement had yet to make the shift to viewing the nation as the single highest moral collective authority.⁹² Nationalism and nation building were still viewed within the prism of the “historical tasks” of the bourgeoisie, and Marxian socialism, however debased, remained the objective.⁹³ This began to change with Italy’s entry into the war in 1915, under the government of Antonio Salandra (1852-1931). The experience of war endowed nationalist narratives with unprecedented practical and emotional appeal. Between 1915 and 1917, Mussolini served in the 11th Bersaglieri Regiment, and attained the rank of corporal, before being discharged.⁹⁴ He would later cite his experiences in the war as decisive in finally disabusing him of his socialist ideals.⁹⁵

If any one event can be said to be decisive in ridding the national syndicalists of their Marxist ideals, however, it was the October Revolution in Russia. The national syndicalists initially welcomed the first wave of the revolution in February/March, 1917. The overthrow of the Tsarist monarchy and installation of the Provisional Government seemed to validate their support for the war as an accelerationist force.⁹⁶ Yet the Bolsheviks’ seizure of power in

⁹⁰ Roberts, *Syndicalist Tradition*, 125.

⁹¹ Mussolini, “Liberty of Humanity,” 15, 11.

⁹² The idea of the nation taking precedence over conventional Marxist class struggle was expressed by Mussolini as early as December 1914. However, nationalism and national cohesion were still viewed as a historical preconditions for socialist revolution. Gregor, *Young Mussolini*, 192.

⁹³ Gregor, *Young Mussolini*, 192.

⁹⁴ Mussolini suffered from a prolonged illness at this time, the origins of which remain a subject of contention. Robert Gerwarth suggests that Mussolini was discharged due to contracting syphilis, a fact expunged from Fascist-era histories, which opted for the more heroic-sounding explanation of Mussolini’s being wounded by a mortar bomb. Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 160. Many historiographies have taken at face value the claim that Mussolini was wounded on the front line, i.e. O’Brian, *Mussolini in the First World War*, 81. In his biography of Mussolini, Richard Bosworth, however, claims that Mussolini’s syphilis has been neither definitively proven nor disproven. R. F. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 166.

⁹⁵ Benito Mussolini, *My Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1939), 42-43; Benito Mussolini, “To the Complete Vanquishing of the Huns,” December 1, 1917, in *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches November 1914- August 1923*, ed. Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), 26.

⁹⁶ Alcalde, “Transnational Origins,” 572.

October/November, ensuing military surrender, and subsequent withdrawal of Russian troops — combined with Italy's disastrous performance in October/November's Battle of Caporetto (which Mussolini tellingly blamed on socialist passivism on the home front) — hardened the hearts of the national syndicalists against socialism and communism.⁹⁷ A revolution born of military defeat was intolerable from a nationalist perspective, and the signing of the punitive Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between Russia and the Central Powers seemed to prove that Soviet Russia was inherently weak.⁹⁸

It was in this context that Mussolini began to refer to himself as a “simple soldier,” highlighting affinity with the common man and the national cause, whilst simultaneously distancing himself from Marxism, associated as it was now with the loathed Bolshevism.⁹⁹ In December, 1917, Mussolini delivered one of the most revealing speeches of the period, entitled *Trincerocrazia* (*Trenchocracy*). He declared that, in the trenches, “a new aristocracy is emerging,” and:

the disabled veterans today are the vanguard of the great army that will return tomorrow. They are the thousands who await millions of demobilized soldiers. The enormous mass — conscious of what it has achieved — is bound to cause shifts in the equilibrium of society... [sic]. The words republic, democracy, radicalism and liberalism no longer have any more meaning than the word socialism. They will have one tomorrow, but it will be the meaning given by the millions of soldiers returning from the front. This meaning could be quite different from the ones we are accustomed to. It could be an anti-Marxist socialism, for instance; a national socialism. The millions of workers who will return to the furrows of their fields after having lived in the furrows of the trenches will realize the synthesis of the antithesis: class and nation.¹⁰⁰

In addition to the obvious influences of Sorel and elite theory, Mussolini's bitterness about the October Revolution is evident. The language of war, violence, and heroism was replacing the socialistic terminology that had hitherto been a prominent feature of national syndicalism. As soldiers' and workers' councils were now seen as synonymous with the loathed Bolshevism, Mussolini and Olivetti increasingly spoke of “combatants” and “producers” in place of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.¹⁰¹ This denunciation of Marxism was also evident in the

⁹⁷ Benito Mussolini, “No Turning Back!” Rome, February 24, 1918, in *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches (November 1914-August 1923)*, trans. and ed. by Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: J. M. Dent, 1923), 32-33; Alcalde, “Transnational Origins,” 572; Procacci, “Interventionism to Fascism,” 160.

⁹⁸ Alcalde, “Transnational Origins,” 569-570.

⁹⁹ Mussolini, “No Turning Back!” 31.

¹⁰⁰ Benito Mussolini, “Trenchocracy,” *Il Popolo d'Italia*, (December 1917), Biblioteca Fascista, accessed May 4, 2024, <https://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2012/03/trenchocracy.html>.

¹⁰¹ Benito Mussolini, “Workmen's Rights After the War,” March 10, 1919, in *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches (November 1914-August 1923)*, trans. and ed. by Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino

group's public persona, as the movement was rebranded to reflect soldierly nationalism instead of Marxian socialism. In March, 1919, under Mussolini, the national syndicalists founded the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian Fasces of Combat), a successor movement to Mussolini's *Fasci d'Azione Rivoluzionaria* (Fasces of Revolutionary Action) (1914-1919), and a precursor to the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party). *Il Popolo d'Italia* (*The People of Italy*), a magazine founded by Mussolini in 1914, adopted the sub-title *Journal of Combatants and Producers* in August, 1918, to propagate the altered value set.¹⁰²

Prezzolini and Lanzillo were equally passionate in their appropriation of the war veteran in service of politics. In 1918, Lanzillo condemned the Russian Revolution and proclaimed that the coming revolution in Italy would *not* be socialist. Rather, it would be led by veterans, who were invigorated and transformed by the catharsis of the frontline, their opposition to the ruling classes proof of their "power and courage" and allegiance to the national cause.¹⁰³ Prezzolini was likewise important in establishing symbolic links between the "spirit" of the war and domestic politics, claiming that veterans were the key to national renewal.¹⁰⁴ It thus becomes appropriate to speak of emergent Fascism at the end of the Great War, at the time when the national syndicalists downplayed their Marxist roots, channelling their former passion for the cause into hatred for the Italian Socialists, Bolshevism, and Marxism. Mussolini's anticipation of "anti-Marxist socialism" indicates eagerness to tease out formerly recalcitrant elements in the national syndicalists' pre-war ideology without attempting to apply them to "true Marxism" or to justify them in Marxist terms.

The symbolic appropriation of the war veteran carried over certain elements of pre-war national syndicalism — such as appeal to mass politics and non-proletarian egalitarianism — while embodying a new emphasis on violence, militarism, heroism, masculinity, and nationalism. It celebrated the "simple soldier" of the Great War, not a decorated general or a medieval knight, but a nationalist, proletarian agent fortified by the brutal virtues of the trenches. The fascist war veteran both extended upon and supplanted the Marxist worker, first representing an idealised synthesis between nationalism and socialism and, in time, the elevation of nationalism above socialism. The nation was no longer the adjunct or complementary framework for socialist

(London: J. M. Dent, 1923), 65-66; Alcalde, "Transnational Origins," 573. See also: A. O. Olivetti, "Nazione e classe," *L'Italia nostra* (May 1, 1918).

¹⁰² Alcalde, "Transnational Origins," 573.

¹⁰³ Alcalde, "Transnational Origins," 573. See also: Agostino Lanzillo, *La disfatta del socialismo* (Florence: Libreria della Voce, 1918).

¹⁰⁴ Alcalde, "Transnational Origins," 573.

revolution that it had been in 1914. It was now, as Olivetti declared in May, 1918, “the permanent patrimony of history.”¹⁰⁵ These were the ideas and motifs that galvanised the newly formed *Fasces of Combat* in 1919 and accompanied the National Fascist Party to the installation of the first fascist government in 1922.

The centrality of war and violence to fascist ideology, epitomised in the construct of the fascist war veteran, is often cited as proof of fascism’s “anti-intellectualism.” However, as should now be apparent, Fascism’s exultation of war was not indicative of mindless “violence without object” or “violence for its own sake,” but of an intellectual re-conceptualisation of the purpose of violence and warfare in historical processes.¹⁰⁶ As Fascism progressively divested itself of its Marxist heritage, notions of violence in the service of socialism morphed into preoccupations with the concept of *innovative* violence, “rebirth” or “national renewal”; or what has been termed retrospectively “violence as creative destruction,” or “paligenetic ultranationalism.”¹⁰⁷ Such concepts are predicated on the understanding that fascism had shed belief in existing metanarratives — such as religion and historical materialism — as the determinants of historical progress, in favour of violent human intervention to address perceived moral and societal decay.¹⁰⁸ War and violence, embodied in the construct of the fascist war veteran, thus became symbolic of a new, distinctly fascist, idealist dialectical synthesis.

Corporatism as an Ideological Export Article

As it matured, the Italian Fascist regime developed organisational qualities which acted as export articles, impacting German imaginations to as great an extent as the already-established ideal of the fascist war veteran. The most significant of these was the notion of a corporatist state: essentially a modernised guild system in which different organisational bodies were directly represented in the state. At a simplified, pragmatic level, Fascist corporatism may be divided into certain developmental phases. Initial steps were associated with the 1926 Syndicalist Law and the 1927 *Carta del Lavoro* (*Labour Charter*), primarily formulated by jurist Alfredo Rocco (1875-1935).¹⁰⁹ The purpose of these reforms was formally to eliminate

¹⁰⁵ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 94.

¹⁰⁶ Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals*, 266-267.

¹⁰⁷ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Gagliardi, *Age of Corporatism*, n.d., <http://doi10.4324/9781032713267-1>.

independent trade unions in favour of employers and workers “syndicates” in each sector of the economy, which represented the interest groups of both parties (employers and workers) while exercising political allegiance solely to the Fascist state. The *Carta del Lavoro* also contained explicit recognition of, and commitment to the capitalist mode of production, stating that: “private initiative, in the field of production [is] the most efficient and useful instrument of the nation.”¹¹⁰

The second phase, and the phase at which many scholars consider “proper” corporatism to have come into being, was associated with legislation introduced by the Fascist Grand Council in February, 1934. This amalgamated the formerly separate workers’ and employers’ syndicates within each corporation into single corporate entities. This was done under the auspices of eliminating class struggle, but in reality served to encourage further cartelisation of the corporations and to establish monopoly capitalism. This coincided with renewed efforts to nationalise and centralise the economy. The heads of each corporate estate were nominated by the Grand Council and were answerable directly to Mussolini. This, in effect, merged the interests of capital with those of the nation, and rendered the corporate bodies central to the functioning of the Fascist state.¹¹¹

Corporatism accounted for much of the acclaim that Fascist Italy received in the interwar period, particularly as the Great Depression soured confidence in free market capitalism and the liberal worldview. Italian corporatism needs to be understood as a composite of elements in service of the realisation of a theory; indeed, many of its most important theoretical components failed to manifest at all.¹¹² This makes it all the more important to approach corporatism in the context of ideas. Its international currency and appeal were inspired as much by *potential* as by reality, and some of the most enthusiastic endorsements of Italian corporatism were made before the corporate system had actually been established.¹¹³ The men comprising the Spann circle, for example, supported Italian Fascism not because they believed in Italian corporatism as it then existed, but because they anticipated its evolving into something that aligned with their own vision of a corporate state. Similarly, Waldemar Pabst

¹¹⁰ “Labour Charter of Fascist Italy,” 1927, Internet Archive, accessed February 13, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/FascistLaborCharter>.

¹¹¹ Alberto Aquarone, “Italy: The Crisis and Corporate Economy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 4, (October 1969): 49-50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200946900400403>.

¹¹² Gagliardi, *Age of Corporatism*, n.d., <http://doi10.4324/9781032713267-1>.

¹¹³ Irene Stolzi, “Idealism and the Fascist Corporative State,” in *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought*, ed. Nicholas Boyle, Liz Disley and John Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 264.

and his colleagues made Italian-style corporatism the central “draw card” of the GSF, despite the fact that corporate bodies had not been realised fully within Italy in the years of the GSF’s peak activity (1931-1933). The Italian project of “building corporatism,” replete as it was with unrealised possibilities, thus offered a refracting mirror through which intellectuals of various persuasions projected visions for a viable third way.

Despite embracing monopoly state capitalism, corporatism in the Italian context should not be detached conceptually from its syndicalist roots. The Fascists’ own use of the term “syndicates” was a holdover from the national syndicalist period, and remained current throughout the Fascist era, first being used to describe trade unionism, then elements within corporate bodies (i.e. workers’ and employers’ syndicates), and occasionally corporate bodies themselves. Notions of syndicates representing the virtues of action and vitality were already present before the First World War and bridged the span between national syndicalism and Fascism, even after Fascism shed all commitment to eliminating capitalism.¹¹⁴ Many of the ideological elements underpinning national syndicalism likewise persisted into the corporate period, including the elite theory of Pareto, now used to argue for the virility of the corporate system; the Sorelian belief in the power of direct representation via trade unionism, now applied to the direct relationship between the corporate bodies and the Fascist state; and, of course, the turn towards nationalism, with the nation now viewed as the single, most important entity in whose service all elements of the corporate system were engaged.

Additional theoretical developments can be seen in the continuing adaptation of dialectical idealism, best exemplified in the philosophy of Giovanni Gentile. One of the most important ideologues of Italian Fascism, Gentile was appointed Minister for Education in 1922 and co-authored and formalised the 1932 *Doctrine of Fascism* with Mussolini, one of the best-known of his voluminous publications.¹¹⁵ Gentile was, first and foremost, a neo-Hegelian philosopher, whose introduction to the German idealists occurred in tandem with his interest in a bevy of nineteenth century Catholic and idealist philosophers, including Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797-1855); liberal statesman Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), who was a prominent contemporary critic of Rosmini-Serbati’s conservatism; and fellow neo-Hegelians Bertrando

¹¹⁴ Benito Mussolini, “Either War or the End of Italy’s Name as a Great Power,” January 25, 1915, in *Mussolini as Revealed in his Political Speeches November 1914- August 1923*, trans. and ed. Barone Bernardo Quaranta di San Severino (London: J. M. Dent 1923), 23-24.

¹¹⁵ Benito Mussolini, *The Doctrine of Fascism*, 1932, Internet Archive, accessed July 16, 2024, https://archive.org/details/isbn_2901478370917.

Spaventa (1817-1883) and Donato Jaja (1839-1914).¹¹⁶ Although Gentile was a relative latecomer to Fascism, not having been active during its movement stage, his thought demonstrates many of the same intellectual preoccupations as those of the national syndicalists.

Gentile dedicated many texts to the relationship between Marx's materialism and idealism, but — unlike the national syndicalists, whose roots were in Marxism — tackled the problem from an idealist perspective. For instance, he used examples from Marx's early writings to argue that dialectical materialism was an outgrowth of dialectical idealism, and thus ultimately subject to idealist logic.¹¹⁷ The "sensuous" experience of objects (i.e. the externalisation of the dialectical impulse) simply revealed the creative capacity of man in a process of self-actualisation.¹¹⁸ Further, the experience of the world could not be limited to an individual's subjective, empirical experience, nor to the individual's relationship with external objects. It produced a synthesis not just of thought (the typical assertion of idealism), but of individual consciousness with the spirit of mankind.¹¹⁹ Gentile organised his views on Fascism around the goal of this metaphysical "totality," a reconciliation of antagonistic agents into a dynamic, unified system of "living thought," whose elements were constantly in motion to ensure continued adherence to the ideal.¹²⁰ Fascism, he claimed, provided the "perfect system" to actualise this quasi-mystic, unifying spirituality.¹²¹

Gentile's spiritual idealism found resonance with other developing trends in fascist thought. One of its most significant implications resolved into the belief that real world experiences, such as politics, could be harmonised with the individual will, and the individual will, in turn, harmonised with the collective will. For example, Gentile argued that achieving totalitarianism

¹¹⁶ Gentile knew Jaja personally during his time as a university student in Pisa, and acquired through him a lifelong interest in Hegelian philosophy, which was to form the basis of his own philosophy of Fascism. M. E. Moss, *Mussolini's Fascist Philosopher: Giovanni Gentile Reconsidered* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 6.

¹¹⁷ A. James Gregor, "Giovanni Gentile and the Philosophy of the Young Karl Marx," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24, no. 2 (April/June 1963): 215.

¹¹⁸ Gregor, "Young Karl Marx," 217.

¹¹⁹ Giovanni Gentile, "Die Wirklichkeit des Geistigen," in *Ausgewählte Werke von Giovanni Gentile in deutscher Übersetzung, Band 1: Allgemeine Lehre vom menschlichen Geist als einem reinen Denktat*, ed. Michael Walter Hebeisen (Biel: Schweizerischer Wissenschafts- und Universitätsverlag, 2015), 33-34.

¹²⁰ Giovanni Gentile, "The Philosophic Basis of Fascism," *Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 2 (January 1928), 301.

¹²¹ A good example of the "realisation" of Gentile's spiritual idealism can be seen in his 1922 work *The Reform of Education*, published following his appointment in that year as Minister for Education under Mussolini. Giovanni Gentile, *The Reform of Education*, trans. Dino Bigongiari (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), Project Gutenberg, accessed July 21, 2024, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36762/36762-h/36762-h.htm>; Andrew Vincent, "Gentile, Education and Mind," in *Thought Thinking: The Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile*, ed. James Wakefield and Bruce Haddock (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2015), 120-121. For a discussion of idealism and mysticism, see Giovanni Gentile, "Idealismus oder Mystik?" in *Ausgewählte Werke von Giovanni Gentile in deutscher Übersetzung, Band 1: Allgemeine Lehre vom menschlichen Geist als einem reinen Denktat*, ed. Michael Walter Hebeisen (Biel: Schweizerischer Wissenschafts- und Universitätsverlag, 2015), 295-296.

was not a question of imposing dictatorial will, but of constructing a universalist state that acted as the repository of all social, political — and, indeed, individual — forces.¹²² Following Hegel, Gentile presented the ideal state as the dialectical reconciliation of the individual with the universal and, ergo, the actualisation of “true” individuality through the conquering of selfish particularities.¹²³ Fascist intellectualism thus possessed a sense of urgency, perceiving itself to be at the intersection of thought and action. It was precisely here, at this critical juncture, that thought could be — and needed to be — most influential. This rendered the political arena particularly important, with Gentile acknowledging that, although Fascism was a philosophy, its “centre of gravity” was by necessity in politics.¹²⁴ This not only led to many theoretical re-evaluations in the intellectual and judicial circles connected to the Fascist state, but to an increase in speculation about the future and the optimal functioning of society.¹²⁵

Gentile summarised this in the 1925 *Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals*, stating that the Fascist nation was “a daunting effort to idealize life and express one’s beliefs through actions and words that are, themselves, actions.”¹²⁶ Philosophical and intellectual elements were therefore profoundly entwined with the Italian regime’s attempts to engineer corporatism. In a 1928 article aimed at foreign audiences, Gentile stated:

the Corporation of Syndicates are a device through which the Fascist state goes looking for the individual in order to create itself through the individual’s will. But the individual it seeks is not the abstract political individual whom the old liberalism took for granted. He is the only individual who can ever be found, the individual who exists as a specialized productive force, and who, by the fact of his specialization, is brought to unite with other individuals of his same category and comes to belong with them to the one great economic unit which is none other than the nation.¹²⁷

For Gentile, corporatism was central to the realisation of a system based upon neo-Hegelian dialectical idealism. It offered a vehicle whereby the individual and the state could be

¹²² Gentile, “Philosophic Basis,” 299-302.

¹²³ Stolzi, “Idealism,” 265.

¹²⁴ Gentile, “Philosophic Basis,” 301.

¹²⁵ Stolzi, “Idealism,” 263.

¹²⁶ Giovanni Gentile, “Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals,” 1925, in *A Primer of Italian Fascism*, trans. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Olivia E. Sears, and Maria G. Stampino, ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 301-303.

¹²⁷ Gentile, “Philosophic Basis,” 303. See also the discussion in Moss, *Giovanni Gentile Reconsidered*, 63-65.

reconciled and harmonised into a single dynamic entity, allowing for the expression of the very spirit of mankind.¹²⁸

The intimate links between corporatism and German idealism made by Gentile and his followers undoubtedly played a role in bolstering corporatism's appeal, as they catered to existing biases in like-minded circles abroad. German-speaking ultranationalist scholars seized upon the use of German idealism in Italian Fascism as proof that Fascism represented a "Germanic" (and culturally superior) model of political and theoretical organisation. For instance, Ernst Wilhelm Eschmann of the GSF praised Mussolini's efforts towards political centralisation as offering the potential to dialectically realise the Hegelian "idea" of the state.¹²⁹ Karl Strünckmann, a conservative intellectual writing for the National Bolshevik journal *Widerstand* in 1929, argued that Italy recalled "Prussian" values, with Prussia viewed as the most authentic repository of Germanness.¹³⁰ Stahlhelm intellectuals H. Hildebrandt, Max von Binzer and Friedrich Everling argued that Italian corporatism derived not only from German intellectual traditions (Hildebrandt) but also borrowed from German political praxis during the Bismarckian era.¹³¹ Italian corporatism thus fulfilled a certain confirmation bias, while nevertheless encouraging change and adaptation. Such audiences saw it as a manifestation of a more desirable (and ironically more "German") model, and were therefore highly receptive to the didactics of Italian Fascism itself.

Italian Fascism formed a central reference point for other ultranationalist movements precisely because it seemed successfully to address universal grievances precipitated by global events, particularly the First World War and the Great Depression. It offered a successful model (real or perceived) for third-way politics, appealing to national socialist movements across the continent. This appeal was also due to the fact that the Italian syndicalists' transition to ultranationalist politics merely represented one of the most dramatic examples of a European

¹²⁸ For details of Gentile's philosophy, see A. James Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹²⁹ Ernst Wilhelm Eschmann, *Der faschistische Staat in Italien* (Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt, 1930), 37.

¹³⁰ Karl Strünckmann, "Die Aufgabe des preußischen Rhythmus im deutschen Geschehen," *Widerstand* 2 (1929): 38.

¹³¹ Max von Binzer, "Die Führerauslese im Faschismus," *Friedrich Manns pädagogisches Magazin* 1249 (1929): 28; Friedrich Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat* (Berlin, 1930), 6, in R 72/309, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; H. Hildebrandt, "Soziale Arbeit," in *Der Stahlhelm: Erinnerungen und Bilder aus den Jahren 1918-1932*, ed. Franz Seldte (Berlin: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1932), 135-139; Sascha Bohn, *Die Idee vom deutschen Ständestaat: Ständische, Berufsständische und Korporative Konzepte zwischen 1918 und 1933* (Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag, 2011), 128; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 140-147.

phenomenon.¹³² In France, the journalist and academic Gustave Hervé (1871-1944) — an affirmed socialist, atheist, anti-militarist, and self-proclaimed anti-patriot in the years before the war — transformed seemingly overnight into an avowed national socialist, viewing capitalism as necessary, religion as important, and war as desirable.¹³³ Other notable figures to have made similar transitions included De Man, as well as French politicians Hubert Lagardelle (1874-1958), Jacques Doriot (1898-1945), and Marcel Déat (1894-1955), all of whom were eventually to collaborate with the Nazis in the Vichy regime.¹³⁴ Future leader of the British Union of Fascists, Sir Oswald Mosley (1896-1980), was equally preoccupied with socialist ideals in his youth, only to incorporate diverse elements of conservatism, elite theory, post-war Keynesian economics and, naturally, Fascism after the war.¹³⁵ While national socialist movements existed across the continent, Fascism offered an ideological “sharpening” of national socialist sentiment into a political ideology with defined parameters. It modelled ideas that were expressed nebulously elsewhere; these ideas then acquired associative elements that perpetuated Fascist ideology, rendering it appropriate to speak of the emergence of a “generic fascism.”

This chapter has sought to scaffold the coming discussions in a number of ways. Firstly, the exploration of the intellectual preconditions of fascism furnishes the following chapters with broader ideological context, demonstrating that the focus groups, like Italian Fascism, formed part of a longer history of mass democratisation and collective politics, characterised by common socio-political and economic reference points. Secondly, the advent of the fascist war veteran can be used as a way to “pinpoint” the emergence of fascism as a novel political ideology. It also indicates the centrality of the Great War as an ideological feature, whose mythologisation and appropriation furnished fascism with its uniqueness. The fascist war veteran overlapped with, and often appropriated broader-based soldierly nationalism, and therefore provides a motif by which to trace the emergence, and subsequently the diffusion and replication of fascism within ultranationalist and/or national socialist circles. Thirdly, the

¹³² For a broader study on the impact that the experience of war had upon combatants' belief in socialism, see Dan S. White, *Lost Comrades: Socialists of the Front Generation, 1918-1945* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

¹³³ The speech in its entirety outlines Herve's internationalist-socialist views. Gustave Hervé, “Anti-Patriotism,” 1906, Marxists.org, accessed July 21, 2024, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/herve/1905/anti-patriotism.htm>; Michael B. Loughlin, “Gustave Hervé's Transition from Socialism to National Socialism: Another Example of French Fascism?” *Journal of Contemporary History* 36, no. 1 (January 2001): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200940103600101>.

¹³⁴ Loughlin, “Gustave Hervé,” 7.

¹³⁵ Oswald Mosley, “The Philosophy of Fascism,” March 22, 1933, in *Fascist Voices: Essays from the 'Fascist Quarterly', 1936-1940, Volume One* (London: Sanctuary Press Limited, 2019), 5-6.

growth of corporatism in the Italian context provided a similarly potent vehicle for the functional export of Fascist ideas. Corporatism appealed to the imaginative capacity of sympathetic individuals, while simultaneously promoting Italian Fascism. By virtue of shared values, foreign ultranationalist movements were drawn into the orbit of Italian Fascism, a dynamic, evolving system of thought.

Chapter Two: *Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus: Corporatism as a Vehicle for the Promotion of Fascism in Germany*

Existing for just two years between December, 1931, and December, 1933, the Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus (GSF) was not an attention-grabbing organisation. It boasted no parliamentary presence, did not engage in violent street politics, and published no materials under its own name. Yet the GSF also represents the most explicit endeavour on the part of German nationalists to import Italian Fascism. In a letter from the GSF's Berlin headquarters in January, 1932, the GSF stated that its task was to "consider the ideas and practical experience of Italian Fascism in order to assess the possibility of transferring the basic principles of that system."¹ These "basic principles" referred, above all, to corporatism. The GSF's formation can thus be understood in the context of the general uptick of interest in corporatism during the early 1930s. The perceived good health of the Italian economy resulted in a corresponding increase in interest in Fascism: the political system overseeing the apparently successful implementation of third-way economics.² The GSF was also notable in that it contained a remarkable concentration of business leaders, meaning that its admiration for Italian Fascism was largely contingent on Italy's self-stated embracing of the capitalist system from the mid-1920s.

Yet while the notion of pro-capitalist corporatism found almost universal acclaim within the GSF, members differed in their views on how the corporate system could best serve national and business interests. For instance, the notion of the fascist war veteran as a vanguard for the corporatist state appealed to certain members with military backgrounds, particularly those holding dual membership in the Stahlhelm; outliers like August Winnig were unusually keen to point to Fascism's syndicalist roots; while for many business leaders, the cartelisation of the Italian economy into corporate entities was most appealing. Still others contended that corporatism should be used to foster healthy competition in the free market. To some extent, these debates reflected the relative lack of consensus about, and incomplete nature of corporate reform within Italy itself. But they also reflected competing interests and ideological value sets within the GSF, with Italian Fascism acting as a malleable example, subject to different interpreters' intellectual backgrounds and personal motivations. Despite these competing

¹ "Brief nach Oberleutnant a. D. von Einem," January 15, 1932, in N 324/32, Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde.

² Beate Scholz, "Italienischer Faschismus als 'Export'-Artikel," 104.

interpretations, Italian corporatism proved sufficiently attractive to furnish the GSF with internal cohesion.

The GSF has garnered little attention from scholars exploring nationalist politics in the Weimar Republic, and still less from scholars who view fascism solely as a philosophy of action. When mentioned at all, it is usually relegated to a footnote in the histories of convoluted radical nationalist politics in the late Weimar Republic, one of countless “right-wing,” “conservative,” or “reactionary” micro groups whose sole significance lay in prepping the stage, socially and politically, for the Nazi takeover.³ The only scholarly works to analyse the GSF specifically are Manfred Wichmann’s 2013 monograph and a related research article, and a 1968 article by Walter Schmidtke, appearing in a broader collection of works on “bourgeois” parties in Germany between 1830 and 1945.⁴ The latter, viewing the GSF in class-based terms, argues that it was motivated by finance capital in the interests of establishing a fascist dictatorship (seen as closely related concepts) and had “served its purpose” by 1933.⁵ Other significant works to discuss the GSF take the form of biographies of its founder and leader, Waldemar Pabst (1880-1970), the most notable of which is Klaus Gietinger’s 2009 study.⁶ Wichmann also focuses primarily on Pabst, but his work stands out in that it explores various other thinkers within the GSF and emphasises the GSF as a significant period of Pabst’s career — an extension of Pabst’s longer-term dream of constructing an ultranationalist “White International” capable of combatting international Marxism.⁷ Indeed, by the time the GSF was established, Pabst had cultivated a network of contacts spanning over South Tyrol, Austria, and

³ Some important studies to mention the GSF include Rüdiger Hachtmann, “Vernetzung um jeden Preis: Zum politischen Alltagshandeln der Generalverwaltung im ‘Dritten Reich,’” in *Gemeinschaftsforschung, Bevollmächtigte und der Wissenstransfer: Die Rolle der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft im System kriegsrelevanter Forschung des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Helmut Maier (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2007), 102-103; and Hoepke, *Deutsche Rechte und italienischer Faschismus*, 303.

⁴ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*; Manfred Wichmann, “Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus Ein antidemokratisches Netzwerk zwischen Rechtskonservatismus und Nationalsozialismus.” *Bulletin für Faschismus und Weltkriegsforschung* 31/32 (2008), <https://www.hsozkult.de/journal/id/z6ann-103047>; Walter Schmidtke, “Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus (GSF) 1931-1933,” in *Die Bürgerlichen Parteien in Deutschland, Band II*, ed. Dieter Fricke (Leipzig: Veb Bibliographisches Institut, 1970), 174-176.

⁵ Schmidtke, “GSF,” 176. The GSF also contained a high concentration of nobles, including former officers and landowning elites. See Stephan Malinowski, *Nazis and Nobles: The History of a Misalliance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 204

⁶ Klaus Gietinger, *Der Konterrevolutionär: Waldemar Pabst, eine deutsche Karriere* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 2009). See also Rüdiger Konrad, *Waldemar Pabst, 1880-1970: Noskes “Bluthund” oder Patriot?* (Beltheim: Bublies Verlag, 2012). Konrad, as Gietinger noted in an online review, adopted a sympathetic interpretation of Pabst, perhaps due to sharing a familial connection with the ultranationalist author and Kapp Putsch participant Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz. See Klaus Gietinger, “Sammelrez: Neuere Forschungen zum Konterrevolutionär Waldemar Pabst,” *HSozKult*, June 2014, <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=42183>.

⁷ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*; Robert Gerwarth, “Fighting the Red Beast: Counter-Revolutionary Violence in the Defeated States of Central Europe,” in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65-66.

Italy.⁸ Whilst serving as leader of the Tyrolean Heimwehr in the late 1920s, Pabst developed a keen interest in Italian Fascism, viewing it as the most viable model for his prospective White International, and an organisational blueprint for the Germanic lands.

In addition to Pabst, Wichmann identifies seven authors as being of particular significance to the GSF's ethos: the lawyer and publicist Hans Reupke (1892-1942), sociologist Ernst Wilhelm Eschmann (1904-1987), Prussian officer and publicist Max von Binzer (1866-1942), philosopher Georg Mehlis (1878-1942), sociologist Gerhard Albrecht (1889-1971), agrarian functionary Klaus von Eickstedt (1891-1980), and jurist and politician Friedrich Everling (1891-1958). Additional prominent members and supporters included Carl Eduard, the Duke of Sachsen-Coburg and Gotha (1884-1954); Crown Prince Wilhelm of Prussia (1882-1951), eldest son of the former Kaiser; Nazi functionaries Hermann Göring (1893-1946), Hans Lammers (1879-1962), and Walther Funk (1890-1960); Stahlhelm second Bundesführer Theodor Duesterberg (1875-1950); Brandenburg Stahlhelm leader Elhard von Morozowicz (1893-1934); the industrialist Friedrich Minoux (1877-1945); Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht (1877-1970); former SPD and USPD politician August Winnig (1878-1956); and Austrian philosopher Othmar Spann (1875-1950).⁹ Though Spann himself was not in the GSF, his circle very much overlapped with Pabst's through their common involvement with the Austrian Heimwehr in the late 1920s, a time during which Pabst had been a Heimwehr leader, and the Heimwehr had adopted Spann's corporate universalist philosophy. Not only was Spann's philosophy already a reference point for many GSF members, but under Pabst's direction, the GSF extended on the collaborative efforts between the Spann circle and the Heimwehr, promoting Spann's articles and the Spann circle's journal, *Ständisches Leben*, to its members.¹⁰

⁸ Many German ultranationalists, sympathetic to the majority German-speaking South Tyrolian population, had every reason to scorn Fascist Italy's repressive policies. Having annexed the region in 1919 under the provisions of the Treaty of London, the Fascist government subsequently embarked, from 1923, on a program of Italianisation, which included publicly banning the German language. This was duly met with underground resistance from the German-speaking population, including in the form of the group *Völkischer Kampfring Südtirols*, founded by Nazi Party member Peter Hofer. It is curious that Pabst's competing sympathies did not produce more tension. Like many of the men examined in the present thesis, Pabst seems to have largely viewed the repression of ethnic Germans as an unfortunate blight unrelated to the core values of Italian Fascism. Rolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 21-23. See also Hans Karl Peterlini, *The South Tyrol Way: From Trouble Case to Autonomy Model – History and Development of a European Minority Region* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2023).

⁹ See "Mitgliederverzeichnis der Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus," in N 247/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1-4.

¹⁰ Pabst, February 9, 1933, R 72/280.

In a more practical sense, the GSF was also an outgrowth of the efforts to unify against parliamentary democracy that distinguished political praxis in ultranationalist circles in the Weimar Republic between 1929 and 1932. These efforts initially manifested in better-known movements like the Volksbegehren gegen den Young Plan (People's Referendum against the Young Plan) in 1929 and the Harzburg Front, formed in 1931.¹¹ The GSF drew the majority of its members from the Harzburg reservoir. As such, the Stahlhelm, the NSDAP, and the Deutschnationale Volkspartei (DNVP) were represented strongly in the GSF, as were various industrialists and aristocrats hostile to the republic.¹² The GSF also attracted atypical social democrats, like Winnig, and members of the liberal-conservative Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP), adding additional dimensions to its political hybridisation.¹³ While attempts at ultranationalist collaboration in the late Weimar Republic, like the Harzburg Front, might have failed politically, the GSF reveals that they remained alive intellectually, merging with, and channelling interest in Italian Fascism into an initiative whose ambition to import Fascism to Germany was unprecedented.

Despite its members' diverging opinions on the "correct" formulation of corporatism, the GSF was relatively unified in its methodology and public image. It deviated in this respect from the politics of negation that were so common in Depression-era Germany. Instead of defining itself "negatively" through opposition to parliamentary democracy, as the Harzburg Front had, the GSF advocated "positively" for an alternative political-organisational model with a real-world reference point in the form of Fascism. It therefore went further than comparable groups in its promotion of the idea — the ingredients of which had hitherto existed only in piecemeal fashion in sections of the Stahlhelm and in the minds of certain nationalist thinkers — that Germanic nationalism could best be expressed by adopting a foreign model (or, at least, key components of one). It made a decided effort to move away from vulgar "street politics," promoting itself

¹¹ Taking its name from the American economist Owen Young, the Young Plan was a 1929 re-negotiation of Germany's reparation repayments scheme, replacing the Dawes Plan of 1924, and coming into effect in 1930. After growing international concern that Germany would become over-indebted under the Dawes Plan, the Young Plan introduced measures that eased pressure on the German economy somewhat, including abolishing the Reparations Commission and foreign control over the Reichsbank. Despite the overall relaxation of Germany's reparation commitments, the Young Plan was opposed staunchly in German ultranationalist circles. Popular opposition to the plan — seen as further "admitting" Germany's war guilt — resulted in the Young Plan referendum. The referendum took place on December 22, 1929, after the Reichstag voted against the Freedom Act, which was brought before it by Alfred Hugenberg and his allies, and which demanded that the entire reparations clause be abolished. The referendum failed and was ruled to be unconstitutional; nevertheless, it ushered in a period of unprecedented ultranationalist collaboration: the Harzburg Front. Jones, *Hitler versus Hindenburg*, 87, 117.

¹² Gietinger, "Neuere Forschungen."

¹³ "Mitgliederverzeichnis der Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus," N 247/280.

as an intellectually oriented study society. It provided lists of reading materials and encouraged members to attend study sessions, the most notable of which were regular lecture evenings at the Hotel Kaiserhof in Berlin.¹⁴ This chapter outlines the GSF's origins as part of Pabst's longer-term goal of building a White International, before examining how Italian corporatism impacted this project — namely by providing apparent justification for highly capitalistic readings of third-way politics. The GSF acts as an explicit indicator of intellectually orientated political activity within the fascist sphere and, as such, is a (as yet largely untapped) font of information for scholars investigating subtle processes of intellectual transfer.

Waldemar Pabst and the Vision of "International Nationalism"

Captain Waldemar Pabst was one of the many uniformed nationalists to descend on the city of Harzburg on 11 October, 1931, for the famous nationalist rally against Weimar democracy. When Pabst's name appears in historical literature, it is most often in connection to the counter-revolutionary forces that fought alongside the new republican government during the German Revolution of 1918-1919.¹⁵ As Pabst was the unequivocal driving-force behind the GSF, it is worth dwelling briefly on his formative experiences and personal and political ambitions. Born on Christmas Eve 1880 in Charlottenburg, Berlin, Pabst was the son of a museum curator. A man of aristocratic pretensions, he emphasised in his memoirs his familial descent from Junker landholders and touted the role of noble investment in his father's museums.¹⁶ After completing Volksschule, Pabst and his younger brother joined the Prussian Kadettenkorps, partly to escape an unpleasant home environment. Pabst remained there until 1906 and would later claim that the experience instilled in him a lifelong appreciation for discipline and an "enormously sharp military sense of duty."¹⁷ During this time, Pabst also established what was to be a lifelong friendship — spanning a remarkable 77 years — with future German Chancellor Franz von Papen (1879-1969).¹⁸ After serving in a Silesian garrison regiment posted in the Polish town

¹⁴ Waldemar Pabst, November 18, 1932, R 72/280; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 94.

¹⁵ Sebastian Haffner, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918-1919* (Chicago: Banner Press, 1986), 107.

¹⁶ Waldemar Pabst, "Ausführlicher Lebensbericht," in *Der gesammelten Lebenserinnerungen Major Waldemar Pabst, Band 1*, in N 620/v. 1, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁷ Pabst, "Ausführlicher Lebensbericht," 2-4.

¹⁸ Franziska Pabst, "Fortsetzung des Lebensbildes von Waldemar Pabst," 1972, in *Die gesammelten Lebenserinnerungen Major Waldemar Pabsts, Band 1*, N 620/v. 1, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 8.

of Neisse, Pabst became a lieutenant in 1907 and, shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, rose to the rank of captain (Hauptmann).¹⁹

He spent the majority of his wartime service in Belgium.²⁰ In 1918, the division in which he served, the Garde-Kavallerie-Schützen-Division (GKSD), then under the command of General Heinrich von Hoffmann (1863-1921), transformed from a cavalry division into front-line infantry.²¹ By the time of the Western Armistice, Hoffmann was in poor health, and command of the GKSD effectively fell to Pabst, who had already been working as the division's chief of staff.²² Appalled by the communist-sponsored workers' and soldiers' councils that greeted the demobilised troops upon their return to Germany, Pabst threw himself into counterrevolutionary activism, soon becoming a leading figure in the voluntary paramilitary, the Freikorps.²³ Under Pabst's leadership, the GKSD transformed into one of the most infamous Freikorps units, and Pabst himself remains a particularly notorious figure for orchestrating the brutal murders of the Spartakusbund leaders Karl Liebknecht (1871-1919) and Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) in January, 1919.²⁴

A side effect of a process of demobilisation on a hitherto unseen scale, the Freikorps was organised in a manner recalling that of the army, with officers like Pabst often commanding men from their former companies.²⁵ The first president of the new republic, Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925) of the SPD, made use of emergency legislation permitting rule by decree, whereby

¹⁹ Waldemar Pabst, "Ausführlicher Lebensbericht," 1; Franziska Pabst, "Fortsetzung des Lebensbildes," 8; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 28.

²⁰ Waldemar Pabst, "Niederschrift der Erinnerungen von Major Waldemar Pabst, und seine Nachkriegserlebnisse als I a und Stabschef der Garde-Kav.- (Schü.) Division," in *Die gesammelten Lebenserinnerungen Major Waldemar Pabsts, Band 2: Im Kampf gegen die Novemberrevolution 1918*, N 620/v. 2, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2-3.

²¹ Donald S. Stephenson, "Frontschweine and Revolution: The Front-line Soldiers in the German Revolution of 1918" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2007), 276.

²² Stephenson, "Frontschweine and Revolution," 276.

²³ See General Lüttwitz's account of Pabst's role: "Auszüge aus dem Buch des Walther Freiherrn v. Lüttwitz," in *Die gesammelten Lebenserinnerungen Major Waldemar Pabsts, Band 2: Im Kampf gegen die Novemberrevolution 1918*, N 620/v. 2, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2; Pabst, "Niederschrift," 5-6. For discussion of Pabst's activities during the broader context of the German Revolution, see Robert Gerwarth, *November 1918: The German Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²⁴ For a summary of Pabst's disciplinary hearing following the murders, see "Aktenkundige Vorgänge der Tage 14.-16. 1, 1919," in *Die gesammelten Lebenserinnerungen Major Waldemar Pabsts, Band 2: Im Kampf gegen die Novemberrevolution 1918*, N 620/v. 2, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 205; Stephenson, "Frontschweine and Revolution," 276.

²⁵ "Der Freiwilligendank eine Einrichtung zur Fürsorge für die Angehörigen der Freiwilligenverbände," April 1919, in *Technische Abteilung der Reichswehr, Teno, Freiwilligencorps*, in NY 4035/2, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; David Ellis, "Zeitfreiwillige und Freikorpskämpfer: Paramilitaries of Early Weimar Germany" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2019), 22. For a comprehensive recent history of the Freikorps, see also Jan-Philipp Pomplun, *Deutsche Freikorps: Sozialgeschichte und Kontinuitäten (para)militärischer Gewalt zwischen Weltkrieg, Revolution und Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023).

he sanctioned Freikorps violence officially.²⁶ However, when Ebert and Defence Minister Gustav Noske (1868-1946) began the process of disbandment and curtailing of the regular army in accordance with the Versailles Peace Treaty — due to come into full effect on 10 January, 1920 — Pabst joined the Nationale Vereinigung (National Association) as a founding member in October, 1919.²⁷ With its nucleus of officers, including Wolfgang Kapp (1858-1922), Erich Ludendorff (1865-1937), Max Bauer (1869-1929), and Walther von Lüttwitz (1859-1942), the Nationale Vereinigung was the most significant organisational force behind the Kapp/Lüttwitz Putsch.²⁸ Between 13 and 17 March, 1920, counterrevolutionary forces attempted to overthrow the Weimar system, seizing control of Berlin, and installing Kapp as the new chancellor. Inviting all “nationally-minded organisations” to participate, the Nationale Vereinigung functioned as a precedent for future attempts at nationalist collaboration and undoubtedly contributed to Pabst’s emergent interest in building ultranationalist unity. Despite the fact that Kapp’s illegitimate government fell within a few short days, Pabst’s belief in a non-sectarian approach to defeating democracy remained undampened. The connections that Pabst made during these formative years laid the groundwork for the subsequent establishment of the GSF.

Many counterrevolutionary activists who had fallen afoul of German republicanism found a haven in the successor-states of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire.²⁹ German counterrevolutionaries to have crossed borders to lie low included such figures as Franz von Stephani (1876-1939) and Heinrich Tillessen (1894-1984), who had assassinated former minister of finance Matthias Erzberger (1875-1921) in 1921.³⁰ They were given asylum in Admiral Miklós Horthy’s Hungary after the collapse of the short-lived communist regime of Béla Kun. Vienna also played host to a number of counterrevolutionaries, including Hungarian nationalists Tibor Eckhardt and future Hungarian prime minister Gyula Gömbös, a close associate of the long-reigning conservative Horthy; and, from Germany, Organisation Consul

²⁶ Reflecting on this in his later memoirs, Pabst described Ebert as an “upright” man driven by love for the Fatherland. “In der Strafsache,” January 5, 1924, Berlin, in NY 4035/3, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 3; Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 75, 80; Mark Jones, *Founding Weimar: Violence and the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 104-106.

²⁷ “Vorbemerkung,” n.d., in *Kapp Putsch*, NY 4035/3, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2-3; Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2005), 37; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 34.

²⁸ “Vorbemerkung,” NY 4035/3, 4-5; Kolb, *Weimar Republic*, 38.

²⁹ Robert Gerwarth and John Horne, “Vectors of Violence: Paramilitarism in Europe after the Great War, 1917-1923,” *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 3 (September 2011): 499, <https://doi.org/10.1086/660364>.

³⁰ Gerwarth and Horne, “Vectors,” 499-500.

leader Hermann Ehrhardt (1881-1971), who had assisted in the organisation of the Kapp Putsch; as well as Waldemar Pabst himself.³¹

After the putsch, Pabst fled to Austria with forged identity papers, under the Anglicised name of “Walter Peters.”³² Throughout the 1920s, he concentrated his political activity in Austria, serving until the early 1930s as the primary organiser of the Austrian paramilitary group the Heimwehr.³³ While Pabst had undoubtedly been following events in Italy prior to his relocation, the first concrete evidence of his introduction to Italian Fascism occurred during his activity organising Heimwehr units in the beleaguered region of Tyrol. Pabst settled in the Tyrolean capital, Innsbruck, where he soon gained control of the local Heimwehr units in much the same fashion as he had formerly organised the Freikorps in Germany.³⁴ This saw Pabst become something of an organisational and ideological nexus between Italian Fascism and the Germanic lands.³⁵ He attained the position of chief of staff of the Heimwehr: a role that involved securing funding from Germany, Austria, and Italy, importing weapons, and navigating the Heimwehr’s relationship with the Austrian government.

From 1928, the Heimwehr received financial aid from Italy, in return for assurances that, upon the establishment of a nationalist dictatorship, Austria would make no claims upon the region of South Tyrol.³⁶ During this time, Pabst was in regular contact with many significant figures within the fascist sphere. These included Mussolini himself, Hermann Göring, and Othmar Spann, as well as numerous contacts in munitions, publishing, and military circles.³⁷ Like the Heimwehr, the Spann circle had developed a keen interest in Italian Fascism, which it viewed as the most viable political entity to realise Spann’s own philosophy of corporate universalism. In 1929, under the tutelage of two of Spann’s closest associates, Walter Heinrich and Hans

³¹ Gerwarth and Horne, “Vectors,” 499-500.

³² “Anfrage der Abg. Prantl, Hüttenberger und Genossen an den Landeshauptmann betreffend Überprüfung der Staatsbürgerschaft des Stabschefs der Selbstschutzverbände Major Pabst,” Innsbruck, November 13, 1929, in *Schriftwechsel Pabst über seine Agententätigkeit in Österreich*, NY 4035/4, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2; “Letter to Major Peters,” Innsbruck, September 3, 1922, in *Schriftwechsel Pabst über seine Agententätigkeit in Österreich*, NY 4035/4, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

³³ Gerwarth and Horne “Vectors,” 500.

³⁴ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 36.

³⁵ For one example, see Pabst, February 9, 1933, R 72/280.

³⁶ Bruce F. Pauley, “Fascism and the Führerprinzip: The Austrian Example,” *Central European History* 12, no. 3 (September 1979): 277.

³⁷ Waldemar Pabst, “Letter to Hermann Göring,” Innsbruck, April 18, 1925, in *Kapp Putsch*, NY 4035/3, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1-7; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 35, 37, 40-41.

Riehl, the Heimwehr adopted Spannian universalism as its official ethos, augmented with pronounced soldierly nationalism.³⁸

Pabst's role in the Heimwehr came to an end when he was eventually deported from Austria in 1930, following conflict with Johannes Schober (1874-1932), the Austrian chancellor, about constitutional changes to the structure of the Heimwehr.³⁹ Upon his return to Germany, Pabst authored a pamphlet in which he described a White International capable of countering international Marxism, an ideal that both reflected the ideological justification of his past endeavours and formed the foundational rationale for GSF.⁴⁰ Pabst envisioned the White International as a great coming-together of all paramilitary forces across Europe in a united front against the legacy and values of the French Revolution.⁴¹ He made the argument, common in Conservative Revolutionary circles, that the French Revolution had destabilised "positive conservative values like religion, family, authority and tradition," and was the common repository of both liberalism and Marxism.⁴²

Pabst envisioned the GSF as an ideological and intellectual scaffold for the prospective White International.⁴³ His ambitions were not without precedent for success. Other GSF members were, or had been, affiliated with similar transnational efforts to promote international ultranationalist collaboration, or to cultivate further intellectual interest in Italian Fascism. Max von Binzer, for instance, worked as the German correspondent for Centre International d'Études sur le Fascisme (International Centre for the Study of Fascism), an institute based in Lausanne, Switzerland, dedicated to the study of fascism.⁴⁴ At the time, Binzer described himself as a "German nationalist and irridentist," and vouched for the objectivity of the institute.⁴⁵ In this role, he made observations about the German people's widespread interest in and sympathy for Italian Fascism, while remaining critical of Italianisation policies in South

³⁸ Klaus-Jörg Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus: Das Gesellschaftsbild Othmar Spanns* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1974), 84.

³⁹ Pabst sought to restructure the Heimwehr in a more authoritarian fashion, a move that would have brought Austria into conflict with Britain and France, the two powers upon which Austria was most financially dependent. Pauley, "Führerprinzip," 282.

⁴⁰ Waldemar Pabst, "Geistiges Programm (Weisse Internationale)," 1931, BA-SAPMO: NY4035/6, 40-44, in Manfred Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst und die Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus* (Berlin: Bulletin für Faschismus- und Weltkriegsforschung, Band 8, 2013), 197-199.

⁴¹ Pabst, "Geistiges Programm," 197-199; Gerwarth, "Red Beast," 66.

⁴² Pabst, "Geistiges Programm," 198.

⁴³ Gerwarth, "Red Beast," 66.

⁴⁴ Binzer, "Führerauslese im Faschismus," 37-38.

⁴⁵ Damm, *Rezeption des italienischen Faschismus*, 285. For the original article, see Max von Binzer, "Les courants d'opinion fascistes en Allemagne," *Centre international d'etudes sur le fascisme*, 1928, 187-204.

Tyrol.⁴⁶ However, as his numerous articles for the newspaper *Deutsches Adelsblatt* (*German Nobility Paper*) reveal, Binzer became significantly more complimentary of Fascism after the corporatist reforms of the *Carta del Lavoro*.⁴⁷ He took pains, for instance, to clarify that Fascism was an inherently “dynamic” system from which Germans could learn much, while attributing the South Tyrol debacle to mere problems of leadership.⁴⁸

Other members similarly found their way into the GSF as part of their broader studies of or through their own working relations with Italy. This helps to account for the high proportion of Stahlhelm men in the GSF.⁴⁹ Mussolini, in his own efforts to build transnational irridentism and spread fascism, financially sponsored various nationalist and paramilitary groups across Europe, of which the Heimwehr and Stahlhelm were two notable examples.⁵⁰ Aside from its activity in South Tyrol, the Stahlhelm established foreign divisions in Italy, among other outposts, and sent multiple delegations to Italy in the late 1920s and early 1930s, even arranging a meeting between first Bundesführer Franz Seldte and Mussolini himself.⁵¹ The NSDAP owed its representation in the GSF to similar pre-existing connections with Italy. The study of Italian affairs was a feature of Hermann Göring’s political career from as early as 1924, when Göring sought temporary exile in Italy following the failure of the Nazi Beer Hall Putsch in November, 1923.⁵² During this time, on behalf of the Nazis, he established regular contact with Giuseppe Bastianini (1899-1961) — whose portfolio included cultivating relations with foreign movements sympathetic to Fascism — and Mussolini’s ambassador to Germany, Giuseppe Renzetti (1891-1953), who was later to appear as a guest speaker at a number of GSF events.⁵³

⁴⁶ Damm, *Rezeption des italienischen Faschismus*, 285.

⁴⁷ Max von Binzer, “Faszismus,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1926, 452; Max von Binzer, “Der faszistische Staat und die Wirtschaft,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1927. See also Binzer’s additional *Deutsches Adelsblatt* publications on Fascism: Max von Binzer, “Faschismus und Monarchie,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1927, 194; Max von Binzer, “Der deutsche Adel und der Faschismus,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1927, 599; Max von Binzer, “Konservativ und faschistisch,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1928; Max von Binzer, “Die Neuordnung des italienischen Adelsrechts,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1929; Max von Binzer, “Deutscher Faschismus? [Ist ein Faschismus in Deutschland möglich?],” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1930; Max von Binzer, “Der italienische Nationalismus der Vorkriegszeit und sein Erbe, der Faschismus,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1930; Max von Binzer, “Faschismus und Privatwirtschaft,” *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1931.

⁴⁸ Binzer, “Faszismus,” 452.

⁴⁹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 240-241.

⁵⁰ Pauley, “Fascism and the Führerprinzip,” 227; Morgan, *Fascism in Europe*, 162.

⁵¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 204, 219.

⁵² As Palumbo discusses, Göring’s period of exile also included stays in Austria and Sweden. He remained for a time in Innsbruck, where he had contact with Pabst, certainly through written communications, but perhaps also in person. Michael Palumbo, “Göring’s Italian Exile, 1924-1925,” *The Journal of Modern History* 50, no. 1 (March 1978): D1035, D1049.

⁵³ Palumbo, “Göring’s Italian Exile,” D1037. For evidence of Renzetti’s lectures for the GSF, see Waldemar Pabst, December 5, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde: Schieder, “Faschismus im politischen Transfer,” 28, 31.

The eventual formation of the GSF in 1931 was thus a culmination of great pre-existing interest in Fascism within German ultranationalist circles.

Formation of the Gesellschaft

The Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus was formally created in Potsdam on 5 December, 1931, and soon established its headquarters in Berlin. Pabst was successful in appealing to a wide array of ultranationalist and conservative interest groups, clubs, and associations to build the GSF's membership. He drew upon his own extensive network, and that of the Harzburg Front, to recruit prominent German capitalists, bankers, and industrialists. In addition to those already acknowledged, the GSF enjoyed the patronage of businessman Fritz Thyssen (1873-1951); Paul Rohde (1878-1941), owner of Otto Mansfeld & Co. steelworks and partner in a number of armaments companies; Friedrich Reinhart (1871-1943), board member of Commerzbank and president of the Berlin Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Günther Quandt (1881-1954), owner of the Berlin-Karlsruher Industrie-Werke AG; Erich Lübbert (1883-1963), general director of Aktiengesellschaft für Verkehrswesen and board member of Dywidag AG; and Otto Christian Fischer (1882-1953), board member of Commerzbank.⁵⁴ Like Pabst, many GSF members also boasted a history of involvement in nationalist politics. Notable examples included Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz (1899-1968), who had been a member of the Organisation Consul and, like Pabst, erstwhile leader of a Freikorps unit; Eduard Stadtler (1886-1945), who had founded the Antibolschewistische Liga (Anti-Bolshevist League) in 1919; Joachim von Oppen (1879-1948), the president of the Brandenburg Landwirtschaftskammer (Department of Agriculture); Franz Ritter von Epp (1868-1947), a Reichstag member representing the NSDAP in Bavaria; and Otto Schmidt-Hannover (1888-1971), a Reichstag member who had lobbied Paul von Hindenburg to stand as a presidential candidate in 1925.⁵⁵ The GSF also maintained connections with fellow nationalist organisations the Nationalen Klub (NK) and the Fichte-Gesellschaft, which allowed Pabst to host events at their venues.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 149-153.

⁵⁵ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 149-153.

⁵⁶ See Waldemar Pabst, July 10, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; and Pabst, February 9, 1933, R 72/280. On Stadtler, see Gerd Koenen, *Der Russland-Komplex: Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900-1945* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2005), 248-250.

The GSF's membership list reveals that the NSDAP and DNVP were the political affiliations represented most prominently among the GSF's rank-and-file.⁵⁷ On the GSF's board of directors, however, the Stahlhelm and the DNVP (counted together, due to their formal political alliance at the time) exercised the greatest influence.⁵⁸ This can be explained, at least in part, as a continuation of the Stahlhelm's strategy in the Harzburg Front. In contrast to the National Socialists, the Stahlhelm wished to construct a broad nationalist coalition which incorporated the splinter nationalist parties that Hitler hoped either to convert to Nazism or to annihilate.⁵⁹ Duke Carl Eduard had provided financial support to the Stahlhelm since 1926, and was, along with Crown Prince Wilhelm, a high-profile asset that the GSF leveraged to increase its appeal.⁶⁰ Pabst even sent a letter to General Hans von Seeckt (1866-1936), another long-term Stahlhelm supporter, entreating him to follow the duke's example and join the GSF.⁶¹ Duesterberg, although not formally on the GSF leadership board, was one of Pabst's most frequent contacts in official GSF communications, and played a prominent role in organising activities, particularly after his withdrawal from parliamentary politics following his ignominious defeat in the first round of the 1932 presidential elections.⁶² Communications between Pabst and Duesterberg generally revolved around pragmatic matters, such as the organisation and co-ordination of GSF events and lecture evenings, and the dissemination of reading materials among members.⁶³

Because the GSF printed no materials under its own name, it is difficult to align the group definitively with any one ideology.⁶⁴ The closest thing to a manifesto that the GSF produced was a series of statements authored and delivered by Pabst in 1932, outlining his reasons for founding the organisation. Taken in the broader context of Pabst's desire to build a White International, Pabst wanted the GSF to act as a non-sectarian forum whose purpose was to learn

⁵⁷ "Mitglieder der GSF," 223-240.

⁵⁸ "Mitgliederverzeichnis der Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus," N 247/280, 1-4. Pabst refers to Ausfeld in a number of communications. See, for example, "Waldemar Pabst to General Müller," October 11, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁵⁹ Jones, *Hitler versus Hindenburg*, 87.

⁶⁰ On the Crown Prince, see Stephan Malinowski, *The Hohenzollerns and the Nazis: A History of Collaboration* (London: Allen Lane, 2025), particularly chapter 6.

⁶¹ "Waldemar Pabst to Hans von Seeckt," January 11, 1932, in N 247/188, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁶² Duesterberg's name does not appear on the list of GSF board members, but under the list of "ordinary members" (*ordentliche Mitglieder*). "Mitgliederverzeichnis der Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus," N 247/280, 2-3.

⁶³ For examples, see "Waldemar Pabst to Theodor Duesterberg," October 27, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; "Waldemar Pabst to Theodor Duesterberg," December 29, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁶⁴ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 122.

from the “Italian experiment” in anticipation of the advent of a Third Reich in Germany.⁶⁵ Importantly, Pabst denied that the GSF's membership was, or needed to be, ideologically fascist.⁶⁶ More relevant than the label was the goal of constructing an authoritarian German state, and the potential ways in which the Italian example could be used to facilitate this. Pabst's claim was no doubt motivated partly by pragmatic considerations; after all, his goal was to build ultranationalist unity across Europe, and not every ultranationalist thought highly of fascism. Pabst did, however, try to extend fascism's appeal by arguing that Italian Fascism was a manifestation of a sentiment shared by all ultranationalists: it had set itself apart successfully from the liberal tradition, the perceived common repository of the evils of materialism, individualism, democracy, socialism, and Bolshevism; and was therefore a project worthy of emulation.⁶⁷ However much Pabst may have wanted the GSF to consist of “men from all movements and circles” united in the fight for a “new Germany,” ideological imperatives — in this case, overt sympathy for Fascism — remained a defining feature of the GSF, undermining the extent to which it could truly “unite” ultranationalists, particularly those suspicious of Italy's own imperial ambitions.⁶⁸

The Importance of Italian Corporatism

A communication between Pabst and Duesterberg from February, 1932, reveals that the two men discussed the allocation of resources for a potential corporate state in Germany — an ideal that seemed within their grasp.⁶⁹ Corporatism was at the heart of GSF members' attraction to Italian Fascism. It was the most popular topic at GSF events and in correspondence, and a central theme in the independent works of individual members. In a 1931 tract, Hans Reupke pointed to Italy's corporate system as achieving a desirable balance between “certain parts of the proletariat, which came from socialism and syndicalism,” conservative landowners, and large industrialists, aided by an effective party apparatus in the form of Mussolini's Fascists.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Waldemar Pabst, “Rede zur Gründung der GSF,” January 1932, BA-SAPMO: NY4035/6, 68-74, in Manfred Wichmann *Waldemar Pabst und die Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus* (Berlin: Bulletin für Faschismus- und Weltkriegsforschung, Band 8, 2013), 208-209.

⁶⁶ Pabst, “Rede zur Gründung,” 210. Other authors associated with the GSF claimed to study fascism objectively, or denied any interest in distributing Italian Fascist propaganda. See, for example Binzer, “Führerauslese,” 37-39.

⁶⁷ Pabst, “Geistiges Programm,” 197.

⁶⁸ Pabst, “Rede zur Gründung,” 208-209.

⁶⁹ “Waldemar Pabst to Theodor Duesterberg,” February 3, 1932, in N 247/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁷⁰ Hans Reupke, *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Wirtschaft* (Berlin: Otto Elsner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1931), 14.

Support for corporatism within the GSF was primarily the result of economic considerations. The immediate pressures of the Depression and the ongoing question of German reparations ensured that the economy was among the most popular themes at GSF lectures and at meetings of the leadership board.⁷¹ Renzetti, an esteemed guest speaker for the GSF on more than one occasion, was also president of the Italian chamber of commerce; and some of the most significant decision-makers on the board of the GSF had clear vested interests in rehabilitating capitalism, including Schacht, President of the Reichsbank between 1923 and 1930 and future Reich Minister of Economics under Hitler from 1934 to 1937; and Minoux, a former Hugo Stinnes employee and prominent German industrialist.⁷²

Almost universally, GSF authors parroted the Fascists' boasts about corporatism's ability to overcome class struggle by integrating the working class with big business beneath the banner of the nation.⁷³ GSF members found much to celebrate in the Fascist government's labour reforms of 1926 and 1927, which seemingly overcame the associations with socialism that might otherwise have tarnished fascism as a political ideology. This crucial period saw Mussolini eliminating independent trade unionism and affirming Italy's commitment to the capitalist mode of production.⁷⁴ GSF authors celebrated the coupling of fascism and capitalism, with Schacht stating that "damage to the rights of private property" (including private investment) was "the basis of Bolshevism."⁷⁵ Walther Funk, like fellow NSDAP and GSF member Reupke, had a stake in proving fascism's compatibility with capitalism, and likewise argued for the compatibility of Nazism with all modes of private ownership.⁷⁶ Minoux, Reupke, Schacht, and Funk employed similar reasoning to that found in Oswald Spengler, in which national autarky would be achieved through increased economic power in capitalist markets, and "socialism" achieved through the "spiritual" harmonisation of workers with big capital.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Waldemar Pabst, "Waldemar Pabst to Theodor Duesterberg," December 22, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde. For documentation of lectures involving economic and labour questions, see Pabst, July 10, 1932, R 72/280; Pabst, February 9, 1933, R 72/280; Waldemar Pabst, October 10, 1932, R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. For evidence of meetings involving the discussion of the economy/labour relations, see Waldemar Pabst, "Waldemar Pabst to Theodor Duesterberg," October 7, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁷² Waldemar Pabst, December 5, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Waldemar Pabst, January 12, 1933, R 72/280.

⁷³ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 133; Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 114.

⁷⁴ Großer Faschistischer Rat, "Die Arbeitsordnung des Faschismus," in *Der Faschismus: Staat und Wirtschaft in neuen Italien*, trans. Walter Heinrich (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1932), 184-195; Carmen Haider, "The Italian Corporate State," *Political Science Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1931): 228.

⁷⁵ Hjalmar Schacht, "German Trade and German Debts," *Foreign Affairs* 13, no. 1 (1934): 4.

⁷⁶ David Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 311.

⁷⁷ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 109.

However, while support for pro-capitalist corporatism may have been a defining feature of the GSF, the works of individual members demonstrate a lack of unity on precisely how the corporate economy ought to function, beyond vague assertions that it should serve the interests of the state. Part of the difficulty in conceptualising fascist economic policy and aspirations lies in the fact that fascists shied away from formulating strict economic doctrines.⁷⁸ This can be seen as a side effect of fascism's ideological aversion to materialism and positivism. Fascists tended to view preoccupation with economic matters as one of the main evils of "materialist" communism and liberalism alike.⁷⁹ It is therefore unsurprising that fascism boasted no economic theorists on par with Adam Smith or Karl Marx. Nevertheless, this lack of unity should not automatically be equated with incoherence. If one is to speak of "fascist economics," it is necessary to begin from the view that external economic motivators simply did not exist — not because this was literally true, but because this belief featured in fascist ideology.⁸⁰ A degree of economic flexibility was therefore an important aspect of the fascist view of economics, mirroring the belief in the exceptional individual's capacity to respond decisively to different situations. For example, Eschmann suggested that Fascism's very lack of a definitive economic position rendered it all the more resistant to corruption, as it would not place the means of production at the mercy of ideological materialism of any kind.⁸¹ This flexibility, coupled with the fact that the Italian corporate experiment remained a "work in progress," ensured that GSF members could read the economic intentions of Fascist Italy in a variety of ways. Divergent, even contradictory readings thus appeared within the microcosm of the GSF. This emerged primarily in relation to differing interpretations on the role and nature of the state, and the extent to which it should be permitted to intervene in the capitalist market.

Many GSF members were supportive of the notion of a powerful, interventionist state: a concept which arguably aligned best with the dictatorial intentions of the Fascist Grand Council. Not only did the Fascist government's labour reforms institutionalise the ability to bypass democratic structures and private industrial interests in favour of certain national corporations, but Mussolini and the Fascist state had the ability to intervene in the free-market

⁷⁸ Historiographical views have ranged from the argument that fascist or corporatist economic strategies align most closely with the USSR and other "totalitarian" regimes due to the high level of state control; that fascist economics present an extreme manifestation of centralised capitalist control; or that the economy was of secondary concern, another victim of fascist political egoism. For an in-depth discussion of theories of fascist economics, see David Baker, "The Political Economy of Fascism: Myth *or* Reality, or Myth *and* Reality?," *New Political Economy* 11, no. 2 (July 2006): 228, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563460600655581>.

⁷⁹ Baker, "Political Economy," 229.

⁸⁰ Baker, "Political Economy," 229.

⁸¹ Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 79.

economy when “the interests of the state [were] involved.”⁸² Eschmann, for one, was impressed by this interventionist model. A sociologist and philosopher, he worked for a number of years as an author and editor for the nationalistic political journal *Die Tat* (*The Act*), which promoted “German socialism”: a national socialism with Spenglerian overtones.⁸³ In *Die Tat*, Eschmann published a number of articles about the Italian economy, in which he argued that Italy alone had achieved a happy medium between the planned economy of the Soviet Union and the liberal free market.⁸⁴

He expanded on this in a book dedicated specifically to Italian Fascism, *Der faschistische Staat in Italien* (*The Fascist State in Italy*), appearing in 1930. In it, he argued that, on the social and political level, fascist corporatism allowed for a more organic, authentic relationship between the state and its citizens.⁸⁵ But this did not mean that the relationship between the people and the state ought to be one of mutual influence and exchange. Following Mussolini, Eschmann claimed that the state, as the legal representative of the nation, should hold absolute, unchallenged sovereignty.⁸⁶ The Party, as the embodiment of the state, existed to coordinate a variety of corporatist organs loyal to the state. These included business and workers' interests (harmonised and operating as one), educational institutions, and the military.

Max von Binzer, in a 1929 tract for *Friedrich Manns Pädagogisches Magazin* (*Friedrich Mann's Pedagogical Magazine*), discussed the organisation and legal parameters of such a system.⁸⁷ Many different interests or associations in the form of syndicates would be represented by the Fascist Grand Council, and the council coordinated under the leadership of the Duce.⁸⁸ This drew on the contemporaneous Fascist use of the word “syndicate,” divorced from socialist, trade unionist connotations. Eschmann suggested that Mussolini's leadership was not actually dictatorial, but a “great reservoir” of coordinated resources, whereby the *idea* of the state — echoing Giovanni Gentile's interpretations of Hegelian idealism — could be fully realised.⁸⁹ He defended the potential for state intervention in the economy by stressing that Mussolini's leadership was flexible, adaptable, and non-dogmatic: elements that fascists

⁸² “Labour Charter of Fascist Italy.” For a detailed discussion on Fascist economic policy, see Claire Giordano and Ferdinando Giugliano, “A Tale of Two Fascisms: Labour Productivity, Growth and Competition in Italy, 1911-1951,” *Explorations in Economic History* 55 (January 2015): 25-38, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2013.12.003>.

⁸³ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 128-129.

⁸⁴ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 132.

⁸⁵ Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 18.

⁸⁶ Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 19.

⁸⁷ Binzer, “Führerauslese,” 25-26, 28.

⁸⁸ Binzer, “Führerauslese,” 25.

⁸⁹ Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 37.

valued as central to a dynamic, properly integrated system.⁹⁰ He also noted that Vilfredo Pareto's elite theory provided a political parallel to "necessary economic inequality."⁹¹ The rule of "fascist elites" ensured "unity between the state and the people," thereby sanctioning state control and co-ordination of the economy.⁹²

While Pareto himself had defended parliamentarism (considered separately from democracy) as a potential vestibule for the healthy circulation of elites, Eschmann believed that all necessary ingredients existed within the Fascist elite itself. Due to the representation of different interests, concentrated within the apparatus of the party, Eschmann did not think it likely that the ruling party would become "aristocratic" in the decadent, pejorative sense, but excessive institutionalised bureaucracy was a potential threat to be avoided all the same.⁹³ The philosopher Georg Mehlis went even further. Mehlis began his career studying the philosophy of history, and later developed an interest in mysticism and fascism, after living for a number of years in Italy. In his 1929 book, *Der Staat Mussolinis (Mussolini's State)*, Mehlis endowed the ideal state not only with supreme power, but with virtues bordering on the transcendental. Drawing on a combination of Hegel and Christianity, Mehlis argued that Fascism represented no less than an earthly manifestation of the divine hierarchy.⁹⁴ Mehlis stated that Mussolini embodied a godly connection between the people and the nation — a connection which had not existed since the abandonment of absolute monarchy: the last truly "organic" system.⁹⁵

For others, the use of state power needed to be subject to certain limitations. Othmar Spann, whose works were promoted actively by the GSF and celebrated by many individual members, took a more nuanced, if idealistic, view of state authority. Spann did not endorse Italian corporatism uncritically as it then existed, but saw it as a transitional phase that could lead potentially to his own vision of corporate universalism.⁹⁶ However, if Fascism concentrated its economic focus disproportionately on sectors traditionally associated with capitalism, such as

⁹⁰ Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 37, 116.

⁹¹ Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 21-23.

⁹² Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 21-23. Pareto expanded upon the circulation of elites with the concept of power alternating between so-called foxes and lions (with "foxes" delivering bouts of liberal innovation and "lions" representing bulwarks of authoritarian conservatism) as a mode of defending against corruption and stagnation.

⁹³ Eschmann, *Faschistischer Staat in Italien*, 37.

⁹⁴ This is not to be confused with the historiographical argument that fascism was a "political religion," which rests broadly on the belief that fascists used techniques associated with organised religion to gain and maintain power. Mystic fascism was idiosyncratic (there is little similarity, for instance, between the arguments of other fascist "mystics" like Julius Evola and Savitri Devi) and did not gain mainstream traction within fascist governments or movements.

⁹⁵ Georg Mehlis, *Der Staat Mussolinis* (Leipzig: E. Haberland Verlag, 1929), 21, 26.

⁹⁶ For details on Spann's vision of corporatism, see Chapter Six.

goods and industry, it opened itself up to the threat of “re-liberalisation.”⁹⁷ Spann stressed that the ideal state, led by “intellectual heroes,” should act merely as a co-ordinating agent for other elements of the corporate system.⁹⁸ This concept found a ready parallel in the Italian Fascists’ use of elite theory, but did not necessarily coincide with the reality of Mussolini’s centralising economic reforms. In the Spannian view (at least theoretically), a degree of decentralisation — for example, the democratic selection of the leader of each corporate estate by his respective constituents — was necessary to the health of the corporate system. This concept of subsidiarity, with origins in Catholic thought, was designed to ensure that the corporations maintained popular accountability, and to safeguard against the excessive concentration of power and capital.⁹⁹ It is important to note, however, that Spann often chose to overlook the contradictions between this ideal and the reality of the Italian Fascist state, defending Fascism on the rather abstract grounds that because it rejected materialism, it could not be truly despotic.¹⁰⁰ Only under materialism, which Spann viewed as common to communism and liberalism, could a state exercise omnipotent rule, as the population would have no share in the organic unity of the state.

Among the GSF members to endorse Spannian philosophy was jurist and politician Friedrich Everling. As an influential member of the Stahlhelm, Everling homed in disproportionately on the appeals to soldierly nationalism in Spannian publications. These he related to the Stahlhelm, and what he perceived to be the Stahlhelm’s historical role.¹⁰¹ The nature of Everling’s ideal corporate state is most clearly expressed in a tract published in 1930 by the Stahlhelm press: *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat (Stahlhelm and the Organic State)*.¹⁰² In the opening pages, Everling linked the Stahlhelm’s political aims to the idea of the conservative, organic state

⁹⁷ Othmar Spann, “Die Bedeutung des ständischen Gedankens für die Gegenwart,” lecture to the Confederazione Nazionale Fascista del Commercio, Rome, June 9, 1933, in Othmar Spann, *Kämpfende Wissenschaft: Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Volkswirtschaftslehre, Gesellschaftslehre und Philosophie* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1934), 10-11.

⁹⁸ This vision of organic intellectuals is not to be confused with Antonio Gramsci’s contemporary theory of the same name. Gramsci argued that all members of society, including manual workers, were “organic intellectuals” in the sense that they had been shaped by the socio-economic structures of their time. Fascist organicism was more elitist in its identification of who qualified as an “intellectual.” Jill Lewis, “Conservatives and Fascists in Austria, 1918-34,” in *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Blinkhorn (London: Routledge, 1990), 105.

⁹⁹ John J. Haag, “Othmar Spann and the Ideology of the Austrian Corporate State” (Masters diss., Rice University, 1966), 136-138.

¹⁰⁰ Othmar Spann, “Hauptpunkte der universalistischen Staatsauffassung,” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, iss. 3, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Wien: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1931), 13.

¹⁰¹ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 2; Anton Pelinka and Günter Bischof, “Introduction,” in *Austro-Corporatism: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Günter Bischof and Anton Pelinka (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 2.

¹⁰² Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 1.

advanced by Spann and the Heimwehr.¹⁰³ Yet Everling went further than Spann in the importance he ascribed to war veterans.¹⁰⁴ In 1930, he declared: "The renewal of the organic economy, the creation of the organic state, is not possible without the basic Stahlhelm philosophy: corporative duty, readiness to serve, the spirit of discipline, and comradeship."¹⁰⁵

Along with his colleague Gerhard Albrecht (a political scientist at Jena University who, like Binzer and Mehlig, had published a number of articles in the nationalistic journal *Werk und Beruf* [*Work and Profession*]), Everling encouraged the Stahlhelm's contemporaneous political affiliation with the DNVP under Alfred Hugenberg (1865-1951).¹⁰⁶ To this end, Everling produced tracts for distribution by the Stahlhelm, including a 1929 pamphlet entitled *Warum bekämpfen wir den Parlamentarismus?* (*Why are we fighting parliamentarianism?*).¹⁰⁷ Written in the context of the Volksbegehren gegen den Young Plan, and appearing in the *Stahlhelm Flugschrift* (*Stahlhelm Pamphlet*), Everling's tract argued that the Stahlhelm's inclusion in the parliamentary process presented an invaluable method to fight the system from within, and a viable way to build corporatism.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Binzer stated that groups like the Stahlhelm represented the German analogue to Mussolini's Fascist syndicates, and were therefore central to the constitution of a corporate state.¹⁰⁹ For these elements in the GSF, the economy was to be managed in an authoritarian manner similar to an army, with capitalist enterprise directed towards the continued strengthening of the nation state.

Not all GSF members shared the belief in a corporate state with the capacity to intervene in the market. Due to the large number of businessmen within the GSF ranks, sympathy for free market capitalism was unusually concentrated within the organisation. For Schacht, for example, the path out of the Depression was to encourage a suspension of interest on reparation repayments, the granting of short-term credits and, importantly, a global increase in free trade.¹¹⁰ This view ran very much counter to the intention and effect of the Italian labour

¹⁰³ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 2; Pelinka and Bischof, "Introduction," 2.

¹⁰⁴ By the time of the GSF's founding, appeals to soldierly nationalism had become commonplace in Spannian publications, along with references to Fascism, with *Ständisches Leben* publishing multiple articles from Fascist authors, and consistently employing rhetorical elements of soldierly nationalism in the form of "fighting language" and military imagery.

¹⁰⁵ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 142, 147.

¹⁰⁷ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 140. For a 1930 Stahlhelm summary of Dr Everling's publications, see Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 29.

¹⁰⁸ Friedrich Everling, "Warum bekämpfen wir den Parlamentarismus?", *Stahlhelm Flugschrift* 1 (1929), R 72/43, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Bach and Breuer, *Faschismus als Bewegung und Regime*, 161. See also Max von Binzer, "Stahlhelm und Faschismus: Eine Gegenüberstellung," *Werk und Beruf* 4 (1932): 105-107.

¹¹⁰ Schacht, "German Trade," 5.

reforms which, motivated by the desire to industrialise the nation, were marked by unprecedented state intervention in the economy. Although the *Carta del Lavoro* itself stressed the relative autonomy of private initiative, the increase of import duties and the revaluation of the lira favoured national, internally-orientated industries, and severely reduced the competitive potential of Italian businesses on the international market.¹¹¹ This prompted the formation of cartels through business mergers and acquisitions. These moves were, to some extent, the product of ideological factors, as the Fascist leadership wished to signal its political power over industry, even when the real-existing economic benefits to the Fascist state were negligible.¹¹² Even so, the idea that an otherwise authoritarian state could be compatible with the free market enjoyed a certain degree of traction within fascist circles.

This mirrored broader theoretical debates about the relationship between laissez-faire and shifting authority structures. Beginning in the 1930s, a new generation of German theorists, among them Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), Wilhelm Röpke (1899-1966), and Walter Eucken (1891-1950), developed the theory of ordo-liberalism, which endeavoured to align the free market more closely with its “theoretical potential” by reducing wasteful expenditure and using the state as a legal arbiter to support the implementation of market principles.¹¹³ So-called “free market fascists” and ordo-liberals were unified by the belief that laissez-faire could be a *feature* of, rather than something inherently opposed to, a healthy corporate system. Schmitt, who also joined the Nazi Party in 1933, suggested that in order to be properly understood and implemented, democracy needed to be uncoupled from its traditional associations with liberalism and parliamentarism.¹¹⁴ He viewed the “will of the people,” a fulcrum of democracy, as an implicitly authoritarian concept subject to top-down shaping and manipulation by the media, educational institutions, political parties, and the military.¹¹⁵ This led Schmitt to conclude that “dictatorship is not antithetical to democracy.”¹¹⁶ Schmitt, furthermore, was one

¹¹¹ Giordano and Giugliano, “Two Fascisms,” 25; Jon S. Cohen, “The 1927 Revaluation of the Lira: A Study in Political Economy,” *The Economic History Review* 25, no. 4 (November 1972): 642, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2593953>.

¹¹² Cohen, “Revaluation of the Lira,” 642.

¹¹³ Baker, “Political Economy,” 231-232.

¹¹⁴ Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), 29.

¹¹⁵ Schmitt, *Crisis*, 29.

¹¹⁶ Schmitt, *Crisis*, 28. The nuanced understanding of politics and sociology that Schmitt helped to pioneer allowed for the detection of authoritarian potential in many areas, not just liberalism. Similar concepts can be seen in more recent modernist or revisionist Marxist sociology, for example in Jürgen Habermas’ notion of *Öffentlichkeit*, which held that public culture in liberal democracies was inevitably orientated towards bourgeois values, even when placing itself in opposition to those values. Habermas never went so far as to claim that democracy was compatible with dictatorship, viewing the two as sufficiently different in the discursive shaping of public opinion.

of the first German nationalist authors to introduce Georges Sorel's ideas to Germany, viewing Sorel as a key thinker in the erection of new authority structures.¹¹⁷ In the 1920s, Schmitt discussed the Sorelian concept of myth-making as an ideological unifier, and acknowledged that even anarchist authors had, through discovering "the importance of the mythical from an opposition to authority and unity, [sic] cooperated in establishing the foundation of another authority, however unwillingly, an authority based on the new feeling for order, discipline and hierarchy."¹¹⁸ Whatever the contradictions between free market authoritarianism and Italian Fascism, this was a point upon which fascist sympathisers of all types could agree.

Nevertheless, it was impossible for certain GSF members to reconcile fully their admiration for Italian Fascism with their belief in the free market. Klaus von Eickstedt, a leading functionary in the Pomeranian Landbund, was one of the few to outright criticise Mussolini's efforts to manage the economy.¹¹⁹ In a 1926 article for the Stahlhelm journal the *Standarte*, Eickstedt stated that a corporate system needed to be based upon free-market capitalism, as restrictions on private enterprise and governmental encroachment on the private ownership of the means of production were associated with Marxism and would, in practice, lead to state socialism.¹²⁰ The solution lay in a Spenglerian state in which traditional interests like agriculture were strongly represented. This would be led by a dictator capable of embodying the national will, protecting the free market without encroaching upon its machinations, and overcoming class struggle through his spiritual connection with the masses.¹²¹

Similarly, in 1933, Minoux stressed the virtues of the free market at a GSF lecture on the economic question, entitled *Wirtschaftswende durch soziale Individualwirtschaft (Economic transition through social private economy)*.¹²² According to Minoux, state intervention was necessary only to protect private investment from the formation of interest groups that would threaten the accumulation of private capital, including trade unions and syndicates.¹²³ Funk, who was to succeed Schacht as President of the Reichsbank in 1937, played a significant role in facilitating relations between big business and Nazi politics, acting as liaison to soothe

Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Space: An Inquiry into the Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

¹¹⁷ Landa, *Apprentice's Sorcerer*, 217.

¹¹⁸ Schmitt, *Crisis*, 76.

¹¹⁹ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 146.

¹²⁰ Klaus von Eickstedt, "Frontsoldat und Gildenstaat," *Die Standarte* 1 (1926): 418-420. See also von Eickstedt's 1931 article: Klaus von Eickstedt, "Die innere Versklavung der deutschen Wirtschaft und ihre Überwindung: Eine Lehre aus dem antiken Kultur," *Friedrich Mann's pädagogisches Magazin* 1339 (1931).

¹²¹ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 145-146.

¹²² Pabst, February 9, 1933, R 72/280.

¹²³ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 105.

capitalist anxieties about Nazi incursions upon private ownership.¹²⁴ Corporatism, in the free market view, was an arrangement mutually beneficial to both the state and the capitalist system, with unrestricted, deregulated private investment being a necessary element for the actualisation of the national will.¹²⁵ It was a view that reduced to an absolute minimum the assertion, common within fascist circles, that nationalisation, protectionism, and economic isolationism were more aligned with the national will than foreign investment and private enterprise. All of this reveals that important methodological differences on the question of the corporate capitalist economy simmered beneath the surface of the GSF, but never fully emerged as a point of ideological contention. As it stood, the potential of Italian Fascism took precedence over the reality, and the immediate pressures of overcoming parliamentarism and installing corporatism in Germany remained the GSF's primary focus.

Considering the GSF's high concentration of business entrepreneurs, aristocrats, and men otherwise sympathetic to capitalism, the former SPD politician August Winnig seems to be quite the outlier. Even so, it is worth examining Winnig in some detail, as he illustrates the dynamism of ideas and the broadness of Italian Fascism's theoretical appeal within the GSF. Winnig was not only an influential GSF member, but a close associate of Ernst Niekisch and the National Bolsheviks. He was also a thinker whom historian Armin Mohler designated as one of the most significant of the Conservative Revolution.¹²⁶ He was one of a number of atypical ultranationalists who participated in multiple organisations with contrasting ideologies and drew upon a wealth of theoretical viewpoints in the development of his own political philosophy. Winnig's career was characterised by efforts to intellectually and politically reconcile working class liberation with ultranationalism — an endeavour that paralleled the development of Italian Fascism itself and saw him traverse political landscapes from Marxism to national socialism.

Beginning as an avid trade unionist, Winnig became a member of the SPD in 1896. By the end of the First World War, he had been appointed Commissioner for East and West Prussia and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Baltic provinces, only to be released from the positions by the Weimar government in September, 1919, after attempting to establish a separatist eastern state,

¹²⁴ Walther Funk, "Nazi Party's Economic Policy," 1931, Spartacus Educational, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://spartacus-educational.com/GERfunk.htm>.

¹²⁵ For a detailed study on the ways that liberal economic policies were carried forward into the Third Reich, see Eric Kurlander, "'Between Detroit and Moscow': A Left Liberal 'Third Way' in the Third Reich," *Central European History* 44, no. 2 (June 2011): 281-283, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938911000045>.

¹²⁶ Armin Mohler, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland, 1918-1932: Grundriss ihrer Weltanschauungen* (Stuttgart: Friedrich Vorwerk, 1950), 83.

which, he hoped, would function as a “safety net” to protect German interests from Allied demands, while simultaneously repressing Polish interests in the region.¹²⁷ Winnig’s project found little sympathy within the SPD, but was well-received by the Prussian officer corps, with arch-conservative figures like General Hans von Seeckt speaking highly of his efforts.¹²⁸ These new connections encouraged Winnig to lend his support to the Kapp Putsch, bringing him into the same political circles as Pabst for the first time.¹²⁹ Gravitating increasingly towards radical nationalism, Winnig joined the SPD splinter-party the *Alte Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (ASPD) in the 1920s, where he came into contact with Ernst Niekisch. From 1926, he and Niekisch shared editorial duties for the monthly publication *Widerstand*, the most consistent purveyor of National Bolshevik ideas in the Weimar Republic.¹³⁰ The National Bolsheviks’ desire to combine nationalism with the emancipation of the working class through erecting a national, socialised economy and forging political alliances with the USSR would have made traditional ultranationalists like Pabst baulk. Nevertheless, Pabst seems to have welcomed Winnig as a GSF member several years later. On Thursday, 1 December, 1932, the GSF held a lecture at the Kaiserhof, where Winnig discussed the relationship between employers and workers, and the role of trade unionism within the context of the “new state” (*Koalitionsrecht und Gewerkschaften im neuen Staat*).¹³¹ The lecture was well-publicised. A communication from Pabst reveals that, in contrast to the GSF’s typical practice, non-members were permitted to attend the event.¹³² Winnig’s was a name that evidently sparked significant public interest and potentially offered the GSF an avenue to recruit new members.

Pragmatism aside, Winnig was, like other GSF members, critical of parliamentary parties, and an advocate of direct political representation. Unlike his GSF associates, however, Winnig’s interest in direct representation through corporatism stemmed from his own experiences with trade unionism and his lingering sympathies for syndicalism. For Winnig, organisational syndicalism presented the true bridge between syndicalism and corporatism. In contrast to wholesale collectivisation, syndicalism allowed for the collectivisation of the means of production on industry-based grounds, with the workers in a certain industry becoming the

¹²⁷ Ralph Schattkowsky, “Separatism in the Eastern Provinces of the German Reich at the End of the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (April 1994): 308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200949402900205>; Präsident des Staatsministeriums, September 23, 1919, R 43-I/1255, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

¹²⁸ Schattkowsky, “Separatism,” 308; Wilhelm Ribhegge, *August Winnig: Eine historische Persönlichkeitsanalyse* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1973), 199.

¹²⁹ Ribhegge, *August Winnig*, 238.

¹³⁰ Ribhegge, *August Winnig*, 238.

¹³¹ Waldemar Pabst, November 17, 1932, in R 72/280, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

¹³² Pabst, November 17, 1932, R 72/280.

collective owners of that industry.¹³³ Winnig's view of worker-state relations is best exemplified in his 1930 book, *Vom Proletariat zum Arbeitertum* (*From Proletariat to Working Class*), in which he engaged in a dialogue with Marx's interpretation of history as class struggle.¹³⁴ Discussing the nature and role of the German working class, Winnig rejected conventional Marxism in favour of the ideas of nineteenth century socialist revolutionary Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871).¹³⁵ Winnig claimed that Weitling, a tailor by trade, boasted more genuine worker's credentials than the intellectual Marx, and was the first self-aware German worker and thus the rightful father of German working-class consciousness.¹³⁶

Weitling was an associate of Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), a French revolutionary whose political namesake, Blanquism, differed from Marxism in de-emphasising the role of the organised proletariat in overthrowing the bourgeoisie, in favour of a small group of professional revolutionaries, who would carry out a political, rather than a "social" (i.e. mass) revolution.¹³⁷ Blanqui's call for a popular defence of French interests in 1870 provided fodder for subsequent nationalistic interpretations of socialism, and his thought was among the theoretical justifications used by the Italian syndicalists in their calls for intervention in the First World War.¹³⁸ Mussolini referred to Blanqui in his early writings as an example of the successful synthesis of patriotism and socialism.¹³⁹ Weitling shared Blanqui's view that the revolution needed to be conducted by force and led by professional revolutionaries or a "dictator" representing the people.¹⁴⁰ Winnig, however, seems to largely have overlooked the

¹³³ Gerard Casey, *Freedom's Progress? A History of Political Thought* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2018), 717-718.

¹³⁴ August Winnig, *Vom Proletariat zum Arbeitertum* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1930), 9-11.

¹³⁵ Winnig, *Proletariat zum Arbeitertum*, 58. Weitling's thought synthesised revolutionary socialism with non-denominational Christianity. For Weitling, the imminent revolution was bound up in religious concepts of judgement day and salvation, which would lead to the abolishment of private property, and, eventually, to a classless, moneyless "kingdom of Heaven." Anton Jansson, "'The Pure Teachings of Jesus': On the Christian Language of Wilhelm Weitling's Communism," *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3, no. 29 (January 2019): 36, 39, 41, <https://doi.org/10.14746/prt.2018.3.2>. For discussion of Weitling, often characterised as a utopian, see Hans Mühlestein "Marx and the Utopian Wilhelm Weitling," *Science & Society* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1948): 113; Bertel Nygaard, "Seidel-Höppner's Wilhelm Weitling," *Socialism & Democracy* 32, no. 2 (November 2018): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2018.1491714>. See also Carl Frederick Wittke, *The Utopian Communist: A Biography of Wilhelm Weitling, Nineteenth-century Reformer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1950); Waltraud Seidel-Höppner, *Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871): Eine politische Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004).

¹³⁶ Winnig, *Proletariat zum Arbeitertum*, 52-57.

¹³⁷ George C. Comninel, "Marx and the Politics of the First International," *Socialism and Democracy* 28, no. 2 (August 2014): 73-74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2014.918451>.

¹³⁸ Gregor, *Young Mussolini*, 165.

¹³⁹ Bosworth, *Mussolini*, 82; Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 216.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Norman Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels: Marxism and Totalitarian Democracy, 1818-50* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 11.

fact that Weitling was, in contrast to Blanqui, an avowed internationalist.¹⁴¹ Instead, he celebrated the fact that Weitling was of working-class origins and ethnically German. A similar rationale underpinned Winnig's praise for Mussolini. Winnig stressed Mussolini's working-class, "common" credentials, claiming that exceptional men who arose from the masses — similar to those celebrated by Marxism, but ethnically connected to their people — were the "future" of successful political leadership.¹⁴²

Indeed, there was more explicit racism in Winnig's works than in those of his more conservative colleagues in the GSF. For example, in his discussion of Marx, Winnig refers repeatedly to Marx's Jewish heritage as evidence of Marx's unsuitability to be a theoretical representative of the German working class.¹⁴³ This shift away from the discussion of ideas, in favour of straw-man attacks on thinkers' racial "qualifications," is prominent throughout Winnig's writings. Informed by biological racism, Winnig was also more cautious than other GSF members about the suitability of the Italian Fascist model for the German context. While he praised Italian Fascism as the "first [sic] victory of the will to power," he cautioned Germans against the wholesale embracing of Mussolini's regime, citing the regime's expansionist foreign policy as a potential threat to Germany.¹⁴⁴ Racialised ideas inevitably circulated within the GSF, but were generally piecemeal in nature. Duesterberg, while no friend of the NSDAP, was a died-in-the-wool antisemite, having drafted — along with Elhard von Morozowicz — the so-called "Aryan paragraph," which barred Jews from membership in the Stahlhelm. In contrast, GSF meetings, though usually available only to members, did not bar Jews from entry as NSDAP events did, nor were Jews explicitly banned from membership in the GSF itself.

Despite hosting an array of internal views on capitalism and racial politics, there was one point on which the GSF was unified. To increase their appeal to other German nationalists, GSF members strove to anchor the corporate idea — including its manifestation in Italy — in a conservative, idealist and, above all, *German* intellectual-political tradition. On the political level, Binzer likened Italy's labour reforms and efforts to build corporatism to the Bismarckian constitution (*Reichsverfassung*), which granted the Minister President extra-parliamentary

¹⁴¹ Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 73.

¹⁴² August Winnig, *Der Arbeiter im Dritten Reich* (Berlin-Charlottenburg: Buchholz & Weißwange, 1934), 44-45.

¹⁴³ August Winnig, *Das Reich als Republik 1918-1928*, (Stuttgart: J. G. Gotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1928), 58.

¹⁴⁴ Winnig, *Reich als Republik*, 352-353.

powers.¹⁴⁵ At the philosophical level, Mehlis stressed the German heritage and credentials of Italy's corporate system, foregrounding its links to the Hegelian, idealist tradition.¹⁴⁶ Everling urged readers to consult Spann's book *Der wahre Staat*, and made it clear — echoing Spann's own assertions — that Spann's organic state (and ergo its alleged burgeoning equivalent in Italy) was a concept derived from a specifically German way of thinking: Fichte, Hegel, and other idealist and Romantic philosophers.¹⁴⁷ Everling presented the organic state as the ultimate manifestation of an idealist “will to power,” claiming that “because the state is an organism of our conception, it should become an organic state shaped by our will. This includes an organic constitution, an organic economy and organic territorial *Lebensraum* appropriate for our people.”¹⁴⁸ Binzer and Winnig thus both seized upon the Nietzschean idea of the will to power, with Binzer suggesting that Nietzsche provided Mussolini with a “spiritual” (*geistige*) equivalent to elite theory, thereby underscoring the “German spirit” of corporatism.¹⁴⁹

Throughout the GSF's existence, the general idea of combining a corporate system with a private capitalist economy was sufficiently unifying to ensure that GSF members, with the exception perhaps of Winnig, supported Italian Fascism as a role model for Germany. As such, most GSF members did not venture beyond affirming their support for Fascism's combined commitment to corporatism and private enterprise. Meanwhile, Italy's own position remained sufficiently theoretically flexible to lend itself to the variety of interpretations present within the GSF. Had the GSF existed long enough to see the next major round of economic reforms in Italy, however, it is likely that its implicit internal differences would have evolved into more acute theoretical conflicts. The 1934 Italian labour reforms further merged the interests of the Fascist state with the functioning of the corporations, endowing Mussolini with dictatorial powers as head of all existing corporate estates, with the representative of each estate being nominated by, and answerable to the Fascist Grand Council.¹⁵⁰ This would likely have left the free marketeers among the GSF sorely disappointed.

¹⁴⁵ Binzer, “Führerauslese,” 28; Franklin Hugh Adler, *Italian Industrialists from Liberalism to Fascism: The Political Development of the Industrial Bourgeoisie, 1906-34* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 387.

¹⁴⁶ Mehlis, *Staat Mussolinis*, 21, 26

¹⁴⁷ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 2, 4. See also Othmar Spann, *Der wahre Staat* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1921), 178, 181.

¹⁴⁸ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Binzer, “Führerauslese,” 8-9; Winnig, *Reich als Republik*, 352-353.

¹⁵⁰ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 118.

Repression and Demise of the Gesellschaft

As Germany shifted closer to its own dictatorship, interest in the GSF began to wane. As early as October, 1932, it seems that the GSF was having difficulty covering its operating costs, as the price of membership rose to 10 marks; a sum that proved unaffordable to some members and prompted complaints.¹⁵¹ Schmidtke claims that, with the establishment of the Third Reich, the GSF “served its purpose,” and had no reason to continue to exist.¹⁵² This view, however, was indicative only of select portions of the GSF, not of the organisation as a whole. Certain members, among them the NSDAP functionaries Göring, Lammers, and Funk, and those who held governmental or otherwise prominent positions — including the second founding member, Duke Carl Eduard — indeed found cause to celebrate the Nazi takeover.¹⁵³ A significant proportion of the GSF’s membership accepted new positions in the Hitler government or otherwise disengaged from extracurricular pursuits. However, a dissolution of the GSF upon the effective termination of parliamentary democracy was the opposite of what Pabst envisioned.¹⁵⁴ In his mind, the GSF’s mission had instead entered a new, even more crucial phase.

For a small cadre of members, including Pabst and Minoux, the Nazi takeover was an incentive to shift the GSF’s focus from study to direct political intervention. To this end, Pabst headed the founding of a new GSF “action committee” (*Aktionsausschuss*), which held its first meeting on 3 April, 1933.¹⁵⁵ In his opening address to the committee, Pabst stated that the GSF must now orientate itself towards practical goals, to steer the new government in a desirable (corporatist) direction.¹⁵⁶ The most immediate objective was to combat unemployment by ensuring that workers were absorbed into appropriate corporate estates. Minoux spearheaded appeals for labour reform, including an incentive to increase male employment through removing women from the workforce.¹⁵⁷ The content of the meetings of the GSF action

¹⁵¹ In January 1933, Pabst received a letter from a GSF member requesting a termination of membership, due to the rise in fees. “Letter to Waldemar Pabst,” January 12, 1933, in N 324/32, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Waldemar Pabst, January 12, 1933, in R 72/188, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

¹⁵² Schmidtke, “GSF,” 176.

¹⁵³ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 162.

¹⁵⁴ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 162.

¹⁵⁵ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 163.

¹⁵⁶ Waldemar Pabst, “Protokoll der ersten Aktionsausschuß,” April 3, 1933, in R 72/260, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 163.

¹⁵⁷ This was to be achieved through a combination of systemic removal of women from the workforce and increased incentives to marry. The reasoning behind this was, in part, that women’s wages were lower than those of their male counterparts, creating a financial incentive to hire women over men. Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 163.

committee also hints at the internal clashes of ideology and methodology that the GSF might have encountered had it ever become a significant political force. For instance, jurist Hermann Meissinger and businessman Martin Sorgemeier raised debates about the future of trade unions, arguing that past workplace bargaining achievements should be recognised and unions submitted to state control as in Italy in the late 1920s and early 1930s; in contrast to Minoux, who would have had them abolished entirely.¹⁵⁸ The action committee was also subject to infighting about how transparent it should be with rank-and-file GSF members.¹⁵⁹

Despite Pabst's efforts, the GSF did not see out the year. By the latter half of 1933, it began to incur negative attention from Nazi organs. On 24 October, the GSF held a lecture evening, at which political scientist and USSR correspondent Klaus Mehnert (1906-1984) gave a speech. The lecture was infiltrated by a member of the Gestapo, who reported on its alleged (and undoubtedly exaggerated) "pro-Bolshevik" flavour.¹⁶⁰ Amidst growing criticism, Pabst became more desperate in his attempts to retain the GSF as an international network of influence and to continue its lecture evenings. A potential salvation tactic was discussed in the form of a merger with the NK, of which Duke Carl Eduard was president.¹⁶¹ The NK had closer ties to the National Socialist government than the GSF did: Hans Pfundtner, who was State Secretary of the Interior, and Lammers, who had recently been appointed State Secretary and Head of the Reich Chancellery, were GSF members who held prominent positions on the board of the NK, with Pfundtner serving as deputy.¹⁶² Carl Eduard, however, remained intransigent in his belief that the GSF had served its purpose, and on New Years' Eve, 1933, the GSF was formally dissolved.

Unlike Carl Eduard, Pabst did not consider the Nazi triumph sufficient redress for the ills of the past. A 1933 letter from Pabst to Crown Prince Wilhelm reveals his thoughts on the matter.¹⁶³ Correcting an earlier written statement, in which Wilhelm had called the 1923 Beer

¹⁵⁸ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 165.

¹⁵⁹ This took the form of an exchange between Pabst, who wanted to circulate the minutes of the action committee's meetings, and Gustav Krukenberg, who wished to keep them secret. Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 165.

¹⁶⁰ "Einladung der GSF zum Vortragsabend," October 12, 1933, in R 1501/5348, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 176.

¹⁶¹ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 177.

¹⁶² Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 177.

¹⁶³ Pabst originally met Hitler during the Kapp Putsch in 1920. Hitler later approached him to request that Pabst join the NSDAP in the capacity of "Reich representative of the Party Leader" in Bavaria, upon Pabst's return to Germany. Pabst did not receive Hitler's offer with enthusiasm and labelled him a "national Bolshevik." Waldemar Pabst, "Seine Kaiserliche und Königliche Hoheit Wilhelm Kronprinz des Deutschen Reiches und Kronprinz von Preussen," Berlin, November 14, 1933, in N 324/32, Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde, 1-2; Gietinger, *Konterrevolutionär Waldemar Pabst*, 286.

Hall Putsch the “first resistance against the traitors to the people and Fatherland,” Pabst reminded the Crown Prince of the Kapp Putsch of 1920.¹⁶⁴ He stated that Kapp and “hundreds of brave fellow-fighters” had been driven from their occupations and the putsch had seen more casualties than that of 1923.¹⁶⁵ Pabst’s network of connections and his lukewarm support for Nazism eventually saw him arrested during the “Night of the Long Knives” of June, 1934.¹⁶⁶ The same fate befell Duesterberg and Reupke. All three were eventually released, courtesy of their connections with prominent individuals who had not fallen afoul of Hitler. Among those to vouch on Pabst’s behalf were Göring, Papen, Carl Eduard, and Pfundtner.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, Pabst was placed under strict Gestapo surveillance, with the requirement that he submit a weekly report on his activities.¹⁶⁸ Not all GSF members escaped with their lives. As Wichmann notes, three members — Herbert von Bose, Ferdinand von Bredow, and Eugen von Kessel — were murdered.¹⁶⁹ Although these members were persecuted because of activities outside of their involvement in the GSF, the Nazi regime had made it clear that there was no room for the GSF in the new regime.

The brevity of its existence notwithstanding, the GSF provides a unique and valuable insight into intellectual relations within the international fascist sphere. It consisted of avowed international nationalists, both in a methodological and in a theoretical sense. In its historical context, the organisation was a product both of international counterrevolutionary networks and collaborative political alliances within Germany. It was simultaneously an extension of the Harzburg Front; of the connections that Pabst had built with the Spann circle via the institution of the Heimwehr in Austria; and less directly, of the more nebulous projects of ultranationalist collaboration (such as the White International) that mushroomed across Europe in the interwar period. In addition, the GSF can be distinguished from other ultranationalist projects in that it presented the most explicit attempt to “transplant” Italian Fascism. Its self-stated purpose was to analyse the organisation and ideology of the Italian Fascist state with the ultimate goal of applying certain Fascist practices, particularly ones relating to economic management and corporate organisation, to a new, dictatorial German state.

¹⁶⁴ Pabst, November 14, 1933, N 324/32.

¹⁶⁵ Pabst, November 14, 1933, N 324/32.

¹⁶⁶ See Duesterberg’s memoirs: Theodor Duesterberg, *Der Stahlhelm und Hitler* (Hannover: Wolfenbüttler Verlagsanstalt, 1949), 80-81.

¹⁶⁷ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 184.

¹⁶⁸ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 184.

¹⁶⁹ Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 184-185.

While the focus on Italian Fascism was itself a holdover from Pabst's time in the pro-Fascist Heimwehr, the GSF soon attracted a cohort of men from German business and banking circles, whose interest in Fascism reflected a predilection towards monopoly capitalism and ensured that the GSF acquired a distinct character of its own. Though many individual GSF practitioners were readers and followers of Spannian universalism, and though the GSF actively promoted Spann, the particulars of Spann's philosophy were tempered by the view of corporatism as a political-economic vehicle whose most important outcome would be the revitalisation of capitalism.¹⁷⁰ GSF members made sense of the theoretical heritage and the future application of Italian Fascism in ways that aligned with their own value systems. Even within the GSF microcosm, these value systems displayed marked differences. The most obvious outlier within the GSF's ranks was the pro-syndicalist, racial determinist August Winnig. But even within the pro-capitalist majority, there existed a variety of views on the particulars of corporatist organisation.

From the Harzburg Front, the GSF had acquired a high proportion of Stahlhelm members, whose sympathy and support for Italian Fascism was largely contingent on Fascism's apparent ability to represent an authentic "soldiers' state." Not only did men like Binzer, Everling, and Duesterberg view the archetype of the frontline soldier as key to the realisation of a corporate state, but as central to the continued functioning and prosperity of that state. The most explicitly pro-capitalist elements of the GSF demonstrated only marginal interest in soldierly nationalism and drew upon elements of Italian Fascist ideology more relevant to the capitalist economy, namely corporatist economics. For some GSF members, the revitalisation of capitalism was to be achieved by concentrating economic power within national business cartels; for others, by reinvigorating the free market, minimising the interventionist capacity of the state, and providing more authentically democratic avenues for private enterprise. Finally, contrary to interpretations that view the GSF as a mere prelude to Nazism, Pabst and a core cadre of men actually doubled-down on their efforts to "Italianise" German politics after the NSDAP assumed power. While these efforts were nipped in the bud by the Nazi regime, they speak to a variety of competing ideological imperatives within the fascist sphere, and the unique power of Italian Fascism's international image.

¹⁷⁰ For a detailed discussion on the differences between Spannian universalism and the practice of Italian Fascist corporatism, see Chapter Six.

Chapter Three: *Der Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten: Constructing “Stahlhelm-Fascism” through Soldierly Nationalism and the Fascist War Veteran*

Whereas the GSF designed itself around Italian Fascism from the outset, *Der Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten* demonstrates just how greatly Fascism could influence the development and character of pre-existing movements. Led by the pragmatic Franz Seldte (1882-1947) and existing for the duration of the Weimar Republic and well into the Third Reich, the Stahlhelm was an influential veterans’ organisation and one of the most powerful anti-republican forces in Germany in the first years of the 1930s.¹ The early Stahlhelm, however, was ambivalent — rather than overtly hostile — to Weimar democracy, and the first phase of the Stahlhelm’s radicalisation (1920-1924) was largely a response to domestic pressures. During this initial stage, the Stahlhelm may be characterised as highly soldierly nationalist, but had yet to acquire a coherent ideological character or political methodology. What might be understood as the second phase of radicalisation (1926- early 1933) involved a progressive entry into parliamentary politics and coincided with the increased international influence of Italian Fascism after the first round of Mussolini’s corporate labour reforms. The final phase (1933-1935) was marked by Nazification and the eventual elimination of the Stahlhelm’s independent identity.

Italian Fascism played a key role in shaping and refining the Stahlhelm’s ideological position and political direction, exercising a “co-ordinating” influence upon the organisation’s worldview and self-perception from 1926 to 1933. It helped to consolidate the Stahlhelm’s strong yet unfocused soldierly nationalism into the construct of the fascist war veteran, in turn introducing through this vector the notion of a dictatorial corporate state modelled on military organisation. In short, the construct of the fascist war veteran, seized upon in the contemporaneous discourses circulating within the Stahlhelm, facilitated the adoption of other elements of fascism. This development initially coalesced into the radical soldierly nationalist periodical *Die Standarte*, a Stahlhelm publication whose contributors helped to intellectualise the very concept of the Stahlhelm, placing it front-and-centre in contemporary discourses within the fascist sphere. Particularly important were the *Standarte*’s founding members: Ernst Jünger, Helmut Franke, and Wilhelm Kleinau. Under Franke’s editorship, the journal was the

¹ The Stahlhelm’s ultranationalism is often contrasted with another influential veterans’ organisation, the pro-republican Reichsbanner, founded in 1924.

most rigorous intellectually of the Stahlhelm's many publications, and the most radical. It provided a forum for thinkers like Jünger to develop their own philosophies, while also acting as a means to integrate the concept of the Stahlhelm, understood as an "idea," into contemporary philosophical and political thought. So prominent were the theoretical connections between Fascism and the Stahlhelm, that some Stahlhelmers would even come to refer to the Stahlhelm as true German "fascism."²

Most scholars of Weimar politics acknowledge the significance of the Stahlhelm as a political force, yet studies focusing specifically on the organisation are rare. Volker R. Berghahn's 1966 book, *Der Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten*, remains unsurpassed in detailing the Stahlhelm's organisational structure, growth, and political development.³ Another valuable, albeit lesser-known study tracing the full history of the organisation is Alois Klotzbücher's dissertation from the same year, *Der politische Weg des Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten* (*The Political Path of the Stahlhelm*).⁴ Studies of military interest groups in the interwar period, such as those by Kurt Finker and Erwin Könnemann, have also analysed the organisational and political aims of the Stahlhelm from broader-based perspectives, while shorter works have studied the Stahlhelm in comparison/contrast to other paramilitary organisations or as a significant actor in regional histories.⁵ Recently, Dennis Werberg conducted a socio-political investigation of the fraught relationship between the Stahlhelm and the NSDAP over the course of the Weimar period. Werberg conceptualises the tensions between established powers and rising political powers, such as the Stahlhelm and the NSDAP, as part of a dynamic, everyday

² Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 178.

³ Volker R. Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag 1966).

⁴ Alois Klotzbücher, *Der politische Weg des Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten, in der Weimarer Republik* (Erlangen: Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 1965).

⁵ See Kurt Finker's thesis "Die militaristischen Wehrverbände in der Weimarer Republik und ihre Rolle bei der Unterdrückung der Arbeiterklasse und bei der Vorbereitung eines neuen imperialistischen Krieges [1924-1929]" (PhD diss., Pädagogische Hochschule Potsdam, 1964); and the subsequent adaptation: Kurt Finker, "Die Militaristischen Wehrverbände in der Weimarer Republik," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 3 (1966); also, Erwin Könnemann, *Einwohnerwehren und Zeitfreiwilligenverbände: Ihre Funktion beim Aufbau eines neuen imperialistischen Militärsystems* (Berlin: Deutscher Militärverlag, 1971). For studies comparing and contrasting the Stahlhelm with other paramilitary organisations, see, for example, Albertin Lothar, "Stahlhelm und Reichsbanner. Bedrohung und Verteidigung der Weimarer Demokratie durch politische Kampfverbände," *Neue politische Literatur* 13 (1968): 456-465; and Helmut Lensing, "Antidemokratische Wehrverbände im Emsland während der Weimarer Republik: Der 'Rote Frontkämpferbund' (RFB), der 'Stahlhelm,' und die nationalsozialistische 'Sturm-Abteilung' (SA)," *Jahrbuch des Emsländischen Heimatvereins* 57 (2011): 49-84. For histories covering regional Stahlhelm activity, see, for example Remco Schaumann, "Der Stahlhelm Bund der Frontsoldaten in Bielefeld und im Regierungsbezirk Minden 1918-1935," *Jahresbericht des Historischen Vereins für die Grafschaft Ravensberg* 83 (1996): 139-198; Lawrence D. Stokes, "'Wegbereiter des neuen Werdens': Der 'Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten' in Eutin 1923-1934," *Informationen zur schleswig-holsteinischen Zeitgeschichte* 31 (1997): 3-28. See also Teresa van der Kraan, "'Möglichkeitsraum': The Stahlhelm and Potential German Modernities from Democracy to Dictatorship, 1918-1935" (BA Hons diss., University of New England, 2019).

struggle for the dominance of “*Alltagsgeschichte*,” or the public space, the parameters of which were shaped by symbolism and aesthetics.⁶ The way in which the Stahlhelm presented itself to the public — its *feldgrau* uniforms, the Imperial tricolour flag, the “Front-Heil” greeting and, of course, its trademark frontline soldier’s steel helmet — acted as an evocative visual shorthand, or “symbolic capital,” representing value sets different from those employed by the Nazis.⁷ From this perspective, the impression of the Stahlhelm is of an organisation whose most important reference points derived from the Great War and the Kaiserreich, rather than from the post-war context or Italian Fascism. Werberg concedes that there was overlap between the Stahlhelm and Italian Fascism through soldierly nationalism, but this is viewed principally in the context of linguistic and aesthetic cues of parallel origins, rather than in the context of Fascism’s transformative intellectual agency.⁸

Other important studies to discuss the Stahlhelm take the form of more general analyses of the political intrigues and parliamentary struggles of the late Weimar Republic.⁹ That the Stahlhelm should often be considered in this context is unsurprising as, at its zenith, its involvement in politics included acting as the paramilitary wing for the DNVP, collaborating in the oppositional pressure groups the Volksentscheid gegen den Young Plan (Referendum against the Young Plan) and the Harzburg Front, and running its second federal leader, Theodor Duesterberg (1875-1950), as a presidential candidate against Hitler in 1932. The tendency to view the Stahlhelm in the context of parliamentary politics, or as the sum of its symbolic capital, lends itself to equating the organisation with its political end-goals. As such, many historians have described the organisation with typical adjectives like “anti-republican,” “reactionary,” “extreme right,” “antisemitic,” or “radical.” These characterisations imply a

⁶ As Werberg notes, this concept is comparable to that of *Möglichkeitsraum*, outlined by Riccardo Bavaj. Dennis Werberg, *Der Stahlhelm - Bund der Frontsoldaten: Eine Veteranenorganisation und ihr Verhältnis zum Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 146-147, 149-150. See also Bavaj’s exploration of the significance of the public space in the Weimar Republic: Bavaj, *Nationalsozialismus*.

⁷ Werberg, *Stahlhelm*, 146.

⁸ Werberg, *Stahlhelm*, 56-57. Based on this, Werberg’s overall characterisation is that the Stahlhelm may be understood as para-fascist. See the following review by Anke Hoffstadt in *Historische Zeitschrift* 320 no. 2 (2025): 508, <https://doi.org/10.1515/hzhz-2025-1100>.

⁹ Some of the most noteworthy studies to discuss the Stahlhelm in the broader context of the Weimar Republic include Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 305-321. For the details on second Stahlhelm Bundesführer Duesterberg’s election campaign, see Jones, *Hitler versus Hindenburg*, 240-248. For a reevaluation of the Stahlhelm’s relationship with other organisations, including the Nazis, the Pan-German League and the DNVP, see Barry A. Jackisch, “Continuity and Change on the German Right: The Pan-German League and Nazism, 1918-39,” in *The German Right in the Weimar Republic: Studies in the History of German Conservatism, Nationalism, and Antisemitism*, ed. Larry Eugene Jones (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 180-183. See also Hermann Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis – The Machtergreifung in a New Light* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Dirk Schumann, *Political Violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933: Fight for the Streets and Fear of Civil War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

state of “being” rather than a process of “becoming,” failing to convey the complexities of the Stahlhelm’s evolution. The extent of the Stahlhelm’s fascistisation can only be understood when one begins with the acknowledgement that the early Stahlhelm was not violently opposed to Weimar republicanism or parliamentary democracy.

The Stahlhelm was also highly internationally orientated. At the height of its influence, it boasted chapters in over a dozen foreign countries, including Italy, Austria, Portugal, and Mexico.¹⁰ It was one of the beneficiaries of funding from Italy, yet the transformative role of Italian Fascism in the Stahlhelm’s radicalisation has only just begun to be explored.¹¹ Alcalde has undertaken the most detailed work in this area. In his broader investigations of the relationship between war veterans and fascism, he identifies the Stahlhelm as one of the most significant illustrations of the transformative capacity and travelling potential of Italian Fascist ideology.¹² Alcalde’s work is valuable particularly for its identification of the construct of the fascist war veteran as specific impetus for the Stahlhelm’s fascistisation.¹³ The image of the heroic frontline soldier, derived from the war, was central to both the Stahlhelm and Fascism’s identities, as it was to many paramilitary organisations across Europe, as Gerwarth has indicated.¹⁴ Alessandro Salvador has suggested that the Stahlhelm’s developing corporatism also needs to be approached in this context: as indicative of the centrality of the Great War in shaping new modes of political thought.¹⁵

This chapter seeks to fill the lacuna in these scholarly observations by highlighting the key role that Italian Fascism played, not only in transmitting these elements to the Stahlhelm, but in combining them. The Stahlhelm did not adopt the fascist war veteran and corporatism in a piecemeal manner; they were co-ordinated through Fascist influence into a coherent value set — something that has yet to be fully investigated. With the mythologisation of the war as a unifying factor, the Stahlhelm gravitated towards the fascist war veteran and soon perceived in Italian corporatism a blueprint whereby the ideal of the frontline soldier could find political actualisation. In addition to the *Standarte*, the reception of Italian Fascism within the Stahlhelm can be analysed through books and articles authored by prominent functionaries and members,

¹⁰ Morgan, *Fascism in Europe*, 162.

¹¹ On Stahlhelm’s more practical exchanges with the Italian Fascists, see Schieder *Faschistische Diktaturen*, i.e. 169-172, 234.

¹² Alcalde, “Transnational Consensus,” 243-244.

¹³ Alcalde, “German Perceptions,” 180-181.

¹⁴ Gerwarth, “Central European Counter-Revolution,” 207-208.

¹⁵ Alessandro Salvador, “‘Frontsozialismus der Tat’: War Experience and the Foundation of Corporatism in the Stahlhelm Veterans’ League,” in *New Political Ideas in the Aftermath of the Great War*, ed. Alessandro Salvador and Anders G. Kjølseth (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 112-114.

and additional Stahlhelm-sponsored materials, including newspapers, personal written communications, yearbooks, and anthologies. This chapter begins with an overview of the Stahlhelm's founding and early politicisation, considered in the domestic context, as a "baseline" against which to measure the impact of Fascist ideas. The increased prominence of Italian Fascism on the international stage, from the mid-1920s onward, was enormously significant to the nature of the Stahlhelm's radicalisation. Through highlighting these entanglements, the chapter seeks to synthesise and extend Alcalde and Salvador's respective observations on the fascist war veteran and corporatism as the most significant vectors for the transmission of fascism.

The Early Stahlhelm and Situational Radicalisation, 1918-1924

In 1932, the editor of the Stahlhelm press, Sigmund Graff (1898-1979), wrote a piece to commemorate the origins of the Stahlhelm. He described the founding of the organisation as "unromantic."¹⁶ Wishing to justify the Stahlhelm's continued existence to the incoming authoritarian nationalist regime, Graff was intentionally circumspect in how he characterised the organisation in its infancy. The idea that united the Stahlhelm was, he claimed, no more, nor less, than the shared experience of the Great War, in which an "unspoken comradeship" had been forged.¹⁷ Although the Stahlhelm was a broad church politically — encompassing competing, sometimes heterogeneous interests — its founding member, Franz Seldte, had a history of involvement in republican politics (something that Graff tactfully omitted in 1932). Founded in December, 1918, the Stahlhelm was not created to be a paramilitary force and chose not to participate in early ultranationalist efforts to destabilise the new system, such as the 1920 Kapp Putsch. Indeed, an analysis of the Stahlhelm before 1924 demonstrates that the group cannot fairly be characterised as wholly anti-republican, particularly when measured against the multiple overtly hostile organisations that mushroomed upon German soil in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Born in 1882 in the city of Magdeburg, Franz Seldte hailed from a solidly middle-class background, inheriting his father's mineral water factory in 1908.¹⁸ In the pre-war years, the

¹⁶ Sigmund Graff, "Grundung und Entwicklung des Bundes," in *Der Stahlhelm: Erinnerungen und Bilder aus den Jahren 1918-1933: Band 1*, ed. Franz Seldte (Berlin: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1932), 21.

¹⁷ Graff, "Grundung," 16.

¹⁸ Klotzbücher, *Politischer Weg*, 7.

young Seldte had been a follower of the Nationalliberale Partei (NLP), a predecessor to the Weimar-era DVP.¹⁹ Seldte was, in turn, tentatively attracted to the DVP, which encouraged stints of collaboration between the Stahlhelm and the party under Gustav Stresemann in the early 1920s.²⁰ During the First World War, Seldte served as a lieutenant in Infantry Regiment 66, until a grenade took his left arm during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, bringing his active service to a premature end.²¹ Promoted to the rank of captain and decorated with the Iron Cross, Seldte was deeply impacted by his wartime experiences: he was known to remove his prosthesis at Stahlhelm gatherings, and wave the stump of his arm about as evidence of his sacrifice for Germany.²² Seldte proclaimed that he envisioned the Stahlhelm as a representation, like his own missing limb, of the values of loyalty, bravery, patriotism, and a willingness for sacrifice.²³

Despite being steeped from the outset in this kind of soldierly nationalism, the Stahlhelm was unsure of a practical political identity. The minutes from a members' meeting on 5 February, 1919, show that the Stahlhelm's Magdeburg chapter held a motion to determine whether the Stahlhelm should position itself "on the side of republicanism and democracy."²⁴ At a similar meeting a few weeks later, "Kamerad Löhr" proposed that the Stahlhelm furnish its members with badges in the new national colours of the republic: black, red, and gold.²⁵ Although these initiatives were rejected in favour of a more "neutral" position, a degree of sympathy for the new regime was evidently present.²⁶ Beyond vague nationalist claims to represent the "frontline spirit," the early Stahlhelm lacked consistency and clarity on ideology and policy.

At the public level, the Stahlhelm declared its support for the Weimar government on multiple occasions. This may be viewed as what Conan Fischer has termed "functional loyalty."²⁷ Important portions of the officer corps, who may have had little love for parliamentary

¹⁹ Klotzbücher, *Politischer Weg*, 4.

²⁰ Werberg, *Stahlhelm* 154. For a detailed account of these events, see also Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 69-91.

²¹ For a record of Seldte's injury, see Verein für Computergenealogie, "Verlustlisten 1. Weltkrieg," Genealogy.net, accessed September 20, 2024, <http://des.genealogy.net/search/show/4168753>. "Das Gründungsprotokoll," in *Der Stahlhelm: Erinnerungen und Bilder aus den Jahren 1918-1933, Band 1*, ed. Franz Seldte (Berlin: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1932), 165.

²² Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 15.

²³ "Der Stahlhelm (Bund der Frontsoldaten)," Magdeburg, 1919, in *Gründung des Stahlhelm in Magdeburg*, R 72/3, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

²⁴ "Der Stahlhelm," 1.

²⁵ "Mitglieder-Versammlung am 25. 2. 19," in *Tätigkeit der Ortsgruppe Magdeburg als Ausgangspunkt für die Gründung des Stahlhelm*, R 72/1, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 6.

²⁶ The Stahlhelm's potential pro-republican position was defeated by a vote of 28 to 18. "Mitglieder-Versammlung am 25. 2. 19," 6.

²⁷ Conan Fischer, "A Very German Revolution? The Post-1918 Settlement Re-Evaluated," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 28, no. 2 (2006): 21.

democracy, recognised the need of allying themselves with the republic as the only viable way to prevent revolutions, civil war, and the further depreciation of Germany's international standing.²⁸ For example, Georg Maercker (1865-1924) — chairman of the Stahlhelm's Saxony chapter and a former army general — had carried out orders from Minister of Defence Gustav Noske to guard the National Assembly of Weimar with volunteer troops while the new constitution was being drafted.²⁹ At a ceremony to commemorate the Stahlhelm's official founding, attended by democrats as well as conservatives, Seldte began with an acknowledgement that they stood “upon republican soil.”³⁰ A statement issued by the Stahlhelm in 1919 phrased the organisation's acceptance of the new system in blunter terms:

Politically, the organisation is based on democratic principles, and stands wholeheartedly on the soil of the new governmental era. It seeks to bring together frontline soldiers from various circles, who, in spite of individual political differences, vigorously advocate for a strong government to enforce the wishes of the majority of the German people. The organisation therefore explicitly rejects any attempt from the right or the left to bend the German people to the will of a minority through violence.³¹

Unlike more radical nationalist organisations of the time, the Stahlhelm was determined to eke out a place in the new system, rather than intentionally setting itself apart. The Stahlhelm's opposition to anti-republican insurgencies, considered alongside its majority rejection of “official” allegiance to the Weimar Republic, suggests functional loyalty, rather than genuine commitment to democracy. This was nevertheless significant, as the virulent anti-republicanism that would later characterise the organisation was conspicuously absent.

The Stahlhelm dedicated the early 1920s to expanding its reach into multiple areas of public life. By 1924, it comprised of over one-hundred cells and sponsored a wealth of splinter organisations. These included its youth division, the Jungstahlhelm (Young Stahlhelm), for boys under seventeen; the sports and recreation group, Sportstahlhelm (Sports Stahlhelm); the charity initiative, Stahlhelm Selbst-Hilfe (Stas); the paramilitary Wehrstahlhelm, or so-called Wehrwolf: Bund der Deutschen Männer (Defense Stahlhelm/Werewolf: League of German Men); the Stahlhelm Studentenring Langemarck (Stahlhelm Langemarck Student Circle) for university students; der Stahlhelm-Landsturm (Stahlhelm Land Storm), for non-veterans who

²⁸ Colin Storer, *A Short History of the Weimar Republic: Revised Edition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2024), 58.

²⁹ Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 63.

³⁰ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 14.

³¹ “Der Stahlhelm,” 1-2.

wished to follow the “Stahlhelm idea”; and the original Stahlhelm “core,” sometimes referred to as the “Kernstahlhelm.”³² Along with organisational expansion came a sharpening of the Stahlhelm’s political position.

Much of the early politicisation was situational and can be understood in the context of domestic politics. In June, 1922, the foreign minister, Walther Rathenau, was assassinated by members of the Organisation Consul, which had also been responsible for the death of finance minister Matthias Erzberger the previous year.³³ Instead of inciting uprisings against the government, the assassinations strengthened commitment to democracy and, for many, delegitimated counterrevolutionary monarchism.³⁴ The Weimar government accordingly enacted the *Republikschutzgesetz* (Law for the Protection of the Republic) to safeguard democratic institutions. The law allowed for the dissolution of nationalist organisations which the republic feared might follow the Organisation Consul’s example.³⁵ The Stahlhelm’s growing influence and lukewarm attitude towards democracy rendered it a candidate for disbandment. It was outlawed temporarily in Prussia on the orders of the state’s Interior Minister, Carl Severing (1875-1952).³⁶ Various planned Stahlhelm meetings and gatherings were vetoed throughout the country, though the reach of the decree was inconsistent as it was subject to local jurisdictions.³⁷ The Stahlhelm was nonetheless infuriated by the government’s measures, with Theodor Duesterberg questioning how parliamentarians who had “never once risked their lives” could dare to pass judgement on behalf of the German people.³⁸

Despite causing the Stahlhelm logistical inconvenience, the *Republikschutzgesetz* served to strengthen the organisation in the longer term.³⁹ The Stahlhelm’s numbers swelled between late 1922 and mid-1923 with men from ultranationalist organisations that had been disbanded by the decree.⁴⁰ For example, Major Franz von Stephani, a founding member of the disbanded Verband nationalgesinnter Soldaten (VNS) became a regional Stahlhelm leader.⁴¹ While Seldte continued to publicly assure Severing of the Stahlhelm’s allegiance to the republic, the

³² See, for example “Zusammenstellung über Neuorganisationen und Abzeichenfrage,” in R 72/5, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1-2; Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 33.

³³ Robert Gerwarth, *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 66-67.

³⁴ Fischer, *Between Democracy and Dictatorship*, 174.

³⁵ Kolb, *Weimar Republic*, 45.

³⁶ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 35-36.

³⁷ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 35-36.

³⁸ Theodor Duesterberg, n.d., in R 72/4, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 9.

³⁹ In addition, as Gerwarth notes, the Law was more commonly employed against “leftist offenders.” Gerwarth, *Bismarck Myth*, 69.

⁴⁰ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 37, 40.

⁴¹ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 40.

Stahlhelm established contacts with military circles and groups openly hostile to democracy, including the Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände Deutschlands (VVVD) and the Jungdeutscher Orden.⁴² The combination of governmental suspicion, the influx of ambitious, politically-minded members, and inflammatory contemporary issues — such as the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr and the hyperinflation — thus resulted in the first “wave” of the Stahlhelm’s radicalisation and correlated with sharpened soldierly nationalism and increasingly politicised appeals to heroic Great War symbolism.⁴³ Debate began to circulate among chapters as to whether it was time to reconsider the Stahlhelm’s “passive political position.”⁴⁴ Revisions were made to the Stahlhelm’s internal structure in favour of a more hierarchical arrangement which the Stahlhelm itself described as “dictatorial,” recalling the organisational constitution of the army.⁴⁵ This involved vetoing the capacity of Stahlhelm members to vote on Stahlhelm policy and restricting severely the ability of Stahlhelm district leaders to act independently, commanding that they “act only on the instructions of the leadership.”⁴⁶

Of additional significance was the political blowback generated by the failed Nazi Beer Hall Putsch of November, 1923. The putsch prompted defensive reactions, which took the form of renewed governmental scrutiny on one hand, and the establishment of organisations loyal to the republic on the other. The Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold, the largest veterans’ defence organisation of the Weimar Republic, was founded in early 1924, reaching up to one million members.⁴⁷ Membership in the communist veterans’ organisation, the Roter Frontkämpferbund, also rose to 15,000, indicating the increased politicisation of veterans’ affairs.⁴⁸ The Stahlhelm, meanwhile, found itself under renewed pressure to demonstrate its

⁴² Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 119.

⁴³ “Entschliessung!” October 15, 1923, Magdeburg, in *Bundespolitik – Allgemeines*, in R 72/263, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Werberg, *Stahlhelm*, 40.

⁴⁴ Der Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten Gauleitung Ostsee, “An die Bundesleitung Magdeburg,” November 4, 1923, in *Bundespolitik – Allgemeines*, in R 72/263, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁴⁵ “An alle Gau-Führer!” November 11, 1923, Magdeburg, in *Bundespolitik – Allgemeines*, R 72/263, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; “Entwurf,” November 4, 1923, in *Bundespolitik – Allgemeines*, R 72/263, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 3; Der Stahlhelm: Bund der Frontsoldaten, in *Bundes-Satzungen*, R 72/18, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 10.

⁴⁶ “An alle Gae!” November 9, 1923, in *Bundespolitik – Allgemeines*, in R 72/263, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁴⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 183-184. For detailed histories of the Reichsbanner and pro-republican veterans’ representation in the Weimar Republic, see Benjamin Ziemann, *Contested Commemorations: Republican War Veterans and Weimar Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 45. It is worth noting that membership in the Rote Frontkämpferbund was not restricted to war veterans. As with the SA, many members were too young to have seen action on the front line. Kristian Mennen, “‘Milkshops’ and ‘Bemedalled Old Men’: War Veterans and the War Youth Generation in the Weimar Republic,” *Fascism* 6 (June 2017): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00601002>

innocuousness. Endorsed by General Hans von Seeckt, the Stahlhelm tersely summarised its official position: “The Stahlhelm stands for the army!”⁴⁹ Unlike its earlier statements, this did not explicitly affirm commitment to the republic. Celebrating Paul von Hindenburg’s election to the German presidency in 1925, the Stahlhelm’s self-titled newspaper adopted a more belligerent tone, warning readers to remain vigilant against “dangerous” passivistic views.⁵⁰

The early 1920s were also marked by increasingly stark divisions between the two main factions of the Stahlhelm, epitomised by the more moderate Seldte in Magdeburg and the more radical Duesterberg in Halle.⁵¹ In 1922, Duesterberg, Maercker, and Elhard von Morozowicz began to agitate for the exclusion of Jewish veterans from the Stahlhelm.⁵² Seldte and many other members of the leadership board were opposed, and the initial motion was duly rejected by a vote of 313 to 108.⁵³ However, by March, 1924, Seldte, under renewed pressure from Duesterberg and Maercker — who by this time had risen to the respective positions of National Vice Chairman and Regional Association Leader (*Landverbandsführer*) — agreed to incorporate the so-called “Aryan paragraph” into the Stahlhelm’s protocol.⁵⁴ The fact that the Stahlhelm had restricted its capacity for internal democratic decision-making the previous year is highly significant. Stahlhelm rank-and-file members who disapproved of the new measure (a significant portion) were unable formally to register their objection.

The Stahlhelm received multiple complaints from members and former supporters, criticising the new exclusionary practice. Even Crown Prince Wilhelm, when visiting Vienna, found himself having to defend the Stahlhelm against charges of antisemitism.⁵⁵ Max Senator, a Jewish ear-nose-and-throat specialist in Kolberg, wrote to the Stahlhelm’s political leadership department, pointing out that the exclusion of Jews was not only contrary to the egalitarian spirit of the frontline, but clearly motivated by politics.⁵⁶ Senator’s accusation was accurate.

⁴⁹ “An alle Gau-Führer!” R 72/263.

⁵⁰ H. Ludwig, “Die Gegenwartsaufgaben des ‘Stahlhelm’,” *Der Stahlhelm* 4 (October, 1925): 1.

⁵¹ Brian E. Crim, “Weimar’s “Burning Question”: Situational Antisemitism and the German Combat Leagues, 1918-33,” in *The German Right in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Jones, 199.

⁵² Werberg, *Stahlhelm*, 157-158.

⁵³ Wette, *Wehrmacht*, 62-64; Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 66.

⁵⁴ “Rundschreiben Nr. 87,” Magdeburg, September 18, 1928, in *Judenfrage*, R 72/273, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

⁵⁵ Der Illustrierte Tages-Kurier-Krakau, “Wie der deutsche ‘Kronprinz’ in Österreich nach Popularität jagt und mit dem Stahlhelmsabzeichen in den Kurorten spaziert,” Nr. 249, in *Judenfrage*, R 72/273, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. These charges were likely not unfounded. See Malinowski, *Nazis and Nobles*, 167.

⁵⁶ Max Senator explained that he had been a long-time supporter of the Stahlhelm, but that, according to the Aryan paragraph, he would not qualify for membership, despite being the recipient of the Iron Cross and other military honours. Max Senator to the Politische Abteilung des Stahlhelm-Bundesamtes, Kolberg, August 18, 1929, in *Judenfrage* R 72/273, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

The mode of antisemitism practised by the Stahlhelm has been characterised by historian Brian E. Crim as situational, aligning with the Stahlhelm's general approach to politics at the time. Crim suggests that antisemitism was not a "core element" of the Stahlhelm, but a response to the political climate, waxing and waning in answer to new policies, rival organisations, and changing demographics.⁵⁷ Indeed, the adoption of the Aryan paragraph coincided with a dispute within the Stahlhelm leadership about the Dawes Plan.

The Dawes Plan, ratified in 1924, ended the Allied occupation and set up a more manageable payment plan for German reparations. Duesterberg was truculently opposed to any concession to the Allies, whereas Seldte was prepared to be somewhat more flexible.⁵⁸ Gustav Stresemann, the chairman of the DVP, had risen to the position of German chancellor and was instrumental in negotiating the approval of the Plan. Stresemann saw in the Stahlhelm a potential vehicle to increase the DVP's political leverage and hoped to gain its allegiance. Duesterberg, however, wished to establish firmer connections with his former colleagues in the anti-republican, monarchist DNVP.⁵⁹ Duesterberg's position may still have been in the minority in the mid-1920s, but it is clear that the Stahlhelm had become increasingly responsive to Germany's political climate and aware of the ultranationalist and antisemitic elements in its support base. The exclusion of Jewish members was a clear signal about where the majority of the Stahlhelm leadership wished to position the organisation politically. The Stahlhelm was in a state of organisational and ideological disarray when Italian Fascism emerged onto the world stage. Fascism would help to provide the coordinating ideological influence that many Stahlhelm members were longing for.

The Standarte: Intellectualisation and Reactions to Italian Fascism

The first explicit mention of Italy as a desirable model for the Stahlhelm has been attributed to a letter penned by Helmut Franke. A former Freikorps soldier, Franke rose to a leadership position in the Stahlhelm in the early 1920s, and was a regular contributor to Stahlhelm

⁵⁷ In contrast to the Stahlhelm, the Jungdeutscher Orden became less antisemitic over time. Crim relates the divergent fortunes of the two groups to their differing political and parliamentary goals. Crim, "Burning Question," 195-196.

⁵⁸ Nationalistic propaganda associated with the Stahlhelm first began to emerge in this context. For example: "Wählt Schwarz-Weiß-Rot! Das ist Deutschnational!" Berlin, November, 1924, Bundesarchiv Plak 002-029-036. The poster portrays the Weimar Republic as a weak baby eagle, unsuited to leadership; a powerful adult eagle, in contrast, represents the Wilhelmine era.

⁵⁹ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 80.

yearbooks and anthologies.⁶⁰ Such was the importance of these publications that Franke's views have been referred to as the "guiding spirit" of the Stahlhelm (*Stahlhelmgeist*).⁶¹ In 1924, the Stahlhelm press published a compilation of Franke's writings from the years 1918 to 1921. The anthology, titled *Staat im Staate* (*State within a State*), consists of dramatisations of Franke's service during the war and as a Freikorps volunteer, as well as a number of political tracts. The title is representative of Franke's view of soldierly exceptionalism, that is, that soldiers represented a "state within a state" and were therefore singularly suited to act as a revolutionary vanguard.⁶² In his political writings, Franke outlined a third-way position, declaring his opposition to both communism and capitalism.⁶³ Discussing his ideal soldiers' state, he advocated "wartime socialism": combining socialism with idealism through the unique prism of the war experience. In one article, he declared:

through communal living in the trenches, the front officer comes closer to socialistic theory; however, he recognises that idealism is behind it, even as the external mechanisms of social democracy disguise it like a filthy cloth [...] The idealism of socialistic theory compels the officer to adopt a fundamentally new attitude towards socialism.⁶⁴

The elevation of the frontline soldier to the ideal representative of mass society functions as vital connective tissue between the Stahlhelm and fascist ideology.

Franke's incorporation of national socialism (likely drawing on contemporary German theorists like Spengler and Moeller van den Bruck) all but ensured Fascism a receptive audience in the Stahlhelm. A letter from Franke to another Stahlhelm leader, dated 16 April, 1920, and appearing in the same anthology, is of particular interest. Outlining his case for national socialism to combat the threat of "a great group of Jews and their like-minded Germans," Franke advocated that the Stahlhelm should function as a "national, social freedom party of frontline soldiers."⁶⁵ He compared this to Italy, questioning why Germany and other countries had not followed a similar path.⁶⁶ As Alcalde observed, the reference to Italy may have been added when the anthology was edited for publication in 1924, as Italian Fascism was still relatively unknown in 1920.⁶⁷ It is possible that the appeal to antisemitism was also a

⁶⁰ See, for example, Helmut Franke, "Von der Zerstörung zur Erneuerung: Eine Hilfskonstruktion," in *Stahlhelm-Jahrbuch 1925*, ed. Wilhelm Kleinau (Magdeburg: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1924), 22-33.

⁶¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 185.

⁶² Helmut Franke, *Staat im Staate: Aufzeichnungen eines Militaristen* (Magdeburg: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1924), 172.

⁶³ Franke, *Staat im Staate*, 167-169.

⁶⁴ Franke, *Staat im Staate*, 170.

⁶⁵ Franke, *Staat im Staate*, 160-161, 163.

⁶⁶ Franke, *Staat im Staate*, 164.

⁶⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 185.

reflection of the Aryan paragraph of 1924, rather than the attitudes circulating within the *Stahlhelm* in 1920. Also in 1924, the Crown Prince Wilhelm expressed similar admiration for Italian Fascism, indicating that, by this year at the latest, approval of Fascism had taken root within the *Stahlhelm*.⁶⁸

A revolutionary tendency soon coalesced within the *Stahlhelm*, promoting the idea of the veterans' organisation as the vanguard for a fascistic, authoritarian state. It was most clearly articulated in the *Standarte*, the *Stahlhelm* periodical founded by Franke, Jünger, and Kleinau.⁶⁹ The *Standarte* was indicative of a significant expansion not only in the volume of the *Stahlhelm*'s publications, but in the scope of their content.⁷⁰ In addition to its self-titled newspaper, the *Stahlhelm* started the *Standarte* in September, 1925, as a supplement. From 1926, it appeared as its own monthly, with the tagline *Zeitschrift des neuen Nationalismus* (*Journal for New Nationalism*), a name designed to underscore its connection to Ernst Jünger.⁷¹ Indeed, of the many thinkers to contribute to the *Standarte*, particular attention must be reserved for Jünger.

Because of his glorification of the very horror of warfare, Jünger occupies a leading place in historiographical studies of post-war soldierly nationalism, national socialism, and the Conservative Revolution. Jünger made a name not only as a highly decorated militarist and prolific writer, but as a philosopher (and, indeed, as an entomologist). At the beginning of the Great War, aged nineteen, he volunteered for the army and soon proved himself a competent military leader, receiving multiple awards and decorations, and rising to the position of company commander by 1917.⁷² Jünger was wounded no fewer than seven times during the war, as detailed in his diary, which recounts the war in all of its brutality and daily monotony, starkly juxtaposed.⁷³ The diary would later form the basis of one of his best-known novels, *In Stahlgewittern* (*Storm of Steel*).⁷⁴ The political thought that Jünger developed cannot be understood in isolation from these early writings and wartime experiences. Throughout the

⁶⁸ Malinowski, *Nazis and Nobles*, 204.

⁶⁹ Kleinau already boasted a well-established career as the chief editor of *Der Stahlhelm* and author of numerous tracts and articles. See, for example, Wilhelm Kleinau, "Die Trommel der Toten," in *Stahlhelm-Jahrbuch 1925*, ed. Wilhelm Kleinau (Magdeburg: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1924), 90-94. Steffen Martus, "Scheitern als Chance: Ernst Jüngers Kunst der Niederlage," in *Ernst Jünger: Politik – Mythos – Kunst*, ed. Lutz Hagedstedt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 257.

⁷⁰ Berghahn, *Der Stahlhelm*, 92.

⁷¹ Helmuth Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger: Die Biographie* (Munich: Siedler, 2009), 283; Bach and Breuer, *Faschismus als Bewegung und Regime*, 166.

⁷² Roger Woods, "The Conservative Revolution and the First World War: Literature as Evidence in Historical Explanation," *The Modern Language Review* 85, no. 1 (January 1990): 79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3732797>.

⁷³ See Ernst Jünger, *Kriegstagebuch 1914-1918* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2010).

⁷⁴ See Ernst Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern* (Berlin: Miller & Son, 1934; original published in 1920).

Weimar period, Jünger referred consistently to his political position as “new nationalism” (*neue Nationalismus*). This is interchangeable with the designator “soldierly nationalism,” though contemporaries more frequently employed the former.⁷⁵

For many scholars, such as Peter de Mendelssohn and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Jünger is to be condemned for his theoretical development of soldierly nationalism, his ties to fascism and Nazism, and his hostility to the Weimar Republic.⁷⁶ Others have argued that he is best understood as a benign authoritarian who, according to Thomas R. Nevin, managed to keep himself “clear of Nazism’s contaminants.”⁷⁷ As a Conservative Revolutionary conterminous with the socio-political forces of the interwar period, Jünger should hardly be exonerated from the developmental dynamics of fascism, but to equate his thought with Nazism and fascism alone is a disservice to the complexities of his philosophy and, indeed, to the broadness of his political affiliations. Helmuth Kiesel, the most prominent of Jünger’s recent biographers, has stressed the importance of contextualising Jünger’s writings as reflective of the tumultuous times in which he lived.⁷⁸ For Kiesel, Jünger serves as something of a literary and philosophical paragon for the crises of the twentieth century, who cannot fairly be relegated to the status of an “intellectual gravedigger of the Weimar Republic” (Wehler).⁷⁹ Indeed, throughout his long and eventful life (1895-1998), Jünger evinced remarkably little inclination to align himself officially with any of the movements and organisations to whose periodicals he contributed, which ranged from the NSDAP, to the Stahlhelm, to the National Bolsheviks.⁸⁰ This

⁷⁵ To underscore the centrality of the frontline soldier to this mode of thinking, the present work substitutes “new nationalism” for “soldierly nationalism.”

⁷⁶ Elliot Y. Neuman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 6. See also Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Vierter Band: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1914-1949* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 515; and Peter de Mendelssohn, *Der Geist in der Despotie: Versuche über die moralischen Möglichkeiten des Intellektuellen in der totalitären Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Grünewald, 1953).

⁷⁷ Thomas R. Nevin, *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 7.

⁷⁸ Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger*, 16; Daniel Morat, “No Inner Remigration: Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger and the Early Federal Republic of Germany,” *Modern Intellectual History* 9, no. 3 (November 2012): 666, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244312000248>; Matthais Schöning, *Ernst Jünger Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2014), 11. For the central role that Jünger played in the construction of the “war myth,” he has frequently been accused of complicity with Nazism, despite the fact that Jünger always remained hesitant about granting support to the National Socialists, particularly after 1933. Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993), 119; Alon Segev, *Thinking and Killing: Philosophical Discourse in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 35; Morat, “Inner Remigration,” 661, 667.

⁷⁹ Wehler, *Gesellschaftsgeschichte, Band 4*, 487; Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger*, 16.

⁸⁰ As Neuman noted, in his later years, Jünger was likewise critical of aligning himself with literary circles. Elliot Y. Neuman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

intellectual mobility also renders him of particular interest to studies of the travelling potential of ideas and theoretical hybridisation.

Coupled with the influences of other Conservative Revolutionary intellectuals like Spengler and Moeller van den Bruck (with whom he collaborated in the journal *Gewissen*), Jünger's thought drew particular inspiration from Nietzsche. He explored concrete realisations of Nietzschean existentialism, cultivating the practice of "active nihilism."⁸¹ Nietzschean nihilism held that the pillars around which life is constructed — religion, nation states, legal rights, etc. — are meaningless, rendering man himself an aesthete in the search for meaning.⁸² Jünger suggested that through the will to power, or the practice of active nihilism, man gains the consciousness that he is ontologically adrift, and is, through virtue of this knowledge, liberated.⁸³ Modern technology and war were the ultimate exemplars of fatalism and nihilism, while also providing a centrifuge whereby man might achieve spiritual transcendence.⁸⁴ This led Jünger to expound the virtues of "total mobilisation," in which a society would be perpetually on the dialectical cusp of total war, renewal, and the transference of energy.⁸⁵

Jünger's first political piece appeared in the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1923, and advocated revolution as a reflection of the will to power.⁸⁶ Unlike the French and Russian revolutions, the German Revolution of 1918-19 had been, for Jünger, devoid of revolutionary substance as it lacked a guiding ideology. Men of "revolutionary character" had played no part in it, fighting instead in the East and/or in the Freikorps.⁸⁷ In a subsequent article, appearing in 1925 in the *Gewissen*, Jünger refined his concept of revolution, introducing the figure of the frontline soldier as the central agent of political change.⁸⁸ Italy presented the most successful marriage of meaningful ideology and revolutionary action, and Jünger lamented the absence of

⁸¹ Vincent Blok, *Ernst Jünger's Philosophy of Technology: Heidegger and the Poetics of the Anthropocene* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 32.

⁸² David Ohana, "Nietzsche and Ernst Jünger: From Nihilism to Totalitarianism," *History of European Ideas* 11 (1989): 751-754, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599\(89\)90263-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-6599(89)90263-5).

⁸³ Ohana, "Nietzsche and Jünger," 751-754.

⁸⁴ Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968; first published 1957), 182-183.

⁸⁵ Ohana, "Nietzsche and Jünger," 755.

⁸⁶ Ernst Jünger, "Revolution und Idee," *Völkischer Beobachter*, September 23/24, 1923, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 33-37.

⁸⁷ Jünger, "Revolution und Idee," 34-35; Ernst Jünger, "Revolution und Frontsoldatentum," *Gewissen*, August 31, 1925, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 57-58; Ulrich Fröschle, "Oszillationen zwischen Literatur und Politik: Ernst Jünger und 'das Wort vom politischen Dichter'," in *Ernst Jünger: Politik – Mythos – Kunst*, ed. Lutz Hagedstedt (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 124.

⁸⁸ Jünger, "Revolution und Frontsoldatentum," 57-58.

a “German Mussolini.”⁸⁹ By the time the *Gewissen* article appeared, Jünger had already agreed to write for the *Stahlhelm*.⁹⁰ In a letter to Oswald Spengler from 7 August, 1925, Jünger wrote with pleasure of his engagement with the *Stahlhelm* and signalled his intention to use the *Standarte* as a vehicle to merge empirical understandings of “the frontline soldier and his duty” with practical, conscious politics.⁹¹

Drawing together authors associated with soldierly nationalism, the *Standarte* was singularly important in introducing fascist ideas to the *Stahlhelm*, rendering the organisation more intellectually amenable to Fascist influence. Alongside its founding members, notable contributors included the nationalistic author Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz; leading Pomeranian Landbund functionary Klaus von Eickstedt; Hermann Ehrhardt, founder of the Organisation Consul; Jünger’s younger brother Friedrich Georg Jünger, who published his first article in the *Standarte*, and whose 1928 book, *Aufmarsch des Nationalismus (Rise of Nationalism)*, was heralded as a foundational text for soldierly nationalism; and Franz Schauwecker, who soon joined the editorial board.⁹² Schauwecker has often been likened to Ernst Jünger as a developer of soldierly nationalism. He too wrote war fiction and semi-autobiographical accounts of life on the frontline, in which the soldier emerges as an ideal “type,” driven by a sense of duty, stoicism, and a willingness to die for his nation.⁹³ According to German nationalist author Werner Beumelburg — whose first book, *Douaumont* (originally published in 1923), the *Standarte* recommended to its readers — to die for one’s nation was the highest spiritual good.⁹⁴ Other contributors wrote under pseudonyms, perhaps cautious of the political differences between the *Standarte* and the rest of the *Stahlhelm*.⁹⁵ The language of the *Standarte*’s articles was passionate, often aggressive “fighting language,” intended to appeal

⁸⁹ Jünger, “Revolution und Frontsoldatentum,” 62–63.

⁹⁰ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 187.

⁹¹ Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger*, 283.

⁹² Friedrich Georg Jünger, *Aufmarsch des Nationalismus* (Berlin: Vormarsch, 1928). Daniel Morat, *Von der Tat zur Gelassenheit: Konservatives Denken bei Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger und Friedrich Georg Jünger, 1920–1960* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 60. For additional work on Friedrich Georg Jünger, see Ulrich Fröschle, *Friedrich Georg Jünger und der “radikale Geist”: Eine Fallstudie zum literarischen Radikalismus der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Dresden: Thelem, 2008); Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 167.

⁹³ For a discussion on Schauwecker’s war philosophy, see Kurt Hiller and Franz Schauwecker, “Krieg und Frieden: Diskussion zwischen Dr. Kurt Hiller, dem Führer der Gruppe Revolutionärer Pazifisten und Franz Schauwecker, einem der Führer des deutschen Nationalismus. Gesprochen im Berliner Rundfunk,” *Die Friedens-Warte* 30, no. 10 (October 1930): 289–296. Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 161. Franz Schauwecker, *Im Todesrachen: Die deutsche Seele im Weltkrieg* (Halle: Heinrich Diekmann Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1919): 115–120.

⁹⁴ Werner Beumelburg, *Douaumont* (Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling, 1925), 7; Woods, “Conservative Revolution and the First World War,” 82.

⁹⁵ Pseudonyms appearing on *Standarte* articles included “Bob,” “Mars,” and “Scaevola” (the latter was perhaps a reference to nationalist author Julius Evola). Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 160.

to readers' emotions. Yet as Maurizio Bach and Stefan Breuer have noted, the use of emotive language belied genuine philosophical nuance.⁹⁶

The *Standarte's* brand of soldierly nationalism was revolutionary, idealistic, and unashamedly modern. In his 1926 novel *Der feurige Weg* (*The Firey Way*), Schauwecker expressed disillusionment with traditional notions of valour and even acknowledged that the Great War had disguised imperial interests.⁹⁷ Meaning was found through the courage needed to fight a hopeless fight, and war acquired its "profound justification" only when seen from the national level. These ideas influenced the *Standarte's* political philosophy and recommendations for the Stahlhelm. In a 1925 article, Ernst Jünger reiterated his view of the frontline soldier as an ideal type, identifiable not by service history, but by a heroic, "youthful" character.⁹⁸ "Youth" in this context was not dependent on a man's years, but on his nature. The youthful bearers of the revolution were men who, arising organically within society, were "connected to the epoch," meaning that they accepted the reality of modernity, mechanisation, and the spiritual supremacy of violence.⁹⁹ This new type of man was to usher in a technocratic, "total" society in which humanity itself harmonised with the imperatives of total mobilisation.¹⁰⁰ Jünger's bleak, futuristic vision of national socialism was unrelenting and totalitarian at every level, with "the worker" (considered as "type," as opposed to "class" to highlight its idealist, not materialist, character) personifying the synthesis of all levels of society with the metaphysics of totality.¹⁰¹ This kind of man, Jünger argued, had been awakened by the Great War, and must now act as bearer of the national revolution in Germany: the political analogue of the inner will to power.¹⁰² The veterans' leagues were the clear starting point, particularly if they were

⁹⁶ Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 169. See also Woods' discussion of the *Standarte* circle: Woods, "Conservative Revolution and the First World War," 79.

⁹⁷ Schauwecker even suggested, in a 1927 article in the *Standarte*, that the war had imperialistic elements — though these did not detract from nationalist heroism in fighting for the Fatherland. Franz Schauwecker, "Auseinandersetzung des Nationalismus," *Die Standarte* 13 (1927): 365-369. Franz Schauwecker, *Der feurige Weg* (Leipzig: Der Aufmarsch Verlagsgesellschaft, 1926), 21; Woods, "Conservative Revolution and the First World War," 82.

⁹⁸ Ernst Jünger, "Abgrenzung und Verbindung," *Die Standarte*, September 13, 1925, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 75-77.

⁹⁹ Jünger, "Abgrenzung und Verbindung," 74.

¹⁰⁰ David Roberts, "Technology and Modernity: Spengler, Jünger, Heidegger and Cassirer," *Thesis Eleven* 111, no. 1 (September 2012), 22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513612445362>.

¹⁰¹ Jünger would flesh out the idea of the worker in his 1932 book *Der Arbeiter*, a further development of the philosophy he discussed during his association with the Stahlhelm. Jünger used the construct of the worker interchangeably with phrases such as "organic state" to symbolise elements of a totalised world, perpetually prepared for war. The political-intellectual influences upon Jünger's thought here are considered in more detail in Chapter Four in the context of National Bolshevism. Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter*, 1932 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 7; Roberts, "Technology and Modernity," 23.

¹⁰² Ernst Jünger, "Die nationalistische Revolution," *Die Standarte*, May 20, 1926, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 213-214.

expanded to include all men of “worthy” character. Friedrich Georg Jünger was even more explicit in describing the key role that veterans’ leagues must play. It was vital, he claimed, for the Stahlhelm to wholeheartedly adopt the values of national socialism and reject its present sympathies for conservative monarchism.¹⁰³

The *Standarte* circle looked increasingly towards Italian Fascism for inspiration in its effort to realise this vision for the Stahlhelm. In contrast to German, völkisch, “blood-and-soil” nationalism or the Stahlhelm’s backward-looking monarchism, Fascism’s incorporation of futurism and technocracy surely appealed to Ernst Jünger. In an article appearing in September, 1925, he compared Hitler to Mussolini in that both presented “a new type of leader,” but suggested that the former lacked that which had allowed the March on Rome to succeed: a movement which fully encompassed and commanded the spirit of the frontline.¹⁰⁴ Here, Jünger was perpetuating the propagandistic value of the March on Rome (which far exceeded its actual value), in which Mussolini emerged as an example of a new type of leader, capable of combining the “spirit of fiery nationalism and the spirit of the frontline soldier” and incorporating all men of suitable character into a mass movement.¹⁰⁵ Franke, in a 1925 article entitled *Die Revolution ohne Methode (The Revolution without Method)* discussed the Kapp and Hitler putsches, concluding that they had failed due to a lack of deep, “spiritual fascism,” as seen in Italy: a foundational requirement for national socialist revolution.¹⁰⁶ Franke’s use of the word “fascism” (*Faschismus*) is telling. As German national socialists rarely referred to themselves as “fascists,” it is clear that Franke was seeking to underline affinity with the Italian phenomenon.

In an article appearing in early 1926, Martin Marth engaged with Italian Fascism’s syndicalist heritage: a subject that the more conservative members of the Stahlhelm would almost certainly have avoided.¹⁰⁷ Jünger and Franke, likewise, did not shy away from acknowledging certain intellectual debts to Marxism, alongside more harmonious influences like Spengler and Heidegger.¹⁰⁸ Marth claimed that Italian syndicalism, as then envisioned by Mussolini’s

¹⁰³ Morat, *Tat zur Gelassenheit*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ Jünger, “Abgrenzung und Verbindung,” 77.

¹⁰⁵ Jünger, “Abgrenzung und Verbindung,” 77; Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 187.

¹⁰⁶ Helmut Franke, “Die Revolution ohne Methode,” *Die Standarte* 3 (September 20, 1925); Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 167.

¹⁰⁷ Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 168.

¹⁰⁸ Jünger referred specifically to Marx’s early thought, viewing it as more compatible with the dialectical idealism of fascism/new nationalism. Ernst Jünger, “Der Frontsoldat und die wilhelminische Zeit,” *Die Standarte*, September 20, 1925, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 80; Ernst Jünger, “Der Wille,” *Die Standarte*, May 6, 1926, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik*

government (that is, with workers and employers' "syndicates" combining into corporate bodies) presented the solution to tensions between capital and labour.¹⁰⁹ This indicated that the *Standarte's* use of Italian Fascism had graduated from simply using Italy as a positive example of soldierly nationalism in practise, to viewing Fascism as inspirational and instructive. Only by aligning workers with the values of the soldiers' state could both the inequalities of capitalism and the class antagonisms of Marxism be overcome. Jünger claimed that Italy was, to date, the only nation that had "seriously attempted" to realise the idea of a genuine national workers' state.¹¹⁰ In August, 1926, Ehrhardt published an article outlining a vision for labour unions serving the interests of the state — clearly inspired by the then-current Fascist goal of integrating workers' and employers' syndicates into corporate entities based on occupation, whose only loyalty would be to the nation.¹¹¹ The *Standarte* thus pre-empted an attraction to Italian corporatism, which the Stahlhelm would come fully to embrace in the early 1930s.

While Stahlhelm members agreed that much could be learned from Italian Fascism, two distinct positions emerged on the method whereby a soldiers' state might best be realised, namely whether the revolution should take the form of a violent coup, or pursue a legalist path, utilising existing republican infrastructure. In the pages of the *Standarte*, there was far more sympathy for the former position. Many of the *Standarte's* contributors already had a history of violent revolutionary activity. Perhaps the most infamous was Ehrhardt. After taking part in the Kapp Putsch, Ehrhardt had founded the Organisation Consul, the group responsible for the murders of Erzberger and Rathenau. Heinz, likewise a former Freikorps officer, had contact with future GSF chairman Waldemar Pabst in the immediate post-war years, and took part in the Kapp Putsch as a company leader.¹¹² He had also, alongside Ehrhardt and Ernst von Salomon (1902-1972), been a key member of the Organisation Consul.¹¹³ Inspired by Mussolini's March on Rome, the Organisation Consul had attempted an unsuccessful "march on Berlin" in 1923.¹¹⁴ Helmut Franke held Ehrhardt in great esteem, stating that he represented a "born leader and

1919-1933, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 199; Roberts, "Technology and Modernity," 23; Franke, *Staat im Staate*, 170.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Marth, "Frontsoldat und Guildestaat: Der Frontsoldat und Syndikalismus," *Die Standarte* 9 (February 28, 1926).

¹¹⁰ Ernst Jünger, "Der neue Nationalismus," *Völkischer Beobachter*, January 23/24, 1927, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 287.

¹¹¹ Hermann Ehrhardt, "Werksgemeinschaft oder nationale Gewerkschaft," *Die Standarte* (August 19, 1926): 492-493.

¹¹² Susanne Meinel and Dieter Krüger, "Der politische Weg von Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz: Vom Freikorpskämpfer zum Leiter des Nachrichtendienstes im Bundeskanzleramt," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 42, no. 1 (1994): 40.

¹¹³ Meinel and Krüger, "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz," 40.

¹¹⁴ Meinel and Krüger, "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz," 42.

soldiers' hero."¹¹⁵ Franke himself had participated in the Nazi Beer Hall Putsch. After its failure, he travelled to Italy, where he studied Fascism first-hand with the goal of seeking inspiration for a successful fascist revolution in Germany.¹¹⁶ Ernst Jünger likewise endorsed the view that meaningful revolution needed to be achieved through violent means, an extension of his view of violence as central to existence.¹¹⁷ Jünger claimed that the way to overthrow the state was only by exiting it, by "a war of attrition," forming "a state within a state."¹¹⁸

Revolutionary violence was not endorsed by the Stahlhelm leadership, and the *Standarte's* more contentious proclamations soon drew negative attention from the federal command.¹¹⁹ Duesterberg, a particularly humourless man, had already criticised the *Standarte* circle's glorification of youth as "nonsense" ("*Quatsch*"), apparently interpreting it literally as discrimination against older veterans.¹²⁰ More pressingly, articles calling for violent revolution did not seem to reflect the kind of policies that the Stahlhelm was pursuing in the mid-1920s.¹²¹ An especially inflammatory article by Leo Schlageter referred to Organisation Consul assassins Heinrich Tillessen and Hermann Fischer as "nationalistic martyrs."¹²² This was potentially too damaging for the Stahlhelm leadership to ignore. The *Standarte* was accordingly banned for three months and Franke dismissed as editor.¹²³ The journal returned from its ban with a marked decline in both contributors and the scope of its readership.¹²⁴ The radical contributors had not taken kindly to the Stahlhelm leadership's rebuff, and many defected to other groups. Heinz gravitated towards the Strasser-wing of the Nazis, while the Jünger brothers began to collaborate with the National Bolshevik *Widerstand* circle (see Chapter Four).¹²⁵ Other contributors, like Schauwecker and Eckhard, went on to join the GSF. Franke and Ernst Jünger also founded a new journal, *Arminius: Denkschrift des deutschen Nationalismus* (*Memorandum of German Nationalism*), to which Heinz and Schauwecker also soon

¹¹⁵ Franke, *Staat im Staate*, 111.

¹¹⁶ Franke made his own imprint on members of the Nazi Party. For example, on October 2, 1926, Joseph Goebbels stated in his diary that he was reading "Hellmuth" (Helmut) Franke's book *Wir brechen die Bahn!*. Joseph Goebbels, "Das Tagebuch von 1925/26," in *Das Tagebuch von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Helmut Heiber (Stuttgart, 1961), 106. See also Helmut Franke, *Wir brechen die Bahn!* (Leipzig: Der Aufmarsch, 1926). Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 185; Klotzbücher, *Politischer Weg*, 82.

¹¹⁷ Klotzbücher, *Politischer Weg*, 82; Jünger, "Nationalistische Revolution," 215-216.

¹¹⁸ Jünger, "Nationalistische Revolution," 216.

¹¹⁹ Mennen, "Milkshops," 26.

¹²⁰ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 98. Jünger expressly qualified that this was a spiritual state of being, not a literal one. Jünger, "Differentiation and Connection," 17-19.

¹²¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 187.

¹²² Morat, *Tat zur Gelassenheit*, 61.

¹²³ Andreas Geyer, *Friedrich Georg Jünger: Werk und Leben* (Leipzig: Karolinger, 2007), 48.

¹²⁴ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 99.

¹²⁵ Meinel and Krüger, "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz," 42-43; Morat, *Tat zur Gelassenheit*, 63.

defected.¹²⁶ *Arminius* was openly revolutionary, and attracted many additional radical nationalist thinkers, like Friedrich Hielscher (1902-1990). It adopted a belligerent stance towards the kind of legalist, traditionally conservative nationalism practised by the Stahlhelm.¹²⁷ The bitterness that Franke and Jünger held towards the Stahlhelm was borne out in the pages of *Arminius*, with Franke stating that he had abandoned hope that veterans' leagues would be able to lead the fascist revolution in Germany.¹²⁸

Under Franke's brief period of editorship, the *Standarte* was a nexus for the hybridisation of ideas, demonstrating more intellectual rigour than was present in the rest of the Stahlhelm. It functioned not only as connective tissue between the Stahlhelm and the intellectual debates of the Conservative Revolution, but also as a vehicle for the development of national socialist theory in its own right. For its part, the Stahlhelm did, in fact, realise some of the *Standarte*'s recommendations, most notably the granting of membership to men who were not war veterans, a move that made no sense for an ostensibly apolitical veterans' organisation.¹²⁹ The Stahlhelm may not have endorsed the most extreme views in the *Standarte*, but it continued to absorb radical splinter organisations, including the Westphalian League and the Bund Wiking (Viking League), the latter of which was led by Ehrhardt.¹³⁰ To add an additional layer of irony, the Stahlhelm soon adopted the corporatist-style "work programme" that Ehrhardt had outlined in the *Standarte*, thus endorsing ideas from the very man whom it had banned the *Standarte* for praising.¹³¹ The notion of Fascist-style corporatism was thus beginning to gain traction in the Stahlhelm proper. As Berghahn noted, the *Standarte* circle left an impression on the Stahlhelm leadership at the intellectual level, helping to entrench the desirability of a frontline soldiers' state, and to politically justify the frontline soldiers' will to power.¹³²

By the mid-1920s, the Stahlhelm's exchanges with representatives of Weimar democracy had become decidedly brusque. In a 1925 communication to the government from Duesterberg's chapter in Halle, the Stahlhelm registered the latest decisions of its federal leadership, agreed

¹²⁶ For a detailed description of Schauwecker's associations during this time, see Ulrich Fröschle, "Radikal im Denken, aber schlapp im Handeln? Franz Schauwecker: Aufbruch der Nation (1929)," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 53 (January 2003): 262-264, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004334045_018.

¹²⁷ Morat, *Tat zur Gelassenheit*, 62.

¹²⁸ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 188.

¹²⁹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 188. See also Helmut Franke, "Die Tragödie der Frontsoldaten," *Arminius* (November 14, 1926).

¹³⁰ Jones, *German Right 1918-1930*, 346.

¹³¹ Ehrhardt, "Werksgemeinschaft," 492-493. Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), 152.

¹³² Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 99.

upon at a meeting in Magdeburg on 4 July.¹³³ Using fighting language that would have been at home in the *Standarte*, such as the “slavery chains [*Sklavenketten*] of Versailles,” and “internal enemies,” the Stahlhelm demanded a more nationalistic approach to both foreign and domestic policy.¹³⁴ While still touting its increasingly hypocritical claim to be “above politics,” the following years would see soldierly nationalism given as justification for the Stahlhelm’s entry into the parliamentary process.

Exchange with Italy and Entry into Parliamentary Politics, 1927-1932

By the mid-1920s, the Stahlhelm had established regular contact with Fascist Italy. The primary intermediary between the two was Giuseppe Renzetti, Mussolini’s liaison to Germany.¹³⁵ Between the mid-1920s and early 1930s, the Stahlhelm attracted more funds from Italian coffers than did the NSDAP, indicating the potential the Fascists saw in the veterans’ organisation and its existing footholds in German civil society.¹³⁶ The Italian regime’s growing interest in the Stahlhelm formed part of its broader efforts to extend Italy’s international influence through nurturing sympathetic foreign organisations with the potential to achieve power in their home countries. The friendly relations between the Italian Fascists and the Stahlhelm persisted despite the sticky question of South Tyrol, where the Fascists were undertaking their Italianisation programme, repressing the German-speaking minority and banning the German language.¹³⁷ Despite issuing criticism of Mussolini’s position on South Tyrol in its newspaper, the Stahlhelm’s overt sympathy for Fascism damaged its revanchist credentials in the eyes of many Germans.¹³⁸ This was satirised in a 1929 cartoon appearing in the magazine *Simplicissimus* (Figure 1). Depicting a Stahlhelmer in a comradely embrace with

¹³³ Stahlhelm Halle Chapter, “Abschrift,” (Halle, July 1925), in R 72/4, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 64.

¹³⁴ Stahlhelm Halle Chapter, “Abschrift,” 65-66.

¹³⁵ Stefan Laffin, “Gaining a Foothold in the Weimar Republic: Giuseppe Renzetti’s Activities in the Years 1925-27,” *Storicamente* 13, no. 9, (2017): 6-7. [10.12977/stor664](https://doi.org/10.12977/stor664); Josef Schröder, “Zur Italien-Reise einer brandenburgisch-pommerschen Stahlhelm-Gruppe im November 1930: Ein Beitrag zu Renzettis Wirken,” in *Geschichtsbilder: Festschrift für Michael Salewski zum 65. Geburtstag, Vol. 47* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 119-132.

¹³⁶ R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini and the Eclipse of Italian Fascism: From Dictatorship to Populism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 73.

¹³⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 189.

¹³⁸ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 189. See Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, “Antwort an Mussolini,” *Der Stahlhelm* (February 21, 1926); Helmut Franke, “Ehre der Arbeit,” *Der Stahlhelm* (February 21, 1926).

an Italian Blackshirt, the caption reads: “Now, Tyroler, as interpreter you may speak German!”¹³⁹

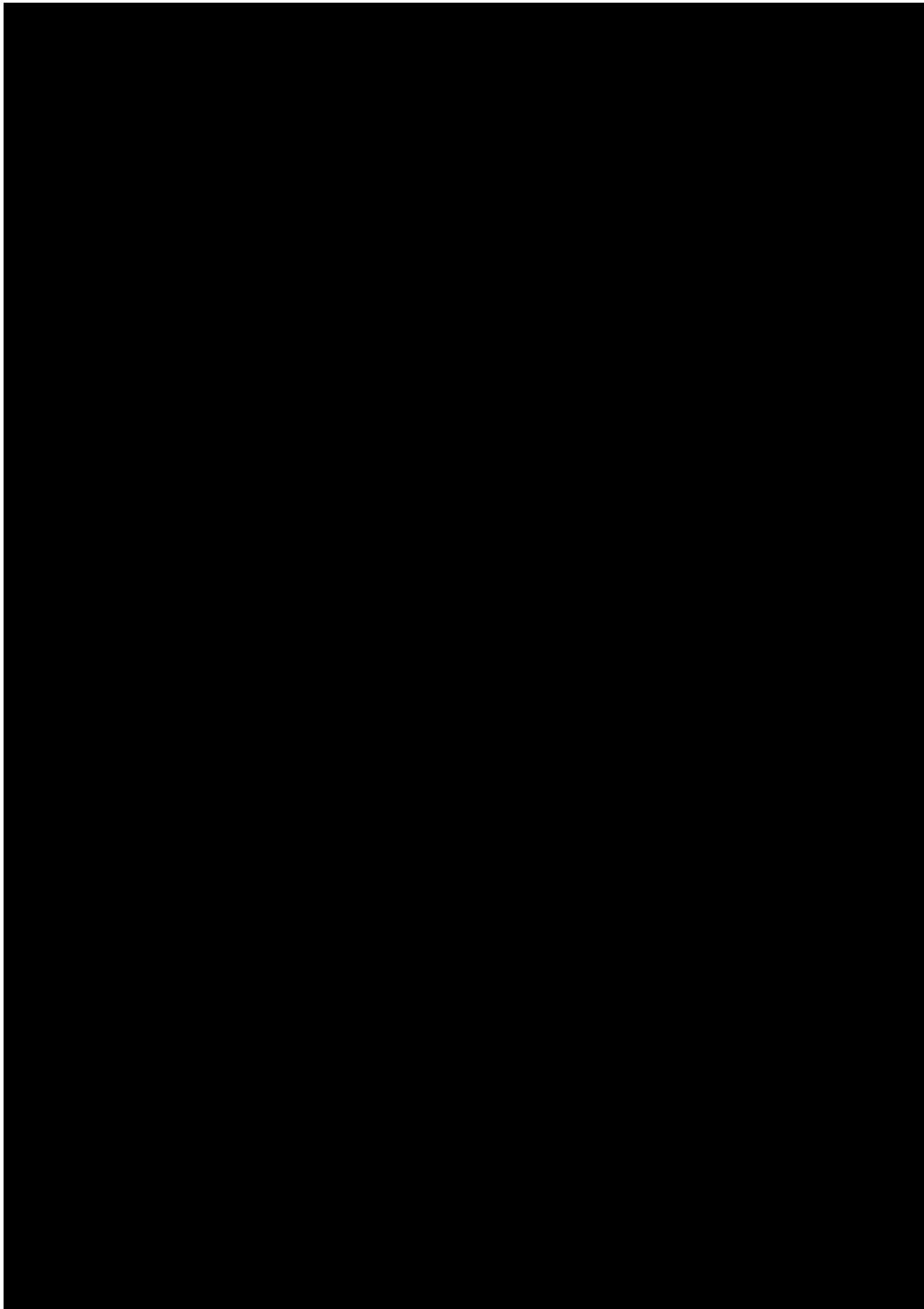


Figure 1. The Stahlhelm satirised as Fascist collaborators: Erich Schilling, “Stahlhelmbesuch bei den Faschisten.” Reprinted from *Simplicissimus* 36 (1929): 433.

¹³⁹ Erich Schilling, “Stahlhelmbesuch bei den Faschisten,” *Simplicissimus* 36 (1929): 433.

The piece was not only astute in depicting the Stahlhelm's attitude; it also reflected the increased contact between the Stahlhelm and the Fascists. In 1930, the Italian Fascists sent a governmental representative to Koblenz to attend the Stahlhelm's annual commemorative event, the frontline soldiers' day (*Reichsfrontsoldetentag*).¹⁴⁰ In the late 1920s and early 1930s many Stahlhelm functionaries, including Seldte himself, undertook visits to Italy.¹⁴¹ Stahlhelm cells were also increasing their influence abroad, particularly in Portugal and Latin America, and the federal leadership in Germany instructed its foreign representatives to coordinate the dissemination of anti-republican propaganda.¹⁴² The Stahlhelm looked favourably towards comparable nationalistic veterans' organisations in foreign countries, further indicating the internationalist orientation of the its organisation and developing ideology.¹⁴³

The Stahlhelm's domestic policy was also characterised during this period by expansion and attempts at collaboration. By increments, the pledge to be "above politics" gave way to "within the state" (*Hinein in den Staat*); a phrase which first appeared in Stahlhelm literature in October, 1926.¹⁴⁴ This was simultaneously a rejection of the putschist tactics favoured by the erstwhile *Standarte* circle, and also of the Weimar system itself. With the goal of preparing its members to take over a range of civil positions, the Stahlhelm injected political opportunism into its already vast network of splinter organisations. For instance, through the social work of the Stas, the Stahlhelm hoped to wrest economic bargaining away from trade unions, which, according to Duesterberg, had become so close to Marxism that often "a distinction between them [could] hardly be made."¹⁴⁵ To simultaneously counteract the individualism of the liberal capitalist economy, the Stas sought to forge a national community based on "the spirit of the front and the will to German freedom."¹⁴⁶

Meanwhile, the Stahlhelm study society, Studentenring Langemarck, hoped to advance the Stahlhelm's branch of nationalistic thought to combat the foothold Marxist theory had within

¹⁴⁰ Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen*, 234.

¹⁴¹ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 215; Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen*, 170.

¹⁴² Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 215; Schieder, *Faschistische Diktaturen*, 171.

¹⁴³ For a Stahlhelm statement on the French Office des nationale Combattants, see Sozialpolitische Abteilung des Bundesamts des Stahlhelms, Bund der Frontsoldaten, "Stellungnahme Betr.: Kriegsteilnehmer-Nationalamt," Magdeburg, November 19, 1927, R 72/10, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2.

¹⁴⁴ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 103.

¹⁴⁵ Theodor Duesterberg, "'Der Deutsche': Die Gewerkschaftsfeindschaft des Stahlhelms," October 31, 1928, R 72/9, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁴⁶ Duesterberg, "'Der Deutsche'," 1; Hildebrandt, "Soziale Arbeit," 135-136.

the German intelligentsia.¹⁴⁷ Through its youth division, the Jungstahlhelm, and the comparable initiative targeting high school students, the Stahlhelm-Studentenbewegung, the Stahlhelm attempted to inspire new generations of men with the ideas of the “frontline fighters’ generation.”¹⁴⁸ The Stahlhelm even made incursions into religious life and, as of 1928, counted 208 evangelical “Stahlhelm-pastors” (*Stahlhelmpfarrer*), and ten Catholic ones.¹⁴⁹ Increasingly antirepublican rhetoric characterised the Stahlhelm’s annual gathering (*Frontsoldatentag*), and appeared in the pages of *Der Stahlhelm*. In addition to demanding the repudiation of the German war guilt clause and the cessation of reparation payments, the Stahlhelm federal leadership demanded “the renewed recognition of the Imperial colours, black, white, red,” and the strengthening of the powers of President Hindenburg.¹⁵⁰ This was intended to encourage a spirit of national unity and to condense power into a single leadership role — essentially “setting the stage” for a Stahlhelm dictator.¹⁵¹

As both inspiration and justification, the Stahlhelm leadership looked towards “those who have no interest in maintaining the parliamentary system”: the Italian Fascists.¹⁵² In July, 1928, the Stahlhelm referred with pride to a statement by the editor of the newspaper *Giornale d’Italia*, Virginio Gayda, who claimed that the Stahlhelm had the potential to renew Germany, overcoming socialism and parliamentarism.¹⁵³ A few months later, in September, the Stahlhelm issued a statement announcing its formal rejection of the Weimar constitution.¹⁵⁴ Heinz Brauweiler, head of *Der Stahlhelm* newspaper, authored a proposal for a referendum to revise the constitution along authoritarian, pro-monarchist lines.¹⁵⁵ The same month, Elhard von

¹⁴⁷ Hans Aschoff, “Die Stahlhelm-Studentenbewegung,” in *Der Stahlhelm Erinnerungen und Bilder aus den Jahren 1918-1933, Band 1*, ed. Franz Seldte (Berlin: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1932), 145.

¹⁴⁸ R. Görnemann, “Vom Werden des Jungstahlhelm,” in *Der Stahlhelm Erinnerungen und Bilder aus den Jahren 1918-1933, Band 1*, ed. Franz Seldte (Berlin: Stahlhelm Verlag, 1932), 132; Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 107.

¹⁴⁹ “Protokoll der Bundesvorstandssitzung am 24/25 November 1928,” November 24-25, 1928, R 72/9, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁵⁰ “Stahlhelmbotschaft zum 8. Reichsfrontsoldatentag in Berlin am 8 April 1927,” *Der Stahlhelm* 9, no. 20, May 15, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, Band 3: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 25; “Zweite Stahlhelmbotschaft von 3. Juni 1928 zum 9. Reichsfrontsoldatentag in Hamburg,” *Der Stahlhelm* 10, no. 24, June 10, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, Band 3: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 66-67.

¹⁵¹ *Der Stahlhelm*, 15 May, 1927, 1.

¹⁵² “EntschlieÙung des Stahlhelm-Bundesvorstandes vom 8. Juli 1928,” *Der Stahlhelm* 10, no. 29, July 15, 1928, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, Band 3: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 73.

¹⁵³ “EntschlieÙung vom 8. Juli 1928,” 73.

¹⁵⁴ “Das Stahlhelm-Volksbegehren Beschluß vom 22/23 September 1928,” *Der Stahlhelm* 10, no. 40, September 30, 1928, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, Band 3: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 85; Breuer, *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit*, 123.

¹⁵⁵ Jones, *German Right 1918-1930*, 462.

Morozowicz, the leader of the Brandenburg Stahlhelm, issued the so-called *Fürstenwalder Haßbotschaft* (Fürstenwalde Message of Hate, or Hate Declaration) to an assembly of Stahlhelm men. Morozowicz claimed: “We hate with our entire souls the current state system, its form and its content,” and called for active resistance to Weimar democracy.¹⁵⁶

Radical figures like Morozowicz had always been present in the Stahlhelm, but what is revealing is how the Stahlhelm leadership reacted. In contrast to the stern rebuke it had given Franke not three years prior, the Stahlhelm leadership now issued a statement in *Der Stahlhelm* claiming that it was not necessary to refute Morozowicz’s *Haßbotschaft*, as it was not, in fact, a hateful message at all.¹⁵⁷ In a remarkable act of doublethink, the paper claimed that Morozowicz had been referring not to the state, but to the *system*.¹⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, this justification did not sit well with Stresemann or the Weimar government, coming, as it did, on top of the Stahlhelm’s scathing criticisms of Stresemann’s foreign policy.¹⁵⁹ This led Stresemann to warn a colleague in late 1928 that they were witnessing in the Stahlhelm “the totally intentional formation of a kind of fascist party.”¹⁶⁰

The Stahlhelm distanced itself from Weimar democracy not only in word, but in deed. Having alienated Stresemann’s DVP, the Stahlhelm gravitated towards the DNVP, with which it had always maintained ties through Duesterberg’s Halle chapter. Between 1928 and 1930, the DNVP underwent a dramatic organisational restructure, resulting in the instalment of media tycoon Alfred Hugenberg as party leader.¹⁶¹ Hugenberg was a more radical figure than his arch-conservative predecessor, Count Kuno von Westarp (1864-1945), and was instrumental in nationalist efforts to create a non-sectarian, pan-German oppositional block with sufficient clout to wrest control from the SPD-led Grand Coalition in the Reichstag.¹⁶² In mid-1929, the Stahlhelm and the DNVP played a key role in organising the *Volksentscheid gegen den Young*

¹⁵⁶ Elhard von Morozowicz, “Fürstenwalder Haßbotschaft,” 1928, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, 1849-1934, Band 2: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche, 1926-1931*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 82.

¹⁵⁷ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 114.

¹⁵⁸ *Der Stahlhelm* 21, no. 10, 1928, 1.

¹⁵⁹ “Stahlhelm und Außenpolitik,” *Der Stahlhelm* 42, October 14, 1928, 1.

¹⁶⁰ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 116.

¹⁶¹ For a detailed study of these events, see Larry Eugene Jones, “German Conservatism at the Crossroads: Count Kuno von Westarp and the Struggle for Control of the DNVP, 1928-30,” *Contemporary European History* 18, no. 2 (May 2009): 147-148, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40542865>.

¹⁶² Jones, *German Right, 1918-1930*, 300.

Plan.¹⁶³ They garnered the support of the NSDAP for the cause, with Hitler joining Seldte and Duesterberg on the Volksentscheid's leadership committee.¹⁶⁴

The Stahlhelm's relationship with the government was further damaged when, in October, 1929, the Minister for the Interior, Albert Grzesinski (1879-1947), disbanded the Stahlhelm and its subsidiaries in Rhineland-Westfalen after the organisation conducted a series of illegal military exercises.¹⁶⁵ In 1930, the Volksbegehren campaign attempted to build influence in the historically conservative, militaristic state of Prussia through a campaign to dissolve the Prussian Landtag, which had become a bastion for the SPD.¹⁶⁶ The high point of this nationalist collaboration is often considered to be the Harzburg rally of 1931 and its attendant political alliance, the Harzburg Front.¹⁶⁷ For the Stahlhelm, however, the "within the state" methodology persisted in Duesterberg's attempt to run for Reich President in 1932 and in the formation, in early 1933, of the Kampffront Schwarz-Weiß-Rot, an electoral alliance with the DNVP.¹⁶⁸ Although short-lived, the Harzburg Front had significant and long-lasting implications. It accelerated the cross-pollination of ideas and the development of alternative fascisms. It led directly to the formation of the GSF, in which the Stahlhelm was heavily represented, and, relatedly, encouraged the development of the Stahlhelm's own interpretation of fascism.

¹⁶³ "EntschlieÙung des Bundesvorstandes des "Stahlhelm" gegen den Young-Plan auf dem 10. Reichsfrontsoldatentag in München," *Der Stahlhelm* 11, no. 23, June 9, 1929, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, Band 3: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 122-123.

¹⁶⁴ Werberg, *Stahlhelm*, 179.

¹⁶⁵ Albert Grzesinski, "Auflösung des Stahlhelm in Rheinland-Westfalen," October 8, 1929, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, Band 3: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 141.

¹⁶⁶ "EntschlieÙung des Bundesvorstandes des Stahlhelm B. d. F. zum XI. Reichsfrontsoldatentag in Koblenz," *Der Stahlhelm* 12, no. 41, October 12, 1930, in *Deutsche Reichsgeschichte in Dokumenten, Band 3: Der Ausgang der liberalen Epoche*, ed. Johannes Hohlfeld (Berlin: Vertrieb amtlicher Veröffentlichungen G.m.b.H., 1934), 171-172.

¹⁶⁷ Larry Eugene Jones, "Nationalists, Nazis, and the Assault against Weimar: Revisiting the Harzburg Rally of October 1931," *German Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (October 2006): 486, 490-491.

¹⁶⁸ Pitted in direct opposition to Hitler in the 1932 presidential election, Duesterberg soon found himself the target of a blistering smear-campaign headed by the NSDAP. The Nazis dug into Duesterberg's heritage and branded him a "quarter-Jew" after revealing that his paternal grandfather had been Jewish, converting to Christianity in 1817. These revelations had a profound impact on Duesterberg. An avowed antisemite, he had hitherto been unaware of his own Jewish lineage. He challenged both Goebbels and Walther Darré, the NSDAP functionaries primarily responsible for the slander, to duels. Both refused, stating that they would not honour a quarter-Jew by duelling with him. Duesterberg summarily withdrew from the campaign after the first round, in which he garnered approximately 2.56 million votes, failing to pose a threat to Hitler or a viable alternative to Hindenburg. Duesterberg, *Stahlhelm und Hitler*, 35; Jones, *Hitler versus Hindenburg*, 274; Geoff Eley, "Conservatives and Radical Nationalists in Germany: The Production of Fascist Potentials," in *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth Century Europe*, ed. Martin Blinkhorn (London: Routledge, 1990), 67.

“*Stahlhelm-Fascism*”

In 1930, the leader of the Stas, Otto Pertz, declared that Europe’s future would be shaped either by Bolshevism or by “*Stahlhelm-Fascism*.”¹⁶⁹ This claim came in the context of the September elections, meaning that Pertz no doubt harboured a tactical desire to appeal to Nazi voters.¹⁷⁰ Pertz’s statement was hardly isolated, however — it was part of a surge of renewed radicalisation within the *Stahlhelm*’s organisational networks. In a barefaced endorsement of new nationalism, the Braunschweiger *Stahlhelm* newspaper changed its name to *Junge Nation* (*Young Nation*) in 1928.¹⁷¹ The *Standarte* had also regained much of its pro-fascist character, albeit from a more amenable “within the state” perspective. It published regular “reports from Rome,” which drew comparisons between Italy and Germany and reflected the inspirational potential that the *Stahlhelm* saw in Italian Fascism.¹⁷² Many high-profile *Stahlhelm* members also undertook extracurricular activities to promote fascism. As explored above, *Stahlhelm*ers made up a large percentage of the GSF’s membership, with Friedrich Everling, Gerhard Albrecht, Max von Binzer, and Duesterberg all being high-profile members. Nevertheless, the *Stahlhelm* leadership feared that being labelled “fascist” outright would risk alienating both its traditionally conservative support networks and President Hindenburg himself.¹⁷³ Seldte and Duesterberg continued to assure Hindenburg that the *Stahlhelm* had always acted within the parameters of the constitution (even while trying to change it), even while the organisation cultivated fascist intellectual trends on a more systemic scale than ever before.¹⁷⁴ *Stahlhelm* literature from this period is populated by references to Italian Fascism as an example of supreme relevancy to Germany.¹⁷⁵ By the end of the 1920s, the *Stahlhelm* was endorsing a position which was — in essence, if not methodology — identical to that which Franke had

¹⁶⁹ Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 178.

¹⁷⁰ Evidence of the *Stahlhelm*’s strained relationship with the National Socialists during this period can be seen, for example, in a confidential 1929 communication from the *Stahlhelm* leadership in Westtharz, in which the regional *Stahlhelm* leader expressed his dismay at potentially losing *Stahlhelm* men to the Nazis. Der *Stahlhelm* Gau Westtharz, “Letter to Hannover Landsamt,” December 17, 1929, R 72/12, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1-2; Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 178.

¹⁷¹ *Junge Nation* 6, no. 9, 1928, 1.

¹⁷² Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 175.

¹⁷³ The *Stahlhelm* generally preferred terms like “*Stahlhelmsgedanke*” (“*Stahlhelm-thought*”) to describe its political position. See, for example, “Letter to Bundesleitung des *Stahlhelm* Magdeburg,” Berlin, December 3, 1926, R 72/6, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁷⁴ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 116-117, 125.

¹⁷⁵ Der *Stahlhelm*, Bund der Frontsoldaten Landsverband Westmark, “Letter to the Bundesföhren,” April 6, 1932, R 72/28, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1; Bach and Breuer, *Bewegung und Regime*, 175.

advanced some six years earlier, namely that Fascism and the Stahlhelm shared a common goal: “the seizure and penetration of the state through the front soldiers.”¹⁷⁶

It was not by chance that the most explicit likening of the Stahlhelm to Fascism came from Pertz, the leader of the Stas. As Salvador noted, the Stas’ social work placed it at the forefront of the struggle against economic exploitation, and it was thus particularly attuned to Fascism’s attempts to engineer an alternative economic model.¹⁷⁷ Before the Great Depression, the Stahlhelm’s position on economic and labour matters had been guided vaguely by its nationalism and was more often situationally than ideologically motivated. A 1927 statement from Duesterberg, issued in response to a factory workers’ dispute with their employers, is illustrative:

If it is a question of international trust capital wanting to depress the living wages of the German worker to an inhumane level, then the Stahlhelm stands by the side of the German worker [...]. Negotiations have been held with key figures to avert the worst. Should there be a strike, however, the Stahlhelm will not shelve its weapons, but will use all its strength to ensure that the German worker is defended in the struggle.¹⁷⁸

Three years later, Stas members were confronted first-hand with the devastating impacts of the Great Depression, and the Stahlhelm was under increasing pressure to provide firmer ideological backing for its position on the labour question. Italian Fascism provided the obvious reference point. In the interim, the Italian Fascist *Carta del Lavoro* had demonstrated three years of widely perceived success. According to the Stas, German workers and employers now shared a common goal, and would, as seen in Italy, work together for the benefit of the nation.¹⁷⁹ In 1930, Duesterberg put forth a clearer justification on the labour question than that of three years prior. He outlined the Stas’ key role, stating: “Through the Stas, the Stahlhelm wants to do something new, namely to bring the idea of comradeship into the economy.”¹⁸⁰ “Kamerad” Halbig, the first chairman of the Stas, noted that Germany was not yet in a position

¹⁷⁶ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 185.

¹⁷⁷ Salvador, “*Frontsozialismus der Tat*,” 112-114.

¹⁷⁸ “Der Stahlhelm und der Lohnkampf der Bergarbeiter,” October 19, 1927, R 72/8, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Stahlhelm Selbsthilfe, “Stahlhelm und Arbeiterschaft,” R 72/717, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Theodor Duesterberg, “Weshalb Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe?,” in *Befreiung und Aufstieg: Reden anlässlich der Kundgebung der Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe am 2. Februar 1930 in Berlin* (Halle, 1930), R 72/232, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 13.

to achieve a “social system such as that created by Mussolini,” but stressed the importance of instilling corporatist principles throughout the Stas’ network:

It is simply not true that employers and workers need to be absolute enemies. [...] Unlike certain trade unions [...], the Stas advises its members that, under the present circumstances, purely economic disputes and wage increases are usually of no benefit to the workers, but are sure to cause serious damage to the German economy, with which the fate of the German worker is inseparably linked.¹⁸¹

This reflected the then-current approach to corporatism outlined in the *Carta del Lavoro*, before the second phase of Italy’s corporate experiment abolished “independent” workers’ and employers’ syndicates. Advocates of Stahlhelm corporatism argued that, during peacetime, the frontline spirit could manifest in an organic state, consisting of equally important industrial and rural “colonies” (i.e. corporate entities).¹⁸² The intended function of these cells was to reduce unemployment while instilling discipline and comradeship, and to strengthen the economy through encouraging national self-sufficiency. Ostensibly, workers would retain some bargaining power within their respective corporate estates.

The corporatism of the Italian state appealed to the Stahlhelm, furthermore, as it presented a mode of organisation in which young people could serve the state while undertaking a variety of social work, simultaneously instilling discipline and diverting workers from Marxist-backed labour groups.¹⁸³ The leader of the Stahlhelm’s department of social politics, H. Hildebrandt, stated that the Stas formed a vital cornerstone in harmonising different civil interests, thus setting the groundwork for corporate estates in Germany.¹⁸⁴ To further work towards building corporatism, the Stahlhelm established the Bund für die organische Wirtschafts- und Staatsaufbau (BOWS), with the aim of bringing employers and businesses into cooperation with the Stas in service of a (Stahlhelm-directed) corporate state.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Kamerad Halbig, “Entstehung und Wesen der Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe,” in *Befreiung und Aufstieg: Reden anlässlich der Kundgebung der Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe am 2. Februar 1930 in Berlin* (Halle, 1930), R 72/232, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 8.

¹⁸² “Aufruf des Stahlhelm zum Eintritt in den “Bund für organischen Staats- und Wirtschaftsaufbau” sowie in die Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe,” 1930, R 72/174, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1; Salvador, “Frontsozialismus der Tat,” 118.

¹⁸³ Salvador, “Frontsozialismus der Tat,” 118.

¹⁸⁴ Hildebrandt, “Soziale Arbeit,” 138.

¹⁸⁵ Salvador, “Frontsozialismus der Tat,” 115; “Der Stahlhelm als staatsaufbauende Organisation,” R 72/303, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1-2; “Aufruf des Stahlhelm,” 1. See also Duesterberg, ““Der Deutsche,”” 1.

In a memorandum to Seldte in January, 1931, Wilhelm Longert stressed the importance of these practical efforts to build corporatism:

If the Stahlhelm does not wish to lag behind, it must act now. When one considers that Fascism is the great attempt to implement the organic idea, the last doubts should vanish. Every expert sympathetic to Germany and Italy will testify to the similarity in ideas between the organic direction and Fascism.¹⁸⁶

By “organic idea” and “organic direction” (*organische Richtung*), Longert was referring to notions outlined in Othmar Spann’s corporate universalism, presented in Spann’s journal *Ständisches Leben*, which Longert praised as practically minded.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, the Stahlhelm’s corporatism was in no small way influenced by Spannian universalism, particularly as the Spann circle had, until recently, been closely associated with the Austrian Heimwehr. The Stahlhelm had a strong foothold in Vienna, having not only a general division there, but also chapters of a number of its splinter-organisations.¹⁸⁸ It had been swift to establish friendly relations with the Spann circle and the Heimwehr, while simultaneously forging closer bonds with Mussolini and learning first-hand about the functioning of the Fascist state in Italy and the influence Mussolini was exercising via the Heimwehr in Austria.¹⁸⁹ Hildebrandt saw Italy and Austria as natural allies for Germany and, like Longert, argued specifically that Spann’s “organic” corporatism represented a break from the liberal/Marxist tradition.¹⁹⁰ The Heimwehr and the Stahlhelm were, through their social work, the natural vanguard of the organic state and the first line of defence against the insidious “Marxist idea.”¹⁹¹ In 1930, Halbig similarly praised the advances the Styrian Heimwehr was making towards instilling a corporate state: “The Styrian Industrial Association has obliged its members to give special consideration to Heimwehr members when hiring new staff. If we were to reach this point in Germany, many

¹⁸⁶ Wilhelm Longert, “Letter to Franz Seldte,” Berlin, January 27, 1931, R 72/309, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Longert, “Letter to Seldte,” 1. For more on universalism, see Chapter Six.

¹⁸⁸ Anke Hoffstadt, “Stahlhelm,” in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Band 5: Organisationen, Institutionen, Bewegungen*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 586.

¹⁸⁹ Aschoff, “Stahlhelm-Studentenbewegung,” 145-146; Pelinka and Bischof, “Introduction,” 2.

¹⁹⁰ Echoing Spann’s own assertions, Hildebrandt stated that Spann was influenced by a different school of thinkers, namely Adam Müller and Friedrich List, both of whom had, in the early nineteenth century, opposed the developing laissez-faire economy from a conservative authoritarian perspective. Hildebrandt’s position is summarised in the following internal Stahlhelm source: “Niederschrift über die 3. Tagung der Landes-Sozialreferenten in Halberstadt,” March 8/9, 1930, R 72/309, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2.

¹⁹¹ “Niederschrift,” 2. The idea that the Stahlhelm was the truest analogue to Italy’s Fascist syndicates was shared by many Italian Fascists themselves. See: Scholz, “Italienischer Faschismus als ‘Export’-Artikel,” 165.

things in the economy and state would look different.”¹⁹² It is clear that, by now, the Stas’ ideal was to impregnate German industry, if not every element of society, with “Stahlhelm-Fascism.”

As part of its efforts to build corporatism in Germany, it was necessary for the Stahlhelm to position corporatism as an inherently “German” idea. This was especially pertinent considering the conservative character of the Stahlhelm’s support base, as many supporters looked more readily towards the Bismarckian and/or Wilhelmine eras than to foreign movements like Fascism. To this end, Longert — who was editor of the newspaper *Nationalwirtschaft* (*National Economy*) — and “Professor” Lent provided the Stahlhelm with a history of the corporate idea of the state (*Staatsidee*). Longert anachronously traced the corporatist idea from Aristotle and St Augustine, through to Thomas Aquinas, Kant, and Hegel, and finally, of course, to Spann and Italian Fascism, placing particular emphasis on the modern organic idea as a continuation of the German-idealist tradition.¹⁹³ Longert and Lent also underscored the importance of “organic” or “biological” hierarchies, and of the Führerprinzip.¹⁹⁴ This meant that the leader of the corporate state would wield authority immune to any “foreign will” — which meant anything seen as incompatible with the (German) national spirit.¹⁹⁵ Along with Hildebrandt’s assertions that corporatism as a political theory derived from German intellectuals, Binzer and Everling authored articles arguing that corporatism as *practise* also had strong precedents in Germany.¹⁹⁶ For instance, Binzer likened the functioning of the Italian state to constitutional changes enacted under Bismarck.¹⁹⁷ Everling argued that Frederick the Great and Bismarck had been practitioners of the organic idea, as they hailed from a military tradition in which comradeship bound together men of all ranks.¹⁹⁸ Seldte, in a speech addressing the Stas, similarly suggested that the Bismarckian era had set an organisational precedent most in keeping with the “Stahlhelm-spirit,” recognising that the right to private property and private accumulation reflected spiritual investment in, and love for the Fatherland.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² Halbig, “Entstehung und Wesen,” 7.

¹⁹³ “Niederschrift,” 10. Longert published more extensively on the subject from an economic perspective in his tract *Liberale oder organische Staats- und Wirtschaftsordnung?* (Berlin: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1931).

¹⁹⁴ “Niederschrift,” 10-11.

¹⁹⁵ “Niederschrift,” 10-11.

¹⁹⁶ Bohn, *Idee vom deutschen Ständestaat*, 128; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 140-147.

¹⁹⁷ Binzer, “Führerauslese,” 28; Adler, *Italian Industrialists*, 387.

¹⁹⁸ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, R 72/309, 6.

¹⁹⁹ Franz Seldte, “Stahlhelm und deutscher Arbeiter,” in *Befreiung und Aufstieg: Reden anlässlich der Kundgebung der Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe am 2. Februar 1930 in Berlin*, ed. Vorstand der Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe (Halle, 1930), R 72/232, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 11-12.

Ironically, demonstrating that corporatism was the correct way forward for Germany also hinged upon establishing that corporatism had already proved a success in foreign countries. Heinz Brauweiler noted that Mussolini provided inspiration for the military regimes of Primo de Rivera in Spain (1923-1930) and Józef Piłsudski in Poland (1926-1935).²⁰⁰ He suggested that the three regimes were similar through their use of “constitutional violence,” in contrast to the “unconstitutional” Russian dictatorship.²⁰¹ To increase corporatism’s appeal to conservative Catholics, Gerhard Albrecht — professor at Jena University and dual member of the Stahlhelm and the GSF — presented the idea of corporatism as international through underscoring its adaptability to Catholicism. Corporatism reflected the only mode whereby class struggle and the atomised liberal economy could both be overcome, in favour of a strong and unified state in which workers and employers enjoyed a sense of mutual belonging derived from shared commitment to Catholic values.²⁰² Both Everling, a long-time member of the DNVP, and Albrecht were active in shaping the Stahlhelm’s ideology to better align with the DNVP’s when the two groups entered into electoral alliance.²⁰³ In 1929, Everling published justifications for the Stahlhelm’s official entry into politics.²⁰⁴ Here, he referred to Mussolini as a guiding example for Germany, stating: “Millions [of Germans] call out for a strong hand that will, like Mussolini in his own fatherland, free us from the plague of parliamentarism.”²⁰⁵

Elsewhere, however, he was less complimentary. Analysing corporatism more thoroughly the following year, he wrote that Italian Fascism, due to its Marxist heritage, had not gone far enough to consolidate workers and employers into unified interest groups based on common professions; failure to do this would weaken each corporate entity by permitting workers too much independent bargaining power.²⁰⁶ This was a criticism shared by other conservative advocates of corporatism, of which Spann was arguably most prominent; and which, as we have already seen, contemporaneously circulated within the capitalistic-minded GSF.²⁰⁷ Everling claimed that there should be seven corporate entities in total, respectively representing agriculture, industrial primary production, industrial processing, crafting, trade, transport, and

²⁰⁰ Heinz Brauweiler, *Schule der Politik: Ausgabe für den “Stahlhelm” Bund der Frontsoldaten* (Berlin: Ring Verlag, 1928), 202.

²⁰¹ Brauweiler, *Schule der Politik*, 202.

²⁰² Gerhard Albrecht, *Vom Klassenkampf zum sozialen Frieden* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1932); Joan Campbell, *Joy in Work, German Work: The National Debate 1800-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 287.

²⁰³ Raimund von dem Bussche, *Konservatismus in der Weimarer Republik: Die Politisierung des Unpolitischen* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1998), 88.

²⁰⁴ Everling, “Warum bekämpfen?” 1.

²⁰⁵ Everling, “Warum bekämpfen?” 1.

²⁰⁶ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 23-24.

²⁰⁷ Indeed, many of Everling’s criticisms derived from Spann, whom he greatly admired. Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 2-4.

the spiritual or intellectual professions.²⁰⁸ However, his main criticism of Fascism stemmed from the fact that it failed to ascribe due centrality to monarchism.²⁰⁹ Desire to reinstate monarchies was generally uncommon within the fascist sphere, but was common within the Stahlhelm. Despite technically being a constitutional monarchy, Fascist Italy had, according to Everling, failed to achieve a satisfactory balance, as the Fascist Grand Council was insufficiently independent from the estates under its rule, and the monarchy exercised negligible influence.²¹⁰ For Everling, a true organic state was inconceivable without a strong monarchy, independent from corporate cells, which could coordinate disparate interest groups.²¹¹ Everling argued the need for a more conservative, pro-capitalist interpretation of corporatism than that practised in Italy.

What unified all interpretations of corporatism within the Stahlhelm was the stress placed on the army as a guiding model for the state. In 1930, Seldte summarised the Stahlhelm's take on the organic idea with typical military language and metaphor:

We old frontline soldiers have learnt both to obey and to command. That means we know that freedom can only come from unity; in terms of individual behaviour, this means self-discipline. Only the unification of each individual's will, will give power to the whole. In the face of today's emergencies, we have had to take charge of many things that would have been almost too much for the original, simple frontline soldier's way of thinking. But tough and old bones, when ordered, pack a second pair of boots in their backpack and march on. The Stas is another of these newly cobbled pair of boots. The front-line soldier complains, but this does not stop him from lining up again and marching on.²¹²

Such proclamations were sufficiently vague to gloss over the many potential points of contention that might arise, including (as seen in the GSF) the question of the corporate state's capacity to intervene in the free market and/or to curb private accumulation. For the Stahlhelm, the corporate idea was only ever as strong as its ability to represent the *Frontgeist* and manifest soldierly nationalism. Everling was somewhat more specific about the potential mechanics of the Stahlhelm-state, as he proposed to universalise military discipline by modelling corporate

²⁰⁸ Bohn, *Idee vom deutschen Ständestaat*, 80-81.

²⁰⁹ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 24.

²¹⁰ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 24-25.

²¹¹ Everling specifically outlined his views of revanchist monarchism in many publications. Two of the most significant are Friedrich Everling, *Republik oder Monarchie?* (Berlin: Auflage Berlin, 1924); and Friedrich Everling, *Wiederentdeckte Monarchie* (Berlin: Brunnen, 1932). Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 25; Bohn, *Idee vom deutschen Ständestaat*, 80.

²¹² Seldte, "Stahlhelm und deutscher Arbeiter," 13.

entities after the organisational structure of the Reichswehr.²¹³ The implication, of course, was that there would be little room for internal “bottom-up” decision-making processes within each corporate estate. Although Othmar Spann was frequently cited by Stahlhelm intellectuals as proof of the viability of the “organic idea,” Spann and his followers neither endorsed an organisationally dictatorial corporate model nor assigned a position of centrality to veterans’ organisations or the army.²¹⁴ In short, the marriage of soldierly nationalism with corporatism, most successfully expressed by Italian Fascism, had clearly impressed upon many Stahlhelmers the viability of the corporate idea, while corporatism itself proved a sufficiently malleable concept to accommodate the Stahlhelm’s militarism, authoritarianism, conservatism, pro-monarchism, and fascism. It did not come into sharp conflict with Italian corporatism precisely because Fascist corporatism was itself a “work in progress.”

The Decline of the Stahlhelm, 1933-1935

The Stahlhelm came to a rather undistinguished end in the Third Reich. It survived the take-over in 1933, and initially even benefitted from Nazi purges and repressions of political enemies. Stahlhelm members joined the SA enthusiastically in campaigns of intimidation, including the boycotting of Jewish businesses.²¹⁵ In return for their support, funds appropriated from liquidated organisations were distributed to Stahlhelm organisations in addition to National Socialist ones.²¹⁶ Soon, however, the Stahlhelm was brought into line with National Socialism as part of the process of *Gleichschaltung*, and its anti-Nazi elements were forcibly suppressed.

In June, 1933, Seldte formally ceded control of the Stahlhelm to Hitler.²¹⁷ The Stahlhelm’s members were accordingly portioned off into various National Socialist organisations, its subsidiaries absorbed, and the remaining core Stahlhelm renamed the Nationalsozialistischer deutscher Frontsoldaten-Bund (NSDFB).²¹⁸ Like the other ultranationalist enemies of Hitlerian

²¹³ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 18.

²¹⁴ For an in-depth discussion of Spannian ideology, see Chapter Six.

²¹⁵ Wolf Gruner, “Introduction,” in *The Persecution and Murder of the Jews, 1933-1945: Vol. 1: The German Reich, 1933-1937*, ed. Wolf Gruner (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008), 41.

²¹⁶ For example, see Bezirksamt Bamberg an den Gemeinderat Gaustadt, “Betreff: Anerkennung von Vereinen als Jungendpflege treibende Vereine; hier die sozialistische Arbeiterjugend und ihre Nebenorganisationen,” March 29, 1933, Stadtarchiv Bamberg, Bestand C 51 (Gaustadt) Nummer 1106, Nr. 4561.

²¹⁷ Berghahn, *Stahlhelm*, 267.

²¹⁸ For an anthology of the Stahlhelm’s activities in this era, see *Der NSDFB (Stahlhelm): Geschichte, Wesen und Aufgabe des Frontsoldatenbundes*, ed. NSDFB (Berlin: Freiheitsverlag, 1935).

Nazism considered in this thesis, the anti-Hitlerian elements in the Stahlhelm did not fare well under the new regime.²¹⁹ Duesterberg, an avowed enemy of National Socialism and critic of Hitler, was arrested in mid-1934 in the “Night of the Long Knives” purge, and interred for several weeks in Dachau concentration camp. Only through virtue of his personal friendship with Hindenburg, and his wife’s direct appeals to the ageing president on his behalf, was Duesterberg released and eventually permitted to drift into anonymity.²²⁰ Seldte, in contrast, paid the expected dues to Hitler, and was appointed Reich Minister for Labour a few days’ after Hitler assumed the chancellorship.²²¹

Stahlhelm sources from the Third Reich — that is, those produced under the NSDFB banner — unsurprisingly toed the line, demonstrating no marked ideological separation from Hitlerian Nazism. Seldte, Schauwecker, and others published materials during this period in which they presented the Stahlhelm’s history as all but synonymous with the National Socialists’, praising Hitler as the true leader of the German people from the first.²²² References to corporatism are still present in as far as they were compatible with Nazi ideology, but the Stahlhelm’s identity as an independent organisation had all but evaporated. In early November, 1935, despite Seldte’s attempts to preserve what little remained of the original Stahlhelm, the Stahlhelm was, on Hitler’s orders, disbanded completely.²²³

The Stahlhelm was the longest-existing German veterans’ organisation of the interwar period. As such, it provides one of the most illuminating case studies by which to trace the reactions of German ultranationalists to Italian Fascist ideology, and to measure the extent to which Italian Fascism could influence the content and direction of non-Hitlerian German ultranationalism. At the beginning of its career in 1918, the Stahlhelm pledged tactical allegiance to the Weimar Republic, only to grow increasingly hostile towards parliamentary

²¹⁹ For a study of Stahlhelm members’ resistance to Nazism, see Ekkehard Klaus, “Sie kamen aus dem ‘Stahlhelm’: Frühe Kampfgenossen Hitlers, die früh in den Widerstand gingen,” *BIOS – Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufsanalysen* 28, no. 1-2 (January 2015): 218-230, <https://doi.org/10.3224/bios.v28i1-2.11>.

²²⁰ Duesterberg, *Stahlhelm und Hitler*, 111.

²²¹ For an example of Seldte’s professional courtesy, see “Seldtes Besuch bei Hitler,” April 21, 1933, Munich Stadtarchiv, Zeitungsausschnitte Personen ZA-P-482-33; Klaus, “Aus dem ‘Stahlhelm,’” 218.

²²² See, for example, Franz Seldte, “Seldte über echten Sozialismus: Die sozialpolitischen Leistungen des neuen Staats,” *Abendzeitung*, no. 289, October 22, 1934, in Stadtarchiv München, Zeitungsausschnitte Personen ZA-P-482-33, 5-6; Franz Schauwecker, “Der Frontsoldat tritt an,” in *Der NSDFB (Stahlhelm): Geschichte, Wesen und Aufgabe des Frontsoldatenbundes*, ed. NSDFB (Berlin: Freiheitsverlag, 1935), 17.

²²³ Seldte attempted to convince Hitler not to disband the Stahlhelm. See “Aufzeichnung über die am 12. August 1935 im Hause Wachenfeld stattgehabte Unterredung des Führers und Reichskanzlers mit dem Bundesführer des N.S.D.F.B. (Stahlhelm) Reichsminister Seldte, betreffend die Zukunft des Stahlhelm,” in Volker R. Berghahn, “Das Ende des ‘Stahlhelms,’” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 13, no. 4 (1965): 448-449.

democracy, initially as a reaction to internal pressures. Even before it denounced the Weimar system overtly, the Stahlhelm and its subsidiaries provided a vehicle for the development of trends in ultranationalist thought. Its periodical the *Standarte* is particularly notable in that it encouraged an intellectualisation of the frontline experience via the writings of the Jünger brothers, Franke, Schauwecker, and Kleinau, among others. The Stahlhelm therefore played a role in developing and disseminating ideas of soldierly nationalism, fascism, and other concepts associated with the Conservative Revolution. Even after the end of the *Standarte*'s "radical" phase, and the abandonment of a potentially revolutionary Stahlhelm, Italian Fascism continued to exercise influence on the Stahlhelm's ideology and political development. This manifested in disparate ways, but was most cohesively expressed through the embracing of Fascist corporatism.

Stahlhelmers' reactions to corporatism demonstrate several things. Through echoing Fascist claims that corporatism was a reflection of "third way" ideology, the Stahlhelm strengthened the idea of corporatism as separate from liberalism or Marxism, and thus a defining feature of Fascism. The Stahlhelm's own interpretations of corporatism were sufficiently vague as to raise the spectre of the same potential impasse as that observed in the GSF: the unresolved question of the extent of state power, versus the right of individual actors to participate in free-market capitalism. Unlike the GSF, however, the prevailing tendency in the Stahlhelm was towards conservative authoritarianism and a powerful state, whose constitution would reflect a military hierarchy. The Stahlhelm's embracing of corporatism supports the notion that corporatism, along with the fascist war veteran construct, was one of the most potent vectors for the influence and transmission of Italian Fascism. While corporatism and soldierly nationalism may have circulated broadly in Conservative Revolutionary circles, Italian Fascism was singularly successful in forging a "marriage" of the ideas, incorporating them into its novel ideology. Had it not been for the influence and image of Italian Fascism, the Stahlhelm's ideology, its notions of corporatism, and the war veteran as vanguard, would have been nowhere near as well-defined.

Chapter Four: *National Bolshevism: Soldierly Nationalism as a Unifier between Fascism and Bolshevism*

German National Bolshevism has presented something of a conundrum for political theorists and historians alike. At the broadest level, it may be defined as a loose value set combining ultranationalism and elements of Marxism with sympathy for the USSR, particularly in foreign policy relations. National Bolshevism was a largely intellectual phenomenon, rarely coalescing into groups with real-existing political influence. Considering its Eastern-orientated character, examining National Bolshevism in the context of Italian Fascist influence may seem counter-intuitive, and indeed no study has as yet commented in depth on this relationship. Yet National Bolshevism was just as receptive to the influence of Fascist thought as the more typical national socialist and Conservative Revolutionary movements that inhabited the fascist sphere. This did not mean that the broad spectrum of National Bolshevik thinkers was unified by a complimentary consensus on Fascism's ideology or organisational qualities. Many National Bolsheviks were critical of Italy's hostile attitude towards the Soviet Union and of the alliances Italy forged with big business, viewed as a betrayal of the regime's socialist roots. Ernst Niekisch (1889-1967), the name most commonly associated with interwar German National Bolshevism, did not consider the Italian model appropriate for Germany at all.¹ Even so, the syndicalist background of Italian Fascism piqued the interest of many of the men associated with National Bolshevism, as did the ultranationalist purposes to which fascist intellectuals adapted elements of Marxism. Taken as a whole, the National Bolshevik attitude towards Italian Fascism might have been inconclusive, but it was never indifferent.

The reasons for National Bolshevism's inclusion in the present study are thus multifaceted. Firstly, the National Bolshevik journal *Widerstand (Resistance)*, founded and edited by Niekisch and existing from 1926 to 1934, provided an intellectual microcosm in which ideas associated with the Conservative Revolution hybridised with features of Marxism, Bolshevism, and Fascism. Taken in the context of developing intellectual tendencies in the fascist sphere, *Widerstand* can also be seen as something of a logical progression from the Stahlhelm periodical, the *Standarte*, particularly during the latter's "radical" phase under the editorship of Helmut Franke. This is because both Ernst and Friedrich Georg Jünger began to work with

¹ Ernst Niekisch, "Frankreich oder Italien – oder...?" *Widerstand* 5 (1930), in BArch 72/39, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 6.

Niekisch shortly after concluding their work for the *Standarte*, and their influence on *Widerstand* (particularly Ernst's) was immense. August Winnig, who became active in the GSF in the early 1930s, was also a long-time associate of Niekisch and sub-editor of *Widerstand*, publishing multiple articles for the journal over the years.² Many of the thinkers associated with National Bolshevism clearly thought highly of Mussolini; some considered themselves fascists, and many, like Winnig, the Jünger brothers, and Ernst von Salomon, were active simultaneously in fascist organisations.³ It is unsurprising, then, that *Widerstand* acted as a vehicle for the introduction of fascist elements into National Bolshevik thought. This was, of course, a discursive process. As we have seen, many German ultranationalist groups valued Fascism more on the basis of its potential than its reality. For groups like the Spann circle (see Chapter Six), the introduction of Italy's corporate labour reforms made Fascism more appealing; for the National Bolsheviks, the early potential and achievements of Fascism — its success as an ultranationalist movement and its roots in Sorelian national syndicalism — engendered a certain captivation.

Many National Bolsheviks lamented that Fascism was a “missed opportunity” for the construction of a truly national socialist state, but this did not prevent contemporary Italy from exercising a powerful influence upon the National Bolshevik imagination. Some *Widerstand* contributors pointed to the continued existence of “positive” features in the Fascist state, likening it to Prussia in its manifestation of “German” qualities, or citing it as evidence of the same kind of organic vitality visible in the Soviet Union, contrasted with the bourgeois decay of the Weimar Republic and the rest of the Western world. These impressions were lent potency by the highly soldierly nationalist character of the National Bolshevik movement. Particularly in *Widerstand*, soldierly nationalism was an ideological cornerstone. This soldierly nationalism rendered the National Bolsheviks inherently receptive to the concept of the fascist war veteran and forms the primary reason for the inclusion of National Bolshevism in the fascist sphere.

To date, German National Bolshevism has attracted only highly specialised scholarly attention.⁴ It remains almost completely absent from general academic studies of Weimar politics, and the casual student of the era would be forgiven for being unaware of it. This neglect is unsurprising if seen as a direct reflection of the National Bolsheviks' influence on

² For Winnig's contribution to the GSF, refer to Chapter Two.

³ “Mitgliederverzeichnis der Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus,” N 247/280, 1-4.

⁴ Scholarly analyses of National Bolshevism began contemporaneously with the phenomenon itself. For an early example, see Erich Müller, “Zur Geschichte des Nationalbolschewismus,” *Deutsches Volkstum* 14 (1932): 782-790.

interwar parliamentary politics: it boasted little parliamentary presence and held negligible sway over the course of political events. It provided explicit ideological backing to just one micro party, the Gruppe Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalisten (GSRN), which attempted, unsuccessfully, to establish networks of collaboration between the Nazis and the communists. The lack of historiographical attention is less forgivable, however, in that it can often be attributed to inconveniences of categorisation. The prevailing compulsion to situate political movements upon a linear, left-to-right spectrum has led to National Bolsheviks being awkwardly labelled “unorthodox right-wing,” “unorthodox left-wing,” or simply “syncretic,” “radical,” or “fringe.”⁵

The most significant works on the subject thus show little consensus on how the movement should be conceptually approached in the first place. Some scholarly efforts to understand the phenomenon have presented it as a Marxist adaptation to the rising tides of fascism or nationalism, and/or an effort on the Bolsheviks’ part to make their ideology more palatable to nationalist audiences.⁶ For instance, Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf’s 1960 book *Linke Leute von Rechts* viewed the movement as essentially Marxist-based, with nationalistic trappings suitable to its historical context.⁷ In an inversion of this thesis, Hans Mathias Kepplinger’s *Rechte Leute von Links*, appearing a decade later, presented National Bolshevism as basically fascist, operating within and partially adapting to the sphere of communist politics.⁸ Louis Dupeux’s 1974 *National Bolshevism in Germany* — which remains the standard full-length text on the subject — took aim at Schüddekopf’s thesis, accusing it of being too broad and failing to make distinctions between National Bolshevism and other nationalist minority groups.⁹ In an effort to remedy these shortcomings, Dupeux interpreted National Bolshevism as a “right-wing extremist position of the truest and hardest form of German nationalism.”¹⁰ Originally published in 1984, Uwe Sauermann’s doctoral thesis on the *Widerstand* periodical (the only full-length work to home in on the importance of the journal as an organ of political expression)

⁵ See, for example, Heinrich August Winkler, “Zwischen Stalin und Hitler: Der Nationalbolschewismus blieb in der Weimarer Republik eine Randerscheinung,” *Der Zeit* 49 (November 1985), accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.zeit.de/1985/49/zwischen-stalin-und-hitler/komplettansicht>.

⁶ Friedrich Baumann, “Faschismus und Nationalbolschewismus,” *Schweizer Monatshefte: Zeitschrift für Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur* 16, no. 4-5 (1936-1937): 202.

⁷ Schüddekopf situated the National Bolsheviks as part of a broader-stroke analysis of the “national revolutionary minority.” Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von rechts: Die nationalrevolutionären Minderheiten und der Kommunismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960).

⁸ Hans Mathias Kepplinger, *Rechte Leute von Links: Gewalkult und Innerlichkeit* (Olten: Walter Verlag, 1970).

⁹ Louis Dupeux, “Nationalbolschewismus” in *Deutschland, 1919-1933: Kommunistische Strategie und konservative Dynamik* (Frankfurt am Main: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1985), 10.

¹⁰ Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 18.

agreed that the National Bolsheviks could best be understood through nationalist logic.¹¹ For Sauermann, as for Armin Mohler (who examined Sauermann's thesis), Niekisch's nationalism undermined any potential he may have had to truly represent socialism, communism, or conservatism.¹² Others have concluded, more succinctly, that National Bolshevism was no more than one of many "intellectual precursors of National Socialism."¹³

Key studies on National Bolshevism from the Cold War present it as a non-ideological, organisational reflection of German-Soviet relations, or as evidence of the viability of classic totalitarian theory, or the "horseshoe" conception of politics.¹⁴ Recognising that the linear view of politics did not equip analysts with the tools to understand National Bolshevism, totalitarian theory held that fascism and communism were fundamentally similar due to commonalities in collective ideology and state organisation, and mutual hostility towards liberal democracy.¹⁵ Like Dupeux, totalitarian theorists often foregrounded outcome-based or tactical goals over the development of ideas. For instance, Klemens von Klemperer, writing in 1951, suggested that fascism was "doctrineless" and communism "dogmatic," with National Bolshevism acting as a manifestation of the "irrational and totalitarian nature of both."¹⁶ As one of National Bolshevism's defining features was the desire for Germany to pursue an Eastern-orientated foreign policy, its sympathy for the USSR has, in these instances, been interpreted as a purely strategic means to liberate Germany from dependence on the West.¹⁷

If National Bolshevism's association with communism is viewed as simply organisational, one would need to overlook the significant fact that many National Bolsheviks, including Ernst Niekisch and August Winnig, came from Marxist backgrounds, and likewise ignore the explicitly Marxist logic permeating such central texts as Karl Otto Paetel's *National Bolshevik*

¹¹ Uwe Sauermann, "Die Zeitschrift 'Widerstand' und ihr Kreis: Die publizistische Entwicklung eines Organs des extremen Nationalismus und sein Wirkungsbereich in der politischen Kultur Deutschlands 1926-1934," (PhD diss., Augsburg University, 1984). See also the following book adaptations of Sauermann's thesis: Uwe Sauermann, *Ernst Niekisch – Widerstand gegen den Westen: Vermächtnis eines Nationalisten* (Schnellbach: Lindenbaum Verlag, 2020), 26; Uwe Sauermann, *Ernst Niekisch und der revolutionäre Nationalismus* (Munich: Bibliotheksdienst Angerer, 1985); and Uwe Sauermann, *Ernst Niekisch: Zwischen allen Fronten* (Munich: Herbig Aktuell, 1980).

¹² Sauermann, *Widerstand*, 11.

¹³ Michael David-Fox, "Introduction: Entangled Histories in the Age of Extremes," in *Fascination and Enmity: Russia and Germany as Entangled Histories, 1914-1945*, ed. Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist and Alexander M. Martin (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 8.

¹⁴ Klemens von Klemperer, "Towards a Fourth Reich? The History of National Bolshevism in Germany," *The Review of Politics* 13, no. 2 (April 1951): 191.

¹⁵ James J. Ward, "Between Left and Right: Ernst Niekisch and National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany" (PhD diss., New York University, 1973), 7.

¹⁶ Klemperer, "Fourth Reich?" 191.

¹⁷ Hans Buchheim, "Ernst Niekischs Ideologie des Widerstands," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 5, no. 4 (October 1957): 534.

Manifesto (1933). If one is to take seriously National Bolshevism's commitment to nationalism, one must also take seriously its ideological adaptations of Marxist theory, however degenerated these may have been. Recognising the problems inherent in organisational views, Erik van Ree argued in 2001 that National Bolshevism should be approached as an ideology, but that the definition needed to be further restricted.¹⁸ This resulted, however, in a preoccupation with defining "true" nationalism and "true" Bolshevism, and led van Ree to labour over whether or not certain individuals were deserving of the National Bolshevik label. Timothy Brown's 2009 book *Weimar Radicals* offers a more holistic lens through which to conceptualise ideological cross-pollination. Brown highlights instances of collaboration, aesthetic hybridisation and ideological transference between Nazi and other new ultranationalist thinkers with Marxism and communism.¹⁹ Although Brown does not engage in depth with National Bolshevism, it is within this broader matrix of hybridisation that National Bolshevism can best be approached. Understanding the National Bolshevik use of Italian Fascism likewise requires recognition of the adaptations of Marxist theory in Italian national syndicalism and its vestiges within fascism.

Many of the studies to engage most productively with the ideology of National Bolshevism have done so through a biographical lens. As a prolific and outspoken writer and politician, Ernst Niekisch is the subject of many such biographies, including three excellent doctoral theses of the 1960s and 1970s by James Ward, Ann Terese Carey, and Maura McDowell respectively.²⁰ Niekisch scholars have, however, encountered the same problems of categorisation that plague the historiography of National Bolshevism as a whole. When commenting on Niekisch as an individual, scholars run the gamut between highest praise and deepest condemnation. Hans-Ulrich Kusserow hailed Niekisch as a hero of the anti-Nazi resistance movement; Dupeux lambasted him as an extreme right-wing "sonorous cretin"; Herman Lebovics designated him "above all a Marxian socialist."²¹ Others have characterised him as oscillating from left to right; as a raging antisemite, for whom the Nazis were not radical enough; or simply as a general radical, who was at best a political fringe-dweller, and at worst

¹⁸ Erik van Ree, "The Concept of 'National Bolshevism': An Interpretive Essay," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310120083017>.

¹⁹ Brown, *Weimar Radicals*.

²⁰ Ward, "Left and Right," 11; Ann Terese Carey, "Ernst Niekisch and National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany" (PhD diss., the University of Rochester, 1972), 2-4. See also Maura McDowell, *The National Bolshevism of Ernest Niekisch* (Maddison: The University of Wisconsin, 1965).

²¹ Hans-Ulrich Kusserow, "Ernst Niekisch – ein Leben in Widerstand," *Politische Studien* 12, no. 22 (1970): 451-452; Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 234-235; Herman Lebovics, *Social Conservatism and the Middle Class in Germany, 1914-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 141.

internally incoherent.²² Still others have argued that he was a conservative. For example, Cary situated Niekisch as a culminating figure in the thought underpinning Bismarckian foreign relations.²³ The very lack of consensus on Niekisch's political persuasion attests to a highly independent thinker who refused to be confined by doctrines of any type.

The present chapter is not concerned with setting strict parameters on what defines National Bolshevism. As few of the men labelled National Bolsheviks (including Niekisch) identified themselves as such, debating over who was a truer representative seems like a fruitless endeavour. In so far as definition is necessary, National Bolshevism is understood here as it was applied by contemporaries: a political position characterised by the attempt to synthesise German soldierly nationalism with socialism or communism, while advocating closer ties with the USSR.²⁴ This builds upon the wave of revisionist scholarship on the Weimar Republic which has sought to deconstruct both the linear and horseshoe theories of politics.²⁵ Dupeux, in his view of National Bolshevism as “right-wing,” provided a key insight, stating that National Bolshevism was an outgrowth of the Conservative Revolution.²⁶ A strong argument can — indeed, should — be made for this. National Bolshevism can be linked to many of the intellectual trends associated with the Conservative Revolution and hence many of the trends that sponsored fascism. Yet Dupeux's position is based on the problematic assumption that the Conservative Revolution was in essence reactionary and backward-looking. Rather than negating modernity, Conservative Revolutionaries attempted to come to terms with hostile ideologies by adopting their most “viable” traits, synthesising modern developments into new alternatives influenced by, but not materially anchored to, traditional conservatism.²⁷

²² Peter Hoffman, *History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 19; Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2015); Sascha Penshorn, “Zarathustra auf den Obersalzberg: Die Nietzsche-Rezeption Ernst Niekischs nach 1945,” in *Nietzsche und die Konservative Revolution*, ed. Andreas Urs Sommer and Sebastian Kaufmann (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 505; McDowell, “National Bolshevism of Ernst Niekisch,” 26. For a discussion on Niekisch's views on Russia, see Sylvia Taschka, *Das Russlandbild von Ernst Niekisch* (Madison: Palm & Enke, 1999).

²³ Carey, “Ernst Niekisch,” 19-20.

²⁴ See also Karl Otto Paetel's subsequent reflections on National Bolshevism: *Nationalbolschewismus und nationalrevolutionäre Bewegungen in Deutschland* (Schnellbach: Bublies, 1999), 12-13.

²⁵ See, for instance, Fischer, *German Communists*; and Gangl and Raulet, “Einleitung,” 27-28.

²⁶ Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 18. Other studies to place National Bolshevism in the context of the Conservative Revolution include Mohler, *Konservative Revolution in Deutschland*; Birgit Rättsch-Langejürgen, *Das Prinzip Widerstand: Leben und Wirken von Ernst Niekisch* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1997).

²⁷ “Materially anchored” here refers to conservatism's traditional roots in landed agriculture and its associated political interests. The vast majority of Conservative Revolutionaries recognised that a return to a manorial system was unrealistic and undesirable. Woods, *Conservative Revolution*, 2.

With this in mind, National Bolshevism presented another attempt to reconcile the central ideologies of the twentieth century into a workable model. Its explicit uses of Italian Fascism can be explored through the works of individuals associated with the movement, and through the periodicals *Widerstand* and *Die sozialistische Nation* (*The Socialist Nation*), respectively edited by Niekisch and Paetel. This chapter begins by outlining the emergence of National Bolshevism as a “generalist” phenomenon in the early Weimar Republic, before discussing its more focused manifestations in the thought of Ernst Niekisch and *Widerstand* circle, and the impact of Italian Fascism in this context. Taken as a whole, National Bolshevism was a significant ideological contributor to non-Hitlerian ultranationalist thought and demonstrated many points of ideological overlap with alternative fascist movements, most notably the Strasser-wing of the National Socialists (see Chapter Five). Exploring National Bolshevism’s complex relationship with Italian Fascism provides a means to shed light on the further reaches of the fascist sphere.

The Origins of National Bolshevism

The first proposal of what would soon come to be termed “National Bolshevism” (*Nationalbolschewismus*) has been attributed to Paul Eltzbacher (1868-1928), a German Jewish lawyer and member of the DNVP.²⁸ Eltzbacher was no stranger to political theory, having written a comprehensive “scientific” analysis of anarchism in 1900, which went on to appear in several languages.²⁹ By 1919, the Russian Revolutions of 1917 had catapulted Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks to mass international attention, and Bolshevism’s presence loomed large in immediate post-war Germany. As Germany experienced bouts of revolutionary upheaval — including attempts to install soviets after the Russian fashion — Eltzbacher felt compelled to intellectually evaluate the situation. Initially, he reacted to the revolutionary climate with a mixture of consternation and tentative approval. Beginning in the spring of 1919, he authored a series of articles for the independent newspaper *Der Tag* (*The Day*), in which he argued that Bolshevism offered a potential mechanism for Germany to regain the national independence it had lost in the war.³⁰ While Eltzbacher did not give a name to his unique political position, the label “National Bolshevism” was applied shortly afterwards (often

²⁸ Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 53-54.

²⁹ See Paul Eltzbacher, *Anarchism* (London: Benj R. Tucker, 1908), 6-11.

³⁰ Paul Eltzbacher, “Bolschewismus,” *Der Tag*, April 26, 1919; Paul Eltzbacher, “Das letzte Mitte,” *Der Tag*, April 2, 1919; Graf, *Zukunft der Weimarer Republik*, 258.

pejoratively) by commentators on Eltzbacher's publications, with the first such instance allegedly occurring in the newspaper *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (*German Daily Newspaper*).³¹ By the end of 1919, the term was well-established.

Dupeux states that Eltzbacher used Marx superficially to serve a nationalist-conservative purpose, essentially in line with the values of the DNVP.³² Yet Eltzbacher possessed more than a pedestrian understanding of Marxism, and his explicit, often approving references to Marx, Lenin, and other communists did little to improve his standing in the DNVP.³³ He adhered to Marx's idea of the five stages of history, but added that true dialectical synthesis could only be achieved through a "socialism of the soul," reflecting the organic will of the people.³⁴ In this, Eltzbacher can be likened not only to other Conservative Revolutionary thinkers in Germany, like Oswald Spengler and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (though Eltzbacher was willing to acknowledge more of explicit Marxism), but also to contemporaneous developments in unorthodox socialism across Europe, including that seen in the Italian national syndicalist movement. Inspired by the so-called "war socialism" that had come to prominence in Germany during the final years of the war, Eltzbacher called for total nationalisation of the means of production and the elimination of private enterprise.³⁵ Germans, he argued, must be prepared to sacrifice individual wealth for the sake of the nation. In his mind, true socialism could only be attained through national autonomy, and he characterised the Weimar Republic as a "socialistic republic [in which] German workers were forced to work in the service of foreign capitalism."³⁶ This reasoning paralleled that of the Italian national syndicalists in the early war years, with nationalism being seen as an accelerationist force that needed to be harnessed in support of the ultimate revolutionary goal.

Similar views were independently attained by thinkers within communist circles. Communist functionaries Heinrich Laufenberg (1872-1932) and Fritz Wolffheim (1888-1942) were active in the short-lived workers' and soldiers' council in Hamburg in the immediate aftermath of the war.³⁷ They employed the "stab-in-the-back" myth, claiming that the German war effort had

³¹ David-Fox, "Introduction," 8.

³² Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 60.

³³ Eltzbacher quotes Lenin and Marx and refers to the communist newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*. See Paul Eltzbacher, "Der Bolschewismus und die deutsche Zukunft," in *Politisches Leben: Schriften zum Ausbau eines Volksstaates* (Jena: Eugen Diedrichs, 1919), 3-41, especially 19-20.

³⁴ Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 60-61.

³⁵ Eltzbacher, "Bolschewismus und Zukunft," 7-8.

³⁶ Eltzbacher, "Bolschewismus und Zukunft," 15-16.

³⁷ For an account of Laufenberg's role in the 1918/19 Revolution and the operations of the Hamburg Workers' and Soldiers' council, see Heinrich Laufenberg, "The Hamburg Revolution," July 26, 1919, Marxists.org,

been betrayed by internal enemies — in this case by corrupt capitalist politicians.³⁸ Identifying as “national communists,” Laufenberg and Wolffheim argued that nationalism and nation-based praxis were necessary in the proletariat’s struggle for liberation.³⁹ As the proletariat undertakes its revolutionary struggle unavoidably “within the embrace of bourgeois nations,” it made little sense to ignore the advantages that the working class could gain by elevating itself from a mere class operating within a nation, to a national-level organisation operating on the world stage.⁴⁰ Importantly, Laufenberg and Wolffheim did not see the nation as a mere tactical stepping-stone to ease the transition from bourgeois nation to international commune. While they acknowledged the ultimately international aims of communism, they levelled their attacks at the “bourgeois” interpretation of the state, rather than the nation state *per se*. Nationalism, in this view, could not be reduced to a mere superstructural analogue of the capitalist mode of production.⁴¹ Late-stage capitalism, through its fetish for the international free market, attacked national cohesion in a similar way as it attacked class cohesion.⁴² Furthermore, Laufenberg and Wolffheim made a distinction between the concepts of nation and nationality. The latter denoted a divisive bourgeois construct, subsuming the nation, an organic, timeless entity, to a mere subservient element of the bourgeois state.⁴³ For Laufenberg and Wolffheim, true proletarian liberation and national liberation were mutually dependent.

In the immediate post-war period, Laufenberg and Wolffheim’s views made them no more popular with the KPD than Eltzbacher’s had made him with the DNVP. Laufenberg and Wolffheim were summarily ejected from the KPD in the autumn of 1919.⁴⁴ Yet in deed, if not in word, the mainstream KPD also pursued a markedly, if temporary, nationalistic line. Abraham Ascher and Guenter Lewy identified the KPD’s use of nationalism as ushering in the “second phase” of National Bolshevism.⁴⁵ The events of 1923 — rampant hyperinflation

accessed March 21, 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/laufenberg/1919/07/26.htm>. For an in-depth analysis of the formation of workers’ and soldiers’ councils amid the chaos of the German Revolution, see Gerwarth, *November 1918* – in particular, Chapter Five.

³⁸ Abraham Ascher and Guenter Lewy, “National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany: Alliance of Political Extremes Against Democracy,” *Social Research* 23, no. 4 (Winter 1956): 451-452.

³⁹ “National communism” is sometimes used interchangeably with National Bolshevism. The two may also be separated on the basis that National Bolshevism indicates a nation-based system or ideology in line with, or sympathetic to the Soviet Union, while national communism indicates a non-Soviet position.

⁴⁰ Heinrich Laufenberg and Fritz Wolffheim, *Nation and Working Class* (Hamburg: Willaschek & Co., 1920), 2-3.

⁴¹ Laufenberg and Wolffheim, *Nation and Working Class*, 6.

⁴² Laufenberg and Wolffheim, *Nation and Working Class*, 6.

⁴³ Laufenberg and Wolffheim, *Nation and Working Class*, 6.

⁴⁴ In April 1920, Laufenberg and Wolffheim joined the newly-formed KAPD, but were expelled after several months. Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution, Germany 1918 to 1923* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 168; Ascher and Lewy, “Alliance,” 451.

⁴⁵ Ascher and Lewy, “Alliance,” 457.

following the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr after Germany defaulted on its reparation payments — necessitated a reimagining of communist methodology. Calling for resistance to the foreign occupation, the KPD employed nationalistic language and even called for a temporary truce between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie for the sake of the German nation.⁴⁶ Prominent communists August Thalheimer (1884-1948), a founding member of the KPD; and Karl Radek (1885-1939), an international Comintern functionary often active in Germany, both produced essays on the situation in the Ruhr that clearly appealed to German nationalism.⁴⁷

The shift in rhetoric was particularly pronounced when one considers that both Radek and Thalheimer had been outspoken in their condemnation of Laufenberg and Wolffheim's National Bolshevism just a few years prior.⁴⁸ In 1923, Radek issued a speech, subsequently published in the official KPD newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*, in which he praised Freikorps soldier Leo Schlageter (1894-1923) for his actions to sabotage French operations in the Ruhr.⁴⁹ Before being executed by the French for sabotaging railway lines, Schlageter had undertaken work on behalf of the Nazis and had been an active participant in the 1920 Kapp Putsch.⁵⁰ Radek acknowledged that "German fascists honestly want to serve the German people," and stated that comrades should respect Schlageter's sacrifice.⁵¹ German nationalists' greatest error lay simply in their failure to realise that the bourgeoisie had betrayed their cause. At the same time, Thalheimer advocated a suspension of hostilities against the German bourgeoisie due to the fact that they were pursuing, even if against their will, an objectively revolutionary position in the Ruhr, in contrast to the imperialistic role they had played in the Great War.⁵²

This nationalist tendency in the KPD was well-received in Conservative Revolutionary quarters. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck praised Radek's article, and correspondingly expressed his admiration for the dynamism of the German communist movement.⁵³ In his famous 1923 book, *Das dritte Reich*, Moeller van den Bruck acknowledged the mutual hatred that

⁴⁶ Ralf Hoffrogge, "Der Sommer des Nationalbolschewismus? Die Stellung der KPD-Linken zum Ruhrkampf und ihre Kritik am „Schlageter-Kurs“ von 1923," *Sozial.Geschichte Online* 20 (2017): 126; Ascher and Lewy, "Alliance," 457.

⁴⁷ August Thalheimer, "Some Tactical Problems of the War in the Ruhr," *The Communist International* 25 (1923), Marxists.org, March 21, 2025, https://www.marxists.org/archive/thalheimer/works/tactical_problems.htm; Karl Radek, "Leo Schlageter, der Wanderer ins Nichts," *Die Rote Fahne*, June 26, 1923, Marxists.org, accessed January 30, 2025, <https://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/radek/1923/06/schlageter.html>.

⁴⁸ Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus in Deutschland 1918-1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1972), 84.

⁴⁹ Ascher and Lewy, "Alliance," 462; Radek, "Wanderer ins Nichts."

⁵⁰ Ascher and Lewy, "Alliance," 462.

⁵¹ Radek, "Wanderer ins Nichts."

⁵² Thalheimer, "Tactical Problems."

⁵³ Ascher and Lewy, "Alliance," 464.

conservatives and communists shared for liberalism, and stated that communists were Germans first and foremost, and thus potential allies.⁵⁴ The naval officer and journalist Ernst Graf zu Reventlow (1869-1943), who would subsequently join the NSDAP, also responded positively to Radek's essay and wrote articles of comparable reproachment for *Die Rote Fahne*.⁵⁵ This remarkable thawing of ideological hostilities can be attributed largely to the KPD's desire to gain tactical advantages and capitalise on the increased nationalistic sentiment that the French occupation provoked in Germany. Yet it nonetheless provides an important backdrop for understanding how National Bolshevik ideas were able to gain domestic traction. National Bolshevism was an intellectualisation of existing, pragmatic strains of socio-political sentiment that cannot be aligned with any one type of ideology.

As it is so difficult to set parameters on when and where nationalism and communism overlapped, it is necessary to cast a wide net to comprehend National Bolshevism. In addition to its presence in the DNVP and KPD, a National Bolshevik tendency also coalesced within the SPD. Ernst Niekisch and August Winnig were prominent members of both the SPD and the USPD. Originally formed in 1917, the USPD consisted of dissidents from SPD, including Spartakusbund revolutionary leader Karl Liebknecht and future KPD leader Ernst Thälmann (1886-1944).⁵⁶ Not approved for frontline service due to chronic health problems, the young Niekisch began his career in the SPD in 1917, but defected to the USPD in 1919. The USPD viewed the SPD as insufficiently radical in its approach to revolutionary politics and overly hawkish in its vote for war credits in 1914. Among other activities, Niekisch's role involved editing the small USPD periodical, *Die Umschau (The Review)*.⁵⁷ After losing approximately 400,000 of its members to the KPD in 1920, the USPD was largely reabsorbed into the SPD in 1922, the two parties finding common ground again through mutual condemnation of the assassination of foreign minister Walther Rathenau.⁵⁸ Niekisch now found himself acting as a deputy chairman for his former party. He would later recall in his memoirs that many SPD members looked upon him with mistrust during this time.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire*, (London: Arktos, 2012), 145-146.

⁵⁵ Istvan Deak, *Weimar Germany's Left-Wing Intellectuals: A Political History of the Weltbühne and its Circle*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 284. See also Ernst Graf zu Reventlow, *Völkisch-kommunistische Einigung?* (Leipzig: Leipziger Graphische Werke, 1924).

⁵⁶ Thalheimer was also a member of the USPD during this time. After the USPD was largely reabsorbed into the SPD, the remaining, independent faction dwindled into parliamentary inconsequence.

⁵⁷ Ernst Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben: Erinnerungen eines deutschen Revolutionärs 1889-1945* (Beltheim-Schnellbach: Bublies, 2015; first published 1974), 113.

⁵⁸ Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 112.

⁵⁹ Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 112.

Niekisch and Winnig's early careers were tarnished by engagement in radical projects that did not sit well alongside the SPD's respectable brand of evolutionary socialism. The final straw for Winnig came in 1920: he was dismissed from the SPD for participating in the Kapp Putsch.⁶⁰ While Winnig was compelled to continue his ideological metamorphosis elsewhere, Niekisch persisted in trying to reform the SPD. Like Eltzbacher, Niekisch saw in the newly communist Russia a potential ally for Germany. However, his initial hopes were dashed by Germany enacting the punitive Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918, compelling Russia to cede large swathes of territory and resources in exchange for the cessation of hostilities on the Eastern Front.⁶¹ Niekisch viewed the treaty as a grave error for Germany, and the failure of the SPD to condemn Brest-Litovsk signalled the first of his many disappointments with social democracy. He published his first political pamphlet, *Licht aus dem Osten* (*Light from the East*), in this context, and referred consistently to Germany's error in subsequent works, condemning the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk as "sacrilegious folly."⁶² In 1919, during his hiatus from the SPD, Niekisch acted as chairman for the short-lived People's State of Bavaria (*Volksstaat Bayern*), which aimed to install a Soviet-style proletarian state.⁶³ His efforts earned him two years in prison, between August, 1919, and August, 1921.⁶⁴

Many scholars have remarked on the ideological gulf between Niekisch and the SPD. Far fewer have commented on why men like Winnig and Niekisch were attracted to the SPD in the first place. It is worth briefly noting, then, how ideologically broad the SPD was, and to contextualise Niekisch and Winnig's criticisms as part of an ongoing struggle for a consistent ideological identity within the party itself. Accepting "scientific" Marxism as a foundational principle, the SPD adopted theorist Eduard Bernstein's (1850-1932) concept of evolutionary socialism, advocating for the gradual, peaceful development of a socialist state by means of political reform enacted through existing democratic infrastructure.⁶⁵ In contrast to revolutionary communism, the SPD accepted the mid-term benefit of abiding by the logic of

⁶⁰ August Winnig, *Zur Neuorientierung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Berlin: Internationale Korrespondenz, 1916), 16; Präsident des Staatsministeriums, September 23, 1919, in R 43-I/1255, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Schattkowsky, "Separatism," 308.

⁶¹ Ward, "Left and Right," 28.

⁶² Ward, "Left and Right," 28.

⁶³ Unfortunately, the manuscript apparently no longer exists. Ward, "Left and Right," 28. For a subsequent discussion of Brest-Litovsk, see Niekisch's 1925 work *Grundfragen deutscher Außenpolitik* (Berlin: Weiland Körner, 1925), 48.

⁶⁴ Gerwarth notes that the traditionally conservative, Catholic society of Bavaria was an additional impediment to the viability of the Munich Soviet Republic. Gerwarth, *Vanquished*, 128.

⁶⁵ David-Fox, "Introduction," 9; Ward, "Left and Right," 63.

⁶⁶ See Eduard Bernstein's work on socialism and social democracy: *Die Voraussetzungen des Sozialismus und die Aufgaben der Sozialdemokratie* (Stuttgart: J.H.W. Dietz Nachfol., 1902), XIX-XX.

capitalist economics, bettering the lot of the working man through the gradual improvement of labour relations.⁶⁶ However, the SPD also held a large stake in the Weimar Republic, and the *realpolitik* demands of managing a capitalist economy, in combination with the emergence of the KPD as the self-professed standard-bearer of Marxism, soon began to erode the SPD's commitment to socialism.⁶⁷

The nationalist-revisionist trend within the SPD formed part of a tendency with firm precedents.⁶⁸ It was an extension of a paradigm shift that the SPD had undergone in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which historian Stefan Vogt has termed "integrationist nationalism."⁶⁹ The mode of nationalism to be integrated was based on the logic of capitalism and the strengthening of the German economy through the expansion into new markets, and formed a key feature of the shift from revolutionary to evolutionary socialism. Evolutionary socialism had already ushered in a partial break from strict historical materialism in favour of "ethical socialism": a neo-Kantian revision which placed greater emphasis upon moral imperatives.⁷⁰ The Great War, and the economic changes that accompanied it (e.g. the implementation of war socialism by the German imperial government) ensured that, for many, it was not a great leap from integrationist nationalism to national socialism.⁷¹ The most important distinction was that, under the latter, the nation state acquired importance equal to (if not greater than) socialism, while the idea of socialism itself underwent further revision.

This revision, finding currency in certain SPD tendencies, was influenced by the same non-materialist adaptations of socialism that underpinned the Conservative Revolution and, at its most extreme, the development of fascist ideology. For the National Bolsheviks, one particularly important text was Belgian intellectual Hendrik (Henri) de Man's (1885-1953) book *Zur Psychologie des Sozialismus* (*The Psychology of Socialism*), published in 1926. Despite being reviled by orthodox Marxists for its negation of historical materialism, the book found a receptive audience in revisionist SPD members, particularly in the so-called Hofgeismarkreis (*Hofgeismar Circle*), a sub-section of the SPD youth wing, the

⁶⁶ Bernstein, *Voraussetzungen*, 88-94.

⁶⁷ Donna Harsch, *Social Democracy and the Rise of Nazism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 18, 32.

⁶⁸ Stefan Vogt, "Strange Encounters: Social Democracy and Radical Nationalism in Weimar Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 2 (April 2010): 255, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009409356917>.

⁶⁹ Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 259.

⁷⁰ Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 263-264.

⁷¹ Some notable SPD-affiliated thinkers to write of the benefits of war socialism included Johann Plenge and Eduard Heimann. Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 260, 263.

Jungsozialisten (Young Socialists).⁷² De Man rejected historical materialism in favour of an ethics-based socialism, which placed greater emphasis upon man's "moral duties," and thus upon man's capacity to express free will.⁷³ Will was less a product of rationalism than of emotion, and "national feeling" formed one of the strongest emotional motivators.⁷⁴ The nation became an intrinsic component of De Man's ethical socialism, as it presented a mechanism whereby the "good" features of liberal individualism and Marxian collectivism could be combined and the objectionable features mitigated.⁷⁵ The nation had the capacity to shift ethical agency away from the individual in favour of a communal body which retained agency enough to express the autonomous ethicality that De Man found lacking in conventional Marxism.

The jurist Hermann Heller (1891-1933), who was active in the Hofgeismarkreis, has been granted the dubious distinction of acting as a theoretical lynchpin between social democratic thought and fascism.⁷⁶ Although Heller maintained that little of merit could be learned from the Fascist experiment in Italy (as it concentrated power too narrowly in the role of the dictator), he adopted an approach to social democracy that drew upon modern nationalism.⁷⁷ He argued that the nation state should not wither away under socialism, but that socialism should be used as a tool to realise the national *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁷⁸ The Hofgeismarkreis' own periodical, *Politischer Rundbrief des Hofgeismarkreises* (*Political Newsletter of the Hofgeismar Circle*), broadly supported Heller's position, arguing for the importance of resolving tensions between the socialist movement and the *Volk*.⁷⁹ However volatile and undefined the SPD's nationalism was, the presence of a "national socialism", epitomised by the Hofgeismarkreis, ensured that Niekisch did not lose hope for the party entirely.⁸⁰ Despite his advocacy for closer ties with the

⁷² Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 265.

⁷³ Henri de Man, *The Psychology of Marxian Socialism* (London: Routledge, 2019; originally published 1926), 25-26; Richard Albrecht, *Der militante Sozialdemokrat: Carlo Mierendorff 1897 bis 1943: Eine Biographie* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1987), 92.

⁷⁴ Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 257, 265.

⁷⁵ For a discussion of de Man's works in the context of "political cross-over," see Dick Pels, *The Intellectual as Stranger: Studies in Spokespersonship* (London: Routledge, 2000), 110-130.

⁷⁶ Jens Hacke, "Liberales Denken und der Faschismus – eine Neubewertung," in *Existenzkrise der Demokratie: Zur politischen Theorie des Liberalismus in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2018), 191-200. Recent scholarship on Heller has largely rehabilitated his reputation. See Thilo Scholle, Mike Schmeitzner (eds.), *Hermann Heller, die Weimarer Demokratie und der soziale Rechtsstaat* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 2024).

⁷⁷ Jens Hacke, *Liberaler Demokratie in schwierigen Zeiten: Weimar und die Gegenwart* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 88-89.

⁷⁸ Hermann Heller, *Sozialismus und Nation* (Berlin: Arbeiterjugend-Verlag, 1925), 35; Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 253.

⁷⁹ Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 257.

⁸⁰ "National socialism" when expressed in lowercase and/or in quotation marks differentiates the thought from Nazism (National Socialism). However, I have retained the terminology to demonstrate the presence of both

USSR, Niekisch's nationalism prevented him from ever becoming a supporter of the KPD. He viewed the SPD as the only party capable of steering German workers away from the KPD and the Comintern position that it represented, which he feared would undermine Germany's goals as an independent nation state.⁸¹ Thus, he actively attempted to push the SPD in a more nationalistic direction.

In the mid-1920s, both Niekisch and Winnig wrote for SPD-sponsored periodicals. Niekisch was especially prolific, authoring a series of articles for *Die Glocke* (*The Bell*) and *Sozialistische Monatshefte* (*Socialist Monthly*), as well as taking on the editorship of *Der Firm*.⁸² All of these publications have been noted for their revisionist, nationalistic tone. *Die Glocke* was founded during the war in an effort to build support for the German war effort among the SPD rank-and-file. Similarly, the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* and *Der Firm* were quite far removed from socialist ideals, as both received funding from private businesses eager to combat communist radicalism amongst the German working class.⁸³ Niekisch used the periodicals as vehicles to criticise the SPD, while simultaneously calling for its revitalisation. Like other German ultranationalists, he was enraged by the government's agreement to implement the Dawes Plan in 1924.⁸⁴ Although the Dawes Plan eased pressure on the German economy after the catastrophic hyperinflation of 1923, nationalist critics viewed it as a mode of solidifying foreign control.⁸⁵ Equally objectionable were the Locarno treaties, which were signed in late 1925, and enshrined many of the foreign policy stipulations of Versailles. Niekisch found it intolerable that the SPD, after failing to condemn Versailles, backed the Dawes Plan in the Reichstag and voted to ratify Locarno.⁸⁶

Niekisch was extremely outspoken on these subjects, and his polemics soon drew criticism from the highest echelons of the SPD. Eduard Bernstein himself — whom Niekisch accused of “plunging the [Social Democratic] Party into serious confusion, so that its very foundations were shaken” — spoke out against Niekisch's views.⁸⁷ A rather heated exchange between Bernstein and Niekisch appeared in the pages of *Die Glocke* in 1925. Bernstein accused

nationalist and socialist thought in groups like the Hofgeismarkeis, as a means to breakdown the tendency to associate the term solely with Nazism.

⁸¹ Ward, “Left and Right,” 70.

⁸² Ward, “Left and Right,” 67, 69.

⁸³ Ward, “Left and Right,” 69.

⁸⁴ Ward, “Left and Right,” 72.

⁸⁵ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 43-44; Ward, “Left and Right,” 79.

⁸⁶ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 64-65; Talbot C. Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 148.

⁸⁷ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 67.

Niekisch of betraying the principles of Marxism and losing all sense of what it meant to be a socialist.⁸⁸ In a letter to Marxist philosopher and SPD functionary Karl Kautsky (1854-1938), Bernstein even suggested that Niekisch was exercising an insidious influence upon Germany's largest trade unions, particularly the Textilarbeiterverband (textile workers' union).⁸⁹ Far from accepting Bernstein's criticism, Niekisch stated that it was Bernstein who had betrayed socialism.⁹⁰ Niekisch contended that the SPD's foreign policy, of which Bernstein was a supporter, did more for German capitalism than for socialism, as its Western orientation afforded capitalists ample opportunity for investment and self-enrichment.⁹¹ Global materialist and political development were beyond human control, he claimed, whereas it remained possible to influence Germany's standing on the world stage by ensuring that the country possessed a strong military and an independent foreign policy.⁹²

In his pamphlet *Grundfragen deutscher Außenpolitik (Fundamental Questions of German Foreign Policy)*, Niekisch argued that national solidarity was far stronger than solidarity between the disparate elements of the global proletariat, and that Germany would do best to approach international politics through the prism of its own interests.⁹³ It was necessary to pursue foreign policies that would strengthen Germany's international standing and thereby liberate German workers from the yoke of Western capitalism.⁹⁴ The only class co-operation that Niekisch believed in was temporary unity to achieve a strengthening of the German state. Despite the support of the Hofgeismarkreis — which severed ties with the rest of the Jungsozialisten over the issue — Niekisch's increasing agitation and fiery exchanges with Bernstein soon proved too much for the mainstream SPD.⁹⁵ Niekisch was expelled from the party in 1926, signalling the end of his attempts to reform the party from within.

While the national socialism practised by some SPD members had undeniable ties to the Conservative Revolution, it remained distant from fascism and National Socialism. The Social Democrats did not abandon their belief in the importance of democratic institutions, nor did

⁸⁸ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 70; Eduard Bernstein, "Soll die deutsche Sozialdemokratie nationalistische Politik treiben?" *Die Glocke* 11 (1925): 557-562.

⁸⁹ Eduard Bernstein, "Eduard Bernstein an Karl Kautsky," 10-11 December 1925, in *Eduard Bernsteins Briefwechsel mit Karl Kautsky (1912-1932)*, ed. Eva Bettina Görtz (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag GmbH, 2011), 219-220.

⁹⁰ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 28, 73.

⁹¹ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 74.

⁹² Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 28, 73.

⁹³ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 14.

⁹⁴ Niekisch, *Grundfragen*, 64.

⁹⁵ Stefan Vogt, *Nationaler Sozialismus und soziale Demokratie: die Sozialdemokratische Junge Rechte, 1918-1945* (Bonn: Dietz, 2007), 97; Saueremann, *Widerstand*, 47-48.

they share fascism's glorification of the transcendental power of violence and war. Nevertheless, the "national socialist" tendency within the SPD reveals a few important points. It calls into question the historiographical propensity to separate — including at the intellectual level — "democratic" and "anti-democratic" forces during the Weimar Republic. Far from the republic's being a "democracy without democrats," "democracy" was a dynamic and flexible concept subject to a range of overlapping and competing interpretations and projections for the future.⁹⁶ In Italy, Giovanni Gentile even touted Fascism as "democracy par excellence," indicating the ideological flexibility of the subject matter, especially when mass participation in politics was conceptually divorced from parliamentarism and republicanism.⁹⁷ Similarly, social democrats were not immune to the intellectual tendencies of the Conservative Revolution and incorporated revisionist and/or non-materialist socialism into their own reasoning, albeit with very different results than those attained by the Italian Fascists.

The synthesis of socialism and nationalism within the Hofgeismarkreis and the clashes with the mainline SPD also provide important insight into Niekisch's intellectual background and the assumptions underpinning his subsequent development. Accepting that National Bolshevism drew on a wide range of ideological reference points, it now becomes necessary to examine how the movement reacted to national socialism's more sinister political relative, Fascism. Unfortunately, little can be said about this prior to the establishment of Niekisch's *Widerstand* journal. This was due partly to the fact that, during the earliest "phase" of National Bolshevism, Fascism was not yet established, and partly to the fact that National Bolshevism had yet to acquire internal coherence, its character often hampered by unanalogous party alignments. As an independent periodical, *Widerstand* signalled a significant step forward in ideological coherence for the movement, drawing disparate strands of ultranationalist thought under Niekisch's pro-Soviet umbrella.

Widerstand first appeared in mid-1926, originally with the subtitle *Blätter für sozialistische und nationalrevolutionäre Politik* (*Journal for Social and National-Revolutionary Politics*). Initially, Niekisch shared the editorship in connection with Benedikt Obermayr and Otto

⁹⁶ Bavaj, "Pluralizing Democracy," 53. See also Jochen Hung, "'Bad' Politics and 'Good' Culture: New Approaches to the History of the Weimar Republic," *Central European History* 49, no. 3-4 (December 2016): 447, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938916000625>. For an investigation on the ways in which "democracy" was presented in the Weimar media, see Jochen Hung, *Moderate Modernity: The Newspaper Tempo and the Transformation of Weimar Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023), 11-13.

⁹⁷ Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 106; Riccardo Bavaj, "Rezension zu: Müller, Jan-Werner: *Contesting Democracy. Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe*. New Haven 2011, ISBN 978-0-300-113211," <http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-16699>.

Jacobsen, but would soon go on to work with August Winnig and illustrator Andreas Paul Weber (1893-1980) as sub-editors from 1927 to 1930, and 1931 to 1934, respectively.⁹⁸ Following the schism between the Jungsozialisten and the Hofgeismarkreis, Niekisch was anxious to shore up his influence with the latter: the only faction of the SPD that had not disowned him.⁹⁹ Within this circle of like-minded associates, he formed a number of friendships, including with Obermayr, the son of a Dortmund trade union leader, and Hans Baumeister, a federal committee member of the Jungsozialisten.¹⁰⁰ In the second issue of *Widerstand*, Obermayr described the journal's ideological position as "nothing more than the active realisation of the Hofgeismar mentality."¹⁰¹

Nonetheless, the tone of *Widerstand* differed from that which Niekisch had employed while trying to reform the SPD. Formerly, Niekisch had used the language of socialism. *Widerstand*, in contrast, advertised itself primarily through its appeals to nationalism, seeking support from völkisch and conservative groups opposed to the Versailles Treaty. In a promotional pamphlet in 1926, *Widerstand* declared its purpose to potential subscribers:

[*Widerstand*] stands for [...] maintaining the belief in Germany's rise to political power. This requires mental fortitude, a spiritual readiness, a flexible capacity to critically examine everything that could impact our inner being [...]. Encouraging a people's will to resist means calling on them to make the greatest efforts for the purpose of self-preservation. No people today needs this more than the German people, who have come closer to national ruin than any other. *Widerstand* guards the flame of the German will to resist; this is our task.¹⁰²

Clearly, *Widerstand* provided a forum for Niekisch and his colleagues to express their nationalism without the encumberments they had encountered in the SPD. However, the *Widerstand* circle's break from social democracy was not clear-cut, and the journal continued to draw attention from disaffected social democrats. It soon captured the interest of the Alte Sozialistische Partei Sachsens (ASP) (later Alte Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands or ASPD), an SPD splinter party from the Landtag of Saxony, which had split from the majority faction over disagreements about the SPD's frequent co-operation with bourgeois parties and

⁹⁸ Thomas Dietzel and Hans Otto Hügel, *Deutsche literarische Zeitschriften, 1880-1945: Ein Repertorium, Band 1* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1988), 1297; Sauermann, *Widerstand*, 51.

⁹⁹ Sauermann, *Widerstand*, 48-49.

¹⁰⁰ Schüddelkopf, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 151.

¹⁰¹ Sauermann, *Widerstand*, 52. See also Benedikt Obermayr, "Hofgeismar," *Widerstand* 26, no. 2 (1926): 14.

¹⁰² Widerstands-Verlag Dresden, *Broschüre* (Dresden: Widerstands-Verlag Dresden, 1926), 4.

organisations.¹⁰³ Hoping to find an alternative to the SPD, Niekisch collaborated briefly with the ASP, including assuming the editorship of the party's newspaper, *Der Volksstaat* (*The People's State*), for a short period of time.¹⁰⁴ But Niekisch garnered only limited support for his pro-Russian foreign policy, and remained too committed to "traditional" ideas for the ASP's liking. ASP members were, for example, critical of his advocacy of internal class collaboration in service of the state.¹⁰⁵

Despite retaining elements of social democracy — a limited commitment to class co-operation and a basic belief in the progressive (evolutionary) implementation of socialism — the personal bitterness that Niekisch and his colleagues harboured towards the SPD is evident. *Widerstand* consistently levelled more criticism towards social democracy than any other political ideology, viewing the SPD as primarily responsible for enshrining Germany's servitude to the Western bourgeoisie.¹⁰⁶ The formal severing of ties with the SPD also made the *Widerstand* circle more attractive to individuals explicitly associated with radical nationalism and fascism. As early as 1926, while Niekisch and his colleagues were negotiating with the ASP, the Jungdeutscher Orden wrote in praise of *Widerstand*.¹⁰⁷ This was the first, but certainly not the last time that *Widerstand* drew positive attention from proto-fascist circles. As the journal found its feet in the late 1920s, increasing the output of its publications, it became a rallying point for nationalist thinkers who, like Niekisch, did not feel represented adequately by any one party or organisation. These new contributors forged connections between National Bolshevism and soldierly nationalism, acting as a conduit to bring the idea of Italian Fascism firmly into the National Bolshevik consciousness.

The Widerstand Circle and the Importance of the Fascist War Veteran, 1926-1933

¹⁰³ Niekisch came into personal contact with the founding members of the ASP through his work on the Sachsen textile union. Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 122-123.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin Lapp, *Revolution from the Right: Politics, Class, and the Rise of Nazism in Saxony, 1919-1933*, (Boston: Humanities Press Inc., 1997), 120.

¹⁰⁵ Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 123-124.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, "Revolutionäre," *Widerstand* 1 (1929): 27. This article states that the SPD was, more than any other party, complicit in bringing the German people into the servitude of the West. See also Spektator, "Der Steuersenker," *Widerstand* 2 (1929): 51-55.

¹⁰⁷ Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 125.

At the peak of its influence between 1931 and 1932, the “*Widerstand* movement” (understood as associates and followers of Niekisch) was estimated to have 6,000 members.¹⁰⁸ These numbers, coming from subsequent Gestapo surveillance reports, were likely inflated by the inclusion of former or non-active members. More conservative estimates suggest that the circle’s numbers were more in the realm of 500-600 active members.¹⁰⁹ While the latter figures are likely the more accurate, they do not represent the full extent of the journal’s readership or influence, as the relative fame of *Widerstand*’s contributors would arguably have attracted a fairly broad audience.

By the late 1920s, *Widerstand* boasted a collection of regular contributors that would have been the envy of any national socialist organisation. They included Ernst Jünger and his brother Friedrich Georg Jünger; former Organisation Consul member Ernst von Salomon; the educational theorist Hjalmar Kutzleb (1885-1959); the publicist Joseph E. Drexel (1896-1976), who would go on to found the *Nürnberger Nachrichten* (Nuremberg News) newspaper after the Second World War; and the medical doctor Gustav Sondermann (1894-1973), a member of the NSDAP since 1923. Other contributors wrote anonymously, one under the nom-de-plume “Spektator,” another denoting their articles only with asterisks. With the exception of Sondermann, who pursued a successful career in the NSDAP until its dissolution in 1945, *Widerstand*’s authors did not display clear allegiance to any one party, organisation or established ideology. *Widerstand* was, first and foremost, concerned with political commentary, theoretical concepts, and how its own value system might be methodologically implemented. Which party (if any) was to realise its unique national socialist future was a question that was never resolved.

Despite the general resistance to affiliating itself with any specific organisation, many *Widerstand* authors were already well-established in fascist circles. The most influential was, of course, Ernst Jünger. Along with Friedrich Georg, Ernst formed close ties with Niekisch in late 1928, after his disappointing experiences with the Stahlhelm.¹¹⁰ As explored above, the Jünger brothers had been regular contributors to the Stahlhelm periodical, *Die Standarte*, under the editorship of Helmut Franke, until 1926. After Franke was dismissed, the brothers sought new vehicles for the dissemination of their political ideas. In addition to joining the *Widerstand*

¹⁰⁸ “Bericht über den ‘Widerstandskreis’ und den ‘Widerstands-Verlag’,” 1932, in “Maßnahmen gegen Veröffentlichung Ernst Niekisch,” 1933-1937, R 58/753, Bundesarchive Berlin-Lichterfelde.

¹⁰⁹ Helmut Beer, “Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus in Nürnberg 1933-1945” (PhD diss., Nürnberger Werkstücke zur Stadt- und Landesgeschichte, 1976), 244.

¹¹⁰ Morat, *Tat zur Gelassenheit*, 63.

circle, they collaborated with their former *Standarte* colleagues in the ultranationalist journal *Arminius*, for which Ernst Jünger wrote twenty-seven articles. Ernst Jünger also wrote for the journals *Die Kommenden* (*The Forthcoming*), an outgrowth of the German völkisch youth movement; and *Der Vormarsch: Blätter der nationalsozialistischen Jugend* (*The Advance: Papers of the National Socialist Youth*), an independent national socialist youth journal, wherein twelve of his articles appeared.¹¹¹ In October, 1926, Niekisch wrote to Ernst Jünger to seek his collaboration in *Widerstand*, and between 1927 and 1933 Jünger made a total of eighteen contributions to the journal.¹¹²

Ernst and Friedrich Georg Jünger were among the many authors to imbue *Widerstand*, and by extension the National Bolshevik movement, with the idea of warfare as transcendental and the frontline soldier as the personification of the “new man” and, hence, the new Germany.¹¹³ By the late 1920s, *Widerstand* had thus established itself as a soldierly nationalist publication. Even Drexel, whose name is not typically associated with such literature, contributed an article steeped in soldierly nationalism.¹¹⁴ He claimed that, during times of great upheaval, the sacred bond among men manifested in the form of the frontline soldier, ever willing to make the “offer of blood” for his country.¹¹⁵ The related concept of national rebirth was also common in *Widerstand*.¹¹⁶ In an article entitled *Vom Geist des Krieges* (*From the Spirit of the War*), Friedrich Georg Jünger provided a particularly good illustration:

The spirit of the Fatherland emerged from the dark, from the night, from the unknown, and it forced the state, the nation, the people and the sons of the people to follow it. [...sic...] What then does defeat mean, if it becomes the foundation of our dreams, the precursor of a deeper, more powerful Reich?¹¹⁷

For soldierly nationalism to transform into a true political value system, he argued, it was necessary to extend it into a set of active principles. These “living” elements also appeared in

¹¹¹ *Die Kommenden* expressed the views of such antisemitic youth organisations as der Bund der Adler und Falken, the Schutz- und Trutzbund and the Schilljugend. It was founded by Adler und Falken leader Wilhelm Kotzde-Kottenrodt and Schilljugend leader Gerhard Roßbach. Stefan Breuer, “Der völkischer Flügel der Bündischen Jugend,” in *Jugendbewegung, Antisemitismus und rechtsradikal Politik*, ed. Gideon Botsch and Josef Haverkamp (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2014), 116, 128-129; Morat, *Tat zur Gelassenheit*, 63.

¹¹² Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger*, 289. Karl Otto Paetel, in a summary of Jünger’s published articles, wrote in his 1953 biographical book that Jünger had published only sixteen articles for *Widerstand*. Karl Otto Paetel, *Ernst Jünger: Eine Bibliographie* (Stuttgart: Lutz und Meyer, 1953), 39.

¹¹³ Ernst Jünger, “Betrachtungen,” *Widerstand* 1 (1929): 19-22; Friedrich Georg Jünger, “Vom Geist des Krieges,” *Widerstand* 8 (1929): 225-226.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Drexel, “Warum – wurden sie Soldaten?” *Widerstand* 8 (1929): 231-232.

¹¹⁵ Drexel, “Warum,” 235.

¹¹⁶ Friedrich Georg Jünger, “Der Bombenschwindel,” *Widerstand* 10 (1929): 294-295.

¹¹⁷ Jünger, “Geist des Krieges,” 227.

Widerstand. They were in many ways an extension of what Ernst Jünger had been seeking to do in the *Standarte*, and were, similarly, another precondition for bringing the National Bolsheviks into the fascist sphere.

Widerstand related soldierly values to the contemporary context in Germany. For instance, Sondermann claimed that the formal political system had been turned upside-down and German institutions infiltrated by the curses (*Flüche*) of “foreign will,” which now exploited the natural German qualities of duty (*Pflicht*) and obedience.¹¹⁸ These very qualities were now necessary to rescue Germany, but had to be exercised in the manner of frontline soldiers, with the “spirit of 1914” being transferred to the streets of 1929.¹¹⁹ A second, particularly incisive article, from April of that year, underscored the desirability of a “military rebellion” (*kriegerische Auflehnung*) to overthrow the Weimar Republic.¹²⁰ Wolf Ecker contributed an article about the necessity of overcoming the “propagandists of pacifism.”¹²¹ Pacifism, in this view, was a symptom of an individualistic and inauthentic society, valuing life for life’s sake, failing to take into account the spiritual lifeblood of the nation and the people.¹²² Combatting this mentality involved waging an ongoing spiritual war, in which the camaraderie and sacrifices of war socialism needed to overcome superficial individualism.¹²³

The journal also published articles that implied more conservative readings of national socialism. Traditionally conservative features, such as the idealisation of rural or peasant life as a counterpoint to the excesses of capitalism, seem a far cry from the technocratic utopia envisioned by modernist authors like Jünger. Yet the two views converged in that they drew upon common Conservative Revolutionary thinkers. Some of the most notable were Spengler and Pareto, who advanced visions of new societies that retained many conservative social values. While Jünger and the Italian syndicalists would have scorned the free market, which Pareto and Spengler endorsed in their different ways, Spengler’s idea of socialism as a spiritual bond and Pareto’s theory of a new form of elitism (interpreted by modernists as the figure of the soldier-cum-worker) appealed to modernists and traditionalists alike.¹²⁴ *Widerstand*’s more traditionally conservative authors also homed in on elements present in Italian Fascism, albeit

¹¹⁸ Gustav Sondermann, “Der Drehpunkt,” *Widerstand* 8 (1929): 241.

¹¹⁹ Sondermann, “Drehpunkt,” 242.

¹²⁰ “Also sprach Rathenau,” *Widerstand* 4 (1929): 127.

¹²¹ Wolf Ecker, “Pazifismus und Abtreibung,” *Widerstand* 1 (1929): 23.

¹²² Ecker, “Pazifismus,” 23-24.

¹²³ Ecker, “Pazifismus,” 24-25.

¹²⁴ In an article for *Widerstand*, Jünger praised Spengler’s conception of German spiritual unity as an alternative to stale bourgeois idealism. Ernst Jünger, “Der Wille zur Gestalt,” *Widerstand* 8 (1929): 247; and Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter – Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932), 34.

ones better suited to their own proclivities.¹²⁵ For example, like a number of other authors considered in this thesis, Karl Strünckmann wrote that Fascist Italy demonstrated qualities worthy of Prussia. Like Niekisch, Strünckmann viewed Prussia as the truest manifestation of German national consciousness.¹²⁶ The renewal of Germany was unthinkable without a return to what Strünckmann called the “Prussian rhythm.”¹²⁷ Evoking Kant, he defined this as a “categorical imperative” towards duty and obedience.¹²⁸ Mussolini and the Fascists were “enthusiastic” representatives of this rhythm, and Strünckmann went as far as to describe Italy’s political system as “prussianismo.”¹²⁹ In doing so, he sought to subordinate Italian Fascism to pre-war German nationalism, implying that the latter was more significant than the former. This discursive example of admiration for Fascist Italy would have been less objectionable to Niekisch, who valued Prussia as most authentically German and often criticised other German nationalists for trying to emulate Mussolini.

Historians have usually portrayed *Widerstand* as decidedly anti-socialist. Sauermann has argued that, with the end of the collaboration with the ASP, *Widerstand* “shed the last of its ‘socialistic’ masquerade,” while Michael Pittwald has laconically described the journal as “intellectually bourgeois.”¹³⁰ It would be better arguably to characterise the tone of *Widerstand* as soldierly nationalist, first and foremost. Soldierly nationalism demonstrated flexibility across ideological lines and constituted the most consistent lens through which the ideas in *Widerstand* were filtered. These included ideas of class and proletarian liberation, and the ways in which the journal viewed Italian Fascism.

In understanding the development of *Widerstand*’s soldierly nationalism, attention must again be given to Ernst Jünger, who did more than any other German author to develop soldierly nationalism.¹³¹ While writing for *Widerstand*, Jünger was also working on his book *Der Arbeiter* (*The Worker*), the first edition of which appeared in 1932.¹³² Many of his *Widerstand* articles accordingly reflect the concepts he was developing in his book, and *Widerstand* praised

¹²⁵ Ernst von Salomon, “Darbende Scholle,” *Widerstand* 5 (1929): 151.

¹²⁶ Karl Strünckmann, “Aufgabe des preußischen Rhythmus,” 38.

¹²⁷ Strünckmann, “Aufgabe des preußischen Rhythmus,” 39.

¹²⁸ Strünckmann, “Aufgabe des preußischen Rhythmus,” 38.

¹²⁹ Strünckmann, “Aufgabe des preußischen Rhythmus,” 42.

¹³⁰ Sauermann, *Widerstand*, 84; Michael Pittwald, *Ernst Niekisch: Völkischer Sozialismus, nationale Revolution, deutsches Endimperium* (Cologne: PapyRossa, 2002), 70.

¹³¹ See Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 173-174.

¹³² For an example of Jünger’s discussion of the concept of “forms,” see the following *Widerstand* articles: Ernst Jünger, “Die andere Seite,” *Widerstand* 3 (1929): 78-79; Jünger, “Der Wille zur Gestalt,” 247-249.

and promoted *Der Arbeiter* upon its publication.¹³³ *Der Arbeiter* presented a uniquely bleak vision of a national socialist future. Like other Conservative Revolutionary national socialist works, it began with the rejection of historical materialism, viewing all materialism as superficial and bourgeois, the Smithsonian and the Marxian two sides of the same coin.¹³⁴ Jünger's worker was therefore not the product of labour relations; he was not presented as a representative of a class, but of a "type" (*Typus*). This was a dynamic and metaphysical concept, intended to transcend theories of idealism, materialism and the very conception of society itself (which Jünger, echoing Rousseau, called "the social contract" [*Gesellschaftsvertrag*]) in anticipation of the advent of a new, total state.¹³⁵ This type assumed tangible form (*Gestalt*) in the worker, whose meaning was bound up in his relationship with, and servitude to the total state.¹³⁶ The worker was the sublime reconciliation of flesh and spirit with the sum of humanity's creations: the infrastructure of modern warfare, which, for Jünger, captured the essence of existence.¹³⁷

Der Arbeiter's themes found ready parallels both in Bolshevism and in Italian Fascism.¹³⁸ Specific points of similarity have been drawn, for example, between Jünger and the Italian scholar Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), founder of the Futurist Political Party, which merged with Mussolini's Fascists in 1919, and co-author of the original 1919 *Fascist Manifesto*.¹³⁹ Both Marinetti and Jünger, drawing upon Nietzschean critiques of society, advocated a highly militarised technocracy, in which the new superman emerged in the image of the frontline soldier.¹⁴⁰ In Jünger's vision, bodies, landscapes, emotions — indeed all elements of experience — were synthesised with technology, forming a perpetual, collective readiness for war (total mobilisation) and thereby a manifestation of Nietzsche's will to power.¹⁴¹ Rather than robbing man of his individuality, the individual would be, for the first time, authentically realised through the synthesis of technology, spirit, and flesh. For the Nazis, Jünger's vision was too egalitarian, and the *Völkischer Beobachter* criticised *Der Arbeiter* as a

¹³³ Ernst Jünger, "Die Atmosphäre des Sumpfes," *Widerstand* 9 (1932): 257; "Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt, Zu Ernst Jüngers neuem Buche," *Widerstand* 10 (1932): 307-308.

¹³⁴ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, 14-15.

¹³⁵ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, 12; Jünger, "Atmosphäre," 259.

¹³⁶ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, 36.

¹³⁷ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, 36, 46-47.

¹³⁸ George L. Mosse, "The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3 (May/June 1990): 262-263.

¹³⁹ See Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Il manifesto dei fasci di combattimento," *Il popolo d'Italia*, June 6, 1919.

¹⁴⁰ Jünger further discusses modern artforms, like photography and film, as totalising elements. Ernst Jünger, "Das Lichtbild als Mittel im Kampf," *Widerstand* 12 (1932): 377; Jobst Welge, "Fascist Modernism," in *Modernism*, ed. Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 548.

¹⁴¹ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, 76-78.

“National Bolshevik” text.¹⁴² Particularly disagreeable was that Jünger’s worker, by implication, transcended racial ideas of hierarchy, suggesting that disparate races and nationalities could be subsumed into the total state — a state that, admittedly, embodied “Prussian” qualities.¹⁴³ Jünger drastically reconceptualised the very idea of German exceptionalism, suggesting that all men could potentially be “German.”

Der Arbeiter’s parallels with Bolshevism and Fascism were, at least indirectly, reinforced by Jünger himself. In *Der Arbeiter*, Jünger refrained from commenting on contemporary party politics, wishing to underline the timeless and elemental nature of “types” and “forms,” but from the time he began collaboration with the National Bolsheviks, he engaged in positive comparisons in his political tracts of Fascism to Bolshevism.¹⁴⁴ He also engaged in criticism of American-style capitalism and the commodification of modern life, even stating that this mentality had infiltrated and corrupted many variants of “socialism.”¹⁴⁵ While Jünger was likely influenced by Niekisch’s Soviet sympathies, his increased interest in Bolshevism should not be viewed as mere pandering to the *Widerstand* editor. Jünger was not a man inclined to temper his opinions, and, indeed, similar themes emerged in his contemporaneous writings outside of *Widerstand*. Although Jünger maintained his habitual criticisms of Marxism (including in his *Widerstand* articles), there now emerged points of conceptual overlap between Fascism and Bolshevism, expressed through the prism of soldierly nationalism.¹⁴⁶

Jünger viewed Italy and Russia as manifesting “organic” characteristics, with both Fascism and Bolshevism representing the necessity of violent action in contrast to the “fatalistic” evolutionary Marxism of social democracy.¹⁴⁷ In a 1930 editorial, he wrote:

In Russia and Italy, a complete reorganisation of the state structure has taken place, the characteristic feature of which is the merging of the concepts of the worker and the soldier. It is symptomatic that Trotsky, after his command of the Red Army, took over the task of industrialisation, particularly the electrification of the country, as it is symptomatic that Mussolini was able to describe an intensive measure to increase agricultural production as a “grain battle.”

¹⁴² Marcus Paul Bullock, “Flight Forward: The World of Ernst Jünger’s Worker,” *Utopian Studies* 23, no. 2 (July 2012): 455.

¹⁴³ Bullock, “Flight Forward,” 41.

¹⁴⁴ These articles appeared across different nationalist publications. See, for example, Jünger, “Revolution and Frontsoldatentum,” 14; Jünger, “Abgrenzung und Verbindung,” 20.

¹⁴⁵ Ernst Jünger, “Die Lebenden und die Toten,” *Widerstand* 1 (1928), in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 414-415.

¹⁴⁶ Ernst Jünger, “Revolution um Karl Marx,” *Widerstand* 5 (1929): 145.

¹⁴⁷ Jünger, “Revolution um Karl Marx,” 159.

[...] What needs to be recognised is this: today literal war materials matter less than the power, which can very quickly shape any instrument, to bring the spirit to actualisation.¹⁴⁸

This comparison demonstrated the conceptually unifying capability of soldierly nationalism, and the role that the fascist war veteran played for the National Bolsheviks. In an article for *Arminius*, Jünger noted that Mussolini's fascist state was a desirable model, even if the exact nature and means needed to realise the German equivalent were different.¹⁴⁹ Jünger did not, like some of his contemporaries, advocate mimicry of either Fascism or Bolshevism for their own sakes; rather, he saw the manifestations of both in Germany as aesthetic byproducts disguising a common idealist, dialectical process whose most important features were rising nationalism and war mobilisation.¹⁵⁰ Jünger's tempered admiration of Italian Fascism is, nevertheless, of utmost significance. If Niekisch influenced Jünger to recognise certain virtues in Bolshevism, then the reverse is also true. Through soldierly nationalist authors like Jünger, Italian Fascism became a significant, if piecemeal, reference point for National Bolshevism's own value sets, merging in a unique way with conceptions of Bolshevism.

The texts that *Widerstand* recommended to its readers provide further indication of the journal's unique applications of soldierly nationalism, and the bridges it constructed between fascism and Soviet communism. *Widerstand* reviewed a broad range of literature. In addition to promoting classic Conservative Revolutionary works like Moeller van den Bruck's *Das dritte Reich*, it endorsed more obscure texts like Max René Hesse's war novel *Partenau* and Friedrich Lehmann's *Wir von der Infanterie* (*We of the Infantry*). It also kept readers abreast of the works of Lenin and of secondary Marxist scholars, with contributors evaluating Marx and communism regularly with varying degrees of admiration.¹⁵¹ Jünger wrote a lengthy appraisal of Leon Trotsky's memoirs in 1930, which evidently he found fascinating and recommended to *Widerstand's* readers as a uniquely "insightful" (*aufschlußreiches*) book.¹⁵² *Widerstand* even promoted counter-intuitive texts, like *Im Westen nichts Neues* (appearing in English as *All Quiet on the Western Front*) by Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970).¹⁵³ As the

¹⁴⁸ Ernst Jünger, "Das große Bild des Krieges," *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges*, Berlin, September, 1930, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 612.

¹⁴⁹ Ernst Jünger, "An die Freude," *Arminius*, August 28, 1927, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 363-364.

¹⁵⁰ Ernst Jünger, "Der heroische Realismus," *Die literarische Welt*, March 28, 1930, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 555-556.

¹⁵¹ See, for example, "Lenin," *Widerstand* 11 (1932): 350-352.

¹⁵² Ernst Jünger, "Trotskis Erinnerungen," *Widerstand*, February, 1930, in *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 548.

¹⁵³ "Das dritte Reich," *Widerstand* 6 (1931): 34; Ernst Jünger, "Partenau," *Widerstand* 7 (1929): 203-204; "Das gute Buch," *Widerstand* 11 (1929): 352.

latter is often viewed as the very antithesis to soldierly nationalism, its use in *Widerstand* deserves particular attention.

Im Westen nichts Neues is often set in contrast to Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern*.¹⁵⁴ To account for the dichotomy in reception between Remarque and Jünger, there has been a historiographical propensity to view Jünger's work as highly aestheticised, avoiding "any genuine emotional confrontation with the past," and thus glorifying the war experience through its construction of myth.¹⁵⁵ This notion still predominates in the twenty-first century, with some scholars even suggesting that Jünger's aestheticism presented an attempt self-consciously to engineer organised misogyny and the repression of "true" socialism.¹⁵⁶ In contrast, Remarque's work is often seen as engaging more authentically with reality through its presentation of the war as senseless.¹⁵⁷ However, the reduction of ideas to fixed attitudes belies the complex processes that existed between individuals, their socio-economic contexts, and their artistic outputs.¹⁵⁸ A greater degree of conceptual overlap is possible if ideas are seen as representative of interrelated socio-economic and intellectual tensions, and other non-static developmental processes, to which both Jünger and Remarque were subject.¹⁵⁹ As Bavaj and Kiesel observed respectively, soldierly reference points and war mythologisation — including their literary and political manifestations in fighting language and war metaphor — were hardly the sole purview of radical ultranationalists, but were sewn into the very cultural fabric of the Weimar Republic.¹⁶⁰ This meant that a wealth of other authors — including those in communist and passivist circles such as Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935), Friedrich Wolf (1888-1953), and Carl von Ossietzky (1889-1938) — engaged in the same literary techniques as fascistic authors, including highlighting the war's egalitarian brutality.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ See Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (London: Routledge, 1984; original published in 1928); Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern*.

¹⁵⁵ The quoted characterisation of Jünger's work comes from Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 100. For additional examples of the "diametric" interpretation, see Wolfram Witte, "Ideologen, Propaganda und Innenpolitik als Voraussetzungen der Kriegspolitik des Dritten Reiches," in *Das Deutsche Reich und der zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 1, ed. the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979), 48.

¹⁵⁶ For example, see Rob Heynen, "Socialism from the Right? Aesthetics, Politics and the Counter-Revolution in Weimar Germany," *New Formations* 75 (Autumn 2012): 83, <https://doi.org/10.3898/NewF.75.05.2012>.

¹⁵⁷ Martin Greiffenhagen, *Das Dilemma des Konservatismus in Deutschland* (Munich: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), 277.

¹⁵⁸ Woods, "Conservative Revolution and the First World War," 77-78.

¹⁵⁹ Woods, *Conservative Revolution*, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger*, 305-306. See also Riccardo Bavaj, *Von links gegen Weimar: Linkes antiparlamentarisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Dietz, 2009).

¹⁶¹ An example of this can be seen in Kurt Tucholsky, "Der Graben," 1926, in Project Gutenberg, accessed April 20, 2025, <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/tucholsk/gedichte/chap003.html>; Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger*, 305-307.

Jörg Lehmann has noted that passivistic and nationalistic war literature contained common “heretical” elements: they both presented warfare in a greatly dissimilar way from that which had characterised war literature in the Wilhelmine Reich.¹⁶² Similarly, Florian Brückner has observed that inter-ideological bridges were constructed — for example between soldierly nationalists and communists — on the basis of this mutual war mythologisation.¹⁶³ For instance, Jünger and Remarque’s books both comment on the evaporation of traditional ideas of chivalry, subsumed by the all-encompassing needs of a new breed of war, which Jünger termed *Materialschlacht* (material warfare), in which men’s bodies are consumed like any other resource.¹⁶⁴ Both novels paint an uncompromising image of life in the trenches. These points of commonality, and the politically unifying capacity that they represented, were highly significant for the *Widerstand* circle.

In 1929, Drexel reviewed *Im Westen nichts Neues* for *Widerstand*.¹⁶⁵ He stated that it was a “truly good work” (*wirklich guter Titel*).¹⁶⁶ Far from setting Jünger and Remarque in opposition, he contrasted “new” war literature with earlier generations of bourgeois war “poets,” whose romanticised writings he believed to be far removed from the reality of war.¹⁶⁷ Remarque, like Jünger, was a literary representative of the frontline generation’s rightful alienation from the “comfortable, banal” world of the bourgeoisie.¹⁶⁸ Drexel did not approve of Remarque’s pacifism, but it did not prevent the novel from disclosing (even if unintentionally) the same greater truths about the human condition found in nationalistic war literature.¹⁶⁹ In contrast to the bourgeoisie, the common man — a category in which Drexel included Jünger — knew an intimate relationship with the war, and therefore with the authenticity of existence.¹⁷⁰ Proletarian men had served on the frontline, and the cause of soldierly nationalism was thus the cause of the proletariat. Drexel’s parallels between socio-economic classes and the war reveal the overlap between “traditional” socialist ideas and new soldierly nationalism, as well as the trans-ideological bridges engendered by war mythologisation.

¹⁶² Jörg Lehmann (formerly Vollmer), “Imaginäre Schlachtfelder: Kriegsliteratur in der Weimarer Republik” (PhD diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 2003), 289-291.

¹⁶³ Florian Brückner, “Der Kriegroman der Weimarer Republik: Methoden, Desiderata, Forschungsperspektiven,” *Jahrbuch zur Kultur und Literatur der Weimarer Republik* 17 (2016): 181-183.

¹⁶⁴ Woods, “Conservative Revolution and the First World War,” 80.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph Drexel, “Im Westen nichts Neues,” *Widerstand* 4 (1929): 102-103.

¹⁶⁶ Drexel, “Im Westen nichts Neues,” 100.

¹⁶⁷ Drexel, “Im Westen nichts Neues,” 97-98.

¹⁶⁸ Drexel, “Im Westen nichts Neues,” 100.

¹⁶⁹ Drexel, “Im Westen nichts Neues,” 102-103.

¹⁷⁰ Drexel, “Im Westen nichts Neues,” 101.

Also present in *Widerstand* were the decidedly fascist concepts of national renewal and the belief in the necessity of violence. In 1931, Nikolaus Götz contrasted Marxism with liberal individualism, claiming that Marx had been a “prophet” who embodied the “spirit of technology.”¹⁷¹ Like Giovanni Gentile and the Italian Fascists, he placed emphasis on the importance of Hegelian idealism and violence as necessary elements to realise true revolutionary transformation. Anti-Marxism presented no comparable philosophical or political content and, for Götz, simply represented fear of the modern.¹⁷² In 1929, Gregor Werl authored an article criticising what he saw as bourgeois appropriation of the revolutionary cause. Evaluating the work of the renowned British comedian and outspoken communist Charlie Chaplin, Werl called Chaplin an “anarchist clown” and criticised anarchism as a fundamentally anti-collectivist ideology, a mirror-image of liberal individualism.¹⁷³ Werl saw Chaplin as a paradox, imprisoned by the conventions he parodied. It was now necessary for criticism of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist means of production — a core feature of Chaplin’s comedy — to be separated from entertainment, which was a tool used by the bourgeoisie to defuse real protest.¹⁷⁴ The article thus contained an overture to the Marxist proletariat, while simultaneously endorsing a rigid, hierarchical, and direct approach to revolutionary politics.

Taken together, these elements place *Widerstand* on near-identical ideological footing with the precursor of Fascism, the Italian national syndicalists. Both the national syndicalists and the National Bolsheviks were inspired by the philosophy of Georges Sorel.¹⁷⁵ As explored above, the Sorelian concept of violence — viewed as necessary, not incidental, for true revolution — went on to become one of the cornerstones of fascist ideology. But where the Fascists had scorned the Bolsheviks for withdrawing Russia from the Great War, National Bolsheviks like Götz viewed Soviet Russia as the very realisation of Sorelian values: a dialectical synthesis of “organic national will” and modern technology, achieved through violence.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, *Widerstand* acknowledged that both Fascism and Bolshevism were the political children of syndicalism, and endorsed syndicalism as the optimal mode of political organisation. In one of his most famous works, *Vom Proletariat zum Arbeitertum*, Winnig, himself a former trade union leader, deemed direct representation by trade unions the most viable mode of collective

¹⁷¹ Nikolaus Götz, “Menschenfresser Technik,” *Widerstand* 4 (1931): 16.

¹⁷² Götz, “Menschenfresser Technik,” 16-17.

¹⁷³ Gregor Werl, “Chaplin,” *Widerstand* 1 (1929): 18.

¹⁷⁴ Werl, “Chaplin,” 16, 19.

¹⁷⁵ “Über die Gewalt,” *Widerstand* 5 (1929): 159-160.

¹⁷⁶ Werl, “Chaplin,” 19.

bargaining.¹⁷⁷ In a telling synthesis of soldierly nationalism and Sorelian national syndicalism, *Widerstand* also claimed that the main syndicalist bargaining tool, the general strike, represented the social parallel of war.¹⁷⁸ The National Bolsheviks also enjoyed practical connections to Sorel's legacy and Italian Fascism. Giuseppe Prezolini (1882-1982), a National Fascist Party member and one of the most famous interpreters of Sorel, contributed an article to *Widerstand* in 1929. In it, he discussed Italian politics of the Renaissance era, conveying to German readers the richness of Italian history.¹⁷⁹ The presence of the article suggests that the National Bolsheviks had, for their part, roused at least some degree of Italian attention, and found sufficient ideological commonalities to ensure mutually friendly exchanges.

Niekisch's personal views on Fascism, however, were generally negative, being heavily influenced by diplomatic tensions between Germany and Italy. He criticised Mussolini's regime's program of Italianisation in the annexed region of South Tyrol and the outlawing of the German language. Whereas many German nationalists turned a remarkable blind eye to the plight of the South Tyrolean German minority population, Niekisch was one of the few who condemned Italy's actions consistently.¹⁸⁰ Another *Widerstand* writer, Fritz Berger, travelled to Rome in 1932 to learn more about Fascism first-hand. In March of that year, he contributed an article to *Widerstand* substantiating Niekisch's views on Italian foreign policy. He claimed that Italy was pursuing an unacceptable line of rapprochement with the Catholic Church and its foreign representatives, placing Italy in conflict with Russia and ergo, from the National Bolshevik perspective, with Germany.¹⁸¹ Whatever merit Italian Fascism might have had, Niekisch believed that Italy's interests, bound up with the very concept of Western civilization, conflicted too severely with Germany's for any useful alliance.¹⁸²

When commenting on Fascism as an ideology, Niekisch's criticisms were somewhat more nuanced. He wrote in 1930:

Despite its autocratic nature, [Fascism] is an offspring of liberalism. [...] In Italy, the defence of bourgeois civilization through Fascism is not merely sociological, but intrinsic to the national configuration. [...] Anti-bourgeois Bolshevism is the polar opposite of bourgeois

¹⁷⁷ Winnig, *Proletariat zum Arbeitertum*, 88-89; Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus*, 234.

¹⁷⁸ "Über die Gewalt," 159-160.

¹⁷⁹ Giuseppe Prezolini, "Der Basilisk," *Widerstand* 3 (1929): 81-82.

¹⁸⁰ "Wohin man mit Mussolini geraten kann," *Widerstand* 9 (1929): 286.

¹⁸¹ Fritz Berger, "Italien und Polen: Mussolini Schutzpatron der polnischen Legion," *Widerstand* 3 (1932): 86.

¹⁸² Ernst Niekisch, "Der deutsche Nationalsozialismus," *Widerstand* 5 (1929): 132-135.

Fascism. Bolshevism pulses with national lifeblood, reflecting the un-bourgeois, rural Russian people, in the same way that Fascism is natural to the bourgeois, urban Italians.¹⁸³

This criticism owes significant debt to the interpretations of fascism fashionable within Marxist circles at the time. While Niekisch did not resort to the economic reductionism often seen in such literature (i.e. the view that fascism was a mere political allegory of late-state capitalism), he equated Fascism fundamentally with the dynamics of class struggle. Nevertheless, Fascism in Niekisch's view possessed a certain "organic" character, a quality which allowed for the conquest of sociopolitical alienation.

This observation emerged more clearly in Niekisch's criticism of the NSDAP. Niekisch reserved a special dislike for Adolf Hitler, rivalled only by his hatred of the SPD.¹⁸⁴ He viewed the NSDAP as misguided at best, and, at worst, as downright un-German.¹⁸⁵ Hitler was a parody in comparison to the titan Paul von Hindenburg, the outgoing representative of a prouder, truer Germany.¹⁸⁶ Niekisch characterised the NSDAP as a combination of Bavarian provincialism (contrasted with Prussianism) and a fawning attempt to emulate Mussolini.¹⁸⁷ This rendered Hitler, ipso facto, inferior to Mussolini. Niekisch even likened Mussolini to Lenin in this context, claiming that both "embodied new modes of thought," representing a new "form of human community."¹⁸⁸ In contrast, Hitler's attempt to become the "German Mussolini" simply denoted another instance of subservience to the West.¹⁸⁹ Niekisch remarked in 1932 that Hitler's Italian orientation owed more to his personal Catholic background and connection to the Occident, than to any actual knowledge or appreciation of the current Italian political system.¹⁹⁰

Although consistently critical of Fascism, Niekisch's reasoning was similar to that of colleagues who took more complimentary views. These differing views appeared side-by-side in *Widerstand*. Another contributor, Anton Graf Bossi-Fedrigotti (1901-1990), wrote an article in late 1932, in which he discussed the Fascists' reorganisation of Italy's military infrastructure.

¹⁸³ Ernst Niekisch, *Entscheidung* (Berlin: Widerstand-Verlag, 1930), 77-78.

¹⁸⁴ In late 1929, *Widerstand*'s opinion of the NSDAP seems to have taken a downturn. Ernst Jünger criticised the NSDAP's attitude towards non-Nazi-aligned nationalists, stating that other nationalists, "in particular Ernst Niekisch," had said nothing but "friendly, positive and comradely" things about the NSDAP. Ernst Jünger, "Reinheit der Mittel," *Widerstand* 10 (1929): 295-296; Ward, "Left and Right," 68.

¹⁸⁵ Niekisch, "Nationalsozialismus," 129-130.

¹⁸⁶ Ernst Niekisch, "Die Begegnung," *Widerstand* 9 (1932): 264.

¹⁸⁷ Niekisch, "Begegnung," 266-267; Niekisch, "Nationalsozialismus," 131; Ernst Niekisch, "Vom deutschen Protest zum Faschismus," *Widerstand* 1 (1932): 18.

¹⁸⁸ Ernst Niekisch, "Tote gehen um," *Widerstand* 7 (1932): 195.

¹⁸⁹ Carey, "Ernst Niekisch," 440.

¹⁹⁰ Ernst Niekisch, "Der großen Worte nackter Sinn," *Widerstand* 2 (1932): 42, 14.

While stressing that Italian armies would never match the German military spirit, Bossi-Fedrigotti stated that Mussolini's capacity to instil frontline discipline in the Italian military was a quality to be admired.¹⁹¹ While Bossi-Fedrigotti stopped short of suggesting that Germany should formally ally itself with Italy, he wrote with admiration of the variety of means whereby the Fascist government had reinvigorated the country's military.¹⁹² Winnig, too, accredited Fascism with introducing a "new element" into European politics.¹⁹³ Like Bossi-Fedrigotti, his appreciation for Fascism stemmed from the belief that Mussolini's regime had actualised the spiritual quality of willpower, transforming it into a real-existing political system. This, for Winnig, endowed Fascism with "historical importance."¹⁹⁴

Taken as a whole, Italian Fascism was of great significance for *Widerstand*, precisely because it was never regarded with indifference. *Widerstand* has often been characterised as synonymous with Niekisch's personal views, but as should now be apparent, this was not the case. Certainly, the journal offered a mouthpiece for Niekisch's criticisms of the Versailles Treaty, the Locarno Pacts, and Western-orientated foreign policy in general, but within its ultranationalist, pro-Russian stance, it accommodated a remarkably wide range of opinions.¹⁹⁵ This is apparent not only in the diverse impressions of Italian Fascism, but also in the variety of views on Bolshevism and Marxist theory. What unified the journal was soldierly nationalism, inherent proximity of which to the values of Italian Fascism placed the *Widerstand* circle within the fascist sphere.

The Praxis of National Bolshevism

By the early 1930s, the contents of *Widerstand* reflected the increasing socio-economic tensions of the Great Depression. Niekisch, always sharpened-tongued, became even more scathing in his attacks on political opponents. He criticised Chancellor Heinrich Brüning (1885-1970) as an "anti-Bismarck," the embodiment of everything un-German; and dismissed Stahlhelm Bundesführer Franz Seldte as a liberal and the DNVP as a powerless Junker-era

¹⁹¹ Anton Graf Bossi-Fedrigotti, "Italien – militärischer Bundesgenosse?: Eine militärpolitische Betrachtung," *Widerstand* 11 (1932): 325-326.

¹⁹² Bossi-Fedrigotti, "Italien," 331-332.

¹⁹³ Winnig, *Reich als Republik*, 352. Winnig was, of course, also active in the GSF (see Chapter Two). There is evidence that the *Widerstand* circle kept abreast of the GSF's activities. An article about Waldemar Pabst's activities in Austria appeared in *Widerstand* in 1932. See "Major Pabst," *Widerstand* 11 (1932): 350.

¹⁹⁴ Winnig, *Reich als Republik*, 352.

¹⁹⁵ Ernst Niekisch, "Deutsche Außenpolitik," *Widerstand* 2 (1929): 33.

throwback.¹⁹⁶ Niekisch criticised the Harzburg Front for its lack of acknowledgement of deeper economic structures.¹⁹⁷ Despite sharing other patriots' hatred of the Young Plan, Niekisch upbraided the Harzburg Front as "impotent" on the basis that (among other things) it needed to recognise the exploitative nature of capitalism before it would have any chance of success. It was not Niekisch nor the *Widerstand* circle, however, that was to represent the most direct attempt to transform National Bolshevik ideas into political praxis.

In 1930, Ernst Jünger joined the editorship board of the nationalist journal, *Die Kommenden*.¹⁹⁸ This role brought him into contact with Karl Otto Paetel (1906-1975), a young revolutionary nationalist.¹⁹⁹ As one of the few figures to embrace the hitherto pejorative term "National Bolshevik" as a self-descriptor, Paetel embodies the most explicit attempt to translate the National Bolshevik position into parliamentary reality. By the early 1930s, he was already well-versed in the soldierly nationalism of Jünger, Franz Schauwecker, and Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, as well as the works of Niekisch, Winnig, Laufenberg, Wolffheim, and Lenin.²⁰⁰ As a leader of the nationalist youth group, Deutsche Freischar, he participated from 1928 in collaborative efforts with other nationalist youth group representatives.²⁰¹ For instance, in early 1929, he joined Friedrich Kopp and Artur Grosse, members of the Jungnationaler Bund (Young National League), to form the Arbeitsring Junge Front (Young Front Working Circle), a group that sought to build alliances between communists and national socialists.²⁰² Their goal was to form a coalition that combined class struggle with revolutionary nationalism.²⁰³ Their praxis was pragmatic and direct. They distributed programs at the NSDAP's party congress in Nürnberg in 1929, informing Nazis of the importance of nationalising industry and appropriating property.²⁰⁴ The Junge Front's tactics attracted attention that was limited, but

¹⁹⁶ Ernst Niekisch, "Bilanz," *Widerstand* 4 (1931): 4, 6.

¹⁹⁷ Ernst Niekisch, "Die nationale Opposition: Was sie tun müßte, wenn sie ernst machen wollte," *Widerstand* 7 (1929): 196; Ernst Niekisch, "Die Stunde der nationalen Opposition," *Widerstand* 9 (1929): 266-267. *Widerstand* was equally critical of socialist protests. For example, it lamented that the May Day demonstrations of 1929 had been transformed into "a harmless festival," robbed by the bourgeoisie of revolutionary potential. "Der 1. Mai," *Widerstand* 5 (1929): 156.

¹⁹⁸ Breuer, "völkischer Flügel," 129.

¹⁹⁹ Paetel was profoundly impressed by Jünger's ideas and would go on to write a biographical study of Jünger after the war. Karl Otto Paetel, *Ernst Jünger: Die Wandlung eines deutschen Dichters und Patrioten* (New York: Krause, 1946).

²⁰⁰ James J. Ward, "Pipe Dreams or Revolutionary Politics? The Group of Social Revolutionary Nationalists in the Weimar Republic," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 3 (July 1980): 518, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200948001500307>.

²⁰¹ Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 515.

²⁰² Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 515-516.

²⁰³ For a critical discussion, authored by Paetel himself, of early views of German national youth movements, see Karl O. Paetel, "Deutsche Jugendbewegung: Ein Literaturbericht," *Politische Vierteljahrschrift* 8, no. 2 (1967): 461-475.

²⁰⁴ Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 516.

significant. Similarly minded contemporaries, most notably Otto and Gregor Strasser of the NSDAP, viewed the group positively, while still remaining wary of the Junge Front's explicit use of Marxism. The Strasser circle's approval of the Junge Front contributed to the sharpening of internal tensions between the pro- and anti-capitalist factions of the NSDAP.²⁰⁵

In 1930, the Junge Front refashioned itself as the Gruppe Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalisten. To further solidify and disseminate its ideology, the GSRN founded its own journal, *Die sozialistische Nation*, in 1931. *Widerstand*, for its part, advertised *Die sozialistische Nation* to its readers.²⁰⁶ The GSRN's ensuing manifesto, authored by Paetel and appearing on the very day that Hitler became chancellor, summarised the key positions and demands of *Die sozialistische Nation*.²⁰⁷ It called for alliance with Soviet Russia, refutation of the Versailles Treaty, the appropriation of private property and the construction of a Soviet-style government run by people's councils.²⁰⁸ Outlining the precedents of German National Bolshevism in the Weimar Republic (Laufenberg and Wolffheim, the KPD's nationalist concessions during the Ruhr crisis, etc.) Paetel called upon specific like-minded groups to build an alliance dedicated to the praxis.²⁰⁹ In addition to the *Widerstand* circle, he appealed to the future head of the Nazi Press Office, Werner Lass (1902-1999), who at that time was active in multiple national revolutionary projects of National Bolshevik persuasion, including *Die Kommenden* and *Der Vormarsch* journals and the movement Bund der Eidgenossen (League of Confederates).²¹⁰ Paetel also called upon the Jungpreußischer Bund (Young Prussian League) under the leadership of the international revolutionary nationalist Jupp Hoven; the Junge Kämpfer (Young Fighters), a splinter organisation of Otto Strasser's Schwarze Front; and the Deutsche sozialistische Kampfbewegung (DSKB), which likewise had its roots in the more socialistic tendencies of the NSDAP.²¹¹

When faced with a choice between the SPD, the Hitlerian Nazis, and the KPD in the elections of 1932, the *Widerstand* and Strasser circles both joined the GSRN in voicing support, albeit tempered, for the KPD.²¹² Yet they were hesitant to participate in Paetel's proposed coalition,

²⁰⁵ Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 517, 519; Wannenwetsch, *Unorthodoxe Sozialisten*, 160.

²⁰⁶ "Die sozialistische Nation," *Widerstand* 1 (1932).

²⁰⁷ Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 530-532.

²⁰⁸ Karl Otto Paetel, *Das nationalbolschwistische Manifest* (Berlin-Charlottenburg: Verlag "Die sozialistische Nation," 1933), 24-25.

²⁰⁹ Paetel, *Nationalbolschwistische Manifest*, 12, 62.

²¹⁰ Paetel, *Nationalbolschwistische Manifest*, 62.

²¹¹ Paetel, *Nationalbolschwistische Manifest*, 62.

²¹² This included a short-lived collaborate newspaper, *Entscheidung* (*Decision*), aimed at drawing nationalists closer to the KPD. Ward, "Left and Right," 287-289.

and neither group ever joined in formal alliance with the GSRN. While the *Widerstand* circle criticised Hitler's anti-Marxism for sabotaging potential anti-capitalist co-operation, it also continued to keep its distance from the KPD.²¹³ Niekisch remained unwavering in his view that the KPD and its associated Comintern orthodoxy presented a threat to Germany's independence as a nation state. In March, 1932, "Spektator" authored an article evaluating the KPD's recent actions.²¹⁴ The KPD was more promising than the National Opposition in that it at least recognised the worth of cultivating Russia as an ally, but an ongoing problem lay in the KPD's position on the Versailles Treaty.²¹⁵ The communists needed to take a firm stance against Versailles in order to be truly revolutionary — and to stand against Versailles was to be, by definition, national-revolutionary. Without assurance that the KPD would dedicate itself to national revolution, the KPD's pro-Soviet stance could only be read, *Spektator* claimed, as an effort to subjugate Russia to the dominion of the West.²¹⁶ The Strasser circle had similar reservations. Unable to recruit its prospective "national communist" allies, the GSRN thus remained isolated in its decision to back the KPD in the 1932 elections.²¹⁷

The GSRN was orientated more towards Marxism than was the *Widerstand* circle. It drew unashamedly on Marxist literature and voiced criticism of conservative representatives of national socialism like Spengler, who were generally positively regarded within the pages of *Widerstand*.²¹⁸ While accepting Prussia as the rightful source of German national consciousness, Paetel cautioned against an overemphasis on the "Prussian" element of Prussian socialism, lest true economic revolutionary change (i.e. historical materialism) be superseded by Spenglerian conceptions of socialist idealism.²¹⁹ Paetel's manifesto also presented an earnest intellectual attempt to reconcile elements of communist ideology with many of the elements that had sponsored Fascism. Fascism's nationalist and syndicalist roots appealed to the GSRN, with Paetel acknowledging that the "first Fascist program bore a thoroughly revolutionary character, roughly equivalent to the USPD."²²⁰ Yet, like other National Bolsheviks, Paetel saw Fascism as a movement that had had great potential, only to squander it in the ultimate example of class treachery. He drew parallels between the Italian Fascists and

²¹³ Ernst Niekisch, "Ratlosigkeit als Politik," *Widerstand* 12 (1932): 368; *Spektator*, "Liquidation des 9. November?" *Widerstand* 8 (1932): 242.

²¹⁴ This was the author's pseudonym.

²¹⁵ *Spektator*, "Nichtangriffspakte und die Folgen," *Widerstand* 3 (1932): 80.

²¹⁶ *Spektator*, "Nichtangriffspakte," 81.

²¹⁷ Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 523.

²¹⁸ Paetel, *Nationalbolschwistische Manifest*, 16, 37-38.

²¹⁹ Paetel, *Nationalbolschwistische Manifest*, 16, 48.

²²⁰ Paetel, *Nationalbolschwistische Manifest*, 18-19.

the NSDAP, claiming that both had succumbed to the interests of the bourgeoisie after agreeing to act as the bourgeoisie's foot-soldiers in the repression of Marxism.²²¹ For the GSRN, Fascism presented a missed opportunity.

The Decline of National Bolshevism, 1933-1934

After Hitler assumed the chancellorship of Germany in January, 1933, the National Bolsheviks found themselves living on borrowed time. Having placed itself in an electoral alliance with the KPD, the GSRN was among the first casualties of National Socialist repression. It was outlawed in the slew of bans on Marxist and communist groups following the Reichstag fire in February of that year.²²² Niekisch, too, was apprehended in March and detained temporarily by the SA for interrogation.²²³ It is a testament to National Bolshevism's many faces, however, that its more conservative iterations, including the *Widerstand* journal, were able to survive the initial wave of purges. Niekisch was permitted to reprise his editorship position, and *Widerstand* persevered until 1934. Niekisch acknowledged that the journal owed its longevity in part to his personal friendship with several men who, after assuming official positions in the Nazi regime, were able to use their influence to delay closer inspection of Niekisch's activities.²²⁴ However, Niekisch and his colleagues knew that *Widerstand's* days were numbered. In constant anticipation of the journal being banned, Niekisch prided himself on maintaining an anti-Hitlerian tone, even claiming that the journal reached its peak quality between 1933 and 1934.²²⁵ While articles of this time did not criticise the NSDAP openly, couched amongst the usual nationalist language were suggestions that Germany had not achieved its revolutionary potential, alongside provocative quotes from communist leaders.²²⁶

Widerstand's inevitable death knell sounded in December, 1934, following the *Widerstand* press' publication of a collection of poems by Friedrich Georg Jünger.²²⁷ A particularly inflammatory elegy — *Der Mohn (The Poppy)* — was interpreted as a criticism of the Nazi regime (as, undoubtedly, it was intended).²²⁸ The ensuing ban effectively marks the end of

²²¹ Paetel, *Nationalbolschewistische Manifest*, 18-23.

²²² Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 526.

²²³ For Niekisch's account of this initial repression, see Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 236-241.

²²⁴ Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 251.

²²⁵ By the time Niekisch wrote his memoirs, it was, of course, in his best interest to downplay any collaboration with the NS regime. Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 250.

²²⁶ Ernst Niekisch, "Die Obrigkeit und ihr Untertan," *Widerstand* 9 (1934).

²²⁷ Kiesel, *Ernst Jünger*, 422.

²²⁸ Friedrich George Jünger, *Gedichte* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klosterman, 1949), 33.

collective German National Bolshevism in the interwar period. The practitioners of National Bolshevism were robbed of the ability to meet or promulgate their ideas in anything but the most euphemistic ways and were subject to increased surveillance and intimidation. This is not to say, of course, that the National Bolsheviks became totally inactive. After many of Hitler's nationalist opponents were eliminated in the Night of the Long Knives in mid-1934, Niekisch's prominence made him a rallying point for nationalist-based opposition to Hitler's regime, and he succeeded in establishing secret cells of intellectual resistance in a number of Germany's larger cities.²²⁹

Not content to limit himself purely to intellectual opposition, however, Niekisch soon began to work with his contact Beppo Römer (1892-1944), a former Freikorps member who had joined the KPD in order to form an anti-Hitler alliance with connections in the Reichswehr.²³⁰ Niekisch also travelled to Paris in 1937 to meet with Paetel, who had gone into exile in 1935, but was likewise dedicated to fostering anti-Hitlerian nationalist sentiment in Germany.²³¹ For their efforts, Niekisch and many of his associates were arrested, detained, and interrogated in 1937. Friedrich Georg Jünger, undoubtedly benefitting from Ernst Jünger's positive reputation within fascist circles, was released after interrogation and permitted to join his brother in his home in Überlingen. Niekisch, Drexel, and Karl Tröger were sentenced to life imprisonment.²³² While in prison, Niekisch suffered torture that left him crippled and almost totally blind. He was eventually liberated by the Red Army in 1945, whereafter he assumed a professorship at Humboldt University in Berlin and dedicated himself to writing his memoirs.²³³

Even during the Third Reich, there is evidence that the National Bolsheviks had a complex relationship with Italian Fascism. Though Niekisch had always maintained that German nationalists should distance themselves from Italian Fascism, it was Mussolini to whom he turned in his hour of need. Aware of the extensive network of sympathetic contacts that the Italian regime had built up throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Niekisch travelled to Rome in 1935 in the hope of garnering support and expanding his network of anti-Hitlerian German nationalists. Through one of his Italian contacts, the journalist Giovanni Engely, Niekisch was

²²⁹ E. Bramsted, "Centering on Germany: Two Revealing Autobiographies," *The Australian Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (June 1959): 114, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20633534>.

²³⁰ Fischer, *German Communists*, 298-300; Hoffman, *German Resistance*, 19; "Ernst Niekisch," *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand*, 2021, accessed March 22, 2025, https://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/recess/biographies/index_of_persons/biographie/view-bio/ernst-niekisch/?no_cache=1.

²³¹ Paetel's name and whereabouts appear on Nazi lists of enemies. Reichssicherheitshauptamt Amt IV, "Meldung wichtiger staatspolizeilicher Ereignisse," Nr 8, 1941, in R 583103, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 14.

²³² "Ernst Niekisch," *Gedenkstätte Widerstand*.

²³³ Ward, "Left and Right," 329.

able to gain an audience with the Duce himself.²³⁴ True to form, Niekisch was uncompromisingly honest with the Italian dictator about his feelings towards Hitler and his opinion that Western-orientated foreign policy was a mistake for Germany and, indeed, for Italy.²³⁵ After hearing Niekisch out, Mussolini purportedly slammed his fist down on his desk and exclaimed in riotous agreement: “That is exactly what I have always said to Hitler!”²³⁶ The meeting ended amicably, with Mussolini pressing Niekisch’s hand and assuring him that he would welcome him back when Niekisch was next in Rome. This moment, of course, was too little, too late, for the German National Bolsheviks. It merely hints at might-have-beens.

For brevity’s sake, this chapter has not been able to address all instances of what may be termed “National Bolshevism” in the Weimar years. A significant proportion of this — as the following chapter shall explore — was the purview of the anti-Hitlerian factions of the NSDAP, most commonly associated with brothers Gregor and Otto Strasser. Niekisch, despite his criticism of the NSDAP, enjoyed friendly relations with many of the men in these contiguous circles.²³⁷ The parameters of National Bolshevism are less easily recognisable than those of more formal ideologies, but this broadness renders the movement no less valuable to intellectual history. The sheer variety of National Bolshevism’s ideological influences challenges historiographical efforts to shoehorn National Bolshevism into boxes such as “right-wing,” “left-wing,” a manifestation of horseshoe theory, or a mere alternative perspective on foreign policy. The movement emerges as a broad synthesis of ultranationalism, soldierly nationalism, and Marxism (both orthodox and unorthodox) with pro-Soviet foreign policy. This definition accommodates National Bolsheviks’ differing views about class struggle, historical materialism, conservatism, traditionalism, religion, and fascism, while also acknowledging the movement’s inherent proximity to the value sets of fascism.

Taken as a whole, National Bolshevism cannot be said to have been inherently sympathetic to Italian Fascism. But it *was* sympathetic to the historical influences that sponsored Fascism, particularly those of the Italian national syndicalists. These elements place it within the fascist sphere, and, indeed, it was through the shared value of soldierly nationalism and its accompanying reverence for war, violence, and national rebirth, that National Bolsheviks formulated their impressions of Mussolini’s regime. National Bolshevism’s place within the fascist sphere does not suggest that National Bolshevism should be understood as “fascist.”

²³⁴ Schieder, *Mythos Mussolini*, 292.

²³⁵ Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 263.

²³⁶ Niekisch, *Gewagtes Leben*, 264.

²³⁷ Ward, “Left and Right,” 222, 224.

National Bolshevism's most significant precedents can arguably be found in the divergent strains of Marxism and syndicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the Italian national syndicalists' turn towards Fascism viewed by many National Bolsheviks as unfortunate, if not as an outright betrayal of the cause. The combination of Marxism and soldierly nationalism encouraged many National Bolsheviks, most notably within Niekisch's *Widerstand* circle, to formulate unique interpretations of Italian Fascism. Fascism was likened to Bolshevism in that both movements were seen as manifesting organic systems of popular representation. National Bolshevism thus extended Germanic ultranationalist impressions of Italian Fascism in novel ways.

Chapter Five: *The Strasser Circle: Strasserism as National Bolshevism through the Use of Italian Fascism*

The “Strasser circle” is an umbrella term encompassing the variations on Nazism associated with brothers Gregor Strasser (1892-1934) and Otto Strasser (1897-1974), both of whom were members of the NSDAP during the Weimar period. The brothers and their associates were responsible for multiple initiatives in the 1920s and early 1930s, including the establishment of their own press empire, centred around a Berlin-based publishing house, the Kampf Verlag, and the production of numerous periodicals and newspapers, including the *Nationalsozialistische Briefe* (NS-Briefe; *National Socialist Letters*), *Berliner Abendzeitung* (*Berlin Evening Newspaper*), *Die Faust* (*The Fist*), *Die Flamme* (*The Flame*), and *Der National-Sozialist* (*The National Socialist*). Between them, they also organised and spearheaded several political interest groups and initiatives, notably the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der nord- und westdeutschen Gaue der NSDAP (AG), led by Gregor Strasser from 1925 to 1926; the Kampfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten (KGRNS); and the Schwarze Front (Black Front), headed by Otto Strasser from 1930 to 1933; as well as an oppositional block within the NSDAP itself, led by Gregor Strasser in the second half of 1932.

The term “Strasser circle” can, nevertheless, be somewhat misleading in terms of implied uniformity. Although brothers, Gregor and Otto Strasser — and their associates — differed in opinion, methodology, and the degree of their radicalisation, particularly after Otto Strasser tendered his resignation from the NSDAP and founded the splinter-group, the KGRNS, in 1930. In addition, some literature on the Strasser circle uses the acronym KGRNS interchangeably with the “Schwarze Front”/“Black Front,” when these were not synonymous concepts.¹ The KGRNS referred to the core organisation established by Otto Strasser and his immediate followers; the Schwarze Front referred to an initiative undertaken by the KGRNS in 1931, in collaboration with Berlin SA-leader Walther Stennes (1895-1983) and former

¹ See, for example, James Frances Hughes II, “Otto Strasser, the Nazi Party, and the Politics of Opposition” (Masters diss., The University of Vermont, 2023), ProQuest (30634972), 1, 4.

Freikorps leader Hermann Ehrhardt, to build an informal alliance between the KGRNS and other like-minded groups.²

At the most basic level, the rationale upon which the brothers' various initiatives are united conceptually — that is, what is broadly understood as the Strasser circle or "Strasserism" — is characterised by the demand to nationalise the economy, and achieve national revolution in a manner that required the elimination of capitalism.³ The second deviation from mainline Nazism was the desire to pursue an eastern-orientated foreign policy; namely for Germany to cultivate pro-Soviet geopolitical relations as a means of gaining leverage against the West.⁴ Because of the nature of these contentions, Otto Ernst Schüddekopf, one of the most prominent historians of National Bolshevism, devoted significant time to the Strasser circle and the Schwarze Front as expressions of the National Bolshevik phenomenon.⁵ Stefan Wannenwetsch also considered the circle in the broader context of the revolutionary revisionism that first emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, viewing Strasserism as a purveyor of unorthodox socialism.⁶ Broader-based analyses like these have several benefits over the majority of literature on Strasserism, which measures Strasserism primarily against internal Nazi Party politics and ideas. Broad-based studies stress Strasserism's place in the thematic company of lowercase national socialism, the Conservative Revolution and, by extension, Italian Fascism. Considered as a species of National Bolshevism, the Strasser circle can also be placed adjacent to the SPD's Hofgeismarkreis, Ernst Niekisch's *Widerstand* circle, and Karl Otto Paetel's GSRN (indeed, Otto Strasser hoped to amalgamate both the *Widerstand* circle and the GSRN into his Schwarze Front).⁷

The portrait of Italian Fascism that emerges in literature produced by the Strasser circle supports a National Bolshevik reading. Whereas many mainline National Socialists were largely complimentary of Mussolini, the men associated with the Strasser circle were often

² Patrick Moreau, "Strasserism in Germany: In Search of an Anti-Western Alliance with Stalin's USSR and Putin's Russia," in *Entangled Far Rights: A Russian-European Intellectual Romance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2018), 158.

³ See, for example, Otto Strasser *Aufbau des deutschen Sozialismus* (Leipzig: Wolfgang Richard Lindner Verlag, 1932), 33-34.

⁴ Strasser, *Aufbau*, 80.

⁵ Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von rechts*, 319. The book was released in a new edition in 1973 as *National-Bolschewismus in Deutschland 1918-1933*. Ward, "Left and Right," 210-212.

⁶ Wannenwetsch, *Unorthodoxe Sozialisten*, 40-41.

⁷ Ascher and Lewy, "Alliance," 465.

guarded or even critical of Fascism due to its capitalistic nature.⁸ Some of the more radical Strasserites even had recourse to refer to all hostile movements as “fascist”; something that recalled, in all but name, the prevailing contemporary communist orthodoxy.⁹ At face value, the Strasser circle rejected what it called “reactionary fascism” (with Mussolini’s regime principally in mind) and did not acknowledge any direct ideological debt to Mussolini or intellectuals of the Fascist state.¹⁰ This hostility was most pronounced in the Schwarze Front and its parent organisation, the KGRNS. Nevertheless, like other National Bolshevik associations, the circle also used Italy as a consistent reference point and adopted specific elements that were not only fascistic, but which also highlight the circle’s divergence from mainline National Socialism.

The first trait to emerge — and one which was largely absent from other National Bolshevik movements — was a growing commitment to building a corporatist state. This was soon accompanied by soldierly nationalism and the fascist war veteran construct, seen as indispensable for the construction and perpetuation of the corporate state. These fascistic features became increasingly prevalent in Strasser circle materials from the mid-1920s onward. Importantly, the circle’s appeals to corporatism were more refined and more concentrated than those of the mainline NSDAP, and its use of the fascist war veteran differed in that, for the Strasser circle, soldierly nationalism did not take a backseat to the racialized nationalism central to Hitlerism. Ironically, while appearing superficially to be more critical of Fascism than their Hitlerian counterparts, the Strasser circle’s use of Italian Fascism recalled more of the actual values and functioning of the Italian regime.

Historians investigating the development of Nazism during the Weimar years have, unsurprisingly, paid significant attention to the Strasser circle, along with the SA, as potential National Socialist alternatives to Hitlerism. Many such studies take the form of examinations of the inner-party factionalism and organisational intrigues leading up to the Night of the Long

⁸ Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe and Per Anders Rudling, “Introduction,” in *Transnational and Transatlantic Fascism, 1918-2018: The Far Right in East Central and Southeastern Europe*, ed. Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe and Per Anders Rudling (London: Routledge, 2025), 1-18. As scholars of transnational fascism Rossoliński-Liebe and Rudling note, “during the 1920s, Mussolini was admired by all kinds of aspiring fascist groups, including Hitler and the Nazis” (5). While this fact is widely acknowledged, it does not suggest wholesale admiration within Hitlerian circles. As Goeschel notes, Hitler at times apparently dismissed Italians as a “racially inferior” people with a lack of military commitment. Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 57.

⁹ J. S. McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought* (London: Routledge, 1996), 550.

¹⁰ See, for example, Richard Schapke, *Die schwarze Front: Von Zielen und Aufgaben und vom Kampfe der Deutschen Revolution* (Leipzig: Wolfgang Richard Lindner Verlag, 1932), 22. For a typical example of Otto Strasser’s comments on “fascism,” see Otto Strasser, *Hitler and I*, trans. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1940), 112.

Knives of mid-1934, in which Gregor Strasser was liquidated along with other “internal enemies” of the regime. In addition to the studies noted above, the Strasser circle has also been touched upon in the context of generic fascism, including comparative histories between Nazism and Italian Fascism.¹¹ The few works specifically to explore German interpretations of Italian Fascism, such as Klaus-Peter Hoepke’s 1968 book *Die deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus* (*The German Right and Italian Fascism*) and Matthias Damm’s 2013 *Die Rezeption des italienischen Faschismus in der Weimarer Republik* (*The Reception of Italian Fascism in the Weimar Republic*), are wide-ranging in scope and thus understandably cannot explore Strasserism in detail.¹² For Hoepke, whose work nonetheless discusses the circle in this context, Strasserite interpretations of Italian Fascism were not unique or remarkable, and its criticisms of Hitlerism merely disguised a “right-wing” ideology that was, at its core, fundamentally similar to the object of its censure.¹³ Peter Stachura, one of the foremost authors on Gregor Strasser, also presented Strasserism as a “watered down,” “vacuous,” and totally inauthentic version of “socialism.”¹⁴ Barbara Miller Lane, who conducted valuable studies into early Nazi ideology, had reached similar conclusions in the 1970s.¹⁵ For these historians, Strasserism differed from Hitlerism only in an organisational sense; ideologically, the two were barely distinguishable.

This is illustrative of one of two major historiographical oversights impacting the historiography of the Strasser circle, and of Nazi ideology more broadly.¹⁶ The second “takes ideology seriously,” but downplays the plurality of Nazi ideologies through overemphasis either on Hitler’s personal *Weltanschauung*, on broader antisemitic or ultranationalist sentiment, or on Hitler’s role in centralising the ideological cohesion of the Nazi Party and its

¹¹ See, for example, Eric Dorn Brose, “Generic Fascism Revisited: Attitudes towards Technology in Germany and Italy, 1919-1945,” *German Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (May 1987): 278, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1431103>.

¹² Hoepke, *Deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus*, 202-203; Damm, *Rezeption des italienischen Faschismus*, 330-365.

¹³ Hoepke, *Deutsche Rechte und der italienische Faschismus*, 202-203.

¹⁴ Peter D. Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 9-10. For Stachura, Gregor Strasser was best understood as a representative of the disenfranchised “frontline generation.”

¹⁵ Barbara Miller Lane, “Nazi Ideology: Some Unfinished Business,” *Central European History* 7, no. 1 (March 1974): 18-19, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938900010451>.

¹⁶ Andreas Umland, “Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie: Geschichtsdenken und politisches Handeln im Dritten Reich* [Utopia as Ideology: Historical Thought and Political Action in the Third Reich], 2nd ed., (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999),” *European History Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (April 2020): 287.

subsidiaries.¹⁷ This has particularly problematic ramifications when applied to Nazism in its movement stage, a time characterised by significant factionalism and ideological ambiguity.

Recently, scholarly focus has shifted more towards emphasising the power of ideas and the plurality of Nazi ideology.¹⁸ One of the most persistent themes in the study of ideological variation is the ongoing tendency to characterise the Strasser circle as the “Nazi left,” due to the circle’s socialistic tendencies. The first such instance has been attributed to historian and political scientist Reinhard Kühnl, who produced a doctoral thesis in 1966 entitled *Die nationalsozialistische Linke (The National Socialist Left)*.¹⁹ Kühnl’s mentor, Wolfgang Abendroth, had been active in National Bolshevik circles during the Weimar Republic, and Kühnl’s book carried over the old Bolshevik aversion to taking seriously any non-materialist claims to “socialism,” thus rendering the left-wing label contingent solely on Strasserism’s relationship with Hitlerism. Other historians to have designated the Strasser circle as the left-wing of the NSDAP include Gregor Reigner and Max H. Kele.²⁰ Pursuing the same overall characterisation of Strasserism, Patrick Moreau’s 1984 book *Nationalsozialismus von links (National Socialism from the Left)* refined its focus to look in more detail at the KGRNS.²¹ Smaller studies in the form of journal articles have also homed in on specific elements and manifestations of Strasserism, including the AG period and the KGRNS.²²

¹⁷ Umland, “Frank-Lothar Kroll,” 288. For example, Peter Fritzsche argues that the NSDAP was singularly successful in tapping into a broad ultranationalist, antisemitic mood which fermented during the Weimar Republic. Peter Fritzsche, “The NSDAP 1919-1934: From Fringe Politics to the Seizure of Power,” in *The Short Oxford History of Nazi Germany*, ed. Jane Caplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 72.

¹⁸ Some of the most valuable literature to pluralise Nazi ideology focuses on regime-stage Nazism. Frank-Lothar Kroll analysed, addition to Hitler, the thought of Heinrich Himmler, Walther Darré, Alfred Rosenberg, and Joseph Goebbels. Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie: Geschichtsdenken und politisches Handeln im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1999). More recent works by Lutz Raphael also focus on the pluralisation of Nazi ideology during the Third Reich. For a discussion on earlier historiography and current pluralising tendencies in the studies of Nazi ideology, see Lutz Raphael, “Pluralities of National Socialist Ideology: New Perspectives on the Production and Diffusion of National Socialist *Weltanschauung*,” in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*, ed. Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 73-86. See also Lutz Raphael, “Die nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung: Profil, Verbreitungsformen und Nachleben,” in *Kriegsende 1945: Befreiung oder Niederlage für die Deutschen*, ed. Günter Gehl (Weimar: Bertuch, 2006), 27-42; and Lutz Raphael, “Radikales Ordnungsdenken und die Organisation totalitärer Herrschaft: Weltanschauungseliten und Humanwissenschaftler im NS-Regime,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27, no. 1 (2001): 5-40.

¹⁹ Reinhard Kühnl, *Die nationalsozialistische Linke 1925-1930* (Meisenheim: Hain, 1966).

²⁰ Max H. Kele, *Nazis and Workers: National Socialist Appeals to German Labor, 1919-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 212.

²¹ Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus von links*.

²² For work on the AG, see, for example, Jeremy Noakes, “Conflict and Development in the NSDAP 1924-1927,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 4 (October 1966): 3-34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200946600100401>. For work focusing on the KGRNS/Schwarze Front, see Paul Gottfried, “Otto Strasser and National Socialism,” *Modern Age* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1969): 142.

Most recently, Robert Gellately dedicated a chapter to the “Nazi left” in his investigation of divisions of opinion within the NSDAP.²³ For Gellately, the Strasser circle’s relative emphasis on socialism, particularly in the 1920s, was largely an opportunistic ploy to increase the party’s — and Hitler’s — appeal, once again placing the Strasser circle firmly in Hitler’s orbit.²⁴ Indeed, Strasserite particulars should not automatically be interpreted as a “challenge” to Hitler — especially not during 1925-1926, when Hitler was banned from public speaking and the Strasser brothers worked hard to keep Nazism alive in his absence. In 2010, Markus März, despite publishing through the auspices of the ultranationalist Ares Verlag, reproduced documentation on the Strasser circle and undertook a detailed analysis of the Strasser circle’s activities in the AG and the Kampf Verlag. While März overemphasises the circle’s criticism of Hitler’s social Darwinism, his study illuminates important ideological differences and situates the circle in the context of the Conservative Revolutionary thought of other non-Nazi ultranationalist thinkers, in particular Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Oswald Spengler, and Ernst Jünger.²⁵ While the Strasser circle cannot, and should not, be freed entirely from the Hitler orbit, the ideological variation that began to emerge in this period deserves serious consideration from historians seeking to understand the ideological pluralities of Nazism.

Much of the literature on Strasserism follows biographical conventions. Notable biographies of Gregor Strasser begin with a slew of valuable but little-known PhD theses from 1966 by Joseph Murdock Dixon, Patrick G. Rogers, and Ulrich Wörtz respectively, and a subsequent dissertation by George P. Hutchinson, appearing in 1980.²⁶ The most prominent works on Gregor Strasser remain Stachura’s *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism* (1983), and Udo Kissenkoetter’s *Gregor Strasser und die NSDAP* (1978).²⁷ Otto Strasser offers a somewhat different portrait. Whereas Gregor was murdered in the prime of his life, making his story neatly “packaged” from a biographer’s perspective, Otto lived long enough to write a series of

²³ Robert Gellately, *Hitler’s True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

²⁴ Gellately, *Hitler’s True Believers*, 72.

²⁵ See März’s discussion of formative ideology. Markus März, *Nationale Sozialisten in der NSDAP: Strukturen, Ideologie, Publizistik und Biographien des national-sozialistischen Straßer-Kreises von der AG Nordwest bis zum Kampf-Verlag 1925-1930* (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2010), 31-82.

²⁶ Joseph Murdock Dixon, “Gregor Strasser and the Organization of the Nazi Party, 1925-1932” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 1966); Patrick G. Rogers, “Gregor Strasser and His Role in the Nazi Party” (PhD diss., Loras College, 1966); Ulrich Wörtz, “Programmatik und Führerprinzip: Das Problem des Strasser-Kreises in der NSDAP” (PhD diss., University of Erlangen, 1966); George P. Hutchinson, “Struggle for Germany: The Political Career of Gregor Strasser” (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1980).

²⁷ Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 2; Udo Kissenkoetter, *Gregor Strasser und die NSDAP* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978), 16.

memoirs in addition to his prolific output of political tracts.²⁸ His autobiographical works offer insight into the political machinations of the Weimar and Nazi eras, but unsurprisingly are infused with apologia for his and his late brother's politics, trying to set them as far apart from Hitler's genocidal racism as possible. Douglas Reed's 1940 book *Nemesis? The Story of Otto Strasser* offers another contemporary portrait of Strasser, the result of the author's interviews with his subject while Strasser was residing in Parisian exile.²⁹ Otto Strasser has also garnered subsequent biographical attention, with studies including a 1965 PhD thesis by Jesse Silverglate and a 1990 book by Günter Bartsch.³⁰ Such studies often, however, replicate the dichotomy characteristic of literature on the Strasser circle: on one side, exaggerated efforts to exonerate their subjects from the stain of Hitlerism; on the other, a reactive unwillingness to acknowledge legitimate points of ideological and intellectual divergence between Strasserism and mainline Nazism.³¹

Investigating impressions of Italian Fascism within the Strasser circle not only reinforces the case for the circle as a species of National Bolshevism but also illuminates and refines understanding of the specific points of variation between Strasserism and Hitlerian Nazism. This chapter begins with an overview of the circle's (initially organisational) emergence within the NSDAP, before analysing National Bolshevik developments and the role of impressions of Italian Fascism in the formation of a Strasserite ideology. It stresses the similarity between the Strasser circle's use of Italian Fascism, and that of the *Widerstand* circle and other National Bolshevik groups. The development of impressions of Italian Fascism in the Strasser circle can be examined through the works of the Strasser brothers and their primary associates, including Albert Krebs (1899-1974), Herbert Blank (1899-1958), Richard Schapke (1897-1940), Hans Reupke, and Graf Ernst zu Reventlow, as well as key theorists like Moeller van den Bruck, whom the KGRNS credited with embodying the true spirit of National Socialism.³² Primary sources take the forms of published books, political tracts, memoirs, and a variety of other materials disseminated by the Kampf Verlag and the other organs of the Strasser press. Many of these authors worked contemporaneously in other projects, unrelated to the NSDAP.

²⁸ Strasser, *Hitler and I*; Otto Strasser, *Mein Kampf: Eine politische Autobiografie* (Frankfurt am Main: Heinrich Heine Verlag, 1969); Otto Strasser, *Exil* (Munich: n.p., 1958).

²⁹ Douglas Reed, *Nemesis? The Story of Otto Strasser and the Black Front* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940).

³⁰ Jesse Silverglate, "The Ideology of Otto Strasser" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1965); Günter Bartsch, *Otto Strasser: Der linke Nationalsozialist*, 2nd ed. (Essen: Bublies Siegfried, 2020), 11-12.

³¹ For an example of the former, see Silverglate, *Ideology of Otto Strasser*. For an example of the latter, see Hughes, "Otto Strasser, the Nazi Party, and the Politics of Opposition."

³² Schapke, *Schwarze Front*, 16.

Acknowledging these entanglements, in addition to their unique manifestation in the Strasser circle, contributes to a deeper understanding of the pluralities of fascisms in interwar Germany, and the multifaceted role Italian Fascism played in their construction.

In Service of the NSDAP - The Strasser Circle, 1919-1925

The idea of a German national socialism was introduced to the Strasser brothers in an unpretentious setting. In 1912, Gregor and Otto's father, Peter, authored a work of political theory entitled *Das neue Wesen* (*The New Essence*), under the nom-de-plume Paul Wegr.³³ A civil servant in the Bavarian towns of Windsheim and Deggendorf, Peter Strasser was, according to Otto, a reserved and sombre middle-class man, whose conventional exterior disguised a "rebellious heart."³⁴ As adults, both Otto and Gregor acknowledged the influence their father had upon the development of their own beliefs.³⁵ Their brother Bernhard, between Gregor and Otto in age, commented in 1954 that it was little wonder his brothers had turned to politics.³⁶ Peter Strasser's book represented the basis of the political aims which Gregor and Otto were later to strive for, outlining "a national, Christian socialism" as a remedy for "the contradictions and inadequacies of the international, capitalist, liberalist disease of our time."³⁷

Peter Strasser's tract offers a window into the ideas circulating amongst nationalist intellectuals in Germany in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anticipating the idealist, neo-Hegelian claims that Spengler would popularise in the interwar years, Peter Strasser advocated for the working class to be liberated from the burden of being the "proletariat," to realise an "organic" national socialism based not on materialism, but on morality and a sense of duty.³⁸ Like other national socialists, Peter Strasser incorporated a range of thinkers — from Adam

³³ The dates given for the work's publication vary. Both Bernhard and Otto Strasser, writing in the 1950s, claimed that the book first appeared in 1896 under the pseudonym "Paul Weger." Stachura, however, claims that this is incorrect, and that the book did not appear until 1912, under the name "Wegr." Strasser, *Exil*, 10; Bernhard Strasser, *Gregor und Otto Strasser: Kurze Darstellung ihrer Persönlichkeit und ihres Wollens* (Wertheim: A. Schelhaas, 1954), 3; Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 11. See also Paul Wegr, *Das neue Wesen: Betrachtungen und Ausblicke* (Kempten: n.p., 1912).

³⁴ Strasser, *Exil*, 8-10.

³⁵ Strasser, *Exil*, 10. Gregor Strasser dedicated a collection of his speeches to his father. Gregor Strasser, *Freiheit und Brot: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften eines National-Sozialisten, Teil 1: Idee*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Kampf Verlag, 1928), 3.

³⁶ Strasser, *Gregor und Otto*, 3.

³⁷ Strasser, *Gregor und Otto*, 3.

³⁸ Strasser, *Exil*, 10. See also Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, 5th ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934), 361-362; Oswald Spengler, "Prussian Socialism," Internet Archive, accessed January 27, 2025, <https://archive.org/details/prussian-socialism>, 55-56.

Smith to Friedrich List — to construct a blueprint for a third way in which the nation-state would function as the primary basis of social cohesion.³⁹ This was intended to simultaneously overcome the worst features of existing politics (i.e. the capitalistic individualism of liberalism, the economic reductionism of communism, and the nepotism of traditional conservatism) by combining the best features of each (i.e. post-Enlightenment, civic nation states as governing entities, the political integration of an enfranchised working class, and the preservation of a traditionally Christian culture). Peter Strasser thus expressed a longing typical of non-materialist socialism and Conservative Revolutionary thought.

The development of Gregor and Otto's politics reflected likewise the emergent trajectory of the Conservative Revolution. As such, it was impacted profoundly by the experience and legacy of the Great War. Both Gregor and Otto enlisted in the army as volunteers at the beginning of the war (Otto at only sixteen years of age). The peculiar "aristocratic and democratic" spirit that Otto encountered after rising to the officer corps left a significant impression upon him.⁴⁰ Already in these early years, he displayed a reluctance to channel his burgeoning political energy into any existing avenue. Nationalism was the mainstay of his ideology, but found its earliest expression not in outright radicalism, but in the staid, non-revolutionary politics of the SPD. While still on the frontline, Otto took out a subscription to the social democratic newspaper, the *Münchener Post* (*Munich Post*).⁴¹ As would soon become apparent, the nationalism of men like Strasser, Ernst Niekisch, and August Winnig (also in the SPD at this time) was of too aggressive a configuration to sit comfortably alongside the SPD party line. This did not mean, however, that Strasser, Niekisch, or Winnig were complete outliers. As explored above, the SPD was a broad church whose most radical nationalist sections — best epitomised by the Hofgeismarkreis in which Niekisch was active — foregrounded the perceived needs of the German nation-state to the extent of abandoning historical materialism. This was justified on ideological grounds, for instance with reference to "ethical socialism," while social democracy and national socialism communicated through the vehicle of "integrationist nationalism."⁴²

In the immediate post-war years, there is evidence to suggest that Otto Strasser viewed the republic as Germany's only chance of retaining national cohesion. In an example of the functional loyalty practiced by many in the officer corps during the installation of the Weimar

³⁹ Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 11-12.

⁴⁰ Strasser, *Exil*, 15.

⁴¹ Strasser, *Exil*, 18.

⁴² Vogt, "Strange Encounters," 255. Refer also to my discussion in Chapter Four.

Republic, Strasser participated in the Freikorps campaign against the communist Bavarian Socialist Soviet Republic in 1919, and in the organised resistance to the conservative nationalist Kapp Putsch of the following year.⁴³ After the immediate crises had passed, however, Strasser resigned from the SPD in search of more radical outlets for his national socialism.⁴⁴ He first met Adolf Hitler in October of that same year, at the behest of Gregor, who had recently become involved with the then little-known DAP (later NSDAP) and was eager to make a convert out of his brother.⁴⁵ Encouraged by the presence of the renowned General Erich Ludendorff, who would also be attending, Otto travelled to his brother's home in Landshut, where the meeting was to take place over dinner.⁴⁶

Strasser took with him a newfound appreciation for the nascent Soviet Union. A few weeks prior, in his capacity as a journalist for the SPD, he had attended an event in Halle organised by the USPD (the revolutionary SPD splinter party to which Niekisch and Winnig belonged at the time). The event featured a lengthy speech by Grigory Zinoviev (1883-1936), then-chairman of the new Comintern (Third International) executive committee.⁴⁷ After the speech, Zinoviev granted Strasser an interview, during which he appealed to the young man's nationalism by acknowledging the sacrifices of German frontline soldiers, and impressed upon him the desirability of collaboration between Bolshevik Russia and Germany.⁴⁸ While the Comintern stopped short of endorsing the goals of maverick national communists like Heinrich Laufenberg and Fritz Wolffheim, Zinoviev's remarks were reflective of the brief, albeit significant, appeals to German nationalism employed by the likes of the KPD during the earliest years of the republic, when the party was hoping to garner support from otherwise inaccessible political quarters.⁴⁹ By impressing upon Strasser the power of the Bolshevik system, Zinoviev achieved an ironic effect. On one hand, Strasser became convinced of the potential benefit of Germany's allying itself with Russia in matters of foreign policy; on the other, he was now more determined than ever to resist Bolshevism, as the very power that made Russia a desirable ally also rendered it one of the greatest threats to German independence.⁵⁰

⁴³ For more on functional loyalty, refer also to my discussion in Chapter Three. Fischer, "Very German Revolution?" 21; Strasser, *Hitler and I*, 2.

⁴⁴ Strasser, *Hitler and I*, 3.

⁴⁵ Strasser, *Hitler and I*, 1.

⁴⁶ Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, 13.

⁴⁷ Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, 10-11. Strasser himself claims that the speech lasted no less than seven hours.

⁴⁸ Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, 12-13.

⁴⁹ Ascher and Lewy, "Alliance," 454-455. Zinoviev echoed comments made by August Thalheimer of the KPD and Karl Radek, the Comintern's primary consultant on Germany. For example, see Radek's appeal to the NSDAP following the death of Leo Schlageter. Radek, "Wanderer ins Nichts"; Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, 14.

⁵⁰ Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, 14.

For Otto, the NSDAP — or, more accurately, his brother's station within it — would soon provide a means to gain the political leverage he desired. The catalyst began with the Beer Hall Putsch of November, 1923. The outcome of the putsch neutralised Hitler temporarily. He was eventually sentenced to five years in Landsberg prison, but served only nine months. With the NSDAP outlawed during this time, Gregor Strasser collaborated with Ludendorff and Albrecht von Graefe (1868-1933) to establish the Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung (NSFB) as a legal means of continuing the NSDAP.⁵¹ Under Strasser's leadership, the NSFB focused on establishing strongholds in rural electorates and joined other völkisch groups to form the Völkisch-Sozialer Block (Völkisch-Social Block), which performed relatively well in the Reichstag election of December, 1924.⁵²

In his maiden speech as a parliamentary representative in the Bavarian Landtag in July, 1924, Gregor Strasser spoke at length of the alleged link between finance capitalism, Marxism, and the "Jewish race."⁵³ To combat one, he claimed, necessitated combatting them all. The solution was to construct a state modelled after the Christian tradition, albeit one in which the nation and the German race replaced the church as primary socio-cultural unifiers. Strasser's emphasis on the importance of the Christian legacy was partly owing to a desire to assuage the fears of the conservative-völkisch farmers' sector about the spectre of collectivisation conjured by the NSDAP's self-stated socialism.⁵⁴ In attempting to win over the farmers' vote in 1924-1925, Strasser was taking heed of agricultural interest groups and influential journals like *Bodenreform* (*Land Reform*). Before the Beer Hall Putsch, *Bodenreform* drew some of the earliest parallels between the NSDAP and the Italian Fascists, stating that, if the NSDAP was serious about achieving political victory, it needed to cultivate Bavarian farmers, just as Mussolini had won the support of Italian rural workers.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Strasser himself had been a participant in the putsch but was released from prison early due to his recent election into the Bavarian Landtag. Gottfried Feder, "Die nationale Revolution vom 8./9. November 1923," in NS 26/112, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 33; Johnpeter Horst Grill, "The Nazi Party's Rural Propaganda before 1928," *Central European History* 15, no. 2 (June 1982): 160-161, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938900010566>.

⁵² Grill, "Rural Propaganda," 160-161.

⁵³ Gregor Strasser "Erste Rede eines Nationalsozialisten in einem deutschen Parlament," July 9, 1924, in *Freiheit und Brot: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften eines National-Sozialisten, Teil 1: Idee* (Berlin: Kampf Verlag, 1928), 7-22.

⁵⁴ Hitler would later state, in a clarification of point 17 of the NSDAP's 25-Point program, that Nazi statements about collectivisation applied solely to Jewish-owned property. Grill, "Rural Propaganda," 164.

⁵⁵ Grill, "Rural Propaganda," 156-157.

Whereas Hitler resisted outlining a firm agricultural policy in the early years, Strasser was evidently receptive to the message.⁵⁶ Although Strasser's speech was typical Nazi fare of its time, one may begin speaking nevertheless of an emergent Strasser circle. This was initially much more organisational than ideological, being committed, first and foremost, to keeping the Nazi movement alive and increasing its support base. When the NSFB was re-absorbed into the NSDAP in February, 1925, Strasser had secured the position of NSDAP Gauleiter of Bavaria, a post that permitted him to establish the AG, officially formed on 9 October, 1925.⁵⁷ With Strasser as its leader (Gaugeschäftsführer), the AG acted as a collective representative of the NSDAP Gauleiters of north-western Germany (Rheinland-Nord, Rheinland-Süd, Westfalen, Hanover, Hanover-Süd, Hessen-Nassau, Lüneburg-Stade, Schleswig-Holstein, Groß-Hamburg, Berlin, and Pommern), and counted among its ranks Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945); Reinhold Muchow (1905-1933); Hermann Fobke (1899-1943), deputy Gauleiter of South Hanover between 1925 and 1928; Karl Dincklage (1874-1930), deputy Gauleiter and SA-Gauleiter of North Hanover; and, in short order, Otto Strasser, who joined the NSDAP that same year.⁵⁸ The AG and its parent organisation, the NSDAP interim group known as the Nationalsozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (NSAG), which was formed in April, 1925, soon established the *NS-Briefe*, a bi-monthly periodical edited by Gregor Strasser and Goebbels.⁵⁹ The *NS-Briefe* was intended to promote the AG, encourage discussion, and disseminate Nazi ideology. It was also a tool to combat the growing influence of Munich-based functionaries Philipp Bouhler (1899-1945), Hermann Esser (1900-1981), and Julius Streicher (1885-1946), whom the Strasser circle accused of being excessively bureaucratic.⁶⁰ The Strasser circle's loyalty to Hitler at this stage is evident, as Strasser and his colleagues argued that Hitler's association with his Munich-based advisors was restricting his capacity to act independently.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Agricultural policies remained a prominent feature of Strasser's politics. For an example of Strasser's future agricultural policy, see his 1932 speech to the Reichstag: Gregor Strasser, "Work and Bread!" May 10, 1932, in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 135-145.

⁵⁷ For more information on the changing configurations of Nazi Gaus in the mid-1920s, see Peter Hüttenberger, *Die Gauleiter: Studie zum Wandel des Machtgefüges in der NSDAP* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1969), in particular, Chapter One.

⁵⁸ "Statuten der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der nord- und westdeutschen Gaue der NSDAP," October 9, 1925, in *Nationalsozialismus und Revolution: Ursprung und Geschichte der NSDAP in Hamburg 1922- 1933*, ed. Werner Jochmann (Frankfurt am Main: Universität Hamburg, 1963), 212; Steinbeck, "Thinking Beyond the Führer: The Ideological and Structural Evolution of National Socialism, 1919-1934," (master's thesis, California State University, 2019); Mathias Rösch, *Die Münchener NSDAP 1925-1933* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2002), 171; Peter Thoma, *Der Fall Otto Strasser* (Cologne: Oppo Verlag, 1971), 12.

⁵⁹ "Statuten der Arbeitsgemeinschaft," 212, 171.

⁶⁰ Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969), 66.

⁶¹ Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, 66.

Nevertheless, in the *NS-Briefe*, the circle had created what would soon become one of the most significant platforms for the expression of an alternative Nazism.

The development of National Bolshevism within the Strasser circle predated — but subsequently shaped — the circle's engagement with Italian Fascism. It is therefore important first to identify the ideas circulating and hybridising within the circle prior to assessing Fascism's impact. During the AG period, the Strasser circle consisted of a loose organisation of men, which, in addition to the abovementioned, included of the ex-Freikorps officer Karl Kaufmann (1900-1969), and the Supreme SA leader (Oberster SA-Führer) Franz Pfeffer von Salomon (1888-1968) — cousin of the nationalist writer, Ernst von Salomon.⁶² Despite the pronounced anticapitalism of some of the men in the Strasser circle, identifying a divergent Nazi ideology during the AG era remains problematic. Firstly, despite being headed by Strasser, the AG did not present a unified position on questions of anticapitalism or social policy, with, for example, the faction of Pfeffer von Salomon and his associates being much more conservative fiscally and socially than Strasser's faction.⁶³ Secondly, many of the Strasser circle's "alternative" opinions, such as its support for trade unionism and its rejection of electoral participation, were not at that time anti-Hitlerian, as in 1925 the official Nazi position on these issues had yet to solidify.⁶⁴ In addition, many of the materials published through the AG — including those unashamedly anti-capitalist in tone — were received enthusiastically by the rest of the NSDAP.⁶⁵ These included Goebbels' 1925 pamphlets, *Der Nazi-Sozi*, published through the *NS-Briefe*'s base in Elberfeld, and *Das kleine ABC des Nationalsozialisten*, which appeared in *Der Angriff* and was promoted as recommended reading

⁶² Mark A. Frischka, *Franz Pfeffer von Salomon: Hitlers vergessener Oberster SA-Führer* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016), 279-281.

⁶³ Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers*, 74. There is naturally much debate about the nature of Nazi (anti)capitalism, with many historians rejecting any claims to "socialism" within the NSDAP. For example, Alexa Stiller characterises capitalism in the Third Reich as a unique variant (völkisch capitalism), while viewing the Party's anticapitalism during the Weimar Republic — including that of the Strasser circle — as purely tokenistic. Alexa Stiller, "Völkisch Capitalism: Himmler's Bankers and the Continuity of Capitalist Thinking and Practise in Germany," in *Reshaping Capitalism in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Moritz Föllmer and Pamela E. Sweet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 282-283. For additional recent research on the NSDAP's relationship with capitalism, see other articles in the volume, especially: Moritz Föllmer, "Capitalism and Agency in Interwar Germany," in *Reshaping Capitalism in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Moritz Föllmer and Pamela E. Sweet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 52-56.

⁶⁴ The Party revised its 25-Point program only in 1928 to clarify that proposed property reform for allocating property to "common purposes" (*gemeinnützige Zweck*) was merely intended as a method to combat the interests of "Jewish property speculation" (*jüdische Grundstücksspekulations-Gesellschaften*). "Programm der Nationalsozialisten Deutschen Arbeiter Partei," February 24, 1920, Dokumentarkiv.de, accessed January 31, 2025, <http://www.documentarchiv.de/wr/1920/nsdap-programm.html>.

⁶⁵ Joseph Goebbels, "Das kleine abc des Nationalsozialisten," *Der Angriff* (Berlin: Franz-Eher Verlag, 1925); Toby Thacker, *Joseph Goebbels: Life and Death* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 56.

material for every Gauleiter.⁶⁶ Even so, the Strasser circle had one stance — and arguably a very important one — that Hitler would undoubtedly have rejected.⁶⁷ It supported collaboration with the USSR in foreign policy, and expressed sympathy towards Bolshevism as an agent of national liberation.

Alongside the Strasser brothers, Goebbels was the most significant figure in introducing National Bolshevik ideology to the AG.⁶⁸ During the mid-1920s, he worked closely with Gregor Strasser and referred to him as a “great guy” (*lieber Kerl; guter Kerl*) on many occasions in his diary.⁶⁹ The two men shared an anti-capitalist national socialist zeal which contained the potential — at least intellectually — to undermine the rabid anti-Bolshevism that generally characterised the NSDAP.⁷⁰ Schüddekopf traced the first clear articulation of a National Bolshevik line in the Strasser circle to an article by Goebbels, appearing in the *Völkischer Beobachter* in August, 1925.⁷¹ Entitled *Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus* (*National Socialism and Bolshevism*), the article was the first of a number of pieces that Goebbels wrote in quick succession in 1925-1926, alternately published in the *NS-Briefe*, *Der Angriff*, and the *Völkischer Beobachter*. Taken collectively, the articles demonstrate a remarkable National Bolshevik interpretation of the contemporary political situation — albeit one governed almost entirely by the logic of nationalism.⁷² In an article from October, 1925, addressed to a (likely hypothetical) “friend from the left,” Goebbels stated that National Socialists and communists fought each other “without really being enemies.”⁷³ The two positions agreed that revolution was necessary to liberate workers from the yoke of Weimar democracy, a reflection of the capitalist order.⁷⁴ For Goebbels, the point of contention — from which all other disagreements stemmed — was the question of nationalism versus

⁶⁶ Goebbels, “kleine abc”; Thacker, *Joseph Goebbels*, 56.

⁶⁷ März, *Nationale Sozialisten*, 108.

⁶⁸ For an in-depth study of the development and unique aspects of Goebbels’ political thought, see Ulrich Höver, *Joseph Goebbels – ein nationaler Sozialist* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1992).

⁶⁹ Joseph Goebbels, “September 30, 1925,” in *Das Tagebuch von Joseph Goebbels, 1925-1926* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags, n.d.) 30; Joseph Goebbels, “October 26, 1925,” in *Das Tagebuch von Joseph Goebbels, 1925-1926* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags, n.d.), 37.

⁷⁰ Höver, *Joseph Goebbels*, 92, 180-200.

⁷¹ Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute*, 196.

⁷² This is in contrast to more Marxist-leaning manifestations of the National Bolshevik phenomenon, such as that of Karl Otto Paetel. Refer to Paetel, *National Bolshevik Manifesto*.

⁷³ Joseph Goebbels, “National Socialism or Bolshevism?” *NS-Briefe* 2 (October 15, 1925), in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 78. Goebbels further discusses the writing of the article in his diary. Joseph Goebbels, “October 2, 1925,” in *Das Tagebuch von Joseph Goebbels, 1925-1926* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags, n.d.), 31.

⁷⁴ Goebbels, “National Socialism or Bolshevism?” 75.

internationalism.⁷⁵ Goebbels' support for National Bolshevism derived from his reasoning that the Russian Revolution was, above all else, an expression of nationalism:

[...] the Russian soviet system does not endure because it is Marxist, because it is international, but because it is national, because it is Russian. No tsar ever grasped the Russian people in its depths, in its passion, in its national instincts as Lenin has.⁷⁶

Goebbels incorporated antisemitism into this argument by suggesting that the more nationalistic the Russian people became, the more they would come to reject the Jews, whose influence infused international capitalism and Marxism alike.⁷⁷ Bolshevism in Goebbels' view was therefore not synonymous with Jewishness. Rather, Bolshevism encompassed its own internal struggle against Jewry. In a published letter addressed to fellow Nazi Party members, Goebbels went as far as to accuse his comrades of complacent and reductionist racism.⁷⁸ Viewing Bolshevism as purely "Jewish" was a grave error, as implicitly it lent support to middle-class anti-Bolshevism, which was based on the fear of appropriation of private property and personal wealth.⁷⁹ Nazis who supported this "primitive antisemitism" were thereby undermining the revolutionary aspect necessary for the achievement of true National Socialism. Warning against the embourgeoisement of the party, Goebbels argued that the middle class operated hand-in-glove with the Jews through the institutions of the capitalist state, and that "true" antisemitism could only be realised through revolutionary socialism.⁸⁰

The combination of revolutionary socialism with antisemitism was present elsewhere within National Bolshevik circles, albeit in more sporadic form. Niekisch's *Widerstand* journal also employed anti-Jewish tropes, including the use of cartoons and phrases (e.g. "the eternal Jew"; "the Jewish Press"), and perpetuated antisemitic stereotypes.⁸¹ Although Niekisch himself incurred accusations of antisemitism due to his personal belief in the superiority of the Prussian way of life, he rarely advocated for politics based on explicit racism, nor resorted to racialized

⁷⁵ Joseph Goebbels, "*Der Nazi-Sozi*": *Fragen und Antworten für den Nationalsozialisten* (Elberfeld: Verlag der Nationalsozialistischen Briefe, 1925), 13-14.

⁷⁶ Goebbels, "National Socialism or Bolshevism?" 76.

⁷⁷ Goebbels, "National Socialism or Bolshevism?" 76-77.

⁷⁸ Lane and Rupp speculate that the letter may have been targeting Alfred Rosenberg personally. Joseph Goebbels, "The Radicalizing of Socialism," in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 81.

⁷⁹ Goebbels, "Radicalizing of Socialism," 81-82.

⁸⁰ Goebbels, "Radicalizing of Socialism," 81-82.

⁸¹ Spektator referred to the "Jewish press" in the context of the Young Plan negotiations in the Hague. Spektator, "Deutschland in seiner tiefsten Erniedrigung," *Widerstand* 9 (1929): 262.

ideological reasoning.⁸² The same, however, cannot be said of his colleague August Winnig. In the same issue in which Niekisch characterised the NSDAP's hatred for Jews (*Judenhass*) as crude and misdirected, Winnig authored an article criticising the SPD for representing a "cult-society of Jews" (*jüdische Kultgemeinschaft*).⁸³ Winnig's personal antisemitism constituted one reason for his rejection of conventional Marxism. The fact that Marx and many of his disciples were Jewish (at least by descent) was of great, and grave, significance to Winnig, though, like the young Goebbels, he maintained that Bolshevism was more organically nationalist than Jewish.⁸⁴

The Strasser brothers, likewise, were vocal about the desirability of a National Bolshevik direction for the NSDAP (though they certainly did not use that terminology) and engaged in rhetorical appeals comparing the German people to the Russian people. On 22 October, 1925, shortly after the Locarno conference had further inflamed the anger of many nationalists, an article by Gregor Strasser appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, entitled *Russland und wir* (*Russia and us*).⁸⁵ In it, Strasser suggested that the West was taking advantage of Germany's instinctive "anti-Bolshevism" in order to drive a wedge between Germany and Russia, preventing any effective resistance to the Versailles Treaty.⁸⁶ Framing his argument in terms of foreign policy, he stated that Russia's communism was of secondary concern; more important was the capacity of "repressed peoples" (*unterdrückte Völker*) — in which category he included not only Germany and Russia, but China, India, and Egypt — to band together to form a block capable of confronting the capitalist West.⁸⁷

⁸² For secondary categorisations of Niekisch as an antisemite, see, for example, Sebastian Elsbach, "Völkischer Bolschewismus und der 'ewige Jude': Antisemitismus bei Ernst Niekisch," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 24 (2015): 155-160; Lionel Grossman, *Brownshirt Princess: A Study of the "Nazi Conscience"* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2009), 149.

⁸³ August Winnig, "Zur Kirchenpolitik der Sozialdemokratie," *Widerstand* 5 (1929): 141-142.

⁸⁴ Winnig, *Proletariat zum Arbeitertum*, 50.

⁸⁵ Gregor Strasser, "Russland und wir," *Völkischer Beobachter* 38, October 22, 1925. For Strasser's speeches on the Locarno treaties, see Gregor Strasser, "In letzter Stunde: Warnruf vor Locarno," September 13, 1925, in *Hammer und Schwert: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften eines Nationalsozialisten* (Berlin: Kampf Verlag, 1932), 28-30; Gregor Strasser, "Reichstages Rede, das dritte Versailles: Reden gegen Locarno im 'Deutschen Reichstag,'" November 25, 1925, in *Hammer und Schwert: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften eines Nationalsozialisten* (Berlin: Kampf Verlag, 1932), 6-17. Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 178-179.

⁸⁶ Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 179.

⁸⁷ Strasser, "Russland und wir"; Gregor Strasser, "Nationale Außenpolitik! Der Bund der unterdrückten Völker," July 17, 1925, in *Freiheit und Brot: Ausgewählte Reden und Schriften eines National-Sozialisten, Teil 1: Idee* (Berlin: Kampf Verlag, 1928), 46.

In late 1925, the AG circulated a document secretly among the northern leaders.⁸⁸ Authored primarily by Gregor Strasser and Goebbels, it was a draft revision of the NSDAP's so-called *25-Point Program*, a manifesto originally published in February, 1920, whose authorship has been attributed to Gottfried Feder (1883-1941).⁸⁹ The revision outlined the AG's position on many key issues, and expanded upon existing points in the original program. It emphasised the program's "socialist" elements: advocating, for instance, for syndicalist modes of direct bargaining such as unionism, strikes, and local-level activism; and the improvement of working conditions through the formation of a state-owned economy, from which private citizens could lease property.⁹⁰ First and foremost, however, the draft was preoccupied with formulations on how the prospective Third Reich would function. The three different regions (*Gaus*) of the Rhine-Ruhr area would be combined into one large block to wield increased collective bargaining power.⁹¹ Additional proposals included the withdrawal of citizenship from Jews, and, significantly, the reorganisation of the political system based upon a corporate-style, modernised guild system.

While the AG posed a significant challenge to the primacy of the Munich branch, it is important not to exaggerate the character of its opposition, as the AG at no point questioned Hitler's centrality to the Nazi movement. What it *did* question was the nature of Hitler's centrality and the prospective economic configuration of National Socialism in ways that implied (but did not develop systemically) serious points of divergence. The AG's clear proclivities toward corporatism and syndicalism — coupled with the fact that the 25 Point revision was circulated in secret — was tacitly ideological, as it reveals Strasser's commitment to decentralising power distribution within the Party.⁹² Furthermore, the very suggestion of an alliance with the USSR had serious ideological implications. Hitler would, after all, reject it on the basis of his own racism. Albert Krebs, a union leader who acted as Nazi Gauleiter for Hamburg in the late 1920s and would later join the Schwarze Front, recalled in his 1959 memoirs that the Strasserite tendency in the AG was decidedly National Bolshevik, drawing heavily upon the thought of Ernst Niekisch, Moeller van den Bruck, and "Bolshevism."⁹³ Gregor Strasser had read Niekisch

⁸⁸ Gregor Strasser, Joseph Goebbels, and others, "Draft of a Comprehensive Program of National Socialism," 1925, in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 83-87.

⁸⁹ "Programm der Nationalsozialisten Deutschen Arbeiter Partei."

⁹⁰ Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, 67; Strasser, Goebbels and others, "Draft," 84-85; Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 48.

⁹¹ Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, 67.

⁹² Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, 67-68.

⁹³ Albert Krebs, *Tendenzen und Gestalten der NSDAP: Erinnerungen an die Frühzeit der Partei* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1959), 187.

prior to 1925, namely the writings that Niekisch produced during his association with the Hofgeismarkreis, and was clearly of the same opinion on many issues.⁹⁴ In a 1927 article, Dietrich Klagges reflected that the National Socialists had many “Marxist-minded national comrades” (*marxistisch gesinnte Volksgenossen*), and that such men simply needed to broaden their understandings of socialism.⁹⁵

The *NS-Briefe* also acted as a vehicle for the Strasser circle to engage with the “Russian question” in what can only be described as ideological terms. This can be seen not only in Goebbels’ above-mentioned analyses of “true antisemitism,” but also in articles about the Russian Revolution, which the *NS-Briefe* continued to publish at regular intervals over the coming years. Many of these were authored by Otto Strasser, writing under the pseudonym Ulrich von Hutten.⁹⁶ Strasser maintained largely the theoretical line established by the young Goebbels. He argued that Joseph Stalin represented a positive development for the Soviet Union, because Stalin’s dictatorial emphasis on Socialism in One Country saw the USSR moving away from the internationalism of “Jews like Trotsky,” whom Strasser saw as “rootless” hijackers of the revolution, towards authentic nationalism.⁹⁷ In this view, communism represented a more-or-less incidental means to an end, which would eventually be abandoned to make way for a national socialism representing the “deepest spirit of Asiatic Russianness.”⁹⁸ Strasser thus forecast an international alliance between nations that were compatible ideologically, through virtue of their respective nationalisms.

The final hint as to the early Strasser circle’s budding ideological significance is betrayed by Hitler’s response. Hitler had already expended time refuting the position of the northern dissidents within the pages of *Mein Kampf*, but after his release from Landberg, he made sure to erase all ambiguity.⁹⁹ At a meeting with the northern Gauleiters on 14 February, 1926, in Bamberg, Hitler gave a lengthy speech in which he stated that any attempt to revise the 1920

⁹⁴ QJI Editorial Board, *Quarterly Journal of Ideology* 1-3 (1976): 44; Benjamin Lapp, “A “National” Socialism: The Old Socialist Party of Saxony, 1926-1932,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 no. 2 (April 1995): 303, 305.

⁹⁵ The Strasser circle attempted to appeal to such men on their own terms by claiming that Nazism offered the most reliable way to achieve *economic* revolution. Only through recognising the shallow materialism of the Marxist conception of history could the nation achieve a lasting socialism in which the economy, too, would be modelled after a romanticised conception of nature. Dietrich Klagges, “Soziale Gerechtigkeit durch Organisation und Berechnung,” *Nationalsozialistische Briefe* 5, no. 2 (1927): 27-28.

⁹⁶ Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 180, 469.

⁹⁷ Ulrich von Hutten (Otto Strasser) “Trotzkis Ende,” *Nationalsozialistische Briefe* 8 (1927): 124; Ulrich von Hutten (Otto Strasser), “Zehn Jahre Sowjetunion, Sinn und Bedeutung der russischen Revolution,” *Nationalsozialistische Briefe* 8 (1927): 158-160.

⁹⁸ Hutten, “Zehn Jahre,” 158-160; Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 180.

⁹⁹ Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 159.

25-Point program constituted nothing less than “treason” to the martyrs of National Socialism, such as Leo Schlageter and, most recently, the victims of the Beer Hall Putsch.¹⁰⁰ Lane has stated that many historians misconstrued Hitler’s rejection of the proposal. According to her, the rejection was owing not to content, but to timing.¹⁰¹ More recently, Brendan Simms has suggested, in contrast, that Hitler’s main objections were driven by his desire to colonise the east, coupled with rejection of the Strasser circle’s “internationalism.”¹⁰² Excerpts from Hitler’s speech, published in the *Völkischer Beobachter* in late February, 1926, reveal that Hitler’s rejection of Strasser’s proposal was not solely owing to organisational differences, nor to heady future ambitions. He refuted any notion of Russian-German collaboration on expressly racial grounds, something more tangible to the Nazi imagination in the mid-1920s than any prospective blueprint for *Lebensraum*.¹⁰³ According to Hitler, liberal England and Fascist Italy, not the communist USSR, were Germany’s natural, racial allies. Bolshevism was indistinguishable from Jewish degeneracy; thus, no good, however construed, could be found in the Russian Revolution and the power structures it had established.

The majority of the NSAG’s members were swayed by Hitler’s speech. After reacting initially with consternation, Goebbels seemed to completely renounce his National Bolshevik views.¹⁰⁴ In a letter to Gregor Strasser on 19 April, 1926, not long before Goebbels assumed the position of Gauleiter for Berlin in October of that year, Goebbels made it clear that he endorsed Hitler’s position wholeheartedly.¹⁰⁵ He urged Gregor to arrange a meeting with Hitler, so that he, too, could clear up any “burning questions” (*brennende Fragen*) and work prosperously with Munich.¹⁰⁶ This apparent betrayal, coupled with Goebbels’ new leadership position and the ensuing financial competition between Goebbels’ publications and the Strasser-owned Kampf Verlag, soon led to a falling out with the Strasser brothers. Henceforth, the relationship between the men was strained at best. At its most cantankerous, it saw Gregor and Otto accusing

¹⁰⁰ Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, 69-70.

¹⁰¹ Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp, “Introduction: Nazi Ideology: Some Unfinished Business,” in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), xvii.

¹⁰² Simms, *Hitler*.

¹⁰³ As noted in the introduction, Simms has been criticised for revising the trend of “Hitler-centrism,” overemphasising the personal role of Hitler in shaping Nazi ideology and foreign policy. See Gellately’s review, “Hitler: Only the World was Enough, by Brendan Simms.”

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Goebbels, “February 15, 1926,” in *Das Tagebuch von Joseph Goebbels, 1925-1926* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags, n.d.), 59-60. Goebbels would later back Hitler’s economic policy, including private enterprise and the retention of the capitalist system. Volkswirtschaftliche und Statistische Abteilung der Reichbank, “Sammlung von Zitaten aus Parteikreisen,” Berlin, August 1935, in R 2501/6789, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 2.

¹⁰⁵ “Joseph Goebbels to Gregor Strasser,” April 19, 1926, in NS 1/340, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1.

¹⁰⁶ “Goebbels to Strasser.”

Goebbels of being a Jew, citing his clubfoot as “proof,” and Goebbels accusing the Strasser brothers of the same due to Otto’s “Jewish appearance.”¹⁰⁷

Although the NSAG and the AG soon drifted into inconsequence, the *NS-Briefe* persisted as an independent publication and provided a springboard for the Strasser brothers to launch their publishing company, the Kampf Verlag, in early 1926.¹⁰⁸ The Kampf Verlag’s numerous publications and associated periodicals would act as a vehicle for the Strasser circle to sculpt and promulgate an alternative vision of Nazism. Unsurprisingly, references to Italian Fascism became more frequent in the years after Fascist Italy’s labour reforms. Considering the early tendencies that the Strasser circle had demonstrated towards syndicalism and corporatism, corporatism formed a natural point of contact between the two ideologies and furnishes the historian with clues that can lead to a deeper understanding of the Strasser circle’s National Socialism. As National Bolshevism was such a nebulous phenomenon, manifesting in many different contexts and sometimes based solely on foreign policy considerations, one must be cautious about drawing ideological demarcations between mainline Nazism and Strasserism based on National Bolshevism alone. The way in which the Strasser circle reacted to Italian Fascism refined the circle’s ideological specificity.

Refining Corporatism: The Italian Image

After the dissolution of the AG, the Strasser circle continued to develop its ideology. Its ideas coalesced within the *NS-Briefe*, which from 1927 came under Gregor Strasser’s sole editorship; and, from 1930, in Otto Strasser’s new periodical, *Der National-Sozialist*.¹⁰⁹ Like the Strasser brothers, many of the new contributors were associated with National Bolshevism, such as Bodo Uhse, who would become a close associate of Ernst Niekisch during the 1930s, and Graf Ernst zu Reventlow, who began to write regular reports on foreign policy for the *NS-Briefe*

¹⁰⁷ Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 183-184.

from 1927.¹¹⁰ Others, however, were sympathetic overtly to Italian Fascism, most notably the lawyer Hans Reupke and the soldierly nationalist author Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz.¹¹¹

Heinz had collaborated with the NSDAP before, helping to establish the NSDAP and the SA in Hesse in the early 1920s, but his career was marked by a distinct restlessness.¹¹² He was active primarily in the Stahlhelm, and was affiliated with the *Standarte* circle.¹¹³ He was also an associate of August Winnig and Franz Schauwecker, alongside whom he founded the Nationalverband Deutscher Schriftsteller (National Association of German Writers), and of Ernst Jünger and Friedrich Hielscher, with whom he collaborated in the *Standarte*, *Arminius*, *Der Vormarsch*, and Hielscher's *Das Reich* (*The Reich*).¹¹⁴ Heinz had also collaborated with Hermann Ehrhardt in the Organisation Consul, and, from 1930, worked as Ehrhardt's personal assistant.¹¹⁵ In addition to trying to emulate the March on Rome in 1923 through the Organisation Consul, Ehrhardt had been one of the most significant players in trying to turn corporatism into practice within the Stahlhelm, and was particularly beloved by the *Standarte* circle during its "revolutionary" phase under the editorship of Helmut Franke. Among Ehrhardt's contributions to the *Standarte* was an article outlining his vision for labour relations within Germany, which echoed the contemporary configuration of the Fascist corporate state in the mid-1920s.¹¹⁶ Through his associations with these key Conservative Revolutionary thinkers, Heinz developed an appreciation for corporatism, at least in as far as it was capable of infusing the institutions of society and the state with soldierly nationalism, and became well-versed in the references to Italian Fascism circulating within this space.¹¹⁷ He thus brought his discursive experiences to the Strasser circle, acting as an emissary for the reconciliation of

¹¹⁰ Uhse joined the NSDAP in 1927 as a protégé of Gregor Strasser, only to defect to the KPD a few years later. *Nationalsozialistische Briefe* 5, no. 2 (Berlin: Kampf Verlag, 1927); Ernst Graf zu Reventlow, *Der Weg zum neuen Deutschland* (Essen: Zentralstelle für den deutschen Freiheitskampf, 1932), 230, 295, 300; Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 184.

¹¹¹ "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz als Redner der NSDAP Führertagung in Magdeburg, 4. Feb. 1929," in R 72/99, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Moreau, "Strasserism," 157.

¹¹² For a detailed account of Heinz's career, see Meinel and Krüger "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz," 43-44. See also Meinel's full-length book, Susanne Meinel, *Nationalsozialisten gegen Hitler: Die nationalrevolutionäre Opposition um Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz* (Berlin: Siedler, 2000).

¹¹³ See Chapter Three.

¹¹⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, "Bewegung in Raum," *Das Reich* 1 (1930-31); Meinel and Krüger, "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz," 44; Kurt M. Lehner, *Friedrich Hielscher: Nationalrevolutionär, Widerständler, Heidenpriester* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015), 56.

¹¹⁵ Meinel and Krüger, "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz," 43.

¹¹⁶ Ehrhardt, "Werksgemeinschaft," 492-493.

¹¹⁷ Heinz declared that he was particularly receptive to Hielscher's mystical thought. See Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, "Die Ursachen des Antisemitismus," in *Klärung. 12 Autoren, Politiker über die Judenfrage* (Berlin: n.p., 1932), 97-115. Hielscher wrote prolifically for Jünger's journals *Arminius* and *Der Vormarsch*. Notable articles include Friedrich Hielscher, "Für die unterdrückten Völker!" *Arminius* (March 16, 1927): 3-5; Friedrich Hielscher, "Die ewige Wiederkunft," *Arminius* 28 (August 28, 1927): 2; Friedrich Hielscher, "Japan, Russland und der Westen," *Der Vormarsch* 12 (May, 1928): 317-319.

corporate ideas with Italian Fascism and the fascist war veteran construct. Both Heinz and Reupke also became members of the GSF in the early 1930s, further signalling their receptiveness to Italian Fascism.¹¹⁸

Whereas Heinz was the more pragmatic in his efforts to increase coherence within the Strasser circle, Reupke's purview lay in political theory. He was a close friend of Gregor Strasser and acted as one of Strasser's political advisors at the height of the latter's career.¹¹⁹ He was also a passionate admirer of Fascism. He spent time in Italy at the end of the 1920s and viewed National Socialism as a "parallel movement" to Italian Fascism.¹²⁰ Drawing upon Spengler's conception of Prussian Socialism — in which class antagonisms would be eliminated through feelings of "spiritual" national belonging — Reupke argued that corporatism contained the tools to eliminate class struggle without sacrificing the best features of capitalism.¹²¹ Like other members of the GSF, Reupke was highly pro-capitalist, and employed the image of Mussolini's Italy as an example of how capitalism could be freed from the fetters of parliamentarism and allowed to realise its full potential in the interests of the state.¹²²

The Fascist interpretation of Pareto's elite theory, in which the circulation of elites would be determined by innate ability in different sectors of socio-economic life, reflected the values of National Socialism and thus offered the best possible model for the prospective Third Reich.¹²³ Reupke used corporatism to draw explicit conceptual links between the two movements, stating, for example: "Every worker is, according to Fascist/National Socialist doctrine, a responsible producer; he is in service to the state, not a private individual."¹²⁴ Like other German ultranationalist admirers of Italian Fascism, he also argued that Fascism was, at heart, a "German" movement. It was thus no betrayal of the nationalist cause to find inspiration in Fascism. To this end, Reupke claimed:

The external forms and beginnings [of a corporate state] exist to a large extent in Germany; at least more so than was the case in Italy, where Fascism had to intervene energetically in

¹¹⁸ Refer to the GSF membership list: "Mitglieder der GSF," in Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 223-240.

¹¹⁹ Kissenkoetter, *Gregor Strasser*, 184; Gerhard Schulz, *Von Brüning zu Hitler: Der Wandel der politischen Systems in Deutschland, 1930-1933* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992), 983.

¹²⁰ Refer also to my discussion of Reupke in the context of the GSF in Chapter Two. Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 9, 14-15; Schieder, *Mythos Mussolini*, 109.

¹²¹ Oswald Spengler, *Preußentum und Sozialismus*, 1919 (Oberursel: Gröls, 2022), 31-32; Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 61-63.

¹²² Heinrich August Winkler, "Unternehmervverbände zwischen Ständeideologie und Nationalsozialismus," *Vierteljahrhefte für Zeitgeschichte* 17 (1969): 346; Campbell, *Joy in Work*, 288.

¹²³ Hans Reupke, *Das Wirtschaftssystem des Faschismus* (Berlin: Hobbing, 1930), 19.

¹²⁴ Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 33.

order to create them. The German people and spirit are accustomed to organisation to a far greater extent than the Roman people.¹²⁵

For Reupke, the NSDAP already contained, in embryonic form, the necessary elements for the establishment of corporatism. Reupke suggested that the corporatist aspects of the 25 Points needed to be systemically expanded, as Gregor Strasser attempted to do in the 1925 draft revision.¹²⁶ Reupke referred to the work of the original author, Gottfried Feder, whose 1919 work, *Das Manifest zur Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft* (*Manifesto for Breaking the Bondage of Interest*), made a distinction between exploitative capitalism, which was Jewish and therefore evil, and productive capitalism, which could be harnessed for the benefit of the nation.¹²⁷

As Reupke's corporatism recalled the contemporary works of conservative philosophers like Spann and Edgar J. Jung, it was inevitably going to be a hard sell to many in the NSDAP, none more so than the National Bolsheviks in the Strasser circle.¹²⁸ In an effort to assuage the fears of anti-capitalist Nazis, Reupke wrote:

National Socialism, like Fascism, rejects industrial democracy on the basis that, as in other areas of life, there should be only one unified command authority. In return, the workers, through their representatives, are entitled to participate equally in determining the most important guidelines of production [...]. National Socialism affirms the necessity of trade unions, both as representatives of workers' professions and interests and as — and this is the new part — divisions of an organic economy. They represent one side of the corporate state structure. Although corporatism between employers and employees, harmony among producers, is one of the essential requirements of the movement, concessions must be made, for the time being, to the emotional state of class antagonism that still exists.¹²⁹

This echoed, almost precisely, the rationale behind the Fascist labour reforms of the mid-1920s, then still in effect.¹³⁰ The reforms went part of the way towards amalgamating workers and employers into single corporate entities, in effect eliminating independent trade unionism while retaining nominal worker independence within each corporate estate in the form of so-called

¹²⁵ Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 42.

¹²⁶ Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 9.

¹²⁷ Gottfried Feder, *Das Manifest zur Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft des Geldes* (Munich: Jos. C. Huber, 1919), 11-12. See also the essay, Gottfried Feder "Der soziale Staat," *Auf gut Deutsch* 14-15 (1919): 218-227; Brown, *Weimar Radicals*, 62; Pinto, "Corporatism," 18.

¹²⁸ Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 20.

¹²⁹ Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 45-46; Reupke, *Wirtschaftssystem*, 15-17.

¹³⁰ Specifically the 1926 Syndicalist Law and the 1927 Labour Charter (*Carta del Lavoro*). See "Labour Charter of Fascist Italy," <https://archive.org/details/FascistLaborCharter>.

workers' syndicates. It is clear, however, that Reupke, like Mussolini, supported a longer-term, "top-down" cartelisation of the corporate estates, viewing this as the only way truly to resolve the labour question.

The bulk of the NSDAP, as well as the Strasser circle, were not convinced by Reupke's arguments, and his recommendations were roundly rejected. The reasons for this, however, varied greatly between the mainline NSDAP and the Strasser circle. For many mainline Nazis — as exemplified by an article by Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) — Jewish "high finance" was simply too enmeshed in the Italian system to warrant any close imitation of that system.¹³¹ According to Adolf Dresler (1898-1971), a Nazi journalist who authored the first German-language biography of Mussolini, Mussolini was a "great friend to the Jews."¹³² For the men in the Strasser circle, however, Reupke's position was most objectionable not because of its "softness" on the Jewish question, but because it amounted to an endorsement of the capitalist system. Responding to Reupke's slew of publications, Reventlow commented in 1932 that National Socialism "should not be led by the bourgeoisie, as under Mussolini," but rather by the enemies of the bourgeoisie.¹³³ The lawyer and former NSDAP member Erich Rosikat, writing for the *NS-Briefe* in 1927, warned similarly that Mussolini, in spite of his Marxist background, was no socialist.¹³⁴ Otto Strasser maintained that Fascism was an exploitative system due both to its co-operation with capitalism and its dictatorial management style.¹³⁵ This, once again, demonstrated a marked contrast with mainline NSDAP opinion. Many Nazi publications remarked that Italy was simply not dictatorial enough. A 1934 book by Friedrich Bülow, for instance, argued that the use of the term "corporatism" (*Stände/Ständestaat*) in the NSDAP was misleading and inappropriate, because "in essence it means a corporately fragmented people."¹³⁶ There was, in short, inherently too much of democracy in any corporatist configuration, no matter how centralised it became. Direct representation of different sectors in the government could open the floodgates for pluralism, sapping decision-making autonomy from the leader.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Alfred Rosenberg, "Mussolini kapituliert!" *Völkischer Beobachter*, July 7, 1925; Schieder, *Zauberlehrling Mussolinis*, 34.

¹³² Schieder, *Zauberlehrling*, 34; Klaus Neumann, "Interwar Germany and the Corporatist Wave, 1918-39," in *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe*, ed. António Costa Pinto (London: Routledge, 2017), 136.

¹³³ Schieder, *Zauberlehrling*, 33.

¹³⁴ Erich Rosikat, "Faschistenlegende," *NS-Briefe* (May 15, 1927).

¹³⁵ Strasser, *Hitler and I*, 112.

¹³⁶ See Friedrich Bülow, *Der deutsche Ständestaat. Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaftspolitik und Wirtschaftsorganisation* (Leipzig: Kröner, 1934).

¹³⁷ Bülow, *deutsche Ständestaat*; Neumann, "Interwar Germany and the Corporatist Wave," 136.

Reupke might not have succeeded in convincing his associates about the merits of the Italian system, but he *did* succeed in encouraging discourse in which Italian Fascism played a central role. He helped to ensure that Fascism, whether used as a positive or negative example, shaped National Socialist ideas about corporatism. The plurality of Nazi ideas about corporatism, furthermore, is evident in that the mainline NSDAP rejected a systemic corporatist program for Germany, while the Strasser circle did not. It merely rejected Reupke's version. In contrast to Reupke's preference for crony capitalist corporate estates, the Strasser circle advocated for a decentralised corporatism, established through and reflecting revolutionary syndicalism.¹³⁸ This became pronounced in the KGRNS, which was formed in mid-1930, shortly after Otto Strasser's resignation from the NSDAP, pending expulsion.¹³⁹ Fellow Nazis to join Strasser in establishing the splinter group included his close associates Uhse and Heinz, as well as Herbert Blank, Richard Schapke, Eugen Mossakowsky (1898-1969), and Bruno Ernst Buchrucker (1878-1966), former leader of the Schwarze Reichswehr (Black Reichswehr).¹⁴⁰

The KGRNS's initial priority was to continue a publishing circle and expand its membership beyond the NSDAP.¹⁴¹ In April, 1930, Otto and his associates issued a statement, appearing in their newly-founded periodical *Der National-Sozialist*, entitled *Die Sozialisten verlassen die NSDAP* (*The Socialists Leave the NSDAP*), outlining their rationale for splitting from the Nazi Party.¹⁴² The most significant reason, according to the statement, was irreconcilable differences

¹³⁸ For Strasser's version of events leading up to his resignation from the NSDAP, see Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, 49-68. Martin Beisswenger, "A Failed Alliance: The Eurasianist Movement and the German Conservative Revolution in the Early 1930s," in *Entangled Far Rights: A Russian-European Intellectual Romance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Marlene Laruelle (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2018), 67.

¹³⁹ Otto's resignation from the Party, and Gregor's decision to remain, drove a personal and political wedge between the brothers. Clearly wishing to distance himself from such damaging associations, Gregor resigned from his position as editor of the Kampf Verlag shortly before it was dissolved entirely on Hitler's orders, and publicly denounced his brother's actions as reckless and impractical. His speeches of the early 1930s de-emphasise the revolutionary aspects of National Socialism. In private, he continued to try to persuade Otto of his folly and the tactical futility of his revolutionary position, and to urge him not to use his, Gregor's, name in any ideological justifications for the KGRNS's politics. "Gregor Strasser to Otto Strasser," December 31, 1932, in R 43/II/1196a, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Gregor Strasser, "The Nature and Aim of the National Socialist Idea," October 17, 1932, in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 127; Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus*, 44.

¹⁴⁰ "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz als Redner der NSDAP Führertagung in Magdeburg, 4. Feb. 1929," in R 72/99, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde; Moreau, "Strasserism," 157; Meinl and Krüger "Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz," 43-44.

¹⁴¹ Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*, 118-119.

¹⁴² Otto Strasser, "Die Sozialisten verlassen die NSDAP," *Der National-Sozialist*, July 4, 1930, in NS-Archiv, accessed February 4, 2025, <https://www.ns-archiv.de/nsdap/sozialisten/sozialisten-verlassen-nsdap.php>.

on the question of the economy.¹⁴³ The statement went on to discuss the KGRNS's commitment to building a decentralised corporate state. The group viewed National Socialism as:

[a] revolutionary movement that does away with an authoritarian state based on false foundations, as well as with formal democracy, and sees its national goal in an organic corporate state of Germany democracy. We therefore felt that the republican-monarchist undertones deliberately maintained by the Party leadership were a burden, and the exaggerated reverence for the Fascist authoritarian state, which is becoming increasingly apparent on the part of the official Party bodies, was a danger to the movement and a sin against the idea [of a true corporate state].¹⁴⁴

Ironically, while the KGRNS's rejected Fascist "authoritarianism," it embraced the foundations upon which Italian corporatism had been justified initially, particularly its national syndicalist origins. Statements from the KGRNS spoke of the necessity of working outside the parliamentary system to build revolutionary, syndicalist praxis, even encouraging NSDAP and SA members to join the fight for a "free socialist Soviet Germany" (*freies sozialistisches Sowjetdeutschland*).¹⁴⁵

More than any other writer, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck was the inspiration for the KGRNS's view of prospective state organisation.¹⁴⁶ Otto Strasser had first encountered Moeller van den Bruck in the early 1920s when writing for the journal *Das Gewissen*.¹⁴⁷ Moeller van den Bruck, along with Heinrich von Gleichen, was at that time the editor of the journal, which was the organ of the nationalist group, the Juli Klub.¹⁴⁸ A key influence in the German Young Conservative movement and a leading figure of the Conservative Revolution, Moeller van den Bruck was a brooding man whose interests were not limited to politics.¹⁴⁹ In 1925, he suffered

¹⁴³ The NSDAP's concurrent collaborations with groups like the DNVP and the Stahlhelm, through initiatives like the Volksbegehren gegen den Young Plan, were cited as further proof that the Party was cultivating unacceptably pro-capitalistic partnerships. Gregor Strasser, for his part, shared these concerns. In a letter to Heinrich Himmler, he registered a deep suspicion of the Stahlhelm and made it clear that the NSDAP should participate in the Volksbegehren only as a means to repeal the Young Plan. Gregor Strasser, "Brief an Heinrich Himmler," August 12, 1929, in NS 26/2340, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde.

¹⁴⁴ Strasser, "Sozialisten verlassen die NSDAP."

¹⁴⁵ "An die Redaktion der H. Volkszeitung," Hamburg, July 22, 1931, in R 1501/212588, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

¹⁴⁶ Strasser, *Exil*, 34-35; Schapke, *Schwarze Front*, 16; See also Moeller van den Bruck, *Dritte Reich*.

¹⁴⁷ Strasser, *Exil*, 34-35. For a detailed study of the journal, see Kemper, "Gewissen."

¹⁴⁸ Volker Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne: Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservatismus* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012), 17, 225.

¹⁴⁹ For instance, Moeller van den Bruck edited the first German translations of works by Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Edgar Allen Poe. Despite the Nazis' subsequent use of Moeller van den Bruck's work, Moeller van den Bruck himself demonstrated no sympathy for Nazism. Following the Nazi Beer Hall Putsch, he stated that Hitler had no understanding of the intellectual underpinnings of national socialism. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, "Kritik der

a nervous breakdown and took his own life, leaving behind a body of work that was cited enthusiastically by intellectuals ranging from National Bolsheviks, to modern conservatives like Jung.¹⁵⁰ For the KGRNS, he was no less than “the greatest intellectual fighter against liberalism” and the most significant representative of national socialism.¹⁵¹

In *Das dritte Reich* (1923), Moeller van den Bruck laid the foundations for a corporatist Germany. Like many Italian Fascist theorists, he viewed corporatism as the best way to prevent dangerous proportional representation of the proletariat masses. In the early 1920s, he had evinced great and largely positive interest in Italian Fascism, and it is likely that, had he lived to see the development of the Italian state in the mid-1920s, he would have approved of certain corporatist policies, albeit not of the dictatorial rationale behind them.¹⁵² Rather than supporting a dictatorial corporatism, as expounded by the Italian politician and primary architect of corporatist policy Alfredo Rocco, Moeller van den Bruck argued that corporatism should be a vehicle through which democratic representation could be actualised.¹⁵³ This kind of reasoning was employed by the Fascists themselves, who also understood “democracy” as independent from liberal parliamentarism and republicanism.¹⁵⁴ So too did they stress nebulous concepts of “organic” national consciousness. However, for Moeller van den Bruck, corporatism reflected “the share which the people take in the working of the state.”¹⁵⁵ By this he meant that, in contrast to a top-down model in which the head of each corporate estate was appointed by the state, each corporate representative needed to be democratically selected by the men he represented.¹⁵⁶ This model was largely replicated in the AG’s draft proposal and was subsequently embraced by the KGRNS.¹⁵⁷

In 1930, the *NS-Briefe* published a series of special editions, the so-called “green editions.” Volume Five contained a tract by the general manager of the Verband der deutschen Gewerkschaften (Association of German Trade Unions), Edo Wandal.¹⁵⁸ A summary of his

Presse,” *Gewissen* 5, no. 45 (n.d.). For a biography of Moeller van den Bruck, in addition to Weiß, see André Schlüter, *Moeller van den Bruck: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010).

¹⁵⁰ Roshan Magub, *Edgar Julius Jung: Right-Wing Enemy of the Nazis* (New York: Camden House, 2017), 84.

¹⁵¹ Schapke, *Schwarze Front*, 16-17.

¹⁵² Laura Cerasi, “Rethinking Italian Corporatism: Crossing Borders between Corporatist Projects in the Late Liberal Era and the Fascist Corporatist State,” in *Corporatism and Fascism: The Corporatist Wave in Europe*, ed. António Costa Pinto (London: Routledge, 2017), 103. See also Weiß’s discussion of Moeller van den Bruck’s relationship with Fascism: Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne*, 345-347.

¹⁵³ Cerasi, “Rethinking Italian Corporatism,” 103; Moeller van den Bruck, *Dritte Reich*, 111-113.

¹⁵⁴ Moeller van den Bruck, *Dritte Reich*, 118; Neumann, “Interwar Germany and the Corporatist Wave,” 129.

¹⁵⁵ Moeller van den Bruck, *Dritte Reich*, 107.

¹⁵⁶ Neumann, “Interwar Germany and the Corporatist Wave,” 129.

¹⁵⁷ Roderick Stackelberg, *Hitler’s Germany: Origins, Interpretations, Legacies* (London: Routledge, 1999), 87.

¹⁵⁸ *Nationalsozialistischen Jahrbuch* (Munich: Franz Eher, 1932), 145.

full-length book *Der Sieg des Sozialismus* (*The Victory of Socialism*) and endorsed by both Otto and Gregor Strasser, the tract argued for the necessity of economic revolution and the establishment of a corporatist state à la Moeller van den Bruck.¹⁵⁹ Class conflict between producers and owners would be overcome by a nationalised, publicly-owned economic system, in which economic surplus would be spent on public services to ease social inequality.¹⁶⁰ Different sectors of the economy would duly be represented in the government through professional associations (*Fachverbände*), or corporate estates, with the head of each association being elected democratically by his constituents.¹⁶¹ The elected heads would then enjoy essentially dictatorial powers within the established framework, synthesising potential capitalist tendencies with the interests of trade unions and the state. Or, as Wandal phrased it: “Every producing entrepreneur in the branch of industry, whether large or small [...] becomes a cooperative member in a latent state when the professional association is founded.”¹⁶²

Within the framework of a publicly-owned economy, Otto Strasser envisioned likewise a system in which power was balanced between three poles: a president, who was to hold lifelong office, a “Grand Council” of no more than two dozen men, and a chamber of approximately one hundred men.¹⁶³ This government was neither federal nor unitary (these being, in his view, liberal constructs). Rather, internal states and territories would be subsumed into a single unified state (*Einheitsstaat*), while the existence and configuration of the Grand Council and chamber would ensure that power was sufficiently decentralised.¹⁶⁴ The selection of Moeller van den Bruck as the KGRNS’s posthumous chief ideologue was partly reflective of Strasser’s desire to distance the KGRNS from Hitler and the NSDAP. However, it also ushered in increased ideological cohesion and a shift in the way in which the Strasser circle approached Italian Fascism. This had ramifications not only for the circle’s conception of corporatism, but also for its National Bolshevism.

The Impact of Fascist Italy on the Strasser Circle’s National Bolshevism

¹⁵⁹ Otto Strasser, “Vorwort,” in *Die Grünen Hefte der “NS-Briefe”* 5 (1930), in R 3003/17873, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde. See also Edo Wandal’s full-length book: Edo Wandal, *Der Sieg des Sozialismus* (Berlin: Seig-Verlag, 1927).

¹⁶⁰ Edo Wandal, “Der Sozialismus von Morgen,” *Die Grünen Hefte der “NS-Briefe”* 5 (1930), 10.

¹⁶¹ Wandal, “Sozialismus von Morgen,” 19.

¹⁶² Wandal, “Sozialismus von Morgen,” 21.

¹⁶³ Strasser, *Aufbau*, 60–61.

¹⁶⁴ Strasser, *Aufbau*, 62–63.

Moeller van den Bruck is also frequently referred to in literature on National Bolshevism, as he did not view Italy and Russia as being inherently in opposition.¹⁶⁵ Key elements in his thought drew upon both states as positive examples. He anticipated the Strasser brothers' view that Russia, in spite of its Bolshevism, presented the most viable natural ally for true resistance to Western imperialism.¹⁶⁶ Yet he also admired the youthful dynamism of the Italian Futurist movement and viewed Italy as the motherland of modern nationalism, arguing that it was heavily influenced by German philosophy and *Kultur*.¹⁶⁷ While critical of Fascism's dictatorial proclivities, Moeller van den Bruck held that Fascism remained didactically important, as it proved that nationalism and socialism were fundamentally entwined concepts.¹⁶⁸ It had achieved a synthesis of nationalism with revolutionary feeling, which would also be necessary in Germany.¹⁶⁹

Inspired by Moeller van den Bruck, Otto Strasser drew similar parallels between the USSR and Fascist Italy in his 1932 book *Aufbau des deutschen Sozialismus*:

The state is not an end in itself; rather, its task is to shape the organism known as “*Volk*” (or “nation”), in such a way as to achieve the best possible combination of all forces, ensuring the existence of the national community in relation to other national communities. From this, it follows that the state is determined by the particular characteristics of its people. [...] If, for example, Fascism is an appropriate form for the Italian people — and the fact that the Italian people endure this form of government suggests that it is — Fascism cannot be an appropriate form of government for the German people. The same can be said for the Bolshevik government of the Russian people, which, for the same reasons, is to be rejected as a form of government for the German people.¹⁷⁰

This shows a subtle shift in Strasser's critique of Fascism. While he maintained that Fascism was an exploitative system, he nevertheless acknowledged Mussolini's government's ability to “organically” represent the Italian people, suggesting that Fascism, like Russian Bolshevism, had overcome the inauthenticity of the liberal worldview. This view can be likened to that of Ernst Niekisch. As explored above, Niekisch remained critical of Fascism even when many of his *Widerstand* colleagues were not. Nevertheless, he attributed to the Fascist state a capacity

¹⁶⁵ Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne*, 204-209.

¹⁶⁶ Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, 168.

¹⁶⁷ Moeller van den Bruck, *Dritte Reich*, 176; Moeller van den Bruck, *Recht der jungen Völker*, 29.

¹⁶⁸ Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, 162-163.

¹⁶⁹ Moeller van den Bruck, *Dritte Reich*, 162.

¹⁷⁰ Strasser, *Aufbau*, 57-58.

to overcome social alienation; it was on this basis that Italy could be likened to the USSR.¹⁷¹ This demonstrates that even the more critical National Bolsheviks gave Italy something of a back-handed compliment, highlighting that the Fascist system did indeed possess qualities yet to be realised in Germany. This was intended to give the German people hope for a comparable, albeit superior, path to political and social liberation.

In the rest of the Strasser circle, didactic usages of Italian Fascism were less tempered by criticism. Gregor Strasser and Reventlow, for example, appealed to the positive image that Italy generally still enjoyed within the mainline NSDAP, in an effort to garner support for their foreign policy recommendations. Unlike the renegade KGRNS, the inner-NSDAP Strasser circle remained beholden to the prevailing Nazi ideology, which attenuated any potential expressions of ideological sympathy for the USSR. This is likely why acknowledgements of the Bolsheviks' "organic" qualities are absent from inner-NSDAP Strasser circle materials after the dissolution of the AG. Rather than drawing comparisons between Russia and Italy on these grounds, Gregor Strasser cited the Italian Fascists' ability to overlook ideological differences between themselves and their allies for the sake of strengthening Italy's standing on the international stage.¹⁷² Germany needed to act comparably in order to find true liberation. Reventlow, too, is illustrative. Painfully conscious of Hitler's pathological hatred for the Soviets, Reventlow presented a carefully reasoned argument for collaboration with Russia in the sphere of foreign policy, avoiding judiciously any ideological comparisons.¹⁷³

In his 1932 book, *Der Weg zum neuen Deutschland* (*The Way to a New Germany*), he argued that, in order to counter the Treaty of Versailles, practical alliances should be pursued in spite of gulfs in ideology.¹⁷⁴ Referring to a potential alliance between Germany and the USSR, Reventlow asked rhetorically: "Can a national state, without risk of bolshevisation, find common ground in foreign policy with Soviet Russia?"¹⁷⁵ To answer this, he referred to Mussolini:

Mussolini, the leader of Italy, already answered this question in praxis. He has come to far-reaching economic, political, and, by all appearances, military agreements with Soviet

¹⁷¹ Niekisch, *Entscheidung*, 77-78.

¹⁷² Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 179.

¹⁷³ Reventlow stated that, in 1923, many young people were "excited for a National Bolshevism," but, writing in 1932, downplayed his own historical enthusiasm. He characterised Radek's "National Bolshevik" tactics as self-serving: a method for the Soviet Union to usurp honest German nationalism for its own gain. Reventlow, *Weg zum neuen Deutschland*, 230, 300.

¹⁷⁴ Reventlow, *Weg zum neuen Deutschland*, 230, 300.

¹⁷⁵ Reventlow, *Weg zum neuen Deutschland*, 300.

Russia. Mussolini did not let it bother him that Fascism and Bolshevism are two stark opposites. [...] Fascist Italy is immune to Bolshevism. Fascism feels that it is strong enough to maintain authority and order in its own ranks. It does not concern itself with the internal politics of other nations and demands the same of them in relation to its own domestic policies. A stable National Socialist Germany with a spirit irreconcilably opposed to Bolshevism could nonetheless work together with the Soviet power, from state to state, government to government, towards clearly defined foreign policy goals and could, under these circumstances, derive great advantages from the alliance.¹⁷⁶

Reventlow may have framed his argument as purely pragmatic, but it contained ideological implications about the nature of Fascism. Fascism emerged as an exemplar of internal coherence and ideological fortitude, able to resist any threat of political subversion — qualities that, by insinuation, National Socialism had yet to acquire. While clearly variances existed between the KGRNS's image of Fascism and that of the inner-NSDAP Strasser faction, as a whole the Strasser circle used the image of Italian Fascism to buttress its vision for a National Socialist Germany and to fortify its National Bolshevism. This not only speaks to the ubiquitous presence of Fascism in German ultranationalist discourse by the early 1930s but reinforces theoretical connections between the Strasser circle and other National Bolshevik movements.

Incorporating the Fascist War Veteran

The Strasser circle's relationship with the construct of the fascist war veteran also reveals much about the ways in which the circle diverged intellectually from mainline Nazism. As Alcalde has demonstrated, the figure of the veteran was not central to the thought of the early NSDAP (prior to 1922).¹⁷⁷ Certainly, individual Nazis, including Hitler, appealed to soldierly nationalism, but veterans were not regarded consistently as an instrument of revolution, nor viewed as vital to the future organisation of the National Socialist state.¹⁷⁸ The unique formulation of the NSDAP, particularly in its early years, recalled more of *völkisch* Bavarian provincialism; in short, Alcalde argues that the Nazis "became fascist" through a process of

¹⁷⁶ Reventlow, *Weg zum neuen Deutschland*, 300.

¹⁷⁷ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 178.

¹⁷⁸ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 178.

hybridisation in which the Italian Fascist war veteran constituted a key aspect.¹⁷⁹ This process involved the recognition of the veteran's centrality — and perceived centrality — to Fascist success; something the Nazis sought to capitalise upon. Even so, the mainline NSDAP did not incorporate the fascist war veteran wholesale into its ideology, nor fully mobilise the image of the veteran for its political goals. This was in part owing to the monopoly on the construct exercised by other ultranationalist groups in the Weimar Republic, most notably the Stahlhelm. For the Strasser circle, a parallel process of incorporation is evident — albeit with an outcome that diverged significantly from that of the rest of the NSDAP.

The Strasser circle displayed little interest in the veteran archetype during the AG period, yet the veteran began to appear by increments in associated literature from the mid-1920s. It did so in a way that recalled more of the fascist war veteran construct than was present in the mainline NSDAP. In many respects, the Strasser circle was inducted into soldierly nationalism through the same mechanisms whereby it was introduced to corporatism. Ernst Jünger, one of the foremost practitioners of German soldierly nationalism, had authored a number of articles for the *Völkischer Beobachter* in which he expressed admiration for Italian Fascism, likening it to the ideal of the soldiers' state.¹⁸⁰ By the mid-1920s, collaborators, including Jünger, who had been associated with the Stahlhelm (which was contemporaneously adopting the fascist war veteran as a key ideological element – see above) proved particularly significant in mediating between the Strasser circle, soldierly nationalism, and the fascist war veteran.

Gregor Strasser was a reader of Franke and Jünger's journal *Arminius*, which was, as we have seen, revolutionary in tone and highly attuned to Italian Fascism. Franke and Jünger were proponents of the idea that veterans needed to form a revolutionary front for the establishment of a corporate state, so that the state could institutionalise the values of the army. This was outlined most systematically in Franke's earlier book *Staat im Staate*, the title of which referred to a "shadow state" of veterans, waiting to seize power by revolutionary means; and which engaged in enthusiastic comparisons between the German veterans' leagues and Italian Fascism.¹⁸¹ Even when Franke and his colleagues had largely abandoned hope for a revolutionary veterans' seizure of power, they continued to pontificate in *Arminius* about Italian successes and the desirability of a comparable German state.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Alcalde, "German Perceptions," 178-179; Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 193.

¹⁸⁰ Jünger, "Neuer Nationalismus," 287-288.

¹⁸¹ Franke, *Staat im Staate*.

¹⁸² Jünger, "An die Freude," 363-364.

In an article in the *NS-Briefe* in August, 1926, Gregor Strasser remarked that *Arminius* was the only publication to have grasped the nuance of National Socialist thought, and of his (Strasser's) position in particular.¹⁸³ For Gregor, 1926 was also a year of political reflection and reorientation. Shortly after the dissolution of the AG, he was involved in an automobile accident which left him bedridden for several months.¹⁸⁴ He used his convalescence to formulate arguably the most explicit description of his ideological position, a pamphlet entitled *Gedanken über Aufgaben der Zukunft* (*Thoughts about the Tasks of the Future*).¹⁸⁵ Basing his argument on the belief that human beings are inherently unequal, Strasser argued that they should also be unequally represented in political life. "Selection by the army" would offer the most desirable way of ensuring dynamic, ongoing political leadership.¹⁸⁶

Despite the obvious parallels with Fascist interpretations of elite theory, this position is significant for the ways in which it diverged from Hitlerian Nazism. The racism of Strasser's soldiers' state was implicit, rather than foundational. Strasser illustrated this point explicitly:

In the völkisch movement, there is much talk about the emergence of a new group of leaders [...] But the ways which are recommended for a solution: these blood tests, Nordicization, and so forth, appear to my practical mind somewhat dubious as to possibility, value and even effect! Another way, however, a thoroughly German, Prussian way of which my friend Pfeffer reminded me on one occasion, is suited as no other: selection by the army! This requires that military service be voluntary, a right and not a duty!¹⁸⁷

Strasser believed that selection by the army would naturally favour the racially superior, for only these men could shoulder the rigours of military life. He did not advocate for conscription into military service. Rather, to ensure that the army remained a repository of only the most heroic Germans — who were therefore also the most suited to political leadership — he advocated for voluntary admission only, as an additional method to "weed out the weak."¹⁸⁸ It would thus be unnecessary to use explicit racial screening, as many Nazi pundits proposed.

The centrality of the veteran to Strasser's thought recalls far more of the state-building ideology of Italian Fascism than of the Nazi "racial state." It was clearly a sentiment that resonated with

¹⁸³ Gregor Strasser, "Deutsch-völkische Freiheitspartei und wir," *NS-Briefe*, no. 26 (15 August, 1926), in NS 26/900, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde.

¹⁸⁴ Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 50.

¹⁸⁵ Strasser, "Gedanken," 57-64. See also the English translation reproduced in Lane and Rupp: Gregor Strasser "Thoughts about the Tasks of the Future," in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 88-94.

¹⁸⁶ Strasser, "Gedanken," 61.

¹⁸⁷ Strasser, "Gedanken," 61.

¹⁸⁸ Strasser, "Gedanken," 61.

the rest of the Strasser circle, as, from 1926 onward, the Great War and the frontline soldier featured prominently in Strasser-press publications.¹⁸⁹ Gregor was also instrumental in practical Nazi initiatives to garner the support of war veterans, playing a leading role in the establishment of a supplementary Nazi organisation to support disabled war veterans.¹⁹⁰ In 1932, his contemporary biographer, Hans Diebow, underscored the lineage between the frontline soldier and Strasser's brand of National Socialism, claiming that Strasserism was the truest representation of the continuation of the economic and social nature of German war socialism.¹⁹¹ Diebow was a great admirer of Mussolini, having produced a biography the previous year which presented the Italian dictator in glowing terms.¹⁹² He thus contributed to framing Strasser's budding soldierly nationalism as a political relative of Italian Fascism, demonstrating the overarching presence of the fascist war veteran in shaping the direction and praxis of the Strasser circle.

Gregor's interest in veterans likewise acted as a conduit for the appearance of the fascist war veteran in KGRNS materials. Selection by the army as a mode of state organisation almost certainly influenced the KGRNS's answer to the NSDAP's 25 Points: the *14 Thesen der deutschen Revolution (14 Theses of the German Revolution)*. The *14 Thesen*, appearing in the *NS-Briefe* and issued shortly after the formation of the KGRNS, demonstrates a far greater emphasis on war and the quality of being a soldier than is seen in Otto Strasser's earlier writings. The document characterises the anticipated German revolution as the culmination of a process that began with the Great War, and speaks of "we frontline soldiers" as the harbingers of the national awakening.¹⁹³ Similarly, Otto Strasser evoked the memory of the war in an article to commemorate the sixteenth anniversary of its outbreak, stating that the KGRNS welcomed the continuation of the war as a means of realising German liberation.¹⁹⁴ In his political manifesto *Aufbau des deutschen Sozialismus (Building of German Socialism)* Otto also repeated Gregor's view that participation in the army should be voluntary; elected military

¹⁸⁹ For example, see Strasser's subsequent article: Gregor Strasser, "From Revolt to Revolution," in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 88-94.

¹⁹⁰ Gregor Strasser, "Organisations-Abtlg. I/Ref Kriegsbeschädigte an alle Gauleitungen," November 18, 1930, in NS 22/411, Bundearchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde. As Alcalde notes, the establishment of this organisation was also politically expedient for the NSDAP in late 1930, following their electoral success. However, this does not negate Strasser's genuine interest in the matter. Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 209.

¹⁹¹ März, *National Sozialisten*, 22.

¹⁹² Hans Diebow and Kurt Goeltzer, *Mussolini: Eine Biographie in 110 Bildern* (Berlin: Wilhelm Kolk, 1931).

¹⁹³ Otto Strasser, "14 Thesen der deutschen Revolution," *NS-Briefe* (July 1, 1929): 22-24. See also the English translation: Otto Strasser "The Fourteen Theses of the German Revolution," in *Nazi Ideology before 1933: A Documentation*, ed. Barbara Miller Lane and Leila J. Rupp (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 106, 110.

¹⁹⁴ Otto Strasser, "Wir grüßen den neuen Krieg," *Der National-Sozialist* 135 (August, 1930).

service would differentiate superior men from inferior.¹⁹⁵ Individual KGRNS members also wrote about the value of the soldier to the German way of life. Herbert Blank produced a military history, *Soldaten*, in 1932, and representations of soldierly life featured heavily in much of the subsequent work of Bodo Uhse.¹⁹⁶

The KGRNS's incorporation of militarism found further expression in aesthetics, specifically in ideas around clothing. In the spring of 1930, Otto Strasser, along with Blank, Schapke, and Günther Vogler, published a text entitled *Die Revolution der Männerkleidung* (*The Revolution of Men's Clothing*). Its central argument was that, as fashion was intrinsically reflective of society, German fashion needed to change to reflect National Socialism.¹⁹⁷ Of course, the KGRNS had practical reasons for wishing to change its members' appearances, too. Prior to 1931, KGRNS members still wore the brownshirt uniform of the SA (also worn by many ordinary NSDAP members), despite recurring physical clashes with their former comrades. The KGRNS abandoned the brownshirt uniform officially later that year, switching to a black shirt uniform with accompanying black boots, trousers, and a flat cap.¹⁹⁸ This was intended visually to represent the "Black Front," but could not help but to conjure in the public imagination images of the Italian Fascist *Squadrismo*, marching triumphantly through the streets of Rome.

In all likelihood, this was not coincidental. In the same year, Blank, writing under the pseudonym Wiegand von Miltenberg, commented on the impressive visual qualities of Italian Fascism. Fascism, he claimed, had achieved a total synthesis between "form and idea," personified in the figure of Mussolini.¹⁹⁹ Hitler paled in comparison, dressing not as a national leader, but as a provincial amateur.²⁰⁰ It would be wrong to see Blank's admiration for the visual qualities of Italian Fascism in terms of aesthetics alone. Commenting further on Mussolini's "Caesarean" appearance, Blank argued that the visual manifestations of Italian Fascism demonstrated an enviable reflection of the political values and aims of the Fascist state. Germany needed to achieve a comparable, if original, aestheticisation of National

¹⁹⁵ Strasser, *Aufbau*, 89.

¹⁹⁶ Herbert Blank, *Soldaten: Preussisches Führertum von Waterloo bis Ypern* (Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling, 1932). See also the novels Bodo Uhse, *Söldner und Soldat* (Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1935), and (originally published in 1948) Bodo Uhse, *Wir Söhne* (Berlin: bb Aufbau Verlag, 1984).

¹⁹⁷ Otto Strasser, *Die Revolution der Männerkleidung: Eine historische Untersuchung und eine wegweisende Lösung über die Umgestaltung der heutigen Männerkleidung* (Berlin: Der National-Sozialist Verlag, 1930), in *Die Strasser-Legende*, ed. Kurt Gossweiler (Berlin: Das neue Berlin, 1994), 64.

¹⁹⁸ Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*, 148-149.

¹⁹⁹ Wiegand von Miltenberg (i.e. Herbert Blank), *Adolf Hitler Wilhelm III* (Berlin: Rowohlt Verlag, 1931), 27.

²⁰⁰ Miltenberg, *Adolf Hitler*, 28-29.

Socialism in order to manifest fully its unique national spirit. To this end, Strasser argued that the soldier embodied the spirit of the future and must, therefore, also act as the inspiration for the future of men's clothing.²⁰¹ The clothing of the future needed to be affordable, simple, and elegant, representing a new sense of community in which the mass philosophy of action took precedence over bourgeois or aristocratic pomp.²⁰² The introduction of the so-called Schwarze Garde (Black Guard) was buttressed ideologically by the increasing soldierly nationalism of the KGRNS. The Schwarze Garde mirrored the fascist war veteran in that it was intended to embody the "soldierly spirit" necessary for revolution.²⁰³ Fascism's aesthetic qualities reflected its organic composition, rendering it one of the most significant intermediaries in the KGRNS's adoption of soldierly nationalism. For the Strasser circle as a whole, the fascist war veteran was a significant vector in shaping the proposed formation, constitution, and appearance of a National Socialist state.

The End of the Strasser Circle

The terminal years of the Weimar Republic cemented the Strasser circle's status as an enemy of the Hitlerian Third Reich. This has been well documented in relation to the inner-NSDAP faction.²⁰⁴ In late 1932, with the NSDAP on the verge of bankruptcy and its electoral support in decline, many Nazis feared that Hitler's "all or nothing" approach would result in a slide back into inconsequence. Hitler would settle for nothing less than the German chancellorship, while others within the Party were amenable to the idea of collaboration with then-chancellor Kurt von Schleicher (1892-1934). Schleicher, seeking to reign in the NSDAP, appealed to Gregor Strasser's personal ambition by offering him the position of vice-chancellor within his cabinet in December, 1932.²⁰⁵ Strasser found himself faced with the unenviable choice of either submitting to Hitler's leadership or engaging in open rebellion against it. His sense of principle precluded the former, and, as Hitler offered the same ultimatum to Strasser's most prominent (but less intransigent) supporters, Strasser became politically isolated. On 8 December, he formally resigned from his parliamentary seat and party portfolios, sealing his image as a traitor

²⁰¹ Strasser, *Männerkleidung*, 66.

²⁰² Strasser, *Männerkleidung*, 66.

²⁰³ Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus*, 154.

²⁰⁴ For details about this process, see Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 103-104.

²⁰⁵ Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*, 177.

to the NSDAP.²⁰⁶ Strasser referred to his “soldierly way of thinking” as a synonym for his political pragmatism during this time.²⁰⁷ In addition, the military dictatorship that Schleicher was seeking to install must have appealed, at least in part, to Strasser’s own vision of the army as a guiding model for political organisation. The Strasser circle was also highly critical of the funding agreements that Hitler and his supporters were brokering with big industrialists, viewing this as a fundamental betrayal of socialism.²⁰⁸ For the KGRNS, Gregor Strasser likewise represented the last hope for pushing the NSDAP in a truly national socialist direction.

The KGRNS benefitted temporarily from the inner-Party conflicts of the early 1930s. Membership was bolstered by influxes of additional men from Nazi organisations who were disenchanted with Hitler’s leadership.²⁰⁹ These included defectors from the Hitler Youth and, in 1931, former SA men who had participated in the Stennes Revolt: an uprising led by Walther Stennes, after Stennes and his supporters had become dissatisfied with the subordinate role that the SA was expected to play to the Party. In its efforts to build a Schwarze Front, the KGRNS also made clear, if cautious, overtures to communists, hoping to sway individual Marxists to its cause. It naturally attracted a degree of sympathy from National Bolshevik circles, with Ernst Niekisch and Karl Otto Paetel, leader of the GSRN, engaging in limited collaborations with Strasser.²¹⁰ Paetel contributed articles to the *NS-Briefe*, arguing for the importance of a German-Russian foreign policy alliance.²¹¹ *Der National-Sozialist* also published “discussions” between KGRNS members and communists, while Mossakowsky, speaking at the first KGRNS congress in October, 1930, likened the KGRNS to the early Bolsheviks.²¹² Commenting on the KGRNS’s small membership, he noted that limited numbers were not a barrier to success, as the Bolsheviks had led a revolution with a core membership of only “about 200 men.”²¹³

²⁰⁶ Gregor Strasser, “Gregor Strasser to Adolf Hitler,” December 8, 1932, in *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism*, ed. Peter D. Stachura (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 113-114.

²⁰⁷ Strasser, “Gregor Strasser to Adolf Hitler,” 113-114.

²⁰⁸ For an insightful study of these machinations, see Adam Tooze, *Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2006).

²⁰⁹ Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus*, 46.

²¹⁰ Ward, “Pipe Dreams,” 519.

²¹¹ Karl Otto Paetel, “Klare Fronten!” *NS-Briefe* 15 (March, 1930); Karl Otto Paetel, “Meine Herren, worum geht es ihnen?” *NS-Briefe* 7 (October 1, 1930); Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus*, 54.

²¹² Otto Strasser, “Internationaler Marxismus oder nationaler Sozialismus?: Eine grundlegende Diskussion zwischen Dr. Otto Strasser, Mitglied des Vollzugausschusses der Kampfgemeinschaft ‘Revolutionäre Nationalsozialisten,’ und Bruno Frei, Chefredakteur der Kommunistischen Tageszeitung ‘Berlin am Morgen,’” *Der National-Sozialist* (1930); “Mitteilung des Landeskriminalpolizeiamtes über den ersten Reichskongress der KGRNS am 25./26. Oktober in Berlin,” November 15, 1930, in *Die Strasser-Legende*, ed. Kurt Gossweiler, (Berlin: Das neue Berlin, 1994), 60-61.

²¹³ “Mitteilung,” 60-61.

These efforts at reconciliation were tentative in nature, however, and the KGRNS never sought collaboration with organised communism. This was due both to the KGRNS's fear of external influence, and to the communists' (and many National Bolsheviks') own misgivings about the KGRNS. The KGRNS's unhelpful association with the Nazi Party aside, many potential allies viewed the KGRNS's negation of historical materialism as a rejection of the core values of socialism. Furthermore, many remained in favour of a Soviet-style planned economy, and considered the KGRNS's corporatism insufficiently socialist.²¹⁴ For instance, Paetel, who based his ideology upon historical materialism, cautioned against the "reckless implementation of a socialist-corporative-style system" at the expense of overlooking class struggle.²¹⁵ Niekisch, too, described the KGRNS in his typically acerbic manner as "49 per cent anticapitalist."²¹⁶

Even within the KGRNS's own ranks, there was rigorous disagreement about the direction and aims of the movement, and defections to communist movements were not unheard-of. In July, 1931, Stennes and Strasser, in collaboration with Heinz, founded the Nationalsozialistische Kampfbewegung Deutschlands (NSKD), which was intended to synthesise the KGRNS with the military connections of Stennes and Ehrhardt.²¹⁷ This was ultimately a failure, and other efforts to increase coherence in the movement were similarly fraught. The introduction of the Schwarze Garde, for instance, was not welcomed by all members of the KGRNS. Ulrich Oldenburg, responsible for the distribution of the Strasser newspaper *Deutsche Revolution*, and Robert Vasterling, leader of the Hanover branch of the KGRNS, headed the objection to what they saw as the introduction of a "new SA" and the formation of a "Strasser cult," and founded the splinter-group the Kampfgemeinschaft deutscher Revolutionäre (KGDR) in protest.²¹⁸ The Schwarze Front also garnered criticism from the GSRN and other National Bolshevik groups, with Paetel accusing Strasser of trying to emulate Hitler, and viewing the Schwarze Front as a threat to a KPD parliamentary victory.²¹⁹ In spite of such discouraging responses, Strasser persisted in his attempts to build a mass movement. He looked primarily towards conservative-

²¹⁴ Moreau, "Strasserism," 158.

²¹⁵ Paetel, "Klare Fronten!" See also Paetel, *National Bolshevik Manifesto*.

²¹⁶ Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 523. The Strasser circle had, admittedly, not always showered Niekisch with praise either. When reporting on the activities of the ASP in the *NS-Briefe*, Gregor Strasser criticised the ASP for its belief in class struggle. Gregor Strasser, "Wir und die Altsozialisten," *NS-Briefe* 5 (September 1, 1927), in *Nationale Sozialisten in der NSDAP: Strukturen, Ideologie, Publizistik und Biographien des national-sozialistischen Straßer-Kreises von der AG Nordwest bis zum Kampf Verlag 1925-1930*, ed. Markus März (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2010), 590-592.

²¹⁷ "Bündische Stimmen," in *Die schwarze Front: Von Zielen und Aufgaben und vom Kampfe der Deutschen Revolution*, ed. Richard Schapke (Leipzig: Wolfgang Richard Lindner, 1932), 85-94.

²¹⁸ Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*, 153-154.

²¹⁹ Ward, "Pipe Dreams," 523.

nationalist splinter groups, and garnered limited success, with the Wehrwolf, the Deutsche Freischar (German Freischar), the Tatkreis (Action Circle), and the Kameradschaft Oberland (Oberland Fellowship) participating in limited capacities.²²⁰ At its largest, the Schwarze Front numbered upwards of 6,000 men, yet remained more an exercise in competing theoretical abstraction than a unified political force.

Upon Hitler's assumption of the chancellorship and the beginnings of the consolidation of the Third Reich, both Gregor and Otto Strasser joined the long list of political enemies of the new regime. The KGRNS, the Schwarze Front, and all publications associated with the Strasser press were banned, along with organised communism in February, 1933, as part of the Nazi-led government's first wave of repressions.²²¹ Otto went into exile and spent the remainder of the 1930s first in Austria, then in Czechoslovakia and France. He was branded by Goebbels as "public enemy number one," and articles denouncing him and calling for his arrest and extradition continued to appear in the German press throughout the 1930s and into the war years.²²² Such articles emphasised Strasser's history in the SPD, his opposition to the Kapp Putsch and his association with "unsavoury" characters ranging from National Bolsheviks and Jews, to foreign secret services. Strasser indeed remained active consistently in the German nationalist resistance movement, publishing the newspaper *Der deutsche Revolution* (*The German Revolution*) from his base in Prague, broadcasting his views over the radio, and calling for Hitler's assassination.

Otto Strasser's intense hatred for Hitler and the Nazi regime had, by this time, taken on a deeply personal aspect. Gregor had elected to remain in Germany in 1933, reprising his former civil profession as a pharmacist after resigning from his Nazi Party portfolios. In mid-1934, he was arrested alongside other dissenting National Socialists, SA men, and conservative figures (including General Schleicher) in the Night of the Long Knives, and imprisoned in the Gestapo headquarters, Columbia Haus, in Berlin.²²³ He was executed summarily by gunshot, being left to bleed to death in his prison cell.

²²⁰ Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*, 166-168.

²²¹ "Der Staatssekretär in der Reichskanzlei to the Reichsminister des Innern," February 10, 1933, in R 43/II/482, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde.

²²² For examples, see "Der Lebensweg eines Verräters," November 22, n.d., in R 4902/7447, Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde; "Otto Strasser: das Mordwerkzeug des englischen Geheimdienst," *Völkischer Beobachter*, November 22, 1939, in R 4902/7447, Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde; "Otto Strasser: Mordanstifter in englisch-jüdischen Diensten," November 22, 1939, in R 4902/7447, Bundesarchiv-Lichterfelde.

²²³ Stachura, *Gregor Strasser*, 124.

Strasserism occupies a place of unique importance in the study of Fascist influence upon German-speaking nationalist movements. Taken together, its various expressions — the AG, the KGRNS, Kampf Verlag publications, Gregor Strasser's circle etc. — demonstrated an evolution of thought that differed from mainline National Socialism in a number of significant ways. The particulars of this deviation can be refined by examination of the ways in which the Strasser circle reacted to Italian Fascism. While it would be simplistic to view either National Bolshevism or Strasserism as single, unified positions, they did adapt and react to their political environments in ways that were sufficiently similar to render it fair to speak of "Strasserism" to describe the views of both brothers and the majority of their followers, and of National Bolshevism as a broader category encompassing Strasserism.

Like other expressions of National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany, the Strasser circle reacted to Italian Fascism with tentative approval and backhanded admiration. The key ideological emissaries of Italian Fascism, corporatism and the fascist war veteran, were expressed more systematically and with more consistency in the Strasser circle than in the mainline NSDAP. With the exception of Reupke, the Strasser circle remained largely critical of Fascist Italy's corporate system, viewing it as capitalistic and exploitative, but nevertheless entertained visions of a decentralised corporatism, leant potency by Italy's successes. The KGRNS adopted Moeller van den Bruck's vision, itself a reflection of earlier corporatist discourse in which Fascism was already considered reflective and symbolic. The constant comparisons with Fascist Italy, initially made by Moeller van den Bruck and subsequently strengthened by the likes of the Strasser brothers and Reupke, ensured that Italy shaped conceptions of corporatism within the Strasser circle, whether used for contrast or comparison. A similar dynamic is visible in relation to the fascist war veteran and the increasing presence of soldierly nationalism within the Strasser circle. This ranged from arguments that the National Socialist corporate system should function in a manner reflecting military selection, to the establishment of the Strasser circle's answer to the Italian Blackshirts, the Schwarze Garde, whose uniformity (including in aesthetics) was likened to Mussolini's perceived success in building a coherent, organic movement. All of this underscores the importance of continuing to diversify studies of Strasserism away from the typical focus on the internal politics of the NSDAP, to shed further light on the many ways that ideological influences traversed political and geographical lines alike.

Chapter Six: *The Spann Circle: Italian Fascism as Corporate Universalism*

Anyone who attended university in Vienna during the Austrian First Republic likely took at least one course with Othmar Spann (1878-1950). A philosopher, sociologist, political scientist, and economist, Spann was a popular professor who counted among his students such well-known figures as the economists Friedrich Hayek (1899-1992) and Oskar Morgenstern (1902-1977), and the political philosophers Eric Voegelin (1901-1985) and Johannes Sauter (1891-1945).¹ Operating from the intellectual hub of interwar Vienna, Spann embodies many of the themes of transnational exchange explored in this thesis. Unlike many of his academic coevals who remained confined to their lecture halls, he made every attempt to translate his philosophy into real-existing political action. An architect of the Conservative Revolution, his metaphysical investigations led him to develop the philosophy of “universalism.”² Universalism drew upon Catholic social thought and advanced an “organic” ontology, in which all elements of existence could be understood only through their mutual, relational dynamics, which were grounded in Spann’s reading of the natural world. From this, Spann derived a unique variant of political corporatism (corporate universalism).

Spann’s most immediate circle cultivated influential connections with Austrian industrialists, paramilitaries, and numerous conservative, pan-German, and fascist associations. At the height of their influence in the early 1930s, Spann and his followers — a loyal and prolific cadre of intellectuals known collectively as the *Spannkreis* (Spann circle) — exercised influence not only in Austria, but in Germany and Czechoslovakia (particularly the Sudetenland). The circle produced numerous publications, the most significant of which was the periodical *Ständisches Leben* (*Corporate Life*), appearing from 1931 to 1937. From the late 1920s, the Austrian paramilitary group the Heimwehr adopted Spann’s philosophy under the ideological tutelage of two of Spann’s closest students, Walter Heinrich (1902-1984) and Hans Riehl (1891-1965), and acted as a bridge for the Spann circle’s entry into fascist politics.³ Through the Heimwehr,

¹ Janek Wasserman, *Black Vienna: The Radical Right in the Red City, 1918-1938* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 83.

² When referring to Spann’s philosophy, this chapter uses the following terms more or less interchangeably, with slight variations based on political (concrete) or philosophical (abstract) contexts: universalism, corporate universalism, organic universalism, the doctrine of totality.

³ C. Earl Edmondson, *The Heimwehr and Austrian Politics, 1918-1936* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978), 72-73.

already invested in fascism, the Spann circle established close and lasting connections with Fascist Italy.

As the Spann circle is the only case study in this thesis *not* based in Weimar Germany, it is necessary to begin with an overview of some of the peculiarities of Austrian historiography, for these have inevitably shaped how Spann has been approached as a historical subject. Debates abound as to whether it is more fruitful to consider the Austrian nation state in relation to Germany and Germans, with whom Austrians shared linguistic and cultural connections; in relation to the former Habsburg Empire, of which Austria had been part geographically, politically, and constitutionally; or, indeed, as its own geo-political entity with the features of a modern, independent state. This conundrum is itself reflective of the multitude of Austrian nationalisms that existed during the interwar period. These competing nationalisms envisioned different futures for Austria: whether as *part* of a pan-German state, as *leader* of a pan-German state, or as its own *kleindeutsche Staat* (small German state; independent Austria). These positions had complex and frequently porous parameters. Even so, a historiographical tendency persists in which German nationalists, Catholic conservatives, and Austrian socialists are segmented into independent camps, roughly corresponding to the geopolitical ambitions outlined above. This so-called *Lager* theory (camp theory) often reduces the concept of pan-Germanism to support for Anschluss with Nazi Germany and paints the Austrofascist regime as a conservative bulwark against fascism: representative of an independent and, ergo, anti-fascist Austria.⁴

Dating from the 1950s, when Austria was still under Allied occupation and “rehabilitated” Austrian Nazis were seeking political legitimacy, there was a natural inclination to draw a line between the legitimate interests of “true” Austrian nationalists and the racist expansionism of the Third Reich.⁵ Similarly, postwar efforts to decouple Austrian and German history tended to associate pan-Germanism with its most authoritarian proponents, such as interim Austrian Nazi chancellor Arthur Seyss-Inquart (1892-1946) and the earlier antisemitic parliamentarian

⁴ The *Lager* theory was first associated with historian Adam Wandruszka in 1954 and played a role in uncoupling post-war nationalist movements, such as the Austrian socialists, the Freedom Party of Austria, and the Christian Socials from association with pro-German nationalists. Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 7. See also Adam Wandruszka, “Österreichs politische Struktur: Die Entwicklung der Parteien und politischen Bewegungen,” in *Geschichte der Republik Österreich*, ed. Heinrich Benedikt (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1954), 289-485.

⁵ Julie Thorpe, “Austrofascism: Revisiting the Authoritarian State 40 Years On,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 2 (April 2010): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009409356916>; Bundesministerium für Unterricht, *Österreichische Zeitgeschichte im Geschichtsunterricht* (Vienna: Bundesministerium für Unterricht, 1961), 151; Peter Thaler “National History: National Imagery: The Role of History in Postwar Austrian Nation-Building,” *Central European History* 32, no. 3 (1999): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008938900021142>.

Georg Ritter von Schönerer (1842-1921).⁶ “Austrianism,” in contrast, was often associated with the democratic traditions upon which the new Austrian nation state had been established, even when some of the most prominent supporters of Austrian independence included the avowedly anti-democratic chancellors Engelbert Dollfuß (1892-1934) and Kurt Schuschnigg (1897-1977), along with other representatives of the Austrofascist state. Indeed, as Julie Thorpe and Peter Thaler have illuminated, interwar pan-Germanism is best understood not as a component of any particular ideology, but as a broad political orientation that formed a reference point for many competing interest groups.⁷ Pan-Germanism could be ideological, but it could also be pragmatic. As Austria had lost access to the supplementary economies of Bohemia, the Balkan territories, and Hungary, politicians were aware of its economic vulnerability, increasing the appeal of Anschluss with Germany.⁸ The desire to unify the German-speaking lands was a feature common in liberal and social democratic circles, as often as in conservative or radical circles (as it had arguably been since the 1840s).⁹ Nor should pan-Germanism be confused with the desire to be dominated by Germany: some pan-Germans, however unrealistically, advocated the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty and Germany’s inclusion in a revitalised Austrian Empire.¹⁰

The incorporation of the Spann circle into a thesis otherwise focused on movements based in Germany is not intended to imply that Austrian history should be understood primarily in relation to Germany. Rather, it supplements the considerations of previous chapters by demonstrating that Germanic para-fascist movements were not confined to Germany itself. It poses an implicit challenge to the traditional nation state paradigm and, following Thorpe, to outcome-focused interpretations of fascism (from which Austria has frequently been excluded on the grounds that it never achieved “true” fascism).¹¹ Geographical separations in the study

⁶ As an illustration, historian Alfred Diamant stated in 1957 that “for Pan-Germans, the National Socialism of Hitler came to offer a compelling attraction.” The notion of radical pan-Germanism can also be traced to the first major English-language book on radical nationalism in Austria-Hungary, Andrew Whiteside’s 1975 study of Georg Ritter von Schönerer. Alfred Diamant, “Austrian Catholics and the First Republic, 1918-1934: A Study in Anti-Democratic Thought,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (September 1957): 606, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591295701000307>; Andrew G. Whiteside, *The Socialism of Fools: Georg Ritter von Schönerer and Austrian Pan-Germanism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Peter Thaler, *The Ambivalence of Identity: The Austrian Experience of Nation-Building in a Modern Society* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), 133.

⁷ Thorpe, “Revisiting,” 318.

⁸ Diamant, “Austrian Catholics,” 603.

⁹ The SDAP’s 1926 party program, for instance, stipulated that the two German republics should unite into a single state. Thaler, *Ambivalence*, 134.

¹⁰ Janek Wasserman, “Österreichische Aktion: Monarchism, Authoritarianism, and the Unity of the Austrian Conservative Ideological Field in the First Republic,” *Central European History* 47, no. 1 (March 2014): 76-77.

¹¹ Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 4.

of Austria's relationship with Germany have stymied inquiry into how pervasive the influence of fascism actually was within Austria itself.¹² Thorpe's work has been instrumental in breaking down these assumptions in relation to the workings and construction of the Austrofascist state. She challenges the "conservative bulwark" interpretation of Austrofascism by exploring the many ways in which Austrofascism and the Fatherland Front drew inspiration from Italian Fascism.¹³ Yet rather than passing judgment on whether the regime "achieved" fascism, Thorpe foregrounds the importance of transformation and intention, making a case for Austrofascism's inclusion in the fascist sphere based on the regime's own projections for the construction of a fascist state. She concludes that the Austrofascists were not pro-Nazi pan-Germanists, but that this fact should not hamper inquiry into the regime's use of fascism or pan-Germanism.¹⁴

The Spann circle, despite taking a very different stance on the pan-German question from the Fatherland Front, reveals a similar dynamic. Like the Fatherland Front, the Spann circle saw in Italian Fascism an illustration of the positive potential of corporatism. Yet, whereas the Fatherland Front looked towards the Italian regime as inspiration for an independent, corporatist Austrian nation state, Spann was a consistent advocate for his own philosophy and attempted to show that Italian Fascism represented universal processes *in situ*. Italy demonstrated the working of historical forces, which, when harnessed properly, could also be used to unify Germany and Austria into a single corporate state. In short, the Spann circle used the Fascist image as a means to strengthen, legitimise, and popularise its own political philosophy. Importantly, this process also engendered a degree of fascistisation within the Spann circle itself. As this chapter will reveal, elements such as an increased emphasis on action and conflict, and a passive acceptance of dictatorship found a place within the universalist ethos largely as a result of contact with Fascist Italy.

The Spann circle's *modus operandi* in its dealings with the Italian Fascists also anticipated its relationship with Nazism. The circle came to believe that Anschluss under Hitler was the best way to unify the German-speaking lands. The circle's support for Nazism has often been glossed over or ignored by Spann's defenders, such as the conservative philosopher Gerd-Klaus

¹² For a useful overview of Austria's relationship with fascism, see Robert Pyrah, "Enacting Encyclicals? Cultural Politics and "Clerical Fascism" in Austria, 1933-1938," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8, no. 2 (May 2007): 370-373, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760701321338>.

¹³ Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 4. In particular, refer to pages 54-61.

¹⁴ Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 7-8.

Kaltenbrunner, economist J. Hanns Pichler, and, more recently, Sebastian Maaß.¹⁵ New Right authors have portrayed Spann as, first and foremost, a “pan-German patriot,” whose philosophy was firmly grounded in conservatism, not to be confused with fascism.¹⁶ Maaß stated, for example, that Spann viewed the ideological principles of Nazism as “foreign and primitive.”¹⁷ Such attempts to absolve Spann of associations with Nazism have drawn criticism from other quarters. In 2014, historian Janek Wasserman suggested that Spann’s defenders were apologists, as Spann himself was a convinced Nazi and NSDAP member.¹⁸

Admittedly, “apologetic” interpretations deconstruct partially the pro-Nazi pan-German stereotype but are problematic in that they often place artificial distance between Austrian conservatives and fascists. This invites an unproductive return to the *Lager* theory, implying that conservatives never truly crossed an imagined “fascist line.” At the same time, foregrounding the Spann circle’s support for Nazism introduces its own set of limitations. It is important to remember that Spann ascribed primacy to his own philosophy, a point argued convincingly by Klaus-Jörg Siegfried in his seminal work on the Spann circle.¹⁹ Spann’s efforts to mould both Italian Fascism and Nazism into universalism speak to a remarkable ideological intransigence. Even while adopting elements of fascism, the Spann circle adhered firmly to its pre-established value set, eventually leading to its demise. The present chapter thus attempts to tread a middle ground between the two competing historiographical positions.

As a subject of scholarship in his own right, Spann has been used surprisingly infrequently to illustrate historical processes. Many works about him have been orientated principally towards philosophy and sociology. Authors such as Rolf Amtmann, Martin Schneller, and, more recently, Klaus Honrath have evaluated the ontological merits of universalism in relation to major trends in Western philosophy and sociology.²⁰ Disciplinary conventions ensure that such

¹⁵ Pichler also wrote the introduction to Maaß’s book. See Sebastian Maaß, *Dritter Weg und wahrer Staat: Othmar Spann – Ideengeber der konservativen Revolution* (Kiel: Regin, 2010).

¹⁶ Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner, *Vom Geist Europas: Ursprünge und Porträts, Band 1* (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2019); J. Hanns Pichler, *Othmar Spann oder die Welt als Ganzes* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1988), 51-52; Reinhard Müller, “Das Leben Othmar Spanns: Ein Vortrag von Hans Riehl,” in *Zyklos 1: Jahrbuch für Theorie und Geschichte der Soziologie*, ed. Martin Endreß, Klaus Lichtbau and Stephen Moebius (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2015), 341; Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 76.

¹⁷ Maaß, *Dritter Weg*, 33.

¹⁸ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 76.

¹⁹ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 221.

²⁰ Rolf Amtmann, *Die Geisteslehre Othmar Spanns: Ihre Stellung in der Geschichte der Philosophie, in der Ganzheitslehre und gegenüber der modernen Psychologie* (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1960); Martin Schneller, *Zwischen Romantik und Faschismus: Der Beitrag Othmar Spanns zum Konservatismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1970); Klaus Honrath, “‘Ganzheitsphilosophische’ Ansätze: Othmar Spann und sein Kreis,” in *Genealogien der Wirtschaftsphilosophie*, ed. Thomas Sören Hoffmann and Klaus Honrath (Hagen: Springer, 2022).

analyses remain relatively aloof from treating Spann as a “concrete” historical subject, seldom venturing into in-depth discussions of his students or practical political activities. Nevertheless, Spann, as a subject, encourages an interdisciplinary approach, and many non-historical works also shed light on questions that occupy historians. Alan Scott and Silvia Rief, approaching the subject from a sociological perspective, have used Spann as an example of the political mobilisation of metaphysics. They contrasted Spannian universalism, and the anti-empiricism it represented, with the use of empiricism by Marxist movements, arguing that both took on atypical, politically didactic forms in the context of the Austrian First Republic.²¹ Recognising the centrality of politics to Spannian philosophy is, indeed, vital. To this end, Wasserman, in his 2014 book *Black Vienna*, employed a Gramscian lens to synthesise Spann’s philosophy with the political realities of interwar Vienna.²² Challenging the traditional view of interwar Vienna as a “red city,” Wasserman focuses on the pervasiveness of Conservative Revolutionary thought, arguing that conservative intellectuals — of whom Spann is one prominent example — played a key role in shaping Viennese political life. Wasserman makes politics central to the understanding of Spann — an element worthy of further investigation.

Spann has also been the subject of a number of dissertations and full-length works. These include a 1962 PhD thesis by Otto Hausmann entitled *Othmar Spann und seine Schule* (*Othmar Spann and his School*); a 1966 Master’s thesis by John Joseph Haag on the subject of Spannian corporatism; and a Diploma dissertation by Astrid Gimpl.²³ Haag went on to become the most prolific scholar on Spann, completing his PhD on the Spann circle in 1969, and publishing subsequent journal articles that homed in on different elements of Spannian philosophy and practice.²⁴ The most significant full-length work on Spann, however, is Klaus-Jörg Siegfried’s 1974 *Universalismus und Faschismus: Das Gesellschaftsbild Othmar Spanns* (*Universalism*

For a discussion of Spann in the broader context of Austrian philosophy, see William M. Johnston, *The Austrian Mind: An Intellectual and Social History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 311–312. For a French-language evaluation of Spann’s economic philosophy, see Jean-Jacques Gislain, “L’histoire de la pensée Économique à L’épreuve de l’universalisme” d’Othmar Spann,” *Cahiers d’économie politique* 51 (Winter 2006): 49–68.

²¹ Alan Scott and Silvia Rief, “Reactionaries of the Lectern: Universalism, Anti-Empiricism and Corporatism in Austrian (and German) Social Theory,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 24, no. 2 (February 2021): 185–186, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431021992205>.

²² Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 10–11.

²³ Otto Hausmann, “Othmar Spann und seine Schule” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1962); Haag, “Ideology of the Austrian Corporate State”; Astrid Gimpl, *Othmar Spann und seine Schule Universalismus* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG, 2010).

²⁴ John J. Haag, “Othmar Spann and the Politics of Totality: Corporatism in Theory and Practise” (PhD diss., Rice University, 1969), 150–152. Subsequent journal articles include John J. Haag, “The Spann Circle and the Jewish Question,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 18, no. 1 (January 1973): 93–126, <https://doi.org/10.1093/leobaek/18.1.93>; John J. Haag, “Knights of the Spirit: The Kameradschaftsbund,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 8, no. 3 (July 1973): 133–153, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200947300800307>.

and Fascism: The Social Model of Othmar Spann), which remains unsurpassed in analysis and detail. Siegfried's study not only looks at the thought of Spann himself, but also that of key followers, while extensively exploring the circle's political connections. His analysis is particularly noteworthy in that it dedicates sufficient weight to the Spann circle's relationship with Fascist Italy — something that most studies on Spann mention only superficially.²⁵

In light of the abovementioned pan-German debates and the historical legacy of the Anschluss, it is unsurprising that the majority of historians have concentrated on the Spann circle's relationship with Nazism and Germany.²⁶ More surprising is that the Spann circle's use of Italian Fascism has garnered so little attention, particularly when one considers that the circle drew on Italy more than any other nation to demonstrate the potential viability of universalism. The circle also engaged in numerous instances of intellectual and political exchange with the Italian Fascists to develop and internationalise a universalist “third way.” The Spann circle's use of Italian Fascism undoubtedly requires deeper exploration, particularly in light of historiographical advances foregrounding the transformative and discursive features of fascism (as seen in the work of Thorpe and Aristotle Kallis, for example).²⁷ As these elements are largely absent from Siegfried's work, it remains salient to situate the Spann circle's use of Italian Fascism in the context of broader transformative trends in non-Hitlerian fascist thought.

Following the structure of previous chapters, this chapter begins with an overview of early Spannian publications as a way to establish a starting point from which the circle's later radicalisation can be measured. The circle's earliest publications were relatively non-political yet set a methodological precedent for its treatment of fascism, exhibiting the capacity to “apply” different concepts to universalism. By 1932, the Spann circle equated universalism explicitly with fascism and argued for an official synthesis of universalist philosophy via Fascism and National Socialism.²⁸ The rationale underpinning this is revealed in numerous publications, in the form of books, articles, published lectures, and monographs. Especially illuminating is the Spann circle's journal *Ständisches Leben*, as well as the extensive

²⁵ Siegfried dedicates a chapter to the Spann circle's relationship with Italy. See Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 103-123.

²⁶ In addition to the abovementioned, see Andreas Huber, “Gesellschaftslehre zwischen Krucken- und Hakenkreuz: Einfluss und Wirken des Krieses um Othmar Spann,” in *Die Soziologie und der Nationalsozialismus in Österreich*, ed. Andreas Kranebitter and Christoph Reinprecht (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019), 182-185.

²⁷ Thorpe, *Pan-Germanism*, 4-5. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Kallis' work emphasises the discursive nature of fascism, underscoring the importance of processual fascism (“fascistisation”). Aristotle A. Kallis, ““Fascism,” “Para-Fascism” and “Fascistization”: On the Similarities of Three Conceptual Categories,” *European History Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (April 2003): 219-249, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02656914030332004>.

²⁸ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 100.

investigations of Italian Fascism undertaken by two of Spann's foremost collaborators: Walter Heinrich and Wilhelm Andreae (1888-1962). Examining the ideas detailed in these sources reveals that Italian Fascism not only influenced nationalist movements; it was used *by* nationalist movements as a means *to* influence.

Origins of the Spann Circle

Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century was a hub of modern innovation, demonstrating unprecedented advances in sociology, psychiatry, and political economy.²⁹ As Deborah R. Coen summarised in 2007: "No time and place have come to represent so vividly the origins of the "modern" as Vienna circa 1900."³⁰ Othmar Spann was born into this lively climate in 1878, one of four siblings in a middle-class household in the suburb of Altmannsdorf.³¹ After completing school, he attended universities in Vienna, Zürich, Bonn, and Tübingen, studying philosophy and political science, and earning his doctorate *cum laude* in political science at Tübingen University in 1903.³² Paradoxically, the intellectual melting pot to which Spann was exposed helped to equip him with the tools to mount serious challenges to modern cosmopolitanism, or, as he and other Conservative Revolutionaries saw it, "decadence."

Spann's thought formed part of a broader trend in conservative and Catholic political philosophy that emerged in Austria in response to the upheavals of modernisation, broadly characterised by adherence to Catholicism and opposition to democracy. In the late nineteenth century, the philosopher Karl Freiherr von Vogelsang (1818-1890), one of the founders of the Austrian Christian Socials Party, called for what was essentially corporatism through the establishment of a Catholic social state.³³ Vogelsang's writings, ebbing in popularity during the heyday of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, enjoyed renewed appeal during the crisis of the Great

²⁹ For explorations of Viennese culture during this period, in addition to Wasserman, see Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-De-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); and, more recently, Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman, "Beyond the Coffeehouse: Vienna as a Cultural Centre between the World Wars," in *Interwar Vienna: Culture between Tradition and Modernity*, ed. Deborah Holmes and Lisa Silverman (Rochester: Camden House, 2009), 1-4.

³⁰ Deborah R. Coen, *Vienna in the Age of Uncertainty: Science, Liberalism and Private Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2.

³¹ Haag, "Ideology," 24.

³² Haag, "Ideology," 10-11.

³³ Haag, "Ideology," 10-11.

Depression — a dynamic that paralleled the popularity of Spann's own version of corporatism.³⁴

By the outbreak of the First World War, Spann was already a prominent political theorist and respected intellectual, having gained his first professorial position in 1911, at the age of thirty-one.³⁵ His pre-war writings evince core components of what would later develop into the philosophy of universalism. In a 1910 article on political economy, Spann proposed that the mechanics of economies were inextricable from the whole of the society in which they developed.³⁶ "Mechanistic" empiricism was a flawed concept that failed to address social realities, and ontological reality could only be grasped with reference to social processes and exchanges.³⁷ This was a largely intuitive process. Spann's emphasis on the value of the "whole," a quasi-mystical metaphysical concept encompassing both spirit and reality, would become one of the essential pillars of organic universalism.³⁸ Spann thus situated himself in the tradition of Romantic and conservative hostility toward liberalism, in which liberalism was seen as a materialistic, destabilising force lacking in spirituality and order.³⁹ In his extensive writings on Spann, Haag has placed particular emphasis on the influence of Romanticism, arguing that twentieth-century Austrian corporatism could only be understood as a continuation of the "cultural despair" first experienced by Romantics and conservative intellectuals in the aftermath of the French Revolution.⁴⁰ As prominent as Romanticism was in Spann's writings, especial weight must be granted to the role of real-existing politics — that is, the context of the twentieth century. Political realities not only shaped the content and direction of Spannian philosophy, but informed the circle's use of Romanticism and, in turn, impelled Spann to integrate fascism into his worldview.

³⁴ Diamant, "Austrian Catholics," 610.

³⁵ Haag, "Ideology," 24.

³⁶ Othmar Spann, "Die mechanische-mathematische Analogie in der Volkswirtschaftslehre," *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 30 (1910): 786-824. Additional early works by Spann include sociological investigations. See Othmar Spann, *Untersuchungen über die uneheliche Bevölkerung in Frankfurt am Main* (Dresden: D. V. Böhmert, 1905). See also Spann's early full-length books, in which he introduced the concept of universalism. Othmar Spann, *Die Haupttheorien der Volkswirtschaftslehre auf dogmengeschichtlicher Grundlage* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1911); Othmar Spann, *Gesellschaftslehre* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1914).

³⁷ Haag, "Ideology," 25.

³⁸ Arnulf Rieber, *Vom Positivismus zum Universalismus: Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung und Kritik des Ganzheitsbegriffs von Othmar Spann* (Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1971), 18.

³⁹ For more on interwar uses of Romanticism, see Rüdiger Safranski, *Romanticism: A German Affair*, trans. Robert E. Goodwin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 223-238.

⁴⁰ Haag, "Ideology," 1; Barbara Kolm, "European Corporatism and Freedom of Association," *The Journal of Private Enterprise* 28, no. 2 (April 2013): 42.

Like many of the other men considered in this thesis, Spann had first-hand experience of war. He served as a first reserve lieutenant for the duration of the Great War and saw action in the Battle of Galicia, at Lemberg/Lviv in 1914.⁴¹ He nevertheless managed to adapt his pre-war expertise to the new circumstances by earning a position on the Scientific Committee for Wartime Economy in Vienna.⁴² After the war, Spann returned to the lectern, where his status as a veteran bolstered his popularity within certain student demographics. Jakob Baxa (1895-1979), who had been rendered permanently deaf on the front line, was drawn to Spann's incisive criticisms of the modern world, as were a bevy of younger men who had not seen service but had grown up imbibing the wartime climate and the increasing socio-political alienation that accompanied the collapse of the Habsburg Empire.⁴³

These pivotal years were also when Spann wrote what is generally considered to be his magnum opus, *Der wahre Staat* (*The True State*), first published in 1921. Originating as an extension of his lectures, the book's basic assertions were that society — understood ideally as a composite of natural or “organic” elements — was of fundamental economic, spiritual, and ontological importance. Spann's “organic universalism,” which he also referred to as “the doctrine of totality,” held that the concept of self-actualisation was a myth, and that the individual was made significant only by virtue of incorporation into society — a process Spann termed *Gezweigung*.⁴⁴ This concept, difficult to translate into English, is the opposite of *Entweigung* (dividing) and has connotations of growth or roots. Part of Spann's success as a lecturer was owing to his frequent use of metaphor to demystify complex points. He illustrated *Gezweigung* by inviting readers to conceptualise the prongs of a fork, which branch off into individual units but are lent meaning only by their connection to the rest of the utensil.⁴⁵ Recalling Hegelian dialectics, Spann stressed the processual underpinnings of universalism, with the “whole” never being complete and recognition of spiritual existence being contingent on change or “ignition,” often attained through the dynamics of relationships, such as mother and child, or teacher and pupil.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 78.

⁴² Maaß, *Dritter Weg*, 32.

⁴³ Haag, “Ideology,” 55, 59.

⁴⁴ Othmar Spann, “Der wahre Staat,” in *Othmar Spann Gesamtausgabe Band 5*, ed. Walter Heinrich, Hans Riehl, Ulrich Schöndorfer, Raphael Spann and Ferdinand A. Westphalen (Graz: Akademische Druck u. Verlagsanstalt, 1972), 41.

⁴⁵ Spann, “Wahrer Staat,” 41.

⁴⁶ Spann, “Wahrer Staat,” 40.

These relationships were, according to Spann, inherently unequal. Organic universalism was based on the belief in fundamental inequalities, echoing both Catholic and biological conceptions of hierarchy, and involved recognition of the metaphysical importance of nature and the inequalities inherent in the natural world.⁴⁷ Spann summarised equality wryly as a “whimsical and contradictory concept,” the realisation of which was not only impossible, but undesirable.⁴⁸ He often metaphorically referred to bodily organs: each organ has a role to play to coordinate the function of the human body, but certain parts, such as the heart and lungs, would always be more important than others, such as the little finger.⁴⁹ Universalism, in turn, applied these concepts to all elements of existence, including spirituality, society, the economy, and the state, with the individual acting as both participant in and reflection of these ontological processes.⁵⁰ The belief in fundamental inequality, common to Conservative Revolutionaries, ensured that *Der wahre Staat* soon garnered a receptive audience.⁵¹ Even though Spann’s socio-economic interpretations ran counter to the dominant empiricist theories of the time, Spann’s theories were also well-received by the broader academic community. His lectures were packed consistently and his books appeared in multiple editions in the 1920s alone.⁵²

Like *Der wahre Staat*, the Spann circle itself was initially an outgrowth of Spann’s rigorous lecturing regimen. Spann invited his most dedicated students — including Baxa, Heinrich, Riehl, and Andreae — to his home every Sunday morning for private seminars.⁵³ The first concrete product of these seminars was a series of texts produced periodically under the title *Die Herdflamme* (*The Hearth*). The *Herdflamme*’s self-stated purpose was to act as a “collection of foundational texts in the social sciences,” representing “all times and all peoples.”⁵⁴ Ostensibly, the Spann circle edited and reissued these texts as a means to understand, and in turn preserve, works of intellectual and cultural merit. Under this banner, they published sources ranging from Plato’s *Republic* to Augustine’s *City of God* and select

⁴⁷ Spann, “Wahrer Staat,” 66.

⁴⁸ Spann, “Wahrer Staat,” 65.

⁴⁹ Spann, “Wahrer Staat,” 211-212.

⁵⁰ Hans Riehl, “Othmar Spann, sein Werden und sein Werk,” 1926, in *Hans Riehl: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Graz: Akademische Druck, 1961), 4-5.

⁵¹ At around this time, Spann established connections with such figures in the Conservative Revolution as Werner Sombart and Oswald Spengler. Wassermann, *Black Vienna*, 84.

⁵² Wassermann, *Black Vienna*, 80-81.

⁵³ Haag, “Politics of Totality,” 58.

⁵⁴ This was printed on the title page of all works published under *die Herdflamme*. For example: Plato, “Platons Schriften,” trans. and ed. Wilhelm Andreae, in *Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker*, Band 3, ed. Othmar Spann (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1926), i.

excerpts from Thomas Aquinas.⁵⁵ Their primary focus, however, was on German Romanticism. Baxa, as a recognised authority on the subject, edited and re-issued a number of Romantic texts for the *Herdflamme*.⁵⁶ He edited the *Herdflamme*'s first publication: a 1922 re-issuing of Adam Müller's (1779-1829) *Elemente der Staatskunst*, originally published in 1809.⁵⁷

All of this served a prosaic purpose. Through annotating their sources, the circle sought to situate Spann's emergent philosophy in a sound historical context, thereby broadening its appeal and contributing to a sense of legitimacy. A good example of this is a collection of texts, edited by Baxa in 1924. The book included excerpts from Romantic thinkers, including Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), Novalis (1772-1801), and Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853). In the introduction, Baxa stated that Romanticism was not a movement that could be confined to any specific discipline or period; it was a concept encompassing existence itself.⁵⁸ To underscore the universal character of Romantic philosophy, Baxa traced currents of Romanticism to Plato, Goethe, and even to ancient India. The previous edition of the *Herdflamme* had been a volume on "Old Indian politics" (*Altindische Politik*), authored by Alfred Hillebrandt (1853-1927), who drew attention to parallels between ancient Indian mysticism and key Western thinkers.⁵⁹ Expanding on this, Baxa suggested that the German Romantics had reined in the misdirected pantheism of these earlier forms of mysticism and recognised the importance of God as a force to unify universalist impulses.⁶⁰ Drawing upon Schelling, Baxa located the "heart" of Romanticism in the interconnected character of man's soul with nature, with God acting as the epitome of this synthesis: both creator and creation.⁶¹ Adam Müller had, in turn, been

⁵⁵ Early publications include Thomas Aquinas, "Ausgewählte Schriften zur Staatslehre des Thomas von Aquino," trans. and ed. Friedrich Schrenvogel, in *Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker*, Band 3, ed. Othmar Spann (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1922); St Augustine, "Gottestaar," trans. and ed. Karl Völker, in *Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker*, Band 5, ed. Othmar Spann (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1923); Plato, "Staat," trans. and ed. Wilhelm Andreae, in *Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker*, Band 6, ed. Othmar Spann (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1925).

⁵⁶ Haag, "Politics of Totality," 59.

⁵⁷ Adam Müller, "Die Elemente der Staatskunst," ed. Jakob Baxa, in *Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker*, ed. Othmar Spann (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1922).

⁵⁸ Jakob Baxa, "Gesellschaft und Staat im Spiegel deutscher Romantik," in *Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker*, Band 8, ed. Othmar Spann (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1924), 3-4.

⁵⁹ Alfred Hillebrandt, "Altindische Politik: Eine Übersicht auf Grund der Quellen," in *Die Herdflamme: Sammlung der gesellschaftswissenschaftlichen Grundwerke aller Zeiten und Völker*, Band 7, ed. Othmar Spann (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1923), 24-41. These observations also occur in Spann's writings. See, for example, Othmar Spann, *Geschichtsphilosophie*, 2nd ed. (Graz: Akademische Druck – u. Verlagsanstalt, 1970), 34-35.

⁶⁰ Baxa, "Gesellschaft und Staat," 8-9.

⁶¹ Baxa, "Gesellschaft und Staat," 12.

instrumental in applying this philosophy to the state. Baxa thus summarised the Romantic conception of the state:

The Romantics dreamt of rebuilding the conditions of the Middle Ages, and recapturing the organic means of living, which had been destroyed in the year 1789. [...] They no longer envisioned the state as purely individualistic, the sum of atoms, but rather conceptualised it as a whole, as a unity, as an organism. Their conception of the state was thus, in modern terminology, already universalistic.⁶²

Baxa's selection of the adjectives "organic" and "universalistic" was hardly coincidental. While Spann may not have coined these phrases, *Der wahre Staat* endowed them with a new and specific intellectual-philosophical significance. By suggesting that the Romantics had anticipated organic universalism, the Spann circle implied not only that Spannian philosophy was applicable across time and space, but also that it continued the rigour and discipline of the German Romantic tradition. The pragmatic use of sources as seen in the *Herdflamme* set a methodological precedent that the Spann circle would soon apply to Italian Fascism.

Early Political Activity and the Turn Towards Fascism

The Spann circle's early intellectual endeavours may not have been political in an overt way, but they were supplemented by practical methods to expand the circle's influence. Spann was singularly successful in installing his students in prominent educational positions, from where they could disseminate universalist philosophy. Andreae, Baxa, and Heinrich (to name just three) were appointed to professorial positions in 1930, 1932, and 1933, respectively.⁶³ Spann's influence in higher education extended also to students' organisations such as the Deutsche Studentenschaft (German Student Organisation); and to numerous additional academic groups, such as the Akademische Legion (Academic Legion), a group of conservative academics; and a composite of intellectuals known as the Kameradschaftsbund (KB).⁶⁴ The latter, formed in 1926 by Heinrich and Walter Brand (1907-1980), Spann's personal assistant, was more obviously political, being dedicated to the restructuring of Central Europe along corporatist lines.⁶⁵ The KB produced its own journal, *Die Junge Front* (*The Young Front*), and acted as a

⁶² Baxa, "Gesellschaft und Staat," 16-17.

⁶³ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 91.

⁶⁴ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 90. For more on the KB, see Haag, "Knights of the Spirit," 137-139.

⁶⁵ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 92.

bridge between the Spann circle's Austrian homeland and the Sudetenland.⁶⁶ With the banning of the Sudeten NSDAP in 1933, the KB — most notably via Brand, Heinz Rutha (1897-1937), and Konrad Henlein (1898-1945) — was instrumental in the founding of the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP), which pursued a largely Spannian line until at least 1936.⁶⁷ Upon the 1938 annexation of the Sudetenland, Henlein was appointed SS-Obergruppenführer under Hitler, and the group absorbed formally by the Nazis.⁶⁸

Establishing a cadre of Spannian intellectuals to act as a vanguard for the “universalist revolution” in various political and social groups — as Henlein, Rutha, and Brand attempted to do in the SdP — was of highest tactical importance for Spann. To make these incursions influential, the members of the Spann circle also drew upon nepotistic advantages and hereditary connections. Riehl and Andreae both hailed from prominent families, helping them to establish links to the business community.⁶⁹ Riehl cemented associations with international business by marrying the daughter of Anton Apold (1877-1950), general director of the Alpine Montagesellschaft.⁷⁰ As this company was German-operated, Riehl was able to forge connections with industrial leaders in Austria and Germany alike.

These associations were reflected in Spann's lectures, in which he emphasised the important positions that business and industry would have in a corporatist universalist system.⁷¹ Erneuerungs-Verlag, the Spann circle's principal publisher from 1931, was headquartered in Berlin with a secondary publishing location in Vienna, and enjoyed financial support from heavy industry, including from steel magnate Fritz Thyssen.⁷² The Spann circle also used personal connections to approach the DNSAP — the Austrian Nazis. Riehl's older brother, Walter (1881-1955), served as leader of the DNSAP between 1920 and 1923, but ultimately resigned over ideological differences with Hitler.⁷³ For the Spann circle, contact with the Nazis

⁶⁶ Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 163.

⁶⁷ Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists*, 163.

⁶⁸ As Glassheim notes, Nazis were influential in the SpD from its inception. The Junge Front was largely Nazi controlled from 1934, and between 1936 and 1938, the SpD was independent essentially in name only. Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists*, 163.

⁶⁹ Although Andreae chose not to continue his family's shipping company, he maintained multiple business contacts. Haag, “Politics of Totality,” 61.

⁷⁰ Hans Riehl, “Mein Leben,” in *Hans Riehl: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Ganz: Akademische Druck, 1961), 250.

⁷¹ Haag, “Politics of Totality,” 60.

⁷² Archiv für die Geschichte der Soziologie in Österreich, “Der Erneuerungs-Verlag,” accessed March 1, 2025, <https://agso.uni-graz.at/archive/sozio/verlage/erneuerungsverlag/00.htm>.

⁷³ It is worth noting that Walter Riehl was a former social democrat and, as such, subscribed to a far more democratic reading of National Socialism. For more on Riehl's political history and ideological disputes with Hitler, see Bruce F. Pauley, *Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis: A History of Austrian National Socialism* (Chapel

could only have seemed beneficial, as the Nazis were, like the universalists, dedicated to the construction of an ultranationalist, pan-German state.

The University of Vienna in the 1920s and early 1930s was a microcosm for the circle's praxis, acting as a bloodless battleground in which Spann, his students, and other conservative academics — such as the legal historian Karl Hugelmann (1879-1959) and the philosopher Hans Eibl (1882-1958) — sought to overcome ideological and spiritual divides between Catholic and German nationalist students (including the growing Nazi movement).⁷⁴ This was such that the Viennese *Arbeiter-Zeitung* (*Workers' Newspaper*) characterised the University of Vienna in 1930 as being “monopolised by a cartel of clerics with swastikas.”⁷⁵ Ernst von Salomon, who attended Spann's lectures at Spann's own behest, recalled the atmosphere in more favourable terms. He praised Spann's ability to inspire and motivate his students and listeners of diverse backgrounds and described Spann's followers not only as the largest group at the university, but also as the most “spiritually alive” (*geistig lebendigste*).⁷⁶

Despite these associations with Nazism, it is important not to overemphasise the Spann circle's connections to fascism at this early stage. The majority of the circle's political efforts in the 1920s were guided broadly by the belief that conservative Catholicism could be reformed to align with universalism. These efforts resulted in a novel intellectual synthesis of German nationalism and conservative Catholicism.⁷⁷ In addition to its prominence in Viennese academic circles, Spannism succeeded in absorbing small Catholic groups across Austria, including the Wiener Studienrunde katholischer Soziologen (Viennese Study Society of Catholic Sociologists) and the Kärntner Gruppe katholischer Soziologen (Carinthian Group of Catholic Sociologists).⁷⁸ It also made significant inroads with some of the most prominent Catholic organisations of the time, notably the Leo-Gesellschaft (Leo Society) and the circle

Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 27-30. For more on the early relationship between the DNSAP and the NSDAP, see John T. Lauridsen, *Nazism and the Radical Right in Austria, 1918-1934* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2007), 296-303.

⁷⁴ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 69. For a detailed study on the political climate of University of Vienna, and the prevalence of antisemitism in this context, see Klaus Taschwer, *Hochburg des Antisemitismus: Der Niedergang der Universität Wien im 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Czernin, 2015); and Klaus Taschwer, “Geheimsache Bärenhöhle: Wie eine antisemitische Professorenclique nach 1918 and der Universität Wien jüdische Forscherinnen und Forscher vertrieb,” in *Alma Mater Antisemitica: Akademisches Milieu, Juden und Antisemitismus an den Universitäten Europas zwischen 1918 und 1939*, ed. Regina Fritz, Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, and Jana Starek (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016), 221-242.

⁷⁵ “Die Kelsen gehen, die Gleispach bleiben,” *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, July 11, 1930.

⁷⁶ Ernst von Salomon, *Der Fragebogen*, 22nd ed. (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2021), 266, 268.

⁷⁷ Wassermann, *Black Vienna*, 95. See also Hyazinth Amschl, “Der wahre Staat nach Prof. Dr. Othmar Spann,” *NR* 5 (1923): 785-787.

⁷⁸ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 98.

of Joseph Eberle, publisher of the conservative journals *Das neue Reich* (*The New Reich*) and, subsequently, *Die schönere Zukunft* (*The Brighter Future*). Both journals printed excerpts from Spann's writings, with *Die schönere Zukunft* being a particularly influential conservative mouthpiece with a readership spanning across Central Europe.⁷⁹

Universalism must have seemed an attractive alternative to many conservatives for whom fascism seemed too volatile. Nevertheless, many conservative Catholic thinkers remained unconvinced of universalism's merits, and ultimately Spann did not succeed in reconciling the Catholic conservative and German nationalist causes into a single united front. For Catholic critics, including the German Jesuit and Solidarist Oswald von Nell-Breuning (1890-1991) and academic Eberhard Welty (1902-1965), Spann simply failed to grant sufficient weight to Catholic social doctrines.⁸⁰ Direct Biblical or papal references are indeed rare in Spann's work, with Catholic teaching often relegated to examples alongside more prosaic metaphors.⁸¹ Spann's incursions into politics over the course of the 1920s thus resulted in a cleavage between universalists and moderate Catholics, known as Solidarists. Unlike Spann, who drew the bulk of his Catholic support from admirers of earlier corporatist social thinkers (primarily Vogelsang), Solidarism argued that the realisation of a Catholic society did not require revolutionary action.⁸² Instead, it could be achieved through compromise with democracy, liberalism, and capitalism. This position was, of course, anathema to Spann. In 1932, he issued a strongly worded rebuke in *Die schönere Zukunft*, in which he argued that meaningful reform was to be achieved "not through the advancement of Solidarism nor through a dull, weak disavowal of external democracy [but by] a decided reform through organic-universalist thought."⁸³ Unsurprisingly, Spann's belligerent stance only worsened the division between Catholic universalists and Solidarists.

According to Wasserman, Spann's actions demonstrate that he was attempting to steer the Catholic intelligentsia in a "fascist" direction.⁸⁴ While it may be accurate to describe Spann's ideal society as "fascist" by 1932, it is important not to reverse the order of Spann's thinking,

⁷⁹ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 93.

⁸⁰ Haag, "Politics of Totality," 69-70.

⁸¹ See, for example, Spann, "Wahrer Staat," 212-213.

⁸² Jonas Hagedorn, *Oswald von Nell-Breuning SJ: Aufbrüche der katholischen Soziallehre in der Weimarer Republik* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 94.

⁸³ Othmar Spann, "Schicksalsstunde der deutschen Katholiken," *Schönere Zukunft* 7 (1931/32): 566.

⁸⁴ Wasserman states, specifically, that the Spann circle was dedicated to "the creation of a fascist state," and that Spann demanded that "Catholic intellectuals [had to] join the fascist fight." Elsewhere, however, he acknowledges that "Spann's political convictions derived from his philosophy, not vice versa." Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 94, 97, 77.

particularly when considering the circle's activities retrospectively. Spann did not approach universalism through the lens of fascism; he approached fascism through the lens of universalism. The Spann circle's initial encroachment into the fascist sphere formed part of an indiscriminate targeting of conservative, nationalist, and authoritarian groups. As will be explored below, the Spann circle underwent a radicalising process beginning in the late 1920s. Fascism did not rise to a position of prominence in the Spann circle's publications until the early 1930s, when Fascist Italy was instituting corporatist labour reforms and Hitler was making enormous political gains on the northern side of the border. Spann's initial interest in fascism was in part due to tactical opportunism, and in part to the weakening of his position within the Catholic and traditional conservative intelligentsia. As it became clearer that universalism would not replace Catholic conservatism, Spann felt compelled to look more closely at fascism as a potential expression for universalism.

The Heimwehr: A Bridge between Universalism and Fascism

From the mid-1920s, the Spann circle established a political connection that facilitated its unequivocal entry into fascist politics. The Heimwehr (less commonly referred to as the Heimatschutz) was the largest paramilitary group in Austria, originally formed in the winter of 1918-1919. It has often been seen as Austria's equivalent of the German Freikorps, due not only to the groups' comparable origins, but to their shared anti-Marxism and fear of "internal enemies."⁸⁵ Like the Freikorps, the Heimwehr's historiography has been largely and unavoidably shaped by the "fascist question." It is commonly accepted as a bona-fide fascist movement, if not the only true fascist movement in interwar Austria.⁸⁶ A competing position characterises it as essentially a conservative organisation with fascist trappings.⁸⁷ But whether the Heimwehr's fascism was wholesale or mere "window dressing," few contend that it was inspired by Italy.⁸⁸ This relationship was, however, characterised by little-explored, shifting

⁸⁵ Unlike the Freikorps, however, the Heimwehr's volunteer troops were initially furnished with imperial weapons by the interim Austrian government. Ludwig Jedlicka, "The Austrian Heimwehr," *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 1 (1966): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200946600100108>.

⁸⁶ Wasserman, for instance, characterises the Heimwehr as "fascist." Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 93. For one of the most notable works on the Heimwehr to argue this position, see Francis L. Carsten, *Fascist Movements in Austria: From Schönerer to Hitler* (London: Sage, 1977). Ludwig Jedlicka argues that the Heimwehr was the only fascist movement in Austria. Jedlicka, "Heimwehr," 127-128.

⁸⁷ Jason Engle argued that the Heimwehr was principally a militarist movement. Jason Engle, "A Legion of Legacy: Tyrolean Militarism, Catholicism and the Heimwehr Movement" (PhD diss., The University of Southern Mississippi, 2017), 1-10.

⁸⁸ Jedlicka, "Heimwehr," 132.

ideological complexities, and processual and discursive dynamics. The Spann circle acted as an intermediary; an intellectual conduit of utmost importance in the Heimwehr's shift towards fascism. The efforts to reform the Heimwehr along universalist lines in turn resulted in the circle itself drawing ideologically closer to Italian Fascism, adopting elements of soldierly nationalism that were already pronounced in the Heimwehr. Spann and his students acted, partly unintentionally, as a vehicle for the transmission and entrenchment of Fascist ideas, while simultaneously becoming more receptive to those ideas themselves.⁸⁹

Throughout its existence, the Heimwehr was plagued by internal tensions and an absence of clear political direction.⁹⁰ During most of the 1920s, its attitude towards Italian Fascism reflected these ideological and methodological inconsistencies. Some Heimwehr leaders, echoing the opinions of large sections of the Austrian populace, were hostile to Italy due to Mussolini's attempts to Italianise German-speaking populations in South Tyrol.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Italian Fascism exercised a fascination for Heimwehr men, particularly as Mussolini (who viewed the Heimwehr as the most viable means of realising fascism in Austria) attempted to woo the Heimwehr leadership with promises of loans and armaments.⁹²

Richard Steidle (1881-1940), erstwhile leader of the Tyrolean faction, became overall leader of the Heimwehr in October, 1927. Working closely with the Chief of Staff of the Tyrolean Heimwehr and future founder of the GSF, Waldemar Pabst (see above – Chapter Two), he set about attempting to streamline the Heimwehr both militarily and ideologically.⁹³ Steidle and Pabst were staunch admirers of corporatism and Italian Fascism, but lacked appreciation of ideological specificities.⁹⁴ This presented a seemingly perfect opening for the Spann circle.⁹⁵ Steidle agreed with Spann that it was vital to establish a “positive” philosophy to underpin the Heimwehr's battle against communism and to unify the movement.⁹⁶ In turn, Spann recognised the importance of using the successes of fascistic regimes to further the cause of universalism.

⁸⁹ Lauridsen, *Nazism and the Radical Right in Austria*, 192.

⁹⁰ Martin Kitchen, *The Coming of Austrian Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1980), 60.

⁹¹ Kitchen, *Coming of Austrian Fascism*, 59.

⁹² Kitchen, *Coming of Austrian Fascism*, 60.

⁹³ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 81; Kitchen, *Coming of Austrian Fascism*, 61-62.

⁹⁴ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 83.

⁹⁵ The tightening of relations between the Spann circle and the Heimwehr was facilitated by the Christian Socials under the leadership of Ignaz Seipel, who served a second term as Chancellor of Austria from October 1926 until May 1929. Seipel was in regular correspondence with Spann, and a strong advocate of strengthening the Heimwehr as a means to combat social democracy. For more detailed information on these events, see Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 83-84.

⁹⁶ The question of precisely when, and to what extent, the Heimwehr adopted Spann's universalism is debated by historians. Edmondson notes that the Heimwehr was always “vaguely corporatist”; nevertheless, the date for the integration of Spannian philosophy is generally set at 1929. Edmondson, *Austrian Heimwehr*, 2-10.

Not only would this increase universalism's appeal to the many fascist sympathisers in the Heimwehr and its support base, but it would also help to furnish universalism with the "everyday" appeal necessary for mass political struggle.

In 1929, Walter Heinrich was installed as general advisory secretary to the Heimwehr federal command, a post which rendered him largely responsible for the content and dissemination of propaganda.⁹⁷ Hans Riehl was similarly appointed as leader of the propaganda department of the Heimwehr sub-division, the Selbstschutzverband (Self-Defence Association), in October of the same year, while Spann himself forged a close working relationship with Walter Pfrimer (1881-1968), head of one of the Heimwehr's most influential factions, the Styrian Heimatschutz.⁹⁸ These installations came immediately after Heinrich had returned from a four-month visit to Italy, during which he had thrown himself headlong into the study of Fascism.⁹⁹ The result was an enthusiastic flurry of publications, some aimed at the Heimwehr rank-and-file, others at the circle's traditional academic readership. Of course, Heinrich's most pressing order of business was to imbue the Heimwehr with the universalist ethos. Adopting the language of soldierly nationalism, he praised the nationalistic passion of his "comrades" (*Kameraden*), while impressing upon them the need to work towards a firmer set of ideological principles.¹⁰⁰ Only thus would the movement be capable of rivalling, and therefore combatting, Marxism and social democracy.

In a pamphlet aimed at Heimwehr laymen, for whom his usual academic language would likely have been too erudite, Heinrich outlined why national revolution needed to destroy democracy and the current system of labour relations. Free market capitalism led to the creation of an alienated industrial proletariat which, Heinrich claimed, furnished Marxism with its support base.¹⁰¹ With its traditional appeal to petty-bourgeois demographics, hitherto the Heimwehr had all but avoided anti-capitalist rhetoric, focusing on abolishing parliamentary democracy without questioning its economic base.¹⁰² But for Spann and Heinrich, installing a corporatist state involved a systematic rejection of the international free market, which, like Bolshevism,

⁹⁷ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 84.

⁹⁸ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 84; Haag, "Politics of Totality," 106.

⁹⁹ Mark Cornwall, *The Devil's Wall: The Nationalist Youth Mission of Heinz Rutha* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 298; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 76. See also Siegfried's analysis of the circle's relationship with the Heimwehr: 100-123.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Heinrich, *Grundsätzliche Gedanken über Staat und Wirtschaft: Ein programmatischer Vortrag über die geistigen Grundlagen der Heimatbewegung im Auftrage der Bundesführung der österreichischen Selbstschutzverbände gehalten* (Vienna: Bundesführung der österreichischen Selbstschutzverbände, 1929), 5.

¹⁰¹ Heinrich, *Grundsätzliche Gedanken*, 11, 13.

¹⁰² Lauridsen, *Nazism and the Radical Right*, 191.

represented loathed “materialism.”¹⁰³ This soon coalesced into the Heimwehr’s so-called *Korneuburger Eid* (*Korneuburg Oath*), which Heinrich co-authored. Steidle presented the oath as a speech to a general assembly of the lower Austrian Heimwehr in May, 1930.¹⁰⁴ It aligned the Heimwehr’s aims officially with those of the Spann circle by affirming the former’s commitment to building a corporate state:

We condemn Western democratic parliamentarism and the party-state! In its place, we want to establish the self-administration of corporate bodies, and a strong state leadership, composed not of party representatives, but of leaders of the great corporate bodies and of the most capable and trustworthy members of our organisation. [...] Every comrade feels and acknowledges himself as the bearer of a new German political ethos [...] He recognises the three powers: faith in God, his own hardened will, the word of the Führer!¹⁰⁵

In one of his propaganda pamphlets for the Heimwehr, Heinrich used language that was even more black-and-white: “Either our organic state idea will be victorious, or Bolshevism will.”¹⁰⁶

This kind of fighting language — emotive, provocative, and/or belligerent rhetoric, often populated with war metaphors — was employed initially as a means to better transmit Spannian ideas to the Heimwehr yet soon became a feature of Spannian publications more broadly. In January, 1931, the first issue of the circle’s best-known journal, *Ständisches Leben*, appeared. It set a markedly different tone compared to the circle’s relatively sedate early publications. In the opening declaration, Spann emphasised “action” (*die Tat*) to an unprecedented degree, stressing that universalism was not an abstract philosophical concept, but a practical political blueprint.¹⁰⁷ The journal also employed references to soldierly concepts or military nationalism. Some articles drew upon military allegories, describing, for example, the individual in a corporatist system as “a soldier in a regiment”; others praised the creation of a “new German people” through “the frontline experience”; still others reviewed works by fascist authors in favourable tones, describing, for instance, spiritual representatives of the true state as “soldierly in public life and leadership.”¹⁰⁸ Spann’s own articles employed incendiary

¹⁰³ Lauridsen, *Nazism and the Radical Right*, 191.

¹⁰⁴ Jedlicka, “Austrian Heimwehr,” 138.

¹⁰⁵ “Korneuburger Eid,” May 18, 1930, Austria Forum, accessed March 3, 2025, https://austria-forum.org/af/Wissenssammlungen/Schicksalsorte/Korneuburg_N%C3%96.

¹⁰⁶ Heinrich, *Grundsätzliche Gedanken* 23.

¹⁰⁷ Othmar Spann, “Zum Geleit,” *Ständisches Leben* 1, no. 1 (1931): 1. On the importance of this idea (*die Tat*), see also Kurt Sontheimer, “Der Tatkreis,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 7, no. 3 (July 1959): 229-260.

¹⁰⁸ Siegmund M. Radda [i.e. Siegmund Maria Radda von Boskowitz], “Einiges vom neueren Schrifttum zur Frage einer organischen Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsverfassung,” *Ständisches Leben* 4, no. 6/7 (1934): 321; Wilhelm Longert, “Das Versagen der alten Nationalen Opposition,” *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 2 (1933): 75; Karl Faigl, “Nationalpolitische Erziehung,” *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 1 (1933): 37.

descriptors, describing political opponents as “enemies,” and liberalism and Marxism as “false doctrines” leading to “economic suicide.”¹⁰⁹

Many of Spann’s articles from the early issues of *Ständisches Leben* were compiled in 1934 into a book, *Kämpfende Wissenschaft (Fighting Science)*, the very title of which also speaks to the Spann circle’s radicalisation. Fighting language was, of course, just one component in the campaign to broaden the circle’s target audience. Under the general editorship of Spann-follower Wilhelm Longert, Erneuerungs-Verlag further extended the Spann circle’s reach from 1931 by publishing pamphlets under the series title *Bücherei des Ständestaates (The Corporate State Library)*.¹¹⁰ These volumes, along with *Ständisches Leben*, were not only physically accessible, but explained universalism’s heady concepts in short, easily digestible points for non-specialist readerships. A prime illustration is *Hauptpunkte der universalistischen Staatsauffassung (Foundations of the Universalist Conception of the State)* authored by Spann in 1931.¹¹¹ In a pithy thirty pages, Spann provided an overview of the ideological basis of universalism and identified the necessary functions of the corporate state. In practice, however, the Spann circle’s expansion during this period was not limited to opportunism and aesthetics. Spann and his colleagues also internalised political features associated with Fascism, adding new and radical elements to universalist ideology.

Ständisches Leben: Italian Fascism as Corporate Universalism?

¹⁰⁹ Othmar Spann, *Kämpfende Wissenschaft: Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur Volkswirtschaftslehre, Gesellschaftslehre und Philosophie* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1934), 71, 77.

¹¹⁰ Relevant publications include Othmar Spann, “Die Irrungen des Marxismus. Eine Darstellung und Prüfung seiner Wirtschaftslehre,” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, no. 1, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1931), 56; Wilhelm Longert, “Liberale oder organische Staats- und Wirtschaftsordnung?” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, no. 2, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1931), 64; Walter Heinrich, “Staat und Wirtschaft: Ein programmatischer Vortrag gehalten von Privatdozenten,” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, no. 4, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Vienna: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1931), 52; Wilhelm Wernet, “Das Handwerk in der berufsständischen Wirtschaft,” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, no. 5, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Vienna: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1932), 68; Paul Karrenbrock, “Recht und Wirtschaft in der ständischen Ordnung,” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, no. 6, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Vienna: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1932), 66; Herbert Dullien, “Die ganzheitliche Volkswirtschaftslehre,” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, no. 7, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Vienna: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1934), 40; Hans Riehl, “Kleine Einführung in die Gesellschaftslehre in 18 Fragen und Antworten,” in *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, no. 8, ed. Wilhelm Longert (Berlin-Vienna: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1934), 32. For a more comprehensive list of material published under *Bücherei des Ständestaates*, see Reinhard Müller, “Der »Erneuerungs-Verlag« Berlin-Wilmersdorf-Wein 1929 und 1931 bis 1935,” 2013, *Archiv für Geschichte der Soziologie in Österreich*, accessed March 6, 2025, <https://agso.uni-graz.at/archive/sozio/verlage/erneuerungsverlag/00.htm>.

¹¹¹ Spann, “Hauptpunkte,” 32.

As part of the effort to make universalism more concrete, Italian Fascism was a near-constant reference point, particularly in *Ständisches Leben*. In addition to articles by the usual contributors, the journal also printed pieces by Fascist politicians and representatives of the Fascist state. These included Carlo Costamagna (1881-1965), a lawyer and corporate thinker who aided in the drafting of laws in Fascist Italy, and who, like Spann, viewed Fascism as a transitory phase on the road to corporatism; and Giuseppe Renzetti, the noted liaison officer between Fascist Italy and Germany.¹¹² Spann's son, Rafael, translated Italian texts for the journal, including speeches from Mussolini, which featured as opening articles of two editions.¹¹³ Like his father, Rafael Spann hoped that men such as Costamagna would act as native vanguards to disseminate universalism within Italy.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Spann and Heinrich joined other fascistic and conservative thinkers, like Julius Evola (1898-1974) and Carl Schmitt, in contributing to Costamagna's Italian-language journal, *Lo Stato* (*The State*), which pursued a comparable line to *Ständisches Leben*.¹¹⁵ Such collaborations formed part of the Spann circle's calculated methodological strategy to spread universalism beyond the German-speaking world and throughout the fascist sphere.

Considering their frequent praise for Fascism, Spannians needed to clarify where Fascism represented their values, and where it did not. Universalism underwent a degree of revision in the early 1930s which, in addition to the relatively superficial points acknowledged above, can be observed in the question of leadership and authority. The closing sentence of the Heimwehr's *Korneuburg Oath* contains what appears to be an endorsement of the Führerprinzip: "faith in God, his own hardened will, the word of the Führer!"¹¹⁶ To illustrate Spann's fascist "credentials," Wasserman states that Spann endorsed the Führerprinzip as early as 1921 in *Der wahre Staat*, noting that this made Spann a natural ally of the then-fledgling

¹¹² Carlo Costamagna, "Umriss einer faschistischen Staatslehre," *Ständisches Leben* 1, no. 6 (1931): 566-575; Giuseppe Renzetti, "Wiederaufbau der Wirtschaft durch Faschismus," *Ständisches Leben* 2, no. 5 (1932): 233-244.

¹¹³ *Ständisches Leben* reprinted articles and speeches from Mussolini on multiple occasions. The first, appearing in the very first issue of the journal, was a translation of a speech Mussolini had given in October 1930. Benito Mussolini, "Rede zur faschistischen Jahreswende," trans. Rafael Spann, *Ständisches Leben* 1, no. 1 (1931): 49-51.

¹¹⁴ For this reason, the Spann circle took particular interest in Costamagna. See, for example, Rafael Spann, "Der Kampf um die geistige Gleichschaltung in Italien. Bericht nebst einer Übersetzung aus Carlo Costamagnas »Lo Stato«," *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 5 (1933): 285-287.

¹¹⁵ A number of Spann and Heinrich's articles, from the years 1930-37, appeared in Italian translation in Costamagna's journal. See Othmar Spann and Walter Heinrich, *Lo stato organico. Il contributo della scuola di Vienna a »Lo Stato« di Carlo Costamagna* (Rome: Settimo Sigillo, 1997); Elisabetta Cassina Wolf, "Apolitia and Tradition in Julius Evola as Reaction to Nihilism," *European Review* 22, no. 2 (May 2014): 260, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S106279871400009X>.

¹¹⁶ "Korneuburger Eid," n.p.

Nazi movement.¹¹⁷ However, Spann's vision of hierarchy in 1921 was that of an intellectual first and foremost, recalling more of Platonic philosopher kings and Nietzschean supermen than of twentieth-century mass rallies and modern cults of personality.

Offset by fears of the tyranny of the majority, Spann's view of authority can only be understood in connection with his ubiquitous criticisms of democracy.¹¹⁸ Democracy, for Spann, involved a great degree of coercion on the part of political leaders over an ignorant voting majority, undermining its self-stated emphasis on freedom; whereas universalism set superior individuals in leadership positions, whose authority was mediated by the existence of different corporations and the organisational layers therein.¹¹⁹ If anything, Spann was quite naïve about the potential for the abuse of power in a one-party state, as revealed in a passage in *Der wahre Staat*:

Raised as a possible danger [...] is the spectre of the "police state," the state that interferes everywhere, wants to regulate everything and ultimately regulates some things to death, or at the very least becomes a nuisance, that is, a state which organises sterile links. And it is indeed true that this danger of paternalism, of excessive governing and done-to-death governance exists. [...] Essentially, however, this danger only exists for the centralised state; it can also be practically averted, primarily through spiritual vitality, the versatility of the human being, but also through organisational precautions which secure and maintain spiritual flexibility.¹²⁰

Spann viewed religious authenticity as a safeguard against potential despotism which, when coupled with the decentralised elements of corporatism, makes it difficult to argue that Spann endorsed the Führerprinzip outright. What can be said with more confidence is that the circle's preexisting, abstract (often vague) position on the question of leadership organisation acquired firmer parameters as a result of contact with Italian Fascism.

The Spann circle took advantage of its own vagueness on the question of institutionalised authority to argue for flexibility in questions of organisational composition. For instance, in 1931, Spann claimed that the existence of a nominal parliament was inconsequential. He used Italy, prior to its 1928 parliamentary restructuring, as an example, stating: "The essence [of the state] lies in the internal transformation of the order of life, not in the external forms."¹²¹ Similarly, in his 1931 book, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat* (*State Socialism and the Corporate State*), Andreae dismissed concerns about Fascist restrictions on press and personal

¹¹⁷ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 83.

¹¹⁸ Spann, "Wahrer Staat," 70-71, 116.

¹¹⁹ Spann, "Wahrer Staat," 117-120.

¹²⁰ Spann, "Wahrer Staat," 70-71.

¹²¹ Spann, "Hauptpunkte," 27.

freedoms as “liberal error.”¹²² This reflected Spann’s assertions that an “omnipotent state” could only exist under individualist, materialist conditions.¹²³ According to Spann, materialist labour relations alienated the population (whether conceived of as consumers under capitalism, or as proletariat in socialism), as all potential corporate representatives were homogenised and thus sublimated to economic interests. To argue this point further, Andreae spent much time contrasting the Fascist and Bolshevik revolutions, suggesting that the latter embodied all the negatives often applied to the former. Bolshevism was “abstract,” materialistic, and “dictatorial,” whereas the Fascist revolution was a manifestation of authentic nationalist zeal and therefore organically democratic.¹²⁴ In short, a universalist state could never be dictatorial, even if headed by a “dictator.” This was because the state merely operated as one of a nation’s corporate bodies, and was not, *ipso facto*, more powerful than other corporate bodies, such as the church or the education sector; it merely exercised a unique role.¹²⁵ The Spann circle’s permissive attitude towards state authority partly explains its lack of criticism of the centralising Fascist Labour reforms of 1934, which ran counter to the mode of corporatism outlined by Spann, and of which more will be said in the next section.¹²⁶

To reconcile Fascism with — or, more precisely, *sublimate* it to — universalism, the circle needed to establish that Fascism was a continuation of the intellectual traditions that the circle itself claimed to represent. Spannian scholars would have felt remiss had they completely overlooked the role of Enlightenment-era thought in the twentieth century, including its influence on Fascism. They acknowledged the importance of Fascist philosophers such as Balbino Giuliano (1879-1958), Enrico Corradini and Giovanni Gentile, and some of their most immediate influences, like Georges Sorel.¹²⁷ Certain aspects of “liberal thought” remained influential in Fascist Italy, such as in the philosophy of Pareto.¹²⁸ Spann accepted that modern Europe would be inconceivable “without the centuries-long philosophical endeavours of individualistic natural law,” but by the same token, he held that the reverse was also true: even the most pernicious elements of modern history had some basis in traditional, conservative,

¹²² Wilhelm Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat: Ihre grundlegenden Ideologien und die jüngste Wirklichkeit in Rußland und Italien* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1931), 204, 207.

¹²³ Spann, “Hauptpunkte,” 13.

¹²⁴ Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 200; Wilhelm Andreae, *Kapitalismus, Bolschewismus, Faschismus* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1933), 192.

¹²⁵ Spann, “Hauptpunkte,” 19-20.

¹²⁶ The contemporary German economist Wilhelm Röpke also observed the contradictions inherent in the Spann circle’s permissive attitude towards state authority. See Wilhelm Röpke, “Fascist Economics,” *Economica* 2, no. 5 (1935): 99.

¹²⁷ Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 200-202; Heinrich, *Faschismus*, 129, 155.

¹²⁸ Othmar Spann, “Instinkt und Bewußtheit in der Geschichte des Faschismus,” *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 1 (1933): 12.

and/or pre-Enlightenment philosophy.¹²⁹ “Positive” historical developments, such as the reconciliation of modern mass society and productive forces with organic hierarchy, were, in Spann’s view, closer to being actualised by Fascism than by any other major political ideology in the twentieth century.

This was largely owing to fascism’s nationalism. Andreae suggested that the realisation of a nationalist state demonstrated a Hegelian idealist dialectical synthesis.¹³⁰ It was vital that the state be hyper-nationalist, as nationalism represented organic, spiritual feeling, and according to Spann, the state needed to function as a repository of these features: an *Überindividuelle* (“above”- or “beyond-individual”) representing organic elements at the federal and international levels.¹³¹ This meant that modern-day ultranationalist states like Fascist Italy were best placed to adapt Romantic traditions to the twentieth century. The Spann circle praised the March on Rome and Mussolini’s nationalist reforms as the first stage in the transition to universalism. In 1933, Spann even went as far as to credit Fascism with rescuing Europe from Bolshevism (*Errettung vom Bolschewismus*).¹³² Ultimately, the entire world needed to be a composite of comparable nations, embodying national ideas. This would, according to Andreae, be a logical extension of Platonic and Hegelian conceptions of the state, in which individuals were bound to the state by both justice and spiritual feeling.¹³³ The true question was therefore whether Italy, having overcome the historical burden of individualism, could continue to harness organic elements and safeguard itself against “re-liberalisation.”¹³⁴

For the Spann circle, fascism was almost entirely devoid of ideology. As promising as Fascist achievements seemed, Spann made it clear that they were the result of “historical necessity” (*geschichtliche Notwendigkeit*), rather than of any ideological or theoretical imperative.¹³⁵ As early as 1929, Heinrich argued that Spain (then under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera) and Mussolini’s Italy had succeeded in overcoming the shortfalls of materialism “simply by being able to intervene without concern for individual interest groups and party egoism.”¹³⁶ The

¹²⁹ Spann, “Instinkt und Bewußtheit,” 11.

¹³⁰ Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 200-202.

¹³¹ Othmar Spann, “Die politische Wendung ist da – Was nun?” *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 2 (1933): 66.

¹³² Spann, “Instinkt und Bewußtheit,” 10.

¹³³ Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 200.

¹³⁴ Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 12-13.

¹³⁵ Spann, “Instinkt und Bewußtheit,” 11. To support his argument, Spann quoted comments that Mussolini himself had made on the subject in a recent essay, republished as the opening article in the March 1933 edition of *Ständisches Leben*. Mussolini’s early allegiance to socialism would have been something of a political embarrassment by the early 1930s; it is noteworthy that Spann did not remark on political materials that Mussolini and his comrades had authored in the early 1920s.

¹³⁶ Heinrich, “Staat und Wirtschaft,” 31-32.

following year, Heinrich claimed that the National Fascist Party had “no theoretical convictions, no conception of its end goal and of the form of the state.”¹³⁷ In a lecture in Rome to Italian Fascist audiences in 1933, Spann again praised the “political genius” Mussolini had evinced in 1922 by engaging in “the deed and nothing but the deed.”¹³⁸ These comments were all couched in clever appeals to Fascism’s “philosophy of action,” but cannot be construed as acceptance, or even recognition, of that ideological feature. Quite the opposite. The circle portrayed fascism as a political movement of enormous promise, but one that, like the Heimwehr, needed firm ideological instruction to achieve lasting greatness. The Spann circle flattered their Italian Fascist friends while viewing them, intellectually, as children.

The circle soon turned its attention to diagnosing the problems of the Fascist state and describing what needed to be done to cultivate corporate universalism. Heinrich acknowledged that the Fascist Grand Council had been building a “foundational intellectual basis for its regime,” but that this process remained incomplete.¹³⁹ Andreae noted that Mussolini had laid the groundwork for “state socialism” (by which he meant corporate universalism) through the erection of nominal corporate bodies, but that the Fascist government had yet to fulfil its corporate function. This entailed the performance of duties specific to the government, in order to represent and, if necessary, protect the other corporate bodies constituting the state.¹⁴⁰ Economically, it had been too cautious, despite the formation of a banking corporation.¹⁴¹ Writing for *Ständisches Leben*, Emanuel Hugo Vogel (1875-1946) further expanded on this point, arguing that, although Mussolini had increased the state’s capacity to intervene in the economy, private enterprise and free market capitalism remained antagonistic to the state and its people.¹⁴² In short, “the monetary and credit system need[ed] to be brought into a much closer relationship with the other branches of the national economy.”¹⁴³

Views on the role of capitalism within a corporate state admittedly varied among Spannians. In contrast to Vogel, both Heinrich and Siegmund Maria Radda von Boskowitz (1907-1945) were highly sympathetic to monopoly capitalism.¹⁴⁴ Heinrich’s conception was most clearly

¹³⁷ Walter Heinrich, *Der Faschismus: Staat und Wirtschaft im neuen Italien* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1932), 2.

¹³⁸ Spann, “Bedeutung des ständischen Gedankens für die Gegenwart,” 3.

¹³⁹ Heinrich, *Der Faschismus*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 207.

¹⁴¹ Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 216-218.

¹⁴² Vogel, “Neue Wege,” 20-21.

¹⁴³ Vogel, “Neue Wege,” 21.

¹⁴⁴ For a contemporary argument for the compatibility of Spann’s worldview (and fascism more generally) with corporate capitalism, see Karl Polanyi, “The Essence of Fascism,” 1935, in *Karl Polanyi: Economy and Society, Selected Writings*, ed. Michele Cangiani and Claus Thomasberger (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 81-107.

articulated in his 1932 book *Das Ständewesen (Corporate State Philosophy)*. As each corporate estate needed to be unified, he argued that smaller businesses needed to be eliminated as independent entities from the economic sector, leading to the formation of monopoly cartels.¹⁴⁵ These apparently competing views on capitalism, however, resolved into a criticism shared throughout the Spann circle: namely that Italian Fascism had failed fully to renounce its syndicalist roots.

Spannian philosophy viewed syndicalism as fundamentally incompatible with corporatism. This was based on a simple premise: syndicalism was grounded in materialist labour relations, whereas corporatism was not. Spannians were critical of Mussolini's decision, in the early years of his rule, to separate workers and employers into independent interest groups.¹⁴⁶ Admittedly, trade unions had since been "depoliticised" during the Fascist labour reforms of 1926-1927 (simply meaning that they had been purged of any political allegiances other than to Fascism), which Heinrich praised as the "foundational law in the establishment of a corporate state."¹⁴⁷ Workers and employers had then been partially amalgamated into so-called "corporations" by the 1927 *Carta del Lavoro*, which combined the hitherto separate workers and employers' syndicates into interest groups dictated by shared professions, and brought them into alignment with the central state authority.¹⁴⁸ Yet workers and employers remained divided into syndicates at the grassroots level.¹⁴⁹ Italians needed to qualify as either employers or workers in order to belong to a syndicate, resulting in the entire system being largely dictated by interests that stood in mutual opposition (even though, in reality, the economy favoured employers far more than employees).¹⁵⁰ This indicated that "syndicalism" continued to cloud Fascist judgement, and the socioeconomic construction of the state remained insufficiently corporatist.¹⁵¹ For Heinrich, the apparent perpetuation of the independent self-interests of

¹⁴⁵ Heinrich, *Ständewesen*, 146.

¹⁴⁶ Heinrich, *Der Faschismus*, 45-48.

¹⁴⁷ Heinrich, *Der Faschismus*, 45, 47.

¹⁴⁸ Riccardo Fucci, *A History of Italian Economic Thought* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 189.

¹⁴⁹ Radda, "neueres Schrifttum," 323; Francis L. Carsten, *The Rise of Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 75.

¹⁵⁰ Carsten, *Rise of Fascism*, 75-76.

¹⁵¹ The Fascist Laws of April 3, 1926 (original title: *Disciplina giuridica dei rapporti collettivi del lavoro and Norme per l'attuazione della legge*) stated that only trade unions allied with the state would be legally recognised; and the *Carta del Lavoro* reaffirmed commitment to the capitalist means of production, while establishing a federal labour corporation. Großen Faschistischen Rat, "Arbeitsordnung des Faschismus," 184-195; Haider, "Italian Corporate State," 228; Heinrich, *Faschismus*, 47; Vogel, "Neue Wege," 20; Andreae, *Staatssozialismus und Ständestaat*, 222.

employers and workers, and the atomisation of the syndicates, diluted the optimal function of the capitalist economy.¹⁵²

The more anti-capitalistic Spannians criticised the Italian system as being too orientated towards economic production, extending disproportionate capitalist interest over sectors such as the arts or the church, which needed to be valued on their own terms.¹⁵³ Further compounding the problem was the fact that the representative of each syndicate was not nominated by the men in his estate, but selected by the Fascist Grand Council itself, meaning that the system was insufficiently decentralised.¹⁵⁴ Heinrich characterised economies as being organised either “horizontally” or “vertically.”¹⁵⁵ The “horizontal” view referred to economic deregulation, which Heinrich considered favourable; “vertical” to excessive state control, which he considered unfavourable. To ensure a more horizontally-organised economy, sectors not typically associated with the economy — such as sciences and religion — also needed to be enfranchised economically, thereby deconstructing the traditional dominance of industry and goods that supported “materialist” worldviews.¹⁵⁶ The conclusion was that Fascist Italy remained too centralised and too materialistic.¹⁵⁷ This, as Spann explained to his Italian Fascist audience in 1933, was a holdover from the liberal worldview.¹⁵⁸ Liberalism, its attendant materialism and the threat of Bolshevism could not be overcome until the entire economy was subdivided into fully organic corporate associations.¹⁵⁹

Had Spann and his colleagues taken Fascist ideology more seriously, they might have noted that fascists could justify the “problematic” elements of the Italian state on ideological and philosophical grounds. Firstly, in dismissing syndicalism as a mere unwelcome vestige of liberal materialism, the Spann circle failed to appreciate the historical importance of syndicalism in Italian Fascist philosophy. Many Fascists were proud of their syndicalist pasts, viewing syndicalism as an important component of the struggle. Giovanni Gentile freely acknowledged that Fascism “has in fact taken over from syndicalism the idea of syndicates as

¹⁵² Heinrich, *Faschismus*, 68-69, 51-52.

¹⁵³ Vogel, “Neue Wege,” 20-21.

¹⁵⁴ Radda, “Schrifttum,” 322.

¹⁵⁵ Walter Heinrich, “Die Unzulänglichkeit der Begriffe “horizontal” und “vertikal” zur Erklärung des wirtschaftlichen Verbändewesens,” *Ständisches Leben* 1, no. 1 (1931): 34; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 172.

¹⁵⁶ Heinrich, “Unzulänglichkeit der Begriffe,” 34.

¹⁵⁷ Radda, “Schrifttum,” 324.

¹⁵⁸ Spann, “Bedeutung,” 10-11.

¹⁵⁹ Spann, “Bedeutung,” 10-11.

an educative moral force.”¹⁶⁰ He argued that Fascism had, however, succeeded in reconciling former trade union antagonisms by bringing the syndicates, and the individuals of which they comprised, into synchronisation with the state, creating dynamic entities (individual, syndicate, state) whose aims were parallel and mutually reflective. The “antagonistic relationships” that the Spann circle deemed so problematic to the functioning of the Italian state were viewed as integral to the dynamic reconciliation of thought and action, and/or could be justified by the centrality that fascist thought ascribed to the very idea of conflict. As long as lower-level practical antagonisms did not threaten the overall integrity and supremacy of the state, Fascism did not share the Spann circle’s sense of urgency for instilling full-blown corporatism. This extended to many fascists’ views on private ownership and the functioning of capitalism: if productive power ultimately served the state, lower-level competition was often viewed as potentially beneficial.¹⁶¹

For every Fascist sympathetic to the conservative corporatism of Costamagna, there were more who supported thinkers like Camillo Pellizzi and Sergio Panunzio, who viewed the supremacy of the state as an ideological-organisational necessity and saw no contradiction between the syndicates and their corporate representatives.¹⁶² For these thinkers, the state’s role was to optimally harness the productive capacity of its elements in order to construct a “living hierarchy,” which was, to use Heinrich’s terminology, unapologetically vertical in nature.¹⁶³ Struggle was seen as evidence of dynamism and readiness for action, qualities that fascists valued as extensions of soldierly nationalism and Jüngerian ideas of perpetual war and total mobilisation. For his part, Spann commented that every great statesman needed to be a warrior and that pacifism was an error; and, as we have seen, the Spann circle made its share of rhetorical appeals to soldierly nationalism.¹⁶⁴ However, it never suggested that existence was, or should be, characterised by perpetual struggle. Nor did Spann and his students recognise that these concepts were integral to fascism as an ideology. As a result, they misjudged grossly universalism’s ability to replace fascism.

¹⁶⁰ Giovanni Gentile, “From the Origins and Doctrine of Fascism,” 1934, in *Italian Fascisms: From Pareto to Gentile*, ed. Adrian Lyttelton, trans. Douglas Parmée (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), 312.

¹⁶¹ See article 9 of the *Carta del Lavoro*. “Labour Charter of Fascist Italy,” <https://archive.org/details/FascistLaborCharter>.

¹⁶² For a detailed discussion of Pellizzi and Panunzio’s thought, see Gregor, *Mussolini’s Intellectuals*, 175.

¹⁶³ Gregor, *Mussolini’s Intellectuals*, 175.

¹⁶⁴ Spann, “Hauptpunkte,” 16.

Conflicts with Nazism and the Decline of the Spann Circle

The Spann circle's attitude towards Italian Fascism paralleled its approach to German National Socialism. The circle hoped to offer a sound theoretical foundation to underpin Hitler's movement and ensure its lasting success.¹⁶⁵ This acquired particular urgency after Hitler became Reich Chancellor, as Spann deemed Hitler's regime the only viable way to realise his lifelong yearning to see the Germanic lands unified politically. As with Italian Fascism, the Spann circle attempted to stimulate reform from inside the Nazi regime by establishing and strengthening its footholds in various Nazi-allied circles and organisations. Almost all leading members of the Spann circle had explicit connections to National Socialism, particularly after 1933.¹⁶⁶ Spann himself became a full NSDAP member in 1933, and his eldest son, Adalbert, became a member of the SS.¹⁶⁷ From 1934, Andreae was a nominal member of (and financial contributor to) the SS, and a member of the Nationalsozialistischer Rechtswahrerbund (NSRB).¹⁶⁸ In Czechoslovakia, after some to-ing and fro-ing, the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront (SHF) — led by Henlein, backed by the KB, and conceived of in collaboration with the Sudeten Nazis (the DNSAP and DNP) — began to receive funding from Nazi Germany in mid-1934.¹⁶⁹ That same year, both Spann's sons, Rafael and Adalbert, became the editors of the Austrian National Socialist newspaper, *Österreichischer Beobachter* (*Austrian Observer*).¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ In 1932, Erneuerungs Verlag published an anonymous pamphlet criticising Hitler's lack of political direction and arguing for the necessity of reconciling with conservatives and implementing universalist corporatist policies. See ***, *Hitler und die deutsche Aufgabe: Der Bruderkampf zwischen Präsidialregierung und NSDAP als antiparlamentarischer Volksbewegung* (Berlin: Erneuerungs-Verlag, 1932), 33-40.

¹⁶⁶ Some of these connections, particularly towards the end of the 1930s, were almost certainly prompted by the desire to appease Nazi accusations of disloyalty. For example, Jakob Baxa applied for NSDAP membership in 1938, shortly before he was suspended from his lecturer position. Reinhard Müller, "Jakob Baxa," 2013, Archiv für die Geschichte der Soziologie in Österreich, accessed March 7, 2025, https://agso.uni-graz.at/archive/sozio/biografien/b/baxa_jakob.htm.

¹⁶⁷ Justus Beyer, "Der Spannkreis Gefahren und Auswirkungen," May 1936, in N 620/10, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 5; Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 76.

¹⁶⁸ "Hochschullererkartei Bd. 1: Buchstabe A – Ben," in R 4901/13258, Bundesarchiv Lichterfelde.

¹⁶⁹ For a detailed account of these events, see Haag, "Knights of the Spirit," 142-144. As Haag illuminates, "realpolitik" was a decisive factor in the Nazi decision to financially back the SHF. Unlike in Austria, Hitler decided that an aggressively expansionist Nazi program would be untenable in Czechoslovakia; funding the SHF was in keeping with this more restrained tactic. To appease the Czechoslovak government, Henlein declared that the SHF was a democratic party without any "links to fascism." In May, 1935, at the insistence of the Czechoslovak government, the SHF changed its name to the benign-sounding *Sudetendeutsche Partei* (SdP).

¹⁷⁰ Reinhard Müller, "Raphael Spann," 2013, Archiv für die Geschichte der Soziologie in Österreich, accessed March 7, 2025, https://agso.uni-graz.at/archive/sozio/biografien/s/spann_raphael_biografie.htm.

Unsurprisingly, articles about National Socialism became increasingly prevalent in *Ständisches Leben* after 1933, often outnumbering those on Italian Fascism.¹⁷¹

The circle also accelerated its political activities and won some support initially within Germany itself through its economic policies. Supported by Heinrich's economic theory and led by advisory board member to the Düsseldorf District Economic Council Paul Karrenbrock (1892-1966), the Spann circle established the Institut für Ständeswesen (Institute for Corporate Thought) in Düsseldorf, with the financial support of Fritz Thyssen.¹⁷² The Institute occupied itself with political missions like eliminating trade unionism and ensuring that economic interests underwent a suitable *Gleichschaltung* in favour of heavy industry and the National Socialist state.¹⁷³

Despite these cooperative endeavours, strain between Spannism and National Socialist ideology grew increasingly apparent from 1933. Nazi Party functionaries, most notably Alfred Rosenberg and Robert Ley (1890-1945), viewed the Spann circle as incompatible ideologically with National Socialism and soon started to impose restrictions on the circle's activities. These included banning Karrenbrock and Heinrich from speaking in public and monitoring the circle's activities beyond Germany's borders.¹⁷⁴ A mid-1930s report from a Nazi correspondent in Rome reveals that Hitler's government was monitoring the Spann circle's activities in Italy. It commented that Spann and his two sons were part of a secret organisation plotting against Germany and National Socialism and warned that Spann was soon to publish an article in *Lo*

¹⁷¹ From 1933, articles engaging directly with the politics of the NSDAP included Walter Heinrich, "Die Überwindung des Parlamentarismus in Reich, Land und Gemeinde," *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 4 (1933): 191-195; Wilhelm Andreae, "Das faschistische Syndikatswesen und die Gleichschaltung der freien Gewerkschaften in Deutschland," *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 5 (1933): 257-261; Walter Heinrich, "Die berufständische Wirtschaft im neuen Staate," *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 8 (1933): 409-418; Ilse Roloff, "Adolf Hitlers 'Mein Kampf' im Lichte der Gesellschaftswissenschaft," *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 11 (1933): 608-616; Otto Dietrich, "Die Wissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus," *Ständisches Leben* 4, no. 4 (1934): 173-175; Ilse Roloff, "Kurzer Abriss der wichtigsten ständischen Gesetzgebung im Dritten Reich, mit einer Übersichtstafel," *Ständisches Leben* 4, no. 6/7 (1934): 334-352; Ludwig Grauert, "Die nationalsozialistischen Leitgedanken im Aufbau der preußischen Staats- und Gemeindeverwaltung," *Ständisches Leben* 4, no. 11 (1934): 549-557.

¹⁷² Reinhard Müller, "Institut für Ständeswesen Düsseldorf 1933 bis 1936," 2013, Archiv für die Geschichte der Soziologie in Österreich, accessed March 7, 2025, https://agso.uni-graz.at/archive/sozio/institute/institut_fuer_staendewesen/00.htm.

¹⁷³ Paul Karrenbrock, "Ständische Wirtschaft auf dem Marsche: Brauchbarkeit und Unbrauchbarkeit der vorhandenen Organisationen," *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 5 (1933): 241; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 174-175. For a detailed account of the economic activities of the Institute für Ständeswesen, conflict with the Deutsch Arbeiter Front (DAF), and relations with German heavy industry, see Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 174-195.

¹⁷⁴ See *Kanzlei Rosenberg Band 1 (1933-1935)*, in NS8/177, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, 194.

Stato, Costamagna's journal, in which he would argue against "our racial teaching" or "zoological materialism."¹⁷⁵

Universalism viewed the "Jewish problem" as one of spiritual and intellectual — not biological — origin.¹⁷⁶ Confronted with this increasingly glaring point of divergence, Spann and his students sought to clarify the universalist position on Nazi racial theory. In doing so, however, they merely added fuel to the fire. Otto Brandl wrote an article for *Ständisches Leben* in 1935 in which he argued that the Jews, instead of being ostracised, needed to be integrated into German society.¹⁷⁷ This notion built upon a rationale that Spann had outlined in previous publications, namely that:

people of the same race have nothing in common other than [...] similar physical and mental abilities. [...] Racial community is therefore not yet a spiritual community. "Racial pride" is only the recognition of common dispositions, i.e. a spiritual connection that is dependent, not essentialist. Only religious and cultural communities demonstrate the capacity to build a true spiritual society.¹⁷⁸

Karrenbrock also drew upon this logic in his 1935 article *Die Lösung der Judenfrage in Deutschland* (*The Solution to the Jewish Question in Germany*). In it, he argued that the National Socialist obsession with racial theory was evidence of a materialistic worldview and a dictatorial mindset.¹⁷⁹ Justus Beyer, a jurist and SS-Führer who worked alongside Karrenbrock at the Institut für Ständewesen, compiled a 66-page dossier for the Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers SS (SD), earmarking the Spann circle's ideology and activities as subversive. The report stated that Spann's teachings were "based on ideological foundations that are not in agreement with National Socialist or völkisch values."¹⁸⁰ Beyer interpreted universalism as seeking a "return to the Middle Ages" and erroneously claimed that

¹⁷⁵ The report concluded with the recommendation that the Reich not immediately ban Spann's *Ständisches Leben* but allow the Spann circle to be "lulled into security" so that additional financial backers and associates might come to light. "Informationsbericht," Rome, in NS 43/185, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, 1-2. For Spann's publications in "Lo Stato," see Spann and Heinrich, "Lo stato organico."

¹⁷⁶ Spannians were critical of the Jews for a number of reasons, including religious hostility. However, Spann also suggested that Jews could be "integrated" into German society by adopting German customs. See Othmar Spann, *Kurzgefaßtes System der Gesellschaftslehre* (Berlin: J. Guttentag, 1914), 215-216; Seigfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 201-202.

¹⁷⁷ Otto Brandl, "Die Rassenfrage vom Standpunkt der ganzheitlichen Gesellschaftslehre," *Ständisches Leben* 5, no. 2 (1935): 106-108.

¹⁷⁸ Emphasis in original. Spann, *Kurzgefaßtes System*, 202.

¹⁷⁹ Paul Karrenbrock, *Die Lösung der Judenfrage in Deutschland: Zugleich eine wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit der Gedankenwelt des "Mythos"* (Düsseldorf: Institut für Ständewesen, 1935); Beyer, "Der Spannkreis," 29.

¹⁸⁰ Beyer, "Der Spannkreis," 1.

Spann's ideal state was a theocracy.¹⁸¹ Karrenbrock was summarily arrested by the Gestapo in October, 1935.¹⁸²

The Spann circle's relationship with Italian Fascism likely influenced its approach to the Third Reich. Firstly, the universalists had been well-received in Fascist Italy for years, if not collaborated with, which no doubt shaped their expectations of a similar reception in Germany. Italy and Germany often appeared side-by-side in Spannian publications as evidence of common first steps towards corporatism, with no acknowledgement of the respective ideological peculiarities of Italian Fascism and Nazism. As such, the universalists apparently had little reason to anticipate such a hostile reaction in Germany. If anything, they carried over higher expectations for Hitler's regime, due to their common language and shared ambition to unify the German-speaking lands. It also speaks to Spann's hubris that he appears genuinely to have been shocked by the Nazi response after he had given the movement so many years of political support.¹⁸³

Secondly, the ongoing development of corporatism in Italy in the mid-1930s — or, better said, the Spannian interpretation of it — furnished Spann and his students with additional, if misplaced, optimism. Despite their above-noted criticisms of the Italian model, the circle maintained that Italy was continuing to grow closer to universalism. Heinrich and Spann welcomed the cartelisation of different sectors of the Italian economy, but emphasised the need for the state to fulfil its corporate function as “referee”: to discipline cartels which would otherwise continue to embody the liberal spirit.¹⁸⁴ On 5 February, 1934, the Fascist Grand Council introduced further legislation to reform the Italian political-economic system, rendering the corporations (which had hitherto existed largely in a name-only capacity) central to the functioning of the economy.¹⁸⁵ This in essence merged the interests of the Fascist state with monopoly capital. The Spann circle welcomed these reforms, even though they ushered in a system that was a far cry from the kind of corporatism outlined by Spann.¹⁸⁶ Instead of a decentralised system in which the state merely acted as referee and each corporation fulfilled a different function, the legislation integrated the Fascist trade unions, monopoly capital, and the existing state apparatus into a single entity, with Mussolini serving as director of all

¹⁸¹ Beyer, “Der Spannkreis,” 1; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 210-211.

¹⁸² Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 205.

¹⁸³ Othmar Spann, “Leidlicher Austrag unleidlicher Dinge,” *Ständisches Leben* 6 (1936): 121

¹⁸⁴ Spann, “Bedeutung,” 6-8; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 114-115, 118.

¹⁸⁵ Aquarone, “Crisis and Corporate Economy,” 49-50.

¹⁸⁶ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 118. For a detailed discussion, see pages 112-122.

participating corporations and all vice presidents being allocated by the Fascist Grand Council.¹⁸⁷

Perhaps distracted by their entanglements with Nazi Germany, Spann and his students did little to point out these glaring contradictions. As noted above, this speaks to the tacit acceptance of dictatorial models, which had become increasingly evident in Spannism from the late 1920s. The universalists' lack of criticism of dictatorial organisation was no doubt also intended to placate Nazi suspicions about the circle's allegiance to Hitler and the National Socialist state. The National Socialists may have criticised the Spann circle's lack of racial theory, first and foremost, but they were also suspicious of the relatively limited powers which universalism allocated to the state and the leader, and the decentralised and pluralistic implications of universalist corporatism.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the most blatant appeals to the Führerprinzip issued by the Spann circle can be found in its attempts to reconcile universalism with National Socialism. For example, in a 1934 article, Franz Krautzberger characterised the corporate state as "the sole, and indeed the highest, governing body of the national community," a view that contradicted the ideal society outlined in previous Spannian publications.¹⁸⁹ While such explicit endorsements were a response to Nazism, the vagaries and contradictions in the Spann circle's position on organisational dictatorship first appeared in the context of Italian Fascism. This makes Italian Fascism an important developmental stepping-stone.

The third parallel, and that which overshadows all of the Spann circle's dealings with fascism, is the circle's consistent failure to acknowledge fascism as an ideology (understood as a reasonably coherent political and philosophical value set) in both its Italian and German manifestations. Spann and his students based their rosy predictions for the future of Italian universalism on the writings of the select few Italians who held similar views, such as Costamagna and Gino Arias, while making no effort to engage intellectually with the many thinkers who supported the Italian regime as a *fait accompli*.¹⁹⁰ As Siegfried notes, Spann and his students seemed likewise, by all accounts, truly to have been surprised by the hostile reception that universalism incurred in Germany.¹⁹¹ Like many other conservatives of his time, Spann fell into the error of believing that Nazism could be "tamed" through appeals to reason

¹⁸⁷ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 119.

¹⁸⁸ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 119; Haag, "Othmar Spann," 136-138.

¹⁸⁹ Franz Krautzberger, "Die 'Romantik' und der 'Tat'," *Ständisches Leben* 4, no. 6/7 (1934): 353.

¹⁹⁰ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 111. See also Gino Arias, "Die faschistische Staatsform," in *Mussolini und sein Faschismus*, ed. Curt Gutkind (Heidelberg: Merlinverlag, 1928), 189-270.

¹⁹¹ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 111.

and “truth,” and thereby moulded into a stable, relatively peaceful empire-state. In this, he not only failed to recognise the total centrality of racism to Nazi thought, but also the pan-fascist ideological imperatives of total mobilisation, imperial expansion, and war. Recognising ideology as a significant driving factor in the Third Reich would have contradicted the premise around which Spann organised his political activity: the belief that fascism remained in want of a guiding ideology.

After the articles by Brandl and Karrenbrock, the Nazi regime became intent on suppressing the Spann circle in its entirety. Amid the barrage of Nazi criticism that ensued, Spann attempted to defend himself by stressing his long-standing support for Nazism, and arguing that he was not a politician, but simply a “bearer of an idea” (*Träger eines Gedankens*).¹⁹² He added that this objective truth, on which he was merely a commentator, had supported the National Socialists’ political successes in much the same way as it had those of the Italian Fascists.¹⁹³ Ilse Roloff, notable as a female Spann student and the new editor of *Ständisches Leben* in Berlin, wrote multiple articles seeking unsuccessfully to clear up Nazi “misunderstandings” of universalism.¹⁹⁴ She interpreted Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* through the lens of universalism, and drew parallels between Hitler’s thought and Spann’s.¹⁹⁵ Roloff attempted to dismiss any disagreements as owing to superficialities.¹⁹⁶ In arguing for Spann’s Nazism, Wasserman draws heavily upon Roloff’s articles as evidence for Spann’s enduring commitment to racial theory.¹⁹⁷ There were undoubtedly longstanding racial elements in Spannism (including, not least, the presupposition that German culture was the highest form of culture, ergo that Germanic peoples were superior). Articles perpetuating racist views also became more common in line with the circle’s radicalisation, in particular as a result of contact with National Socialism.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, one must be circumspect about viewing Roloff’s assertions as a cut-and-dried index of universalism’s attitude to race. The articles were produced at a time when the circle was acutely aware of its tenuous standing in the Third Reich. Nor should differences between essentialist (biological) racism and situational racism be brushed aside as

¹⁹² Spann, “Leidlicher Austrag,” 121; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 216.

¹⁹³ Spann, “Leidlicher Austrag,” 121; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 216.

¹⁹⁴ Ilse Roloff, “Mißverständnisse über den Universalismus Othmar Spanns,” *Ständisches Leben* 5, no. 1 (1935): 43-47.

¹⁹⁵ Roloff, “Adolf Hitlers ‘Mein Kampf’,” 608-610.

¹⁹⁶ Roloff, “Adolf Hitlers ‘Mein Kampf’,” 611.

¹⁹⁷ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 102-103.

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Adolf Ehrt’s review article, which perpetuates the argument that Bolshevism is inherently linked to the international Jewry. Adolf Ehrt, “Bolschewismus und Judentum,” *Ständisches Leben* 4, no. 6/7 (1934): 332-334.

mere semantics, as Roloff herself tried to do.¹⁹⁹ Such differences cut to the heart of ideological questions and illuminate points of divergence within the fascist sphere.

Indeed, this is evinced by the fact that Spann and Roloff's downplaying of race only angered their critics further. Led by Rosenberg, Nazi theorists shoehorned universalism into "Catholic political thought" alongside other enemies such as the Austrofascists.²⁰⁰ In 1938, Spann drank champagne with his family in celebration of the Anschluss, the realisation of his lifelong dream. Hours later, he was taken into custody by the Gestapo.²⁰¹ The other core members of the circle met similarly with ironic fates. Heinrich was sent to Dachau, while Spann and his son Rafael were interrogated in Munich and allegedly imprisoned in Dachau and Sachsenhausen respectively, though documentation of their imprisonment was inadequate, or has subsequently been lost.²⁰² Andreae, Riehl, and Baxa were likewise stripped of their academic positions.²⁰³ After his ordeal, Spann was permitted to live in exile in his rural estate in the Burgenland.²⁰⁴

It is tempting to view Othmar Spann as the Svengali of Black Vienna, a spider at the centre of a web, manipulating threads of influence throughout Austria and much of Europe. Spann was both a formidable intellectual and a tireless opportunist, able to inspire lifelong loyalty in his followers and to mould the academic world of his time through a combination of pragmatism and genuine intellectual commitment. Yet his story was marked equally by naivety. Both Siegfried and Haag observed that Spann was, first and foremost, an academic, mostly innocent to the demands of realpolitik.²⁰⁵ In some respects, Spann proved to be naïve in the intellectual arena as well, for he was so convinced of his own worldview and the political system derived therefrom, as to be blindsided to the existence and persuasiveness of fascist ideology, both Italian and German. The Spann circle's attempts to find universalism in fascism ultimately amounted to little more than confirmation bias, opportunism, and tunnel vision.

¹⁹⁹ Roloff, "Adolf Hitlers 'Mein Kampf'," 611.

²⁰⁰ Scant attention was paid to the fact that Spann and the Austrofascists had a mutually antagonistic relationship, with the Austrofascists considering Spann insufficiently patriotic, and Spann considering Austrian corporatism a farce.

²⁰¹ Some sources, drawing on Salomon, place Spann's arrest on the same day as the Anschluss (i.e. Haag, "Ideology"; Wasserman), while others suggest that it took place within "a few days" (Siegfried; Haag, "Politics of Totality"). Salomon, *Fragebogen*, 282; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 218; Haag, "Politics of Totality," 154; Wassermann, *Black Vienna*, 219; Haag, "Othmar Spann," 141.

²⁰² Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 218; Wassermann, *Black Vienna*, 219.

²⁰³ Wasserman, *Black Vienna*, 219; Andreas Kranebitter and Christoph Reinprecht, "Soziologie und Nationalsozialismus in Österreich: Eine Einleitung," in *Die Soziologie und der Nationalsozialismus in Österreich*, ed. Andreas Kranebitter and Christoph Reinprecht (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019), 28-29.

²⁰⁴ Haag, "Politics of Totality," 155.

²⁰⁵ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 121-122; Haag, "Othmar Spann," 140.

In practise, Spann and his students approached Italian Fascism both as paternalistic mentor and as eager student. On the one hand, they wanted to reshape Fascism into universalism; on the other, they sought to capitalise on Fascism's reputation, political successes, and support networks to popularise and disseminate universalism. As a result, the Spann circle is one of the most explicit interpreters of Italian Fascism explored in this thesis. This chapter has identified these attempts as part of a broader pattern of behaviour within the Spann circle itself and as evidence of the workings of the intellectual-political fascist sphere in interwar Europe.

Like the other case studies explored above, the Spann circle demonstrated elements of fascistisation. This was most readily discernible in the circle's adoption of fighting language, its tacit acceptance of dictatorship and organisational centralisation, and in a general impetus towards political radicalisation. Some of this could be more broadly attributed to the political milieu of the interwar period but was aided and abetted clearly by contact with Italian Fascism, first through the vehicle of the Heimwehr, then through direct contact with Italy. Despite adopting these fascist "trappings," however, Spann and his colleagues did not so much seek to "spread fascism," as to *use* fascism as an instrument to transform universalism into a viable political system.

Spann's staunchest historiographical defenders have drawn a line between Spannian thought and Nazism, while his harshest critics have taken Spann's close involvement with Nazism as indicative of his ultimate allegiance to National Socialism. A flexible, middle-ground approach, mindful of the shifting dynamics of perception and transfer, appears more appropriate. The Spann circle was deeply invested in, and supportive of both Fascist and Nazi politics, and is therefore deserving of serious attention from scholars of fascism. Nonetheless, Spann was too convinced of his own ideas to be fairly interpreted as a purveyor of Nazism first and foremost. With this in mind, the inclusion of the Spann circle in the fascist sphere demonstrates that fascist influence seeped across political and geographical borders alike, drawing support from many different quarters. This, it is hoped, avoids the oversimplification of reducing all Conservative Revolutionary thinkers to "Nazis," while nevertheless acknowledging the broadness and multifaceted ways in which fascism manifested in the contemporary imagination. Italian Fascism informed Spann's political opportunism, galvanised the circle's support for Nazism, and even altered some elements of Spannian ideology, helping Spannians "update" universalism in their efforts to appeal to the preoccupations of broader, potentially sympathetic audiences in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet the Spann circle failed to appreciate the ideological imperatives of fascism, which, when applied

to Hitlerian racism, resulted in the circle's demise. This reinforces the ongoing burden on historians to "take ideology seriously."

Conclusion

The main objective of this thesis has been to demonstrate that, despite the existence of certain parallels, the radicalisation of the five groups was shaped by the theoretical content and developmental directions of Italian Fascism. Germanic fascisms did not emerge internally from “blood and soil” or völkisch nationalism. Ángel Alcalde’s research has illuminated the processual nature of fascistisation.¹ Such understandings of historical change — often a component of transnational history — have been gaining traction in recent decades and have informed the underlying trajectory of the present work. Understanding fascism as process allows one to reorientate the concept around Italian Fascism, while recognising its infectious potential during a period of widespread socioeconomic and political distress. This suggests that it is viable to conceptualise fascism as a generic ideology, albeit with caveats.²

Rather than seeking to determine whether or not a movement should be labelled “fascist,” fascism may be understood as a moving conceptual matrix, whose presence was contingent on the travelling capacity of Italian Fascism and the intentions of contemporaries who viewed it as a positive force. These dynamics are observable in the groups considered in these pages. What is more, the intention to become fascist fell across a spectrum. It ranged from intentional, unapologetic attempts to replicate Italian Fascism, as seen in the GSF and sections of the Stahlhelm, to the more passive absorption of selective elements into ideologically related (i.e. “fascist-adjacent”), but independent, ultranationalist identities. Often, fascistisation was a combination of both intentional and situational factors. For example, the Spann circle intentionally employed fascistic fighting language to broaden the appeal of its own ideology, something considered necessary due to the situational proliferation of paramilitary and soldierly nationalist groups and the popularity of fascism therein.

Assessing the extent to which fascistic radicalisation can be attributed specifically to Italian Fascism — as opposed to the spread of generic soldierly nationalism and corporatism — is challenging. It is impossible completely to disentangle these ambiguities, but the omnipresence of Italian Fascism in contemporary literature suggests that the Fascist image was profoundly influential both on its own terms, and as a means of conceptual reconciliation between hitherto unrelated ideological and organisational properties. Direct contact with Italian Fascism,

¹ Alcalde, “German Perceptions,” 179.

² For an overview of the various “depreciations” of the term “fascism” in generic contexts, see Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 3-8.

including financial sponsorship, was also widespread, and further encouraged the diffusion of the ideology. Yet whether directly funded or not, the five case studies reveal that Italian Fascism was often evoked as a relevant, (usually) positive, didactic example. Even groups that were critical of Fascism cited certain “positive” elements and thus played their part in the extension of the fascist sphere. For instance, the Strasser circle turned to Italian Fascism to justify its National Bolshevism, pointing to Mussolini’s capacity to rise above ideological barriers for the good of his nation as evidence of why Germany should seek an alliance with the USSR.³ Similar justifications were also made by referring to Italy’s “Prussian” qualities.⁴ Even when subordinating Italian Fascism to (allegedly superior) German traditions, authors forged and strengthened links between Italy, Germany, and their own political views. This contributed to a broader perpetuation of Fascist Italy’s image within ultranationalist circles, entrenching theoretical associations between fascism and German ultranationalism.

Further supporting the case for Fascist Italy’s influence was the fact that the German-speaking fascist sphere did not manifest instantaneously but corresponded roughly to the development of the Italian regime. This is not surprising, of course, but is worth emphasising as a secondary component of the overall process-focused argument. The first round of Italian corporate labour reforms and the implementation of the *Carta del Lavoro* in the mid-1920s resulted in a general intensification of interest in Fascism among Germanic ultranationalists, which in turn fuelled the radicalisation of the focus groups (with the exception of the GSF, which, being founded only in 1931, was essentially “born radical”). By structuring the chapters chronologically and beginning each with an overview of the groups upon their founding — often prior to any contact with, or knowledge of Italian Fascism — I have attempted to highlight the impact of fascistisation upon the groups’ identities, and to emphasise progressive radicalisation. The Stahlhelm, the Spann circle, the Strasser circle, and National Bolshevism were all formed in the spirit of ultranationalism, but in their infancy did not contain features that they would later develop in response to impressions of, and contact with, Italian Fascism. For example, the Stahlhelm’s early soldierly nationalism placed it conceptually adjacent to Fascism but evolved only gradually into a focused intention to build a soldiers’ corporate state, a reflection of the far more specific role of the fascist war veteran, acquired through contact with Italy. Naturally, the groups were also subject to non-specific situational radicalisation provoked by the

³ Reventlow, *Weg zum neuen Deutschland*, 230, 300.

⁴ See, for example, Strüneckmann, “Aufgabe des preußischen Rhythmus,” 38–42.

increasingly unstable political climate of the Weimar Republic. Yet the image of Italian Fascism shaped the course of their radicalisation greatly, particularly after 1926.

Fascism as Imaginative Process

This thesis has also sought to “take fascist ideology seriously” by foregrounding intellectuals, ideas, and theoretical outputs when tracing the diffusion of Italian Fascism and the resultant advent of “lowercase fascism.”⁵ At the most basic level, this form of intellectual history may be contrasted with the wealth of studies which have approached fascism primarily as a socio-economic movement, an aesthetic political religion, or a phenomenon otherwise lacking in ideological or intellectual substance.

This helps to account for the fact that fascist ideology was itself exported frequently in a piecemeal manner, filtered through the prism of subjective interpretation. It was tailored to suit different values in different academic, political, and social contexts. The GSF, which boasted a high concentration of businessmen and industrialists, was enthusiastic about Italian-style corporatism as a method to safeguard capitalism and private accumulation, then under threat from communism. In contrast, in National Bolshevik circles, thinkers like Winnig and Paetel harkened back to the national syndicalist roots of Mussolini’s movement, rather than praising Italy as it then existed.⁶ Different again, the Stahlhelm was primarily receptive to the Italian regime’s construction of the war veteran archetype, while Spann and his followers, as academics, evinced far greater interest in intellectualising and capitalising on the Italian corporate experiment. Each of the groups thus “used” Italian Fascism in different ways, picking and manipulating content to support their own ambitions and interests. This process was crucial to the transformation of fascism from a specific to a generic phenomenon.

Ernst Jünger, whose influence weaves through most of the chapters above, arguably provides a fitting concluding illustration. In 1927, Jünger claimed that Fascist Italy was the only system to have “seriously attempted” to build a state reflecting the values of new nationalism (i.e. soldierly nationalism).⁷ This particular piece appeared in the Nazi *Völkischer Beobachter*, but echoed statements that Jünger had made in numerous other publications at around the same

⁵ On the historiography of “taking fascism seriously,” see David Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and its Era, 1919-1945* (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 5-8.

⁶ Winnig, *Reich als Republik 1918-1926*, 352; Paetel, *National Bolshevik Manifesto*, 22; Casey, *Freedom’s Progress?*, 717-718.

⁷ Jünger, “Neuer Nationalismus,” 287.

time, including in the Stahlhelm periodical *Die Standarte* and *Arminius*.⁸ While Jünger did not promote Italian Fascism as explicitly as many of the other authors considered in this thesis, he is one of the best-known of a handful of Conservative Revolutionary intellectuals who influenced numerous movements and groups within the fascist sphere, without ever definitively aligning himself with any of them.

This intellectual mobility is indicative of the complex networks of communication that allowed for theoretical exchange and discourse within the fascist sphere — without which, needless to say, impressions of Italian Fascism would never have emerged as a serious force in the first place. Jünger's engagement with Italian Fascism speaks to the broader attraction that Fascism exercised over the imaginative capacity of German ultranationalists. Like others considered above, Jünger employed Italy as shorthand for the values of soldierly nationalism, set in stark contrast to the decadence of the “liberal” worldview.⁹ The Italian state was not only touted as an example of great relevance for Germany's own future, but as an advancement of world-historical significance. In the same article, Jünger reflected:

Italy is, as mentioned above, the only country in which the realisation of this idea [i.e. new nationalism] has been taken seriously. We may well say that the March on Rome is of the same importance to the new will, which is awakening within the people, as the conquering of the Bastille was for the bourgeoisie.¹⁰

Somewhat vague references to the “new will” (alternatively referred to as “the new idea,” or “new consciousness”) referred to the merging of dialectical idealism with socialism, one of the defining features of Conservative Revolutionary thought. One of Fascism's most attractive attributes was its apparent capacity to authentically harness the new collective will, thus overcoming social alienation.

When remarking on Mussolini's attempts to construct a “new” system, Jünger was alluding to the two vectors whereby Italian Fascism proved to be most contagious among German ultranationalists: the construct of the fascist war veteran and burgeoning corporatism. The implication was that corporatism was the most viable organisational system through which to

⁸ See Ernst Jünger, “Vom absolut Kühnen,” *Standarte*, August 12, 1926, in *Ernst Jünger Politische Publizistik 1919 bis 1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 240; Ernst Jünger, “Der Nationalismus der Tat,” *Arminius*, 21 November, 1926, in *Ernst Jünger Politische Publizistik 1919 bis 1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001), 252, 255.

⁹ For example, Jünger claimed: “Let us not be led astray by the western literary intelligentsia that dominates almost our entire press. The recently-published anti-Mussolini issue of *Simplizissimus*, which reached the height of mindlessness, is a good example of this.” Jünger, “Neuer Nationalismus,” 287.

¹⁰ Jünger, “Neuer Nationalismus,” 288.

mould the various social and economic institutions of the state into a constitution resembling that of the army. In short, for Jünger, corporatism was a method to actualise and disperse soldierly values throughout the state's infrastructure. It was not that Italian Fascism had a monopoly on either of these concepts — indeed, Jünger did more for the theoretical content of soldierly nationalism than Mussolini ever did — but that Italy was *perceived* to be the only country to have transformed soldierly nationalism into a viable governmental and social system. Jünger was thus perpetuating the concept of the fascist war veteran, while deepening simultaneously conceptual associations between corporatism and fascism.

Finally, Jünger's article illustrates the intersection between thought and action which gives "impressions of Italian Fascism" their relevance to historical study. It is written in a more simplistic style than was Jünger's wont in his more philosophical works, designed to appeal to Nazi sympathisers in the general population without alienating them with excessive erudition. The juncture between abstract theory and socio-political reality is something with which intellectual historians must inevitably grapple. As recognised by a number of scholars of transnational and intellectual history — including Riccardo Bavaj, Christian Goeschel, Stefan Breuer, and Geoff Eley — ultranationalist groups occupied cognate, overlapping theoretical spaces, and interacted with their real-existing contexts in ways which were both intellectually discursive and subject to shifting situational pressures.¹¹ As Duncan Kelly and others have pointed out, historical events of world significance, such as the Great War or the advent of the Hitler regime, have often adumbrated the potential "vibrant, potent and creative set of worlds" that alternative thinkers put forward.¹² What appeared as perfectly viable possibilities in their respective contexts are too often submerged by the tide of world events and rendered misleadingly negligible in retrospect. With this in mind, it would be too simplistic to view Jünger's endorsement of Nazism as wholesale endorsement, just as his endorsement of Italian Fascism was not wholesale.¹³ Jünger, like many other thinkers of the interwar period, was occupied with possibility, indicating the open-endedness of political thought within the fascist sphere, particularly before 1933.

As groups like the Strasser circle demonstrate, national socialism (and National Socialism) was a broad church in which ideas coexisted and often competed against one another in a struggle

¹¹ Bavaj, *Nationalsozialismus*, 6; Goeschel, *Mussolini and Hitler*, 294; Breuer, *Ordnung der Ungleichheit*, 259; Eley, "Introduction," 5.

¹² Duncan Kelly, "Intellectual History and the History of Political Thought," in *A Companion to Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 141.

¹³ Bullock, "Flight Forward," 455.

for supremacy.¹⁴ Such ambiguities reflected what Manfred Gangl and Gérard Raulet characterised as an intellectual “oscillation process,” denoting ideological cross-pollination among Weimar-era thinkers and calling into question the theoretical coherence of traditional understandings of political “left” and “right.”¹⁵ This oscillation process is evident in all of the case studies herein, but is particularly starkly illustrated by National Bolshevism, including the Strasser circle. While the present study has focused on the National Bolsheviks’ use of, and relationship with Fascism, it rests upon the understanding that other ideological features, including those inherited from Marxism, were taken equally seriously and were no less influential in shaping the internal logic of the *Widerstand* journal and the Strasser circle in its various manifestations. Because of this, National Bolshevism sits most uneasily alongside Italian Fascism in a purely comparative sense, due to practitioners’ lingering sympathies for historical materialism. Nevertheless, its adoption of “travelling” features of Fascism, achieved through input from leading Conservative Revolutionary figures like Jünger, justifies its inclusion in the fascist sphere. I have used the term “fascist sphere” throughout the thesis to capture not only the generally positive attention given to Italian Fascism, but also the capacity of thinkers within this space to replicate and perpetuate fascistic concepts, with or without materialising fascism proper.

Fascistisation, or fascism as process, continues to offer many avenues for future research. It could be employed to investigate a wealth of other movements, many of which have yet to be studied in depth. In the German-speaking world alone, additional groups that would benefit from further analysis of the intellectual impact of Italian Fascism include the Jungdeutscher Orden, the DNVP, the Austrian Heimwehr, and the *Arminius* circle. The latter is particularly well-suited to this kind of methodology: *Arminius* was an independent journal arising from the Stahlhelm’s *Standarte* circle, founded by Hans Reupke and co-edited by Ernst Jünger. It perpetuated the radical, revolutionary form of soldierly nationalism that its founders had been endeavouring to instil in the Stahlhelm. Not only does no specific scholarship yet exist on *Arminius*, but the journal also acted as a forum for Jünger to consolidate his philosophy, and for Reupke (who was one of the most devoted admirers of Italian Fascism considered in this thesis) to promote his explicitly pro-Fascist agenda, unencumbered by the moderating influence to which he had been subjected by the Stahlhelm leadership. Even when no longer associated with the Stahlhelm, Reupke and his colleagues continued to propose political

¹⁴ See Raphael, “Pluralities of National Socialist Ideology,” 73-74.

¹⁵ Gangl and Raulet, “Einleitung,” 27-28; Gangl, “Interdiskursivität und chassés-croisés,” 43.

strategies for the Stahlhelm, which drew heavily upon fascist rationale. Future research in this area might explore the scope of *Arminius*' readership and influence, both in the Stahlhelm and in the general population, investigate whether *Arminius* used Italian Fascism in a markedly different way from Reupke's *Standarte*, and assess the extent to which *Arminius* influenced cognate circles and organisations.

Italy as the "Nucleus" of Fascism

Although this work has approached fascism as an evolving, dynamic process, this is not an invitation to take a "no holds barred" view, in which any xenophobic, populist, "Trumpian," or authoritarian movement or regime constitutes "fascism."¹⁶ In his famous investigation, Robert Paxton observed that tracing the spread of fascism through its aesthetic features (militarism, demagoguery, propaganda etc.), is insufficient as it invites too broad an application of the term.¹⁷ Yet Paxton also rejects the temptation to treat fascism as a true "ism", suggesting that, as it did not achieve the rigour of systemic thought on par with liberalism or communism, the role of ideas and intellectuals in fascism was subject to situational dynamics to a far greater extent than in the other "isms".¹⁸ For Paxton, the usefulness of intellectual history does not extend far beyond the first of "five stages of fascism"; that is, democracy's discontents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as the movements examined by Zeev Sternhell.¹⁹ This critique accepts as a basis Sternhell's assertion that fascism — at least in an idealised form — arose before the First World War, a position which, as we have seen, negates the centrality of the war itself to the intellectual development of fascism. It also downplays the importance of recognising the Italian context as not merely the first manifestation of fascism as a movement, but of fascism as *ideology*.

Indeed, the fascist sphere may have had nebulous parameters, but it revolved around a definable nucleus. Another central assertion of this thesis is, therefore, that Italian Fascism is the necessary benchmark against which all fascist ideology should be measured. In order to understand how an ideology born in Italy was able to exercise such appeal across Europe, it is

¹⁶ For debates about the relationship between fascism and Trumpism, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Janet Ward, "Introduction," in *Fascism in America: Past and Present*, ed. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Janet Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 1-26, and the individual chapters in the volume.

¹⁷ Paxton, "Five Stages," 1-5.

¹⁸ Paxton, "Five Stages," 7.

¹⁹ Paxton, "Five Stages," 11-12, 13.

important to begin with the acknowledgment that Fascism itself was a product of transnational and inter-ideological hybridisation. This rendered it capable of presenting multiple attractive fronts, relevant to foreign situations. Depending on context, it advertised itself as anti-capitalist, pro-capitalist, socially conservative, socialist, irredentist, imperialist, and so on. These apparently contradictory values were not, however, owing to a lack of internal logic. Rather, they had legitimate precedents in the voluminous developmental and theoretical reference points that converged to create the new ideology before, during, and after the Great War. Fascism cannot be divorced from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century developments in social theory, economics, and nationalism which, despite varying grossly in aims, were unified by a basic desire to synthesise emergent concepts of mass politics, sociology, and the existing institutions of the modern nation state into viable political and organisational models. Re-evaluations of society were central to the “revolutionary revisionism” that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century, taking such forms as syndicalism and national socialism.²⁰ These were present across Europe, but overlapped and hybridised in an acute way in a Franco-Italian cluster, represented by the works of theorists such as Georges Sorel and Antonio Labriola.²¹

Despite the massive liberties the revolutionary national syndicalists took with Marxian theory, onus still lies on the Great War — or, more precisely, the mythologisation associated with it — in locating the ideological specificity of fascism.²² The Great War did not act merely as the catalyst to transform fascism from theory into practice. It was central to the essence of fascism. Prior to and during the early years of the war, the Italian national syndicalists remained convinced of what they interpreted as the core values of Marxism, viewing their clashes with mainline socialists as principally owing to disagreements on methodology. If any one event can be said to have precipitated the soon-to-be Fascists’ break from socialism, it was the October Bolshevik Revolution. The syndicalists viewed the Bolshevik withdrawal from the war as the ultimate betrayal and, to distance themselves from the Bolsheviks, began to reject the very language of socialism and Marxism, falling back on their nationalism and, increasingly, the “fighting language” of burgeoning soldierly nationalism.

In this context, the construct of the fascist war veteran began to emerge and, as the syndicalists re-imagined themselves as the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*, it becomes appropriate to speak

²⁰ Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 4.

²¹ Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 57-58; Sternhell, *Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 40; Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*, 8-9; Stuart, *Marxism and National Identity*, 150-151.

²² Alcalde, “Transnational Origins of Italian Fascism,” 573.

of “fascism.” Nationalism and warfare, concepts which for the national syndicalists had been a means to an end in support of “true Marxism,” acquired ideological hegemony in their own right. The “simple soldier” replaced the proletarian worker, and the perceived national good superseded class struggle, with the latter coming to be viewed as nationally divisive and, ergo, subversive.²³ Concepts of national rebirth replaced the syndicalist belief in economic revolution; the “spirit of the nation” was already present, albeit slumbering. War and violence were seen not merely as necessary for revolution, but as forms of “creative destruction” central to historical processes, idealist dialectics, the awakening of the nation, and the regeneration of the human spirit. Contemporary intellectuals often looked with great interest across the Alps towards these emergent ideas and their theoreticians, like Mussolini, Sergio Panunzio, and Giovanni Gentile; and, no less significantly, in light of the “insights” acquired through Fascism, revisited earlier generations of thinkers whose philosophies Fascism claimed to have made flesh (including Hegel, Nietzsche, Pareto, Sorel, and Spengler). The intellectual historian’s role in analysing the nature of diffusion of fascism should not, therefore, be limited to the era of “pre-fascism.”

The Fascist War Veteran and Corporatism as Vectors for the Transmission of Fascism

The final assertion of this thesis has been that Italian Fascist ideology was transmitted through two primary emissaries: the fascist war veteran and corporatism. These elements proved successful precisely because theories of soldierly nationalism and corporatism were already widespread across Europe, reflecting a broadly felt desire to find a “third way” between liberal capitalism and Soviet communism.²⁴ The real or perceived success of the Fascist project in Italy, appealing as it was to soldierly nationalists and corporatists alike, became part of a feedback loop. One of the results of this was the diffusion of the fascist sphere, as groups acquired, through Fascism, additional elements to which they might otherwise not have been receptive. The groups considered in this thesis all contributed to this dynamic. Fascism clearly could not, and did not, embody all of the philosophies or political victories ascribed to it by its admirers. The imagery of Italian Fascism promulgated by the groups was thus often far-

²³ Mussolini, “No Turning Back!” 32-33.

²⁴ Goffredo Adinolfi, “Corporatism and Italian Fascism,” in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Europe and Latin America: Crossing Borders*, ed. António Costa Pinto and Federico Finchelstein (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 11.

removed from the realities and complexities of the Italian state. Rather than reflecting Fascism accurately, Germanic ultranationalist impressions instead formed an “imaginative process” with Italian Fascism as progenitor. To this end, it is important to recognise that the adoption of elements of fascism by groups like the National Bolsheviks and the Spann circle was not equal to the manifestation of full-blown fascism but is better conceptualised as “ripples” emanating outward from the perceived ideal embodied by Italy.

The fascist war veteran was a specific breed of soldierly nationalism “made fascist” through its hybridisation with national syndicalism and other peculiarities of the Italian context.²⁵ The adoption of the fascist war veteran is observable in all five focus groups to varying degrees. Unsurprisingly, the *Stahlhelm* embraced it with the most enthusiasm. As a veterans’ organisation, the *Stahlhelm* was steeped in soldierly nationalism from the outset. Nevertheless, the *Stahlhelm* prior to 1924 was a far cry from the aggressively anti-republican force that it would become by the early 1930s. In addition to direct contact with Fascist Italy, the *Stahlhelm*’s transition from garden-variety soldierly nationalism to fascist soldierly nationalism was facilitated and intellectualised by the *Standarte* circle under Helmut Franke’s brief period of editorship (1925-1926). Franke’s journal set a more radical tone than the mainline *Stahlhelm*. Franke and his colleagues viewed the *Stahlhelm* as equivalent to Mussolini’s Fascist squads before 1922 and advocated for the violent revolutionary overthrow of the Weimar government and the establishment of a soldiers’ state.²⁶ Even after Franke had been dismissed and the *Standarte* circle remodelled to comply with the *Stahlhelm*’s “within the state” methodology, the *Stahlhelm* adopted the fascist war veteran as a guiding model. Not only would the *Stahlhelm* state pattern itself after the army, but the constitution of the state would be corporatist. So pronounced was the influence of Italian Fascism, that by the early 1930s, some *Stahlhelm*ers risked alienating more conservative supporters by describing the *Stahlhelm*’s ideology as “*Stahlhelm-Fascism*.”²⁷

The National Bolshevik movement and the Strasser circle (considered together due to their significant ideological overlap) did not manifest soldierly nationalism as immediately as the *Stahlhelm* but adopted it wholeheartedly during the 1920s. It was particularly pronounced in Ernst Niekisch’s journal *Widerstand*, in Gregor Strasser’s publications after the dissolution of

²⁵ Alcalde, *War Veterans*, 31.

²⁶ Franke, *Staat im Staate*, 164.

²⁷ Bach and Breuer, *Faschismus als Bewegung und Regime*, 178.

the AG Northwest, and in the KGRNS under Otto Strasser.²⁸ Although Niekisch himself was not enamoured with soldierly nationalism, the influx of prominent and regular contributors to his journal certainly were. Like the Stahlhelm, both the *Widerstand* and Strasser circles assessed the merits of Italian Fascism against its ability to represent soldierly nationalism.²⁹ For instance, Gregor Strasser, a reader of Franke and Jünger's pro-Fascist *Arminius*, came to view "selection by the army" as the best method for determining a man's eligibility for governmental office.³⁰ This proposed solution recalled more of Italian Fascism than Hitlerian Nazism, advocating a conception of a soldiers' state in which suitable men would be chosen for leadership positions by military methods, rather than by racial "qualifications." Furthermore, the *Widerstand* and Strasser circles extended the fascist sphere in a manner not seen in more traditionally conservative groups, due to positive likening of Fascism to the USSR, with both being viewed as manifestations of a common organic nationalist impulse.³¹ Similar comparisons were made by other ultranationalists, but in National Bolshevik circles the USSR was viewed positively, and Fascism "organically" likened to it in this context.³²

The Spann circle's soldierly nationalism was more moderate but nevertheless deserves attention. Othmar Spann and his followers possessed a staunch ideological commitment to corporate universalism, the parameters of which Spann had mapped out in detail from at least the early 1920s.³³ Soldierly nationalism was not a core component of universalism. Nevertheless, the relatively smooth way in which the Spann circle incorporated it speaks to a degree of compatibility. The circle appealed to soldierly nationalism from the late 1920s onwards. This took the form of direct appeals to war veterans and paramilitary men through the use of fighting language, a direct result of exchange with and impressions of Italian Fascism, first expressed through the intermediary of the Austrian Heimwehr. The Heimwehr was committed to establishing a corporatist Austria and simultaneously promoted Spannian universalism and Italian Fascism as inspiration for this goal (with two of Spann's most dedicated students, Hans Riehl and Walter Heinrich, acting as political advisors to the

²⁸ Some examples include Jünger, "Betrachtungen," 19-22; Friedrich Georg Jünger, "Vom Geist des Krieges," 225-226; Strasser, "Thoughts about the Tasks of the Future," 91; Otto Strasser, "The Fourteen Theses of the German Revolution," 106, 110.

²⁹ Niekisch is somewhat of an exception here, as, unlike many of his colleagues, he remained critical of Fascism simply because of its Western-orientated character.

³⁰ Strasser, "Tasks of the Future," 88.

³¹ See, for example, Jünger, "Große Bild des Krieges," 612; Reventlow, *Der Weg*, 300; Schüddekopf, *National-Bolschewismus*, 179. See also the nationalist interpretations of Bolshevism in Goebbels, "National Socialism or Bolshevism?" 78.

³² For a non-National Bolshevik comparison from the Spann circle, see the review article Faigl, "Nationalpolitische Erziehung," 35-36.

³³ Spann, *wahre Staat*.

Heimwehr leadership in 1929).³⁴ Employing soldierly nationalism increased the Spann circle's rapport with the Heimwehr rank-and-file and its sympathisers. This was not purely opportunistic, however. The Spann circle internalised certain elements of soldierly nationalism through the vector of the fascist war veteran. This is apparent in such works as Spann's tellingly-titled *Kämpfende Wissenschaft* (*Fighting Science*) of 1934, and in the frequent recourse to soldierly nationalist motifs in the circle's primary journal, *Ständisches Leben*, such as a new emphasis on "action" and frequent input from Italian Fascists themselves, including Mussolini.³⁵ In addition, the circle became increasingly apologetic for the dictatorial ambitions of the Fascist state, even when these contradicted Spann's vision of corporatism.³⁶

Like the Spann circle, the GSF was principally concerned with the transmission of corporatism and demonstrated mostly indirect endorsement of the fascist war veteran. It is difficult to trace the precise use of the fascist war veteran within the GSF, as the group did not publish its own materials, being, first and foremost, a corporatist study society whose public persona manifested in live events. Nevertheless, key members — including founder Waldemar Pabst and the large Stahlhelm contingent on the leadership board — hailed from military backgrounds. Pabst spent years as captain of the Tyrolean Heimwehr before founding the GSF, acquiring additional paramilitary experience through the role and a deep appreciation for Spannian corporatism.³⁷ Pabst's very involvement in the paramilitary speaks to his conviction that groups like the Heimwehr and Stahlhelm were vital to the establishment of a corporate state. For GSF members who held dual membership in the Stahlhelm, such as Duesterberg, Friedrich Everling, and Max von Binzer, soldierly nationalism was of uppermost importance for Germany's future and indispensable for the construction and maintenance of a suitable state.³⁸ Like Pabst, Everling was a follower of Spann, consistently recommending Spann's publications to Stahlhelmers and GSF members alike.³⁹ In addition to the individual soldierly nationalism of many GSF men, this suggests that the GSF also employed similar pragmatic commendations of soldierly nationalism and the fascist war veteran as those seen in the Spann circle's contemporary publications.

³⁴ Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 84-86.

³⁵ Spann, *Kämpfende Wissenschaft*. See, for example, Benito Mussolini, "Die Lehren des Faschismus," *Ständisches Leben* 3, no. 1 (1933): 1-9; Spann, "Zum Geleit," 1.

³⁶ See, for example, Andreae, *Staatsozialismus und Ständestaat*, 204, 207.

³⁷ Waldemar Pabst, 9 February 1933, R 72/280.

³⁸ Duesterberg, "Weshalb Stahlhelm-Selbsthilfe?" R 72/232, 13; Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 18; Max Binzer, "Stahlhelm und Faschismus," 105-107.

³⁹ Everling, *Stahlhelm und organischer Staat*, 17.

The second main vector of Fascist transmission — corporatism — overlapped with soldierly nationalism, but employed its own rationale, and was capable of appealing to different interests. Unlike soldierly nationalism, which accompanied Fascism from the outset, corporatism emerged by degrees in Fascist Italy, and corporatism as theory significantly predated corporatism as practise.⁴⁰ Italian corporatism was envisioned as a real-world reflection of Fascism's ideological values, a means of reconciling and harmonising all sectors of society and their economic outputs with the objectives of the state. Among the groups considered above, the GSF was the most enthusiastic advocate of Italian corporatism. It promoted the Italian model in a more or less unadulterated form for Germany, with the common denominator based in economic rationale. For most GSF members, Italian corporatism's most attractive feature was its ability to safeguard capitalist accumulation. However, the GSF's wholehearted approval belied not only the incomplete nature of Italian corporatism (with GSF members interpreting the Italian experiment in a variety of ways with or without basis in reality), but also the GSF's own lack of conceptual clarity about what form German corporatism should take.

The GSF failed to address its own internal contradictions concerning the role of the free market and the extent to which private accumulation should be relegated to the interests of the state. Members like Ernst Wilhelm Eschmann and Georg Mehliis held that the state should enjoy unchallenged sovereignty in economic matters. Others, like Klaus von Eickstedt and Friedrich Minoux, maintained that an independent free market and private accumulation were necessary to avoid a micro-managed "Bolshevik" economy and ensure national prosperity.⁴¹ So great, however, was the allure of the Italian third way, that these contradictions remained latent during the GSF's brief existence, never emerging as a subject of serious dispute.

The Stahlhelm's strong representation in the GSF helped to strengthen and consolidate associations between corporatism and soldierly nationalism under the aegis of Fascism, and to encourage general, pro-corporate conformity between the GSF and Stahlhelm. However, the Stahlhelm's conversion to corporatism came years before the founding of the GSF, through the intermediary of the fascist war veteran. Corporatism first emerged in the Stahlhelm via one of its subsidiaries, the Stas, the Stahlhelm's social work division.⁴² Already attenuated to the importance of the fascist war veteran for constructing a "Stahlhelm state," many Stahlhelmers saw Italian corporatism as the most realistic way to operate said state.⁴³ This was bolstered by

⁴⁰ Gagliardi, *Age of Corporatism*, <http://doi10.4324/9781032713267-1>

⁴¹ Eschmann, *fascistische Staat in Italien*, 19; Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst*, 105, 146.

⁴² Salvador, "Frontsozialismus der Tat," 112-114.

⁴³ Stahlhelm Selbsthilfe, "Stahlhelm und Arbeiterschaft," R 72/717, 1.

the perceived successes of the labour reforms enacted under Mussolini in the mid-1920s. There was a degree of debate within the Stahlhelm about what form corporatism should take in Germany, but the organisation's overall endorsement of the idea was contingent on corporatism's capacity to transfer military organisation to state organisation, and thus, unlike the GSF, secondary to the value of the fascist war veteran.

Debates about corporatism were largely absent from the National Bolshevik movement and the *Widerstand* circle. This was owing to censure of capitalism and ensuing scepticism about corporatism's purported ability to reconcile workers and employers.⁴⁴ What *did* appeal to many National Bolsheviks, however, was Sorelian national syndicalism, in many ways the ideological forerunner of Italian corporatism.⁴⁵ Despite opposing positions on capitalism, both systems emphasised direct collective bargaining power, with the former apparently offering a more authentic means for the national proletariat to bypass internationalism and seize the means of production without recourse to a potentially corrupt Marxist-Leninist vanguard party. Because of this, the Fascists' efforts to instil organisational corporatism indirectly contributed to *Widerstand's* views on the "positive" elements of Fascism. Fascism, the circle argued, actualised a system that, like Bolshevism, constituted a truer representation of its people than was possible in liberal nations.⁴⁶

Where National Bolshevism and corporatism intersected most significantly, however, was in the Strasser circle. Corporatism emerged as an important concept in the works of Gregor Strasser, Hans Reupke, and their associates from the mid-1920s. Nebulous strains of corporate thought had existed within the Nazi Party from its inception, best exemplified in the writings of Gottfried Feder.⁴⁷ Yet the Strasser circle adjured clearer, more consistent connections between corporatism, Italian Fascism and its own vision for a National Socialist Germany than were ever present in the mainline NSDAP. As one of Gregor Strasser's closest advisors, Reupke was passionate about Italian Fascism and endorsed corporatism as a model for Germany in numerous political tracts.⁴⁸ In his 1925 revision of the Nazi Party's "25 Points," Gregor Strasser unsuccessfully attempted to make corporatism a central feature of the Party programme by expanding upon the preliminary corporatist tendencies outlined by Feder.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Niekisch, *Entscheidung*, 77-78.

⁴⁵ "Über die Gewalt," 159-160.

⁴⁶ Jünger, "Revolution um Karl Marx," 145; Niekisch, *Entscheidung*, 77-78.

⁴⁷ Feder, *Manifest zur Brechung der Zinsknechtschaft*, 11-12.

⁴⁸ Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 61-63. See also Reupke, *Wirtschaftssystem*.

⁴⁹ Reupke, *Nationalsozialismus*, 9.

Corporatism also emerged in Otto Strasser's lauding of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck as the principal ideologue of the KGRNS movement. One of the most significant thinkers of the Conservative Revolution, Moeller van den Bruck envisioned corporatism as a decentralised system affording greater "democratic" accountability to its denizens.⁵⁰ Moeller van den Bruck's own sympathies for Fascism aside, the KGRNS's corporatism amounted, like Gregor Strasser's, to a much closer replication of the Italian system than anything proposed by the NSDAP. Fascist ideologues appealed to corporatism on similar grounds as Moeller van den Bruck, touting its "democratic" benefits, whereas the NSDAP tended to view corporatism with suspicion due to its potential for pluralism and decentralisation.⁵¹

Of the groups considered, the Spann circle was intrinsically the most committed to the corporatist idea. Spann was one of the foremost corporate theorists of his time, comprehensively outlining his vision in the 1921 book *Der wahre Staat*, which predated any Fascist efforts to engineer corporatism. As a result, Spann and his acolytes had established too firm a philosophical and ideological value set to approve of any direct replication of the Fascist system, which they saw as flawed and incomplete. Nevertheless, Italy's reforms immediately captured the group's interest, and, in time, greatly impacted the circle. In contrast to the GSF, which treated the Italian system fairly uncritically, Spann saw Italian Fascism as a doctrineless "blank canvas" evincing the potential to realise universalism. In addition, Spann and his colleagues, like Walther Heinrich and Wilhelm Andreae, argued that Fascist corporatism retained too much of syndicalism.⁵² In its ideal form, corporatism needed to be based upon "organic" connections; in contrast, syndicalism, as a form of Marxism, remained governed by crude materialism.⁵³ Spann and Heinrich were no free marketeers and welcomed a cartelised corporate economy, yet they were critical of the centralised nature and ambitions of the Fascist state, believing that the state's function should be of equal, albeit unique, importance to the functioning of the corporate economy.⁵⁴ The Spann circle's criticisms of dictatorial control fell by the wayside in the 1930s, however, due in part to increasingly desperate efforts to shoehorn Fascism's successes into an argument for viability of corporate universalism. Despite this failure, Spannian philosophy loomed large in interwar Europe, and influenced many of the other groups considered in this thesis. Intersecting, as it often did, with impressions of Italian

⁵⁰ Cerasi, "Rethinking Italian Corporatism," 103.

⁵¹ Bülow, *deutsche Ständestaat*; Neumann, "Interwar Germany and the Corporatist Wave," 136.

⁵² Spann, "Bedeutung des ständischen Gedankens," 10-11; Heinrich, *Faschismus*, 68-69, 51-52; Andreae, *Staatssozialismus*, 207, 222.

⁵³ Heinrich, *Faschismus*, 45-48.

⁵⁴ Spann, "Bedeutung," 6-8; Siegfried, *Universalismus und Faschismus*, 114-115, 118.

Fascism, universalism was a significant example of the construction of new intellectual hybrids.

For many German ultranationalists, Italian Fascism encapsulated, advanced, and influenced their own ideologies, particularly through the emissaries of the fascist war veteran and corporatism. The potency of these two elements often translated into sympathy for Fascism; this, in turn, contributed to the development and promulgation of what may be termed “generic fascism,” as different groups adapted their impressions of Fascism to German-speaking contexts. Alcalde and António Costa Pinto respectively investigated the fascist war veteran and corporatism as agents for the transnational export of Italian Fascist ideology.⁵⁵ However, the two vectors have hitherto been approached mostly separately, and little said on the dialectical relationship between them, including when filtered through the refracting prism of the German ultranationalist imagination. Acknowledging the dynamic interplay between the fascist war veteran and corporatism contributes to a more holistic impression of how Fascism was able to cross geographical and ideological divides, and the intellectual vicissitudes engendered by its cross-pollination with other ideas. This thesis has attempted to highlight the equal importance of the fascist war veteran and corporatism in this process, while analysing the ways in which the two converged in the minds of Germanic ultranationalists, resulting in the expansion of the fascist sphere. It has also provided new insights into the reception of these vectors by examining the responses they generated from groups of varying political character and ideological persuasion. Even when not overwhelmingly positive, the potency of the fascist war veteran and corporatism resulted in the further diffusion of fascism.

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Taken together, the Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus, the Stahlhelm, the National Bolsheviks, the Strasser circle, and the Spann circle reveal the prevalence and power of impressions of Italian Fascism in the interwar German-speaking lands. They demonstrate the ongoing importance of diversifying understandings of fascism from traditional outcome-focused perspectives to process-based understandings. Fascism stemmed from an ideological core which, while unique, was based upon values that overlapped with those of foreign contexts, rendering Fascism capable of easy transmission and permutation. Impressions of Italian Fascism among German ultranationalists thus formed part of a process in which

⁵⁵ Pinto, “Corporatism,” 3. Refer also to the other contributors to this volume, in particular Pasetti, “Fascist Labour Charter,” 60-77; and Cerasi, “Rethinking Italian Corporatism,” 104-123.

conceptual associations between soldierly nationalism and corporatism merged with the concept of what it meant to be “fascist.” This process of pluralisation, stemming from a specific origin, has yet to be applied systemically to the often-nebulous concept of generic fascism.

Often traced to Renzo De Felice’s multiple-volume biography of Mussolini in the 1960s, a resurgence of literature has sought to rehabilitate Mussolini’s image, engaging, at best, in legitimate efforts to differentiate Italian Fascism from Nazism; at worst, in artificial decoupling of fascist aims and apologia for Italy’s crimes before and during the Second World War.⁵⁶ The groups analysed in this thesis were certainly disparate in ambitions, aims, and attitudes; so too were their usages of Italian Fascism. Yet they were also, at the most basic level, inhabitants of a modern society in which the complex communication pathways of mass politics and media allowed for the transmission and hybridisation of ideas in hitherto unprecedented ways. This makes the decoupling of Nazi and Fascist aims theoretically problematic, particularly during the period of formal alliance between the two powers. The theoretical intersections engendered by these networks invite, in turn, a diversified, pluralised view of political ideologies. The manifestation of ideology in the real world was subject to change in response to shifting circumstances — for example, the KPD’s efforts to blur the lines between communism and Nazism in the final years of the Weimar Republic, or the NSDAP’s sporadic bouts of anticapitalism.⁵⁷

In addition to the potential topics touched on above, the investigation into the fascist sphere need not be confined by the standard temporal bookends of 1919 to 1945. A recent edited volume by Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe and Per Anders Rudling explores the adaptations and continuations of fascist thought from its inception to the twenty-first century.⁵⁸ The importance of “perception” as an analytical concept is also contributing to disentangling some of the more problematic assertions in the study of the legacies of Italian and German fascisms. For instance, Daniela Weiner recently examined the didactic application of mutually negative German and Italian perceptions of Fascism and Nazism in school textbooks during the 1950s.⁵⁹ Similarly, Filippo Folcardi’s book, *The Bad German and the Good Italian*, appearing recently for the first

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Patrizia Dogliani, “The Debate on the Historiography of Fascism,” *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought* 3, no. 3-4 (1989): 248-250.

⁵⁷ Brown, *Weimar Radicals*, 15-16, 153; Fischer, *German Communists*, 113.

⁵⁸ See the chapters in *Transnational and Transatlantic Fascism, 1918-2018: The Far Right in East Central and Southeastern Europe*.

⁵⁹ Daniela R. P. Weiner, “Thinking about Fascism(s): The Relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in Italian, West German, and East German Textbooks, 1950-60,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 58, no. 1 (2023): 136-151.

time in English translation, explores perceptions of Germany and Italy during the Second World War, and the ways in which they have been conscripted for modern-day political purposes.⁶⁰ Folcardi's book challenges De Felice's persistent image of Italy's benign nature in comparison to the atrocities of its German allies. It explores the myth's origins in contemporary Allied propaganda aimed at destabilising the Axis and analyses the ongoing role of this politically charged apologue in historiographical scholarship and popular perceptions of modern Italy.⁶¹ Such inroads suggest that much work remains to be done on the roles of subjectivity and perception in the ongoing construction of narratives about fascism.

Transnational analyses equip historians with the tools to examine the workings of the fascist sphere beyond its traditional concentration in Europe. Some historians have designated this as inquiry into "global fascism", entailing a shift away from the scholarly tendency to replicate fascism's inherent Eurocentrism by focusing primarily or solely on its European manifestations.⁶² Daniel Hedinger's recent work incorporates Asian countries into the dynamics of radicalisation. Hedinger argues that Mussolini's efforts to facilitate the growth of fascism in the 1930s largely gave way to less specific transimperial hybridisations during the Second World War, but that fascist influence — understood as ideologically-driven — nevertheless penetrated East Asia.⁶³ Debates about fascism in America are likewise acquiring much-needed scholarly parameters through the efforts of historians to cast critical eyes across the Pacific, examining fascism's real and perceived manifestations in the United States.⁶⁴ Such efforts distinguish real instances of hybridisation, including those stemming from Italy, from superficial similarities or analogues, many of which predated fascism. Combined with debates about present-day manifestations of "fascism" in various guises, it is clear that the fascist sphere remains intellectually relevant, as well as active. Precisely because fascist ideology did not end with Mussolini's regime, understanding the dynamics of hybridisation, adaptation, and

⁶⁰ Filippo Folcardi, *The Bad German and the Good Italian: Removing the Guilt of the Second World War*, trans. Paul Barnaby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023). See also the following book reviews: John Foot, "Captain Corelli's Machine-Gun. The Bad German and the Good Italian: Removing the Guilt of the Second World War by Filippo Folcardi, translated by Paul Barnaby," *London Review of Books*, May 23, 2024, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v46/n10/john-foot/captain-corelli-s-machine-gun>; Alessandro Salvador, "The Bad German and the Good Italian: Removing the Guilt of the Second World War by Filippo Folcardi. Translated by Paul Barnaby," *Modern Italy* (2024): 1-3. <http://doi.org/10.1017/mit.2024.62>.

⁶¹ Salvador, "Bad German and Good Italian," 1.

⁶² Daniel Gr, "Fascist Internationalism: From a Vanished Institution to a Failed Concept?," *Journal of Modern European History* 23, no. 2 (2025): 150.

⁶³ Hedinger, "Fascist Internationalism," 148-149. See also Hedinger's full-length work: *Die Asche: Rom – Berlin – Tokio*.

⁶⁴ For debates about the relationship between fascism and Trumpism, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Janet Ward, "Introduction," in *Fascism in America: Past and Present*, ed. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Janet Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 1-26, and the individual chapters in the volume.

mimicry offers antidotes to the knee-jerk temptation to universalise fascism at the expense of cultural and historical relativities.

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