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The German Nationalist People's Party: The Conservative Dilemma in the Weimar Republic

The German Nationalist People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, DNVP) was founded after the German Revolution of November 1918 when members from several right-wing political groups — the German Conservative party, the Free Conservatives, the National Liberals, the Christian Social and völkisch groups — joined forces.¹ Whereas hitherto a splintered right could be assured that imperial power would oppose radical policies, such electorally weak groups faced political impotence in the new democratic republic. The foundation of the DNVP sought to give them influence in the new political system through a united conservative party with a wide political and social appeal.

Throughout the 1920s however, the DNVP was never agreed on the extent to which, as a party dedicated to the restoration of the monarchy, it should cooperate in an apparently illegitimate political framework. Hans von Linderer-Wildau, the party's general secretary after 1919, expressed the dilemma in the following terms: 'The fundamental rejection of an illegitimate state dictated a clear stance of opposition, but the feeling of personal involvement with the fate of the state, which is the essence of conservative thought, encouraged constructive cooperation.'² Although the DNVP professed to be a conservative party, in the 1920s there was no agreement on the meaning of conservatism. Attempts to define a German National philosophy merely reflected the views of strands within the party and were not valid for the movement as a whole.

These problems became more acute as electoral expansion increased the significance of the Nationalist party. Although the Nationalists won only ten percent of votes cast in the elections to the

National Assembly of January 1919, this had risen to twenty-one percent in the May 1924 Reichstag elections and after the Reichstag elections of December 1924 the DNVP with 103 Reichstag seats was the largest party after the Social Democrats (SPD).³ This expansion was helped by widespread revulsion against reparations, the Versailles peace treaty and the consequences of inflation which the DNVP fused into a more general protest against the 'system'.

Despite the impressive electoral expansion of a party ostensibly dedicated to the restoration of the German Emperor, the Weimar republic in the mid-1920s gave all the appearances of political stability and it seemed unrealistic to expect the Nationalist party to secure an absolute majority of Reichstag seats in the foreseeable future. It followed that the demands of those agrarian, industrial and workers' interests supporting the DNVP could only be met by participation in coalition government. This led the DNVP to appoint representatives to the short-lived cabinet of Chancellor Hans Luther in 1925 and to participate in the cabinet formed in January 1927 under Chancellor Wilhelm Marx where the DNVP shared power with the liberal German People's party (*Deutsche Volkspartei*, DVP) and Marx's own party, the Catholic Centre (*Zentrum*).

When the Nationalist party joined the Marx cabinet in January 1927, Count Westarp, the chairman and fraction leader of the DNVP, had to convince the party that government participation was compatible with party principle.⁴ He had also to convince social groups in the party — workers, industrialists, agrarian representatives — that each would benefit materially from the new government. Finally he had to convince his coalition partners — the DVP and Centre party — that their best interests were served by continued cooperation with the Nationalists. Only thus could he convincingly argue that he had shifted the political balance of Weimar significantly to the right.

The ideological difficulties of government participation were most clearly revealed by the extension of the law to protect the republic. This legislation had been enacted in July 1922 to meet the threat to the republic posed by violent right-wing groups like the Organisation Consul.⁵ The Nationalists in the cabinet, unable to persuade their cabinet colleagues that the law should expire, were forced to agree that the law be extended for two years. The extension of a law to preserve what to a Nationalist was an illegitimate state was greeted with dismay in the DNVP Reichstag fraction, 38

of whom registered their disapproval by abstaining in the vote on the law's extension in May 1927.⁶

Although economic interests in the DNVP had supported government participation to safeguard their material interests, experience of government tended to exacerbate social divisions in the party. DNVP industrialists were harsh critics of the Emergency Law on Working Hours of April 1927 which stipulated that work in excess of eight hours would command a pay rate twenty-five percent above that for the normal working day. This legislation was welcomed by the German National Workers' League, but only the considered absence of twenty-two deputies of parties ostensibly in opposition to the government allowed the legislation to pass the Reichstag.⁷

Some Nationalist industrialists were also dismayed at the legislation on unemployment insurance of October 1927 which gave workers a legal right to unemployment benefit and relieved trade unions from the financial outlay the redundancy of their members imposed on them.⁸ Equally, for a party which relied heavily on the support of agrarian organizations such as the *Reichslandbund*, the mounting hostility of agrarian circles to government as credit became increasingly tight was particularly disturbing.⁹

Nor was the DNVP any more successful in establishing the basis of a more lasting cooperation with its coalition partners, the DVP and Centre party. Uncertainty about the DNVP's attitude to an eventual reparations settlement with the Allies seriously harmed relations with the Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, the leader of the DVP. More had been hoped from the Centre party which shared the Nationalist commitment to a Christian school law.¹⁰ The draft which von Keudell, the DNVP Minister of the Interior, submitted to the Reichstag in October 1927 abolished the preferential position of the common school by requiring that the establishment of all schools had to be preceded by parental petition and by providing a mechanism to change the form of existing schools if parental choice so indicated.¹¹ The DVP as a liberal party adhered to the secular principle in education and opposed these proposals. Negotiations finally collapsed in February 1928 when the DVP supported a motion preventing the establishment of denominational schools in Hessen and Baden.¹²

The DNVP, however, held the Centre and DVP jointly responsible for the bill's failure and for the elections this disagreement brought about. In a speech in March 1928 Count Westarp hoped

that 'the election would show that government should be conducted with us and not with the Social Democrats.' An agreement could have been reached on the schools law but 'the Centre wished to preserve its freedom of movement to the right and left for the forthcoming election campaign. In parliamentary terms, the School Law offered them a good opportunity to reaffirm their independence.'¹³ The position of those German Nationalists who had argued most strongly for government participation was naturally seriously weakened by the cabinet's failure.

In May 1928 Reichstag elections the Nationalist party retained only 78 of their former 103 mandates. The other government parties also suffered: the DVP delegation fell to 45 from 51; and the Centre to 61 from 69.¹⁴ The major factor behind the electoral defeat of the Nationalists was the very stability of the Weimar republic.

Two divergent interpretations of the defeat emerged in the party. On the one hand it was argued that the decline of the party was caused by its failure to become a true people's movement, responsive to workers' and youth interests. The German National Workers' League cited the glib lock-out practices of Nationalist employers and claimed that the DNVP could have won more votes from those voting for the first time.¹⁵ While clearly critical of the political emphasis of the DNVP, this approach was not inconsistent with the kind of party Westarp wished to create. A second group however questioned the assumptions underlying Westarp's gradualist concept of conservatism and his advocacy of government participation; in their view, political ideals should precede economic interests: 'We are no parliamentary party like the others' argued von Freytagh-Loringhoven. 'We are the bearers of the idea of freedom, the heralds and front-line fighters for German rebirth. We gain nothing if we hope to achieve the number of mandates we had in 1924 by 1932 in order to fall to the 1928 level by 1936.'¹⁶

In view of the impasse of the Westarp strategy, these two approaches to politics were expounded in the Nationalist party during the summer of 1928. One view — represented by Walther Lambach, chairman of the DNVP Employees' Committee — sought to restate DNVP ideals by welcoming into the party those who could not support the restoration of the Kaiser as national republicans. Another view — which was identified with Alfred Hugenberg, the future party leader — argued that the republic would disintegrate in time and that the DNVP should prepare to exploit this crisis. These

two distinct concepts of conservatism subjected party unity to increasing strain in the summer of 1928.

Lambach had been trying to reshape the Nationalist party since the beginning of 1928. In January he had founded the Christian National Self-Help Movement, based on trade union, Christian Social and Young Conservative forces in the party such as Gottfried Treviranus who supported the concept of a people's party with wide appeal and willing to participate in government.¹⁷ The so-called 'Lambach affair' was provoked by his article on monarchism in the *Politische Wochenschrift* on 14 June 1928 welcoming national republicans into the party.¹⁸ It followed that this would enable the DNVP to accept compromise in office more easily than in the recent past. By upholding party principles against Lambach, those critical of government participation could question the parliamentary tendencies in the DNVP allegedly encouraged by Westarp in recent years.

Lambach's article provoked a debate in the party on conservatism. Von Freytagh-Loringhoven linked the article with a speech of Hans Bechly, the chairman of the DHV in June 1928 which advocated a new leadership elite of trade unions to express a 'people's conservatism'. To von Freytagh-Loringhoven, conservatism presupposed a social elite based on land ownership, industrial leadership or state or military service. Insofar as it contained a popular element, this lay in the natural deference of workers and labourers to their social superiors. Continuity between past and future generations rested on traditional patterns of social behaviour and wealth distribution. A people's conservatism based on a trade unionist elite was a contradiction in terms as trade unions had no stake in the existing social order.¹⁹

Lambach's principal antagonist was Alfred Hugenberg whose antipathy was deeply rooted in his political and social background. Hugenberg's closest ideological affiliations did not lie with the broad right as expressed by the German Nationalist party but with the *Alldeutscher Verband* (Pan-German League) which he had helped found in 1890 at the age of twenty-five.²⁰ The *Alldeutscher Verband* argued that Germany needed to become a super power, united by *völkisch* solidarity with sufficient living space (*Lebensraum*) to rival the United Kingdom and its Empire.²¹ This integral nationalism was alien to the Prussian state mentality of the Conservative party. Like the *Alldeutscher Verband*, Hugenberg did not see the state as an ethereal concept above society but as a means to

express German unity. These political differences reflected differences in social perspective. By defending the right of the talented to rise in society, Hugenberg revealed a more dynamic concept of society than that of the Conservative party — based as it was on a hereditary landed elite.²² For Hugenberg the talented became socially acceptable once their devotion to the cause of the German nation was clear. Society should be ordered ‘not on . . . the basis of a small number of privileged people, but on the concept that members of the German race, be they workers, farmers or bourgeois, representing past and future, form a unit which can step forward to act, exercise rights and fulfil duties’.²³

Hugenberg’s background lay in heavy industry and the media. His industrial strength was built on his record as chairman of the Krupp board from 1909 and on the reputation he won in distributing industrial finance for political ends.²⁴ Political considerations encouraged him to exploit the possibilities of the media. In 1916 he became chairman of the Scherl Publishing Board and controlled the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger*, *Der Tag* and, later, the boulevard newspaper, the *Berliner Illustrierte Nachtausgabe*.²⁵ He used the Ala advertising agency to place advertisements in papers of suitable political views and sought to undermine the official liberal Wolff’s bureau by building up the Telegraphen-Union as an independent news agency. In 1926 he secured a controlling interest in the Ufa film company, the leading film company in Germany.²⁶

These interests were controlled by the Economic Union for the Promotion of the Intellectual Forces for German Restoration, a group of twelve industrialists and Hugenberg associates established in 1927.²⁷ It was financed by funds gathered in 1913-14, largely from heavy industrial circles in the Rhine-Westphalia area. It was guided by the maxim ‘that (political) considerations should not be regarded as matters of secondary importance as is usual in industry’, but should influence commercial decisions. Although this led Hugenberg to support non-profitable sectors of the concern for political ends, he was also aware of the financial advantages political control could bring to his media interests. In the early 1920s he informed Karl Helfferich, then a leading DNVP Reichstag deputy that he could mobilize his press interests behind any government of the right.

I told him (Helfferich) that a comprehensive propaganda machine was present, should a national government be established . . . I would even try to maintain fin-

ancially weak sectors so that they could assume their ascribed role. I ask you to imagine: if in 1923-24 or in January 1933 things could have gone our way, then all the companies which we guided with difficulty through hard times, would have been flourishing enterprises. No one would then have thought that money had been badly invested.²⁸

Hugenberg lacked personal magnetism and his significance in the Nationalist party in the early years of the Weimar republic rested on his role as an intermediary for industrial finance and on his position in the media. Although it had long been clear that he entertained serious doubts about the value of government participation, his emergence as the leader of those rejecting government participation became clear when, in September 1927, rather than attend the Königsberg party conference, he sent Westarp an open letter urging the party to discuss issues of substance such as the need to create a state suited to the needs of the German people. He stressed that the party in the country, not the parliamentary delegation — which throughout the 1920s was far less suspicious of government participation than the grass-roots organization — was the guardian of the Nationalist conscience.²⁹ Hugenberg was repeating the emphasis on the significance of the party organization recently stressed by von Dommles, chairman of the Potsdam local organization of the DNVP and a close friend of Hugenberg's in a circular to regional organizations which urged the creation of an opposition movement within the DNVP to the party leadership.³⁰

Hugenberg's speeches during 1927 and 1928 analyzed the Weimar political structure, economic mismanagement and weakness in foreign policy as interrelated problems. He confronted the Westarp strategy with a coherent political and economic programme which he shared with the dissident group in the party. In Herford in October 1927 he redefined the criteria on which DNVP achievements in government should be judged. The increased role of the state in the economy and excessive taxation to finance social policies and reparations reflected the Marxist policies of successive governments. By destroying industrial profits they ensured economic depression.³¹ In Westphalia in January 1928 he warned of the transient nature of economic prosperity. This could only be avoided by

a real reversal of policy — not a few government seats without influence in a Reich government thwarted by Prussian and coalition intrigues but by a constitution which does not place power in the hands of constantly changing coalitions

of splinter parties but . . . gives leaders the confidence that they can carry out constructive policies for the people and their future.³²

Hugenberg's position was strengthened by the party's electoral defeat of May 1928 and by the Lambach case which enabled him to re-emphasize these general principles of political behaviour by demanding Lambach's exclusion from the DNVP.³³ The Lambach case and the party's electoral defeat brought to a head the mounting dissatisfaction within the DNVP with the existing party leadership. At a meeting of party representatives on 8 and 9 July where the Lambach case was discussed, Westarp met a challenge from fifteen regional organizations led by Hugenberg and von Dommes.³⁴ Their programme was their determination to preserve the DNVP as a party of firm ideology, immune from the compromises of the parliamentary system.³⁵

This opposition group used the decentralized structure of the DNVP to good effect during the summer. The influence of the regional organizations was exercised through the sovereign body of the party, the representatives (*Parteivertretung*) which had to meet at least once each year, which elected the party chairman and whose decisions were binding on the party executive (*Vorstand*) — which it also elected.³⁶ Through the astute manipulation of contacts within the DNVP organization, Hugenberg's friends in the party — who were often also members of the *Alldeutscher Verband* — laid the basis for Hugenberg's election as party chairman by a narrow majority when the *Parteivertretung* met on 20 October. The Reichstag fraction and interest groups were generally well disposed towards government participation and had tended to support Count Westarp. The future of the DNVP was outlined by Hugenberg in a speech delivered to the *Parteivertretung* on the day following his election. The party must become a united movement to exploit the economic crisis caused by reparations. The economic crisis would attract minor parties and the political middle to the right. The party would only assume government responsibility once it could command real power in the state.³⁷

To implement this strategy Hugenberg chose to reduce the significance of the parliamentary fraction where opposition towards his election as party leader had been greatest. In part this was done by using the party executive's authority to appoint the DNVP Reich list. Opponents could also be undermined through the regional organizations.³⁸

Hugenberg's position was strengthened by crucial organizational changes resolved at the meeting of the *Parteivertretung* on 8 December 1928. The *Parteileitung* was abolished and the party administration placed directly under Hugenberg. Elections to the executive by the *Vertretung* gave Hugenberg a secure majority on a body which was to play a fuller role in decision-making in the party.³⁹ The *Führerprinzip* (leadership principle) was also emphasized; it implied a national movement rather than a political party attuned to compromise and a closed party immune from those interparty contacts and economic interest ties which could divert it from an ideologically true position.⁴⁰

Another feature of the internal reform of the Nationalist party concerned the subordination of interest groups to the political leadership of the DNVP. Whereas under Westarp interest committees at regional level exercised functions irrespective of the wishes of their regional organizations, Hugenberg increased the control of regional organizations over interest committees in their areas. New guidelines adopted in 1929 subordinated local Catholic committees to regional organizations and Hugenberg refused to encourage regional organizations to establish Catholic committees in their area, even when Catholics at the Reich level argued that without such pressure the electoral appeal of the DNVP amongst Catholics would be severely restricted.⁴¹

Restrictions on party committees proved more controversial in the case of employees in the party. The DNVP Employees' Committee had been established on an autonomous basis by Nationalist employees in the early 1920s.⁴² An executive meeting of the DNVP in June 1929 reduced their functions to those of an advisory body and made the election of chairmen of regional employees' committees subject to confirmation by the chairman of the regional organization.⁴³

This step reinforced the suspicions of the Christian Social wing of the DNVP of Hugenberg's social and economic policies. Since his years at Krupp, Hugenberg advocated a so-called *Werksgemeinschaft* arrangement by which the worker's loyalty would be to the individual firm and not to a trade union.⁴⁴ He felt that the contributions to finance Weimar welfare policies increased unemployment by the high costs they imposed on the economy and prevented the thrifty worker from getting on.⁴⁵ Respect for social advancement distinguished the bourgeois from the Marxist. Hugenberg and his associates were acutely conscious of the changing economic and

social balance within Germany and hoped to reverse this trend. Paul Bang of the *Alldeutscher Verband*, a close colleague of Hugenberg, argued that 'the word ruling class has now changed its meaning. We are the ruled, the rulers are elsewhere... We must fight the powers which have destroyed our state... trade union capitalism.'⁴⁶

The major social policy dispute during the first year of Hugenberg's leadership concerned a book on social policy written by Gustav Hartz and published by Scherl. This book faithfully reproduced Hugenberg's ideas on social policy in Germany by arguing that contributions for unemployment and sickness benefits reduced real wages and by suggesting that compulsory savings by workers would encourage self-reliance and reduce social conflict.⁴⁷ The book was discussed in April 1929 at a meeting of German National workers and employees in the Reichstag; it was rejected by a large majority and many harsh words were uttered about the new party leader.⁴⁸

As well as reforming the party internally, Hugenberg hoped to establish a front of nationally committed groups against the corrupt Weimar state. By adopting a referendum as its means of expression, Hugenberg hoped to debase the significance of parliament as a representative institution and to diminish the status of the Reichstag fraction. He hoped to provoke disunity in the Centre and liberal parties of the middle which sustained the coalition government under the Social Democratic Chancellor Hermann Müller.⁴⁹ In bringing this front together, Hugenberg had in mind the broad front he had established during the first world war when using his industrial position to promote the annexationist ideas of the *Alldeutscher Verband* in industry and government.⁵⁰

Although the nationalist paramilitary organization, the *Stahlhelm*, had urged a referendum in 1928 to reform the Weimar Constitution, Hugenberg had in mind a referendum attacking the forthcoming reparations settlement. In his view, reparations payments forced Germany to export to maintain balance of payments equilibrium and prevented the development of a closed economy on an autarchic basis. Only a close relationship between industry and agriculture in an autarchic economy could prevent the exploitation of agriculture by exporting industries and a working class whose interests as consumers lay solely in cheap food. Reparations payments led to agrarian ruin.⁵¹ The possibility of a referendum by a national front against a forthcoming reparations settle-

ment was discussed in the directive committee of the *Alldeutscher Verband* in December 1928 and moves to establish a front on these lines continued throughout 1929.⁵² A working committee was set up in May 1929; it included Hugenberg, the *Stahlhelm* leaders Seldte and Duesterberg and Martin Schiele of the *Reichslandbund* and set in hand preparations for a referendum against the reparations agreement being negotiated in Paris.⁵³

As yet there were no firm contacts with the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). Cooperation between the DNVP and the Nazis was a direct result of Hugenberg's chairmanship of the DNVP. Until 1928 the Nationalists had regarded the Nazis as politically irrelevant. However, those who supported the *völkisch* nationalism of the *Alldeutscher Verband* found that their ideological differences with the NSDAP were exceedingly fine.⁵⁴ Principled opposition to the Nazi party was associated with social circles who shared the disdain of the old Conservative party for a movement as plebeian as the NSDAP. The fears of economic interests that cooperation with the Nazis would prevent the DNVP from government participation cut little ice with Hugenberg.

Hugenberg felt the social and intellectual eminence of the Nationalists would assure them the leadership of the German right and restrain the socialist leanings of the Nazis; once the Nazis had been persuaded to join the referendum in the early summer of 1929, Hugenberg regarded financial subsidies to either party as a gain for the common cause and persisted in this view at least until the autumn of 1930.⁵⁵

Following the acceptance in June 1929 of the Young plan by the German delegation in Paris and by the cabinet as a basis for further negotiations, the Reich Referendum Committee was formally established in Berlin. By the end of September a text had been agreed which rejected German war-guilt, demanded that the Reich Government work towards a complete evacuation of occupied territories and accept no obligations to foreign powers based on German war-guilt. The Reparations Agreement agreed in Paris was deemed to be such an obligation.⁵⁶

The heady hopes with which Hugenberg launched the national front were soon shattered. Firstly, it was clear that some *Stahlhelm* representatives resented the replacement of the *Stahlhelm* referendum by the Hugenberg initiative on foreign policy.⁵⁷ More serious was the bitter conflict which developed with the agrarian interest organization, the *Reichslandbund*, over Clause Four of the

Referendum text by which officials of the German Reich — including the Reich President — who signed treaties with foreign powers based on German war-guilt were subject to criminal proceedings.⁵⁸ The *Reichslandbund* feared this would alienate parties of the middle and Reich President Hindenburg and would make DNVP participation in government — so necessary if agrarian interests were to be protected — even more remote. Count Westarp, who had still retained his position as chairman of the Reichstag fraction, warned Hugenberg that as it would be difficult for the Reichstag fraction to defend Clause Four in the Reichstag, he should seek Nazi agreement to its removal. Hugenberg failed to secure the agreement of the Nazis to the abolition of the Clause but eventually — after considering the dissolution of the national front — arranged a compromise whereby penal provisions would not be retroactive and the Reich President would be excluded from its terms.⁵⁹

A further difficulty for Hugenberg arose from the growing evidence that cooperation with the Nazis in the national front harmed the DNVP electorally. The Baden Landtag elections of October 1929 revealed that the DNVP was being superseded by the NSDAP as the leading party of the right.⁶⁰ The Nazis, now worthy of mention in bourgeois society through their association with Hugenberg, received full coverage in the Hugenberg press at the same time as they openly attacked the Nationalist party.⁶¹

Finally Hugenberg faced increasing resentment from the DNVP Reichstag fraction. Many deputies shared the reservations of the *Reichslandbund* on Clause Four and towards the end of October a number of them led by von Lindeiner-Wildau approached Westarp to suggest that the forthcoming Kassel party conference rid the party of Hugenberg's leadership. Westarp dissuaded von Lindeiner from this, but could not prevent the mounting anxiety that under Hugenberg the party would never again participate in government. Indeed in his speech to the party executive in November, Hugenberg emphasized that, once the Young plan had been ratified, the German Nationalists would never participate in a government committed to fulfilling its terms.⁶²

The difficulties of the Young plan referendum, superimposed on the underlying resentment at the social and political policies of the new party chairman, led to the disintegration of the DNVP Reichstag fraction in the voting in the Reichstag on Clause Four of the Referendum Law at the beginning of December. Agrarian

representatives (Fromm, Möncke, Schiele, Schlange), industrialists (Rademacher, Klönne), Christian Social representatives (Hartwig, Hülser, Lambach) and Young Conservatives supporting a more positive approach to government participation (Hoetzsch, von Keudell, Lejeune-Jung, von Lindeiner, Treviramus) all abstained.⁶³ The right of abstention had been conceded by Hugenberg but a declaration explaining motives expressly excluded. Three Christian Social representatives — Hartwig, Hülser and Lambach — issued such a statement in full knowledge of the likely consequences and exclusion proceedings were brought against them by Hugenberg in the executive.⁶⁴ These deputies used Clause Four to break with a party from whose social and political policies they had become increasingly alienated. The full committee of the German National Workers' League immediately issued a resolution supporting the three deputies and severing its ties with the DNVP.⁶⁵

The decision of several Young Conservatives to leave the party was prompted by Hugenberg's attempt to expel Treviranus from the party for having written to a Bremen acquaintance suggesting that if there were no change in the party leadership, it might be necessary to set up a new party.⁶⁶ Treviranus was in close contact with Kurt von Schleicher in the Ministry of Defence who in December 1929 offered him RM 300,000 to create a new party organization. Through Schleicher, Treviranus secured an audience with the Crown Prince and with Reich President von Hindenburg.⁶⁷ Schleicher, in close touch with the President, hoped to create the basis for a government under Heinrich Brüning of the Centre party which would derive support from the anti-Hugenberg elements of the DNVP.

The process of disintegration in the DNVP Reichstag fraction was not completed in December 1929 but continued into 1930 as the Weimar government system itself changed. Early in 1930 it was becoming increasingly clear to Hindenburg's advisers that the government would be split by the clash between the Social Democrats and the liberal German People's Party over proposals to finance the budget deficit and unemployment insurance provisions. Hindenburg hoped to use this to replace the SPD-led coalition under chancellor Müller by a cabinet drawing support from the Centre party and circles to its right. This cabinet would be vested with presidential powers to enable it to make full use of the emergency provisions of the Weimar Constitution, should it meet with opposition from the Reichstag.

During the spring and early summer of 1930 the DNVP Reichstag fraction split repeatedly over whether it should support the new government under Heinrich Brüning of the Centre party. Count Westarp argued that the DNVP had to assist a government which improved the agrarian position and which enjoyed the support of the Reich President. Hugenberg saw the government as part of the defunct Weimar system, dedicated to fulfilling the Young plan reparations settlement. When in July 1930 the SPD tabled a motion of no confidence in the cabinet over its use of emergency presidential powers to implement tax and agrarian proposals against the wishes of the Reichstag, Hugenberg, after failing to secure a change in government in the leading German state Prussia or a postponement of the vote through negotiations with Chancellor Brüning, demanded that the DNVP vote against the government. In the division which followed, 25 DNVP deputies representing agrarian, industrial and Young Conservative groups supported Brüning. The government however still failed to secure the support of the Reichstag which was dissolved and elections declared. Count Westarp began negotiations with the Young Conservative secessionists of December and on 23 July the Conservative People's Party was established.⁶⁸ Agrarian groups were dismayed that the DNVP had renounced agrarian interests in favour of chimerical political aims; the *Reichslandbund* did not support the DNVP as in previous elections but supported separate agrarian lists.⁶⁹ Industry registered its dissatisfaction with Hugenberg by forwarding much finance to the Conservative People's Party.⁷⁰

The Nazi party continued to gain at the expense of the DNVP in Landtag elections and, after the Reichstag elections of September 1930, became the most powerful movement on the right with 107 deputies. The DNVP won only seven percent of the Reich vote (compared with fourteen percent in May 1928) and their delegation fell to 41 members.⁷¹

Publicly the Nationalists declared that the election had vindicated Hugenberg's political course by weakening the parties of the middle and by strengthening the national front. Some Nationalists even prided themselves on having brought the Nazis into prominence. On reflection, the DNVP conceded however that their slogan — 'Make my right wing strong' — had sometimes been interpreted by German Nationalists as an appeal to vote Nazi to strengthen Hugenberg's hand against the opposition within the

DNVP Reichstag fraction.⁷²

Although the political crises of 1923 and 1929-33 revealed the basic instability of the Weimar republic, it was the Nazis and not the German Nationalists who proved better able to exploit these weaknesses. This seems all the more remarkable in that the fiasco of the Hitler putsch in Munich in November 1923 seemed to have discredited the Nazis while the DNVP soon became — after December 1924's Reichstag elections — the second strongest party in the German Reichstag. Their position was assisted by the election of Field Marshal von Hindenburg as Reich President in the spring of 1925 and by their strong representation in the higher civil service, the judiciary and the academic world. Their failure is the failure of strategies pursued by successive party leaders.

Westarp and Hugenberg differed fundamentally over the meaning of conservatism. Count Westarp interpreted conservatism as the Prussian governmental tradition applied with due regard to economic interests. It developed organically from the existing political economic and social fabric. In Hugenberg's view, Marxist ideas on social policy, trade union rights and egalitarianism had already destroyed Germany's international position in the first world war and were in the process of destroying the domestic economy which had to be reconstituted on the basis of agrarian protectionism and the operation of free market forces in industry. If conservatism meant a gradual development from the experience of the past or strove to be Tory Democratic by accepting trade unionism and coalition government, Hugenberg was not a conservative. His conservatism was defined by the DNVP deputy Schmidt-Hannover as 'a synthesis between the national revolutionary ethos and governmental authority to stop the continuing marxist revolution'.⁷³ To reverse this Marxist revolution required the restoration of the rights of the employer within the firm and the establishment of a vertical loyalty between management and workers in place of trade union loyalty between groups of workers; a reform of social policy to encourage workers to finance their future unemployment and sickness benefits through compulsory saving; an economic policy which would ensure that food prices were sufficiently high for farming in the east of Germany to be profitable; a foreign policy which ended reparations by using a reparations crisis to show by Germany's own economic demise that a tribute policy could not be consistently pursued; and the introduction of a political structure sufficiently authoritarian to enforce

these measures if necessary against the numerical majority of the German nation. These were not policies for the fainthearted, nor policies that allowed of delicate negotiation with parties to the left of the DNVP. Westarp's DNVP was transformed by Hugenberg into a party bearing many of the hallmarks of fascism — the Führer principle, the emphasis on the seizure of power and espousal of acclamatory democracy.

It is important to realize what Hugenberg understood by his oft-quoted demand for a change of the political system. He was aware that to advance *allddeutsch* ideas in public was impossible and that plans had to be laid with care.⁷⁴ A memorandum prepared during the Brüning cabinet indicates the extent of the administrative changes Hugenberg — assisted by his friend Heinrich Class of the *Alld deutscher Verband* — had prepared. These included a thorough sifting of civil service personnel in Berlin and the German states and the eviction of all suspect officials. Unreliable elements of the police force would be evicted and state arbitration techniques established with powers of legal enforcement in labour disputes. Resistance to the government would be high treason. Cells would be formed within factories and skilled agitators advance the government case. Propaganda after the power seizure would be through the official information unit, the *Reichszentrale für Heimatdienst*. In the case of protest strikes, the armed forces and a citizens' militia would secure food supplies.⁷⁵

To Hugenberg the Social Democratic Party could only be understood as a response to an effete and politically immature bourgeoisie and as part of the wider crisis facing the west which the influential German philosopher Oswald Spengler had identified. Hugenberg agreed with Spengler in defining western civilization as the triumph of will over matter and as the control of destiny through personal responsibility for one's fate. The threats to Spengler's concept of Faustian man as the incarnation of western civilization also prevented a man of talent from rising in society and threatened a healthy German nationalism. Germany could only be restored by returning to former values of individual responsibility which had characterized Hugenberg's own career.⁷⁶

Hugenberg's major achievement by 1930 had been to assist the growth of the Nazis to become the major political force on the right. The squat bespectacled Hugenberg did not have Hitler's personal magnetism and failed to exploit the economic and political crisis of 1929-33 which he had foretold. The traditional image of

the German right-wing establishment — the image of vested wealth and monarchist attachment — was alien to the experience of the majority of Germans (especially as unemployment rose) and lacked the dynamism of the Nazi appeal. The Hugenberg strategy — like the Westarp strategy — was a broken reed.

NOTES

1. *Deutschnationale Volkspartei, Ziele der Deutschnationalen Volkspartei* (Berlin nd), 3. The German Conservative party, based on Lutheran East and West Prussia, Brandenburg, Pommern and Mecklenburg, had been the party of the Prussian landed aristocracy; the Free Conservative party, formed by secessionists from the Conservatives after the 1866 Austro-Prussian war, portrayed itself in its programme of 1907 as a 'constitutional centre party'; some National Liberals had already collaborated with Conservatives during the War in the German Fatherland party (*Vaterlandspartei*); the organizational strength of the Christian Social movement lay in the Christian trade unions and the German National Clerks' and Employees' Organization (*Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfenverband*, DHV) which had representatives in several parties; the *völkisch* movement had been based on antisemitic parties such as the German Social party and the German Reform party.

2. Quoted in E. Jonas, *Die Volkskonservativen 1928-33* (Düsseldorf 1965), 24.

3. L. Hertzmann, *DNVP: Right-Wing Opposition in the Weimar Republic 1918-24* (Lincoln 1963), 131; W. Liebe, *Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei, 1918-24* (Düsseldorf 1966), 78; *Schulthess' Europäischer Geschichtskalender* (Munich 1927), vol. 65, 108.

4. Count Westarp was born in 1864, followed a career in the Prussian civil service and from 1912 had been chairman of the Reichstag fraction of the German Conservative party.

5. This law followed the assassination of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau and was due to expire on its fifth anniversary in July 1927.

6. *Schulthess' Europäischer Geschichtskalender* (Munich 1928), vol. 68, 96-97.

7. L. Preller, *Sozialpolitik in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart 1949), 350-51.

8. U. Hüllbüsch, 'Die deutschen Gewerkschaften in der Weltwirtschaftskrise' in W. Conze and H. Raupach, eds., *Die Staats- und Wirtschaftskrise des Deutschen Reiches 1929/33* (Stuttgart 1967), 131. The industrialist Fritz Thyssen was loath to provide funds for a party which agreed such measures. In his view the increase of social burdens on industry since 1917 amounted to RM 10 milliard; the burden of reparations imposed by the Dawes plan to RM 2.5 milliard. Fritz Thyssen to A. Scheibe, 28 November 1927, Nachlass Westarp.

9. R. Lorenz, *The Essential Features of Germany's Agricultural Policy from 1870 to 1937* (New York 1941), 66-68, 77. In February 1928 the Reichslandbund suggested in a memorandum that as a protest taxes be withheld from the Government. See *Akten betr Kabinettsprotokolle R431/1429*, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BA).

10. Three kinds of primary schools (*Volksschulen*) existed in the Weimar republic: the common school (*Gemeinschaftsschule* or *Simultanschule*) composed of pupils irrespective of denomination; the denominational school (*Bekenntnisschule*) where particular faiths, Protestant or Catholic, were preached exclusively; and the secular school (*weltliche Schule*) which did not conduct religious education. Under the Weimar Constitution, the common school did not require a parental petition to be established; the other schools did. See M. von Tiling, *Wir Frauen und die christliche Schule* (Berlin 1928), 2-5.

11. The draft was submitted to the Reichstag as Motion no. 3654. A copy is in Nachlass Marx 1070/70 Stadtarchiv Köln (StK).

12. *Osnabrücker Volkszeitung*, 28 January 1928, Nachlass Marx 1070/170 StK.

13. Speech of Count Westarp, 28 March 1928 in DNVP-Akten 7533/4, Forschungsstelle für Nationalsozialismus, Hamburg (FNH).

14. *Schulthess' Europäischer Geschichtskalender* (Munich 1929), vol. 69, 106-07.

15. Unpublished Memorandum of Deutschnationaler Arbeiterbund, 12 June 1928, Nachlass Westarp (NW).

16. Axel von Freytagh-Loringhoven, 'Staatspolitik' in M. Weiss ed., *Der Nationale Wille* (Berlin 1928), 142. Freytagh-Loringhoven, born in 1878, a former academic was a DNVP Reichstag deputy and a leading figure in the party's *völkisch* committee.

17. *Bekanntnis zur christlich-nationalen Selbsthilfe* (Berlin 1928). Treviranus, born in Lippe in 1891, entered the DNVP Reichstag fraction in 1924 and from 1925 was the political commissar of the party.

18. M. Dörr, *Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei 1925 bis 1928* (Marburg 1964), 554-56.

19. Axel von Freytagh-Loringhoven, 'Zusammenhänge', in *Deutsche Zeitung*, 21 August 1928. Akten der DNVP 7533/4 FNH.

20. A. Kruck, *Geschichte des Alldeutschen Verbandes, 1890-1939* (Wiesbaden 1954), 8-9.

21. *Ibid.*, 38-39.

22. See A. Hugenberg, *Innere Colonisation in Nordwesten Deutschlands* (Strasburg 1891), 400, 406, 408-09, 416-17.

23. A. Hugenberg, 'Der deutsche Wald' in *Streiflichter aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Berlin 1927), 50.

24. L. Bernhard, *Der Hugenberg Konzern* (Berlin 1928), 53-55.

25. V. Dietrich, *Alfred Hugenberg. Ein Manager in der Publizistik* (Berlin 1960), 55.

26. K. Koszyk, *Deutsche Presse, 1914-1945* (Berlin 1972), 221, 233; Bernhard, *op. cit.*, 62-63, 80-82; Peter de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin* (Berlin 1959), 282-83.

27. L. Wegener, 'Zu den Akten Wirtschaftsvereinigung zur Förderung der geistigen Wiederaufbaukräfte Deutschlands' in *Nachlass Wegener* fol. 37 BA.

28. Hugenberg speech at a meeting of the Wirtschaftsvereinigung, 3 August 1934, Nachlass Schmidt-Hannover BA.

29. Alfred Hugenberg to Count Westarp, 17 September 1927, Nachlass Wegener, BA.

30. Anlage to DNVP Rundschreiben (Circular) no. 88, 1 September 1927, DNVP Akten, Erw C 1 folder 17 III Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Osnabrück.

31. Hugenberg speech in Herford, 30 October 1927, Nachlass Hugenberg, Gut Rohbraken (NHGR).

32. Hugenberg speech in Bielefeld, 2 May 1928, NHGR.

33. Dr Alfred Hugenberg, *Block oder Brei*, Berliner Lokalanzeiger 26/28, August 1928.

34. Graf Westarp to chairmen of DNVP regional organizations, 12 July 1928, NW.

35. DNVP Kreisverein Potsdam, Bericht über die heutige Besprechung in Berlin. Anlage 3, 5 September 1928, DNVP-Akten 51/4 Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Aurich (NStA).

36. The Vertretung comprised the chairmen of all Landtag fractions, DNVP representatives in the Reichsrat and Prussian Staatsrat, the party's ministers, the party executive and a representative from each Landesverband (regional organization) for every 40,000 votes it had won at the preceding Reichstag election. M. Weiss, 'Organisation' in Weiss, op. cit., 368. On the powers of the Vertretung, see Dörr, op. cit., 563-71.

37. 'Tagung der Parteivertretung am 20 und 21 Oktober in Berlin' in *Unsere Partei*, 6:24 (1 November 1928), 338-41, ZSg 1 44/6 no. 1 BA.

38. See Deutschnationale Besorgnisse vor Hugenberg, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, no. 828, 4 November 1928, Nachlass Wegener folder 11 BA; G. R. Treviranus, Rückblick, 1, NW; Heinrich Class to Leo Wegener, 24 May 1929, Nachlass Wegener folder 23 BA.

39. Beschluss der deutschnationalen Parteivertretung, *TU Parlamentsdienst*, 8 December 1928, NHGR.

40. *Unsere Partei*, 7:2 (15 January 1929), 31, ZSg 1 44/7, no. 2 BA.

41. Westarp to Bödicker, 4 February 1928, NW; Minutes of Reichskatholikenausschuss, 10 March 1929, Nachlass Wegener folder 32 BA.

42. Von Jecklin to Alfred Diller, 24 September 1920, Nachlass Diller 11/6 FNH.

43. Walther Lambach to members of Reich Employees' Committee, 25 June 1929, Nachlass Diller 11/7 FNH.

44. A. Hugenberg, 'Das Rathaus' in *Streiflichter aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Berlin 1927), 6-7.

45. A. Hugenberg, *Die neue Stadt* (Berlin 1935), 9.

46. Paul Bang at meeting of Geschäftsführender Ausschuss of the Alldeutscher Verband, 19 January 1929. Alldeutscher Verband Akten 412/2 FNH.

47. Gustav Hartz, *Irrwege der deutschen Sozialpolitik und der Weg zur sozialen Freiheit* (Berlin 1928), passim.

48. *Angestelltenstimme und Arbeiterstimme*, 9:5, May 1929, Nachlass Diller 11/7 FNH.

49. Otto Schmidt-Hannover, *Vortragsentwurf zur Reichsgründungsfeier*, 1 January 1933 (Berlin 1933), Nachlass Schmidt-Hannover, BA.

50. Kruck, op. cit., 72-74, 76.

51. Hugenberg's speech in Stettin at the DNVP 1931 Conference, in WTB 82:1971, 19 September 1931. Akten der Reichskanzlei betr. DNVP R 43 1/2655 BA.

52. See the minutes of Geschäftsführender Ausschuss, 1/2 December 1928, Alldeutscher Verband-Akten 412/2 FNH.

53. E. Friedenthal, *Volksbegehren und Volksentscheid über den Youngplan und die deutschnationale Sezession* (Diss., Tübingen 1957), 43.

54. Der peinliche Bundesgenosse, *Germania*, 22 November 1929. Nachlass Marx 1070/1052 StK.

55. In October 1930 Hugenberg wrote to the industrialist Fritz Springorum that industry, rather than finance the Conservative People's Party, should forward funds to the parties which had participated in the referendum front. See Hugenberg to Springorum, 6 October 1930, NHGR. In November 1930 Hugenberg's close friend Leo Wegener argued that the more money the DNVP leadership had at its disposal, the more influence it could exert on the NSDAP. Leo Wegener to Frenzel, 8 November 1930, Nachlass Wegener, folder 22, BA.

56. The Young plan fixed a final reparations sum; payments were to continue until 1988; on average they would be higher than in previous years, yet in the immediate future Germany would be paying less than under the existing Dawes plan. See *Der neue Reparationsplan* (Berlin 1929), Nachlass Marx 1070/315 StK.

57. Hans Brosius to Hugenberg, 13 August 1929, NHGR.

58. Reichslandbund. Stellungnahme gegen SS 4 des Gesetzesvorschlages gegen die Versklavung des deutschen Volkes, 17 September 1929, NW.

59. Count Westarp to Hugenberg, 17 September 1929, NW; A. Hugenberg, Entwurf. Zerfall der nationalen Front, September 1929, NHGR; DNVP Geschäftsführendes Vorstandsmitglied Rundschreiben, no. 40, 24 September 1929, Nachlass Diller 11/10, FNH.

60. In Baden, the DNVP lost four of their former seven seats; the Nazis rose from nil to six. See *Schulthess' Europäischer Geschichtskalender* (Munich 1930), vol. 71, 194-95.

61. K. D. Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie* (Stuttgart 1955), 126.

62. Niederschrift des Grafen Westarp über Entstehung und Verlauf der Parteikrise, Ende November/Anfang Dezember 1929, NW.

63. Also absent from the vote were the following, who claimed to be ill: the industrialists Hasslacher and Reichert, agrarian representatives Vogt and Bachmann, civil servants' representative Schmidt-Stettin, the Catholic Max Wallraf, and Albrecht Philipp of Saxony. See *Deutsche Tageszeitung* no. 570, 2 December 1929.

64. DNVP Geschäftsführendes Vorstandsmitglied. Mitteilung no. 50, 4 December 1929. Nachlass Diller 11/10 FNH.

65. *Der Jungdeutsche*, 10 December 1929, Nachlass Schmidt-Hannover BA.

66. G. R. Treviranus, *Rückblick*, NW. Along with Treviranus, Young Conservatives Hoetzsch, von Keudell, Klönne — an industrialist —, von Lindeiner, Lejeune-Jung, and Schlange-Schöningen — a landowner — left the party.

67. G. R. Treviranus, *Das Ende von Weimar. Heinrich Brüning und seine Zeit* (Düsseldrof 1968), 368-72.

68. Jonas, op. cit., 79-80.

69. 'Der Landbund stellt eigene Listen auf', 23 July 1930. Akten betr. Wirtschaftsverbände. 441 FNH.

70. A. Heinrichsbauer, *Schwerindustrie und Politik* (Essen 1948), 19, 30.

71. A. Milatz, *Wähler und Wahlen in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn 1965), 104.

72. *Unsere Partei*, 8:18, 18 September 1930, ZSg 1 44/8 no. 3 BA; R. G. Quaat, 'Der Weg des Nationalismus', Mitteilung no 1 der DNVP, 1 January 1930, Nachlass Diller 11/10 FNH; DNVP Mitteilung no. 2, 22 January 1931, DNVP-Akten 51/4, Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Aurich (NStA).

73. Bericht, Kassel 25 November 1929. Akten betr. politische Parteien, Vereine, Verbände, 165/3846 Bd. 2, Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg (HStM).

74. Alfred Hugenberg, 'Notizen über Parteiorganisation', December 1928, NHGR.

75. Memorandum in Hugenberg's writing; NHGR; also 'Betr. Personalien. Vorbereitungen bei einer evtl. Regierungsbildung. Aufgabenverteilung', nd., NHGR.

76. Hugenberg, 'Das Rathaus' in *Streiflichter aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Berlin 1927), 1.

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