What Produces Fascism: Preindustrial Traditions or a Crisis of the Capitalist State?

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I

The aim of this essay is to explore some of the emerging emphases in current discussions of fascism. In some ways that discussion has entered the doldrums. There was a certain high point in the late 1960s, when the subject was first properly opened up, and when the generalizing ambitions of social scientists and historians briefly converged. Ernst Nolte's Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche, translated with exceptional speed as Three Faces of Fascism: Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism; general surveys by Eugen Weber, Francis L. Carsten, and John Weiss; an anthology on the European right edited by Eugen Weber and Hans Rogger; the thematic first issue of a new periodical, the Journal of Contemporary History; Barrington Moore, Jr.'s vastly influential Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (1966); the Das Argument discussions of the German new left; and three international conferences in Seattle (1966), Reading, England (1967), and Prague (1969)—all these imparted an excitement and vitality to work on the subject. In retrospect there is an air of innocence to this activity, and its intense preoccupation with comparison, generalization, and theory has tended not to survive the subsequent growth of empirical research. These days people are far more cautious, because the accumulated weight of historical scholarship has seemed to compromise the explanatory potential of the old theorizations.
So what is left, once certain old certainties (like totalitarianism or the orthodox Marxist approaches) have been abandoned? The answer, if we consult the most recent publications, is not very much. We know far better which theories do not work (totalitarianism, the 1935 Dimitrov formula, the authoritarian personality, the mass-society thesis, monopoly-group theory, and so on) than those that do.² There have been certain major interventions—the work of Nicos Poulantzas and the controversy surrounding Renzo De Felice are two that come to mind—but on the whole they have not sparked much widespread debate.³ Most writers have tended to settle for a typological approach to the definition of fascism, by using certain essentially descriptive criteria (ideological ones have tended to be the most common) as a practical means of identifying which movements are “fascist” and which are not. Yet this begs the more difficult conceptual issues and leaves the stronger aspects of definition (such as the dynamics of fascism’s emergence, and its relation to class, economics, and political development) to the concrete analysis of particular societies.⁴

Understandably, this is an outcome with which historians can live. In fact, the enormous proliferation of empirical work over the past ten to fifteen years has concentrated overwhelmingly on more immediate problematics, normally with a national-historical definition (for example, of Nazism or Italian fascism rather than fascism in general). We “know” far more than ever before, but this remains the knowledge of highly particularized investigations. Not surprisingly, a common response has been the philistine cry of despair (or perhaps of triumph): “reality” is simply too “complex.” Radical nominalism easily follows, and there is precious little agreement as to whether fascism even exists as a general phenomenon.⁵

At the same time, there is now a large body of excellent work that lends itself to theoretical appropriation. Some of this is on the less significant fascisms of the north and west of the European continent or on the larger but ambiguous “native fascisms” of the East, and facilitates a stronger comparative dimension to the discussion. Other contributions are on specific aspects of German and Italian history, including the structure of interest representation, the sociology of the Nazi movement and the nature of the Nazi electorate in Germany, or the precise dynamics of the post-World War I crisis in Italy. In the longer term this intensive reworking of the empirical circumstances of the fascist victories, on the basis of exceptionally elaborate primary research, often sophisticated methodologies, and “middle-level generalizations,” promises to reconstruct our theoretical understanding of fascism. My own object is more modest. It is clear that the coherence of current research relies on a number of organizing perspectives that
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derive from the older theoretical literature. These run through the analytical structures of particular works with varying degrees of explicitness and self-conscious utilization. The aim of this essay is to identify some of the perspectives, to explore their strengths and weaknesses, and by drawing on the more recent theoretical discussions, perhaps to suggest where future interest might fruitfully be directed. 6

II

One of the commonest emphases in the literature is a kind of deep historical perspective, which proceeds from the idea of German, and to a lesser extent Italian, peculiarity when compared with the “West.” In this case the possibility of fascism is linked to specific structures of political backwardness. These are themselves identified with a distinctive version of the developmental process, and are thought to be powerful impediments to a society’s ultimate “modernization.”

This “backwardness syndrome” is defined within a global conceptual framework of the most general societal comparison. It stresses “lateness” of industrialization and national unification and their complex interaction, predisposing toward both a particular kind of economic structure and a far more interventionist state. The divergence from Western political development is usually expressed in terms of the absence of a successful “bourgeois revolution” on the assumed Anglo-French model, an absence that facilitates the dominance after national unification of an agrarian-industrial political bloc with strong authoritarian and antidemocratic traditions. The failure to uproot such preindustrial traditions is thought to have obstructed the formation of a liberal-democratic polity, and in general this is taken to explain the frailty of the national liberal traditions, and their inability to withstand the strains of a serious crisis. In recent social science this perspective stems from (among others) Barrington Moore, Alexander Gerschenkron, and the discussions sponsored by the Social Science Research Council’s Committee on Comparative Politics. In contemporary Marxism it has drawn new impetus from discussion of the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. In both cases the analysis may be traced back to the end of the last century. 7 It exercises a profound influence on how most historians tend to see the problem of fascism, though frequently at a distance, structuring the argument’s underlying assumptions rather than being itself an object of discussion.

The argument was put in an extreme, discursive form by Ralf Dahrendorf in Society and Democracy in Germany, which deeply influenced a generation of English-speaking students of German his-
tory. It has also functioned strategically in a large body of work dealing with the imperial period of German history (1871–1918), whose authors write very much with 1933 in mind. One of the latter, Jürgen Kocka, has recently reaffirmed Dahrendorf’s argument in a particularly explicit way, which highlights the specific backwardness of German political culture. Thus in Kocka’s view “German society was never truly a bourgeois society,” because the “bourgeois virtues like individual responsibility, risk-taking, the rational settlement of differences, tolerance, and the pursuit of individual and collective freedoms” were much “less developed than in Western Europe and the USA.” Indeed, the chances of a “liberal-democratic constitutional development” were blocked by a series of authoritarian obstacles. Kocka lists

the great power of the Junkers in industrial Germany and the feudalizing tendencies in the big bourgeoisie; the extraordinary power of the bureaucracy and the army in a state that had never experienced a successful bourgeois revolution and which was unified from above; the social and political alliance of the rising bourgeoisie and the ever-resilient agrarian nobility against the sharply demarcated proletariat; the closely related anti-parliamentarian, anti-democratic, and anti-liberal alignment of large parts of the German ruling strata.8

In fact, the “powerful persistence of pre-industrial, pre-capitalist traditions” preempted the legitimacy of the Weimar Republic and favored the rise of right-wing extremism.

These arguments, which are conveniently summarized in Kocka’s essay, are representative of the generation of German historians who entered intellectual maturity during the 1960s, in a fertile and (for the time) liberating intellectual encounter with the liberal social and political science then in its North American heyday. This is particularly true of those historians who have explicitly addressed the question of Nazism’s longer-term origins, for whom such figures as Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, Ernst Fraenkel, Martin Broszat, M. Rainer Lepsius, and Dahrendorf provided early intellectual examples.9 Here, for instance, is Hans-Jürgen Puhle summarizing the argument in terms that correspond precisely to the ones used by Kocka. Fascism is to be explained by the specific characteristics of a society “in which the consequences of delayed state-formation and delayed industrialization combined closely together with the effects of the absence of bourgeois revolution and the absence of parliamentarization to form the decisive brakes on political democratization and social emancipation.”10

It should be noted that this approach to the analysis of fascism is advanced as an explicit alternative to Marxist approaches, which for this purpose are reduced by these authors polemically and rather
simplistically to a set of orthodox variations on themes bequeathed by the Comintern, in a way that ignores the contributions of (among others) Poulantzas, the Gramsci reception, and Tim Mason. Thus in a labor polemic against the German new left Heinrich August Winkler gives primary place in his own explanation of Nazism to preindustrial survivals, which in other (healthier) societies had been swept away. This was the factor that explained "why certain capitalist societies became fascist and others not." Or, as Kocka puts it, adapting Max Horkheimer's famous saying: "Whoever does not want to talk about pre-industrial, pre-capitalist and pre-bourgeois traditions should keep quiet about fascism."

Kocka specifies this argument in a detailed study of American white-collar workers between 1890 and 1940, which is motivated by an explicit comparison with Germany. He begins with a well-known feature of Nazism, namely, its disproportionate success among the lower middle class or petty bourgeoisie, and among white-collar workers in particular. He then abstracts a "general social-historical hypothesis" from this—namely, that the lower middle classes develop a "potential susceptibility to right-wing radicalization as a consequence of transformation processes which typically appear at advanced stages of capitalist industrialization"—and proceeds to test it against the experience of American employees in retailing and industry between the end of the nineteenth century and World War II. After careful discussions of social origin, educational background, income differentials, organizational experience, and status consciousness, he concludes that American white-collar workers showed a much lower propensity to see themselves as a distinct class or status group superior and hostile to the working class. This "blurring of the collar line" helps explain the absence of "class-specific" political tendencies comparable to those of German employees, because while the latter turned to the Nazis in large numbers, their American counterparts joined with manual workers in support of the New Deal. Thus the comparable socioeconomic situations of white-collar workers in the two countries failed to produce identical ideological or political orientations. If this is so, Kocka argues, perhaps the general hypothesis, which seeks to explain the rise of fascism by the "changes, tensions, and contradictions inherent in advanced capitalist societies," needs to be qualified.

Kocka considers a number of explanations for the divergence, juxtaposing German and American particularities in each case. Thus the socialist consciousness and greater independence of the German labor movement, which led to its deliberate isolation in the political system, was not replicated in the United States and American white-collar workers had far less reason to construct ideological defenses against the
left. Second, ethnicity fragmented the potential unity of both workers and petty bourgeoisie in the United States far more than religious or ethnic differences did in Germany. Third, the swifter emergence of the interventionist state in Germany tended to emphasize the importance of the collar line and legally cemented the lines of differentiation (for example, through the separate insurance legislation for white-collar employees), while, fourth, the existence of "a stratified educational system" tended to strengthen the barriers between occupations by lowering the mobility between manual and nonmanual jobs. Each of these points is well taken, though the enormous expansion of tertiary employment in Germany after the turn of the century (and hence the broadly based recruitment of the white-collar labor force), is probably understated, as are the conceptual difficulties in mobility studies, which Kocka takes rather uncritically on board. 17

Kocka reserves his major explanation for a fifth factor, namely, "the continuing presence or absence of pre-industrial corporatist/bureaucratic traditions at advanced stages of industrialization." 18 In the United States the absence of feudal traditions has long been seen as a crucial determinant of the country's political culture, permitting the hegemony of democratic citizenship ideals and the containment of class animosity. 19 In Germany, by contrast, the political culture suggests a "deficit in some essential ingredients of a modern bourgeois or civil society that was closely but inversely related to the strength of Germany's pre-industrial, pre-capitalist, and pre-bourgeois traditions." In the case of white-collar workers this created much ready support for the fascists. 20

There is much to agree with in Kocka's account, which is exactly the kind of controlled comparison the field so badly needs. By taking the idea of preindustrial continuities and arguing it through in a very specific context he enables us to see more clearly its attractions and disadvantages. The very concreteness of the analysis allows the case for the German Sonderweg—for German exceptionalism—to be made more convincingly probably than ever before. At a general level his conclusions seem unimpeachable. This applies most certainly to his stress on "the relative autonomy of social-structural and socio-cultural developments" within the larger process of capitalist industrialization. As the American material shows, there is nothing in the logic of the latter per se to send industrial workers automatically to the left and nonmanual ones automatically to the right of the political spectrum (or, one might add, to associate specific ideologies or political attitudes necessarily with any particular social group).

At the same general level, it is hard to quarrel with Kocka's formulation of the pre-industrial argument:
The uneasy coexistence of social structures that originated in different eras, the tense overlaying of industrial capitalist social conflicts with pre-industrial, pre-capitalist social constellations—the "contemporaneity of the uncontemporary"—defined Germany's path to an industrial society, but not America's.21

His practical elaboration of this point, however, is not wholly convincing. To single out the primacy of preindustrial traditions from the larger explanatory repertoire seems arbitrary, not least because some of the major German particularities in Kocka's list—for example, the rise of the Social Democratic party (SPD), or the constitution of Angestellten (employees in the private sector and low-status public employees) as a separate social category by the interventionist state—are formed during industrialization rather than before it.22 Moreover, though Kocka seeks to establish German peculiarity compared with the "West", what he actually shows with most of his argument is American peculiarity with Europe, certainly with the European continent and in many ways with Britain too.

Ultimately Kocka's view of fascism is confusing. On the one hand, he upholds the relationship between capitalism and fascism ("the susceptibility of the new middle class to right-wing extremism... would not have existed without the changes, tensions, and crises that accompanied the creation of an industrial capitalist society"), pointing only to its interaction with older preindustrial traditions in a complex causal dialectic ("the tension and crises inherent in industrial capitalist systems on one side, and the repercussions of the collision of older traditions with industrialization and modernization, on the other").23 On the other hand, the main logic of his argument definitely gives analytical priority to the preindustrial part of the equation, making it the real difference between Germany (which went fascist) and other countries (which did not).24 However, all capitalist societies are forged from precapitalist materials, and this is as true of the United States (with its nonfeudal configuration of property-owning white democracy) as it is of Germany (with, if we follow Kocka for the sake of argument, its feudal legacy of military and bureaucratic traditions) and elsewhere. In the period of industrialization itself the implied ideal of a "pure" capitalism without precapitalist admixtures (the "modern bourgeois or civil society" that Germany is supposed not to have been and against which German history is measured) never existed. That being the case the crucial problem becomes that of establishing how certain "traditions" became selected for survival rather than others—how certain beliefs and practices came to reproduce themselves under radically changed circumstances, and how they became subtly transformed in the very process of renewal. Preindustrial values had to be rearticu-
lated in the new conditions of an industrial-capitalist economy. It is this process of active reproduction through a succession of new conjunctures between the 1870s and 1930s, surely, that has first claim on our attention.

In other words, Kocka’s argument can be tested only on the terrain he deliberately abandons, namely the immediate context of the Weimar Republic. It is here that white-collar attitudes acquired their specific content and political effectiveness, in the vicissitudes of the capitalist economy and the permanent political uncertainty after 1918, for to ensure their disproportionate right-wing orientation (and eventually to harness a fascist potential) required a positive ideological labor, on the part of employers, the state, and the right-wing parties.

One of the least satisfactory aspects of the preindustrial argument is a kind of inevitabilism—a long-range sociocultural determinism of preindustrial traditions—that implies that German white-collar allegiances were just never available for left-wing politics until after 1945. This is partly belied by the manifest dividedness of white-collar allegiances until the late 1920s, and once we concede the existence of significant exceptions, as in any historical argument indeed we must (for example, why did the causal chain of preindustrial status mentalities and right-wing proclivities work for some white-collar groups at different times but not for others?), the preindustrial argument looks far less compelling. In fact, there is much evidence that in the earlier circumstances of the German Revolution many white-collar workers moved significantly to the reformist left. That the left-wing parties (especially the SPD) failed to respond creatively to these possibilities was less the result of German white-collar workers’ ineluctable conservatism (bequeathed by the absence of bourgeois revolution, and so on), than of specific political processes and their outcomes, which were themselves naturally subject to the disposing and constraining influence of social and economic determinations.

Similarly, we can scarcely understand the nature of the collar line unless we also examine the technical division of labor, the social context of the workplace, and the position of white-collar workers in the labor process—all of which were experiencing some basic changes in the early twentieth century, in Germany no less than in the United States, but which are strangely absent from Kocka’s final account. In the end the invocation of preindustrial ideological continuities confuses these issues, though the argument is handled more constructively in Jürgen Kocka’s text than in most others.
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III

One point emerges clearly enough from Kocka's account, and that is the limited explanatory potential of a sociological approach to fascism. This should not be misunderstood: I am not voicing hostility to sociology per se, either to the use of different kinds of social theory or to the adoption of social-scientific methodology, quantitative or otherwise. Nor am I suggesting that sociological approaches to fascism in particular are completely lacking in value. Quite the contrary, in fact. The careful dissection of the fascist movement's social composition through analysis of the leadership, activists, and ordinary membership, and through a long tradition of sophisticated electoral analysis, has been an essential feature of recent research. It has generated an enormous amount of information and many new questions, providing the indispensable foundation for any intelligent reflection.

The problems arise with the larger conclusions. Writers move too easily from an empirical sociology of the fascist movement and its electorate to a general thesis concerning its origins and conditions of success, which is usually linked to conceptions of modernization, social change, and the impact of economic crisis. Such conceptions combine with the deep historical perspective identified above to suggest that fascism is structurally determined by a particular developmental experience. This is powerfully represented, for instance, in Barrington Moore's celebrated arguments about the relationship of different developmental trajectories ("dictatorship" and "democracy") to the societal dominance of different types of modernizing coalitions (based on specific configurations of land-owning and urban-bourgeois elements and their links to popular forces). In German historiography especially, it is strongly implied that fascism follows logically from patterns of partial or uneven modernization, which throw unreformed political institutions and "traditional" social structures into contradiction with the "modern" economy. In some versions this effectively redefines fascism as a more general problem of political backwardness.

In this sort of thinking the notion of traditional strata, which are unable to adjust to modernization for a mixture of material and psychological reasons, has tended to play a key part. Since the 1920s, for instance, there has been general agreement that fascism originates socially in the grievances of the petty bourgeoisie or lower middle class. In the words of Luigi Salvatorelli in 1923, fascism "represents the class struggle of the petty bourgeoisie, squeezed between capitalism and the proletariat, as the third party between the two conflicting sides." This was the commonest contemporary judgment and has been pursued repeatedly by both historians and sociologists, Marxist and non-Marxist alike. Most of the accumulated evidence (and a moun-
tain of continuing research) is assembled in an enormous collection of essays recently edited by Stein Ugelvik Larsen, Bernt Hagtvet, and Jan Petter Myklebust, *Who Were the Fascists: Social Roots of European Fascism* (1980), and while the aggregate effect of around 800 pages is hard to assess, it seems to confirm the received assumptions. There have been attempts to suggest that other social groups were ultimately more important in the fascists’ makeup, or that class was less important than “generational revolt.”27 On the evidence of *Who Were the Fascists*, however, the fascist movement’s social composition seems to have been disproportionately weighted toward the petty bourgeoisie (that is, small-scale owners and producers, together with the new strata of salaried employees, including lower grade civil servants, junior managerial and technical personnel, teachers, clerical workers, and parts of the professions).28

At the same time, to call fascism flatly a protest movement of the petty bourgeoisie is clearly an oversimplification. As David Roberts observes in an excellent discussion of petty bourgeois fascism in Italy, the tendency is to “assume that if we can find social categories enabling us to distinguish fascists from non-fascists, we have the key to explaining the phenomenon,” with consequences that are potentially extremely reductionist.29 As Roberts continues, historians of Italian fascism habitually analyze it “in terms of socio-economic crisis and the traumas and frustrations which industrial modernization causes the lower middle class,” and the same is equally true of writers on Nazism.30 As suggested above, this argument conjoins with another popular thesis concerning the relationship of fascism to modernization, where the movement’s specificity derives from “its appeal to certain kinds of people who see themselves as losers in modern technological civilization,” who rejected “the modern industrial world” and took refuge in an ideology of “utopian anti-modernism.”31 The problem here is that the correlations between fascist ideology, the support of the petty bourgeoisie, and general economic trends are drawn in a way that is too general and mechanical. Though the casualties of capitalist industrialization were certainly prominent among the radical right’s supporters, this was by no means the whole story.

As David Roberts reminds us, the deficiencies in this standard view “stem not from the insistence on the petty bourgeois role in fascism, but from the inferences about motivation that are made from this fact of social composition.”32 Summarizing his own argument in *The Syndicalist Tradition and Italian Fascism* he highlights a quite different ideological tendency in the petty bourgeoisie: so far from “trying to preserve traditional values and repudiate the modern industrial world,” its exponents were firmly committed to a heavily productivist
vision of industrial progress, and harboured few “backward-looking” anxieties about the modern world in the way normally attributed. In fact, they were preoccupied less with the socioeconomic problems of declining preindustrial strata than with the long-term political questions of Italy’s national integration and cultural self-confidence. Their resentments were aimed less at the bearers of capitalist industrialization than at the representatives of a narrowly based parliamentary liberalism (not forgetting, of course, the socialist left, whose growth the latter seemed irresponsibly to permit). In Roberts’ view, petty-bourgeois fascism emerged as a critique of “Italy’s restrictive transformist political system” under the radicalizing circumstances of World War I. As “political outsiders,” its spokespersons presented themselves as a new populist “vanguard” capable of providing the ideological leadership effectively abdicated (as they saw it) by the old Giolittian establishment. Moreover, their urgency stemmed not just from the shattering experience of the war, but from the ensuing crisis of the biennio rosso, with its alarming evidence of Socialist electoral gains, working-class insurgency, and ambiguous Popolare radicalism. Under these circumstances radical nationalism was an intelligible response to the social dynamics of national disintegration. Affirming the virtues of industrial power, productivism, and class collaboration, its architects offered a program of national syndicalism, which “could mobilize and politicize the masses more effectively and thereby create a more legitimate and popular state.”

In other words, it is worth considering the possibility that fascism was linked as much to the “rising” as to the “declining” petty bourgeoisie. Now, on past experience (the celebrated “gentry controversy” in Tudor-Stuart historiography is a good example), this kind of terminology may create more trouble than it is worth, so let me explain carefully what I mean. Both Germany and Italy were societies experiencing accelerated capitalist transformation, through which entire regions were being visibly converted from predominantly rural into predominantly urban-industrial environments. In both cases the process was extremely uneven (in vital ways functionally so), with equally large regions trapped into social and economic backwardness (the south in Italy, or the East Elbian parts of Prussia and the Catholic periphery of the south, south-west, and extreme west of Germany). In Italy the process was the more concentrated and dramatic, producing interesting similarities with Tsarist Russia: for example, the massive spurt of growth from the 1890s to World War I; the very high levels of geographical, structural, and physical concentration of industry, which brought masses of workers together in a small number of centers and created new conurbations with politically volatile populations; the in-
terventionist role of the state, linked to a powerful complex of railway, heavy-industrial, shipbuilding, engineering, and hydro-electrical interests, the selective involvement of foreign capital, and a well-knit oligopoly of government, industry, and banks; an exclusivist and oligarchic political system; and a dramatic discrepancy between north and south, between a dynamic industrial sector that in all respects was highly advanced and an agricultural one that was equally and terribly backward.

This situation produced complex political effects. Simplifying wildly, we might say that the pace of social change outstripped the adaptive capabilities of the existing political institutions, particularly when the latter were called on to be responsible to new social forces—agrarian populations concerned for their future in an economy increasingly structured by industrial priorities, urban populations demanding a more rational ordering of their hastily improvised city environment, a potential chaos of private economic interests, the mass organizations of the industrial working class, and the more diffuse aspirations of the new professional, administrative, and managerial strata of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. It is the last of these groups that interests me here.

For in a situation of widespread political uncertainty—in both Germany and Italy (and, we might add, Austria, Hungary, and Spain) an existing political bloc of industrial, agrarian, and military-bureaucratic interests entered a protracted period of instability and incipient dissolution in the 1890s from which it never really recovered—large numbers of the educated citizenry experienced a radical skepticism in the appropriateness of the existing political forms, which were largely liberal and parliamentary in type. Acutely conscious of the sociocultural fissures in their newly unified nations, such people took recourse to a new kind of radical nationalism, which stressed the primacy of national allegiances and priorities (normally with a heavily imperialist or social-imperialist inflexion) over everything else. Under circumstances of unprecedented popular mobilization, in which socialists and other “antinational” elements achieved an increasingly commanding position for themselves, this lack of confidence in the unifying imagination of the liberal and conservative political establishment acquired an extra political edge. From the turn of the century radical-nationalist voices called for a new drive for national unity, at first as a kind of dissenting patriotic intelligentsia, but more and more from an independent political base, with its own organized expressions and wider social resonance.

In my own work on Germany I have tried to characterize this dissenting radical-nationalist politics as a new kind of right-wing popu-
It was to be found above all in the ideology and mass agitational practice of the nationalist pressure groups, for whom the Pan-German League may be considered a vanguard, but which included the Navy League, the Defence League, the anti-Polish movement, and a variety of other organizations. Originating in the regional and local dissolution of the old Bismarckian power bloc (essentially an industrial-agrarian coalition, hegemonically ordered by a right-wing liberal politics), it created a new space for disinterested patriotic activism. Though aimed at the directly “unpatriotic” activities of the socialists, ultramontanes, and national minorities (especially the Poles), this was also motivated by a growing anger at the alleged faintheartedness of the constitutional government, the old-style conservatives, and above all the liberal parties from whom many of the radical-nationalist activists came by personal background, family, or general milieu.

In other words, radical-nationalists raised a radical right-wing challenge, at first obliquely and then openly, to the established political practices of the dominant classes. If Germany was to enter into its imperialist heritage, they argued, if patriotic unity was ever to be achieved and domestic squabbling overcome, if the work of national unification was to be completed and the nation’s internal divisions healed, above all if the challenge of the left was to be met, then a new political offensive to regain the confidence of the people was required. This demand—for a radical propagandist effort to win the right to speak for the “people in general”—I have called “populist.” At its height this radical-nationalist agitation produced a generalized crisis of confidence in the existing political system, which undermined the latter’s hegemonic capability—the ability, that is, to organize a sufficient basis of unity among the subordinate classes to permit stable government to continue. In Germany this point was reached around 1908-09, and arguably opened the way for a far-reaching reconstitution of the party-political right over the next decade. In Italy the process was more strung out, extending from the intellectual nationalist ferment of the early 1900s to the interventionist drive of 1914-15. Arguably a similar process was unleashed by Spanish Regenerationism after the Spanish-American War.

My suggestion is that we can explain the attractions of radical nationalism (and by extension those of fascism without recourse to the cultural and economic “despair” of threatened “traditional” strata, to concepts of “anti-modernism,” or to the persistence of Kocka’s “preindustrial traditions.” Those attractions may be grasped partly from the ideology itself, which was self-confident, optimistic, and affirming. It contained an aggressive belief in the authenticity of a German/Italian national mission, in the unifying potential of the nationalist panacea,
and in the popular resonance of the national idea for the struggle against the left. Radical nationalism was a vision of the future, not of the past. In this sense it harnessed the cultural aspirations of many who were comfortably placed in the emerging bourgeois society, the successful beneficiaries of the new urban-industrial civilization, whose political sensibilities were offended by the seeming incapacitation of the establishment before the left-wing challenge. While I would concur with Roberts that this outlook possessed a definite appeal to a certain type of patriotic intellectual or activist, it is also likely that in times of relative social and political stability the ideology in itself could achieve only a limited popular appeal. But in times of crisis, which brought the domestic unity, foreign mission, and territorial integrity of the nation all into question, this might easily change. The dramatic conjuncture of war and revolution between 1914 and 1923 produced a crisis of exactly this kind.

Given the operation of certain recognized social determinations (like the status distinctions between white-collar and manual work, or the deliberate fostering of white-collar consciousness by employers and the state), we should concede a certain effectivity to this specifically political factor when trying to explain the radical right-wing preferences of large sections of the new petty bourgeoisie. There is no space to develop this argument more fully here, and in some ways the knowledge to do so is not yet assembled, given the general paucity of research in the area. Though we are well equipped with data concerning the voting patterns in Weimar elections, for instance, or the relative prominence of different occupations among the Nazi party members, we are still very ignorant about the social histories of the particular professions and categories of white-collar employment. What we do know certainly suggests that the avenue of inquiry is worth pursuing. The presence of professionals, managers, and administrators among Nazi activists is now well attested, and the Nazi state provided plenty of scope for the technocratic imagination—in industrial organization, public works, social administration, and the bureaucracy of terror. This sort of evidence moves securely with the direction of the above remarks. At the very least the grievances of the “traditional” petty bourgeoisie coexisted in the fascist movements with other aspirations of a more “forward-looking” and “modernist” kind.

IV

This critique of the “petty-bourgeois thesis” can be further developed. Despite the overrepresentation of the petty bourgeoisie, fas-
Fascist parties were always more eclectic in their social recruitment than much of the literature might lead us to suppose. Two observations in particular might be made. On the one hand, peasants proved especially important to a fascist party’s ultimate prospects, because the transition from ideological sect to mass movement was achieved as much in the countryside as in the towns. This was true of both Italy (1920–21) and Germany (1928–32). Conversely, some of the smaller fascist movements owed their weakness to the country population’s relative immunity to their appeals. This applied to both Norway and Sweden, where farmers kept to the established framework of agrarian-labor cooperation, and to Finland, where neither the Lapua movement (1929–32) nor its successor, the Patriotic National Movement (Isänmaallinen Kansa–äänikunta, 1932–44), could break the hold of the Agrarian Union and Coalition Party on the smaller farmers.

On the other hand, it is also clear that many fascist parties acquired significant working-class support. The best example is the Nazi party itself, with its 26.3 percent workers in 1930 and 32.5 percent in 1933. But though higher than the working-class membership of the Italian Fascist party (15.4 percent in 1921), this was by no means exceptional. Both Miklós Lackó and György Ránki show that the Hungarian Arrow Cross won much support from workers, in both the more proletarian districts of Budapest and the industrial areas of Nógrád, Veszprém, and Komárom–Esztergom.

There is a tendency in the literature to play down the importance of this working-class support in the interests of the petty-bourgeois thesis, especially in the German case, where the research is extensive. Certainly, we can admit that the Nazis made most progress among specific types of workers. Tim Mason lists “the volatile youthful proletariat” in the big cities, who went straight from school to the dole, who lacked the socializing education of a trade-union membership, and who provided much of the Sturmabteilung (SA) rank-and-file support; the “uniformed working class” in public employment, especially in the railways, post office, and city services; and those in the small-business sector of provincial Germany, “where the working-class movement had not been able to establish a stable and continuing presence.” It seems clear that the Nazis failed to breach the historic strongholds of the labor movement—the urban industrial settings that contained the 8 million or so wage earners who voted habitually for the SPD and the German Communist party (KPD)—and had to be content with those categories of workers the left had failed (or neglected) to organize.

Yet this was surely significant enough. Though not sufficient for contesting the left’s core support, it deprived the latter of a necessary larger constituency. As Mason points out, between 1928 and July
1932 the combined popular vote of the SPD and KPD fell from 40.4 percent to 35.9 percent, and it was progressively unclear how they were to break through the "sociological, ideological, religious and, not least sex barriers" that defined the "historic" working class in Germany. Mason suggests, in fact, that under the conditions of economic crisis after 1929 these barriers were virtually impassable. By eliminating the chances for either reformist legislation or effective trade-union economism, the depression "robbed the working-class movement of its anticipatory, future-directed role for the working class in general," and "to the degree that industry and trade shrank, the potential constituency of the workers' parties stagnated." The effect, Mason concludes, was a disastrous "narrowing of the political arena of the working class movement."43

This brings us to an interesting problem. In effect, the SPD and KPD were facing under particularly extreme, urgent, and dramatic circumstances the classic dilemma of the European left in the general period after the stabilization of 1923-24: how to win popular support for socialism by electoral means, at a time (contrary to earlier predictions) when the industrial proletariat in the classical sense had little chance of becoming a numerical majority of the voting population, and when a reformist practice had ceased to show tangible returns. In the crisis of Weimar, moreover, the cause of socialism had become inextricably linked to the defense of democratic gains. It became imperative for the left to break out of the class-political ghetto for which its entire previous history had prepared it, by building broader political alliances and appealing not only to workers, but to white-collar employees, small owners, pensioners, professional people, students, and so on. Most of all, it was vital to conceive of other than class collectivities, by rallying the people as consumers, as women, as taxpayers, as citizens, and even as Germans—not as some opportunist and eclectic pluralism of discrete campaigns, but as the coherent basis for the broadest possible democratic unity. Yet it was in this democratic project that the politics of the left proved most lamentably deficient, at least until after 1935, when the Popular Front revealed a new strategic perspective. It was less the left's inability to carry the working class itself (though, as Mason points out, in 1930-32 about half the wage-dependent population voted for other parties) than its abdication from this wider popular democratic mobilization that proved most fatal to the Republic's survival.44

Arguably, it was precisely here that fascism showed its superiority. In the end, the most striking thing about the National Socialist German Workers party (NSDAP), for instance, was not its disproportionate dependence on a particular social group (the petty bourgeoisie), but its
ability (by contrast with the two working-class parties) to broaden its social base in several different directions. The promiscuous adaptability of Nazi propaganda has often been noted, and it was certainly adept at tapping manifold popular resentments, promising all and nothing in the same breath. This remarkable diversity of social appeal can, however, easily mislead. Though both cynical and opportunist, Nazi eclecticism was also a major constructive achievement. The Nazis rallied a disparate assortment of social and political elements that lacked strong traditions of cooperation or effective solidarity in the political sphere, and often surveyed long histories of hostility and mutual suspicion. From September 1930 to January 1933 the NSDAP was a popular political formation without precedent in the German political system. It not only subsumed the organizational fragmentation of the right. It also united a broadly based coalition of the subordinate classes, centered on the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie but stretching deep into the wage-earning population.

It did so on the terrain of ideology, by unifying an otherwise disjointed ensemble of discontents within a totalizing populist framework—namely, the radicalized ideological community of the German people-race. The resulting combination was extraordinarily potent—activist, communitarian, antiplutocratic, and popular, but at the same time virulently antisocialist, anti-Semitic, intolerant of diversity, and aggressively nationalist. In Germany this right-wing Jacobinism was all the more complex for the absence of a strong existing tradition of popular radical nationalism, though as I have tried to argue above, one had begun to take shape since the start of the century. In Italy, for example, as David Roberts argues, the fascists had access to the suppressed Mazzinian tradition of unfulfilled radical-nationalist expectations, which they could then recover and transform. In Germany, in the absence of something similar, the recourse to new synthetic solutions (anti-Semitism, the race-mission in the East, “national socialism”) was correspondingly all the more important. There was perhaps something of the same contrast in the difference, say, between the authoritarianism of a Pilsudski in Poland, which could conjure memories of national democracy for its present purposes, and the more radical innovations of the Arrow Cross and Iron Guard in Hungary and Romania. This goes some way to explaining the greater radicalism of Nazi racialism and the apparent irrationalism of the program’s implementation during World War II.

This line of argument reinstates the importance of ideology for our understanding of fascism. In particular, it directs us to the contested terrain of popular-democratic aspirations, where the socialist left proved most deficient, the fascist right most telling in their mode of
political intervention. Where the left, in both Italy and Germany, kept aggressively to a class-corporate practice of proletarian independence, the fascists erupted into the arena and appropriated the larger popular potential. Of course, putting it like this presupposes an expanded definition of ideology, where it means something more than what happens inside a few literati's heads and is then committed to paper and published for wider consumption. In other words, I mean something more than the well-tried intellectual history so popular with many Germanists during the 1950s and 1960s—that is, not just ideas and attitudes, but also types of behavior, institutions, and social relations, so that ideology becomes materially embodied as well as just thought about (for example, not only the fascist movement's formal aims, but its style of activism, modes of organization, and forms of public display). On this basis fascism becomes primarily a specific type of politics, involving radical authoritarianism, militarized activism, and the drive for a centralist repressive state, with a radical-nationalist, communalist, and frequently racialist creed, and a violent antipathy for both liberal democracy and socialism. Providing these elements are treated not as some revealed unity, but as a set of potentials whose concrete substance may be unevenly and partially realized in "real" (particular, historical) fascisms, a definition of this kind could be quite serviceable.

V

It is time to draw some of these threads together. My comments have clearly been concerned mainly with the strong German and Italian cases, with occasional reference to fascist movements elsewhere. I have also (mindful of the typology referred to in note 4) confined myself to a particular aspect of the overall problem, namely the "coming to power" of indigenously generated fascist movements, rather than the less compelling examples of the smaller imitative or client movements, or the dynamics of established fascist regimes. In so doing I suggested that the specificity of the fascist movements resided in a particular capacity for broadly based popular mobilization—a distinctive ideology or style of politics, as the preceding paragraph puts it. Fascism is more extreme in every way. It registered a qualitative departure from previous conservative practice, substituting corporatist notions of social place for older hierarchical ones, and ideas of race community for those of clerical aristocratic and bureaucratic authority. These and other aspects of fascist ideology are intimately linked to its broadly based popular appeal. Fascism is an aggressively plebeian movement, espousing a crude and violent egalitarianism. Above all, fascism stands
for activism and popular mobilization, embracing everything from paramilitary display, street fighting, and straightforward terror to more conventional forms of political activity, new propagandist forms, and a general invasion of the cultural sphere. It is negatively defined against liberalism, social democracy, and communism, or any creed that seems to elevate difference, division, and conflict over the essential unity of the race-people as the organizing principle of political life.

At the same time, fascism was not a universal phenomenon, and appeared in strength only in a specific range of societies. In explaining this variation there are two main emphases. One is the deep historical perspective discussed in relation to Jürgen Kocka. At some level of explanation the structural factors stressed by the latter are clearly important and might be summarized as follows: (1) accelerated capitalist transformation, in a dual context of simultaneous national state formation and heightened competition in the imperialist world economy; (2) the coexistence in a highly advanced capitalist economy of large ‘traditional’ sectors, including a small-holding peasantry and an industrial-trading petty bourgeoisie, “deeply marked by the contradictions of capitalist development”; and (3) the emergence of a precocious socialist movement publicly committed to a revolutionary program. This complex overdetermination (the “contemporaneity of the uncontemporary,” or “uneven and combined development”) characterized both German and Italian history before World War I, articulated through the interpenetration of national and social problems. Most of the primary analytical traditions share some version of this framework (for example, the political science literature on state formation and the related theories of developmental crises, the particular works of Gershenkron and Barrington Moore, and most of the analogous literature within Marxism).

However, German historians have given this structural argument an additional formulation, which is far more problematic. Evaluating German development (or “misdevelopment,” as they call it) by an external and linear model of “modernization,” which postulates an ultimate complementarity between economic growth and political democratization (which in Germany, for peculiar reasons, was obstructed), such historians stress the dominance in German public life of preindustrial ideological traditions. The absence of a liberal political culture is thought to have permitted the survival of traditional authoritarian mentalities that enjoyed strong institutional power bases, and could then be radicalized under the future circumstances of an economic or political crisis. Thus a “reactionary protest potential” is created. Fascism draws its support either directly from traditional social strata, or from newer strata (such as white-collar employees) supposedly be-
holden to traditional ideals. This essentially is Jürgen Kocka's argument.

Though not incompatible with a modified version of the above, the second approach stresses the immediate circumstances under which the fascists came to power. Here it is necessary to mention the impact of World War I, the nature of the postwar crisis in the European revolutionary conjuncture of 1917–23, the unprecedented gains of the left (both reformist and revolutionary), and the collapse of parliamentary institutions. Together these brought a fundamental crisis in the unity and popular credibility of the dominant classes, which opened the space for radical speculations. Here again, although one was the major defeated party and the other a nominal victor in World War I, the German and Italian experiences were remarkably similar in these respects. In both cases the radical right defined itself against the double experience of thwarted imperialist ambitions and domestic political retreat, each feeding the other. In both cases the postwar situation was dominated by the public accommodation of labor, whose political and trade-union aspirations appeared to be in the ascendant: trade unions acquired a new corporative legitimacy; socialists attained a commanding presence in large areas of local government; the national leaderships of the SPD and Italian Socialist party (PSI) occupied the center of the political stage; and substantial movements to their left (first syndicalist and then communist) added an element of popular insurgency. In both cases, too, liberal or parliamentary methods of political containment were shown to have exhausted their potential, guaranteeing neither the political representation of the dominant classes nor the mobilization of popular consent. In such circumstances fascism successfully presented itself as a radical populist solution.

In other words, fascism prospered under conditions of general political crisis, in societies that were already dynamically capitalist (or at least possessed a dynamic capitalist sector), but where the state proved incapable of dispatching its organizing functions for the maintenance of social cohesion. The political unity of the dominant classes and their major economic fractions could no longer be organized successfully within the existing forms of parliamentary representation and party government. Simultaneously the popular legitimacy of the same institutional framework also went into crisis. This way of formulating the problem—as the intersection of twin crises, a crisis of representation and a crisis of hegemony or popular consent—derives from the work of Nicos Poulantzas and its subsequent reworking through the extensive and continuing reception of Antonio Gramsci's ideas into the English language. It has been formulated with exemplary clarity for the case of Nazism by David Abraham:
Could no bourgeois political force organize the political unity of the dominant economic fractions out of the diversity and factiousness of their economic interests? Was no political unity possible and no mass political support available within the Republic, despite the singlemindedness of the dominant classes' anti-socialism? Were the maintenance of capitalist economic relations and political democracy so antithetical in this conjuncture that abandonment and undermining of the Republic were self-evident necessities for the dominant classes? 48

In the context of the Weimar crisis, adjustments within the existing institutional arrangements looked increasingly untenable, and more radical solutions beyond the boundaries of the existing political system consequently became more attractive.

The problem of defining fascism is therefore not exhausted by describing its ideology, even in the expanded sense of the latter intimated above. Fascism was not just a particular style of politics, it was also inscribed in a specific combination of political conditions (themselves the structured, mediate effect of complex socioeconomic determinations), namely the kind of dual crisis of the state just referred to. Now, that kind of crisis is normally associated with the Great Depression after 1929, but the postwar crisis of political order between 1917 and 1923 was equally important. The global ideological context of the Bolshevik Revolution and its international political legacy gave enormous impetus to the radicalization of the right, and the more vigorous fascist movements generally arose in societies that experienced serious left-wing insurgencies after 1917-18. As well as Italy and Germany, Hungary, Austria, Finland, and Spain are all good examples. Although the recent tendency has been to accept that “Francoism was never really fascism but rather some variant of limited, semi-pluralist authoritarianism,” for instance, Paul Preston has argued convincingly that it was (at least between the mid-1930s and mid-1950s), and does so partly on the basis of “the Spanish crisis of 1917-23,” which was “analogous to the Italian crisis of 1917-22.” 49 Moreover, this approach supplies criteria for assessing the seriousness of other crises elsewhere. Thus the formation and fleeting victory of the Popular Front in 1934-37 threatened to create a comparable situation in France, until the breakup of the left government dissipated the gathering concentration of radical right-wing forces.

The operative circumstances were ones that made it possible for the dominant classes to take extreme or exceptional solutions seriously, though never without well-founded hesitation. One such circumstance was obviously the very emergence of the fascists as a credible mass movement, for without the popular materials an “extra-systemic solution” (in Abraham's phrase) was clearly a nonstarter. 50 But, as a gener-
alization, recourse to the fascist option was politically most likely where the left had achieved significant inroads into the administration of state power and the limitation of private capitalist prerogative, or where combinations of entrenched left-reformism and concurrent revolutionary activity seemed to obstruct the resolution of economic crisis and the restoration of order. For example, the most persuasive reading of the crisis of Weimar stresses the importance of a kind of social-democratic corporatism (embodied in trade-union legislation, a ministry of labor, compulsory arbitration procedures, unemployment insurance, other welfare legislation, and so on), whose defensive strengths could not be dismantled within the existing constitutional framework of parliamentary decision-making. The structural necessity of fascist remedies (given certain inflexible commitments and requirements among the most powerful fractions of the dominant classes) can then be located in the labor movement's ability to defend the institutional advances of the 1918 revolution (or more accurately, of the political settlement of 1918–23). When we add the SPD's strong position in provincial and local government, the impressive militancy of the Reichsbanner militia, and the continued vitality of a strategic Marxist-reformist vision among the party intelligentsia, the appeal of a radical authoritarian solution becomes all the more intelligible.

This idea of a defensive social-democratic corporatism, which within the limits of this essay has to remain theoretically underdeveloped, may well be a fruitful one for the discussion of fascism. It lends a formal unity to the political crisis of Weimar, between the foundering of the Grand Coalition in March 1930 on the issue of insurance legislation, and the precipitiation of the von Papen-Hitler maneuver in December 1932–January 1933 by General Kurt von Schleicher's renewed corporatist exploration. Mutatis mutandis, the argument also works for the Italian situation in 1918–22, where the presence of a mass socialist party publicly committed to a revolutionary program (however rhetorically) had effectively thrown the state into paralysis. Here the growing popular strength of the left, its aggressive use of the workers' councils in Milan and Turin, its commanding position in northern local government, and its massive concentrations of regional support provoked a massive counterrevolutionary backlash, organized through Mussolini's fascists. In both Germany (1918–33), and Italy (1918–22), and for that matter in Spain (1931–36), we are dealing in effect with limited socialist enclaves (some of them physical, some institutional, some merely attitudinal or ideological) within the existing state, which constituted intolerable obstructions to the kind of stabilization a powerful coalition within the dominant classes was increasingly pursuing. Arguably a comparable situation threatened to arise in the wake of the Popular
Front in France (1934–37), and if the Labour Government had chosen to conduct a stubborn resistance to the demands for conservative stabilization in 1931 instead of capitulating, similar circumstances might have materialized in Britain as well. As Joseph Baglieri says of Italian fascism:

The movement's functional role against the socialists and the Popolari attracted the sympathies and support of all those interests which felt threatened by the post-war mobilization of the lower classes, the incipient process of economic and political democratization, and the breakdown of traditional authority. In the process of crushing the left, the fascists succeeded in offering these interests an alternative sovereignty which successfully stood in for the crumbling Liberal state. 53

Fascism may be best understood, therefore, as primarily a counter-revolutionary ideological project, constituting a new kind of popular coalition, in the specific circumstances of an interwar crisis. As such it provided the motivational impetus for specific categories of radicalized political actors in the immediate aftermath of World War I, embittered by national humiliation, enraged by the advance of the left. As working-class insurgency defied the capacities of the existing liberal politics to achieve the necessary stabilization, this radical-nationalist cadre became an important pole of attraction for larger circles of the dominant classes and others who felt threatened by the reigning social turbulence. In Italy, where the socialist movement was generally further to the left than in Germany, and where no equivalent of the SPD functioned as a vital factor of order, this process of right-wing concentration around the redemptive potential of a radical-nationalist anti-socialist terror was far more advanced. But later, in the renewed but differently structured crisis of 1929–34, a recognizable pattern recurred. Elsewhere a similar scenario was scripted, but indifferently played out. Spain and possibly Austria were the closest examples of a similarly enacted fascist solution. Other countries certainly generated their own fascist cadres—in some cases very large (France, Finland, Hungary, Romania), in some quite small (Britain, Scandinavia). The severity of the political crisis, and the resilience of established political forms, determined the broader attractions of the fascist ideology.

In the end both perspectives are necessary—the deep historical or long-term structural one and the stress on the immediate crisis, but we have to be clear about what exactly each may reasonably explain. In particular, the causal primacy of “preindustrial traditions” threatens to become both teleological and heavily determinist, locating the origins of fascism somewhere in the middle third of the nineteenth century, when Germany (and Italy) failed to take the “long hard road to modernity,” in Dahrendorf’s phrase.
Much of this would be perfectly acceptable and in the most rounded of analyses, should be complementary to the other type of approach rather than antithetical. Yet in the works of Jürgen Kocka and other German historians the explanatory claims are far more aggressive than this. The “preindustrial traditions” are given a privileged place in the causal repertoire in a way that specifically displaces certain other approaches—those beginning with the interior dynamics of the immediate fascism-producing crisis. What is seen to be the driving contradiction of the latter—the antidemocratic mentalities that left various social groups so receptive to the fascist appeal—is displaced from its own contemporary context onto a much deeper argument about the course of German history and its singularity. This is accompanied by a clearly stated polemical purpose: fascism is to be explained not by its capitalist present, but by the baleful influence of the feudal past. Winkler is quite explicit on this score. The antidemocratic outcome to the world economic crisis in Germany, as opposed to “the other developed industrial societies,” had “less to do with the course of the crisis itself than with the different pre-industrial histories of these countries. The conditions for the rise of fascism have at least as much to do with feudalism and absolutism as with capitalism.”

This is unnecessarily restrictive. Older attempts to take the relationship between fascism and capitalism as the primary causal nexus were indeed inadequate, but that is no excuse for evading the challenge of more recent discussions of fascism or more general theories of the state, forms of domination, and so on. Historical discussions of the relationship between capitalism and fascism are actually proceeding with an unprecedented intensity, as the most cursory glance at current research on the Weimar Republic or the final years of liberal Italy will quickly reveal. But they are doing so in an almost wholly “empirical” or “practical” way, without any guiding reference to the larger theoretical issues discussed in this essay. If we are truly to understand the problem, I would argue, it is here, by theorizing fascism in terms of the crisis that produced it—that we shall have to begin.

Notes

Whatever coherence and value the text may possess owes a great deal to the thoughts and writings of those who have labored longer and more directly on the subject of fascism than I have myself. My main intellectual debts should be clear from the notes but my thinking has been shaped over a period of time by the work of three friends and
colleagues in particular, who may not always recognize their own ideas after I have finished with them, but who deserve to be handsomely thanked: Jane Caplan, Michael Geyer, and Tim Mason.


4. For example, see S. Payne's useful general text, *Fascism: Comparison and Definition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), pp. 195ff., 6ff., where he proposes a "descriptive typology" based on "(a) the fascist negations, (b) common points of ideology and goals, and (c) special common features of style and organization." The negations involve antiliberalism, anticommunism and qualified anticonservatism. The common goals include a new kind of "national authoritarian state," a "new kind of regulated, multi-class, integrated national-economic structure," a radical foreign policy, and "an idealist, voluntarist creed." The stylistic and organizational features
are "an aesthetic structure of meetings, symbols and political choreography"; militarized forms of mass mobilization; a stress on violence, masculinity, and youth; and a "tendency towards an authoritarian, charismatic, personal style of command."

This is very similar to the approach of Juan Linz, who has published a number of widely cited and influential essays proposing "a multi-dimensional typological definition" of fascism. (see his "Some Notes toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective," in Laqueur, ed., Fascism, pp. 3-121). Personally, though there are many valuable insights to be culled discretely from his work, I find Linz's general argument obscure, inconclusive, and confusing in the density of its cultivated empirical complexity. Moreover, the typology described above needs to be extended by a further set of distinctions between the different kinds of fascist movements. One possibility would be the following: (1) indigenously generated movements that successfully came to power (Italian Fascism, Nazism, Francoism); (2) small imitative movements that achieved no particular popularity in their home societies (e.g., the British Union of Fascists, or the various Scandinavian Nazi groups); (3) larger indigenous movements with strong similarities of ideology, sociology, and style, but that originated independently of Italian or German sponsorship in a different configuration of social forces, and never took power under peacetime conditions (e.g., Arrow Cross in Hungary, or Iron Guard in Romania); (4) finally, the so-called Quisling regimes installed by the Germans during the war.


6. A familiar but nonetheless important disclaimer should be entered here: by making certain criticisms of existing works, I am not trying to discount their value or consign them to the scrap-heap. The point is to open up discussion, nothing more. In certain ways this essay connects with a larger intellectual project, concerned with redrawing the agenda of German historical discussion for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See D. Blackbourn and G. Eley, Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung: Die gescheiterte bürgerliche Revolution von 1848 (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1980), and the controversy it has aroused. This book has now appeared in an expanded and revised English edition as The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). This essay originated in a review essay for another journal, and it is only fair to mention the texts that originally provoked it, as they clearly helped formulate the judgments on which the following exposition rests. They include: Laqueur, ed., Fascism; Mosse, ed., International Fascism; Payne, Fascism; Larsen, Hagtvet, and Myklebust, eds, Who Were the Fascists; H. A. Winkler, Revolution, Staat, Faschismus: Zur Revision des Historischen Materialismus (Gottingen, 1978); and J. Kocka, White Collar Workers in America 1890-1940: A Social-Political History in International Perspective (London, 1980).

complex "geoeconomic-geopolitical model," in which a country's early "geopolitical position," its "semi-peripheralization" in the world economy, and its manner of unification supply the vital preconditions for the emergence of fascism.


9. K. D. Bracher, The German Dictatorship: Origins, Structure and Consequences of National Socialism (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1973; original German edition 1969); W. Sauer, "National Socialism: Totalitarianism or Fascism?" American Historical Review 73 (1967): 404-24, and "Das Problem des Deutschen Nationalstaats," in H.-U. Wehler, ed., Moderne deutsche Sozialgeschichte (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1966), pp. 407-36; E. Fraenkel, The Dual State (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941); M. Broszat, Der Nationalsozialismus: Weltanschauung, Programm und Wirklichkeit (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1960); M. R. Lepsius, "Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur: Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft," in G. A. Ritter, ed., Deutsche Parteien vor 1918 (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1973), pp. 56-80; Ralf Dahrendorf, Society and Democracy in Germany (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967). By "German historians" in this context I mean historians in West Germany. It is hard to say exactly how broad this generational experience was, partly because the ideological fronts have changed again since the early 1970s, leaving the most self-conscious exponents of avowedly "social-scientific" history (e.g., as represented in the controlling group of the journal Geschichte und Gesellschaft) feeling relatively isolated within the West German historical profession as a whole. But for a fairly representative example of literature and authors at the height of the earlier liberalizing trend (several of the contributors have since moved quite markedly to the right), see M. Stürmer, ed., Das kaiserliche Deutschland: Politik und Gesellschaft 1870-1918 (Dusseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1970).

10. H.-J. Puhle, Von der Agrarkrise zum Präfaschismus (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1972), p. 53. The constipated nature of this sentence is an accurate (even benevolent) reflection of the original German.


16. Ibid.


21. Ibid., pp. 281ff. The phrase "contemporaneity of the uncontemporary" originates with Ernst Bloch. In some ways it corresponds to Trotsky's "uneven and combined development" and the Althusserian "overdetermination."

22. In other ways the argument seems strained. Thus the suggestion that "corporatist remnants in German society help explain why working-class status in itself was more important than differences between crafts and occupations" seems both eccentric and obscure, as does the reference to "the relative insignificance of the line between skilled and unskilled workers in German trade unions and social structure" (ibid., p. 265).

23. Ibid., pp. 282ff.

24. This is also true of Winkler, "Die 'neue Linke' und der Faschismus," p. 83.

25. Aside from the voluminous contents of Larsen, Hagtvet, and Myklebust, eds., Who Were the Fascists, there is a useful introduction to such research in R. Mann, ed., Die Nationalsozialisten: Analysen faschistischer Bewegungen (Stuttgart, 1980).


27. Several authors have suggested that the working class was more important to the

28. The volume is extraordinarily useful from this point of view, not least because of its genuinely comprehensive coverage of the European continent. P. Schmitter on Portugal, D. Wallef on *Christus Rex* in Belgium, and H. van der Wusten and R. E. Smit on Holland are particularly useful, as are the ten sophisticated essays on Scandinavia.


30. Ibid., p. 338.


33. The Partito Popolare Italiano (Popular Party), formed in 1918–19, was Italy’s first Catholic party and the political ancestor of Christian Democracy. In the years 1919–22 it became the vehicle for a variegated movement of agrarian radicalism, although the various forces acting to control the latter always ensured that it could never become a peasants’ party as such.

34. Roberts, “Petty-bourgeois Fascism in Italy,” p. 345. This recourse to Mazzini was anything but traditional or “backward-looking” in the sense normally intended by such descriptions. As Roberts says: “In Italy, after all, nationalism was hardly traditional for the society as a whole, and it could still have progressive consequences in such a context. Since these fascists were seeking alternatives to the political patterns that had developed because of the way Italy was unified, it was plausible for them to turn to Mazzini, who represented all the unfulfilled promise of the Risorgimento; his vision of a more popular kind of Italian unity had not been achieved, so it was not merely reactionary nostalgia that led fascists to look to him for ideas and inspiration as they sought solutions to contemporary problems.” For a similar argument in the context of German radical nationalism, see G. Eley, *Reshaping the German Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), esp. ch. 5, pp. 160–205.

35. There is a useful introduction to the gentry controversy and its historiographical context in R. C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 90ff. The problematic nature of trying to establish precise causal correlations between “rising” or “declining” social forces and specific ideologies or political movements should be plain. My aim is not to exchange the “threatened traditional strata” type of explanation for fascism for an equivalent reductionism based on the idea of “rising new strata” of the white-collar petty bourgeoisie. The point is to think carefully about why exactly radical nationalism
(and other aspects of the fascist ideological project) proved so appealing to different categories of people. The interesting thing about radical nationalism in Germany was its ability, in a complicated process covering the first two decades of the century, to harness the aspirations of both the old petty bourgeoisie and the new—both the small producers, traders, and businessmen in town and country, and the new technocracy of the professional and managerial intelligentsia. If I understand Roberts correctly, his work lends itself to a similar sort of argument in Italy. The problem of fascism then becomes in part the process of unifying, or at least combining on a stable basis, the disparate aspirations of a variegated social base.


37. My use of the term is not intended to invoke a specific historical experience, like that of Russian or North American Populism in the later nineteenth century. It refers to a broadly based appeal to “the-people-in-general” against unrepresentative, ineffectual, and morally flawed dominant interests. As such, it could become articulated into both a politics of the right and a politics of the left. For the key text in stimulating this specific theoretical usage, see E. Ladau, “Towards a Theory of Populism,” in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, pp. 143–99. See also S. Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular,’” in Samuel, ed., *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, pp. 227–40.


43. Ibid., pp. 59, 65.

44. Ibid., p. 60.

45. The argument in this and the previous two paragraphs owes much to Laclau, "Fascism and Ideology."


