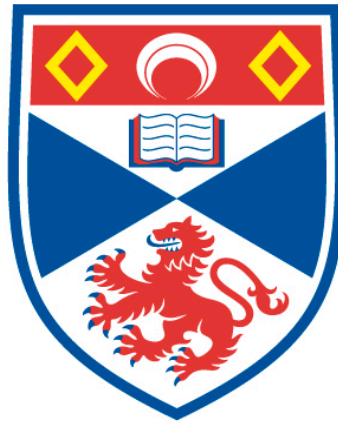


DEMOCRATS INTO NAZIS? : THE RADICALIZATION OF THE
BÜRGERTUM IN HOF-AN-DER-SAALE, 1918-1924

Alex Burkhardt

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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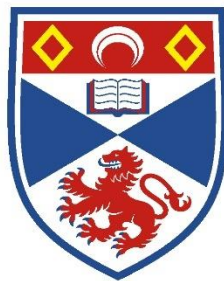
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Democrats into Nazis?

The Radicalisation of the Bürgertum in Hof-an-der-Saale, 1918-1924

Alex Burkhardt



University of
St Andrews

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews

12th October 2016

For my father

Abstract

This thesis analyses the radicalisation of the *bürgertum* in a single Bavarian town, Hof-an-der-Saale, in the five years after the First World War. It is bookended by two important and enormously different elections. In the first of these – the January 1919 elections to the National Assembly – the *bürgerliche* districts of Hof voted almost entirely for the German Democratic Party, a left-liberal, pro-Republican party that called for a parliamentary democracy, the separation of church and state, rights for women, a renunciation of German militarism and a close collaboration with the Social Democrats. But just five years later, in the Reichstag elections of May 1924, these very same districts cast their votes for the *Völkisch Block*, a cover organisation for the then-banned Nazi Party. Within half a decade, then, Hof's *bürgerliche* milieu had switched its allegiance from a party of left-liberal democrats to the most radical nationalists in German history.

Why did this dramatic and disturbing electoral turnaround occur? In an effort to answer this question, this thesis offers a detailed study of the narratives and discourses that circulated within Hof's *bürgerliche* milieu during this five-year period. It uses newspaper editorials, the minutes of political meetings, electoral propaganda, the documents of civic associations and commercial organisations, the Protestant newsletter and a range of other sources in an effort to reconstruct what Hof's *Burghers* thought, said and wrote between these two elections. What happened between January 1919 and May 1924 to transform Hof's *bürgerliche* inhabitants from Democrat into Nazi voters, and how did this startling change manifest itself at the level of discourse and political culture?

Declarations

1. Candidate's declarations:

I, Alex Burkhardt, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

B

I was admitted as a research student in September 2013 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in September 2013; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2013 and 2016.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my late father, whose own father originally came from Hof and spent several years in British captivity during the Second World War. I regret that he is not around to read it and to see that the endless war stories he told me during my formative years left some kind of impression after all.

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List of Abbreviations and Translations

Aufrufe	Appeal or “call to arms”
BMP	Bayerische Mittelpartei: Bavarian Middle Party
Bürgergesellschaft	The “Citizens Community Hall”, a meeting hall in Hof
Bürgerrat	Citizens Council
Bürgertum	Middle Classes or Bourgeoisie
DDP	Deutsche Demokratische Partei: German Democratic Party
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei: German National People’s Party
DVP	Deutsche Volkspartei: German People’s Party
HA	<i>Hofer Anzeiger</i> : Hofer Gazette
Kaiserreich	The pre-1918 Imperial German Empire
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands: German Communist Party
MSPD	Mehrheitssozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands: Majority Social Democratic Party of Germany
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei: National Socialist German Workers’ Party
OV	Oberfränkische Volkszeitung: Upper Franconian People’s Newspaper
Räterepublik	Council Republic
Reichswehr	The inter-war German Army
Saalestadt	“Town on the Saale River”
Vereinshalle	“Association Hall”, a meeting hall in Hof
Völkischer Block	The Völkisch Block (cover name for the banned NSDAP)
Vogtland	The region in southern Saxony and Upper Franconia which includes Plauen and Hof
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands: Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany

1 Introduction

(Literature Review, Methodology and the History of Hof)

On a cold, drab Sunday afternoon in late January 1919, heavy snow began to fall on Hof-an-der-Saale, a town of 40,000 people on the Bavarian border to Czechoslovakia. It was fortunate, the local newspaper later remarked, that the snow held off until after lunch, because most of the town's inhabitants had spent the morning trudging to and from polling booths to cast their votes in the first German elections since the end of the First World War and abdication of the Kaiser some ten weeks before¹. This was a critical juncture in German history, an election to decide on the kind of state that would replace Wilhelm II's authoritarian monarchy.

It was perfectly obvious who the residents of Hof's working class districts would vote for. In these impoverished industrial quarters, where dingy tenement blocks and textile manufacturing plants lined the Saale River and where some cramped and insalubrious rooms housed entire families, voters backed the Independent Social Democratic Party almost to a man (and, for the first time in German history, woman)². In the more affluent districts to Hof's north and west, however, the outcome was harder to predict. Here, factory owners, civil servants, doctors, shopkeepers, schoolteachers and other bürgerliche (or middle class) residents of the *Saalestadt* faced a choice

¹ "Morgenpost" in "Hofer Anzeiger", no. 17, 20.01.1919, Stadtarchiv Hof.

² Rudolf Macht, *Geschichte Der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 3/1 (1918-1923): Spaltung* (Hof: Herausgegeben im Selbstverlag des Verfassers Rudolf Macht, 1991), pp. 45–46.

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between three newly constituted parties, with the forces of left-wing and right-wing liberalism as well as German nationalism all vying for their support. Ultimately, however, they overwhelmingly endorsed the left-liberal German Democratic Party, a redoubtably progressive, pro-Republican outfit, one celebrative of the end of the monarchy, committed to working with moderate Socialists, supportive of women's rights, in favour of reconciliation with Germany's erstwhile enemies and welcoming of Jews³. The middle classes of Hof, it seemed, were embracing the German Revolution with open arms.

Just five years later, however, on a balmy spring day in May 1924, these same doctors, teachers, shopkeepers, civil servants and other Burghers again went to the polls in a social and political climate that was unrecognisable from January 1919. Now, the back pages of the local newspaper were bedecked with swastikas and called on readers to vote for "the Völkisch Block", a cover organisation for the banned Nazi Party. Men in military uniform marched in the streets; Nazis and Communists clashed at "Patriotic Events"; and the local Protestant Newsletter polemicized against "Jewish Bolshevism". The German Democrats were now a forgotten, almost spectral presence, haunting thinly populated meeting halls; in 1924 they won just over 600 votes compared with over 6000 five years previously, while victory in the middle class districts went to the Völkisch Block, which received the backing of over 8000 people⁴. Within the space of five years, then, the

³ "Ergebnisse der deutschen National-Wahl" in "HA", no. 17, 20.01.1919.

⁴ "Reichstagswahl-Resultate" in "HA", no. 107, 5.5.1924.

Bürgertum of this small Bavarian town had switched its support from a party of centre-left democrats to the most radical nationalists in German history.

Why did this remarkable and disturbing turnaround occur? The following dissertation is an attempt to answer this question. It is an analysis of the political culture of the Hofer Bürgertum between these two elections, an investigation into what these people thought, said and wrote in the five years after the First World War. It looks closely at the content of the newspapers they read, the speeches given at political meetings they attended, the sentiments expressed at civic associations they founded, the values propagated in the sermons of the local Protestant pastor and the parish newsletter, the opinions offered in the private writings of politically involved individuals, and a range of other historical sources which can offer some insight into the discourse that circulated within this social milieu during the first half-decade of the Weimar Republic. The aim is twofold: first, to establish which argumentative formulations, narratives, values and discursive strategies continually surfaced within this bürgerliche milieu during this five-year period: second, to identify those historical events which transformed this discourse from one compatible with the ideology of the Democratic Party to one compatible with the ideology of the Nazis.

The following introductory chapter outlines how this investigation into the political culture of the radicalising Hofer Bürgertum is to be conducted. It begins with a review of the literature on the phenomenon of bürgerliche

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radicalisation in Germany after the First World War, because Hof was not, in fact, a unique case, but only one example of a nationwide process by which the German middle classes turned against Republican democracy in the first years of the Weimar Republic. However, this extensive and important literature on bürgerliche radicalisation has not, on the whole, provided a detailed analysis of the *ideology* of the radicalising bürgerliche milieu. The second, methodological section sets out a plan for a study that will fill this gap by concentrating on the ideological dimension of bürgerliche radicalisation in the Weimar Republic. The third and final part of this chapter provides a brief account of Hof's history before 1918 and justifies the choice of this town as a case study of the process of bürgerliche radicalisation during the Weimar Republic.

1.1 Bürgerliche Radicalisation in the Weimar Republic: The State of Scholarship

A glance at the results of Reichstag elections in the first five years of the Weimar Republic is ample testimony to the German middle classes' ineluctable drift to the right. In January 1919, the success of the left-liberal German Democratic Party in Hof was replicated across Germany, as the DDP won the lion's share of middle class votes and entered the Reichstag as part of the "Weimar coalition". The following year, however, the Democrats lost much of their middle class backing and the centre of bürgerliche political

gravity shifted rightwards to the right-liberal German Peoples' Party. This rightward migration did not end here, however, as the German Bürgertum took further steps away from the political centre ground in subsequent elections, first in the direction of the national-conservative DNVP and, then, ultimately, toward the Nazis⁵.

But how did this electoral radicalisation of the German middle classes actually play out in the small, provincial towns and villages where the vast majority of burghers lived? This, too, is a relatively well-researched topic: a plethora of studies have focused on individual towns or regions and charted the process by which the middle classes turned against Republican democracy, not just at the polls but at the civic and institutional level, in local churches, newspapers and clubs. A number of locales have been subjected to detailed investigation, including Saxony, Lower Saxony, Marburg, Gotha, Greifswald and Celle: all show how the mood changed dramatically from 1918 on, how the German middle classes first distanced themselves from and then radically turned against the Republican project⁶.

⁵ The classic account of the rightward drift of the German Bürgertum in the Republic remains Larry Jones, *German Liberalism and the Dissolution of the Weimar Party System, 1918-1933*. (North Carolina: Chapel Hill, 1988).

⁶ Notable examples of this literature on the radicalisation of the German Bürgertum during the Weimar Republic: Dirk Schumann, *Political violence in the Weimar Republic, 1918-1933: fight for the streets and fear of civil war* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2009); Peter Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilization in Weimar Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Rudy Koshar, *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism: Marburg, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Helge Matthiesen, *Bürgertum und Nationalsozialismus in Thüringen: das bürgerliche Gotha von 1918 bis 1930* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1994); Helge Matthiesen, *Greifswald in Vorpommern: konservatives Milieu im Kaiserreich, in Demokratie und Diktatur 1900-1990* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2000); Frank Bösch, *Das konservative Milieu: Vereinskultur und lokale*

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Many of these studies place particular emphasis on the volatile experiences that drove German Burghers away from moderate parties and into the arms of extremists, as a series of traumatic episodes in the first years after the war destroyed whatever amenability they harboured toward the new Republican order. The publication of the Versailles Treaty in spring 1919 and the debilitating effects of the hyperinflation in 1923⁷ were both critical in effecting this change, as was a burgeoning confrontation with the radical left at the local and national level⁸. German Burghers increasingly sought out politicians who uncompromisingly rejected, rather than begrudgingly accepted, the “dictated peace” of Versailles, who would provide more resolute opposition to “Marxism” rather than work together with the Social Democrats, who hoped to replace Republican democracy with something entirely different rather than “work constructively” within the system⁹.

The existing literature has also charted the organisational and institutional manifestations of bürgerliche radicalisation in considerable detail. The first examples of this potential for a radical middle class politics in the Weimar Republic were arguably the “Burgher Councils” which sprang up during the

Sammlungspolitik in ost- und westdeutschen Regionen (1900-1960) (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002).

⁷ Two studies which place particular emphasis on the role of the hyperinflation in undermining the moral order of the German Bürgertum are Gerald D Feldman, *The Great Disorder Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Martin H. Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt: Revolution, Inflation und Moderne, München 1914-1924*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, Bd. 128 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

⁸ Helge Matthiesen, “Zwei Radikalisierungen: Bürgertum und Arbeiterschaft in Gotha 1918-1923”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 21.1 (1995), 32–62.

⁹ Riccardo Bavaj, *Der Nationalsozialismus: Entstehung, Aufstieg und Herrschaft*, Deutsche Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert, 7 (Berlin: be.bra verlag, 2016), pp. 21–24.

Revolution and were intended to appropriate the Socialist idea of “Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils” in the service of bürgerliche mobilisation¹⁰. In some places, these councils were accompanied by so-called “Home Guards” units, armed formations which were created specifically to “protect property” against the “red menace” said to be haunting Germany after the Spartacist Uprising in January 1919¹¹. But ad hoc outfits such as these were gradually replaced by more tightly organised and ideologically sophisticated formations such as the German National People’s Party and the “Combat Leagues”, paramilitary groups that sought to “reclaim control” of public space from the left.

But as well as creating these new, avowedly nationalist and anti-socialist formations, more traditional social and institutional organs of Protestant-Bürgerliche Germany also came to reflect this growing ideological radicalisation. Several studies have pointed to the role of the local Protestant church, the provincial press and, above all, the dense network of bürgerliche associations – an ostensibly non-political range of shooting, singing and

¹⁰ Hans-Joachim Bieber, *Bürgertum in der Revolution: Bürgerräte und Bürgerstreiks in Deutschland 1918-1920* (Hamburg: Christians, 1992); As Ulrich Kluge has pointed out, however, the Soldier’s Councils themselves were home to a strong bürgerliche element. See Ulrich Kluge, *Soldatenräte und Revolution: Studien zur Militärpolitik in Deutschland 1918/19*, *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft*, Bd. 14 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975), p. 124.

¹¹ Schumann, *Political violence in the Weimar Republic*, pp. 16–25; Zdenek Zofka, “Between Bauernbund and National Socialism: The Political Reorientation of the Peasants in the Final Phase of the Weimar Republic”, in *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency, 1919-1933*, ed. by Thomas Childers (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 43.

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gymnastics clubs – in fostering middle class unity and radical nationalist ideology¹².

What all this amounted to was a self-contained, increasingly mobilised subculture, a “militant fraternity” that, in the wake of the German Revolution, felt itself to be on the defensive and drifted ever rightward politically¹³. True, until the Nazi electoral breakthrough at the end of the 1920s, this mobilised and radicalised middle class never seemed to settle on a single political party, flitting with striking capriciousness between Democrats, Liberals, Nationalists and a range of smaller splinter parties. But the longing for “bürgerliche concentration” remained unmistakable— the problem was that the existing liberal and nationalist parties frequently seemed too remote and elitist, insufficiently able to meet the growing demand within the Bürgertum for a political representation that would reflect their populist conception of German nationalism¹⁴. But when the Bürgertum did unite politically, it could be a powerful force, as was proven during the 1925 Presidential election, won by the wartime Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg largely with the support of the radicalised Nationalist Milieu¹⁵.

¹² Bösch, *Das konservative Milieu*, chap. 5.; Claus-Christian Szejnmann, *Nazism in Central Germany: The Brownshirts in “Red” Saxony* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), chap. 4.

¹³ Frank Bösch, “Militante Geselligkeit: Formierungsformen der Bürgerlichen Vereinswelt zwischen Revolution und Nationalsozialismus”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. Sonderheft. Vol. 21 (2005), 151–82.

¹⁴ Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 178–180.

¹⁵ Peter Fritzsche, “Presidential Victory and Popular Festivity in Weimar Germany: Hindenburg’s 1925 Election”, *Central European History*, 23.2/3 (1990), 205–24.

As one historian has pointed out, then, we are now “very well informed about the nationalist milieu that formed as a result of middle-class perceptions of revolution, defeat and inflation” in the years after 1918¹⁶. However, though this body of literature on middle class radicalisation in the Weimar Republic is both extensive and instructive, it has, on the whole, neglected the *ideological* and *discursive* dimensions of this process. As yet, no study has focused in a sustained way on the *language* and *narratives* that circulated within the radicalising nationalist camps of small town Protestant Germany¹⁷.

This gap is all the more glaring because, over the last several decades, historians have looked in great detail at the changing nature of post-war German nationalist ideology at the elite level, among the literati, journalists, academics, politicians, publishers, military figures and Protestant pastors who were the chief spokespeople of post-war German nationalism. A fairly extensive literature now shows beyond reasonable doubt that the experiences of war, defeat and revolution exerted a radicalising effect not only on the *bürgerliche* milieu in the towns and villages of provincial Germany, but also on the ideological disposition of prominent German nationalists who were closer to the centres of political and discursive power.

¹⁶ Moritz Föllmer, "Which Crisis? Which Modernity? New Perspectives on Weimar Germany", in *Beyond Glitter and Doom: The Contingency of the Weimar Republic*, ed. by Jochen Hung, Godela Weiss-Sussex, and Geoff Wilkes (Iudicium, 2012), pp. 19–31 (p. 19).

¹⁷ Indeed, as the introduction to a recent collection of essays pointed out, the German Revolution has not yet been extensively subjected to newer, cultural-historical inquiries into language, symbolism and meaning. See Klaus Weinbauer, Anthony McElligott and Kirsten Heinsohn, "Introduction: In Search of the German Revolution", in *Germany 1916-23: A Revolution in Context*, ed. by Klaus Weinbauer, Anthony McElligott, and Kirsten Heinsohn (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015), pp. 7–36.

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A number of such studies have focused particularly on post-war Munich, “the centre of the Central European Counter Revolution” and a “witches’ cauldron” of radical nationalist thought¹⁸. In the aftermath of the war, ideas circulated in this city that would become central to Hitler’s worldview – that Bolshevism was a “Jewish conspiracy”, that “the German race” needed “living space” in order to thrive, and that the Weimar Republic was a cabal of traitors and “racial aliens”¹⁹.

Boris Barth, meanwhile, has looked beyond Munich to the German High Command and the Protestant Church, charting the evolution of the “Stab in the Back Legend”, which held that the German Army had not lost the war on the battlefield but had been betrayed by civilian, frequently Jewish revolutionaries²⁰. Moritz Föllmer has laid bare the growing extremism of prominent civil servants and industrial magnates, who after 1918 reached with increasing readiness for Völkisch concepts and ideas in order both to explain the “crisis” engulfing Germany and defend their social positions²¹. And

¹⁸ Bruno Thoss, *Der Ludendorff-Kreis 1919-1923: München als Zentrum der Mitteleuropäischen Gegenrevolution zwischen Revolution und Hitler-Putsch*, Neue Schriftenreihe des Stadtarchivs München, Bd. Nr. 98 (München: Wölfle, 1978); Ralf Georg Reuth, *Hitlers Judenhass: Klischee und Wirklichkeit* (München: Piper, 2009), p. 145; Robert Gerwarth, “The Central European Counter-Revolution: Paramilitary Violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War”, *Past & Present*, 200.1 (2008), 175–209 (p. 184).

¹⁹ Othmar Plöckinger, *Unter Soldaten und Agitatoren: Hitlers prägende Jahre im deutschen Militär, 1918 - 1920* (Paderborn; München [u.a.]: Schöningh, 2013); Michael Kellogg, *The Russian Roots of Nazism: White Émigrés and the Making of National Socialism, 1917-1945* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁰ Boris Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration: das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2003).

²¹ Moritz Föllmer, *Die Verteidigung der Bürgerlichen Nation: Industrielle und hohe Beamte in Deutschland und Frankreich 1900-1930*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft, Bd. 154 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); Moritz Föllmer, “Der ‘kranke Volkskörper’. Industrielle, hohe Beamte und der Diskurs der nationalen Regeneration in der Weimarer Republik”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27.1 (2001), 41–67.

there is, of course, a long history of inquiry into the so-called “Conservative Revolution” of writers and journalists some of whom gathered around the right-wing journal “Die Tat” to call for a new German polity, a “Third Reich” that would draw on the putative experience of national unity that had perceivably animated the men in the trenches²².

We know, then, that the Protestant Bürgertum in towns and villages across Germany radicalised in the years after the First World War. And we know, too, that the ideology of German nationalism, as articulated by its leading spokespeople, changed and took on new, more extreme forms in order to meet the challenges of defeat and revolution. But we do not yet have sufficient knowledge of how these two processes fed into and influenced each other. Did the ideas propagated in Völkisch Munich or by literary former soldiers filter down into and drive the process of middle class radicalisation in towns like Hof, informing the editorial content of the newspaper, the sermons of local pastors, the discussions at meetings of local veterans? And if such ideas did resonate in Hof, why and when did they become appealing, given that most Burghers seemed to have rejected them in January 1919? In short, a bridge between these two bodies of literature, on the social and intellectual

²² See the classic study by Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1978); also Claudia Kemper, *Das ‘Gewissen’ 1919-1925: Kommunikation und Vernetzung der Jungkonservativen, Ordnungssysteme, Studien zur Ideengeschichte der Neuzeit, Band 36* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011); André Postert, *Von der Kritik der Parteien zur außerparlamentarischen Opposition: Die jungkonservative Klub-Bewegung in der Weimarer Republik und ihre Auflösung im Nationalsozialismus*, *Historische Grundlagen der Moderne*, 10, 1. Aufl (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014); Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: New York: Macmillan Press; St. Martin’s Press, 1996).

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radicalisation of German nationalism after the First World War, does not yet exist.

1.2 Methodological and Theoretical Underpinning

My study, then, is an attempt to explain the radicalisation of the Hofer Bürgertum between 1918 and 1924 through an analysis of the discourses that circulated within this group during this period. But this raises two theoretical and methodological questions. First, what exactly was the “Hofer Bürgertum” and how can I claim to treat this social formation as a single entity with a common ideology? Second, what sources could help me access the ideology and political culture of this group, and what exactly am I looking for in these sources in order to reconstruct the “ideology” they articulate?

1) Defining the “Hofer Bürgertum”

Historians have long disputed which groups did and did not belong to the “German Bürgertum”. Some scholars have suggested that, though it was not a single social class, the Bürgertum was essentially composed of all those “middling” professional groups sandwiched between the industrial working classes on the one hand, and big industrial and agrarian interests on the

other²³. According to this definition, then, the “German Bürgertum” consisted of a mishmash of different professions and social groups, with factory managers, pastors, farmers, shopkeepers, lawyers and teachers all potentially belonging to it. This partly class-based definition, however, becomes problematic when we consider that some nationally-minded German workers also voted for the bürgerliche political parties rather than the Social Democrats or Communists²⁴. Furthermore, in the Weimar Republic, the Catholic Bürgertum exhibited very different social and political behaviour to the Protestant Bürgertum, with the former generally voting for the Catholic Centre Party and holding aloof from radical nationalist formations²⁵.

A more flexible definition of the term “bürgerlich” characterises it as something cultural and ideological, embedded in the way that an individual thinks and in the daily routines and rituals that structure their everyday lives. This conceptualisation is particularly associated with social and political scientists such as M. Rainer Lepsius and Karl Rohe, both of whom emphasise the profoundly fragmented character of 19th and 20th century German society, which was home to different subcultures (or “socio-moral

²³ Jürgen Kocka, *Klassengesellschaft im Krieg: Deutsche Sozialgeschichte 1914-1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1973), pp. 65–95.

²⁴ Karl Rohe, *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen in Deutschland: Kulturelle Grundlagen Deutscher Parteien und Parteiensysteme im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 154.

²⁵ J.L. Spenkuch and P. Tillmann, "Religion, Economics and the Electoral Success of the Nazis" (Northwestern University, 2015); This is not to suggest, of course, that all German Catholics were proponents of a parliamentary system or supporters of Weimar democracy. See Ulrike Ehret, "Antisemitism and the 'Jewish Question' in the Political Worldview of the Catholic Right", in *The German Right in the Weimar Republic: Studies in the History of German Conservatism, Nationalism, and Antisemitism*, ed. by Larry Eugene Jones (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), pp. 220–44; Friedhelm Mennekes, *Die Republik als Herausforderung: Konservatives Denken in Bayern zwischen Weimarer Republik und antidemokratischer Reaktion (1918 - 1925)* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1972).

milieus”) with different ways of viewing and interacting with the world. Alongside Socialist and Catholic Milieus was the “Protestant-Bürgerliche Milieu”, a social formation that voted for liberal, nationalist and conservative political parties²⁶. These scholars emphasise that it is not possible to conceive of this social constellation as a “class” – it included individuals and communities with diverse levels of material wealth and from many different backgrounds who all nonetheless shared a particular view of the world. Thus when historians talk about the “Bürgertum”, what they are really referring to is this social milieu as it manifested in whatever town or region they are investigating²⁷. This is also how the term “Bürgertum” will be used in this study – as indicative of that socio-moral milieu that was distinct from the Socialist or Catholic camps and had a history of voting for liberal and conservative parties.

The argument here, then, is that the Hofer Bürgertum may have been a socially, economically and professionally diffuse constellation, but it can nonetheless be treated as a single milieu. It included the “textile barons”, capitalist entrepreneurs who owned the large clothing factories on the Saale river, as well as an independent *Mittelstand* of officials, teachers, journalists,

²⁶ M. Rainer Lepsius, *Demokratie in Deutschland. Soziologisch-historische Konstellationsanalysen: ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), chap. 2; Rohe, *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen*, pp. 65–69.

²⁷ Different historians use different terms for designating this social constellation. Chris Szejnmann refers to the “Nationalist Milieu” in his study of Lower Saxony, Frank Bösch talks of “the Conservative Milieu” in his study of Celle, while Helge Matthiesen opts simply for the term “Bürgertum” in his book on Gotha. But it is evident that all three are referring to essentially the same social formation. See Szejnmann, *Nazism in Central Germany*; Bösch; Helge Matthiesen, *Bürgertum und Nationalsozialismus in Thüringen: das bürgerliche Gotha von 1918 bis 1930* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1994).

salesmen, craft workers and small businessmen²⁸. All of these groups read the same newspaper, moved in the same circles and, before the war, united behind the same political party, the National Liberals²⁹. Significant, too, is that they formed common *Vereine*, the social clubs and societies through which “the community life of Hof’s Bürgertum was played out”³⁰. This is not to suggest, however, that Hof’s bürgerliche milieu was entirely united in its political proclivities. Whereas some elements showed themselves to be “strongly monarchist and above all nationalistic”³¹, “supportive of the Wittelsbach nobility” and celebrative of the “Prussian-German Kaiserreich”³², others proved to be of a more left-liberal and reformist bent³³.

This study will make frequent use of the term “middle classes” in order to denote Hof’s bürgerliche milieu. This may initially seem to be at odds with the

²⁸ Wolfgang Zorn, “Probleme der Industrialisierung Oberfrankens Im 19. Jahrhundert.”, in *Jahrbuch für fränkische Ländersforschung* (Aisch: Kommissionsverlag Degener & Co., Inh. Gerh. Gessner, Neustadt, 1969), p. 307; and Julius Kellermann, “Einiges aus der Hofer Wirtschaft der letzten 40 Jahre (1918-1958)”, Stadtarchiv Hof. Kellermann provides an exhaustive overview not only of Hof’s big textile factories and breweries, but also of the hairdressers, butchers, bakers and banks that constituted Hof’s bürgerliche economy.

²⁹ Axel Herrmann, *Kleine Hofer Stadtgeschichte* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2012), p. 76.

³⁰ There were already 65 such Vereine in 1877, a number which only increased over the next few decades, and they included theatre clubs, singing and sports clubs, as well as more expressly political organisations such as the Bismarck Society. They were led mainly by local civil servants, teachers, craftsmen and businessmen, and there was little room for workers within their ranks. The membership lists of the “Hofer Beautification Club” and the “Hofer Shooting Club” for 1907 reveal a panoply of accountants, teachers, doctors, vicars, master builders, restaurant owners, salesmen, master bakers, hotel owners, watch makers, telegraph inspectors, engineers, bookbinders, opticians, dentists, policemen and train drivers but no factory workers in a list of 400 people, in a town that was perhaps 50% working class. See Herrmann, *Kleine Hofer Stadtgeschichte*, p. 75; Rudolf Macht, *Geschichte der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 2 (1891-1918): Bewahrung* (Hof: Herausgegeben im Selbstverlag des Verfassers Rudolf Macht, 1991), p. 233.; “Mitgliederliste der Hof Verschönerungsvereins 1907”, Stadtarchiv Hof, Bestand 015 Nr 22.

³¹ Macht, *Geschichte Der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 2 (1891-1918): Bewahrung*, p. 223.

³² Herrmann, *Kleine Hofer Stadtgeschichte*, p. 76.

³³ Ernst Goller, the National Liberal candidate for Hof, stood on the left of the party and was close to the Progressive Democrats. Rudolf Baumgarten, *Die Hofer Sozialdemokratie vom Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zum geschlossenen Übertritt zur USPD* (Würzburg, 1980), p. 33.

fact that the preceding section has explicitly disavowed a classically Marxist approach to “social classes” as empirically given entities, and instead proposed a more culturally informed conceptualisation based on the works of Karl Rohe and Rainer Lepsius. However, the term “middle classes” is used here not to imply a residual attachment to Marxist class theory, but because of the problems in translating the German term “Bürgertum” into English. The closest translation of “Bürgertum” is, arguably, “bourgeoisie” but, to some English-speaking readers, the term “bourgeoisie” may also be loaded with Marxist class connotations. Ultimately, I decided that the term “middle classes” is closest in character to the German term “Bürgertum”, even though it necessarily involves the use of the word “class”, with all the Marxist connotations this carries of group definition being something inherent in the material world, rather than a matter of mentalities and culture. But – to repeat – this is merely to make the text more accessible to an English-speaking audience³⁴.

To summarise, then, my study treats the Hofer Bürgertum as a single social constellation which subscribed to common values and can be distinguished from its chief rival, the working class/socialist milieu of Hof. But my study acknowledges, and takes as one of its principle themes, the fact that significant tensions and conflicts also characterised the internal life of this complex bürgerliche milieu.

³⁴ Other English language studies of the Weimar-era Bürgertum have made mixed use of the terms “Bürgertum”, “middle classes” and “bourgeoisie” to denote a social constellation which they also consider to be to some extent culturally constructed. For example, Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism*, chap. 1; Koshar, *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism*, p. 13.

2) *Sources and Discourses*

In order to reconstruct the ideology and discourse of the protestant-bürgerliche milieu in Hof, my study makes use of six principle types of source:

(1) Editorial articles from the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the chief bürgerliche newspaper in Hof. As one historian has observed, “for most Germans in the 1920s, newspapers constituted the only available window on politics”, and a number of studies have shown how crucial the right-wing and nationalistic press was for the towns and villages of provincial Germany³⁵. Thus the *Anzeiger* offers the best means of reconstructing the public conversation carried out within the Hofer Bürgertum. By the end of the war, it had a daily circulation of some 13,000 copies; its readership was most likely even higher³⁶.

(2) Speeches held at meetings of local Protestant-bürgerliche political parties, principally the German Democratic Party (DDP), the Bavarian Middle Party (BMP, the regional branch of the DNVP), various splinter parties, and the Nazis (NSDAP).

(3) Documents of local civic societies, such as veterans’ leagues, patriotic clubs, and gymnastics and singing societies. As already mentioned, the literature on bürgerliche radicalisation has illustrated the centrality of clubs

³⁵ Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 117–120; See also Jürgen W Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (München: Beck, 1991), p. 333.; Modris Eksteins, *The Limits of Reason: The German Democratic Press and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy*, Oxford Historical Monographs (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), chap. 3.

³⁶ Rolf Hoermann, *Der Hofer Anzeiger. Das Werden und Wirken einer Heimatzeitung in der bayerischen Ostmark* (Unpublished Phil. Dissertation, University of Munich, 1938).

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and associations to the social and ideological cohesion of the local Bürgertum in the Weimar Republic. Such clubs frequently functioned as central propagators of nationalism and anti-socialism³⁷.

(4) Reports from the local employers' and factory owners' formation, the Trade Chamber for Upper Franconia, which met monthly. This was a forum in which some of the economic luminaries of the Hofer Bürgertum – the principle factory owners and capitalists – could meet to air their views.

(5) Documents of the local Protestant church, principally the parish newsletter³⁸, speeches of local pastors, and meetings of Protestant associations such as the Protestant Workers' Society. A number of historians have argued that the Protestant church was a pillar of local bürgerliche culture in the provinces and not infrequently a critical propagator of nationalist ideology in the Weimar Republic³⁹.

(6) The writings of politically engaged and prominent Hofer Burghers, such as Dr Eduard Herold, a local schoolteacher and prominent nationalist, the local bank manager Julius Kellermann, and the editor of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, Dr Otto Ernst.

³⁷ The most detailed explication of this thesis remains Koshar, *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism: Marburg, 1880-1935*; See also Szejnmann, *Nazism in Central Germany*, pp. 143–152.

³⁸ The Parish newsletter appeared every two weeks on four pages, had a circulation of some 1500 and a readership of approximately double that number. "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", 28th August 1921, Nr. 18.

³⁹ Bösch, *Das konservative Milieu*, pp. 96–100.; Szejnmann, *Nazism in Central Germany*, pp. 110, 164.; Wolfram Pyta, *Dorfgemeinschaft und Parteipolitik, 1918-1933: die Verschränkung von Milieu und Parteien in den protestantischen Landgebieten Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1996), p. 477.

But how will this large and varied range of sources be used to reconstruct the ideology of middle class Hof? My study is written in the spirit of what Thomas Mergel has called the “new cultural history of politics”, an approach which seeks to access “worldviews, political codes and programmatic speech” through a close examination of the language used by a particular social body or in a given setting⁴⁰. The aim is to extract recurring terms, argumentative strategies and narrative formations from the sources in order to draw conclusions about the ideology of the Hofer Bürgertum – and, crucially, to show how particular events altered the content of this discourse. Later chapters in particular will use Michael Freeden’s notion of ideology as a series of inter-related ideational sub-categories in order to isolate the conceptual building blocks of middle class ideology in Hof and to show how these changed over time⁴¹.

Overall, then, the aim is to reconstruct the ideology of the Hofer bürgerliche milieu between the two elections of January 1919 and May 1924, which provide convenient bookends for and expressions of the process of radicalisation that is explored here. This will be carried out through a close study of the texts produced by this milieu during this period. One question remains, however: what makes the town of Hof-an-der-Saale suitable for a study of bürgerliche radicalisation in the Weimar Republic?

⁴⁰ Thomas Mergel, “Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der Politik”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, 2002, 574–606.

⁴¹ See Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1996); and Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) for more on Freeden’s definition of ideology.

1.3 Hof-an-der-Saale: Nationalism and Class Division

Research into the Nationalist Milieu has identified a number of “risk factors” that made a particular town or region especially susceptible to the appeal of radical nationalist politics in inter-war Germany. A brief account of Hof’s history shows that a striking number of these risk factors were in place in the *Saalestadt*. The next section identifies them while also providing a historical overview of the development of the town.

1) Protestantism

Today, Hof is a medium sized town of 40,000 people on the Saale River in the north-eastern corner of Bavaria. However, despite being part of a majority Catholic state, Hof is a town with a history of profound Protestantism – it was, in fact, part of a region that was central to the Reformation⁴². Hof became part of Bavaria by historical accident: it was located in a previously Prussian region sold to the Wittelsbach Monarchy by Napoleon in 1810, and those Catholic officials sent north from Munich to work in Hof came to refer to it as the “Bavarian Siberia”, a remote and non-descript town, part of an alien “Protestant” universe⁴³.

⁴² Christoph Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen in einer Stadt Oberfrankens: Hof 1918 - 1924: Ein Beitrag zur politischen Willensbildung in der Frühphase der Weimarer Republik* (H.-J. Hagen, 1986), p. 12.

⁴³ Herrmann, *Kleine Hofer Stadtgeschichte*, pp. 54–55.

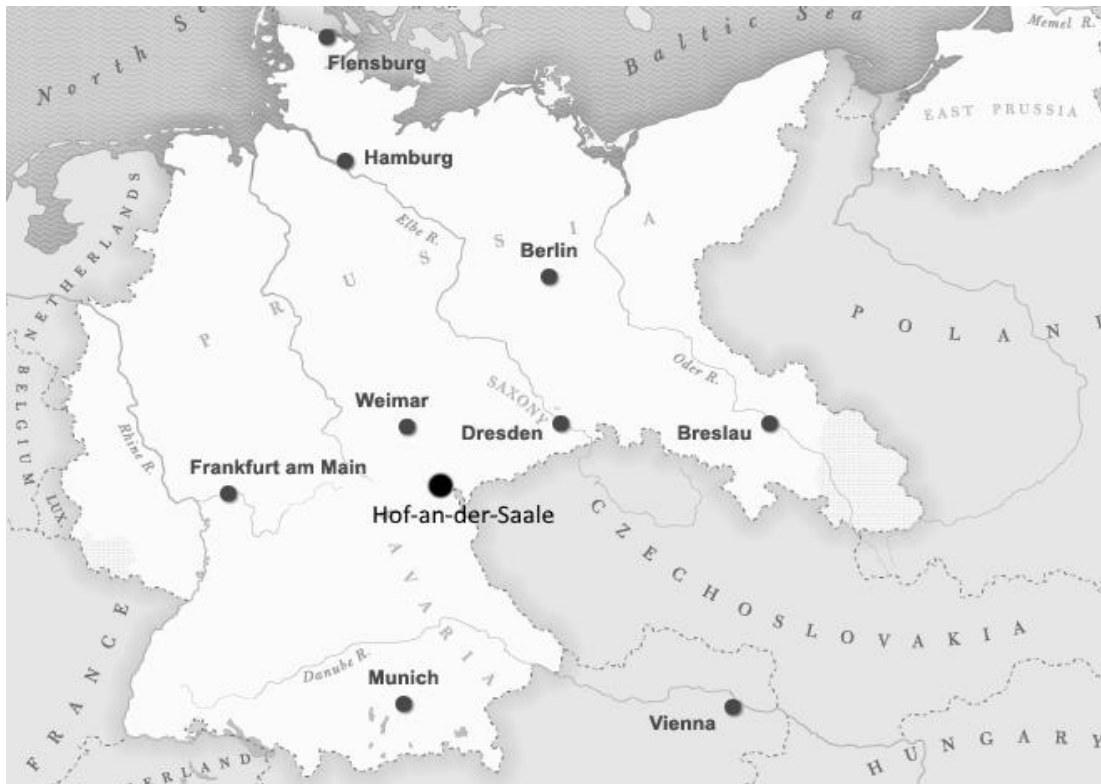


Figure 1-1. Map of Germany after the Treaty of Versailles and the location of Hof

This is significant because it was Protestant Germany that proved most susceptible to the lure of radical nationalist ideologies and organisations. The Socialist and Catholic milieus nominally owed their allegiance primarily to supranational institutions – the international workers’ movement and the Vatican, respectively – and they had both experienced official persecution during the late 19th century, which alienated them from state nationalism⁴⁴. Protestantism, on the other hand, was the official religion of the monarchist Prussian state, which meant that nationalism and Protestantism were closely

⁴⁴ Lepsius, *Demokratie in Deutschland*, p. 45.

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related during the Kaiserreich and the Weimar Republic⁴⁵. And, as more than one historian of Upper Franconia has argued, this region was particularly susceptible to the appeal of Protestant nationalism precisely because it was in a majority Catholic state⁴⁶.

2) *Geographical Location*

Hof lay at the intersection of two critical borders – the German border to the newly created Czechoslovak state, and the Bavarian border to the state of Saxony. Both of these factors were important for different reasons. First, Germany's relations with the new Czech state were not always friendly, and there was considerable tension in the border regions around Eger and Marienbad for several years after the First World War. Research has shown that “threatened border regions” were particularly vulnerable to the appeal of radical nationalist politics, which was often able to instrumentalise the sense

⁴⁵ Indeed, the most glaring example of this is the fact that Protestantism was one of the few reliable indicators of whether or not somebody voted Nazi. See Jürgen W Falter and Hartmut Bömermann, “Die Entwicklung der Weimarer Parteien in ihren Hochburgen und die Wahlerfolge der NSDAP”, in *Politik und Milieu: Wahl- und Elitenforschung im historischen und interkulturellen Vergleich*, ed. by Heinrich Best and Zentrum für Historische Sozialforschung (Cologne (St. Katharinen: Scripta Mercaturae Verlag, 1989).

⁴⁶ For three separate studies that look specifically at the relationship between Upper Franconia, Protestantism and radical nationalism, see Manfred Kittel, *Provinz zwischen Reich und Republik: politische Mentalitäten in Deutschland und Frankreich 1918-1933/36* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2000); Jürgen W. Falter, “Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Franken bei den Reichstagswahlen 1924-1933. Ein Vergleich mit dem Reich unter besonderer Berücksichtigung landwirtschaftlicher Einflußfaktoren”, *German Studies Review*, 1986, 319–59; Rainer Hambrecht, *Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Mittel- und Oberfranken (1925-1933)* (Stadtarchiv: Korn u. Berg [Vertrieb], 1976).

of resentment and vulnerability created by the new border and by any “territorial amputations” Germany had suffered⁴⁷.

The significance of the border to Saxony became very apparent in 1923 because Upper Franconia and especially the area around Hof assumed considerable strategic importance for the Nazi movement. Firstly, after the Nazi party was banned in Saxony, the headquarters of the Saxon NSDAP were actually moved to the *Saaletadt*⁴⁸. Secondly, Hitler’s initial plan in 1923 was to stage a putsch in Munich and then march north with his followers from Bavaria through Saxony and on to Berlin, replicating Mussolini’s “march on Rome” of the previous year. Upper Franconia was to function as an eventual platform for their march north. The experience of Hof, then, will allow us to see if a sizeable Nazi presence in a particular town or region actually made the process of bürgerliche radicalisation more extreme and intense, steering it in a more “National Socialist” direction rather than toward the relatively less extreme German Nationalist Party or Stahlhelm.

3) *Class Conflict*

More than one historian of the Nationalist Milieu has identified a burgeoning confrontation with the local political left as the chief reason for bürgerliche

⁴⁷ Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 156.; Vanessa Conze, “Unverheilte Brandwunden in der Außenhaut des Volkskörpers”, in *Ordnungen in der Krise: zur politischen Kulturgeschichte Deutschlands 1900-1933*, ed. by Wolfgang Hardtwig, Ordnungssysteme, Bd. 22 (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2007), pp. 21–48.

⁴⁸ Szejmann, *Nazism in Central Germany*, p. 29.

radicalisation in the Weimar Republic⁴⁹. Indeed, there is some indication that, where the political left was more extreme, so the process of bürgerliche radicalisation took on a correspondingly radical form⁵⁰. And in Hof, such class conflict was especially marked due to the historical development of the town after the mid-19th century.

Hof was first connected by train to the Zwickau coal mining region in 1851, beginning a process of rapid industrialisation which transformed the town into a notable textile, porcelain and beer producing centre⁵¹. Its population increased from 9,000 to 44,000 within the space of a few decades⁵², countless industrial plants and factories sprang up along the Saale river, and the town itself expanded dramatically, with vast new districts to house the expanding class of workers, as well as a growing Bürgertum⁵³.

Significantly, the predicament of these workers was, by almost every conceivable measure, considerably worse than in any other comparable Bavarian city⁵⁴. After years of repression on the part of the Bavarian

⁴⁹ Matthiesen, "Zwei Radikalisierungen"; Bieber, *Bürgertum in der Revolution*; Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism*.

⁵⁰ See especially Matthiesen, "Zwei Radikalisierungen".

⁵¹ Zorn, "Probleme", p. 298.; Herrmann, *Kleine Hofer Stadtgeschichte*, p. 71.; Wilhelm Müller, 'Hof an Der Saale. Wandlungen Einer Stadt Im Grenzbereich', *Heimatbeilage zum amtlichen Schulanzeiger des Regierungsbezirks Oberfranken*, 1975, p. 24.

⁵² Alois Birkl, *Geschichte der sozialistischen Bewegung in Hof, Dargestellt im Rahmen der Gesamtbewegung* (Hof Stadtarchiv), p. 12.

⁵³ Friedrich Ebert, *Wie Hof gross Wurde: Vom Dorf zur Fabrikstadt* (Hof: Nordoberfränkischen Vereins für Natur-, Geschichts-, Landes- und Familienkunde, 1950), pp. 39–43.

⁵⁴ Baumgarten, *Die Hofer Sozialdemokratie*, p. 22; Birkl, *Geschichte der sozialistischen Bewegung in Hof*, pp. 24–29.

Magistrate and local factory owners⁵⁵, however, the dam finally broke in 1906: trade union membership increased dramatically, a string of socialist co-operatives was established and, by 1914, Hof had become a centre of Bavarian industrial unrest and working class militancy⁵⁶. In the 1912 elections, the Hofer working class milieu celebrated its greatest triumph by ensuring that a Social Democrat was the town's representative in the Reichstag, making the *Saaalestadt* "the third strongest bastion of Bavarian Socialism after Nuremberg and Munich"⁵⁷.

Even before the First World War, then, the "social confrontation" between workers and employers in Hof had become fairly volatile, with an "intensification of the social climate" and "increased radicalisation in the sense of a stronger class-struggle mentality" evident within the Socialist milieu⁵⁸. Indeed, the town itself took on an almost sectarian feel, with the working classes concentrated in the *Schwabenviertel* and the Bürgertum mainly inhabiting the more affluent areas to the north and west⁵⁹.

The outbreak of the war in 1914 added a new dimension to this burgeoning class conflict. In the days before war was declared, the local Social Democrats held a large "peace rally" at which "German militarism" and "the

⁵⁵ The Hofer Magistrate has been described as "the leading anti-Socialist authority in Bavaria" even before Bismarck's anti-Socialist law was passed. See Baumgarten, *Die Hofer Sozialdemokratie*, p. 28; Birkel, *Geschichte der sozialistischen Bewegung in Hof*, p. 77.

⁵⁶ These included a consumers' co-operative, a rent payer's society and a number of cultural foundations. See Macht, *Geschichte der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 2 (1891-1918): Bewahrung*, pp. 399–412.; Karl Schmid, *Die Entwicklung der Hofer Baumwoll-Industrie, 1432 - 1913* (Würzburg, 1923), p. 109.

⁵⁷ Baumgarten, *Die Hofer Sozialdemokratie*, p. 35.

⁵⁸ Baumgarten, *Die Hofer Sozialdemokratie*, p. 78.

⁵⁹ Herrmann, *Kleine Hofer Stadtgeschichte*, p. 71.

armaments industry” were blamed for growing international tensions⁶⁰, whereas the *Hofer Anzeiger* showed enthusiastic support for the German government’s entry into the war and lauded a group of nationalist revellers singing “The Watch on the Rhine” in the town square⁶¹. That said, such bellicosity was not shared by all of Hof’s Burghers, some of whom had in fact attended the Socialist peace rally⁶².

Hof suffered severe privations during the war, with food prices rising precipitously, raw materials becoming increasingly hard to obtain, and work in the textile factories grinding to a halt, all of which resulted in hunger demonstrations and other protest initiatives from mid-1915⁶³. It was in 1917, however, when this growing strain began to express itself in an appreciable political radicalisation. In April of that year, the German Social Democrats split into two separate parties: Majority Socialists (MSPD), who continued to support the government and the war, and Independent Socialists (USPD), who refused to do so and also offered a political home to radicals who looked to the Russian Revolution for inspiration. Significantly, the Hofer branch of the SPD was the only faction in Bavaria to go over in its entirety to the Independents – a development in keeping with its long history of radicalism⁶⁴.

The bürgerliche milieu, meanwhile, was already beginning to evince those

⁶⁰ Baumgarten, *Die Hofer Sozialdemokratie*, pp. 84–89.

⁶¹ “HA”, no. 177 from 30.07.1914.

⁶² “HA”, no. 178 from 31.07.1914; Baumgarten, *Die Hofer Sozialdemokratie*, p. 88.

⁶³ Macht, *Geschichte der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 2 (1891-1918): Bewahrung*, pp. 596–600.

⁶⁴ Other branches of the Bavarian SPD were divided by this question of transferring to the USPD, but only the Hof-Münchberg-Naila-Rehau branch unanimously elected to join the new party. See Franz Schade, *Kurt Eisner und die Bayerische Sozialdemokratie* (Hannover: Verl. f. Literatur u. Zeitgeschehen, 1961), p. 43.

ideological divisions between radical nationalists and liberals that would be thrown into even sharper relief after the war. While some Burghers began to openly call for democratic reform and a “peace without annexations”⁶⁵, others formed a local branch of the right-wing annexationist Fatherland Party in October 1917⁶⁶.

It was in this climate of privation, war weariness, increasing working class militancy, and the growing division of the Hofer Bürgertum between liberal-reformist and radical nationalist elements that the German Revolution broke out in November 1918. Within a few short days, the *Hofer Anzeiger* went from reporting on troop movements in Northern France to describing the collapse of the monarchy and the spread of “Workers’ and Soldiers’ Councils” in towns and cities across the Reich. On 12th November 1918, the Wittelsbach Monarchy was deposed in Munich and the Independent Socialist Kurt Eisner announced that a “Bavarian Republic” had taken its place. The following day, the Revolution came to Hof itself, and it is here where our story begins.

⁶⁵ “Der Kaiser wünscht der Parlamentarisierung der Regierung” in “HA”, no. 271 from 2.10.1918. See also the report of a meeting of the District Office on 21st October 1918, at which one conservative pastor called for constitutional reform: WB des BA Hof-Land, 12. October 1918, Stadtarchiv Bayreuth - K3 Praes. Reg. 1838.

⁶⁶ The documents of this organisation indicate that it was a largely bürgerliche enterprise; its President was a local Councillor of Commerce and its membership list is the usual panoply of teachers, factory owners, officials, “men of independent means”, master butchers, lawyers, vicars, accountants and salesman that are familiar from the documents of Hof’s other bürgerliche Vereine. See “Mitgliederliste der Hofer Vaterlands-Partei”, Stadtarchiv Hof, Bestand O 19 Nr 3.

1.4 Conclusion

The first section of this chapter points to two extensive, but so far unrelated, bodies of historical scholarship: one which charts the radicalisation of the German middle classes in the first years of the Weimar Republic, and another which focuses on the radicalisation of German nationalist ideology during the same period. But no study has as yet tried to link the two – to inquire into the ideological factors which underpinned middle class radicalisation in the German provinces. In the second section, I outlined my plan for such an investigation and justified the choice of Hof-an-der-Saale as a case study with reference to the town's Protestant character, geographical location and history of class conflict.

But this study begins at a moment when the radicalisation of Hof's Bürgertum still lay in the future. In January 1919, two months after the end of the war and collapse of the monarchy, almost all of Hof's Burghers voted for the Democratic Party, a liberal and reformist organisation which embraced the Reich's new democratic order. But what was the context to the DDP's victory in the *Saalestadt*? How and why were Hof's more democratically minded Burghers able to set the agenda in the wake of Germany's defeat? And how did Hof's middle classes respond to the tumultuous changes engulfing their town and their country? It is to these questions that we now turn.

2 A Democratic Consensus

(The German Revolution and the Rise of the DDP in Hof, November 1918 – January 1919)

On the afternoon of 10th November 1918, Leon Blumtritt, an Independent Socialist delegate in the Bavarian Landtag and editor of the *Oberfränkische Volkszeitung*, spoke in Hof before an audience of thousands, most of them workers. He announced that the monarchy had collapsed, that Germany was in a state of revolution, and that elections to a Hofer Workers' and Soldiers' Council would take place immediately¹. Once the votes had been cast and this new revolutionary body created, Blumtritt led his followers to the town hall, where he informed Mayor Neupert that the Council was now in control of the *Saalestadt*. The throng then made its way to the schoolhouse, confiscated the weapons of the local garrison, and finally occupied both the train station and district headquarters, before Blumtritt gave a last speech extolling the new revolutionary order. After this, the crowd finally dispersed.

Few within the Hofer Bürgertum can have expected that their hometown would be visited by scenes as dramatic as these, even just a few weeks prior to their occurrence. The world, it seemed, had been turned upside down. And yet, this chapter argues, leading figures within the Hofer Bürgertum soon proved remarkably willing to accept and even embrace what was happening in Germany. The Revolution allowed the most reformist and democratically

¹ "Oberfränkische Volkszeitung", no. 265, 11 November 1918., Stadtarchiv Hof.

minded elements to come to the fore and assume a leading position, while fully discrediting radical nationalists and monarchists, who almost completely disappeared from the scene of local *bürgerliche* politics. Thus, in autumn and winter 1918/19, there was a genuine chance that a real, enduring commitment to democracy among the Hofer Bürgertum might be created.

The chapter is divided into three sections, all of which aim to prove that democratic, anti-militaristic ideas initially took hold within Hof's *bürgerliche* milieu in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. The first section focuses on the rise of the German Democratic Party in the *Saalestadt*, offering an analysis of democratic ideology and illustrating the resonance of this ideology among Hof's middle classes. The second section examines how Hof's Burghers perceived Germany's international situation, arguing that a broadly pacifist and anti-militaristic view of events held sway. The third section focuses on the effects of the Spartacist Uprising, a revolt of radical left-wing forces which took place in Berlin in January 1919, and argues that these events in no way endangered, and possibly even strengthened, the democratic consensus within Hof's Bürgertum.

2.1 The Rise of the German Democratic Party

On 8th December 1918, a month after Blumtritt's confrontation with Mayor Neupert in front of the town hall, representatives of the Hofer Bürgertum met

in the Bürgergesellschaft to establish a local branch of the newly formed German Democratic Party². The leading role was taken by Otto Ernst, editor of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, along with the lawyer Otto Meisner, the Landtags deputy and baker Karl Schrepfer, the *Hofer Anzeiger's* owner Karl Hoermann, the municipal councillor Dr Scheiding and his wife, Frau Berta Scheiding. Notably, those Burghers who had most aggressively supported the war and joined the Fatherland Party were not present. Their credibility in tatters, they wisely held aloof from the DDP's founding³.

The DDP was one of several new parties which sprang up in late 1918 to fill the void left in German politics by the dissolution of the old middle class parties of the Kaiserreich, and it was, by some distance, the most left-wing of these. Whereas the Nationalists and, initially, the People's Party yearned for a restoration of the monarchy and ruled out any co-operation with the workers' parties, the DDP was redoubtably pro-Republican, understanding itself primarily as a bridge between the German Bürgertum and the Majority

² Confusingly, the left-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP) in Bavaria was initially called the German Peoples' Party (DVP) until October 1919. But this was not to be confused with Stresemann's right-liberal DVP; indeed, a branch of this was also founded in Hof (though it played only a negligible role in local politics). For the sake of clarity, this chapter and study will refer only to the German Democratic Party. Macht, *Geschichte der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 3/1 (1918-1923): Spaltung*; For more on the history of the German branch of the DDP, see Petrus Müller, 'Deutsche Demokratische Partei in Bayern (DDP), 1918-1930', *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* <<https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de>>; Joachim Reimann, 'Der Politische Liberalismus in der Krise der Revolution', in *Bayern im Umbruch*, ed. by Karl Bosl (Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag., 1969), pp. 164–99 (pp. 173–185).

³ Macht, *Geschichte der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 3/1 (1918-1923): Spaltung*, p. 21.; This initial distaste for the nationalist right was not unusual among the Bavarian middle classes. As Karl-Ludwig Ay has shown, much of this section of the population had suffered greatly as a result of the war and had begun to turn against the state and annexationist factions such as the Fatherland Party long before the Revolution. Karl-Ludwig Ay, *Die Entstehung einer Revolution. Die Volksstimmung in Bayern während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1968), pp. 97–102.

Social Democrats. It favoured a separation of church and state, the socialisation of some branches of industry and the full parliamentarisation of German political life. And, in the immediate aftermath of the war, it was the DDP which quickly cemented itself as the leading party of bourgeois Germany, winning almost 20% of the vote in January 1919⁴.

Historians, however, have disputed the significance of these results. For some, the success of the DDP can be taken as evidence of a genuine move to the left within the German Bürgertum, who were weary after four years of war, disgusted at the manner in which the Kaiser had abdicated, and hopeful of securing a “just peace” from the Allies. Some have gone even further to suggest that the DDP’s triumph after the First World War was the endpoint of a ten-year process whereby a reinvigorated German liberalism was placed on a more social and democratic footing⁵. Other historians, however, view initial middle class backing for the DDP as tactical and opportunistic. The German Bürgertum, they argue, remained a fundamentally reactionary, virulently anti-socialist and “extremely autistic”⁶ entity which “flocked to the banner” of the DDP “not because they had become zealous democrats” but merely because the party appeared to be “the best defence against socialist domination of parliament”.⁷

⁴ Jones, *German Liberalism*, pp. 15–30.

⁵ Jones, *German Liberalism*, pp. 30–35.

⁶ Hans Mommsen, *Die Verspielte Freiheit; Der Weg der Republik von Weimar in den Untergang; 1918 Bis 1933* (Frankfurt am Main; Ullstein Tb, 1990), p. 9.

⁷ Eksteins, *Limits of Reason*, p. 61.; This is also the view of Heinrich August Winkler. See Heinrich August Winkler, ‘Revolution als Konkursverwaltung. 9. November 1918: Der vorbelastete Neubeginn’, in *Der 9. November: Fünf Essays zur deutschen Geschichte*, ed. by

In Hof, there is undeniably some evidence that the local DDP did indeed advertise itself rather cynically as a point of anti-Socialist concentration. On 7th December, the party issued a proclamation which asked if “Social Democracy, a class party, should have the ability to stand above us and decide everything” or if, instead, “those among us who cannot and do not want to be Social Democratic (should) seize the influence we are entitled to”,⁸ while one advertisement for the candidate hustings on 18th December similarly heralded the DDP as a vehicle for those “who do not want to see either an Independent or a Majority Socialist elected”.⁹

Such sentiments were not, however, representative of the DDP’s overall strategy during the autumn and winter of 1918/19. On the contrary; the local DDP much more frequently presented itself as a thoroughly pro-Republican, left-leaning organisation that was more than prepared to co-operate with the Majority Social Democrats. At the party’s founding meeting in Hof, Otto Ernst declared that, with the “reactionary right” discredited, “only the Social Democrats can now be considered our opponents – and we don’t want to attack these opponents, only to create a partition between us”, before Landtags delegate Haack added that “the German Democratic Party is now determined to move to the left; our path goes a long way with Social

Peter Bender and Johannes Willms, *Beck’sche Reihe*, 1057, Originalausg (München: C.H. Beck, 1994), pp. 11–33 (p. 31).

⁸ “Deutsche Volkspartei Hof!” in “Deutsche Demokratische Partei Hof, 1918-1924”, Stadtarchiv Hof, ZA.2430.

⁹ “Deutsche Volkspartei Hof” in “DDP”.

Democracy”.¹⁰ A few days later, at a meeting of the Liberal Society, Dr Scheiding declared himself “happy that, at the founding of the Democratic Party in Hof... no antagonistic attitude to the Socialists was taken”, adding that the Bürgertum “must learn to see the good in our (socialist) opponents” and not “rob ourselves of the chance to speak with them” – “snappy and splendid” sentiments which were “unanimously accepted” and applauded by those in attendance.¹¹ Indeed, even the prospect that the MSPD could enjoy a long period in power was one that the DDP’s leaders were ready to countenance; at a Democratic gathering in the Hofer Bürgergesellschaft on 30th December, Karl Schrepfer called on a “bürgerliche democracy or in the name of god a moderate Social Democratic government” to “clear the table” of Germany’s disordered politics¹².

Indeed, it is striking how much goodwill there was toward the Majority Social Democrats among Hof’s Burghers over the autumn and winter of 1918/19, and how ready local Burghers were to differentiate between moderates and radicals on the political left. One early circular of the Hofer Democrats maintained that the party “had a lot of things in common with the Majority Social Democrats, because they also want a calm construction of the political system in a republican form”, whereas “with the Independents, who with a single leap want to transform everything, we have nothing in common”¹³,

¹⁰ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung (Schluss)” in “DDP”.

¹¹ “Hof, 12 December” in “DDP”.

¹² “Wahlversammlung der deutschen Volkspartei, Hof 30 Dezember” in “DDP”.

¹³ “Hof, 11. Januar” in “DDP”.

while at the DDP Candidate hustings, Karl Schrepfer denounced “the über-radicals” as “misguided” but conceded that “the Majority Social Democrats could perhaps be correct in their way of thinking”¹⁴. In the *Hofer Anzeiger*, Otto Ernst, too, felt able to declare his “full trust” that the MSPD-dominated Provisional Government in Berlin would “under no circumstances attempt to abuse the majority”¹⁵, and he could find “no reason to assume that the moderate wing of the Social Democrats does not take seriously its commitment (to democracy)”¹⁶.

This essential warmth toward the Majority Social Democrats partly owed to the fact that prominent Hofer Burghers perceived them as nationally minded. During the war, Ernst maintained, the MSPD had been “good patriots” for whom “the national idea” had been “holy”¹⁷, and in November 1918, only “the wiser Social Democrats”, out of a sense of “national unanimity”, had helped “prevent the worst that could have befallen the German people; a civil war”¹⁸. Another prominent Hofer Burgher, a local schoolteacher and published poet named Dr Eduard Herold, also saw the Majority Socialists as an essentially “national” entity, praising “the Socialism of Ebert and Scheidemann”, two men who had “learned to accept the existing state” and were “providing new content to the old and preserved state form”. But this was only to be expected, because “the German worker” did not “have internationalism in his

¹⁴ At “Kandidatenwahl für die Nationalversammlung, Hof 19. Dezember” in “DDP”.

¹⁵ “Die Umwerthung der Werthe” in “Hofer Anzeiger”, no. 316, 16.11.1918, Stadtarchiv Hof.

¹⁶ “Experimente” in “HA”, no. 328, 30.11.1918.

¹⁷ “Allzumenschliches” in “HA”, no. 4, 4.1.1918.

¹⁸ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung, Hof 10. Dezember” in “DDP”.

blood". It was "a serum injected from outside by questionable literati and politicians with a marked Western-French accent". Herold concluded that "the German is in his innermost essence conservative, and the German worker is no exception. And conservative is only another word for 'national'".¹⁹ The Majority Socialists, then, were seen as the chief exponents of this patriotic, working class conservatism.

Thus the Hofer DDP was no mere fulcrum of bürgerliche anti-socialism. Nor was it a focal point for all those Burghers horrified by the removal of the Kaiser. In fact, the party and the *Hofer Anzeiger* became increasingly vocal in their condemnation of Germany's monarchy. The disaster of the war, Karl Schrepfer maintained at the 30th December meeting, was principally to blame on "the mistakes of our monarchy and our military dictators"²⁰, while Otto Meisner, though acknowledging that it could take years to develop a truly "democratic mentality" in Germany, ruled out any return of the monarchy, which he described as a "totally inauthentic system" that had "broken its trust" with the German people by "constantly calling for new sacrifices", none of which were "too big in value or blood"²¹. Circulars of the DDP immediately prior to the election conclusively committed the party to "a fight against all attempts to restore the old Imperial State, which proved itself incapable of

¹⁹ Eduard Herold, *Ein Jahr deutsche Republik* (Hochschul Verlag Munchen 1920), p. 36., Stadtarchiv Hof.

²⁰ At "Wahlversammlung der deutschen Volkspartei, Hof 30. Dezember" in "DDP".

²¹ "Deutsche Volkspartei Hof (Deutsche Demokratische Partei)" in "DDP".

protecting the German Volk at a time of peril” and pledged to a “removal of everything that was so damaging under the monarchy”²².

Indeed, for Otto Ernst in particular, the revolution was something to be celebrated. On 29th November, he argued in the *Hofen Anzeiger* that Burghers “no longer yearn for the return of our former rulers”, that the Revolution, far from being “merely Proletarian”, could not have occurred without the “implicit connivance” of the middle classes. With the monarchy gone, “the bürgerliche element” was now “called on to co-operation”, for they had “seen in the Revolution... a phenomenon that was not entirely unsympathetic”, one to which they “would remain true” provided that it would bring the “basis and possibility for a socially and economically tolerable existence”²³. And as Dr Scheiding put it at a meeting of the Liberal Association in December 1918, “the new times demand new forms, and everyone must now try to behave democratically”²⁴.

But what did “democracy” actually mean to men like Scheiding, Otto Ernst and Karl Schrepfer, whose views now enjoyed so much influence in the *Saaletadt*? Democracy, it seems, was a “politics of reason”, the charting of a “moderate middle ground” between the equally reprehensible extremes of right and left. As Ernst put it on 14th December, “it is immaterial whether we are dealing with a dictatorship of the right or the left”, because both were to

²² “Vor der Entscheidung!” in “DDP”.

²³ “Wohin treiben Wir?” in “HA”, no. 327, 29.12.1918.

²⁴ “Hof, 12. December” in “DDP”.

blame for “overburdening the German people”²⁵, and he explicitly positioned the DDP on the political centre ground, describing it as “the only means” of ensuring that “the bürgerliche parties” would be able to “make their claims” against “elements from the right and... from the extreme radical left”²⁶. DDP circulars after regional elections applauded the fact that “neither a reactionary nor a revolutionary majority will rule Bavaria”²⁷, and pledged to “fight against class dictatorship as well as against reaction”²⁸. As Meisner asked at a meeting in January 1919, “who is a bigger demagogue, Tirpitz or Eisner? Who is a more violent man, Ludendorff or Liebknecht?”²⁹. Democracy, then, meant the steering of a course between what Dr Herold called the “Scylla and Charybdis” of “anarchy to the left” and “the old rigidity and ossification to the right”³⁰.

The enemies of democracy, then, were not moderate socialist or Catholics, but extremists of all hues. What is striking, however, is that the political content of the new republican system envisioned by Hof’s democrats was remarkably liberal and left leaning, with several measures proposed that the Majority Socialists themselves would happily have endorsed. At the founding of the DDP in Hof, for example, the Landtag delegate Herr Haack called for “the raising up of the lower social classes, the construction of social legislation, as well as legislation for workers’ protection and provisioning” and

²⁵ “Objekt, nicht Subjekt!” in “HA”, no. 340, 14.12.1918.

²⁶ “Die Entscheidung” in “HA”, no. 346, 21.12.1918.

²⁷ “Der Erste Waffengang ist ehrenvoll bestanden...” in “DDP”.

²⁸ “Vor Der Entscheidung!” in “DDP”.

²⁹ “Deutsche Volkspartei Hof (Deutsche demokratische Partei), Hof 20 Januar” in “DDP”.

³⁰ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 2.

“the nationalisation of certain natural resources, means of transport and syndicates”³¹, while at a meeting of the DDP in the nearby village of Döhlau on 9th January, the unnamed speaker demanded “the proper mix of socialism and individualism”³² – that is, the socialisation of “vital” industries. The Hofer DDP remained opposed to the kind of all-encompassing programme of socialisation being demanded by the parties of the far left, but even this kind of partial socialisation was closer in spirit to the MSPD than the parties of the liberal and nationalist right.

Striking, too, is that the broad thrust of opinion within the Hofer Democratic Party was in favour of a separation of church and state, something that the Socialists were also demanding. At the candidate hustings on 19th December, Otto Ernst expressed the view that “democracy cannot be against a separation of school and church”, adding that it would “benefit the church if it was also constructed democratically in a democratic state”³³, while on 30th December, Karl Schrepfer took for granted that “the separation of church and state will come”³⁴. A week before this, at a meeting of the DDP Women’s Group, the speaker, Frau Maurer, declared that “women want the Volk and the schools to retain religion” but insisted that “the freedom of the individual must also be protected” and that the “separation of state and church is in the

³¹ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung (Schluss)” in “DDP”.

³² “Döhlau, 9th January. Seitens der Deutschen Volkspartei...” in “DDP”.

³³ At “Kandidatenwahl für die Nationalversammlung, Hof 19. Dezember” in “DDP”.

³⁴ “Wahlversammlung der deutschen Volkspartei, Hof 30 Dezember” in “DDP”.

interests of the religious community itself"³⁵. The Hofer Teacher's Society, meanwhile, wrote a letter to the *Hofer Anzeiger* backing the Democrats and declaring themselves unequivocally in favour of separation, stating that "the school is independent of the church", that "no child is permitted to attend a religious lesson against the will of his or her parents" and that "no teacher will be forced against their will to take part in religious education"³⁶.

The strikingly left-liberal conception of democracy which gained currency within the Hofer Bürgertum over the autumn and winter of 1918/19 also extended to a fairly unequivocal acceptance of the rights of women, including in the job market. As historians have shown, figures on the nationalist right continued to propound an essentially conservative view of women's role in German society during this period³⁷, but such narratives found little resonance in the *Hofer Anzeiger* or at meetings of the local DDP. On 27th November, the former meted out considerable praise for the role of women during the war, when "many thousands" had, with "great intelligence and adaptability", worked "in offices and factories" and were thus "indisputably

³⁵ "Deutsche Volkspartei in Hof (Versammlung der Frauengruppe), Hof 23. Dezember" in "DDP".

³⁶ "Das Verhältnis von Schule u. Kirche, Hof 8. January" in "HA", no. 9, 10.1.1919.

³⁷ Kirsten Heinsöhn, "'Volksgemeinschaft' als gedachte Ordnung: Zur Geschlechterpolitik in der Deutschnationalen Volkspartei", in *Geschlechtergeschichte des Politischen: Entwürfe von Geschlecht und Gemeinschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Gabriele Boukrif, Geschlecht, Kultur, Gesellschaft, Bd. 10 (Münster: LIT, 2002), pp. 83–106; Kirsten Heinsöhn, "Das konservative Dilemma und die Frauen. Anmerkungen zum Scheitern eines republikanischen Konservatismus in Deutschland 1912 bis 1930", in *Ich bin der letzte Preusse: Der politische Lebensweg des konservativen Politikers Kuno Graf von Westarp*, ed. by Larry Eugene Jones and Wolfram Pyta, Stuttgarter Historische Forschungen, Bd. 3 (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), pp. 77–107; Uwe Puschner, "Völkische Diskurse zum Ideologem 'Frau'", in *Völkische Bewegung - Konservative Revolution - Nationalsozialismus*, ed. by Walter Schmitz and Clemens Vollnhals, Kulturstudien, Bd. 2 (Dresden: Thelem, 2005), pp. 45–77.

entitled” to the vote³⁸, while a pamphlet handed out with the *Hofer Anzeiger* asked “Do Politics Make Women Unfeminine?”, answering with a resounding “no” – the more pressing question was: “Is there real femininity without politics?”³⁹ A similar line was propounded by the local DDP, which called on “Mothers to vote, so your children have bread” and also “working women to vote so that your rights will be represented” as well as recognising “the high importance of women for house, job and community” and insisting on “the complete involvement of women in the job market”⁴⁰. At the founding of the local party branch, Otto Ernst “greeted the woman as a fellow fighter and fellow striver also in political life”⁴¹, and at the candidate hustings the following week, women were praised as “spouses, mothers and workers” for whom “the state is no longer an unfamiliar and foreign spectre” but something she must “work with and govern in”⁴². The party backed up these words by establishing a “Women’s Group of the German Democratic Party in Hof” which also called for the “involvement of women in political matters”⁴³.

The Hofer DDP, then, was no mere focal point for bürgerliche anti-socialism or repository for those disturbed by the passing of the Kaiser. It represented a genuine move within the local Bürgertum toward the endorsement of a liberal and constitutional democracy. The most telling evidence of this came at the

³⁸ “Die Frau und das Wahlrecht” in “HA”, no. 325, 27.11.1918.

³⁹ “Macht die Politik die Frau unweiblich?” in “Mitteilungen über Haushalt, Gartenbau und Landwirtschaft.”, no. 3, Gratisbeilage zum “Hofer Anzeiger”, Stadtarchiv Hof.

⁴⁰ “Frauen Vor!” in “DDP”.

⁴¹ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung (Schluss) in “DDP”.

⁴² At “Kandidatenwahl für die Nationalversammlung, Hof 19. Dezember” in “DDP”.

⁴³ “Deutsche Volkspartei in Hof (Versammlung der Frauengruppe), Hof 23. Dezember” in “DDP”.

party's candidate hustings in December. Three conditions were placed on those hoping to become the party's Landtag delegate; they had to be firmly opposed to any restoration of the monarchy, they had to be in favour of a separation of church and state, and they had to be ready to accept a limited socialisation of certain industries (though opposed to an all-encompassing programme of socialisation). Ultimately, the DDP opted for Karl Schrepfer, a local master baker turned politician who represented the party in the Bavarian parliament for the five years that are the subject of this study.⁴⁴

Vor der Entscheidung!

Männer und Frauen! Gebt acht!

Bürger, Bauern und Arbeiter! Auf zur Wahl am 19. Januar!

Mit Eurem Stimmzettel helfst mit, Ruhe, Ordnung und Sicherheit in deutschen Landen wiederherzustellen!

Mit Eurem Stimmzettel schaffst mit, die zunehmende Zerrüttung unseres Wirtschaftslebens, die uns Hunger, Elend und Anarchie zu bringen droht, zu bannen!

Mit Eurem Stimmzettel protestierst gegen die Losreißung deutschen Reichsgebietes durch Polen und Tschechen, gegen die würdelose Behandlung der deutschen Staatsbürger im Westen, gegen die unheilvolle Zersplitterung im Innern!

Bürger, Bauern und Arbeiter, wählt!

Wählt, damit ein neues Deutschland der Arbeit, der Freiheit und des Friedens entsteht, in dem das ganze Volk in Freiheit und Gleichberechtigung seine Geschichte selbst bestimmt zum Segen des Einzelnen wie der Gesamtheit!

Bürger, Bauern und Arbeiter, wählt am 19. Januar die Kandidaten der

Deutschen Volkspartei

(Deutsche demokratische Partei).

Figure 2-1. DDP Electoral Appeal, January 1919

⁴⁴ At "Kandidatenwahl für die Nationalversammlung, Hof 19. Dezember" in "DDP".

2.2 The “Dreamland” of the Armistice

When it came to the question of Germany’s internal political constitution, then, pro-Republican and anti-monarchist sentiments enjoyed considerable influence within the Hofer Bürgertum during the German Revolution. This was mirrored in bürgerliche perceptions of Germany’s international predicament, as pacifist and anti-militaristic ideas circulated freely in the *Hofer Anzeiger* and in local bürgerliche clubs.

The question of why Germany had actually lost the war was one of the most immediate issues facing Hof’s bürgerliche milieu. As the historian Boris Barth has shown, the view quickly spread on the radical right that the Reich had not, in fact, been defeated by its enemies in the field, but that the army had been “stabbed in the back” by Marxist agitators on the home front, who staged a revolutionary uprising and thereby rendered the troops powerless⁴⁵. In Hof, too, there is evidence that something resembling this formulation was occasionally invoked. An article in the *Hofer Anzeiger* on 23rd November welcomed the returning soldiers “as undefeated... forced to leave the battlefield in an orderly manner because the home front wanted it - the home front that proved too weak to bear the many burdens of the war”⁴⁶.

In actual fact, however, it was far more common for leading Hofer burghers to blame Germany’s predicament not on a “stab-in-the-back” but rather on the “Pan-German Camarilla” around Eric Ludendorff, whose grandiose

⁴⁵ Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration*.

⁴⁶ Wilhelm Schafer, “Fahnen heraus!”, in “HA”, no. 322, 23.11.1918.

nationalism had resulted in overstretch and catastrophe. At the founding of the Hofer DDP, for example, Otto Ernst insisted that “the reactionary right has got us into this mess and has now fully discredited itself,⁴⁷ while Karl Schrepfer argued at the DDP candidate hustings that it was “Ludendorff and the power-crazed clique of Pan-Germans” who, through their “advancement of an aggressive war” had brought disaster on the German people⁴⁸. Ernst also implied that such “conscienceless agitators” had lied about Germany’s military capacity, thereby propagating a “reckless propaganda” in order to whip up more support for their expansionist war aims⁴⁹. On 14th December, the local journalist Fritz Auer argued in the *Hofer Anzeiger* that the Reich’s “military dictators” had, during the war, “striven ever further with their imperialistic impulses” which had unfortunately proven “more than our actual strength could deliver”⁵⁰, while on 30th December, at a gathering of the Hofer DDP, Karl Schrepfer again lamented “the sad consequences of the world war which had brought defeat despite all our sacrifices after our military dictators had repressed all attempts to bring about a timely peace”. This, he said, was the ultimate proof against “political demagoguery”, which could produce “another Ludendorff”, a man who “promised only victory and instead brought collapse”⁵¹. Dr Herold, too, in reflecting on the war’s end in 1919, denounced

⁴⁷ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung (Schluss)” in “DDP”.

⁴⁸ At “Kandidatenwahl für die Nationalversammlung, Hof 19. Dezember” in “DDP”.

⁴⁹ “Enthüllungen über die Seekriegführung” in “HA”, no. 323, 25.11.1918.

⁵⁰ “Objekt, nicht Subjekt!” in “HA”, no. 340, 14.12.1918.

⁵¹ “Wahlversammlung der deutschen Volkspartei, Hof 30 Dezember” in “DDP”.

the “imperialistic dreams” that had caused the German people to “forget their real calling... to be the salt of the earth”⁵².

The disastrous developments of the immediate past, then, could be blamed not on a revolutionary “stab-in-the-back” but on grandiose nationalists. Similarly, Germany’s future salvation rested not on a “war of revenge” but on international co-operation. The Reich, it was supposed, had surrendered to the Allies on the basis of President Wilson’s 14 points, which promised a “peace without annexations”, national self-determination, and the creation of a League of Nations that would ensure a future of prosperity and reconciliation between the former belligerent countries. And, indeed, there was some optimism within the Hofer Bürgertum that so benign a fate was precisely what awaited Germany. Otto Ernst, writing on 23rd November, looked forward to the creation of a “League of Nations” which would ensure world peace and “address all problems” through “obligatory courts of arbitration, disarmament, freedom of the seas and world traffic, open doors, collective opening up of Africa, (and) neutrality of states”, adding approvingly that “the new German leaders must be recognised as flawless supporters of this idea”. Ernst cautioned that the success or failure of such a League depended on whether it emanated from “justice or power”, but he was still optimistic that, if “supported by moral factors”, a League of Nations would ensure that “the happiness of peoples (will) bloom”⁵³. Dr Herold, too, saw the League as Germany’s deliverance from the catastrophe of defeat, describing

⁵² Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 2.

⁵³ “Recht oder Macht!” in “HA”, no. 322, 23.11.1918.

it as “perhaps the most German thought that has ever been thought” and arguing that the German Volk had historically “contributed more” to the idea of a “concert of the peoples” than any other. It was a vision “that our greatest and most fertile spirits have advocated” and, though the “tasks that now await our people in the planned League” were “enormous”, it would also allow Germany to “prove all of its natural gifts and strength” to the world⁵⁴.

This optimism that a League of Nations might deliver Germany from its malaise was partly based on the hope that America would play a decisive role in shaping the post-war order, that President Wilson, “through his personal intervention”, would “make a powerful contribution” to the League’s creation⁵⁵. According to a series of articles in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, America would be an “honourable negotiator” trying to “bring about an honest and pacifistic peace” that would not be “directed at the German Volk” but instead would “secure a good understanding” with them⁵⁶. Indeed, the Americans were benign conquerors who “do not view themselves as victors but are trying to help the young German Republic”, coming “not as enemies but as friends”. Their influence would be the guarantee of a flourishing German democracy, for they were “against every monarchist striving” and committed to assisting “Republican aspirations”⁵⁷. The British, too, though they were frequently portrayed in the *Hofer Anzeiger* as cold-bloodedly self-interested and fully in league with the hated French, were also sometimes depicted as powerful

⁵⁴ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, pp. 4, 5.

⁵⁵ “Das Friedens Angebot seitens Amerikas” in “HA”, no. 322, 23.11.1918.

⁵⁶ “HA”, no. 308, 8.11.1918.

⁵⁷ “Eine maßvolle amerikanische Auffassung” in “HA”, no. 345, 20.12.1918.

proponents of international reconciliation; as Ernst remarked, it was not only Wilson but also “influential English circles with Lord Edward Grey at their head” who were “campaigning” for the creation of the League⁵⁸.

The surprising degree of optimism with respect to Germany’s post-war fate, then, was linked to the possibility of future international co-operation. This sentiment was mirrored in some bürgerliche quarters by a striking degree of pacifism and a renunciation of militarism which obtained well into the spring of 1919. Typical of this was a commemorative evening held by the District Teacher’s Association of Hof for the 27 of their former members killed during the war. The centrepiece of the evening was a speech by the local head teacher August Horn, who transformed his tribute to the fallen into a general denunciation of war and militarism. After voicing his sadness not only over the German dead but “all victims of the war”, he expressed the hope that, “in the future... we will fight with spiritual weapons rather than with murder”. Germany’s soldiers, he said, had gone to their graves for a “better, more peaceful Reich... even if they didn’t realise it”, and he implored his audience to “abandon dreams of outer power and greatness”. “We are not a ruling people”, he continued, but a nation that would find solace in “true work for the happiness of humanity”. In a rousing conclusion, he announced that “our memorial ceremony... has become a protest against war”, and asked if, “today, when we feel the wounds of war all the more deeply... did it have to be this way?... Is humanity only to advance through war?... Does our path

⁵⁸ “Recht oder Macht!” in “HA”, no. 322, 23.11.1918.

have to lead through blood and tears?” Horn refused to accept any of these positions: “We don’t want to believe it, we don’t want to think it, we don’t want to say it... and we want to strive against it with all of our souls... For there can be nothing normal, nothing natural, there cannot be an eternal plan for worldly order that involves rational people killing each other”⁵⁹.

August Horn was not the only leading Hofer Burgher to advance such sentiments; indeed, Otto Ernst was so impressed by his speech that he devoted an entire page to it in the *Hofer Anzeiger*. A few days later, the same newspaper published an article entitled “Reconciliation” written by Immanuel Heyn, a Protestant Pastor, which constituted another damning indictment of war and German militarism. Heyn argued that “the peoples of the world have better things to do than fight each other, to get involved in catastrophic feuding, to see who can make the most murderous weapons”, and he described it as “terrible” that “the guilt for this terrible war is only sought among our enemies”, for “should there not also be talk of German guilt?” As far as Heyn was concerned, there could “never be peace among nations until all those involved in the war - including we Germans - let go of pride and hatred”. The pastor closed his article with a prayer to god that “religious and nationalist fanaticism dies and that true Christianity – a religion of reconciliation – emerges”⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ “Dem Gedächtnis unserer gefallenen Helden!” in “HA”, no. 90, 16.4.1919 and 91, 17.4.1919.

⁶⁰ Immanuel Heyn, “Versöhnung” in “HA”, no. 91, 17.04.1919.

Beyond the local Teachers' Society and the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the local DDP also presented itself as an advocate of international reconciliation and pacifism well into the spring of 1919, declaring its intention to stand for "world peace and a League of Nations"⁶¹. Most strikingly of all, just a few days before the publication of the Versailles Treaty, the Democrats invoked the internationalist spirit of 1st May, traditionally a "day of struggle" for the workers' movement of all countries, with a proclamation which explicitly rejected the bürgerliche nationalism that had led to the war. In the past, May Day had been "a celebration of the International Proletariat", even if "the Bürgertum of all countries, who were locked into narrow nationalistic thinking, could not share this view". However, "the terrible world war and unprecedented collapse" had "lain waste to these convictions", which "for most people means learning a new way, to change from a profound nationalism to an equally profound internationalism."⁶² These sentiments were voiced again at a meeting of the Hofer DDP on May Day, where Frau Berta Scheiding, a local lynchpin of the Democratic Women's Group, urged "absolute praise for the League of Nations and World Peace" as well as "understanding between peoples"⁶³.

Some historians have characterised the six-month period between the signing of an armistice in November and the publication of the Treaty of Versailles in May of the following year as a "Dream Land". During this period, they argue,

⁶¹ "Hof, 27. April" in "DDP".

⁶² "Zum Ersten Mai!" in "DDP".

⁶³ "Hof, 1. Mai" in "DDP".

much of the German public failed to accept the reality of defeat and believed instead that a new world of peace and reconciliation, ordered according to President Wilson's 14 Points and mandated by an American-backed League of Nations, might be on the horizon⁶⁴. Such optimism, too, was of course highly compatible with widespread calls for democracy, denunciation of the monarchy and belief in a future of tolerant republicanism. The evidence here suggests that this excessively optimistic spirit was present also within the *Hofer Bürgertum* during this initial six-month period after the German Revolution. It was a spirit that would prove highly conducive to the success of the local Democrats, the proponents of a politics of tolerance and reason.

2.3 The Independent Socialists and the Spartacist Uprising

One potential problem which confronted the *Hofer* Democrats in selling their moderate, reconciliatory conception of Germany's future to the local *Bürgertum* was radical left-wing violence. As Otto Ernst wrote in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, "the German *Bürgertum* is not yet so secure in its democratic outlook that revolutionary convulsions can occur without repercussion,

⁶⁴ The period between the armistice and the Versailles Treaty was first characterised in this way by Ernst Troeltsch, who was writing shortly after the Treaty's publication. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Fehlgeburt einer Republik, Spektator in Berlin 1918 bis 1922*, ed. by Johann Hinrich Claussen (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag 1994), p. 69. Troeltsch's notion of a "Dream Land" has been rediscovered by contemporary historians. See Michael Geyer, "Zwischen Krieg und Nachkrieg; Die Deutsche Revolution 1918/19 im Zeichen blockierter Transnationalität", in *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918/19*, ed. by Alexander Gallus (Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), pp. 187–223; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat; On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York; Picador/H. Holt, 2004), pp. 189–289.

without a fall back into old (authoritarian) ways of thinking”⁶⁵. Such “convulsions” took different forms during the German Revolution, but their most egregious manifestation came in January 1919, when the radical left-wing Spartacist League staged an uprising in Berlin in an attempt to prevent imminent elections to a National Assembly.

Were Otto Ernst’s concerns justified? Was radical left-wing violence enough to deter the Hofer Bürgertum from voting for a moderate democratic party such as the DDP, to “fall back into old ways of thinking”? The following section argues that, in fact, the Spartacist Uprising actually enhanced the appeal of the DDP’s conception of politics because the Majority Socialist Provisional Government took a leading role in crushing the radicals. This was a huge boost to the DDP’s argument that there was a big distinction between “the constructive and destructive faces of German socialism”⁶⁶, and that the former were viable partners in the creation of a democratic Republic. First, however, this section offers an analysis of the bürgerliche perception of the extreme left during the German Revolution. What qualities did the Hofer Bürgertum attribute to radical revolutionaries, and why did they detest and fear them?

⁶⁵ “Unzeitgemäßes” in “HA”, no. 350, 28.12.1918.

⁶⁶ “Allzumenschliches” in “HA”, no. 4, 4.1.1919.

The Independent Social Democrats

In the final two months of 1918, the principle bogeyman of the Hofer Bürgertum was the Independent Social Democratic Party, which had broken away from the rump of the Social Democratic Party in 1917 in protest at its continued support for the war and the Kaiser's government. During the Revolution, the left-wing of the USPD advocated permanent rule by the Worker's and Soldier's Councils rather than elections to a National Assembly, a far-reaching programme of socialisation that would take large swathes of the economy out of private hands, and they also had a generally favourable view of the Russian Bolsheviks⁶⁷. In this respect, the Hofer Bürgertum were doubly unfortunate, because, firstly, in Munich itself the Bavarian Revolution had largely occurred at the behest of Independent Socialists around Kurt Eisner; and, secondly, because in Hof the USPD was the dominant party of the left. On both the local and state level, then, the local Bürgertum and DDP were confronted not by moderates in the MSPD but by their more left-wing cousins.

The main charge levelled against the USPD during the first months of the German Revolution was that they aimed to establish a dictatorship rather than permit Germany to become a democracy. At the founding meeting of the

⁶⁷ Throughout its existence, the USPD was consistently torn between a radically revolutionary left-wing and a right-wing which was more conventionally Social Democratic. See David W. Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution: A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, 1917-1922* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1975); There is little doubt, however, that the USPD was home to politically radical "left-socialists" who hoped to set post-1918 Germany on an anti-parliamentary course. See Riccardo Bavaj, *Von Links gegen Weimar. Linkes antiparlamentarisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Dietz, 2005), pp. 183–201.

Hofer DDP on 10th December, Otto Ernst thundered that the Bavarian Bürgertum “had been robbed of its rights” by “a class party” that had “usurped power” and was “turning this power into a dictatorship”, its ultimate aim being to “reduce the middle class and Bürgertum to nothing”⁶⁸. Two days later, Ernst again declared that, under the USPD, “the economic, social and spiritual existence of Burghers” in Bavaria was “threatened by a blood-crazed radicalism and communism”⁶⁹. The *Hofer Anzeiger* published a number of reports from Worker’s and Soldier’s Councils across the Reich which had fallen under the control of radicals and all of them, it seemed, were pushing for a “Soviet-style system”. The Berlin Council had registered its opposition to a National Assembly and its support for a permanent “Council dictatorship” – which elicited an indignant commentary from Franz Büchl, chief editor of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, who wrote underneath that, “if this really happened, we would have exactly the same conditions as they currently do in Russia!”⁷⁰.

This Independent Socialist “dictatorship”, as well as aiming at the extermination of the Bürgertum, would also implement a policy of total socialisation which would destroy Germany’s economy and reduce the Reich to ruin. For Ernst, the drive for socialisation had left “millions of hands and heads broken, billions in goods already lost” and “continuing daily to be

⁶⁸ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung, Hof 10. Dezember” in “DDP”.

⁶⁹ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung (Schluss)” in “DDP”.

⁷⁰ “Die Unabhängigen als gegner der Nationalversammlung” in “HA”, no. 317, 18.11.1918.

lost”⁷¹, a claim repeated at a meeting of the DDP in December, when “20 billion in property” was alleged to have “disappeared into thin air” as a result of socialisations carried out by USPD-led Councils. At a meeting of the Upper Franconian Chamber for Trade in Bayreuth on 10th December, one local businessman warned that the USPD’s “forced socialisation of our industry would bring our economic life to ruin... Such an experiment would also be to the disadvantage of the workers”, with “Russia as a tragic example of this misguided teaching”⁷², while at a meeting of the Hofer Democratic Women’s Group, Frau Fröhlich similarly extolled the benefits of “private undertakings” which “cannot be allowed to disappear”⁷³.

This Soviet-style system envisioned by the Independent Socialists was held to be dictatorial not only because it aimed at the exclusion and destruction of the Bürgertum, but also because it enjoyed only minimal support even among the working classes. This allowed the *Hofer Anzeiger* and DDP to differentiate between the “healthy” mass of the German working classes on the one hand and the unscrupulous aspiring tyrants who claimed to lead them. “The radicals are trying to create a dictatorship of the Proletariat, despite the small minority that supports them” warned Ernst in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, “and this has nothing to do with democracy”, describing them a few days later as “a

⁷¹ “Wohin Treiben Wir?” in “HA”, no. 327, 29.11.1918.

⁷² “Bericht über die Sitzung der oberfränkische handelskammer am 10. Dezember 1918” in “HA”, no. 341, 16.12.1918.

⁷³ “Deutsche Volkspartei in Hof (Versammlung der Frauengruppe), Hof 23. Dezember” in “DDP”.

small group of radical Bolsheviks”⁷⁴. The returning soldiers, Ernst continued, had not “spent four hard years in the field to come back to the dictatorship of a few hundred people”⁷⁵. At the founding of the Hofer DDP, he referred to this as an “arbitrary, one-sided class dictatorship”, while the local chemist and war veteran Ernst Bogel also maintained that “90% of soldiers are against this dictatorship and in favour of quick elections to a National Assembly”⁷⁶.

The undemocratic and dictatorial character of the USPD was most frighteningly brought to life at local meetings of the German Democratic Party, which were frequently disrupted by Independents Socialists. The *Hofer Anzeiger* published copious reports of intimidating, demeaning and in some cases violent actions by members of the USPD at Democratic gatherings in Hof and its environs, such as in Presseck on 20th December, where an “Independent Socialist” in the audience brought a premature end to Hans Ebert’s speech by directing “frivolous jokes” and “personal insults” at the speaker⁷⁷. On 8th January, the USPD attempted to break up a meeting of the DDP in nearby Konradsreuth, and they struck again in Leupoldsgrün the next day, when their “perpetual shouting” offered “a glimpse into the nature of freedom” in a future “Bolshevik” state⁷⁸. That this kind of thing was happening close to home, in towns and villages near to Hof rather than in distant Berlin

⁷⁴ “Die Umwerthung der Werthe” in “HA”, no. 316, 16.11.1918.

⁷⁵ “Wohin treiben wir?” in “HA”, no. 327, 29.11.1918.

⁷⁶ “Die Gründung der Deutschen Volkspartei in Hof: Imposante Gründungsversammlung (Schluss)” in “DDP”.

⁷⁷ “Presseck. Am 29 Dezember...” in “DDP”.

⁷⁸ “Leupoldsgruen, 8 Januar...” in “DDP”.

and Munich, only made the USPD's planned "class dictatorship" a more unsettling and more tangible prospect.

Many of these tropes were brought together in the figure of Kurt Eisner, the interim Independent Socialist Premier of Bavaria and the *bête noir* of the Hofer Bürgertum during the first two months of the German Revolution. Eisner was the principle architect of a future "class dictatorship" in Bavaria, a "celebrated theatre critic but unfortunate politician"⁷⁹ who had "shown himself to be a truly radical Berliner" by insisting that "the National Assembly is not the basis of a new democratic order" and demanding instead "rule by the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils"⁸⁰. Ernst later called for "an end to this sinister dictator" whose style of government was "worse than an absolutist ruler" and was reminiscent "of the worst times of Tsarism"⁸¹. He was a "half dreamer and fantasist, half demagogic dictator and violent politician" who had no place at the zenith of Bavarian politics and, after the "repression" of bürgerliche newspapers in Munich at the beginning of December, the DDP's Dr Müller (a local Headmaster) sarcastically expressed his "confidence" that "the current dictator of Bavaria" would "finally ensure the freedom of the press" according to "a truly democratic spirit"⁸². To the Hofer Bürgertum, then, Eisner was a borderline Bolshevik⁸³.

⁷⁹ Dr. Müller-Meiningen, "Gegen die Diktatur Kurt Eisners im freien Volksstaate Bayern" in "HA", no. 335, 9.12.1918.

⁸⁰ "Gegen die Diktatur Kurt Eisners..." in "HA", no. 336, 10.12.1918.

⁸¹ "Kurt Eisner; Eine bittere Entauschung" and "Experimente" in "HA", no. 328, 30.11.1918.

⁸² Dr. Müller-Meiningen in "HA", no. 335, 9.12.1918.

⁸³ This was, in fact, a little unfair; as a number of historians have argued, Eisner aimed to chart a "middle ground" between a fullblown endorsement of parliamentary democracy and

The radical left's most egregious crime, however, was that it made Germany weak at a time of acute national peril. Indeed, Eisner's most unforgivable crime was his diligent publication of documents from the Bavarian archive which provided damning evidence of the culpability of German officials for the outbreak of the First World War, which was perceived as a deliberate "betrayal of Germany"⁸⁴. If continued, this could lead "within four weeks" to the hoisting of the French colours above the castle in Nuremberg, the "housing of colonial troops" and "grinning negro soldiers" in "our old German towns", according to one Bavarian officer writing in the newspaper⁸⁵. And if Ernst and Herold felt able to describe the Majority Socialists and German working classes as essentially "national", the Independent Socialists and their creed were insidiously "anti-national", perhaps even alien to "the German essence". Herold scorned Eisner's "helpless alienation from German spiritual needs", attacking his hypocritical and unpatriotic inability to find "a single word for the children of Bavaria still in French and English Prison Camps" despite Eisner's manifest "regret" that "not all enemy troops have been sent home"⁸⁶.

the Soviet-style pretensions of the radical left. See Schade, *Kurt Eisner*; Allan Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria 1918-1919: The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965). Indeed, to avowedly Marxist historians, Eisner was an admirable man but ultimately inadequate as a revolutionary. See, for example Hans Beyer, *Die Revolution in Bayern, 1918/1919*, 2. bearb. u. erw. Aufl (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1988); Michael Seligmann, *Aufstand der Räte: Die erste bayerische Räterepublik vom 7. April 1919*, Reihe Libertäre Wissenschaft, Bd. 8, 1. Aufl (Grafenau: Trotzdem, 1989).

⁸⁴"Eisner: eine bittere Entauschung" in "HA", no. 328, 30.11.1918; According to Eisner's granddaughter, writing 60 years later, the aim of this policy was to induce a "critical distancing of the people from those previously in power, and a fundamentally warmer attitude to the Revolution." Freya Eisner, *Kurt Eisner, Die Politik des libertären Sozialismus*, Edition Suhrkamp ; 422, Erstausg., 1. Aufl (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 113.

⁸⁵ Dr. Otto Goldfeld, "Stimmen der Zeit; An alle Deutschen!" in "HA", no. 328, 30.11.1918.

⁸⁶ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, pp. 11, 12.

The Spartacist Uprising

The USPD, then, were a group of unpatriotic aspiring dictators, defined above all by their opposition to a National Assembly and advocacy of permanent rule by the Councils. They were, however, undoubtedly perceived as a primarily *political* threat by the likes of Otto Ernst and Eduard Herold. This distinguished them from the Spartacists, a group of extreme socialists affiliated to the Communist Party who attempted an uprising in Berlin in January 1919 in an attempt to prevent elections to a National Assembly from taking place⁸⁷. The *Hofer Anzeiger* and local Democrats viewed the Spartacists less as a political group and more as a criminal tendency with no discernible political goals, with many voices within the Hofer Bürgertum maintaining that the rebels were fighting not to accomplish anything, only to destroy⁸⁸. This sentiment was perhaps most pointedly expressed by a speaker at a meeting of the Hofer Democratic Women's Group who, when asked what she understood by the phrase "Bolshevism in Germany", remarked that it consisted of little more than mobs "who go onto the streets with machine guns, disrupt every political meeting and want to topple every minister"⁸⁹, and the *Hofer Anzeiger* decried the Provisional Government's decision to treat Spartacists as political prisoners, for their uprising was not a

⁸⁷ See Werner Müller, "Die KPD in ihrem Ersten Jahr", in *Die vergessene Revolution von 1918/19*, ed. by Alexander Gallus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), pp. 160–87.

⁸⁸ Other historians have also shown that the equation of communists with criminals was a leitmotif of bürgerliche narratives during the German Revolution. See Dirk Schumann, *Political violence in the Weimar Republic*, p. 9.; Sara F. Hall, "Moving Images and the Policing of Political Action in the Early Weimar Period", *German Studies Review*, 31 (2008), 285–302 (pp. 291, 296.).

⁸⁹ "Deutsche Volkspartei in Hof (Versammlung der Frauengruppe), Hof 23. Dezember" in "DDP".

political act but little more than “a despicable outbreak of the darkest criminality”⁹⁰, the outrages of “conscienceless criminals”⁹¹.

However, the most conspicuous feature of the Hofer *Bürgertum*’s presentation of the Spartacists was the tendency to constantly link them to the Russian Bolsheviks. This trope took several different forms. First, Russia was repeatedly invoked as a terrible premonition of what awaited the Reich if Liebknecht and Luxemburg were victorious – indeed, “Russian conditions” became shorthand for the chaos, poverty and mass death that were the inevitable results of the victory of “Bolshevism”. Thus the Spartacists, claimed Otto Ernst, would lead the working class of Germany to “perish together with Burghers in the misery of Bolshevism... just as is the case in Russia”⁹², and on 10th January, a local engineer, Dr Zinzmeister, sent a letter to the *Hofer Anzeiger* bearing the title “The Heavens Protect Germany from the Blessings of the Russian Revolution”. Zinzmeister expressed the view that “to wish Russian conditions on Germany would be suicide... 14 days ago I was in Moscow. All businesses stand still and the poverty on the streets is gruesome. Utter misery. It’s about time that the German Volk be told the truth about Russia’s situation”⁹³. A circular of the German Democratic Party the

⁹⁰ “Die Lehren der Berliner Schreckenswoche” in “HA”, no. 13, 15.1.1919.

⁹¹ “Energielosigkeit” in “HA”, no. 10, 11.1.1919.

⁹² “Wohin treiben Wir?” in “HA”, no. 327, 29.11.1918.

⁹³ “Der Himmel behüte Deutschland vor den Segnungen der russischen Revolution”, in “HA” no. 9, 10.1.1919.

next day also lambasted the Spartacists for “wanting to test out on us the political contrivances of a backward people”⁹⁴.

The second feature of the trope which connected German leftist radicalism with the Bolsheviks was the charge that Lenin’s regime was not only an inspiration to the rebels in Berlin; it was actively arming and financing the Spartacists in an attempt to export the Russian Revolution⁹⁵, flooding the streets with Communist Propaganda⁹⁶, and dispatching Karl Radek, “the grimmest of all Russian Bolsheviks”, to the capital, where he was “indispensably involved in all the Spartacus League’s violent undertakings”⁹⁷. Little wonder that Lenin and Trotsky “count their influence over the situation in Germany and Austria as their biggest success”, and hoped “that the current (Majority Socialist) Revolution, which they compare with the (liberal) rise of Kerensky, will follow the ‘correct course’ similar to the October Revolution”⁹⁸.

What made this vision of a Bolshevik-funded uprising of German revolutionaries even more disturbing, however, was the fact that, in early January 1919, the Red Army offensive in the Baltic began to threaten the East Prussian frontier. This “repeat of the Russian Invasion of 1918” raised the horrifying possibility that “the last dam” would be “broken”, allowing “Bolshevism to flow across Europe”⁹⁹. If this happened, there was little

⁹⁴ “Deutsches Volk, wach auf!” in “DDP”.

⁹⁵ “Mit russischem Geld und russischer Munition” and “Die Bilanz des Bürgerkrieg” in “HA”, no. 11, 13.1.1919.

⁹⁶ “Berliner Bluthochzeit” in “HA”, no. 15, 17.1.1919.

⁹⁷ “Das Gastspiel Radek” in “HA”, no. 2, 2.1.1919.

⁹⁸ “Russland an der Jahreswende” in “HA”, no. 349, 27.12.1918.

⁹⁹ “Die Bolschewiki stehen vor Riga!” in “HA”, no. 3, 3.1.1919.

question of what would befall Königsberg or Tilsit; they would “share the fate of all cities that are captured by the Bolsheviks, namely murder, robbery and plundering”¹⁰⁰. The *Hofer Anzeiger* explicitly linked the advance of the Red Army with the Spartacist Uprising, writing on 7th January that “just as Russian Bolshevism threatens every hour to break into German lands from Riga and Mitau... new acts of violence are being perpetrated by the Spartacist terror in Berlin”¹⁰¹, raising the apocalyptic prospect of a simultaneous Bolshevik uprising from within and invasion from without.

Given the scale of the violence, the emotive power of reports emanating from Russia, and the implications for Germany’s international predicament, it is perhaps unsurprising that, in the uprising’s earliest days, misgivings were expressed within the Hofer Bürgertum about both the feasibility of introducing a democratic system and the Majority Socialists as potential partners in such an enterprise. Indeed, the finger of blame was initially pointed at the Provisional Government for their failure to take decisive action. “All order is smashed to shards... the Constitution suspended, anarchy, lack of restraint... and a government that is incapable of fighting back against chaos”¹⁰².

But these misgivings did not fundamentally shake the Hofer Bürgertum’s commitment to democracy or compromise their essentially sympathetic view of the MSPD, which they clearly viewed as a party capable of governing the country. There was an evident awareness that Friedrich Ebert’s hands were

¹⁰⁰ “Vermischtes” in “HA”, no. 16, 18.1.1919.

¹⁰¹ “Berlin in Zeichen der Revolution” in “HA”, no. 6, 7.1.1919.

¹⁰² “Neujahr 1919” in “HA”, no. 1, 1.1.1918.

ted by the Independent delegates in the Provisional Government, who stood accused of preventing him from bringing his full wrath to bear against the Spartacists. But the resignation of the USPD delegates over the new year of 1919 left a “homogenous Majority Socialist Cabinet”, meaning that “all those who sensed the real reason why no firm hand was felt” could now “breathe a sigh of relief”¹⁰³, and Ernst welcomed the fact that, “with a free hand”, Ebert and Scheidemann could now “do everything to create order” on the streets of Berlin¹⁰⁴. On 18th January, Ernst applauded their crushing of the uprising, congratulating “the government Ebert-Scheidemann” who, “after considered preparation, finally took drastic measures... and did what had to be done without a second thought” The Majority Socialist Provisional Government, it seemed, had “spared our land Russian anarchy and Russian Bolshevism”¹⁰⁵.

Thus the conception of bürgerliche politics propagated by the Democrats – that they would serve as a bridge of reconciliation between German Bürgertum and the Majority Social Democrats – was actually strengthened by the events of the Spartacist Uprising, because it was above all a Majority Socialist government which took the lead in crushing the uprising and defeat “Bolshevism” in Germany. The DDP’s central claim – that the enemy was not the left, or Catholics, but extremists of all hues – seemed to be confirmed by this new constellation of political power in Germany. The ultimate proof of the success of this vision for Germany’s future came at the polls, as the

¹⁰³ "Allzumenschliches" in "HA", no. 4, 4.1.1919.

¹⁰⁴ "Energielosigkeit" in "HA", no. 10, 11.1.1919.

¹⁰⁵ "Im Kampf um die Macht" in "HA", no. 16, 18.1.1919.

Democrats won some six and a half thousand votes on January 19th, making them by a considerable distance the biggest bürgerliche party in Hof. The German Nationalists, meanwhile, failed to break the 200 vote mark¹⁰⁶.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that a democratic consensus took hold in bürgerliche Hof during the German Revolution. It first showed that the German Democratic Party became the dominant political force within the bürgerliche milieu and that this party was no mere focal point for anti-socialism but rather the proponent of a genuinely left-liberal conception of Germany's future. It then argued that radical nationalist sentiments had little purchase within the Hofer Bürgertum during this period and that, in fact, support for a League of Nations and even pacifism were remarkably widespread. Finally, this chapter suggested that left-wing radicalism did not endanger the prevalence of democratic ideas among Hof's Burghers because the *Hofer Anzeiger* and the DDP were able to show that the Majority Social Democrats were allies against the radical left. These extremists were presented, variously, as aspiring dictators, the source of German weakness at a time of national peril and, in the case of the Spartacists, as Russian agents who had no concrete political goals but aimed only at nihilistic destruction. The Majority Socialists,

¹⁰⁶ "Ergebnisse der deutschen National-Wahl" in "HA", no. 17, 20.01.1919.

meanwhile, remained democratically minded patriots who had saved the nation from “Bolshevism”.

It would, of course, be a gross exaggeration to argue that the thousands of people who comprised Hof’s bürgerliche milieu had become convinced republican parliamentary democrats overnight. And, as later chapters will show, many of the positions represented by the Hofer DDP during the German Revolution ultimately proved too far to the left for many of Hof’s Burghers. Over time, resistance to them would emerge. Nonetheless, the ideology sketched out above, and the party which advanced it, was in a position of considerable strength in the aftermath of the First World War. The middle class denizens of the *Saalestadt* were exposed to this ideology every day in their newspaper, packed meeting halls to listen to and applaud it and, ultimately, voted for it in their thousands in January 1919. The evidence that Hof’s Bürgertum were responding positively to the Revolution and Germany’s new democratic order is considerable. Why, then, did this initial support not crystallise into a longer term commitment to the Republic?

3 The Democratic Consensus Challenged

(The Räterepublik, the Treaty of Versailles and the Municipal Elections,

April – July 1919)

In the spring of 1919, the mood within the Hofer Bürgertum began to shift in a direction that was much less agreeable to the German Democratic Party. The trigger for this inauspicious development lay in two profound traumas that would colour the outlook of Hof's middle classes for the entire period explored in this study. First, in April, a shifting coalition of radical left-wing revolutionaries seized control of Munich and proclaimed a "*Räterepublik*" ("Council Republic"), ushering in a period of revolutionary unrest across Bavaria which also spread to Hof itself. However, no sooner had this leftist uprising been extinguished than the Allies published the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, triggering opprobrium across the German political spectrum and also within the Hofer Bürgertum.

According to Matthew Stibbe, the double trauma of the *Räterepublik* and the Versailles Treaty marked the beginning of the post-war radicalisation of the German middle classes, who were both "frightened by working class militancy" and "angered by the harsh terms imposed on Germany under the Treaty". It was at this point, Stibbe suggests, that "the old, nationalist right re-emerged in a new guise" and the bürgerliche defection from the DDP began¹. And, as this chapter argues, the first steps in the Hofer Bürgertum's long

¹ Matthew Stibbe, *Germany, 1914-1933; Politics, Society, and Culture*, 1st ed (Harlow, England ; New York; Longman, 2010), p. 79.

journey from Democracy to Nazism were indeed taken during the spring and summer of 1919, as both the *Räterepublik* and the Treaty of Versailles fuelled the idea that the German Reich and its middle class inhabitants were confronted with grave and implacable threats to their very existence. However, to argue that these twin traumas destroyed the authority of the DDP in Hof would be a gross exaggeration; Democrats were still able to count on the support of the majority of the town Bürgertum during the local and municipal elections of June 1919. But by the end of that summer, the DDP's position in Hof was weaker than it had been just six months previously.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first focuses on the events of the *Räterepublik*, both in Bavaria and Hof, and argues that this greatly increased the fear of the radical left within the town's bürgerliche milieu. The threat of "Bolshevism" was described in increasingly apocalyptic terms, and Hof's Burghers showed a new willingness to take up arms to combat "red terror". The second section analyses the impact of the Versailles Treaty, arguing that this was viewed not so much as a peace treaty, or even a punitive "diktat", but rather as the first stage in a programme of deliberate "extermination" whereby Germany would be territorially dismembered, its economy ruined and its people starved to death. The third and final section focuses on the local and municipal elections of summer 1919 and shows that, for the first time, the DDP found itself confronted by several new, ostensibly "apolitical" bürgerliche associations which explicitly challenged the party's claim to represent the Hofer Bürgertum. All in all, then, very little that occurred

in Hof over the spring and summer of 1919 was favourable to the position of the local Democratic Party.

3.1 The *Räterepublik* and Anti-Bolshevist Mobilisation

What impact did the experience of the Bavarian *Räterepublik* have on the ideology of the Hofer Bürgertum? As the following section argues, its effects were, in fact, deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, local Burghers once again found themselves allied with the Majority Social Democrats in the fight against left-wing extremists, which seemed to confirm the DDP's overall message that a bridge needed to be built between moderates among both the working and middle classes. On the other, however, the *Räterepublik* produced a heightened, almost hysterical fear of "Bolshevism" among the Hofer Bürgertum which even resulted in an increased willingness to take up arms against the "red peril". This newly febrile mood among the local middle classes was not necessarily advantageous to the DDP, a party which advertised itself as the exponent of a calm, rational politics of reason and compromise. Furthermore, if the MSPD should ever move to the left and side with the extremists in the future, then it would severely undermine the Democrats' credibility.

The *Räterepublik* was first declared in Munich on 6th April by a shifting

coalition of Independent Socialists, Communists and Anarchists². The elected Bavarian government fled the capital and similar such uprisings occurred in other towns and cities across the state. In Hof, too, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council declared its full support for the Munich Soviet Republic on 7th April, printing a proclamation which stated its intention to "assume control of all communal and political authority" and reserving the right to "determine all governing measures"³. The following day, Hof's new rulers convened stormy meetings with representatives of the local banks and members of the civil service, the first of which saw the USPD's Arthur Mahr instruct bankers to close their outlets until the following afternoon and order them "not to send or transfer any money outside of Bavaria or to permit any withdrawals among private people totalling more than 500 Marks", with the directors "made personally responsible" for the implementation of these measures⁴. The second meeting, with a gathering of 600 to 800 local officials and civil servants, did not begin on time, because Mahr deliberately turned up 30 minutes late in order to "make clear that only the Workers' and Soldiers' Council now has a say". Upon arrival, he triumphantly declared that "Russian conditions" now prevailed in Hof, conditions "which not even the purest socialist could have dreamed of" a few weeks previously, before demanding that "the Council be permitted to interfere in, and exert control over, the

² For more on the confusing and shifting nature of the makeup of the Räterepublik leadership, see Martin H. Geyer, "Munich in Turmoil; Social Protest and the Revolutionary Movement 1918-19.", in *Challenges of Labour; Central and Western Europe, 1917-1920*, ed. by Chris Wrigley (London; New York; Routledge, 1993), pp. 51–72 (pp. 64–67.).

³ "An sämtliche Arbeiterräte" in "OV", no. 83, 8.4.1919.

⁴ "Aussage des Bankdirektors Karl Buchmann in", Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K 107, XII, 117.; See fürther Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 65.

activities of civil servants”, adding that those present “could seek their daily bread elsewhere” if they refused “not just openly, but also out of inner conviction to stand behind the new socialist-communist *Räterepublik*”⁵.

Despite Mahr’s self-confident performance at these meetings, however, the “dictatorship of the Proletariat” proved to be a short-lived affair in Hof; indeed, within 24 hours of its creation, it had been dissolved without a shot being fired. The far left’s failure became abundantly clear at a meeting of the North Upper Franconian Workers, Soldiers and Farmers Council on the afternoon of April 10th, when the farmers refused to support the “Hofer *Räterepublik*” and threatened to cut off the supply of foodstuffs to the town if “further disturbances” occurred, forcing the Independent Socialists to reluctantly accept that the “time for a *Räterepublik* has not yet come”⁶.

Despite this climb-down, however, left-wing radicalism proved more persistent in Munich and other parts of Bavaria, including in some towns and cities close to Hof, and military force was frequently necessary to put an end to “Red Terror” in the region. For several weeks in April 1919, the *Hofer Anzeiger* was dominated by bloodcurdling reports from towns and cities across the state, some of them only a few kilometres away. In Bamberg, a “Red Army” of

⁵ "Lokales und aus dem Kreis" in "HA", no. 88, 14.4.1919.

⁶ "Wochenberichte des Bezirksamt Hof-Land", Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K3 Praes., Reg. 183912.4.1919, k3, Praes. Reg. 1840. The critical role of Bavarian farmers in determining the success or failure of revolutionary undertakings throughout the state (and especially in Munich) has been addressed elsewhere. See Heinrich Hillmayr, *Roter und weißer Terror in Bayern nach 1918: Ursachen, Erscheinungsformen und Folgen der Gewalttätigkeiten im Verlauf der revolutionären Ereignisse nach dem Ende des ersten Weltkrieges* (München: Nusser, 1974), p. 15.

“10,000 men” had taken control of the city⁷; in Würzburg, “Spartacists” had “taken 16 hostages” from among the “Bürgerschaft” and were threatening them with execution⁸; in Munich, a number of “bürgerliche hostages” had fallen into the hands of the Communists, including a businessman, the editor of a local newspaper, a general and a train station intendant⁹; in Rosenheim, “the Spartacists” had already “summarily executed 10 bürgerliche hostages” and were shooting dead everyone with a weapon; in Augsburg, revolutionaries were said to be immediately killing prisoners who fell into their hands¹⁰; in Nuremberg, the “Red Army” had “stormed the offices of the Democratic Party and taken several hostages”¹¹.

Articles such as these which detailed the “excesses” of the far left were accompanied by more extensive accounts from eye witnesses, such as the report of a man who had escaped Munich and written to the newspaper describing the “despair” of its population, which had been decimated by “daily arrests of masses of people, including women, who disappear without a trace”¹². Nor were chilling articles such as these restricted to the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the local Parish newsletter dedicated an article to the overfilled “Munich Cemeteries”, which invoked “the rattling of machineguns, day and night” in “a week full of death”¹³ and carried the contribution of an Augsburg

⁷ “Letzte Telegramme” in “HA”, no. 89, 15.04.1919.

⁸ “Die Räterepublik in Würzburg gestürzt” in “HA”, no. 85, 10.04.1919.

⁹ “München, 14. April” in “HA”, no. 88, 14.04.1919.

¹⁰ “Letzte Telegramme” in “HA”, no. 95, 24.04.1919.

¹¹ “Ein blutiger Zusammenstoß in Nürnberg” in “HA”, no. 98, 28.04.1919.

¹² “Die Lage im München und Augsburg” in “HA”, no. 96, 25.04.1919.

¹³ “Auf Münchner Friedhöfen im Mai 1919” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt für den Dekanatsbezirk Hof (Hof Und Umgebung)”, no. 6, 11.05.1919., Evangelisches Dekanat Hof.

clergyman which detailed the “terror” and “violence” of the “Spartacists”, who opened fire on the church during mass, shelled the post office and a number of civilian buildings, and ultimately forced the author to spend Easter Sunday in a cellar¹⁴.

The most disturbing and infamous example of the “communist terror” said to be engulfing Bavaria came on 5th May, when the *Hofer Anzeiger* reported on what became known as the “Hostage Murders” – the execution of several bürgerliche prisoners in a Munich school hall by members of the revolutionary Red Guard. The *Hofer Anzeiger* described in lurid detail this “senseless, gruesome slaughter” on the part of “the Communards”, with the impeccably middle class victims named as a railway secretary, a student counsellor, several minor nobles, a professor, a local businessman, an artist and members of the “German Warrior’s League”¹⁵. In his article, Franz Büchl described this as an “atrocious” and compared it to the execution of prisoners by the Paris Commune in May 1871 and as part of an overall “class war” on the part of extremists, before expressing the hope that these “appalling murders” would “finally bring to their senses those who protested against the murders of Liebknecht and Luxemburg and who still haven’t seen enough blood flow in the streets”¹⁶. A few weeks later, on the 19th May, even more

¹⁴ “Brief aus Augsburg” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 6, 11.05.1919.

¹⁵ “Weitere ermordete Geiseln” in “HA”, no. 106, 8.5.1919; In fact, most of the hostages were members of the “Thule Society”, a Munich völkisch group which included later-prominent members of the Nazi Party as members. See Gerhard Schmolze, *Revolution Und Räterepublik München 1918/19 in Augenzeugenberichten* (Düsseldorf: DTV Deutscher Taschenbuch, 1982), pp. 349–361. For Schmolze, the “episode with the Thule Society was the first confrontation of the revolutionary working classes with the young fascist movement”.

¹⁶ Franz Büchl, “Die Münchner Geiseln” in “HA”, no. 103, 5.5.1919.

horrifying reports emerged about the “Red Army’s plans to execute some 1400 bürgerliche hostages in the event of a government attack on Munich”¹⁷. Nor did the *Hofer Anzeiger* allow its readers to forget about the “Hostage Murders”, continuing to adorn its front page with reports on the trials of some of those involved for months after the *Räterepublik* had been crushed¹⁸.

Clearly, this was very different to the events of the Spartacist Uprising, when revolutionary violence played out in distant Berlin. The far-left had behaved aggressively in Hof, surrounding areas were succumbing to revolutionary violence, and the state capital was the scene of atrocities committed by the same extremists to whom Leon Blumtritt and Arthur Mahr had pledged their allegiance. Unsurprisingly, then, all of this produced an intensification in anti-Bolshevism and an enhanced willingness to take up arms within Hof’s middle class milieu.

The most vivid manifestation of this were the *Aufrufe*, a flood of appeals and proclamations by hastily formed paramilitary and counter-revolutionary formations which called on the “battle-ready” men of Hof to join and help meet the “Bolshevist” danger in Bavaria and employed striking, almost apocalyptic language in their attempts to recruit members¹⁹. The appeal of the Volunteer Bavarian People’s Defence, for example, stated in no uncertain terms that the situation in Bavaria “is now about your fate and your family’s fate.

¹⁷ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 115, 19.05.1919.

¹⁸ “Der Münchner Geiselmorde” in “HA”, no. 205, 3.9.1919.

¹⁹ At the end of April and beginning of May in 1919, every edition of the *Hofer Anzeiger* included two or three such appeals, which were also printed and distributed. See Macht, *Geschichte Der Hofer Arbeiterbewegung Band 3/1 (1918-1923): Spaltung*, p. 82.

Unemployment, famine, rape and plunder will accompany the Spartacist Dictatorship. Trade will cease. The price for all necessary items will rise until they are prohibitive... The edifices of social legislation... will fall apart”²⁰, while an appeal by the Bavarian Protection Troops described “the battle for Munich” as “one of the biggest, most decisive battles in world history”, for “a victorious Bolshevism” would mean “Armageddon for Europe and eventually the entire planet.”²¹ The appeal of the Hofer Work and Protection Society described Bolshevism as “a terrible enemy that threatens our Fatherland”, with “what is currently happening in Munich and the surrounding areas” a threat to “your possessions and happiness, your peace and order, your work... your destiny and the destiny of your family”²², while the Franconian branch of the Bavarian Warrior’s League invoked “the Bolshevik waves of blood which will flow over our stricken mother earth” in the event of a successful prolongation of the *Räterepublik*²³.

Nor was this kind of apocalyptic anti-Bolshevist language restricted to paramilitary appeals; it came to permeate the Hofer Bürgerliche milieu. On 27th April, with the *Räterepublik* still in power in the Bavarian capital, the Bürgergesellschaft hosted a talk by the virulently anti-communist journalist Dr Fritz Gerlich. In his speech, entitled “Bolshevism; A Religion of Salvation”, Gerlich warned that a successful Communist revolution would result in “the

²⁰ “Freiwillige Bayerische Volkswehr” in “Die Räterepublik in Hof, April/Mai 1919”, Stadtarchiv Hof, ZA.2432.

²¹ “Aufruf des Bayerischen Schützenkorps” in “Räterepublik”.

²² “Arbeits und Schutzengemeinschaft Hof’s” in “Räterepublik”.

²³ “Bayerischen Kriegerbunds” in “Räterepublik”.

destruction of German industry, mass famine and the extermination of the bourgeoisie”, the last of which was already taking place in Munich²⁴, and such sentiments were echoed in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, where Büchl declared that a victorious Bolshevism would usher in “chaos, the collapse of Germany, starvation (and) savagery”²⁵. On 23rd April, meanwhile, the Bavarian Protection Corps held a “hastily convened” meeting chaired by Max Feiler, a Hofer native, entitled “Rise Up Against Bolshevism!”, at which Feiler warned of the “smashing of the accomplishments of a thousand years of cultural, spiritual and economic work” by Bolshevism “the enemy of all values”. Ultimately, there is some evidence that these appeals proved effective – that the men of Hof “registered in large numbers” for “the fight in Munich”²⁶.

Aufruf

zum Eintritt in das mobile Schützen-Bataillon „Hof“.

Kameraden!

Als Landsmann und langjähriger Frontoffizier kein Unbekannter für Viele von Euch, wende ich mich an Euch, Ihr kampferprobten Soldaten des nordoberfränkischen Landes. Die höchste Not unseres Vaterlandes erfordert schnellste Hilfe!

Unsere Volksgenossen zwischen der blauen Donau und den ewig schönen bayerischen Bergen harren schuldlos der Befreiung.



Offiziere, Sanitätsoffiziere, Unteroffiziere und Mannschaften des aktiven, inaktiven und Beurlaubtenstandes aller Waffen, ob Arbeiter, Bürger, Bauern oder Studenten, die hinter der Regierung Hofmann stehen, meldet Euch unverzüglich zum Eintritt in das mobile Schützen-Bat. „Hof“ für sofortige Verwendung gegen München!

Alle, die Ihr Euch von heute ab aus Hof und Umgegend meldet, werdet, soweit Ihr der Infanterie angehört, diesem Bataillon zugewiesen.

Bedingungen: wie für die Volkswehr. **Gebühren:** wie für die Volkswehr; vom ersten Tage der Verwendung außerhalb Bamberg's an 5 Mark Tageszulage.

Besondere Abzeichen: Nachbildung des Hofer Stadtwappens, auf der Brust zu tragen. Mit dem Eintritt in das mobile Schützen-Bataillon Hof habt Ihr in erster Linie Anwartschaft auf Übernahme in die Reichswehr. — Militärpapiere mitbringen.

Wer bestelle: Hof, Dismarsstr. 31 (Gasthof Strauß, I. Stock).
Meldezeit vormittags 9—12 Uhr und nachmittags 2—5 Uhr.

Leypold,
Oberleutnant und Regiments-Führer.

11753

Figure 3-1. Call-to-Arms against the Räterepublik, 1919

²⁴ “Der Bolschewismus als Erlösungsreligion” in “Räterepublik”.

²⁵ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 82, 7.4.1919.

²⁶ A “Hofer Mobile Protection Battalion” was successfully created, while an anti-Bolshevist meeting on 23rd April resulted in a “large number” of young people registering at the local garrison for service. See “Hof, 23. April”, “Auf gegen den Bolschewismus” and “Bildung eines mobilen Schuetzen-Batlns. Hof.” in “Räterepublik”.

Events in Bavaria were thus presented to Hof's Bürgertum as the manifestation of a uniquely destructive force that threatened not only the stability of their country but their very lives. The vividness of this depiction was only heightened by the use of a trope that was familiar from reporting on the Spartacist Uprising; that the *Räterepublik* was intimately linked to Revolutionary Russia. Indeed, Russia once again became a vivid *Schreckbild*, a grim premonition of what awaited Germany if the leaders of the *Räterepublik* were victorious. This was put most pointedly at the meeting of the Bavarian Protection Corps on 23rd April, when Feiler described "Russia, where everything lies in ruins" as "an example of what is intended for us"²⁷, but it was a claim constantly repeated across the Hofer bürgerliche Milieu, often in bloodcurdling language. At a meeting of the local Democratic Party on 13th April, Councillor Hohmann vividly described the conditions in Russia, where "famine reigns, the death rate increases and industry is at a standstill", with the land ruled by "an absolutist ruler - once named Tsar Nicholas, now named Lenin" whose goal it was to "eradicate the Bürgertum". The "principle of Bolshevism", Hohmann continued, was that "we cannot create a better world until we have destroyed everything" – and this was precisely what Bavaria would learn unless the *Räterepublik* were quickly eliminated²⁸. In nearby Tiefengrün, another "strongly attended" protest meeting of local Burghers against the *Räterepublik* was held on 3rd May, at which a local head teacher, Herr Bunzmann, described the catastrophic consequences of

²⁷ "Auf Gegen den Bolschewismus!" in "Räterepublik".

²⁸ "Ein wuchtiger Protest gegen die Räterepublik" in "Räterepublik".

the introduction of a “Council System” in Russia and warned of the dangers for Bavaria if the same kind of system were victorious in the state²⁹.

The local Hofer Parish newsletter, meanwhile, later polemicized against the “banning of God in Russia”, with the “abolition of Christianity” as “one of the main goals of Bolshevism”. One article published in the newsletter included copious details on the mass shooting of monks in a cloister, an Orthodox Archbishop being buried alive, and the drowning of fifty priests in the icy waters of the River Kama, with the implication being that a victorious *Räterepublik* would visit similar such atrocities on the German people³⁰. This, in fact, was the beginning of a long-running trend of virulent anti-Bolshevism in the newsletter which grew in intensity over the course of the next three years.

Again, and as during the Spartacist Uprising, Revolutionary Russia not only presented a terrifying portent of Germany’s future if the radicals were successful, but it was also constantly emphasised that the outrages taking place in Bavaria were actually financed and directed by the Bolsheviks, who were actively trying to export their revolution. This trope was particularly common in the counter-revolutionary *Aufrufe*. The Voluntary Bavarian People’s Defence described the revolutionaries as “a misguided and whipped up minority, led by power hungry leaders who are foreign to our land and

²⁹ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 103, 5.5.1919.

³⁰ “Die ‘Verbannung’ Gottes aus Russland” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 20, 23.11.1919.

people”³¹, while the “German Bicycle and Motorcycle League Concordia” called on all its members to join the Freikorps in order to battle “the Munich Terror Regiment and the foreign vermin who compose it”³². The Mobile Freikorps of Bamberg spoke explicitly of “Russian fanatics” who were “trying to force the blessings of Russian-Asiatic barbarism on the German people”³³, while an appeal by the “Mobile Protection Battalion of Hof” spoke simply of the “Russian danger” in Bavaria³⁴.

Sentiments such as these were also prominent in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, which on 27th April reported that “in the last 14 days, more than 50 Russians” had “made their way to Munich with instructions from the Moscow government to support the Communist movement”³⁵ and also reported on the arrest in nearby Kulmbach of a “Russian Bolshevist” who was loaded with fake money and carrying an order “giving him permission to travel throughout Germany”³⁶. By the 10th May, when a group of Russian troops were arrested in the woods near Munich, the *Hofer Anzeiger* simply entitled the accompanying article, “Who is to blame?”³⁷

Yet again, the invocation of Russian Bolshevism was one semantic strategy used by the *Hofer Anzeiger* and the paramilitary units in an attempt to differentiate the foreign, “alien” Russians and fanatics leading the revolution

³¹ “Freiwillige Bayerische Volkswehr” in “Räterepublik”.

³² “Deutscher Rad-und Motorfahrer-Verband “Concordia”“ in “Räterepublik”.

³³ “Mobiles Freikorps Bamberg” in “Räterepublik”.

³⁴ “Mobile Schützenbataillon Hof” in “Räterepublik”.

³⁵ “Die Lage in und um München” in “HA”, no. 97, 26.4.1919.

³⁶ “Lokales und aus dem Kreis” in “HA”, no. 86, 11.4.1919.

³⁷ “Deutsches Reich” in “HA”, no. 168, 10.5.1919.

from the “healthy mass” of the German working classes who could perhaps be won back for “the nation”. A variant on this theme was the argument that the revolutionaries had nothing spiritually in common with the masses they claimed to lead – that the former were intellectual, wordy, overly theoretical and, not infrequently, deranged, whereas the German worker was trusty and hard headed³⁸. The *Räterepublik* leaders were “salon revolutionaries”, “coffee house literati”³⁹ – bookish ideologues who were detached from reality but had somehow found themselves in a position to impose their romantic and fantastical ideals on the doughty population of Munich. The DDP’s Dr Hohmann dismissed them as “a class of literati, artists, students who come from foreign countries” who, “after the enormous suffering of the war”, had “suddenly appeared” and whipped up the unnerved working classes, “despite having done nothing for them”⁴⁰. Eduard Herold referred to the *Räterepublik* leaders as “Salon Spartacists” and “snobs of the Revolution” who were playing at politics without any real understanding and who would break down if exposed “for just one day, just one hour to the atrocities” playing out in Russia⁴¹. Fritz Gerlich, too, remarked at the anti-Bolshevist meeting in the Bürgergesellschaft that “revolutions are not made in a salon”⁴². And, as we shall see, this denunciation of the leaders of the extreme left as alienated

³⁸ The use of this trope was widespread among “conservative contemporaries” in the aftermath of the *Räterepublik*. See Martin H. Geyer, “Formen Der Radikalisierung in Der München Revolution 1918/19”, in *Revolutionäres Potential in Europa am Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges. Die Rolle von Strukturen, Konjunkturen und Massenbewegungen*, ed. by Helmut Konrad and Karin M Schmidlechner (Wien: Boehlau Verlag, 1991), pp. 63–89 (p. 63); Martin H. Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt*, pp. 59–64.

³⁹ “Die Lage in und um München” in “HA”, no. 92, 19.4.1919.

⁴⁰ “Demokratie und Räterepublik” in “*Räterepublik*”.

⁴¹ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 19.

⁴² “Der Bolschewismus als Erlösungsreligion” in “*Räterepublik*”.

from the “true German spirit” could easily take on anti-Semitic connotations.

The panicked fear of Bolshevism unleashed by the *Räterepublik* put down deep roots in the *Saalestadt*. This became clear later in the summer, when rumours began to circulate among local Burghers that a “Communist Putsch” was “imminent”. These whisperings found their way into the *Hofer Anzeiger*, which reported that the local Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council had drawn up a “list of 60 hostages who were to be arrested and shot” in the event of a putsch, with “massive shipments of weapons” already arrived and in working class hands. For Otto Ernst, these rumours had a ring of credibility to them because “such impractical Putsch attempts are flaring up every day in Germany”; the resulting “unrest and excitement in the Bürgerschaft” had thus “risen to its highest level”⁴³. A member of the Communist Party strenuously denied these accusations in a letter to the newspaper⁴⁴, and Blumtritt delivered a fiery speech in a meeting of the town council which accused “the bürgerliche side” of deliberately contriving rumours of a Communist uprising in order to justify their own plans for a reactionary takeover of power⁴⁵. Readers of the *Anzeiger*, however, continued to send letters to the newspaper which stoked the flames of sectarian mistrust, including one contribution from a “war invalid” who claimed to have overheard two

⁴³ “Ist ein kommunistischer Putsch in Sicht?” in “HA”, no. 155, 7.7.1919.

⁴⁴ “Hof, 8 Juli. Von der hiesigen Ortsgruppe der kommunistischen Partei...” “HA”, no. 156, 8.7.1919.

⁴⁵ “Sitzung des Stadtrats” in “HA”, no. 157, 9.7.1919.

Communists in the Theresienstein Park discussing plans for an uprising⁴⁶.

The content of the local press, paramilitary propaganda and persistent rumours of an imminent “Communist putsch” all bore testament to the profoundly disturbing effect that the experience of the *Räterepublik* had exercised upon the Hofer Bürgertum. In the autumn of 1919, however, there were tentative signs that even darker forces were now at work, as an “anti-Semitic movement” began to mobilise in the town⁴⁷. On several occasions toward the end of 1919, the local director of police wrote to the State Ministry in Munich and the regional council in Bamberg to express “grave misgivings” about this burgeoning movement; it was distributing leaflets which blamed Jews for the *Räterepublik*, vandalising synagogues, holding “tumultuous” meetings and even carrying out physical attacks on local Jews. This kind of violent anti-Semitism remained a marginal element in Hof during the autumn of 1919, and the director evidently considered it to be primarily a police, rather than a political, problem⁴⁸. Nonetheless, here was further evidence that the *Räterepublik* had not only stoked the flames of a virulent anti-Communism among some of Hof’s citizens; it had also given succour to extremist groups which peddled the narrative of “Jewish Bolshevism”.

Clearly, then, the *Räterepublik* produced an intensified and enduring fear of

⁴⁶ “Eingesandt; Ist ein kommunistischer Putsch in Sicht?” in “HA”, no. 158, 10.7.1919.

⁴⁷ The upswing in anti-Semitic agitation which followed the Räterepublik encapsulated much of Bavaria in the last months of 1919. See Andreas Heusler, *Das Braune Haus: Wie München zur ‘Hauptstadt der Bewegung’ wurde*, 1. Aufl (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2008), pp. 78–80.

⁴⁸ See “Antisemitische Bewegung”, Stadtarchiv Hof, A 2928.

Bolshevism, and a heightened willingness to mobilise against it, within the Hof's bürgerliche milieu. Much of the language used and the themes invoked were similar to, and even indistinguishable from, the depiction of the Spartacist Uprising in January 1919. The key difference, however, was that this had played out in Berlin, whereas the violence and chaos in spring 1919 appeared to be unfolding in nearby towns, cities and, potentially, in Hof itself. This highly disquieting proximity explains the fact that the *Räterepublik* exerted a more intense radicalising effect on Hof's Bürgertum than leftist upheavals in other parts of Germany that occurred in 1919, of which there was no shortage.

However, as noted in the introduction to this section, the *Räterepublik* also offered an opportunity to the local Democratic Party: it could be instrumentalised by them to advance their contention that there was a fundamental difference between moderates and extremists on the left, and that the Bürgertum should unite with the former to combat the latter. The main reason for this was that the radical putsch in Munich was, in fact, directed against a Majority Socialist government headed by Johannes Hoffmann, which had been forced to flee Munich to Bamberg in the wake of the uprising.

Indeed, Hoffmann's government quickly became the principle point of unity around which Hof's Bürgertum, and even its most radically anti-Bolshevist elements, coalesced in the spring of 1919. Almost immediately upon the declaration of the *Räterepublik*, the local Democratic Party issued a

proclamation which insisted that “everything that divides us from the Majority Social Democratic Party must be put aside”, for “the task of every order-loving person” was to “support the government of Minister Hoffmann in his struggle against anarchy and for the creation of a new, democratic Bavaria”⁴⁹. The party then proceeded to organise “well attended” demonstrations in co-operation with the MSPD in Hof⁵⁰, Bad Steben, Schwarzenbach and Naila “for those who stand behind the Bavarian Landtag and the government of Hoffmann”⁵¹, a “really democratic government”, and “the only legitimate authority in Bavaria”⁵². The DDP met in the Hofer Bürgergesellschaft on 13th April to pass a resolution which explicitly called on its members to support “the government of Hoffmann” so that it might “fight and defeat the undemocratic *Räterepublik* with all means”⁵³, sentiments which were echoed by the Lower Franconian Farmer’s Council, which declared itself “resolutely behind the government of Hoffmann”⁵⁴, and the “Workers Community of Oberkotzau”, a bürgerliche union of DDP, the House Owner’s Association, the Bavarian Railway League, and the Working Community of Oberkotzau, which declared itself “determinedly on the same side as the Landtag and the government of Hoffmann”⁵⁵.

The fact that the Majority Socialist government of Hoffmann appeared to be the principal enemy of the *Räterepublik* gave local Democrats ample

⁴⁹ “Aufruf. Gegen den Munchner Terror” in “Räterepublik”.

⁵⁰ “Aufruf! Arbeits und Schutzgemeinschaft Hof” in “Räterepublik”.

⁵¹ “Die Deutsche Demokratische Partei...” in “Räterepublik”.

⁵² “Für die Regierung Hoffmann” in “HA”, no. 102, 3.5.1919.

⁵³ “Demokratie und Räterepublik” in “Räterepublik”.

⁵⁴ “Die Bauern für die Regierung Hoffmann” in “Räterepublik”.

⁵⁵ “Aufruf der Arbeits-Gemeinschaft Oberkotzau” in “Räterepublik”.

opportunity to reinforce their argument that moderate socialists were potential allies. The Hofer DDP's delegate to the Bavarian Landtag, Karl Schrepfer, put his name to a proclamation which congratulated "the Majority Socialists in Bavaria" for having "also spoken out against the creation of a *Räterepublik*"⁵⁶, while Dr Herold poured scorn on the "villains" of the extreme left for their "denigration" of "old, proven working class leaders such as Hoffmann", who had "given their blood" for the workers' movement⁵⁷. In the *Hofer Anzeiger*, too, Otto Ernst praised the "manful determination" of the MSPD's leaders, the party's development into a "highly principled, leading party of government", and he called on moderate socialists to discard the last vestiges of their "agitatory" past in order to fulfil their "historic political task, which began with the revolution" and continue with the implementation of a "positive, responsible socialist politics"⁵⁸.

Similarly, the *Hofer Anzeiger* reported on local Majority Social Democrat meetings at which the antagonism between moderate and radical left became abundantly and gratifyingly clear. At the end of April, with the *Räterepublik* still in power in Munich, the MSPD held a stormy meeting in Hof at which the speaker warned of the grave dangers of immediate socialisation and condemned the "radicals" in Munich who wanted to implement it immediately. When he insisted that the *Räterepublik* was "built on lies and deception" he came under heavy fire from Independent Socialists in the audience, who

⁵⁶ "Ein Protest der Abgeordneten aus Franken" in "Räterepublik".

⁵⁷ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ "Steine zum Aufbau" in "HA", no. 136, 14.6.1919.

fiercely attacked the MSPD's "obvious partiality to the Democrats". The meeting then collapsed into a "great tumult", but it was clear where the *Hofer Anzeiger's* sympathy lay – with the MSPD's speaker and his "masterful" combating of extremists⁵⁹.

The *Räterepublik*, then, had a highly ambivalent effect on the outlook of the Hofer Bürgertum. On the one hand, it led to a palpable intensification in middle class fear and hatred of the radical left. Hofer Burghers, for the first time, directly experienced revolutionary "terror", and they were also acutely aware of acts of horrifying violence taking place in villages, towns and cities a short distance away. This heightened anti-Bolshevism was expressed through the increased use of apocalyptic language, with tropes that had been established during the Spartacist Uprising – that this was a Russian inspired, Russian financed, extremely violent and nihilistic enterprise directed by elements who were both ethnically and spiritually foreign to Germany – once again deployed and, this time, with increased vigour. Furthermore, the *Räterepublik* triggered an increased willingness among Hof's Bürgertum to actually take up arms, mobilise and join paramilitary formations that were deployed across Bavaria in operations against the radicals.

On the other hand, however, this intensified anti-Bolshevism was not immediately detrimental to the position of the local Democrats. Indeed, because of the prominent role played by the Majority Socialists in confronting the revolutionaries, it actually lent further credence to the DDP's assertion

⁵⁹ "Morgenpost" in "HA", no. 97, 26.4.1919.

that moderates and radicals on the left could be differentiated from each other and that a viable democracy could be built in partnership with the former. This double pronged effect – enhanced hatred of the far left, enhanced amenability toward the moderate left – was ostensibly compatible with the DDP’s conception of politics. If the Majority Socialists ever moved further to the left and sided with radicals, however, then the consequences for the local Democrats would be grim indeed.

3.2 The Treaty of Versailles: A Blueprint for “Extermination”

Some historians have argued that the experience of the First World War contributed to an on-going “nationalisation of the masses” in Germany, a process whereby politics became increasingly mythologised, sacral and irrational (as opposed to the perceivably rational, interest based nature of politics in “Western”, liberal democracies)⁶⁰. However, as we saw in the last chapter, pacifist, pro-League of Nations, even internationalist sentiment gained in currency within the Hofer Bürgertum during the German Revolution. The following section argues that it was in fact the publication and signing of the Treaty of Versailles which ushered in a profound change in this aspect of the political culture of the local Bürgertum. It further argues that the

⁶⁰ Most notably George L Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses; Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1991); See also Sean A. Forner, “War Commemoration and the Republic in Crisis; Weimar Germany and the Neue Wache”, *Central European History*, 35.04 (2002), 513–49.

Democrats, as the proponents of a rational, moderate politics of reconciliation, were ill-placed to exploit the opprobrium that the Versailles Treaty produced⁶¹.

The Treaty was published in May 1919, literally days after the destruction of the *Räterepublik*, and it triggered a veritable maelstrom of outrage among Hof's middle classes. The headline in the *Anzeiger*, which was still expressing some optimism about what the Treaty would contain even a few days before its publication, now fulminated against "A Dictated Peace"⁶², and the local DDP, which up until this point had preached a doctrine of international reconciliation, immediately convened a demonstration at which Dr Hohmann declared the "deep mourning with which the German people receive the terrible conditions that the Entente have set before them", a "dictated peace which makes every economic revival impossible, which separates 5 million Germans from their mother people and designates them to foreigners, which steals our ships and natural resources and thus destroys our economy". Hohmann "had expected a peace of justice, of reconciliation, such as was articulated in Wilson's 14 points", but Germany had been "deceived more terribly than any other country in world history"⁶³. Fritz Auer repeated this sentiment in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, describing the Treaty as the "screaming negation of the Wilsonian programme" that had formed the basis for

⁶¹ This is broadly the position taken in Schivelbusch, *Culture of Defeat*.

⁶² "Ein Frieden der Gewalt" in "HA", no. 106, 8.5.1919.

⁶³ "Tagung des Landesvorstandes der Deutschen Demokratische Partei, 12.5.1919" in "Deutsche Demokratische Partei Hof, 1918-1924".

Germany's surrender⁶⁴ and the platform for an intended "plundering" of the Reich⁶⁵. An article on 17th June written by a local teacher entitled "The Dictated Peace and the Schools" argued that the underlying aim of the Treaty was to turn Germans into "helots", to produce "slavery, beggary" and "deprivation" within the German school system, because "slaves don't need education"; in a "slave state, where everyone labours for foreigners, (one) doesn't need the kind of schools we have". "It would be better never to have been born", the article concluded, "than to live without honour in an unfree fatherland"⁶⁶.

Other voices, however, attributed even darker intentions to the Allies than the desire merely to enslave or plunder Germany. For many, the Versailles Treaty was the beginning of a process of "extermination"; Rolf Brandt, the *Hofer Anzeiger's* special reporter in Versailles, described it as a "death sentence"⁶⁷ and the product of "annihilatory politics"⁶⁸. Dr Herold, who prior to this point had invested great hope in a coming League of Nations, now wrote a poem which asked "Are you not human beings? Do you know anything about suffering and distress? Do your mothers teach their children to pray? Do you really want to bury a great, free people?"⁶⁹, while another poem appeared on the front page of the *Hofer Anzeiger* which began with the line

⁶⁴ "Was soll nun Geschehen?" in "HA", no. 108, 10.5.1919.

⁶⁵ "Die beabsichtigte Ausplünderung Deutschlands" in "HA", no. 114, 17.5.1919.

⁶⁶ "Gewaltfriede und Schule" in "HA", no. 138, 17.6.1919.

⁶⁷ "Von der Friedenskonferenz" in "HA", no. 107, 9.5.1919.

⁶⁸ "Was soll nun Geschehen?" in "HA", no. 108, 10.5.1919.

⁶⁹ Eduard Herold, "An Unsere Feinde!" in "HA", no. 109, 12.5.1919.

“Extermination! The word hisses from the lips of our enemies”⁷⁰. On 15th May, the Hofer Democrats held a meeting at which the party collectively declared “its deepest disgust at this reprehensible crime”, and described the peace as “a gruesome strangulation of the German people”⁷¹, while a meeting of the Protestant synod of the regional Bishroptic in Hof denounced it as a “brutalisation of all human and heavenly rights” and an “attempt to annihilate our very existence – the fundamental rights of all cultured peoples – and to reduce to slavery a two-thousand-year development toward freedom”⁷².

For the second time in the space of a month, then, bloodcurdling and apocalyptic language was appearing with startling regularity on the front page of the local middle class newspaper. But how was the Allied “extermination” of the German people to be accomplished? Particularly horrifying were the losses of German territory stipulated under the treaty, especially along the Rhine and in Upper Silesia, which was described in highly emotive terms. The most vivid illustration of this came in the form of a map, advertised in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, “which shows the intended dismemberment of Germany in gripping detail”⁷³, while the newspaper reported “grief over Germany’s disgrace” from the Rhineland⁷⁴ and maintained that “a terrible crime is being committed here against an enchained people” whose “voice is being

⁷⁰ Alwin Romer, “Himmelfahrt 1919” in “HA”, no. 123, 28.5.1919.

⁷¹ “Hof, 15th May...” in “DDP”.

⁷² “Der Diozesansynode Hof” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 6, 11.5.1919.

⁷³ “Lokales und aus dem Kreis” in “HA”, no. 115, 19.5.1919.

⁷⁴ “Das Rheinland und der Friedensvertrag” in “HA”, no. 110, 13.5.1919.

repressed with violence.”⁷⁵

In the reporting on Upper Silesia, however, more explicitly racist principles entered the equation. The *Hofer Anzeiger* expressed the view that Upper Silesia would remain German because the Poles were an incompetent and insalubrious people; America had already complained about their “limitless disorganisation” and threatened to break off transports of goods if “such circumstances” continued to obtain⁷⁶. Fritz Auer argued that “Upper Silesia only ever became a land of high culture because of German work”, pointing to several towns and villages in Polish-majority areas without sewerage systems or running water, whereas “barely a single village in Upper Silesia lacks these basic amenities for hygiene and happiness”⁷⁷. Racist thinking of this kind was also in evidence in the *Anzeiger*’s protest against the loss of German colonies, which were “necessary for the existence of the German people, because without these colonies it is impossible to provide opportunities for work and settlement to our overflowing population, and also to make the strength of this overflowing population useful to the German economy”. A Treaty that did not “esteem the cultural work of the white race in Africa” was null and void⁷⁸.

The plan to “exterminate” and “destroy” Germany, however, was presented as a two-pronged attack; as well as the mooted “dismemberment” of the

⁷⁵ “Die Pfalz in Gefahr” in “HA”, no. 122, 27.5.1919.

⁷⁶ “Polnische Wirtschaft” in “HA”, no. 135, 13.6.1919.

⁷⁷ “Oberschlesiens schwere Stunde” in “HA”, no. 153, 4.7.1919.

⁷⁸ “Die Kolonialfrage und Deutschland” in “HA”, no. 134, 12.6.1919.

Reich, the Treaty also aimed at the destruction of the German economy. Reparations payments were a “monstrous burden”⁷⁹, “impossible to pay” and constituted the deliberate destruction of the German economic system⁸⁰, while measures which dealt with the German navy were an attempt to “bring an end to German trade shipping”⁸¹. All of this was being undertaken with the intention of starving and killing off a good percentage of the German population, and specific measures were presented in this way, such as the delivery of “140,000 milk cows” to the Allies, which “would reduce the intake of children, mothers and the sick in the large cities to 9% of their daily allowance, and they are already at 60%”⁸². Indeed, the economic misery and poverty that the Treaty would inevitably produce could only result in the unstoppable spread of Bolshevism in Germany and beyond. This, Fritz Auer argued, would be an enormous problem for the Allies because “the Bolshevik flood... won’t stop at Germany’s western border – it will sweep into France and Italy”, which would be “a bitter Schadenfreude for us, even though we would be the ones suffering the most.”⁸³

Nowhere was the Allied will to “exterminate” the German people more in evidence than in the continued blockade of the Reich’s ports. This was, in fact, a strategic measure on the part of the Allies; an attempt to apply

⁷⁹ “Die Finanzfragen im deutschen Gegenvorschlag” in “HA”, no. 125, 31.5.1919.

⁸⁰ “Also doch Gewaltfrieden” in “HA”, no. 107, 9.5.1919.

⁸¹ “Der Tag Danach” “HA”, no. 109, 12.5.1919.

⁸² “Was die Ablieferung des Viehes bedeutet” in “HA”, no. 112, 15.5.1919. There is, in fact, some evidence that Allied demands did indeed produce famine-like conditions in parts of Germany. See Conan Fischer, “The Human Price of Reparations”, in *After the Versailles Treaty: Enforcement, Compliance, Contested Identities.*, ed. by Conan Fischer and Alan Sharp (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 81–96.

⁸³ “Hungerkrawalle” in “HA”, no. 146, 26.6.1919.

pressure to the German government to sign the Treaty. To the local Medics' Association, however, it was evidence of a "will to extermination amongst our enemies which isn't directed at troops but at defenceless children, old women, the sick and the vulnerable." The Association expressed these views in a letter written to the *Hofer Anzeiger* which also lamented that the German people had "laid down our arms, trusting the word of our enemies that they would stick to Wilson's programme, and we are now defenceless." But the Allies had "chosen to continue the war in another form, in the form of a hunger war" by "not permitting the slightest easing" of the blockade – "on the contrary, they are making it even worse". In this way, "a people of 70 million is being violated."⁸⁴ Dr Herold, too, thundered against "our enemies who, long after the war is over and the guns are silent, continue with the blockade and allow thousands of German women and children, the weak and the sick to die of hunger, which is monstrously awful". The principle of "humanity", Herold continued, "which our enemies claim to be their main value at all the war conferences", could only "shake its head in shame"⁸⁵.

Another tactical measure used by the Allies in an attempt to force a timely signature of the Treaty was to retain those German prisoners of war in captivity, which became the chief reason for protest meetings in Hof over the spring of 1919⁸⁶. As in the case of the blockade, however, this was

⁸⁴ "Resolution betreffend die Ernährung in Deutschland" in "HA", no. 116, 20.5.1919.

⁸⁵ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 24.

⁸⁶ On 12th April, and again on 12th May, "Prisoners of War days" were held in Hof with the intention of "collecting money to pay for propaganda to free the prisoners". See "HA", no. 88, 14.4.1919 and 169, 12.5.1919.

understood by Hof's Burghers not as part of a cynical strategy but as further evidence of Allied malignancy. Herr Schippel, the Hofer representative for the German Help Work for Military and Civil Prisoners, wrote to the *Hofer Anzeiger* to argue that the delay to the return of the German prisoners would place such pressure on national infrastructure that the Reich would be "tipped into Bolshevism" and descend into chaos – indeed, that this was the Allied goal⁸⁷. "Of all the suffering that the World War has brought, the fact that our imprisoned brothers have not yet been released is the most tragic" was the message at another meeting of the Hilfswerk on 5th May. "French, English, Italians are free – only the Germans wait with burning desire for the day that will bring release from year-long martyrdom"⁸⁸. One such proclamation read, "for months, the guns have been silent, but against all humane feelings, the return of soldiers to their families is still being refused"⁸⁹, while another talked of a "heart-moving cry, a cry of desperation, profound and moving like no other, crossing the borders... the despairing cry of our sons and brothers, who in enemy countries continue to languish in torturous captivity"⁹⁰. Once the Treaty had been signed and the PoWs began returning, Auer bitterly remarked that the retention of German prisoners had been "nothing more than a means of blackmail to ensure that we signed quickly"⁹¹. But prior to their release, it had only heightened the perception of the Allies as needlessly sadistic.

⁸⁷ "Lokales und aus dem Kreis" in "HA", no. 132, 10.6.1919.

⁸⁸ "Morgenpost" in "HA", no. 105, 7.5.1919.

⁸⁹ "Zum Hilfswerk für unsere Kriegs und Zivilgefangenen" in "HA", no. 108, 10.5.1919.

⁹⁰ "Deutsches Hilfswerk für die Kriegs und Zivilgefangenen" in "HA".

⁹¹ "Die Heimkehr unserer Kriegsgefangenen" in "HA", no. 158, 10.6.1919.

The Hofer Bürgertum, then, believed the Reich to be confronted by malignant enemies who aimed at the extermination of the German people. There were, however, subtle differences in the depiction of the Allied powers in the *Hofer Anzeiger*. The British “aimed at the economic destruction of Germany” because they were fearful of the Reich’s economic power and its threat to their monopoly on world trade⁹². The most intractable enemy, however, was the French, who were not motivated by rational concerns but a crazed, vengeful chauvinism. Indeed, France was the chief bearer of the “will to extermination” inherent in the Versailles Treaty. This was particularly true of Prime Minister Clemenceau, who was repeatedly depicted as an old, unjust, unmoving imperialist, block headedly committed to ideas of revenge against Germany, a man “chained by Hubris” to his chauvinistic agenda⁹³. It was impossible to conclude a peace with or trust French politicians, who had deliberately made the peace “unbearable” to give themselves a pretext for a long-term invasion and occupation of the left bank of the Rhine⁹⁴. However, this hatred of the French was not restricted to her politicians; the French press, according to Ralf Brandt, was full of “warlike sentiment” long after the armistice had been declared⁹⁵, and the French public would “believe

⁹² “Englische Arbeit” in “HA”, no. 121, 26.5.1919.

⁹³ “Die Totenglocken” in “HA”, no. 148, 28.6.1919.

⁹⁴ “Die Verschwörer am Rhein” in “HA”, no. 130, 6.6.1919.; This was not an entirely unreasonable suspicion. According to Eberhard Kolb, the French were “determined to use their one and only chance to weaken Germany for the long-term and to create a French hegemony in Europe.” See Eberhard Kolb and Dirk Schumann, *Die Weimarer Republik (Oldenbourg Grundriss Der Geschichte, Band 16)* (München; De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2012), p. 28.

⁹⁵ “Von der Friedenskonferenz” in “HA”, no. 115, 19.5.1919.

anything”⁹⁶ as a result of the “conscienceless politics and astonishing press” that had whipped them up into a state of hatred against Germany, a fact most grimly illustrated by the “open sale in Paris of clothes worn by fallen German soldiers” as celebratory keepsakes⁹⁷. Otto Ernst summed up the aggressively anti-French sentiment within the Hofer Bürgertum on the 28th June, when his editorial expressed the “hope for a Götterdämmerung of justice in which the mountain of French madness, which is today being constructed, collapses and goes up in flames. The clock of death must someday resurrect us too!”⁹⁸.

The depiction of France, then, greatly contributed to the Hofer Bürgertum’s conviction that the plan was not to punish or even cripple the Reich but to actually exterminate the German people, thereby heightening the sense of existential threat. This was further worsened by an acute sense of humiliation at having been “duped” by talk of a Wilsonian peace before the armistice. One historian has argued that the bitterest disappointment in the wake of Versailles was reserved for President Wilson, who had been celebrated as a quasi-god like figure in the first months of the armistice and had become a traitor to himself, to freedom and to Germany through the Treaty of Versailles⁹⁹. Within the Hofer Bürgertum, too, Wilson was seen as the ultimate betrayer, a man who had “sank from the heavens back down to muddy earth” in the wake of the Treaty’s publication. Could it be, asked Otto

⁹⁶ “Der 22 Mai” in “HA”, no. 116, 20.5.1919.

⁹⁷ “Bemerkungen” in “HA”, no. 122, 27.5.1919.

⁹⁸ “Die Totenglocken” in “HA”, no. 148, 28.6.1919.

⁹⁹ Thomas Lorenz, *“Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht!”; der Versailler Vertrag in Diskurs und Zeitgeist der Weimarer Republik*, Campus-Forschung, Bd. 914 (Frankfurt; Campus-Verl, 2008), pp. 362–365.

Ernst, that this man, “a successor to Lincoln, who half a century ago triumphed over slavery in the United States” would now “condemn a cultured nation to the ranks of the enslaved”? Ernst quoted one of Wilson’s own speeches from the previous February in which the President, still riding high on the crest of a wave created by his 14 points, had promised to bring a new, peaceful order after the war, and warned of despair and destruction if America “disappointed the people of the world”. But now, Ernst remarked, “there is little hope that Wilson still stands by these words” – and his pessimistic prophecy of American failure would soon become reality¹⁰⁰. This “man of many phrases”, Fritz Auer remarked, had become a “dead man”, taken seriously by none besides “a few blockheaded people in Germany”¹⁰¹.

Clearly, then, the Treaty was not only perceived as an existential threat to the German nation; it also discredited all of those individuals and organs that had seemed to promise a future of international reconciliation and co-operation. Alongside Wilson’s reputation, another victim of this was the idea that a “League of Nations” might be Germany’s deliverance. That this was “the most German thought ever thought”, as Eduard Herold had put it in late 1918, now seemed grotesque.¹⁰² “What was that about a Wilsonian peace? What was that about a League of Nations? Absurd. Little things for gullible Germans” was the bitter intonation from Ralf Brandt on 22nd May¹⁰³. Any such League, he later added, would be constructed “on the basis of the hatred of many

¹⁰⁰ “Die falsche Rechnung” in “HA”, no. 125, 31.5.1919.

¹⁰¹ “Das Spiel der Vier” in “HA”, no. 137, 16.6.1919.

¹⁰² Herold, *Ein Jahr*, pp. 4, 5.

¹⁰³ “Von der Friedenskonferenz” in “HA”, no. 121, 26.5.1919.

peoples and the enslavement of one”, according to the priorities of the “French, who are ready to begin the process of extermination”¹⁰⁴.

The Treaty, then, was not a mere legal document but a blueprint for genocide and, in the days and weeks after its publication, there emerged a growing consensus within the Hofer Bürgertum that the government should refuse to sign it; on 13th May, 300 people attended a district meeting in Pfaff’s Colosseum which called on the German government “not to sign this dictated peace”¹⁰⁵. The local Democrats, too, initially voiced outrage: according to a party proclamation from the 13th May, they were “of the unshakeable conviction that we should refuse our signature to these uncompromising enemies” despite “fully recognising the consequences if we reject these conditions, which in any case can neither be fulfilled nor accepted”¹⁰⁶. The matter was equally cut and dry for Otto Ernst, who on 6th July argued that “we must refuse to put our signature to this disgraceful peace document... it is the bony hand of death that waves to us... An unacceptable peace instrument must not be accepted!”¹⁰⁷, and a week later, Ernst again argued that “signing the peace cannot be justified under any circumstances”¹⁰⁸.

Fatefully, however, the Hofer DDP soon began to vacillate over the question of whether or not to sign the Treaty, and by the end of June, its leaders had become less forthright, perhaps recognising that a refusal to sign might

¹⁰⁴ “Bermerkungen” in “HA”, pp. 122, 27.5.1919.

¹⁰⁵ “Lokales und aus dem Kreise” in “HA”, no. 111, 14.5.1919.

¹⁰⁶ “Hof, 15th May” in “DDP”.

¹⁰⁷ “Seltsame Pfingsten” in “HA”, no. 131, 7.6.1919.

¹⁰⁸ “Steine zum Aufbau” in “HA”, no. 136, 14.6.1919.

trigger an Allied invasion. “A compromise should be sought”, argued Otto Ernst, “in which we sign but reject certain fundamental points. It is no longer to be doubted that such questions cannot be answered dogmatically”¹⁰⁹. Similarly, Hof’s Democrats consistently refused to condemn those who ultimately agreed to sign the Treaty. At a meeting of the Upper Franconian DDP, Karl Schrepfer insisted that “we must recognise the patriotic motives of those who believe they can spare Germany the worst by signing this document”¹¹⁰, while Otto Ernst accepted that “it would be unfair to condemn those men and women who, surely with heavy hearts, gave their votes in favour of a signature. They have not thereby proven that their motives are devoid of national feeling. Their behaviour is an attempt, in their own way, to serve Germany. None of us can say it would have been more useful to refuse to sign”¹¹¹.

In years to come, as the mood within the Hofer Bürgertum became more aggressively nationalistic, the DDP’s failure to unambiguously reject the Versailles Treaty and condemn those who had signed it would count against them. Indeed, the Hofer Democrats’ status as a party of rational moderation, of international reconciliation and co-operation, did not leave them well placed to exploit the storm of nationalist opprobrium that greeted the publication of the Treaty, which destroyed the fairly optimistic view that had predominated with respect to the international situation and the shape that a post-war order

¹⁰⁹ “Männer, nicht Menschen!” in “HA”, no. 142, 21.6.1919.

¹¹⁰ “Deutsche Demokratische Partei: Bezirksvertretertag Oberfranken-Nordost” in “DDP”.

¹¹¹ “Die Entscheidung” in “HA”, no. 143, 23.6.1919.

might take. And, significantly, it also greatly increased the sense of existential threat that had already taken hold due to the experience of the *Räterepublik*, with words such as “extermination”, “dismemberment” and “destruction” constantly cropping up in the reporting on and speeches about the Versailles Treaty. The time might well come when many Burghers would begin to ask if the radical right, with its vision of a Social Darwinist struggle of nations and its uncompromising opposition to both “Marxism” and the Versailles settlement, had not, in fact, been right all along.

3.3 The Local and Municipal Elections: Challenges to the Democrats

It was in this climate that local and regional elections were held in June 1919. Were the Democrats, and the model of politics they represented, still as popular as they had been six months before, or had the *Räterepublik* and the Versailles Treaty damaged their position? The following section addresses this question and it has three overall aims: first, to show that the DDP stuck to its principles in these elections and continued to present much the same left-liberal profile as it had the previous January; second, to show that it could still rely on significant support from within the Hofer Bürgertum; but that, third, its popularity and authority had indeed been compromised, especially due to the effects of the *Räterepublik*. For the first time, the DDP’s commanding position was challenged by several alternatives which offered a very different vision of bürgerliche politics to the one advocated by the Democrats. These parties

were not only buttressed by the growing mood of nationalist and anti-bolshevist excitement among Hof's Burghers; they also represented the first, tentative recovery of the right after its virtual eclipse during the German Revolution.

The Hofer branch of the German Democratic Party continued to advocate the consolidation of Germany's new democratic and republican order in the summer of 1919. One proclamation called for "the preservation of a truly democratic foundation" for German society and insisted that "all state citizens of both genders" continue to be "guaranteed absolute equality"¹¹². Karl Schrepfer in particular made some strikingly anti-authoritarian statements; in an article written for the *Hofer Anzeiger*, he expressed satisfaction at the extent to which "the traditions of the past (had been) overcome" and celebrated the fact that, "through the extension of the franchise to everyone over the age of 20", all "advantages of the privileged" were also "being overcome", ensuring that "the democratic front" would be "firmly, unambiguously upheld". He also emphasised the principle of "autonomy" for "individual citizens" as a further extension of the "spirit of democracy"¹¹³. Otto Ernst echoed this anti-authoritarian and participatory sentiment by calling for the town's Burghers to engage themselves politically, for public affairs were no longer decided by a distant imperial bureaucracy; "today", he insisted, "it is important for every person in the state" to "contribute positively to the shaping

¹¹² "Deutsche demokratische Partei: Gemeindeprogramm" in "DDP".

¹¹³ "Demokratie und Gemeindewahlen" in "DDP".

of things”¹¹⁴.

As in January 1919, the DDP presented “democracy” as synonymous with a “politics of the middle”, the rejection of the extremes of right and left. At a meeting of the DDP’s regional council in July, Karl Schrepfer warned that “extremists from the left and right are gaining ground”, and he stressed instead the importance of “democracy, which wants true justice and freedom for the people”. The DDP, he said, was the genuine “middle party for all circles”, a “*Bürgerpartei*” of the new Germany in the best sense of the word”¹¹⁵. For Dr Herold, too, the “most implacable enemy of true democracy” was “demagoguery”, and he called for a “reconciliation of the classes” as “the only way out of chaos” and the recipe for the “internal overcoming of Bolshevism”¹¹⁶.

According to this conception of democracy, the German Revolution had been an unambiguously positive development, as it had swept away the remote authoritarianism of the Kaiser’s government. For Schrepfer, the Revolution of November 1918 was the completion of a bürgerliche revolution that had begun some 70 years earlier, with the Democrats as the contemporary bearers of the revolutionary “ideas of 1848”. Any attempt on the part of the MSPD to claim ownership of the Revolution for itself was thus a “historical falsification”, for “the roots of the principles of democratic government”,

¹¹⁴ “Steine zum Aufbau” in “HA”, no. 136, 14.6.1919.

¹¹⁵ “Deutsche Demokratische Partei: Bezirksvertretertag Oberfranken-Nordost” in “DDP”.

¹¹⁶ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 9.

Schrepfer insisted, lay “much deeper” than the rise of Socialism¹¹⁷. Similarly, when Leon Blumtritt described the Bürgertum and the Democrats as “counter-revolutionary forces”, Otto Ernst responded by arguing that it was, in fact, the “*Räte* Republicans” themselves who were the real counter-revolutionaries, because their radicalism was “smoothing the way” for a right-wing reaction and thereby “endangering the gains of the revolution”¹¹⁸. Ernst repeated this claim a few days later by arguing that, in declaring for the *Räterepublik*, the Hofer Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council was actually positioning itself against the government of Hoffmann, the true source of “revolutionary authority” in Bavaria¹¹⁹.

The local Democrats, as in January, also continued to advocate a process of partial socialisation of industry. For Karl Schrepfer, speaking in Schwarzenbach near Hof, “socialisation” was “the political word of the day”; it meant “the running of an economy by and for the community” – indeed, “for all of humanity” – rather than “for individual profit or foreign demands”. The political system Schrepfer apparently favoured consisted of “socialism in the foundation and democracy in the structure” with the integration of the working classes an “absolute necessity”¹²⁰. Again, at another meeting in Regensburg, Schrepfer advocated “the transfer of all undertakings to the community if they are used to exploit our comrades to the advantage of individual persons”¹²¹,

¹¹⁷ “Demokratie und Gemeindewahlen” in “HA”, no. 134, 12.6.1919.

¹¹⁸ “Ein wuchtiger Protest gegen die *Räterepublik*” in “Räterepublik”.

¹¹⁹ “Haltet den Dieb” in “HA”, no. 92, 19.4.1919.

¹²⁰ “Sozialisierung im Reiche und in Bayern” in “DDP”.

¹²¹ “Regensburg, 8 April” in “DDP”.

while at a meeting in Hof, Dr Hohmann propounded “a reasonable form of socialism” that would “secure the gains of the revolution”. At this same meeting, a resolution was passed which called for an “organic transfer of the means of production to the community in those places where a hegemonic capitalism has developed to the disadvantage of the people”¹²², while a later Democratic proclamation demanded “full democracy in politics and the economy” and a “planned socialisation which will give the workers a larger share in and more influence in the organisation of the economy”¹²³.

As we saw in the last chapter, the Democrats had fiercely advocated an extension of the franchise to women and called for their widespread integration into “political and economic life” during the January elections to the National Assembly. By the time of the July 1919 municipal elections, however, the situation in Hof had changed, and there was considerable controversy over whether the town’s women should give up their jobs to make way for the returning soldiers. Indeed, several women’s groups formed in an attempt to resist this development; on 5th April, a local women’s group for white collar workers was established in Hof¹²⁴, while at the end of May, the “Commercial League for Women Employees” invited its members to a meeting explicitly intended to protest against the attempt to “force women out of work”¹²⁵. A few days after this, another “well-attended” women’s meeting took place, this time under the auspices of the Commercial League for

¹²² “Ein wuchtiger Protest gegen die Raterepublik” in “DDP”.

¹²³ “An das bayerische Volk!” in “DDP”.

¹²⁴ “Lokales und aus dem Kreis” in “HA”, no. 82, 7.4.1919.

¹²⁵ “Lokales und aus dem Kreise” in “HA”, no. 125, 31.5.1919.

Female Employees, at which Fraulein Berta Lang lamented the “current difficult situation of women employees” and called for “determined unity” among Hof’s female workers¹²⁶.

Though some of their enemies on the right disagreed,¹²⁷ the Democrats continued to offer their full support to working and politically engaged women. The DDP women’s group met on 26th April to stress the “importance of women’s involvement at all levels in the district” – including in work – and then added their own proposals to the DDP’s programme for the June elections¹²⁸. On 14th June, Emma Mann spoke at a large Democratic meeting in Pfaff’s Colosseum on the topic of “Women and the Municipality”, forcefully arguing for increased involvement of women in parliament and on local councils, because “communal tasks can no longer be completed without women” (a sentiment which was received with “loud applause”)¹²⁹. And, in their electoral proclamations, the DDP frequently and explicitly targeted women, who “have been given the right to vote by the new people’s state” and who now had “the right to help determine what happens at every level in the district, the council and the Fatherland” – which was precisely why the Democrats had “placed a large number of women on their candidate list”¹³⁰.

The DDP, then, stuck to its left-liberal guns for the local and municipal

¹²⁶ “Lokales und aus dem Kreise” in “HA”, no. 142, 21.6.1919.

¹²⁷ The German National Business Association of Hof wrote to the Hofer Anzeiger to suggest that Hof’s women should indeed give up their jobs to make way for the returning soldiers out of a sense of “patriotic duty”. See “Abbau der Frauenarbeit” in “BMP”.

¹²⁸ “Hof, 26 April” in “DDP”.

¹²⁹ “Hof, 14 Juni” in “DDP”.

¹³⁰ “Deutsche Frauen!” in “DDP”.

elections of June 1919. But did their programme still resonate with the Hofer Bürgertum? There is considerable evidence that it did indeed continue to find principled adherence, that the *Räterepublik* and Versailles Treaty had done little to weaken the local middle class commitment to democracy. In his writings, Dr Herold endorsed democracy as “the state form of unrestricted possibility”, with the only viable way forward for Germany leading “from demagoguery to democracy, from despair to new hope, from hatred to love”¹³¹. To doubt the democratic credentials of the German people, he concluded, was “a crime against our faith”, and he concluded with the decidedly anti-imperialist sentiment that the song “*Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles*” may have faded away in a purely power political sense, but then it always was a false song”. Instead, he maintained, it “should be sung in the sense of highest freedom!”¹³². And despite the turmoil created by “radical political groups” who “believe in their egoism that they represent the real Germany”, he insisted that “valiant work is being done in the National Assembly in Weimar”, where the “foundations of the new Germany are being built, brick by brick”¹³³.

Individual aspects of Democratic policy also found wider support; the party’s determined empowerment of women was echoed in the Parish newsletter, which asked if it wasn’t “preferable that women go to work” rather than be “denounced as useless” and “spend their time in bitterness or pointless

¹³¹ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 9.

¹³² Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 10.

¹³³ Herold, *Ein Jahr*, p. 12.

pleasure”¹³⁴, while the church council described women’s engagement in the economy as a demonstration of “Christian neighbourly love” and called on “God to crown their work with mercy and warm heartedness”¹³⁵. The DDP’s measured support for partial socialisation also had its adherents; a representative of the Reich League of Luxury Salesmen, Herr Franz Breilkopf, argued at a meeting in May that “the common good must be placed above individual good” and described partial socialisation as “the natural development of our economy”¹³⁶. Two professional associations, the white collar union for Sales and Salaried Employees and the Work and Protection Society of Hof, also instructed their members to vote for the DDP in the June elections¹³⁷; the latter held a large meeting on 26th April which was attended by “the political, industrial, commercial and professional associations of Hof”, who lauded the “healthy development of our town” that had “been created by the Revolution” and strenuously defended the work of the Democrats¹³⁸.

Unlike during the January elections, however, voices of disquiet with respect to the DDP’s platform were beginning to make themselves heard in Hof. This was particularly so on the matter of socialisation, with several bürgerliche interest groups suggesting that even the limited socialisation envisioned by the Democrats was too far in the direction of Social Democracy. At a meeting of the Upper Franconian Chamber for Trade on 11th April, a local

¹³⁴ “Soziale Religion” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 1, 2.3.1919.

¹³⁵ “Die Frauenhilfe” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 6, 11.5.1919.

¹³⁶ “Sozialisierungs- und Kommunalisierungs-Pläne ” in “HA”, no. 104, 6.5.1919.

¹³⁷ “Der Gewerkschaftsbund Kaufmannischer Angestellter” in “DDP”.

¹³⁸ “Der Bolschewismus als Erlösungsreligion” in “Räterepublik”.

businessman named Dr Hoffmann denounced the “economic experiments” then being floated by “certain political parties” on the grounds that “the private capitalist economic system has consistently proven itself favourable to the overall development of the happiness of the people”. The “initiative of free enterprise”, he continued, had shown itself to be “the most important foundation” for “economic success”, and he predicted economic collapse for Germany if even modest plans for socialisation were implemented¹³⁹. Several weeks after this outburst, the Bürgergesellschaft hosted an “open protest meeting” organised by local “business owners, shopkeepers, and consumers” against “socialisation” at which any attempt to nationalise industry was again presented as the first step on the road to communism¹⁴⁰, while a meeting of the Agricultural Association of Upper Franconia, attended by “agricultural employers” from Hof, Munchberg, Naila and Rehau, rejected state controls in the rural economy¹⁴¹. It is perhaps no coincidence that this renewed offensive against the idea of socialisation came in the immediate aftermath of an attempted power grab on the part of the radical left, which put socialisation at the heart of its programme.

As well as socialisation, questions were also being asked about the DDP’s principled support for a separation of church and state in the field of education. A gathering in nearby Kirchenlamitz on 15th May which insisted on “freedom of conscience for parents and teachers” and demanded that, “in the

¹³⁹ “Bericht über die Sitzung der Handelskammer für Oberfranken am 11 April 1919” in “HA”, no. 93, 22.4.1919.

¹⁴⁰ “Öffentliche Protest-Versammlung” in “HA”, no. 100, 30.4.1919.

¹⁴¹ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 143, 23.6.1919.

event of a separation of church and state, religious instruction will remain a proper aspect of the curriculum” attracted some 1500 people. According to the reporter, “the overwhelming majority” of those in attendance “wanted nothing to do with religion-free schools”¹⁴².

The local Protestant Church, too, was now beginning to openly mobilise against the “anti-Church policy” of the DDP, as is apparent from its newsletter. Religion, according to this publication, was “not only a private affair, but an affair of the whole people”, and it would constitute a “national disaster” if the government were to “reduce religious instruction to a mere lesson of choice, and if, in the future, thousands of children are raised to be religiously indifferent”¹⁴³. The Hofer Protestant Peoples’ League sent a petition to the state ministry for education and culture protesting the newfound rights of parents to take their children out of religious instruction. This would not only be a loss to children, who would be robbed of “the consolation and peace that religion brings”, but also to society, which needed “to be directed by conscience and a sense of responsibility before god”¹⁴⁴. The annual Synod of the regional Bishpropic passed a resolution which demanded that “religious instruction, as determined by the church, should remain a compulsory subject”¹⁴⁵, while the Protestant church hosted a “parents’ evening” at the end of May at which Pastor Friedrich Krag spoke on the topic of “Religion and Moral Instruction”. He argued that every other country where religion had

¹⁴² “Kirchenlamitz, 15. May” in “HA”, no. 113, 16.5.1919.

¹⁴³ “Ist die Religion Privatsache?” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 1, 2.3.1919.

¹⁴⁴ “Hof, 18th February” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 1, 2.3.1919.

¹⁴⁵ “Die Diözesansynode Hof” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 6, 11.5.1919.

been made into a “mere subject of choice” had suffered the consequences, and that, “during the war, religious education had brought many blessings to our people”; it would mean an “impoverishment of our children and our entire people” if religious instruction was replaced with a “bleak and monotone instruction in morals”¹⁴⁶.

This churchly mobilisation against one of the central tenets of the DDP’s policy was accompanied by a growing suspicion in Protestant circles about the questionable moral character of post-revolutionary Germany in general. An article in the July edition of the parish newsletter written by Pastor Dietrich, for example, denounced “the so-called ‘new time’, which has been more or less violently imposed on us” for declaring itself “to be an enemy of everything that goes with church and religion”¹⁴⁷, while another article by Pastor Krag inveighed against “dancing”, which was wholly inappropriate in “these terrible times”. “Germany lies bleeding from a thousand wounds”, the article continued, “and people dance. We stand before despair, and people dance... Germany, until now you were the land of education and civilised behaviour!”¹⁴⁸ As far as Dietrich was concerned, there were dark echoes in this “tragic disintegration of our inner strength” in the French Revolution, “when the true king was removed and the god of ‘reason’ was set on the

¹⁴⁶ “Nachrichten aus der Gemeinde” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 6, 11.5.1919.

¹⁴⁷ “Die neue Zeit und die Erziehung unserer Kinder” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 10, 6.7.1919.

¹⁴⁸ “Ein kurzes Wort über das Tanzen in dieser fürchtbar schweren Zeit” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 1, 2.3.1919.

altar”¹⁴⁹. This, of course, was not an explicit attack on the Democrats, but it was a denunciation of the Revolution they laid claim to, the system they had perceivably helped create, and also their championing of a separation of church and state in schools.

The Hofer DDP’s position on several important issues, then, could no longer command unanimous backing within the town Bürgertum. But dissent was not restricted to disgruntled comments made at meetings and in the Protestant Newsletter; this time, the Democrats were forced to compete against rival bürgerliche formations in the municipal elections. This fact was mournfully acknowledged by Otto Ernst at a Democratic meeting on 15th May; it had not been possible to advance a “unified burgher list” for the local elections, he said, “due to the resistance of certain bürgerliche groups”¹⁵⁰. Indeed, in nearby Thiersheim, a breakaway “Democratic-Bürgerliche Club” had formed on the municipal council; unlike the DDP, it refused to seek compromises with the Social Democrats and called on “all non-Social Democratic burghers and workers” to vote for its own list in the local election¹⁵¹. In Hof itself, a “District Burgher League” of disaffected local businessmen also set out their own list and called on potential voters to reject any attempt at socialisation, which would “take economic forms that took centuries to develop and unscrupulously destroy them overnight”¹⁵². But even this formation was

¹⁴⁹ “Zum letzten Sonntag im Kirchenjahr” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 20, 23.11.1919.

¹⁵⁰ “Hof, 15th May” in “DDP”.

¹⁵¹ “Thiersheim, 6. May” in “HA”, no. 106, 8.5.1919.

¹⁵² “Gemeindewähler!” in “HA”, no. 134, 12.6.1919.

forced to compete with a so-called “Neutral List” which hoped to attract bürgerliche votes in Hof, while, in nearby Oberkotzau, a “Burgher Party” headed by Mayoral-hopeful Herr Ernst Wolff, a “man of private means”, constituted itself to compete against the Democrats on the town council¹⁵³. To make matters worse, certain bürgerliche associations in Hof refused to instruct their members to vote for the Democrats; the Hofer Land and House Owners Association, for example, could not bring itself to endorse any one of the parties and so advised its members to vote either for the Democratic candidates or the District Burgher League¹⁵⁴.

In contrast to the DDP, these new bürgerliche formations invariably presented themselves as “apolitical”, as beyond the “party system”. This, they claimed, would better allow them to represent the “common good” and treat the administration of the town as a purely managerial affair. The District Burgher League heavily emphasised this in the local elections, promising to “shut all party politics out of its program” and to conduct municipal business “freely, without the hindering straitjacket of politics”¹⁵⁵. The Oberkotzau Burgher Party, too, invoked this “apoliticism”, arguing that, “during the war years”, the “great service” of their Mayoral Candidate Herr Wolff in the provisioning of the town had been “recognised by the entire population, irrespective of party membership”; indeed, the fact that Wolff stood “above parties” was the

¹⁵³ “Oberkotzau” in “HA”, no. 136, 13.6.1919.

¹⁵⁴ “Gemeindewahler!” in “HA”, no. 134, 12.6.1919.

¹⁵⁵ “Gemeindewahler!” in “HA”, no. 134, 12.6.1919.

perfect platform from which he could become mayor¹⁵⁶. The Hofer “Neutral List”, too, called on those “who don’t want the town council to become a battleground of party politics, who want instead that the good of the community be the basis for decisions” to abandon the expressly political DDP and vote instead for them¹⁵⁷. One representative of this “Neutral List” later wrote to the *Hofer Anzeiger*, insisting that “party politics do not belong in the town hall”, that “the happiness of the entire community” could not be achieved by “splitting its voters into party groups”. A “town council split between parties”, he argued, “cannot set an enlightening example” to the people of Hof; “if the town hall becomes the playground of political parties, it would be a disaster”. Significantly, this letter then proceeded to detail the concrete experience of the Neutral List’s candidates – who were mostly local businessmen and officials – and contrasted this with the purely programmatic thinking of the Democratic Party, which was “needful of the milk of its liberal mother party”, a party of theorists and pen pushers “lost in paper and printing ink”¹⁵⁸. As the District Burgher League’s leader, Herr Birkel, also argued on 13th June, it was unthinkable that anyone in his organisation could “vote for the Democrats, because they are linked to a party programme whereas we have no programme; we only decide according to particular economic considerations”¹⁵⁹.

As well as being “apolitical”, these new bürgerliche formations were also

¹⁵⁶ “Oberkotzau” in “HA”, no. 135, 13.6.1919.

¹⁵⁷ “Zur Gemeindewahl!” in “HA”, no. 136, 14.6.1919.

¹⁵⁸ “Zur Gemeindewahl” in “HA”, no. 136, 14.6.1919.

¹⁵⁹ “Hof, 13 Juni” in “HA”, no. 136, 13.6.1919.

stridently anti-socialist, and they did not make the fine distinction between left-wing moderates and radicals upon which the DDP based so much of its programme. At a meeting of the District Burgher League in Pfaff's Colosseum on 13th June, Birkel warned that "the unity of the two socialist parties will come", that Germany's "economic life will be destroyed if a Socialist majority gets into power", to which the only answer was for "the Bürgertum to go together to the voting urns", for "the Bürgertum is powerful if it sticks together."¹⁶⁰

These developments were unwelcome indeed for the DDP; Karl Schrepfer accused these "dissidents" of "stabbing the Democratic Party in the back"¹⁶¹. And the *Hofer Anzeiger*, while continuing to back the Democrats, expressed deep regret about the fact that bürgerliche voters were now faced with 3 non-Social Democratic choices for the local elections, which would inevitably split the bürgerliche vote and hand the initiative to the left¹⁶². None of this, however, could change the fact that the Democrats now found themselves confronted by ostensibly "apolitical" formations which called into question, or even completely rejected, many of the positions they represented.

When the results of the election were published on 16th June, they indeed showed that the authority of the DDP in Hof had been compromised, though it was far from broken. The Democrats performed well in the vote for the district council, sweeping up almost the entire bürgerliche vote, while in both

¹⁶⁰ "Hof, 13 Juni" in "HA", no. 135, 13.6.1919.

¹⁶¹ "Hof, 14 Juni" in "DDP".

¹⁶² "Zur Gemeinde- und Kreiswahl" in "HA", no. 133, 11.6.1919.

Marktredwitz and Steben it was the only bürgerliche party of note, winning “emphatic victories”. On the Hofer municipal council, however, the DDP took a hammering, finishing last of the three bürgerliche formations with only 3 seats to the District Burgher League’s 7 and the Neutral List’s 4, while in Thiersheim, a master butcher and member of the Burgher Party, Herr Regnet, was elected mayor, and a candidate of the same party, Herr Reuper, was elected mayor of Weissenstadt¹⁶³.

There is little question that all of this constituted a weakening of the DDP’s position. But to what extent can this be seen as a direct response to the *Räterepublik* and the Versailles Treaty? Would the authority of the Democrats have been challenged so openly without such tumult? This is difficult to assess. Certainly, neither the Neutral List or the District Burgher League explicitly positioned themselves as “reactions” to what had happened over the previous two months. But the shrill demands for bürgerliche unity in the face of the threat of the left and more aggressive attacks on socialisation surely reflected the fact that some among Hof’s middle classes had lost faith in the perceived softness of the DDP and, perhaps, in the parliamentary system they advocated. The *Räterepublik*, above all, must have seemed like very convincing evidence that parliamentary democracy could not keep order and that the far left was a significant threat.

Furthermore, though neither of these new parties called the democratic

¹⁶³ “Wahl-Resultate für den Stadtrat, für den Kreistag” in “HA”, no. 16.6.1919;. “Thiersheim, 27 Juni” in “HA”, no. 149, 30.6.1919.; “Weissenstadt, 2 Juli” in “HA”, no. 152, 3.7.1919

system into question or rejected the legitimacy of the Revolution, the principle of “apoliticism” was clearly linked to a growing distrust of the entire notion of political parties and, thus, of parliamentarism itself, as well as to a vigorous and indiscriminate anti-socialism. A number of historians have shown that, especially within the German Bürgertum, a rejection of political parties at this time very frequently implied a rejection of democracy, and a longing for a government that “stood above the parties” – that is, a return to an authoritarian state model such as existed during the Kaiserreich¹⁶⁴.

All in all, then, it would be an exaggeration to say that these municipal elections represented the end of Democratic hegemony in Hof; the DDP had still performed well, still presided over a sizeable party organisation and still controlled the newspaper. But there was little question that the democratic consensus emerged from spring 1919 weaker than it had been six months previously.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the twin crises of spring 1919 had an ambivalent and complex effect on the mood within the Hofer Bürgertum. The *Räterepublik* produced an intensified fear of “Bolshevism”, and a willingness

¹⁶⁴ Rudy Koshar makes the concept of “apoliticism” central to his analysis of the radicalising Bürgertum of Marburg in Rudy Koshar, *Social Life, Local Politics, and Nazism; Marburg, 1880-1935*; See also Hans Mommsen, *Von Weimar nach Auschwitz; zur Geschichte Deutschlands in der Weltkriegsepoche; ausgewählte Aufsätze* (Stuttgart; Dt. Verl.-Anst., 1999), pp. 108–135.

to mobilise against it, while the publication of the Versailles Treaty gave rise to a storm of nationalist outrage. Neither of these developments destroyed the authority of the local Democratic Party, but they did create a mood of anger, fear and resentment that was not very compatible with the calm, rational middle way of reason and compromise exalted by the DDP, nor with the pacifism and internationalism this party had at times espoused. This fact became evident during the municipal elections, when the Democrats were challenged by other groups who presented a rival vision of middle class politics defined by “apoliticism” and anti-socialist unity. Furthermore, fearful rumours of an imminent Communist putsch later in the summer bore ample testimony to the longterm effects of the *Räterepublik*, while an upswing in far-right anti-Semitic activity in the autumn of 1919 indicated that even darker forces had been unleashed over the course of the spring and summer.

Arguably even more unsettling than all of this, however, was the fact that the ordeal of the “Hofer *Räterepublik*” in April 1919 had caught the attention of senior political and military circles in Bayreuth and Munich, who now believed that the *Saaalestadt* was home to a recalcitrant nest of left-wing extremists. Discussions took place in Bayreuth in August 1919 about the prospect of a military intervention into the “red corner” of Upper Franconia in order to “cleanse it” once and for all¹⁶⁵. Only a pretext was lacking.

¹⁶⁵ “Angelegenheiten an Generalkommando III. AK. Und Gru. kdo.4, 1. Juli 1919.”, Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K3 Praes.,. Reg. 1896; “Aufzeichnung Der Telefonischen Mitteilung Der Garnisonskommandos Bamberg, 4. Juli 1919.”, Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K3 Praes.,. Reg. 1896.

4 The Democratic Consensus Destroyed

(The Kapp Putsch and the Reichstag Elections, March – June 1920)

On 14th March 1920, a group of army officers and right-wing politicians staged a putsch in Berlin. Their aim was to overthrow the elected government, abolish the Republic and reverse the German Revolution. They had some support among monarchists and sections of the military, but their putsch ultimately failed when the working class parties, supported by the Democrats and the Catholic Centre Party, called for a general strike, paralysing Germany and its “new government”. However, the collapse of the putsch did not bring an end to the general strike, which in some parts of the Reich developed into near-civil war-like conditions. This reached its most destructive proportions in the Ruhr industrial region, where a “Red Army” was ranged against military and paramilitary formations in a bloody confrontation which ultimately cost hundreds of lives. In Bavaria, meanwhile, the Social Democratic government of Hoffmann was removed and replaced with an authoritarian-conservative regime under Gustav von Kahr, who quickly set about turning the entire state into a haven for right-wing nationalist groups¹. Indeed, the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary convulsions of the spring and summer of 1920 constituted a turning point in the history of the Weimar Republic. In the elections of June 1920, the moderate Weimar Coalition lost its electoral majority as both working class and Bürgertum shifted to the

¹ See Werner Maser, *Der Sturm auf die Republik: Frühgeschichte der NSDAP*, [Rev. und erg. Neuausg (Stuttgart]: DVA, 1973), pp. 217–221 for a detailed account of Hoffmann’s removal.

extremes of right and left².

As the following chapter argues, these events were also a real and decisive turning point in the Hofer Bürgertum's transition from democrats into Nazis, as burghers in the *Saalestadt* experienced a third left-wing uprising in the space of 18 months. Unlike during the *Räterepublik* of the previous spring, however, the events surrounding the Kapp Putsch involved greater use of violence and, crucially, on this occasion the local Majority Socialists sided not with the Bürgertum but with the extremists. Worse still, this experience came in the context of growing revolutionary chaos across the Reich, including in the region around Hof, and also of Bolshevik advances in Eastern Europe, which at one point in the summer of 1920 threatened Germany's eastern frontier. All of this dramatically increased the sense of outrage and existential threat that had been fostered within the Hofer Bürgertum by the *Räterepublik* and the Versailles Treaty the previous year. The new mood of increasingly aggressive anti-socialism and nationalism was not favourable to the prospects of the local Democrats, who had staked their claim to leadership on reconciliation with the working classes and peaceful internationalism. Their decline was made painfully clear in the Reichstag and Landtag elections of 1920, when they sustained heavy losses to the German Nationalists.

The chapter is divided into three sections, each of which aims to show that

² As one historian has observed, these elections were not only an effective rejection of the newly created constitution; they also laid bare and exacerbated the deep divisions that would rend German society throughout the interwar period. See Johannes Erger, *Der Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch: Ein Beitrag zur Deutschen Innenpolitik 1919/20* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1997), p. 301.

the Kapp Putsch exerted a profoundly radicalising effect on Hof's Bürgertum which had serious ramifications for the authority of the local Democratic Party. The first section details the events which followed the Kapp Putsch in Hof, placing particular emphasis on the role of the Majority Social Democrats in these events and how this coloured the response of Hof's middle classes. The second section asks how the growing civil strife and political violence which was perceivably engulfing Germany in the spring of 1920 came to be presented to Hof's Burghers. The focus here is particularly on events in the Vogtland, the region to the immediate north of Hof, which was ravaged by revolutionary unrest long after the uprising in the *Saalestadt* had been extinguished³. The third and final section concentrates on the elections of summer 1920 and argues that this was, in fact, the moment when the baton of political leadership within the Hofer Bürgertum was passed from the Democrats to the Bavarian Middle Party, the regional branch of the right-wing nationalist German National Peoples' Party (DNVP).

4.1 The Kapp Putsch

"The Reich Government Overthrown – Kapp Will Supposedly Be Dictator"; this was the headline in the *Hofer Anzeiger* on 13th March 1920. And, as this rather sceptical-sounding statement indicates, the putsch was unanimously

³ The Vogtland includes parts of Thuringia, Bavaria, Saxony and the Czech Republic. References to the Vogtland in this study refer specifically to that part of it found in the south of Saxony.

condemned by leading figures among Hof's Bürgertum when news of its first reached the *Saaletadt*. In the *Anzeiger*, Fritz Auer rejected it as "lunatic", a form of "desperado politics" undertaken by a "right-radical clique"⁴, while the local DDP immediately issued a proclamation which "strongly condemned the unconstitutional, criminal violation by a group of reactionaries against the people and their elected National Assembly" and "positioned itself solidly behind the Bavarian government"⁵. Otto Ernst sarcastically dismissed it as "a wonderful episode", an "adventure" and a "strike against the state" undertaken by "saviours of the Fatherland": a "camarilla of officers which is not well-disposed to the new times". But the ensuing General Strike, he continued, "had forced (the putschists) to realise that it isn't possible to strike the will of the people in the face without consequences"⁶. At a Democratic meeting in Marktredwitz, too, Dr. Hohmann described the putsch as "a terrible misfortune for people and Fatherland, especially economically"⁷, and he later offered "a sharp condemnation of the reactionary putsch", which he described as "a great crime against the German people"⁸.

Despite the opposition of the leaders of Hof's Bürgertum to the Kapp Putsch, however, there was to be no repeat of the co-operation with the Majority Socialists that had marked the experience of the *Räterepublik* the previous spring. This was mainly due to the MSPD's role in the reaction of Hof's

⁴ "Die Reichsregierung gestürzt. - Kapp soll Diktator werden" in "HA", no. 63, 13.3.1920.

⁵ "Die Deutsche Demokratische Partei Hof" in "Deutsche Demokratische Partei Hof, 1918-1924".

⁶ "Eine tolle Episode" in "HA", no. 66, 17.3.1920.

⁷ "Marktredwitz, 14 März" in "DDP".

⁸ "Von den Bayerischen Demokraten" in "DDP".

working class milieu. Indeed, the first working class politician in Hof to learn of the putsch was the Majority Socialist leader Arthur Mahr, who in late 1919 had defected from the Independents to the MSPD⁹. On the morning of March 13th, Mahr received a telephone call from the headquarters of the regional party in Nuremberg informing him that a right-wing putsch was underway in Berlin and advising him to co-operate with the local Independent Socialists and the Communists in organising a general strike of Hof's workers. Mahr immediately made his way to the offices of the Oberfränkische Volkszeitung to discuss this with the USDP leadership, which agreed to a united action of the local MSPD, USPD and KPD, whereupon an "Executive Committee" consisting of three Independent Socialists (including Blumtritt), one Majority Socialist (Mahr) and one Communist (Lang) was hastily constituted¹⁰.

Those present then proceeded to draw up a proclamation articulating the response of Hof's united working class leadership to the Kapp Putsch which identified "mutinying Reichswehr soldiers" as the force behind the "reactionary putsch" and called on Hof's workers to defend "the gains of the revolution, which are now highly endangered" by "vanquishing the Reaction from Germany forever!" The proclamation called for a general strike and the disarming of the local bürgerliche Home Guards, declared that all power lay in the hands of the Workers and Soldiers' Council and demanded a "purely Socialist" government for the entire Reich. This proclamation closed with

⁹ "Oberfränkische Volkszeitung", no. 200, 28.8.1919.

¹⁰ This is according to the testimony of Arthur Mahr given on 4 and 17 May 1920 during the trial of those involved. See "Prozess gegen den Hofer Vollzugsausschuss", Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K 107, XII, 117.

details for a mass demonstration at two the following afternoon and bore the insignia of the local USPD, MSPD and KPD¹¹.

During the Kapp Putsch, then, the Majority Socialists explicitly made common cause with perceived left-wing radicals, rather than opposing them in union with the moderate Bürgertum, as had been the case during the *Räterepublik*. This was an understandable response if their aim was merely to combat the putschists, but their leaflet had gone further and demanded “Council Dictatorship”. These demands were repeated at the protest meeting on 14th March, when Blumtritt spoke before a crowd of some 13,000 people before leading a large throng to the municipal district offices to demand weapons and a list of local members of the Home Guards, which Councillor Loeb, “not wanting to be a hero or a martyr”, duly provided¹². The next stop was the office of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, which was occupied and heavily censored for several days.

¹¹ “An das revolutionäre Proletariat von Hof und Umgegend! - Hof, den 13. März 1920” in “Politische Plakate und Flugschriften”, Stadtarchiv Hof, K, P - Karten, Pläne, Plakate u. ä.

¹² ‘OV’, no. 64, 16. März 1920; Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 84.

An das revolutionäre Proletariat von Hof und Umgegend!

Hof, den 13. März 1920.

In Berlin ist heute Nacht ein

reaktionärer Putsch

erfolgt. Die

Truppen der Reichswehr meutern,

sie hatten die Regierungsgebäude besetzt

**und haben den Rücktritt der republikanischen
Regierung erzwungen**

**Arbeiter! Parteigenossen! Frauen und Mädchen! Jetzt
handelt es sich um die ganzen Errungenschaften der Revolution,
die auf das Allerbeste gefährdet sind!**

**Steht in Massen auf, den reaktionären Putsch niederzuschlagen,
die Reaktion ein für alle mal aus Deutschland zu verjagen!**

Alle Räder stehen still!

**Nur die Betriebe der dringenden Lebensmittelversorgung, sowie die Gas- und
Elektrizitätswerke bleiben im Gang!**

**Nehmt am Montag sonst nirgends die Arbeit auf!
Sammelt Euch zu Massendemonstrationen am**

Montag nachmittags 2 Uhr,

überwacht aufmerksam die Vorgänge!

Rüstet Euch zum Widerstand!

Die Waffen der Einwohnerwehren sind von der Arbeiterschaft zu
beschleichen und

Figure 4-1. MSPD, USPD and KPD declaration after the Kapp Putsch

The following morning, March 15th, saw groups of armed workers climb into trucks and disperse into the villages around Hof in order to confiscate the arms of the Home Guards, middle class militias that had sprang up in the months after November 1918¹³. In Felitzsch, the leader of the Home Guards also happened to be the Mayor – he refused to give up any guns and withdrew to his house, which was subjected to a lengthy “siege” by members of the new “Red Guard”, who threatened to burn it down and execute his son¹⁴. Nearby Rehau was already tense because the previous day had seen a demonstration by the MSPD and USPD “against the right-wing dictatorship” at which several members of the Home Guards had been attacked and “severely beaten”. When socialist workers later arrived to collect the weapons of their “class enemies”, shots were exchanged and several Home Guards members were “taken into protective custody”¹⁵. In Münchberg, striking workers forced their way into factories that had not followed the call to strike and closed them down before embarking on several “house searches” of prominent burghers. When they tried to confiscate the Home Guards’

¹³ Whether or not the Home Guards truly constituted “counter-revolutionary civil war troops” is a matter of some debate but, for the historian David Clay Large, the Bavarian Home Guards represented “a first attempt to rally the entire able-bodied, middle class citizenry against the Revolution”. See David Clay Large, *The Politics of Law and Order: A History of the Bavarian Einwohnerwehr, 1918-1921*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society; v. 70, Pt. 2 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1980), p. 76; Hans Fenske also locates the Home Guards within the “National Opposition” to the Weimar Republic but describes them as a relatively “measured and conservative” group in comparison to their “right-radical” successors such as the NSDAP. See Hans Fenske, *Konservativismus und Rechtsradikalismus in Bayern nach 1918* (Bad Homburg: Gehlen, 1969), p. 18.

¹⁴ “Beschuldigten-Vernehmung Karl Henselmann” in “Prozess gegen den Hofer Vollzugsausschuss”.

¹⁵ “Zur Lage” in “HA”, no. 65, 16. März 1920; “Rehau, 16. März” in “HA”, no. 66, 17. März 1920.

weapons, a brief firefight broke out and one of the workers was shot dead¹⁶.

In his speech before the municipal council the following day, Mayor Buhl asserted that these developments had left “the Bürgerschaft in a state of anxiety”, and he denounced “the workers” for “overstepping their legal boundaries”. Councillor Pfeifer sounded an especially wounded note in his speech, in which he emphasised that “the Bürgerschaft has thus far avoided doing anything to provoke the workers”, insisted that the Hofer Home Guards had “tried to cultivate a good relationship with the Workers’ and Soldiers’ Council” since their founding, and claimed that they too had been “outraged by what happened in Berlin and sympathised with the workers” prior to the actions of the Hofer left. Otto Ernst, too, gave a forlorn speech in which he remarked that the “Bürgerschaft of the town of Hof” had “been prepared to work actively” to ensure that the “reactionary putsch” would not be successful – it had thus been “alienating and surprising” to the local Bürgertum that not one but “all three Socialist parties had also taken action against them” and demanded a “Council Dictatorship” in their leaflet, “terrorised salesmen and businesses, cut off the free press and demanded that all burghers give up their weapons”, engaged in house searches and brought about an “entirely one sided arming of the working classes”¹⁷.

Unfortunately for Hof’s new “dictators”, however, the leader of the local Home Guards, Karl Fritsch, took matters into his own hands on 15th March by

¹⁶ “Münchberg, 16. März” in “HA”, no. 66, 17. März 1920; Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 86.

¹⁷ “Stadtrat und Vollzugausschuss” in “HA”, no. 68, 20. März 1920.

travelling personally to Bayreuth to inform the high command of the Upper Franconian military that “the *Räterepublik* has been declared in Hof, Naila and Münchberg” and that “public buildings have been occupied by Communists”. This information was immediately conveyed to the Bavarian Interior Ministry in Munich and, later that day, a meeting was held at which General Möhl, long a proponent of a military intervention in Hof, warned that “Germany stands before destruction” and declared the main function of the Reichswehr to be “the fight against Bolshevism”. On 18th March, the General State Commissioner, after judging it unacceptable “that the Home Guards be prevented from defending themselves”, finally declared his intention to “cleanse the red Hofer corner” and authorised military action. On the 19th March, the government in Munich declared Upper Franconia to be in a “state of emergency” and began organising a military task force to march on the town. This was to be headed by units of the regular army but, crucially, it would also include a notorious division of Bavarian Home Guards, the so-called “Chiemgauer Brigade”, a paramilitary group which had been involved in the bloody repression of the Munich *Räterepublik* the previous year¹⁸.

News of imminent military action against Hof soon filtered through to the leaders of the “Hofer Soviet Republic”, who were clearly disconcerted and immediately showed their willingness to compromise. By this point, the

¹⁸ For more on the Chiemgauer Brigade, see Zink and von Gaessler, “Niederschrift über die Auseinandersetzungen in Oberfranken nach dem Kapp-Putsch”, Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K3 1900 NS S. 10 and Rudolf Kanzler, *Bayerns Kampf gegen den Bolschewismus: Geschichte der bayerischen Einwohnerwehren* (München 1931), pp. 90–94. The latter is an account written several years later by the founder of the Chiemgauer and a key figure in Bavarian paramilitary politics. For a more objective account of the Chiemgauer’s evolution, and the attack on Hof, see Clay Large, *Einwohnerwehr*, pp. 17, 39.

“Executive Council” had amassed over 1000 weapons from local Home Guards units, but in an attempt to forestall military action, half of these were returned, all bürgerliche prisoners were released and the general strike was lifted¹⁹. Such conciliatory gestures, however, were by now lost on the Bavarian military, which had long been waiting for a pretext to break the power of the organised left in the “red corner” of Upper Franconia. Blumtritt and his comrades obviously did not expect their compromise measures to have the desired effect, because they also posted armed workers around the town and began frequent patrols of the streets²⁰. The confrontation that had been brewing since November 1918 was now imminent.

On the 21st March, units of the Reichswehr, accompanied by the Chiemgauer Brigade, moved north from Bayreuth and occupied Münchberg. At 2AM on the morning of the 22nd, they set off for Hof and took the town without any resistance. The Chiemgauer, who had apparently been eagerly anticipating the kind of resistance that had met them in Munich the previous spring, fired several shots into the air, which deceived some Reichswehr units into thinking that a battle was indeed taking place. From their positions on the hills around Hof, they opened fire with artillery, hitting and destroying part of the Sophia school. By 5.30 in the morning, with the town under military control, several officers made their way to Blumtritt’s flat in order to “secure” the “Soviet Dictator of Hof” (the plan, according to one of their number, was to

¹⁹ “Amtsblatt für Stadt Hof”, no. 16. März 1920., Stadtarchiv Hof, BA Nr. 33-34.; “Hof, 19. März” in “HA”, no. 67, 19. März 1920.

²⁰ Vernehmungsprotokoll Johann Ritter, 6. May 1920 in “Prozess gegen den Hofer Vollzugsausschuss”.

summarily execute him). Fortunately for Blumtritt, however, he had been forewarned about the arrival of the troops and, along with ten other leading leftists, had already fled across the Saxon border to Plauen, which meant that the Chiemgauer had to content themselves with systematic house searches (they found an enormous cache of weapons in the cellar of the *Oberfränkische Volkszeitung*)²¹.



Figure 4-2. The Chiemgauer Brigade in Hof, 1920

On the 23rd March, the Chiemgauer retraced the steps made a few days previously by truckloads of revolutionary workers to the towns and villages around Hof, but with the opposite aim: to retake the weapons that had been confiscated from the Home Guards a few days before. According to contemporary reports, they did this in an exceptionally brutal fashion. In

²¹ See Kanzler, *Bayerns Kampf*, pp. 90-94 and Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, pp. 90-94.

Oberkotzau, they obtained a list of those workers who had been involved in the initial confrontation with the Home Guards, arrested them, took them into a small room in the town hall and “beat them to within an inch of their lives”, while “similarly horrifying scenes” played out in nearby Wunsiedel on March 24th. Many years later, the son of one of those arrested could still recall “hearing screams” emanating from the cellars where the Chiemgauer held their “interrogations”²².

Like the “Red Terror” that had preceded it, the “White Terror” proved to be short-lived, as both the Reichswehr and Chiemgauer left the town and returned to southern Bavaria on the night of March 25th. This brought an end to the ten most tumultuous days in Hof’s inter-war history, but it also made unmistakably clear that the power of the organised left in the *Saaletadt* had been conclusively broken. As one official wrote in June 1920, “the military action in March did not occur without leaving a clear impression on the radical working classes”, whose “leaders are conducting themselves much more quietly than before”, and it was “now apparent just how terrified the radical leaders were by the arrival of Reichs and Volkswehr in March”²³. Indeed, whereas Blumtritt, Mahr and other prominent figures within Hof’s working class milieu had made three attempts to assume complete political power within the town in the 16-month period from November 1918, after the Kapp

²² Raimund Dörfler, *Einwohnerwehr in Oberfranken 1919-1921. Zulassungsarbeit an der Universitaet Erlangen*, 1976, pp. 136–142.; Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 95.

²³ “Schreiben des Kriminalwachtmeisters Gehauf, 5. Juni 1920”, Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K3 Praes.,. Reg. 1896 I.

Putsch they were never to do so again.

Ironically, however, the Hofer left was now perceived as considerably more radical by the local Bürgertum, even though the events surrounding the Kapp Putsch had effectively tamed them. On 24th March, Mayor Buhl stood before the municipal council and argued that the military engagement in Hof had been “justified” due to the extraordinary behaviour of the town’s socialist left. Buhl denounced the “acts of violence” that had emanated from the workers – “in one neighbouring village, the mayor was threatened with a revolver. In another place, one farmer was threatened with having his house burned to the ground. In another, people were put against the wall and threatened with execution. In another, bullets with flattened tips (i.e. Dum-Dum bullets!) were fired”²⁴. The day before, Councillor Summerer, a local Democrat, had also lamented the fact that “burghers and workers had always lived together in harmony” in Hof, but that this harmony had been badly damaged by the behaviour of the latter during the Kapp Putsch²⁵. According to Councillor Pfaff, also a Democrat, the workers “should never have been so stupid as to send a car with armed workers and a machine gun to Münchberg”, with such acts rendering the deployment of Reichswehr troops “inevitable”²⁶. Buhl lamented the fact that, “since the Berlin putsch”, the previously “good relations” between workers and burghers had been damaged due to “the disarming of the Home Guards, the arming of the workers, and the demands

²⁴ “Stadtvertretung und Staatskommissar” in “HA”, no. 72, 25.3.1920.

²⁵ “Sitzung des Stadtrates” in “HA”, no. 71, 24.3.1920.

²⁶ “Sitzung des Stadtrates” in “HA”, no. 71, 24.3.1920.

in a pamphlet for the Räte dictatorship”, while Otto Ernst once again expressed his surprise that “the workers” had confronted the Burghers “in such a rough form”, despite the relative harmony that had obtained since the Revolution²⁷. Karl Schrepfer, too, made a fire-and-blood speech at a DDP meeting in Naila on 22nd March: after condemning the behaviour of the workers during the Kapp Putsch, which he described as “high treason” and fully deserving of a military intervention (earning him a “bravo” from the audience), he “warned the working class leaders” about their future conduct and lamented the fact that “our previously quiet and happy workers” had allowed themselves to be “misled by a few demagogues”²⁸.

Unlike during the *Räterepublik* episode, however, this time it was obvious to everyone that the Majority Social Democrats had also been party to the “Red Terror” in Hof. At a meeting of the DDP on 25th April in the Bahnhofshotel, Summerer admitted that the Majority Socialists “had shown their true face on the day of the Putsch”: it was now clear that the MSPD and USPD were “related by blood”, concerned “only with a Socialist order and the dictatorship of the Proletariat” and that the “union of the two parties” was “dearly wished, especially by the Majority Socialists”. The MSPD, which had allied itself with the Bürgertum during the Spartacist Uprising and the *Räterepublik* to fight the far left, had now become “a party that sharply fights against democracy”, one that “could not be brought to reason” by a “politics of reconciliation”. Indeed, at this same meeting, a local factory owner named Herr Pensel argued that

²⁷ “Stadtvertretung und Staatskommissar” in “HA”, no. 72, 25.3.1920.

²⁸ “Naila, 22. März” in “DDP”.

the Kapp Putsch had made it clear that the “division of Majority Socialists from the USPD” was “only superficial”, and there could be no further confusion about how the Bürgertum “should deal with the left”²⁹.

In Hof itself, one particularly unfortunate peculiarity was the fact that Arthur Mahr, the leader of the local MSPD, had in fact been part of the USPD at the time of the Munich *Räterepublik*, and had actually taken the lead in confronting local civil servants during the notorious meeting in Pfaff’s Colosseum on 8th April 1919. In an act either of startling strategic incompetence or deliberate provocation, Mahr called a meeting of “Civil Servants and Workers of the Head” during the elections of June 1920 at which he tried to present the Majority Socialists as the “panacea to the financial plight of the civil servants”. Unfortunately, much of his audience consisted of the same people who, just over one year before, he had personally threatened with unemployment if they did not embrace the *Räterepublik*. At this meeting, several of those in attendance took the opportunity to “settle scores” with Mahr, reminding him of his conduct in the spring of 1919 and stating that “a political relationship between civil servants and workers is impossible due to the very low opinion that Social Democrats have of ‘head workers’”.³⁰

In the aftermath of the putsch, then, the view spread within the Hofer Bürgertum that the Majority Socialists, their former allies in pro-Republican

²⁹ “Bezirksvertretertag der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei” in “DDP”.

³⁰ “Zur Wahlbewegung” in “HA”, no. 129, 4.6.1920.

anti-extremism, were actually little different from the Independent Socialists and Communists. And it increasingly seemed as if the political constellation in the entire region was changing, that the MSPD was no longer on the same side as the Bürgertum. Where once the DDP and MSPD had organised joint protests to support the Republic and condemn the radical left, reports were now coming in from across Upper Franconia of joint MSPD and USPD demonstrations to demand full “Council Rule”³¹. Reports also began to filter through about regional groups of the two parties reuniting after years of mutual hostility, with both co-operating much more readily on local councils, particularly on the question of the Home Guards³². In Wundsiedel, the two socialist parties raised a joint protest bill against the actions of the Chiemgauer (which the bürgerliche delegates on the council accepted “under the condition that we also energetically protest the brutal Social Democratic acts of violence against the Home Guards”)³³.

From the perspective of Hof’s burghers, this perceived Majority Socialist drift to the left and rapprochement with the USPD was reflected in national politics³⁴. In the *Hofer Anzeiger*, Fritz Auer pointed to the growing influence of extremist Trade Unions and “Soviet-style politicians” within the Majority Social Democrats and maintained that the DDP should immediately abandon the

³¹ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 68, 20.3.1920.

³² “Lokales und aus dem Kreise” in “HA”, no. 74, 27.3.1920.; “Lokales und aus dem Kreise” in “HA”, no. 89, 16.4.1920.

³³ “Lokales und aus dem Kreise” in “HA”, no. 94, 22.4.1920.

³⁴ This perception of a post-Kapp Putsch leftward drifting MSPD was largely accurate. See Heinz Hurten, *Der Kapp-Putsch als Wende: der Rahmenbedingungen der Weimarer Republik seit dem Fruehjahr 1920*. (Vs Verlag Für Sozialwisse, 2014), p. 39.

government if the MSPD continued to move to the left³⁵. “Influential tendencies within the MSPD”, Auer argued, were now “so far to the left that they are already in the camp of the Independents”, and he invoked the situation in Pomerania, where the MSPD was trying to engineer a merger with the USPD, even though the latter would only practice “purely proletarian politics” and reject any co-operation with the bürgerliche parties. And in the event of a lost election, “the radicals – not just the Independents and Communists but also the leftward moving Majority Socialists” would turn to violence “and civil war, climbing over thousands of working class corpses in order to bring about the Red *Räterepublik*”³⁶. On 24th April, the Hofer Business Association held a well-attended meeting in Liederkrantzheim; the chairman was Karl Hoermann, owner of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, who declared that the aim of not only the Independents and Communists but also the Majority Socialists was “to completely annihilate the middle classes”³⁷, while Karl Schrepfer, in a commentary written for the *Hofer Anzeiger*, lamented the fact that, “instead of following the English model”, the German workers’ movement was increasingly “looking to the east”. This represented “the biggest danger over the next decades”, for “the radicalisation of large sections of the industrial working class means that a large, moderate workers party is for the foreseeable future out of the question.”³⁸

The Kapp Putsch and its aftermath, then, marked a shift in the Hofer

³⁵ “Ein Spiel mit dem Feuer” in “HA”, no. 83, 9.4.1920.

³⁶ “Wahlen und Waffen” in “HA”, no. 98, 27.4.1920.

³⁷ “Das Reichsnotopfer” in “HA”, no. 96, 24.4.1920.

³⁸ Karl Schrepfer, “Wahlbetrachtungen” in “DDP”.

Bürgertum's perception of the constellation of German politics, both locally and nationally. The notion that the battle lines ran primarily between moderates (on both right and left) and extremists (on both right and left) no longer seemed tenable in the light of what had happened in the town and its environs. When it came to the crunch, so it seemed, the real division ran between right and left – just as it had during the Kaiserreich. And this division was apparently so powerful that it could move Hof's citizens to violence. This, however, presented a problem not only for social cohesion in the *Saalestadt* but also for the local Democrats, who had spent the last 18 months preaching that the Bürgertum and Majority Socialists, whatever else separated them, were united in their opposition to extremism. The Kapp Putsch, it seemed, had both shown this to be a fiction and raised serious questions about the credibility of the Hofer DDP.

4.2 The “German Civil War”

The disruption and violence triggered by the Kapp Putsch was not restricted to the town of Hof: it extended across much of the Reich. Indeed, in some areas it took on almost civil war-like proportions, particularly in the Ruhr Industrial Region, where units of the Reichswehr and paramilitary Freikorps were pitted against a “Red Army” of some 10,000 men³⁹. The following

³⁹ See Klaus Tenfelde, “Fragmentiert, verschüttet: Der Bürgerkrieg 1920 und die Denkmalskultur im Ruhrgebiet”, in *Revolution und Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland 1918-1920*, ed. by Karl Christian Führer et al., Essen 2013, pp. 413–31.

section analyses how these events were perceived within the Hofer Bürgertum and argues that they greatly fed into the sense of existential threat that two experiences of a “*Rätelerepublik*” within a single 12-month period had already fostered.

Of particular relevance to this study were developments in the Vogtland, the region in southern Saxony to the immediate north of Hof. Throughout the spring of 1920, this area continued to be unsettled, mostly due to the actions of a “Revolutionary Committee” and “Red Army” led by a communist activist named Max Hölz⁴⁰. This was particularly unsettling for Hof’s Burghers because Plauen, the main urban centre in the Vogtland and the chief target of Hölz’s revolutionary enterprise, lies a mere 30 kilometres north of the *Saalestadt*, and the fear spread that Hof too could become a target for the “Red Army”. Indeed, so acute was the disquiet Hölz inspired in Hof that the trials of those involved in the local uprising after the Kapp Putsch had to be moved to Bayreuth for fear that he might try to intervene⁴¹.

Max Hölz had grown up in the Vogtland and volunteered for the Saxon army at the outbreak of the First World War, but several years in the Galician

⁴⁰ Even today, Hölz remains a controversial figure; as a magazine article published in 2009 noted, some “see him as a hero, others merely as a criminal.” (Michael Seifert, “Kesselheizer der Revolution”, *Historikus Vogtland*, August 2009, pp. 8–14, Stadtarchiv Plauen, D43/40.22.) In the GDR, however, a number of positive and even hagiographic works were written about Hölz, such as Manfred Gebhardt, *Max Hölz: Wege und Irrwege eines Revolutionärs* (Neues Leben Berlin, 1983), Stadtarchiv Plauen, D61/11; Rudolf Donnerhack, *Drei Monate: Vorgeschichte und Verlauf des Kapp-Putsches in Plauen*, Museumsreihe (Druckerei Franz Neupert, Plauen, 1961), Stadtarchiv Plauen, D41/91; Glier Willi, Werner Hengst and Alfons Wätzig, *Max Hölz, 1889-1933: Eine Biographische Skizze* (Bezirksleitung Karl-Marx-Stadt der SED, 1988), Stadtarchiv Plauen, D61/10A.

⁴¹ Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 96.

trenches had transformed him into a budding revolutionary⁴². Upon his return to Plauen, he became an active member of the local branch of the Communist Party with a reputation for charismatic and effective leadership; he was intimately involved in the formation of a Workers' and Soldiers' Council in the Vogtland in late 1918 and the creation of a *Räterepublik* in spring 1919. When this was broken up by the Saxon military, Hölz was forced into hiding⁴³, but he re-emerged in the wake of the Kapp Putsch and again became a prominent presence in the region. This time, however, he headed a group of insurrectionaries who called themselves the "Revolutionary Committee of the Vogtland", moving from town to town, staging various uprisings, taking prisoners, engaging in firefights with the police and generally causing mayhem in the name of a vaguely defined "communism". For the *Hofer Anzeiger* in particular, Hölz was a terrifying phenomenon, and his machinations dominated the front pages of the newspaper once the situation in Hof had calmed.

Hölz first appears in the *Anzeiger* on 22nd March – the same day that Hof itself was occupied by the Bavarian military – when he stormed the Plauen court with 100 "heavily armed men", freed the 14 people on trial and took

⁴² Seifert, p. 8; According to a medical report issued upon his return to Germany in 1918, Hölz's war experiences had also aggravated a "congenital nervous condition" which, according to his enemies, accounted for his later revolutionary fervour. See "Versorgungsamt Plauen: Renten-Akten für Max Hölz", Stadtarchiv Plauen, Akten-Rep 3, Kap 5, Sekt 1A, Nr 263; He was accused of exhibiting "psychopathy with a hysterical manifestation" and a "capacity for violence, vanity and false cinema-romantic". See Christian Heisenberg, "Zum Siebzigsten Todestag von Max Hoelz", *Das Vogtland; Schrift zu Kultur und Geschichte des Vogtlandes*, 2004, pp. 40–41 (p. 40), Stadtarchiv Plauen, D43/39.1.

⁴³ Willi, Hengst and Wätzig, pp. 8–10; Seifert, p. 8.

several hostages⁴⁴. His exploits again made the newspaper on 25th March, as he surfaced in Markneukirchen to extort 100,000 marks from the town administration on pain of violence⁴⁵, and on 28th March, when he made an audacious appearance in Plauen. Arriving in 5 cars with a group of heavily armed men, he first made a speech “about his communist ideas”, then stormed and “demolished” the offices of the bürgerliche newspaper, before retiring with his band to Cafe Trömel and demanding 100,000 marks from its owner, who Hölz took hostage when he proved unable to pay⁴⁶. On 31st March, he extorted 100,000 marks from the Plauen Burgerrat, and the “Red Executive Committee” published another proclamation in a local newspaper on the same day which threatened various acts of destruction against factories and “the razing of the houses of the property-owning classes and all state buildings”, which was to be carried out by a specially selected “Burning Committee”, if Plauen’s Bürgertum continued in its efforts to “bring reactionary troops to the Vogtland” with a view “to breaking the dictatorship of the Proletariat”⁴⁷.

The 6th April edition of the *Hofer Anzeiger* led with a blood-curdling and detailed report of Hölz’s next enterprise. The “Red Army of the Vogtland”, which consisted of “100 armed men”, had turned up again in Plauen on 3rd

⁴⁴ “Überfall auf das Plauener Landgericht” in “HA”, no. 70, 23.3.1920.

⁴⁵ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 72, 25.3.1920.

⁴⁶ “Die Ohnmacht der Sächsischen Regierung” in “HA”, no. 75, 29.3.1920. The Plauen Chief of Police was later investigated for his failure to take action against Hölz during his activities in 1920. See “Akten der Verwaltung der Kreisstadt Plauen: die Anschuldigungen gegen Polizeidirektor Mettte und Assistent Todkleben in der Hoelzaffaire letz”, Stadtarchiv Plauen, Rep. 3 Kap 4 Sekt. 2A Nr 4 Blatt 426.

⁴⁷ “Kommunistenherrschaft im Vogtland” in “HA”, no. 77, 31.3.1920.

April and demanded that all local businessmen and factory owners meet in Cafe Trömel at 3 in the afternoon “or else suffer the consequences”. Surprisingly, almost all of them arrived on time, as well as the mayor and chief of police; the attendees were held under armed guard for 2 hours until 5PM, when Hölz finally appeared. He made his familiar demand for 100,000 marks from each businessman in order “to help build the Red Army of the Vogtland” and insisted that the bürgerliche Home Guards give up their weapons – any burgher found in possession of a weapon was to be immediately shot⁴⁸. Two days later, the *Hofer Anzeiger* reported on a militant speech held by Hölz “before thousands of people” in Plauen in which he demanded the “complete destruction” of the “old imperial order”, promised “deeds as well as words”, declared that “the revolution is not made in parliament... but in the streets”, described himself as a “robber” but one who “only robbed what the bourgeoisie has already robbed”, and prophesied that “in the next days, we will have to be even harder”⁴⁹. On the 8th April, the *Anzeiger* printed a proclamation by the “Red Executive Committee” which explicitly threatened “the bourgeoisie” and “the farmers” with extermination⁵⁰. Hölz was front page news on the 10th April: he had declared himself “dictator” of the Vogtland and then occupied the local barracks, from where he intended to direct his “Red Army”.⁵¹

From the point of view of the *Hofer Anzeiger* and its readers, all of this was

⁴⁸ “Der Terror Hölz im Vogtland” in “HA”, no. 80, 6.4.1920.

⁴⁹ “Plauen, 5. April” in “HA”, no. 81, 7.4.1920.

⁵⁰ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 82, 8.4.1920.

⁵¹ “Hölz als Diktator des Vogtlandes” in “HA”, no. 84, 10.4.1920.

intensely disturbing and severely “undermining of the authority of the state”. But on April 10th, the state finally responded, as units of the Bavarian Reichswehr once again arrived in Hof. This time, however, their intention was to push north over the Saxon border into the Vogtland. Two days later, the front page of the *Hofer Anzeiger* was once again dedicated entirely to the “heroic actions” of Max Hölz, “the man who wants to make the entire world happy”: the newspaper related a story sent by an eye-witness who told of the “Red Guards” storming into Cafe Trömel and “plundering” the guests: their victims included “a man from Hof” who was relieved of some 2000 marks at gun point⁵².

Most disturbing of all, however, was Hölz’s response when he learned that Reichswehr troops were massing on the Saxon border; the “Red Army of the Vogtland” went on a veritable rampage, with Hölz declaring a general strike, calling for “hostages to be taken from among the Bürgertum” and for public buildings to be set ablaze. The “Red Guard” then proceeded through the streets of Plauen “plundering” wherever they went and, at 1AM on the 11th April, Hölz and his “Burning Committee” returned to Falkenstein, “setting fire to five villas” around the castle, which by 3AM “resembled a lake of fire”. Several middle class hostages were taken, including a journalist, before the Red Guard travelled to Klingenthal, hurled hand grenades at random houses and took five further hostages, including a senior policeman⁵³. Two days later, the *Hofer Anzeiger* published a long letter from the journalist taken prisoner

⁵² “Die 'Heldentaten' des 'Volksbeglückers' Hölz” in “HA”, no. 85, 12.4.1920.

⁵³ “Die 'Heldentaten' des 'Volksbeglückers' Hölz” in “HA”, no. 85, 12.4.1920.

by Hölz's "Red Guard"; he provided a chilling account of his arrest and the several days he spent in captivity, which included bearing witness to the torching of the Falkenstein villas and the attack on Klingenthal⁵⁴.

By 14th April, however, the situation had begun to deteriorate for Hölz, with the Reichswehr occupying large areas of the Vogtland, including Plauen, and declaring martial law⁵⁵. It was at this point that reports began to appear about armed clashes between "Hölz Bands" and the Reichswehr which were taking place across the Vogtland, and it was clear that the army was gradually forcing Hölz back, with hundreds of "Red Guards" arrested and several killed⁵⁶. With the occupation of Falkenstein and Klingenthal by 16th April, the game was quite evidently up for the "Red Army of the Vogtland", but Hölz himself was nowhere to be found: reports began to circulate that he had fled over the border to Czechoslovakia, where he was arrested by a Czech border patrol in Marienbad⁵⁷. The Saxon government demanded his extradition, but the Czechs refused, and Hölz was instead transferred to Austria: he was later freed, returning to Germany later that same year to continue his activities. For now, however, the "Red terror" in the Vogtland was at an end, and the trial of those "Red Guards" taken prisoner during the fighting in April took place over the summer⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ "Als Gefangener der Hölz'schen Armee" in "HA", no. 86, 13.4.1920.

⁵⁵ "Vom Hölz" in "HA", no. 87, 14.4.1920.

⁵⁶ "Aus dem Sächsischen Vogtland" in "HA", no. 89, 16.4.1920.

⁵⁷ "Hölz im Marienbad ergriffen" in "HA", no. 91, 19.4.1920.

⁵⁸ "Plauen, Verwaltungsbericht 1924-23 Bd. I", pp. 61-74, Stadtarchiv Plauen, Archivsbibliothek PL117.

Almost every detail of this extraordinary turn of events was reported in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, and thus read by those bürgerliche residents of the *Saalestadt* who had, a few weeks before, witnessed the creation of a *Räterepublik* and an intervention by the Bavarian military. To make matters worse, Hölz's activities were not isolated cases of working class militancy: they appeared in the *Anzeiger* alongside reports on the situation across Germany, which conveyed a similar picture of civil war-like conditions, because in some areas the General Strike called by the Socialist parties in an attempt to stop the Putsch had developed into an overall workers' uprising.

On 15th March alone, the day that the united Hofer left issued its proclamation, we can read of 20 people being killed after a left-wing demonstration in Leipzig, a hand grenade and machine gun battle in Weimar and the occupation of all public buildings by radicals in Hannover⁵⁹. Two days later, the front page of the *Hofer Anzeiger* reported that 10 soldiers had been killed in Dresden; that “the working classes” had “concentrated all power in their own hands” in Greiz; and the storming of the town hall in Dortmund after a “left-radical putsch”⁶⁰. The following days saw reports from Berlin, where “the working classes have declared a *Räterepublik*”; from Saxony, where “*Räterepubliken* have been declared” and “in many cases the Reichswehr has been overwhelmed by the rebels”; from Kiel, where “the General Strike

⁵⁹ “Zur Lage im Reiche” in “HA”, no. 64, 15.3.1920.

⁶⁰ “Zur Lage im Reiche” in “HA”, no. 66, 17.3.1920.

continues”: from Stettin, where “the workers have armed themselves”⁶¹. By 20th March, Leipzig was said to be in a virtual state of civil war⁶²; 1400 armed radicals were marauding around Nuremberg⁶³; and Elberfeld was taken over by an “armed band” on 27th April, its train station “occupied by Spartacists”⁶⁴.

It was in the Ruhr in particular where this working class uprising reached its most terrifying proportions, and the *Hofer Anzeiger* went so far as to publish military-style maps that showed the “front” in much the same way as it had depicted the battle lines of the First World War⁶⁵. In the Westphalian industrial centres, it was reported that “the Communists have 10,000 armed workers who have overrun more than a dozen industrial towns with machine guns, cannons, artillery, and everywhere instilled their terror-regime”⁶⁶, while Fritz Auer contributed a long report about “The Commune in the Ruhr”, which was presided over by a “group of bandits” whose behaviour “showed all the signs of gruesomeness and degeneracy” and who operated according to a “Bolshevist logic”⁶⁷. A bloodcurdling report on 15th April spoke of a “mass murder in Essen” perpetrated by the Spartacists upon their entry into the city; it described in lurid detail the storming of the Essen Wasserturm by a “red band” who proceeded to massacre the defending regiment, despite the fact

⁶¹ “Zur Lage im Reiche” in “HA”, no. 67, 19.3.1920.; “Zur Lage im Reich” in “HA”, no. 68, 20.3.1920.

⁶² “Die Zustände in Leipzig” in “HA”, no. 69, 22.3.1920.

⁶³ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 69, 22.3.1920.

⁶⁴ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 100, 29.4.1920.

⁶⁵ “Vom Kampfgebiet an der Ruhr” in “HA”, no. 84, 10.4.1920.

⁶⁶ “Der rote Terror im rheinisch-westfälischen Kohlenrevier” in “HA”, no. 70, 23.3.1920.

⁶⁷ “Die Kommune im Ruhrgebiet” in “HA”, no. 78, 1.4.1920.

that the latter had laid down their arms⁶⁸. Such reports frequently included graphic details; at the castle of Count Westerholt near Bochum, “the Spartacists” had “plundered the farmyard” and “slaughtered the animals”, “stormed” the castle, “destroyed every single item of furniture and art”, and forced “the countess to cook and tend to the attackers, as well as put up with their shameless orgies”⁶⁹. Little wonder, given all of this, that Otto Ernst, in his Easter editorial, declared the “question of the Ruhr” and the “terror of the Communist leadership” to be a “Golgotha for the German Reich”⁷⁰.

Though this left-wing violence was more widespread and extreme than at any point in the past, the *Hofer Anzeiger* deployed some familiar tropes in order to make sense of it. As during the Spartacist Uprising and the Munich *Räterepublik*, the newspaper repeatedly claimed that behind this German leftist radicalism stood Russian Bolshevism. “It is very clear”, Fritz Auer wrote, “that the arming of the working classes and the organisation of their movement was already well underway before the Kapp Putsch. How else would it have been possible, in such a short time, to collect together the monstrous amounts of weapons and war material, and to distribute them so diligently?”⁷¹ There could be no doubt that the Russians were the culprits, for “the current struggle of the Red Army of the Ruhr follows a unified, fiendish, brutally power-hungry Russian conspiracy” which had been in preparation since 1919. The “Ruhr uprising”, then, had “given rise to circumstances that

⁶⁸ “Massenmord in Essen” in “HA”, no. 91, 19.4.1920.

⁶⁹ “Aus dem rheinisch-westfälischen Gebiet” in “HA”, no. 81, 7.4.1920.

⁷⁰ “Zwischen Karfreitag und Ostern” in “HA”, no. 79, 3.4.1920.

⁷¹ “Politische Wochenschau” in “HA”, no. 84, 10.4.1920.

are painfully similar to Russian Bolshevism”, and it was “becoming increasingly clear that the struggle of the Red Army of the Ruhr has been prepared through Russian influence”⁷².

However, what made all of this particularly terrifying was the fact that, in the summer of 1920, the Red Army was on the march in Eastern Europe, and reports in the *Hofer Anzeiger* on the chaos in the Ruhr frequently appeared side by side with equally disturbing articles about Bolshevik military successes, the sheer size of the Red Army and the growing vulnerability of East Prussia, which was referred to as an “endangered zone”⁷³. Indeed, the newspaper explicitly linked the advance of the Red Army in the east with what was happening in Germany, reporting on a rumoured meeting of “leading left-radical figures” in the Ruhr which was attended by three Soviet officers who stated that “the advance of the Red Army” in Germany would “go hand in hand” with a Russian advance against Poland, and that, “by July, Trotsky hopes to be at the gates of Berlin”⁷⁴.

Much of this was accompanied by grisly atrocity stories, with members of the “Bourgeoisie” who fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks being “gruesomely murdered”⁷⁵. The Protestant newsletter proved especially assiduous when it came to detailing Bolshevik outrages: one long article written by Pastor

⁷² “Die Kommune im Ruhrgebiet” in “HA”, no. 78, 1.4.1920.

⁷³ “Neues Vorgehen der Bolschewisten an der ganzen Front” in “HA”, no. 120, 25.5.1920; “Weitere Niederlagen der Polen” in “HA”, no. 122, 27.5.1920.; “Polen und Sowjetrusland” in “HA”, no. 123, 28.5.1920.

⁷⁴ “Die Lage im Rheinland-Westfalen” in “HA”, no. 75, 29.3.1920.

⁷⁵ “Ausland” in “HA”, no. 118, 21.5.1920.

Dietrich described “Bolshevism” not as “a general theory or economic matter” but as an ideology which originated from “a ravenous hatred and vengefulness toward Christianity”. The “first goal” of Bolshevism was “the destruction of Christianity” and its “substitution for atheism”, and the article described a range of Bolshevik atrocities perpetrated against Christians in Eastern Europe – mass shootings, live burials, drownings – and declared that, “if Bolshevism is victorious, then Christianity will disappear from the face of the earth”. Never before, he argued, had such “bloody and devilish rage for the extermination of Christianity” been seen; “the cloisters are being robbed, the churches are vacant and their servants are being martyred in their hundreds wherever the Red Terror, accompanied by streams of blood, enacts the rape and destruction of the land”. The article closed with the warning that “the next gateway of Bolshevism will be Germany”⁷⁶.

It is important to take together all of these developments – in Hof, the Vogtland, the Ruhr and Eastern Europe – and consider what effect they might have had on the worldview of the *Saaalestadt’s* middle classes. In the weeks following their own experience of “Red Terror”, Hof’s burghers were now confronted with daily reports about a communist bandit marauding the region to their immediate north, near civil war like conditions in the centre of Germany, and the advance of the Red Army in Eastern Europe. The end times, it seemed, were upon them, and Fritz Auer remarked darkly on the “astonishing similarities between these days and what happened in Russia”

⁷⁶ "Der Christenhass des Bolschewismus" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt für den Dekanatsbezirk Hof (Hof und Umgebung)", no. 9, 25.4.1920.

prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. Germany, then, was “heading the same way as Russia”, with “Kerensky called Ebert” and “Kornilov as Luttwitz”⁷⁷. In a speech at a meeting of the District Burgher League of Hof, Karl Pfeifer summed up this mood of apocalyptic despair. “When we gathered last year for our General Meeting, we received the news that the government had been usurped in Munich and the *Räterepublik* had been announced. Once this was overcome, the disgraceful peace visited upon us by our enemies and strike after strike has made it impossible, even to this day, to restore peace. There is no joy in life, no desire to work harder”, and Pfeifer predicted a “general collapse” unless Germany’s catastrophic descent into chaos were arrested⁷⁸.

This flood of daily reports on left-wing violence across the local region, Germany and Europe, which came hot on the heels of the Hofer Bürgertum’s own experience of class warfare in their home town, was fundamental to the process of radicalisation investigated in this study. Many middle class denizens of the *Saaletadt* were now finally convinced that a democratic system was an inappropriate framework within which to deal with the terrible threat of left-wing extremism, and that a firmer hand than that of the Democrats was needed to meet this threat. A radically anti-socialist, authoritarian solution, not a nuanced differentiation between “radicals” and “moderates” within a parliamentary framework, now began to seem more attractive.

⁷⁷ “Wahlen und Waffen” in “HA”, no. 98, 27.4.1920.

⁷⁸ “Hof, 18. März” in “HA”, no. 69, 21.3.1920.

4.3 The Reichstag and Landtag Elections of June 1920

It was in this extremely fraught atmosphere that the citizens of Hof, and of Germany, went to the polls in June 1920 to vote in state and national elections, and these elections presented the Hofer Democratic party with severe difficulties. The following section deals with these elections and it has three aims. First, to show that the cumulative effects of the Munich *Räterepublik*, the Treaty of Versailles and especially the experience of the Kapp Putsch had dramatically shrunk the market for a “politics of reason” which preached democracy, international reconciliation and an alliance with moderate Socialists. Second, that the DDP tried to tap into this new mood by changing its image, advertising itself as a party of anti-socialist unity, unreservedly committed to a free economy and a “religious spirit” in schools. Thirdly, however, as a fundamentally left-liberal party, the DDP was simply unable to project this image as effectively or convincingly as its main competitor – the Bavarian Middle Party, the regional wing of the German National People’s Party, which was gaining ground in the towns and communes around Hof.

Even before campaigning for the June elections began, the signs that an anti-socialist mobilisation were gathering pace within the local Bürgertum were becoming harder to ignore. A Bürger-Vollzugsrat was formed in Naila with the aim of “protecting the interests of the Bürgertum”⁷⁹, while on 22nd April, the Bavarian Burgher Block took out almost an entire page of the *Hofer Anzeiger*

⁷⁹ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 80, 6.4.1920.

to call for “Burghers to unify yourselves!”. The contents of this proclamation were significantly to the right of anything the local DDP had extolled over the previous year. In a “Bürgerliche State”, private property would be guaranteed, as well as religion in schools, and more importance was placed on “one’s own people, culture and economy” rather than “any International”. Those “who want to make everything equal, who will not allow the individual to strive and compete” were denounced, and “the preservation of a measure of inequality in social and economic life” were called for⁸⁰. By the end of April, the owner of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, Karl Hoermann, was able to declare with satisfaction at a meeting of the Business Club in Liederkrantzheim that “in the last weeks, we have seen how the Bürgerschaft can be induced (...) to pull itself together, to trust in itself and unify itself. Let’s hope that these calls to unity will continue to be successful”⁸¹.

This, then, was the direction in which bürgerliche politics in Hof and its environs was heading in the wake of the Kapp Putsch. When campaigning for the election began, the Democrats knew that they had to embrace this spirit of anti-socialist bürgerliche unity if they wanted to be a credible option for Hof’s middle classes. Gone was the desire to “go a long way with Social Democracy” and “not to attack our opponents on the left”; now, according to the DDP’s campaign literature, a “left-wing majority” after the election would produce “a dictatorship of terror, robbery, murder and plunder (...) as we

⁸⁰ “Wer ist Bürger?” in “HA”, no. 94, 22.4.1920.

⁸¹ “Das Reichsnotopfer” in “HA”, no. 96, 24.4.1920.

recently saw in the Ruhr”⁸², while Dr Hohmann argued that a “purely working class government” would pursue “a one sided class politics, of “oppression against other sections of the population” and “experiments in our economic life” – which would eventually lead to civil war”⁸³. As the election drew closer, the Democrats warned that “if the Reichstag elections produce a Socialist majority, we will have a Socialist government, in which the Independents play the leading role”. This would mean a “class dictatorship of the Proletariat according to the Russian model, and wherever this dictatorship has reigned – in Russia, Hungary, Munich, the Ruhr – the consequences were always the destruction of economic life, misery among the Volk, repression of the middle class” and “interminable unrest and civil war”⁸⁴. Herr Pensel, a local factory owner, warned at a DDP meeting on 25th April that “the danger of the left” was “much greater than that from the right”, because “a leftist dictatorship would mean the end of our economic life”⁸⁵. Clearly, then, any attempt to differentiate between moderates and extremists in the working class movement had been quietly dropped by the Democrats: now the talk was of “socialism” and “the left” as a homogenous, and hostile, phenomenon.

Despite this attempted makeover, however, the DDP still had to constantly defend itself against the claim that its support for the Majority Socialists had been “excessive” throughout the previous 18 months of Republican government. At the 26th April meeting, Herr Pensel also denounced the “work

⁸² “Wer am 6. Juni nicht wählt” in “DDP”.

⁸³ “Ist die herrschaft der Extreme möglich?” in “DDP”.

⁸⁴ “Beamtentum und Sozialdemokratie” in “HA”, no. 130, 5.6.1920.

⁸⁵ “Bezirksvertretertag der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei” in “DDP”.

of the Democratic fraction in the National Assembly”, which “is far too considerate of the Majority Socialists and consequently could not accomplish enough”⁸⁶, while the party also stood accused of seeking “the politicisation of economic life” through the “socialisation of the means of production” and of being far too fulsome in its support of the working class general strike that had followed the Kapp Putsch⁸⁷. Karl Schrepfer, speaking at a meeting in the Bürgergesellschaft on 28th May, rejected the “polemics from the right, the accusations that we have betrayed the Bürgertum”⁸⁸; Councillor Meisner insisted that “it is an absolutely unjustified accusation that we have been little more than an appendix of the Social Democrats”⁸⁹; and Dr Luppe angrily contested “the constant accusation that we position ourselves too closely to the Majority Social Democrats”, though he conceded that the DDP had made “certain concessions” that “we otherwise would not have if we had been working alone.”⁹⁰ But the Democrats were vulnerable on this point, and it rendered dubious their efforts to style themselves as a party of “anti-socialist unity”.

In much the same vein, the DDP’s attitude to the revolution that had ushered in Germany’s new Republic was unrecognisable from what it had been the previous summer. Whereas once figures like Otto Ernst and Karl Schrepfer had tried to take ownership of this “bürgerliche Revolution”, they now did

⁸⁶ “Bezirksvertretertag der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei” in “DDP”.

⁸⁷ “Erklärung” in “HA”, no. 108, 8.5.1920.

⁸⁸ “Bayerische Politik in der Gegenwart und Zukunft” in “DDP”.

⁸⁹ “Was kann uns retten aus unserer Not?” in “DDP”.

⁹⁰ “Demokratie und Nationalversammlung” in “DDP”.

everything possible to distance themselves from it and, in some cases, condemn it. Their strategy was to argue that they had never wanted the Revolution, but they had been forced to take the reins in order to “save what could be saved” in November 1918⁹¹. Indeed, the DDP now declared its main task to be “the raising up of the German People” who “lay broken as a result of the lost war and the Revolution it produced”⁹². “We Democrats didn’t create the Revolution and we didn’t approve of it”, declared Meisner at the DDP meeting on June 4th. “In our opinion it was a crime against the people and it will remain so.” Indeed, Germany’s plight was chiefly due to the Revolution: without it, “we would not have won the war, but perhaps a certain strength to resist would have been left to us (...) we would still have been able to negotiate”⁹³. One Democratic proclamation addressed to “salesmen, industrialists and business people” also rather anxiously pointed out that, in November 1918, “the necessary mastering of the internal situation was only possible through a collaboration of the bürgerliche left parties with the Majority Social Democrats” – a compromise which, the author admitted, “was only possible through painful sacrifices from industry and trade”. Had this compromise not been made, the proclamation continued, then the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” would surely have been installed⁹⁴. Whereas once the DDP had been accomplices to the German Revolution, then, they were now striving to depict themselves as the only force that had saved the

⁹¹ “Die “charaktervolle” bayerische Mittelpartei” in “DDP”.

⁹² “An die bayerische Wählerschaft” in “DDP”.

⁹³ “Was kann uns retten aus unserer Not?” in “DDP”.

⁹⁴ “An die deutschen Kaufleute, Industriellen und Gewerbetreibenden!” in “DDP”.

entire bürgerliche order *from* the Revolution.

It was also becoming increasingly evident that little patience remained for even the limited programme of socialisation once advocated by the DDP. From almost all quarters of Hof's trade and business community came vigorous, in some cases vitriolic denunciations of socialisation. At a meeting of the Business Association on 23rd April, Karl Hoermann attacked socialisation for "giving businessmen no possibility to grow their businesses"⁹⁵, while the Board of the Land and Housing Owners League announced on 3rd June that an "effective dam" against Social Democracy was necessary in order to prevent their "restless socialisation" – otherwise "the rest of German economic life would fall" to this baleful movement, signalling "the end of the free burgher and entrepreneur"⁹⁶. The Upper Franconian Chamber of Trade became an increasingly aggressive agitator against socialisation, passing a resolution which called for "a ban on strikes and the raising of the minimum working hours"⁹⁷, while the Selber businessman Heinrich Zahn, in submitting the chamber's yearly report, denounced "the economic policy of the last year" – which the Democrats had also helped shape in parliament – because it had focused too much "on realising socialist ideas". Dr Streit, another local industrialist, agreed and railed against the socialist measures such as "shortened working hours" and "continuous

⁹⁵ "Das Reichsnotopfer" in "HA", no. 96, 24.4.1920.

⁹⁶ "Hof, 3. Juni" in "HA", no. 129, 4.6.1920.

⁹⁷ "Die Handelskammer für Oberfranken" in "HA", no. 104, 4.5.1920.

strikes” as the chief causes of Germany’s economic misery⁹⁸.

The Democrats endeavoured to cater to this increasingly assertive opposition to socialisation. The party which had previously extolled “socialism in the base and democracy in the form” now announced itself as an enemy of “the forced economy” and demanded “an immediate return to free trade and commerce”⁹⁹, while Karl Schrepfer, speaking in Oberkotzau on 3rd June, insisted that the “basic principle in economic life has to be: a free path to free productivity! Down with the forced economy!”¹⁰⁰ A proclamation by the DDP on 13th May stated that Germany’s “economic life” would “rise and fall with the personal virtue and strength of the individual” and was “above all based on private property” and “the spirit of entrepreneurship”. The DDP’s brief was “to defend this basis against foolish socialisation, which will destroy the economy through incompetence and laziness” and the circular closed by demanding that “independent small businesses” be protected from “senseless collectivisation through socialist town councils”¹⁰¹. Yet another election promise from the DDP on 13th May declared that the party stood “on the basis of private property” and denounced the “deadly threat” of socialisation, which “would destroy an already fragile German economy” if left unchecked¹⁰², while Schrepfer insisted in the Bürgergesellschaft that “our economy must be based on the entrepreneurial spirit of free personalities, without forced

⁹⁸ “Sitzung der oberfr. Handelskammer am 23. April 1920” in “HA”, no. 98, 27.4.1920.

⁹⁹ “An die deutschen Kaufleute, Industriellen und Gewerbetreibenden!” in “DDP”.

¹⁰⁰ “Aus der Wahlbewegung” in “DDP”.

¹⁰¹ “An die bayerische Wählerschaft” in “DDP”.

¹⁰² “An die deutschen Kaufleute, Industriellen und Gewerbetreibenden!” in “DDP”.

conditions” and positioned the DDP as an intransigent enemy of “socialisation and communalisation of economic industries”¹⁰³.

Significantly, however, the Hofer DDP still showed signs of being torn between this pragmatic need to meet the changing mood of the local middle classes on the one hand and its former principles on the other, with pro-socialisation sentiment still occasionally creeping into its self-presentation. Speaking at a meeting in Hof, for example, Dr Luppe described the Democratic Party as “an unconditional supporter of the free economy”, but added that “today the possibility (for such an economy) isn’t there”, because “demand is much greater than supply” and “prices would just rise senselessly and only a small section of the population would be able to feed itself” if Germany reverted to free enterprise¹⁰⁴. This was not what Hof’s businessmen and much of its farming community wanted to hear.

Similarly, some voices within the DDP continued to advocate a politics of “class reconciliation” rather than anti-socialist bürgerliche unity, including Dr Luppe, who argued that it was “very short-sighted to believe that one section of the population, whether the working class or the Bürgertum, is capable of governing alone”, adding that “no part of the population can be violated”, for “democracy is built on social equality, on equal rights for all.”¹⁰⁵ Dr Hohmann, too, saw it as the principle task of the DDP to “bridge the interest divisions between capital and labour”, to create “a politics of reconciliation” and

¹⁰³ “Bayerische Politik in der Gegenwart und Zukunft” in “DDP”.

¹⁰⁴ “Demokratie und Nationalversammlung” in “DDP”.

¹⁰⁵ “Demokratie und Nationalversammlung” in “DDP”.

“understanding in our economic life between employers and employees”. This was the old talk of class reconciliation rather than the longing for anti-socialist unity fostered among Hof’s middle classes by their two experiences of a *Rätorepublik*.

Nowhere was the DDP’s ambivalence more evident than in its attitude to religious education in schools. At a speech in Oberkotzau on 3rd June, Karl Schrepfer felt compelled to defend the party against “accusations of being an enemy of the church” by pointing to the example of Friedrich Naumann, perhaps the most prominent German left-liberal of the pre-revolutionary period, whose aim it was to fill “the educated and the workers with the spirit of religion”¹⁰⁶. However, the uncomfortable fact was that the DDP’s own literature still betrayed an uncertain attitude on the question of religion in schools. One DDP proclamation on 20th April stated rather ambiguously that, “in the area of school and educational policy”, the party aimed to “assert the spiritual unity of our people wherever possible, and not endanger it through religious power politics”, calling for “a discussion with the morally and religiously valuable church communities in the spirit of peace and understanding, not power politics and spiritual divisiveness.”¹⁰⁷ That the DDP were ambivalent on this point was evident from statements made by Dr Hohmann, who asked “what happens to a state” when “the foundation of freedom of conscience is damaged, where the importance of inner conviction no longer exists due to compulsion and intolerance, in which the church,

¹⁰⁶ “Aus der Wahlbewegung” in “DDP”.

¹⁰⁷ “An das deutsche Volk!” in “DDP”.

instead of dedicating itself to its important tasks, gets involved in party politics?"¹⁰⁸. Once again, this was out of step with a social milieu becoming more and more assertive in and self-conscious of its evangelism.

The DDP, then, had serious problems in this election. It tried to adapt to the rightward-leaning mood that was becoming apparent among Hof's middle classes, but given what it had been advocating over the previous 18 months, and what it sometimes still advocated, it simply could not exploit this mood as effectively as the Bavarian Middle Party. Indeed, to a large extent, the DDP was forced to fall back on the personal appeal of Karl Schrepfer, its Landtag deputy, in winning votes for the regional elections. And Schrepfer was popular less for his championing of "democracy" or reconciliation with the Socialists than for his effective advocacy of business interests in the Bavarian parliament¹⁰⁹.

Even more unfortunate for the DDP was the fact that it now found itself battling for bürgerliche votes with the Bavarian Middle Party, the regional wing of the German National People's Party. This was an anti-Semitic, radical nationalist outfit which condemned the Revolution of 1918, openly advocated a restoration of the monarchy and brooked no talk of moderate socialisation

¹⁰⁸ "Der Aufmarsch der Parteien und das Ziel des Kampfes (III)" in "HA", no. 128, 3.6.1920.

¹⁰⁹ This became extremely clear from speeches given by Schrepfer in Traunstein, Freilassing, Berchtesgaden, Muehldorf, Rehau and Lichtenburg, all of which focused on his work for small business interests rather than the "values" of the Democratic Party. See "Der Oberbayer. Kreisverband der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei...", "Rehau, 26. Mai", "Bezirksvertretertag der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei" in "DDP" and "Die demokratische Landtagsfraktion und ihre Stellung zu Industrie, Handwerk, Gewerbe und Handel" in "HA", no. 123, 28.5.1920 and "Das Reichsnotopfer" in "HA", no. 96, 24.4.1920.

or a deconfessionalisation of schools¹¹⁰. And there was no doubt that the BMP was gaining ground in the region; the *Hofer Anzeiger*, a Democrat-controlled newspaper, constantly inveighed against it in the run up to the elections, evidently spooked by the threat that it posed to the hegemony of the DDP.

This was especially the case in the smaller communes and villages around Hof, where the BMP's electioneering was much more aggressive than in the *Saalestadt* itself. One report from the Frankenwald described it as "despicable" that "our freedom-loving rural people are being dragged into the channels of the German Nationalists, the Pan-Germans and the warmongers"¹¹¹, while another letter from Marktleuthen appeared in the *Hofer Anzeiger* on 3rd June lamenting the fact that only the BMP had sent its candidate to speak in the village, whereas in the 1919 election, it had been visited by multiple "brilliant speakers" from the DDP¹¹².

The Bavarian Middle Party, unlike the Democrats, was not required to perform ideological gymnastics in order to tap into the sense of outraged anti-socialism that had taken hold within the Hofer Bürgertum: theirs was not the language of "democracy", making peace with the Social Democrats, de-

¹¹⁰ For more on the pre-1920 history of the Bavarian Middle Party see Christian F. Trippe, *Konservative Verfassungspolitik 1918-1923: Die DNVP als Opposition in Reich und Ländern*, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien, Bd. 105 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1995), pp. 91–93; Elina Kiiskinen, *Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei in Bayern (Bayerische Mittelpartei) in der Regierungspolitik des Freistaats während der Weimarer Zeit*, Schriftenreihe Zur Bayerischen Landesgeschichte 145 (München: Beck, 2005); Fenske, *Konservatismus und Rechtsradikalismus*, pp. 68–73.

¹¹¹ "Die Wahlbewegung" in "Bayerische Mittelpartei Hof, 1918-1924", Stadtarchiv Hof, ZA.2431.

¹¹² "Morgenpost" in "HA", no. 128, 3.6.1920.

confessionalising schools or limited socialisation. At a gathering in Hof at the end of May, the BMP's Reichstag candidate Dr Strathmann lambasted the republican state form and argued that the responsibility for its flaws lay largely at the door of the Democrats, under whom Germany was "already approaching the dictatorship of the Proletariat"¹¹³. Herr Fröhlich, a local lawyer, explicitly stated that the BMP "reserved the right to strive for the restoration of the monarchy"¹¹⁴, while Republican-style "Coalition government" was denounced as having "contributed nothing to the rebuilding of Germany" at a meeting in Bad Steben¹¹⁵. Strathmann unambiguously, and more credibly than the formerly pro-socialisation DDP, also situated the Bavarian Middle Party "on the basis of private property", and demanded "the cultivation of a Christian spirit", for the German people was "suffering from a moral sickness and must first find itself again morally", which could only happen if "the clergy" were permitted "under all circumstances to retain the possibility of carrying out its duties to the body of the people" – which meant an unconditional preservation of religious education in schools. He repeatedly stressed the "holding high of nationalist thinking" and a ceaseless battle "against enervating internationalism"¹¹⁶, and he also showed himself to be a proponent of the "stab-in-the-back legend", which Otto Ernst described as

¹¹³ "Warum..." in "BMP".

¹¹⁴ "Morgenpost" in "HA", no. 120, 25.5.1920.

¹¹⁵ "Bad Steben, 20. Mai" in "BMP".

¹¹⁶ "Warum..." in "BMP".

“the old conservative left-overs” in his indignant report¹¹⁷.

Perhaps most unsettling of all were the dark murmurings circulating in Nationalist circles that the Democrats were a “Jew Party”, “servants of the Jews”¹¹⁸ and the “body guard of Jewish big capital”¹¹⁹. Dr Scheiding, a local and prominent member of the German Democratic Party, wrote to the *Hofer Anzeiger* to decry the “recent growth of the Bavarian Middle Party (DNVP) and their hideous electoral campaign” which had unleashed “the most miserable Jew-baiting through the painting of disgraceful pictures” on public buildings. Scheiding went on to add that his own house had been “sought out” and “daubed with the anti-Semitic swastika” by these “cowardly boys” who, he suggested, had been infected with “the poison of Jew-hatred” in some of the classes at Hof’s own gymnasium. He rounded off his indignant letter by asking if “the democratic state will eventually pay for the fact that, instead of brotherly love and reconciliation, we will instead be subjected to racial hatred and demagoguery?”¹²⁰

There is no doubt that local Democrats were rattled by the growing appeal of the Bavarian Middle Party in the area, and they launched a frontal assault against it, not only at meetings but on the pages of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, where they still had editorial control. The principle strategy was to attack the

¹¹⁷ Ernst maintained that Strathmann’s argument about a “stab-in-the-back” did not “even need to be dignified with a counter-argument”, because “the great mass of our middle class knows who led them into the painful position they’re in now”. See “HA”, no. 124, 29.5.1920.

¹¹⁸ “Was kann uns retten aus unserer Not?” in “DDP”.

¹¹⁹ “Bayerische Frauen und bayerische Männer!” in “HA”, no. 128, 3.6.1920.

¹²⁰ “Nachklänge zur Wahl” in “HA”, no. 131, 7.6.1920.

“reactionary” nature of the Nationalists. In the *Hofer Anzeiger*, Dr Hohmann described the Bavarian Middle Party as “the successor to the guilt-loaded Conservative Party” which, he rather optimistically believed, would have little success in the “freedom loving” German South, whose inhabitants were more “mistrustful of the conservative Juncker-spirit” than in Prussia¹²¹. At a meeting in Bad Steben, too, Herr Summerer accused the BMP of trying to “plant an East Elbian politics of domination in our democratic south”¹²², and a DDP election proclamation described the Nationalist party as the vanguard of a “reaction” which had first developed “in Prussia in the last century” and which sought to restore the dominance of the nobility by rescinding “all freedom-oriented laws, all laws that give equal rights and duties, all laws which undermine noble dominance and privilege”¹²³. Dr Hohmann, too, dismissed the “romantic state forms” advocated by politicians of the Bavarian Middle Party, for “the question of the monarchy” was “nothing more” than an attempt to rescind “the rights of the people which are guaranteed in a parliamentary system”¹²⁴. At one meeting of the BMP in Naila on 29th May, the nationalist Councillor Breundel was attacked by Summerer, who accused him of being a mere puppet of “big agricultural interests” and his party of “rejecting equal voting rights”¹²⁵, and in the *Anzeiger*, Ernst denounced the “vulgar anti-Semitic polemicizing” that the BMP’s campaign had unleashed in the

¹²¹ “Der Aufmarsch der Parteien und das Ziel des Kampfes” in “HA”, no. 126, 1.6.1920.

¹²² “Bad Steben, 20. Mai” in “DDP”.

¹²³ “Wer am 6. Juni nicht wählt...” in “DDP”.

¹²⁴ “Auserordentlicher Parteitag der Deutschen Demokratischen Partei” in “DDP”.

¹²⁵ “Naila, 29 Mai” in “BMP”.

region¹²⁶.

As the election drew closer and closer, however, this disquiet among local Democrats at how well the BMP was being received particularly in the town's environs began to develop into something approaching panic. Increasingly, local Democrats tried to discredit the Nationalists by linking the extremes of right and left, warning that a vote for the Bavarian Middle Party would lead to a civil war. In his final address to the *Anzeiger's* readers before the election, Ernst argued that radicals of both left and right were "unrealistic visionaries" who "looked forwards or backwards to a wonderful paradise" in either the past or future and whose fantasies could "lead to a tragedy of the bloodiest kind, the destruction of the barrier of the middle" if endorsed by the electorate. Both extremes were reliant on emotion and hysteria in contrast to the calm, rational "politics of the middle" advocated by the DDP, and "whoever wants to make politics with their heart", he concluded, "is a criminal against the Volk", because "to vote for the extreme candidates of right or left out of mere dissatisfaction is Bolshevism"¹²⁷. Otto Meisner, too, argued that the extremes of right and left were united by their willingness to use violence, to "plant bombs under state balance" in order to bring about the "collapse of the state". The extremes were "decided", he argued: "they want civil war"¹²⁸.

But the futility of these last ditch attempts to frighten Hof's middle classes into rejecting the German Nationalists as a party of "civil war" were thrown into

¹²⁶ "Die Wahlen" in "HA", no. 131, 7.6.1920.

¹²⁷ "Morgen!" in "HA", no. 130, 5.6.1920.

¹²⁸ "Die Unentbehrlichkeit der Koalition" in "HA", no. 130, 5.6.1920.

sharp relief on 7th June, when the results of the election were released. Both locally and nationally, these made highly depressing reading for Hof's Democrats, and the *Hofer Anzeiger* led with the solemn headline: "A Gain in votes for the Right and Far Left at the Expense of the Middle"¹²⁹. In Hof itself, the DDP had still won the majority of the bürgerliche vote for both the Reichstag and Landtag elections, but it had lost 13% of its share to the Bavarian Middle Party, which had leapt from 190 to 1,336 votes. Ostensibly, this may have seemed like a mere setback, but the uncomfortable fact was that the BMP had dedicated almost no resources to campaigning in the town itself, holding only one meeting there throughout the entire campaign; indeed, the Nationalists did not even open a local chapter of the party in Hof until September 1920. The DDP, by contrast, had concentrated most of its campaigning in the town and the *Hofer Anzeiger*, in particular, had devoted tremendous energy to persuading local burghers not to desert the Democrats. The fact that support for the DDP nonetheless dropped by 13% could thus be viewed as a highly disquieting development rather than a mere setback, and the Democrats could reasonably ask how their party would fare if the BMP devoted more resources to campaigning in the town and if the *Hofer Anzeiger* conducted itself in a less partisan manner¹³⁰.

Indeed, something like this scenario had in fact obtained in the smaller towns

¹²⁹ "Der Stimmenzuwachs nach rechts und ganz links auf Kosten der Mitte" in "HA", no. 132, 8.6.1920.

¹³⁰ For Rabenstein, it was only the lack of an alternative to the DDP in Hof during these elections that allowed the party to retain much of its vote. Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 162.

and communes that surrounded Hof, and here, the results were devastating. In Rehau, Marktredwitz, Münchberg, Kulmbach, Naila and on the Hofer Land, the DDP had struggled to assert itself against the BMP in the Landtag elections, and in the Reichstag elections it had been more or less wiped out by the German Nationalists. This, too, came against the backdrop of national results, where the Democrats had experienced severe setbacks, with the DNVP (and right-liberal Peoples' Party) the evident beneficiaries.¹³¹

One piece of electoral analysis in the *Hofer Anzeiger*, then, rightly recognised these results as a “catastrophe” from the point of view of the Democrats¹³². At the Reich level, wrote the *Hofer Anzeiger's* Berlin correspondent, the DDP “cannot have the remotest expectation of participating in the government” and was now seen as a “defeated party”¹³³. Karl Schrepfer himself contributed an article to the *Hofer Anzeiger* which, despite its coolly analytical tone, could not disguise an underlying despondency. He characterised the “swing to the right” as “an enormous reaction against the Revolution” just as the previous “swing to the left” in January 1919 had been a reaction against the war¹³⁴. Indeed, the election result was not only a blow to the DDP but also to the democratic system of government: Fritz Auer remarked that the parties of the middle had “lost 190 Reichstag deputies” to the parties of extreme right and left¹³⁵, and a few days after the election, he was already writing about the

¹³¹ Jones, *German Liberalism*, pp. 67–83.

¹³² “Weitere Wahlergebnisse” in “HA”, no. 133, 9.6.1920.

¹³³ “Politische Betrachtungen zum Wahl-Ausfall” in “HA”, no. 132, 8.6.1920.

¹³⁴ “Wahlbetrachtungen” in “HA”, no. 133, 9.6.1920.

¹³⁵ “Wer wird die neue deutsche Regierung stellen?” in “HA”, no. 134, 10.6.1920.

virtual impossibility of building a government¹³⁶.

So despairing were Hof's Democrats that, in searching for an explanation to this debacle, they increasingly took to blaming the German electorate itself for its wilful and misguided voting behaviour. Fritz Auer conceded that "the connection to Social Democracy contradicted the inner convictions and sensitivities of a huge section of the German Bürgertum", but then blamed the Bürgertum for its inability to "locate itself in the new state of affairs" and show "the correct understanding" for "the difficult position the Democrats found themselves in."¹³⁷ Otto Ernst was similarly scathing, bemoaning the fact that "the contradictions between capital and workers, republic and monarchy, communism and private property have been newly sharpened by the election results." The German people, he continued, "can only come to peaceful relations by charting a middle course, but a large portion of the electorate has not understood this. Let us hope that the German people come to this understanding without great upheavals that will bring our entire national life into danger"¹³⁸.

But this naval gazing could not disguise the fact that the elections of 1920 marked the point when the baton of political leadership within the Hofer Bürgertum was essentially passed from the Democrats to the Nationalists. The former had endeavoured to change their image over the course of the election and tap into a new, more anti-socialist and nationalist mood among

¹³⁶ "Politische Betrachtungen zum Wahl-Ausfall" in "HA", no. 132, 8.6.1920.

¹³⁷ "Der Ausgang der Wahl" in "HA", no. 134, 10.6.1920.

¹³⁸ "Der Ausgang der Wahl" in "HA", no. 134, 10.6.1920.

the local Bürgertum which was the product of the combined experiences of the *Räterepublik*, the publication of the Versailles Treaty and, above all, the Kapp Putsch. But the Democrats were fighting a losing battle in their attempt to present themselves as a focal point for anti-socialist unity because of their previous positions on questions such as co-operation with the MSPD and socialisation. The Nationalists, on the other hand, embodied ideas that were already very much in keeping with this new spirit, and their success in June 1920 was only a foretaste of what would play out in Hof over the following years.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the pre-eminence of the German Democratic Party in Hof, though already compromised by the experience of the *Räterepublik* and the publication of the Versailles Treaty the previous spring, was effectively broken by the events which followed the Kapp Putsch. For the third time since November 1918, the organised left had attempted to seize power in the *Saalestadt*, this time with serious consequences, and their uprising came within the context of growing violence both in the local area and in the Reich itself. The mood of fear and anger within the Hofer Bürgertum expressed itself during the elections of June 1920 through a rejection of the Democratic Party, which was partial in the *Saalestadt* itself and almost total in the town's environs. The DDP had made an attempt to

change its image during this election and tap into the new mood of aggressive anti-socialist unity, but it was unable to present this image as effectively or as authentically as its nearest competitor, the Bavarian Middle Party. Though the Democrats had held onto much of their vote in the town of Hof itself, there was little question that June 1920 marked the point when their power in the area went into terminal decline. The next two years would see the furtherance of this process and the rise of the Bavarian Middle Party as the chief fulcrum of bürgerliche political activity in the *Saalestadt*.

The elections of summer 1920 were not the only foreshadowing of this coming change, however. On 31st May, the Naval Association, which was closely connected to the Bavarian Middle Party, held a “Skagerrakfeier”, a celebration of the 1916 Battle of Jutland between the navies of Germany and Britain. This event had been planned in January 1920 and was initially intended as a “simple memorial service” for the Association’s modest membership, but to the surprise of the organisers, it attracted a huge number of people. The “commemoration” turned out to be a bellicosely nationalistic gathering that unambiguously celebrated Germany’s war experience and, though it was not explicitly mentioned, quite clearly constituted an endorsement of Germany’s pre-war authoritarian order and rejection of everything the Revolution had brought. The speaker, Herr Justizrat Karl Stroebel, declared that “the German Reich, the legacy of Kaiser Wilhelm I, the work of Bismarck, lies on the floor”, but insisted that “we cannot allow ourselves to give up on the hope of a revival of the German people”, and his

contribution was followed by a speech by a naval officer who celebrated the achievements of the German navy during the war¹³⁹.

Before summer 1920, militaristically coloured events such as these which celebrated the war, extolled a more authoritarian state form and called for German “renewal” had attracted little interest in Hof. From this point on, however, they would become the highlights of the bürgerliche calendar and key aspects of Hof’s burgeoning nationalist consensus.

¹³⁹ Vereinigung ehemaliger Marine und Schutztruppen-Angehöriger für Hof und Umgegend, “Skaggerak-Feier in Hof” in “Verbände”.

5 A Nationalist Consensus

(The Spread of Radical Nationalist Ideology in Hof,

September 1920 – December 1922)

At 5 o'clock in the afternoon on the 14th May 1921, a large gathering took place on the Rosenbühl, a hill to the west of Hof with a panoramic view of the town, to inaugurate the new "Bismarck Tower", an imposing stone structure built with funds collected by the local Bismarck Association¹. After performances by the Liederkranz Choral Association and the Town Orchestra, the keynote speech to officially open the tower was given by the Protestant Dean Herr Nürnberger, who lauded Bismarck's "enormous accomplishment" in "unifying the Germanic tribes and creating the German Reich". He described the Iron Chancellor as a "man of action" who, unlike the squabbling parliamentarians of post-war Germany, "did not need to sit down and wrestle with his thoughts" but was instead motivated by "a great sense of duty", a "ruthless energy", an incomparable "love of his Fatherland" and a "deep religiosity". Nürnberger characterised the time before the war as a wondrous age of German achievement, in which "German science reached new heights, investigated new depths, German industry bloomed powerfully, German technical expertise celebrated great triumphs, German trade crossed the seas of the world". But it was precisely this success, he continued, that was so intolerable to Britain and France, who had decided that the Reich "had to be destroyed" and "tried to surround" Germany. But in August 1914, they

¹ "Korrespondenz des Hofer Bismarckvereins", Stadtarchiv Hof, Bestand A Nr 9273.

came up against a people filled with “the right spirit”, a spirit that had made Germans into “a united people of brothers”. Unfortunately, and despite the fact that the nation’s troops had been “incomparable”, “heroes in east and west”, this spirit of internal unity had “leaked more and more” out of the home front, leading to “the collapse of the German Reich”. An era of misery and disgrace had resulted from this inner weakness but, “despite everything”, Nürnberger concluded, “we never want to be shaken in our belief in the future of the Fatherland”².

Nürnberger’s speech at the inauguration of the Bismarck Tower exemplified many of the ideological tropes which, this chapter argues, became endemic to the political culture of the Hofer Bürgertum after summer 1920. The language on the pages of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, in the local Protestant Church, at the best attended political meetings and among bürgerliche associations no longer extolled democracy, celebrated the Revolution or advocated co-operation with moderate Socialists. Instead, a nationalist consensus increasingly took hold; its principle exponents condemned democracy, pacifism and Marxism, called for the construction of a unified *Volksgemeinschaft* that would be able to resist Germany’s enemies abroad, exalted military symbolism and values, and described the revolution as the result of a treacherous “stab in the back” that had ushered in disgrace and moral decline. Irrespective of where or by whom this ideology was promulgated, at its centre lay a vision of “the nation” as an organic, sacred,

² “Die Weihe des Bismarckturmes” in “Militärische, vaterländische und völkische Verbände Hofs, 1918-1924”, Stadtarchiv Hof, ZA.2433.

almost mystical entity that was endangered by traitorous elements within and predatory forces without.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first charts the evolution of a nationalist consensus within the institutions of *bürgerliche Hof* in the months after the elections of 1920, arguing that there was, essentially, a “changing of the guard”, with prominent positions coming to be occupied by exponents of radical nationalist ideology. The second section offers a detailed analysis of the structure and content of this nationalist worldview and illustrates just how profoundly different it was from the democratic belief system that had been widely propagated in Hof before the summer of 1920. This second section is divided into ten subsections, each of which deals with a separate ideological trope.

5.1 A Changing of the Guard: the Rise of Radical Nationalists

“Where the fiddles play or people tell jokes, there is huge interest, but when it comes to dealing with serious political or economic questions, we see only empty benches.” This was the melancholy introduction to a report on a meeting of the German Democratic Party in Hof on 24th February 1921, at which Otto Ernst spoke “before very few interested persons” on the party’s dealings over the previous year, complained about receding interest among Hof’s middle classes and accused regional party headquarters of neglecting

the area when deciding where to send their most prominent speakers³. Ernst was in fact commenting on a general pattern whereby attendance at meetings of the DDP had fallen dramatically since the elections of summer 1920; the previous November, another gathering in Cafe Luitpold had fallen flat, with “very few in attendance” and Dr Scheiding calling for an increase in membership dues as a result of the party’s growing financial difficulties. Indeed, so poor was the attendance at this meeting that the planned speech by the local headmaster, Dr Müller, was cancelled in the hope that “it might be given in front of a larger audience at a different time”.⁴ Perhaps the most glaring evidence of the DDP’s decline in Hof, however, came in February 1921, when a meeting of all local parties was held in Pffaf’s Colosseum to protest against German reparations. The report in the *Hofer Anzeiger* dedicated several columns to a speech by Dr Höhna, local delegate for the Bavarian Middle Party, while Ernst’s contribution for the Democrats was summarised in five derisory lines at the end.⁵ Of course, not all Democratic meetings held between 1920 and 1922 were badly attended but, as a general rule, the packed halls of 1918 and 1919 were very much in the past, replaced by empty benches (and coffers).⁶

Despite the unmistakable evidence of their growing marginalisation, the Hofer Democrats stuck to their guns and continued to present a thoroughly left-

³ "Hof, 24. Februar 1921" in "Deutsche Demokratische Partei Hof, 1918-1924".

⁴ "Hof, 12. November 1920" in "DDP".

⁵ "Gegen die Verskalvung: Die Protestversammlung in Hof" in "HA", no. 38, 14.2.1921.

⁶ For example, the Reichstag Delegate Weiss travelled from Nuremberg to speak in Hof in October 1921. According to the report, the “personality of the speaker” resulted in a “large audience”. Such successes, however, were very unusual for the DDP after summer 1920. See “Hof, 29. Oktober 1921” in “DDP”.

liberal profile to the denizens of Hof. In early 1922, Dr Scheiding launched into an impassioned defence of democratic government, dismissing growing criticisms of parliament and calls from right-wing nationalist circles for a more plebiscitary or authoritarian system. He insisted that, because Germany had a “population of 60 million people”, the only way to govern it was through “the creation of parties”, and he further insisted that leaders could “rule against the will of the people” if their “conscience” demanded it, for “democracy” was more about “responsibility and duty” than “freedom”. Inherent in these words, then, was a bitter recognition that the “masses” had deserted the parties of the “rational middle way” and flocked to the extremes⁷.

The DDP also continued to be dismissive of the idea that the German Army had been “stabbed in the back” by civilian revolutionaries. “Why do we always have to hear the stab in the back legend, even though all books on the war are illuminating on this point?” lamented Scheiding in his report on a Democratic congress held in Nuremberg⁸, while at a meeting in October 1921, Herr Weiss, a school inspector, argued that the Revolution was “above all due to the fact that the German people had lost trust in the (imperial) government”, and he dismissed as a “legend” the claim that “the people stabbed the army in the back”. Similarly, he maintained, those who had signed the Versailles Treaty were not “November Criminals” but “honourable men who had believed that accepting the Allied settlement would allow

⁷ “Hof, 13. Februar 1922 (Hauptversammlung der DDP Hof)” in “DDP”.

⁸ “DDP Hof (Monatsversammlung)” in “DDP”.

Germany to save Upper Silesia”⁹ and, for Otto Ernst, speaking in Hof in April 1921, the war had been caused in the first place not simply by Allied jealousy or lust for revenge, but also by the Reich’s own misguided politics with respect to Russia and Britain, which had alienated these countries and helped unleash the conflict¹⁰.

As we saw in the last chapter, however, the market for such a conception of politics in Hof was receding markedly due to the combined experiences of the *Räterepublik*, the Versailles Treaty and the Kapp Putsch. Further evidence was provided by the growing success of the Bavarian Middle Party which, over the autumn and winter of 1920/21, built on its strong showing at the elections to assume the mantle of political leadership among the town’s middle classes. It was only in September 1920, three months after it had claimed 13% of the DDP’s vote in Hof and swept the board in the town’s environs, that the BMP first opened a local chapter of the party in the *Saalestadt*. Its inaugural meeting was held on 9th October, where a burgeoning membership was addressed by Dr Höhna, the local chairman, and the Bayreuth jurist Herr Meyer, who declared the party to be “the representative of the national idea” which “alone contained the strength for German resurgence”, and he called for the implementation of the “völkisch idea”, which would see Germany “cleansed of the rash of foreign elements”.¹¹ Thereafter, it was evident that the BMP’s meetings were the best attended of

⁹ “Hof, 29. Oktober 1921” in “DDP”.

¹⁰ “Hof, 13. April 1921” in “DDP”.

¹¹ “Hof, 9. Oktober” in “Bayerische Mittelpartei Hof, 1918-1924”.

any middle class party in Hof; on 16th March, it filled the Vereinshalle much as the Democrats had during the German Revolution¹² and, two months later, at the party's first yearly review in May, Höhna was able to announce with some satisfaction that local membership had increased from 25 to 300 people in the space of six months¹³. By the following year, this figure had expanded to over 1000 members; a "wonderful sign of the spread of the Völkisch idea in Hof"¹⁴.

The meetings of the increasingly popular BMP, however, were not the only spaces in Hof where a nationalist worldview was articulated. Just as the town's political party scene had altered in the wake of the Kapp Putsch and the June 1920 elections, so there were changes at the *Hofer Anzeiger* which indicated the growing consolidation of a nationalist consensus in the town. In July 1920, Otto Ernst, co-editor and fervent campaigner for the local DDP, left the newspaper. It is unclear if he did so of his own volition, or if the newspaper's owners were consciously looking for a change in direction in response to what had happened in Hof¹⁵. Either way, in September 1920 – the very same month when the Bavarian Middle Party opened its regional branch in Hof – Ernst was officially replaced by Karl Röder, who assumed responsibility for writing the editorials and determining the newspaper's political content.

¹² On this occasion, its ranks were swelled by the presence of the anti-Semitic German-Völkisch Protection and Defence League which had been forced to abandon a nearby meeting due to disruption by the Independent Socialists. See "Bayern, Deutschland und unsere Feinde" in "BMP".

¹³ "Von der Hauptversammlung der Bayerischen Mittelpartei, Ortsgruppe Hof" in "BMP".

¹⁴ "Hof, 24. Mai 1922. Die Jahreshauptversammlung der Ortsgruppe Hof der Bayerischen Mittelpartei" in "BMP".

¹⁵ Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 151.

Röder had a very different view of the world to his predecessor and, from the end of 1920, both he and Franz Büchl effectively turned the *Hofer Anzeiger* into an organ of anti-Republican dissent. Editorial articles now reflected the hyper-nationalist tone evident at meetings of the Bavarian Middle Party rather than the left-liberal conception of politics advanced by the German Democrats. Indeed, in stark contrast to the card-carrying Democrat Otto Ernst, Röder had few kind words for the DDP, whose ideas increasingly “did not always find understanding and, yes, even met with rejection” from the German Bürgertum. They had consistently failed, he maintained, “to provide a self-confident, practical opposition” to the “internationalist tendencies of Social Democracy”¹⁶ and he further accused them of “standing closer to the Social Democrats than to the other bürgerliche parties”¹⁷, while Franz Büchl also attacked the DDP for their “pacifist, bürgerliche-internationalist plans”¹⁸.

Indeed, Röder’s fury over the DDP’s favouring of the left acquired a new intensity at the end of 1922, when the Majority and Independent Socialists once again merged into a single party. During the German Revolution, he fumed, the Democrats had “preferred to work with the Social Democrats rather than create a united Bürgertum – ‘what would the German worker say?’ asked these worried idealistic politicians, and they meant the Social Democrats”, a party which “had now joined together” with “those who claim to have no Fatherland” in the USPD. Röder expressed the hope that the merger

¹⁶ “Die Mainlinie in der Demokratie” in “HA”, no. 296, 16.12.1920.

¹⁷ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 219, 17.9.1921.

¹⁸ “Die Einigung des Bürgertums auf nationaler Grundlage ist das unverrückbare Ziel des Hofer Anzeiger“ in “HA”, no. 303, 24.12.1920.

of MSPD and USPD had “finally opened the eyes of the Bürgertum so they can see where the journey is headed” – that is, away from the DDP’s conception of “class reconciliation” within a democratic framework¹⁹.

In local meeting halls and on the pages of the newspaper, then, the mood in Hof was unambiguously shifting in a direction which, for the local DDP, could only be described as bleak. As summer turned to autumn, however, these changes were increasingly reflected on the streets of the town. One of the first prominent indications of this came at 10 o’clock in the morning on 1st November 1920, when the Military Union of the Town of Hof gathered in front of the Warriors’ Memorial in the Wittelsbacher Park “to commemorate the fallen of 1870/71 in loyalty and gratitude”. This meeting was attended by almost a dozen local military associations, including the Veterans’ and Warriors’ League, the Naval and Protection League, the Hofer Regional Group of the Officers’ League and the League of German War Participants²⁰. These groups had been active prior to the end of 1920, but never before had they gathered so purposefully for such a public appearance, nor had they engaged in a ceremony that was so rich in nationalist and military symbolism, as they used their massed banners to create an enclosed space around the war memorial, sang patriotic and military songs and heard speeches by their leaders which were rife with anti-Republican intimations²¹.

¹⁹ “Reinliche Scheidung” in “HA”, no. 167, 18.7.1922.

²⁰ “Den Toten unserer Stadt” in “Verbände”.

²¹ Rabenstein shows how limited the appeal of these military associations was prior to the Kapp Putsch in Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, pp. 102–104.

Indeed, the prominence of the military associations only grew over the course of the following year, providing yet another space in which hyper-nationalist, anti-Republican sentiments could be and increasingly were expressed. But the events which held the widest appeal for the Hofer Bürgertum were the so-called “War Hero Evenings” which took place in the town from 1920 on. These were organised by a variety of different groups, including the Bavarian Middle Party and some of the military associations, and they all followed the same format: a high-ranking military luminary was invited to Hof to wow the audience with an account of their swashbuckling experiences between 1914 and 1918. In the course of doing so, however, they not only glamourized military conflict and tacitly celebrated military values; they also frequently expressed political opinions which were invariably anti-Republican in colour (though some speakers were more explicit in this respect than others).



Figure 5-1. Advertisement for a speech by General von Lettow-Vorbeck, 1921

The first of these “War Hero Evenings” took place on 13th January 1921, when the Hofer Group of the German Marine Club, in co-operation with the Hofer Association of Former Marine and Protection Troops, invited General von Lettow-Vorbeck to speak in the Vereinshalle. Lettow-Vorbeck had been the commander of the German colony of East Africa which had held out against Allied colonial forces for the duration of the war, and his speech was an enormous success; it attracted “well over 1000 people” and, according to the report, others had to be turned away at the door²².

It was precisely the popularity of this event which encouraged other military and veterans’ groups, as well as the BMP, to organise similar evenings, at least seven of which took place over the course of 1921 and 1922. They included evenings with Alfred Meyer-Waldeck, the governor of Germany’s Chinese colonies during the war, who spoke at the behest of the German Marine Club; Captain Lieutenant Gunther Plüschow, the only airman present at the siege of the German colony of Tsingtau, who had been invited by the Association of Former Marine and Protection Troops; Captain-Lieutenant Mücke, a German seaman of the First World War whose talk was organised by the Bavarian Middle Party; Graf Luckner, the commandant of a German Battleship, who spoke at the invitation of the Marine Club and the Marine and Protection Troops; two evenings with Admiral Scheer, “the victor of Jutland”, whose first talk proved so popular that he returned to Hof six months later to deliver another; Admiral Graf Spree, who had engaged several British

²² “General von Lettow-Vorbeck über den Krieg in Ostafrika” in “Verbände”.

Dreadnoughts in November 1914; and General Graf von der Goltz, the leader of “the famous Baltic Sea Division” that had fought the Bolsheviks in Eastern Europe at the end of the war and who had been invited to speak by the Bavarian Middle Party.

The “war heroes’ evenings” were enormously successful, but there were other less spectacular but equally telling indications that Hof’s Bürgertum was beginning to buy into an aggressively formulated nationalist consensus. One of these was the increasingly outspoken nature of the local Protestant Parish Newsletter. As we saw in previous chapters, this ostensibly “apolitical” organ had long been used by its publishers, especially Pastor Christian Dietrich, as a vehicle for expressing political views and particularly for denouncing Russian Bolshevism. After June 1920, however, it became more expressly political and noticeably more outspoken, with Dietrich frequently taking the opportunity to polemicize against the Republic, the state of the nation and – his favourite topic – Russian Bolshevism.

Indeed, as Dietrich’s growing candour indicates, the evolution of a nationalist consensus in Hof was not always accompanied by changes of personnel within institutions: it could actually occur in the outlooks of particular individuals who shifted their positions or changed their behaviour. The most striking example of this was the local poet and schoolteacher Dr Eduard Herold, who increasingly seemed to embody the ideological shift that had occurred within Hof’s middle class milieu. In 1918, Herold had described

democracy as the “system of unlimited possibilities”, the League of Nations as “the most German thought ever thought”, and he had lauded Ebert and Scheidemann as socialist patriots who could help build a new Germany²³. Now, this same man became a fixture at meetings of the military associations, where he denounced “the unholy shackles of Marxism” and called for a “national rebirth” that could never be accomplished under the auspices of a parliamentary system²⁴.

Wherever one looks in *bürgerliche Hof* in the autumn and winter of 1920/21, then, there are unmistakable signs of a profound shift in the political mood. This process was not, of course, unique to the *Saaletadt*; in the years after the November Revolution, local middle class milieus across the Reich formed into increasingly mobilised and aggressive “national camps” which differentiated themselves from local Socialists and called for the substitution of parliamentary democracy with a more authoritarian system²⁵. Though the beginnings of this transformation in Hof are perceptible in the aftermath of the *Räterepublik* and the publication of the Versailles Treaty, however, it was only in the last six months of 1920, due to the shock of the Kapp Putsch and its aftermath, that this process really gathered pace and the discourse of the local *Bürgertum* became increasingly nationalistic, more aggressively anti-socialist and anti-democratic in tone. In future, the overall mood in the

²³ See Herold, *Ein Jahr*, pp. 4, 5, 9 and 36.

²⁴ “Im Schützenhaus” in “Verbände”.

²⁵ One local study of the Lower Saxon town of Celle has gone so far as to argue that it was the German Revolution which actually transformed the diffuse and disunited local *Bürgertum* into a “conservative milieu” which spoke with a coherent voice. See Bösch, *Das konservative Milieu*, p. 35.

Saalestadt would no longer be determined by men such as Ernst, Schrepfer and Scheiding but by Röder, Höhna, Herold, Dietrich and Strathmann, none of whom spoke in terms of parliamentary democracy, international reconciliation or “building a bridge” to the moderate left. But what language did they speak?

5.2 The Ideology of Hof’s “National Camp”

The following section offers a detailed analysis of the nationalist ideology that came to permeate the political culture of the Hofer Bürgertum from mid-1920 onwards. It is further divided into nine subsections, each of which deals with a different ideological trope. The argument which runs throughout all nine of these subsections is that a conception of the nation – of “Germany” – as a sacred entity lay at the very centre of the worldview propagated by Hofer nationalists. Every single ideological trope examined here – the denunciation of the November Revolution, the importance of military values, the hatred of Marxism – was ultimately anchored in this vision of the nation as something holy. “The Fatherland” was to be exalted and protected at all costs; anything damaging to it had to be combated and, if possible, extirpated. This glorification of the nation lay behind almost every aspect of the worldview promulgated on the pages of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, at meetings of the Bavarian Middle Party, and in all those other organs and forums which contributed to the evolution of a nationalist consensus in the *Saalestadt*, and we can only

understand the position taken by Hof's nationalists on any of these questions if we also understand the intensity of their veneration of the nation.

The Sacred Nation in Danger

In late 1922, Dr Dobmeyer, a prominent member of the local Bavarian Middle Party, gave a speech in Cafe Luitpold before "a very large audience" which was intended to provide an introduction and overview to the ideology of the German Nationalists. Dobmeyer first posited a fundamental difference between the "liberal-democratic" worldview on the one hand and the "conservative" worldview on the other. The former, he argued, was a "child of the Enlightenment, without history, full of phrases and slogans", a misguided ideology which placed its emphasis on "rights and demands, insisting on the happiness of the individual, the happiness of the masses above the entirety of the state"²⁶. The conservative conception of politics, by contrast, stressed "the happiness of the people, which is an inseparable, perfectly unified whole", a "romantic" conception of politics which was "anchored in the past of the people" and emphasised "duty and self-sacrifice". And this paradise in which "the people" were treated as an "inseparable, perfectly unified whole" rather than a mass of atomised individuals could not be brought about by a "system" but only by "men of honour, chivalry, internal nobility, self-denial and duty",

²⁶ This rejection of the Enlightenment, and the "mechanising, individualistic" impulses it had injected into the course of history, was central to the ideology of the post-1918 "New Nationalism". See Hans Mommsen, "Das Trugbild der 'nationalen Revolution'. Betrachtungen zur nationalistischen Gegenkultur in der Weimarer Republik", in *Völkische Bewegung*, ed. by Walter Schmitz and Clemens Vollnhals, pp. 21–33.

such as “Bismarck, the most realistic statesman” in German history²⁷.

This mystical vision of “the nation” and “the people” as a unified entity, a single living, breathing organism, lay at the centre of the radical nationalist worldview that came to permeate Hof’s bürgerliche milieu after the summer of 1920²⁸. It was a vision that starkly contrasted with the message still being promulgated by the Hofer Democrats who, as we saw above, still maintained that a “population of 60 million people” was inherently internally differentiated and could only be managed through the formation of political parties²⁹.

For Hof’s increasingly prominent nationalists, however, this failure to see the German Volk as something inherently unified was not only misguided; it was dangerous, because Germany was a land “at the heart of Europe, surrounded by enemies”, as Dr Höhna put it at a meeting of the BMP in January 1921. If the German Reich wanted to survive and thrive in this precarious environment, its people *had* to be internally unified, to act, as Höhna put it, with “commonality of purpose”. In his speech, Höhna provided a potted history of the 19th century, suggesting that, at every turn, where the German people had shown unity (such as in 1870), they had prospered, but where they had shown disunity (such as in 1848) they had failed and been exploited

²⁷ “Politische Einführungskurse der Bayer. Mittelpartei Hof.” in “BMP”.

²⁸ As Moritz Föllmer has pointed out, this demand for “inner unity” and “national solidarity” was widespread in inter-war Germany, especially on the nationalist right. But it was a concept riven with tensions and ambiguities which could, in fact, produce more conflict than harmony. See Moritz Föllmer, “The Problem of National Solidarity in Interwar Germany”, *German History*, 23.2 (2005), 202–31.

²⁹ “Hof, 13. Februar 1922 (Hauptversammlung der DDP Hof)” in “DDP”.

by predatory foreigners³⁰. For Dr Hans Keller, another regional speaker of the German Nationalists, what mattered was not “what’s yours or mine, goods or money” but “the entire spiritual existence of the Volk”, for “the entire history of the last 100 years” had shown the importance of “the national will” and “Bismarck’s principle of national unity”³¹. For Pastor Dietrich, writing in the Protestant Newsletter, the “unity of the population in the occupied territories”, where “no distinction is made between royalists, socialists, Catholics, Protestants, workers and employers”, was something for “all Germans to take inspiration from” and the Reich’s only chance for redemption, given its hugely precarious geographical position³².

The sacred nation could only survive and thrive if it were internally unified, then, and this vision of inner unity actually drew on a concrete historical precedent: the First World War³³. Indeed, nowhere was the theme of inner unity more forcefully expressed than at the “War Hero Evenings” organised in Hof over the course of 1921 and 1922. Without exception, every one of the military luminaries invited to speak in the *Saalestadt* concluded their speeches by drawing the same “lesson” from the experience of the war – that German unity had prevailed during the conflict, had allowed the Reich to fight

³⁰ “Deutsche Geschichte seit 1848 und Gegenwartsnot” in “BMP”.

³¹ “Reichsgründungsfeier” in “BMP”.

³² “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt Für Den Dekanatsbezirk Hof (Hof Und Umgebung)”, no. 10, 8.5.1921.

³³ As several studies have shown, it was especially the “August Experience” - a state of putative “internal unity” that had perceivably embraced all Germans at the beginning of the First World War - which served as the basis and inspiration for the vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft* propagated by the nationalist right during the Weimar Republic. See Steffen Bruendel, *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat: die ‘Ideen von 1914’ und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), chap. 2; Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, chap. 1.

so tenaciously “against a world of enemies”, and was now the only thing that could lift the nation out of its malaise. It was “unity and persistence”, Lettow-Vorbeck insisted, that had allowed German troops in East Africa to triumph against an enemy with more colonial experience, more troops and better guns, while Meyer-Waldeck declared that “in Tsingtau there were no parties, only Germans”, and that “if everyone stands together unified in true work and fulfilment of duty, then Germany too will rise again!”³⁴ “We must all be one, regardless of party and community belonging”, insisted Graf Luckner at his talk in November 1921, for only “German spirit and German unity, German courage and German work” could save the Reich³⁵. “The navy had been united against the enemy at all times”, Admiral Scheer reflected at the end of his speech, “it should be the same now. Only through unity and the gathering of all strength can Germany rise again!”³⁶

The Rejection of Democracy and Need for a “Volksgemeinschaft”

What kind of state form might most effectively deliver this longed for “internal unity”? In fact, as we shall see, there was initially some tension within Hof’s nationalist milieu about how to answer this question. There was, however, total agreement that parliamentary democracy was not up to the task, and it was for precisely this reason that Hof’s prominent nationalists so vehemently

³⁴ “Exzellenz Mayer-Waldeck” in “Verbände”.

³⁵ “6400km Kreuzerfahrt mit dem einzigen Segelkreuzer im Weltkrieg” in “Verbände”.

³⁶ “Admiral Scheer über: “Die Seekriegführung im Weltkriege”“ in “HA”, no. 96, 24.4.1922; “Ein nationaler Festabend” in “Verbände”.

rejected democracy and consistently demanded its replacement by a more authoritarian political structure³⁷. This opposition to democracy was frequently justified on the grounds that the Reich was threatened by external enemies, that democracy led to an internal splintering and division of the German people which paralysed the Reich at the very moment when it needed to be most purposeful if it were to meet the existential threat emanating from beyond its borders. At the protest meeting against Allied reparations demands in February 1921, Höhna lamented the German tendency to “lose itself in inner party fighting and thus forget the collective danger” of the Reich’s external enemies³⁸, while Pastor Dietrich, writing in the Protestant newsletter, denounced the “unlimited party struggle” of parliamentary democracy which had left the German people “torn apart and cleaved in the depths of its thought and feeling” and which largely explained why it was “enslaved, disenfranchised, abused and disgraced” by foreign enemies³⁹. Eduard Herold, who once lauded democracy as the system of “unrestricted possibility”, now lamented the fact that “all of our energy has been locked in passionate party struggles”, whereas “to be a Volk” meant “to preserve the

³⁷ No shortage of historians has examined this kind of “anti-parliamentary thinking” in the Weimar Republic, the widespread belief in the illusion of “a government without parties” that would represent “the unified will of the Volk”. This was one of the major themes in the classic study by Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*. But it has since been examined in Rainer Hering, “Parteien vergehen, aber das deutsche Volk muß weiterleben.’ Die Ideologie der Überparteilichkeit als wichtiges Element der politischen Kultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik”, in *Völkische Bewegung*, ed. by Walter Schmitz and Clemens Vollnhals, pp. 33–45; Thomas Mergel, *Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik: Politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag*, Beiträge zur Geschichte des Parlamentarismus und der politischen Parteien, Bd. 135 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2002), p. 399.

³⁸ “Gegen die Versklavung: Die Protestversammlung in Hof” in “HA”, no. 38, 14.2.1921.

³⁹ “Ein Kundgebung der Generalsynode” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 20, 26.9.1920.

unity of saying ‘no’ to Germany’s enemies⁴⁰.

But the most virulent critic of parliamentary democracy in bürgerliche Hof was Karl Röder, the new editor of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, who incessantly posited an opposition between “the will of the people” and the splintering effect of the party system, which gave rise to egoism and internal division. In April 1921, for example, he launched into a lengthy tirade against the “parliamentary miscarriage” that had been inflicted on but had “not really worked in Germany”⁴¹. The “German people”, he argued, “longs for a form of government more in keeping with its true character” rather than the contemptible “mimicry” of an imported, western-style parliamentarism⁴². Parliamentary government, Röder wrote scornfully during the two-year anniversary of the creation of the Weimar constitution, had produced “cattle trading among the parties” and a system that had not “gone into the blood of the people”⁴³. Democracy was something that “would not fit into the history of the German people”⁴⁴: a “repulsive”, “stupid comedy”, a “pigsty” in which “the parties” were “only interested in their responsibilities to their voters, not the Volk or history”⁴⁵, a system which had already “brought ruin to Germany”⁴⁶.

As mentioned, however, there was some disagreement among Hof’s nationalists about what kind of state they wanted to replace parliamentary

⁴⁰ “Zum 11. November” in “Dr. Eduard Herold (22.03.1885 - 15.11.1955)”, Stadtarchiv Hof, N-Nachlässe - N25.

⁴¹ “Parlamentarische Fehlgeburt” in “HA”, no. 85, 12.4.1921.

⁴² “Ein Seufzer der Erlösung” in “HA”, no. 169, 21.7.1921.

⁴³ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 189, 13.8.1921.

⁴⁴ “Ein Pyrrhussieg” in “HA”, no. 205, 1.9.1921.

⁴⁵ “Wirth, der Unsterbliche” in “HA”, no. 253, 27.10.1921.

⁴⁶ “Scylla und Charybdis” in “HA”, no. 277, 23.11.1922.

democracy. For the Bavarian Middle Party, at least, this question seemed to have a straightforward answer. “Yes, we are monarchists”, admitted one article contributed by the German Nationalists to the *Hofer Anzeiger* in November 1921, “because we want a government that stands above the parties, and no man who comes from the parties can do so”⁴⁷. Monarchist attitudes were also, at times, voiced by other prominent nationalists. In December 1920, Röder described a monarchy as a “secure basis and principle that could unite the people”⁴⁸, and when the former King of Bavaria Ludwig III died on 18th October, Franz Büchl’s portrayal of the late monarch in the *Hofer Anzeiger* bordered on hagiography. Büchl praised Ludwig’s “independence from political parties”, arguing that his usurpation in November 1918 had been “bitter and unfair”, and asking what, if anything, had “gotten better under the new regime, which was meant to give free play to free power, but has not done so?”⁴⁹

At other times, however, the *Hofer Anzeiger* was much less firm in its support for the principle of monarchy, which had been badly damaged by the perceived incompetence and megalomania of Wilhelm II. In April 1921, Röder conceded that “the times of monarchist activity (...) may well be over, so long as the politically thinking world has drawn the proper lessons from the results of the First World War as well as the time immediately previous to it”⁵⁰, and he also contributed several articles which offered a damning indictment of the

⁴⁷ “Wider die Deutschnationalen!” in “BMP”.

⁴⁸ “Die Mainlinie in der Demokratie” in “HA”, no. 296, 16.12.1920.

⁴⁹ “Der frühere König Ludwig III” in “HA”, no. 246, 19.10.1921.

⁵⁰ “Ansichtskarte aus Steinamanger” in “HA”, no. 79, 5.4.1921.

character and policies of the former Kaiser, who he accused of an “unfounded self-confidence”, a disagreeable “need for self-justification”⁵¹ and a “grandiose madness” which was evident “before the war”⁵².

The de-legitimation of the monarchical system in the aftermath of the war, then, initially presented Hof’s radical nationalists with a problem; what kind of political principle could they now endorse to replace it? They found their answer in the “Volk” itself⁵³; the aim now was the creation of a state form that could best embody this mystical conception of the nation, a non-parliamentary system which would bring “the will of the people” to expression and which would be directed by a “strong man”, the model for which was frequently Bismarck, “the personification of the German idea, the archetype of German will and German action”⁵⁴. And this vaguely articulated model of order which combined popular national unity with charismatic authoritarianism had a name; the *Volksgemeinschaft*, a “people’s community”. Indeed, Dr Dobmeyer had closed his speech on the “conservative worldview” with a call

⁵¹ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 231, 30.9.1922.

⁵² “Das Buch Wilhelms II.” in “HA”, no. 259, 2.11.1922.

⁵³ A number of historians have shown how German nationalism even before, but especially during and after, the war became increasingly focused on “the nation” and the “Volk” itself as an object of worship rather than the monarchy. See, for example, Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, pp. 11–82; George L Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, p. 89; Föllmer, *Die Verteidigung der Bürgerlichen Nation*, pp. 254–266.

⁵⁴ “Deutsche Geschichte seit 1848 und Gegenwartsnot” in “BMP”; “Zum 50. Jähr. Gedenktage der Gründung des Deutschen Reiches” in “HA”, no. 15, 18.1.1921; Several historians have analysed the important role played by Bismarck as the source of an “anti-democratic myth”, and the legitimacy symbol for anti-democratic politics, during the Weimar Republic. See Richard Evan Frankel, *Bismarck’s Shadow: The Cult of Leadership and the Transformation of the German Right, 1898-1945* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005); Wolfgang Hardtwig, “Der Bismarck-Mythos. Gestalt und Funktionen zwischen politischer Öffentlichkeit und Wissenschaft”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft*, 21 (2005), 61–90; Robert Gerwarth, *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

“not for the spirit of class war but for the *Volksgemeinschaft*”⁵⁵ and, Dr Strathmann later argued, “the *Volksgemeinschaft*” would bring “a sense of national, völkisch belonging to Germany”, a “unity so strong that none of the Entente’s violent measures will be able to break it”⁵⁶. Indeed, as Karl Röder wrote in July 1922, it was this “sense of collective emergency” which had led “many to speak of the necessity of a German *Volksgemeinschaft*”, adding that “we too hold this idea as the only saviour of Germany, an idea based on justice (and) resolution”.⁵⁷

The most salient aspect of this *Volksgemeinschaft* was that it, unlike parliamentary democracy, was not internally divided, not riven by differences of class, confession or gender, and so it could act with the commonality of purpose necessary for Germany’s survival. All sections of the population had to be integrated into this community, to be made to feel “national”; as Dr Strathmann put it at one BMP meeting in December 1920, “workers and employers must all feel themselves part of a great community”, a “productive working community that must grow into a *Volksgemeinschaft*”⁵⁸. Karl Röder, too, maintained that “the German Volk in all its layers, professions, jobs and classes” had to be “forged together into an iron ring which is stronger than the lies of our enemies”⁵⁹, and he called for the integration of a “united working class” into the “*Volksgemeinschaft*” so it could join together with the

⁵⁵ “Politische Einführungskurse der Bayer. Mittelpartei hof.” in “BMP”.

⁵⁶ “Was gebietet die Stunde?” in “BMP”.

⁵⁷ “Reinliche Scheidung” in “HA”, no. 167, 18.7.1922.

⁵⁸ “Schicksalsfragen der Reichspolitik” in “BMP”.

⁵⁹ “Für Wahrheit, Recht und Ehre” in “HA”, no. 263, 7.11.1922.

Bürgertum in order to “fight against the hyenas who surround Germany and are hungry for its blood” – a feat which could only be accomplished through the negation of “the parties”⁶⁰.

That this idea had spread to other sections of the community became clear when Pastor Nürnberger explicitly “rejected the materialistic worldview” and contrasted it with “the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*” at a meeting of the Protestant Women’s Help Campaign of Hof in October 1921. This principle, he argued, had to be “put against the idea of class hatred”, with “workers and employers, high and low” seen as “members of a living organism”, and he called for an “an esprit de corps: those below must honour those above, and those above those below.”⁶¹

It is certainly true that German nationalists were not alone in their calls for a “*Volksgemeinschaft*”; as several historians have shown, this concept was a fixture of political discourse across almost the entire political spectrum of the Weimar Republic⁶². The Democrats, too, spoke of a “*Volksgemeinschaft*” that would involve considerable “class reconciliation”. But there nonetheless remained differences in the way that different actors used and understood such terms; the DDP’s use of it, for example, frequently rested on a much

⁶⁰ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 250, 23.10.1920.

⁶¹ “Aus der Gemeinde” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 22, 23.10.1921.

⁶² See Thomas Mergel, “Führer, Volksgemeinschaft und Maschine. Politische Erwartungsstrukturen in der Weimarer Republik und dem Nationalsozialismus 1918-1936”, in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft*, 2005, 91–127; Wolfgang Hardtwig, ‘Volksgemeinschaft im Übergang. Von der Demokratie zum rassistischen Führerstaat.’, in *Gemeinschaftsdenken in Europa: Das Gesellschaftskonzept ‘Volkshheim’ im Vergleich 1900-1938*, ed. by Detlef Lehnert, Historische Demokratieforschung, Bd. 5 (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2013), pp. 227–53.

more differentiated conception of the character of German society than that evident on the far right⁶³. As we saw in the previous section, leading Hofer Democrats recognised that the “German people” was internally divided, and they advocated a political arrangement with the Majority Socialists, the nominal leaders of the German working classes. Hof’s nationalists, by contrast, posited the existence of a unified, undifferentiated, organic “will of the people”, with the political parties as barriers to the expression of that will. Also, significantly, the aim of class “reconciliation” as advocated by Hofer nationalists was not primarily about the desire to create a better society, but to form the kind of community that could better resist Germany’s enemies abroad. The sanctity and ascent of the nation, not social justice, was the priority.

The Internal Enemy: Marxism as a Threat to National Unity

The biggest danger to the creation of the longed for “national unity” was not, however, parliamentary government, but the “Marxist” left, an indiscriminate rejection of which was central to the nationalist ideology that gained a foothold among Hof’s Burghers.

⁶³ Marcus Llanque, “Der Weimarer Linkliberalismus und das Problem politischer Verbindlichkeit. Volksgemeinschaft, demokratische Nation und Staatsgesinnung bei Theodor Heuss, Hugo Preuss und Friedrich Meinecke”, in *Liberalismus im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Jörn Leonhard, Wissenschaftliche Reihe (Stiftung Bundespräsident-Theodor-Heuss-Haus), Band 12 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), pp. 157–83.

Significantly, whereas the Democrats had carefully differentiated between moderates and radicals on the left in an attempt to forge an alliance with the former against extremists, Hof's nationalists spoke of a common "Marxist" front which, whatever its internal nuances, collectively constituted the deadliest threat to the construction of a *Volksgemeinschaft*. Röder wrote of a "red mishmash" which extended "from the Majority Socialists to the Communists"⁶⁴, of "five socialist parties" who would all "betray their country in cold blood to foreign mass murderers and dreamers" if given the chance⁶⁵. In November 1921, he described "the red sea as a collective" and, though the MSPD had, in the past, shown itself able to "stand on solid ground" rather than succumb to "revolutionary raving", their talk was ultimately too "double tongued to trust unconditionally", and Röder felt sure that they would, at the right moment, "with pleasure give a fraternal kiss to the Communists". All that mattered, he argued, was the essential division between "national" and "Marxist" Germany rather than the internal complexities of these different camps. "On the one side is the determined emphasis on the national idea, the strong surge to create everything from within the Volk itself and lead it back to its great tasks, to trust in our own strength", he wrote. "On the other side is the international dream, which ignores hard and bitter facts and expects help from foreigners"⁶⁶. The battle, then, could never be fought in alliance with moderate Socialists, but only against them and all other manifestations of "Marxism" in Germany.

⁶⁴ "Ein verhängnisvoller Besuch" in "HA", no. 139, 15.6.1922.

⁶⁵ "Politische Wochenübersicht" in "HA", no. 250, 23.10.1920.

⁶⁶ "Weiß-Grün statt Rot" in "HA", no. 272, 18.11.1920.

Significantly, this baleful “Marxist” network did not end at Germany’s borders. At a meeting of the Bavarian Middle Party in 1921, Dr Strathmann first denounced “Marxist insanity”, and insisted that “our *Volksgemeinschaft* is undermined by Marxism” through its “triple appeal to internationalism, class war and materialism”. However, he then went on to draw a comparison between Bolshevism in Russia and German Social Democracy. “The class war of Social Democracy”, he argued, had “been subverting our country for 60 years”, but, “in Soviet Russia”, “Marxism” had “reached its goal of exterminating all the other classes”. Ultimately, “class war”, whether practised by the Bolsheviks or the SPD, meant “the enslavement, not the freedom of the proletariat”⁶⁷. In this speech, then, Strathmann not only depicted moderate Social Democracy as part of the same ideological family as Independent Social Democracy and Communism, but he also included Russian Bolshevism in this gargantuan, international “Marxist” front. This same equivalence was also drawn by Karl Röder, who contended in an October 1922 article that “Social Democracy has not entirely turned away from the Soviet Party, but still believes that a unification could someday lead to the dictatorship of the Proletariat”⁶⁸. The fact that the SPD took “under its protection people who wear the Soviet Star and want to introduce Bolshevik conditions here”, he argued, was proof that Social Democracy had its “roots in Marxism”, a base out of which “Bolshevism, the extermination of all

⁶⁷ “Schicksalsfragen der Reichspolitik” in “BMP”.

⁶⁸ “Die Moral der Sächsischen Geschichte” in “HA”, no. 257, 31.10.1922.

national culture” had also developed⁶⁹.

The careful recognition of nuance and differentiation on the left which had been in evidence during the German Revolution, then, was now replaced by an antipathy to all manifestations of “Marxism”, whether in Germany or in Russia. And, if German Social Democracy was different to Russian Bolshevism only by degree, then it had to be fiercely resisted, given what Lenin’s regime was doing in the territories it now controlled. As in 1919, the fear of Russian Bolshevism and the threat it posed to the sacred nation was particularly pungent on the pages of the Protestant Newsletter, which reported almost obsessively on events in the Soviet Union. “The secular rulers of Russia”, Pastor Dietrich wrote in 1922, were engaged in a “terroristic advance against church authority” which “has the sole purpose of slowly breaking the influence of the church on the life of the people”. Russia, this article concluded, was “in the middle of a persecution of Christians; we only have to think of the murder of so many priests”⁷⁰, and the newsletter also provided detailed statistics on the number of clergymen, professors, teachers, doctors, officers and policemen who had been sentenced to death by the Bolshevik Government, concluding that “world history knows no others who can be placed alongside the bloody hangmen of Russia, Lenin and Trotsky”⁷¹, the former being a “blood-soaked, violent madman” and quite possibly the

⁶⁹ “Hier oder dort!” in “HA”, no. 232, 2.10.1922.

⁷⁰ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 20, 24.9.1922.

⁷¹ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 6, 12.3.1922.

anti-Christ⁷².

Dietrich did not, as yet, explicitly link developments in Russia with revolutionary events in Germany, but the implication was clear from the fact that reports on the Social Democratic assault on religion in Germany frequently appeared side by side in the newsletter with the Bolshevik attack on the church in Russia. Most disconcertingly of all, however, was the fact that, in 1921, the Protestant Newsletter began to explicitly refer to “the Jewish dictators of Russia”⁷³, the “Jewish-Bolshevism” which was “increasingly showing itself” in the “territory where the empire of the anti-Christ is being created”⁷⁴. Thus the radical presentation of Soviet Russia as the site of “Jewish-Bolshevism”, a trope common in the ultra-nationalist circles of Völkisch Munich, was also being invoked by Protestant Pastors in Hof. In 1923, with the Völkisch movement on the rise in Hof itself, the Protestant Newsletter would also begin to depict Germany’s indigenous “socialist” revolution as the work of the Jews.

Whereas the DDP’s Otto Ernst had written approvingly of Ebert and Scheidemann crushing the Russian-backed Spartacists⁷⁵, then, Hof’s nationalists presented the MSPD as but one link in a larger “Marxist” network which had brought mass death and ruin to Russia. The left’s capacity for violence in Germany and Russia, however, was only one reason for the

⁷² “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 1, 2.1.1921.

⁷³ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 4, 11.2.1921.

⁷⁴ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 20, 24.9.1922.

⁷⁵ “Im Kampf um die Macht” in “HA”, no. 16, 18.1.1919.

virulent anti-Marxism of Hof's prominent nationalists. In fact, the main charge levelled at "Marxists" was that they presented an egregious threat to the sacred nation because of their "anti-national" disposition. By stoking the fires of class warfare and turning "German against German", they undermined the attempted creation of a *Volksgemeinschaft* and thus brought all Germans closer to destruction due to the common external threat from west and east. "The issue of first importance", declared the Protestant-Nationalist Pastor Dr Traub at a BMP meeting in November 1922, was "whether England or France ruled in Europe", which made it unforgivable that, in Germany, "internal-political questions such as Trade Union politics and employee politics" were "decisive". Such questions would not determine the destiny of the nation, he argued; the only way Germany could ultimately prosper was by "freeing itself from its socialist rulers", otherwise it would become either "a kind of Ireland, existing on England's mercy, or a kind of Rhineland Union existing on France's mercy"⁷⁶. For Dr Strathmann, too, "the chasm that cuts across the German people" was the fault of "the Marxist teaching of class war and internationalism", which had "exhorted every worker in every factory in Germany" to hate the indigenous "'capitalist bourgeoisie' more than an imperialistic Englishman or Frenchman", and it was a "question of destiny for the German people" that the workers "free themselves from this Marxist insanity" and return to the bosom of the nation so that the Reich might be

⁷⁶ "Dr. Traub..." in "BMP"; Traub was a Protestant-Nationalist Pastor who represented the more conservative, less völkisch wing of the DNVP. See George L Mosse, *Die völkische Revolution. Über die geistigen Wurzeln des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Verlag Anton Hain, 1979), pp. 258–260.

better able to resist its many enemies⁷⁷.

For Karl Röder, the hugely deleterious role performed by the Social Democrats in undermining national unity and thereby rendering Germany incapable of presenting a united front to the predatory outside world owed primarily to the misguided faith of “internationalism”. This was an “irrational striving” endemic to “the entire left-wing thought world” to construct “a superficial international fraternity” that had “left the Fatherland, which is threatened by outside enemies, on a shaky footing”⁷⁸. Röder also liked to compare the naively, self-destructively internationalist bent of German socialism with the redoubtably nationalist mentality of the workers of other countries; on 20th March 1920, he observed that the British socialists had accepted “without debate” a motion to approve further Allied occupations of Germany. “Despite this fact, our Social Democratic speakers have nothing better to do than to attribute full guilt to Germany”, he added, “without noticing the rejection of the idea of internationalist proletarian solidarity especially among the English working classes”, a position he described as “conscienceless”⁷⁹. Germany, then, the country which had most need of internal unity by dint of its precarious geographical location, was precisely the country which lacked it because of its peculiarly naive, peculiarly fanatical “Marxist” movement.

Hof’s nationalists were at pains to point out that this poisonous

⁷⁷ “Was gebietet die Stunde?” in “BMP”.

⁷⁸ “Des deutschen Volkes Weihnacht!” in “HA”, no. 303, 24.12.1920.

⁷⁹ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 67, 19.3.1921.

internationalism was solely the preserve of the “Marxist” leaders of the working classes. The workers themselves, however, had been misled; they could still be shown the truth, won for the nation and integrated into the “*Volksgemeinschaft*”. “The war against Social Democracy”, a member of the Hofer BMP and local factory owner named Rudolf Kötter argued at a meeting in late 1922 in Café Luitpold, “is not against the workers, but against their leaders (...), whose goal is only to serve their own purposes and bring themselves to political power”. The Bavarian Middle Party, he added, “wants to place the workers’ movement on national ground and fights consciously against the leaders of the Social Democrats”. Ominously, Kötter further explained this distinction between “national” workers and “non-national” Social Democratic leaders by heavily implying that the latter were Jews. “Süssheim, Rosenfeld, Moses, Eisner!”, he declared. “Most of these people are not German”⁸⁰.

The November Revolution as the Source of National Decline

The creation of a “*Volksgemeinschaft*” that would both preserve the sacred nation and serve as its political expression, then, necessarily meant the destruction of both democracy and “Marxism”. And the moment at which these two pernicious phenomena had come to power – and thus the absolute antithesis of the happy future of national unity promised by the vision of the

⁸⁰ “Am 1. Dezember...” in “BMP”.

Volksgemeinschaft – could be precisely dated: November 1918. The German Revolution ultimately came to take on a central place in the nationalist ideology that came to permeate bürgerliche Hof: it was the core experience of national shame and disaster from which “the nation” had to be redeemed through the creation of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, and everything it symbolised had to be overturned. “A black day appears once again on the calendar”, Röder wrote on the fourth anniversary of the Revolution, “the memory of the day in November 1918 when Revolution and the armistice laid the ground for Germany’s unhappiness”⁸¹. On the same day the previous year, he had written that the Revolution was a source of “shame”, the work of “questionable politicians, radicals and egoists”, and he could find no reason to “celebrate a series of events that have brought nothing but unhappiness” to Germany, denouncing the “terrible red days” of November 1918, the “senseless destruction of a great heritage” through a “repulsive”, “deep political disgrace” that was “foreign to the customs of the German people”⁸².

The German Revolution, in fact, came to function as a kind of projection screen for the obsessions and frustrations of Hof’s nationalists, with particular institutions and individuals putting their own slant on their denunciation of it. Whereas Röder and the BMP decried it as the origin of the Reich’s “national disgrace” and decline, for the Protestant Newsletter it was the source of an

⁸¹ “Für Wahrheit, Recht und Ehre” in “HA”, no. 263, 7.11.1922.

⁸² “Deutscher ‘Feiertag’” in “HA”, no. 264, 9.11.1920.

egregious “moral decline” that had come to afflict the land⁸³. Indeed, this theme of widespread moral decline and collapse was a constant one on the pages of the newsletter, and it was invariably instrumentalised to inform an overall critique of the post-revolutionary status quo. This frequently took the shape of concern over a perceived decline in sexual morality. “Germany’s moral plight is enormous!”, Pastor Dietrich fumed in January 1921, before describing in depth the spread of venereal disease, brothels, prostitution and illegitimate birth. “We can say with certainty”, he concluded, “that our people is going forth into the abyss”.⁸⁴ A later edition of the newsletter denounced “filthy literature”: “We speak so much of Germany’s moral renewal”, it argued, but through such literature “we will renew nothing! We will only sink deeper into a slump”, and the article called on “writers, newspaper readers” and “all those who do not want the good morals of our people to be lost” to “fight against printed filth!”⁸⁵.

The fear that the 1918 Revolution had ushered in a breakdown in sexual morality was sometimes conflated with anxiety over growing criminality. One article in the Protestant newsletter invoked statistics released by the criminal commissar of Berlin which laid bare a horrifying increase in the crime rate, especially the number of sexual misdemeanours involving young girls. “And this at a time in which people have nothing better to do than ban religious

⁸³ As Richard Bessel has argued, this sense of “moral decline” was widespread in Germany after the First World War, and not just on the political right. See Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1993), chap. 8.

⁸⁴ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 1, 2.1.1921.

⁸⁵ “An Alle!” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 13, 19.6.1921.

education and to create as much of a break as possible between Christian ethics and lifestyles!”, the article lamented⁸⁶. Also of concern was the “dancing craze”, which “can be seen everywhere in an idiotic manner”⁸⁷, as well as the increased popularity of the cinema, “a terror that grows daily” and contributed to “the sinking morals of our people”, shoring up the “brutalisation and meanness” that was the chief legacy of the Revolution⁸⁸.

One of the driving forces of this breakdown of public morality, it was implied in the Parish newsletter, was the “great idiocy” of having given equality to the sexes – yet another legacy of the November Revolution. One article approvingly quoted the publisher and youth group leader Walter Serno⁸⁹, who argued that “the origins and history of ethics have a deep logic” and that it was “impossible to run against them and go unpunished”. “Is it not the lack of marriage of many healthy, strong Wandervögel and wonderful, motherly women due to the all-too-free relationship of our sexes?”, the article asked, arguing that “ongoing sexual incentives and constant egalitarianism loosen the tension which has to work on the healthy power of the sexes”. “If this is the case”, came the conclusion, then Germans had “taken a terrible responsibility” on themselves⁹⁰. That same month, the Protestant Internal Mission held its yearly festival in Hof, at which the Bavarian Pastor Rüdel

⁸⁶ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 18, 28.8.1921.

⁸⁷ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 2, 14.1.1922.

⁸⁸ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 16, 30.7.1922.

⁸⁹ Walter Serno was a publisher with close links to the Wandervogel Youth movement. See Winfried Mogge, *„Ihr Wandervögel in der Luft...“: Fundstücke zur Wanderung eines romantischen Bildes und zur Selbstinszenierung einer Jugendbewegung* (Königshausen u. Neumann, 2008), p. 108.

⁹⁰ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 19, 11.9.1921.

argued that “the family is the core cell of national strength, the plantation of ethics, the basis of the state, the protector of earthly goods and virtues”, adding that “the mother has to make the beginning”, for “the connection of the soulful mother with the housewife is the ideal and the guarantor of a happy family life”⁹¹. This markedly conservative conception of the role of women and gender relations was very far removed from the more emancipatory sentiments that had circulated freely in Hof during the German Revolution itself.

Just as Röder and the BMP instrumentalised their account of Germany’s international plight in the service of a far reaching critique of Social Democracy and “its” Revolution, so every decrying of a breakdown in public morality in the Protestant Newsletter was implicitly a rejection of the Revolution’s principle architects, the Social Democrats. Indeed, the breakdown of public morality was the result of a conscious assault on the part of Germany’s new “red” leaders on the institutions and values of the church. On the “Day of the Proletarian Youth” in Plauen, Dietrich wrote in May 1922, the socialist youth had burned “patriotic history books, religious writings of all kinds and church hymn books”⁹²; in Munich, the “Free Socialist Youth” had held a “Red Week” for the sole purpose of “filling people with hatred” against the church⁹³; and in “Socialist Thuringia” a “ban on the Protestant Hymn Book” had been “demanded” because “monarchist songs are in it”. “Such

⁹¹ “Von der Bezirkssynode” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 20, 25.9.1921.

⁹² “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 19, 10.9.1922.

⁹³ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 1, 2.1.1921.

songs don't belong in a time when one lives from profiteering and cheating", Dietrich fumed. "The Republic stands on very weak feet if it feels threatened by a few hymns"⁹⁴. Germany, then, had been "fractured" by the Revolution, with the "Christian churches" confronting a "storm of unbelief" and a "more uncertain future than at any time since the cross was first lifted on German soil"⁹⁵. Little wonder, then, that one speaker at a meeting in June 1921 of the German-Protestant Volksbund of Hof felt able to claim that the Revolution was "a sin against the God-given order"⁹⁶.

This entire state of affairs – from the breakdown of public morality to the disruption of gender relations – was thus largely to blame on a new spirit of secular "materialism" that was in turn a product of the Revolution. "Mammon" had "made the German people" capable "of all disgraceful actions", argued Dietrich in February 1921, and "materialism" was "the murderer", the "grave digger" of the nation, which had "sunk so deep that there is no comparison in our history"⁹⁷. And as he fulminated the following year, the aim of "materialism" was "to get rid of god so it doesn't have to fear him" in its pursuit of "the desirous and perverted life"⁹⁸.

⁹⁴ "Aus Kirche und Welt" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 20, 24.9.1922.

⁹⁵ "Eine Kundgebung der Generalsynode" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 20, 26.9.1920.

⁹⁶ "Aus der Gemeinde" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 13, 19.6.1921.

⁹⁷ "Landes-Buss-u. Bettag" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 4, 13.2.1921.

⁹⁸ "Atheismus" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 18, 27.8.1922.

The Need for Renewal from the Revolution

All of the factors discussed here – moral decline, materialism, national disgrace – were conflated in the nationalist ideology of bürgerliche Hof as baleful products of the 1918 Revolution which, combined, represented a weakening of the sacred nation at a time when it had to be strong. The solution advanced was a familiar one: “the realisation of the great idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*”, as Pastor Nürnberger argued at a meeting of the regional synod in September 1921, which could only occur through a vaguely defined process of “internal renewal”⁹⁹. In this way, the Revolution and the *Volksgemeinschaft* served as opposed poles in a manichean schema in which everything negative was linked to the former and everything positive to the latter.

This need for renewal through a *Volksgemeinschaft* to counteract the corrosive effects of the Revolution frequently took the form of a narrative of decline and “rebirth”, of death and resurrection, which ran throughout the discourse of the national camp like a red thread. Every January, for example, the Hofer BMP staged one of the best attended events in the bürgerliche calendar: a celebration evening for German Unification, which was invariably “full to the last place” and for which all of the town’s middle class luminaries turned out¹⁰⁰. The speeches given in both 1921 and 1922 presented

⁹⁹ “Von der Bezirkssynode” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 20, 25.9.1921.

¹⁰⁰ The gathering held in 1921 included four schoolteachers, the local music academy, journalists from the Hofer Anzeiger and the local poet Eduard Herold. See “Reichsgründungsfeier” in “BMP”.

remarkably similar accounts of the rise, fall and inevitable rise again of the German nation. In January 1921, Höhna described German Unification as “the realisation of everything the best of Germans had longed for”, of “one Reich, one Volk, one law and one Kaiser”, the beginning of an “unexampled ascendancy of our Volk”, which was then contrasted with the present, “servitude of the worst kind”, the “signing of the lie that we alone were to blame for the war”, “disunity, worthlessness and fantastical raving” on the part of “the Marxists”¹⁰¹. One year later, in January 1922, it was Dr Strathmann’s turn to contextualise the plight of post-revolutionary Germany: he “led his audience through the heights of German history, when freedom, honour, justice and power streamed through the German Reich in the time of Heinrich VI, Frederick the Great and Bismarck”, but he also invoked “the abysses of German history, when our people had lost freedom, honour, justice and power” – namely, “the time after the Thirty Year’s War, after the Congress of Vienna, and the terrible situation we now find ourselves in”¹⁰².

On both occasions, however, both Strathmann and Höhna quickly followed their doom-laden accounts with the promise of renewal: the former was convinced that “the belief in a better future” would “lead Germany out of the abyss” and that Germans could “take solace in history” when their “fathers did not despair”, while the latter, too, insisted that, despite the disastrous state in which Germany found itself, “unity, nationalism, a clear view and upright will” would enable the Reich to “lift the thousand year imperial crown out of the

¹⁰¹ “Reichsgründungsfeier” in “BMP”.

¹⁰² “Der Tag der Gründung des Deutschen Reiches” in “BMP”.

Rhine” into which it had sunk after the end of the war.

This vision of “national rebirth” that would redeem the sacred nation from the shame and disgrace of the Revolution was often articulated in explicitly religious language, the most evocative opportunity for which was provided by Easter. In his Good Friday address in March 1921, Karl Röder drew a vivid comparison between Christ’s suffering and resurrection with the predicament of the German people, which was “caught in a terrible Good Friday”, “tortured”, benighted by “brutal lies” and an “imperialistic gutter politics”, with the Entente in the role of the Pharisees nailing the Reich to the cross. Despite this, however, and “though everything is ranged against us”, he insisted that “there is still strength in the German people”, a people “that has made such immortal values, that is fundamentally disposed to such a strong will and such nobility”. “Out of these times of German mourning and the German fight for existence”, he concluded, “a wonderful victory of the völkisch life will follow”¹⁰³. A few days later, the newspaper carried another article by a Protestant Pastor, Herr Rieper, which compared “the terrible destiny of the German people” with “Golgotha”. The Reich, he wrote, was surrounded by “two murderers”; in the west, an “imperialism” motivated purely by “economic interests” that “wants to reduce us to proletarians”, and in the east, the “mystical fanaticism and blind lust for destruction” of Bolshevism. In between was a benighted Germany, but the Reich, Rieper concluded, would soon

¹⁰³ “Deutschlands Karfreitag” in “HA”, no. 71, 24.3.1921.

“experience its resurrection” and bring forth “the saviour of the world”¹⁰⁴.

There are few other passages in which we can so clearly see the religious significance of the idea of the nation within the ideology that came to predominate among Hof's Bürgertum. The “nation” had effectively been sacralised, while the German Revolution came to symbolise all of those developments that threatened it and from which it had to be redeemed through the creation of a “*Volksgemeinschaft*”.

The “Stab-in-the-Back” Legend

The fact that Germany had lost the war was potentially highly problematic for the coherence of the narrative sketched out above. If the “war experience” (and especially August 1914) provided the concrete model for the future *Volksgemeinschaft*, then why had this “internally unified” nation been unable to avoid defeat? If German soldiers had been “incomparable heroes”, why had they lost? These tensions were resolved through the deployment of the “Stab-in-the-Back” legend, the idea that the German army, at the moment of ultimate victory in 1918, had been deliberately sabotaged by domestic revolutionaries¹⁰⁵. It was thus simultaneously an endorsement of the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and yet another reason to condemn its perceived

¹⁰⁴ “Deutschland's Ostersonntag” in “HA”, no. 72, 26.3.1921.

¹⁰⁵ As Boris Barth has shown, this narrative was developed at the very highest echelons – it gained traction within the army high command and found its way into the sermons of leading Protestant clerics. See Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration*.

antithesis, the Revolution.

As we saw in previous chapters, Hof's Democrats gave little credence to this narrative. But from summer 1920, it was deployed liberally by local nationalists. As Dr Dobmeyer put it in the Bürgergesellschaft in 1921, a "socialist revolution" which had been "prepared in advance" by "mutineers and elements foreign to the land" had delivered the "stab in the back" which occasioned the collapse of the German army¹⁰⁶, and a November 1921 proclamation from the German Nationalists emphasised this point even more aggressively by setting out a series of statements made by prominent leftists prior to the Revolution which proved their culpability¹⁰⁷. Nor was the use of the stab-in-the-back legend restricted to delegates of the Bavarian Middle Party. Dr Eduard Herold, too, was now beginning to openly explain Germany's defeat during the war in terms which resembled the "Stab-in-the-Back" narrative, declaring in a newspaper article in late 1920 that "the victory of the Allies in autumn 1918 was not the result of superiority in strength among the enemy peoples, but the consequence of a lack of resistance through internal circles of the powerless in Germany"¹⁰⁸.

One of the most flagrant articulations of the stab-in-the-back narrative came in November 1922, when the Bavarian Middle Party organised a speech by

¹⁰⁶ "Geschichte und Gegenwart" in "BMP".

¹⁰⁷ This proclamation quoted, among others, the Independent Socialist Emil Barth as saying "since 1917, we have been consciously working for the toppling of the authorities"; the Social Democratic newspaper editor Ströbel as saying "it would not be in the interests of Social Democracy if we won the war": and Walter Rathenau, "the light of the Democrats", commenting that "if we march as victors through the Brandenburg Gate, then world history has lost its meaning". See "Wider die Deutschnationalen!" in "BMP".

¹⁰⁸ "Deutsche Zukunft" in "Dr. Eduard Herold (22.03.1885 - 15.11.1955)".

General Graf von der Goltz, whose paramilitary unit had “supported Finland against the blood-crazed Bolsheviks” in early 1918. Von der Goltz’s fight, the advertisement in the *Hofer Anzeiger* suggested, had been “on four fronts: against the Bolsheviks, against the Soldiers Council in Libau which was influenced by German Radicals, against the anti-German, half-Bolshevist government of Latvia and against the Entente”¹⁰⁹. This, then, was a man who embodied the predicament of the “sacred nation” – fighting imperialists in the west and Bolsheviks in the east with one hand tied behind his back by traitorous revolutionaries within Germany. At the meeting itself, von der Goltz first described his battle against the Red Army, which “waged war against Germany with the dangerous weapon of propaganda for the World Revolution”, before launching into an impassioned denunciation of the German Revolution. This, he argued, had “endangered the discipline of the troops and the success of the German undertaking” in Finland because, if revolutionary measures “had been implemented by the German troops in Finland, it would have delivered the country to Bolshevism”. The implication was that only by rejecting the Revolution had von der Goltz been able to maintain the cohesion of his army and fight successfully. Indeed, he had later “gone on the attack” against the Bolsheviks, who had “threatened the East Prussian Border” in early 1919, achieving great military successes against them “until the signing of the disgraceful peace of Versailles and the betrayal

¹⁰⁹ “Graf von der Goltz” in “HA”, no. 261, 4.11.1922.

of the German troops by their own government”¹¹⁰.

The stab-in-the-back narrative thus served two key purposes within the nationalist ideology that increasingly structured the discourse of the Hofer *Bürgertum*: first, it preserved the credibility of the authoritarian, “internally unified” *Volksgemeinschaft* that had perceivably waged the war and, secondly, it constituted a critique of the Revolution and its offspring, the Republic.

German War Guilt

For very similar reasons, another key aspect of Germany’s recent history also came to be a matter of dispute from the end of 1920: the question of who was to blame for the outbreak of the First World War. For Hof’s revolutionary left, one of the chief legitimisations of the Revolution was that the old regime had caused the war and, as we saw in the second chapter, the Democrats also advanced this position for much the same reason. But it was hotly disputed by Hof’s increasingly influential nationalists.

Indeed, the charged nature of this issue became abundantly clear in November 1922, when the “Union for Truth, Justice and Honour” held a protest meeting against the Treaty of Versailles in Pfaff’s Colosseum which, according to the report, attracted almost 3000 people. The two keynote

¹¹⁰ "Graf von der Goltz" in "BMP".

speakers, Major Jahreis and the historian Adolf Kötter, laid bare “the deviousness of our enemies” in holding Germany responsible for the war, which in actual fact had been contrived through “the vengeful ideas of France, the Pan-Slavic lust for power of Russia and the egoism of England”. “We have been forced into the meanest lie in world history”, Kötter declared, “that Germany alone was guilty of the war, and the misery we have endured for years is the result of this devilment”¹¹¹.

The question of war guilt was also constantly invoked at meetings of the Bavarian Middle Party. In March 1921, Dr Strathmann declared in a speech in Bad Steben that the real causes of the war were “England’s jealousy of a strengthening economic competitor” and France’s “lust for revenge”, while the claim that “Germany alone was to blame” was merely a “lie” propagated by “hypocrites” both within and beyond Germany’s borders¹¹². Dr Höhna, similarly, argued at a large meeting in the Vereinshalle in 1921 that the Allies “had not been forced into war” in 1914 “in order to bring justice to the world”, but that their aim had always been “to enslave” Germany “for generations”¹¹³. General Gallwitz, too, argued in August 1921 that the basic cause of the war was the “desire of England” to destroy its competitor, Germany, by any means necessary, including “unacceptable methods” such as “deceptive propaganda and hunger blockades”. Germany, he insisted, bore no responsibility for 1914-18: “neither the German people, nor the Kaiser, nor the

¹¹¹ “Gegen die Kriegsschuldlüge” in “HA”, no. 268, 13.11.1922.

¹¹² “Was gebietet die Stunde?” in “BMP”.

¹¹³ “Bayern, Deutschland und unsere Feinde” in “BMP”.

so-called military party wanted war”, he argued, and accusations to the contrary were the product of enemy propaganda¹¹⁴.

Many of these themes were brought together in the celebration of German colonialism which frequently informed the “War Hero Evenings”, with the majority of those military luminaries invited to speak in Hof having been involved in the colonies before 1914. Germany’s thriving pre-war colonialism was, first, evidence of the vibrancy of the Reich before the Revolution; second, it was testament to the fruitfulness and power of “soldierly values”; and third, it explained the jealousy of the Allies and their determination to crush the Reich. For Lettow-Vorbeck, the acquisition of colonies in Africa had been necessary for acquiring resources, as a depository for the Reich’s excessive population and, unlike Britain, which viewed its colonies as “bases for its army”, the German mission in Africa had been purely economic and civilising¹¹⁵. Both Plüschow and Meyer-Waldeck, too, described pre-war Tsingtau in China as a “pearl of a colony”¹¹⁶ and a veritable paradise, a “blooming town with beautiful streets, buildings, a German school, a German-Chinese University attended by students from throughout China, a practical port”, a railway and coal mines.¹¹⁷ Scheer, too, was full of praise for the work of German colonialism and particularly admiring of Tirpitz’s achievement in creating a vast German navy¹¹⁸. And it was these very accomplishments that

¹¹⁴ “General von Gallwitz” in “Verbände”.

¹¹⁵ “General von Lettow-Vorbeck über den Krieg in Ostafrika” in “Verbände”.

¹¹⁶ “Gunther Plüschow, der Flieger von Tsingtau” in “Verbände”.

¹¹⁷ “Exzellenz Mayer-Waldeck” in “Verbände”.

¹¹⁸ “Ein nationaler Festabend” in “Verbände”.

had led to the war due to “England’s jealousy of our blooming trade and growing fleet”, a war “prepared long in advance by our enemies” and prosecuted using illegal means, such as a “hunger blockade” which was an “infringement of all people’s rights”.¹¹⁹

A number of critical themes were brought together in this question of German war guilt. Firstly, it was inadmissible to Hof’s nationalists that their sacred Fatherland had been guilty of waging aggressive war. Everything “good” resided in the nation, therefore everything “bad” had to be projected outward onto its enemies – a singularly Manichean schema. Furthermore, however, the question of German guilt was very clearly about the legitimacy of the November Revolution. If the pre-1918 German state had been responsible for the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, then its removal had perceivably been justified; but if it had not been responsible, then the Revolution itself was a transgression and a betrayal.

This became especially clear at a meeting in March 1921, when the German Nationalist Landtag Deputy Oberst Xylander travelled north from Munich to speak in Hof¹²⁰. Xylander’s entire speech consisted of a tirade against the “lie” that Germany was solely responsible for the war; he argued that England and France, the former disturbed by Germany’s growing economic might and the latter by a “crazed lust for revenge”, had “systematically prepared the war” by forming an “iron ring” around the Reich. These sentiments were loudly

¹¹⁹ “Admiral Scheer über: “Die Seekriegführung im Weltkriege”“ in “HA”, no. 96, 24.4.1922.

¹²⁰ Xylander was also a member of the aggressively anti-Semitic German-Völkisch Protection and Defence League. See Fenske, *Konservatismus und Rechtsradikalismus*, p. 72.

contested by the USPD's Leon Blumtritt, who stood up to argue that, in fact, Germany had indeed been guilty for the outbreak of the war and that the Entente's policies had been "understandable" given the Kaiserreich's aggressive foreign policy. Xylander replied that Blumtritt had spoken "like a Frenchmen" and that Clemenceau would immediately have given him a medal for such a speech¹²¹. Clearly, the bitterness of this exchange owed to the fact that both men were arguing as much about the legitimacy of the Revolution as about who was really to blame for the outbreak of the war¹²².

The External Enemy: France and the Versailles Treaty

A profound hatred of the French and outrage over the Treaty of Versailles were, of course, central to the nationalist narrative which gained ground in bürgerliche Hof after summer 1920. The former continued to be the prime antagonist and the chief bearer of a will to "exterminate" the German people. "Again and again", Röder wrote on 27th November 1920 after the first meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva, "we are forced to recognise that France is the irreconcilable hater whose fear of Germany hypnotises everybody else"¹²³, and he described the "will to extermination" to "the west of our fatherland" as "enormous": the French aim was not "the material corrosion of

¹²¹ "Bayern, Deutschland und unsere Feinde" in "BMP".

¹²² This conflict over the correct interpretation of the First World War was a key aspect of the political culture of the Weimar Republic. See Benjamin Ziemann and Christine Brocks, *Veteranen der Republik: Kriegserinnerung und demokratische Politik 1918 - 1933*, 1. Aufl (Bonn: Dietz, 2014), pp. 10–11.

¹²³ "Politische Wochenübersicht" in "HA", no. 280, 27.11.1920.

Germany” but rather the “systematic demoralisation of the German soul” and the “eternal relegation” of Germany to the status of a “pariah”¹²⁴.

The principle instrument of the French desire to destroy Germany was the Versailles Treaty, a document of “crystallised hatred” and “murderous lust for extermination”¹²⁵ which, Röder argued, constituted a “nullification of Germany’s right to exist”¹²⁶, and the aim of the Treaty was to break up the Reich and reduce it to the same “powerless conglomerate” of small states that it had been “100 years ago”¹²⁷. Dr Höhna echoed this sentiment but drew an even more horrifying historical parallel: the real aim of the Versailles Treaty, he argued, was to revert the Reich to “the place it was during the 30 Years War” – a desolate, war torn, disunited plaything for the ambitions of greater powers¹²⁸. So intense was the sense of anger in Hof over the Versailles Treaty that, in October 1920, a nationalist association named the Bavarian Border Guard was able to organise a well-attended evening of protest in Pfaff’s Colosseum¹²⁹. Eduard Herold remarked bitterly that “nothing is more misleading than the name ‘Versailles Peace Treaty’; it should be called the ‘Versailles Declaration of War’”¹³⁰, and for Pastor Dietrich, it was “an offense against all human and godly law”¹³¹.

Ostensibly, then, the principal threat to the sacred fatherland originated from

¹²⁴ “Entlarvte Betrüger” in “HA”, no. 161, 12.7.1921.

¹²⁵ “Will man hören in Brüssel?” in “HA”, no. 302, 23.12.1920.

¹²⁶ “Des deutschen Volkes Weihnacht!” in “HA”, no. 303, 24.12.1920.

¹²⁷ “Geschäft bleibt Geschäft” in “HA”, no. 157, 7.7.1921.

¹²⁸ “Hof, 9. Oktober 1920” in “BMP”.

¹²⁹ “Festabend der Bagreta” in “Verbände”.

¹³⁰ “Zum 11. November” in “Dr. Eduard Herold (22.03.1885 - 15.11.1955)”.

¹³¹ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 7, 27.3.1921.

across Germany's western border. Upon closer examination, however, this anger over France and the Versailles Treaty was not primarily directed at the victorious Allies. The consensus, in fact, was that a united Germany would be strong enough to deal with this threat. Once again, then, Hof's leading nationalists increasingly instrumentalised the hatred of France and Versailles to further advance their attack on the Republic and the Revolution. Given the Darwinistic and cut-throat nature of international relations, it was argued, the French and British were only behaving as any victorious power would. "The enemy is now right to demand that we fulfil (the Treaty) to the letter", declared Dr Höhna at a meeting in late 1921, "because we signed the lie"¹³². Thus the real responsibility for the Reich's suffering lay with those Germans who had signed it – perceivably, the very same people who had brought about the Revolution¹³³. In August 1921, the BMP invited General von Gallwitz, a wartime artilleryist and a German National delegate in the Reichstag, to speak in Hof, and he argued along exactly these lines, maintaining that, at the end of the war, Germany had "failed to understand the mentality of its enemies" and had shown terrible naiveté by surrendering on the basis that it would be given a "just peace". Principally to blame for this were not the Allies but "those parties" who had agreed to the terms of the armistice out of a "lack of political foresight". Even worse, Germany's leading figures were still "drawn from the same circles who got us into this mess" by agreeing to disarm, the same people who were "even now" inflicting further damage on Germany through

¹³² "Hof, 9. Oktober 1920" in "BMP".

¹³³ "Schicksalsfragen der Reichspolitik" in "BMP".

parliamentary misrule¹³⁴.

Military Values

The sacred nation, then, was surrounded by external enemies, and it was unable to adequately defend itself because of those elements – namely Marxism and parliamentarism – which had come to power during the German Revolution. For Hof's nationalists, however, there was another internal factor that was hugely damaging to the Fatherland's chances of survival in the cutthroat world of international relations: pacifism, the impulse among German revolutionaries to negate and undermine not only the army but military values in general. Such values were perceivably the only means of defending the Fatherland, and so destroying them brought the nation a step closer to extinction¹³⁵.

A very telling indication of this is that, for Hof's nationalists, it was not the decision to sign the Versailles Treaty that represented the critical moment at which Germany's fate was decided; by this point, it was already too late. The decisive mistake was the decision on the part of Germany's Revolutionaries to disarm in November 1918 in response to Allied armistice demands.

¹³⁴ "General von Gallwitz" in "Verbände".

¹³⁵ Such instinctively "militaristic" patterns of thinking were by no means restricted to the nationalist right: recent studies have pointed to, and analysed, a widespread culture of "bellicosity" during the Weimar Republic. See Rüdiger Bergien, *Die bellizistische Republik. Wehrkonsens und "Wehrhaftmachung" in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2012), esp. pp. 36, 37; Frank Reichherzer, *'Alles ist Front!': Wehrwissenschaften in Deutschland und die Bellifizierung der Gesellschaft vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis in den Kalten Krieg*, Krieg in der Geschichte, Bd. 68 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2012).

Everything that had happened after this – the Versailles Treaty, the London Ultimatum – were mere side effects of this one fateful decision to render the Reich “defenceless”. “Yes, the Military High Command urgently recommended the signing of an armistice”, Röder wrote in late 1922, “but the German people were disarmed through the makers of the revolution. Does anyone today deny that we would have been offered better conditions if we had not thrown away our good German sword?”¹³⁶. The “ability of a people to assert itself is guaranteed by the sword”, he later wrote, attacking the Social Democrats for “helping our enemies to their triumph” by enforcing German disarmament¹³⁷. The “red government”, he later added, “sold our honour along with our weapons” – it was they who had “cast us into this misery because, by raising false hopes, they stole our weapons from us and undermined patriotic feeling through the revolution.”¹³⁸

It was for precisely this reason that the ideology of “pacifism” was so vociferously resisted by Hofer Nationalists; like Marxism and Democracy, it had left the sacred nation vulnerable. In the *Hofer Anzeiger*, Röder constantly inveighed against the “pacifist dreaming” of German politicians who called for international reconciliation, “especially as ‘reconciliation and understanding’ means bowing and scraping to our enemies”¹³⁹, and the “pacifist ramblings” of the post-war period, he continued, had been little more than a “cheap

¹³⁶ “Für Wahrheit, Recht und Ehre” in “HA”, no. 263, 7.11.1922.

¹³⁷ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 153, 2.7.1921.

¹³⁸ “Der Lohn der Unterwürfigkeit” in “HA”, no. 19.7.1921.

¹³⁹ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 129, 4.6.1921.

fairground swindle”, disproved by the barbaric imperialism of the Allies¹⁴⁰. Even the Protestant Newsletter was now searching for a theological justification for a rejection of pacifism. Dietrich, writing in summer 1921, denounced “the pacifists who advocate the biblical viewpoint that a peaceful empire of Christ can only come to earth when no more war is waged”¹⁴¹; “since we accepted the peace (...) and disarmed ourselves”, he later wrote, it had become clear that “not all Christian duty is fulfilled in the words ‘Lay Down Your Arms’”.¹⁴²

Again, pacifism was so objectionable to Hof’s nationalists because it denied the brutal reality of international relations – a dramatic contrast to those ideas of “international reconciliation” that had been propagated by the Hofer Democrats even just days before the publication of the Versailles Treaty¹⁴³. Indeed, this clear switch in the perception of the nature of international power politics was most clearly reflected in the changed view of the League of Nations, which was now seen as a “Wilsonian bastard”¹⁴⁴, a “deception”, a “rabble”, a kind of joke that had no real purpose except as a platform for “French conceit”¹⁴⁵ and which served only to “hasten our demise”¹⁴⁶, according to Karl Röder. Indeed, it was above all the conduct of the League, which had served only to endorse and enforce the savage terms of the

¹⁴⁰ “Der Unwahrhaftigkeit ausgeliefert” in “HA”, no. 197, 23.8.1921.

¹⁴¹ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 12, 5.6.1921.

¹⁴² “Was hat die christliche Kirche im Laufe der Jahrhunderte geleistet?” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 16, 31.7.1921.

¹⁴³ “Zum Ersten Mal!” in “DDP”.

¹⁴⁴ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 226, 25.9.1920.

¹⁴⁵ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 298, 18.12.1920.

¹⁴⁶ “Der glücklichste Tag” in “HA”, no. 27, 1.2.1921.

Versailles Treaty, that had discredited the hopes of “pacifist dreamers” in Germany. “The blood that streamed during the world war and which was meant to result in an apotheosis of eternal peace”, Röder caustically remarked, had turned out to be “an untruthful idea”¹⁴⁷, and this “illustrious gathering”, this “garden of eternal happiness and eternal peace” was really “an amazing but ridiculous swindle”, an “object of exploitation” which served the agenda of, principally, France¹⁴⁸.

This militarism and anti-pacifism, however, was not purely about support for the army as an institution; it also extended to an endorsement of “soldierly” values more generally, with military imagery and terminology colouring the meetings and discourse of Hof’s nationalists. The flag consecrations and gatherings of the military associations were steeped in military values and symbolism; the *Hofer Anzeiger* exalted Germany’s Army as the “pride of the nation”; and the Protestant Newsletter inveighed against the fact that “the disparaging of the entire German armed forces” was “being implemented” by the Allies. “Instead of 800,000 men in peacetime we have 96,000”, lamented Dietrich, and “about 40,000 officers have been released and there are only 4000 left in the forces. We have no heavy artillery, no plans or blimps, national service has been abolished.” Germany was left entirely vulnerable, the noble values associated with its once-militarised culture egregiously

¹⁴⁷ “Schluss der Vorstellung!” in “HA”, no. 300, 21.12.1920.

¹⁴⁸ “Krach in Genf” in “HA”, no. 288, 7.12.1920.

undermined¹⁴⁹.

The Bavarian Middle Party, too, showed itself more than ready to exploit military symbolism and terminology. One of the centrepieces of the Hof branch's celebration of German Unification in January 1921 was an on-stage conversation between a veteran of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 and a veteran of the First World War, which was closely followed by the reading of a laudatory poem entitled "Our Dead"¹⁵⁰. The following year's festivities concluded with a play written by Eduard Herold and performed by local schoolchildren which dramatized several historic German military victories and depicted the "ideal victory of a strong German will"¹⁵¹. The German Nationalist speaker Oberst Xylander, too, called for Germans to "free ourselves from the spirit of pacifist internationalism", to "recognise Germandom and our Fatherland", and to help build a "battle-ready" nation¹⁵².

The enormously popular war heroes' evenings represented the pinnacle of this glorification of military values. Strikingly, not one of the military luminaries invited to speak in Hof actually fought on the Western or Eastern fronts during the war. They were all either naval men, fought in the German colonies or battled the Bolsheviks in post-war skirmishes in the Baltic; all of them had partaken in "glamorous" war experiences rather than the monotonous, mechanised slaughter of the Western front or the pitched battles in the east.

¹⁴⁹ "Aus Kirche und Welt" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 3, 30.1.1921.

¹⁵⁰ "Reichsgründungsfeier" in "BMP".

¹⁵¹ "Der Tag der Gründung des Deutschen Reiches" in "BMP".

¹⁵² "Bayern, Deutschland und unsere Feinde" in "BMP".

Lettow-Vorbeck gave a rousing account of the battles his small colonial army fought (and won) against the might of the British Empire¹⁵³, while Meyer-Waldeck described how his small force of 4,700 German troops held out against 56,000 Japanese during the siege of Tsingtau, which “brought great respect” for “German heroism” from the enemy and the Chinese¹⁵⁴. Plüschow’s account was particularly cinematic. He first described his exploits in China, his time in British and American captivity, and his dramatic escape aboard a Dutch steamer so that he might “continue to fight for his beloved Fatherland” which, according to the gushing reporter, bore testament to his “almost unheard of bravery”¹⁵⁵. Mücke’s account, too, had little in common with the mundanity and horror that was the lot of most soldiers who fought in the war. This “very archetype of the German officer”, who was “full of a sense of duty and responsibility, full of national pride” described an “adventurous journey” on board a ship in the Indian Ocean¹⁵⁶. Graf Luckner left his audience in a state of “breathless excitement” with his account of steering German cruisers through the British blockade, deceiving British search parties and eventually being captured, a period when he had “never felt so much like a German” and when “the German Reich” had “never lain so close to his heart”¹⁵⁷. Both of Admiral Scheer’s appearances in Hof were turned into veritable patriotic evenings: he described the World War as a “huge experience for all those who went through it”, before a sentimental poem

¹⁵³ “General von Lettow-Vorbeck über den Krieg in Ostafrika” in “Verbände”.

¹⁵⁴ “Exzellenz Mayer-Waldeck” in “Verbände”.

¹⁵⁵ “Gunther Plüschow, der Flieger von Tsingtau” in “Verbände”.

¹⁵⁶ “Die Kriegsfahrt des Landungszuges S.M.S “Emden”-“Ayesha”“ in “BMP”.

¹⁵⁷ “6400km Kreuzerfahrt mit dem einzigen Segelkreuzer im Weltkrieg” in “Verbände”.

entitled “Memories of the Fleet” was read and the Male Singing Choir of Hof took the stage to give a rendition of Johann Dürner’s “*Sturmbeschwörung*”¹⁵⁸.

The best Germans, then, were soldiers. Military values had allowed Germany to fight against overwhelming odds, and to preserve the sacred nation against the aggression of malignant enemies. War itself was something exciting, exotic and noble; as Meyer-Waldeck put it at the end of his speech in Hof, “future generations will one day say: ‘it sounded so beautiful, what our fathers did during the war’”¹⁵⁹. And after recounting their war experiences, the speakers invariably closed their speeches by attempting to draw “lessons” from their stories for Germany’s future. As we saw in the previous section, this invariably consisted of a call for “inner unity”, but this was frequently articulated in terms of a transfer of military values to the civilian and political realm, of organising Germany along military lines and according to military ideals. Von der Goltz concluded his speech with a call to “the old German front soldier spirit, the unity of all Germans, as the only means of taking up the fight against the outer enemy and freeing Germany from its chains of slavery”¹⁶⁰, while the *Hofer Anzeiger*’s advertisement for Graf Spree’s speech in November 1922 concluded with the observation that, “in this time of disgrace and humiliation, in which the outer enemy as well as the internationalist-thinking inner enemy forces us more and more into the abyss,

¹⁵⁸ “Admiral Scheer über: “Die Seekriegführung im Weltkriege”“ in “HA”, no. 96, 24.4.1922; “Ein nationaler Festabend” in “Verbände”.

¹⁵⁹ “Exzellenz Mayer-Waldeck” in “Verbände”.

¹⁶⁰ “Graf von der Goltz” in “BMP”.

it is good to always turn our view back to the time in which we were nationally minded and determined and, for this reason alone, could produce incomparable acts”¹⁶¹. Indeed, the stated aim of the Marine and Protection Troop Association, according to its chairman Dr Baffet, was to “keep alive” the memory of the “great time” before 1918 so that Germany might “rise again”. And it was for precisely this reason – to “keep alive” the “memory of great times” – that the League had invited “great men such as Lettow-Vorbeck, Plüschow, Graf Luckner and Mücke” to Hof¹⁶².

The “Cult of the Fallen Soldier”

One of the most powerful components of this celebration of military values, and one of the most emotionally effective ways of legitimising the vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, was to appropriate the memory of those who had died in the war. Indeed, from 1920 on, a veritable “cult of the fallen soldier” developed within Hof’s middle class milieu. In 1919, the pacifist schoolteacher August Horn had used the memory of Germany’s war dead to animate his vision of a future of peace and international reconciliation, but now Hof’s burgeoning military clubs used it for a very different purpose, and no meeting of theirs was complete without homage being paid to the Reich’s war dead¹⁶³.

¹⁶¹ “Die Seeschlacht von Coronel” in “HA”, no. 258, 1.11.1922.

¹⁶² “Ein nationaler Festabend” in “Verbände”.

¹⁶³ According to George Mosse, this “cult of the fallen soldier” was central to the “myth of the war experience” which permeated post-war German political culture. See George L. Mosse,

“What rang out from Sedan’s heights/What our youth sang in Flanders fields/Germany, Germany above everything/Above everything in the world” was the refrain which opened the 50th anniversary celebration of the Hofer Veterans’ Club on the 5th September 1921¹⁶⁴ and, the following year, local Veterans’ and Warriors’ Clubs dispersed to the small towns and villages around Hof to inaugurate a number of newly erected war memorials. These gatherings invariably followed the same course: a meeting in a local town hall or school, followed by a march in closed formation to the memorial, which would be blessed by a pastor, before speeches by members of the leagues which invariably contained “intimations” against the Republic¹⁶⁵.

The values associated with this “cult of the fallen soldier” may have been principally promulgated by the military leagues, but they increasingly began to seep into ostensibly non-military bürgerliche associations. A “Family Evening” held by the Gymnastics Club in 1922, for example, was infused with the language and imagery of the war dead. It began with a military-style “Victory and Peace” march and concluded with a speech by the local head teacher Dr Müller, who demanded “respect for the men who selflessly put themselves in the service of a patriotic task” and sacrificed themselves for Germany during the war¹⁶⁶.

But perhaps the most notable aspect of this “cult of the fallen soldier” was its

Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 70–107.

¹⁶⁴ “Die Fünfzigjahr-Feier des Veteranen- und Kriegervereins Hof” in “Verbände”.

¹⁶⁵ See, “Döbra, 27 November” and “Eisenbühl, 30. November” in “Verbände”.

¹⁶⁶ “Von unseren Turnvereinen” in “HA”, no. 285, 2.12.1922.

deployment in order to animate the narrative of “decline and rebirth” which, as we saw in a previous section, was central to the discourse of Nationalist Hof and which had a fundamentally anti-revolutionary thrust. “Although the work of our fallen seems to have succumbed to the storm of the time”, declared Dr Müller at the Veterans’ meeting in the Wittelsbach Park in November 1920, “the hope lives in all of us that the day will come when the German Reich will once again assert itself.” The goal of all the veterans’ leagues, he argued, “must be the re-strengthening of Germany, because we cannot allow that those who died” had “spilled their blood for nothing”¹⁶⁷. Müller then handed over to Pastor Heerdegen, who spoke “in moving words” about “the 1224 fallen and missed sons of Hof from the 1914/18 war”, calling on “the German Volk” to “stand by the graves of its dead heroes with deep sorrow”. “The hopes for which our men died have not been fulfilled”, he concluded, “but now they call to us to be unified and to overcome the misery of the time”, for, “if we want to rise again, we need faith”¹⁶⁸.

Yet again, then, this utilisation of Germany’s war dead to animate a narrative of national death and resurrection was fundamentally directed against the 1918 Revolution. It became endemic to the political culture of Hof’s middle classes. At the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Singing Association of Schauenstein in June 1921, for example, the village mayor, after recounting the “enthusiastic multitudes” who had left the club to answer the “call to war in 1914”, lamented the fact that their efforts had brought only “an oppressive

¹⁶⁷ “Den Toten unserer Stadt” in “Verbände”.

¹⁶⁸ “Den Toten unserer Stadt” in “Verbände”.

peace”, before concluding that “a land such as Germany” could “never be stifled, the strength of its people never destroyed; it will rise again and our children and children’s children will live in a happy homeland”¹⁶⁹. During his speech at one of the War Heroes’ Evenings in 1922, Admiral Scheer, too, drew on the cult of the fallen soldier – “the sacrificial courage of our many comrades who now sleep a hero’s sleep in the deep of the sea” – to legitimate this vision of “unity” and of “the belief and desire” for a reborn Germany¹⁷⁰.

The Reich’s war dead, then, were instrumentalised as part of a quasi-religious narrative of death and resurrection. They “called from beyond the grave” to demand “national unity” – which perceivably meant that they were opposed to the divisive Revolution and the Republic. And though the dead could not be brought back, Germany could be resurrected in their place; “the nation” would “rise again”, obviating the grief at their absence, as well as the insult done to their memory after 1918. What all of this constituted was the deployment of an emotionally powerful myth in order to sanction a particular vision for how German society could and should be ordered – a vision that took the experience of the war as its model the Revolution of November 1918 as its absolute antithesis.

¹⁶⁹ “75 Jährige Jubilaeumsfeier des Gesangvereins Schauenstein” in “HA”, no. 151, 30.6.1921.

¹⁷⁰ “Ein nationaler Festabend” in “Verbände”.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter had two primary aims. The first of these was to illustrate the growing prominence of radical nationalists in Hof at the institutional level in the months after the Kapp Putsch. The decline of the German Democratic Party continued apace, to the point where it was experiencing severe financial difficulties by the end of 1921, whereas the Bavarian Middle Party enjoyed a staggering growth in membership and consistently recorded impressive attendances at its meetings. Otto Ernst, the democratically minded editor of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, was replaced with the stridently nationalist Karl Röder, while the Protestant Parish Newsletter became significantly more outspoken in the articulation of its Protestant-national value system. Furthermore, veteran's leagues and military associations grew in prominence and appeal, while some of the best attended events in the bürgerliche calendar were "war heroes' evenings", which served as yet another platform for the articulation of nationalist principles.

The second aim of this chapter was to provide an analysis of this nationalist ideology. It would, of course, be a mistake to exaggerate how homogenous this was, as different actors and organs often put their own unique slant on it. Ultimately, however, this worldview was underpinned by common principles and defined by common tropes regardless of who was articulating it and in what context. It rested on two key pillars: first, a conception of Germany, "the nation", as something sacred, an almost mystical entity that had to be exalted

and protected; second, a vision of international relations as inherently cold, cutthroat and Darwinist, a never ending battle in which only the strong would survive. From these two central convictions extended every other principle of this nationalist worldview: that internal unity was absolutely essential if Germany was to survive and thrive; that a warlike and battle-ready spirit had to be engendered among the population for much the same reason; and that those forces which lay behind the 1918 Revolution – Marxism, democracy and pacifism – had to be extirpated, because they were the very phenomena that undermined national unity and, thus, increased the chances that Germany would lose the battle for survival. The poles of this ideological schema were occupied by the opposing concepts of “the Revolution”, which was the repository of everything negative and threatening to the nation, and “the *Volksgemeinschaft*”, as November 1918’s uniformly positive antithesis.

As this chapter has shown, the Bavarian Middle Party was one of the most assiduous propagators of this worldview and one of the main pillars of Hof’s emerging nationalist consensus. However, in the elections of spring 1924, it was not the BMP but the *Völkisch Block* – a cover organisation for the Nazi Party – that would prove to be the main beneficiary of this change in mood. What happened between the end of 1922 and the elections of 1924, then, to complete the Hofer *Bürgertum*’s transition from a democratic to a Nazi constituency? It is to this question that we now turn.

6 Enter the Nazis

(The Rise of the Patriotic Movement in Hof, January 1923 – May 1924)

When a branch of the National Socialist Party was founded in Hof on 26th November 1922, the signs that it would go on to enjoy extraordinary success in the town were not immediately apparent. The meeting took place in the Löwengrube tavern, and the keynote speaker, a local völkisch activist named Herr Simon, gave a fiery speech entitled “National Socialism – Germany’s Saviour” which consisted of the usual invective against the “November Criminals”, the “War Guilt Lie” and the Treaty of Versailles. But Simon was heard by only 27 people, most of them members of local völkisch leagues. Indeed, the party’s first meetings over the winter and spring of 1922/23 were badly attended, with one in April forced to start later than planned due to the large number of empty seats at the appointed time. How, then, did the Hofer Nazis, who at first seemed to have little chance of usurping the German Nationalists as the dominant political force among the *Saalestadt’s* middle classes, ultimately win a resounding victory at the polls some 18 months later?

The following chapter argues that this change of political leadership within Hof’s National Camp occurred primarily because the Nazis gradually assumed a dominant position within the so-called “Patriotic Movement”, a grassroots mobilisation of nationalist associations and military clubs which incessantly held events on an ever-greater scale over the spring and summer

of 1923. This significant surge in Völkisch and nationalist activity was initially triggered by the French invasion of the Ruhr at the beginning of 1923 but, as time passed, it became the principal platform and forum for all of the anti-Republican sentiment that had been gaining ground in Hof ever since the summer of 1920. Notably, in the elections of 1924, the Nazis were able to successfully present themselves as the embodiment of this patriotic, populist, grassroots “uprising” rather than as a conventional “political party” such as the BMP – that is, the kind of “parliamentary” party that the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the parish newsletter and even the BMP itself had been polemicizing against for over two years. Ironically, then, the Nazis in Hof to some extent represented the BMP’s own anti-party, anti-parliamentary rhetoric coming back to haunt it.

The chapter is organised into three sections which trace and explain the growing pre-eminence of the “Patriotic Movement” in Hof over the course of 1923, show how the Nazis assumed a dominant position within this movement, and finally illustrate how they turned this into electoral capital in the spring of 1924. The first section asks how the French invasion of the Ruhr and the ensuing hyperinflation were received and depicted within the established institutions of Hof’s bürgerliche milieu, aiming to lay bare the significant mobilisational potential of this development. The second section charts the rise of the Patriotic Movement over the spring and summer of 1923 in response to the Ruhr crisis, and shows how the Nazis gradually came to play such an important role within it. The final section argues that Hitler’s

putsch attempt in November actually strengthened the hand of the Nazis in Hof, and that this ultimately enabled them to perform so well in the elections of 1924.

Throughout, this chapter also aims to provide an analysis of the ideology advanced under the auspices of the Patriotic Movement. As we shall see, the worldview advanced here was not fundamentally different to the nationalist outlook analysed in the previous chapters, the ideology that the BMP, the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the Veteran's Leagues and a range of other bürgerliche formations had been espousing in Hof over the course of the preceding two years. Hitler's followers proved to be particularly radical exponents of this worldview, particularly when it came to "the Jewish question", but, on the whole, it was a message that the Hofer middle classes had long become accustomed to hearing¹.

6.1 The Ruhr Crisis

"What we have feared for months has finally become reality. The French have invaded the Ruhr"². These were the opening words of Karl Röder's editorial on 13th January 1923, as French and Belgian troops marched into the Ruhr industrial region. But this act of Allied aggression not only produced a

¹ As Moritz Föllmer has pointed out, "the appeal of National Socialism lay not in its programmatic originality, but in the radicalism with which it pushed for the assertion of völkisch conceptions." Föllmer, *Die Verteidigung der Bürgerlichen Nation*, p. 314.

² "Tage der Trauer" in "HA", no. 12, 13.1.1923.

groundswell of public outrage in Germany; it also had a catastrophic effect on the German currency and massively exacerbated the hyperinflation of the mark which had begun the previous summer, a development which exercised a profoundly radicalising effect on much of the German middle classes³. The following section asks how these events were initially interpreted by and presented within some of the key organs of Hof's National Camp. The argument here is that they were instrumentalised not only to inflame nationalist passions and anti-French hatred but, perhaps more importantly, to further advance the critique of the German Revolution – and especially the disarmament of the Reich by “Marxists” – which Hof's nationalists had been continuously articulating for over a year.

The first and most obvious effect that the occupation had on the discourse within bürgerliche Hof was an intensification of anti-French sentiment. France had long been presented as the chief nemesis of Germany in the *Hofers Anzeiger*, but the hatred of the French reached unprecedented heights in the first months of 1923⁴. Poincaré's invasion of the Ruhr was “the act of an irreconcilable archenemy”, Röder wrote on 13th January, “and one can only wish in these days of national humiliation that one-day revenge will be taken.”⁵ As before, the French goal was “the annihilation of Germany”, a

³ Feldman, *Great Disorder*, pp. 418–453, 854–859.

⁴ In actual fact, more than one historian has suggested that the invasion of the Ruhr was indeed the expression of an aggressive and predatory French policy which actually did foresee the eventual breakup of the Reich. See, for example, Conan Fischer, *The Ruhr Crisis, 1923-1924* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Kolb and Schumann, p. 28.

⁵ “Tage der Trauer” in “HA”, no. 12, 13.1.1923.

motto which hung “in the political offices of Paris like a house blessing”⁶ and underscored a politics aimed at dismembering the Reich to create “a Medieval mishmash of colours (...) in the heart of Europe” as in the time before 1871⁷. On 13th March, the German Nationalist Bavarian Justice Minister Franz Gürtner appeared at a well-attended protest meeting organised by the local BMP and put precisely this argument, describing “the relationship between the German and French people” as “irreconcilably poisoned”. Indeed, French politics had always aimed at “the destruction of Germany”, with this latest outrage simply a continuation of the Napoleonic impulse to ensure that no strong unified power would arise east of the Rhine⁸.

Even worse, this was not merely presented as a military occupation but as a “sadistic tyranny”, with accounts of French power-political ruthlessness accompanied by vivid atrocity propaganda. Typically, the Protestant Parish Newsletter proved particularly enthusiastic in taking up this bloody theme. “In the Ruhr, the French continue with their gruesomeness,” wrote Pastor Dietrich in the spring of 1923. “Murder, death strikes and fearful abuse are the order of the day”, and “for every French officer, 3 litres of milk must be delivered; for every French dog, 1 litre of milk”, while “German children receive only skimmed milk”. The French were stopping trains of schoolchildren and forcing their occupants to walk through the rain,

⁶ “Er ist zu Schiff nach England” in “HA”, no. 84, 10.4.1923.

⁷ “Vor dem Meisterstück” in “HA”, no. 8, 9.1.1923.

⁸ “Der bayerische Justizminister Gürtner” in “Bayerische Mittelpartei Hof, 1918-1924”.

“gruesomely martyring” German officials and “beating to death” German policemen⁹.

As ever, one of Dietrich’s favourite themes was the decline “in all areas of moral life” that France’s occupation had occasioned, with the newsletter reporting that “lawlessness, arbitrariness and crime” were rife, that “leading French officials use their position to organise the trafficking of girls” and that, from Essen, “many girls had disappeared without trace”, taken to “French brothels”¹⁰. In August 1923, the newsletter published a compilation of grim statistics on the occupation, recounting that there had been “93 people murdered, 75,514 thousand forced out of their homeland, 50,000 students left without lessons, and 9 death sentences passed” in the Ruhr since its beginning. This, then, was an unexampled “insanity” upon which “history” would “pass judgement”¹¹.

One of the most egregious infringements of the French occupiers, from the point of view of the *Hofener Anzeiger* and Protestant Newsletter, was their use of African colonial troops, who were consistently portrayed as animalistic savages falling upon civilised, innocent Germans¹². “Poincaré’s Algerians

⁹ "Aus Kirche und Welt" in 'Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt für den Dekanatsbezirk Hof (Hof und Umgebung)', no. 11, 3.6.1923.

¹⁰ "Zum Rhein- und Ruhrtag" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 16, 12.8.1923.

¹¹ "Aus Kirche und Welt" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 17, 26.8.1923.

¹² Several studies have explored the impact of French colonial troops on nationalist discourse - and especially the 'racialisation' of this discourse and its role in constructions of white self-identity - in post-war Germany. See Christian Koller, *Von Wilden aller Rassen niedergemetzelt: Die Diskussion um die Verwendung von Kolonialtruppen in Europa zwischen Rassismus, Kolonial- und Militärpolitik (1914-1930)*, Beiträge zur Kolonial- und Überseegeschichte, Bd. 82 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001), esp. pp. 207–262; Sandra Mass,

have great freedom to exercise their high moral instincts”, Röder wrote in February 1923, and “in the new year he will probably bring in black Africans to further prove the power of his empire”¹³. This would surely be a particular “worry” for “the women of Westphalia”, among whom “the black disgrace” would “seek new victims”¹⁴. “The children!”, intoned an alarmed Dietrich in the Protestant Newsletter in summer of 1923, and he accused “the French army – namely Moroccans” of “attacks on children, especially boys, in an animalistic manner”. “Where the French soldier is, and especially where the Black Disgrace is brought upon a European people”, the newsletter lamented, “fornication occurs in its most gruesome form”. In the Ruhr, “150 cases” of “terrible moral crimes” had been brought, “and 92 can be placed on the guilty account of black French soldiers”¹⁵.

This kind of commentary, then, was part of an overall strategy of raising the sense of outrage within the Hofer Bürgertum to an absolute fever pitch and, thus, of mobilising the local middle classes in service to a nationalist agenda. Indeed, the solution to this unhappy state of affairs was a familiar one: national unity. For Röder, one of the unintended benefits of the French occupation of the Ruhr was that it had created a common national outrage that spanned the entire German political spectrum and population. “It had to come this far, a frivolity of the most terrible kind had to be committed, for

Weisse Helden, schwarze Krieger: zur Geschichte kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland 1918-1964 (Köln: Böhlau, 2006), esp. chap. 2.

¹³ “Um Leben und Sterben” in “HA”, no. 28, 1.2.1923.

¹⁴ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 48, 24.2.1923.

¹⁵ “Zum Rhein- und Ruhrtag” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 16, 12.8.1923.

Germans to find themselves again” he wrote in his editorial at the end of January 1923¹⁶, and a “national community of suffering” had been created, with “all German eyes and hearts turned to the Ruhr, where the entire population, high and low, rich and poor” stood “in manly loyalty to their Fatherland”¹⁷.

The Protestant Newsletter expressed this in the form of a historical short story, published in February 1923, which was set after the French defeat of Prussia at the battle of Jena in 1806. The story described a “Prussian state which seemed to be in ruins”, a “victorious French Emperor” and “much stupidity, disgrace and weakness” in Germany – an obvious parallel to contemporary conditions. The story depicted a down-on-his-luck and cynical officer of the Prussian Army whose idealistic desire to “serve his German brothers” was rekindled by a good natured pastor¹⁸. The message was unmistakable: Germans must unite and work together in order to overcome French tyranny and ascend once again to greatness.

Thus the French occupation of the Ruhr, like the “August experience” at the beginning of the First World War, provided a concrete social model of classless unity and enmity toward the foreigner that could serve as the basis for a permanent state-form in Germany. Indeed, this link to the “unity” of the war was evident in Röder’s continued call for the German people, both within and beyond the Ruhr, to endure: *durchhalten!* This sentiment had been

¹⁶ “Blutegel und Holzwürmer” in “HA”, no. 20, 23.1.1923.

¹⁷ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 24, 27.1.1923.

¹⁸ “Wohltun trägt Zinsen” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 4, 25.2.1923.

popular during the War itself, and Röder made this link explicit in a column from February 1923. “Today we have to call for ‘endurance’, just as in the last years of the war”¹⁹, insisting that, “if we remain firm, we will win”²⁰, and celebrating the fact that the French, “with their beautiful sabre”, were “constantly striking against a stone”, which “grew harder (...) as the blows become angrier”²¹. He disgustedly dismissed calls for “negotiation” emanating from some sections of the political class, which he described as a betrayal of the “battle being fought against the bastard son of Napoleon on the Ruhr”²², and emphasised that “passive resistance” with “all energy and force” was the only solution to the French occupation²³.

The French occupation of the Ruhr, then, was instrumentalised in order to further fan the flames of nationalist outrage and to advance the model of social order that Hof’s National Camp had been demanding for the previous two years. It was also extremely useful as another weapon with which to further hammer the Republic and the Revolution. Röder lamented the fact that Germany was not in a position to muster anything more than “passive resistance” against the occupiers because, once again, it had willingly disarmed itself after the 1918 armistice – which was the fault of the revolutionaries. “All Germans must recognise the connection that lies behind our misfortune: revolution and disarmament, after which we were naturally

¹⁹ “Um Leben und Sterben” in “HA”, no. 28, 1.2.1923.

²⁰ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 42, 17.2.1923.

²¹ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 30, 3.2.1923.

²² “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 48, 24.2.1923.

²³ “Reinigung!” in “HA”, no. 50, 27.2.1923.

forced to sign the Versailles Treaty”, he wrote in late January 1923²⁴, and “when we ask ourselves in bitter resignation who actually made us defenceless, why we are now treated like dogs”, the answer could only be “the demobilisers of 1918, these blind haters of our people’s own defence”²⁵. These were “miserable mis-leaders of the people”²⁶, “traitors to the people” who had enacted a “frivolous uprising” in November 1918²⁷ and forced Germans to “throw away our weapons out of cowardice” in “the Michel act of 1918”, when it had been “more important to the heroes of the German Revolution” to “get rid of national-thinking compatriots rather than to attack the external enemy”²⁸. Ultimately, then, it had been “the politics of weakness” that had “brought us to this dark point of nameless suffering”²⁹.

That there had been alternatives to this “politics of weakness” was evident from the behaviour of the Turks, who had refused to throw away their weapons and had thus concluded much more favourable terms with the Allies, as the Protestant Newsletter observed in the spring of 1923. “What the small, poor Turks, exhausted from 12 years of war, have accomplished must also be possible for a great and strong Germany”, wrote Dietrich. But, then, “the Turks had no Erzberger, no Scheidemann, no Wirth, and they weren’t so

²⁴ “Die stumpfe Waffe” in “HA”, no. 14, 16.1.1923.

²⁵ “Um Leben und Sterben” in “HA”, no. 28, 1.2.1923.

²⁶ “Tage der Trauer” in “HA”, no. 12, 13.1.1923.

²⁷ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 230, 29.9.1923.

²⁸ “Der neue Aderlass” in “HA”, no. 115, 17.5.1923.

²⁹ “Tage der Trauer” in “HA”, no. 12, 13.1.1923.

stupid as to destroy 'militarism'; they kept their weapons and remained true to their Fatherland"³⁰.

Yet again, the authors of the Revolution – and hence those who were chiefly guilty of the fact that Germany was in no position to defend itself against the French occupation – were the "Marxists". Germans could not forcefully resist the invaders, Röder wrote in the summer of 1923, because it was "infected with the spirit of Marxism", and the "socialist racket which spread during the Revolution" was principally responsible for the fact that "the German army was ripped to pieces" in November 1918³¹.

That the Socialists were primarily responsible for Germany's plight was made even worse by their disingenuous attitude to the occupation of the Ruhr. In his editorials, Röder continuously depicted the Social Democrats as secretly infuriated by the new "nationalist" attitude of the German working classes, but unable to admit as much for fear of losing support. It was causing the Social Democrats "a few worries that so much is being spoken in a patriotic tone", he wrote in the summer, for "what should become of the International when everyone speaks of the German Fatherland?"³² Indeed, the "natural national feelings" that the French occupation had given rise to in the entire population, including the workers, were a huge problem for the Socialists because it showed the "idiocy" of their worldview, for "neither pacifism nor the Marxist International have ever set a fact on its feet" and it was thus "not in their

³⁰ "Aus Kirche und Welt" in "Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt", no. 15, 29.7.1923.

³¹ "Die stumpfe Waffe" in "HA", no. 14, 16.1.1923.

³² "Unternehmung Müller gescheitert" in "HA", no. 161, 11.7.1923.

interests that a strong Volk can preserve itself"³³. Any superficial signs of national solidarity in "the left-wing camp" were not to be accepted at face value, he warned, for "whoever does not let his eyes deceive him knows that this attitude is not fundamental but only temporary"³⁴.

The "patriotic consensus" that was the product of the Ruhr crisis further allowed Röder to make a distinction between the Social Democratic political leadership and the "healthy", "national thinking" mass of the German working classes who might still be claimed for the "*Volksgemeinschaft*". He expressed considerable satisfaction that "the Ruhr working classes have other views than the Social Democratic leaders in Berlin", insisting that "one single Ruhr worker is higher in his political morality than the entire Social Democratic Berlin party"³⁵. It was only a matter of time, he argued, before "the workers come to the conclusion" that the International had failed and thus "join the rest of their Volk in destiny", for "the Social Democrats don't represent the entire working classes but only a part of them"³⁶.

The French occupation of the Ruhr, then, was only possible because Germany had been hamstrung by the forces of internationalism, pacifism and Marxism – the same forces that had enacted the Revolution and created a Republic. Underpinning all of this was the same Darwinist view of the nature of international relations. The very ideas of "international reconciliation of the

³³ "Exoriare aliquis" in "HA", no. 32, 6.2.1923.

³⁴ "Politische Wochenübersicht" in "HA", no. 36, 10.2.1923.

³⁵ "Zur Bluttat in Essen" in "HA", no. 78, 3.4.1923.

³⁶ "Unternehmung Müller gescheitert" in "HA", no. 161, 11.7.1923.

peoples, disarmament and world justice” were, Röder wrote, a “plunder”, because “our own conscience says and recent history has mercilessly shown that no Volk is helped out of its misery by the noblesse and kindness of another, but that every nation in the world assumes the position it has fought for through its own courage, conviction and firm will”³⁷. It was only “helpless optimists”, he argued, who “believe in the morality of the world”, but in actual fact, “with peoples it is no different in spiritual desire and striving than it is with individuals. Here as there, destiny lies in individual strength”³⁸.

The French invasion of the Ruhr was also blamed for the increasingly egregious inflation that more and more came to preoccupy both the *Hofer Anzeiger* and the Parish Newsletter over the spring and summer of 1923. “We are juggling millions, billions, trillions”, Röder wrote dolefully in July, describing the “danger” as “huge” and lamenting “the advance of hand to mouth living, eternal inability to count on anything, the permanent worry of balancing income and outgoings” among much of the population³⁹. The Parish Newsletter published increasingly desperate appeals for money from its readers to keep the organ afloat, with “the insane costs of paper and the high, daily increasing costs of printing” forcing the newsletter’s publishers to increase its price⁴⁰. A meeting of the Parish Deaconry on 29th June lamented that the “terrible state” of the parish was primarily a result of “the monstrous

³⁷ “Zerreisst das Tischtuch?” in “HA”, no. 156, 5.7.1923.

³⁸ “Blutegel und Holzwürmer” in “HA”, no. 20, 23.1.1923.

³⁹ “Achtung!” in “HA”, no. 176, 28.7.1923.

⁴⁰ “Aus der Gemeinde” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 15, 29.7.1923.

inflation” and raised serious questions about the capacity of Hof’s denizens to cope with the coming winter if it continued⁴¹.

But the inflation not only provided the occasion for a ratcheting up of nationalist, anti-French sentiment; it was also taken as indicative of the “moral plight” of post-revolutionary Germany, which was most evident in the behaviour of unscrupulous “profiteers” who were trying to make money from the people’s misery⁴². “There is a lack of morality among those who play the patriot” while “secretly hoping that the dollar will reach 100,000 marks” on the dividend market, Röder wrote in February 1923, and he insisted that “the people must first be made healthy” – that is, morally renewed – before Germany could recover from the inflation⁴³. He denounced the “dark machinations of a speculation that is directed at general misery”, the “mammonism” that had spread in certain sections of the people⁴⁴, the “dark work” of a “riff-raff” who were “shameful enemies of the Fatherland”, and “indifferent to the plight of the people”⁴⁵. The Parish Newsletter, too, lamented that “from the political side nothing, absolutely nothing is done” to hinder the fact that “we have been delivered over to the great profiteers”⁴⁶.

⁴¹ “Aus der Gemeinde” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 14, 15.7.1923.

⁴² This trope, which linked a widespread moral breakdown to the hyperinflation and profiteering, was endemic to the German middle classes after the First World War. As Gerald Feldman has put it, “No less offensive than the misappropriation of money and goods (...) was the sense that there had been a misappropriation of spiritual values and a soiling of what the Bürgertum (...) held to be holy.” Feldman, *Great Disorder*, p. 858; For more on the specific case of Munich and Bavaria, see Martin H. Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt*, chap. 4, 5.

⁴³ “Eine Fiktion?” in “HA”, I. 44, 20.2.1923.

⁴⁴ “Willenstabilisierung” in “HA”, no. 96, 24.4.1923.

⁴⁵ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 106, 5.5.1923.

⁴⁶ “Aus der Gemeinde” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 15, 29.7.1923.

The French invasion of the Ruhr, then, was a gift to Hof's nationalists – it offered an unparalleled opportunity for inflaming nationalist passions and anti-French feeling, confirmed the cutthroat character of international relations, the folly of disarming, the perfidy of the revolutionaries, the need for “national unity” and the ultimate stupidity of “internationalism”. Both Germany's inability to defend itself and the shameful “profiteering” among certain sections of the population seemed to confirm the state of disgrace and moral torpor which, according to Hof's nationalists, had been the lot of the nation since November 1918. Ultimately, then, the French Invasion of the Ruhr and the hyper-inflation were instrumentalised by the institutions of nationalist Hof to further advance the overall critique of the post-revolutionary status quo. And, of everything that had happened since the Kapp Putsch, this was unarguably the most emotionally powerful development with the greatest mobilisational potential.

6.2 The Rise of the “Patriotic Movement”

With the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the Parish Newsletter and the Bavarian Middle Party fanning the flames of local outrage, it is little surprise that the French invasion of the Ruhr proved hugely stimulating to nationalist activity in Hof. Over the spring and summer of 1923, public life in the *Saalestadt* became increasingly dominated by a burgeoning “Patriotic Movement”, a network of nationalist and völkisch clubs which met continuously for festivals, flag consecrations, open air masses and other events. Initially, they aimed to protest the French

occupation of the Ruhr but, as the “movement” gathered pace, it soon became the central agent in the articulation of nationalist ideology in the *Saalestadt*. Though there was significant crossover in terms of membership with the Bavarian Middle Party, the Patriotic Leagues perceived themselves to be “beyond political parties” and, crucially, one of the most prominent components of this movement were the Nazis, who increasingly took on a leading role in organising its activities, ultimately becoming the most visible presence at its meetings.

The initial signs that the French advance into the Ruhr would trigger a widespread *völkisch* mobilisation in Hof appeared in the late winter of 1923 with the formation of scattered “patriotic” organisations and a more intensive nationalist agitation within existing *bürgerliche* associations. On 28th February 1923, for example, a “patriotic music and songs evening” was held in the *Bürgergesellschaft*; its aim was the “strengthening of the new, powerful ring of loyalty and love” that bound together “the German people in this hour of our emergency”. The Town Orchestra played a number of patriotic songs and Dr Wilke, a local nationalist, invoked the “heroism of the defenceless” in the Ruhr against “the archenemy, France”⁴⁷. Two days later, in nearby Wirsberg, a small group of “patriotically minded men” met in a local tavern to form a patriotic club⁴⁸, a newly formed group called the “Tuesday Brothers” began to

⁴⁷ “Der von der Bürger-Gesellschaft hof...” in ‘Militärische, vaterländische und völkische Verbände Hofs, 1918-1924’.

⁴⁸ “Wirsberg, 25. Februar” in “Verbände”.

hold “Patriotic Evenings” in Hofer public houses⁴⁹, while local bürgerliche choral groups began to perform songs that were designed to invoke Germany’s plight – such as “The Ruhr Song”, which had been specially composed by Dr Herold⁵⁰.

These tentative beginnings to Hof’s incipient Patriotic Movement provided the platform for a veritable explosion of nationalist and völkisch activity over the spring and summer. This occurred at the behest of the “Patriotic Leagues”, a range of about half a dozen nationalist associations, some of which had state and even nationwide followings. They included the Blücher League, the Bavaria and Reich League, the Reichsflagge and, initially, the Nazis. At first, then, Hitler’s organisation was but one among many components of a much more extensive “Patriotic Movement”, but it became increasingly prominent in events enacted under the canopy of this movement⁵¹. All of these events consisted of a similar suffusion of völkisch, Protestant and military imagery, and most followed a similar format, with open air Protestant masses, flag consecrations, marches and anti-French, anti-Republican speeches.

The first signs that local Patriotic Leagues were beginning to mobilise more aggressively in response to the French invasion came in March and April

⁴⁹ "Die Gesellschaft 'Dienstagsbrueder' in 'Verbände' They were named after the day of the week on which they met.

⁵⁰ "Am Ostersonntag" in "Verbände".

⁵¹ A number of studies have shown how Hitler’s movement was at first but one component of a much bigger, quasi-paramilitary "patriotic" movement that developed in Bavaria after the banning of the Home Guards in 1921. See Georg Franz-Willing, *Krisenjahr der Hitlerbewegung: 1923*, 1. Aufl (Preussisch Oldendorf: Schütz, 1975), pp. 36–77; Harold J. Gordon, *Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 88–119; Fenske, *Konservatismus und Rechtsradikalismus*, chap. 9.

1923, with a protest meeting of the “Oberland League” in the Vereinshalle on 27th March attracting a large audience⁵², and a “Patriotic Evening” held by the Hofer Branch of the Field Artillerists on 26th April “filled to the last place”⁵³. But the Patriotic Movement experienced its real breakthrough on the 12th June 1923, when a number of Leagues met at 11 in the morning in the small town of Schwarzenbach to hold a “Patriotic Festival” which, according to some estimates, attracted some 20,000 people⁵⁴. Those present first attended an open air mass (complete with a rousing nationalist speech from the local pastor), after which they marched in closed formation to the war memorial on the Döbraberg, a hilltop on the outskirts of the town, to consecrate their flags⁵⁵. A month later, a similar gathering took place in the small village of Wirsberg. It was initiated by “Bavaria and Reich”, but, again, it was attended by a range of different Leagues who effectively took over the entire village for the day and engaged in flag consecrations, a rally and a military march⁵⁶. On August 29th, it was the turn of the Reichsflagge to host their “patriotic gathering” on the Gupfen, a hilltop near to the village of Berg, which was attended by regional groups from across Upper Franconia as well as units of Bavaria and Reich, the Blücher League and the Nazis. It began on a sports field near the village at 10 in the morning, from where the leagues marched to the war memorial on the hilltop, laid a commemorative wreath, and then

⁵² “Der Bund Oberland, Ortsgruppe Hof” in “Verbände”.

⁵³ “Vaterländische Abend der Vereingung ehem. Feldartilleristen Hof u. Umgebung” in “Verbände”.

⁵⁴ Hambrecht, *Der Aufstieg der NSDAP*, p. 49.

⁵⁵ “Die vaterländische Kundgebung auf dem Döbraberg” in “Verbände”.

⁵⁶ “Die vaterländische Kundgebung in Wirsberg” in “Verbände”.

marched to the village of Eisenbuhl for a Protestant mass⁵⁷. A few days previously, the Blücher League had held their own meeting in Hof itself, which was also attended not only by “representatives of other patriotic fighting leagues, but also by the national clubs and the nationally minded population of Hof”. According to the report, many houses were decorated with both the Bavarian and imperial flags for this occasion, and the event followed the usual format, with a flag consecration, patriotic songs and a Protestant mass complete with a nationalist speech from the Pastor. Notable, too, is that members of the Chiemgauer Brigade who had “liberated” Hof from the “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” some three years previously also attended this meeting⁵⁸.

These are just a few examples of the meetings of völkisch and nationalist clubs that punctuated the summer of 1923 in Hof and its environs. But the highpoint of this outbreak of völkisch activity came on 15th September, when Hof played host to a so-called “German Day” (which actually extended over an entire weekend). This was an enormous gathering of patriotic leagues from throughout Upper Franconia who met to attend a series of meetings, speeches, masses and flag consecrations held in various locations throughout the town⁵⁹. Their number included several nationalist luminaries, such as Admiral Scheer, who returned to Hof after his successful speaking

⁵⁷ “Vaterländische Kundgebung auf dem Gupfen” in “Verbände”.

⁵⁸ “Fahnenweihe des Bundes “Blücher”, Ortsgruppe Hof” in “Verbände”.

⁵⁹ There were several such German Days across Bavaria in the summer of 1923. Rabenstein estimates that some 12,000 people attended the marches and meetings on the German Day in Hof, with many more taking part in the open air mass. Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, pp. 124–125.

engagements the previous year; Hauptmann Adolf Heiß, leader of the Reichsflagge; Major General Otto von Lossow, commander of the German Army in Bavaria; and Hitler himself, who spoke to his followers on the festival's second day. The German Day began on the Friday with an "Evening of Greeting" in the Vereinshalle at which Dr Höhna of the Bavarian Middle Party and Hauptmann Heiß spoke, and continued the following day with the aforementioned open air mass on the banks of the Saale, which was also attended by Hitler. A march through the streets of Hof, much of which had been bedecked with Bavarian and Imperial flags for the occasion, ensued, before the different leagues scattered to visit war memorials and hold flag consecrations. They reconvened at 8PM in meeting halls across Hof to hear speeches from their leaders (and to drink). Significantly, the Oberfränkische Volkszeitung explicitly advised its readers and local socialists to leave Hof for these two days so as to avoid violence, organising a mass excursion to the countryside for this purpose⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ "Gewerkschaftskollegen! Parteigenossen! Republikaner!" in "OV", no. 215, 14.9.1923.

Dem Deutschen Tag zum Gruß!



Deutsche hinaus!
Lasset es hallen von Haus zu Haus!
Beule alle dem Vaterland,
Schnell die fahnen drum zur Hand
Und heraus mit frohem Sang,
Vendergang und Kling und Klang,
Deutsche hinaus!

Willkommen in Hof, ihr deutschen Männer aus
Bayerens blauen Bergen, aus Hühelns dunklen Wäldern,
aus Sachsen und dem grünen Thüringland!

Seid ihr gekommen, zuziehende fest zu feiern, wie blühende Acker
geiziger und koller? Das wäre in dieser Jahreszeit ein lächerlich Beginnen.
— Nein, ihr seid gekommen in der Stunde weltlicher Not, da es sich ent-
scheidet, ob Deutschland zwischen der romanischen und slavischen Expansion,
zwischen Polens und Russen, zu einem Völkervölkern gemahlet wird, wie es die
kommunistischen Führer in ihrer Katastrophensucht so heuchelnd wünschen.
Ihr seid gekommen, um fern von überlebten Parteien und Klassenhader
Gott und Seele zu finden in der heiligen Gemeinde dort, die sich mit
reinen Herzen und reinen Händen zu der großen deutschen Freiheitsbewegung
zusammenschließen. Ihr seid gekommen, Freunde und Bekannte, um Zeugen
zu sein bei dem machtvollen Bekenntniswort Nordobersachsen:

Die Wipfel unserer Wälder, so rauschen deutsche Töne,
Denn schwarze Mütter und Junge auch heute froh und frei,
Es schmetert der flinke Silberband, es schmetert das ganze Hundeland:
**In Wettergraus und Sturmwindnacht
steht fest und treu die Frankenswacht!**

Seid ihr gekommen, Bayern vom Neck zu trennen, wie stöhnende
Feinde lachend und raunend? Das wäre in dieser jenseitigen Zeit ein fremdlich
Beginnen, das Ende der deutschen Geschichte. — Nein, nicht Bayern
los vom Reich, sondern Bayern herein im Reich! Hül aus dem
Eisen leidet der freicheitliche. Aber „Wett-Bau“ zu „Schwarz-Wett-Rot“.
Das ganze Deutschland soll es sein, wo nur die deutsche Junge singt und
Gott im Himmel lüder singt. Deutschland soll es sein und — Groß-
deutschland soll es sein. Kamer und Hoffnung im Herzen gehen wir die unerschlichen
Beider in Böhmen und Polen, in Danzig und Litzke, in Siebenbürgen und
Schlesien, Ostpreußen und wie zu einer gerundeten Welt lassen wir die Wälder
schweifen hinüber zu den Kärmen und Hünen von Straßburg, der wunder-
schönen Stadt:

„O Straßburg, o Straßburg, | Bald schlägt die deutsche Stunde,
Und sonst auch unker Glück, | Wir holen dich zurück.“

Seid ihr gekommen, die Arbeiter zu bekämpfen,
zum Bürgerkrieg zu rufen, wie Kwerntand glaubt
und Verkauflung schwätzt? Das wäre in dieser
verhängnisvollen Zeit ein nachloses Beginnen. — Nein, ihr
deingt nicht das Schwert, sondern den Frieden. Ihr
seid gekommen, um den unheiligen Trennungsscheid
zwischen Arbeiter und Bürgerkrieg, der dem deutschen
Volk mehr Kräfte und Energie raubte, als alle
verderblichen Kriege zusammen, auszulöschen und
auszugleichen für alle Ewigkeit! In der nationalistischen
Bewegung gibt es keinen Hinterlistigsten Gehärdet
und Tagelöhner, Mann und Reich, Herr und Knecht.

„Soß Amt und Noth, Herr Bruder, willst du in
unserer Kämpf'n,
Hier darfst du nur ein Deutscher und nicht als
Deutscher sein.“

Nach die letzte Spur von Staatsrecht und Klassenhader sei aus der
nationalen Bewegung verbannt. Wer deutschen Vater ist, getoht zu uns.
Wir kennen keine Proletariat, wir kennen nur Deutsche, solche,
die es schon sind und solche, — die es noch werden.

Willkommen in Hof, deutsche Männer! Ihr seid der einzige Hoffungs-
punkt in unserer zerfahrenen und zerfahrenen Zeit, die Bürgen und Zeugen einer
besseren Zukunft. Die nationalistische Bewegung ist die stärkste Kraft im
Dasein des deutschen Volkes. Die nationalische Bewegung, elementar wie
eine Naturgewalt, rein und lauter wie ein Bergwind, greift längst über unsere
verhüllten Reichsgrenzen hinaus, in Österreich, in Holland, in den
skandinavischen Ländern, ja selbst in England, wie eine Rede Baldwins vor
dem Oxford Studenten zeigt, Echo weckend. Wir sehen vor einer ungeheuren
Wiedererweckung des germanischen Geistes, vergleichbar der Frühlingstagen
der jungen Gotik. Der deutsche Mensch war nicht tot, sondern er schlief nur.
Heil dem Staatsmann der Zukunft, dem wir seit Bismarcks Tod ersehnen
und ersehnen, dem es beschieden ist, all diese gewaltigen Kräfte, die jetzt noch
ungebändig und übermäßig daherkommen und — ja, ja, ich weiß es schon,
Ihr Juwelier und Professionsbesitzer — sich auch manchmal überlegen
wie ein wider Erbgang, zu produktiver und positiver politischer Wirkung
zu bringen und zu sammeln. — Und er wird kommen, der Befreier
Deutschlands, wenn die Zeit erfüllt ist. Und nach Jahrsfrist
werden die Generationen, die auf unsere Tage unerbittlichen Drucks und
empörender Sklaverei unter Frankreichs Kautz zurückbliden, die Worte
sprechen: „Mühte nicht Deutschland solches Leben, um zu seiner Herrlichkeit
empafeln.“ Drum sursam corda! Die Herzen in die Höhe!

„Und brüht uns heute Schmach und Not,
Die Stunde schlägt, da läßt uns Gott
Und wieder Deutsche sein.“

Willkommen in Hof, deutsche Männer! Und auch, ihr Soldaten,
Bauern, Capisten, wolle wir nicht vergessen. Euch gebührt der Ehren-
platz am Hofe „Deutschen Tag“, ihr Capisten der Capisten.
So staut herab aus Himmelshöh'n, ihr Frankensöhne von
der Großen Kette, die ihr in Handern und Polen, auf den
Vogelsteinbergen und im Karpatenstauer dem großen Auf-
weckungstag entgegenstehet! Seht die Föhnen, umfost die
Standarten, legt lauten die Glocken, es naht der stille, große Tag:

„Ihr seid für uns gemeinhilf und gemalt
Im Doer des Leidens und im ganzen Welt,
Und eure Augen, die zu früh sich schließen
Dem Rauch des Lebens, se sind uns gewalt.“

In uns fließt jeder Tränen einer Sinne
Und eure Blut hat sich mit uns vereint,
Das Mobern einer jahren jungen Keiba
Ist ein Gesicht, das unsere Tümele qualit.

Steigt auf aus eurem Geis aus fremder Erde,
Hört eure Weider Gruß und laute Klang,
Damit wir leben, habt ihr stehen müssen
Und eure Odem hege unserer Tag!

Waf zu dem Steiner lenkt ihr die Plüde,
Anzahl von Licht und ewigen Lebensganz,
Aus eurem Opfer nicht uns reiche Dank
Und Leben willt der deutsche Colerang.“

Deutsches Volk, da nimm wohl finken,
Doch verfinke nicht da nicht,
Und wenn wir untergehn, —
Wir werden auferstehen!

Dr. Eduard Herold.



Figure 6-1. The German Day in the Hofer Anzeiger, September 1923

The German Day was the crowning achievement of the Patriotic Movement in Hof and, over the course of 1923, this movement became the main forum for the articulation of nationalist ideology in the *Saalestadt*. What, however, did this ideology consist of? The rest of this section focuses on this question and argues that, overall, the worldview articulated under the auspices of the Patriotic Movement was little different to that which Hof's National Camp had been espousing since the elections of summer 1920. The significance of the Patriotic Movement, then, was not its ideological innovation, but its organisational and mobilisational potential – and, crucially, that it proved to be much more hospitable terrain for the Nazis than for the Bavarian Middle Party.

That the French occupation of the Ruhr served as the initial trigger for the rise of the Patriotic Movement in Hof was confirmed by many speakers at gatherings of the Leagues. Their aim, according to Herr Doppelhammer, chairman of the Field Artillerists, was to “once again become conscious of our völkisch uniqueness against the hatred and strength of the French”, a nation which, the Erlangen University Professor Dr Reinmöller argued at the same meeting, had always aimed to “annihilate Germany”. “Some say we are not allowed to speak of hatred and revenge”, he continued, “but I say it. I consider it a great duty to plant thoughts of hatred in my students”, and he declared himself an “apostle of revenge”, prophesying that “the day of

revenge will come earlier than we think”⁶¹. For Eduard Herold, speaking at the meeting on the Döbraberg, it was also the “satanic atrocities on the Rhine and the Ruhr” against “defenceless men, women and innocent children”, the “devilish” behaviour of the French, that had provided the Patriotic Movement with its initial impulse⁶².

The topic of France and the Ruhr occupation, however, was rarely the most prominent aspect of the speeches given at meetings of the Patriotic Movement. In fact, speakers almost always used the Ruhr crisis as a platform from which to launch into a broader treatment of Germany’s predicament, one generally based on all of the ideological tropes that are familiar from the previous chapter.

The parliamentary system, as ever, was unambiguously rejected. On the Döbraberg, Dr Herold dismissed the “filigree constitution of Weimar”, which had been made by “five-penny men and wholesome mediocrities, snorers, asphalt politicians and coffee house literati” who had attempted to turn Germany into a “party political bazaar” of “egoistic special interests”, and he compared this lamentable construction unfavourably with the “holy democracy of death” among those in the Patriotic Movement who had “been through the fire of war”. Typically, he also contrasted an “organic” popular feeling with the wholly artificial structure of a contrived “democratic system”, insisting that “parliamentarism” was “meaningless”, a pathetic counterpoint to

⁶¹ “Vaterländischer Abend der Vereinigung ehem. Feldartilleristen Hof u. Umgebung” in “Verbände”.

⁶² “Die vaterländische Kundgebung auf dem Döbraberg” in “Verbände”.

the “elemental will of the people” as expressed through the “patriotic movement” with its “enormous moral force”⁶³. As Dr Reinmüller also put it at the meeting of the Field Artillerists, “in the past, the different Germanic tribes” had “ripped each other apart”, but today this disservice was performed by “the political parties”, which was all the more lamentable because “Germany cannot be conquered when it is united”⁶⁴.

As ever, “Marxism” joined democracy in the rogue’s gallery that was keeping Germans divided at this time of acute peril. Increasingly, however, the Patriotic Movement could actually draw on the concrete experiences of its followers in this denunciation of Marxism, because violent clashes between activists of the left and right were growing in frequency. At the meeting of the Blücher League in August 1923, scuffles occurred when members of a workers’ aerobics club took exception to the arrival of members of the Chiemgauer brigade, with both sides trying to steal the other’s flags⁶⁵. The German Day itself was the occasion for quite considerable political violence in Hof and its environs. The windows of a Jewish department store were smashed by Nazis, while two left-wing radicals beat up Herr Dorsch, a prominent nationalist, and then barricaded themselves in the offices of the Oberfränkische Volkszeitung, which was subjected to a siege by enraged attendees of the German Day. Several left-wing radicals who tried to speak up during nationalist meetings were badly beaten, including “one Communist

⁶³ “Im Schützenhaus” in “Verbände”.

⁶⁴ “Vaterländischer Abend der Vereinigung ehem. Feldartilleristen Hof u. Umgebung” in “Verbände”.

⁶⁵ “Herbstnebel wallen durch das Tal!” in “Verbände”.

who was wearing the Soviet Star” and another who “cried ‘Heil Moscow’”, while a Nazi on his way home to Koditz was dragged from his bike and beaten by what the *Hofer Anzeiger* referred to as “a group of left radicals”⁶⁶.

These scattered incidents, however, paled in comparison to events in Plauen, where a train carriage full of those who had attended the German Day was confronted by the Proletarian Hundreds at the station. This developed into a pitched battle which lasted for some time with many injured, and the next day saw further street fighting, as the Communists “occupied the train station” and interrogated anyone leaving Plauen to head off potential German Day attendees before “marauding through the town singing the International”⁶⁷.

Speakers at Patriotic Movement gatherings had no compunction about drawing on such incidents to buttress their arguments. “I was here in 1920”, Hauptmann Heiß intoned on the German Day. “Then there were no flags in the streets: an all-powerful man, Blumtritt, ruled (...), and not far from here, another brave man, Max Hölz, surfaced”. The Patriotic Movement, he continued, would soon “finish” with these Marxist enemies; a prophecy which earned him “stormy calls of ‘Heil’”⁶⁸.

When it came to intellectualising this local antagonism with the workers’ movement, however, the main charge levelled at “Marxism” continued to be its internationalism, its setting of German against German at a time of

⁶⁶ “Kommunistische Ausschreitungen in Plauen gegen die Teilnehmer am Deutschen Tag in Hof” in “HA”, no. 219, 17.9.1923.

⁶⁷ “Morgenpost” in “HA”, no. 220, 18.9.1923.

⁶⁸ “Vereinshalle” in “Verbände”.

national peril. Speakers at meetings of the Patriotic Leagues were constantly linking the “inner and outer enemy”: “It is perhaps the darkest page in German history”, Herold claimed during his speech at Wirsberg, that, “when Satanic atrocities are being committed by the French, (...) traitors to the Fatherland” were trying to “stage an uprising”. This was the ultimate proof, he argued, that “between the devilish, lying disposition of Poincaré and the nihilistic spirit of German left-wing radicalism is a secret spiritual connection”, a union of “related souls” between “Satan and Mephisto”⁶⁹. In his speech on the German Day, Hauptmann Heiß similarly maintained that “the immediate necessity” was that “Marxism should be destroyed; when we have achieved that, we can turn our sword outside”.

What is notable about this aspect of Heiß’ speech, however, is that, in emphasising the link between the inner and outer threat to Germany, he spoke of “Stresemann-Marxism in Berlin, and Versailles beyond our borders”⁷⁰. Heiß thus equated Gustav Stresemann, leader of the right-liberal German People’s Party, with “Marxism in Berlin”, thereby categorising all the perceived “enemies” of the “Patriotic Movement” – democrats, bürgerliche liberals, leftist revolutionaries, the Social Democrats, “Berlin” – under the single rubric “Marxism”. This is one of the clearest indicators that, to the Patriotic Movement, Marxism did not necessarily refer to the worker’s movement – it was more a spirit of the times that had to be resisted, and it

⁶⁹ “Die vaterländische Kundgebung in Wirsberg” in “Verbände”.

⁷⁰ “Vereinshalle” in “Verbände”.

allowed them to group together every social, cultural and political phenomenon they found objectionable.

The most egregious expression of this baleful “Marxist” spirit had been the decision on the part of the November Criminals to lay down arms in November 1918, which constituted “a sin against the German people”, for “without power there can be no rights”⁷¹. “A Volk that has disarmed itself”, argued Rudolf Schäfer, “has no right to complain, and such a Volk cannot wonder when it is despised and smashed to the floor”⁷². Indeed, for Eduard Herold this was the principal reason for the existence of the Patriotic Leagues: to “protest against the self-disarming of the German people in November 1918” by “the enemies outside and the traitors in our own land”⁷³.

Once again, then, this interpretation of German disarmament was revealing of some key tendencies within the ideology of the Patriotic Leagues that are familiar from the reading of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the Bavarian Middle Party and the Military Clubs from the previous chapter. First, the nation was sacred – it had to be preserved and protected at all costs, with “the Fatherland” serving as the fulcrum around which the entire ideology revolved. Secondly, there was a deep-seated conviction that the world was dangerous, that international relations were characterised by cutthroat, power political calculations – a world in which only the strongest would survive. In this Darwinist struggle, there was no room for either internal weakness or

⁷¹ “In der Hofer Bürger-Gesellschaft” in “Verbände”.

⁷² “Fahnenweihe des Bundes 'Blücher', Ortsgruppe Hof” in “Verbände”.

⁷³ “Die vaterländische Kundgebung auf dem Döbraberg” in “Verbände”.

international reconciliation, only an interminable test of strength for which Germany had to be permanently prepared. “The enemy dares to say: ‘Germany is guilty of the war’”, Professor Reinmüller stated at the Field Artillerist meeting in April 1923, “and unfortunately we have to say, yes, our enormous guilt is that we are here where we are, with the French on the Rhine and in the Ruhr, because every Volk that does not have the will to resist such humiliations removes itself from the considerations of the peoples”⁷⁴.

Yet again, the confluence of Marxism and parliamentarism was what made the sacred nation vulnerable in this unforgiving environment, and yet again, the antidote to it was “national unity”, which was the central, most persistently repeated value of the Patriotic Movement. “The meaning of the Patriotic Leagues”, the leader of the Rosenheim Blücher League declared at a flag consecration in August, “was to ensure that Germany would once again be one”, and Rudolf Schäfer, the leader of the entire organisation, added that “all German tribes must stand shoulder to shoulder so that Germany will not be torn to pieces” and that “national feeling and thinking must remain upright if class hatred and internationalism, religious hatred and confessional discord” were to be defeated. “If a single will rules in this Volk”, he declared, “then one day our affair will be victorious”⁷⁵.

⁷⁴ “Vaterländischer Abend der Vereinigung ehem. Feldartilleristen Hof u. Umgebung” in “Verbände”.

⁷⁵ “Fahnenweihe des Bundes ‘Blücher’, Ortsgruppe Hof” in “Verbände”.

This language of national unity was more or less identical to what had been circulating within Hof's National Camp for some three years prior to the rise of the Patriotic Movement. Notably, however, this movement did not simply talk of a vague "national unity"; they also placed considerable and explicit emphasis on the need to win over the workers and integrate them into the "national community". "We do not want a war on the workers", insisted Eduard Herold at the Bavaria and Reich meeting in Wirsberg. "We want to bring them to our flags", for "without industrial workers, the German people cannot live", and "the patriotic movement stands or falls on the winning over of the workers"⁷⁶. Herold reiterated this theme constantly over the summer of 1923. "Have you come to declare war on the workers?", he asked in a column for the *Hofer Anzeiger* which covered the entire front page for the German Day. "No (...) You have come to dissolve for all eternity the unholy separation of workers and Bürgertum, which robs the German people of so much strength and energy", insisting that "the slightest hint of pride of profession or class" was "banned from the national movement", for "whoever is of German blood belongs to us"⁷⁷. Other speakers on the German Day took up this theme, with Herr Ernst, a local nationalist and factory owner, declaring that, "whether high or low, whether poor or apparently rich, the only thing that counts with us is that German blood flows in your veins", while Hauptmann Heiß expressed satisfaction that "our position has caused tension within the

⁷⁶ "Die vaterländische Kundgebung in Wirsberg" in "Verbände".

⁷⁷ "Dem Deutschen Tag zum Gruß" in "HA", no. 218, 15.9.1923.

working classes”, because it had brought “happiness among those workers who have been national for a long time”⁷⁸.

This new emphasis on winning over the working classes was a huge advantage to the Nazis, because it was, as Herold remarked, the “historic service of Adolf Hitler” to “recognise the problem” of “the liberation of German workers from the unholy shackles of Marxism”⁷⁹, and it was thus primarily the Nazis who would return the German worker to the bosom of the nation and create the “*Volksgemeinschaft*”⁸⁰. Hitler’s party, then, clearly had considerably more credibility in this respect than the BMP, which was much less intimately involved in the Patriotic Movement than Hitler’s organisation. The German Nationalists, after all, were men in suits speaking in meeting halls; the Nazis marched on the streets alongside their “comrades” in the Patriotic Movement.

Indeed, this fact points toward the profoundly military character of the Patriotic Movement and its constant invocation of military values. “The belief in the battle-ready man alone can bring light to the darkness of the times”, Hauptmann Heiß argued on the German Day, adding that “nothing can help except the sword. Everyone must be ready to bear arms”⁸¹, while, on the Döbraberg, Eduard Herold proclaimed that “to be German and to be able to

⁷⁸ “Vereinshalle” in “Verbände”.

⁷⁹ “Im Schützenhaus” in “Verbände”.

⁸⁰ As Conan Fischer has suggested, “it might be that the National Socialists attracted their middle class constituency not because they promised to rally it against workers, but because they strove to short circuit the language of class politics altogether through their advocacy of the national ethnic community.” Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis*, 2nd edn (Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 111.

⁸¹ “Vereinshalle” in “Verbände”.

fight is the same thing”⁸². Again and again, speakers at Patriotic meetings intoned the need for rearmament and national service; only “when national service for those who can fight and duty of service for those who cannot” were reinstated, General Treutlein-Mordes argued at the meeting of the Field Artillerists, would Germany rise again, and it was to “bring this idea of the German army to the German people” that the Patriotic Leagues existed⁸³. In order to “once again come to the heights”, Scheer argued on the German Day, “it is necessary to have general armed service”, to “return to the spirit of the readiness to bears” in “the spirit of German blood”⁸⁴.

These military values informed the model of social order constantly propagated by the Patriotic Movement. “The question of monarchy or republic is incidental”, Professor Reinmüller pronounced at the Bavaria and Reich meeting in Wirsberg, for the League “knows only one party: the party of German warriors, who are prepared to give their lives for Germany’s freedom and greatness”⁸⁵. Reinmüller later linked this warlike spirit to the völkisch German past in his speech to the Field Artillerists, announcing that “the old Germans” had “demanded from their sons unmitigated bearing of arms”. The “German woman”, too, had “her tasks”; namely, “to bear and raise a battle ready species, to tell them stories from the history of German heroism and

⁸² “Die vaterländische Kundgebung auf dem Döbraberg” in “Verbände”.

⁸³ “Vaterländischer Abend der Vereinigung ehem. Feldartilleristen Hof u. Umgebung” in “Verbände”.

⁸⁴ “In der Bürger-Gesellschaft” in “Verbände”.

⁸⁵ “Die vaterländische Kundgebung in Wirsberg” in “Verbände”.

the years of suffering in our time”⁸⁶. This, then, was a warlike worldview which drew on the völkisch German past to envision a society in which everything was oriented toward war – an essential factor, given that the holy nation was threatened by rapacious enemies. And as Reinmöller put it, the state form of such a society was irrelevant; all that mattered was its ability to deliver on these values – to preserve and project “the nation”.

The creation of such a society continued to be framed in terms of a “national rebirth”, a deliverance from the decline and disgrace that had recently characterised German history. “We stand before an unknown rebirth of the German idea comparable to the spring days of the young Gothic”, Eduard Herold pronounced in his column on the German Day. And this “rebirth” had an unmistakably authoritarian thrust. “Hail to the statesman of the future”, he continued, “because since the death of Bismarck we have longed and prayed for one who is able to channel all this violent energy”, and he was certain that “the liberator of Germany” would “come when the time is right”⁸⁷.

As in the past, this theme of decline and rebirth, with its highly religious connotations, was favoured especially by those Protestant-nationalist pastors

⁸⁶ “Vaterländischer Abend der Vereinigung ehem. Feldartilleristen Hof u. Umgebung” in “Verbände”.

⁸⁷ “Dem Deutschen Tag zum Gruß” in “HA”, no. 218, 15.9.1923. This kind of ‘Führererwartung’, or ‘longing for a leader’, was endemic to the political culture of both right and left during the Weimar Republic. Many historians have argued that it was reflective of the profound crisis of legitimacy which bedevilled the Republican system, as well as an intense desire to reduce complexity. See Mergel, “Führer, Volksgemeinschaft und Maschine”, esp pp.105-110; Klaus Schreiner, “Wann kommt der Retter Deutschlands? Formen und Funktionen von politischem Messianismus in der Weimarer Republik”, *Saeculum*, 49.1 (1998); Michael Wildt, “Volksgemeinschaft und Führererwartung in der Weimarer Republik”, in *Politische Kultur und Medienwirklichkeiten in den 1920er Jahren*, ed. by Ute Daniel (München: Oldenbourg, 2010), pp. 181–204.

who were a fixture at the open air masses and flag consecrations of the Patriotic Leagues. “A hundred years ago”, Pastor Heerdegen put it during his address on the German Day, “Germany’s leaders called for an inner renewal, and today it is also important to be internally renewed before we can turn outwards”⁸⁸. At the Bavaria and Reich meeting in Wirsberg, Pastor Beyer argued similarly that “the external revival is only possible when an internal revival has occurred, when the spirit of faith reins (...) when once again a morally strict, morally pure expression appears in German lands”⁸⁹.

The most powerful instrument in the construction of this narrative of death and resurrection continued to be Germany’s fallen soldiers⁹⁰. All of the ceremonies described here made constant and copious reference to the “fallen”; laying wreaths at war memorials was the central aspect of their liturgy, while “the bells stopped” during the Open Air Mass on the German Day so that those in attendance might “remember their fallen comrades”⁹¹. “Think today of the thousands and hundreds of thousands of graves in which our heroes rest”, Professor Reinmöller intoned at the meeting of the Field Artillerists in April 1923. “And what do they say to us? ‘Remember that you are German! For the land of freedom awaits us!’”⁹². The dead of the war and

⁸⁸ “Feldgottesdienst” in “Verbände”.

⁸⁹ “Die vaterländische Kundgebung in Wirsberg” in “Verbände”.

⁹⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, see Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, pp. 70–107, for more on the “cult of the fallen soldier” and its role in nationalist ideology. For the specific role played by this trope in Nazi ideology during the “Time of Struggle”, see Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole 1923 bis 1945*, Kölner Beiträge zur Nationsforschung, Bd. 2 (Vierow: SH-Verlag, 1996), pp. 77–194.

⁹¹ “Feldgottesdienst” in “Verbände”.

⁹² “Vaterländischer Abend der Vereingung ehem. Feldartilleristen Hof u. Umgebung” in “Verbände”.

their memory, then, continued to function as perhaps the most powerful mobilisation tool available to the Patriotic Movement. The grief and anger over the fallen soldiers was continuously deployed in order to encourage those who had survived to right the injustice that had been done to their memory and to the Reich by the Revolution. The dead could not be resurrected, but the nation could be reborn in their place, obviating the anger and mourning at their absence and violated memory.

All of these narratives are familiar from the previous chapter and, indeed, they had been circulating among Hofer Nationalists for several years prior to the rise of the Patriotic Movement. The sanctity of the nation, and the fear of its destruction in a cold and unforgiving world, remained the central hinge upon which this ideology turned. From these central convictions extended every other aspect of this worldview – the need for national unity and the reinstatement of military values, the rejection of democracy, Marxism and pacifism as divisive and thus endangering to the nation, the enlistment of Germany's fallen soldiers as a spiritual endorsement of this vision.

What differed in 1923, however, was the nature of the institutions advancing this ideology. In 1921 and 1922, its central mouthpieces had been the established organs of middle class Hof – the newspaper, the church, a political party, bürgerliche associations with a long history. The Patriotic Movement, however, was composed of a network of paramilitary organisations that had come into existence largely for the purpose of

nationalist agitation. And, fatefully, as the “Patriotic Summer” of 1923 gathered pace, it increasingly seemed that the Nazis were emerging as this movement’s spearhead. They were the driving force behind the organisation of the German Day itself; they were frequently involved in the violence that punctuated it; they supplied the event’s biggest celebrity name in the form of Hitler; and they increasingly assumed unmistakable leadership of the entire movement in Hof.

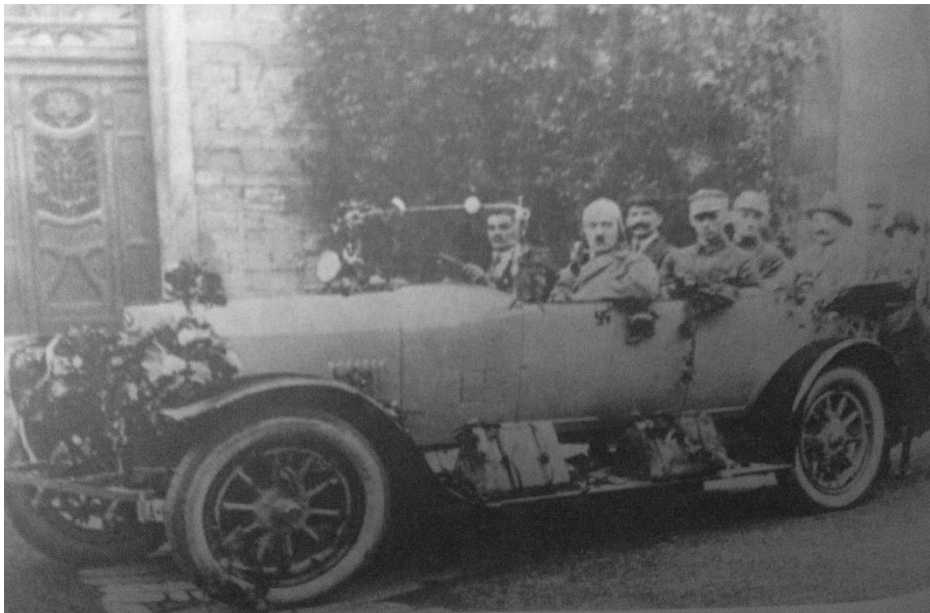


Figure 6-2. Hitler in Hof on the German Day, 1923

The ideology they advanced was little different from that in evidence among the other Patriotic Leagues, with the crucial difference that it was more thoroughly and more persistently anti-Semitic. For the Nazi economist Gottfried Feder, who spoke in the Vereinshalle in July, it was the “Jewish question” that ultimately explained Germany’s plight, for “the Israelites” were “never to be found in honest work” and existed purely through a system of

“interest slavery”. They could “not be numbered among the German people”, he concluded, before declaring war on “these world bloodsuckers”⁹³, while Hitler, too, made dark references to “the rapacity of foreign elements who do not belong to the German Fatherland” in his speech on the German Day⁹⁴. As we have seen, anti-Semitism within the “Patriotic Movement” was not restricted to the Nazis, but hatred of the Jews assumed a central place in Nazi meetings and speeches to a noticeably greater extent than was the case with the other Leagues.

It is impossible to understand why the Hofer Bürgertum voted so heavily for the Völkisch Block – a cover organisation for the Nazi Party – in the May 1924 elections without also grasping the significance of the Patriotic Movement in the summer of 1923 and the important role of the Nazis within it. For, as this section shows, the Bavarian Middle Party was only marginally involved in this nationalist mobilisation, they gave up their role to the Patriotic Leagues and paramilitary groups who increasingly served as the chief propagators of nationalist ideology in Hof. It was to this world of marching, flag consecrations and street fights with socialists, rather than the stiffer world of party political meetings, that the Nazis belonged; they were thus able to present themselves to the Hofer Bürgertum less as a political party and more as one aspect of this popular, patriotic movement. They were not an organisation that sought to “represent” the people at the polls and in parliament; they *embodied* the will of the people, stood among them at mass

⁹³ “Die Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei” in “Verbände”.

⁹⁴ “Adolf Hitler” in “Verbände”.

gatherings and marched on their streets. The BMP, by contrast, was ultimately, manifestly, a political party, which made its rhetoric of anti-parliamentarism something of a self-inflicted wound when it came to confronting an organisation such as Hitler's.

6.3 The Hitler Putsch and the Elections of 1924

The central importance of the Nazis to the populist, nationalist mobilisation that came to grip Hof's Bürgertum in the wake of the French invasion of the Ruhr was cemented over the autumn and winter of 1923/24. This resulted, somewhat paradoxically, from an event which might have been expected to destroy Hitler's political career: an attempted putsch on the night of 8th November 1923 in Munich, during which the Nazis tried to take over the city with a view to eventually "marching on Berlin" and installing a new "national" government. But the putsch failed and, in its aftermath, the Nazi Party in Bavaria was banned, while Hitler was put on trial the following year. And yet, as this section argues, these developments not only failed to discredit the Nazis in Hof; they actually strengthened their popularity and produced an increase in National Socialist activity in the *Saaalestadt*⁹⁵.

⁹⁵ Indeed, this was a common response across Bavaria, where both events buttressed Hitler's and the NSDAP's popularity among nationalists. See David Jablonsky, *The Nazi Party in Dissolution: Hitler and the Verbotzeit, 1923-1925*, Cass Series on Politics and Military Affairs in the Twentieth Century (London, England; Totowa, N.J: F. Cass, 1989), chap. 2, 3.

“The Munich Putsch Rejected” may have been the headline in the *Hofer Anzeiger* on 10th November but, tellingly, the opening section of Karl Röder’s editorial was concerned not with Hitler’s undertaking in the Bavarian capital but with the 1918 German Revolution. The putsch had occurred “on the fifth anniversary of the Revolution”, an event which had first “introduced the German people to an unholy historical period of disgrace, detestation, leaderlessness and political and economic misery”, he fulminated. “The five years of German unhappiness that we have lived through in bitter agony were a machination of Social Democracy”, and “the Revolution of 1918 was a crime, high treason of the most despicable kind”, that had been “forced on the unnerved German people” by “a single party” – the SPD⁹⁶.

Behind this diatribe lay deep concern over the likely consequences that Hitler’s Putsch attempt might have for the Patriotic Movement in Bavaria and Hof. Hitler and the Nazis had, in fact, first tried to enlist the support of, and then been stopped in their tracks by, other figureheads of the Patriotic Movement, including the Bavarian State Commissioner Gustav von Kahr, the head of the Bavarian Army (and Hofer native) General von Lossow, and the head of the Bavarian State Police Hans von Seißer⁹⁷. There was a significant chance that this could open up a deep divide within the Patriotic Movement between the Nazis and those other leagues whose loyalty was not to Hitler. By attacking the 1918 Revolution, Röder’s aim was to remind nationalist-minded readers of the common enemy and to conceal the gaps that, he

⁹⁶ “Tiefer ins Elend” in “HA”, no. 266, 10.11.1923.

⁹⁷ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris* (Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 206–212.

knew, would inevitably open up within the Patriotic Movement as a result of the putsch.

But Röder could not elude the uncomfortable responsibility of offering an opinion on what had happened in Munich, and his initial strategy was to take the side of Kahr against Hitler and Ludendorff. He consistently praised Kahr, who had demonstrated his “natural leadership”, but described the “Hitler-Ludendorff Putsch” itself as “a crime”, a “monstrous stupidity” that had “been paid its proper wage”. Perhaps mindful of Hitler’s popularity among much of Hof’s National Camp, Röder sought to deflect the blame for the putsch onto his accomplices, chiefly Erich Ludendorff. “It is hugely regrettable that Adolf Hitler, who performed such a service in the national movement, who was called to give the German workers new goals and an honourable leader, has allowed himself to be misled by Ludendorff”, he argued, dismissing the latter as a “Prussian” who had “abused Bavarian friendliness”. Tellingly, Röder closed his editorial with a renewed call for unity based on antipathy to the common enemy. “A deep split has formed in the patriotic movement”, he lamented, and “the enemies without” in France, along with “the enemies within, who hate national Germany”, who had first “cast the German people into this madness with the 9th November 1918”, were all “rubbing their hands” in unison⁹⁸.

The deep unease Röder felt about the prospect of a split developing within the National Camp, and his rather awkward attempts to avoid picking a side,

⁹⁸ “Tiefer ins Elend” in “HA”, no. 266, 10.11.1923.

were thrown into even sharper relief in the weeks after the Putsch, as he vacillated between different interpretations of what had happened, perhaps in an attempt to avoid alienating any section of his audience. “Hitler’s people can say with some justification that they were betrayed”, he opined on 12th November, conceding “the embarrassing fact that Kahr did not behave” with the integrity “that his previous conduct led us to expect”⁹⁹. But just two days later, he argued that “Ludendorff and Hitler definitely bear some responsibility” for the “deeply regrettable current situation” in which the “nationalist uprising” now found itself, while at the same time insisting that “Hitler and Ludendorff will be missed”. He ultimately concluded, however, that “the statesmanlike perspective of Kahr was more far-reaching than Hitler’s or Ludendorff’s”¹⁰⁰. After this tacit endorsement of Kahr, however, Röder’s column the following Saturday emphasised “the service of Hitler”, who was “the first to carry in his heart the wish to create a new Germany in which the internationalist madness had been destroyed”, and who “created in National Socialism not only a party but a popular movement in which the hope of German rebirth could gain traction”. “This man”, he concluded, “is indispensable for the national affair”¹⁰¹.

Röder’s confused and vacillating assessment of the putsch betrayed the fact that he was, ultimately, hedging his bets – and with some justification, for there is evidence that a split did indeed develop within the nationalist

⁹⁹ “Hitler - Kahr” in “HA”, no. 267, 12.11.1923.

¹⁰⁰ “Vor neuen Aufgaben” in “HA”, no. 269, 14.11.1923.

¹⁰¹ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 272, 17.11.1923.

movement of Hof in the wake of the Hitler Putsch. The local NSDAP engaged in a flurry of activity in its immediate aftermath, with a miniature repeat of the German Day on 11th November which saw Nazis, joined by members of other Patriotic Leagues, “marching through the streets shouting ‘Heil Hitler!’”, and similar demonstrations occurring in towns and villages around Hof. At one of these, in Leimitz, Pastor Dietlein declared that “a brave people never forgets its dead” after laying a wreath at the local war memorial, thereby conflating the dead of the putsch with the dead of the war¹⁰². The Nazis gathered again on 15th November for a “festival of mourning” which “brought all of Hof to its feet”. According to the report, the “streets were filled even before 8AM” as the “National Leagues were positioned on the Hallplatz” with “some 60 flags”. Pastor Heerdegen held a “mourning and commemoration speech for those who had died out of loyalty to their ideas”, for these “true Germans who had gone to their deaths out of love for their Fatherland”. He invoked “the necessity of making the German people battle-ready again” and the need for “sacrifices for the Fatherland” which would ensure that “the blood spilled in Munich was not in vain”¹⁰³.

Others, however, voiced less approbation for Hitler’s role in the Putsch. On 15th November, the *Hofer Anzeiger* published an article entitled “November Storm”, written by an anonymous member of the local nationalist movement, which offered an unsympathetic portrayal of Hitler’s role in the events of 8th

¹⁰² "Hof, 12. November' in 'Verbände"; This conflation of the dead of the putsch with the dead of the war was a key aspect of the Nazis' own "cult of dead heroes". See Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden*, p. 94.

¹⁰³ "Die gestrige Trauerfeier..." in "Verbände".

November 1923. Kahr, Lossow and Seißer had been “forced”, the letter suggested, to participate in the “bloody drama” of the Munich Putsch. Hitler and Ludendorff had believed that “their persons, their presence” would “bring the army and police to passivity. They were wrong”. As a result of their error, the article continued, “we stand before a ruined house”, the “collapse of a good portion of the patriotic, the national movement, the collapse of belief in national men and national words, the collapse of hopes” and “bitter disappointment”. The article described the explanations of Kahr, Lossow and Seißer as “insightful, impactful and worthy”, whereas the failure of the putsch “spoke against” its leaders, “their self-evaluation, their political, military and popular-psychological capacities”¹⁰⁴. Hitler, then, had been at best misguided and at worst deluded.

In a similar vein, leading figures of the Bavaria and Reich Patriotic League declared their continued support for Kahr in the aftermath of the putsch, with Herr Bay and Herr Debes, two captains of the local branch, insisting on continued support for Kahr’s government at a meeting on 22nd November¹⁰⁵. Eduard Herold, too, described Hitler as a “victim of his own popularity” and praised Kahr as a man with “a cool view” who had seen “the monstrous danger of civil war” in Hitler’s reckless action, which was based merely on a “short term view”¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁴ “Novembersturm” in “HA”, no. 270, 15.11.1923.

¹⁰⁵ “Schwarzenbach, 22. November” in “Verbände”.

¹⁰⁶ “Die Ortsgruppe Hof von 'Bayern und Reich'“ in “Verbände”.

Despite these voices of condemnation from within the Hofer National Camp, however, the truth was that much of this milieu was more in alignment with Hitler than Kahr. On 13th November, the leaders of Bavaria and Reich felt compelled to publish a notice in the *Hofer Anzeiger* which tried to explain away the fact that “some members of the local branch” had participated in the Nazi demonstration the previous Sunday; this had only happened because “they had wanted to show their agreement with the idea of the unity of the national movement which is shared by all patriotically thinking people”¹⁰⁷. But that their participation actually amounted to a more fundamental endorsement of the Hitler Putsch was revealed at the meeting on November 22nd, when Debes was forced to admit that some 50 members had since left the League and gone over to the Nazis¹⁰⁸.

Similar problems materialised in the Reichsflagge and the Blücher League. “There has as yet been no formal split within the Reichsflagge Hof”, wrote Councillor Wilhelm to the Upper Franconian government in early 1924, “but there have been huge internal differences of opinion”, with “at least the overwhelming majority of the league’s members standing on radical Völkisch ground”¹⁰⁹. This sentiment was confirmed by a report written by the Criminal Commissioner Herr Hopperdietzel, who observed that “since the Hitler-Putsch, two directions have made themselves evident” within the

¹⁰⁷ “Der Bund 'Bayern und Reich', Ortsgruppe Hof...” in “Verbände”.

¹⁰⁸ “Die Ortsgruppe Hof von 'Bayern und Reich'” in “Verbände”; Jablonsky also shows that the Hitler Putsch was a disaster for Bavaria and Reich, whose membership became increasingly activist in the wake of the putsch while its leadership moved in the opposite direction. See Jablonsky, *The Nazi Party in Dissolution* p. 38.

¹⁰⁹ Bezirksamtmann Wilhelm, 1 Februar 1924 in “Bezirksamt Hof an Regierung von Oberfranken”, Stadtarchiv Bamberg, K3 Praes. Reg. 1959.

Reichsflagge: “a völkisch and a German-national”, with the latter gaining the upper hand¹¹⁰. In the Blücher League, too, there was clear evidence of “strong sympathy with the National Socialists”¹¹¹.

Indeed, by the time Hitler’s trial began at the end of February 1924, the *Hofer Anzeiger* itself had quite evidently realised in which direction the wind was blowing and was now offering a much more emphatic endorsement of Hitler. In the light of his testimony at the trial, Kahr had become a “bitter disappointment”, his appearance before the court “ridiculous” and “full of vagaries”. “These days”, Röder remarked, “one is finally cured of the idea that Kahr could ever have been a German leader”¹¹², and he argued that the measures taken by Kahr in the aftermath of the Putsch, especially his banning of the Nazi party, were comparable with “Bismarck’s anti-Socialist law”. Indeed, they were worse, because the Völkisch Movement was a “natural reaction against the disgrace of the German Fatherland”¹¹³. From initially backing the Catholic-Conservative leadership of Kahr against the populist, “short-term” inclination of the Nazis in the immediate aftermath of the Putsch, then, Röder was now proclaiming Kahr as the chief enemy of the “national movement”, almost certainly because he had realised that much of the *Hofer Anzeiger*’s readership sympathised with the Nazis.

¹¹⁰ “Polizeibehörde Hof (Hopperdietzel) an Polizei Direktor Nürnberg-Fürth, 19.07.1924”, Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, 218 (1) 378.

¹¹¹ Bezirksamtman Wilhelm, 1 Februar 1924 in “Bezirksamt Hof an Regierung von Oberfranken”.

¹¹² “Zweiter Akt” in “HA”, no. 68, 18.3.1924.

¹¹³ “Der Prozess” in “HA”, no. 49, 26.2.1924.

On the day Hitler's trial began, Röder described Nazism as "a great spiritual movement" led by Hitler, "the most popular man of the people", and Ludendorff, "the greatest general of our time". He now dodged the issue of what had happened in Munich on 9th November entirely; the trial was not really about this, he argued, but rather "laying bare the conditions that allowed the putsch to happen"¹¹⁴. The putsch was thus yet another opportunity to denounce the Revolution. "If we can't be completely in agreement with all the goals of Adolf Hitler, especially his economic programme", Röder wrote the following week, "we cannot refuse sympathy to this striver for a new and pure Germany" and, though he "wanted to go his way with violence without considering the laws", this made him little different to "Herr Ebert and Scheidemann, who made their revolution in the year 1918 without such pure and true German hearts"¹¹⁵.

Indeed, once again, it was this first revolution which formed the fulcrum of Röder's argument, for "an act that was an answer to the November Revolution of 1918 can never be high treason", and he compared Hitler's and Ludendorff's "willingness to go to their deaths for their ideas" with "Ernst Toller, the hero of the Munich *Räterepublik* who, instead of manfully standing up for his principles, cowardly hid in a cupboard as sentence was passed on the other Communist disgraces"¹¹⁶. Thus the German Revolution, and the "Communist dictatorship" of the *Räterepublik*, were invoked here to provide

¹¹⁴ "Der Prozess" in "HA", no. 49, 26.2.1924.

¹¹⁵ "Politisches Unheil" in "HA", no. 51, 28.2.1924.

¹¹⁶ "Sehr mildernde Umstände" in "HA", no. 74, 25.3.1924.

the moral counterpoint to, and justification for, Hitler's putsch attempt, which had been recast from a "monstrous stupidity" into a noble riposte to November 1918¹¹⁷.

That the National Socialist "idea" was putting down extremely firm roots in the *Saaalestadt* in the aftermath of the putsch was not only evidenced by the stance of most of the Patriotic Leagues and the uninhibitedly pro-Hitler tone of the *Hofer Anzeiger*, but also by a particular article in the newspaper at the end of 1923. Entitled "How they Lie!", this article disputed a claim made in a liberal Berlin newspaper that a student (the son of one of the editors of the socialist *Oberfränkische Volkszeitung*) had been "expelled" from a Hofer High School for wearing a Republican insignia because "the entire teaching body stands almost totally behind the National Socialist Party". Its shrill title notwithstanding, the content of the article offered a fairly weak attempt to obscure what had actually happened. "The student was only sent home mistakenly by the teacher responsible", it argued, but then added that the pupil had subsequently decided to attend a different school. The article further rejected the claim that the entire teaching body was made up of Nazis by stating that it in fact included members of "many parties which stand on national ground". But this obfuscatory reply seems to indicate that the school staff were most probably largely anti-Republican nationalists, and that a pupil had indeed left the school for wearing a Republican insignia¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁷ "Tiefer ins Elend" in "HA", no. 266, 10.11.1923.

¹¹⁸ "Wie Sie lügen!" in "HA", no. 286, 4.12.1923.

In the Protestant Parish Newsletter, too, echoes of the National Socialist worldview became louder and louder in the months after the Hitler Putsch. “In Hanover, at a Communist ‘evening of entertainment’”, wrote Pastor Dietrich in early 1924, “the solo dancer H. Keisberg” had “danced naked” in “a swastika and steel helmet”, before “Christ appeared in evening dance and sang ‘Victorious We Want to Smash France’”. This “insolence and meanness”, he concluded, was typical of “Communism, which is infected with the Jewish spirit”. In the same edition, Dietrich approvingly reported assertions made by Julius Streicher, the Nazi Gauleiter of Upper Franconia and publisher of *Der Stürmer*, that “the Jews” enjoyed undue prominence in the municipal administration of Nuremberg. “In the big town hospital”, Dietrich wrote, “50% of doctors are Jews; the head of the youth welfare department, which takes care of 4000 Christian children, is a Jew called Dr Heimerich who cannot stand to see a crucifix, and at his side are well-paid officials with impeccable Social Democratic credentials” who were using poor relief collections to enrich themselves. Comments made by Ludendorff at his trial, meanwhile, were for Dietrich a clear indication that “Marxism, Zionism and (Catholic) Ultramontanism” were principally responsible for Germany’s post-revolutionary downfall¹¹⁹.

The local newspaper, church and what remained of the non-Nazi Patriotic Leagues, then, had made their support for Hitler absolutely plain by the time that campaigning for the spring 1924 elections began. They did so partly

¹¹⁹ “Aus Kirche und Welt” in “Evangelisches Gemeindeblatt”, no. 7, 6.4.1924.

because they agreed with him and partly because they recognised his enormous popularity among the rank and file members of the Patriotic Movement. And it soon became clear that the Nazis – or the Völkisch Block, as they were now legally obliged to call themselves in the wake of the ban on the NSDAP¹²⁰ – were the ones setting the tone in the run up to the election, and that they now enjoyed a commanding presence within Hof's National Camp, their popularity hugely buttressed by the events of the previous summer, as well as by Hitler's putsch and trial¹²¹.

This became abundantly clear on 24th February, when Dr Roth, a Völkisch Block delegate in the Bavarian Landtag, spoke in the Vereinshalle, which had to be “closed due to overfilling, a truly German sign of the interest that the völkisch movement” had found in the *Saaletadt*, according to the jubilant report. Roth “declared war on all political parties” – including those of the nationalist right – “because they stand on the ground of parliamentarism”. The Völkisch Block, he argued, was not a party but “a spiritual movement” – a “movement for German freedom”. In contrast to the nationalists, this movement was “fundamentally revolutionary”; it “didn't want to return to the old conditions before 1918, because much was then amiss in the German Reich, otherwise it would not have collapsed so easily”. The most fundamental of these flaws, he argued, were “the differences of class and

¹²⁰ See Geoffrey Pridham, *Hitler's Rise to Power: the Nazi Movement in Bavaria, 1923-1933* (London: Hart-Davis MacGibbon, 1973), p. 15.

¹²¹ There was some controversy within Bavaria's Völkisch movement about whether the Völkisch Block actually had Hitler's backing. But in Hof, at least, those who campaigned for it in the 1924 elections had all been Nazis prior to the banning of the NSDAP. See Jablonsky, *The Nazi Party in Dissolution* and Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 141.

status that we had”, and he concluded his speech by proclaiming that “the völkisch movement cannot be combined with the Patriotic Movement because the latter is reactionary, the first revolutionary”¹²². In this way, then, the Hofer Nazis laid claim to an ostensibly contradictory element in the political culture of local nationalists: they promised to overturn the hated Revolution of November 1918, but they also embodied the greater demand among the local middle classes for political participation which the Revolution had helped to inaugurate¹²³.

Der Völkische Block

Sonntag, 23. März 1924, nachmittags 2 Uhr
in der Vereinshalle zu Hof 5375

==== fünfte große ====

öffentl. Wahlversammlung.

Herr Dr. Buttman,
Oberbibliothekar des Landtags in München, spricht über:
Reaktion oder Revolution?

Kollegenossen! Ein Kenner der bayerischen Politik spricht
über den Zweck der völkischen Bewegung. Kommt und urteilt!

Gasöffnung 1 Uhr. Freie Aussprache.

Der Völkische Block, Ortsgruppe Hof.

Figure 6-3. Advertisement for a Völkisch Block Meeting, 1924

¹²² “Abgeordneter Dr. Roth in Hof” in “Verbände”.

¹²³ This apparent contradiction - Nazism as both enemy and product of the November 1918 Revolution - has been addressed by many historians; see Winkler, “Revolution als Konkursverwaltung”, p. 32; Sebastian Haffner, *The Meaning of Hitler* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1997), p. 11; Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*.

This, then, was the essential character of the ideological profile presented by the Völkisch Block in the 1924 elections. In describing themselves not as a “political party” but as a “movement”, they effectively tapped into a tradition of denouncing all parties and parliamentarism that, as we saw in the last chapter, had characterised the ideological landscape of nationalist Hof for almost four years. Indeed, this trope had been propagated by the Bavarian Middle Party itself – which meant that this party’s own anti-parliamentary rhetoric had finally come back to haunt it in the form of a competitor which seemed more genuinely rooted in a populist, paramilitary form of politics. And in presenting themselves not purely as an anti-Marxist party that wanted to restore the structure of the Kaiserreich, but as a “revolutionary” and “völkisch” movement that wanted to correct the injustices of the past in the service of national liberation, the Völkisch Block seemed to be a much more credible standard bearer of the *Volksgemeinschaft* than the BMP. It also gave the Block much greater appeal among the working classes, many of whom, as we shall see, actually voted for it.

This, then, appeared to be the great “national” movement that the *Hofer Anzeiger*, Protestant Newsletter, paramilitary groups and – ironically – the BMP itself had been talking about for years. And, crucially, the Völkisch Block was tireless in propagating its message, holding seven meetings in Hof

during this election, more than any of its competitors, and showing frenetic activity in the small towns and villages around the town¹²⁴.

The Nazis were thus the inheritors of the spirit of the “Patriotic Movement” that had seized Hof’s National Camp over the summer of 1923. But this represented a significant problem for those Leagues who were still unwilling to throw their weight completely behind it. On 12th March 1924, the Blücher League held an “evening of entertainment” which was also attended by many members of Bavaria and Reich and at which Rudolf Schäfer returned to Hof and spoke for almost two hours. The attendance, as the report ruefully observed, was “not so good” – almost certainly because many of the former members of these leagues had defected to the Völkisch Block. Indeed, it was fortunate that they were not in attendance, because Schäfer’s speech, though it did not name him, was far from complementary toward their Führer. “It is easy to present yourself as a völkisch man who visits German days” and “gives the impression for two days of ruling an entire town”, Schäfer declared, but all of this was a mere “superficiality”, and he condemned the “revolutionary” disposition of the Völkisch Block: “they say we have to look only forwards, never backwards, but are we supposed to imagine that a new Germany can simply be created out of ideas, like a building in the air?”. “If we think in this way”, he concluded bitterly, “we’ll end up in the same place as Marxism and go to ground on the idea that we can create something new

¹²⁴ “Hitler-Marsch für Zither erschienen”: “Der Völkische Block”: “Hitler-Feier auf der Luisenburg” in “Verbände”; See also Rabenstein, *Politische und publizistische Strömungen*, p. 142.

without building on what went before". This, then, was a much more conventionally conservative invocation of the need to "restore" the structure and content of the Kaiserreich against the disruptive influence of the Revolution. Judging by the attendance, it was not what much of Hof's national camp wanted to hear.¹²⁵

Indeed, the "revolutionary", activist leanings of the Nazis gave them a decisive advantage over the staid Bavarian Middle Party in the fraught atmosphere of 1924. And the fact that the BMP had the most to lose from the rise of the Völkisch Block became most apparent at a large electoral meeting in March 1924 at which both Dr Strathmann and Herr Fröhlich, a German National member of the Bavarian Landtag, spoke before a substantial audience. Despite the impressive attendance, however, the meeting was marked from the beginning by a mood of implacable tension which "eventually developed into a scandal". Both speakers first offered the usual attacks on Marxism, but then they came to the thorny question of the BMP's attitude to the Völkisch Block. Fröhlich in particular seemed intent on offering an olive branch, congratulating the "völkisch movement" on its "great successes" the previous summer, contending that "we too struggle against everything non-German and Internationalist, against foreigners who want to destroy the German spirit" and insisting that both groups shared a common antipathy to the German Revolution. He then tried to list the ways in which the BMP had supported the Nazis, claiming that "the Middle Party argued for the

¹²⁵ "Von der Versammlung des "Blücher"-Bundes Hof" in "Verbände".

preservation of the National Socialist Stormtroopers, that Hitler be allowed to remain in the country, and for the restoration of the Nazi Party in Bavaria”, but he continued sadly that “Hitler’s struggle was once against the left, now it seems to be more against the right”, and added that the Putsch attempt had “turned us into a joke abroad”. This provoked catcalls from members of the Völkisch Block in attendance, and so Fröhlich again proceeded in a reconciliatory fashion: “The Middle Party does not deserve attacks from the völkisch side (...) We owe thanks to the man who fought for Germany’s freedom, Adolf Hitler”.

After this confused contribution, and with the atmosphere becoming increasingly heated, a (possibly drunk) member of the Völkisch Block rose from his seat and walked onto the stage in an attempt to confront the speaker. He was restrained by security, which provoked a storm of boos from the Nazis in attendance. Dr Strathmann, hoping to rescue the situation, then took the stage and insisted that the BMP was already a “völkisch Party” that had long been practising “völkisch politics” for some time. “Foreigners must be removed from state service”, he announced, “that is völkisch politics! The Communists and Social Democrats are not völkisch, they are funded and led by the Jews”, the Democrats were “not a völkisch party, they supported the policies of the Social Democrats”, but the Bavarian Middle Party had “practised völkisch politics with its struggle against the Weimar constitution, against the Treaty of Versailles, against the diktat of Spa and London, supported the Ruhr struggle, against profiteering (...), the removal of those

who came to power through the Revolution". This was a rather desperate attempt by Strathmann to justify his own party's existence by hitching it to the seemingly unstoppable bandwagon of the "völkisch movement" in Hof. Indeed, he even implied that the BMP could serve as the "party-political wing" of this movement, the "greatness" of which, he insisted, "is that they don't fall into the tricks of party life", for "Adolf Hitler has always said that the völkisch movement doesn't want to be a party".

But if Strathmann truly entertained the hope that the völkisch movement would generate popular support and mobilisational potential for the Bavarian Middle Party, he was to be disillusioned in the ensuing discussion, which only raised the temperature at what was already a tempestuous meeting. Herr Dietrich, a local Nazi, spoke first, and declared that Germany "could only rise again through a struggle for the goals of the National Socialist German Worker's Party", that "the swastika must win across the entire line", and that Adolf Hitler would "complete his great work of healing Germany". He was followed by Herr Fritsch, who insisted that the German Nationalists were "not quite so free of Jews as they like to claim", before giving examples of Jews in leading positions in the party. "There must be a clear division between the Soviet Star and the Swastika", he proclaimed; "on the one side, Jewish Communism with its race-destroying tendencies; on the other side, the old German signs of health, under which the brothers and sisters of German colour would find themselves again". The final contributor was Herr Schenk, who attacked "industry" for "trying to make profits at the expense of

workers and employers”, which “was not völkisch but naked interest politics”. After these anti-Semitic, quasi-Socialist, anti-Communist contributions, Dr Strathmann retook the stage in an attempt to close the proceedings, but he was unable to do so because the Nazis in attendance began “to sing the Hitler song”, forcing the meeting to break up in tumult¹²⁶.

The BMP, then, was simply too conventionally conservative for many of Hof’s Burghers, who were now looking for something more activist, more “revolutionary”, perhaps even more overtly racist. In short, they wanted National Socialism. And, based on the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the Protestant Parish Newsletter, meetings of the BMP and the remaining Patriotic Leagues, much of bürgerliche Hof was marching to the drumbeat of the Nazis by the time the elections came around in spring 1924.

However, rather than offer the Völkisch Block an explicit endorsement, which might have alienated local members of the Bavarian Middle Party, Karl Röder resorted in the *Hofer Anzeiger* to the tried and tested method of attacking the common enemies of the nationalist movement. “When we go to the polls on Sunday”, he wrote before the Bavarian elections, “we must above all remember the disgrace that the once so-powerful German Reich has come to through the revolutionaries of 1918”. Even if, he argued, one wanted “to take the stab-in-the-back as a legend, which everyone who lived through the collapse at the front can refute”, then “the fact remains that the November

¹²⁶ “Versammlung Fröhlich-Strathmann” in “BMP”.

lunacy brought a time of worthlessness to Germany”¹²⁷. The aim of the Bürgertum in the elections, he insisted, “must be to cancel out all the effects of Marxism”¹²⁸, to “establish a unified front against Marxism, against the Socialist International”¹²⁹.

Special scorn in this Manichean schema was reserved for the German Democrats, the advocates of “the golden middle way”. In fact, Röder argued, in this election there was “only a right or a left; to the right, the national Bürgertum; left, international socialism”. Many, principally the Democrats, had “tried for five years to create a bridge between these two worldviews”, but “now there is only an open and honest battle”. And, in this battle, the Democratic Party was “in danger of being ground to dust”¹³⁰. But this, for Röder, was something to be celebrated. “Only those parties which are prepared for German action, to fight the internal and external enemy with all their strength, have a right to live”, he intoned, and the Democrats, with their “punishable idealism” and “preference for joining with the Social Democrats over other bürgerliche parties”, had no place in this Darwinist struggle for survival¹³¹.

Nothing remained, then, of the compromise-based notion of politics advanced by the DDP during the German Revolution some five and a half years before.

The traditional pillars of middle class Hof – the newspaper, the church, the

¹²⁷ “Knapp vor der Wahl” in “HA”, no. 82, 3.4.1924.

¹²⁸ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 84, 5.4.1924.

¹²⁹ “Knapp vor der Wahl” in “HA”, no. 82, 3.4.1924.

¹³⁰ “Den Wahlen zu” in “HA”, no. 19, 22.1.1924.

¹³¹ “Knapp vor der Wahl” in “HA”, no. 82, 3.4.1924.

most prominent nationalist associations – were now preaching a Manichean, us-and-them anti-Socialism and an ideology of militaristic mobilisation. The rising Nazi Party put its own populist, völkisch-socialist, quasi-revolutionary, virulently anti-Semitic slant on this conception of politics. And, in the elections themselves, it was they who won the day, with resounding victories for the Völkisch Block in the Bavarian Landtag Elections at the beginning of April and Reichstag elections in May.

For Röder, these victories constituted “the recognition that Volk and Fatherland is stronger than Marxism” and, as he observed, the Völkisch Block had not only taken almost the entirety of both the BMP’s and the DDP’s vote – it had actually made inroads into the working class districts of Hof and sapped the electoral strength of the Social Democrats, the ultimate proof that “Marxism is not buried in the hearts” of Germans but was now “seen as a foreign spirit”. All in all, he concluded, the state and national election results showed that, “in Germany, the confrontation between international Marxism and the völkisch idea has begun”¹³².

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to explain why it was the Nazis, rather than the Bavarian Middle Party, which in the spring elections of 1924 turned out to be the primary beneficiaries of the “nationalist consensus” outlined in the

¹³² “Zur Landtagswahl” in “HA”, no. 85, 7.4.1924.

previous chapter. The French invasion of the Ruhr and the hyperinflation triggered a dramatic surge in activity among local nationalist, patriotic and Völkisch groups which, by the summer of 1923, had become a veritable movement that was capable of taking over entire towns and villages for its festivals. The Nazis were able to manoeuvre themselves into a leading position within this movement and thus present themselves as its embodiment in the elections of the following year, riding on the crest of a wave of this grassroots, populist, nominally “revolutionary” uprising. Indeed, so popular had the Nazis become in the aftermath of the events of the summer that Hitler’s catastrophic putsch attempt of November 1923 could be recast as an honourable blood sacrifice in the name of German unity which only strengthened the appeal of the Völkisch Block.

The BMP, by contrast, lacked the revolutionary élan of the Nazis: it was more backward looking and more obviously a conventional political party, which was particularly problematic, given that a key aspect of the nationalist ideology that had gained ground in Hof over the previous two years consistently denounced the very principle of political parties and parliamentarism. It simply could not exploit the Völkisch mobilisation that had taken place in Hof over the course of 1923 as effectively as its more pugnacious and populist competitor.

7 Conclusion

“Though it appears that the freedom loving Bürgertum of Hof is gone, the good bürgerliche spirit in Hof is not dead (...) Reason will win, because you can’t make politics with the soul and the heart, only with reason”. These words were spoken by Herr Sandner, a local teacher, at a meeting of the German Democratic Party in the Bürgergesellschaft during the 1924 election campaign. It is unclear how many people heard Sandner’s speech, which was an impassioned defence of democracy and an exhortation to the German people to “accept that we lost the biggest war in world history”¹. But the numbers in attendance were unlikely to be very high; a report from a similar meeting on 14th January provides compelling evidence of the near total eclipse that the DDP had experienced in the *Saalestadt* by this point. This gathering “unfortunately received only a very small attendance”, while Herr Schneider, the party secretary, gave an assessment of the state of the local DDP which “was not rosy”, and he went so far as to advocate a union with the right-liberal DVP due to a “lack of activity” on the part of the former².

This thesis has attempted to explain how and why the left-liberal German Democratic Party, which just five years before had seemed to hold all of the cards where Hof’s middle classes were concerned, had come to such a state of irrelevance, and how its place had been taken by extreme right-wing and

¹ "Hof, 3. März. Deutsch-Demokratischer Kreisparteitag" in "Deutsche Demokratische Partei Hof, 1918-1924".

² "Hof, 14. Januar. Der Deutsch-Demokratische Verein Hof" in "DDP".

anti-Semitic nationalists rooted in a populist and paramilitary uprising. In an effort to make sense of this development, this study has provided an analysis of local middle class political culture in Hof over this five-year period, reconstructing the narratives and discourses that circulated within the Hofer Bürgertum to see how and why they changed. It has used newspaper editorials, meetings of political parties and bürgerliche associations, the documents of employers' groups, the writings of politically engaged individuals, the Protestant newsletter and a range of other sources in an effort to reconstruct what Hof's Burghers thought, said and wrote between these two profoundly different elections and to explain why their political allegiances changed so dramatically in such a short period of time.

This study has argued that the transformation of Hof's middle classes from a Democratic into a Nazi constituency occurred in two separate phases, and that these phases need to be treated and explained separately. The first phase consisted of the transition from a democratic to a nationalist consensus, which occurred between November 1918 and summer 1920. With the Right totally discredited in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, middle class politics in Hof came to be dominated by left-liberals who believed in the creation of a Republic, co-operation with the Majority Socialists, separation of church and state in schools, the formation of a League of Nations and the renunciation of German imperialism. Hof's Burghers not only packed meeting halls to hear this message; they also voted for it in huge numbers and many of their most prominent spokespeople, such

as the poet Eduard Herold and head teacher August Horn, articulated it in public. There was, at the very least, a chance that this new spirit could endure, that Hof's democrats could preserve their authority and that a long-term commitment to Republican democracy might be fostered among the middle classes of the *Saalestadt*.

The fact that this did not materialise was largely due to three crises which severely undermined the viability of the DDP's political vision and delegitimised those who espoused it. The first of these was the creation of a *Räterepublik* in Munich, Bavaria and Hof itself, which injected a panicked anti-Bolshevism into the discourse of the local middle classes and significantly increased social tensions in the town between workers and burghers. The second was the publication of the Versailles Treaty, which inflamed nationalist passions and destroyed the prospect of a future of international peace and reconciliation. The third, and arguably most important, was the Kapp Putsch, when social strife in Hof came within the context of near-civil war like conditions in parts of Germany and the advance of the Red Army in Eastern Europe.

All of this significantly enhanced the perception within Hof's middle classes that they were confronted with implacable threats to their very existence. The Democrats had staked their claim to leadership on a calm, rational "politics of the middle", on compromise with the MSPD, and on international reconciliation. They were thus unsuited to capitalising on this growing mood of nationalist outrage and anti-socialist paranoia, and they consequently lost

their pre-eminent position to the Bavarian Middle Party, the local wing of the German National Peoples' Party, which over the following two years came to dominate the politics of middle class Hof. What developed was a nationalist consensus, articulated not only by the BMP but also the *Hofer Anzeiger*, the Protestant Newsletter and a range of military associations, which exalted the nation as a sacred entity and demanded "inner unity" in order to protect it from rapacious foreign powers. This required a "national rebirth" and the nullification of all those forces that might prevent it – chiefly, Marxism and parliamentarism, the perceived standard bearers of the 1918 Revolution.

If elections had been held in Hof at the end of 1922 rather than the spring of 1924, it is highly likely that the majority of middle class voters would have opted for the Bavarian Middle Party. However, the events of 1923 were crucial in explaining the second aspect of the process treated here – the emergence of the Nazis as the leaders of Hof's National Camp. Unlike the first part of the process, this second change in political allegiance was not accompanied by a fundamental change in local middle class ideology and discourse. On the contrary, the Nazis emerged not as challengers to the nationalist consensus but as its most radical, able and credible representatives. They accomplished this by manoeuvring themselves into a position of leadership within the burgeoning "Patriotic Movement", a network of nationalist and military associations which engaged in intensive activity over the spring and summer of 1923 and had a substantial mobilisational potential among the Bürgertum of Hof and its environs. Significantly, the

Nazis presented themselves not as a conventional political party but as the revolutionary force behind this populist, grassroots movement, which gave them a huge advantage over their more conservative rivals in the BMP. So popular did the Nazis become as a result of their spearheading of this movement that not even Hitler's catastrophic putsch attempt could derail them and, by the spring of 1924, they were the most prominent right-wing party in Hof.

How representative were these dramatic events of the experience of the small-town protestant middle classes across Germany in the years after the First World War? Certainly, much that happened in Hof was specific to the town; its history of radical leftism which culminated in the local dominance of Independent Socialism after the war, for example, indelibly coloured the way it experienced the *Räterepublik* and Kapp Putsch, while its status as a majority Protestant town in the Bavarian "Cell of Order" made it unusually susceptible to the appeal of radical nationalist politics after 1920. But despite Hof's idiosyncrasies, it was ultimately but one example of a nationwide process of radicalisation that gripped protestant middle class milieus across small-town Germany in the years after the First World War.

Indeed, the introductory chapter of this study elaborated on two extensive bodies of literature, the first of which has focused on precisely this process of provincial radicalisation, with the second charting the increasingly extreme nature of post-1914 German nationalist ideology at the level of social, political and economic elites. The overall aim of this study was to build a bridge

between these two historiographical traditions; to provide another case study of middle class radicalisation which focuses predominantly on its ideological and discursive dimensions. What, then, has my contribution added to these bodies of literature?

Firstly, this study supports the view that, after the First World War, the republican project enjoyed considerable and genuine support among middle class voters³. In Hof, such voters did not turn to the DDP principally out of an opportunistic desire to weather the storm of the Revolution, but because of an authentic appetite for constitutional change in a more participatory, republican and even left-liberal direction. In Hof, at least, there is little to suggest that Germany's middle classes were fundamentally and uniquely illiberal and authoritarian: rather, there is substantial evidence that ideas of republican democracy and co-operation with the Majority Socialists initially gained widespread backing in the *Saalestadt*.

Secondly, this study has had much to say about the *timing* of and *triggers* for this process of radicalisation. In his study of the town of Celle, Frank Bösch argued that the national-conservative milieu was "a child of the Revolution"⁴ but, in the case of Hof, this assertion needs to be more precisely formulated⁵. The radicalisation of the local middle classes was not a direct response to

³ Jones, *German Liberalism*, pp. 1–12; Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, pp. 106–112.

⁴ Bösch, *Das konservative Milieu*, p. 35.

⁵ There is, in fact, a certain vagueness in the literature about exactly what timespan constituted the "German Revolution" - if it refers solely to the events of November 1918 or if it was, in fact, a longer period between November 1918 and the passing of the Weimar Constitution in 1919. See. Volker Ullrich, *Die Revolution von 1918/19* (München: C.H. Beck, 2009), pp. 9, 10 for a discussion of this.

November 1918, but rather to those crises which ensued in the 18 months *after* November 1918. The *Räterepublik* and publication of the Versailles Treaty were significant here, but of critical importance was the experience of the Kapp Putsch, when middle class perceptions of a burgeoning “civil war” (accompanied by fears of a possible Bolshevik invasion) reached an absolute fever pitch. Crucial here was the fact that, in stark contrast to their behaviour during the *Räterepublik*, the Majority Social Democrats sided with extremists on the left rather than the German Democrats. This did enormous damage to the idea that the Bürgertum could collaborate with moderate sections of the working class movement in the construction of democracy, a claim which was central to the DDP’s appeal and conception of politics. The Democrats thus lost greatly in legitimacy, and the door was opened to those who denounced the MSPD, USPD, Communism and even Russian Bolshevism as common manifestations of the same anti-national “Marxist” enemy.

The Kapp Putsch and its consequences thus marked the point when the Hofer Bürgertum definitively turned away from a pro-republican politics, and it was only after the Kapp Putsch that radical nationalist narratives and concepts became virtually hegemonic to the discourse of Hof’s Bürgertum⁶. This study has provided substantial evidence that many of the ideas used by leading German nationalists, as outlined in the large literature on post-war

⁶ Other historians have also described the Kapp Putsch as a decisive turning point in the history of the Weimar Republic. See Hürten, *Der Kapp-Putsch als Wende*. In his study of the Gotha middle classes, Helge Matthiesen also emphasises the events after the Kapp Putsch as a turning point in the process of local bürgerliche radicalisation. See Matthiesen, "Zwei Radikalisierungen", pp. 47-49.

nationalist ideology, did indeed “filter down” into provincial newspapers, meeting halls and parish publications, contributing considerably to the process of radicalisation on the streets and at the polls. The *Volksgemeinschaft*, the “August Experience”, the “stab-in-the-back” legend, even the idea of “Jewish Bolshevism” – these were not the preserve merely of leading protestant pastors, generals and “Conservative Revolutionaries” but, judging by the example of Hof, were deployed liberally in political arguments and editorials in the small towns where the majority of Hitler’s voters lived.

Such ideas thus had a widespread popular resonance, but they did not simply “spread”, as if by a process of intangible, spiritual osmosis. Critical here, in fact, were the individuals and institutions which *articulated* such ideas, especially because these were, in many cases, the traditional pillars of middle class Hof – the newspaper, the local pastor, headteachers, civic societies and associations. This confirms the findings of several scholars that the established institutions of the Nationalist Milieu made an inimitable contribution to the spread of radical nationalist ideology in the Weimar Republic and thus helped fertilise the soil for the eventual advent of National Socialism⁷.

This thesis has focused more substantively on the *ideological* dimension of Weimar-era bürgerliche radicalisation than has been the case in most

⁷ Bösch, *Das konservative Milieu*, chap. 5; Rudy Koshar, “Contentious Citadel: Bourgeois Crisis and Nazism in Marburg/Lahn, 1880-1933”, in *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency, 1919-1933*, ed. by Thomas Childers (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 25; David Michael Imhoof, *Becoming a Nazi Town: Cultural Life in Göttingen between the World Wars*, Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), especially chap. 1, 3, 5; Matthiesen, *Greifswald in Vorpommern*; Pyta, pp. 472–478.

previous studies. This is not to suggest, of course, that historians such as Fritzsche, Matthiesen and Schumann have entirely neglected the discursive and ideational aspects of this process. However, previous studies have generally placed the focus squarely on events and their role in the process of bürgerliche radicalisation at the polls and in organisations without offering a sustained analysis of a crucial component that mediates between events and behaviour – namely, perceptions, discourses and beliefs. Understanding the internal structure and provenance of this linguistic component of bürgerliche radicalisation has thus been one of the main tasks of this thesis.

Within the radical nationalist ideology that gained so much purchase within Hof's bürgerliche milieu, the central discursive component was the term "nation" – the "Fatherland" – which assumed the status of something sacred: an object of worship. "The nation" was the anchor that allowed its disciples to retain a sense of orientation and meaning in a fast-changing, crisis ridden world. Equally important to this ideology was a sense of the sacred Fatherland as endangered by *external enemies* beyond the Reich's borders. Principle among these enemies was France, which was consistently depicted as crazed, vengeful and chauvinistic, a "blood-hungry hyena" which aimed to dismember Germany and reduce it to the same conglomerate of inconsequential principalities that it had been during the middle ages⁸.

However, Hof's nationalists believed that Germany was strong enough to meet these external threats if only it could be internally united and fashioned

⁸ "Politische Wochenübersicht" in "HA", no. 250, 23.10.1920.

into “an inseparable, perfectly unified whole”⁹. The term *Volksgemeinschaft* encapsulated these hopes and expectations for a future of unity and, thus, the resurgence and preservation of the nation. Any attempt to achieve this internal unity in the present, however, was obviated by *internal enemies*: principally Marxists, pacifists and the democratic system itself. The victory of these forces had come during the revolution of November 1918, which served as the baleful counterpoint to the treasured experience of unity which had perceivably obtained during the war.

To be sure, there were clear differences in the way these different enemies and obstacles were depicted. Within the discourse of Hof’s Democrats, “democracy” had meant a “politics of reason”, an attempt to steer a middle course between the destructive extremes of right and left, and an acceptance of the necessity of political parties in order to mediate between the different groups that constituted the German people. For Hof’s nationalists, however, acknowledging such a level of societal complexity would have endangered the vision of “unity” that was so crucial to the creation of a *Volksgemeinschaft*. Consequently, “democracy” was held to be inauthentic and fundamentally alien to the German “essence”, a system that “would not go into the blood of the people”¹⁰. “Marxism”, meanwhile, was a form of malignant “insanity” which would inevitably lead to the “extermination of all national culture”¹¹. And whereas the Democratic discourse had held Majority Social Democrats to be

⁹ “Politische Einführungskurse der Bayer. Mittelpartei Hof.” in “BMP”.

¹⁰ “Politische Wochenübersicht” in “HA”, no. 189, 13.8.1921.

¹¹ “Hier oder dort!” in “HA”, no. 232, 2.10.1922.

the legitimate representatives of the German working classes and partners in the construction of a Republic, the nationalist discourse depicted them as nothing more than another manifestation of this egregious Marxist network, a “red mishmash” which also included Russian Bolshevism¹².

Whatever the differences in how these various internal enemies were depicted, however, they were all held to be problematic to the accomplishment of the internal unity necessary in order to *restore* Germany to greatness. Indeed, the Fatherland was a *sacred* but *fallen* entity, and the task of Germany’s nationalists was to redeem it, to return it to greatness – in a sense, to resurrect it. It was for this reason – the idea of bringing something back from the dead – that the concept of the fallen soldier was constantly invoked by Hof’s nationalist ideologues. The emotions attached to the dead of the war could be reappropriated and reattached to the narrative of the fallen Fatherland. The process of resurrection meant, in practice, the negation of the November Revolution and the construction of a *Volksgemeinschaft*. And precisely because this vision of social order was legitimated by the memory of fallen soldiers, and also rooted in the experience of the war, it inevitably became infused with military connotations. Battle-readiness, order, unity and the importance of a single Führer were thus inherent to the vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft* propagated by Hof’s nationalists.

So, too, was the exclusion and possible destruction of those internal enemies who could not be integrated into this new community. The ultimate expression

¹² “Ein verhängnisvoller Besuch” in “HA”, no. 139, 15.6.1922.

of this was the violence directed against Marxists and Jews during the German Day. Some of Hof's more "respectable" nationalists may not have welcomed such disturbances to peace and order but, in articulating an ideology which demanded unity and, thus, the removal of internal enemies, they contributed to a climate in which violence became almost inevitable.

But violence was not the only consequence of the spread of this nationalist ideology in Hof; it also underpinned voting choices, and the town ultimately went on to become a stronghold of National Socialism, with Hitler's party winning 52% of the vote – an absolute majority – in the elections of summer 1932. Indeed, the dramatic expansion of the Nazi vote between 1929 and 1933 (after five years in the electoral wilderness) has been an unmentioned factor that has nonetheless loomed large over this study. Future research might focus more intensively on how the ideological tropes and discursive patterns established among the provincial German middle classes during the first, tumultuous years of the Weimar Republic ultimately fed into what happened after 1929¹³. Ultimately, then, this study has not only aimed to add to our knowledge of bürgerliche radicalisation in the Weimar Republic; it also points toward important questions about the discursive and ideological links between the German Revolution and the rise of the Nazis.

¹³ There have already been calls for a more sustained reckoning with what Riccardo Bavaj has termed the "causal relations between the Revolution of 1918/19 and the ascendancy of the National Socialists from 1930 to 1933." Bavaj describes "the dynamic of political radicalisation in the beginning phase of the Weimar Republic" as "one of the preconditions of the rise of the Nazi Movement". See Bavaj, *Der Nationalsozialismus*, p. 23.

Appendix 1: Election Results 1919-1933

Table 1: Reichstag Election 1919-1933

	1919 19.1	1920 6.6	1924 4.5	1924 7.12	1928 20.5	1930 14.9	1932 31.7	1932 6.11	1933 5.3
Majority Social Democrats	989	1659	7437	9205	10,796	10,103	7654	6942	7704
Independent Social Democrats	11,129	10,729							
German Democratic Party	6433	5544	663	831	1261	524	119	109	56
Middle Party (German Nationalists)	190	1636	1176	4829	3481	2067	1148	2134	N/A
Nazi Party/ Volkisch Block	N/A	N/A	8426	3510	3560	7577	13,353	11,870	14,944
Bavarian People's Party (Centre Party)	914	968	958	985	857	936	849	848	890
Communist Party	N/A	157	711	374	617	1276	2442	3083	2031
Reich Party of the Middle Classes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1079	1286	68	35	N/A

Table 2: Landtag Elections 1919 - 1933

	1919 12.1.	1920 6.6.	1924 6.4.	1928 20.5.	1932 24.4.
Majority Social Democrats	1516	1466			
Independent Social Democrats	10,409	10,820	7534	10,396	7359
German Democratic Party	6333	6036	709	1464	N/A
Bavarian Middle Party				3394	1336
German People's Party	131	1278	32	372	N/A
Nazi Party/Volkisch Block	N/A	N/A	9898	3560	12,300
Bavarian People's Party (Centre Party)	1193	1000	756	845	914
Communist Party	N/A	N/A	1012	598	1448
Bavarian Farmer's League	4	3	1202	598	1448

Appendix 2: Register of Persons

Fritz Auer. Columnist for the *Hofer Anzeiger*.

Leon Blumtritt (1877-1931). Editor of the *Oberfränkische Volkszeitung*, Landtag Delegate for the Independent Social Democrats, de facto leader of the political left in Hof.

Franz Büchl (1855-1926). Editor in chief of the *Hofer Anzeiger* from 1880-1925.

Karl Buhl (1884-1957). Mayor of Hof from 1919-1933.

Christian Dietrich (1864-1927). Protestant Pastor and co-editor of the Protestant Parish Newsletter.

Dr Josef Dobmeyer (1885-19..) Local teacher, active member of the Bavarian Middle Party and chair of the Bismarck Youth Association.

Otto Ernst (1890-?) Editor of the *Hofer Anzeiger* until 1920, member of the local Democratic Party, left Hof in 1921.

Karl Fritsch (1901-1944). Leader of the Hofer Home Guards, early member of the Hofer Nazi Party, publisher of a local Volkisch newspaper, and Interior Minister of Saxon after 1933.

Wilhelm Heerdegen (1891-1965). Local Protestant Pastor.

Eduard Herold (1885-1955). Local schoolteacher, published poet, and later active member of the League Bavaria and Reich.

Karl Hoermann (1873-1957). Owner of the *Hofer Anzeiger* and chairman of the Hofer Business Association.

Dr Heinrich Höhna (1888-1944). Teacher and delegate for the Bavarian Middle Party.

August Horn (1870-1956). Headteacher.

Friedrich Krag, Pastor in Joditz and co-founder of the Protestant Parish Newsletter (with Christian Dietrich).

Arthur Mahr (1873-1966). Trade Union Secretary, initially a member of the Independent Social Democrats, but in late-1919 he switched to the Majority Social Democrats and became editor of their newspaper, the *Volksstimme*.

Otto Meisner. Local and prominent member of the German Democrats.

Dr Müller. Local headteacher, initially active in the DDP but, from 1920, increasingly prominent in the veteran's organisations.

Karl Neupert (1874-1946). Lord Mayor of Hof from 1917-1919.

Philipp Nürnberger (1857-1929). Dean of the Protestant Church and chair of the "Association for the Building of a Bismarck Commemorative Column."

Karl Röder (1890-1975). Editor of the *Hofer Anzeiger* from September 1920.

Gottlieb Scheiding (1860-1943). Doctor and leading member of the National Liberal Association before 1918. After this, he joined the DDP and became the chairman of the local branch in 1921.

Frau Berta Scheiding. Wife of Gottlieb Scheiding, chair of the Hofer Democratic Women's Group.

Karl Schrepfer (1874-1938). Master Baker turned politician. Landtag Deputy for the Democrats between 1919-1924. In 1924 he left the DDP and joined the Economic Party.

Hermann Strathmann (1882-1966). Theologian and Landtag deputy for the Bavarian Middle Party, which he co-founded.

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