Bonapartism, Fascism, and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic

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In a survey of theories of fascism, the historian Martin Kitchen divided them into three types: "heteronomic," "autonomic," and "syncretic." Included in the first type were those theories "which assert that fascism is determined and produced by capitalism (or to use the somewhat euphemistic terms, 'industrial society', 'modern society', 'the age of the masses' or 'modernisation') . . . whereas those in the second hold that fascism was an independent force which was able to determine the course of capitalist development."¹ Syncretic theories combine aspects of the first two. Although these distinctions have seldom been absolute, they do indicate general tendencies found in the literature on fascism, whether Marxist or non-Marxist. This essay will explore one set of basically syncretic theories within the Marxist tradition, the set of analyses of National Socialism that derived from Marx's and Engels' accounts of Bonapartism in nineteenth-century France.²

The exploration will proceed in three parts. First, I will outline the conditions of emergence of the Bonapartist perspective on fascism from the debates within the Communist International during the 1920s. Second, I will examine some of the elements of Marx's and Engels' concept of Bonapartism that proved especially stimulating and fruitful in framing a Marxist explanation of National Socialism. Finally, I will exposit, compare, and contrast the leading Bonapartist perspectives of the 1930s, those of August Thalheimer, Leon Trotsky, and Otto Bauer. Throughout, I will be largely, although not exclusively, con-
cerned with the explanatory framework of the theories rather than their political functions or strategic implications.

The Bonapartist Perspective on Fascism

The triumph of Mussolini's Fascist movement in Italy in 1922 and the stunning defeat and brutal suppression of Italy's militant and powerful labor movement were experienced by European Marxists as cataclysmic shocks. These serious reversals as well as the unexpected strength of counterrevolutionary movements in postwar central Europe shattered apocalyptic hopes among members of the Comintern for rapid proletarian victories modeled on the Bolshevik example and prodded some thoughtful social democrats to reconsider their strategies for a purely peaceful parliamentary road to socialism. These shock experiences also sparked considerable debate and theoretical controversy about fascism and counterrevolution within the European left, which established the parameters for subsequent Marxist interpretations of German National Socialism.

Already in the mid-1920s, the complex of problems and questions arose that would be central to Marxist theorizing on what constituted fascism. First, in what temporal trajectory of capitalist development should the fascist phenomenon be placed? Was it the product of the epoch of imperialism and capitalist decay, an aberration of belated and incomplete capitalist development, the offspring of postwar social displacement, disorientation, and economic crisis, or a complex hybrid of these possibilities? Second, what accounted for the political geography of fascism? Why had it taken root in Italy rather than elsewhere? Was fascism merely a local phenomenon, the outcome of a specific configuration of class forces and political crisis confined to Italy? Or was fascism likely to spring up in other countries with relatively weak industrial development and large transitional classes (landowners, peasants, artisans, small shopkeepers)? Could it even be a general form of counterrevolutionary movement common in varying degrees to all capitalist nations? Third, what constellation of class forces made fascism possible? What was the relation of the fascist movement to the large-scale capitalists, the landowners, the old and new lower middle class, the peasantry and labor? How was it related to the postwar labor offensive and the capitalist counterattack? Was it essentially the counterrevolutionary instrument of big capital and the agrarians or was it a semi-autonomous movement of the petty bourgeoisie and déclassé elements? Finally, what was the political nature of fascism? What was
its relation to the preexisting political system, the parties, and the state? Once in power, was the fascist state a new form of class rule, the direct instrument of monopoly capital, or was it analogous to the Bonapartist regime described by Marx? Divergent answers to these questions generally implied alternative strategies for combating fascism as well.

Although the Fifth Congress of the Communist International in 1924 attempted to settle these issues by resolving that “fascism is the instrument of the big bourgeoisie for fighting the proletariat, when the legal means available to the state have proved insufficient to subdue them,” even within European Communist parties answers to these questions continued to be quite diverse and leading Communists openly dissented from this resolution. Thus, for example, as late as 1928 the Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti considered fascism a largely Italian phenomenon and warned against diluting the concept by applying it to all forms of reaction. In Italy the intermediate and transitional classes had been especially strong and the specific constellation of class relations was unlikely to occur elsewhere. Moreover, fascism was originally to some degree autonomous from capitalist interests. According to Togliatti, while the attacks of fascist gangs on the organizations of workers and peasants

worked naturally to the advantage of industrial and financial capital . . . fascism was not simply capitalist reaction. It embraced many other elements at the same time. It comprised a movement of the rural petty bourgeois masses; it was also a political struggle waged by certain representatives of the small and middle bourgeoisie against a section of the traditional ruling class, . . . finally it was a military organization which claimed the ability to take on the regular armed forces of the state with some probability of success.6

Once in power, claimed Togliatti, fascism became “a center of political unity for the dominant classes but only after a far-reaching transformation in its structure and social compositions.” Fascism also differed from other forms of reaction in its savage suppression of democratic rights and its thoroughgoing extirpation of all autonomous mass organizations including those of the Socialists, which the Comintern resolution had maligned as instruments of capitalist dictatorship and twins of fascism.

After 1928, however, such relatively sophisticated and complex analyses became anathema within the Comintern. As the Soviet leadership under Stalin became increasingly preoccupied with the domestic tasks of “building socialism in one country,” it stringently disciplined and purged foreign Communist parties in order to compel
them to conform to the shifting policies of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Henceforth, virtually unquestioning orthodoxy was enforced within the Comintern.

In the case of the Comintern analysis of fascism, orthodoxy meant that the dubious propositions already advanced in the 1924 resolution now congealed into frozen verities. First, fascism was held to be a product of monopoly capitalism in the epoch of decay. "It is based on the concentration and centralization of capital and the associated development of trusts and cartels, and leads to the massive centralization of the whole apparatus of mass oppression—including the political parties, the Social Democratic apparatus, the reformist trade unions, the cooperatives, etc." Second, fascism was declared a general phenomenon common to all capitalist nations: "The totality of modern capitalist states constitutes a varied amalgam of fascist countries (Italy, Poland) and bourgeois democracies containing fascist elements and standing at different stages of the fascisation process." Third, the social base of fascist movements was said to be "the petty bourgeois masses, and the corresponding strata of white collar workers and officials," largely manipulated and deployed by the high bourgeoisie for counter-revolutionary goals. Finally, the Soviet Comintern delegate Dmitrii Manuilski avowed,

Political reaction as a form of government has advanced continuously with the development of imperialism in all capitalist states and has become the counterpart to imperialist aggression. The fascist regime is not just any new type of state; it is one of the forms of bourgeois dictatorship characteristic of the imperialist epoch. Fascism grows organically out of bourgeois democracy. The process whereby bourgeois dictatorship switches to an open form of suppression of the workers thus represents the essence of the fascisation process.

This Comintern version of fascism was, as Kitchen remarks, "the extreme form of the heteronomic theory."

Two further elements of this orthodoxy, which reigned in the Comintern and German Communist party (KPD) from 1928 to 1935 and which contributed indirectly but substantially to Hitler's victory, deserve emphasis. First, any repressive and antilabor regime was labeled "fascist." Hence, the conservative and authoritarian governments of Chancellors Henrich Brüning, Franz von Papen, and General Kurt von Schleicher in Germany between 1930 and 1932 were described as already fascist, thus trivializing the danger of Hitler's accession to power. Second, the Social Democrats were branded a twin of the moderate wing of fascism. Indeed, since Socialists, unlike the Nazis, supposedly successfully deceived the workers, they were desig-
nated the primary enemies of the Communists. Such a position obviously precluded any common action with organized socialists against the Nazis. Thus in February 1932, less than a year before the Nazi seizure of power, Ernst Thälmann, the leader of the German Communist party, could still stamp the national Brüning government and the Social Democratic-dominated government of Otto Braun in Prussia fascist for such antilabor measures as cutting welfare payments and curbing strikes.\(^{13}\) He could complacently denounce what he called the “opportunistische overestimation of Hitler fascism” and blithely assert that Social Democracy was the most active element in the fascisation of Germany and hence the KPD’s most dangerous enemy.

Consequently, during the period of the rise of Hitler, Marxist analyses treating the Nazi movement as anything other than the pliable and bribed instrument of German big business and the Junkers were formulated outside of and in opposition to the official Comintern position, as were antifascist strategies based on a united front of the German Social Democratic party (SPD), Communists, and trade unions. The three key figures who posed comprehensive alternative analyses and strategies were the German right communist August Thalheimer, the expelled Soviet left-oppositionist Leon Trotsky, and Otto Bauer, the foremost theoretician of the Socialist party of Austria. Despite quite significant differences in their theories of fascism, all three, for reasons to be explored, took Marx’s and Engels’ writings on nineteenth-century Bonapartism as their point of departure. By employing the concept of Bonapartism, all three developed extensive interpretations of the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi seizure of power that compared favorably both in subtlety and political acumen with the crude instrumentalism of the Comintern.

**Bonapartism in Marx and Engels**

The French historian Pierre Ayçoberry, in his historiographical study *The Nazi Question*, praises August Thalheimer for brilliantly framing the question “concerning the relative autonomy of the state vis à vis the dominant economic class.\(^{14}\) He concludes, however, by contending that “at bottom, he did not contribute much more than a return to Marx, the return to origins, a standard tactic of reformers and heretics. But he was to have many descendants in this regard: the application of the notion of Bonapartism to German history and the debate on the reciprocal relations of the Nazi state and the great monopolies originated with him.” Such an assessment begs more questions than it answers. Leaving aside that Thalheimer concentrated on the conditions
leading to the Nazi seizure of power rather than on the Nazi state, it fails to answer the question of "which Marx" Thalheimer and the other Bonapartist theorists returned to.

Thalheimer, Trotsky, and Bauer were all well aware that the instrumentalist conception of the state and politics favored by the Comintern could muster strong textual support, such as the famous passage in the *Communist Manifesto* where Marx wrote, "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie." \(^{15}\) Although Marx's writings on Bonapartism and the Commune were certainly his most sustained political writings, the decision to privilege these texts over others suggests that Thalheimer, and to a lesser degree Bauer and Trotsky, found either Marx's mode of analysis, the structural characteristics of the events he analyzed, or both, especially germane for understanding National Socialism. Second, neither Thalheimer nor any of the others simply appropriated and applied Marx's model of Bonapartism. Not surprisingly, given Marxist historicism, all of them used it as a starting point but also recognized and emphasized negative analogies between Bonapartism and fascism that depended on the intervening development of capitalism since the mid-nineteenth century. The question to be asked then is: What aspects of Marx's and Engels' accounts of Bonapartism did they find useful? While the answers would be somewhat different for Thalheimer, Trotsky, and Bauer, some elements were shared among the three.

In many respects the historical situation in which Marx originally grappled with the regime of Louis Napoleon presented obvious parallels with the triumph of fascism in Italy or the rise of Hitler, parallels that few well-versed Marxists could overlook. Despite the defiantly optimistic peroration with its ringing prophecy of the downfall of Louis Napoleon's regime, Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* portrays a tragedy of working-class defeat, followed by the attrition of a parliamentary republic, culminating in the seizure of power by an unscrupulous and shadowy political adventurer aided by a secret society and backed by the bayonets of the army. The events that brought Louis Napoleon to power were as much a shock to Marx after the heady optimism of the 1848 revolutions as the triumph of fascism was to Marxists in the 1920s. Marx explained these events by closely examining both the cohesion and the fragmentation of the French bourgeoisie. \(^{16}\)

According to Marx, the dictatorship of Louis Napoleon was in no respect a direct response to a working-class offensive. Indeed, after the crushing defeat of June 1848, when Parisian workers had revolted in an attempt to retain the right of the unemployed to guaranteed jobs in the national workshops, "the proletariat passes into the background of the
revolutionary stage,” although the June Days would haunt “the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost.”

The June Days not only catalyzed cohesion in an otherwise fragmented bourgeoisie, which rallied around the slogans “property, family, religion, order,” but also traumatized property holders giving rise to a deep-rooted fear of disorder or any sign of reawakening class conflict. This fear, periodically revived by peasant and labor unrest or petty-bourgeois discontent, would condition the willingness of the bourgeois parliamentary bloc to lean on the executive and the army and to undermine and eliminate democratic rights, including universal manhood suffrage. “It understood that all the so-called bourgeois liberties and organs of progress attacked and menaced its class rule at its social foundation and political summit simultaneously, and had therefore become ’socialistic.’”

Unable to represent the majority of the nation, the bourgeois parliamentarians would attempt to stifle the political expression of the majority.

Not only were the bourgeois parliamentarians unable to represent the vast majority of the nation, but riven by irreconcilable internal antagonisms, they were unable even to represent the bourgeoisie. Much of The Eighteenth Brumaire is taken up with the parliamentary intrigues and machinations of the various factions of the bourgeois parties, the internal disintegration of the party of Order and the consequent crisis of representation. From the outset, the party of Order was, according to Marx, split into two great rival factions, Orleanists and Bourbons, each backing a rival royal house. As is usual with Marx, he treats these factions not merely as political divisions but rather as expressions of social interests, capital and landed property respectively, reinforced by cultural distinctions. The continual squabbles within the party of Order over constitutional issues and the conflicts of this party with the president, Louis Napoleon, who constantly attempted to enlarge his sphere of authority, soon alienated those whom it purported to represent.

The parliamentary party was not only dissolved into its two great factions, each of these factions was not only split up within itself but the party of Order in parliament had fallen out with the party of Order outside parliament. The spokesmen and scribes of the bourgeoisie, its platform and its press, in short, the ideologists of the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie itself, the representatives and the represented, faced one another in estrangement and no longer understood one another.

This estrangement increasingly led to a rejection of parliamentary government by the extraparliamentary bourgeoisie and to its support for an authoritative executive in the person of the president, Louis Napoleon. The aristocracy of finance, its business tied up with public
credit, "condemned the parliamentary struggle of the party of Order as a disturbance of order." The commercial bourgeoisie soon followed suit. In short, the parliamentary party of Order failed to aggregate the heterogenous interests of the bourgeoisie or create the conditions of order and stability that were regarded as necessary for the pursuit of private business affairs.

This crisis of representation and the longing for stability, order, and economic security meant that the bourgeoisie was willing to countenance Louis Napoleon's coup d'état in December 1851. In so doing the bourgeoisie confesses that its own interests dictate that it should be delivered from the danger of its own rule; that in order to restore tranquility in the country, the bourgeois parliament must first of all be given its quietus; that in order to preserve its social power intact, its political power must be broken: that the individual bourgeois can continue to exploit the other classes and to enjoy undisturbed property, family, religion and order only on condition that their class is condemned along with the other classes to like political nullity.

If the fragmentation of bourgeois interests and the generalized crisis of representation eroded the parliamentary republic and thus made Napoleon's coup possible, there remained the question of how and with what bases of support the adventurer Louis Napoleon was able to seize and retain power. Marx's account of the sources of support for Louis Bonaparte and the social interests that his regime served is extremely complex. According to Marx, the mass base of Louis Napoleon's presidency and coup d'état had been the conservative peasantry, which, inspired by the Napoléonic legend, had elected Bonaparte to the presidency in December 1848. Louis Napoleon's major organizational base of support, however, was the Society of December 10th, a secret society gathered from the déclassé flotsam of all social classes, which functioned both as an approving claque simulating public enthusiasm and as a terrorist gang intimidating political opponents. The second organizational source of support was the army recruited from the peasantry. From 1848 Louis gradually brought the army under his control, replacing parliamentary generals, wining and dining the officer corps, promising future glory.

Marx also detailed the political means employed by Louis Napoleon to strengthen the executive power against the parliament after his election to the presidency in December 1848. Part of his success was attributable to the deficiencies of the Constitution of 1848, which made the president the only official elected directly by the entire nation and invested him with quasi-royal powers. Louis Napoleon's adroit use of these prerogatives combined with the factional disarray of the National
Assembly resulted in a steady increase in the autonomy of executive authority. By the time the parliamentarians decided to oppose his designs for an unconstitutional second presidential term, his tight grip on the levers of power, the army and the bureaucracy, enabled him to carry out a successful coup.

Under Louis Napoleon, the executive power with its army and vast body of officials appeared to have acquired complete autonomy vis-à-vis civil society. Marx considered the appearance of complete autonomy illusory claiming instead that the executive rested on the passive base of the masses of small isolated peasant proprietors. This vast dictatorial power seems to have served no well-defined class interests or indeed any interests apart from those of Louis Napoleon and his immediate entourage. Louis Napoleon pursued contradictory policies and attempted to play off all classes against one another, to conjure and steal "the whole of France in order to make a present of her to France." However, while breaking the political power of the bourgeoisie, "by protecting its material power, he generates its political power anew." This seems, however, to be an inescapable consequence of maintaining bourgeois property relations rather than the willed or foreseeable result of conscious policy.

The other *locus classicus* for Bonapartist analyses of fascism was Engels' attempt in the *Origin of the Family, State and Private Property* to generalize the phenomenon of Bonapartism by classifying it as an exceptional form of state in conditions of class balance. According to Engels,

> By way of exception, however, periods occur in which the warring classes balance each other so nearly that the state power, as ostensible mediator, acquires, for the moment, a certain degree of independence of both. Such was the absolute monarchy of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, which held the balance between the nobility and the class of burghers; such was the Bonapartism of the First and still more the Second French Empire, which played off the proletariat against the bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. The latest performance of this kind in which ruler and ruled appear equally ridiculous, is the new German Empire of the Bismarck nation; here capitalists and workers are balanced against each other and equally cheated for the benefit of the impoverished cabbage junkers.

While this rather elliptical historical formula sacrificed any sense of the complex internal fragmentation of classes, the importance of transitional classes, or a crisis of representation for the triumph of Bonapartism nonetheless both Otto Bauer and Trotsky would make use of the notion of "class balance."

Thus in summary, the Bonapartist theorists of the 1920s and 1930s
could in varying degree draw on some elements of Marx's dissection of Bonapartism: the depiction of Bonapartism as in part a response to working-class defeat accompanied by bourgeois fear and fragmentation; the account of the corresponding crisis of representation, attrition of parliamentary rule, split between public power and private social interest, and autonomization of the executive as the bourgeoisie recognized that its political power was incompatible with preserving social dominance; the portrayal of the opportunities this provided for a declassé adventurer and his followers to seize power. It should be noted, however, that Marx's analysis could be more readily made to yield answers to questions about the social character of fascism and its relation to the political system than about its relation to the historical development of capitalism or fascism's political geography.

**Bonapartist Perspectives of the 1930s**

The analysis of the attrition of Weimar democracy and the rise of Hitler based most closely on Marx's Bonapartist model was undertaken by August Thalheimer and other contributors to *Gegen den Strom* (Against the Current), the journal of the German Communist party—Opposition (KPD(O)) between 1930 and 1933. Thalheimer, who had been a key theoretician of the German Communist party until his expulsion for outspoken opposition to the Comintern resolution of 1928, warned with prophetic lucidity against the tendency on the part of both Communists and Social Democrats to underestimate the fascist danger. Given the organizational weakness of the KPD(O), however, his clear-sighted warnings during the early 1930s would remain Cassandra-like. Although his articles were discovered by the German new left in the 1960s, recent Marxist critics have faulted him for ostensibly failing to relate the orientations and attitudes of classes in Germany to the economic conjunctures of the 1930s and the categories of political economy. This criticism is only partially justified, since it tends to focus myopically on his best-known article, "Uber den Faschismus" (On Fascism), rather than his writings on the political situation in Germany.

It was in "Uber den Faschismus," written in 1928 and published in 1930, that Thalheimer depended most heavily on *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, which he quoted extensively. Nonetheless, he did not equate Bonapartism and fascism, stating instead that "they are related phenomena with common as well as divergent characteristics both of which have to be worked out." Indeed, he proceeded analogically, establishing a series of correspondences and contrasts between these two
forms of rule. Among the features they shared, he numbered the autonomy of executive power, “the political subordination of all masses, including the bourgeoisie itself, under the fascist state power but with the social dominance of the large bourgeoisie and large landowners,” and the attempt to appear as the benefactor of all classes. Even the dynamics of class struggle that brought both regimes to power were similar, a defeat of a working-class offensive and the exhaustion of the bourgeoisie, which searched for a savior to preserve its social power. The nationalism and imperialist aspirations of both regimes as well as their internal contradictions propelled both to war.

However, a number of features distinguished the two regimes as well. Some of these stemmed from the different national histories of France and Italy, as for example Louis Napoleon’s use of the Napoleonic legend as opposed to Mussolini’s more artificial attempt to recall the glory of ancient Rome. “More important, however, are the distinctions which stem from changes in the general character of capitalism.” Louis Napoleon belonged to the age of competitive capitalism and could sometimes advance national liberation, for instance in his aid to Italian independence, whereas Mussolini’s foreign policy bore the marks of modern imperialism and was reactionary from the outset. Moreover, the organizational bases of the two regimes diverged in certain respects. Whereas the Society of December 10th was the counterpart of the secret societies of the early French labor movement, the fascist party was the counterrevolutionary counterpart of the Bolsheviks. The mass character of the fascist party “makes it in certain respects stronger, but also increases its internal contradictions, the contradiction between the social interests of these masses and the interests of the dominant class which it serves.”

Although Thalheimer did not explicitly emphasize his differences from the Comintern position in this article, they were nonetheless pronounced. While he too related the triumph of fascism to the era of imperialism and monopoly capitalism, albeit somewhat perfunctorily, he pointed out that the nations where fascism had come to power—among which he counted Italy, Poland, and Bulgaria—were not exactly major capitalist societies. While the attempt to dismantle the parliamentary system and create “stronger political guarantees for bourgeois domination” was evident in “such highly developed capitalist lands as England, Germany and France which were more or less socially and economically shaken by the results of the war, that points in the direction of fascism, it can lead to forms of open dictatorship of capital in certain critical situations. But these will not necessarily be identical with fascism.”

Thus while there was a general tendency toward the decline of
parliamentary regimes, the subsequent forms of rule were contingent. One explanation for this was that although the bourgeoisie played a central role in the demise of parliament, preparing the conditions for its own political dispossession, it was relatively passive in the actual coups that brought dictatorships to power. Nor could fascism be regarded as the final form of capitalist rule, a position common in the Comintern, with its obvious corollary that after fascism the working class would triumph. Thalheimer reminded his readers that despite Marx’s characterization of the Second Empire as the last and rottenest form of state power, it had been followed by a stable parliamentary democracy.36

Thalheimer sometimes sounded like an instrumentalist, claiming that fascism was an open dictatorship of capital, but this could presumably be reconciled with his account of political expropriation since the social power of the bourgeoisie not only remained intact but was enhanced by the destruction of all working-class and mass organizations.37 Thus his account of the social characteristics and political nature of fascism paralleled Marx’s account in The Eighteenth Brumaire and was considerably more nuanced than the instrumentalist position adopted by the Comintern in 1928. Moreover, in contrast to the dogmatism of the Comintern, Thalheimer left his analysis open-ended by calling for further investigation of the forms of capitalist dictatorship and questioning the possibility of reducing different national experiences and class configurations to a schematic theoretical formula.

Although “Uber den Faschismus” largely discussed Italian fascism, by the time it was published Thalheimer had already written about the crisis of German parliamentary democracy in the spring of 1929 in an article entitled “Die Krise des Parlamentarismus—das Vorspiel zur Krise der bürgerlichen Herrschaft” (The Crisis of Parliamentaryism—a Prelude to the Crisis of Bourgeois Domination).38 In this article Thalheimer cited numerous attacks by leading journalists and politicians including Chancellor Gustav Stresemann against the dependence of the government on parliamentary parties. Most of these speeches and articles advocated strengthening executive authority and ending “partyism,” which pandered to special interests. Thalheimer compared this opposition on the part of the bourgeois spokespersons to their own parties and representatives and the appeal for a more autonomous executive to the preparatory period that had led to Bonapartism in France in the early 1850s or to fascism in Italy in the early 1920s. At the root of the crisis of parliament he detected an offensive on the part of the German trusts, which, faced with worsening international competitiveness, could no longer tolerate the costly and uncontrollable outcomes of the parliamentary process.
The pressure of the trust capital on the masses of people in Germany grows visibly. The “industrial middle class” is ground down, monopoly capital has already created higher profit rates for itself, at the same time putting pressure on wages and social costs. The consequence, a slow but steadily growing counter pressure from under, radicalization of the petty bourgeois and the working class.39

This radicalization was already apparent during the elections in May 1928 when both far left and right had gained at the expense of the centrist parties. The bourgeois parties by attacking parliamentarianism were ideologically preparing their own demise. “The social dominance of the bourgeoisie has fallen into contradiction with its political rule. It prepares its own political resignation in order to preserve and fortify its class dominance.”40 Thus by selectively deploying elements of Marx’s Bonapartism model, Thalheimer described a gathering crisis of parliamentary democracy and bourgeois hegemony well before the onset of the Great Depression and Hitler’s electoral breakthrough. Because of the international situation of German capital, large industry was no longer willing to maintain the costly series of political and social compromises such as high welfare payments that had stabilized Germany since 1924.41 It should be noted, however, that until 1932 Thalheimer, in contrast to Marx in The Eighteenth Brumaire, tended to depict capital as a unified political agent arrayed behind the leadership of the major trusts. Moreover, he was vague on the way the needs of German trusts translated into demands by leading politicians for a stronger executive.

Thalheimer’s understanding of the crisis of representation enabled him to see through the pseudo-parliamentary trappings of the presidential government Thalheimer regarded as a prelude to fascist dictatorship. Already in spring 1930, Thalheimer affirmed that although Brüning could rely on a majority in parliament he could not rely on a parliamentary majority—since his majority included the Nationalists, who took their lead from the president.42 In addition, neither the composition nor the policies of the government were controlled by the Reichstag. President Hindenburg had determined the composition of the Brüning government, had mandated agricultural tariffs and the program of aid to the Junkers, and could prorogue parliament at any time using the emergency powers granted in Article 48 of the Constitution. Moreover, the mass of the bourgeoisie had turned increasingly antiparliamentary.

Thalheimer strongly believed that the objective preconditions for a fascist dictatorship were already present in Germany.43 While the elimination of concessions to labor made during the postwar labor offensive of 1918–20 had in the past been possible under parliamentary
democracy, now the broad and systematic attack on German labor, the attack on wages and welfare, was becoming so intense as to be incompatible with the maintenance of democratic rights, especially the right of organization and the right to strike. Second, he argued that while the agency costs of the state might well be higher under a fascist dictatorship, these costs would be more than offset by cuts in social expenditure. Third, he contended that it was not a question of the bourgeoisie voluntarily handing over power to the fascists but rather the unavoidable logic of its position. In Italy the bourgeoisie had only wanted to intimidate labor, to eliminate its organizations, "not the rule of fascism. But to break the organization of labor by systematic terror, it had to accept in the bargain the building, arming, military training of fascist organizations and the tolerance and support for their actions by civil and military authorities." While a sector of the bourgeoisie already openly backed fascism, another sector continued to oppose it, but "against their will they play into the hands of the fascists." 44 Even the Democrats and more liberal members of the Peoples' party were clamoring for a stronger executive authority, while the agrarian wings of the Nationalists, Popular Conservatives, and Center vociferously supported a dictatorship by President Hindenburg. 45

Again before the Nazi electoral breakthrough, Thalheimer perceived the impending danger. The National Socialists were the most active wing in this weakening of parliamentary rule, cooperating with but simultaneously distancing themselves from the conservative grouping around Hindenburg. 46 Above all, they were using the situation advantageously to build up their party organization in the workplace and governmental apparatus. They were both participating in parliamentary institutions to destroy them and at the same time increasing their extraparliamentary terror against labor. Recognizing that fascism, like Bonapartism, was in part a consequence not of the strength of labor but rather its weakness, internal division, and exhaustion, Thalheimer cautioned against an abstentionist or passive policy on the part of labor, although given the policies of the Communists and Socialists, he appears to have doubted the likelihood of energetic or concerted action. 47 The form of bourgeois rule was not a mere juridical question but one of the balance of class power. Parliamentary democracy was worth defending against fascism, he avowed, but it could be defended only by extraparliamentary means.

While these early articles by Thalheimer stressed the incompatibility of continued parliamentary government and democracy with the onslaught against labor orchestrated by German trusts, during the chancellorships of von Papen and General Schleicher, the final act of the Weimar Republic, Thalheimer and other contributors to Gegen den
Strom emphasized the failure of the presidential dictatorship to overcome the economic crisis of capitalism, stabilize the political situation, attract a mass base, or aggregate the interests of the various fractions of the high bourgeoisie. In his analysis of the November 1932 elections, Thalheimer made clear that the authoritarian von Papen-Schleicher government rested on no base of support either within or outside of parliament. If it tried to demonstrate that the new Reichstag was incapable of functioning nothing was gained.

Capital expects the dictatorial government to create "order." This government, however, is parliamentary scandals, new elections or actions of the sort of July 20th or September 12. A dictatorial government that is even more insecure and weaker than a parliamentary one, which has to stage a coup de main every few weeks, is not what the grande bourgeoisie expects from a reactionary dictatorship.48

While the Nazis had suffered their first major defeat in this election, a loss of some 2 million votes, Thalheimer attributed this loss to purely temporary factors.49 These factors included hopes reposed by the large and petty bourgeoisie in von Papen’s program for economic revival, the pressure of large landowners in favor of von Papen, the disappointment of many Nazi followers with the lack of immediate success by the party, and the extraparliamentary activity of labor. Von Papen’s economic program was failing since he was “paralyzed by his incapacity to bridge the divisions between industrial and agrarian capital in the interest of capital as a whole.” Moreover, government instability created an unfavorable business climate. Even the Junkers whom von Papen favored were increasingly falling away from the government because of his incapacity to meet their maximum demands. As the von Papen government failed, Nazi voters who were disappointed by the lack of success in taking power in August would stream back.

This mode of analysis was continued in December 1932 in the anonymous article “Von Brüning bis Schleicher” (From Brüning to Schleicher), which declared that von Papen had brought on the instability by his plans for revising the Constitution and by incurring the opposition of industrial and commercial capital to the costs of his agrarian program.50 While von Papen’s downfall once again opened the prospect for Nazi participation in the government, those at the pinnacle of the state apparatus, especially the generals, were still not prepared to subordinate themselves to the fascists. If anything, despite initial appearances, General Schleicher’s government was even weaker than his predecessor’s. He retreated from von Papen’s plans to alter the Constitution and his program for creating employment and stimulating
the economy was failing even more rapidly than von Papen's. Schleicher tried to play the benefactor of all classes, eliminating the import quotas that damaged industrial interests, promising the agrarians a mandatory mixture of butter and margarine, ending von Papen's wage controls, and promising no further lowering of living standards to labor. His social rhetoric was beginning to be perceived by the bourgeoisie, however, as a disturbing sign of weakness vis-à-vis labor. Nor was Schleicher in a position “to force the various fractions of the bourgeoisie to reduce their particular interests to a common denominator.”

The meetings between Hitler and von Papen could be seen as threats to replace Schleicher in the unified interests of large capital. This judgment was reiterated and elaborated in the issue of Gegen den Strom that appeared a few days after the formation of the Hitler-von Papen government, a government it described as Nazi-dominated despite the presence of the conservative Nationalist coalition partners. “Von Papen and Schleicher fell because of the antagonisms within the camp of the bourgeoisie . . . because those strata of the bourgeoisie which felt disadvantaged by their policies could play the fascist party off against them. Today, however, the bourgeoisie has handed over power to the fascists and resigned in their favor.” The consequence of this would be the complete elimination of the rights of laborers and an unrestrained attack by capital. While the Nazis could not resolve the international capitalist crisis, they could “reduce the living standard of labor to a level of unimaginable misery” while providing subventions to industry and the Junkers. The industrialists had abandoned political power but their control over the workplace would be even more stringent.

There were certainly numerous deficiencies in the analysis of Thalheimer and the KPD(O). The relation between cohesion and fragmentation, particular and common interests within the bourgeoisie, was never clearly spelled out. Sometimes the bourgeoisie appeared as a unified agent subordinate to the interests of the trusts, at other times as a more heterogenous social group, antagonistic to labor and sharing a common interest in order, but otherwise unable to coordinate its manifold economic and political interests. Although there were indications in several articles that the Nazi party garnered cross-class support, there was little concrete investigation of its composition. The strength and lasting contribution of Thalheimer's analysis, however, lay in his often penetrating treatment of the political process and social implications of the steady erosion of parliamentary democracy and the establishment of presidential dictatorship, a treatment derived from the leading motif of The Eighteenth Brumaire and rooted in an exam-
ination of the ways in which a defense of social and economic interests of the German bourgeoisie had become structurally incompatible with the preservation of democratic rights and norms.

The second major Marxist figure of the 1930s who analyzed the phase of presidential dictatorship in Germany from 1930–33 in terms of Bonapartism was Leon Trotsky. Like Thalheimer and in opposition to the German Communist party (KPD), Trotsky sharply distinguished between the period of presidential dictatorship and fascism and pressed for a united front of labor organizations to halt the Nazis. Trotsky’s use of the Bonapartism concept, however, contrasted markedly with that of Thalheimer in several respects. Whereas for Thalheimer fascism was the modern analog of Bonapartism—Bonapartism in the era of mass politics and monopoly capitalism—Trotsky viewed Bonapartism as either a preparatory phase for fascist dictatorship (“preventive Bonapartism”) or a degenerate form of fascist rule (“Bonapartism of fascist origin”). While Bonapartism could assume many forms depending on concrete historical conditions, the essence of Bonapartism for Trotsky consisted of being a dictatorship resting on the military, police, and bureaucracy:

a government of the saber as judge arbiter of the nation—that’s just what Bonapartism is. The saber by itself has no independent program. It is the instrument of "order." It is summoned to safeguard what exists. Raising itself politically above all classes, Bonapartism . . . represents in the social sense, always and in all epochs the government of the strongest and firmest part of the exploiters; consequently, present day Bonapartism can be nothing else than the government of finance capital which directs, inspires, and corrupts the summits of the bureaucracy, the police, the officers’ caste and the press.”

Thus for Trotsky, Bonapartism lacked mass support or indeed any firm support outside the state apparatus. A Bonapartist dictatorship was preventive when civil war was threatened, when the working class and fascists were balanced but an open confrontation had not occurred. “As soon as the struggle of two social strata, the have and have nots, the exploiters and exploited—reaches its highest tension, the conditions are established for the domination of bureaucracy, police, soldiery. The government becomes ‘independent’ of society.” This would be a short-lived and highly unstable form of government. More stable was “Bonapartism of fascist origin,” which arose when after seizing power, a fascist party gradually lost its petty-bourgeois mass base as some of its followers were absorbed into the state apparatus and others were disillusioned by the regime’s inability to fulfill its social promises. At that point, “fascism is regenerated into Bonapartism.” Hence Trotsky
placed Bonapartism and fascism in a temporal trajectory of "preventive Bonapartism"—fascist dictatorship—"Bonapartism of fascist origin," all of which socially served finance capital but rested on different social bases and had different relations to the petty bourgeoisie and labor.

This notion of Bonapartism as a short-lived phase of class equilibrium prior to civil war emerged in Trotsky's characterization of the Brüning chancellorship in early 1932.

The Brüning regime is the regime of bureaucratic dictatorship or, more definitely, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie enforced by means of the army and police. The fascist petty bourgeoisie and the proletarian organizations seem to counterbalance one another . . . Brüning's dictatorship is a caricature of Bonapartism. His dictatorship is unstable, unreliable, shortlived. Supported directly only by a small minority of Democrats against the will of the workers, threatened by fascism. . . . The dictatorship of bureaucratic impotence fills the lull before the battle, before the forces are openly matched. 57

If the Brüning government was a caricature of Bonapartism, the governments of von Papen and General Schleicher in late 1932 were the real thing, specifically German forms of Bonapartism. Hindenburg's reelection to the presidency in spring 1932 with the support of the Socialists and Catholic Centrists had the character of a plebiscite against civil war. "But precisely this is the most important function of Bonapartism: raising itself above the two struggling camps in order to preserve property and order. It suppresses civil war, or precedes it or does not allow it to rekindle." 58 Hindenburg permitted the government to appear to have mass support, although Hindenburg himself had broken with the democratic parties and openly served the landowners, industrialists and bankers, while the upper levels of the property class were Papen's only base of support. Hence, despite such apparent successes as the coup against the Socialist government in Prussia in July, von Papen's grip on power was precarious. Behind Hindenburg and von Papen stood the state apparatus, the strongest sector of which was the army, embodied by General Schleicher, whom Trotsky viewed as the "core of the Bonapartist combination." 59 While Trotsky regarded the von Papen-Schleicher governments as highly unstable, he expected finance capital to opt for an open fascist dictatorship only if the class struggle intensified. 60

This proved to be false but was noted by Trotsky without theoretical reevaluation after the Nazi seizure of power. In his own account of the coming to power of the Hitler-Hugenburg government, it was not intensified struggle by the revolutionary working class but rather the fragmentation of the possessing classes that issued in the handing over
of power to the Nazis. General Schleicher, in whom Bonapartism assumed its purest form, fell because the passivity of the proletariat "weakened the hoop of fear that binds together the possessing classes, bringing into the open the antagonisms that tear them apart." The economic base for Bismarck's coalition of iron and rye, of heavy industry and large-scale agriculture, no longer existed. Because of its narrow social base, the industrial bourgeoisie needed Junkers and rich farmers, but economically the preservation of agriculture had become a millstone. When Schleicher deserted the agrarians, they engineered his downfall and replaced him with Alfred Hugenburg, who was the embodiment of the Junkers and landed property. Hitler had been added to "decorate the camarilla of property owners with the leaders of a 'national movement,' and secondly, to place the fighting forces of fascism at the direct disposal of the proprietors." Trotsky considered this operation highly risky for the propertied clique around Hugenburg, which he believed held the real posts of power "while the plebians are assigned the decorative or secondary posts." The government was a brittle, contradictory, and internally divided amalgam of representatives of agriculture, industry, and the reactionary petty bourgeoisie. Although Trotsky did not rule out that the clique of property holders would eliminate the Nazis and a return to a Bonapartist regime, he thought more likely a situation of semi-civil war that would make the Nazis indispensable and in which they would displace their "much too corpulent mentors," expropriating them politically.

Although occasionally rising to the rhetorical power of Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, especially in "What Is National Socialism?" of June 1933, in which he discussed the symbolic manipulation by the Nazi regime, Trotsky was clearly less indebted to Marx's concept of Bonapartism and more dependent on Engels' various formulations for his analysis of fascism than was Thalheimer. Were their differences ultimately more than terminological? Did they have any consequences apart from the fact Trotsky labeled Schleicher a Bonapartist, while Thalheimer regarded the period of presidential dictatorship as a prelude to fascism, the modern variant of Bonapartism? In fact, the terminological differences were closely tied to substantive differences. Thalheimer's account of the increasing autonomy of the executive was much more processual; autonomization was a dynamic response to both a crisis of representation within the bourgeoisie and the incompatibility of the maintenance of parliamentary system with the industrialists' offensive, an offensive that reflected both the international position of German capital and the relative weakness of German labor. As a result he paid much more attention to the specific policies of both the bourgeois parties and government and recognized that the steady
movement toward fascism was accompanied by a corresponding erosion of labor’s power in the face of the capitalist offensive. By contrast, Trotsky’s more mechanistic account treated the early 1930s as a period of labor offensive, albeit one thwarted by labor’s misleaders and the unstable equilibrium between labor and fascism approaching civil war, a perspective on the nature of the period not far removed from the Comintern’s. Nonetheless, both Trotsky and Thalheimer stood far from the Comintern in their recognition that the presidential dictatorship between 1930 and January 1933 was not fascist and that all available means for united labor action had to be utilized to prevent the Nazis from seizing power.

The third major Marxist figure who adopted a Bonapartist perspective was Otto Bauer, the leading theoretician of the Austrian Socialist party. While both Trotsky and Thalheimer treated Bonapartism and fascism as related phenomena, they asserted that key differences depended on contrasts between the phase of competitive capitalism in which Louis Napoleon had operated and monopoly capitalism, but both left the precise nature of this dependence unspecified. In contrast, Bauer attempted to link his Bonapartist analysis of fascism with a closer examination of the structural transformation of the interwar economy, a linkage often obscured by excerpting his chapter on fascism from Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen? (Between Two World Wars?) of 1936. Moreover, he strove to place fascism within the framework of a generalized European economic, political, and cultural crisis of the postwar era, a crisis of capitalist civilization, and in doing so developed a far more comprehensive syncretic theory of fascism than did the other two.

Bauer took World War I as the starting point of the crisis of capitalist civilization. The war had disrupted the delicate balance of the international economy, which was never restored in the postwar world. Much of Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen? consists of a detailed analysis of the world economy in the 1920s, of international credit and currency problems, the expansion of agricultural output and changes in industrial production processes such as the rationalization movement in Germany. As a consequence of the enormous expansion of production brought on by industrial rationalization coupled with a lagging mass-purchasing power that put downward pressures on prices and profits even during the prosperous late 1920s, the economic crisis of the 1930s was quantitatively more severe than earlier ones. The inability of the leading capitalist powers to reestablish stability in the postwar world, a failure associated with reparations and international credit, also meant that the depression of the 1930s was qualitatively different from earlier cyclical downturns. In the face of falling prices, agriculture and indus-
try had demanded strong measures to protect the domestic market and substantial export premiums. Central banks had adopted monetary regulation to stave off the collapse of their currencies. Everywhere open competition and free trade had been replaced by bureaucratically administered economies that began by regulating currency and foreign trade but soon extended their controls to agricultural production, wages, the labor market, and consumption, ushering in a new neomercantilist phase of capitalism, of which fascist Germany was the most extreme variant.

Fascism too, according to Bauer, was very much a product of closely interconnected social processes caused by the disruptions of the war years and the economic crisis of the postwar period. Both Italian fascism and German National Socialism had recruited their initial followers from among declassed veterans who knew no other existence than war. The ideology and organizational forms of fascist movements were above all military. The war and the postwar economic crisis had also impoverished and embittered many small farmers and petty bourgeois, who then rejected democracy and the middle-class parties they had previously supported and turned instead to fascism. Moreover, the capitalist class had seen its profit rates fall in the postwar crises, and it therefore desired to break the resistance of labor, a desire probably irreconcilable with the continuance of democracy. Fascist movements had been especially strong in Italy and Germany, both of which had weak and belated traditions of parliamentary democracy, had been shaken by their war experiences (domestic opposition to entering the war in Italy, the unexpected military defeat in Germany), and suffered severe economic dislocation in the immediate postwar period.

Although capitalists had not originally encouraged the formation of fascist movements, they quickly discovered that these movements were useful for intimidating labor and driving it on the defensive. In Germany, however, after 1923, when the Ruhr had reverted to national control and the currency and economic recovery had been underwritten by foreign loans, German capital stopped its funding of the paramilitary right and instead bankrolled the bourgeois parties. Even the monarchist Nationalists gradually accepted democratic rules. Only with the onset of the depression in 1929 had German heavy industry and the Junkers rediscovered the usefulness of a fascist movement. “The bourgeois factions which supported Brüning used the anxiety of the Social Democracy and trade unions at the prospect of a fascist dictatorship in order to extract from them toleration for Brüning’s capitalist dictatorship, which with the deflationary policy of its emergency decrees rapidly lowered the living standard of the popular masses.” The fact that the Nazis attacked such labor defense organi-
zations as the Reichsbanner and Rotfront ensured favorable handling by the state authorities.

This did not mean, however, that the industrialists or Junkers had become fascists. Indeed, they were largely contemptuous of the plebians who composed the fascist movement.

But as in Italy the moment came in which the capitalists and Junkers had only the choice of suppressing the fascists, and with that instantly changing the balance of forces in favor of labor, or handing over state power to the fascists. In this situation Hindenburg's Junker cronies decided on the transfer of state power to Hitler. As in Italy representatives of the historic bourgeois parties entered the first fascist government believing that they could subordinate and assimilate the fascists. But more rapidly than in Italy, German fascism used this conquered state power to throw the bourgeois parties out of the government, to dissolve the parties and organizations of the bourgeoisie and to establish its totalitarian dictatorship. Here too the class struggle seemed to end when the fascist storm troops set up their domination over all classes.71

Although the fascists justified themselves to the bourgeoisie on the grounds of having saved it from Bolshevism, the proletariat had long been on the defensive. The capitalist class and large landowners transferred power not because of a threatened proletarian revolution but rather “to destroy the achievements of reformist socialism.”72 (This emphasis on social-democratic achievements was not surprisingly far more pronounced in Bauer’s work than in Trotsky’s and Thalheimer’s.)

The fascist dictatorship was the outcome of a peculiar balance of class forces that, using Engels, Bauer compared to the balance between the nobility and bourgeoisie that had sustained absolutism or the balance between the bourgeoisie and labor that had resulted in Bonapartism. The capitalists had been too weak to carry through their deflationary and antilabor policies by ideological or legal means, but “strong enough to pay, arm and unleash on the proletariat a lawless, anti-legal private army.”73 Labor, led by the reformist socialists and trade unions, had been strong enough to hinder the deflationary policy but not strong enough to defend itself against force. Since the socialists had supported the democratic republic, peasants, petty bourgeois, and many workers viewed them as an integral part and beneficiary of the hated system that failed to protect these strata from impoverishment during the economic crisis. Therefore these strata flocked to the fascists. “The result of this balance of forces or much more the weakness of both classes is the victory of fascism.”74 Thus while Bauer, like Trotsky, made use of the balance-of-classes notion from Engels, the accounts of the players and relative weights in that balance were quite different.

While the bourgeoisie had been politically dispossessed, its organi-
zations, press, and traditions destroyed, the leading sector of the bourgeoisie rapidly found that the new system of domination would serve its own interests. The fascist dictatorship smashed the unions and other mass organizations that previously inhibited capitalist dominance and by eliminating all democratic rights silenced any possible opposition. It retained a capitalist economy and therefore had to be solicitous about the profitability of industry. Being dependent on the banks and credit system for government financing, the dictatorship had to represent the interests of high finance as congruent with national interest. Moreover, in power the fascist parties suppressed the radical anticapitalist tendencies in their own ranks, Hitler's murder of Sturmabteilung (SA) leaders in June 1934 being a prime example, thus removing the last impediment to bourgeois social dominance.

However, while Bauer, in contrast to Thalheimer and Trotsky, did not ascribe any importance to divisions within the capitalist class for the victory of fascism, once fascism was in power he thought that the development of the administered economy was likely to injure the interests of particular fractions of capital and thereby heighten intracapitalist tensions. Fascist totalitarianism ran counter to the traditions and ideology of many strata of the bourgeoisie. Autarky and preparation for war hurt the export-oriented finished goods industry. Rentiers feared a devaluation of their financial instruments in the event of war. Increasingly the armaments industry and large landowners who were closely related to the officer corps obtained the upper hand. Thus in the final analysis, the fascist dictatorship rested on and served only one fraction of the bourgeoisie, the war-oriented sector. This position approached the definition of fascism announced a year earlier at the Seventh Comintern Congress, where as part of the shift to a strategy of forming Popular Fronts with socialists and liberal parties, the official spokesman Georgi Dmitrov had proclaimed that fascism was "the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinist, most imperialist elements of finance capital."

However, in it comprehensiveness, empirical weight, and subtle analysis of the relation between the ruling caste and dominant class under fascism, Bauer's fascism theory was distant from that of the Comintern. Rather than being satisfied with generalities about monopoly capitalism, Bauer undertook a concrete analysis of the strains of the postwar economy. While he believed that there were strong tendencies in all modern capitalist economies toward a bureaucratically administered economic system, these tendencies emerged fully only where fascism was victorious, as in Italy and Germany. To explain why fascism had come to power in these nations, Bauer provided a multicausal interpretation that connected the weakness of parliamentary democratic traditions, the effects of the war, and the specific character of the
postwar economic crisis in both countries. Bauer's account of the preconditions, social composition, and appeal of the fascist movements was considerably more intricate than either the position of the Comintern or those of Thalheimer and Trotsky. In accordance with earlier Italian analyses like Togliatti's, he acknowledged the relative autonomy of the fascist movement. However, despite his use of a Bonapartist model, Bauer's analysis of the political crisis and presidential dictatorship in Germany was far sketchier than Thalheimer's or Trotsky's and bourgeois fragmentation played no role whatsoever in his chronicle of the triumph of fascism. Nonetheless, Bauer's combined analysis of developmental tendencies in the postwar economy and the internal conditions in Italy and Germany that created a favorable climate for the victory of fascism permitted him to confront the Comintern theory of 1928 on its own terrain and offer a comprehensive alternative to this heteronomic model.

Despite the significant contributions of Thalheimer, Trotsky, and Bauer to a Marxist theory of fascism, in the postwar world, the Bonapartist alternative was largely relegated to oblivion as the historiography of Nazism fell victim to the cold war. Across the military and political barriers of divided Europe, a theory of totalitarianism that equated Nazism and Communism on the basis of purely formal similarities faced an unrevised and mirror-image communist theory that equated fascism with monopoly capitalism in the era of imperialism. Only with the growth of the new left in the 1960s would these Bonapartist analyses be disinterred, reprinted, reexamined, and eventually further elaborated and modified. The appropriation of the Bonapartist theories of the 1930s enabled adherents of the new left to establish contact with a critical Marxist tradition while avoiding the staggering simplifications of the instrumentalist interpretation with its lack of complex mediations between social classes, economics, and political representation still dominant in the East bloc. Presently the impetus for reexamining seems exhausted, but over a fifteen-year period beginning in the mid-1960s historians and political scientists associated with the new left produced a substantial body of work on National Socialism deriving either directly or indirectly from some variant of the Bonapartist perspective. Although much of this work transcended some of the manifest weaknesses of the literature of the 1930s, for example, the relative inattention to Nazi ideology, the thinness of empirical evidence for the divisions between factions of capital, nonetheless this recent literature testifies to the vitality and rich legacy of this alternative tradition.
Notes

I wish to thank Steven Lee and Craig Rimmerman for having read and commented on earlier drafts of this essay.

22. Ibid., p. 132.
25. Ibid., p. 171.
26. Ibid., pp. 177–79.


32. Ibid., pp. 41-42.

33. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

34. Ibid., pp. 35-36. In response to German leftists who comforted themselves with the observation that Germany was not Italy and hence was immune to a fascist victory, Thalheimer and other members of the KPD(O) subsequently modified this position. See, for example, the anonymous article "Deutschland und Italien" of 1934 reprinted from *Gegen den Strom* no. 4 in *Der Faschismus in Deutschland*, pp. 212-18.


36. Ibid., pp. 35-39. His attempt to prove that Marx did not really mean that Bonapartism was the final form of bourgeois rule in the *Civil War in France* is highly contrived to say the least. Marx, as Engels later noted, was simply wrong.

37. Thalheimer, "Uber den Faschismus," pp. 43-47. Adler, in "Thalheimer, Bonapartism and Fascism" (p. 107), accuses Thalheimer of lapsing into instrumentalism. There is certainly some slippage as there was in most Bonapartist theories of fascism, but there is no problem with saying that the social power of the bourgeoisie is increased, and its control over the workplace enhanced, even though it has lost its political power.

38. July 20 was the date of von Papen's illegal coup against the socialist-led government of Prussia; September 12 was the date of a vote of no-confidence in von Papen staged by the Nazis in revenge for his refusal to bring Hitler into the government on Hitler's terms. Thalheimer, "Die Krise des Parlamentarismus—das Vorspiel zur Krise der bürgerlichen Herrschaft," in *Der Faschismus in Deutschland*, pp. 49-51.

39. Ibid., p. 52.

40. Ibid.

41. More recent Marxist and non-Marxist histories of the Weimar Republic have tended to confirm that the employers' offensive began in 1927/1928 as they were faced with a profit squeeze, rather than after the onset of the Great Depression. See, for example, David Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 229-38.

42. Thalheimer, "Grundlagen und Wege der faschistischen Entwicklung in Deutschland," in *Der Faschismus in Deutschland*, pp. 78-79.

43. Ibid., pp. 82-84.

44. Ibid., pp. 87-88.

45. Ibid., p. 86.

46. Ibid., p. 87.

47. Ibid., pp. 88-91. Needless to say, for Thalheimer as for Trotsky, the defense of parliamentary democracy was simply a way station on the road to proletarian dictatorship. The example of the Bolsheviks' support of Kerensky against Kornilov was invariably cited.

48. Thalheimer, "Nach den Wahlen des 6. November," in *Der Faschismus in Deu-
tschland, pp. 186–87. July 20, 1932, was the date of von Papen’s illegal coup against the Socialist-led government of Prussia; September 12 of a vote of no confidence in von Papen in the Reichstag staged by the Nazis in revenge for his refusal to bring Hitler into the government on his own terms.

49. Ibid., pp. 188–90.
51. Ibid., p. 196.
52. "Faschistische Diktatur über Deutschland," in Der Faschismus in Deutschland, pp. 198–200.
63. Leon Trotsky, "What Is National Socialism?" in The Struggle Against Fascism, pp. 399–407, is one of the few works in which Nazi ideology is treated at length. Trotsky’s often insightful observations, however, were not incorporated in any theoretical perspective. This work also often takes on an instrumentalist cast, since Trotsky claims that monopoly capital assigns Hitler his tasks.
68. Ibid., pp. 137–39.
69. Ibid., pp. 143–46.
70. Ibid., p. 145.
71. Ibid., p. 146.
72. Ibid., p. 147.
73. Ibid., p. 148.
74. Ibid., p. 149.
75. Ibid., pp. 149–53.
76. Ibid., pp. 154–55.
79. A first step toward republication of some of the heterodox Marxist theorists of the 1930s was Abendroth’s Faschismus und Kapitalismus. Trotsky’s works on National Socialism were republished in the Federal Republic of Germany in the late 1960s and in English in the early 1970s. During the 1970s the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die
Geschichte der österreichischen Arbeiterbewegung reprinted the collected works of Otto Bauer. For some of the reception of the Bonapartism literature in the German new left see Das Argument 41 (December 1966).

Some recent discussion, uses, or confirmations of the Bonapartist theorists of the 1930s include Kitchen, Fascism, pp. 71–82; Reinhard Kühnl, Formen bürgerlicher Herrschaft (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1971), pp. 140–42; Mihaly Vadja, Fascism as a Mass Movement (New York; St. Martin’s, 1976), pp. 93–104; and much more critically, Nicos Poulantzas, Fascism and Dictatorship (London: NLB, 1979), pp. 59–62. Poulantzas seems only to have read Thalheimer’s “Über den Faschismus” and to have misinterpreted that. David Abraham, in The Collapse of the Weimar Republic, gives considerable empirical evidence for the divisions between various fractions of capital, divisions that played a key role in Thalheimer’s analysis of the relations among the state, large capital, and the Nazi party in 1932–33. Kühnl has devoted considerable attention to Nazi ideology, which was treated peripherally by the theorists of the 1930s.