

# Introduction

## THE NAZI SEIZURE OF POWER IN HISTORICAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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How did it happen that Adolf Hitler was able to gain access to the levers of power on 30 January 1933 and transform the German state into a one-man, one-party dictatorship that would wreak havoc with Germans, Jews, and the international order for the next ten years? No question has consumed the historians of modern German history more than this. Was Hitler's appointment as chancellor an accident—what some have called a *Betriebsunfall*—or the inevitable and necessary outcome of long-term historical processes over which specific historical actors had no effective control? Was there any way in which individuals like Reich president Paul von Hindenburg, Franz von Papen, and Kurt von Schleicher could have averted this outcome? Or were they morally culpable for having made possible what the renowned German historian Friedrich Meinecke called "The German Catastrophe"? In other words, were these developments driven by historical imperatives that precluded intervention by individual historical agents, or were these individuals either directly or indirectly responsible for the tragic events of 30 January 1933? If so, who were these individuals, what did they hope to accomplish, what did they do, and to what extent did they succeed or fail? Equally important, what did they do after the fateful events of 30 January 1933? Did they resist, or did they adapt and accommodate? If they resisted, why did they accomplish so little? If they accommodated, what effect, if any, did this have on the regime with which they had made their private peace? Or did they fall victims to the illusion that they could avert the worst and make the best of what was a horrible situation to begin with? Was there a conservative containment strategy? If so, was it in any way whatsoever coordinated, or was it simply a series of haphazard measures that stood little chance of success? Why, in the final analysis, did Germany's conservative elites prove so inept in responding to the threat that National Socialism presented to their vital interests and status in German society? Or were they more interested in

accommodating to the demands of the regime than in containing the dynamism of the Nazi movement?

These are only a few of the myriad questions that confront the historian who tries to make sense of the events of 30 January 1933. No single volume—and certainly not one as modest in its design as this—can adequately address, let alone answer, all of these questions. This book rests upon the premise that Hitler's appointment as chancellor on 30 January 1933 and the Nazi seizure of power that followed were neither inevitable nor unavoidable. To be sure, historians have learned that if these events are to be properly understood, they must be placed in a broader historical perspective. Perhaps, as some historians have done, it is necessary to go back as far as the political transformations of the late nineteenth century, or to the founding of the Second Empire, or even to the romantic and nationalist revolt against the eighteenth-century Enlightenment with its cosmopolitanism, its belief in the primacy of human reason, and its affirmation of universally valid propositions like the concept of natural law and the doctrine of human rights. This position has certainly had its more recent exemplars as, for example, in George Mosse's assertion in his classic work on *The Crisis of German Ideology* that Hitler—or something like Hitlerism—would most likely have come to power in Germany even if the world economic crisis had never taken place. In other words, the cultural imperatives with all of their *völkisch* and antiliberal concomitants were so powerful in Germany that the collapse of Weimar democracy and the triumph of Nazism or something like it were inevitable.<sup>1</sup> A similar argument, though not from the perspective of cultural and intellectual history but from that of political history, came from Fritz Fischer and the school of young historians that rallied behind his banner. Extrapolating from theses that he had first developed in his monumental book *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, Fischer argued that there was a direct line of continuity from the constellation of elites that existed in Germany on the eve of World War I to the "alliance of elites" that resurfaced in the last years of the Weimar Republic and that turned to Hitler and his movement for their support in a crusade against the remnants of Weimar democracy.<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, Hans-Ulrich Wehler and the so-called Bielefeld School that had crystallized around him and Jürgen Kocka in the 1970s and 1980s traced the rise and eventual triumph of National Socialism to certain deformities in Germany's social and economic development, the persistence of Germany's preindustrial elites, and the political weakness of Germany's liberal bourgeoisie first in the Second Empire and then, even more tragically, in the Weimar Republic.<sup>3</sup> Whatever their differences—and they were indeed profound—Mosse, Fischer, and Wehler

all shared one thing in common: namely, the conviction that Germany's experiment in democracy was doomed to failure by the sheer weight of tradition and that it stood little, if any, chance of survival.

To be sure, the teleological determinism of these arguments was not without its critics.<sup>4</sup> As early as 1935, the British historian Robert Thomson Clark had argued that Hitler's appointment as chancellor was the culmination of a concatenation of events such that had one event turned out differently, then Hitler would never have come to power.<sup>5</sup> Karl Dietrich Bracher's explanation for the failure of Weimar democracy in his classic study *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* employed a structural mode of analysis that focused on the systemic breakdown that occurred in the latter years of the Weimar Republic as a result of its inability to mediate the increasingly bitter conflict between the different sectors of the German economy. Bracher goes on to argue, however, that the state of political paralysis that existed in Germany since at least the fall of 1929 created a situation in which the agency of individual historical actors was suddenly invested with much greater causal efficacy than might otherwise have been the case. In the final analysis, it was how these actors behaved that would determine whether or not the Weimar Republic would survive the crisis that had descended upon it with such fury at the very end of the 1920s. Bracher thus rescues the principle of individual agency and moral responsibility from the more deterministic models of historical analysis associated with Fischer and Wehler. In Bracher's opinion, responsibility for Hitler's appointment as chancellor rests squarely on the shoulders of the camarilla around Reich president Paul von Hindenburg, a group that included the likes of Franz von Papen and Kurt von Schleicher.<sup>6</sup>

The principle of individual moral responsibility also plays an important role in the writings of Hans Mommsen, Heinrich August Winkler, and Henry Turner Jr. Although Mommsen and Bracher shared much in common and were outspoken critics of the more restorationist tendencies that made themselves felt in the German historical profession after 1945, Mommsen was extremely critical of the central role that Bracher assigned to Hitler both in the series of events that culminated in the Nazi assumption of power in 1933 and in the subsequent policies of the Third Reich. Mommsen's critique of Bracher was informed not just by his rejection of the totalitarian theory of the Nazi state but also by his concern that Bracher's Hitler-centrism had the practical effect of exculpating the German people of any responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich. For Mommsen, the pattern of complicity in these crimes was much broader than intentionalists like Bracher were prepared to admit. Mommsen was particularly critical of the role that Germany's

<sup>4</sup>From Weimar to Hitler: Studies in the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic and the Establishment of the Third Reich, 1932-1934" Edited by Hermann Beck and Larry Eugene Jones. <http://berghahnbooks.com/title/BeckFrom>

conservative elites had played in the series of events that culminated in Hitler's appointment as chancellor and how they allowed themselves to be duped into believing that they could control Hitler once he was in power.<sup>7</sup> Though careful not to associate himself with Mommsen's thoroughgoing embrace of structural functionalism, Winkler agrees that Hitler's appointment as chancellor and all that followed were in no way unavoidable and points to the wide range of responses that were available to Germany's conservative elites as they wrestled with the collapse of Weimar democracy. This was particularly true in light of the crisis within the NSDAP after the party's heavy losses in the November 1932 Reichstag elections and the subsequent split between Hitler and the NSDAP's Reich organization leader Gregor Strasser. That the camarilla around Hindenburg opted for the "Hitler solution" was a matter of choice and by no means the only option available to them in the last months of the Weimar Republic.<sup>8</sup> Henry Turner Jr. is even more explicit in this regard. Not only does Turner raise a series of nagging questions about the validity of Fischer's thesis about the "alliance of elites"<sup>9</sup> but he reminds us in his book *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power* that the NSDAP was on the verge of collapse right up until the moment of Hitler's fateful meeting with Papen on 4 January 1933. Even then there were still opportunities to avert a Hitler chancellorship if only Schleicher and his colleagues in the Reich defense ministry had found the resolve to act. In the final analysis, Turner argues, ultimate responsibility for Hitler's installation as chancellor lay with a small circle of men whose actions—or, in the case of Schleicher, inaction—helped elevate Hitler from his well-deserved obscurity to the leadership of the most powerful nation on the European continent.<sup>10</sup>

The second premise that stands at the heart of this book is that the Nazi seizure of power was not a single event that happened on 30 January 1933 but a process that extended over a longer period of time and involved more than Hitler's installation as chancellor. At the very least, this process extended from Franz von Papen's appointment as chancellor in early June 1932 to the Röhm Purge two years later. In this respect Bracher has identified four specific stages in the Nazi seizure and consolidation of power.<sup>11</sup> The first ran from the installation of the Hitler cabinet on 30 January 1933 through the Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of the People and State that Hindenburg enacted on the day after the Reichstag fire on the night of 27–28 February. During this phase Hitler and the Nazi leadership were still somewhat tentative and probing the legal and political parameters of what they could do within the restraints imposed upon them by the terms under which Hitler assumed the chancellorship. The decree of 28 February repre-

sented a fundamental assault on the legal protection that all Germans enjoyed under the Weimar Constitution and cleared the way for what would happen in the second phase of the Nazi consolidation of power. This phase lasted from the beginning of March through the middle of the summer of 1933 and was marked by the passage of the Enabling Act (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*) on 24 March, the systematic dismantling of what still remained of German democracy with the dissolution of all political parties save the NSDAP, the suppression of organized labor, and the coordination (*Gleichschaltung*) of the individual state governments. A particularly important feature of this phase was the systematic deployment of state-sanctioned violence against enemies of the regime, including functionaries of the conservative forces that had joined Hitler in his government of “national concentration.”<sup>12</sup> Outmaneuvering their conservative allies at every turn, the Nazis were able to establish what amounted to a one-party dictatorship with little, if anything, in the way of organized resistance.

The third phase in the Nazi seizure of power began with Hitler’s announcement in mid-July 1933 that the Nazi revolution had accomplished its objectives with the destruction of the Weimar state and that it was now time for a period of consolidation and renewal. This held obvious implications for Hitler’s storm troopers (*Sturm-Abteilungen der NSDAP* or SA), the paramilitary wing that had been the principal agent of the Nazi revolution and now found itself relegated to the sidelines at least for the foreseeable future. The second half of 1933 was characterized by a relative calm that stood in sharp contrast to the preceding six months; a new normal had settled upon the country. But by the end of the year, there were signs of increasing unrest, particularly within the SA, whose leader Ernst Röhm began to make vague allusions to a “second revolution” in which the social promise of the Nazi revolution would be finally fulfilled. Rumors of a “second revolution” in which the destruction of the Weimar state was to be followed by a redistribution of wealth and property had an unnerving effect on Hitler’s conservative allies and threatened to undermine their loyalty to the regime.<sup>13</sup> Nowhere was this more apparent than at the upper echelons of Germany’s military establishment, where Röhm’s plans for a “people’s army” created through the amalgamation of the Reichswehr and SA had aroused particular concern.<sup>14</sup> As tension began to build through the late spring and early summer of 1934, Hitler and his closest supporters were finally forced into action by a speech that Franz von Papen, the vice chancellor in the Hitler cabinet and the putative leader of the conservatives who had allied themselves with Hitler, delivered at the University of Marburg on 17 June. Here Papen gave voice to the

growing fears of Germany's propertied classes about the rumors of a "second revolution," drew public attention to the discrepancy between the promise and practice of the Nazi revolution, and announced that it was time to transform the Nazi revolution into a "conservative revolution" based upon a reaffirmation of the spiritual values that lay at the heart of Germany's national greatness. Papen's speech forced Hitler's hand, and on 30 June 1934 Hitler and a small circle of associates launched a two-pronged strike against the SA and those conservatives who had conspired to remove Hitler from office in what came to be known as Hitler's "Night of the Long Knives."<sup>15</sup>

Though first formulated more than a half century ago, Bracher's periodization of the Nazi seizure and consolidation of power still serves as a useful framework for the presentation of the chapters contained in this volume. The first three chapters by Larry Eugene Jones, Joseph Bendersky, and Martin Menke belong to what one might call the prehistory of the Third Reich and focus on three individuals who were deeply involved in the series of events that culminated in Hitler's appointment as chancellor. In his chapter on Kurt von Schleicher, Larry Eugene Jones argues that Schleicher was convinced that Germany could survive the present crisis only if its political establishment reached some sort of accommodation with the Nazis. The assumption underlying Schleicher's *Zähmungskonzept* was that the responsibilities of government participation would not only deprive the Nazis of the advantages they enjoyed in opposition but would also exert a moderating effect upon the NSDAP, as had previously been the case with the Social Democrats. A Nazi presence in the national government would provide Germany's conservative elites with the mantle of popular legitimacy they needed to carry out a revision of the Weimar Constitution along conservative lines. At the same time, Schleicher remained irreconcilably opposed to any solution to the political stalemate in the last months of the Weimar Republic that would have elevated Hitler to the chancellorship. In an attempt to overcome Hitler's opposition to his party's participation in the national government despite its heavy losses in the November 1932 Reichstag elections, Schleicher cultivated close ties with Gregor Strasser, the leader of the Nazi Party organization and a man generally regarded as the leader of the NSDAP's more moderate elements. But Schleicher did not, according to Jones, seek to provoke a secession on the NSDAP's left wing, and Strasser's decision to resign his party offices in early December 1932 represented a severe setback to Schleicher's hopes of strengthening the Nazi moderates. In the meantime, Schleicher was outmaneuvered by his own protégé Franz von Papen, who entered into negotiations with Hitler behind his back in

early January 1933 and played the decisive role in the series of events that eventually led to the Nazi party leader's appointment as chancellor.

One of the most controversial figures in the politics of the late Weimar Republic is the renowned jurist and legal theorist Carl Schmitt. In his chapter on Schmitt, Joseph Bendersky takes issue with those of Schmitt's critics who make him and his constitutional theories culpable for Hitler's appointment as chancellor. To the contrary, Bendersky argues that Schmitt was strongly opposed to dismissing the Weimar Constitution and parliament in favor of a presidential dictatorship. At the same time, Schmitt recognized that the system of parliamentary government as embodied in the Weimar Constitution was no longer capable of providing the strong, effective government that was necessary if Germany was to survive the deepening economic and political crisis that had descended upon it in the early 1930s. On the basis of Schmitt's recently published diaries and his correspondence with Ernst Rudolf Huber, Bendersky reconstructs the relationship that developed between Schmitt and Schleicher in the second half of 1932 and the role that Schmitt played in providing Schleicher with legal justifications for the temporary suspension of certain provisions of the Weimar Constitution in order to achieve a modicum of political stability. At no point, however, did Schmitt advocate abandoning the Weimar Constitution in favor of a dictatorship. Even his advocacy of a "negative no-confidence vote" was always within the legal confines of the constitution and the political legitimacy of Hindenburg. Like Schleicher, Schmitt desperately hoped to prevent Hitler from gaining power and was deeply disturbed when that did not prove the case. Schmitt did his best to keep his distance from the new regime through its first months in office and did not endorse the principle of dictatorial rule, as an article he wrote on the Enabling Act in April 1933 clearly revealed.

A further factor that contributed to the collapse of the Weimar Republic was the weakness of those parties that remained loyal to the republican system of government. Martin Menke turns his attention to this question in his chapter on Ludwig Kaas, the chairman of the German Center Party (*Deutsche Zentrumspartei*) since December 1928. A compromise candidate whose primary virtue was that he was not associated with any of the factions that were vying for control of the Center, Kaas was, Menke argues, woefully unprepared for the chairmanship at the time of his election to the party leadership and never rose to the demands that it placed upon him over the course of the next four years. This could be seen in his frail health and his frequent absences from Berlin at critical points in the Center's efforts to rescue German

democracy from the challenge of the more radical political parties on the left and right. Throughout all of this, Menke argues, Kaas remained unequivocally committed to the principle of constitutional government and never once wavered in his support for the Weimar Republic. At the same time, however, the concept of *Sammlung* that served as the fundamental principle of Kaas's political strategy remained hopelessly vague and never provided the appeal across class and party lines that would have been necessary to salvage the Weimar Republic from the forces of political radicalism. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the transition from Weimar democracy to the Third Reich, a period during which the Center found itself relegated to the political sidelines before being banished from the political stage in the summer of 1933. Acting partly out of his fear of Nazi violence and partly because he felt that all national-minded forces should unite, Kaas supported the Enabling Act and was instrumental in persuading a majority of the Center's Reichstag delegation to vote for it in March 1933. Kaas was therefore at least partly responsible for the uncertain and vulnerable situation in which the German Catholic Church found itself once the regime failed to live up to the terms of the Concordat with the Vatican.

The next chapter by Winfried Becker also examines the predicament of political Catholicism in the first months of the Third Reich, though not from the perspective of the Center but from that of its Bavarian counterpart, the Bavarian People's Party (Bayerische Volkspartei or BVP). The BVP was the mainstay of the Bavarian state government and, as such, was determined to resist takeover from Berlin with all the resources at its disposal. But its position became increasingly vulnerable on the heels of the Reichstag elections of 5 March 1933 and a concerted campaign by Nazi authorities at the state and national levels to strip the Bavarian government of its power. This "party revolution from below," as Martin Broszat has characterized it, manifested itself primarily in widespread grassroots violence that had taken shape in response to Hitler's repeated exhortations from 10 March on to maintain peace and order. In his detailed reconstruction of the events in Bavaria, Becker documents the haplessness of state authorities when confronted with the threat of brute force in Bavaria and the duplicity of authorities in Berlin. As Becker demonstrates, not even cabinet officers in the Bavarian government or city councilors who belonged to the BVP were safe from the wave of violence that descended upon Bavaria in March 1933. German Jews, including the leader of the Munich Israelite community (*Kultusgemeinde*) Rabbi Leo Bärwald, were treated with special brutality. In the meantime, efforts on the part of Bavaria's representatives in Berlin to initiate negotiations that would have led



to the peaceful transfer of power under conditions that would have afforded the BVP a measure of protection from the wave of violence that had been unleashed against their party met with obfuscation and procrastination. Their situation was rendered all the more untenable by the calculated and systematic breach of the constitution in Bavaria and the complacency with which the bulk of the Bavarian population reacted to Nazi violence and the mistreatment of state government officials.

Becker's chapter brings into sharp relief two important themes that characterized the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 and 1934. The first of these was the systematic use of violence against those institutions or individuals that either stood in the way of the NSDAP and the SA in the Nazi consolidation of total power or were seen as opponents that needed to be brought into line. Attacks against Jews were closely connected to the *leitmotif* of violence in the Nazi consolidation of power and were no doubt in part designed to intimidate those who stood on the sidelines from opposing the regime. The stigmatization and exclusion of German and foreign Jews thus served as a lightning rod that greatly strengthened the internal cohesion of German society in the first months of the Third Reich. The second theme addresses the enormous popularity and appeal of the new regime. Nazi promises to rehabilitate cherished German traditions, to rescue the nation from communism, and to unify the people in a national community reminiscent of August 1914 lured even otherwise rational individuals into a false sense of hope or complacency. A case in point is the leadership of the German business community, the topic of Peter Hayes's chapter "German Big Business and the Nazi Revolution." While most German business leaders were caught off guard by Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933, they were quickly brought into line, contributing massive sums of money to the NSDAP's campaign in the March 1933 Reichstag elections and eventually acquiescing to Nazi pressure to remove Jews—in some cases with great reluctance—from positions on their managerial boards. Much of this took place under an umbrella of campaigns against "corruption" and bribery and charges of tax evasion. A particularly critical moment in the acquiescence of big business was the forcible occupation of corporate and business headquarters by the SA in the spring of 1933 in an action that apparently did not enjoy Hitler's blessing but that nevertheless carried with it the implicit threat of violence if the German business community continued to waver in its support for the regime. Hitler's subsequent intervention to put an end to the SA occupation of businesses and factories reassured Germany's business leadership of the Nazi party leader's

commitment to the principle of free enterprise and greatly facilitated their acceptance of the regime.

Research on antisemitism at the beginning of Nazi rule has generally concentrated on the boycott of April 1933 and the antisemitic legislation that followed, while the widespread antisemitic violence of the late winter and spring of 1933 has received comparatively little attention. Hermann Beck focuses on attacks that were directed against the approximately eighty thousand East European Jews residing in Germany in 1933. Antisemitic acts in the first months of Nazi rule ranged from the forced cancellation of debts and the destruction of goods and property to physical violence, kidnapping, aggravated robbery, bodily assault, and outright murder. Adding to the demoralization of Germany's Jewish population were rituals of humiliation, such as "pillory marches," in which victims were paraded through the streets in degrading conditions. German officials, who knew very well what was going on, minimized and excused attacks—reactions fed by their own prejudice and the desire to please their new Nazi masters. Members of the bureaucracy frequently went so far as to find fault with the victims by fabricating offenses that had allegedly caused the attacks, thus protecting the perpetrators. Such behavior on the part of officials signaled to the attackers that they had free rein and made it obvious that Jews not could expect any help from those who administered the country in the event of future crimes.

Nazi efforts to secure a popular consensus and to create a national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) that transcended the divisions of class, confession, and region rested not just upon propaganda but also upon the systematic and intentional use of violence. Bruce Campbell's chapter on the role of the SA in the Nazi seizure and consolidation of power focuses on the organization within the Nazi movement that was primarily responsible for the use of violence as a means of forging a popular consensus in support of the regime and its totalitarian aspirations. Campbell's investigation stresses among other things political pressures such as the constant mobilization from 1930 on that left SA men at all levels burnt out, filled with resentment, and eager for revenge. Complicating the position of the SA were difficulties in controlling defections from its ranks, paradoxically coinciding with an influx of new members before 1933 that concealed the full extent of the defections and thus produced an overall balance sheet that showed rapid growth. Yet while the SA was the foremost organ of Nazi violence, its leaders often saw themselves as rivals to the Nazi party leadership in terms of power and tangible rewards. The leaders of the NSDAP party organization, on the other hand, often saw the SA as a threat to their

own control of the party and pressured Hitler to take action aimed at reining in its radicalism. Campbell goes beyond analyzing the external factors that shaped the SA's behavior by delving into the personal characteristics of the SA rank and file to identify the importance of "primary male group" bonding and the fundamentally local nature of politics in the Weimar Republic as an explanation for SA violence. As Campbell explains, all of these contributed to the extent and nature of the SA violence that facilitated the National Socialist takeover in 1933–34.

The second major theme running through the chapters on the period after 30 January 1933 consists of the attractions and popularity of the new regime. The call for greater social equality and a new society free of class conceit and imbued with concern for the greater good of all contributed to what Fritz Stern once called "the temptation of National Socialism."<sup>16</sup> Few concrete measures toward this end were ever implemented, but the egalitarian tone that dominated National Socialist discourse and propaganda during 1933 and 1934 could not fail but to leave its mark on the popular perception of the regime.<sup>17</sup> This egalitarian appeal accounted for a good deal of the regime's popularity. An invigorating feeling of a newly forged *Volksgemeinschaft*, a national community reminiscent of the spirit of domestic solidarity in August 1914 when ranks had closed against a sea of enemies, took hold across the nation. As Protestant bishop Otto Dibelius, soon to become an opponent of the regime, said in a radio address to an American audience in which he rationalized the boycott of 1 April 1933, "Today the German Reich is united and firmly joined together as never before in our history."<sup>18</sup> Newly gained strength and self-assurance emanated from that knowledge, and the new government was credited with bringing it about. The early propaganda of the regime shrewdly emphasized the creation of an internally united and rejuvenated nation, an element that accelerated the breakup and demise of Germany's political parties, driven by the argument that multiple political parties were but an obstacle on the road toward a united national will.

The inspiration of the "Ideas of 1914" and the longing for some sort of national community that transcended the divisions of class, confession, and region resonated far beyond the ranks of the NSDAP and its affiliated organizations. That such an appeal had a universal purchase on the hearts and minds of those Germans who stood well outside the orbit of the NSDAP could be seen in the ranks of one of Nazism's most determined opponents, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands or SPD). As Stefan Vogt argues in his chapter on the Social Democratic intellectuals and politicians associated with the *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus*, there

were even Social Democrats who maintained that National Socialism, notwithstanding the obvious danger that it posed to German democracy and the welfare of the German working class, was a legitimate expression of the German national will and that some facets of it were worthy of support. The *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus* was a journal that served as a platform for the promotion of a nationalist revision of socialist theory and politics, and its protagonists believed that patriotism was the great common denominator of the German people and that the truly socialist and national elements of the Nazi movement could be filtered out and separated from those elements in the NSDAP that were responsible for the repressive and essentially antisocialist rhetoric associated with its public profile. In the final analysis, Vogt argues, the ideological convictions of this group's members led them to adopt an assessment of the Nazi movement that was too optimistic, a factor that later prevented them from developing an effective strategy for its defeat and containment.

If the editors and writers of the *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus* were slow to recognize the danger of National Socialism and the threat it posed to the welfare of the German working class, this was not, as William Patch argues in his chapter on the German trade union movement from 1930 to 1933, the case with leaders of organized labor. Patch's chapter addresses both the appeal that National Socialism held for some trade unionists in the transition from democracy to dictatorship in 1932–33 and the role that SA violence played in compelling the main trade union federations to set aside their differences in the search for unity in the struggle against Nazism and its antagonism toward the German trade union movement. Patch begins by challenging the argument that long-term oligarchic tendencies on the part of union leaders predisposed them to reach an accommodation with the Nazi regime and argues instead that union leaders worked strategically with political parties and government officials to address the priority of their rank-and-file membership of alleviating unemployment at the same time that they sought to rally their followers around national causes. The attempts of union leaders to "reconcile 'national' and 'social' values, i.e., patriotism with a commitment to egalitarian social reform" in order to accommodate the Nazi regime, however, were undermined by the latter's determination to take over the workers' movement. In the final analysis, internal union democracy fell victim to last-minute efforts by union leaders—driven by fear, opportunism, or pure naïveté—to tie the fate of their unions to the more radical interpretations of "nationalism" and "socialism" proffered by the NSDAP. Efforts on the part of the free, Christian, and liberal labor unions to close ranks in the face of the Nazi

threat were ultimately outstripped by the regime's determination to destroy both organizational democracy and organizational freedom, with the result that the unions were unceremoniously dissolved in the late spring of 1933 and subsequently incorporated into the German Labor Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront* or DAF).

The next three chapters deal with efforts to build bridges between the German churches and the Nazi regime. In 1933 the German Protestant Church was subdivided into twenty-eight state churches or *Landeskirchen*. Drawing upon the example of the Hamburg State Church, Rainer Hering shows just how deeply politics penetrated all facets of life, not the least of which was the organizational life of German Protestantism. Hering focuses in particular on the introduction of the *Führerprinzip*—the leadership principle popularly associated with Hitler and the NSDAP—in the German Protestant Church. The focal point of Hering's chapter is the office of the state bishop (*Landesbischof*) that Nazi officials created as a corrective to the revolutionary changes that had taken place in the organization of German Protestant life with the founding of the Weimar Republic. The forms of governance that had been introduced into the church during the Weimar Republic had had a democratic effect on the church hierarchy and a levelling effect on the church's position in society. The "revolution in the church" that took place with the introduction of the *Führerprinzip* and other changes prompted by the Nazis reestablished a hierarchy in the church's organizational structure and thus brought the church into line with the authoritarian organization of the Nazi state. In illustrating the theological and political divisions that Nazi intervention created within the ranks of German Protestants, Hering brings into sharp focus the precarious conditions in which church leaders attempted to salvage what they could of the church's status and influence and the compromises that they had to make in order to do so. The first state bishop of Hamburg, Simon Schöffel, as well as his successor Franz Tügel, not only vilified Weimar and the whole concept of democracy in an attempt to break bread with the Nazis but also went to great lengths to create a purported symbiosis between Protestant theology and the goals of National Socialism. Liberal critics had no ground on which to stand in the new Germany. Hering emphasizes that the church's internal reforms and accommodation with the National Socialist state were not in any way predetermined but rather depended on the actions of individuals who were driven by very different motivations.

A different perspective on developments within the Protestant Church in the months that followed Hitler's appointment as chancellor is to be found in the chapter by Edward Snyder on Friedrich von

Bodelschwingh, director of the Bethel Institutes in Bielefeld and one of German Protestantism's foremost social policy theorists. Snyder's chapter casts new light on the pressures to which the leaders of Germany's Protestant Church found themselves subjected with Hitler's succession to power. A conservative who sympathized with many of the Nazi positions on racial hygiene and the Weimar state, Bodelschwingh saw in the Nazi rise to power an opportunity to create a politically and socially united German nation. At the same time, he actively opposed the agitation of the so-called German Christians for a more radical reform of Lutheran theology and liturgy and feared that this might lead to a rupture between church and regime. It was this fear that ultimately led Bodelschwingh in the spring of 1933 to stand for election as the first Reich bishop of the newly created German Protestant Reich Church (Deutsch-Evangelische Reichskirche). With strong support from those elements within the church that opposed the radicalism of the German Christians, Bodelschwingh was elected by a narrow margin in late May 1933 only to find himself immediately embroiled in a conflict with the German Christians that led him to resign the office he had assumed less than a month earlier. Bodelschwingh's resignation, Snyder argues, was significant because it signaled the collapse of efforts to keep the church from falling under control of the state and set in motion the series of events that culminated in the establishment of the Confessing Church under Martin Niemöller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer later that fall. More importantly, it revealed just how divided German Protestants were on an entire host of issues, not the least of which was their position on the so-called Jewish question and the relationship between church and state. In the final analysis, it was the Jewish question and the introduction of the Aryan clause that marked the fork in the road within the Protestant Church. Here, in contrast to a small minority of more courageous church men like Bonhoeffer, Bodelschwingh sought to avoid controversy and proved reluctant to confront the state over this and other issues.

In many respects, the situation of the Protestant Church in the early stages of the Third Reich was not significantly different from that of its Catholic counterpart. Here the major problem facing the regime was the fact that the vast majority of German Catholics did not share the widespread enthusiasm of German Protestants for the establishment of the Third Reich. It was against the background of these developments that a small handful of Catholic conservatives under the leadership of Franz von Papen, Hitler's vice chancellor and the putative leader of those conservative forces that sought to contain the radicalism of the Nazi movement, launched the Alliance of German Catholics

(Arbeitsgemeinschaft katholischer Deutscher or AKD) in the spring of 1933 in an effort to build a bridge between German Catholics and the Nazi regime. But, as Larry Eugene Jones and Kevin Spicer demonstrate in their chapter on the AKD, this effort was ultimately doomed to failure not just by Papen's own ineptitude but also by the deep-seated and mutual mistrust that existed between the regime and authorities of the Catholic Church. Despite support from elements of the Catholic intelligentsia and the Catholic nobility, the AKD never succeeded in developing that groundswell of popular support upon which Papen and the leaders of the Nazi regime had been counting. At the same time, increasing friction over the regime's failure to respect the legal protections that the institutions of Catholic associational life presumably enjoyed under Article 31 of the Reich Concordat of 20 July 1933 underscored just how superfluous the AKD had become in the eyes of Hitler and his associates. The AKD's fate was effectively sealed by the late spring of 1934, and it was discretely shut down by state authorities in the aftermath of the Röhm Purge.

The final two chapters by André Postert and Katharine Kennedy deal with the reception of the Nazi revolution by German youth and the impact the Nazi revolution had upon the instruction they received in history and social studies in elementary and secondary schools throughout the country. As Postert illustrates in his chapter on the political coordination of German youth, the advent of the new state was greeted enthusiastically by a large segment of young Germans throughout the country. The Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend or HJ) exerted a strong natural attraction on rival German youth organizations of all sorts—political, *bündisch*, denominational, and sporting clubs—and did not hesitate to use coercion to force their incorporation into its own organizational structure. The vitality of the new Nazi state exercised a powerful appeal on young Germans from all sectors of society, including those who had been previously organized under the auspices of rival political movements. The new state's popularity stemmed less from any sort of overt identification with the ideological goals of the Nazi movement than from the Hitler Youth's vigor and opposition to old, entrenched structures and from the idealism of its commitment to the goal of uniting all Germans in a genuine *Volksgemeinschaft* in which social, confessional, and regional divisions were finally overcome. Yet while Postert emphasizes the need to recognize the passion with which large segments of the younger generation greeted the rise of National Socialism, he also points out that the enthusiasm of 1933 clearly eclipsed that of later years and that by 1935 much of the excitement of the first two years of Nazi rule had begun to fade as membership figures

peaked and increasing apathy toward the regime's recruitment efforts became apparent.

That enthusiasm in 1933 was stronger and that measures taken then were more radical than in subsequent years is a point that Katharine Kennedy also emphasizes in her contribution on the Nazi penetration of the German school system. The reshaping of elementary school curricula began in the spring of 1933, as several German states suspended their usual history curriculum in March 1933 in order to offer nazified narratives of Germany's recent history aimed at exalting National Socialism and delegitimizing the Weimar Republic. In response to the educational policies of the new regime, some states hastily cobbled together supplementary booklets for use in the classroom that depicted the new racial state, the cult of the leader, and the obsession with national community that lay at the heart of the Nazi worldview. Kennedy's colorful account highlights how Nazi symbols, rituals, and festivals entered elementary schools in 1933 and quickly became defining aspects of the school year that actively encouraged an aestheticized attachment to National Socialism. In schools, as in other spheres of social life, the policies propagated during the period of the Nazi seizure of power often proved more radical than those in the years that followed.

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The chapters assembled in this volume show that Hitler's rise to power and his appointment as chancellor of the German nation in January 1933 were made possible by the ineptitude and disunity of Germany's political elites and by the inability of those forces loyal to the Weimar Republic to develop an effective strategy for the containment of the Nazi threat. Schleicher's ill-fated "taming strategy" was based on the premise that giving the Nazis a share of power would require them to behave more responsibly at the same time that it would provide Germany's conservative elites with the mantle of popular legitimacy they needed to carry out an authoritarian reorganization of the German state system. In this respect, Schleicher sought the cooperation of Germany's most distinguished legal theorist Carl Schmitt, who worked closely with the Reichswehr in developing legal strategies for decoupling the exercise of executive authority from the vicissitudes of constantly shifting parliamentary coalitions in the Reichstag. But such schemes received little support from the leaders of Germany's republican parties who, like the Center's Ludwig Kaas, remained strongly committed to the principles of constitutional government and were deeply suspicious of plans for even a temporary suspension of the



Weimar Constitution and the transfer of power to an executive authority that was no longer responsible to the Reichstag. It could have been of little solace to Kaas that when Hitler assumed the chancellorship, his appointment was consistent with the letter, if not the spirit, of the Weimar Constitution. All that remained was the desperate hope that the conservatives who had installed Hitler in power would be able to control the dynamism of the Nazi movement and harness it to their own political agenda.

That this hope would prove illusory became abundantly clear in the weeks that followed Hitler's appointment as chancellor. What ensued was the marginalization of Hitler's conservative allies and the devastatingly rapid consolidation of power in the hands of the Nazi elite. This was accomplished by a combination of violence and coercion coupled with willing complicity and eager enthusiasm on the part of a German public that embraced Hitler as the messiah who would redeem Germany from the cloud of defeat and despair that had descended upon it in 1918. That all of this took place under the Damocles sword of physical retribution and incarceration for those who disagreed with their new masters makes it difficult to gauge just how much of this excitement was genuine. Yet, even where the passionate eagerness as exhibited by parts of the youth movement was absent, there was still a hopeful desire by elements of the trade union movement, Catholic conservatives, Protestant church leaders, and even the Social Democratic pundits who wrote for the *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus* to seek commonalities and accommodation with the regime. These commonalities, often misconstrued or exaggerated by opportunistic or fearful individuals, were generally sufficient to stifle determined resistance.

By the end of 1933 the changes in the German state and society were all-encompassing and irreversible. Federal traditions with deep roots in German history that reached back over centuries had been eliminated and replaced by a centralized state that flew in the face of Germany's historical development since the Reformation and was more reminiscent of revolutionary France. The multifaceted nature of German society and organizations, from political parties, big business, and trade unions to the churches and religious associations, had been brought into line. In many respects, the period of the Nazi seizure and consolidation of power would prove more radical than what followed during the years of peace between 1934 and 1938. The wave of antisemitic violence that swept through Germany in the spring of 1933 met with no opposition and seemingly few misgivings on the part of German civil society. Neither the civil administration nor the churches nor the conservative elites that had placed Hitler in power were willing

to risk their place in the new Nazi state for the sake of the Jews. For many, the issue of antisemitism would prove to be the decisive litmus test of how they would relate to the regime in general. The process by which the Nazis seized and consolidated power between 1932 and 1934 would do much to define the essential features of Nazi society and the Nazi state for the millions of Germans who would either embrace it or, what was much less likely, reject it.

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## Notes

1. For the essential elements of Mosse's argument, see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964), 254–93.
2. Fritz Fischer, *From Kaiserreich to the Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History, 1871–1945*, trans. Roger Fletcher (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1986), esp. 97–99.
3. In this respect, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit. Ein polemischer Essay zum "Historikerstreit"* (Munich: Beck, 1988), as well as the fourth volume of Wehler's *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Vom Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der zwei deutschen Staaten 1918–1949* (Munich: Beck, 2008), esp. 580–89.
4. For example, see Larry Eugene Jones, "Why Hitler Came to Power: In Defense of a New History of Politics," in *Geschichtswissenschaft vor 2000: Perspektiven der Historiographiegeschichte, Geschichtstheorie, Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte; Festschrift für Georg G. Iggers zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, Jörn Rüsen, and Hans Schleier (Hagen: Magrit Rottmann Medienverlag, 1991), 256–76. In a similar vein, though with different conclusions, see Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany, 1930–1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 13–22.
5. Robert Thomson Clark, *The Fall of the German Republic: A Political Study* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), 9–13.
6. Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik: Eine Studie des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*, 3rd ed. (Villingen-Schwarzwald: Ring-Verlag, 1960), esp. 686–732. For the classic statement of this argument, see Theodor Eschenburg, "The Role of Personality in the Crisis of the Weimar Republic: Hindenburg, Brüning, Groener, Schleicher," in *Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution*, ed. Hajo Holborn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 3–50.
7. Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, trans. Elborg Forster and Larry Eugene Jones (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 490–544. For a more pointed critique of the role that Germany's conservative elites played in the appointment of the Hitler cabinet, see Hans Mommsen, "Die deutschen Eliten und der Mythos des nationalen Aufbruchs von 1933," *Merkur: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken* 38 (1984): 97–102, and "Die nationalsozialistische Machteroberung: Revolution oder Gegenrevolution," in *Europäische Sozialgeschichte: Festschrift für Wolfgang Schieder*, ed. Christof Dipper, Lutz Klinkhammer, and Alexander Nützenadel (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 2000), 41–56.
8. Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar 1918–1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich: Beck, 1993), 535–94.
9. Henry Ashby Turner Jr., "'Alliance of Elites' as a Cause of Weimar's Collapse and Hitler's Triumph?," in *Die deutsche Staatskrise 1930–1933:*

- Handlungsspielräume und Alternativen*, ed. Heinrich August Winkler (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992), 205–14.
10. Henry Ashby Turner Jr., *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power: January 1933* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1966), esp. 163–83.
  11. Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Stages of Totalitarian Integration (*Gleichschaltung*): The Consolidation of National Socialist Rule in 1933 and 1934," in *Republic to Reich*, ed. Holborn, 109–28. For a fuller elaboration of Bracher's argument and periodization of the Nazi consolidation of power, see his chapter "Stufen der Machtergreifung," in Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, and Gerhard Schulz, *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung. Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933/34* (Cologne and Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1960), 31–219.
  12. In this respect, see Hermann Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis in 1933; The Machtergreifung in a New Light* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 219–52.
  13. On Röhm, see the excellent biography by Eleanor Hancock, *Ernst Röhm: Hitler's SA Chief of Staff* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), esp. 140–66.
  14. On the German military and its role in the series of events that led to the Röhm Purge in the summer of 1934, see the classic study by Klaus-Jürgen Müller, *Das Herr und Hitler: Armee und nationalsozialistisches Regime 1933–1940* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1969), 88–141, as well as the more recent monograph by Immo von Fallois, *Kalkül und Illusion: Der Machtkampf zwischen Reichswehr und SA während der Röhm-Krise 1934* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1994).
  15. On Papen, the Marburg speech, and the conspiratorial activities of the Papen vice chancery, see the definitive study by Rainer Orth, "Der Amtssitz der Opposition"? Politik und Staatsumbaupläne im Büro des Stellvertreters des Reichskanzler in den Jahren 1933–1934 (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2016), esp. 345–450.
  16. Fritz Stern, "National Socialism as Temptation," in Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 147–91.
  17. Hermann Beck, "The Antiburgeois Character of National Socialism," *Journal of Modern History* 88 (2016): 572–609.
  18. "Die nach Amerika gerichtete Rundfunkrede des Herrn Generalsuperintendenten Dibelius vom 4. April 1933," Evangelisches Zentralarchiv Berlin, 51, EII e 8, 4.

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