THE POLITICAL MOVEMENTS AMONG THE RURAL PEOPLE IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, 1918 TO 1932, II*

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III. The Conservatives on the Defensive

The relationship between the Conservatives and the National Socialists was rather ambiguous. Many Conservatives in Schleswig-Holstein and elsewhere, while despising the personnel of the Nazi party and disapproving of certain features of Hitler's policy, nevertheless, welcomed the entire "ethnic" movement as an instrument for attaining their own purposes and as a kind of nationalistic revival which finally would lead the masses of the "awakened" back into the fold of the Conservative party. Consequently, relations among the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei,* other conservative organizations and the various "ethnic" movements tended to be quite cordial, if not openly so, at least behind the scenes.

The conservative forces were organized mainly into three groups: the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei,* the *Landbund,* and the *Stahlhelm* (Steel-Helmets.)

Of these organizations, the *Stahlhelm,* in its beginnings, was least committed to the Conservative party standpoint. As a *Bund* of all World War veterans, restricted only by the prerequisite of a certain amount of actual combat service, it had to leave undetermined its position on questions of practical politics and even the new constitution of the Reich. Many of the younger generation among the ex-soldiers dreamed of overcoming the distinctions of social status and class. They hoped the new organization would perpetuate that fellowship of all classes which they had experienced in the trenches. One of the earliest proclamations of this sentiment, the speech of the student, Theodor Bartram, at the inauguration of the *Bund deutscher Frontsoldaten an deutschen Hochschulen (Bund* of German com-

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bat soldiers at German universities) at Kiel University, February 26, 1919, manifested obvious relations with the ideologies of the youth movement and also of the *Landespartei.*

The older generation in the Steel-Helmets had scarcely been touched by such notions, since they were still imbued with the ideas of the Wilhelminic era, or even impressed with an ideology which received its inspiration from the symbolic, idealized figure of Frederick the Great. Since offices in this military organization were bestowed largely according to the military rank of the members, the younger generation did not have much of a chance to gain influence. The splitting off of the *Werwolf* was a result of this conflict between the generations. In Schleswig-Holstein the *Werwolf* participated in the above-mentioned merger of militant ethnic *Bünde,* which had competed in Dithmarschen since 1924 with the Steel-Helmets proper under the name of *Stahlhelm Westküste.*

The Steel-Helmets, however, developed more and more in the rural parts of Schleswig-Holstein into an organization which had its support mainly among the owners of large estates and large farms with their adherents. This became obvious during the short life of a conservative government in the second half of 1932. Conceived originally as a movement to restore the community of the people by the example of the fellowship of veterans, the Steel-Helmets had relapsed into a political instrument of the upper classes.

During the first years after the War, the Conservative party had been very weak in the rural parts of Schleswig-Holstein. The reactionary Kapp *Putsch* of 1920 had been a complete failure in this region, and as late as 1923, any plans for a conservative *putsch* met with stubborn opposition among the farmers. Nevertheless, in the elections of 1921, the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* was the second party in voting strength in the rural areas, surpassed only by the Social Democratic party. The *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* was not a mere continuation of the old Conservative party. By winning over certain strata of the

urban population, including elements of the so-called "new middle class," it had attained a broader field of potential influence than the old Conservatives had ever possessed. The DNVP had a fair chance of becoming a popular conservative party. As such, it would have been capable of winning over the former "national liberal" and "progressive" farmers, for they succeeded in 1924 in getting almost 50% of the rural vote on the *Geest* and about 40% in the marshes and in the East. This development was cut short when in October, 1928, Hugenberg and the large manufacturers' wing gained control of the DNVP.

Although the Conservatives soon had regained a fair amount of success in the elections, the political leadership of farmers was not any longer really in their hands since the *Bauernverein* had started to compete with the *Landbund* and in some areas had even replaced it. The existence of an independent organization of the Schleswig-Holstein farmers, which maintained contacts with democratic organizations in other parts of the Reich, was felt as a serious threat by the Conservatives. In these years, after the stabilization of the Reichsmark, the Dawes agreement, the German-Russian treaty, and the beginning of industrial recovery, the new democratic state seemed to get more firmly established. That respectable Schleswig-Holstein farmers should join the supporters of the new democracy meant for the East Elbian landowner class a severe loss of prestige regardless of the loss of votes. Besides, the *Bauernverein* decidedly represented the economic interests of the cattle raisers and cattle grazers, and could therefore easily be driven into opposition against those landowners whose position in price and tariff policy was that of grain and potato growers. The fight, which for this reason the *Landbund* and the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* put up in Schleswig-Holstein against the *Bauernverein,* was thus only part of the general struggle between the economic associations of large landowners and the farmers' organizations.

The position of the conservatives in this struggle was at first disadvantageous on account of the disintegration of the pre-war *Bund der Landwirte* in consequence of the

breakdown of the imperial régime. Even after its reorganization into the *Landbund* the Conservatives remained weak.

The *Bauernverein,* on the other hand, was able, in the elections of December, 1924, when the *Landespartei* had ceased to exist, to force the nomination of its own candidates on the tickets of the Democratic party, the *Deutsche Volkspartei* (DVP) and even the DNVP. This was achieved by a threat to nominate a separate *Bauernverein* ticket—a characteristic illustration of the strengthening of special interest organizations through proportional representation. Therefore, the Conservatives strove for control of the *Bauernverein.*

The first attempt to establish close collaboration between the *Landbund* and the *Bauernverein* was made late in the summer of 1924. The agreement lasted only for half a year. This episode led, however, to the founding of a separate association of small farmers and cottagers, the *Kleinbauern-und Kleinbesitzer-Verband der Westküste,* which had its main support in the marshes owing to the sharp class distinctions between large and small farmers. Even a new attempt to reach a lasting agreement between the provincial leaders of the two large organizations, an attempt which was made in 1927 with the good services of the *Regierungspraesident,*[1] failed because the *Landbund* leaders refused to pledge adherence to the democratic régime and officially to sever connections with the DNVP.

Among the rank and file of the two organizations, restiveness and antagonism against the democratic régime continued to mount particularly when the price of hogs fell and credit difficulties increased. In some of the counties complete union of the two organizations had already been achieved. When it became apparent that negotiations between the provincial leadership of the two associations did not lead to any result, opposition leaders within both organizations called open air mass meetings of farmers in

[1] A very interesting example of the ways in which the Conservatives were able to enlist the support of the high bureaucracy even under a liberal régime.

all county seats. Due to participation of the small town middle classes the total number of demonstrators amounted to about 140,000.

In the first place, these mass meetings were to draw attention to the threatened position of the agricultural debtor and, in addition, they were to force the merger of the farm organizations over the heads of the official leaders. The demands which were raised at these meetings concerned tariff, credit, and tax regulations, and ended with an appeal to all political parties to take care of a proper representation of agriculture on their tickets for the coming elections. It was further demanded that the three organizations representing farm interests immediately unite into one large organization which would represent a force not to be overlooked by anybody. This was one of the first proclamations of the idea of one big union of all farmers which later on found its realization in the National Socialist *Bauernschaft*. The platforms adopted at these meetings included the familiar cry of the *Landbund* for increased agricultural tariffs. The main concern was, however, with the matter of indebtedness and credit. It is easy to see why the clamors should have been loudest in the marshes and other areas of intensive, highly commercialized agriculture. Similar mass meetings were staged simultaneously in Ostfriesland, the coastal region between the Elbe and Ems rivers, where similar socio-economic conditions prevailed. These meetings, which were called by a small committee with no authority, hardly would have turned out so successfully had there not already been present since summer a deep dissatisfaction among the farmers with their organizations. Thus, they were ready for the slogan of a unified organization for all agriculture, from cottager to large landowner. That the placid, sober-minded, and reserved Schleswig-Holstein farmers should have turned out in such masses for these open air meetings and parades—thereby adopting a form of political conduct hitherto used only by labor organizations— indicates how far the process of social fermentation had gone and how strong the opposition to the leaders in office had already become.

Henceforth, the merger movement proceeded along two lines: one, the *Landvolk* movement favored by the *Landbund;* the other one, the *Bauernbund,* split off from the *Bauernverein* in the summer of 1928, under the leadership of the two farmers Toennsen of Schaalby and Koehler of Buhnstorf, both sympathizers with National Socialism.

The new organization of the *Bauernbund* was the provincial association of the unions of *Landbund* groups with the *Bauernverein* groups which had sprung up in numerous counties. The *Landbund* leadership finally was compelled to merge its own reduced membership into this new organization which then assumed the name, *Schleswig-Holsteinischer Land-und Bauernbund.* This organization, in which the peasants numerically prevailed, was controlled, at first, by large landowners and their political friends among the large farmers. The attempt to absorb the remnants of the original *Bauernverein* failed because of the opposition of *Bauernverein* leaders both in Schleswig-Holstein and in the national association. The influence of the *Bauernverein,* however, waned in 1930 when the NSDAP declared a boycott against it. The way in which the *Landbund* attacked the *Bauernverein* corresponded exactly with the tactics it applied throughout the Reich against the independent farmers' organizations.

While the *Landbund* succeeded in breaking up the farmers' organization which supported the democratic régime, the Conservatives failed to achieve their real aim of bringing the peasantry into their political fold, because in the regions where the peasantry prevailed, the new *Bauernbund* was soon controlled by National Socialists. The failure of the Conservatives' ambitions was probably also caused by the fact that the *Landbund* leaders, while negotiating with the *Bauernverein,* encouraged those farmers' riots which shook the country after the fall of 1928. The unfortunate turn which these turmoils took must have discredited the *Landbund.*

The *Landvolk* movement originated in the summer and fall of 1928 when the farmers started refusing to pay taxes because of the increase in foreclosures. The dissatisfaction

was used by a farmer in Eiderstedt, W. Hamkens, to arouse a militant opposition to the government among farmers, especially in the marshes. Thus this movement began in those areas which were most susceptible to depression. The new feature in this movement was the strict repudiation of participation in parliamentary government and the propagation of "direct action"—refusal to pay taxes from the "substance," prevention of forced sales and of attachment of agricultural implements, boycott of farmers who did not collaborate, and refusal to cooperate with the present régime. The practical application of these tactics led to conflicts with the executive organs of the state, which resulted in mass sentences for the farmers involved, especially the two leaders, and produced unrest far beyond the region. Similar movements originated in Oldenburg, Saxonia, Thuringia, Pomerania, eastern Prussia, Hanover, and Silesia. In Schleswig-Holstein these incidents confirmed the opinion among the farmers that the present régime was the enemy of agriculture, that the farmer could not expect any protection from the democratic state but rather had to protect himself against it. The proud and lordly marsh farmers who were accustomed to think of themselves as the ruling class and to regard the *gensdarmes* as the protectors of their rights and property were particularly angered when the armed state police was called out to disperse their own mass meetings and parades.

The *Landvolk* movement abstained from developing formal organization; they were apprehensive lest the will for action and the fighting spirit might dwindle under the influence of the bureaucracy that goes with an organization. Later on "emergency committees" were established to take care of the debtors' problems, and in these, depending on local conditions, *Landbund* leaders, Steel-Helmets, or National Socialists participated. In some counties the emergency committees went so far as to demand refusal to pay contributions to the Chamber of Agriculture and other organizations and to invite the people to boycott the "vampire-like trusts, department stores, and consumers' cooperatives."

When finally a terrorist group sprang up in the *Landvolk* movement, which perpetrated "demonstrative" attacks on tax collectors' offices and courthouses, the more sensible farmers withdrew, and the National Socialist party also thought it advisable to keep aloof from the *Landvolk* movement; for, as the Gau-leader of Schleswig-Holstein pointed out in a circular, the party had been greatly impaired by having been associated with the *Landvolk* movement. After a heavy riot in Neumünster, Adolf Hitler prohibited participation by party members in activities of the *Landvolk.*

It was unfortunate for the *Bauernverein* that it avoided taking any stand whatever when the first clashes between farmers and police occurred as the result of an order attaching cattle for the payment of delinquent taxes. The *Bauernbund,* however, had immediately declared its solidarity with the rioting farmers and demanded a series of economic measures of a distinct National Socialist character. Later, when the *Landvolk* movement fell into disrepute on account of bombings and the appearance of political adventurers as agitators, the *Bauernbund* as well took an official stand against it, without actually losing contact, however. On October 6, 1929, the *Land-und Bauernbund* published a program with an obvious trend towards National Socialism. Here the *Bauernbund* declared expressly that the Schleswig-Holstein farmer did not have any confidence in the "present régime of bureaucracy and party rule." At the same time it withdrew definitely from the *Landvolk* movement.

The *Landvolk* movement found its adherents chiefly in southern Holstein, in southern Dithmarschen, around the town of Itzehoe, and particularly in the interstitial zone between the marsh and the *Geest* and in the river marshes; on the Holstein *Geest* the village Hohn in Kreis Rendsburg was for some time a main stronghold of the movement. This pattern may be explained by the movement's dependence for support on the *Tannenbergbund* and the *Stahlhelm Westküste* and its affiliated organizations.

In order to understand the *Landvolk* movement, it is important to realize that its active circle consisted primarily

of men who did not hold office either in the government or in the agricultural organizations. The official representatives of agricultural interests, however, from the chamber president to the magistrate and even to the leaders of the *Bauernverein* and *Landbund* were all connected with the democratic parliamentary state, and naturally were entangled in many ways with the political parties in power. The *Landvolk* people felt, with good reasons, that all these politicians would not be inclined to endorse more militant tactics of passive resistance. They themselves had scarcely anything to lose, at least not any political prestige, and were in this respect free to act.

The *Landvolk* movement presents a very interesting insight into the formation of political will within the rural population. It developed from a union of militant circles drawn from all conservative groups directed against the parties and the recognized agricultural associations. Personal connections existed with the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei,* the *Landbund,* the Steel-Helmets, the *Werwolf,* the Pan-German Society, and the Ehrhard Circle, as well as with the *Tannenbergbund,* the *Deutschvölkische Freiheitsbewegung,* and the radical wing of the National Socialist party. The real nucleus of the movement was formed not only by professional revolutionaries, who may have had connections with "Organization C," [2] but also by some farmers, among whom Claus Heim was most outstanding.

In relation to the National Socialist party, the *Landvolk* movement was at first a competitor. However, from the very beginning, its chances were limited because its leaders had never aimed at seizing power, but rather saw their task in undermining the existing régime either by mere passive resistance or by intimidating state and communal officials (hence the bombings!). A rigid organization like the one which the National Socialists were building was precisely what *Landvolk* adherents rejected partly out of fear of bu-

[2] "Organization C" (for Consul) was a terroristic secret organization, stemming from those auxiliary units of the *Reichswehr* which were formed in the emergencies of 1919 and 1920. The Organization had been involved in the assassination of Erzberger and Rathenau and in several other political murders.

reaucratic stagnation, partly because it was expected to be easier this way to escape suppression by the police. They also were making a virtue of necessity, since it was not likely anyway that broad masses of farmers would ever flock to this radical movement. The loose form permitted connections with various "rightist" associations, which in their turn would tolerate a "spontaneous" movement whereas they would have fought as a competitor any real organization.

The ideology of the *Landvolk* movement was strongly National Socialist. When the movement broke down, the majority of its adherents went over to the National Socialists. With the breakdown of this debtors' rebellion, the poor chances for any separate action of farmers had been proven; it had not been able to win the favorable public opinion of the towns and of rural non-farmers. The National Socialist party on the other hand claimed to be a movement of the entire people. National Socialism could step in where the front against the "system" had been dilapidated on account of the breakdown of the *Landvolk* movement and the resulting weakening of the *Landbund* and of the Conservatives. In the country it spread mainly by means of the *Bauernbund* which soon displaced the *Bauernverein* everywhere.

Herewith a new platform for the economic contest had been created. The old type of representation of agricultural interests had lost out and the new attempt at spontaneous direct action also had failed. Thus the road was paved for the National Socialist party to capture the farm vote. This was proved by the elections of September 14, 1930.

IV. The Origins and Rise of National Socialism

Like all political movements in modern society, the National Socialist party in its beginnings was predominantly urban. The first local units were organized in Altona, Kiel, and Flensburg in the years 1924 and 1925.

In the rural areas of Schleswig-Holstein, the prospects for the party were at first bad; the form and content of

Nazism seemed to be incompatible with the character of the people. Adolf Hitler, however, after a visit to some locals in Dithmarschen in the spring of 1929, observed that, although he had often been warned that National Socialism would never gain a foothold in Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen), he had always refused to believe it and had been right after all.

The rural organization of the National Socialist party gained its first stronghold on the Holstein *Geest* and spread much later to the eastern districts. One of the oldest and strongest centers was the little town of Albersdorf on the Ditmarsian *Geest,* situated on one of the main railroad lines. In 1929 there were about eighteen locals on the *Geest* of southern Dithmarschen while only five locals existed in the marshes. On the Schleswig *Geest* the party organization started to spread about a year later. Latest of all sections to be penetrated by the organization was the Schleswig hill zone.

The beginning of National Socialist propaganda among the Schleswig-Holstein farmers coincides approximately with the beginnings of the depression in agriculture. The *National Socialist Yearbook of 1927* (second edition) contains an article by the Gau-leader of Schleswig-Holstein, Hinrich Lohse,[3] "National Socialism and German Agriculture," which presents all of the essential points on which the agitation among rural voters was based.

The situation of German agriculture, Lohse said, was getting worse from year to year. International finance had put this last bastion of national independence under fire in order to break its resistance. The profitableness of agriculture was endangered since a "so-called German government" had signed unfavorable commercial treaties with some other states. The tariff of 1925 did not protect the

[3] Lohse was a native of a *Geest* village in Holstein, an ex-soldier who, after some adventures in business, became the main speaker for the *Landespartei* and later on one of the first organized members of the NSDAP in Schleswig-Holstein. As a man of lower middle class origin, of fragmentary education, and as a professional politician without a foothold in any other gainful occupation, he was quite typical of the "old guard" in the party.

interests of cattle breeders. The importation of frozen meat on the contrary was rather favored by such measures as the concession to an English firm to build a refrigeration plant in Altona. A Reichstag majority in favor of a protective tariff on meat could not be attained. Besides, the "international Jewish finance capital" was able to compensate such tariffs through its influence on freight rates. Back of it was the intention to destroy first the German meat production and then the cultivation of grain, for two reasons: to get a monopoly for foreign agriculture and to make the German people dependent for their food supply and thus force them to comply with the "Dawes servitude." The Marxian parties in rejecting agrarian tariffs for the benefit of the consumers made politics only for the day. The political leaders of agriculture, most of whom adhered to liberal capitalistic ideas, had not yet fully recognized the danger. Within the DNVP, the industrial group, which had close relations with the "international finance capital," had won complete control. The limitation of the party's activities to economic policy which had frequently been demanded by agricultural circles or even the foundation of a purely agrarian party was "nonsense, as long as parliamentary Germany was ruled by finance capitalism." Not pressure politics but only a strong "ethnic state" which would give the knockout to international finance capitalism would be able to aid agriculture.

Typically National Socialist is the idea that the agrarian interests alone as a minority would never have a chance under a democratic régime. This, of course, would be true only if the possibility of compromise were rejected. Such compromises actually had taken place in 1925 when the combined agrarian and industrial interests re-established a protective tariff system, very much against the advice of independent economic experts.

The tactical position of the National Socialist party in relation to the parties supporting the parliamentary democratic régime improved with the increasing depression. All parties responsible for the agricultural policy of the government were inclined to underestimate the effect and

the duration of the depression and therefore tried to shape public opinion by optimistic statements. The National Socialists did the opposite. They demanded a fundamental change in the political system since only through an entirely new economic policy might the depression be overcome. For that reason they took an intransigent attitude in the provincial council *(Provinzial-Landtag)* into which seven representatives had been elected on November 17, 1929. "I shall tell you," the party leader from Eiderstedt, Otto Hamkens, a lawyer and farmer, addressed the administration parties: "Not only this year we have an emergency, but there will be more such years, and then you will be at the end of your wits. . . . The budget of the day leaves us quite cool. We don't enter the legislatures in order to collaborate positively. We can collaborate only with the aim of overthrowing the present system of government. Only then will we be able to do constructive work!" This uncompromising attitude gave the National Socialists a tactical advantage over their most dangerous opponent, the DNVP. The Conservatives had lost much of their popularity because of their wavering course in questions of foreign affairs and because of the split in the party when Hugenberg, who was regarded as the agent of heavy industry, took over the party leadership in the fall of 1928.[4]

The younger generation in particular seceded and joined the National Socialists either directly or at first by going over to groups of young conservatives. Among these only the *Landvolk Partei* gained any importance in Schleswig-Holstein. The attempts of the *Landbund* to prevent farmers from voting for Hitler by lending support to the *Landvolk Partei* were, however of little effect. Young conservative circles among farmers as early as 1930 probably had sympathized more with the National Socialists than with the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* which was supported by large landowners and big capital, representing entrepreneur interests with only a slight touch of employees' influence through the German National Association of Com-

[4] Compare Sigmund Neumann, *Die deutschen Partein, Wesen und Wandel nach dem Kriege* (Berlin, 1932), pp. 62 *ff.*

mercial Employees *(Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfen Verband)*. Hugenberg's leadership further antagonized these circles. The farmers' traditional antipathy to Prussian conservatism was combined with the anti-capitalistic feeling of the "new middle class" in the neo-Prussian Schleswig-Holstein.

Thus it came about that the *Bauernbund* did not become the dutiful tool of conservative leaders of the *Landbund*, but rather an outpost of National Socialism in the rural areas. This becomes understandable if one considers that the 37,600 members of the *Bauernbund* were for the most part the same men who had been fighting against the Conservatives since 1918—in the *Landespartei*, in the Democratic party, in the *Volkspartei*, and also in the ethnic movement. This applies particularly to the leaders.

It was solely the opposition to parliamentary government which made these men inclined to a temporary alliance with the *Landbund* and the Conservative party (DNVP). They thought that in a highly industrialized society the farmers never would get decisive influence in the government through a legislature in which they were confronted with the two great blocs of industrial workers and industrial and commercial entrepreneurs. Apparently an alliance of the "family farmers" with the Labor party, such as was effected some years later in Sweden, was never contemplated.

In the spring of 1930, after the receding of the second *Landvolk* movement in Schleswig-Holstein and at a moment when the confidence of the farmers in the old parties had been considerably shaken, the National Socialist party stepped forward with its new agrarian program. Its main point was the re-establishment of profits through reduction of production costs (reduction of the rate of interest, prices of fertilizer, and rates for electricity), through lowering of commercial profits, through protective tariffs, through simplification and lowering of tax assessments for agriculture, and through lowering of land prices (prohibition of land purchases for speculative purposes was proposed to prevent a further boom in real estate prices). The labor problem was to be solved by firmly establishing the

agricultural laborer in the farm community through socially just contracts instead of by collective agreements as adapted from industrial labor policy. This proposal was designed to win the favor of farmers and landowners without antagonizing too much the agricultural laborers. To gain the support of the latter, competition of foreign seasonal workers was to be excluded, improvement of housing conditions was promised, and opportunities for advancement to ownership were to be provided through resettlement policies. On the other hand, the formula of a "healthy balance of large estates, medium and small farms" indicated that no radical policy of resettlement was intended, a statement which was to soothe the large landowners. The foremost promise, however, was that agriculture would be regarded as the privileged class *(der erste Stand)* in the National Socialist state. The farmers, especially in areas of strongly developed market production, Eiderstedt and Dithmarschen, had certain apprehensions about the relationship of the individual and the state in National Socialism. But they were convinced that in any event the farmer would be such an important factor in the National Socialist state that he would be able to shape the state according to his wants. Farmers made their decision in favor of National Socialism because the National Socialist party appeared to pursue their interests with more determination than any other party and because the party leadership in Schleswig-Holstein was placed in the hands of men who either were farmers themselves or who had at least come from farm families. Since the autumn of 1928, the NSDAP had a newspaper of its own, the *Schleswig-Holsteinische Tageszeitung,* and in the spring of 1930 they secured almost full support from the influential *Kieler Zeitung.*

The elections for the provincial council (Provincial *Landtag)* of November 17, 1929, revealed for the first time the strength and regional distribution of the National Socialists; they won seven mandates out of 61, five of which came from districts along the west coast. In northern and southern Dithmarschen, the National Socialist candidates obtained more votes than any of the others. The small

enclave belonging to the state of Oldenburg *(Landesteil Lübeck)* became a main stronghold of the NSDAP when it entered the state government of Oldenburg; the propaganda in eastern Holstein was carried on from there.

In July, 1931, the supreme party leadership took a very decisive step by asking their members to join the *Landbund, i.e.,* the *Land-und Bauernbund* in Schleswig-Holstein, "this great organization" in which, according to Adolf Hitler, "absolutely valuable forces are at work, which might also cooperate in the Third Reich, if placed in the right position." Thus, the *Land-und Bauernbund* was declared eligible for alliance; but, on the other hand, the struggle for the commanding positions in the organization was opened after the lower positions already had been filled by party members.[5]

The farmers' inclination to embrace National Socialism probably was strengthened by the fact that the "Green Front" under the influence of owners of large estates in the eastern parts of the Reich had been supporting the foodstuff policy of Dr. Schiele, which was contrary to the interests of the Schleswig-Holstein meat producers. The medium and small farmers, who furnished the main support of the NSDAP, were especially hit by this measure. It was for this reason that the *Bauernverein* under the leadership of the former *Landespartei* member, Iwersen-Munkbrarup, withdrew from the national association of *Bauernvereine* which was connected with the "Green Front." This step had caused further splits in the *Bauernverein.* At this moment the Nazi-controlled *Bauernbund* claimed and obtained a monopoly for all offices of self-government and farm organizations in the province. At the election of officers in the Chamber of Agriculture of Schleswig-Holstein in October, 1931, thirty-one out of the thirty-five representatives were its delegates.

[5] A description of this struggle, as it took place in Hessen, is given in Schmahl-Seipel, *Entwicklung der völkischen Bewegung* (Giessen, 1933). A similar relationship was effected in December, 1931, between the NSDAP and the *Nordwest deutsche Handwerker Bund;* this facilitated the penetration of the NSDAP into the trading villages and small towns.

The same technique of undermining was applied to the organizations of small manufacturers and business men, the industrial and commercial middle classes. The overwhelming success in the Reichstag elections of the summer of 1932 was due largely to this method of obtaining control of economic interest organizations.

In the fall of 1931 the great bank crash, increased difficulties in getting credit, and falling agricultural prices led to a new wave of direct action which took the form of tax strikes, strikes against paying interest, and prevention of forced sales of land. This movement became so threatening that the *Bauernbund* and the NSDAP decided to intercept it. The county units of the *Bauernbund (Kreis Bauernbunde)* themselves established self-help organizations. The *Bauernbund* initiated about a thousand meetings all over the province on October 10, 1931. The participants formed village associations *(Schicksalsgemeinschaften)* for the prevention of forced sales; they also were to strive for a moratorium. These groups did not stop at mere proclamations. Toward the end of October a rioting crowd of about a thousand farmers interfered by threats and intimidation with the forced sale of a *Geest* farm in the Kreis Steinburg. The *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, the important Conservative newspaper, thought it remarkable that this time the leaders seemed to be more temperate men and men of more importance than the participants in former *Landvolk* riots; the bitterness shown even by sober people who were perfectly willing to do their duty as loyal citizens seemed to indicate that this problem deserved more careful attention. Finally in November, 1931, a "Farmers' Cooperative for the protection of property" *(Landwirtschaftliche Besitzschutzgenossenschaft* e.G.m.b.H.) with its headquarters in Kiel was founded in connection with the Schleswig-Holstein *Land-und Bauernbund.*[6] It endeavored to bring about settlements between farmers and their creditors and later helped to execute the debt-reduction plan of Mr. Hugenberg. Thus a movement, which had flared up in the

[6] At the time of its liquidation, May, 1934, this organization had approximately 3,100 members.

country again and again for four years, was on the way to becoming "legalized" and centralized.

The proclamations and petitions which were decided upon in the meetings of October 10 convey a good insight into the sentiments of the peasantry and their demands. "Never before has the situation of agriculture on the west coast been as serious as today," ran the declaration of the *Kreis Bauernbund* of southern Dithmarschen. "Formerly the inefficient and careless farmers went into bankruptcy; today also those farmers, and in even larger numbers, go bankrupt who are diligent, who work efficiently and live modestly, who commit only the one mistake of actually trusting that the good advice we get from armchairs and green tables of the administration will help us to get ahead. We were fooled by accounts made up about intensifying, rationalizing, increasing production, and improving quality. Our farms have dropped to about half the value they had last year because of the low prices of agricultural products and the increased burden of interests. Fifty per cent of the farmers have had to declare their insolvency. . . . Dairying, stock fattening, raising of pigs and calves, truck farming—no branch of agriculture is profitable today. . . . The octopus arms of international finance capitalism are extended to us through all banks and savings banks." Therefore, they had met in order to bring about unification of all forces "that on the ruins of a bankrupt system a new Reich of youthful strength would arise, in which honest and diligent work would receive more justice than nowadays. . . . Long enough we have dissipated our forces because we used to think of ourselves too much as kings on our farms. . . . We cannot afford anymore to live in unconcern over the fate of our neighbor. That way we will go to the dogs one after the other." That is why 65,000 farmers had united in an emergency association, the aim of which was the prevention of forced sales by measures which would remove the causes. They demanded a sharp reduction of interest rates, measures against the importation of any kind of food which was produced in sufficient quantities in Germany, abolition of the unsound margin of mer-

chants' profits, a lowering of all social, public, and other excessive burdens *i.e.*, taxes and contributions to social security) so as to adjust them to the farmers' ability to pay, abolition of the intolerable foreign debt and a sufficiently large government credit to finance a moratorium until agricultural prosperity was restored.[7]

The problem of indebtedness now was obviously in the foreground of people's minds. Psychologically revealing and important to the understanding of political developments is the renunciation of the marsh farmer's traditional individualistic attitude of being "king on one's farm." Significant, too, was the bitter disappointment about the failure of progressive capitalistic methods of management which were recommended and propagated by the official and cooperative institutions of German agriculture immediately after the war at a time of shortages in all commodities. These were indeed symptoms of a thorough change in mode of thought; economic liberalism had lost its meaning for these people. The "communities of fate" *(Schicksalsgemeinschaften)* devised their tactics accordingly. Only he who places himself in the common front will receive protection; he who does not do so, is threatened with economic and social boycott as a traitor. It is proclaimed everybody's duty to act with solidarity in case of forced sales. But everyone who could pay his debts without hazard to his economic security was asked to comply with his obligations, in particular those to his own laborers and his fellow farmers.

Through all these channels—the *Bauernbund,* the *Schicksalsgemeinschaften,* the party organization proper, and the Brown Shirts—the National Socialist party succeeded during the years 1930 to 1932 in attracting the majority of the rural population, farmers and others. In the election of July 31, 1932, the NSDAP obtained 63.8% of the rural vote.

In fact, in the summer of 1932, there were only three rural groups which still stood outside: the owners of large

[7] *Schleswig-Holsteinisches Bauernbund,* Nov. 18, 1931, No. 45.

estates or rather the older generation of them, since the younger ones had to a great extent already become National Socialists; the richest, and therefore, most respected large farmers; and finally, parts of the agricultural working class, especially in areas of sharp class contrasts, where the Social Democratic party and the Communist party still had large followings.

In areas of less pronounced social differentiation the Marxist parties had not succeeded in retaining the rural workers, much less in extending the circle of their voters. In the country they had been on the defensive since 1924; their proportion of votes had decreased ever since 1919 (with the one exception of the election in 1928), although in the cities they were gaining from 1924 until the summer of 1932. The Social Democrats were, as a party of urban industrial workers, tactically in a very unfortunate situation when it came to canvassing rural areas. From their earlier more dogmatic past, the stigma of animosity towards the farmers was still attached to them. Since the Marxists set their hopes on an increasing concentration of capital or rather the increase of the proletariat, their adversaries thought that a vigorous peasantry on its own soil would be a thorn in their flesh.

The foodstuff policy which they advocated seemed to justify such criticism. The party itself did not manage to overcome this hostile attitude among the farmers by advocating constructive ideas. Its representatives in the Schleswig-Holstein provincial council (Provincial *Landtag)* did not make a serious attempt to free themselves from the antitheses of city-country, consumers-producers, or to appeal to the farmers' own interests.

The Communists, however, tried, by pointing out the differences of interest within the agricultural population, to win over not only the laborers but also settlers, peasants, cottagers, and fishermen, and to "neutralize" the medium and small farmers. Following the tactical instructions of the action program of 1927, the Communists pointed out the contrast between the industrial boom of 1927-28 and the suffering of the agricultural and middle classes. "The year

of 1927 was a year of prosperity and this year may be called 'dictatorship of the national industrial and commercial organizations' on the one hand, and on the other hand 'the distress of agriculture.'" They tried to play up the interests of dairying and meat production against those of grain cultivation and industry. They opposed any tariff on feeds which would hurt the small farmer in Schleswig-Holstein. For this reason they criticized, in the campaign of 1931, the policy of moving the hog-fattening industry to the eastern grain and potato producing parts of Germany.

Since they did not bear any responsibility, they could raise purely demagogic demands, like that for the cancellation of all taxes due from 1924 to 1926. The Communist farmer organizations which won some ground in 1931 and 1932 in Hanover and Ost Friesland seem to have found no following of any importance in Schleswig-Holstein, at least not among farmers.

In 1931 or 1932, there was founded under the leadership of the former *Landvolk* editor, B. von Solomon, on the *Geest* south of Itzehoe a Communist farmers' and workers' committee of action *(Bauern und Arbeiter Aktionskomitee)* which tried to take the wind from the sails of the National Socialist village associations *(Schicksalsgemeinschaften)*.

The Communists' schemes to unite small and medium farmers with agricultural and industrial labor in a common front against large landowners and big business met with particularly unfavorable prospects in Schleswig-Holstein. On the one hand there was no broad class of impoverished farmers cherishing the sentiment of being exploited and oppressed which, according to the Communists' own assumptions, would have been the precondition. Among the agricultural laborers on the other hand, communistic ideas were not likely to gain much sympathy because this class was in general too stable and too well connected to the land by ownership or other tenure of a house and vegetable patch or even, like the cottagers *(Insten)*, by a share in the farm land.

The *Landarbeiter Verband*, a farm laborers' union affil-

iated with the social democratic *Freie Gewerkschaften,* which represented their demands for improved working conditions, stood in sharp opposition to the Communist party and did not hesitate to expel entire locals in which the Communists had obtained control (*e.g.,* the local in Wesselburen in Dithmarschen). The only rural areas in which the Communists succeeded in inducing large numbers of farm laborers to join their party were those where sharp differences in wealth and tenure restricted the chances of climbing upwards on the ladder of tenure. These were chiefly the Isle of Fehmarn, the districts of large estates in eastern Holstein, and some of the larger villages in the marshes. Communist locals of importance sprang up also in some villages in the hinterland of the metropolitan center of Hamburg—perhaps in consequence of settlement of urban workers. Although the Social Democrats, even after the end of the inflation (1923), obtained more than one-fourth of the rural vote in some elections, the Communists obtained only small percentages.

In the summer of 1932, therefore, neither the Marxist parties nor the old middle class parties had a strong following among the rank and file of the rural population. Then came the suspension of the democratic government of Prussia by a conservative Reich government. Although in the subsequent elections this led to slight increases in the conservative vote, these were more than offset by the overwhelming victory gained at the polls by the National Socialists. The latter obtained about 63% of the rural vote, the DNVP only 8%, the two socialist parties (SPD and KPD) together not quite 25% even though they won almost 45% of the urban vote.

The successful appeal of the Nazis to the masses was not due merely to their opposition to the democratic régime —in this the DNVP had not lagged behind since Hugenberg had become the leader of the party. The Nazis' demands concerning economic policy were advanced also by other parties. The interests of the small farmers as opposed to big business were represented in the *Landvolk Partei,* in the *Christlich Sozialer Volksdienst,* and in the *Wirtschafts*

Partei. None of these parties had been capable of winning such strong support of the masses as the National Socialists.

The peculiar mass appeal of this party probably was due to a large extent to the fact that the Nazis created not merely another party but an entirely new type of political machine which constituted a totalitarian movement in a double sense: first, in that it aimed at a monopoly of political power; second, in that it was not merely a fee-collecting organization but claimed the "entire man," demanding an exceedingly intensive participation in party work by its members. In this fashion, the movement offered a psychic outlet for the repressed ambitions and emotions of rural youth; it lent prestige and authority to persons of mediocre or subordinate positions in ordinary ways of life. The farmer's son whose ambitions for a career in the professions or in the army had been thwarted by the outcome of the war or by the economic vicissitudes of the post-war era, the man who instead of becoming a well-established lawyer or physician had to be content with a small practice as a dentist or the humble position of a milk inspector, felt elated when he could march through the streets of the county seat at the head of a troop of Brown Shirts and break up a Communist meeting.

Although this involved a burden particularly heavy for farmers during the busy seasons, the movement offered a new experience of fellowship of a very tangible nature; it offered a substantial backing in political and economic emergencies; it prevented forced sales; it secured patronage for the craftsman or retail dealer who joined the party; and it aided those who on account of their political activities had lost jobs or positions. These considerations explain the curious fact that these traditionally liberal farmers of strongly developed capitalistic mentality turned in such large numbers to a party whose agricultural program was based on the idea of a "just price," was directed toward a stabilization of farm incomes, and therefore led inevitably to far-going restrictions on the freedom of farm management. The drift towards National Socialism was perhaps largely conditioned by the excessive uncertainty of the

markets for agricultural products in the post-war years. This insecurity had been felt with particular intensity in Schleswig-Holstein where most farms, and especially those with one-sided specialization, were highly dependent on the market. It is not difficult to understand that the smaller farmers, who are less given to speculative exploitation of marketing conditions than the large farmers and the operators of large estates, were anxious about the economic security of their families even at the price of their economic and personal liberty. The idea of security which appeared in 1919 as a mere ideology in the *Landespartei* had in the meantime become a widely accepted element of the farmers' class consciousness.

Furthermore, the importance of the belief in the "leader" should not be underestimated. Many farmers, when they felt at the end of their wits and when neither the government nor any of the other opposition parties seemed to be able to solve their problems, gave their vote not so much to the Nazi party as to Adolf Hitler. "He was our last hope," they would say afterwards, "we thought we might at last try it with him." Among the more zealous Nazis, of course, Hitler was regarded as a savior and liberator from all the troubles of the day. It is often said, however, that in rural Schleswig-Holstein the irrational elements of National Socialist thought had exerted scarcely any influence. The farmers, who are notoriously rather sober, calculating men, had voted the NSDAP ticket because they expected a Nazi government would rid them of their debts either by a moratorium or by inflation. According to our own inquiries, these motivations, although certainly of importance, seem to have been greatly overestimated at the time. Most people arrive at political decisions not by such purposive, rational deliberations but under the influence of tradition or from faith in the personality of outstanding leaders.

The other factors which contributed very considerably to the success of the NSDAP were its appeal to the younger generation and the chances which it offered to strata of rural society hitherto excluded from political leadership.

The NSDAP was, apart from the KPD, the only party in which young men could hope to wield any influence or play a leading rôle. No wonder that even in the nobility the younger generation often joined the NSDAP. All other parties were directed by men past forty. Furthermore, as in most established, rather stable rural societies, political leadership in rural Schleswig-Holstein had been firmly in the hands of the owners of estates and large farms and their retinue among the professions. Now the NSDAP opened a new avenue of political ascent to the small farmer, the small business man, the semi-professional classes of agricultural technicians, and even to those who never had established themselves successfully in any occupation. For, since the entire stratum of rural notables was more or less discredited on account of collaboration by its members with the democratic system as village magistrates, as officials of the Chamber of Agriculture, and in other agencies, a revolution against this régime inevitably led to the emergence of an entirely new stratum of political leaders and representatives. Thus, the attempts to restore the political dominance of conservative landlords and large farmers was doomed to failure, for when the Nazi seized power in 1933, most political offices and other positions of authority in the rural areas were occupied by persons from the middle strata of rural society.

The membership in the NSDAP in Schleswig-Holstein did not exceed fifty or sixty thousand before the end of 1932.[8] Provided that the organized followers of Hitler were at that time the convinced National Socialists, there is thus little reason to assume that the broad masses who voted for the NSDAP were up to 1932 intensively steeped in the specific Nazi creed, or that they had a clear conception of all the tenets of Nazi ideology. Their voting for Hitler was primarily motivated by more or less tangible expectations which the National Socialists had evoked—expectations in the first line of improvement in their economic conditions.

[8] Computed from police reports to the *Oberpraesident* of Schleswig-Holstein. Kiel *(Oberpraesidium)*.

Our analysis, however, has shown that certain elements of thought akin to National Socialist ideology had attained rather wide dispersion even before the NSDAP consolidated all the more militant currents of the counter-revolutionary opposition to the democratic régime. These elements can be classified into two major groups: first, a line of thought which can be described as a neo-romantic conception of the social order, at its best postulating an ideal state based on the "community of the people" *(Volksgemeinschaft)*. While this line of thought in certain circles bordered dangerously close on anti-Semitism, it was as such not incompatible with democratic principles. The very ambiguity of these ideas made them acceptable to voters not at all disposed to give up civil liberties. There was, as previously indicated, closely interwoven with these notions the longing for charismatic leadership—the daydream of a new iron chancellor, a political savior who would solve all the dilemmas of the situation. However, nowhere in this complex of thought was there any anticipation of the complete abolition of the rule-of-law.

The inception of this most essential characteristic of the Third Reich is to be found in the second complex of elements of National Socialism. This was the line of thought which may be defined as "counter-revolutionary syndicalism." The resort to "self-help," to "direct action," the refusal to play the game of politics according to the rules of parliamentary democracy, the use of violence and intimidation against political adversaries [9] were the main features in this complex. They are essentially of revolu-

[9] An analysis of election results by communities showed a rather strong inverse correlation between the size of the community and the percentage of votes obtained by the NSDAP. (Only the very small communities, mostly estates, did not correspond to this pattern.) This may be explained partly as a consequence of greater like-mindedness in small communities, partly, however, by the more effective social control and pressure exercised by the NSDAP once it had obtained a considerable support in such communities. There were, in 1931 and 1932, many rural communities where scarcely a barn door was not decorated with NSDAP posters. Anybody who knows the methods of social control applied by the Nazis will agree that such uniformity of behavior very likely was not entirely voluntary.

tionary syndicalist vintage and were brought upon the political scene in Germany largely as imports from fascist Italy.

Nothing proves more clearly the disintegration of middle class political ethics than the indulgence shown by broad circles of conservatives and even liberals in relation to the syndicalistic methods introduced into political life by the National Socialists and their forerunners. Blinded by their opportunistic view on political matters, the leaders of the farmers, business men, and even of the professional classes failed to visualize that the turbulent actions of the "Nazis" would finally lead to the destruction of the very foundation of the modern state, the rule of law, and result in tyranny.