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Kim R. Holmes

# The Forsaken Past: Agrarian Conservatism and National Socialism in Germany

The moderns did not go back into the tradition, they brought it forward as an instrument with which to attack the present. (Stephen Spender)

**Baudelaire, in a fit of penetrating insight** into modern art, once said: *'La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent...'*[1] Much the same can be said about life in the Weimar Republic, whether it was that of the destitute factory-worker in the suburbs of Berlin, or the nearly bankrupt Junker on his estate in East Prussia. War and revolution had brought concern about the uncertainties of modern life, which hitherto had largely been the preserve of malcontent artists and intellectuals, into full view for the less culturally conscious shopkeeper, farmer and sales clerk. Although the lives of such people had never been easy before 1914, they had not been fundamentally insecure either. What was once merely laborious became, after the war, increasingly bewildering, uncertain, or as Baudelaire would have it, *contingent*. Under Bismarck, it was primarily the workers and a few intellectuals who were against the social order; in the Weimar Republic, the farmers, Junkers, shopkeepers, noble army officers and civil servants joined the ranks of the socially alienated.

It was the Weimar Republic's misfortune that its detractors from the right deceived their enemies, and to a certain extent even themselves, into believing that they were standing athwart all the changes of the modern world. From the vantage point of 1930, with political parties on the left and right calling for radical solutions to the economic crisis, it was very difficult indeed to determine who

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stood for revolution and who did not. The fact that revolutionary ideas were affiliated with conservative movements at all, such as in Hugenberg's alliance with the Nazis in 1931, was in part the legacy of a longstanding paradox in late nineteenth century German conservatism: the German state and its conservative supporters in the nobility and middle classes, in an effort to compete with the powerful nation states in the west, had adopted revolutionary political means to achieve socially conservative ends, and as a result had succeeded in hastening the transformation of the social order that gave those conservative values their raison d'être.[2] The more German conservatives encouraged the development of the modern industrial state, the more untenable their position as defenders of traditional authority (monarchy and aristocracy) became.

This dilemma of using modern means to achieve traditional goals had been present in German conservatism from the very beginning, but it was far more serious for conservatives in imperial times than for the founders of German conservatism in the eighteenth century. Justus Möser was the first major cultural critic of the Enlightenment in Germany, and though he was caught up in the classical conservative dilemma of defending a past that no longer existed, he never became a conservative revolutionary.[3] As defenders of the *Standestaat*, or what remained of it, Möser and A.W. Rehberg, another early conservative, strove to preserve traditional forms of corporate authority from the encroachments of absolutist princes, but they never advocated overthrowing the princes. Nor did they suggest, in order that society conform to some idealistic vision of the past, that sweeping revolutionary changes be made in the social system. Their conservatism was mainly defensive, and though Möser and Rehberg spoke of the authority of the past, they did not see it as a blueprint for revolutionary change.

Later, after the French Revolution, Möser's type of conservatism was completely lost. It was replaced with the heir of Frederickian absolutism — Prussian conservatism — which, after 1848, Leopold von Gerlach fashioned into the most formidable adversary of revolutionary ferment in Germany. The aims of Prussian conservatism were straightforward enough: to restore the monarchy, with brute force if necessary, and to ensure the rights of the Prussian monarchy at all costs. Its fortunes remained relatively uncomplicated until Bismarck became chancellor. Looking for ways to preserve the monarchy in times of rapid change, Bismarck forged an unholy alliance with the powerful instruments of moder-

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nity; once he had marshalled the power of industrialism and nationalism for the monarchy, and once he had adapted the principles of monarchy to *Realpolitik*, conservatism in Germany was never again the same. It became more cynical and opportunistic, or as Gordon Craig has suggested, a synthesis of 'authoritarianism and modernity'.[4]

Nevertheless, Bismarck did not go nearly as far with his 'modernity' as the conservative revolutionaries, cultural pessimists and other spokesmen from the right, who in late imperial Germany became conservatism's most outspoken theoreticians.[5] These Dostoyevskian misanthropes, most notably Julius Langbehn and Moeller van den Bruck, preached revolutionary conservative doctrines that were completely cut off from traditional forms of German conservatism. They not only forsook the anti-absolutist principles of Möser, but the monarchism of Prussian conservatism as well. Moeller van den Bruck despised the reactionary aristocracy and middle classes for merely wanting to preserve their material interests. Harking back to a mythical medieval empire, he called for a dictatorship (the Third Reich) that would supposedly bring all German-speaking peoples together in a highly centralized, National Bolshevik Germany. His goal was not to conserve the values of a venerated past, but to transform the spirit of the times with a conservative counter-revolution. As Fritz Stern has pointed out, Moeller and Langbehn considered themselves as prophets, not heirs.[6]

Being disdainful of the past, the revolutionary conservative's stake in the future was therefore much higher and more desperate than that of Möser or von Gerlach. Of Max Weber's three types of legitimate authority — traditional, legal (constitutional) and charismatic — they chose the latter, thus 'murdering' tradition with utopian visions of the past.[7] Indeed, for Moeller and Lagarde, charisma took over in the name of both tradition and democracy — the leader was to represent both the mythical past and the people — and conservatism's longstanding war with rationalism was given a whole new meaning. Utopianism, which hitherto had been associated with religious dreaming or romantic imagination, was now, after being forged with the idea of politico-cultural revolution, a thoroughly modern concept, one that took its roots from Rousseau, not More.[8] With this new approach, the conservative revolutionaries moved closer to Baudelaire's *modernité* — a vision of the future cut off from the past — and their desire to wipe the

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slate clean in the name of some preconceived idea gave their conservatism an abstract quality never before seen in Germany. A kind of rationalism had finally wormed its way into conservatism after all. For all of Moeller's ostensible irrationalism and disdain for the Enlightenment, his thought had still taken on some of the character of his philosophical enemy: both the *philosophes* and Moeller were hostile to tradition. Their worldviews were both predicated on the assumption that the world order can and should conform to some preconceived ideal. That their ideals differed enormously does not alter the fact that Germany's new conservatives had in practice accepted the *philosophes'* argument that a political and cultural system based on a priori ideals was preferable to the truly irrational and chaotic products of tradition. Indeed, in the confrontation of the past with the present, the past had lost, for it was now philosophy, not tradition, that moved the minds of Germany's new conservatives.[9]

Contributing to the disjunction of German conservatism from its historical roots were the compartmentalized attitudes of conservative social groups towards their cultural values on the one hand, and their political and economic practices on the other. For decades prior to the outbreak of the First World War, the Junkers had warned of the dangers of modernist culture and political change, but they had behaved all along like capitalist entrepreneurs and technical innovators when it came to running their estates in East Elbia. Moreover, it was they, the leaders of the conservative Bund der Landwirte, who first applied leftist methods of mass political mobilization and propaganda to conservative political ends. Nationalistic industrialists fumed against western decadence and the perceived corrosive effects of liberalism and materialism on German morals, but still insisted on free trade for industrial goods (which after all was the cornerstone of liberal economic policy), and on introducing new industrial techniques which made the German steel and chemical industries among the most formidable in the world. The German *Bauern* lamented the passing of the feudal *Dorfgemeinschaft*, but they were not averse to trading in the international grain market, nor to participating in agricultural organizations, agrarian political parties, farm co-operatives and credit unions which had profit and political gain, not communal beneficence, as their immediate practical aims. The discrepancy between what the agrarians said and what they did, as with the industrialists, merely stirred up more political fog. As Daniel Bell

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once observed, it is the diremption of social structure (social relations based on economic structure) and culture (the moral belief system) that causes social crises, and in Weimar Germany society and culture were indeed in open conflict. The agrarians' political culture was increasingly hard pressed to explain all the political implications of their economic interests.

All conservative segments of German society had, in one way or another, made a Faustian deal with modernity. In the 1890s the Junkers fought free trade policies which favoured industry, but nonetheless tolerated the tacit alliance between the state, the banks and the growing industrial monopolies in return for the monarchy's protection of their privileged position in German society. The peasants, on the other hand, were even less assimilated into industrial society than the Junkers, but they too were forced to accommodate the forces of capitalism and tradition and to compromise with the industrial system in order to survive. Later, during the depression, all western industrial democracies took strong measures to protect agriculture from the economic crisis, but few went as far as Germany in making agriculture a virtual ward of the industrial state.[10] Since the Junkers could not, as in the west, appeal for help for purely economic reasons — that would have meant acquiescing in the materialist worldview of liberalism — they had to exonerate themselves by posing as protectors of the nation's most respected values. The agrarians' compromise with the industrial order may have been acknowledged in practice, but never in word.

In the name of a higher moral authority, the mythical German nation, Weimar agrarians railed against the liberal 'system'. It never occurred to them that their subtle distinction between the reputed supra-political German state and the detested liberalism of the Republic served to clarify neither their conception of state authority nor their idea of what was to replace parliamentary democracy once it was destroyed. Indeed, German conservatism in Weimar Germany never developed clear-cut conservative aims. Since there was no restoration movement to speak of, monarchy never became an acceptable rallying point for a conservative movement. Weimar conservatives therefore were left with the impossible task of attempting to regain a utopian vision of the past by obliterating the present, that is, the established order of the Weimar Republic.[11] The conservative cause was reduced to an evocative authoritarianism that would merely give more power to their symbol of the German nation — the state apparatus of army

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and bureaucracy. Naturally, this did not give much hope to supporters of political stability. By undermining the Weimar constitution, these erstwhile supporters of stability found themselves assaulting the established order in the very name of a higher order. Lacking a workable conservative alternative, one that embraced both tradition and political stability, many who called themselves conservative in the Weimar Republic actually helped to bury what remained of the pre-revolutionary social order.

To be sure, the paradox of conservatives calling for revolutionary change in Weimar Germany, exemplified not only by disgruntled intellectuals like Moeller van den Bruck, but by many Prussian aristocrats as well, was in part the outgrowth of an unfinished revolution. Nevertheless, though the Revolution of 1918-1919 was incomplete, the changes it brought were not perfunctory. With the fall of the monarchy, the Junkers' last ties with the old order were severed. They had been deteriorating for quite some time, but it was not until after the war that the Prussian aristocracy lost all legitimate claim to special treatment by the government. The revolution did not merely send the Junkers into political opposition, it made revolutionaries out of many of them. Unwilling to accept the Weimar constitution, they became spoilers whose primary aim was to overthrow the decision of Weimar, which many of them believed to be both temporary and illegitimate. In this respect, the broad lines of the political crisis of 1931-1933 were but continuations of the political battles that began with the revolution. Hitler resolved the crisis once and for all, but the fact that many of the so-called conservative agrarians in the Weimar regime were also conservative revolutionaries did not hamper his efforts.

Agrarians, Junkers and peasants alike, used the concept of tradition as a political weapon against the Weimar regime. When Director Horlacher of the Bavarian Agriculture Chamber insisted in 1928 that 'the peasant on his native soil...be maintained as a fulcrum of the state order', or when Jürgen von Ramen, a member of the Bavarian chapter of the Junglandbund, suggested a year later that state policy ensure that 'peasants be returned to the soil', neither of them were talking about a return to the political culture of the feudal *Dorfgemeinschaft*.[12] They were, on the contrary, calling for a political dictatorship and planned economy — both modern concepts of rational organization — that would protect their profits and preserve what remained of their agrarian way of life.[13] Junkers in the Weimar Republic were no longer traditional

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Prussian conservatives who stood as protectors of a legitimate social order; they were outsiders in a modern industrialized society, estranged from their heritage yet determined, as they always were, to adapt to circumstances in order to survive.The best way to do this was to gain popular support for their political programme, and the best way to do that was to modernize their political culture by turning it into an ideology. The old aristocratic heritage was thus jettisoned in favour of a nationalist and autarkical ideology; agricultural interests and agrarian values became 'German' interests and 'German' values. By corrupting Prussian conservatism with *völkisch* ideology, the Junkers reduced their heritage to a mere caricature of what it had been in pre-industrial times.

The peasants had also broken with the rural political culture of the early nineteenth century. They were no longer the servile, parochial *Bauern* of the German ancien régime; they were small farmers who, despite their respect for the purely cultural aspects of rural life, nonetheless compromised with the industrial capitalist order of the twentieth century. They took their goods to market, bought and sold land, participated in nationalist organizations, adopted modern technological innovations in farming, and engaged in political agitation against a legal order which they believed discriminated against their interests.[14] Discussing the impact of industrialization on the small farmer, Heide Wunder notes: '[in the latter part of the nineteenth century] the peasant became [a mere property owner of farm land], and was, like the great landlords before him, exposed to the "Laws of the Market" [...]. Because of industrialization, which caused land and soil to lose their monopoly over the economic process, being a peasant became an occupation like any other.'[15] Although the traditional structure of the peasant family, their respect for the land and their constant pre-occupation with local interests persisted well into (and even beyond) the 1920s, these remnants of former times were mixed with and therefore altered by the changes of the previous seventy-five years. As before the days of emancipation, the peasants' hope still lay in the future — not the past. Peasant radicalism in the post-First World War era was not a reassertion of rural traditionalism, but an expression of the general radicalization of German society. The peasants were profoundly unhappy with their position in modern Germany and were, like the Junkers and the intellectual conservative revolutionaries, unable to turn back to the past for real solutions.

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If traditional German conservatism, whether it be Prussian conservatism or the *Standestaat* philosophy of Justus Möser, was utterly irrelevant to the problems of Weimar agrarians, it was because they — both Junkers and peasants — refused to reconcile their embrace of the instruments of modernity with their political culture. Unlike the Tories in England, who could fall back on the sacred traditions of English Law, champions of the right in Weimar Germany lacked a legitimate conservative tradition that could not only accept political change, but which could also guard against the dangers of political extremism. The agrarians' Faustian deal with modernity — the Junkers' eager embrace of the so-called revolution from above and the peasantry's not-so-eager accommodation of their cultural heritage to mass politics and market capitalism — invalidated the legitimacy of the old order without ever finding anything to take its place.[16] In order to create a new kind of legitimacy, they concocted ideologies that were totally alien to the conservatism of pre-industrial Germany. It was indeed the agrarians' *modernité*, their absolute lack of a workable conservative tradition, that led them into the abyss of 1933. Like the National Socialists would do to a far greater degree, they demonstrated the sheer ambiguity of modernity, the irony of a conservative movement that destroys the very past it claims to uphold.

**The importance of the rural vote** in the rise of National Socialism has been known for quite some time, but it has never been explained why a supposedly socially conservative group of farmers would abandon their timeworn traditions and embrace a revolutionary party like the NSDAP which stood to change more than conserve the political and economic landscape of the countryside. Are we to assume, as Hans-Jürgen Puhle does, that the Junkers collaborated with the NSDAP to bring down the Weimar Republic because the former were somehow 'pre-modern' or 'prefascist'?[17] Are we to believe, as Henry Ashby Turner Jr., does, that the Nazis represented a 'utopian form of anti-modernism', and that social groups left behind by modernization — the peasants being perhaps the best example — were attracted to them because of their hostility to that process?[18] It has never been established exactly what the rural classes were trying to conserve with their 'militant conservatism' (Heinrich Winkler), nor how a reputed desire to escape the modern world by leaping into the mythological past of National

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Socialism relates to historical peasant traditions.[19] These historians seem to believe that the authoritarian political culture of rural areas remained relatively unchanged by modernization, that industrialization and capitalism were but tools in the hands of feudally-minded reactionaries whose mentalities themselves remained on the whole unaffected by the modernizing changes they wrought.

Were the agrarians as feudally-minded as these historians believe? Since the early 1890s the agrarians had been embroiled in ideological politics, and many (though not all) of their ideas were later picked up by the Nazis and given new meaning within the context of *völkisch* nationalism. Thus many agrarians in late Weimar Germany heard echoes of their own voices in Nazi agrarian propaganda, and it was precisely at this juncture that the modernity of post-1895 agrarian politics and the NSDAP meet. The *Bauernstandideologie*, the ideology of the 'peasant order', does not represent an atavistic political culture, but the foundations of a modern ideology; the peasants' reinterpretation of the past, which was later adopted by the Nazis themselves, was not a sign of 'backwardness', but of their *modernité*, of how far they had come into the radical politics of the twentieth century. The attempt to restore the 'murdered past' was in fact the peasantry's first dalliance with modern utopianism, and its support for the NSDAP represents the ultimate decline of peasant traditionalism.[20] It is inconceivable that a peasant would have voted for the NSDAP unless he had first divested himself of those feudal political traditions which, if they had still existed in the 1920s, would have made it amply clear that National Socialism was indeed the revolutionary movement it would later prove itself to be.

All agrarians had, in one way or another, been accomplices in 'murdering' their past. The Junkers forsook Prussian conservatism by taking up German nationalism and techniques of mass politics. Their political culture was indeed authoritarian, but it was not, in an historical sense, conservative. The peasants, on the other hand, faced a different problem. Prior to emancipation, they had been politically under the thumbs of either landlords, aristocrats or the state. After emancipation they gradually worked their way into the party system, though not with very satisfactory results. During the Empire they were caught in a social twilight zone between the upper (aristocratic) and middle classes on the one side, and the workers on the other. Their fate had never been a major item in the great

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debates between constitutionalism and monarchy before 1848, nor even between monarchism (in conjunction with National Liberalism) and socialism during Bismarck's time. They were, in short, a constituency looking for a party. However, the more they tried to adapt to mass politics, by founding peasant protest parties for instance, the more irrelevant their cultural traditions became to their politics. Likewise, the better off they became, the more economic interests figured in their politics. Lacking a conservative tradition which could account for the ambiguities of social change and the acceptability of pure economic accumulation, the peasantry was unable to reconcile the fundamental contradiction between their cultural preferences, which were decidedly traditional, and their economic and political interests, which were not. They wanted to retain the tempo of rural life, the work ethic, respect for the land as the centrepiece of family life and to avoid the crass materialism of the cities; however, at the same time they encouraged expansion of the agricultural market, bought and sold land like it was a commodity, used labour-saving devices which undermined the work-ethic and demanded more and more credit which made them all the more beholden to the 'system' they despised. The contradiction between what the peasants said — their reverence for the old ways of the *Bauernstand* — and what they did — their participation in the modernization of rural society — created a political identity crisis which pervaded agrarian life in the Weimar Republic.

The peasants' uncertain political identity was also reflected in the ideology of the peasant parties. According to David Apter, the ideologies of nationalism and socialism are modernizing forces because they break down traditional types of authority.[21] The peasants had been flirting with nationalist and autarkical ideologies since the 1890s, and along with peasant parties had long since accepted new types of organization (co-operatives, credit and other economic organizations) into their political life. Nevertheless, the peasantry never really felt that this new political system of parties and interest organizations was legitimate; it was not only foreign to traditional peasant culture, but also had been created in the spirit of protest. Thus peasants resorted to a technique of rationalization which Apter believes characterizes the modernizing force of nationalism. Apter points out that, in the modernization of traditional societies, '...the prerequisite for accepting any innovation on the political level was to find some real or mythical traditional counterpart';[22] the idea was to clothe modernization in traditional symbols

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and to express political innovations in familiar terminologies. This was indeed the case with the corporate and nationalist ideologies behind the agrarian organization and party movements in Germany: the economic and political interests of an emerging class of capitalist farmers were defined in terms of historical traditions which no longer existed in any meaningful form. The peasants were trying to create a new moral system to account for their role as economic and political men in a pluralistic society, but because it was impossible to forge a political identity out of liberalism, they were left with nationalism and concocted theories of rural (*ständisch*) socialism as the only bases for a new political culture. Advancing political claims in the name of the mythical German nation not only legitimized those claims, but the peasants' role in society as well.

Thus were the peasants conditioned to accept the Nazis' 'sacred-collective' road to modernization.[23] It was certainly not inevitable that they would follow the Nazis, but the fact that the NSDAP promised a new social order for the so-called *schaffenden Bauern*, one which simultaneously stressed hope for the future and respect for the past, certainly made these self-proclaimed saviours of the peasantry appear to be an attractive alternative to the more traditional and less bold peasant parties. The significance of Nazi agrarian ideology is not in its particular philosophical content, but in its message that the Nazis would create a moral system which would reconcile the cultural and economic lives of the peasantry, that is, in its message of social solidarity and economic growth.[24] Apter asserts that:

> Nationalism... helps to center authority on certain aspects of tradition, asserts the continuity of society, and links the present with the past and, by so doing, asserts the immortality of the society, its on-going and life-giving characteristics. The definition of membership in the society, the sanctity of the past, and the symbolism of political forms are made explicit, reinforced, and stipulated as part of a modernizing culture.[25]

Indeed, the Nazis, who evoked the emotional bonds of tribal nationalism in terms of allegiance to the modern secular state, modernized German society like no other political force before them, and they created a moral ideology that, like all modern ideologies (including socialism), submerged the individual in a moral system in which myth, utopian potentiality and the

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sacredness of the collectivity defined the nature of freedom and the role of the political man in society.

Why is this so important to know? Because it is seldom understood that it was mainly the Nazis' message of nationalist modernization of agriculture that mobilized the peasants behind the NSDAP. The Nazis' political programme for the peasantry — their demand that the 'peasantry should be elevated economically and culturally' — held out the prospect of resolving the economic crisis and ushering in a new age of economic security within the framework of a moral system that was *perceived* to be traditional.[26] The NSDAP ostensibly promised the peasants that nationalized agrarian organizations, in addition to 'reviving peasant culture', would provide them with more farm machinery, dung, seeds, breeding animals, artificial fertilizers and electricity.[27] Furthermore, it vowed to cut imports, to take state control of the agricultural financial system and to secure the integrity of farms by regulating the movement of private property. The Nazi agrarian programme thus amounted to a pledge to establish a new order in which economic growth and progress could be pursued in good conscience; it represented a commitment to build a new political and economic system that, with rationalist planning and coercive reorganization of society if necessary, would at last end class conflict and bring agriculture and rural society into line with modern industrial Germany.

Once the Nazis were in power, however, they discovered that it was exceedingly difficult to live up to both their cultural and economic promises to the peasantry. With the *Erbhofgesetz* (law of hereditary entailment), the NSDAP attempted to follow through Walther Darré's plans to maintain the peasantry as the cultural and racial 'life-source' of the German people — the law was designed to preserve the existing number of peasant farms (*Bauernhöfe*) — but it was not long before more practical considerations came into play.[28] In 1934 Hitler's interest in the *Erbhof* scheme, which had never been very great in the first place, began to wane, and though the policy of closed inheritance remained, the real focus of agrarian policy shifted to Herbert Backe's highly publicized drive to increase agricultural production (*Erzeugungsschlacht*). Once agriculture came under the auspices of Goering's Four-Year Plan, Darré's *Blut and Boden* ideology never again played a major role in the formulation of economic policy for the agrarian sector. In 1942 Backe replaced Darré as head of the agricultural ministry, because, as

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Goebbels described him, Backe was a 'real first-class practical man'.[29] Moreover, during the war it was Himmler, and not Darré, who was given charge of agrarian settlement in the east. Germanization as a measure of political control of occupied territories was the foundation of war-time settlement policy in the east, and not Darré's hopes for a re-agrarianization of the countryside as a bulwark against the advance of capitalism and Marxism.

But did the Nazis actually modernize rural society? The *Reichsnährstand* indeed employed modern techniques of economic rationalization; it increased central control over production, distribution and property, and it centralized efforts to regulate and promote agricultural labour. Furthermore, agricultural yield per hectare grew until the outbreak of the war, though intensification of labour was more responsible than technological innovation.[30] Pre-war prices for agricultural goods rose, as did farmers' income, and though the *Reichsnährstand* was somewhat ambivalent about mechanization, sales of farm machinery in 1938-39 were still higher than they had been six years before.[31] Despite the party's commitment to the *Erbhofgesetz*, the concentration of farm lands into larger units continued.[32] The *Erbhofgesetz* failed also in its aim to preserve the family orientation of the German farm. As David Schoenbaum has demonstrated, the state's promotion of industry contributed greatly to the migration of the agricultural population to the cities.[33]

Thus Darré's efforts to re-feudalize the countryside were a dismal failure. To the extent that the *Erbhofgesetz* was retrogressive, insofar as an even greater concentration of peasant holdings would probably have occurred without it, it still was not the primary obstacle to the modernization of German agriculture and rural society.[34] The most burdensome problems for agriculture as a whole were long-term structural weaknesses in the agricultural economy itself and the Nazi regime's determination, as part of Hitler's rearmament plans, to divert all available resources into industry. Although the Nazis were responsible for the continued loss of rural people to the cities, and for the loss of farm lands to military installations as well, they were not, for example, entirely responsible for the conditions which gave rise to the perennial shortages of fats and fodder. The primary impediments then to further agricultural growth were the Nazi regime's pro-industrial policies, and not Darré's feeble attempts to hold back socio-economic development with the *Erbhofgesetz*. The desire to put

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agriculture on a war footing, the rationale behind the intensification of the *Erzeugungsschlacht* in 1936, overwhelmed the plan in 1933 to preserve the peasantry as the 'life-source' of the German people.

There can be little doubt, as George L. Mosse suggests, that fascism was a 'scavenger ideology', and National Socialism certainly was no less so.[35] A Nazi placard posted during the presidential elections in April 1932 illustrates his observation very well:

> Adolf Hitler is the whip of the social reaction! Such are the lies spread by the bosses of Social Democracy and their glaring-red cousins in the KPD. [...] Whoever wants to put an *end to social reaction* [my italics], which gathered all over Germany in the wake of November 1918, whoever wants to struggle with us for freedom, work and bread, and whoever, as we ourselves are determined to do, wants to give the German people back their rights to life, must cast their vote against the November parties of social reaction and elect A. Hitler.[36]

Is this opportunism? Of course, but in the Nazis' opportunism, which stemmed from a fanatical commitment to ideology, were the very seeds of their betrayal of the bourgeois and so-called reactionary elements of National Socialism. Unlike the Junker who strove to remake the world over only once, to restore some mythological vision of the past with modern methods of political persuasion, Hitler wanted to remake the world over and over again, that is, to make revolution. It was indeed the mark of Hitler's *modernité*, his utter disdain for the past, that he saw no contradiction whatsoever between his aims and his methods. For those who followed him, they too, no matter what their original purposes may have been, stepped into a new era of German politics which few agrarians could have even imagined.

## Notes

1. Charles Pierre Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la Vie moderne', *Oeuvres de Baudelaire, L'Art Romantique*, Vol. 3 (Paris 1948), 231.

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2. The most comprehensive analysis of the dilemma of German conservatism is Martin Greiffenhagen's *Das Dilemma des Konservatismus in Deutschland* (Munich 1971). Greiffenhagen insists that the failure of German conservatism should be attributed to its inability to offer a viable alternative to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it embraced the tools of the Enlightenment, he contends, but not its spirit; it employed the principle of rationalism not only in philosophy (Hegel), but in economic and political organization as well, and used them to oppose the emancipatory goals of the Enlightenment. As Greiffenhagen suggests: 'Conservatism uses the weapon of the enemy with a doubly bad conscience: on the one hand because rationalism is indeed the enemy's weapon, on the other, and above all, because this weapon reveals the very essence of its enemy'; ibid., 64. All German translations are by the author.

3. Klaus Epstein describes Möser's thought in *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton 1966 [paperback] 1974), 297-338, 547-594.

4. Gordon Craig, *Germany, 1866-1945* (New York 1978), 11.

5. Armin Mohler gives a history of the idea of revolutionary conservatism in the Weimar Republic in *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland, 1918-1932: Ein Handbuch* (Darmstadt 1972), 9-12. Hermann Rauschning describes the philosophy of revolutionary conservatism in *The Conservative Revolution* (New York 1941), 50-62. Ralf Dahrendorf contends that Nazism was a bourgeois revolution of modernity, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Munich 1965; Garden City 1967 [paperback] 1969), 377-378. Fritz Stern defines revolutionary conservatism as an 'ideological attack on modernity', *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, xvi-xxx. Heide Gerstenberger offers a revisionist interpretation of revolutionary conservatism, in which it is seen as a fulfilment of bourgeois liberalism, in *Der Revolutionäre Konservatismus: Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Liberalismus* (Berlin 1969).

6. Fritz Stern, op. cit., 276.

7. Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London 1963), 209. Greiffenhagen discusses the problem of tradition and authority, op. cit., 172-191.

8. Heide Gerstenberger tries to separate the idea of revolution from German conservatism by insisting that its revolutionary spirit was derived from religious tradition and not from science or rationalism (as Marx's idea of revolution supposedly was); op. cit., 36. Greiffenhagen sees German conservatism's revolutionary character merely as an act of frustration, without any rational content at all, as an unwanted consequence of thwarted reaction; op. cit., 252.

9. Discussing the 'Revolutionary Concept of Tradition' in modern literature, Stephen Spender once remarked: 'The confrontation of the past with the present seems to me therefore the fundamental aim of modernism'; op. cit., 80. The same can be said for revolutionary conservatism in Germany. To Moeller, Lagarde and other revolutionary conservatives, the past was a weapon to be used against the present, not a source of timeless values.

10. On 8 December 1931, Brüning's government took over all costs for the harvest of 1932 and postponed foreclosures until the farmers could bring in their crops. John Bradshaw Holt discusses the Weimar Republic's intervention in agriculture, *German Agricultural Policy, 1918-1934* (New York 1936), 1-167, as does Dieter Walz, *Die Agrarpolitik der Regierung Brüning* (Erlangen-Nürnberg 1971), 75-210. Hans-Jürgen Puhle makes an analytical comparison of state intervention in agriculture in the United States, France and Germany, *Politische*

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*Agrarbewegungen in kapitalistischen Industriegesellschaften: Deutschland, USA und Frankreich im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 1974), 28-247.

11. Fritz Stern notes the paradox of obliterating '...the despised present in order to recapture an idealized past in an imaginary future'; op. cit., xvi. Consciousness of this paradox, or the idea of irony, is, according to Greiffenhagen, '...the most sublime form of conservative self-understanding'; op. cit., 235. Thomas Mann said irony best represented the 'spirit of conservatism'; ibid.

12. For the remark by Horlacher, report from Bayerische Landesbauernkammer, 28 November 1928, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BHA), Munich, ML 3655, 28. For the remark by von Ramen, report from Stadt-Polizeiamt Bayreuth to Stadrat Bayreuth, 5 March 1929, BHA, MInn 81651, 3781.

13. And the agrarians were not thinking merely in terms of a Bonapartist regime. Director Hopp of the Bavarian Landbund wanted to see a fascist dictatorship like Mussolini's established in Germany; on 26 November 1928 at a Bavarian Landbund rally in Bayreuth, he said: 'When will our redeemer come? We hope for such a dictator [like Mussolini], for whom we have prepared the soil in order that he can fulfill his duty.' *Oberfränkische Zeitung und Bayreuther Anzeiger*, 27 November 1928, No. 280, 4, BHA, ML 3640. As for a planned economy, it is true that during the First World War both the Junkers and the peasants had been bitterly opposed to the government's 'forced economy' (*Zwangswirtschaft*), but this was not because they were for a free market, rather because the government's policies forced them to meet unprofitable agricultural quotas. If the 'forced economy' had favoured agriculture, there would have been little concern. As a matter of fact, a pro-agricultural *Zwangswirtschaft* was precisely what they had in mind.

14. The German peasant was more technologically advanced in the 1920s than his counterparts in France and Belgium, though behind the farmer in Holland and Scandinavia; Alan S. Milward and S.B. Saul, *The Development of the Economies of Continental Europe, 1850-1914* (Cambridge 1977), 56. There are many historians who would disagree that social development in the countryside was as rapid as presented in this work: for example, Pankraz Fried, 'Die Sozialentwicklung im Bauerntum und Landvolk', *Bayerisches Handbuch, Das Neue Bayern, 1800-1970*, Max Spindler (ed.), Vol. IV/2 (Munich 1975), 752; and Friedrich-Wilhelm Henning, 'Der Beginn der modernen Welt im agrarischen Bereich', *Studien zum Beginn der modernen Welt*, 97-98. Henning believes that 'relations of production' are the most important gauge of social change; similarly, Adolf Sandberger looks at social change in hard demographic and economic structural terms, 'Die Landwirtschaft', *Bayerisches Handbuch*, 74.

15. Heide Wunder, 'Zum Stand der Erforschung frühmoderner und moderner bäuerlicher Eliten in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, Vol. 19 (Bonn 1979), 606.

16. David Abraham asserts that 'The old moral order of which the Junkers were a central element was neither destroyed nor delegitimized'; *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis* (Princeton 1981), 67. This may have been true for the army or bureaucracy, but it was certainly not true for society at large, nor even for the peasantry. After all, as Abraham himself recognizes, the peasants co-operated with the Junkers only because there was no other place to go, and because the Junkers had the political influence to persuade the government to raise agricultural tariffs. They were not at all sympathetic to the Junkers' aristocratic political culture, nor their moral prestige; on the contrary, they believed

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they were just as corrupt and self-interested as any other wealthy elite in Germany; indeed, it was this perception of the Junkers which caused the peasants to found their own parties in the first place.

17. Hans-Jürgen Puhle, 'Some Social and Political Roots of Prefascism in Germany, 1890-1914', *Two Lectures in Modern Germany History*, George G. Iggers (ed.), (Amherst 1978), 15.

18. Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., 'Fascism and Modernization', *World Politics*, 24, 4 (July 1972), 550, 559. Cf. A. James Gregor, 'Fascism and Modernization: Some Addenda', *World Politics*, 26, 3 (April 1974), 370-384. For more on the peasants' alleged anti-modernism, see Theodor Bergmann, 'Betrieb oder Scholle? Die landwirtschaftliche Bevölkerung zwischen Strukturwandel und Konservatismus', *Die Gegenreform: Zur Frage der Reformierbarkeit von Staat und Gesellschaft*, Martin Greiffenhagen and Hermann Scheer (eds), (Reinbek bei Hamburg 1974), 119-120, 127-129. For more on conservatism as anti-modernism, see Klaus Horn, 'Kosten der Angst: Konservatismus als Ergebnis der Retrogression gesellschaftlichen Bewußtseins', *Die Gegenreform*, 131-141, and Urs Altermatt, 'Conservatism in Switzerland: A Study in Antimodernism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14, 4 (October 1979), 581-610, and Fritz Stern, *Politics of Cultural Despair*, xvi-xxx.

19. Heinrich Winkler, 'Vom Protest zur Panik: Der gewerbliche Mittelstand in der Weimarer Republik', *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik*, Hans Mommsen, Dietmar Petzina and Bernd Weisbrod (eds), Vol. 2 (Düsseldorf 1977), 791. Winkler believes that 'the urban and rural middle classes were still so steeped in pre-industrial traditions...' that their fall into 'militant conservatism' during the depression was practically unavoidable; ibid.

20. Spender, op. cit., 209.

21. David Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago and London 1965), 330-340. Karl Deutsch discusses theories of mobilization and modernization in *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York 1953), and 'Social Mobilization and Political Developments', *American Political Science Review*, 55 (September 1961), 493-514. Cf. S.N. Eisenstadt, 'Breakdowns of Modernization', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 12 (July 1964), 345-367, and *Modernization: Protest and Change* (Englewood Cliffs 1966), 132-135.

22. Apter, op. cit., 113.

23. Ibid., 31.

24. In this context, it is important to note, as Apter reminds us, that '...ideology is not philosophy'; op. cit., 314. Political ideology is not concerned with the pursuit of philosophical truth, but rather with the '...application of particular moral presuppositions to collectivities'; ibid. Nor, according to Apter, is ideology scientific '...because [its] objectives are not scientific'; they are political and concerned with the pursuit of power; ibid., 318.

25. Ibid., 340.

26. *Nationalsozialistische Landpost*, Sondernummer 5, April 1932.

27. Ibid.

28. The *Erbhofgesetz* was not purely an ideological matter: not only did the law establish the principle of state control over property relations, it was also consciously designed to prevent the further splintering of farm lands into smaller units. Thus not only was the ideological aversion to collectivization involved, but also the economic interest in maintaining farms large enough to fulfil the party's autarkical plans. The NSDAP's concern about the splintering of farm lands is described in

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*Nationalsozialistische Landpost*, op. cit.

29. Quoted from J.E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany, 1928-45* (London and Beverly Hills 1976), 247.

30. Ibid., 179; David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany 1933-1939* (New York 1966), 172.

31. Farquharson, op. cit., 175; Schoenbaum, op. cit., 169-171.

32. Friedrich Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik im Dritten Reich: Anspruch und Wirklichkeit des Reichserbhofgesetzes* (Hamburg 1979), 157.

33. Schoenbaum, op. cit., 186.

34. Both Grundmann and Farquharson believe that the *Erbhofgesetz* was a major obstacle to the modernization of rural society in Germany; Grundmann, op. cit., 151-158; Farquharson, review article of Grundmann's *Agrarpolitik im Dritten Reich, American Historical Review*, 85, 5 (December 1980), 1224-1225. Grundmann in particular seems to believe that Nazi agrarian policy was a hindrance to modernization, not only because of the anti-modernist aims of Darré, but also because of the fact that the attempt to rationalize agricultural production was meant to serve the irrationalist and militarist aims of *Lebensraum* ideology. Unless he assumes that only rationalist measures put in the service of humanitarian ideals constitute a modernizing force, it is not at all clear why he takes this position. Moreover, his interpretation fails to explain why Hitler eventually turned his back on Darré's *Blut und Boden* ideology and embraced Backe's *Erzeugungsschlacht* instead. In his drive for greater agricultural output, Backe employed a wide array of modernist symbols associated with the cult of productivity and the dignity of efficient labour. Anson G. Rabinbach discusses the Nazis' use of modernist symbolism in the promotion of industrial labour in 'Aesthetics of Production in the Third Reich', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11, 4 (October 1976), 43-74.

35. George L. Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York 1980), 178.

36. Nazi Schriftplakat, described in report by Bayerisches Staatsministerium des Innern, 1 April 1932, 15, Bayerisches Staatsarchiv, Landshut, Rep. 164/17, Fz. 116, Nr. 381.

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