CHAPTER TEN

Economic Collapse and the Rise of Fascism, 1920–33

The "war to end all wars" didn't eliminate war, but it did hasten the destruction of many pre-war empires. The once mighty czarist regime collapsed in 1917 and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was swept onto the proverbial dust heap of history the following year. Both these transformations were, to one extent or another, the result of uprisings from below by those who had had enough of war, oppression and exploitation. The Turkish revolution that came from within the ruins of the Ottoman Empire was much more top down. The Ottoman Empire was the last great Islamic empire and had been in crisis long before 1914. In fact, it was referred to as the "sick man of Europe" for many years before its final collapse.

Allied with Germany during World War I, the multinational, religiously diverse Ottoman Empire suffered military defeats and internal decline. In addition, the Ottomans were beset by nationalist uprisings of their Arab subjects, who were financed by the British and directed by the famous "Lawrence of Arabia." After the Ottoman defeat in the war, the British, French and their minor power allies, like the Greeks, sought to dine on the territorial remains. The British and French partitioned the oil-rich Ottoman provinces, while ignoring promises made to the Arabs living there. The British and their Greek allies attempted to seize parts of the Turkish heartland of Anatolia.[1] The reaction was a Turkish nationalist revolution led by Mustafa Kemal, who was known after 1935 as Atatürk or "Father of the Turks."[2] The hero of the Turkish resistance to the Allied invasion of the Dardanelles in 1915, Atatürk was a modernizer who led those who wished for a modern Turkey to replace the discredited Ottoman Empire.

Atatürk reasonably accepted that the lost Arab provinces were beyond recovery and concentrated on defending the Turkish heartland. He and his co-thinkers had little nostalgia for the old Islamic monarchy; they wanted to create a modern secular republic, albeit built from the top down. From 1919 until 1922, Atatürk and his forces fought Allied armies that occupied major parts of the country, including the capital Istanbul. Further, Sultan

Mehmed VI and his supporters thought the monarchy might survive under a British mandate or American protection. In the end, the invaders were expelled, the previously dictated peace treaty was revised and the last Ottoman sultan fled into exile aboard a British ship. Thus, in 1922, the office of sultan was abolished and a republic proclaimed by 1923.

Although there wasn't much democracy in this new republic, Atatürk did launch a program of radical social and political reform. Whereas the Ottoman Empire had claimed spiritual leadership of the Islamic world, this new Turkish republic was fiercely secular. Within a decade, the republic had adopted the Western world's calendar and metric system, switched from the Turkish language to the Latin alphabet, and prohibited religious attire in public. Further, women gained the right to vote and serve in Parliament.[3] Not surprisingly, the abolition of all Islamic institutions and separation of the state from religion has been resisted by many conservative Turks, up to and including the present century.

Not all those defeated in World War I were as immediately successful at resisting allied demands. The Austro-Hungarian Empire was completely destroyed and broken into its various ethnic components. Germany was presented with a harsh treaty that stripped it of all colonies as well as a tenth of its European territory; it was also forced to take the burden of guilt for the war and thus required to pay for all the damage done. The war guilt clause and the reparations payments were poison pills forced on the new German republic. This treaty was a far cry from the promises President Woodrow Wilson had made of a just peace. Why then did representatives of the new Germany sign it? Simply put, they had little choice, as the British continued to blockade Germany, leaving growing numbers of people dying of starvation. The Treaty of Versailles, as the peace settlement is known, was likely a factor (among many) leading to the rise of Nazism and World War II. The treaty enacted numerous measures that would surely provoke hatred among large sectors of the German population,[4] but did not destroy Germany as a nation-state. The treaty was unjustly harsh, yet the victors wound up unable or unwilling to enforce it. It was, in one way of thinking, the worst of all possible worlds.

In Germany, the captains of industry and their political supporters remained unreconciled to any significant level of reparations.[5] This is not terribly surprising given that the peace treaty was imposed on, rather than negotiated with, Germany. From 1921, the German rulers' strategy, through the *Reichsbank*, was to ruin the nation's currency in order to reduce reparation payments and roll back the gains workers had achieved during the revolution.[6] The magnates of Germany industry seemed to think that

runaway inflation would wipe out the German debt and render meaningless labor contracts and wage agreements, as the situation generally exhausted the working people. Early in 1922, a dollar was worth 1,000 marks—by November, a dollar bought 6,000 marks. On January 4, 1923, a dollar fetched 8,000 marks, less than a week later it was worth 10,000 marks, and by January 15, it took 56,000 marks to purchase one US currency unit. From then on, the mark skyrocketed with little relation to anything approaching economic reality; reaching 60,000,000 marks to the dollar by the first week of September.[7] Inflation was such that a typical Hamburg dockworker was paid 17 billion marks a day by fall 1923.

Before 1923 came to an end, transactions were no longer conducted in marks but with hard currency or gold, or by barter. The exception, of course, was wages that were still typically paid in nearly worthless paper marks. The money was of so little value that people often used it for heating their apartments or as wallpaper. At the beginning of that same year, the French sent 60,000 troops into the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland, to force reparation payments from an unwilling Germany. There was an immediate reaction from the common people of Germany, who participated in demonstrations, strikes and work slowdowns. Under pressure from below, the government organized a campaign of passive resistance to the French occupation. It was a confusing time: it was hard to tell if workers were striking out of nationalist passion or class hatred for their employers, like Krupp and Thyssen, who continued to amass greater and greater profits. The German Communist Party (KPD) planned and then cancelled an uprising in October 1923. The cancellation failed however, as the messenger sent to Hamburg didn't arrive in time, and on October 23, over a thousand KPD members seized police stations and erected barricades.[8] Although they held out for a few days, the uprising soon collapsed[9] because most workers did not rise up. Many, particularly SPD members, did not participate because they still believed that gradual reforms would be the best road to improving their lives. Some were passive simply out of despair. Moreover, there is evidence that the split between those workers ready to rebel and those who pinned their hopes on gradual change was at least partially generational.[10] That is, older workers were influenced by pre-war socialist gradualism, while the rebellious disposition of younger workers tended to be the consequence of war and revolution.

If the "War to make the World Safe for Democracy" didn't, the question remains, how did average Europeans fare after the guns finally fell silent? Not only did the great depression of 1929 sink the hopes and happiness of many average people, the fact is that the period before the crash wasn't

so wonderful either. The economics of labor conditions can be measured many ways. One of the most common methods is to compare the level of real wages. Real wages means "nothing but money wages corrected according to the price changes."[11] Using this tool, one finds that if 1900 is taken as the base year [1900=100] then real wages fell almost 10 percent by 1924 in the United Kingdom.[12] In Germany, real wages fell twenty percent by 1924 although the decline was somewhat reversed the following year.[13] If we leave real wages aside and look at relative wages, the picture is even bleaker. Relative wages show the relative movement of the purchasing power of the worker vis-à-vis the rest of society. It more clearly shows that if productivity climbs more than the purchasing power of labor, workers can only buy a smaller share of the national product. Thus, in the United Kingdom during the economic cycle of 1924–32, real wages were only 7 percent below 1900, but *relative* wages were 22 percent below 1900.

In Germany, during the 1924–1935 cycle, real wages were 77 percent of 1900, but *relative* wages were a mere 44 percent of the pre-war benchmark.[14] In France, after the end of the war, "labour conditions undoubtedly became worse, real wages decreased, intensity of work increased immensely—especially owing to the reconstruction and rationalization process applied to French industry."[15] Not only were wages a problem for workers, in many places inadequate housing contributed to a decline in living standards. In the Ruhr coalfields, for example, the number of people crowded into already small dwellings increased after the war. From 1912–1925 in the city of Bochum, the average number of occupants per room jumped. While in 1912, one-room housing had an average of 1.09 persons and two rooms 1.65, by 1925 there was an average of 2.30 people living in one room and 1.80 in two rooms.[16] Housing became another tool for management, "to gain an element of control and stability over a chaotic situation."[17]

What neither the Treaty of Versailles nor the new German government did was purge the old monarchical leaders from the military or the government administration. This may well have been the biggest flaw in the Weimar Republic. On the positive side, there was healthy political participation in the new republic, as shown by party memberships and an electoral turnout higher than many modern Western governments today. On gender equality, the Weimar Republic compares favorably with other European nations. Not only were women given the right to vote, unlike in France or Italy, but females served in the Reichstag in greater numbers than in the British House of Commons. On the other hand, from the outset, right-wing anti-democratic militants used violence to achieve their goals. Note the murders of Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Kurt Eisner and

many more by German "patriots". One key weakness of the new republic was that while the kaiser was forced into exile, the generals, judges and all the old monarchist officials remained. The result was a socio-political environment that accepted violence on behalf of the far right who, from 1918–1922, committed 354 murders. Meanwhile, murders committed by those on the left numbered only 22. Yet, of the latter, 17 received harsh sentences including 10 condemned to death. On the other hand, right-wing murderers were typically released (326 out of 354) or, if convicted, received on average only a 4-month prison term.[18]

Still, one should dispute the conventional narrative that presents a republic, without republicans, as notable almost exclusively for the level of decadence on display in urban centers like Berlin and Hamburg. This negative narrative sees a straight line from Prussia, famously called 'an army with a country rather than a country with an army,' to the Third Reich, with the Weimar democracy as little more than a speed bump on the road to militarism and war. This standard view oversimplifies not only the complexity of the Weimar Republic but also that of Prussian/German history. It is important to look beyond the cartoon version of German history that fascists presented in the twentieth century, which has also been largely accepted at face value by anti-fascists.

For example, Frederick the Great, a man of the Enlightenment and not merely a military leader, once observed that "all religions are just as good as each other, as long as the people who practice them are honest, and even if Turks and heathens came and wanted to populate this country, then we would build mosques and temples for them."[19] Such sentiments are unlikely to have come from the mouths of early twentieth-century German rightists. Another myth is the alleged bloodthirstiness of traditional Prussian courts. In fact, the number of persons executed in England and Wales exceeded that of Prussia by a factor of sixty-to-one in the nineteenth century. Moreover, most of the condemned in British courts were charged with crimes against property, whereas most Prussian executions were for homicide.[20]

The post-war rise of the extreme right was certainly not a phenomenon isolated to defeated nation-states. Horrified by the Bolshevik Revolution, Europe's ruling classes sanctioned "paramilitary mobilization against the perceived menace. This occurred not only where the threat was plausible—in the Baltic states and Ukraine, in Hungary and in parts of Germany—but also in more peaceable victor states such as France and Britain."[21] Particularly on the extreme nationalist right, old leaders were often eclipsed by brutalized ex-officers and a young generation both of whom were furious about revolution and in some places, military defeat.

Militias, such as the German *Frei Korps*, provided a chance to live a romanticized warrior life. An explosive subculture developed throughout Europe in which "brutal violence was an acceptable, perhaps even desirable, form of political expression."[22] Seeing themselves as political soldiers, these paramilitary fighters often lacked anything approaching a clear program. Rather, they defined themselves as being against "reds" and ethnic minorities, while searching for a return to a mythical masculine past. But this movement was far from marginal in many cases. Often, as was the case in Italy, the old liberal ruling class found it opportune to ally with the far right to gain fresh vigor. Also, they typically had the illusion that they could control and use movements like fascism and Nazism. In fact, they were the ones who were used.[23]

In Poland, newly independent after World War I, the republic lasted only a few years. The new Poland was fractured between the conflicting traditions previously learned in Russian, German and Austrian pre-war partitions, as well as the ideological visions to be expected in a new nation-state. The Polish military was a battleground between both different political views and cliques based on personality.[24] Moreover, the economy often undermined the new republic, as in 1923, when the Polish mark went from 53,375 to one US dollar, to 6,050,000 Polish currency units to one dollar.[25] Even after this financial disaster was resolved, the republic's government increasingly lost public confidence, while some on the right, and the left, looked for a strongman.

In May 1926, Marshall Pilsudski, who like Mussolini was a former socialist, seized power in a *coup d'état* against the elected government. At first, Pilsudski had the support of the moderate left, who then were disappointed to find that the marshall had no intention of shifting the balance of power in favor of workers. Instead, he set up a dictatorship that had a whiff of fascism about it. Despite his well-known lukewarm belief in Catholicism and political support from anti-clericals, Pilsudski's regime enjoyed, like Mussolini's, warm relations with the Vatican. Knowing the dictatorship would guarantee the interests of the Church, the Holy See "conferred its blessing on the new leadership in Warsaw even though it was hardly Catholic in spirit or program."[26] Until his death in 1935, Pilsudski had a close relationship with Pope Pius XI even if the latter, by 1933, saw Hitler as the only man ready to take on bolshevism.[27]

In 1926, the same year that Pilsudski seized power, there is alleged to have been an attempted coup against the republic in Czechoslovakia. Radola Gajda, acting chief of staff of the Czechoslovak Army, was fired and convicted of having committed treason against the government. The

details are murky and some issues are in dispute.[28] What is clear is that Gajda harbored fascist sympathies. After being dismissed from the army, he became the leader of the National Fascist Community and, in 1929, was elected under their banner to Parliament.[29] Although he was never to seize power, he was implicated in political intrigue, including a 1934 raid on a military barracks. He was never punished severely, either because of lack of evidence or the government's desire not to create a martyr for the fascists.

In Greece, an authoritarian dictatorship led by Ioannis Metaxas came to power in the interwar period, proclaiming the only true Greeks were Orthodox Christians and those of Greek ethnic background.[30] Whether this should be considered a fascist regime or merely a right-wing dictatorship is a matter of debate. The fact that it was openly anti-parliamentary, racist, and crushed all dissent is not. Like Mussolini, Hitler and others before them, Metaxas claimed the Greek Communist Party was about to seize power and thus forced him into action to save "Greek civilization." Even before the dictatorship, the post-World War I government was fiercely anti-communist, and almost openly hostile to labor.

One government official told a meeting of tobacco workers, in 1929: "Let us make it clear, if you are communists, you are enemies of the state and we shall dissolve your organizations as hostile. We do not recognize your right to band together to become stronger and more threatening to the state."[31] It is worth noting that it was bourgeois politicians who paved the way for the dictatorship by agreeing to let Metaxas become head of the government.[32] This followed the same path as had already been paved in Rome and Berlin. Established in 1936, the Metaxas dictatorship banned a wide range of authors from Marx and Kant to Tolstoy. Despite ties to Mussolini's Italy and Nazi Germany, Britain retained enough influence to force the Greek dictatorship to align with the Allies.

Even Britain, one of World War I's victors and perceived by many as an island of tranquility, faced widespread challenges to the propertied classes who dominated the national government. Trade union membership had almost doubled during the war, from 4,189,000 in 1913 to 8,081,000 by 1919. Furthermore, the three strongest unions—the miners, railroad workers and transport workers—formed the Triple Alliance in 1916. This organization held the power to shut down the British economy. By war's end, working-class militancy at home combined with turmoil in Ireland, the Middle East and armed intervention in Russia to cause a crisis for British rulers. In January 1919, Winston Churchill, acting in his capacity of secretary of war, directed the military leadership to "prepare a complete scheme and organization of Military Forces throughout the United

Kingdom to act in aid of Civil Power in the event of a national strike of a revolutionary character."[33] The military mandarins were not very keen on the idea and urged that police forces be made ready for strike breaking, without making this the duty of the army.[34]

Little wonder that the field marshalls and generals felt that way, given the situation in Britain. The British Army was "war-weary and unreliable. The men still in uniform were restless; those leaving the forces faced unemployment; those at work had low pay, while prices were rising. General disillusionment with a post-war world that offered them few rewards . . . ."[35] By the spring of 1919, the tension between classes was so great that some even feared Britain was on the edge of social revolution.[36] With the raising of the red flag on the city flagpole during the Glasgow general strike of late January 1919 and the seemingly irrepressible power of the Triple Alliance, people can be forgiven for what now may seem like unjustified fear, or hope. After all, the government certainly thought revolution was in the air. Ten thousand English troops, tanks, machine guns and a Howitzer were deployed in Glasgow's George Square, while nearby Scottish troops were kept in their barracks, as their loyalty was suspect.[37] Still, even after the defeat of the 1919 strikes, the government was not about to take chances. An innocently named "Supply and Transport Committee" (STC) was established. This was actually the British government's strike-breaking organization. From autumn 1919 until November 1921, the STC met 46 times and defeated the most important immediate post-war industrial disputes.[38] While the STC was pared back for budgetary reasons after the immediate crises had passed, it was later revived in new form to attempt to break the 1926 General Strike.

During the same period, things were going from bad to terrible for the British rulers in Ireland. Attempts to grant limited home rule in order to divide the Irish independence movement had failed. In December 1918, the pro-independence Sinn Fein took 73 out of 105 seats in the Irish elections and declared a republic. When the republican Parliament met in 1919, half of the elected Sinn Fein MPs were in prison. In this context, and with the memory of the Easter Rebellion firmly in view, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) launched an armed struggle in 1919. To crush the IRA guerillas, the British government deployed paramilitary groups comprised mainly of war veterans known as the "Black and Tans." Violence was high in 1920 with the IRA assassinating British intelligence officers, while the Black and Tans shot to death 15 civilians at a football match in Dublin. The following year brought roughly a thousand more deaths, but also a compromise treaty in which the IRA dissolved the Irish Republic of 1919, in return for British

recognition of 26 of Ireland's 32 counties as the Irish Free State. A civil war followed as more radical IRA supporters felt this agreement, which left Ireland divided, was unacceptable.

When the story of the Irish revolt against the British Empire is told, it is often a narrative that is relentlessly male dominated. The reality is that women were an integral part of the rebellion from the beginning. During the independence war, Irish women engaged in not only what might be thought of as "women's activities" like first aid, fundraising and visiting IRA prisoners, but also labored in arms movement, communications and spying on enemy activities. In her diary, Eileen Cunningham tersely recorded her activities. Her handwritten notes, from 1920, record:

> Carrig Barracks was burned. Military lorry was to be attacked in Macroon. Raids on Crikstown and Dooniskey Mails. After this, Volunteers expected reprisals at Macroon, and took up positions in and around town. These positions were held for nearly a week and meant much work carrying arms, intelligence etc. … .[39]

In recent years, more and more diaries and letters of female rebels have shown that the defeat of Empire was far from an all-boy show.

The facts surrounding the May 4–13, 1926 General Strike in Britain are generally available and need detain us only briefly.[40] The causes leading to the General Strike varied from the loss of export markets for coal, falling coal prices, a glut of coal on the world market, and a large number of inefficient pits. Furthermore, the return to the gold standard made British coal uncompetitive, which led mine owners to attempt to maintain profits by reducing wages and lengthening hours. When the miners rejected this attempt to prop up dividends at their expense, they were locked out and the Trade Unions Congress (TUC), very hesitantly, called a general strike that caused millions to stop work. For nine hard-fought days, poverty-stricken workers battled peacefully against a state apparatus that called upon both their traditional police forces and specially mobilized middle- and upper-class men. Over 50,000 came forth in London seeking to become "special constables," as trucks full of soldiers crisscrossed the central section of the capital.[41] On May 13, the TUC, terrified that the strike might collapse (or maybe equally terrified it might not and thus turn into a power struggle), called off the strike during a meeting with Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin at 10 Downing Street. To the right, this was a victory, while many on the left saw it as a betrayal.[42]

A more complex but still radical interpretation of 1926 is that this was a troubled period in terms of the transition from the pre-1914 forms of social control to new mechanisms. A new strategy being developed by the British ruling class had scarcely had a chance to coalesce or establish itself by 1926. This was, in part, because it was threatened by widespread shop-floor militancy that had begun during World War I, and persisted into the economic crisis of the 1920s. Because the government plan to build up the right wing of the labor movement was less established than anticipated, the confrontation over wage cuts did not spur the collapse of organized labor resistance, as hoped. Surprised by the strength of worker response in 1926, the rulers had to back off their more extreme attacks on wages and conditions in hope of recasting their strategy to co-opt the TUC leadership, and build up the Labour Party's right wing, while isolating the left.[43]

Descending from the heights of theory, it is important to ask what 1926 meant for the strikers, most of all the miners. It is agreed by almost everyone that the miners suffered unspeakable privation both before and after the lockout. During the General Strike, although the suffering was perhaps greater, there was at least the sense that things might change for the better. Although portrayals of the strikers predictably depict the strong and proud male worker, it is good to remember that strikers were part of a larger proletarian community. True, this was a male-dominated world that was deeply patriarchal, but social dynamics were more complex than stereotypes suggest. As one historian studying South Wales discovered, general roles "could be a good deal less rigid than many imagined."[44]

During the 1926 struggle, gender roles were challenged, even if they mainly reappeared unaltered after the defeat of the General Strike. In Durham, where almost a third of the adult men worked in the coalmines, community did not mean a bland occupational homogeneity. Instead, the community was able to subsume and integrate various identities in order to maintain solidarity with the miners.[45] In addition, the family unit and traditional gender roles were subverted by the need for collective action. Since everyone must eat to survive, and miners hardly had enough to eat even before the lockout, the role of collective communal eating is well worth noting.[46] This collective experience reduced gender segregation, even as it maintained the masculine identity of male miners. Despite the ultimately limited nature of these changes, the process of collective food provision and consumption showed how quickly people can change in the course of social struggles. Of course, the most immediate task, and a vital unifying force, was the need the community felt to maintain a united front of solidarity with the miners. One female participant, Lilian Lawrence, was

asked about the reaction to those men who carried on working in the mines. Lawrence told how her mother and aunt broke the windows of her uncle's house because he was a scab. When asked if her mother broke any other windows, she responded, "Oh, yes, the ones that was scabs, yes."[47]

Unlike much of the rest of inter-war Europe, Sweden did not suffer the same revolutionary or reactionary fever. In Sweden, the Social Democrats, for all their faults,[48] steered a middle ground between workers' revolution and upper-class repression. Often called "the third way," Swedish Social Democrats used electoral success and trade union might to construct a welfare state without abolishing capitalism. When Swedish Social Democracy took control of the government in 1932, a class compromise was reached with the old ruling class. In a program that contrasts sharply with the limited achievements of FDR in the United States and the central planning that characterized the USSR, the new Swedish government fought for a society where "no longer would private calculations of profit and loss alone determine the level of employment and production; now the state would intervene to rectify the flaws of uncoordinated capitalist enterprise."[49] The Swedish Social Democrats were able to maintain their political dominance and their class compromise program until well after World War II.[50]

Meanwhile, the Russian Revolution, that had been a source of so much hope for European workers in 1917, suffered a counter-revolution during the 1920s. Gone were democratic systems, new artistic styles and attempts to eliminate the old patriarchal structures that oppressed women.[51] Instead there was return to a parody of the old czarist system, with its rule by terror. A newly ascendant bureaucratic regime led by Joseph Stalin increasingly seized more and more power until almost all of the old Bolshevik leadership had been arrested and executed. In their place came a new group, with the Bolshevik Party becoming a hollow shell that merely functioned as a political ornament worn on the shirt of the new Soviet dictatorship. Before his death, Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin had struggled unsuccessfully against the abandonment of the socialist experiment.[52] Until his assassination in 1940, Leon Trotsky, one of the most important leaders of the revolution likewise fought a losing war against the collapse of the hopes of 1917.[53]

This turn of events begs for the question to be asked: why? Without entering into a belabored examination of every theory that has been put forth, and enough books have been written on this subject to fill a small college library, a few basic facts should be considered. The Bolshevik, later renamed Communist, Party, being a Marxist organization had always stressed the centrality of the working class to their party and any future

revolution. Yet, for most of its pre-revolutionary history, the Bolsheviks had been a party of intellectuals who believed in the working class without receiving overwhelming support from that class. Then in 1917, their hope became a reality and the Bolsheviks actually had the impressive support of massive numbers of workers, soldiers and sailors. Although the peasants made up the vast majority of the Russian Empire's population, by 1917 the industrial working class was over 4,500,000 strong with an additional 7,000,000 people in the military, whom Russian Marxists considered as workers.

Within a year, by 1918, this working class began to disintegrate. Hunger became rampant in the cities and factories closed because of a lack of materials, driving people back to their family villages. Then, as discussed earlier, the country endured foreign invasions and Civil War for the next three years; during this period as many as a million workers returned to the peasantry. Other workers were coopted into the Red Army or the governmental apparatus, thus becoming former workers. By the end of the Civil War, there remained roughly a million industrial workers in Soviet Russia. This was reflected in the class composition of the party:, at the time of the February Revolution, 60 percent of the membership had been workers. Despite their best efforts, this same organization had only a 40 percent working-class membership by the end of the Civil War, as the rest of the party were either peasants or middle class.[54]

The party leadership, for all their brilliance, had no real idea about what to do. On many occasions, leaders tried to blame objective conditions for their situation. As one Bolshevik oppositionist bitterly remarked at a meeting in which party leaders claimed that the working class no longer existed, "Permit me to congratulate you on being the vanguard of a nonexistent class."[55] One historian summed up the Bolsheviks' dilemma, "Against all odds, they had made a workers' revolution. Then, in the hour of victory, the Russian proletariat had disappeared—leaving only its vanguard, like the smile of the Cheshire cat, behind."[56] Some, like Stalin, concluded that, without a working class or a worldwide socialist revolution to help underdeveloped Russia, all that was left was to substitute the party apparatus for socialist democracy. For this, one needed trained cadres; a new elite was educated and went on to run the USSR until its demise towards the end of the twentieth century. As there was both a desire and need for the USSR to industrialize, particular emphasis was given to producing competent engineers who understood the value of political conformity.[57] This goal of modernizing Russia was a gain of the October Revolution and was

actively pursued, while other ideals like gender equality[58] and civil liberties were abandoned.

When the Great Depression of 1929 hit the countries of capitalist Europe, workers (particularly industrial workers) were hardest hit. This was especially true in Germany where the bourgeoisie saw the chance to cripple, if not destroy, the working-class movement. Unions lost members and their bargaining power to the widespread joblessness. Workers' wages and standard of living fell drastically. In 1931, a Berlin satirist noted, "[that] workers must receive wages for their work is a theory that has been generally abandoned today."[59] By 1933, 40 percent of all male industrial workers were unemployed, as contrasted with only 13 percent of white-collar workers. Mass unemployment ate away at the "basic substance of the working class movement. Anxiety about keeping a job, worry about finding a job, was not in the long term compatible with militant opposition to the existing social order."[60]

Despite various lightly documented attempts to claim that workers willingly joined the Nazis, there is little evidence to support this whether measured by voting patterns, membership figures, or political logic. Even had the Nazi Party been sincere in its rhetoric about being for the German worker, this was an organization with a social base and financial backers who were "fundamentally and totally hostile to the workers—and this not only in an ideological and political sense, but also with respect to the central economic interests of the working class."[61] After all, one of the most central appeals of fascism, most of all for the vitally important bourgeois portion of their base, is that it will destroy all proletarian organizations and institutions. Facing a working class bitterly divided into Social Democratic and Communist camps, German fascism was able to use violence and a mass mobilization of petit-bourgeois and lumpen elements to crush the left. The battle between the left and Nazis took place in the streets, but also increasingly in sophisticated propaganda.[62] It is useful to remember the unique features of fascism as distinct from those of the traditional right. Whereas most right-wing dictatorships content themselves with using administrative, legal and economic pressures to weaken opponents, fascists seek to quite literally destroy all working-class organizations and murder all resisters among the common people.[63]

Naturally, the onset of the Great Depression left many Germans open to appeals to nationalism and racism. Yet, the most Hitler and his Nazis could muster in a free election in July 1932 was 37.3 percent of the votes cast. A few months later, in November 1932, support for the Nazis had declined another 4 percent, they had lost 34 Reichstag seats and were

facing bankruptcy. In order to spread fear, and justify the arrest and murder of political opponents, most of all the KPD, Hitler had the Reichstag building torched. Using an underground tunnel that connected Nazi leader Hermann Göring's residence with the basement of the Reichstag building, Nazi storm troopers fanned out and spread incendiaries. Having set the fire, they hurried back through the tunnel. With Germany's Parliament building in flames, Hitler proclaimed that a Communist uprising had been launched. He then demanded, and received, emergency powers from his cabinet and President Hindenburg. With these powers, all civil rights were eliminated and truckloads of fascist thugs rounded up thousands of Communists and Social Democrats, along with anyone else thought to be an important anti fascist.

What was the popular response? Hans Werner Richter, a German in his twenties when the Nazis began their murderous crackdown, recalled his shock that

> … nothing moved, nothing happened, no strike, no general strike, no call to battle in the streets—nothing … Socialist and Communist youth, ready to take the fight to streets, waited in vain for order that never came, except for the instruction of the Communist Party to creep into the underground.

Along with many other young people, Richter awaited direction to "strike out," only to be told to wait or go home.[64]

This set the stage for the election the following month. It is hard to think of a more undemocratic election. The opposition to the Nazi Party had no opportunity to campaign; even simply hanging an anti-fascist poster became a criminal offense. Likewise, those individuals on the Nazi "red lists" were kept from polling places through a combination of violence, murder and imprisonment in one of the new concentration camps for political prisoners. Amazingly, the common people, particularly the working classes, continued to resist the Brownshirt plague, as the election results prove. Despite resorting to political violence, vote stealing and rigging, and having generous financial backing from Krupp munitions and I.G. Farben, in March 1933 Hitler's legions still took only 43.9 percent of the vote. Why then were the Nazis able to seize power? In the end, it was not the popular vote that mattered but the support of the old ruling class. Hitler was given power, as one historian contends, "as a result of political intrigues among the ruling elite just as their electoral support was on the wane."[65] In all the understandable fascination with the obscene genocide, mass murder and

horror of German Nazism, one thing usually gets forgotten. That is, for the ruling class of Germany, their support for fascism was not merely a response to crisis, it was rather a way of utilizing the crisis.[66] Big business, the army and other remnants of the German Empire gave the Nazis power and a job to do. The problem was the German fascists got carried away, started a war and then lost it.