Introduction

Michael N. Dobkowski and Isidor Wallimann

The rise of National Socialism in Germany and the resulting Holocaust has proven to be one of the most engaging subjects of historical reflection. For the most part, scholars have focused on the more traditional questions of Hitler, political culture, the place of ideology and anti-Semitism, the strategy of dominating Europe, the Nazi movement, or the functioning of the regime itself, especially its bureaucratic mechanisms. In more recent years, scholars in both Europe and the United States have focused on Nazism's attitudes toward women and gender and argued that they were second only to racism in structuring the new German society and defining its enemies. These are of course important issues that require attention in order to explain the rise of German fascism and its genocidal project. However, they will at best render only partial explanations and possibly even distorted ones because they lack, we think, an adequate appreciation of the structural—that is, economic, class, and power—dimensions that largely led to the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the successful rise to power of the Nazi party. It is this area and approach that we are highlighting in this volume. Rather than presenting the Weimar Republic as a failed democracy, flawed in both its political culture and its democratic institutional tradition, and undermined by an economic collapse, the emphasis here will be on seeing it as a developed capitalist society with distinct structural deficiencies and contradictions that weakened it from the outset.

There is, of course, a relatively small but important and growing
number of scholars who are working in Marxist and/or other structural traditions in both Europe and North America in an effort to better understand the rise of German fascism, and we collected and introduced a number of their works in our 1983 volume *Towards the Holocaust: The Social and Economic Collapse of the Weimar Republic*. Several of the principal contributors to that volume, such as Dietmar Petzina, John Nagle, Reinhard Kühnl, Ulrike Hoerster-Phillips, and Richard Geary, described “a republic fatally flawed at the outset by a failure to effect structural changes which would have secured a democratic order—of a republic that consequently was undermined because the bourgeois elements which should have defended it would not do so, and the working-class and minority group elements which tried to defend it, could not do so.”

Previously and since the argument has been advanced by David Abraham’s important book, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis*, which maintained that important segments of the economic and political elites of the Weimar period, in their search to overcome their own structural and economic and political problems, passed political and economic power to individuals who eventually helped doom the Weimar Republic by transferring power to the Nazis. When it was first published, this book occasioned great controversy concerning both its thesis and its methodological scholarship. Abraham has admitted that in places the first edition contained errors in footnoting, translating, and paraphrasing. While he has apologized for these, and has corrected them in the second edition, he has also resolutely denied the accusations of fraud and fabrication.

The charges against Abraham, however, far transcend the alleged carelessness of an individual. Certainly the allegations and controversy, amounting virtually to a witch hunt, indicate that the very interpretation and approach utilized by Abraham touched some raw nerves among historians. Without engaging in the minutiae of the controversy, we think that its intensity and excess were motivated at least in part by an attempt on the part of some scholars who have a stake in a different picture of the German elite’s relationship with the Nazis, to discredit a historical approach that had the temerity to suggest that there might be close structural links between German industrialists and Junkers and the rise of fascism. With the question of these links made even more urgent by recent signs of historical and political amnesia in Western Europe, it is an opportune moment to introduce additional material, interpretations, and authors that contribute to the further development of Marxist and other structural perspectives, and thus to the debate. Authors such as Kurt Gossweiler and Reinhard Kühnl, who either enrich or relativize the Abraham thesis, have not previously appeared
in English (with the exception of Kühnl's essay in our 1983 volume), although their research and writing have been significant in Germany for many years.

The apparent amnesia about fascism and World War II in Europe has taken various forms, including the resurgency of right-wing apologists for Nazism; a passion for Hitler memorabilia, including the forged diaries purchased by Stern magazine; public apathy concerning unpunished war criminals; the controversial invitation by West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to President Ronald Reagan to visit the German military cemetery at Bitburg; the election of Kurt Waldheim as president of Austria and his subsequent audience with the pope; and perhaps most disturbingly, the tendency on the part of established and recognized scholars to write about the period in ways that would have been politically and morally unacceptable even several years ago.

In Germany today the actual scandal lies in playing down the Nazi period rather than in its outright denial. Some, like Joachim Fest, Hitler biographer, have attempted to incorporate Nazism into a universal notion of "totalitarianism." This is one side of a growing historical relativism that has been described as "helpless antifascism"—helpless because of its mental inertia and appeal to a passive morality that is grounded in neither fact nor morality.

Other scholars, such as Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber, have attempted to contextualize the Nazi Holocaust by arguing that Hitler had reason to fear the Jews (Nolte), or that German atrocities must be seen in the light of previous Soviet atrocities and political developments at that time (Hillgruber). This revisionist tendency is part of a larger political and historiographical agenda that has as its basis the temptation "to forget," that seeks a unifying myth that might restore to Germans a measure of pride in their past and a sense of resoluteness against their "real" enemies, the Soviets. This reconstruction of the historical past cannot be fashioned without considerable sleight of hand. This volume is intended to expose the "magic" of some historical practitioners and offer a scholarly corrective.

Articles in the present volume accordingly fall into three categories: those that offer new insights into and/or empirical analyses of the class alliances that supported fascism; those that reexamine the ability of existing opposition forces to resist its rise; and those that look at current revisionist tendencies and the conditions that have fostered them.

Part I presents the contributions to the nature of the dominant alliance, set in the context of the national and world political economy. It is well known that in terms of industrial production Germany had a relatively "late" start compared with other industrializing countries. However, by 1914 industrial production had grown so rapidly as to
place Germany among the very top in terms of its share in the total world industrial output. Other countries appear to have made the transition from a preindustrial to an industrial mode of production over a longer period of time, thus producing, so it could be concluded, less of a structural strain. Germany's rapid transition implies that despite its industrial might remnants of the preindustrial society lingered on, well into the twentieth century. It might also be argued that these remnants were stronger, able to exert significantly greater political power, than in countries where a longer period of time had essentially reduced feudal powers (such as the church and the aristocracy) to a "negligible quantity" by the time of the Nazi movement and its subsequent rule.

Observations of this kind have raised the question as to whether German fascism should be viewed as the outcome of irreconcilable structural conflicts resulting from a distinct pattern of industrial development, an independent force that was able to influence the course of capitalist development, or a syncretic combination of the two.

Both Geoff Eley and Derek Linton speak to this question and evaluate the merits of reasoning from which it springs. Kurt Gossweiler addresses the same problem, if only indirectly, when he suggests that Weimar democracy might have been saved through a broadly based coalition and an economic policy designed to weaken the Junkers' economic and political position through land reform.

All capitalist societies that thoroughly asserted themselves over feudal powers, however, subjected populations to incessant change, although of unequal magnitude or intensity. A number of prominent social scientists have suggested that it was the "middle class" particularly—threatened by processes of modernization or change and crises in capitalist production—that supported and thus was "responsible" for the Nazi rise to power. Eley rejects this view, suggesting instead that Nazism be seen as a larger movement responding to the society-wide insecurity produced by the speed and magnitude at which capitalist production had taken hold, uprooting millions and tearing apart the traditional social fabric of entire nations.

A phenomenon such as German fascism—not having been observed earlier—clearly is symbolic of a "new era," one most strikingly characterized by monopoly capitalism and imperialism. It is reasonable to ask, therefore, whether these developments, relatively recent in the history of world capitalism, had anything to do with the rise of German fascism. Further, is fascism to be observed in any nation that has reached the state of monopoly capital and imperialism, or does it rise only in specific—emergent capitalist—conditions? The "Bonapartist" perspective on fascism, examined by Linton, sheds a good deal of light
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on this question, as does the more recent work of Nicos Poulantzas, evaluated by Jane Caplan.

One aspect of Poulantzas’ work on fascism was to examine economic and political dimensions of the societies in which it arose. Both Gossweiler and David Abraham attempt to determine the degree to which German fascism can be linked to specific economic interests and elites and the extent to which it emerged from political processes outside the realm of production. We have included a revised version of previously published work by Abraham because it represents a cohesive and powerful presentation of his very suggestive and important structural analysis of the rise of German fascism within a model of class differentiation.

Nazi rule was also initiated and made possible by the existing elites—economic, political, and military—as Gossweiler points out. He argues that those who were “victorious” in bringing about Nazi rule could have preserved the Weimar republic but chose not to because they were unwilling to accept the anticipated lower long-run rate of capital accumulation. Instead, important segments of these elites empowered a “new” political elite to manage the affairs of government by dictatorship.

Gossweiler’s claim raises an interesting question: What is the process by which “new” elites, based in emergent political movements, are able to gain legitimacy with existing elites? How can “old” elites, particularly the capitalist ruling class, gain sufficient confidence in an emerging elite, not of its mold, to allow it to dictate its affairs in the realm of politics? John Nagle and Brian Peterson investigate these questions in Germany, showing how the National Socialists chose distinct tactics to make themselves acceptable to established elites and to generally legitimize itself with its voters—Nagle examining aggregate national politics, Peterson looking at regional elites and their relationship to the NSDAP. Together their work presents the often contradictory diversity of the Nazi movement and policy as well as the conflicts among existing elites.

In Part II a number of authors explore the specific weaknesses and divisions in the ideology and tactics of those who tried to oppose the fascists. Gunter Remmling analyzes the role of the German Communist party and the “legal” destruction of the left and the labor movement; Kurt Pätzold examines the function of Nazi terror and demagoguery in pacifying the opposition; and Ben Fowkes looks at the divisions within the Social Democratic party and the consequences for the ability to resist. Fowkes argues that the failure of a broad left coalition to curb the economic and political power of the Junkers was
due in part to the fact that the left could not agree on such an aggressive stance. The major strategy of the noncommunist left, particularly the Social Democratic party, was to defend the existing democracy, not to further the material interests of the workers to challenge directly the power of the economic elites.

Articles in Part III take up the issue of historiography, in an effort to explain the movement away from an antifascist front to a posture that is increasingly apologetic of German fascism, its war and genocide. Looking at Dachau, the town with the first concentration camp built by the Nazi dictatorship, Tony Barta demonstrates how and by whom the antifascist front was defeated within months after the German capitulation and over the course of the American occupation. Addressing the same process from a national perspective, Reinhard Kühnl follows these patterns into the 1980s. He demonstrates the various ways in which the German right, having transferred power to the Nazis, has been engaged in relativizing, downplaying, and excusing the fascist dictatorship ever since the war. Academics have played no small part in this endeavor, too often accepting the political right's cold war ideology and its insistence that German fascism be viewed outside of social structure and its economic, class, and power relationships.

In 1959 Theodor W. Adorno warned that "we'll have come to terms with the past only when the causes that have led to it will be abolished."4 Individual and national identity should not be awakened at the cost of repressed truths and false historical legitimations. Today the real danger seems to us to be not the few neo-Nazi organizations and active fascists, but the readiness to minimize the crimes of the past, to relativize and universalize them, or, as in the case of some historians, to try to put things "into perspective" by equating Nazi crimes with those committed by other nations, by suggesting dubious parallels, and by denying the singularity of what happened. It is our hope that the essays in this volume will help to illuminate the shadows of the past so that they will not again fall upon the future.

Notes
