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## Agrarian Protectionism in the Weimar Republic

Dieter Gessner

**In the last thirty-five years**, a number of historians – for example, Gerschenkron, Hamerow and Barrington-Moore – have traced and interpreted the relationship between agriculture, conservatism and fascism.<sup>1</sup> Their works clearly show the effectiveness of the agrarian-conservative mentality and its associated social and political behaviour in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, its impact on contemporary German history still awaits full appreciation.

Following his work on the relationship between Prussian conservatism and agrarian interest organizations, H.-J. Puhle has put forward several provocative theses about the correlation between conservatism, agricultural economics and 'pre-fascism'.<sup>2</sup> Puhle renounced Moore's sociological methods and was far removed from those who saw a direct line of succession from the Prussian Junkers to Hitler. However, he ignores much of what German conservatism came to mean during the first German Republic and what gave it such tremendous influence during the last years of the Weimar Republic. Students of Weimar conservatism, such as Mohler and Klemperer, have concentrated upon a specific manifestation known as 'revolutionary' or 'young' conservatism, or as 'neo-conservatism'.<sup>3</sup> This relates to a strong intellectual current which emerged in small groups such as the Berlin *Herrenklub* and its counterparts in other parts of Germany. The ideas of this movement became widely accessible in the form of slogans like Moeller van den Bruck's 'The Third Reich' and in this way did much to shape the political propaganda of the radical right.

Intellectually, these ideas had far less in common with the traditions of agrarian conservatism than with the scepticism felt by traditionally liberal groups towards the forms of liberal and democratic thought in the era of 'organized capitalism'. Gerstenberger has convincingly argued that the share of liberalism in 'revolutionary conservatism' was much higher than that of traditional agrarian-based conservatism.<sup>4</sup>

But such an interpretation largely overlooks the connection between conservatism and the aristocratic and bourgeois landowners, traditionally representing agrarian interests; the connection between conservatism and Germany's agricultural economy is merely regarded as a non-relevant factor. Consequently, scholarly research on recent German history often refers to the tradition of 'authoritarian', 'anti-liberal', and 'anti-democratic' ideas not only in the ruling industrial and aristocratic elites, but also in the broad masses of the German population.<sup>5</sup> This approach has indeed helped towards the understanding of the complicated course of historical development during the Weimar Republic; but these authors have all tended to regard the persistence of 'anti-republican' traditions as a deformation of the liberal Weimar Constitution and its party system rather than the continuation of a particular economic structure and mentality.

Students of Wilhelminian Germany, on the other hand, are generally impressed by the vitality of agrarian-conservative thought and tend to stress its importance in the face of the tremendous pace of German industrial development before the outbreak of the first world war. This raises a number of questions. Just how powerful, for example, was the agitation for autarchy in food production during this period? How seriously did Germany's intellectual elite regard the threat of 'over-industrialization', or their own views on 'reagrarianization' of Germany's economic structure? To what extent did the peasant middle class act as counterweight to the process of social emancipation within the urban white-collar and working classes? Did it express the rearguard action of a dying class?

In dealing with these questions, it must be realised that the German Empire was — before and after 1914 — an industrialized state whose social formation only partly met the needs of a modern industrialized economy.<sup>6</sup> Nationalists saw this agrarian-industrial state as a unique and qualitatively higher species of the state.<sup>7</sup> Even after the loss of the predominantly agricultural regions in West Prussia and Posen, Germany was still a country of small and middle-sized peasant producers on the one hand and of large landowners on the other.

The position of agrarian conservatism in the pre-war period must first be outlined in some detail in order to show the points of continuity with the period after 1918. The chief exponents of agrarian conservatism in the pre-war period were the aristocratic and bourgeois large landowners. This was true by virtue of their predominant social, economic and political position with regard to the rest of the rural population and their manifold connections with the civil administration,

the military and the German Conservative Party (*Deutschkonservative Partei*). The position of the large landowners east of the Elbe, as well as in the Catholic areas of Westphalia, the Rhineland and Silesia, was all but uncontested. The efforts of the German liberal movement to organize the peasantry and to establish a political foothold in these areas invariably ended in failure.<sup>8</sup> Attempts by the Social Democrats to recruit support among the rural population were severely handicapped by their official adherence to Marxist predictions of the inevitable demise of the small and middle-sized peasantry. Only with the spread of 'revisionism' was a practical departure from Marxist theory possible.<sup>9</sup> Traditionally great social and political influence upon the Prussian government had been wielded by the large landowning class. Ever since Bismarck, in the wake of the 1873 economic depression, had brought about the 'Iron and Rye Alliance' between heavy industry and large agriculture, agrarian protectionism, as an unequivocal political manifestation of agrarian conservatism, had been a constant factor in German history.<sup>10</sup>

By virtue of its predominant position not only in political organizations, but also in economic associations and self-governing corporations like the Economy Societies (*Oekonomie-Gesellschaften*), the Chambers of Agriculture (*Landwirtschaftskammern*) and the German Agricultural Council (*Deutscher Landwirtschaftsrat*), large-scale agriculture succeeded in taking critical decisions out of the hands of badly understaffed ministerial bureaucracies. As a result, the responsibility for political implementation came to rest principally in the hands of agricultural pressure groups, the most powerful of which was the Agrarian League (*Bund der Landwirte*). Founded in 1893, the Agrarian League exercised a dominating influence within the German Conservative Party and provided it with a mass following in the countryside.<sup>11</sup>

The influence of agrarian conservatism in the pre-first world war period was by no means limited to questions of economic and trade policy, but also extended to the social-political sphere. Since the industrialization of the Prussian Rhine provinces and the liberal agrarian reforms at the beginning of the nineteenth century, an internal migration from east to west had taken place throughout the German Empire. In place of farm workers migrating to the west came seasonal workers from Poland. This, however, did not fully solve the problem of agricultural depopulation. In an effort to prevent complete depopulation of certain areas and as a means of countering the threat of Polish penetration, the Prussian government introduced its own programme of 'inner colonization'. With the establishment of the Royal Prussian Settlement

Commission (*Königlich-Preussische Ansiedlungskommission*) in 1891 and the passage of the law for the 'Advancement of Farmholdings', the social character of this policy was closely tied to conservative goals.<sup>12</sup>

The third realm of German agrarian conservatism before 1914 was credit policy. As early as 1895 the Prussian Minister of Finance, Johannes Miquel, had founded an agricultural credit institution known as the Prussian Central Cooperative Bank (*Preussische Zentralgenossenschaftskasse*) – more popularly known as the *Preussenkasse*. This channelled governmental subsidies not only to peasant 'Savings and Loan Banks', but also to the much older Rural Estates (*Landschaften*), which were dominated by the large agricultural interest.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, with the founding of agrarian-interest organizations and numerous Christian peasant unions (*Bauernvereine*), closely linked to the Centre, agrarian conservatism took on the character of an ideology with its own mass base, a phenomenon generally referred to as 'agrarism'. Its philosophical roots date back to the conservative reaction against the liberal agrarian reform of 1807 and can be documented in the romantic political writings of Stahl and Müller.<sup>14</sup> The idealization of agriculture which is included in the restorative impulse within agrarism can best be understood as an attempt to contain the spirit of the liberal agrarian reforms of the post-Napoleonic period. The central thrust of this movement, therefore, was directed as much against the mobilization and capitalization of the soil as against the rational entrepreneurial ideas of such agricultural economists as Thier and his disciples.<sup>15</sup> Agrarism, in short, opposed attempts towards mobilization and modernization of Germany's agriculture structure.

In this intellectual climate, the conservative economist Rodbertus formulated his theory of land, based upon the economic inequality of land and capital.<sup>16</sup> The critical test of agrarism, however, came with the founding of the Agrarian League in 1893. This economic organization originated as a *Kampfverband* against the efforts of Bismarck's successor, Leo von Caprivi, to reintegrate the German economy – and with it German agriculture – into the world market after a lengthy period of protectionism. In its struggle against the Chancellor's efforts to reduce agricultural tariffs by commercial treaties with Russia, Austria-Hungary and Serbia, the Agrarian League used agrarism as an inexhaustible source of political rhetoric. It sought to establish the uniqueness of German agricultural structure and production with special emphasis upon the national perspective. The national economist Gustav Ruhland, then special adviser to the Agrarian League, tried to

give this notion a more systematic context, basing his arguments upon Friedrich List's doctrine regarding the national development of productive forces.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the agricultural theorist von der Goltz, in the course of a critical exchange with Thaer, established the priority of a nation's productive factors as opposed to productivity itself.<sup>18</sup> In 1887, Max Sering, the theoretical proponent of 'inner colonization', based his argument upon the threat of over-industrialization and the increasing superiority of foreign agricultural competition.<sup>19</sup> In this way, the doctrine of agrarism, as well as a political weapon, became part of serious agricultural scholarship and played an instrumental role in the formulation of agricultural policy.<sup>20</sup>

Before 1918, then, protective tariffs were able to keep cheaper foreign farm products off the German market while German surplus could be dumped in foreign markets with the help of an elaborate export subsidy system. At the same time, the government alcohol monopoly guaranteed extra profits to potato producers. In the meantime the domestic colonization programme brought structural changes in the nature of German agriculture in accordance with nationalistic aims: the policy of 'Germanization' in the provinces bordering Poland is an example. In the realm of domestic politics, agrarian protectionism promoted a conservative alliance of the 'productive estates', since even heavy industry occasionally tended to be protectionist. In this manner chancellors from Bismarck to von Bülow succeeded in checking the spread of social democracy.

The major consequence of the closure of the German farm market to foreign competition was that the German agricultural economy was biased towards production of basic nineteenth-century food staples such as potatoes, rye, pork and sugarbeets. As a result, overall development of the dairy economy lagged significantly. Production of milk and milk products, eggs, beef and veal, as well as of high protein-content fodder, did not change with the increased rye and potato crops or the alterations in eating habits.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, steam power was only used on large farms.<sup>22</sup> Due to the high value placed upon agricultural land — particularly as a status symbol for the large landowner — the land hunger of the large number of farm workers and small peasants went unsatisfied. As a result, Germany's traditional agricultural structure, with its multiplicity of small and minute enterprises on the one hand and the large agricultural latifundia on the other, underwent none of the changes seen in Holland and Denmark. The position was further complicated by the limitations of the cooperative credit facilities for small and middle-sized agricultural producers. Because agricultural

credit existed primarily in the form of mortgages, it flowed almost exclusively to the large landowner, so that most peasant owners of small and middle-sized farms were unable to take advantage of the use of chemical fertilizers, hybrid seed corn and more modern machinery. Moreover, the cooperative self-help efforts of the small and middle-sized agricultural producers did not extend to improved marketing of their products. The real beneficiary was the middle-man, whose own profit margin remained constant despite tremendous fluctuations on the agricultural price index.<sup>23</sup> Marketing cooperatives based on foreign models scarcely existed in Germany.<sup>24</sup> The small and middle-sized peasants, therefore, were never able to penetrate the agricultural market in Germany, with the result that it lost its regulative function. On the other hand, modern business methods such as book-keeping never took hold in peasant enterprises.

The structural weaknesses of Germany's agricultural economy became all too apparent during the course of the first world war. When the Allied blockade stopped imports of fodder, the German cattle industry was forced to reduce its stock drastically. Despite agricultural surpluses brought from Poland and the occupied parts of Russia, the German population suffered the first pangs of hunger in the winter of 1916-17, contrary to all the arguments of the German autarchists.

The defeat of 1918 and the loss of important agricultural regions on the eastern frontier left the overall structure of Germany's national economy essentially unchanged. In the light of a catastrophic lack of supplies during the war, German government officials joined agricultural-interest organizations in issuing an immediate call for increased agricultural production. In accordance with this policy, the agricultural-interest organizations opposed governmental economic controls and came into immediate conflict with the new republican state. What proved most decisive, however, was that the political relationship between the large landowner and the civil service had undergone a radical change since 1914. As a result, influential agricultural-interest organizations such as the National Rural League (*Reichs-Landbund* or RLB), the successor to the pre-war Agrarian League, and the Christian peasant unions pressed for the creation of a special agricultural ministry. This, in turn, led to the transformation of the War Nutrition Authority (*Reichskriegsernährungsstelle*) into the Reich Ministry for Nutrition and Agriculture (*Reichsministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft*) in 1919-20.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, a somewhat wider concept of 'inner colonization' was resuscitated by Hindenburg's appeal for the allotment of farms and smallholdings to ex-soldiers. It was against this background

that the Council of People's Representatives (*Rat der Volksbeauftragten*) passed the Reich Settlement Law, prepared by Max Sering, which established the foundation for the return of city dwellers to the countryside.<sup>26</sup> After the end of the inflation, the agricultural-interest organizations fought, though unsuccessfully, to transform the newly created credit facility, the *Rentenbankkreditanstalt*, into an instrument of agricultural self-administration. Due to the catastrophic effects of the war and the inflation, farmers' cooperative credit facilities, including the *Preussenkasse*, remained virtually insignificant without large-scale government involvement.<sup>27</sup>

After 1918 the National Rural League and its affiliates throughout the country sought their political representation in the newly-founded German National People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei* or DNVP), while the Catholic peasant unions retained their ties with the Centre and its Bavarian wing, which had reorganized itself as the Bavarian People's Party (*Bayerische Volkspartei* or BVP).<sup>28</sup> Under the Weimar Republic, the agrarian wing of the DNVP proved extremely influential. Its chief representative, the former conservative deputy Martin Schiele, was a member of the innermost leadership from the party's foundation until Hugenberg's succession to the chairmanship in 1928. The Bavarian Christian Peasant Union, led by Georg Heim, played a decisive role in the founding of the BVP.<sup>29</sup> In the Centre the agricultural influence was significantly weaker than that of the Christian trade unions at the beginning of the Republic, but increased steadily from 1927-28.

The first decisive battle of agrarian protectionism in the Weimar Republic came in 1925 in the area of trade policy. After regaining the international trade rights previously limited by the Versailles Treaty, Germany was confronted with the need to develop her own systematic tariff policy as well as reorganizing her trading policies.<sup>30</sup> Through its entry into the second Luther cabinet of 1925-26, the DNVP, under the leadership of Count Kuno von Westarp and Schiele, had secured the right to participate in the formulation of the 'Small Tariff Amendment' of August 1925 as well as in the initial trade-treaty negotiations. It managed to achieve the reestablishment of an autonomous agricultural tariff roughly equivalent to the last pre-war tariff.<sup>31</sup> In October 1925 the Nationalists, against the wishes of the NDVP's agrarian wing, left the government in protest against the Locarno Treaty; they then had to use extra-parliamentary pressure to protect their interests in the trade-treaty negotiations with Spain, France and Sweden. Throughout this period the most important figure was the Nationalist, Schiele,



Minister of Agriculture in the Luther government. Decisive, however, in the efforts to secure the reintroduction of protective agricultural tariffs was support from heavy industry. During the difficult trade-policy deliberations of 1925 the Social Democrats, the strongest party in the Reichstag, modified their traditionally anti-protectionist position in favour of a selective agricultural tariff; moreover, the principal representative of German heavy industry, the National Federation of German Industry (*Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie*), followed the initiative of a group around Paul Reusch, General Director of the *Gutehoffnungsbutte-Konzern*, and adopted a compromise which avoided any direct conflict of interests with organized agriculture on trade-policy issues.<sup>32</sup> Fundamental to this change of attitude was the rejection by both organized agriculture and heavy industry of the social-political programmes advocated by the Social Democratic and the free trade-union movement. Moreover, certain sectors of German heavy industry had always been protectionist in their trade policies. Another factor was that potassium and nitrogen fertilizer industries and farm machinery makers depended upon agricultural business cycles and the increasing need for agricultural investment. Consequently, there developed during the middle years of the Weimar Republic a somewhat precarious German agrarian-industrial 'alliance', always threatened when exporters were handicapped by agricultural protectionism or whenever the agrarian interest suspected industry of using agricultural tariffs as bargaining objects in trade-policy negotiations.<sup>33</sup>

The DNVP's second participation in a right-wing government during 1927-28 was more favourable for the conservatives than the first. In spite of constant coalition difficulties, Schiele, again Minister of Agriculture and with President von Hindenburg's express approval, developed a comprehensive government programme of agrarian protectionism. In addition to the imposition of increased tariffs on all agricultural imports and a systematic elimination of existing trade-treaty commitments, Schiele demanded direct agricultural subsidies in the form of state credit.<sup>34</sup> The government's willingness to adopt the demands of the agricultural-interest organizations into and, above all, Hindenburg's significant role in the formulation of its programme characterized the further development of agrarian protectionism during the Weimar Republic. Consequently, the next government, headed by Social Democrat Hermann Müller (1928-30), no longer dared to proceed with its original intention to negotiate an international trade understanding.<sup>35</sup> Apart from this, the DNVP's second period in government had had another consequence. When the trade-treaty negotiations with Poland,

begun in 1926, were resumed the following year, the Marx government appointed Andreas Hermes chairman of the negotiations, a man who was soon to lead the agricultural opposition in Germany. Much to the distress of Stresemann and the German Foreign Office, Hermes made a practice of boycotting the negotiations whenever German concessions to Polish agricultural export interests were to be discussed.<sup>36</sup> This tactic, however, greatly strained the relationship between industry and agriculture. Because of the extensive credits which Poland had received prior to 1929, this market was extremely important to the German export industry since, after the outbreak of the world economic crisis and with the decline of international trade, trade with Poland and Russia was regarded as possible compensation for the loss of other markets.<sup>37</sup>

The vehemence of agrarian agitation after the DNVP's departure from the government in 1928 and the recruitment of Hindenburg as a backer of agrarian political demands are to be understood only in the light of the acute agricultural crisis of 1927-28. Even before the world economic crisis had fully affected Germany, the rapid decline of German agricultural prices after 1924 pointed to serious structural difficulties in the economy. The agricultural crisis rapidly led to an unusually high degree of radicalization among peasant producers, increasingly favouring the radical right parties.<sup>38</sup> As well as the international fall in raw material prices, however, the crisis in Germany was characterized by a high level of debt among both small and large agricultural producers following a period of intensive capital investment.<sup>39</sup> After the hyper-inflation, in order to meet the increased demand for foodstuffs, especially high-protein dairy products, peasants and large landowners alike were forced to borrow, regardless of interest rate, in order to cover purchases of fertilizer and farm machinery, and also the increased social welfare expenditures and taxes. In contrast to the pre-war period, these loans were in the form of short-term credits. Consequently, the Central Cooperative Credit Institute (*Zentrales Genossenschaftliches Kreditinstitut*), under pressure from the agricultural-interest organizations, overextended its assets, leaving the problem of covering the debts to the Prussian government.<sup>40</sup> The collapse of beef and pork prices in 1927-28 led to a wave of foreclosures against the cattle producers of Schleswig-Holstein. Even when cattle prices began to stabilize in 1929, the decline of grain prices still alarmed the agricultural-interest organizations into increased agitation. In order to compensate for his declining income, the German farmer tended to increase yields to the point of overproduction. In this way,

not only the inadequacy of the German agricultural market, but also the persistence of a pre-capitalist economic mentality among the peasantry intensified the effects of the crisis.

During the middle years of the Weimar Republic, German Social Democracy had more or less consistently opposed the protectionist concessions of the right-wing governments. However, when the agrarian crisis of 1927-28 brought distress to small and large landowners alike the agitations of agricultural-interest organizations obtained more and more public response. Even in the Social Democratic camp there was growing acceptance of the revisionist views of Rudolf Hilferding and the agricultural expert Fritz Baade, who maintained that agricultural tariffs were the best defence against international agrarian crises. As a result, the old Socialist demands for a land reform in favour of agricultural settlers were completely eclipsed.<sup>41</sup> In this context the SPD again demanded a national grain monopoly and proposed a governmental price-support policy.<sup>42</sup> All these ideas represented a retreat from the Social Democratic traditional free-trade position, which they had maintained as late as 1925 in cooperation with neo-liberal national economists.<sup>43</sup> With the entry of the Social Democrats into the Müller government in 1928, traditionalism and pragmatism combined to create a half-hearted agricultural legislation or a general tariff authorization. It was during this period that the united front of German agricultural-interest organizations, the 'Green Front', was established; the principal aim was to provide agrarian protectionism with a new political base inside as well as outside parliament. Moreover, they sought to counter the new centrifugal political forces within the agricultural community by more vigorous representation of its material interests. The relevance of such action had already become abundantly clear with the emergence of peasant vocational parties during the first part of 1928. Not only had RLB functionaries in Thuringia, Hesse and Westphalia established the Christian-National Peasants and Farmers' Party (*Christlich-Nationale Bauern- und Landvolkpartei* or CNBLP) but local peasant union officials in Silesia and Bavaria had founded the German Peasants' Party (*Deutsche Bauernpartei* or DBP). The emergence of these peasant splinter parties seriously imperilled the solidarity of the agricultural-interest organizations. The severe defeat which the DNVP suffered in the May 1928 Reichstag elections was mainly due to the fractioning of conservative voters between these parties.

The agrarian splinter parties, the defeat of the NDVP and the founding of the 'Green Front' were all signs of the crisis of conservatism in the Weimar Republic. Its origins lay in the attempt of various

conservative groups to pursue a pragmatic policy intended to represent specific social and economic conflict. During the second half of the 1920s, the conservative middle class looked to special parties such as the agrarian splinter parties, the Business Party (*Reichspartei des deutschen Mittelstandes*), or the Re-evaluation Party (*Reichspartei für Volksrecht und Aufwertung*), all with programmes tied not so much to ideologies as to social and economic interests. The 'Green Front' also corresponds to this model in that its economic programme was directed towards the achievement of specific agrarian protectionist goals and reverted to the agricultural ideology of the pre-war period only in support of these aims.

Closely connected with these various efforts and with the threat to the DNVP as a conservative people's party was the danger of a pluralism of conservative forces and of a repudiation of a conservative ideal of state and society. The election of Alfred Hugenberg in succession to Count Westarp as chairman of the NDVP in the autumn of 1928 is to be understood as a response to pragmatic and governmental conservatism, which appeared initially as an increased ideologization of DNVP tactics and strategies and subsequently as an alliance with Hitler's *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP).<sup>44</sup> In Hugenberg's eyes the subterfuges and the verbose policy statements of the 'Green Front' were contemptible. On the other hand it was his objective to transform the DNVP from a heterogeneous people's party into the nucleus of a rigidly conservative opposition. In practice, this meant that the conservatives would emphasize, as at the beginning of the Republic, their opposition to the form of government which had emerged from the November revolution, and would dramatize all points of conflict with the parliamentary system. A further corollary to this reorientation of German conservatism, however, was the need to develop new ideological alternatives to the increasing pragmatism of individual conservative groups. Accordingly, in the field of agricultural policy Hugenberg's DNVP promulgated a utopian programme which sought, among other things, to diminish the pragmatists of the 'Green Front'.<sup>45</sup> At the same time the party seized upon critical national issues such as the revision of German reparations in the Young Plan and established itself as the centre of the so-called 'national opposition' within the conservative camp. The aim was to isolate the leadership of the then most powerful conservative faction, the 'Green Front', from the rural masses. Hugenberg was greatly assisted in this by the outbreak of the world economic crisis, which severely restricted the scope and effectiveness of agrarian protectionism.

In 1930 the leadership of the German military and several of Hindenburg's key advisers made a serious attempt to strengthen the position of the 'Green Front'. On the advice of General Kurt von Schleicher, the President appointed the conservative chairman of the Centre Reichstag delegation, Heinrich Brüning, to the chancellorship.<sup>46</sup> This appointment was part of a much larger attempt to concentrate state-supporting conservative forces, deliberately excluding Hugenberg, and to win their support for the semi-dictatorial Brüning government. According to Schleicher's calculations, the 'Green Front' had considerable significance as a power factor in domestic politics. However, in order to assure its cooperation, Schiele would have to be taken into the government and the policy of agrarian protectionism must be continued.<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, Schiele became Minister of Agriculture while Brüning, barely two weeks after assuming office, presented the Reichstag with a comprehensive agrarian law embracing many 'Green Front' recommendations. Brüning combined these concessions with new tax levies aimed at balancing the budget. This gamble succeeded in the initial trial of strength early in April 1930. In the vote on the so-called *Junktim*, which combined the agrarian and tax bills, the Nationalist delegation was split when the deputies affiliated to the 'Green Front' went over to the government side, leaving Hugenberg little opportunity to make political capital out of the decision. Facing a second critical test of strength in the summer of 1930, the Chancellor adopted even stronger measures. When a parliamentary majority demanded the suspension of the government's emergency authorization, Brüning abruptly dissolved the Reichstag. Once again the Nationalists split, although this time without providing Brüning with the votes he needed. By now it was impossible to bridge the antagonisms within the DNVP. Several days after the dissolution of parliament Count Westarp, Schiele and a group of predominantly agrarian deputies resigned from the DNVP. The German conservative movement now found itself in a state of disintegration.

No decision made by Brüning during his chancellorship was more significant for the future of Germany's democratic institutions than the premature dissolution of the Reichstag in the summer of 1930. Not only did the timing of such a move result from a fundamental misinterpretation of the political situation, but the election campaign in the following autumn brought about the final defeat of the conservatives, despite the abortive founding of a conservative *Sammelpartei* known as the Conservative People's Party (*Konservative Volkspartei* or KVP) and the support for the conservatives given by Schiele and the Christian-

National Farmers' Party. As a result of the election, the number of National Socialist deputies leapt from 12 to 107, communist members of the Reichstag now numbered 77, while the DNVP's representation shrank to 41 seats. This spelled the complete collapse of Brüning's parliamentary base. But the catastrophic defeat of Germany's conservative forces was even more significant in that the electoral successes of the Nazi Party stemmed largely from its ability to penetrate the ranks of Germany's rural voters. This was all the more astounding since before 1930 the NSDAP had concentrated its efforts primarily in urban areas, and in country districts was generally regarded as an enemy of private property. In the spring of 1930, however, the party had made a serious effort to free itself from this stigma by promulgating its *Parteiamtliche Kundgebung über die Stellung der NSDAP zum Landvolk and zur Landwirtschaft*.<sup>48</sup> The Nazi leadership followed this up in the summer of 1930 with the creation of a special cadre of agricultural experts who were to be attached to the various regional bodies within the Nazi organization. Under the leadership of R. Walther Darré, this so-called Agrarian Apparatus provided the party with an extremely effective propaganda instrument which was directed principally against the National Rural League and its regional affiliates.<sup>49</sup> Shortly after the 1930 Reichstag elections, Schiele lost his position as chief president of the National Rural League, and his successor, Count von Kalckreuth, accepted the National Socialist deputy, Werner von Willikens, into the RLB presidium. While the RLB and its national organization proved particularly vulnerable to the Nazi assault, Catholic agricultural organizations were able to defend themselves somewhat more effectively by an ideological re-orientation. Adopting a programme heavily indebted to the Christian-corporate tradition of the Papal Encyclicals of Leo XIII and his successors, Catholic farm leaders were able to check the spread of Nazism in the areas they dominated, although this involved something of a political retreat and greater self-restraint in the domestic political conflict.<sup>50</sup>

Following NSDAP infiltrating of agricultural-interest organizations and local Chambers of Agriculture, the 'Green Front' rapidly fell apart, while Schiele and his supporters in the Brüning government became increasingly isolated. It became ever more apparent that the Reich Chancellor was dependent solely upon the personal confidence of President von Hindenburg. In an attempt to consolidate his position, Brüning vainly tried to push the reparations issue to some sort of resolution, while also attempting to incorporate agrarian protectionist

elements into his own deflationary economic programme.<sup>51</sup> However, the general contraction of international trade, which limited the effectiveness of trade-political agrarian protectionism, meant that the principal focus of such measures shifted more and more to the domestic market. As a result various domestic economic measures such as direct governmental subsidies, tax reductions, lower freight costs, increased credit facilities and the prohibition of foreclosure on agricultural land – particularly in the East – were all incorporated into a comprehensive government programme known as *Osthilfe*.<sup>52</sup>

German industry contributed, though inadequately, towards the costs of this programme and the proportion of agricultural to industrial investment did indeed rise significantly between 1930 and 1933.<sup>53</sup> Although German industrialists felt that this demonstrated their support of Brüning's efforts to rehabilitate the agrarian sector, they were still extremely reluctant to face the necessary consequences of agrarian protectionism in the sphere of trade policy, and rejected the idea of a complete ban on imported agricultural products. Industrial leaders also feared that the abandonment of Germany's most-favoured-nation status would result in bilateral trade agreements less beneficial to their own export trade. After 1931 the Brüning government became increasingly trapped between the conflicting interest of industry and agriculture. Whereas the two forces – by means of informal ties between the National Federation of German Industry and the 'Green Front' – had succeeded in reaching a compromise in the hotly contested question of the Polish trade treaty,<sup>54</sup> the German export industry now raised energetic and uncompromising resistance to the agricultural opposition's efforts to sever ties between the German national economy and the international trade market.<sup>55</sup> Rigorous agrarian protectionism was still supported by many national economists who predicted that the stimulation of a domestic boom would overcome the general economic crisis. They believed the critical stimulating factor to be, not foreign trade, but a vigorous domestic agricultural policy.<sup>56</sup> The advocates of a domestic market strategy included national economists such as Edgar Salin who, in opposition to the neo-liberal school, urged stronger government intervention in the economic sphere – not unlike Brüning's own emergency authorization.<sup>57</sup>

The antagonism between agricultural and industrial interests remained a critical factor in German domestic politics even after the collapse of the Brüning government in the spring of 1932. The dissolution of the 'Green Front' and its replacement by radical anti-governmental forces such as the NSDAP, together with the collapse of the alliance between

industry and agriculture, led to a complete paralysis of governmental efforts during the cabinets of von Papen and von Schleicher. The president of the National Rural League, Count von Kalckreuth, welcomed Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, regarding it as a step towards 'the re-establishment of the German national state upon a sound agrarian base.'<sup>58</sup> However, the agricultural elite's hope for continued agrarian protectionism, was to be utterly dashed by the creation of the *Reichsnährstand* later in 1933.

Brüning has put forward his fall from power in Spring 1932 as the beginning of the end of Weimar, attributing his defeat to a conspiracy among a small group of private individuals,<sup>59</sup> thus laying the foundation of a Brüning legend from which historical scholarship has only lately begun to free itself. In this way, the former Chancellor assigned responsibility for his political failure to those conservative critics who opposed *Osthilfe*, his own version of domestic agrarian protectionism, on the grounds of its provisions for rural resettlement.<sup>60</sup> This interpretation, however, carefully avoids the fact that Brüning's resettlement plans contained a strong revolutionary impulse aimed at a radical restructuring of large landed agriculture in the east. The problematic character of the Brüning government's economic policies and the significance of agrarian protectionism for the Weimar Republic are thereby obscured. In fact, the continuation and transformation of Weimar agrarian protectionism by the Brüning government bore little relation to the conservative premises upon which his government was based. For Brüning, agrarian protectionism was little more than a political tool which severely handicapped his own anti-cyclic economic policy and eventually condemned it to failure for lack of real alternatives.<sup>61</sup>

Seen from the perspective of the increasing interventionism of the modern economic state, it is clear that the protective and restorative elements of Weimar protectionism undoubtedly prevailed over its modernizing tendencies. It is with the reactionary strain of agrarian protectionism that the 'Blood and Soil' policies of the Third Reich were so intimately connected.



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**NOTES**


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1. J. Romein, 'Ueber den Konservatismus als historische Kategorie' in *Wesen und Wirklichkeit des Menschen. Festschrift für Helmut Plessner* (Gottingen 1957), 215-44, defining conservatism as 'traditionalism coming to self-consciousness during a moment of danger as well as the interest in a general preservation of propertied interests'; A. Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (New York 1968); T. S. Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction. Economic and Politics in Germany, 1815-1871* (Princeton 1958); H. Rosenberg, 'The Economic Impact of Imperial Germany: Agricultural Policy' in *The Journal of Economic History, Supplement III* (1943), 101-07; B. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston) 1966).

2. H.-J. Puhle, *Von der Agrarkrise zum Praefaschismus. Thesen zum Stellenwert der agrarischen Interessenverbände in der deutschen Politik am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden 1972).

3. A. Mohler, *Die Konservativen in Deutschland 1918-1932. Grundriss einer Weltanschauung* (Stuttgart 1950); Klemens von Klemperer, *Germany's New Conservatism. Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton 1957).

4. H. Gerstenberger, *Der revolutionäre Konservatismus. Ein Beitrag zur Analyse des Liberalismus* (Berlin 1969).

5. K. D. Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie* (Villingen im Schwarzwald 1971); W. Conze, 'Die politischen Entscheidungen in Deutschland 1929-1933' in W. Conze and H. Raupach, eds., *Staats- und Wirtschaftskrise des Deutschen Reiches* (Stuttgart 1967), 176-252; G. Schulz, *Zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur. Verfassungspolitik und Reichsreform in der Weimarer Republik, I* (Berlin 1963); K. Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933* (Munich 1962).

6. In 1925 the gross national product in Germany, based upon the 1913 index, amounted to 45.515 million marks. Agriculture accounted for 16 per cent, mining 3 per cent, and industry and handicraft 45 per cent. In 1933 the gross national product in Germany, based upon the same 1913 price index, was 45.068 million marks. Of this total, agriculture comprised 23 per cent, mining almost 3 per cent and industry and handicrafts 37 per cent. See W. G. Hoffman *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin 1965), 455. In 1925 and 1933 35.6 per cent and 32.9 per cent of the German population respectively lived in rural communities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. 10.8 and 10.6 per cent respectively lived in so-called rural towns with a population of 2,000-5,000. See K. M. Bolt, 'Bevölkerungsgliederung' in *Handwörterbuch der Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften, II*, 182.

7. A. Wagner, *Agrar-Industriestaat* (Jena 1901).

8. In 1909 the National Liberal Reichstag deputy Wachhorst de Wente founded the German Peasants' League (Deutscher Bauernbund) as a counterweight to the Agrarian League. This organization had no influence on the League's policy.

9. H. G. Lehmann, *Die Agrarfrage in Theorie und Praxis der deutschen und internationalen Sozialdemokratie. Vom Marxismus zum Revisionismus und Bolschewismus* (Tübingen 1970), 113-278.

10. M. Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe. Crisis and Adaptation since 1880* (London 1946) and M. G. Plachetka, *Die Getreideautarkiepolitik Bismarcks und seiner Nachfolger im Reichskanzleramt* (Dissertation, Bonn 1969).

11. See U. Lindig, *Der Einfluss des Bundes der Landwirte auf die Politik des Wilhelminischen Zeitalter 1893-1914 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der preussischen Verhältnisse* (Dissertation, Hamburg 1953) and more recently H.-J. Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preussischer Konservatismus im Wilhelminischen Reich (1893-1914)* (Hannover 1966) and E. David, *Der Bund der Landwirte als Machtinstrument des ostelbischen Junkertums 1893-1920* (Dissertation, Halle 1967).

12. On the development of 'inner colonization', see W. F. Boyens, *Die Geschichte der ländlichen Siedlung*, 2 vols. (Berlin 1959-60), Vol. I, 17-43.

13. H. Jessen, *Das landschaftliche Kreditwesen* (Dissertation, Cologne 1960).

14. On this point the early literature is more illuminating than the recent. For instance, see W. Treue, 'Die preussische Agrarreform zwischen Romantik und Rationalismus' in *Rheinische Vierteljahresblätter*, XX (1955), 337-57, as well as F. Lenz, *Agrarlehre und Agrarpolitik der deutschen Romantik* (Berlin 1912), and K. Bauer-Mengelberg, *Agrarpolitik in Theorie, Geschichte und aktueller Problematik* (Berlin 1931). For further background information see, R. Koselleck, *Preussen zwischen Reform und Revolution* (Stuttgart n.d.) 487-559.

15. A. Thaer, *Grundsätze der rationellen Landwirtschaft*, 4 vols. (Berlin 1809-12); A. von Weckerlin, *Ueber englische Landwirtschaft und deren Anwendung auf andere landwirtschaftliche Verhältnisse insbesondere in Deutschland* (1842).

16. For Rodbertus' conservative theory of the soil, see Bauer-Mengelberg, *Agrarpolitik in Theorie, Geschichte und aktueller Problematik* (Berlin 1931), 122, and K. Ritter, *Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik im Kapitalismus* 2 vols. (Berlin 1956), 165-71.

17. A new edition of the main work by Gustav Ruhland, *System der politischen Oekonomie*, 3 vols. (1933) was published in 1933 with an introduction by Reichsbauernführer R. Walther Darré.

18. T. Freiherr von der Goltz, *Die agrarischen Aufgaben der Gegenwart* (Jena 1895).

19. M. Sering, *Die landwirtschaftliche Konkurrenz Nordamerikas in Gegenwart und Zukunft* (1887).

20. H. Rosenberg, 'Zur sozialen Funktion der Agrarpolitik in Zweiten Reich' in *Probleme der deutschen Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main 1969), 51-80.

21. H. W. Graf von Finckenstein, *Die Entwicklung der Landwirtschaft in Preussen und Deutschland 1800-1930* (Würzburg 1960). See also E. Bittermann, *Die landwirtschaftliche Produktion in Deutschland 1800-1950* (Halle 1956) and H. -B. Krohn, *Langfristige Entwicklungstendenzen der Agrarischen Veredlungswirtschaft in der Welt 1900-1954* (Dissertation, Göttingen 1956).

22. H. Haushofer, *Die deutsche Landwirtschaft im Technischen Zeitalter* (Stuttgart 1963), 245.

23. A. Jacobs and H. Richter, *Grosshandelspreise in Deutschland 1872-1934* (Sonderheft des Instituts für Konjunkturforschung, Berlin 1935).

24. See H. Faust, *Geschichte der deutschen Genossenschaftsbewegung* (Frankfurt am Main 1965).

25. F. Facius, *Wirtschaft und Staat. Die Entwicklung der staatlichen Wirtschaftsverwaltung in Deutschland vom 17. Jahrhundert bis 1945* (Boppard am Rhein 1959).

26. Boyens, *Die Geschichte der ländlichen Siedlung*, I, 34-35, 44-52.

27. For the status of German agricultural credit after the first world war, see H. Schmidt, *Langfristige Entwicklungstendenzen des landwirtschaftlichen Kreditgeschäfts unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verflechtung des Agrarkreditsektors mit den Verhältnissen des allgemeinen Kreditmarktes* (Dissertation, Kiel 1964), 12-23.

28. W. Liebe, *Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei 1918-1924* (Düsseldorf 1956); R. Morsey, *Deutsche Zentrumsparlei 1917-1923* (Düsseldorf 1966).

29. H. Renner, *Georg Heim* (Bonn 1961).

30. For an apologetic discussion of these developments, see A. Panzer, *Das Ringen um die deutsche Agrarpolitik von der Währungsstabilisierung bis zur Agrardebatte im Reichstag im Dezember 1928* (Kiel 1970).

31. For a detailed analysis of the 'parliamentary mechanism', see M. Stürmer, *Koalition und Opposition in der Weimarer Republik 1924-1928* (Düsseldorf 1967).

32. See my paper delivered at the International Symposium 'Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik', Bochum 12-17 June 1973.

33. Carl Duisberg, president of the National Federation of German Industry at a meeting of the 'Industrial Club' in Düsseldorf, 7 March 1925, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, Sammlung Zsg 1-44/2.

34. Memorandum of the Minister of Nutrition and Agriculture, 'Landwirtschaftliches Notprogramm und seine Durchführung' in *Deutscher Volkswirt*, II (13 July 1928).

35. Das Kabinett Müller II, ed. M. Vogt, 2 vols. (Boppard am Rhein 1970), I, 6; communiqué from Müller dated 4 July 1928, in *Verhandlungen des Reichstages*, Vol. 423, 55.

36. See B. Puchert, *Der Wirtschaftskrieg des deutschen Imperialismus gegen Polen 1925-1934* (Berlin 1963), 152-163. On Hermes' role in these negotiations, see the somewhat imprecise estimate of H. Barmeyer, *Andreas Hermes. Seine Bedeutung für die deutsche Landwirtschaft in der Weimarer Republik und für den parteipolitischen Neuanfang in Berlin 1945* (Dissertation, Hannover 1969), 117-94.

37. See memorandum from Curtius, Minister of Economics, 'Die Notwendigkeit eines Handelsvertrages mit Polen', 5 May 1927, replying to a previous memorandum from Schiele in the Politischen Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn, Handakten des Ministerialdirektors Ritter (hereafter cited as AA, Ha-Pol. Ritter), Polen, Vol. 4; confidential statement of the German Industry and Trade Conference (*Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag*), 14 November 1928, in the unpublished Nachlass of Paul Reusch, *Historisches Archiv der Gutehoffnungshütte*,

vol. 40010124/1 (hereafter cited as HA/GHH: NL Reusch, 40010124/1), and report by P. Klöckner, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, BA: R 43 I/139.

38. R. Heberle, *Landbevölkerung und Nationalsozialismus. Eine soziologische Untersuchung zur politischen Willensbildung in Schleswig-Holstein 1918 bis 1932* (Stuttgart 1963) and G. Stoltenberg, *Politisches Strömungen im schleswig-holsteinischen Landvolk 1918-1933* (Düsseldorf 1962).

39. H. Bettac, *Die gegenwärtige Ueberschuldung der deutschen Landwirtschaft* (Dissertation, Greifswald 1932). See also F. Beckmann, 'Landwirtschaftliche Kreditfragen' in Bernard Harms, ed., *Strukturwandlungen der deutschen Volkswirtschaft*, 2 vols. (Berlin 1928), I, 158-68.

40. See G. Colm, 'Zum Problem der öffentlichen Kapitalwirtschaft' in *Finanzarchiv*, N.F. 1, 1932, 92-101.

41. F. Baade, 'Richtlinien für ein sozialdemokratisches Agrarprogramm' in *Die Gesellschaft*, II (1924), 122-53. See also Baade's statement in *Protokolle des Sozialdemokratischen Parteitag 1927 in Kiel* (Berlin 1927), 114-27, as well as his *Schicksalsjahre der deutschen Landwirtschaft* (Kiel 1933).

42. See the programme of the 'Green Front' in H. Kretschmar, *Deutsche Agrarprogramme der Nachkriegszeit* (Berlin 1933), 64-89. For Baade's reaction to this programme, see the *Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkszeitung*, 26 March 1929, No. 27. See also J. Kalinski, 'Das Einheitsprogramm der deutschen Landwirtschaft' in *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, XXXV (1929), 278-84.

43. W. Röpke, 'Die neue Wirtschaftsstruktur Deutschlands als Grundlage seiner zukünftigen Handelspolitik' in *Schriften des Vereines für Sozialpolitik*, 171 (1925).

44. On Hugenberg and his political objectives, see Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen, 'Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei' in E. Matthias and R. Morsey, eds., *Das Ende der Parteien 1933* (Düsseldorf 1960), 543-652, and A. Chanady, 'The Disintegration of the German National People's Party, 1924-1930' in *The Journal of Modern History*, XLIX (1967), 65-91.

45. See *Unsere Partei* (15 April 1929).

46. Memorandum by von Schleicher, 'Gedanken zur Lage' reprinted in T. Vogelsang, *Reichswehr, Staat und NSDAP* (Stuttgart 1962), 414.

47. 'Niederschrift des Grafen Westarp über die Bildung der Regierung Brüning's und die Verhandlungen bis zur Ablehnung des Misstrauenvotums' (13 April 1930) in the *Nachlass of Count Westarp in Gärtringen near Stuttgart*.

48. G. Franz, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Bauernstandes in der Neuzeit* (Darmstadt 1963), 535-38.

49. H. Gies, 'NSDAP and landwirtschaftliche Organisationen in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik' in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, XV (1967), 341-76.

50. F. Jacobs, *Christliches Bauernprogramm. Programm der Vereinigung der deutschen christlichen Bauernvereine* (Berlin 1932). See also F. Jacobs, *Von Schorlemer zur Gruenen Front. Zur Abwertung des berufsständischen und politischen Denkens* (Düsseldorf 1957), 50.

51. On the role of reparations in Brüning's foreign policy, see W. J. Helbich, *Die Reparationen in der Aera Brüning und zur Bedeutung des Young-Plans für die deutsche Politik 1930-1932* (Berlin 1962). For a correction of certain aspects of Helbich's thesis, see H. Sanmann, 'Daten und Alternativen der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Finanzpolitik in der Aera Brüning' in *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftspolitik*, X (1965), 109-40, and H. Köhler,

'Arbeitsbeschaffung, Siedlung and Reparationen in der Schlussphase der Regierung Brüning' in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, XVII (1969), 276-307. The contradictions between Brüning's deflationary programme and his agrarian protectionist policies has been demonstrated from an agrarian point of view by H. Beyer in 'Die Agrarkrise und das Ende der Weimarer Republik' in *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie*, XIII (1965), 62-92.

52. For the 'Silberberg Plan', see F. M. Fiederlein, *Der Deutsche Osten und die Regierung Brüning*, Papen und Schleicher (Dissertation, Würzburg 1966), and G. Schulz, 'Staatliche Stützungsmaßnahmen in den deutschen Ostgebieten' in F. A. Hermens and Th. Schieder, eds., *Staat Wirtschaft und Politik in der Weimarer Republik*. Festschrift für Heinrich Brüning (Berlin 1967), 141-204.

53. W. G. Hoffman, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft*, 143.

54. Confidential circular from the National Federation of German Industry, 18 March 1930, on the pig and coal quotas negotiated with Poland, AA, *Handakten Ritter, Polen*, Vol. 12.

55. See M. Schiele, 'Die Agrarpolitik der Deutschnationalen Volkspartei 1925/28' (*Deutschnationales Flugblatt*, No. 320. 1928).

56. M. Victor, 'Das sog. Gesetz der abnehmenden Aussenhandelsbedeutung' in *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, XXXVI (1932), 57-85.

57. H. Brügelmann, *Politische Oekonomie in kritischen Jahren. Die Friedrich List-Gesellschaft e.V. von 1925-1935* (Tübingen 1956).

58. *Reichs-Landbund*, 25 March 1933.

59. H. Brüning, 'Ein Brief' in *Deutsche Rundschau*, LXX (1947), 1-22. See also Brüning, *Memoiren 1918-1934* (Stuttgart 1970), 556-603.

60. Brüning's plans for domestic colonization were denounced by conservatives as 'agrarian bolshevism'. See the letter written by Freiherr von Gayl to von Hindenburg, 24 May 1932, partially reproduced by W. Conze, 'Dokumentation zum Sturz Brünings' in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, I (1963), 261-88.

61. D. Gessner, *Agrardepression und Präsidentskabinette in Deutschland 1932/33. Politische Probleme des Agrarprotektionismus am Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf 1977).