



Hitler addresses the Reichstag, 1933.



## THE SPREAD OF FASCISM: THE AUTHORITARIAN 1930s

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Make way for the "new man, the fascist man, the man of the twentieth century." "We are the pioneers that head the column of the future." For a time, these claims by young fascists of the 1930s seemed on the verge of fulfillment. Whereas in the 1920s only one regime, Italy, had called itself fascist, in the 1930s it was joined by Nazi Germany, and clerical regimes influenced by fascism ruled in Austria, Portugal, and, after 1939, Spain. The trend toward authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe was completed in the 1930s (with the exception of Czechoslovakia). There was a time in 1934 when it looked as if fascist movements would overthrow the French Republic. Small but vociferous fascist movements were active in Britain, the Low Countries, and Scandinavia. Although not all these movements or regimes adopted the irreligion, the guided economies,

<sup>1</sup>Corneliu Codreanu and Anton Adriaan Mussert, Romanian and Dutch fascists.

the anti-Semitism, and the unbridled dynamism of Italian fascism and German Nazism, much of the political tone and style of the 1930s were influenced by apparent fascist successes.

Fascism seemed the wave of the future; the liberal regimes, by contrast, seemed old and tired. Liberal Europe, complained the Austrian socialist leader Otto Bauer, was "bewitched" by the apparent mechanical efficiency of fascist states where "the trains ran on time."<sup>2</sup>

## GERMANY: NATIONAL SOCIALISM IN POWER

### The Revival of Nazism, 1929–32

Even before the great crash of 1929, the Nazi party had begun to reemerge from its mid-1920s obscurity. The passions aroused by debate over the *Young Plan* (1928–29), which set reparations payments over many years to come, gave Hitler his best platform since the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. It was the depression of 1929, however, that really opened the way for Hitler by reviving fear of revolution and exposing the fecklessness of the Weimar Republic.

As we have seen, the deteriorating economy had made a parliamentary majority impossible in the Weimar Republic after March 1930.<sup>3</sup> The *Reichstag* election of September 14, 1930, only proved how radically the electorate had been polarized: Nazis increased their seats from 12 to 107, and the German Communist party rose from 54 to 77 seats. These processes continued in the *Reichstag* election of July 1932, when the Nazis replaced the Social Democrats as the largest party in Germany by winning 230 seats.

Hitler's mass electoral following provides a rough guide to the social dislocations of depression-ridden Germany. Hitler's supporters included declining small farmers, distressed shopkeepers, minor civil servants suffering from wage cuts, embittered nationalists, and frightened conservatives seeking some strong medicine against Germany's apparently headlong rush into an atomized, rootless, disorderly society.

The Nazis scored their greatest successes in Protestant agricultural areas. Schleswig-Holstein, a region of small independent dairy and beef cattle farmers, was the only German state to give Hitler's party an absolute majority before the Nazis took power. Farmers there had become violently hostile to the Weimar regime. The tariff of 1925 had failed to protect them against frozen meat imports from the British Empire, while it had made imported feed grains more expensive.<sup>4</sup> When the world agricultural depression began around 1927, the number of

<sup>2</sup>Otto Bauer, *Zwischen zwei Weltkriegen?* (Bratislava, 1936), p. 135.

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter 11, p. 337–39.

<sup>4</sup>A British firm received a concession for a frozen meat importing facility at Altona, near Hamburg, in the 1920s.

farms and herds seized for unpaid debts rose sharply, victims of "interest slavery." The Schleswig-Holstein farmers' alienation was fostered by ethnic resentments, for their area had been added to the Prussian state by the war of 1866. To complete the picture, the farmers were worried that their way of life was being swallowed up by a faceless, godless, urban society that seemed to dominate the Weimar Republic, and especially the Social-Democratic Prussian state with its great decadent city of Berlin. Convinced that traditional political leaders already enmeshed in Weimar republican arrangements could do nothing to alleviate their predicament, the Schleswig-Holstein farmers flocked first to a local peasant party strongly impregnated with national socialist attitudes, and eventually to the National Socialist party itself. This local example of small independent farmers switching precipitously from middle-class Weimar parties to Nazism is only the most conspicuous case, and the one most fully studied.<sup>5</sup> Similar cases could be found among other Protestant small farmers, equally maddened by debt, concern for a vanishing way of life, and resentment of workers, unions, and cities.

No constituency in Germany gave the Nazis less than 20 percent of the vote in July 1932. This included the cities, even though Social Democratic political machines were powerfully entrenched there.<sup>6</sup> He did well in upper-class neighborhoods, but the independent lower middle class—retail merchants, artisans, lower civil servants, and those on the bottom rungs of the independent professions—were the most susceptible to Nazi recruitment. In their view, the Weimar Republic neglected them. Whereas the workers had their unions and welfare legislation, the lower middle class felt isolated and vulnerable to the depression. The Marxist parties had no appeal to these Germans, who clung to their middle-class status. The established upper-class elites excited their envy or resentment more than their admiration. For the threadbare *petit bourgeois*, the National Socialists' two-pronged attack on socialism and big finance touched responsive chords.

At the end of Hans Fallada's novel *Little Man, What Now?* (1932), it is not clear whether the protagonist will turn to the far left or far right after losing his job with a heartless department store. This new proletarian's bitter sense of loss of status is complete when callous bourgeois elbow him off the sidewalk on the way home. Since the Marxist parties appealed only to those ready to accept working-class status, Nazism was the only protest movement open to the desperate of every other social class. Hence its growth from 2.6 percent of the vote in 1928 to 18.3 percent in September 1930, and again to 37.3 percent in July 1932.

It was primarily Hitler's mass electoral following among Germany's rural and urban middle class that drew the German elite to him. At first,

<sup>5</sup>Rudolf Heberle, *From Democracy to Nazism. A Regional Case Study of Political Parties in Germany* (1945; reprint ed., Baton Rouge, LA., 1970).

<sup>6</sup>The lowest votes were in Social-Democratic Berlin, Catholic Cologne, and rural Catholic lower Bavaria.

Hitler had seemed boorish and offensive to many upper-class Germans. But he was much less threatening to them than the Marxists, and after his vote-getting capacity had been demonstrated, Germany's leaders rushed to try to enlist that power for their own purposes.

German intellectual leaders had already helped prepare the way. As early as the Napoleonic Wars, nationalist professors had tried to arouse patriotic pride in the distinctiveness of German *Kultur* from the invaders' values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. During the nineteenth century, anti-Semitism and intellectual rejection of Western liberal rationalism grew more pervasive. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a mood of cultural pessimism was widespread among German intellectuals. They called for a redeemer who would save German blood, soil, and idealism from the corruptions of ugly factory cities, flabby bourgeois, and rootless aliens. Although few major German intellectuals actually gave the uncouth Nazis their personal support during the movement's growth, they had helped make Nazi propaganda themes acceptable.

Business leaders also helped with money and useful contacts. Fritz Thyssen, heir to the powerful *Vereinigte Stahlwerke*, for example, gave Hitler substantial sums. After Hitler's electoral success in 1930 aroused greater interest in him, prestigious big business groups such as the Düsseldorf Industry Club helped confer respectability on him by inviting him to speak. On such occasions Hitler stressed his movement's antisocialism and disavowed the anticapitalist rhetoric of some of his associates. It is not true, however, that German big business paid for Hitler's success. Hitler's best source was ticket sales to party rallies. Most big business leaders contributed more readily to a wide range of more traditional centrist and conservative politicians. Their decisive contribution came in January 1933, when they supported Hitler's entry into the government on the understanding that the government would be dominated by traditional conservatives.

The older nationalist movements tried hard to attract Hitler into their ranks. They had more money than Hitler, but he had the backing of the masses. Hoping to make Hitler a vassal rather than a rival, Alfred Hugenberg, a former Krupp director who became head of the German National People's party (DNVP) in 1928, attempted to make common cause with Hitler in the fight over the Young Plan in 1929.

Chancellor Brüning himself also tried to enlist Hitler's support. He needed it, for his deflationary depression remedies had made widespread enemies. Brüning's economic policies made it impossible for him to form any parliamentary majority with the existing parties. He did not want to work with the Social Democrats and, in any event, could not have ruled through them alone. He had to govern either by presidential decree or by finding some new form of mass backing. Deflation, in other words, could be carried out only by force or cajolery: Hitler's mass following and his shock troops were vital to either attempt.

Buoyed by their ascending influence, Hitler and his followers added all they could to the atmosphere of crisis in which they flourished. They gave an impression of tough vigor unmatched by anyone except the much less numerous German Communists, and an impression of anti-Marxist violence far beyond that of any other force on the right. The brown-shirted SA. (stormtroopers, *Sturmabteilungen*) held mass rallies, broke up leftist protest demonstrations and offices, and fought pitched battles in the streets with the Social Democrats' own direct-action squads. In one small town, the subject of William Sheridan Allen's *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town* (1965),<sup>7</sup> there were no less than thirty-seven political street fights between 1930 and 1933, of which four were general melees. This figure does not include the number of times that political rallies were forbidden without leading to violence, or the number of times that the state police had to be called in to supplement the local force. The atmosphere of incipient chaos led many conservative Germans to blame the unemployed for causing the disorder, the left for encouraging it, and the Weimar Republic for failing to prevent it. For such persons, Hitler's strong-arm tactics offered the satisfaction of bringing all three to heel.

### The End of Weimar: Presidential Government, 1930–33

Parliamentary government had ceased to function normally according to the Weimar Constitution with the collapse of Chancellor Hermann Müller's majority on March 27, 1930. It was not clear for some time what would replace it.

One possibility was a pure socialist ministry. The Social Democrats, after all, remained the largest German party in Weimar's third legislature, having won about 30 percent of the popular vote in 1928; together with the German Communist party, Marxists had received just over 40 percent of the popular vote (compared with the Nazis' 2.6 percent). This possibility was only theoretical, however. Socialists and Communists had been bitterly divided since 1917. Moreover, a minority cabinet had to depend on the president's power to promulgate laws directly, without a parliamentary majority, in case of emergency. And since the death of the moderate Social Democratic President Friedrich Ebert in 1925, the president had been the far more conservative Marshal Paul von Hindenburg.

A second possibility was renewed recourse to elections to produce a coherent majority of left, center, or right. The German public did, in fact, endure a veritable orgy of balloting between 1930 and 1933: three *Reichstag* elections (September 1930, July 1932, November 1932) and a two-stage presidential election (March 1932), plus many state elections. No coherent majority emerged in the crosscurrents of depression politics and national politics, although Nazis replaced Social Democrats as

<sup>7</sup>Allen's "Thalberg" was actually Nordheim, a small railroad town in northwestern Germany.

the largest single party in July 1932, and the moderate parties nearly vanished. In the meantime, many Germans simply became disillusioned with the electoral process.

The course actually followed after March 1930 was a compromise that pleased no one. While continuing to seek a majority in frequent elections, a series of conservative chancellors who had President Hindenburg's personal confidence exercised presidential government, calling on the president to countersign their decrees under Article 48. Three chancellors in turn governed this way between 1930 and January 1933: Heinrich Brüning (March 1930–July 1932); Baron Franz von Papen (July–December 1932); and General Kurt von Schleicher (December 1932–January 1933). This situation obviously gave a great deal of power to the aging and impressionable field marshal. German history from 1930 to 1933 is a story of personal intrigue for the president's confidence. And it is a story that helps explain how far from inevitable was Hitler's accession to the office of chancellor and how large was the immediate responsibility of a handful of men.

Chancellor Brüning, as we have seen, was forced back on the president's support after his only electoral effort, the *Reichstag* elections of



A Nazi electoral poster:  
"Women! Millions of men are without work. Millions of children are without a future. Save the German family! Vote for Adolf Hitler!"

September 14, 1930, gave the Nazis the opportunity to display their popular appeal. Although the Social Democrats offered not to oppose the government, in a noble but self-defeating gesture of loyalty to the Weimar system, Brüning's recent memoirs make it clear that he wanted above all to draw the Nazi following into a new Catholic-nationalist majority.<sup>8</sup> Fearful of further elections, however, he continued his twin program of deflation at home and intransigence abroad with the president's support. The failure of both left him totally dependent on Hindenburg's friendship, and the old man's opinions were increasingly subject to influence from a few close associates. They persuaded him in May 1932 to replace Brüning with someone better able to harness the Nazi movement to conservative purposes.

Hindenburg then named as chancellor Baron Franz von Papen, a Catholic nobleman of good social connections and deeply conservative convictions. Papen put together a "ministry of barons" (senior army officers and top civil servants) that moved the government even further from parliamentary leadership. Papen began his ministry with two acts of conspicuous favor to the far right. On June 16 he cancelled a ban on the Nazi SA that Brüning had imposed in April, thereby restoring to Hitler the possibility of mastering the street. In the ensuing brawls between Nazi and left demonstrators, 82 people were killed and 400 seriously wounded in Prussia alone during six weeks.<sup>9</sup> The disorder gave Papen the excuse to destroy the last remaining stronghold of the democratic left. On July 20, drawing on presidential emergency powers, Papen expelled the duly-elected Social Democratic state government of Prussia from office and put the state police under Army orders. Then Papen called a new *Reichstag* election for July 31, 1932. Nazi support grew from 18 to 37 percent of the popular vote.

Hitler now made a direct bid to President Hindenburg for office. The interview went badly. Hindenburg later remarked that Hitler was an odd sort who might be fit for, at most, the Ministry of Posts.<sup>10</sup> Angered by the old man's brusque discourtesy, Hitler insisted on the office of chancellor or nothing. Papen believed that he could electioneer the Nazis to death and then draw their following into his own machine. The elections of November 6, 1932, seemed to confirm his strategy. The Nazis were left exhausted and deeply in debt as they suffered their first electoral decline (from 37 percent to 33 percent). Papen, however, still had no parliamentary majority to show for his efforts.

Here personal intrigue reached its most decisive point. Papen proposed a frank counterrevolution, using the president's powers to replace the Weimar Constitution with a new authoritarian regime. But General

<sup>8</sup>Heinrich Brüning, *Memoiren, 1918-34* (Stuttgart, 1970), p. 461.

<sup>9</sup>Alan Bullock, *Hitler, A Study of Tyranny*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1962), p. 213.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 187.

The New German Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, Vice Chancellor Franz von Papen (*left*), and Propaganda Chief Josef Goebbels (*right*) at a youth ceremony in May 1933.



Kurt von Schleicher, Hindenburg's closest military associate, convinced the president that the Army would not support such a step toward civil war. Schleicher proposed one more try at a parliamentary majority in which he would detach the "left" Nazi Gregor Strasser and his following from Hitler and form a coalition extending all the way to trade union officials on the left: it would be a last echo of the Army-union cooperation under military government from 1916 to 1918." Schleicher replaced Papen as Chancellor on December 2, 1932, and started to work on this byzantine coalition.

The outraged Papen was able to rally a coalition of his own—all of Schleicher's enemies. Hitler, worried by the apparent downturn of his

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fortunes since the November elections and eager to halt the defection of Strasser, now expressed his willingness to work with Papen rather than rule alone. Prominent businessmen, upset at Schleicher's efforts to bring trade unionists into the government, turned their support to Papen. When Schleicher's scheme came apart as trade unionists and moderate party leaders refused to participate, Papen's new coalition was ready. He proposed that Hitler be made chancellor, Papen himself vice chancellor, and the nationalist leader Hugenberg Minister of Finance, a combination too full of mutual distrust to have come together unless threatened with exclusion by Schleicher.

Hindenburg was persuaded that the Papen plan might achieve what successive chancellors had sought since 1930. A Hitler-Papen-Hugenberg coalition government offered a chance to obtain a parliamentary majority excluding the Social Democrats and Communists, to keep the Nazis in line by absorbing their leaders within a reassuring conservative coalition, and to escape from the improvisation of presidential government. On January 30, 1933, Hindenburg received Hitler and made him chancellor of the German Reich.

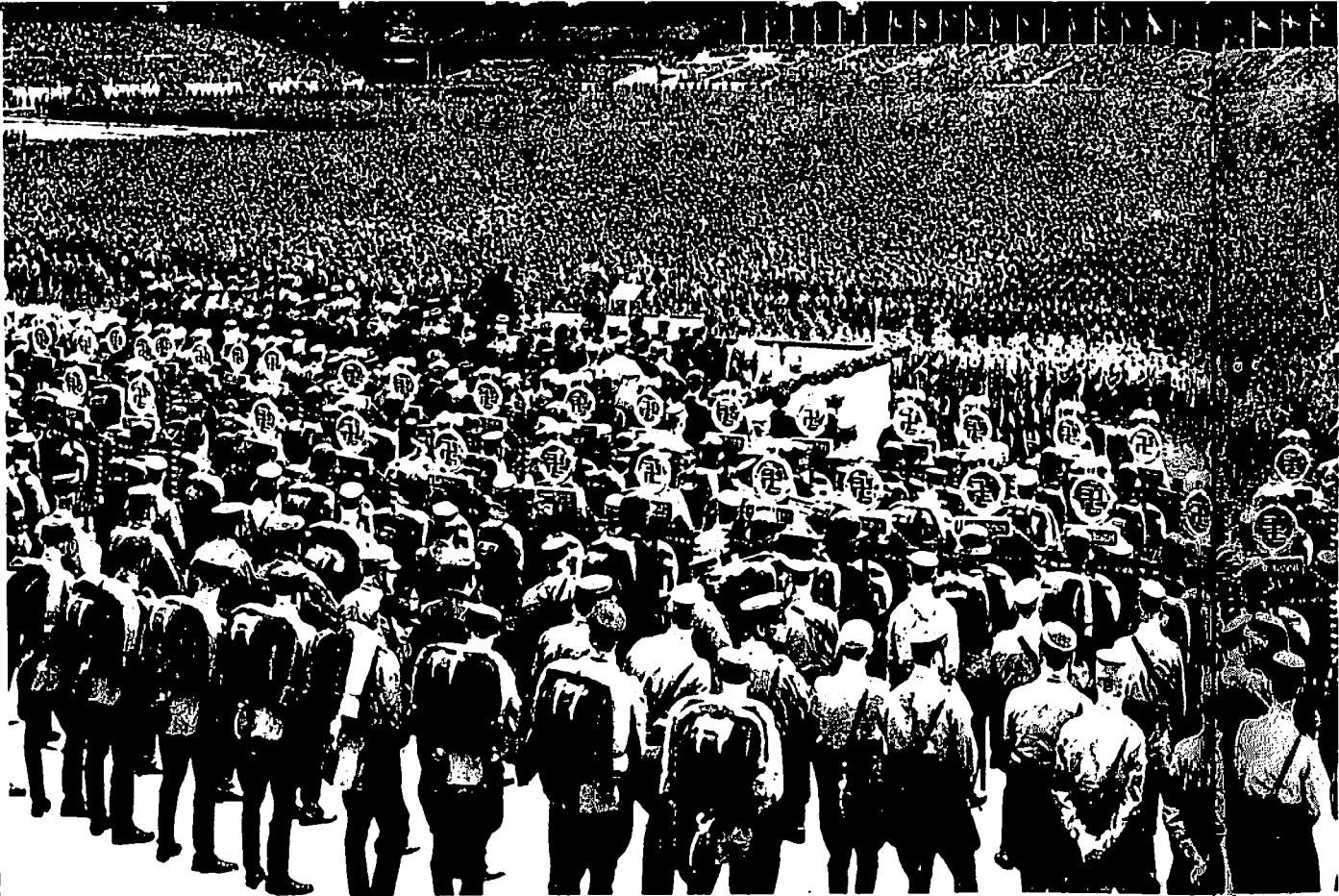
Responsibilities for bringing Hitler to power are widely shared. The voters who awarded him the largest proportion of electoral strength gave him his basic leverage. When that electoral strength failed to reach absolute majority and began to recede in November 1932, however, President Hindenburg and the intriguers around him saved Hitler in the effort to harness Nazi street and electoral power to their own purposes. Prominent businessmen paid the Nazi party's debts in December 1932; they and other conservatives worked for any coalition that would keep the Marxists out of office.

Although at least 63 percent of the electorate voted for non-Nazi parties through November 1932, the opposition failed to make use of its majority position. The moderate parties were more willing to form coalitions with the Nazis than with the Marxists. The German Communists, convinced that Hitler represented the last stage of dying capitalism, actually cooperated with the Nazis in a recall petition against the Social Democratic Prussian state government in the spring of 1932 and in a Berlin transit strike in November. They reserved their bitterest enmity for the Social Democrats, whom they called "social fascists" for being content to practice politics as usual in times of crisis. Social Democrats, in fact, did just that. Whereas they had thwarted the Kapp *Putsch* of 1920 with massive strike movements, they made no similar effort against such flagrant illegalities as Papen's expulsion of the Prussian state government in July 1932.

Hitler neither seized power nor was brought to power by some inevitable working out of German history. He was given a temporary prominence by large numbers of voters, brought into office by a backstairs conspiracy, and, finally, acquiesced in by the majority of average non-Nazi citizens.

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Fascist theatre: National Socialist units at a

### Revolution after Power, 1933–39

What did it mean to have Adolf Hitler as chancellor of the German Reich? The conservative politicians, senior officers, and high bureaucrats around Hindenburg thought they had at last escaped from improvised presidential government by making use of Hitler's mass following. Hitler, in turn, expected to make use of the office to consolidate his still limited power. Hitler's interpretation proved correct. If there was a Nazi revolution, it took place after he had become chancellor, not before.

Hitler's first step was to heighten the impression that a communist conspiracy was at work and that only the Nazis could deal with it effectively. The burning of the *Reichstag* building in Berlin on February 23, 1933, provided the opportunity. It is no longer thought that the Nazis hired the mentally retarded young Dutch Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, who set the fires.<sup>12</sup> The Nazis really believed that a

<sup>12</sup>Fritz Tobias, *The Reichstag Fire*, trans. Arnold J. Pomeranz (New York, 1963) argues that van der Lubbe did in fact burn down the *Reichstag* building on his own, a conclusion supported by the latest investigation. Hans Mommsen, "The Reichstag Fire and its Political Consequences," in Hajo Holborn, ed., *Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution* (New York, 1972).



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communist uprising was at hand. Much of the German public shared that hysteria and raised no objection to the mass arrests and show trial of Communist leaders that followed. A decree of February 28 suspended individual civil liberties (for good, as it turned out) "as a defensive measure against Communist acts of violence."

Hitler's backers within the Establishment had hoped that he could provide a way out from the electoral deadlock that had dogged German politics since 1930. But even with all the resources of the state at their command, as well as the calculated violence of the SA., Hitler's candidates could not obtain an absolute majority of the votes. In the elections of March 5, 1933, the Nazis won 288 seats, just short of 44 percent of the popular vote. The Catholic Center held firm, and the Social Democrats and Communists shared almost a third of the popular vote. The electoral route had still not given anyone an unquestioned mandate.

Hitler then proposed an enabling act empowering him as chancellor to promulgate laws on his own authority for the next four years. The Nazis, Hugenberg's Nationalists, and the Catholic Center party provided the necessary two-thirds vote for this change in the constitution. Only the Social Democrats, twelve of whose deputies were already in prison,



Hitler with the aging President Hindenburg at Hindenburg's country estate, 1934.

voted against the proposal; the Communist deputies were all in prison already. That vote of 441 to 92, on March 23, 1933, freed Hitler from the presidential countersignature as well as from the *Reichstag*, while in the nation at large, the impression of impending communist revolution freed Hitler from any genuine opposition from German moderates. The stage was set for Hitler to grasp all the reins of power.

There followed a process that German historians call *Gleichschaltung*, a useful word, without an exact English equivalent, that means "leveling" or "bringing into line." Step by step, all public agencies and all traditional bodies that had formerly enjoyed great autonomy in Germany—Army, churches, bureaucratic corps—were brought into line over the following four years by a mixture of threat and reward.

Hitler never bothered to replace the Weimar Constitution with a Nazi charter. Nevertheless, he made decisive changes in German public order. Various parties were either outlawed (Communists, Socialists) or persuaded to dissolve (Center, Nationalists) until on July 14, 1933, the National Socialist party was declared the only legal party. The political autonomy of the federal states, which even Bismarck had not dared touch, was curtailed by appointing *Statthalter* to replace elected governments and by abolishing the German upper house or *Reichsrat*, which

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had represented the states. Thus Germany became a centralized rather than a federal state for the first time. Finally, with the death of President Hindenburg in August 1934, Hitler absorbed that office and eliminated any possible rivalry from above.

Racial laws put Nazi anti-Semitism into effect. As early as April 1933, all "non-Aryan" members of the civil service were excluded from public office. The far-reaching Nuremberg Decrees of September 1935 deprived Jews of citizenship and forbade intermarriage with "Aryans." Quotas were set in the professions. Following the assassination of a German diplomat in Paris by a Jew in November 1938, the Nazis took a number of harsh measures designed to force Jews to sell or abandon their property and emigrate. SA men smashed 7500 Jewish store fronts throughout Germany during the night of November 9, the *Kristallnacht* (night of broken glass). In addition to being forbidden to collect any insurance on the damage, the German Jews were assessed a fine of 1 billion marks, and 20,000 of them were herded into concentration camps.

Hitler also tried to turn the churches into instruments of state policy. The Protestant churches, attended by many Hitler supporters and lacking any single center as a focus for opposition, were particularly susceptible to Nazi influence. The various state-supported Lutheran churches were united into a single German Evangelical Church under governmental authority; opposition leaders, such as Pastor Martin Niemöller, were imprisoned. The Catholic Church, unified and led from abroad, was less subject to Nazi control. But it was eager enough to safeguard the Catholic school system in Germany to sign a concordat with Germany in July 1933 forbidding priests to take part in politics and giving the Nazi regime a say in naming bishops.

The diplomatic corps and the Army were among the last German groups to be brought into line. When Foreign Minister Baron Konstantin von Neurath became sixty-five years old in February 1938, he was replaced by a party stalwart, Joachim von Ribbentrop, marking the party's intrusion into a corps traditionally reserved for career diplomats. At the same time, leaders of the Army—General Werner von Blomberg (Minister of War) and General Werner von Fritsch (chief of staff)—were removed under spurious accusations of sexual irregularities.

Finally, as we have seen, the German economy was whipped into intense activity by public-works and rearmament projects managed by a highly organized corporatism.<sup>13</sup> Despite Nazi propaganda favoring peasants and craftsmen, Germany had more great industrial concerns and more crowded cities by 1939, and fewer small farmers and artisans, than in 1933.

This revolution after power was not the "second revolution" that some

<sup>13</sup>See Chapter 11, pp. 340-42.

Nazi ideologues had hoped for at the beginning. Gottfried Feder had wanted to curb big business in favor of small business. Ernst Röhm had wanted to sweep away the old elites and replace them with new Nazi men; in particular, he wanted to replace the officer corps with a mass army based on his SA. Brown Shirts. Even as he brought German institutions into line with the party, however, Hitler also brought party mavericks into line with the real sources of power: big business, bureaucracy, and the Army. He did this by murder. During the chilling "night of the long knives," on June 30, 1934, hand-picked squads raided homes and apartments and took several hundred people off to their deaths: Röhm and much of the SA. leadership; Schleicher, who had tried to block the way in 1932; and the old-line Nazi, Gregor Strasser, who had wanted to accept a cabinet post from Schleicher. Thereafter, Hitler had no opposition within the party.

As for opposition from the general citizenry, it was effectively muted. Opposition still smacked of communism, and the penalties were severe. Above all, Hitler's mounting economic and strategic successes stilled criticism.

By 1939, Germany had been transformed from a pariah into the state most feared in Europe. But Hitler's *Gleichschaltung* had not really turned Germany into one well-oiled war machine. It is now known that the regime was kept running in many cases by carefully nurtured rivalries. The party encroached on the domain of professional civil servants; the Army resented Hitler's growing private armed force, the *Schutzstaffel*, or SS.; and so on. The capstone of *Gleichschaltung*, therefore, was the creation of an outward impression of monolithic efficiency through Joseph Goebbels' propaganda services and the efforts of an increasingly arbitrary police.

### CLERICAL AUTHORITARIANISM

The antiliberal swing of the 1930s took on a special tone in Catholic Europe. It was no accident that only the Catholic Center party, among moderate constitutional parties of the Weimar Republic, retained its electorate during the polarizing elections of 1930 to 1933. European Catholics, who had for the most part never accepted the individualistic, anticlerical tenets of nineteenth-century liberalism, had their own forms of antiliberal politics to which Catholic electors remained loyal after 1929 as before.

In the late nineteenth century, the Catholic Church had struggled to defend itself against the effects of liberalism: the idea of separation of Church and state; the individualist notion that each man is master of his own conscience; the replacement of priests with laymen as school-teachers when education became free, public, and compulsory. It was Republican France and the new constitutional monarchy of Italy that

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transgressed most actively in these regards: Italy had conquered Rome and the Papal States in 1870; France had made education both public and secular in the 1880s and had separated Church and state in 1905.

The mainstream of Catholic social and political thought, therefore, remained hostile to constitutional liberalism and individualism. Even Pope Leo XIII, who was finally willing to permit French and Italian Catholics to participate in republican electoral politics, supported a hierarchical, organic view of social rights and obligations in *Rerum Novarum* (1891), the Catholic Church's first formal pronouncement "on the condition of workers." In the ordered hierarchy of a good society, according to Leo XIII, each level enjoys rights and exercises duties commensurate with its station. Workers owe their employers respect and obedience; employers owe their workers respect and humane treatment. Some more radical Catholic social thinkers attacked capitalism itself for its callous disregard for workers. But they did not think private property should be abolished. It should be purified by a moral regeneration in which Christian employers would treat their employees as wards.

The depression encouraged the revival of Catholic criticisms of unbridled liberal capitalism. In his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931),<sup>1</sup> Pope Pius XI outlined a model economic and social system in accord with "the natural law, or rather, God's will manifested by it." Property is legitimate, he argued, and "man is born to labor as the bird to fly." But capital had grasped "excessive advantages," leaving the workers a "bare minimum" under the "Liberalistic tenets of the so-called Manchester School." Worse still, free competition had produced "immense power and despotic economic domination . . . concentrated in the hands of a few." Capital and labor alike must be subordinated to the good of the whole community. Free competition must be limited, workers must receive a "just wage" sufficient to "overcome" the proletarian condition, and owners should receive a "just share only of the fruits of production."

The pope admitted that only the state could perform this work of social reconstruction. The best system, he thought, was corporatism. The state should grant virtual monopoly status to "Syndical or corporative organizations" that included representatives of workers and employers in the same trade or profession. These then would direct all matters of common interest; strikes and lockouts would be forbidden. The advantages were "peaceful collaboration of the classes, repression of socialist organizations and efforts," and defense of "the peace and tranquility of human society . . . against the forces of revolution."

Followers of Pope Pius XI's socioeconomic views insisted on their distance from Hitlerian National Socialism. They rejected Nazism's athe-

<sup>1</sup>The official English title reads, in part, "Encyclical letter . . . on Reconstructing the Social Order and Perfecting it Conformably to the Precepts of the Gospel." The opening Latin words *Quadragesimo anno* refer to the fortieth anniversary of Leo XIII's social encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891).

ism, its cult of action for its own sake, its frank acceptance of state power. They longed for an organic society in which "natural" groupings would run society in harmony and without great extremes of wealth and poverty. Like Nazism, however, they subordinated individuals to the good of the whole and pointed to socialism as the main enemy. They helped pave the way to acceptability for authoritarian regimes in Catholic countries.

### Portugal: Salazar

The Portuguese Republic had been swept away by a military coup in 1926, before the depression; it had lasted only sixteen years. Antonio Oliveira Salazar, the military junta's Finance Minister, emerged as the strong man of the regime in the 1930s. He was content to leave the presidency to generals, but as premier (1932-69) he actually ran Portugal in his own style.

Salazar was a Catholic Integralist.<sup>15</sup> As such, he considered the rights of individuals subordinate to the needs of the group, and longed for a hierarchical society in which each person knew his place and kept it. Commitment to stable order, deep philosophic doubt about the possibility of human progress, and piety marked Salazar's regime.

Salazar had abandoned theological seminary for the study of economics. As a student leader of young conservatives at the University of Coimbra, he drew his values from Charles Maurras' *Action française* movement. He entered the government in 1928 when as Professor of Economics at the University of Coimbra he was called on to get the new military junta out of financial difficulties. Salazar was a strictly orthodox economist. A balanced budget was sacrosanct to him. He simply cut spending to fit income, paid off the national debt, and froze Portugal for twenty years in an almost immobile state of economic backwardness. In 1934 the total value of industrial production in Portugal was only one-fifth that of agriculture. It was not until the first Development Plan of 1953 to 1958 that Salazar actively promoted industrial development, with its concomitant need for outside capital and its risks of social disorder.

Politically, the New State (*Estado Novo*) sought the same immobilism. The Constitution of 1933 retained the nonparty Chamber together with the Chamber of Corporations, but no opposition candidates were permitted, and the premier was responsible only to the president. Strikes were forbidden; married women were not permitted to hold jobs. This regime kept Portugal politically somnolent until an opposition candidate ran for president in 1958. In 1959, Salazar abolished presidential elections.

In the 1930s, the regime took on some of the external trappings of

<sup>15</sup>See Chapter 9, p. 275.

fascism. An obligatory youth movement, the green-shirted *Mocidade Portuguesa*, enrolled all youth from seven to fourteen. The paramilitary Portuguese Legion used the Roman salute. Tight censorship and strict police control restricted civil liberties in the name of order.

At root, however, Salazar's regime was more conservative than fascist. Salazar himself, an austere bachelor, shunned public appearances and did nothing to mobilize fervent masses. He quietly broke the National Syndicalist movement that attempted to found a more dogmatic fascist party in 1933 and 1934. Salazar chose immobility rather than adventure, safety rather than dynamism. In his quest for security, he even sacrificed economic growth for the preservation of Integralist Christian corporatist values and a stable society.

#### Christian Social Austria: Dollfuss and Schuschnigg

Post-Versailles Austria was a hydrocephalic monster. Its huge head, the former Habsburg Imperial capital of Vienna with its 2 million worldly inhabitants, was mismatched with the tiny body of the German parts of the former empire, some 4 million upper Austrians, mostly alpine farmers. The one solution longed for by almost every Austrian in 1919, union (*Anschluss*) with Germany, was forbidden by the Treaty of Saint Germain, Austria's part of the peace settlement. Economic activity within cramped new borders got underway only with the support of substantial Allied loans, which forced the Austrian state budget to stringent economies. Under such conditions, it is hardly surprising that parliamentary politics never worked in the infant Austrian Republic.

Austrian politics in the 1920s was a deadlock between two irreconcilable forces. A formidably solid Social Democratic party, fortified with its own armed paramilitary force (*Schutzbund*), governed Vienna. Less weakened by the Socialist-Communist split than most Western Marxist parties, the Austrian Social Democrats remained both large and intransigent during the 1920s under the leadership of the scholarly Otto Bauer. Austria's loose federal structure gave the party large powers in Vienna, where it created an elaborate social-welfare program including immense public housing projects like the 1500-family Karl-Marx-Hof. On the anti-Marxist side was the Christian Social party, which united most of the Catholic population of the rest of Austria, fearful and hostile to "Red Vienna." It was led by an austere priest and professor of theology, Father Ignaz Seipel, who struck outside observers as a figure transplanted from the Counter-Reformation.<sup>16</sup> Also on the anti-Marxist side was another paramilitary force, the Home Guard (*Heimwehr*), a loose collection of local militias formed just after the First World War to fight against revolution and against possible incursions from neighboring

<sup>16</sup>French wits called him "Autrichelieu" (The Austrian Richelieu).

successor states. Neither the Social Democrats nor the Christian Social party could capture more than about 45 percent of the votes, although Father Seipel managed to govern for most of the time between 1923 and 1927, with the aid of Protestant anti-Marxists and the Peasant party. At best, the two antagonistic blocs eyed each other sullenly. At worst, they fought it out. On the Black Friday of July 15, 1927, demonstrations got out of hand in Vienna: The Hall of Justice was burned, and eighty-seven persons were killed during uncontrolled police revenge.

This unpromising situation was seriously aggravated by two additional factors after 1930. The shaky Austrian economy was especially susceptible to the depression. As has been noted, the failure of the great Vienna bank, the *Credit-Anstalt*, unleashed the European banking crisis of the summer of 1931. Further, anti-Marxist activists were increasingly swallowed up in a burgeoning Nazi movement spreading from Bavaria. With the parliament deadlocked in an almost even split, some kind of authoritarian regime seemed inevitable. The issue became an international one in Austria, because no solution was possible without outside help. The Nazis sought help from Hitler; the Christian Social party turned to Mussolini.

The Christian Social dictatorship of Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss (1933–34) combined a Catholic, corporatist authoritarianism at home with a foreign policy of independence from Germany supported by Italy. Dollfuss, whose small stature (4'11") was more than compensated for by his rashness, thought he could govern by "a single party, whose common bases will be the defense of Austrian independence and the corporative organization of the State."<sup>17</sup>

Dollfuss dissolved the deadlocked parliament in March 1933. Then he began to construct a new regime, which he claimed would be the first in the world based on the 1931 papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. Only a single party, the Fatherland Front, was allowed to function. Dollfuss reduced the independence of the Social Democratic city government of Vienna, and placed restrictions on socialist newspapers and organizations. The death penalty, abolished in 1919, was restored. The *Heimwehr* provided shock troops for the regime. The government was openly anti-Semitic. A concordat gave the Catholic Church the major role in public education. The new constitution, finally issued in May 1934, replaced "exaggerated parliamentarism" with a series of corporative councils, most of whose members were appointed.

The Social Democratic party found its activities more and more constricted. Finally, determined not to repeat the German Social Democrats' passivity in the face of Hitler, the Austrian left acted. After *Heimwehr* units had invaded a Social Democratic headquarters in Linz and seized

<sup>17</sup>Quoted by French Minister to Austria Gabriel Puaux, September 15, 1933. *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932–39, Ire série, vol. 4, p. 367.*

some weapons, the Social Democrats decided to call out the *Schutzbund* in Vienna and begin a general strike. Dollfuss retaliated with military force, including an artillery shelling of the Karl-Marx-Hof apartment complex on February 12, 1934. That day 193 civilians were killed and 128 among the government forces. The Social Democratic newspapers and organizations were then outlawed.

Dollfuss insisted that his regime was not fascist. To guard against being swallowed up in an atheist, statist German dictatorship, the Christian Social regime even forbade Nazi party activities in Austria. In March 1934 Dollfuss negotiated an alliance with Mussolini and with Julius Gömbös, the authoritarian prime minister of Hungary, to aid him in this policy. When a Nazi band assassinated Dollfuss on July 25, 1934, and attempted to install a Nazi regime, Italian armed forces on maneuvers in the Alps gathered at the Brenner Pass while loyal *Heimwehr* units regained control for Dollfuss' associate, Kurt Schuschnigg. In many ways, Austria under Dollfuss and his successor Schuschnigg (1934–37) bore resemblances to Nazi Germany during the same period. Their sharpest difference was the Austrian regime's commitment to separate existence. The clerical authoritarian Austrians, aided by the Fascist Mussolini, thus administered a far more striking blow to Hitler in 1934 than did any of the liberal states at any time during the 1930s.

### Spain: Franco and the Falange

The military revolt against the legal government of Republican Spain in 1936 and the subsequent three-year civil war are discussed in Chapter 13, on the Popular Front era. But this account of the European turn toward authoritarianism in the 1930s is not complete without a brief look at Franco's Spain.

The dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939–75) was the only interwar authoritarian regime to take power by military conquest. Franco and his followers invaded Spain from Spanish Morocco in July 1936. With the support of most of the professional Army and the acquiescence of conservatives and most of the clergy, they fought their way across Spain until the republican forces were finally defeated in 1939.

Unlike Hitler and Mussolini, therefore, Franco did not owe any of his power in Spain to a mass fascist movement. The *Falange*, a fascist-styled group founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the "dictator" of 1923 to 1930, contributed little to Franco's success and assumed only a marginal role in the new regime. Franco was a pragmatically conservative professional officer, bitterly opposed to the republic's anti-militarism, its incipient socialism, and the leeway it gave Catalan separatism. He prized order above dogmatic reaction. The new regime favored landlords, businessmen, and the clergy without being as dependent on any of them as they were dependent on it. Like Salazar, Franco

chose immobilism rather than expansion and so survived the Second World War.

### FASCISM IN EASTERN EUROPE

Conditions were ripe for fascism in Eastern Europe in the 1930s. Ethnic antagonisms in each country remained virulent. Unsatisfied national minorities—Germans in the Polish Corridor and in the Czech Sudetenland, Slovaks in eastern Czechoslovakia, Croats in northwestern Yugoslavia—turned naturally to those arch enemies of the postwar settlement, Hitler and Mussolini. Dominant national groups, threatened by internal secession movements, looked around for authoritarian routes to national unity.

Since Eastern Europe was heavily agricultural, the worldwide collapse of farm prices in the late 1920s drove government and citizens to bankruptcy. Bankers and merchants foreclosed on family farms. Because nowhere else in the world did Jews compose so high a proportion of bankers and merchants, anti-Semitism became a convenient shorthand for rural resentments against cities and against "the modern world." The land-hungry Eastern European peasants, attracted to Lenin a decade earlier, looked to new saviors after witnessing the results of Stalin's forcible land collectivization.

Eastern European parliamentary regimes offered no solution to these catastrophes. Their agrarian parties were composed of large and medium-sized landowners, and their liberal parties were based on urban professionals. Parliamentarism came to seem an alien implantation. Some Eastern Europeans rediscovered the charms of more or less fictitious "historic" traditions of authoritarian rule and ethnic purity.

All these encouragements to fascism were reinforced by a profound shift in Great Power positions in Eastern Europe in the 1930s. On every level—economic, military, and cultural—the French preeminence of the 1920s gave way to rising Italian and German influence. Successor states that had absorbed Russian soil in 1918 looked for stronger anti-Soviet bulwarks than the French Army, entrenched behind its Maginot Line. And the German economic boom after 1933 shifted the focus of Eastern European trade and finance from the sagging French economy.

#### Hungary and Bulgaria

It was only to be expected that the main losers of the postwar settlement—Hungary and Bulgaria—would be drawn to the most vigorous anti-Versailles powers. Hungary, too, had experienced Bolshevik revolution in 1919; and among its bankers and merchants was an especially high proportion of Jews on whom rural resentment was focused. Admiral Miklós Horthy, who had guided the counterrevolutionary victory in

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Hungary in 1919, continued to rule as "regent" through the Second World War. The upper-class parliamentarism of the 1920s vanished, however, with the appointment of General Julius Gömbös—an admirer of Mussolini and Hitler—as an authoritarian prime minister (1932–36). He strengthened ties with Mussolini and established an alliance with Dollfuss. An overtly fascist movement, the Arrow Cross, advocated more violent solutions, but Hungary remained in the hands of the counterrevolutionary traditionalists when Gömbös died in 1936.

The same was true of Bulgaria. Under King Boris III there was virtual authoritarian rule after 1934, when the parliament was dispensed with altogether for several years. But Boris successfully blocked more radical right movements, such as IMRO, the Macedonian nationalist-terrorist organization.

### Romania

A surprising development was the appearance of the most original, spectacular, and successful of the interwar fascist movements in Eastern Europe in a "victor" state, Romania. This was Corneliu Codreanu's Legion of the Archangel Michael and its strong-arm squad, the Iron Guard.

Even though Romania had been doubled in size and power by the Versailles settlement, that that did not solve pressing internal problems. The nation was four-fifths peasant, suffering from vast rural overpopulation on tiny family plots. The merchant and professional classes were very largely Jewish; in Bucharest, anti-Semites claimed, 11,000 out of 14,000 employees of banks and commercial establishments were Jewish. Peasants in debt clearly thought of their creditors or of large landholding syndicates as Jewish. Romania's expansion had exposed the state to new perils, for it had acquired the mouth of the Danube (Bessarabia) from Russia, which had not recognized this cession. Hence, even though there was no internal Marxist threat (the Communist party was very small after the first years, and in 1937 socialists received only 0.8 percent of the vote), the external Marxist threat was very real. Finally, there was no effective political solution to any of these difficulties. When universal suffrage was first introduced in Romania in 1919, it was natural to assume that a peasant party would receive an automatic majority. In fact, the prewar elite managed to hold on through the Liberal party, which was in power for ten of the sixteen years after the First World War. And even when the Agrarian party spent some years in power, it could not solve Romania's problems. Meanwhile, the depression was beginning to affect farm prices. Romanians with grievances were forced to look outside the political system for redress.

Codreanu, son of a schoolteacher, managed to harness these discontents in an extraordinary movement. He began by organizing students,

an alienated group without enough jobs to look forward to: their main demand was the imposition of quotas on Jewish admissions to the universities. The other main component was discontented, small family farmers, mostly in the poorest areas of northeastern Romania (Moldavia) where the middle class was almost exclusively Jewish and which earlier politicians had ignored. He welded these two groups together around religion, anti-Semitism, and hatred of cities and modern liberal society. Codreanu's legion was the most outwardly religious of all fascist movements: legionnaires, led by Orthodox clergy carrying ikons, were sent into remote villages with songs and costumes to win rural converts. Codreanu himself wore traditional Moldavian peasant dress.

The Iron Guard was a religious fraternity organized in cells (nests) whose members had sworn a blood oath to poverty, duty, and, if need be, murder on behalf of a purified Romania. Codreanu had begun his party activity with the assassination of a local police official. Political murder became virtually a way of life for the Iron Guard. Eleven public officials were killed by legionnaires in the 1930s.

Codreanu's party was no mere fringe movement. Its 16 percent of the popular vote in 1937 made it the third largest party behind the Liberals and Agrarians. Rather than continue with parliamentary government, however, King Carol II tried to beat the legion at its own game. In 1938 he suspended the constitution, imposed authoritarian rule, and jailed the legion's leaders. Codreanu and others were "killed while trying to escape," according to the official account.

The king's experiment failed, partly because Romania's problems in the 1930s were insoluble. A more immediate reason for failure was the country's vulnerability to a whole ring of neighbors (Russia, Bulgaria, Hungary) that had lost land to Romania in the postwar settlement. When representatives of Hitler and Stalin negotiated a new partition of Eastern Europe in August 1939, there was no power to which Romania could turn to defend its swollen 1919 frontiers. A year later, after Hitler's defeat of Poland and France, the Russians demanded and received not only Bessarabia but other territories that had never been Russian. In September 1940, under German and Italian pressure, the Romanians had to give up much of Transylvania to Hungary and return to Bulgaria territories won in 1913. Altogether, Romania lost one-third of its territory. King Carol was forced to abdicate.

General Ion Antonescu, a professional officer with Iron Guard sympathies, ruled after September 1940 as "conducator" (the Romanian equivalent of *Führer*) with the aid of Horia Sima, Codreanu's successor as guard chief. Thus the Iron Guard finally reached political power. Pressing for a "second revolution," guard members committed mass murders of Jews and imprisoned former political leaders. But since Hitler and Antonescu wanted order more than fervor at this point, the "conducator" had the Army crush the Iron Guard in three days of bloody fighting in

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Bucharest, in January 1941. Thereafter, Antonescu ruled as an outright military dictator without fascist ideological trappings.

The Iron Guard was the only fascist movement in Eastern Europe that actually ruled without direct German occupation, and its moment of power only lasted four months. Considering the virulence of Eastern European fascism, its relative failure may seem surprising. The social structure was partly responsible. In Eastern Europe, fascist movements drew on a massive distressed peasantry but only a rather small distressed middle class, and it was the older elites that remained in power. That is the chief reason for the fascists' relative lack of success. Even before 1929, Eastern European states had turned to authoritarian officers or revived monarchies. Thus, the work of "saving society" had already been performed by conservatives before the fascist revival of the 1930s. The Eastern European fascist movements appeared late on the scene, often as rivals or even enemies of more traditional authoritarian regimes. To the end, therefore, these fascist movements retained an anti-Establishment tone; scholars who have specialized in the study of Eastern European peasant fascism, such as Eugen Weber, stress its revolutionary character. By and large, Eastern European fascisms remained sectarian minorities.

## FASCIST MINORITIES IN WESTERN EUROPE

Fascism also remained a minority movement in the deeply rooted constitutional regimes of Western Europe. Even there, however, it colored and influenced the more moderate center-right groups struggling to keep their supporters.

### France

France had the most vigorous fascist minority in Western Europe. That was to be expected for a number of reasons. First, Frenchmen had become conscious as early as the 1890s of their country's decline from the greatest world power of the seventeenth century to the stagnant and sometimes unedifying Third Republic. Those who blamed the decline on bourgeois values and the rise of the left had already rallied to Charles Maurras' *Action française* before the First World War.<sup>18</sup> The ambiguity of France's victory in 1918 contributed to the sense of decline. It had been possible only with powerful allies, and, even then, at a cost that could never be repeated without fatally weakening the French population. Second, the French middle class had suffered severely from inflation, and France was preeminently a nation of small, independent pro-

<sup>18</sup>See Chapter 1, p. 35.

prietors. Finally, in a country with a rich revolutionary tradition, the overwhelming commitment of French industrial workers to militant Marxism seemed a threat both to the wealthy and to many small, independent Frenchmen, nominally partisans of the "Great Revolution" of 1789. Under these conditions, movements that promised national revival, order, economic stability, and authority were endemic in French political life between the wars. They were relatively inconspicuous when things went well for the republic; when things went badly, they became a serious alternative.

Three developments transformed French fascism from a fringe movement to a serious mass movement in the 1930s. The republic proved totally incapable of dealing with the depression, and Germany slipped out from under the Versailles chains to become an even greater menace than in 1914. Veterans who chafed that the republic had lost in useless palaver what the soldiers had won in the trenches joined their rage with that of the unemployed and those whose salaries or pensions had been cut by classical depression remedies.<sup>19</sup> Finally, the inclusion of Communists with the more moderate left in a new Popular Front electoral alliance in 1936, coupled with the spontaneous sit-down strike that accompanied the Popular Front's electoral victory, sent a wave of fear through French conservatives.

The largest of the new movements, claiming nearly 1 million members, was the *Croix de feu*,<sup>20</sup> headed by a retired colonel with monarchist connections, François de la Rocque. Much smaller but more outspokenly profascist was the *Parti populaire français* of Jacques Doriot, former leader of the French Communist youth movement. When Doriot was expelled from the Communist party in 1934 for premature espousal of a Popular Front strategy, he ricocheted across the political spectrum. A magnetic personality, Doriot was so deeply entrenched as mayor of the working-class Paris suburb of Saint-Denis that he brought that following over with him into anti-communist authoritarian nationalism, which also attracted ardent middle-class reactionaries disillusioned with the rather lackluster de la Rocque. Another French fascist movement that derived from the French left grew out of a youthful revolt against the financial orthodoxy of the French Socialist party (SFIO). Marcel Déat and other reformist socialists broke with the SFIO in 1932 over their desire to participate in a bourgeois government. Déat then went on to preach a nationalist rather than internationalist socialist solution to the depression in his neo-socialist movement. In addition, there emerged a number of anti-Semitic groups and right-wing action squads, such as the blue-shirted *Solidarité française* financed by the perfume manufacturer

<sup>19</sup>See Chapter 11, pp. 333–35.

<sup>20</sup>The name comes from its origins as a veterans' movement restricted to soldiers who had won the *Croix de guerre* under fire; that is, front-line veterans. It has nothing to do with the "fiery cross" of the Ku Klux Klan.

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François Coty. All these movements called themselves leagues, to distinguish themselves clearly from "corrupt" electoral parties.

The climax of French fascism between the wars came the night of February 6, 1934, when a number of right-wing leagues combined in a massive demonstration against the Chamber of Deputies. The immediate pretext was a moral crusade against the part played by some of the deputies in the Stavisky Affair, a case involving cover-up of fraud by a promoter, Alexander Stavisky. But behind that crusade lay the pent-up exasperation of veterans, nationalists, sufferers in the depression, and all those who associated France's troubles in the 1930s with inadequate public authority. Premier Edouard Daladier called out armed police to keep the crowd out of the parliament buildings, and in the ensuing fight thousands were injured and twelve persons were killed, the bloodiest internal conflict in France between the mutinies of May 1917 and the liberation of 1944. Daladier resigned the next day, even though he still had a majority of votes in parliament. A former president of the republic, Gaston Doumergue, put together a nonparty cabinet of national unity, ranging from Radicals on the left to the parliamentary right and including such extraparliamentary figures as Marshal Pétain as Minister of War. Thus the fascist leagues had been able to shift the government from the moderate left to a nonparty emergency regime.

In the long run, however, French fascists were unable to gain power by their own devices. Although their tone became much more shrill after the left electoral successes of May 1936 and the subsequent strike wave, they were clearly on the defensive and unable (or unwilling) to take action when the Popular Front government outlawed all direct-action leagues in June 1936. Since the scheduled elections of 1940 were overtaken by the war, it is impossible to give any precise measure of the electoral support for the legal parties that de la Rocque and Doriot created after suppression of their leagues. All that can be said is that the French fascist critique of the Third Republic's inefficacy and decadence helped sweep away the republic and all its works after the defeat of June 1940, and it strongly colored the French regime that replaced the republic after the armistice.

Why did French fascism remain a minority movement in the 1930s? Nationalists were too traditionally anti-German to copy German models for French revival. France had, after all, been nominally victorious in the First World War and thereafter less disastrously affected by subsequent economic catastrophes than Germany. French grandeur continued to be associated with the revolutionary traditions of 1789, rather than with the conservative opposition to them. Finally, the division of the French fascist movements and the absence of any one exceptional leader made coordinated efforts difficult. The riots of February 6, 1934, helped arouse the old cry of republican defense more fully than any event since the Dreyfus Affair, and the French fascist leagues never achieved another such peak of activity until the German occupation in June 1940.

### Britain

The only significant fascist movement in interwar Britain grew out of the frustrations of the depression, which hit Britain more disastrously than any other nation except Germany and the United States. While unemployment was reaching 20 percent of the labor force, no party had any convincing solution to offer.

The Labour government's rejection of Sir Oswald Mosley's bold and original plans for stimulating purchasing power<sup>21</sup> in 1930 convinced Mosley that the Labour party was a bunch of worthless weaklings, "a Salvation Army that took to its heels on the day of Judgment." He endeavored to transcend the existing party deadlock by founding the New party in March 1931, but this effort only convinced him that any parliamentary combination was a hopeless instrument for radical change. The New party won no seats in the election of September 1931.

<sup>21</sup>See Chapter 11, p. 331.

Sir Oswald Mosley inspects a British Union of Fascists unit in London, October 1936.



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and its original recruits of young Labour leftists (John Strachey, Aneurin Bevan) soon quit in protest over Mosley's anti-Soviet attitude, and his hiring of strong-arm squads to protect him from hostile Labourites.

In October 1932, Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists (BUF). His starting point, as always, was a bold and decisive remedy for unemployment. That led him to other far-reaching proposals. A "living wage policy" was impossible, of course, with the "old gang of present parliamentarism," left and right. Mosley proposed a "modern" regime "capable of rising to new tasks,"<sup>22</sup> in which a Chamber of Corporations would manage the economy, and a parliament, composed of representatives of various economic interests, would have only consultative powers. The king would name the prime minister after consultation with a National Council of Fascists; the prime minister's work would be ratified by plebiscites every five years. Mosley turned current economic priorities upside down, giving domestic measures against unemployment precedence over concern for international financial stability. Hence he attacked "international finance capital" and talked of nationalizing the banks. Although he opposed the international capitalists of London, he based his hopes for British economic revival on "national" capitalism, which, he insisted, had common interests with the workingman. Both would benefit by Britain's turning its back on Europe and developing the empire under a system of imperial preference. With this last proposal, Mosley resembled the proempire right of prewar days. But his political techniques had not been seen in Britain before. BUF mass meetings were marked by black-shirted guards and floodlit black flags. Mosley insisted on the "dynamic" and "modern" character of fascism.

The high point of Mosley's popularity came in 1934, when the *Daily Mail* published an editorial headlined, "Hurrah for the Blackshirts!"<sup>23</sup> Party membership was estimated to reach 20,000. Mosley's only genuine mass following, however, emerged in the proletarian East End of London, where he struck a responsive chord with his contempt for parliamentary Labour and, later, with his anti-Semitism. His Black Shirts switched from beating up Labour party members to beating up unassimilated Eastern European Jews who had settled in the East End of London before the war.

These tactics produced widespread revulsion in England, and in 1936 the Tory government outlawed uniformed groups and tightened police measures against parades and rallies. But the BUF's decline after 1934 stemmed from more fundamental causes. Tory electoral victories in 1931 and 1935 reassured most British conservatives that Stanley Baldwin was safeguard enough, as did the modest revival of prosperity that Britain enjoyed despite Baldwin's inactivity. Britain had not suffered

<sup>22</sup>Oswald Mosley, *Greater Britain* (London, 1932), pp. 16, 156.

<sup>23</sup>*Daily Mail*, January 8, 1934.

military defeat, and parliamentary government was closely associated with British images of national greatness. Mosley's BUF had been founded before Hitler came to power, and growing anti-German sentiment lessened his appeal to the British middle class. After 1936, Mosley, a declining star at the age of thirty-eight, was reduced to Jew-baiting in the East End of London, a scurrilous end for a man of his brilliant but wayward talents. In the end, the far right was less successful in interwar Britain than it had been in a previous crisis, the battle over Irish Home Rule from 1910 to 1914.

British fascism is an interesting phenomenon, not only because of Mosley's stature (he was one of few European fascist leaders who achieved eminence before becoming fascist) but also because its original motive force was economic crisis rather than cultural despair or military defeat. Above all, British fascism revealed the vigor of reaction against liberal parliamentarism and free-trade capitalism in the 1930s, even in their homeland. Although the overtly fascist BUF became a marginal sect, the traditional parties were also subtly drawn away from liberal values. They accepted the necessity of protective tariffs, state-regulated business cartels, and other types of public economic management that had still been anathema ten years earlier.

### The Low Countries and Scandinavia

Flemish resentment against the French-speaking Walloons' dominance of binational Belgium was by far the most active unresolved nationality issue in Continental Western Europe between the wars. It was only natural that Flemish nationalists, for whom the established Belgian parties (Catholic, Liberal, Socialist) offered no redress, should turn in the 1930s to antiparliamentary mass movements with fascist trappings. Various Flemish movements united to form the *Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish National Union) in 1933, led by a former schoolmaster, Staf de Clercq, and supported in part by German money. The VNV had a genuine mass following in rural Flemish districts; it received 13 percent of the vote in the four northern provinces in 1936 and 15 percent in 1939. Its main rival was the fervent uniformed squad of young men known as *Verdinasos* or *Dinasos* (a contraction of *Verbond van Dietsche Nationaalsolidaristen*, Band of Dutch-speaking National Solidarists) led by a young lawyer, Joris Van Severen, with special appeal to veterans and students. Van Severen advocated the reunion of all Flemish (Dutch) peoples in modern Holland, Belgium, and Luxemburg in an expanded Netherlands as powerful as that of the seventeenth century.

The most successful antiparliamentary mass movement in the Low Countries—indeed, perhaps the biggest for a brief time in all Western Europe—was not based on nationalist resentments, however, Léon Degrelle's Rexist movement in Belgium tapped a protean ground swell of disgust with parliamentary politics in 1935 and 1936 and seemed

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capable, for a moment, of replacing the old parties with one new mass party. Degrelle emerged as a militant in the Belgian Catholic Youth Movement; he was in charge of its publishing house, called "Rex" (after *Christus Rex*, Christ the King). In November 1935, at the age of twenty-nine, he launched a campaign to displace the stuffy leadership of the Catholic party, as well as of the Liberal and Socialist parties. Promising to sweep clean with a "new broom," Degrelle unleashed a kind of emotional binge against slack and corrupt parliamentarism. His followers demonstrated with brooms in front of party headquarters, and they packed political rallies shouting "Rex vaincra" (Rex will win).

The movement mobilized crowds in a way unknown to staid Belgian parliamentary politics. Its Catholic, monarchist, corporative authoritarianism owed much to Degrelle's former idol, Charles Maurras. His followers were the young, the previously apolitical, and a host of rural and small-town folk easily aroused against "high finance," corrupt cities, and Marxism ("Rex or Moscow" was a leading slogan). Although the depression was passing, its ravages were clearly a factor in Rexist popularity. Mussolini sent secret funds to the Rexists and allowed Degrelle to use Italian radio beamed to Belgium.

The elections of May 1936 gave Rexist candidates 11.5 percent of the total vote (21 out of 202 seats). Votes ran as high as 29 percent in rural French-speaking districts, but Degrelle also had some following in the Flemish districts of northern Belgium. The showdown came in a parliamentary by-election in early 1937 in which Degrelle himself was a candidate. He proclaimed that if he won his seat, a general election would then have to be called. The existing parties united around Prime Minister Paul Van Zeeland as the opposition candidate. After the Catholic primate of Belgium condemned Rexism as a "danger for the country and for the Church," Degrelle was held to 20 percent of the vote against Van Zeeland's 80 percent. This broke the spell, for a movement whose main asset was the promise of a victorious new style of politics could not survive any interruption of its climb. Brief as its heyday was, however, Rexism revealed how deep was the inarticulate frustration with parliamentary regimes in postdepression Western Europe.

In Protestant Holland, fascism was a more secular affair than Degrelle's Catholic Integralism, but there were common themes of authority, anti-Marxism, national regeneration, and the "new man." The immediate spur to Dutch fascism was a naval mutiny aboard the warship *Seven Provinces* in Dutch Indonesia in 1931. Profiting by this shock to the social and imperial order, a waterworks engineer, Anton Adriaan Mussert, founded the National-Socialist League (NSB). Mussert received almost 8 percent of the vote in elections of April 1935, with the proportion reaching 20 percent in Protestant small-farming areas in the southwest. The NSB was then the fifth largest party in Holland. The stability of Dutch parliamentary monarchy, recovery from the depression, and growing fears of Nazi Germany hurt Mussert's movement, and

in spite of the slogan "Mussert or Moscow" his electoral toll dropped in 1937.

Even relatively stable Scandinavia had its fascist movements, although there, too, they remained noisy minorities. The most conspicuous of these was the Norwegian movement of Vidkun Quisling, whose last name became a synonym for collaboration after the German occupation of Norway in 1940. Quisling was a professional army officer (like Franco, Mosley, and the Hungarian Julius Gömbös). As Norwegian military attaché to St. Petersburg, he had actually witnessed the Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath, when he participated in international food relief in the Crimea. After entering Norwegian politics in the Agrarian party, Quisling became Defense Minister in 1931, a position that he lost in a controversy surrounding his use of troops against strikers. Quisling then founded the *Nasjonal Samling* (National League) in May 1933. His following remained small, for Norway had no sensitive nationality problem, and Quisling's efforts to generate excitement over recovering Greenland and Iceland from Denmark remained fruitless. Furthermore, even though the Norwegian Socialists had been the only Scandinavian Socialist party to join the Third International in 1919, the Norwegian left posed no revolutionary threat in the 1930s. The special stamp of Quisling's fascism, beyond a vague anti-Marxism and ritual attacks on "Anglo-Jewish finance capital," was the leader's taste for evoking ancient Norse grandeur and Nordic racial solidarity. The movement was important mainly for assembling those elements on which wartime collaboration after 1940 could be built.

### THE APPEAL OF FASCISM

At the very onset of the depression, before Hitler came to power, the Scottish writer and diplomat John Buchan looked back gloomily at the decline of parliamentary institutions and the breakdown of creeds in the twentieth century: "But for the bold experiment of Fascism, the decade has not been fruitful of constructive statesmanship."<sup>24</sup> During the 1930s, similar doubts expressed about the European liberal tradition swelled to a roar.

Fascism caught up the refugees from a liberal system that no longer appeared to work. Liberalism seemed to provide neither a living nor security. Some of these ideological refugees could turn to Marxism, but that step required one to identify with the proletariat and to accept the Soviet Union as a model. Thus, Marxism's growth in the 1930s had inherent limits. Fascism offered something to every kind of discontent; indeed, its very denial of class was one of its major assets. To the threatened elites, the authority of fascism offered an immediate end to

<sup>24</sup>John Buchan, *The King's Grace* (London, 1929).

class struggles and a managed economy without ruinous competition. To a desperate lower middle class, fascism offered security and a chance to bring organized labor to heel. To embittered nationalists, it offered national unity and glory. To the jobless, it offered jobs.

It will not do, of course, to assess fascism's appeal solely in terms of economic and social interest. In ways still only partly understood, fascism offered all sorts of individual psychological gratifications: for some, the reassurance of belonging; for some, the thrill of vicarious brutality.<sup>25</sup> Most people, no doubt, merely acquiesced.

At bottom, the authoritarian regimes seemed simply to work better than liberal regimes in the 1930s. The appeals of success simply evaporated, of course, when fascism was defeated in 1945. The outer trappings of fascism have therefore fallen into disrepute. That does not preclude the possibility, however, of similar future reactions by frightened and insecure middle and upper classes.

<sup>25</sup>See "L'enfance d'un chef," Jean-Paul Sartre's short story of a self-doubting adolescent boy who enjoys the tough pose of a fascist youth gang. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Le Mur* (Paris, 1939), pp. 145-241.