

Topic

This study will analyze the Munich edition of the Nazi Party's *Völkischer Beobachter* from 1930 to 1933 in an effort to determine what, if any, influence conservative revolutionary thought may have held over the ideological content of the Nazi Party's official press organ in the final years of the Weimar Republic.

Committee

Dr. Joseph W. Bendersky will direct the thesis. The second reader will be Dr. G. Antonio Grover. The third reader has not yet been determined.

Relevancy of the Topic

The political climate of the Weimar Republic was contentious throughout its short life span and the advent of democracy in Germany was accompanied by opposition from both the revolutionary right and left of German politics. Out of the defeat of 1918 emerged a new generation of young political and intellectual conservatives. The loss of the war held a different meaning for many of these neo-conservatives; it was a unique opportunity to break with the liberal institutions of the nineteenth century that they so despised.¹ It afforded them an opportunity to define a conservatism that was not linked with the legacy of Otto von Bismarck or the reactionary conservatism of parties like the *Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei* (DNVP). The foundation of this conservative revolution has often been

¹ Keith Bullivant, "The Conservative Revolution," in *The Weimar Dilemma: Intellectuals in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Anthony Phelan (Dover, New Hampshire: Manchester University Press, 1985), 48.

characterized by its shared *Fronterlebnis* (experience at the front), yet it must be understood that this circle of intellectuals was multifarious and their ideas and intellectual contributions were often at odds with one another. Klemens von Klemperer has noted, however, “that, in spite of the obvious difference between these men, they were all dedicated to the tradition of the Youth Movement and of the ‘ideas of 1914’”.²

This new conservatism found its place in the youth movements and conservative literary circles of Germany in the years immediately following the war. Organizations like the June Club and publications such as *die Tat* (The Deed) served as means to both nurture and publish the intellectual writings of the movement’s most prominent members. Its most widely read and regarded figures included authors such as Ernst Jünger, Moeller van den Bruck, Oswald Spengler, and Edgar J. Jung. Despite their relative isolation from the political sphere, these conservative revolutionaries were a crucial component to the anti-democratic sentiments that plagued the republic until 1933. Much of their intellectual effort was devoted towards creating a third path between the pillars of liberalism and Marxism that had come to dominate Western Europe. This new conservatism proffered ideas like National Bolshevism and *Deutsche Gemeinwirtschaft* (social economy), but its lasting legacy can be found in those intellectual concepts put forth in their most widely read works. The cultural pessimism of Spengler’s *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West) along with van den Bruck’s attempt to define this new conservatism and its political goals in *Das Dritte Reich* (The Third Reich) represent merely a fraction of the anti-democratic literature that emerged during the Weimar Republic.

² Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany’s New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 74.

Their radicalization has, however, found them inextricably linked with the rise of Nazism. Many of these conservative revolutionaries rejected overtures from the Nazi party early on, because they viewed National Socialism as antithetical to their conservative ideology. Moeller van den Bruck and Edgar J. Jung were particularly critical of the Nazis. Others, such Ernst Jünger, would offer some support to the Nazi party during the 1920s even though they rejected Hitler as sufficient for leading a German revolution. Jünger's decision to write for the *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1923, along with his seminal political essays *Der Arbeiter* (The Worker) and *Die totale Mobilmachung* (Total Mobilization) have been used to link the conservative revolution with National Socialism. Some conservative revolutionaries held "high hopes" initially for the success of the National Socialist party in 1933 as a means towards their revolution, but the majority of them had distanced themselves from the party well before its seizure of power and others, like Jünger, would quickly extricate themselves after 1933.³

There remains, however, a debate within the historiography over the relationship of these conservatives to the National Socialist movement. Von Klemperer notes that although many of these conservatives were already seen as the "intellectual fathers of National Socialism" by 1934, their greatest failure was not their contributions to the Nazi ideology; rather, it was their failure to stand against the tide of National Socialism when they had a chance to. Furthermore, their very nature as a revolutionary force in Weimar served "the aims of the Nazi revolution".⁴ Nonetheless, others have argued that the conservative revolutionaries were merely one current within the "highly complex"

³ Jerry Z. Muller, *The Other God that Failed: Hans Freyer and the Deradicalization of German Conservatism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 6.

⁴ Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), 196.

movement that helped bring the Nazis to power.⁵ Political bias also has played a significant role in the appraisal of the conservative revolutionary movement.⁶ Despite the disparate nature of this group, their intellectual influence, mixed with their outright antipathy for the bourgeois politics of the Weimar Republic, has often earned them the label of *Wegbereiter*, the precursor or “path-paver” for the success of fascism in Germany.

Although such historians have often pointed to the connection between the conservative revolutionaries and the National Socialists, no attempt has been made to analyze or attribute the ideological writing of such a significant publication as the *Völkischer Beobachter* to the intellectual climate cultivated by these conservatives. Detlef Mühlberger has noted in his recent research and translation of the newspaper, that the current lack of “content analysis” of the newspaper is surprising given its importance to the Nazi movement during the Weimar Republic.⁷ The most recent scholarship on the newspaper has yielded some success, as can be seen in David B. Dennis’s recent work *Inhumanities: The Nazi Interpretation of Western Culture*. Although his research was focused on the social and cultural aspects of the newspaper, it demonstrates that the *Völkischer Beobachter* remains a wealth of information that has yet to undergo rigorous historical analysis. The historiography on the conservative revolution remains a significant source of scholarship as well, as can be seen in James van Dyke’s recent article “Ernst Balach and the Conservative Revolution”. His attempts to draw parallels between the

⁵ Bullivant, “The Conservative Revolution,” 67.

⁶ See Hans-Jürgen Puhle’s article “Conservatism in Modern German History” and Martin Greiffenhagen’s “The Dilemma of Conservatism in Germany”

⁷ Detlef Mühlberger, introduction to *Organization & Development of the Nazi Party*, vol. 1 of *Hitler’s Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933* (New York: Peter Lang AG, 2004), 18.

German artist and the conservative revolutionary movement demonstrate both the breadth and significance of the movement and the continued need for historical analysis.

The *Völkischer Beobachter* was the ideological mouthpiece of the National Socialist party from 1920 until the final years of the Second World War. In its earliest days under the control of the Nazi Party, the *Völkischer Beobachter* served to drum up support for the fledgling movement. Although much of its content was ideological, it also served as a practical means to distribute party material and divisional statements, as can be found in its earliest issues.⁸ The National Socialist party was, however, a disparate organization in its formative years and, as Oron J. Hale notes, the party newspaper clearly reflected the “intra-party strife” and the difficulty of maintaining “ideological discipline”.⁹ This is particularly significant in light of my research, because it helps explain both the diverse nature of the newspaper’s content and leaves room for an analysis of the ideological influences that may have found their way into the paper. The fact that the party leadership had to issue a proclamation in 1927 to remind its members that the *Völkischer Beobachter* was “authoritative” on all political questions, makes an examination of the ideological content all the more important.¹⁰

⁸ Detlef Mühlberger, trans., “From the Movement. National Socialist German Worker’s Party,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, No. 16, 3 September 1921. in *Organization & Development of the Nazi Party*, vol. 1 of *Hitler’s Voice: The Völkischer Beobachter, 1920-1933* (New York: Peter Lang AG, 2004), 42-45.

⁹ Oron J. Hale, *The Captive Press in the Third Reich* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), 42-43.

¹⁰ Hale, *The Captive Press*, 43.

Methodology

Much has been written about the conservative revolution since the end of World War II. Yet even within this vast collection of research on the relationship between these conservative intellectuals and the rise of National Socialism no scholar has offered an empirical analysis of a Nazi publication during the Weimar Republic with the intent of determining the Nazi use of these neo-conservative ideas. Most have tended to offer a far more subjective understanding of the connection between the two, often relying solely on a comparative analysis of the conservative writing to the Nazi ideology.

The newspaper was printed on a daily basis and by limiting myself to the paper's content between 1930 and 1933 I will be afforded a wealth of information to analyze, while also making it a manageable endeavor in a limited timeframe. The focus of my analysis will be set on the Munich edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. The Munich and Berlin papers were the two largest publications by the party during the early Weimar Republic, but the Munich edition is the one most widely available for the purpose of my research. Although Detlef Mühlberger has noted in his translations of the newspaper that disparities within the content of these editions does exist, those differences tend to be minor and based upon regional and local events. The remainder of the paper's content was standardized and my analysis of one edition should be equally applicable with the other.

The longevity of the paper, along with the diverse nature of its writers and content should allow for an in-depth examination into the ideological tenor of the paper. Having developed my German reading skills over the last three years, I will provide my own translation of the newspaper's articles with a focus on identifying the critical themes and ideas that characterized the conservative revolutionaries as they have been established

within the historiography. Despite the lack of cohesion amongst this group of intellectuals, I will make use of von Klemperer's characteristics of this new conservatism as a means to define it in opposition to both traditional conservatives, as well as the fascist movement.¹¹ Particular attention will still need to be paid to the terminology employed within the paper itself. I will be using Robert Michael and Karin Doerr's *Nazi-Deutsch* in an effort to distinguish between those terms that held specific connotations in the Third Reich from those that held a different meaning in the traditional German. In doing so, I will be able to offer evidence as to whether or not a relationship between these two movements can be found in the print culture of the Nazi Party during the Weimar Republic. In either case it remains a significant endeavor and it will help to refine the historiography as well as our understanding of the frequently debated and misunderstood relationship between the National Socialists and conservative revolutionaries.

¹¹ Von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism*, 17-32.

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