Part II

Confronting the Past: Lessons from History
The Destruction of the Workers' Mass Movements in Nazi Germany

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Since its appearance on the political scene of Weimar Germany the National Socialist German Workers party (NSDAP), had been bitterly opposed by the workers' mass movements. Berlin, a stronghold of workers' organizations, was the Rote Festung, the Red Fortress, in Nazi jargon. And there were many other red fortresses in Weimar Germany. The Nazis thus viewed the destruction of the workers' mass movements as a prerequisite for the establishment of absolute power. Adolf Hitler was obsessed by the idea of annihilating the workers' movements—an obsession that was equaled only by his pathological preoccupation with the destruction of the Jews. Flagrant misuse of the law and secret-police terror constituted Hitler's chief weapons in his attack on the Jews and workers. Hitler, the cunning demagogue, also knew that many Germans either shared his hatreds or believed them to operate to their advantage.

When Hitler ordered the destruction of the workers' mass movements, he certainly fulfilled the wishes of the German ruling class. As far as the large landowners, industrialists, generals, and top administrators were concerned, workers existed to be exploited, and rebellious workers belonged at the end of a rope or in front of a firing squad. Most middle-class Germans aped the attitude of the ruling class and admired the Freikorps mercenaries who were murdering thousands of German workers when Hitler was still an obscure fanatic. As long as the workers were impoverished and powerless the solid burghers had nothing but loathing and contempt for them. When the
workers rebelled against their oppressors the middle-class citizens applauded the most brutal methods of ruling-class repression.

Class-conscious workers were fully aware of their situation in the “fatherland.” Their experience had made quite clear the truth of Marx’s observation that the capitalists view the person who, without capital or ground rent lives entirely by his labor, in other words the proletarian, as a mere worker, but not as a human being. They also recognized fully that the modern working class consists of laborers who live only so long as they have work, and who have work only “so long as their work increases capital.” The consequences cut deeply into the workers’ lives: capitalist laws of the market rendered the price of labor equal to its cost of production, limited to “the cost of the means of subsistence he needs for his upkeep and for the propagation of his race.” The workers knew one thing for sure: the capitalist laws of the market forced them to live in slums and eat garbage. In the Kaiser’s Germany the workers sang the imperial anthem with their own lyrics describing their customary dinner of Pellkartoffeln und Heringschwanz (boiled potatoes and herring tail).

But the German workers did more than ridicule the emperor’s fatherland. They fought back against their oppressors and created powerful proletarian mass movements, whose growing strength was reflected in working-class participation in government. In the first of the nine national legislative elections in the Weimar Republic, which took place on January 19, 1919, the combined left vote amounted to 45.5 percent of the total. The Social Democratic party (SPD), took 37.9 percent of the vote; 7.6 percent of the voters supported the radical Independent Social Democratic party (USPD). On January 19, 1919, voting participation was 82.7 percent. During the last free Reichstag elections of November 6, 1932, the SPD polled 7,248,000 votes with 121 seats in the German parliament; the German Communist party (KPD) polled close to 6 million votes with 100 seats in the Reichstag. In other words, the SPD took 20.4 percent of the total vote; 16.9 percent of the voters supported the KPD. Together the two disunited Marxist parties had 37.3 percent of the total vote. On the other side of the trenches lurked the NSDAP; the Nazis received 33.1 percent of all the votes. On November 6, 1932, voting participation was 80.6 percent. These elections brought gains for the Communists and losses for the Socialists and Nazis. In the preceding election of July 31, 1932, the NSDAP had received 37.3 percent of the total, the highest percentage the party ever won before its assumption of power on January 30, 1933. On July 31, 1932, the German people gave 21.6 percent of the vote to the SPD and 14.3 percent to the KDP—a combined left vote of 35.9 percent. The voting participation was 84 percent.
The KPD, the most powerful Communist party in Europe, was founded in December 1918, growing out of the revolutionary Spartakusbund. The KPD originated within the left wing of the pre-world War I Social Democratic party. The KPD achieved a mass basis in 1920, when the party reported some 380,000 members, and Communist party membership held steady until March 1922. During the period of relative stabilization in Weimar Germany, Communist party membership declined. In September 1930, in the first year of the Depression, the KPD had some 120,000 members. The Communists also led the 100,000 workers who in 1924 had joined together in an organization called Roter Frontkämpferbund, or League of Red War Veterans. Half of the membership consisted of workers who were not members of the KPD or any other political party. Many of the men gave their lives in the street battles which they fought against the Nazi’s Sturmabteilung (SA), or Storm Detachment. The stormtroopers killed or tortured many red fighters in the basements of their Nazi party strongholds (Braune Haus).

The KPD represented the workers’ mass movement as a revolutionary party. The majority of the workers supported the SPD—a party strongly committed to social reform. The Social Democratic party, founded in 1891, has its roots in the political activities of German workers which date back to 1790, gaining momentum in the 1830s and 1840s. In 1869, August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht—the father of Karl Liebknecht, leader of the Spartakusbund—founded the Social Democratic Workers’ party, which was the immediate Marxist predecessor of the SPD. In 1912, the SPD had 110 seats in the Reichstag and was the strongest parliamentary group in Germany. During the nationalistic fever dance of World War I, the SPD lost almost three-fourths of its members, dropping from 1 million to 250,000. By 1921, the SPD had regained its character as a mass movement, numbering 1.2 million members. During the period of relative stabilization the SPD suffered numerical losses, but by 1930 it again had over 1 million members. On February 22, 1924, the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold was founded in Magdeburg. The Reichsbanner, a paramilitary organization of war veterans dedicated to the protection of the Weimar Republic, eventually numbered over 1 million members—most of them recruited from the ranks of the SPD and the free trade unions.

In the second half of the nineteenth century German workers formed trade unions to protect their social and economic interests. After World War I, the union movement achieved great strength, and the free trade unions with their social democratic orientation came together to establish the powerful German Trade Union Federation (ADGB), which grew during the years 1920–22 into an organization of
7.9 million members. During the period of relative stabilization the ADGB lost members, dropping to 4.1 million in 1925. The German population in 1925 numbered 63,178,619. By 1929, membership had increased to 4.9 million. Membership began to decline again in 1930 as the world economic crisis made its impact on Germany.13

During the last years of the Weimar Republic the deadliest enemy of the workers, the Nazi Party, grew in strength. As the depression year of 1929 drew to a close the NSDAP had about 178,000 members. A total of 129,563 Germans belonged to the Nazi party on September 14, 1930. At the beginning of 1932 the NSDAP probably had 450,000 members. The party’s membership stood at 719,446 at the end of January 1933. By the end of 1933, 4 million Germans had jumped on the bandwagon, and 750,000 of them were workers.14 In 1930, there were approximately 100,000 SA stormtroopers who clashed in street battles with Red Front fighters and the Reichsbanner. In these confrontations the SA could usually count on the support of the German police who shot down many Communist and Socialist workers.15

Despite their partial self-definition as a socialist workers’ party the Nazis were not successful in mobilizing the working class and their “radical rhetoric about socialism remained nothing but rhetoric.”16 The Nazis’ rise to power was made possible by the support of large numbers of middle-class voters who saw their economic position and social status threatened by the social and economic changes in Weimar Germany. The Nazis were especially successful in rural and small-town areas, where they “gave the most blatant expression to the fears and prejudices of the middle and particularly the lower middle classes.”17 During the 1930s the Nazis also operated with the consent and backing of the ruling class. Many generals, big businessmen, bankers, top civil servants, and landowning aristocrats supported the NSDAP. Hitler’s destruction of the workers’ mass movements was in keeping with ruling-class wishes and expectations. His suppression of the workers also laid the fears of many middle-class Germans to rest.

As the NSDAP rose to political prominence in Weimar Germany, the party began to receive political and financial support from influential representatives of banking and big business. Hitler repeatedly made speeches to leading capitalists, including “industrial magnates such as Vögl of the United Steelworks and Springorum of Hoesch,” persuading them to become Nazi supporters.18 On January 27, 1932, Hitler spoke to the Dusseldorf Industry Club, an organization of the industrial leaders of the city and surrounding area. Fritz Thyssen, the steel baron, championed Hitler’s political career and had made the arrangements for the Nazi leader’s speech which took place in the exclusive Park Hotel. This meeting brought the NSDAP “increased support from industrialists in the Ruhr district,” who by the summer of 1932 wanted
to include the NSDAP in the government. Fritz Thyssen and Hjalmar Schacht, who had been president of the Reichsbank until April 1930, went a step further—they wanted to have Hitler as the next German chancellor.

In the spring of 1932, Nazis and industrialists worked together in a circle organized by the chemical engineer and corporate executive Wilhelm Keppler. The group mapped out the details of a promise made by leading Nazis that they would fulfill and safeguard “the wishes and interests of big industrialists,” and in November 1932, thirty-eight German industrialists recommended the Nazi cause in a letter to President Hindenburg. Signatories included Cuno, Schacht, Vögler, Thyssen, Krupp, Siemens, Springerum, and Bosch. Industrial and business leaders who opposed the Nazis favored traditional conservative causes; their opposition was guided by pragmatic reasoning rather than political principles.

Shortly after the accession of the Nazis on January 30, 1933, the Schutzstaffel (SS) found new recruits among German aristocrats. A number of industrialists accepted membership in the circle of Friends of the Reichsführer-SS; Heinrich Himmler’s new pals who paid money into the coffers of the SS included Dr. Heinrich Bueteisch of I. G. Farben, Hans Waltz, a director of Robert Bosch, Friedrich Flick and representatives of the Deutsche Bank, Norddeutscher Lloyd and Hamburg-Amerika shipping lines, the Dresdner Bank, the Dr. Oetker food company, Siemens-Schuckert, and Mitteldeutsche Stahlwerke.

If the destruction of all workers’ organizations constituted the immediate payoff which the Nazis made to the rural aristocracy and the leaders of German industry and commerce, the Nazis made another payoff in the form of slave labor. The National Socialist government forced the inmates of concentration camps, foreign workers, and prisoners of war to perform slave labor, allowing large landowners and industrialists—as well as the Nazis themselves—to reap enormous profits. Some industrial moguls, such as Alfried Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, operated their own slave labor camps near their factories. Krupp’s profit-making inferno included Buschmannshof, the German capitalist’s concentration camp for children. In 1944 Krupp exploited about 100,000 slave workers in Germany, other Nazi-dominated countries, and in concentration camps. Other industrialists opened factories inside the concentration camps. The giant chemical combine I. G. Farben used camp labor after 1941 in its Buna synthetic rubber plant at Auschwitz concentration camp and operated its own concentration camp in nearby Monowitz. And other companies in Germany that exploited concentration camp prisoners included AEG, Telefunken, Siemens, BMW, and Rheinmetall.

The business relationship between the SS and German capitalists
was not one-sided, however. The SS also realized profits from the forced labor system, both in its own enterprises and from monetary contributions which German corporations and banks made to the organization.  

The millions of political prisoners, Jews, and other victims of race hatred which the SS had collected worked under hellish conditions and were fed a starvation diet. Camp workers usually died after four months or became unfit for work. Those who could no longer work were put to death in the gas chambers. At Auschwitz prisoners were tortured in "medical experiments conducted by the Bayer division of I. G. Farben."  

Hitler's destruction of the workers' mass movements satisfied the expectations of the ruling class; but the dictator had another, more important reason for his campaign of swift annihilation. Hitler and his gang realized that Marxist working-class organizations were a potential threat to the consideration of Nazi dictatorship, making their destruction inevitable. The seeds of dictatorship were cast upon the land during the final phase of the Weimar Republic, when German politics drifted into extraconstitutionality. The Reich President's Emergency Decree for the Protection of the People and the State of February 28, 1933, obviously revoking the basic constitutional rights of the citizens, hastened these developments. Then the enabling law of March 24, 1933, gave the Hitler government unquestioned authority to issue any kind of dictatorial edict.  

The chief weapons the Nazis used to destroy the workers' movements were secret-police terror and a perverted legal system called National Socialist battle law, or Kampfrecht. The wide ranging attack included the arrest, torture, and murder of proletarian leaders and activist workers, the theft of all properties and funds belonging to trade unions, workers' organizations, the KPD and the SPD, and the prohibition of all working-class activities.  

The first blow against the KPD fell on February 2, 1933—the fourth day of Nazi rule—when the Communists were denied the right to hold demonstrations. Two days later the Nazis initiated what soon became recurrent practice: invoking article 48 of the Weimar Constitution to issue a Decree for the Protection of the German People, they spread a threadbare mantle of legality over their dictatorial rule. This measure made it impossible for opponents of the Nazi regime to hold meetings, engage in demonstrations, or publish their views. On February 17, 1933, Hermann Göring, in his capacity as Reichskommissar for the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, ordered all police officers to use their firearms against Communists without mercy. Göring's decree, euphemistically entitled Furtherance of the National Movement, repre-
presented another aspect of what became standard practice in Nazi Germany: the combination of repressive legislation with police terror.

On February 24, 1933, Berlin's Political Police closed Karl-Liebknecht-Haus, the Communist party's headquarters. On the evening of February 27, Göring sneaked an SA squad into the Reichstag, the seat of Germany's national parliament. The stormtroopers set the building on fire, but the Nazis blamed the Communists for the destruction. The National Socialists made the Reichstag fire a pretext to step up the brutal violence which they employed to suppress the KPD. On February 28, the day after the blaze, the Nazis prompted the senile Hindenburg to sign the Emergency Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which again invoked article 48 of the Weimar Constitution and threatened "to repulse Communist acts of violence endangering the State." With one stroke of his pen Hindenburg had suspended all constitutional provisions for individual and civil liberties; he had also put his legal seal of approval on Hitler's establishment of the German dictatorship. On the same day came the sweeping mass arrests of Communist Reichstag deputies, party officials, workers, and Communist and pacifist writers, journalists, lawyers, and physicians. The SA occupied the Karl-Liebknecht-Haus in Berlin and changed its name to Horst-Wessel-Haus.

On March 1, Reichsminister Göring delivered an interminable radio address and told his listeners: "We do not only want to repulse the Communist danger . . . rather . . . it will be my noblest task . . . to exterminate Communism in our people." One day later Hitler endorsed his fat henchman's attack on the KPD in an election speech which he gave in Berlin's Sportpalast. But the newly anointed chancellor widened Göring's offensive, reviling Marxism in general and the "destructive" idea of democracy. The Nazi leader also revealed his Social Darwinist frame of mind as he went on to assail the ideal of human equality and to glorify the superior personality and the productive strength of capitalism. While Hitler raved in the Sport Palace the German police kept on arresting thousands of Communists. On March 3, Ernst Thälmann, chairman of the KPD's Central Committee, was arrested in Berlin-Charlottenburg in the apartment of a lathe operator. On March 8, the Political Police moved its department for the "fight against bolshevism" into the KPD's former Karl-Liebknecht-Haus.

On March 9, Wilhelm Frick, minister of the interior, declared in a speech that Communists and their "red allies" from the SPD must be taught "productive work" in the concentration camps. On March 15, the Reich Cabinet echoed the minister when its members recom-
mended that Communists should be punished with special brutality—"mit ganz brutalen Strafen." 41

The official announcement of the SS state came on March 20, 1933, when Heinrich Himmler, acting police president of Munich and leader of the SS, told journalists at a press conference that the concentration camp at Dachau was about to open. 42

On March 23, the Nazi government carried out the second major legal maneuver in support of Hitler's establishment of the German dictatorship. By a vote of 441 the Nazi-dominated Reichstag adopted the Law for the Removal of Distress of People and Reich, transferring the legislative powers of the Reichstag to the Cabinet and thereby giving Hitler the power to enact laws deviating from the Constitution. The incarceration of all Communist deputies had forced the KPD out of the Reichstag, and this left only the Socialist deputies, who cast their ninety-four votes courageously against the enabling law. 43

Under their newly tailored legal mantle the Nazis intensified their terror campaign; with increasing regularity the never-ending reports of arrests of Communist and Socialist functionaries included the news that the victim had been shot while "trying to escape." 44

At the beginning of their third month in power the Nazi leaders knew that most Communist political activists were either dead, in prison, on their way to a concentration camp, or in exile. Therefore the Nazis widened the attack which came to include people suspected of harboring left-wing or other anti-Nazi feelings. Consequently the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service was promulgated on April 7, 1933. Paragraph four of the law was sufficiently vague to fit the dictator's purposes, stating that all civil servants who were suspect because of their "former political activity" could be dismissed. Paragraph three decreed the immediate dismissal of civil servants who were not of "Aryan descent." The National Socialists used this infamous "Aryan paragraph" as their big "legal" canon in their relentless attack on "the economic underpinnings of the Jewish community: a tidal wave of discriminatory legislation followed the attack on Jewish civil servants." 45

The First Decree to the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service of April 11, 1933, ordered in section one the immediate dismissal of all civil servants with Communist affiliations. In section two the decree extended the firing to civil servants who had only one Jewish grandparent. 46 The Third Decree of May 6 extended the expulsion to former members of the Communist party and its affiliated organizations, including the national-communist movement Schwarze Front. The Third Decree furthermore extended the definition of civil servants to judges, notaries, school and university teachers, and mem-
bers of the Schutzpolizei, or police. Professional proscription continued until Communists, Socialists, Jews, and other politically “undesirable” people had been economically ruined. With the growth of the concentration camp population and the unfolding of the Holocaust the economic destruction of these people was followed by their physical annihilation. When the smoke swirled around the ruins which were the only legacy of Hitler’s Third Reich over 10 million concentration camp prisoners had been murdered—among them were 6 million European Jews.

On April 7, 1933, the Nazi government decreed that Communists and Jews could no longer practice law. A decree of April 22 forced Communists and Jews out of the medical profession. On April 30 professional proscription victimized Jewish and Marxist journalists. On May 6 the Nazi government promulgated a law prohibiting Communists and Jews from working as tax consultants. A decree of July 27 expelled Communists and Jews from the ranks of dentists and dental technicians, while other laws and decrees reached into other types of professional activity.

On May 1, 1933, Joseph Goebbels published an article carried by all German newspapers; the Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda boasted that Marxism had been smashed. With typical insolence he declared: “Marxism had to die so that a road to freedom could be opened up for German work.”

The Social Democratic party and the trade unions suffered the same fate as the Communists. The SPD and the KPD had failed to establish a united front against the National Socialists. The Nazis, however, made no distinctions in their attack on the German workers: Communists and Socialists who had not fought side by side eventually perished together.

During the first month of their rule the Nazis had concentrated their attack on the German Communists, and within a few weeks they had destroyed the most powerful Communist party in Europe. In the second month of their dictatorship the Nazis directed the full force of their onslaught against the Social Democratic party and the trade unions.

On March 8, 1933, SA and SS units occupied SPD and trade union offices and the buildings housing Socialist newspapers. These arbitrary and unlawful acts occurred all over Germany. On the same day the Nazis arrested thousands of Social Democratic functionaries.

The attacks continued. On May 10, the Nazis began their campaign against Social Democratic leaders, leading to the removal and arrest of all Socialist deputies, politicians, administrators, and mayors. To forestall the resistance of paramilitary units the Nazis moved against the
Reichsbanner occupying their headquarters in Magdeburg on March 11.\textsuperscript{51}

On March 31, the Reich government promulgated a law that brought back the death penalty by hanging, targeting “crimes against public security” for this barbaric punishment. In this way the Nazis fused their perverted “battle law” with their political terrorism. This law was followed by the Anti-Terror Law of April 4, which introduced the death penalty for “political crimes.”\textsuperscript{52} Always quick to add insult to injury Göring announced to a Berlin audience on April 9, that he was “especially happy that also German socialism has been victorious.”\textsuperscript{53} On May 2, at 10 A.M. the Nazis occupied by surprise all buildings and firms belonging to the Free Trade Unions, including the Arbeiterbank, or Workers' Bank. Robert Ley, president of the Prussian Privy Council, who ordered this gigantic robbery of the German working class, used the occasion to declare: “The devil's doctrine of Marxism must croak miserably on the battlefield of the National Socialist revolution.”\textsuperscript{54} The payoff came on the next day, when Hitler ordered his mouthpiece Rudolf Hess to elevate Ley to the rank of Reichsleiter of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront, or German Labor Front.\textsuperscript{55} This totalitarian apparatus run by Nazis for the benefit of Nazis replaced all German labor unions. The relationship between the Nazi Labor Front and the Free Trade Unions exhibited the same nightmarish unreality shrouding the ghastly performances of concentration camp orchestras that played under the SS whip in front of the gas chambers. The Nazi attack on the German labor unions triggered mass arrests of union leaders. And the population living behind barbed wire kept on growing—by April 1939, Nazi concentration camps were crowded with more than 300,000 Germans.\textsuperscript{56}

Hitler opened the first congress of the Arbeitsfront on May 10, 1933, with a speech declaring that the fight against Marxism would never end. He vowed to destroy Marxism, “to exterminate [it] down to the last root, ruthlessly and mercilessly.”\textsuperscript{57} On the same day the Nazis literally kicked the Social Democratic deputies out of the Munich town council, and in Berlin and many other German cities Nazi students burned so-called un-German books.\textsuperscript{58} The book burning happened shortly after the publication of a “first list” of forbidden authors which had appeared on April 23, outlawing all significant writers from Bertolt Brecht to Stefan Zweig. Nazi proscription of creative activity silenced about eight hundred authors and banned all major artists and thinkers.\textsuperscript{59} In the concentration camps the Nazis murdered many artists, writers, and intellectuals along with activist workers and other political foes of the German dictatorship.

On May 19 the working people became subject to the Law About
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Trustees of Labor which empowered the chancellor to appoint such trustees. By filling the posts with high-ranking Nazis, including lawyers, administrators, and managers, Hitler greatly expanded their power to maintain the Arbeitsfrieden, or labor peace, including the determination of wage scales, working conditions, vacations, and dismissals. From then on, these lackeys ruled the workers’ lives, always to the benefit of employers. The stormtrooper and Minister of Labor Franz Seldte addressed the entire gang of trustees on June 20. Seldte, who would soon be promoted to the rank of SA-Obergruppenführer, parroted the authoritarian nature of the law ordained by his master and declared that collective bargaining and arbitration based on the “Marxist principle of the class struggle” had ceased to exist. The minister’s speech announced to the workers that the entire organizational structure erected by the trade unions since the dawn of the labor movement had been buried in the graveyard of the Labor Front. One June 22, Ley, the führer of the Labor Front, ordered the Nazi thugs in the National Socialist Organization of Industrial Cells (NSBO) to “clean out” the Arbeitsfront “down to the last cell.” Ley told his minions to “brutally remove” all former Marxists, followers of the Catholic Center party, and members of middle-class organizations from the Labor Front. With this pronouncement the Nazis declared war on the Christian labor unions: On June 24, members of the NSBO occupied all offices of the Christian labor unions and terminated their existence.

The destruction of the SPD was officially announced on June 22, 1933, with the declaration by the minister of the interior that the Social Democratic party was an enemy of the state and the people, deserving the same treatment that had been used against the Communist party. The Nazi government prohibited all functions performed by the SPD including parliamentary representation, meetings, and publications. The Nazis confiscated all assets belonging to the SPD and its affiliated organizations and arrested the remaining Socialist leaders including Paul Löbe. Löbe, who had been president of the Reichstag from 1925 to 1932, later joined the German resistance group Goerdeler-Leuschner to carry on the fight against the Nazis. During the Nazi regime the 120 seats of the SPD in the Reichstag remained vacant.

After the final destruction of the workers’ mass movements on June 22, 1933, the Nazis began their attack on the other political parties. On June 25, Goebbels gave a speech in the Rhineland town of Rheydt, where he was born, and declared that the German people must be “unified” in one political party, the NSDAP, and denied that any other political party had the right to exist. On the same day the Nazis arrested the deputies and functionaries of the Bavarian People’s party. On the evening of June 27, representatives of the conservative German
Nationalist Front, got together with Chancellor Hitler and signed a pact of friendship; then the German Nationalist Front "decided" to dissolve itself. On June 28, Goebbels spoke in Stuttgart and demanded self-dissolution from the leading Catholic political party, the Catholic Center party, and on July 1, the Staatspolizei closed the offices of the entire complex of organizations affiliated with the Center party. The Gestapo also confiscated all the assets owned by the organizations of the party.

On July 4, the Bavarian People's party and the German People's party ceased to exist. The leaders used the occasion of their parties' "voluntary" dissolution to make subservient noises in the direction of the Nazis. On July 5, the leaders of the Catholic Center party addressed their subservient utterances to Herrn Reichskanzler Hitler and declared the Center party's "self-dissolution." This day marked the end of political parties in Germany. On July 5 the Nazi-dominated press celebrated the National Socialist Totalitätsanspruch, or "totality claim." As Kriegk, the editor of a popular Berlin newspaper, put it in the incredible neo-German of the Third Reich: "Now the work of destruction of the party state has been completed."

On July 11, Hitler's mouthpiece Reich Minister Frick officially declared the completion of the "German revolution" and proclaimed: "The National Socialist German Workers' party has herewith become the sole carrier of the state." On July 14, a law was passed which declared that the NSDAP was the only political party in Germany, making all attempts to maintain or form other political parties a crime subject to severe punishment. The law concerning the Unity of Party and State of December 1, 1933, completely and irrevocably handed the state over to Hitler's National Socialist party.

For the Nazis the destruction of the workers' mass movements and democratic politics was not only a political maneuver on the road to genocide and total war; it was also a gigantic heist foreshadowing the colossal plunder of the Jews and many European peoples. On May 9, 1933, the Nazis set the Prussian criminal justice system in motion to engineer the confiscation of all assets belonging to the SPD, the Socialist press, and the Reichsbanner. On May 12, all assets belonging to the Free Trade Unions were confiscated and handed over to the leader of the Nazi Labor Front, while the confiscation of SPD assets was carried out in all parts of Germany. On May 15, the Labor Front took over the consumers' cooperative societies thereby giving the Nazis a fortune in hard-earned savings which millions of workers had entrusted to the cooperatives. On May 26, the Reich government passed a law based on paragraph 40 of the penal code concerning high treason which led to the confiscation of all Communist assets. On June 22, the
Nazis confiscated all remaining SPD assets and those of organizations affiliated with the Socialists.\(^73\)

On July 11, 1933, the Nazi government officially declared that the "German revolution" had been completed. The official circular, signed by Frick as minister of the interior, also celebrated the establishment of the one-party system.\(^74\)

Meanwhile the National Socialist leaders reviled the other political parties as collections of miserable cowards who had deserted their colors without a fight. On June 16, 1933, Goebbels spoke at a Nazi party rally in Hamburg and expressed his astonishment over the swift disappearance of the Nazis' enemies.\(^75\)

Long after the destruction of Nazism by the Allied armies of World War II, many problematic questions continue to haunt us. Did the anti-Nazi forces underestimate Hitler's will and ability to rule? Did they assume Nazism was doomed to quick failure and disintegration? Did German leftists believe that the Nazis were a necessary evil needed to hasten the collapse of capitalism, thereby opening the road to socialism? Did the hostile feelings separating the KPD from the SPD run deep enough to forestall the formation of a proletarian United Front? Did the workers' leaders fear that high unemployment would turn the call for a general strike into an empty gesture? Were the workers' leaders out of touch with the rank and file? Did the leftists fear the Reichswehr, believing that the army would come out shooting to prop up the Nazis? Were the proletarian leaders rooted too deeply in the parliamentary-legal process to force the fast-moving Nazis out of the political arena? Did the Nazis' gangster methods stun their opponents to such an extent that they could not defend themselves? Had the world economic crisis paralyzed the workers' will to resist?

These questions and others have remained part of the debate surrounding the destruction of the workers' mass movements. Writing in late May 1933, Leon Trotsky called "the unparalleled defeat of the German proletariat the most important event in modern history since the assumption of power by the Russian proletariat."\(^76\)

Notes


11. See Kühnl, *Die Weimarer Republik*, p. 163.
12. See ibid., p. 172. See also Karl Rohe, *Das Reichsbanner Schwarz Rot Gold: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Struktur der politischen Kampfverbände zur Zeit der Weimarer Republik* (Dusseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1966).
18. Ulrike Hörster-Philipp, "Conservative Concepts of Dictatorship in the Final Phase of the Weimar Republic," in *Holocaust*, p. 120.
20. *Holocaust*, p. 120.
22. See George Hallgarten and Joachim Radkau, Deutsche Industrie und Politik von Bismarck bis Heute (Cologne: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1974).
27. For a list of corporations, banks, and their contributions to Himmler’s special account see Eschwege, ed. Kennzeichen J, p. 267.
29. The decree of February 28, 1933, based on Article 48, paragraph 2 of the Weimar Constitution was the basis of the Nazis’ totalitarian police state. See Verordnung des Reichspräsidenten zum Schutze von Volk und Staat, Reichsgesetzblatt (hereafter cited as RGBI) I, 1933, p. 83.
30. Gesetz zur Behebung der Not von Volk und Reich (Ermächtigungsgesetz), RGBI I, 1933, p. 141. Article 3 of this enabling law empowered the chancellor to engross and promulgate the laws of the Reich.
32. Reich, p. 41.
34. For Göring’s Runderlass, Förderung der nationalen Bewegung, see Reich, p. 61. See also Reich, p. 104.
35. RGBI I, 1933, p. 83.
37. See Reich, p. 79–81. See also Reich, p. 108.
38. See ibid., p. 83. In 1944 Thälmann died in a Nazi concentration camp.
39. See ibid., p. 103.
40. Ibid., p. 106.
41. Ibid., p. 115.
42. See ibid., p. 123. Oranienburg concentration camp opened on March 21, 1933.
43. See ibid., p. 140; RGBI I, 1933, p. 141.
44. See Reich, p. 155.
46. See RGBI. I, 1933, p. 195.
47. Ibid., p. 245.
48. Ibid., pp. 188, 222, 257, 542. See also Reich, p. 191.
50. See Reich, pp. 105–6.
51. See ibid., p. 109.
52. See ibid., pp. 150, 156.
54. Reich, p. 197.
55. See ibid., p. 198.
56. See Reich, pp. 202, 216, 238, 255, 261, 268, 284, 304. See also Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution*, p. xiii.

57. Reich, p. 211.

58. See ibid., p. 212.


60. See *Gesetz über Treuhänder der Arbeit*, RGBI I, 1933, p. 285.

61. Reich, p. 255.

62. See ibid., p. 260.

63. See ibid., pp. 260–61.

64. See Reich, p. 277.


66. See Reich, p. 264.

67. See ibid., p. 271. The organizations included Friedensbund Deutscher Katholiken, Kreuzschar, Sturmschar, Volksverein, Katholischer Jungmännerverband.

68. Ibid., p. 275.


70. Reich, p. 280.


72. See Reich, pp. 209, 216.

73. See ibid., pp. 220, 236, 261.

74. See ibid., p. 280.
