Throughout the pre-1933 period, the National Socialist party (NSDAP) projected an image of being a broadly-based Volkswagen whose aim was to restore the fortunes of all Germans regardless of status or class. The party's ideological and propagandistic appeal was modelled to attract to the swastika as many sections of Weimar society as possible. This approach made sense, after all, if the NSDAP were to expand its electoral constituency to the point where it could establish a popular mandate for power. Following the unsuccessful Munich putsch in 1923, Hitler renounced violent, revolutionary tactics in favor of a long-term parliamentary strategy that would allow him to assume governmental responsibility within the letter of the law. In the end, of course, the NSDAP did win power legally even if it constantly violated the spirit of the law. While failing to attain an overall majority in Reichstag elections in July and November 1932, the NSDAP, despite showing incipient signs of having passed its peak, was ultimately brought into the government, thanks to the last-minute interventionist power politics of industrial and agrarian elitist groups representing propertied, nationalist, and Protestant Germany.1

Contrary to Joseph Goebbels's assertion in early 1933 that the Machtergreifung signified "a revolution of a workers' movement,"2 empirical historical inquiry has established that by 1933 the NSDAP drew its electoral support overwhelmingly from the small-town and rural Protestant Mittelstand, comprising men and women in roughly equal numbers, in northern, central, and eastern Germany.3 Although by 1930-31 the lower Mittelstand, particularly of the "old" or traditional type, predominated among the party's voters and members, the upper Mittelstand were beginning to flock into the ranks in ever-increasing numbers in 1932,4 thus making the NSDAP more of a catch-all movement of middle-class protest, a movement of bourgeois integration. Two identifiable
groups were manifestly immune to Nazi blandishments: the Catholics, who continued to vote solidly for the confessional Center Party and Bavarian People's party, and the organized industrial working class, who steadfastly maintained their allegiance to the Social Democratic (SPD) and Communist (KPD) parties. Changes in voting patterns among the organized workers usually involved a switch by unemployed, unskilled or semi-skilled urban voters from the SPD to the more radical KPD. Despite some success among workers in certain urban and industrial areas in Westphalia, the Rhineland-Ruhr, Saxony, Thuringia, the Pfalz, and Berlin-Brandenburg, the NSDAP remained a party of middle-class interests, and in terms of its membership, industrial workers were also significantly underrepresented, especially in the leadership cadres. In both proportionate and absolute terms, the working-class element in the NSDAP's constituency from 1925 to 1933 was small, and its claims to be a genuine popular movement had, therefore, no basis in reality. This is the scenario against which any discussion of the party's relationship to the German proletariat must take place. This chapter analyzes this relationship with a view to obtaining a clear perspective on the principal reasons for the NSDAP's failure to win much support among this particular group in Weimar society.

Those industrial workers who did find their way to Hitler were invariably located, for one reason or another, outside the mainstream of working-class, organizational, and ideological development and, in some instances, were drawn from the lumpen proletariat. A small labor aristocracy of skilled workers, dependent craftsmen, and workers with responsibility, such as foremen, were as likely to end up voting for Hitler as not, regardless of whether they were urban- or rural-based. They were joined by another set of workers who did live in small towns or the countryside and who, if employed, were not subject to the supervisory control of a trade union or other kind of workers' group. Most of them were employed in a semiskilled or nonskilled capacity in small businesses and family concerns, such as handicrafts, where the influence of the master/owner and his family was often decisive. In such circumstances, workers were expected to conform to the values laid down by their superiors. In the period of spiralling unemployment during the early 1930s, workers caught in this situation could be reasonably expected to be more careful than usual not to offend their employers for fear of dismissal. Similar types of workers—weakly or not at all unionized—were also to be found in public transport, especially the railways and trams; in postal services; in the gas, water and electricity industries; and among agricultural laborers in socially depressed parts of eastern Germany. These workers lacked, therefore, a developed proletarian consciousness, which prevented them from identifying with the traditional working-class movement. Their scholastic and political education was of a very low standard, and they quite often had no previous record of voting for either the
The younger members of this group, whether employed or not, were particularly susceptible to National Socialist emphasis on nationalism, egalitarianism, and the appeal to the "dignity of labor," while the dynamic and pseudo-idealistic style of the party struck a responsive chord in young, immature minds. At the same time, the style and vigor with which NSDAP propaganda was conducted cannot be underestimated as a factor in attracting workers in a depressed social and economic environment.

Another, albeit indeterminate, group of pro-Hitler workers were those fearful of losing their secure, if modest, economic and social status in an era of uncertainty and vast unemployment and being relegated to the lumpen proletariat. Unskilled or semi-skilled workers out of a job usually shunned the NSDAP, but the younger, long-term unemployed in both rural and urban areas were more favorably disposed towards National Socialism. Also, workers who were generally traditionally minded, patriotic, and even anti-Semitic, rejected the international flavor of the working-class movement and saw in the NSDAP the best opportunity of reestablishing the workers and their organizations within a more "acceptable," that is, nationalist, framework. Brewery workers provide an example of this category. Finally, the NSDAP managed to win over small sections of organized industrial workers in a few well-defined regions within the major industrial centers of the country. In virtually all of these regions, unusual industrial and social conditions prevailed, resulting in a reversal of normal voting inclinations. Chemnitz-Zwickau, where small-scale textile manufacturing and a domestic system predominated, is a well-known example of this type of environment. Here, the NSDAP polled well above its normal, low average in industrial areas: for example, 47 percent in the Reichstag election in July 1932.

It is impossible to precisely quantify the different sections of the pro-NSDAP working class until a more detailed investigation is made of local and regional electoral responses, but taken as a whole, the aggregate was not significant. The political motivation of any social group, especially one which in part behaves contrary to accepted class patterns, is a complex phenomenon, involving not only class and occupational status, but other variables such as peculiar local and domestic influences, emotional attachments, age, education, and personal sensitivities.

The mass of organized workers was sufficiently disciplined, socially and politically, to resist National Socialism. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the working class had developed in an atmosphere of ostracism and outright persecution, a sense of group and class identity which, if anything, had been further solidified by the experience of the First World War, the November Revolution, and the economic and
political vicissitudes of the Weimar years. In a society as class-conscious as the Republic, where voting preferences were mainly determined by class, social, and confessional allegiances, the organized proletariat was bound to shrug off the NSDAP's advances more easily than most. Like the Catholics, the workers constituted more than a mere segment of the population. They possessed a distinguishable and mature subculture situated firmly within a variegated organizational structure. This situation engendered feelings of class unity, solidarity, and loyalty which, in turn, were reinforced by the effective political representation of working-class interests at the very highest levels of government through the SPD, KPD, and the socialist trade unions. The Catholic working class likewise had their representatives in politics and in the factories. The influence of the SPD and Catholic parties also extended into regional government. Prussia was controlled by the SPD for most of the Weimar period, and in Bavaria, the Bavarian People's party reigned supreme. These parties achieved material benefits for their working-class supporters—higher wages, better conditions of work, and improved welfare facilities. The integrity and vitality of working-class life was thus protected on many sides, at least until the onset of the depression in the early 1930s.

The depression undoubtedly weakened the trade-union movement at a time also when the SPD appeared to be politically paralyzed at the national level and when the two major proletarian parties were mutually hostile. As a result of wage cuts, short-term employment, reduced consumer spending, inadequate unemployment insurance, rising cost of living, intense competition for jobs, and, of course, unprecedented levels of unemployment, the trade unions suffered severely and in 1933 were in no condition to resist National Socialist onslaughts. However, while tragically split at the very moment of fascist resurgence, because of the KPD's ultra-leftist strategy, which identified the SPD as "social fascists," the working class remained loyal to their interests and organizations. There was no question of disillusionment with socialism among the vast majority of workers. The boundaries of the National Socialist appeal were thus marked only a few degrees inside the proletarian constituency. Racist anti-Semitism, chauvinism, militarism, imperialism, and other salient features of Hitler's doctrine were simply incompatible, ideologically and historically, with the traditions and ethos of the German working class. On the other hand, it is wrong to argue, as the Oxford historian Timothy W. Mason has done, that the NSDAP was a conscious crusade against the working class. Similarly, Trotsky's comment that Hitler's triumph was "the greatest defeat of the proletariat in the history of the world" falls into the same category of gross exaggeration. The interests of the NSDAP and the German workers may have been, objectively speaking, diametrically opposed, but it is quite another matter to depict the Party as an actively antiworkers movement above
all else. The NSDAP has to be understood instead as the spearhead of a broader restorationist, racial-chauvinistic movement in German society directed at the many facets of modernism: industrialization, democracy, liberalism, Marxism, urbanization, and parliamentarianism. From a National Socialist standpoint, the working class was but one social manifestation of modern civilization. The social and politico-ideological dynamics of National Socialism were multivarious and complex, and cannot be reduced, therefore, to simplistic, one-sided explanations.

There is a large body of literature dealing with the theoretical and empirical relationship between capitalism/big business and fascism. This is a controversial area of debate among historians, and it is not our purpose here to attempt a balancing act between conflicting interpretations. Rather, in deliberately rejecting a deterministic approach to the problem, this chapter examines a number of empirical reasons for the tenuous relationship between the NSDAP and the German working class. There were important deficiencies in the party's appeal to organized workers, which largely account for its relative inability to attract their support.

In the first instance, the failure of the NSDAP to offer a coherent and convincing interpretation of its "socialism" was a grave handicap. The party produced a plethora of radical-sounding phrases and slogans—often imitations of the SPD or KPD originals—which were put across with considerable vehemence but little sincerity, particularly during election campaigns and in large cities and urban areas. Taking a lead from the proworker orientation of the NSDAP's northern wing in 1925-26, a social revolutionary approach dominated the party's propaganda until the Reichstag election in May 1928 as it sought to establish in competition with the Socialists and Communists a secure foothold among industrial workers in major cities. When the results of the 1928 election made clear the almost total ineffectiveness of this urban plan, the NSDAP's emphasis in ideology and propaganda was fundamentally altered in favor of a new middle-class, nationalist-conservative strategy. Between 1929 and 1933, when the traditional bourgeois party system disintegrated amidst socioeconomic and psychological tensions induced by the depression, the NSDAP was able to build up its following among the broad range of the Protestant middle classes on the basis of its new orientation, in which social revolutionary themes were drastically toned down compared with previous years. Even then, the party's socialism remained vague and eclectic; in essence, it was an expression of petty bourgeois reactionary anticapitalism which, saturated with ultrachauvinism and racist anti-Semitism, had nothing in common with the traditions of Marxist socialism. The NSDAP's anticapitalism was a counter-revolutionary, antimodernist ideology in the fullest sense.

Nazi socialism was rooted in late nineteenth century neoconservatism of the kind preached by Adolf Stoecker and Friedrich Naumann and
revived in the early 1920s by Oswald Spengler and others. Spengler's concept of Prussian socialism, which articulated the German intelligentsia's disdain of materialism and monetary values, was most notably taken up within the NSDAP by Gregor Strasser, who repeatedly stressed the need to combat these "evil" influences of modern civilization: "It is the most distressing feature of this capitalistic economic system that all values are measured by money, by means, by property! The decline of the Volk is the inevitable result of the turn to this measure of value because selection by property is the mortal enemy of race, of blood, of life."24 The early diary of Joseph Goebbels25 and the speeches and writings of Gregor Strasser during the mid-1920s contain the most vivid examples of the party's radical rhetoric. In 1926, for example, Strasser thundered in a fashion that would not have disgraced a SPD or KPD spokesman: "We are socialists, we are enemies, deadly enemies of the present economic system, with its exploitation of the economically weak, with its unjust means of reward, with its immoral evaluation of people according to their possessions and money instead of according to their responsibilities and achievements, and we are resolved to destroy this system in all circumstances."26

This was social demagoguery at its very worst and at its most vacuous. Indeed, Strasser blithely remarked the same year that "rational thought corrodes the foundations of life itself."27 This was not an encouraging view for those seeking an intelligible expose' of his "socialism." Strasser demanded of others the same emotional-mystical commitment to the cause which he had: "And we know with a certainty which proceeds from the blood . . . that our path is right."28

His message was revelatory rather than explanatory, and in this nonintellectual attitude Strasser was at one, of course, with other party leaders.29 Just as the socialist parts of the party's official program of 1920 were left without adequate explanation throughout the pre-1933 period, so the radical pronouncements of leading NSDAP officials remained mere invective, a device of dishonest propaganda, and a futile stratagem to deceive German workers into following Hitler. Against the deep class-consciousness and socialist education of the proletariat, the NSDAP's social revolutionary animus was inevitably seen to be the pathetic fraud it was. Only members of right-wing paramilitary groups, nationalist-minded intellectuals and students, discontented white-collar workers, the self-employed, small and independent producers, and traders and craftsmen supported this peculiar "German socialism." All of them, fearing proletarianization in an increasingly complex and impersonal industrial world, clung hopefully and tenaciously to their social and economic status in the face of expanding capitalism and organized labor.

Hitler, unlike Goebbels and Strasser, never made any real attempt to hide his contempt for the masses, especially the
workers whom, he stated in *Mein Kampf,* were to be won over to the NSDAP and the nationalist idea only because of the strength of their numbers. The Führer undoubtedly appreciated the importance of the November Revolution in relation to the working class. He explained the Revolution in terms of domestic political problems rather than military shortcomings, stressing in particular the pernicious influence of Marxists and Jews on the German proletariat in 1917-19. If Germany were once again to emerge as a world-class power, Hitler reasoned, the home front had to be made safe and stable by integrating the industrial work force into the national community. He was not interested in the social welfare or wider interests of the workers; they were to be seduced and cajoled into supporting the NSDAP by bread and circuses, as Hitler informed Otto Strasser. By emotional inclination and political instinct, the Führer remained the archtypal petty bourgeois. He unswervingly upheld the principle of private property throughout his career, ruthlessly purged so-called socialists from the party at various stages after 1923, opposed for a long period the establishment of a National Socialist-sponsored trade union, and ultimately came to power with the backing, among others, of reactionary elements of big business. For Hitler, and the NSDAP as a whole, socialism or anticapitalism simply amounted to an extension of their anti-Semitic chauvinism: "Unproductive," that is, Jewish, finance capitalism was the enemy, not "creative" German private capitalism.

The blatantly opportunistic and spurious nature of the NSDAP's socialism largely accounts for the failure of its trade union affiliate, the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization (NSBO), to make noteworthy inroads into the ranks of the factory proletariat before 1933. The NSBO's appeal was a rather crude amalgam of nationalism and anticapitalism, as illustrated, for example, by its Hilf-Aktion (Hinein in die Betriebe) in 1931. During 1932 the NSBO tried to sharpen its radical image by organizing and participating in strike action by factory employees and other groups of blue-collar workers, culminating in the Berlin transport workers' strike in autumn of that year. This tactic was unsuccessful. When the NSBO began at last to expand its membership in 1932 from forty thousand to over three hundred thousand, this was achieved mainly on the basis of recruitment among artisans, craftsmen, and lower-grade white-collar salaried employees in industry and the public services. Only after 1933 did the NSBO begin to attract substantial numbers of ordinary workers and then in an atmosphere of violence and wholesale assaults on the working class and its organizations.

The development of the NSBO epitomizes the wider ineffectiveness of the mistakenly labelled "Nazi Left" among the German working class before 1933. The term "Nazi Left" occurs frequently in the historiography of early National Socialism.
Towards the Holocaust

being properly assessed. It is a loose and convenient description, designed to cover all putative socialist and anticapitalist circles in Hitler's movement, including the party, SA, Hitler Youth (HJ), NSBO, and the National Socialist Students' League (NSDStB). This Nazi Left is usually assumed to have existed from about 1924-25 until the so-called "Second Revolution" was crushed during the Röhm Purge in June 1934. Furthermore, Gregor Strasser, who was the NSDAP's chief of propaganda (1926-27) and organization (1923-32), is invariably referred to as the leader of this Nazi Left. The whole idea of there having been a Nazi Left in any concrete form, whether led by Strasser or anyone else, can be seen to be entirely erroneous if the evidence is examined.

We have already noted, and discounted as counterfeit, the socialism of the NSBO. A similar conclusion may also be reached about the alleged socialism of the SA. Despite drawing most of its rank-and-file followers from the working class, the SA never sought to formulate a coherent ideological posture consistent with the nature of its sociological makeup. A programmatic statement of its socialism was never made. Instead, the basis of the SA's socialism was merely a series of passionate, radical, and often pugilistic remarks by various leaders on the necessity of smashing Marxism, the Republic, and Jews, and of creating some sort of ill-defined egalitarian Volksgemeinschaft. The absence of evidence for a considered or genuine socialist ethos is hardly unexpected in view of the SA's combative and militaristic profile: It was a force designed to capture and dominate the streets. Ideology mattered little in these circumstances, and the socialism it is supposed to have possessed amounted to little more than the ability to organize soup kitchens, shelter, and clothing for sections of the working-class unemployed in Germany's larger cities. The SA's radicalism is, in fact, a charitable description of its inordinate capacity for thuggery on a grand scale. When the Machtsergreifung did not realize the career prospects, status, and power ambitions of some of its personnel, the SA, under the leadership of Röhm, sought a further extension of the Nazi Revolution. This was an exercise in power; it was not meant to further the cause of socialism, in whatever guise. The principal reasons for the events of the summer of 1934, which saw the political emasculation of the SA, are hardly connected with a fight for a second socialist revolution.

The only party organizations to have possessed an authentic attachment to a social revolutionary radicalism were, ironically, of comparatively little political importance, the NSDStB and HJ. In the mid-1920s the NSDStB was led by an earnest group around Wilhelm Tempel who, in a vague fashion, tried to bridge the gap between National Socialism and the poorer university students. The attempt was as unsuccessful as it was short-lived, however, for when Baldur von Schirach replaced Tempel as Reichsführer, the NSDStB began to adopt a conservative-nationalist
outlook in keeping with the NSDAP’s post-1928 reorientation. It was on this altered ideological and social basis that the NSDStB went on very rapidly to a position of strength in university politics.

The HJ’s engagement with socialism was of slightly longer duration, from its creation in 1926 until the dismissal from office of its founder and leader, Kurt Gruber, in October 1931. During that five-year period, the HJ, while emphasizing its nationalism and anti-Semitism, gave juvenile expression to a certain socialistic anticapitalism. However intellectually shallow this commitment was among the under-eighteen-year-old members, it was at least sincere and motivated by an exuberant youthful idealism, which aimed at breaking up class-ridden Weimar society and replacing it with a true national community. This ideological inclination attracted a predominately working-class membership. Only when von Schirach and Adrian von Renteln took over from Gruber was the HJ’s socialism and proletarian composition diluted to some extent as the group’s appeal was increasingly guided towards the nationalist concerns of bourgeois youth. Nonetheless, in 1933 the HJ retained enough of its early character and ethos to remain the only National Socialist organization still genuinely believing in some kind of socialism. But, of course, in terms of political influence, the HJ hardly counted. That influence lay above all in the hands of the NSDAP, and it is with reference to the party that the socialist credentials of the National Socialist movement before 1933 need to be ultimately measured.

The ideological foundations of the "Nazi Left" are alleged to have been provided by the Draft Program formulated under the supervision of Gregor Strasser in late 1925. In fact, it would be misleading to regard the Draft as evidence of a socialist wing in the NSDAP and equally wrong to see it as a program supported by all shades of opinion among the party’s would-be radicals. The Draft merely amounted to a more precise and emphatic reaffirmation of the anticapitalist sections of the official NSDAP program of 1920. Strasser’s Draft accentuated the radicals’ commitment to a brand of extreme nationalism and Pan-German imperialism to which Hitler and the bourgeois Munich section of the party could hardly have objected; at the same time, the Draft’s anti-Semitic content, while relatively moderate by the Führer’s high standards in demanding the deportation of all Jews who had entered Germany since August 1, 1914, and the withdrawal of German citizenship from all remaining Jews, was nonetheless in the mainstream of the NSDAP’s general attitude towards the Jewish question. As for the Draft’s proposals on nationalization, worker participation in industrial management, profits and ownership, and agrarian reform, these were uniformly tentative, nebulous, and indicative only of the radicals’ emotional ties to a romantic version of anticapitalism. The Draft foresaw a sort of mixed economy in which all property belonged to the nation, but where individual
citizens would continue to own property on a lease basis. This was the Draft's main proposal to effect a redistribution of wealth, but it clearly lacked either substance or sense. In reality, the interests of industrial workers and agricultural laborers were given paltry consideration. Ideologically, therefore, the Draft, in spurning Marxism and formal capitalism in favor of a fascist-corporative structure based on a national dictatorship, was disappointingly unoriginal. It was simply another lucid example of that petty bourgeois socialism so common in right-wing circles in Germany during the 1920s. Even so, the Draft did not have the unanimous backing of the party's radicals. While the Strasser brothers and Goebbels seem to have inclined towards a limited egalitarian, proworkers approach, others, such as ex-Freiikorps commander Franz von Pfeffer and the North Germans, Ludolf Haase and Hermann Fobke, were more elitist in outlook and wanted a society attuned to the concept of achievement (Leistungsprinzip). These differences were highlighted by the discussion of the Draft at a meeting of the Working Association of the North West German Gauleiter of the NSDAP (AG) in Hanover in January 1926 and were not significantly reduced during the remainder of the 1920s.

The Nazi Left was as disunited organizationally as it was ideologically in 1925-26. The AG, which was set up in September 1925, might have furnished the basis for a permanently organized faction within the NSDAP had not Gregor Strasser, under severe pressure from Hitler following the Bamberg Conference in February 1926, disbanded it. While in existence, the AG was a loosely constructed body for discussion of ideological matters involving those party leaders and officials who were anxious to give greater weight to socialist principles. It is true that Strasser was on friendly, personal terms with many of the AG's more prominent personalities, but such bonds were not necessarily translated into political alliances. In brief, the NSDAP's radicals in 1925-26 did not possess a degree of organizational or ideological unity that would justify the view that a Nazi Left existed as an identifiable entity within the Party. The term "Nazi Left" is simply a convenient way of referring to that small number of party members who displayed an indistinct form of anticapitalist radicalism, a viewpoint firmly located in an anti-Marxist, petty bourgeois scale of values in Weimar Germany. Developments among these members accompanying the collapse of the AG—the formal withdrawal of the Draft program by Gregor Strasser in March 1926, the embarrassing failure to support the SPD-KPD sponsored campaign for the expropriation without compensation of the former royal houses (Fürstenenteignung), and the acrimonious "defection" of Goebbels—add substance to the thesis that there was no Nazi Left.

Moreover, the establishment and development in northern Germany of the Kampfverlag under the direction of the Strassers did not produce a more meaningful concept of a Nazi Left. The journal,
The NSDAP and the German Working Class

NS-Briefe, was conceived by Gregor Strasser in the summer of 1925 as a forum for discussing programmatic issues and generally as a means of strengthening the cause of anticapitalist radicalism in the party.49 Strasser repeatedly emphasized that the journal was not questioning Hitler's authority, but only challenging some of his political ideas. This aspect was poignantly illustrated by the heated debate in 1927 between Strasser and Alfred Rosenberg over the definition and understanding of "National Socialism."50 Rosenberg relegated socialism to a peripheral role in his interpretation, while Strasser made clear his fundamental disagreement with this view. However, even here, Strasser could not be precise about his socialism; his differences with Munich it became apparent, were over emphasis rather than substance.51 Otherwise, the tone and style of NS-Briefe and related publications of the Kampfverlag were anticapitalist and antibourgeois,52 but they adduced nothing more substantive vis-a-vis socialism than this. Indeed, the main function of the Strasserite press in the mid-1920s was to support the Party's attempts to attract industrial workers to its ranks; A certain sympathy for the proletariat and the need to bring it into the struggle for "national freedom" was a frequent theme in its pages.53

When the appeal to industrial workers was seen to have been a complete failure at the Reichstag election in 1928, the Kampfverlag circle and its radical supporters in the NSDAP were put in an agonizing dilemma: Should they abandon socialism and fall in behind Hitler's new nationalist-conservative strategy towards the middle classes, or should they press on more vehemently with the old line? Gregor Strasser, for one, had sufficient political sagacity to draw the obvious conclusions, and he thereafter increasingly sought to distance himself from his brother and a few other diehards who persevered.54 But the publication in 1929 by Otto Strasser of the "Fourteen Theses of the German Revolution" was another typically bombastic statement that once again failed to clear the fog which engulfed the radicals' socialism. If the 1928 Reichstag election dealt a mortal blow to the NSDAP's radicals, the withdrawal of Otto Strasser and his followers in 1930 has been rightly seen by Reinhard Kühnl as the final act of the putative Nazi Left.55 Kühnl, however, has reached a correct conclusion for the wrong reasons.

In the first place, Kühnl is convinced of the existence of a recognizable Nazi left in the NSDAP from 1925 to 1930, whereas it has been indicated here that this probably is an erroneous supposition. Secondly, Otto Strasser's political importance has been exaggerated by Kühnl: He was always in the shadow of his older brother, Gregor, and only made a name for himself after he had left the NSDAP and established the Black Front organization. Subsequently, Otto's many (unreliable) writings on the early NSDAP served to distort his own modest contribution
to the party. More importantly, Kühnl may be unaware of the fundamental reason for the nonexistence of a Nazi Left by 1930; namely, the dramatic transformation in the political and ideological attitudes of the Nazi Left's alleged leader, Gregor Strasser.

Strasser's identification with an emotional socialism and anticapitalism had diminished since he became organizational chief of the NSDAP in January 1923 and particularly since the collapse of the urban-plan strategy in the elections of that year. He began, instead, to evolve a broader, less sectarian vision of Weimar politics. This became evident in his article, "Der neue Ton," published in Die Faust in February 1929, in which he called for moderation and more emphasis on discussion with opponents by the Party. At the same time, there were whispers in certain circles within the NSDAP about Strasser's changing priorities. A Party member, Friedrich, for example, complained to Theo Habicht, leader of the NSDAP in Wiesbaden, that not only was the Party betraying socialism, but worse still, Strasser had given into the "fascist tactics" of Hitler: "Gregor Strasser was the brightest hope for a socialist NSDAP and now that has been most regretfully lost. His refusal to join his brother, Otto, in opposition to Hitler in 1930, was the first concrete manifestation of Gregor's changing perceptions; further evidence appeared in 1930-32.

During the early 1930s, Strasser developed a wide and diverse range of personal and political contacts outside the NSDAP, including important circles in the Rhenish-Westphalian Coal Syndicate and the chemical conglomerate, I. G. Farben, industrialists such as Paul Silverberg, various neocconservative groups, among them the Tat Circle, Chancellor Hindenburg, General Kurt von Schleicher, and trade unionists. Consequently, Strasser enjoyed a substantial and favorable reputation among a significant cross section of Weimar politics at a time when his achievements as organization leader and public speaker consolidated his standing within the NSDAP. He had emerged as a powerful political figure in his own right. By 1932, despite several well-publicized speeches with a radical flavor--like that in the Reichstag in May 1932 when he gave voice to the "anticapitalist yearnings" of the German people--Strasser had come out as a firm advocate of a coalition course for the NSDAP as a means of establishing a broadly structured nationalist-conservative government. In this process of evolution from abrasive party politician to conciliatory national figure, Strasser's earlier socialism was no longer conspicuous. Although he continued to enjoy a popular reputation as the NSDAP's leading socialist, in reality, that earlier notable component of his ideological armory had been superceded by other tendencies. A nationalist disposition now transcended his narrow Party allegiance, and the Nazi Left had lost its erstwhile principle spokesman.
The total ideological and organizational vacuity of the idea of a coherent Nazi Left was unmistakably revealed by the NSDAP crisis in December 1932, which culminated in Strasser resigning his party offices because of his fundamental disagreement with Hitler over strategy and policy. In his moment of supreme personal and political crisis, Strasser discovered that though he may have had numerous friends and sympathizers in the National Socialist movement, including Gauleiters and Reichstag deputies, he had few allies willing to follow him against the Führer. There was no Nazi Left to come to his aid because, contrary to the view of many contemporaries, including General von Schleicher, such a group did not exist. And it never had. Schleicher's plan to use the Nazi Left under Strasser's leadership as an essential element in a coalition government rested on a tragic illusion.

The new chancellor did not perceive that socialism had long ceased to be a viable political influence in any part of the NSDAP, and in turn, he misunderstood the nature of Strasser's personal development during the last years. Furthermore, Schleicher was ignorant of the organizational character of the party, which effectively blocked the emergence of a Nazi Left or any other faction. The loyalty of the Gauleiters was ultimately to Hitler: They depended for their position on his support. Despite a rapidly expanding and complex bureaucracy, which was directed by Strasser, Hitler was determined to maintain his direct and personal relationship with the Gauleiters. However much Strasser formally controlled organizational affairs, the special link between the Gauleiters and Hitler continued to function independently on the basis of the Führer's charisma and authority. In December 1932 that link held fast and virtually guaranteed the failure of the would-be usurper, Gregor Strasser.

The refusal of the overwhelming majority of the German working class to respond positively to National Socialism before 1933 can be explained in terms of the ideology, character, and strategy of the NSDAP, as well as by the traditional class and politico-ideological perceptions of the workers themselves. There was an absence of basic empathy between the two sides. Within this broader context, we have argued here that the whole notion of a "Nazi Left" is erroneous, since there never was a coherent ideological and organizational framework for such a group, particularly after 1923 when the socialist orientation had signally failed and Gregor Strasser began to trod a different path in Weimar politics. The nonexistence of a Nazi Left thus helps account for the NSDAP's inability to attract the working class before 1933. Once Hitler was in power, the National Socialists had to find alternative methods of reaching a modus vivendi with the workers. Persuasion and electoral propaganda, which had made little impact in the Weimar period, were replaced, therefore, by outright terror and violence during the
course of 1933 and supplemented thereafter by a mixture of artful seduction (Schönheit der Arbeit—the "Beauty of work" slogan and program), tight supervision (German Labor Front), and callous repression (Gestapo, SS).
NOTES


Towards the Holocaust


5 Gerhard Schulz, Der Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus: Krise und Revolution in Deutschland (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1975), p. 479 ff. Note the contemporary overreaction to the scale of working-class support for the National Socialists; for example, Georgi Dimitroff, Address to the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, in Dimitroff, Ausgewählte Werke, Bd. 2 (East Berlin, 1956), p. 526.

6 Kater, "Zur Soziographie," pp. 139, 149f, argues that in 1923 only 9.5 percent of NSDAP members were workers, though this figure has been rightly criticized for not including skilled workers (Facharbeiter). See Jürgen Kocka, Zur Problematik der deutschen Angestellten 1914-1933," in Hans Mommsen, Dietmar Petzina, Bernd Weisbrod, eds., Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1974), p. 390, fn. 13. Even so, the worker component would remain small, at around 18 percent. In August 1921 it is estimated that 10.4 percent of members were workers (Donald H. Douglas, "The Parent Cell: Some Computer Notes on the Composition of the First Nazi Party Group in Munich 1919-21," Central European History, 10,
The NSDAP and the German Working Class 147

1977, pp. 62-63). Between 1925 and 1929 workers made up only 7 percent of party members (Michael H. Kater, "Ansätze zu einer Soziologie der SA bis zur Röhm-Krise," in Ulrich Engelhardt et al., eds., Soziale Bewegung und politische Verfassung: Beiträge zur Geschichte der modernen Welt /Stuttgart: Klett, 1976, p. 302), while a figure of 8 percent has been quoted for the period before 1930 (Albrecht Tyrell, Führer befiehlt... Selbstzeugnisse aus der "Kampfzeit" der NSDAP /Düsseldorf: Droste, 1969, p. 379). A total of 270,000 workers were reputedly party members before 1933. See Martin Broszat, Der Staat Hitlers (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), p. 52. NSDAP statistics, which indicate that 32.5 percent of members in January 1933 were workers, must be treated cautiously because of the very loose definition of "worker" employed by the party. It is certain that a considerable lower-middle-class element was included in the quoted percentage (cf. Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP: Parteistatistik, I, Munich 1935, pp. 69-71). In heavily industrialized areas, the percentage of proletarian NSDAP members was obviously higher than average. In this connection, see Detlef Mühlberger, "The Sociology of the NSDAP: The Question of Working-Class Membership," Journal of Contemporary History, 15, 1980, pp. 500, 504; Wilfried Böhneke, Die NSDAP im Ruhrgebiet 1920-1933 (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1974), Part C; and Jürgen W. Falter, "Wählerbewegungen zur NSDAP 1924-1933: Methodische Fragen, empirisch abgesicherte Erkenntnisse, offene Fragen," in Otto Büsch, ed., Wählerbewegungen in der europäischen Geschichte (Berlin: Colloquium-Verlag, 1980). In some nonindustrial regions, such as Middle Franconia, the percentage of workers holding Party membership was surprisingly high, 40.5 percent in 1932. (Rainer Hambrecht, Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Mittel- und Oberfranken (1925-1933) /Nuremberg: Stadtarchiv, 1975, pp. 304-8.) Possible explanations for the presence of workers in the NSDAP's ordinary membership are suggested in Stachura "Who Were the Nazis?" There is little scholarly dispute about the unimportant working-class component in the ranks of party leaders (Gauleiter, Reichstag faction, and so on). See Kater, "Sozialer Wandel," pp. 36-38, 51ff; Ronald Rogowski, "The Gauleiter and the Social Origins of Fascism," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 19 (1977), pp. 399-430; Peter Hüttenberger Die Gauleiter: Studie zum Wandel des Machtgefüges in der NSDAP (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1969), pp. 214, 219; and Albrecht Tyrell "Führergedanke und Gauleiterwechsel: Die Teilung des Gaues Rheinland der NSDAP 1931," Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 23, 1975, esp. pp. 343-56, for an illuminating sketch of pre-1933 Gauleiters.

Towards the Holocaust


11 Peter H. Merkl, in introduction to section on German fascism in *Who Were the Fascists*, p. 263.


16 Mason, *Sozialpolitik*, p. 79.


18 It is not possible to provide an exhaustive list here. But a recent survey by Bernt Hagtvet and Reinhard Kühnl, "Contemporary Approaches to Fascism: A Survey of Paradigms,"
in Who Were the Fascists, pp. 26-51, contains excellent bibliographical references.


21 Cf. Berlin Police Report of March 1927 which stresses the NSDAP's efforts in Elberfeld, Chemnitz, Plauen, Berlin, and so on, and further Police Report of October 15, 1927 in Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA); Reichskanzlei R431/2696. Also see report of January 1927 to the NSDAP Reichsleitung from Karl Kaufmann covering activities in the Ruhr, in BA; Sammlung Schumacher: 230.


26 Gregor Strasser, "Gedanken über aufgaben der Zukunft," NS Briefe, 1, 1926, NR. 18.

27 Strasser, Kampf um Deutschland, p. 133.

23 Ibid., p. 113.


34 Reinhold Muchow, Sind die Nationalsozialisten sozialreaktionär? (Munich: Eber-Verlag, n.d.).


38 Heinrich Bennecke, Hitler und die SA (Munich: Olzog, 1962), esp. pp. 142-212; Andreas Werner, "SA: 'Wehrverband,' 'Parteitruppe,' oder 'Revolutionsarmee'? Studien zur Geschichte der SA und der NSDAP 1920-33" (Dissertation,
The NSDAP and the German Working Class 151


Peter D. Stachura, Nazi Youth in the Weimar Republic (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Press, 1975), pp. 47-57.

Jbid., pp. 57-62.


Gregor Strasser's anti-Semitism may not have been as radical or as racially motivated as that of other Party leaders, including Hitler, but he did expressly denounce on many occasions "Jewish finance capitalism," which he alleged would "reduce all other peoples to bondage" (Strasser, Kampf um Deutschland, pp. 17, 19). He also criticized alleged Jewish control of the media, and in his radio broadcast in June 1932 he bluntly affirmed that his aim was
to drive Jews out of responsible positions in German public life, though he would stop short at persecuting them. Despite Strasser's comparative moderation, he was successfully prosecuted several times during his career by the Jewish Central-Verein for his anti-Semitic public utterances. Donald Niewyk The Jews in Weimar Germany (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1930), p. 38.

Details in BA:NS26/396. See further criticism of the Draft by a Dr. Harnisch, who stresses its unacceptable Marxist character, in BA:NS26/1304.

Strasser's letter to AG members of March 5, 1926, requesting the return of Draft copies, in BA:NS26/900.

Comprehensive coverage is given by Ulrich Schüren Der Volksentscheid zur Fürstenenteignung 1926 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1978), passim.

Strasser editorial in NS-Briefe, October 1, 1925; Strasser letter to Oswald Spengler of June 2, 1925, in Oswald Spengler, Briefe, 1913-36, ed. Anton A. Koktanek (Munich: Beck, 1963), p. 391ff. For further details on origin and development of the journal, see report of October 1936 by the Hauptarchiv der NSDAP, in BA:NS26/1175.

Rosenberg's letter of February 24, 1927 to Strasser, in BA: NSG (Kanzle Rosenberg): 143—Persönlicher Schriftwechsel; Strasser article in NS-Briefe, February 15, 1927.


This particular aspect is well documented by Gregor Strasser's article, "Bürgerliche Ängste," in NS-Briefe, February 1, 1926.

Gregor Strasser, "Deutsch-völkische Freiheitspartei und wir," in NS-Briefe, August 15, 1926; also Strasser in NS-Briefe, July 15, 1927. There were statements by the Strasser press on a wide range of topics, from foreign policy to female emancipation. On the latter see Gregor Strasser, "Die Frau und der Nationalsozialismus," Völkischer Beobachter, April 6, 1932. Also, Michael H. Kater, "Krise des Frauenstudiums in der Weimarer Republik," Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, 59 (1972), pp. 207-55.

The NSDAP and the German Working Class


55 For example, Hitler and I (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940); History in My Time (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941); Exil (Munich: Heinrich-Heine-Verlag, 1969).

56 Stachura, "'Der Fall Strasser': Gregor Strasser, Hitler and National Socialism 1930-1932," in Shaping of the Nazi State, p. 91f.

57 Die Faust was a substitute for the temporarily banned Berliner Arbeiterzeitung.

58 BA. Zeitgeschichtlicher Sammlung: ZSg 103 (Zeitungsausschnittsammlung Lauterbach)/732 (NSDAP).


60 See Gregor's letter of July 22, 1930 to Rudolf Jung, the Sudeten German leader, in BA: Sammlung Schumacher: 313.


62 The full text of this "Arbeit und Brot" speech is in BA: Zeitgeschichtlicher Sammlung: NSD 12 (Reichspropagandaleiter der NSDAP)/16.

63 See Strasser's revealing letters on this subject to Erich Koch on September 1, 1931 (BA:NS22/1065); to Dr. Schlange, Gauleiter of Brandenburg, on September 12, 1931 (BA:NS22/1046); and to Ernst Graf zu Reventlow on March 23, 1932 (Berlin Document Center: Personal File Reventlow). The theme of coalition was also central to Strasser's major speeches in late 1932: for example, to an NSD rally in Berlin in October (text in BA: Nachlass Zarnow: Nr. 44), and in his "Die Gebote der Stunde" address on November 14 (text in BA: Zeitgeschichtlicher Sammlung: NSD 13 /Reichspressechef der NSDAP7: 11).

64 Stachura, "Der Fall Strasser," p. 93.

65 As shown by his voluminous correspondence: see BA:NS26/1068-76.

66 Stachura "Der Fall Strasser," pp. 105ff., 112.