

National Socialism in Germany is often viewed as a unique phenomenon as a result of the global extent to which the NAZI regime exercised expansion and extermination. However, the groundwork for this seemingly specific example of fascism contains the same defining characteristics as other examples of fascism throughout Europe. A strong nationalistic foundation in Germany provided Germans a strong sense of unity as well as the incentive to preserve their nation against foreign and internal enemies. The role of nationalism as an atypical component to National German Socialism allowed Adolf Hitler to gain authoritarian power from German citizens both legally and willingly. Fears of enemies created in the nationalist rhetoric of German ascendancy, led many Germans to surrender their political power in order to uphold the stability of the nation.

It would not have been feasible for the NAZI Party to implement the extreme measures taken over the course of the 1930s and 1940s without adulating the long established conviction of German superiority. The ability to achieve the goals of Lebensraum or the extermination of the Jews rested solely on the capability of the NAZI party to convince everyday Germans that the nation which united them was unique, superior, and just in their actions. The underlying belief that Germans were different even in their criterion in determining members of the nation is seen in Edgar Jung's prose. "The nation in the Western sense is a mass of people formed into a State, and not the organism of a people bound by destiny and blood: the individual is seen as not being born

into such an organism but into the state.¹ Jung's comments demonstrate the sense that Germany's view of national identity is based on higher standards. While Western nationality is defined as simply an assemblage of individuals living in the same area, a German's identity is not determined on the exterior place of birth. It is viewed as one's destiny to be a member of the German nation; it is the interior, the blood, which is the real definition of German.

The Nazi Party consistently capitalized on the passionate national sentiment of German supremacy. Theodor Fritsch describes what was at stake if those undermining the wellbeing of the nation were left to their whims. "It had come in accordance with unmistakable psychological laws- just as surely as a house must collapse if no one stops those who are undermining its foundations."² This quote clearly states that the preservation of the nation is a priority of the Germans and anyone who is not a member of the nation will certainly have reason to disturb the foundation.

By reaffirming the distinction between Germans and Non-Germans in a biological sense, the Nazi's were able to demonstrate on an ever increasing radical plain that these differences were not only real, but needed to be eliminated. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen in *Hitler's Willing Executioners* shows that one of the basic roles of the Concentration Camps was the creation of an environment which blatantly reaffirmed superiority of Germans over Jews. "The third central feature of the camp system was its transformation of the victims to conform to the Nazi image of them"³ Such horrific conditions made it impossible for Germans to consider themselves even within the same species as the

¹ Jung, Edgar. "The Organic German Nation." *Fascism*. Ed. Griffin, Roger. Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1995. 107

² Fritsch, Theodor. "The Need for the Nation to be Healed." *Fascism*. Ed. Griffin, Roger. Great Britain: Oxford University Press, 1995. 102

³ Goldhagen, Daniel. *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. New York: Vintage Books 1996. pg 175

emaciated, shaven, and downtrodden, concentration camp victim. Goldhagen also states that the severity of the actions performed at the Concentration Camps were justifiable by the underlying national belief in racial superiority. “In this new world-governed by the Nazi German morality of pitilessness in the application of violence to “subhumans” – Nazi German man and Nazi German woman could treat non- Germans as they saw fit.”⁴ Thus the concentration camp also served the role as an outlet in which Germans could exercise the authority which accompanied racial dominance.

If the foundation of German fascism was nationalism, then the establishment of enemies during the Weimar Republic was the fuel that allowed National German Socialism to gain precedence and continue running. With the end of World War I German soldiers and conservatives began to search for those who were to blame for the embarrassing defeat. The creation of the “stab-in-the-back theory” emerged as the belief that the German public, most notably Jews and Communists, had failed in their patriotic efforts to support the war.⁵ Conservative Germans legitimate belief that Germany had been winning the war when they were forced to surrender is evident in Dietrich Orlow’s *History of Modern Germany*. “Forgetting that the OHL had acknowledged military defeat and forced Germany to peace negotiations, the Conservatives and their allies suddenly recalled that Germany’s armies had been “victorious” until they were “stabbed in the back” by the Revolution of 1918.”⁶ Not only did the Conservatives assert that these groups were to blame for the loss of the war, they were also beneficiaries of the new Weimar Republic as well as the Treaty of Versailles.

⁴ Goldhagen, Daniel. *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. New York: Vintage Books 1996. pg 175

⁵ Markovits, Andrei. European Right Movement. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI. 4 October 2007.

⁶ Orlow, Dietrich. *A History of Modern Germany 1871 to Present*. Coursepack: pg 402.

The genuine shock expressed by the German nation at the terms of the Versailles Treaty allowed the Conservatives to push their message that the Jews were not simply enemies of the German nation but were ultimately November Criminals. Cassels discusses how perpetuating the belief that the Jews were enemies of the nation was simplified by the abundant Jewish leadership which existed in the Social Democratic Party. "In this conspiratorial perspective special opprobrium was visited on the left-wing Jewish intelligentsia. Much of the Social Democratic leadership in November 1918 was indeed Jewish, and this fact played its part in the application of the epithet "November Criminals."⁷ The Social Democrats were alone in carrying the burden of signing a treaty associated with the belittlement of Germany.

Throughout the Weimar Republic the fear of Communists not only led to the creation of a new enemy against the state, but paved the way for the abdication of freedom to authority. The desire for stability appears to prevail over democracy in the National Assembly as a direct response to the threat of Communists.

But the National Assembly went beyond this and wrote Article 48 into the constitution. This gave the president the right to declare an emergency and govern the Reich or a *Land* for a limited time without parliamentary approval. The delegates to the national assembly had the "Spartacus Week" upheavals of 1918-1919 in mind when they included article 48 in the constitution...⁸

The legislation which results out of the fear of a communist enemy becomes the primary means by which Adolf Hitler assumes power in 1933. Following the aftermath of the Reichstag Fire, Hitler was able to effectively use the Communists once again as a

⁷ Cassels, Alan. Fascism. Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1975. pg 94

⁸ Orlow, Dietrich. A History of Modern Germany 1871 to Present. Coursepack: pg 400.

harbinger of chaos.⁹ Through the use of Article 48, he legally obtained the most severe public abdication of freedom by establishing a dictatorship. While the legislation allowed Hitler to assume such a level of power without public consent, the role of Communist fears had a significant impact in the lack of public outcry against the decision.

The extent to which the Social Democrats of the Weimar Republic favored stability over democracy is most evident in their dealings with paramilitary organizations following the war. The slippery slope of abdication to authority seems to begin with the Ebert-Groener pact which allowed the military freedom to deal with the Communists as they pleased, to a hands-off approach to organizations such as the Freikorps.

The rampant patriotism of the Freikorps was appealing to Conservative Germans, but their adamant opposition to Bolshevism was enticing to the Social Democrats as well. Cassels comments on how even the Allies of World War I were unable to see a reason to abolish such an organization due to its anti communist ways. “The freikorps was super patriotic and violently anti-Bolshevik, and for the latter characteristic they were tolerated by both the Allies and the German government.”¹⁰ This approach to the friekorps truly demonstrates the genuine fear of Bolshevism during this period, especially if this fear was powerful enough to convince victims of past German aggression to allow such a potential threat to persist.

The combination of a need for stability along with anxiety of enemies perpetuated into 1930s Germany allowed Hitler’s violent actions to persist without mass hostility. The ability of Hitler to execute the Night of Long Knives in 1934 without a massive

⁹ Markovits, Andrei. European Right Movement. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI. 11 September 2007.

¹⁰ Cassels, Alan. Fascism. Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1975. pg 98

outcry becomes understandable in the context of the political environment of 1920s Germany.¹¹ For fourteen years Germans lived with a government that allowed essentially free reign for military organizations to deal with the Communist enemy. While the execution of an unknown number of paramilitaries at the hands of another organization was newsworthy, the existence of the Sturmabteilung and the Schutzstaffel was nothing out of the ordinary. The ability of members of National Socialism to commit atrocities and gain dictatorial power arises within an environment in which it is understood that stability can justify the means.

The phenomenon of the National Socialist German Worker's Party comes to fruition through a culmination of specific events throughout German history, but ultimately its foundation is composed of the same features as other fascist movements. A robust sense of nationalism, the existence of enemies which threaten the stability of the nation, and a desire to abdicate freedom for the protection of the nation are simple criteria for an all encompassing description of fascism. However, this framework is capable of explicitly recounting the story of the National Socialist German Worker's movement in the twentieth century.

¹¹ ¹¹ Markovits, Andrei. European Right Movement. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI. 4 October 2007.