

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CHALLENGE AND THE FAILURE OF HITLERISM

THE emergence of Hitlerism has made the development of a functioning industrial society our most vital, most urgent task. Hitlerism is not only an attempt to create a functioning industrial society—an attempt which nearly succeeded. It is also an attempt to find a new social ideal as basis of society. And it proceeds from the abandonment of the very freedom to achieve which was the goal of the mercantile society and the justification of its social ideal, social institutions and political power.

Viewed as an attempt to create a functioning society, the Nazi party, the many semi-military organizations built around it and, finally, the Nazi Army, at once "make sense" socially. They are the institutions in which Hitlerism has tried to give the individual social status and function. There has been a tendency to see in these institutions nothing but "fronts" to mask the social emptiness of Nazism, or mere disguises for a rearmament drive at a time when Germany did not yet dare to arm openly. There is a great deal of truth in either explanation. One or both of these may have been originally the only purpose the Nazi leaders had in mind when they created their organizations. But whatever the original purpose, these new organizations have become social institutions, and their purpose has become that of integrating the individual members of the industrial system into a society.

In the Nazi organizations the individual is given a status and a function quite independent of the productive process; that is, quite independent of his economic status and function. At least in theory, but also largely in practice, his rank in these organizations is in no way dependent upon his wealth, his income or his status in the old society. The only criteria are political ability, qualities of leader-

ship, and loyalty to the Führer. The Nazi creed of the purpose of the life of the individual is that it be "totally" integrated with the life of the national or racial group. If this purpose were indeed accepted as the basic purpose of individual life, then the Nazi organizations would have succeeded in integrating individual and group in a common purpose—the first criterion of a functioning society.

Actually, the Nazi organizations have been attempting to realize social equality, or at least to offset economic inequality, by giving equal chances in the non-economic sphere to the economically underprivileged. It has been the practice in all Nazi organizations to give positions of command and authority largely to people who occupy subordinate positions in the economic sphere. Conversely, members of the upper classes have been pointedly assigned to inferior positions in the Nazi hierarchy. In the Nazi units in factories or businesses it is usually an unskilled worker or a junior clerk, often a man formerly unemployed, who is put on top. After working hours he is the boss of the very people whom he has to obey during working hours. When the universities were organized as units in the Nazi system, around 1936 or 1937, it was often the janitor who emerged as unit leader and as the political and social superior of professors and deans. It is standing practice in all Nazi legations and embassies to have a junior clerk occupy the highest political position within the Nazi organization of the embassy. He is the Secret Police representative on the spot who watches over the loyalty of his superiors and who is in direct contact with the authorities at home. He also enjoys direct disciplinary powers over the entire embassy personnel. The ambassador's authority is purely external and confined to the relationship with the foreign government to which he is accredited. Internally an obscure third secretary, press attaché or code clerk is the boss and the direct representative of the Führer. In the same way professors of a university, or vice-presidents of a corporation are in authority only with respect to external

relations—toward students, customers, and the public at large. Internally, the power of command has largely been transferred to a party functionary who very often is taken from the ranks of those who have no political or social standing in the economic sphere.

This policy may well have originated in sheer expediency. The unskilled worker become political boss may have been the one person in the whole plant whom the Nazis could trust. He may have been regarded also as completely dependent upon the political power which created him. But Nazi newspapers and publicists have become unanimous in their contempt for rank and status in the economic sphere as something that belongs to the *ancien régime*, to the past. Even though the individual cases may have been due to *ad hoc* considerations and not to deliberate policy, their cumulative effect has been the creation of a deliberate and conscious social reorientation.

A more serious argument against the attempt to ascribe a deliberate social policy to the Nazis would be that the social policies and programmes of Nazism are so confused, so contradictory and so full of hidden and open conflicts of ideas and interests as to make ridiculous the assumption of a social master-plan. There is far less "masterminding," in the Nazi system than the world, impressed by Nazi propaganda, commonly assumes. Especially in the social field, the propaganda impression of great basic concepts is as much a fake front for planless plunging as the propaganda picture of a "monolithic unity" is a cover for very real and very deep conflicts within the party and within the country. The practice of giving rank in the Nazi hierarchy may not have grown out of a consistent and intentional policy, but the result has been that the Nazi organizations have on a large scale given superior rank to those who hold inferior rank in the economic system—and very largely to those who, like the unemployed unskilled worker, had no function and status in economic society.

The basically social meaning of this practice shows in its

most direct form in the Nazification of that last bulwark of the old society: the German Army. In the old army, status and function were organized according to the social order of the pre-1914 society. A substantial part of the regular commissions were reserved for the Junkers. But the mercantile ruling class of professional and business men was admitted as reserve officers. Nobody could get a reserve commission unless he came from a "respectable family." There was no mass army in pre-1914 Europe—except the Russian—in which the lower classes were as rigidly excluded from officers' commissions as in the German Army.

Today, according to all reports, there is no army in Europe where promotion from the ranks is more common than in the Nazi Army. Status and function in the Nazified German Army go according to skill. And the skills which bring a commission to the rank of officer and advancement within the officers' corps are very largely industrial skills: the skills of mechanic and repair man, of foreman and straw boss, of truck driver and production engineer. These are skills which, as a rule, neither the economically privileged classes nor the Junkers possess. These two classes are therefore handicapped in the new Nazi Army. This is largely obscured to the foreign observer. For the commanders on the top whose names are the only ones an American or English newspaper reader is likely to come across are often veterans from the last war and therefore still products of the social selection operating before 1914. But the regimental and divisional officers of today—the commanders of tomorrow—seem to come to an increasing degree from the lower middle classes and the working class. The continuous complaints of the old army hierarchy, that the army is being "proletarized" and that there are "no more gentlemen left in the army," are abundant proof of this.

"Of course, this "proletarization" of the army was largely dictated by technological reasons. To repair a tank or to

operate a big bomber requires a degree of mechanical skill which cannot be acquired in an old-line cadet academy or in the study of law. Another obvious reason was political expediency. It is essential politically for the Nazi régime to destroy the only surviving social group of the old order—the old officers' corps. But the desire to give those who are economically unequal a compensation in the non-economic society of the army was at least as decisive as the opportunist considerations. The so-called "democratization of the army" is one of the foremost slogans of Nazi propaganda at home. Over and over again it is repeated: In the new army rank is given exclusively according to military and technical skill; status and function in the army no longer depend upon wealth or birth; true social equality has been realized in the army.

According to the Nazi creed the party organizations and the army are the only socially significant and constitutive institutions. They are society *per se*. The economic sphere is regarded as not only subordinate but as socially meaningless. It is pictured as socially neutral in its values, in its ranking and in its stratification. It is not denied that there is economic inequality, nor that a very large number of men have no status and no function in the economic sphere. It is simply asserted that it does not matter socially what happens in the economic sphere as long as the productive machinery runs smoothly. The Nazi hierarchy with its party and army organization is the one sphere in which status and function are social status and social function. Rank is social rank, prestige is social prestige and rewards are social rewards.

The often heard criticism, that nothing really changes if an unemployed worker is put into uniform and appointed a storm-troop leader, is meaningless from the Nazi point of view. This criticism is based upon the obvious fact that "the storm-troop leader" is as unproductive in his uniform as he was before when he was on relief. There is no economic change. Accordingly, in a society in which

social status and function are status and function in the productive process, the change is no change at all. Not so in Nazism where the storm troops are a social institution, whereas the productive system is not. According to Nazism, an outcast has been restored to citizenship in the society and has been given social status and function where he had none before. The criticism that he does not produce any more goods than before would appear to a Nazi perfect nonsense and a complete misunderstanding of the nature of his society.

The *social* meaning of the Nazi organization is the attempt to integrate into an industrial society the individual living in the industrial system. And in the centre of the Nazi *political* system is the attempt to make the decisive power in the industrial system legitimate power. One of the main reasons of the strength of the Nazi economic machine has been the understanding that property rights have ceased to be a basis of power in the industrial system. The Nazis never bothered about the shareholder—legally the owner and controller of modern industrialism. They just by-passed him. While he got his dividends, good care was taken that he pay them out again in taxes or in “voluntary” investments in government bonds. While he retained a part of his legal rights, the political authorities saw to it that he did not exercise them. To “liquidate” the shareholder would have been as disturbing politically as it was easy to paralyse him. Besides, from the Nazi point of view, nothing would have been gained by a nationalization of property; political and social powers in the industrial system do not rest with property but with physical control.

The focus of all Nazi political organization is the physical control of industry. Where formerly the managers wielded this control, the central government now dictates labour policies, production, prices, volume and direction of sales, and profit margin. It has retained the managers as expert advisers on engineering and organizing methods.

Of course, it has freed them of shareholders' control and of the necessity to bargain with unions. But it has only freed management from minor limitations on its power in order to impose upon them the total control and absolute rule of a total and absolute government.

The criticism that there can be no freedom under such complete control of the economic sphere by a total government does not, of course, appear to the Nazis a valid criticism. They never pretended to establish or to maintain freedom; they have always regarded its abolition as necessary and desirable. All that matters from the Nazi point of view is that the decisive power in the industrial system has been assumed by that organ which, according to the Nazi creed, is the legitimate holder of all power: a central government based upon the "Führer's will" or the "law of the race." In other words, to say that Nazism is the destruction of freedom—as is, of course, only too true—in no way disproves the Nazi claim that their government has legitimate power and that, therefore, their society is a functioning industrial society. The attack on Nazism has therefore to start with a refutation of the Nazi claim that theirs can be a functioning society.

The starting point of Nazi political theory was the conviction that the modern industrial mass-production plant is the model for a totalitarian state. Twenty years ago that was said by the two writers who have influenced Nazi social policies and theories more than anybody else: the novelist Ernst Juenger and the romanticist socialist Moeller van den Bruck. The organizations of Nazism are pre-eminently designed to take hold of, and to integrate, urban masses. All Nazi organizations including the party itself are constructed of small "cells"—a city block, a factory, a university. This system only works in a physical environment in which people live closely together. From the earliest days of the Nazi movement there have been complaints that the organization does not function in rural surroundings

where the required close supervision and hierarchy of petty bosses become unworkable. The spectacular advance of Nazism began in 1927—long before the Depression—with the first application of these principles to an industrial city: Berlin. Before that time Nazism, while supported by powerful rural and small middle-class elements, never could organize for large-scale political action. The model Nazi organization was built in the great industrial Berlin suburb of Siemensstadt where the organization of the workers in the factories—the “factory cell”—is the basis for the organization of the population after working hours, and where the factory politician is at the same time the ward boss.

This may seem to contradict Nazi ideology with its glorification of the farmers, its “*Lebensraum*” and its “blood and soil” slogan. Of course, all this cheap Wagnerian pseudo-romanticism goes on. It is even probable that Hitler himself believes in it. But that matters as little as Columbus’ lifelong belief that what he discovered was really the Indies. The reality of Hitlerism is anything but romantic; it is anything but Wagnerian, and it is totally free from any glorification of the farmer or the soil. Actually, in Nazism, the farmer has been made an outcast. The famous “Hereditary Farm Law,” which pretends to give the farmer perpetual and secure ownership of his land, really gives the land perpetual and secure ownership of the farmer. It is a return to villeinage under which the farmer resigns his claim to status and function in society in order to have an imaginary protection against society. If—as seemed possible at several stages during the last ten years—the Nazis had decided to collectivize all farms on the Soviet model, it would hardly have made any difference to the social structure of the Nazi system. The Nazi agrarianism is nothing but a stage property—and, even as such, shoddy. The emphasis of the Nazi régime has been from the beginning on the political organization of total industrial production. The real internal enemies

of Nazism from the beginning have been the ruling classes of the pre-industrial, the mercantile society.*

The concept of man's nature on which Nazism bases itself is that of Heroic Man. And the purpose of society in which the man of Nazism finds his fulfilment is War and Conquest.

That war is the main purpose of society, the true fulfilment of man's nature and the basic principle of social order and political organization, has certainly been a fundamental conviction of the Nazi leaders and theoreticians from the time when their movement was nothing but one of countless back-parlour conventicles. But to say that Heroic Man became the basis of Nazi society, and war its purpose because Hitler and his lieutenants wanted it so, is far too simple. Actually, there were for many years attempts within the Nazi party and the Nazi leadership to find an alternative basic principle.

But no alternative could do the job of providing a basis for the social integration and the political power of a *totalitarian industrial system*. Only total armament could provide the jobs for the unemployed. Military or semi-military organizations were the only ones in which the individual member of the industrial system could be given status and function independent of economic status and economic function. And only war and the preparation for it enabled the central government to establish complete and direct control of the productive system and to take over the political and social power wielded before by the industrial managers and the union leaders.

Most people probably believe that it is this creed of war and conquest which has made Nazism the world danger

* Even Nazi racial anti-Semitism is primarily a means to destroy the representative class of the mercantile society: the upper bourgeoisie of professional men, bankers, merchants, industrialists, etc. The particular historical and social conditions which led to the identification of this class with the Jews and Non-Aryans in Central Europe, and the reasons why racial (as against religious) anti-Semitism meant the actual destruction of this class have been discussed in detail in the chapter "Miracle or Mirage?" in my *End of Economic Man*.

which it is today. Actually, it is this very creed which may have prevented Nazism from conquering the world. Most people would also think that this single-minded devotion to war and conquest is the main source of the strength of the Nazis. But it is probably their greatest and their fatal weakness. And only too many people believe that Nazism would have been harmless but for its religion of militarism. But it is this very creed of war and conquest which will ultimately prove to have been the factor that defeated Nazism. That Hitlerism could find no other basis for industrial society than war and conquest may eventually turn out to have been the salvation for those who hate and repudiate Nazism and all it stands for. Far from being the source of the Nazis' strength, their basic purpose of war and conquest is the root of their real failure. Far from being the greatest threat to freedom, it may well be the one thing that has given us a chance to work for a free industrial society.

Because the Nazis could not find any other basis for their society than war and conquest, theirs has not become a functioning society. No people in the Western world—not even the Germans—have been willing to accept war as the ultimate, the highest aim of society. Consequently, the attempted integration of the individual into society through status and function in the Nazi organizations has failed to become a valid functioning integration. The individual has not accepted war and conquest as the basic aims of life—neither of his own, individual life nor of the life of the group.

This failure of Nazism to develop an industrial society on any basis but war and conquest, and with any other concept of man's nature than that of Heroic Man, has given those of us who believe in freedom a chance to fight for it. More, it has rallied to the cause of freedom millions who had already given up freedom—except for empty lip service. There is little doubt that the great masses in the industrial system—at least in Europe—could have been persuaded to

abandon freedom and to accept slavery. All they asked for was security. The famous, or rather infamous, declaration of a group of French Socialists just before the outbreak of the war, that they would rather be Hitler's slaves than fight a war, only said aloud what millions of others were thinking. And the English newspaper writer who, after Munich, declared that the Czechs ought to be grateful as they were now able to live in peace and security instead of in constant dread of war, was also no isolated phenomenon.

Had Nazism been able to find any other basis for slavery than war and conquest, its totalitarian revolution might have swept Europe without encountering any resistance at all. Whenever the Nazis pretended to consider another basis for totalitarianism than war and conquest, they found immediate response in other countries. There was a desperate hope among the industrial masses, rich and poor, right and left alike—to be given a secure and non-militant basis for slavery. In France, the Nazi propaganda slogan of a total state based on the pseudo-romanticism of the Youth Movement converted many, especially on the Left, to "collaboration" with Hitler and Hitlerism. In England, the hope of a Nazism based on the "body beautiful" even found expression in a feeble but government-sponsored imitation, the Keep Fit campaign which was fortunately speedily buried under the ruins of Munich.

These may appear very minor aberrations of a hysterical and mentally unbalanced period. But as symptoms they are important. They show the attraction which Hitler's totalitarianism would have had upon the industrial countries of Europe had he but been able to offer security as the basis of his slavery.

But Nazism could only offer war as the basis of slavery. The peoples of Europe were not willing to accept war and conquest as the basic purpose of society. They were thus forced by the Nazis themselves to repudiate slavery. The people who, above all, wanted security even at the price of freedom, now have to fight for their freedom. Hitler him-

self—nobody else—has unwittingly and unwillingly given freedom a meaning and a value it had all but lost.

This does not mean that a defeat of Hitlerism will inevitably bring about a free society. On the contrary, it is certain that this defeat by itself will not even create a functioning industrial society, let alone one which is also free. After a war as destructive and as uprooting as this, the people will above all demand a functioning society. They will be even more ready than they were before the war, to sacrifice freedom, if this should appear to be the necessary price for a comprehensible, meaningful and functioning order. The greatest danger today is that we shall defeat Hitler's totalitarianism of war only in order to replace it by one of peace and security. All the schemes for post-war order which place the security of permanent peace above all other goals—such as, for instance, that of a world superstate—come dangerously close to abandoning freedom and to a totalitarianism which would be all the more threatening as it would be much harder to attack, morally and physically, than Hitler's.

We cannot expect a free industrial society as an inevitable and logical consequence of victory. Victory is only the first condition. But there is at least a good chance today that we shall succeed. It is certain that a functioning industrial society of the Western peoples will grow out of this war—if there is to be a West. It is for the basis and structure of this society that the war is being fought. Precisely because the very foundations of our society are the stakes in this war it should be possible to make this functioning industrial society a free society.

So far in this book we have tried to answer the question: What is a functioning society and what is wanted to give the industrial system a functioning society? Now we shall have to answer the equally basic question: What is a free society?