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NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND THE GERMAN PROLETARIAT, 1925–1935: OLD MYTHS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

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Scholarly interest in the social composition of both the membership and electorate of the National Socialist movement before the *Machtübernahme* of 1933 continues unabated, though the nature and weight of argument have undergone some significant changes, particularly during the last decade. The earliest theories about the social nature of the movement, such as those adduced by contemporary observers like Theodor Geiger and in the postwar period by Seymour Lipset and Arthur Schweitzer, lacked supporting empirical evidence.¹ The impressionistic view that the NSDAP was a predominantly lower middle-class party (*Mittelstandspartei*) was widely accepted, despite the fact that in the *Kampfzeit* the NSDAP progressed through various discernible phases of development which, it might have reasonably appeared, had implications for its social support, as well as its ideological and propagandistic orientation and electoral priorities, as Hitler strove to foster a mass movement capable of assuming power within the legal and constitutional framework of the Weimar state. After all, it was appreciated by scholars that the Hitlerian power strategy was perennially conditioned by the expediency of tactical opportunism. Even with the growing availability of hard data – for example, from the membership lists held in the Berlin Document Center and German regional archives – the debate was stifled to a considerable extent by disagreements over what methodological and interpretational models to apply to the findings.

A further and enduring problem has been how to relate various occupations, especially those on the lower-middle-class/working class divide, to social class categories. An issue of fundamental importance arises from the absence among scholars of an agreed class model. Indeed, the answer of some is to argue that given the whirlpool of economic, social and political upheaval in the Weimar republic, it is simply not feasible to understand the development of the NSDAP, or any other party, in class terms.² However, the employment of sophisticated, computer-based, quantitative methods to relevant data has allowed impressive advances to be made in our knowledge of the NSDAP's following.³

¹ T. Geiger, *Die soziale Schichtung des deutschen Volkes. Soziographischer Versuch auf statistischer Grundlage* (Stuttgart, 1932); S. M. Lipset, *Political man. The social bases of politics* (New York, 1960), pp. 140–52 (new edn, Baltimore, 1981); A. Schweitzer, *Die Nazifizierung des Mittelstandes* (Stuttgart, 1970).

² J. T. Linz, 'Some notes towards a comparative study of fascism in sociopolitical historical perspective', in W. Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism. A reader's guide* (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 13–78; W. S. Allen, 'Farewell to class analysis in the rise of nazism: comment', *Central European History*, xvii, 1 (1984), 54–62.

³ M. H. Kater, 'Quantifizierung und NS-Geschichte. Methodologische Überlegungen über Grenzen und Möglichkeiten einer EDV-Analyse der NSDAP-Sozialstruktur von 1925 bis 1945',

The view that the NSDAP was a mainly lower middle-class party was challenged only rather tentatively before the early 1980s. A number of historians, including Harold Gordon and Heinrich August Winkler, had suggested that the party had drawn its support from a wider spectrum of Weimar society, but they generally lacked convincing proof.⁴ Moreover, a pioneer in the use of quantitative methods in analyzing the social composition of the party, Michael Kater, produced a series of outstanding articles in the 1970s which appeared to substantiate the validity of the 'Mittelstand' hypothesis, culminating in the publication of a major monograph in 1983.⁵ His far-ranging examination, on the basis of computer techniques and multiple statistical analysis, of the ordinary membership and leadership of the NSDAP from its creation in 1919 until the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945, underscores the strength of the lower middle-class presence until Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor in 1933, while at the same time recognizing a not insignificant upper middle-class element by 1932.⁶

Kater's massive data base, comprising every available official list of Nazi personnel, is constructed into social categories used in the census of June 1925, thus: workers (*Arbeiter*), lower middle-class (*unterer Mittelstand*, comprising artisans, salaried employees, commercial staff (*Kaufleute*) and small farmers), and upper middle-class (*oberer Mittelstand*, that is, senior managerial staff, top-level civil servants, academically-trained professionals, university students and former aristocracy). Sometimes, rather confusingly, sub-divisions of these categories are added, such as 'lower and intermediate (petty) employees'. A serious problem immediately arises because by contrasting the occupations of party members and leaders with those of the German labour pool as a whole, Kater ignores the fact that NSDAP personnel were almost entirely male, whereas the labour force was both male and female. In other words, the male membership of the NSDAP should have been compared only with the male constituency of the German labour force. Consequently, Kater's conclusions regarding the class composition of the party are clearly dubious.

Kater's study had already been superseded to some degree a short time beforehand by the first of the new wave of impressively researched publications which has opened a distinctive chapter in the historiography of this important subject by issuing at last a formidable challenge to the long-established 'Mittelstand' thesis. Richard Hamilton, using as his base a richly detailed sociogeographic analysis of the results of Reichstag elections from September 1930 to November 1932 in 14 major cities throughout Germany (Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt/Main, Stuttgart, Hanover, Nuremberg, Mannheim, Hamburg, Cologne, Essen, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Duisburg and Wuppertal), clearly demonstrates that in most of these cities the NSDAP scored notably well in

Geschichte und Gesellschaft, III (1977), 543–84. See also some thoughtful views in P. Baldwin, 'Social interpretations of nazism: renewing a tradition', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xxv (1990), 5–37.

⁴ H. J. Gordon, *Hitler and the beer hall putsch* (Princeton, 1972), p. 82; H. A. Winkler, 'Mittelstandsbewegung oder Volkspartei? Zur sozialen Basis der NSDAP', in W. Schieder (ed.), *Faschismus als soziale Bewegung. Deutschland und Italien im Vergleich* (Hamburg, 1976), pp. 97–118; H. A. Winkler, *Mittelstand, Demokratie und Nationalsozialismus. Die politische Entwicklung von Handwerk und Kleinhandel in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne, 1972). D. Mühlberger, 'The Sociology of the NSDAP: the question of working class membership', *Journal of Contemporary History*, xv (1980), 493–511. See also J. P. Madden, *The social composition of the nazi party, 1919–1930* (Ph.D., University of Oklahoma, 1976).

⁵ M. H. Kater, *The nazi party. A social profile of members and leaders, 1919–1945* (Oxford, 1983). His earlier works include, 'Sozialer Wandel in der NSDAP im Zuge der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung', in Schieder, *Faschismus*, pp. 25–68.

⁶ Kater, *Nazi party*, p. 236.

comfortably-off, protestant, upper middle-class districts, such as Zehlendorf in Berlin and Blankensee in Hamburg.⁷ The wealthier the urban electorate in these constituencies, the greater the NSDAP vote.

The value of this work is that its principal conclusions in this regard are sustained by irrefutable empirical evidence. Essentially, it shows that the social base of National Socialism in the early 1930s extended far beyond the confines of the petty bourgeoisie and into the ranks of the urban, protestant *haute* bourgeoisie. The reasons for this pattern of electoral behaviour are explained in terms of disillusionment with the traditional middle-class parties' failure to furnish solutions to the manifold problems engendered by the depression, and also in terms of the adroit, exploitative character of National Socialist propaganda. That sounds perfectly reasonable, except that Hamilton has to infer these motives to an extent from his assessment of the content of newspapers likely to have been bought and read by the upper middle-class. Reports and editorials in this section of the press frequently depicted the NSDAP as a safe alternative for disgruntled middle-class voters. Consequently, this part of his study is not nearly as solid as his electoral performance information. Moreover, it may be that the significance of short-term political influences is overstressed to the neglect of longer-term structural factors in accounting for electoral responses. Less successful also is his attempt to refute, as a corollary to his main point of argument, the '*Mittelstand*' thesis, because his data does not reach sufficiently far to allow such an ambitious extra aim to be realised. It needs to be remembered that in 1930 only about one third of the German population resided in large cities, and it is well known that the NSDAP performed much better in smaller provincial towns and rural districts, especially in protestant northern, central and eastern parts of the Reich. That the lower middle class, particularly the 'old' *Mittelstand* of artisans, shopkeepers and peasantry, has to be seen as a significant component of National Socialism in the Weimar era, which is not the same as saying the '*Mittelstand*' thesis is valid, is confirmed in the equally valuable monograph written by Thomas Childers.⁸ Childers pursues his examination of the National Socialist electorate on a much broader data base than that used by Hamilton. The socio-economic returns of the census of 1925 for nearly 500 towns and rural districts are collated and applied to the outcome of six Reichstag elections from 1924 to 1932 in order to obtain coefficients relating NSDAP voters to five principal social groups: the 'old' *Mittelstand*, the *Rentnermittelstand* (retired middle class), the 'new' *Mittelstand*, the working class, and denominational groups. Childers identifies that a stable constituency for the NSDAP existed up to a point, but also that the remainder of that constituency was highly unstable. The NSDAP was the beneficiary of the progressive decline during the 1920s and early 1930s of the established bourgeois parties because of its judicious electioneering techniques which tailored its message to suit each particular social group. Accordingly, the party rallied support after 1930 not only from the 'old' *Mittelstand*, but also from a more disparate spectrum of the middle class: the working class and catholics were proportionately underrepresented, though were by no means insignificant. By 1933, therefore, the NSDAP had developed not as

⁷ R. F. Hamilton, *Who voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, 1982). See also his 'Braunschweig 1932: further evidence on the support for national socialism', *Central European History*, xvii, 1 (1984), 3-33.

⁸ T. Childers, *The nazi voter. The social foundations of fascism in Germany, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill, 1983), and T. Childers (ed.), *The formation of the nazi constituency, 1919-1933* (Totowa, N. J., 1986). For small farmers' support for the NSDAP before 1933, see G. Corni, *Hitler and the peasants. Agrarian policy of the Third Reich, 1930-1939* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 18-38.

a middle-class party, but rather as a socially heterogeneous popular movement.⁹ Unlike Hamilton, Childers pinpoints longer-term structural problems affecting Germany since the last quarter of the nineteenth century as the primary impetus behind the ultimately widespread middle-class adherence to the NSDAP. In this respect, the economic displacement of the 'old' or traditional *Mittelstand* by the rapid course of industrial capitalism, which was exacerbated by the hyper-inflationary and stabilisation crises of 1923/4, is underlined. Although these conclusions are not original, this study presents a thoroughly detailed and definitive confirmation of the inadequacies of the lower middle-class thesis of National Socialism.

The impulse for a more profound and differentiated analysis of the NSDAP's middle-class constituency before 1933 that the studies by Hamilton and Childers provided, has been maintained in the works of other historians published in the later 1980s. Peter Fritzsche, for instance, is concerned to explain the reasons for the collapse of the bourgeois parties which allowed the NSDAP immediate opportunities at the end of the 1920s.¹⁰ Focusing mainly on the urban political landscape in Lower Saxony between 1918 and 1930, he sees the NSDAP's breakthrough into national politics as the inevitable result of political changes within the middle classes from the early 1920s. These include deep dissatisfaction with the traditional parties of the right and centre-right,¹¹ the growth of radical nationalism and *völkisch* ideas, and of anti-marxism, which fused into a revolutionary populism in search of a utopian *Volksgemeinschaft* (national-racist community). The NSDAP finally fell heir to this radical agenda.

How far these conclusions about Lower Saxony can be extended to the rest of Germany is, of course, uncertain. Local evidence also underpins Koshar's analysis of the small, mainly protestant middle-class university town of Marburg, in Hesse.¹² The role of the middle-class voluntary associations (*Vereine*) and local dignitaries, and their evolving interaction with the local National Socialists, is highlighted. The NSDAP rose to electoral prominence on the backs of these stolid bourgeois citizens. Finally, Michael Prinz's concentration on a specific component of the *Mittelstand*, the salaried, white-collar employees (*Angestellte*), usefully complements earlier studies of this group by Hans Speier and Jürgen Kocka.¹³ Although insensitive to the reality of hierarchical division in German society and unfortunately inclined to treat the *Angestellte* as a homogeneous entity, Prinz is none the less successful in accentuating their susceptibility to Hitler before 1933. The largest single association among non-socialist unions, the *Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfenverband* (DHV), was in direct if, at times, ambivalent contact with the NSDAP from the mid-1920s.¹⁴ Apprehensive of losing their social and economic status in an era of large-scale capitalism and organized labour, and suffering the traumatic levelling consequences of the hyper-inflation crisis and then of the

⁹ Childers, *Nazi voter*, pp. 178, 264ff.

¹⁰ P. Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for fascism. Populism and political mobilization in Weimar Germany* (New York, 1990).

¹¹ See L. E. Jones, *German liberalism and the dissolution of the Weimar party system, 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill, 1988).

¹² R. Koshar, *Social life, local politics, and nazism: Marburg, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill, 1986).

¹³ M. Prinz, *Vom neuen Mittelstand zum Volksgenossen. Die Entwicklung des sozialen Status der Angestellten von der Weimarer Republik bis zum Ende der NS-Zeit* (Munich, 1986); H. Speier, *Die Angestellte vor dem Nationalsozialismus. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der deutschen Sozialstruktur 1918-1933* (Göttingen, 1977); J. Kocka, *Angestellte zwischen Faschismus und Demokratie* (Göttingen, 1977).

¹⁴ Further information in I. Hamel, *Völkischer Verband und nationale Gewerkschaft: Der Deutsch-nationale Handlungsgehilfen-Verband, 1893-1933* (Frankfurt/Main, 1967).

Depression, the *Angestellte* flocked in substantial numbers to the NSDAP, which promised to protect them. They were also pushed in that direction because the increased number of women in white-collar employment led to a perceived reduction in the status of the *Angestellte*, as did the extension under the auspices of the public welfare system (*Sozialstaat*), of certain privileges, such as paid holidays, to manual, blue-collar workers. Overall, this was a class in revolt against loss of social status and declining living standards. Of the ideological attractions of National Socialism for the *Angestellte*, Prinz is perhaps less forthcoming.

If these recent outstanding works, in emphasizing the diversity of the broad middle-class constituency of the NSDAP before 1933, have effectively rendered the 'Mittelstand' thesis untenable, they do not alter the equally long-standing and widely accepted view that the working class was of secondary importance in bringing Hitler to power. Setting aside definitional arguments about which groups precisely can be included in the 'working class', and also differences among historians regarding what percentage of the NSDAP's membership and electorate the working class, however defined, might have constituted, a consensus has prevailed that this class was considerably underrepresented in proportion to its size in the German population as a whole. The recent elucidation of the nature of middle-class support for the NSDAP, however, has had the inadvertent, but no less important, result of promoting more determined and skilful investigation of the National Socialist/working class relationship in both the Weimar republic and the Third Reich. A further, quite dramatic dimension of the debate concerning the social and class character of National Socialism has emerged, therefore, challenging set views and opening up valuable new perspectives.

The standard opinion that the working class kept its distance in large measure from the NSDAP before 1933 has been defended over the years with reference to several points. During the initial phase of its development, from 1919 until the ignominious Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923, the NSDAP, it is usually argued, evinced in its ideology, propaganda and objectives little affinity with the working class. The official party programme of February 1920, for example, embraced a motley collection of petty bourgeois nationalist, *völkisch* and anti-semitic resentments which were intrinsically incompatible with the socialist and internationalist ethos of the German labour movement. The NSDAP, in other words, was very decidedly a party of the Bavarian radical right which found little resonance among workers. Estimates of their membership of the party have been low.¹⁵ An attempt during the second period of the party's development, from its re-foundation in February 1925 until the Reichstag elections in May 1928, to penetrate the industrial proletariat in northern Germany was a failure. The so-called 'Nazi left' did not exist as a coherent or viable ideological or organizational entity, no meaningful 'socialist' ideology was offered to the workers, who continued to identify with the traditional left-wing parties, the Social Democrats (SPD) and Communists (KPD), and Hitler was obviously unenthusiastic about the enterprise, in any case.¹⁶

¹⁵ Kater, *Nazi party*, pp. 20-3; D. M. Douglas, 'The parent cell: some computer notes on the composition of the first nazi party group in Munich, 1919-1921', *Central European History*, x, 1 (1977), 55-72; P. Madden, 'Some social characteristics of early nazi party members, 1919-1923', *Central European History*, xv, 1 (1982), 34-56.

¹⁶ P. D. Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the rise of nazism* (London, 1983), pp. 40-60; J. Bons, 'Der Kampf um die Seele des deutschen Arbeiters. Zur Arbeiterpolitik der NSDAP, 1920-1933', *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, xxv (1989), 11-41.

Confronted by the electoral disaster of this strategy in May 1928, the NSDAP reoriented its propaganda more towards the broad range of the middle classes, while scaling down, but not abandoning its radical 'socialist' and anti-capitalist rhetoric. In the due course of time, so this line of argument continues, the party grew in the early years of the depression as a significant political force with predominantly lower middle-class backing, taking advantage of the disintegration of the established bourgeois parties and interest groups on a platform of strident chauvinism, anti-marxism and anti-semitism, and under the leadership of a charismatic *Führer*.¹⁷ A number of marxist historians, including the late Timothy Mason, went so far as to describe the NSDAP as a conscious crusade against the German proletariat.¹⁸

The relatively few workers who, it has been claimed, were attracted to the NSDAP as members or voters have been depicted as emanating by and large from the politically unschooled and unorganized periphery of proletarian life, living outside the leading cities and industrial centres. Where the NSDAP did succeed in making some kind of impact on the organized working class, as in specific locations in Berlin-Brandenburg, the Rhineland, Westphalia, Saxony and Thuringia, this has been ascribed to unusual socio-economic factors in these areas. Accordingly, those blue-collar workers who did find their way to the NSDAP have been identified as younger, long-term unemployed in towns and countryside, certain types of public transport workers (railways, trams), postal workers, public utility workers (gas, water and electricity), workers employed in small family firms where the owner's invariably right-wing political views could be imparted, domestic workers (toy-making, textiles, as in Chemnitz-Zwickau) and some sections of agricultural and forestry labour, especially in protestant eastern Germany. In all these categories, the younger elements were the most vulnerable to National Socialism.¹⁹ The influence of conservative and nationalist traditions on sections of the working class, thus producing the German counterpart of 'working-class Tories' in the United Kingdom, has often been advanced as a particular reason for this pattern.

Perhaps it should have become clear to some historians at an earlier date that these groups of workers supportive of the NSDAP probably added up to rather more than a small minority of the German working class, but that in any case, much more empirical research into its relationship with National Socialism was necessary. Too much of the discussion had been unduly determined by ideological and political views, and vested interests. Marxist and labour historians, many of whom seem to entertain romantic-utopian perspectives of the working class of whatever nationality, have proved unable or unwilling to examine objectively what little evidence was available, particularly where such evidence may have pointed to a more substantial working-class following for the NSDAP than they wanted to admit. Historians in the former, now discredited German Democratic Republic were the most culpable in this respect, but they had their allies in the West. They had what amounted almost to an obsession about excluding the working class from responsibility for Hitler coming to power or for the subsequent existence of the Third Reich.

¹⁷ P. D. Stachura, 'Der kritische Wendepunkt? Die NSDAP und die Reichstagswahlen vom 20. Mai 1928', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, xxvi, 1978, 66–99. See also M. H. Kele, *Nazis and workers. National socialist appeals to German labor, 1919–1933* (Chapel Hill, 1972).

¹⁸ T. W. Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich. Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft* (Opladen, 1977), p. 79. An English version of this work, *Social policy in the Third Reich. The working class and the 'national community', 1918–1939*, is due to be published early in 1993 (Berg, Oxford).

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 63–4.

Fortunately, the entire controversy about this vital theme of Nazi studies has been enlivened just recently by a series of pathbreaking monographs which have produced fundamentally challenging answers. In his critical review of the historiography of the debate concerning the social character of the NSDAP before 1933, Peter Manstein argued, though without adducing any new evidence, it must be said, that the case for understanding the party as a socially variegated *Volksbewegung* (popular movement) had to be further supported with reference to the working-class component.²⁰ This should come about, he suggested, through a more refined methodological and conceptual approach. His plea has now been responded to in decisive fashion. Jürgen Falter has led the way by presenting for the first time a comprehensive and convincing statistical profile of working-class support for the NSDAP before 1933.²¹ A sequence of leading articles on this theme by him over the last decade²² has now been capped by a sophisticated, highly nuanced examination of the party's electorate. He uses bivariate correlational analysis to access data on the results of Reichstag and Reich presidential elections, emphasising those that took place between 1928 and 1933, supplemented by returns from the *Fürsteneiteignung* plebiscite of 1926 and the plebiscite related to the nationalist campaign against the Young Plan in 1929/30. Multiple regression analysis and ecological regression techniques have been employed also to help produce a differentiated picture of the NSDAP voter, his socio-economic background, and the reasons for his political predilection. Falter introduces a diversified range of economic, occupational, confessional, demographic and political variables, which are skilfully deployed to refute conventional hypotheses of National Socialism, particularly the '*Mittelstand*' theory. At the same time, a number of other established views in this sphere, such as the underrepresentation of catholics in the NSDAP electorate, are confirmed, albeit on a statistically verifiable basis not previously available.²³ Otherwise, this study presents a solidly documented argument for comprehending the NSDAP as a 'popular party of protest' (*Sammlungsbewegung des Protests*), enjoying substantial support not only from the lower and upper bourgeoisie, but also, most significantly, from the working class.²⁴

More than any other Weimar party, the NSDAP succeeded in attracting noteworthy support from all sections of the electorate, allowing it to justify its constantly proclaimed propaganda boast that it was a genuine *Volkspartei*. Conjecture and ideologically conditioned appraisals of the extent of National Socialism's working-class following in the pre-1933 era have now been replaced with hard evidence that completely overturns conventional wisdom. A long list of percentages is given, but the one which commands most attention is the 40 per cent cited as the working-class component of the NSDAP vote by March 1933, the date of the last, if somewhat flawed democratic elections in Hitler's Germany.²⁵ This proletarian constituency comprised not only employed workers, but also their dependents, as well as unemployed and retired workers.

Although blue-collar workers were still under-represented in relation to their size in

²⁰ P. Manstein, *Die Mitglieder und Wähler der NSDAP 1919-1933. Untersuchungen zu ihrer schichtmässigen Zusammensetzung* (Frankfurt/Main, Berne, 1988).

²¹ J. W. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991).

²² For example, J. W. Falter and D. Hänisch, 'Die Anfälligkeit von Arbeitern gegenüber der NSDAP bei den Reichstagswahlen 1928-1933', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, xxvi (1986), 179-216, and J. W. Falter, 'War die NSDAP die erste deutsche Volkspartei?', in M. Prinz and R. Zitelmann (eds), *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (Darmstadt, 1991), pp. 21-47.

²³ Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, pp. 51ff., 169-93.

²⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 198-230.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 288.

the German population, they clearly amounted to a very substantial minority in the NSDAP, including, by March 1933, approximately two million former SPD and 350,000 former KPD voters.²⁶ As for the middle-class element in the party's electorate, Falter finds that white-collar employees (*Angestellte*) were not particularly over-represented, thus agreeing with a view previously expressed by Childers, while the protestant self-employed, pensioners and housewives were. In line with his wider analysis, Falter shows that there was no such phenomenon as a 'typical' Nazi worker, in the same way as there was no 'typical' Nazi middle-class voter, Nazi catholic, Nazi protestant, or 'typical' anything else.

If there is a weakness in this study, it lies in Falter's explanation of the large working class vote for the NSDAP. Discounting unemployment as a major factor, like many historians before him, he instead emphasises, in the first instance, the efficacy of the party's propaganda towards the workers. Falter does not accept that in the aftermath of the disappointing Reichstag election result in 1928 the NSDAP curtailed its efforts to attract the workers. Consequently, the party's radical anti-capitalist propaganda was maintained. That is undeniable, but it was directed mainly to cities and large industrial centres, while the chauvinistic, anti-marxist and racist propaganda was intensified towards the middle classes in smaller towns and the countryside.²⁷ By his own calculations, the latter made up a majority of the NSDAP vote, and they did not believe for a moment that they were supporting a pro-worker party. The selective quotations from Hitler which are used to demonstrate the continuing 'socialist' concern of the party are not convincing.²⁸ The *Führer*, after all, can be quoted on almost everything. Falter also cites the importance of the press and the efficiency of the NSDAP's organization in attracting all types of voter, but this argument is rather overstated. Moreover, the references to the influence of milieu and tradition are thin and poorly developed.²⁹

Falter's revelation about the extent of working-class electoral support for the NSDAP before 1933 is complemented by Detlef Mühlberger's regional examination of the party's leadership and ordinary membership.³⁰ While this work demonstrates their social heterogeneity, the presence of a proportionately overrepresented upper *Mittelstand* as well as a significant working-class element is underlined. He has used previously untouched membership lists from a number of German provincial archives to construct a class and occupational profile of what were invariably male supporters in four districts: the Western Ruhr (1925-6), Württemberg (1928-30), Hesse-Nassau-South (1929-31) and South Hanover Brunswick (1925-33), thus providing an overview of the period of the party's rise to power. Whether it can be fully accepted, however, that Mühlberger's conclusions are sufficiently representative to be applied on a nationwide basis is questionable, particularly as his data excludes all of the central and eastern territories of the Reich. There are also reservations to be expressed about his class model, which is built around the censuses of 1925 and 1933, and about the use of the term 'lower class' when actually 'working class' is meant. His broad classifications, which include a problematical 'lower- and middle-middle class', are further broken down into no fewer than twenty-one subgroups³¹ – a scheme unlikely to command universal approval among scholars. None the less, taken as a whole, this

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 369.

²⁷ G. Paul, *Aufstand der Bilder. Die NS-Propaganda vor 1933* (Bonn, 1990), pp. 92, 102ff., 256-7.

²⁸ Falter, *Hitlers Wähler*, pp. 226ff.

²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 325-48, 357ff.

³⁰ D. Mühlberger, *Hitler's followers. Studies in the sociology of the nazi movement* (London, 1991).

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 19-25.

study is successful in intimating through a plethora of tables that the NSDAP's membership was drawn from a wide variety of social backgrounds in both the agrarian countryside and urban industrial areas.

A detailed picture of the social and occupational status of members in numerous local branches of the party within the four designated districts is provided. The percentage of workers naturally varied from branch to branch and over time, but it is possible to glean from the figures that the overall working-class component of the NSDAP in the four districts was at least one-third, perhaps slightly more. Involved were agricultural workers, and skilled and unskilled workers in industry, crafts, trade and transport, drawn overwhelmingly from younger (male) age groups, and living mainly in rural or small-town communities. These workers had not previously been involved in politics or were workers who had formerly supported middle-class parties. Factory workers or the unskilled proletariat in large units of production usually preferred the SPD and KPD to the National Socialists. Furthermore, it is shown convincingly that the rank-and-file of the ancillary paramilitary organisation, the SA (Stormtroopers), was predominantly working class, thus corroborating Conan Fischer's findings for the SA in general.³² It is indicated also that the working class was roughly equal in size to the lower middle class in the SS in the four selected regions.³³

Unfortunately, the value of these conclusions is diminished somewhat, as in Falter's case, by a failure to explain the reasons for the large working-class element in the party. This important omission is reflective of a certain reluctance on Mühlberger's part to make more of his considerable amount of material. More systematic analysis is required in a text which too often is little more than a descriptive narrative of the contents of the tables presented. In total, however, this work constitutes yet another repudiation of earlier theories concerning the class nature of National Socialism before 1933.

From a rather different perspective, a further successful assault on historiographical convention is made by Conan Fischer's new volume which, despite being primarily concerned with evaluating the KPD's response to National Socialist advances into the proletarian constituency it regarded as its own, does make clear that large numbers of workers were, in fact, won over to Hitler.³⁴ Close competition for working-class support took place between both parties in factories, on the streets and in the sprawling, run-down proletarian districts of major cities and towns across the country. In an attempt to forestall the NSDAP, it is argued, the communists frequently decided to adopt the slogans, programmes and propaganda themes of their opponents, including the appeal to nationalism. Hence, for example, the presentation of a 'Programme for the National and Social Liberation of the German People' by the KPD in August 1930. Indeed, the alleged inherent nationalism of the working class is constantly stressed as the fundamental reason for its attraction to the NSDAP.³⁵ Support for the party came from the very large non-organized segment of the working class, notably from workers in handicrafts and small-scale manufacturing. By 1931/2, about 50 per cent of the NSDAP's urban vote was delivered by working-class districts, that is, from 'working-class tories', who were anti-socialist, anti-marxist and nationalist.³⁶ It is, in

³² C. Fischer, *Stormtroopers. A social, economic and ideological analysis, 1929-35* (London, 1983), esp. pp. 25-48.

³³ Mühlberger, *Hitlers followers*, pp. 181-201. Compare with G. C. Boehnert, *A sociography of the SS officer corps, 1925-1939* (Ph.D., University of London, 1977); H. F. Ziegler, *Nazi Germany's new aristocracy. The SS leadership, 1925-1939* (Princeton, 1990).

³⁴ C. Fischer, *The German communists and the rise of nazism* (London, 1991).

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 105f., 112ff.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 119.

consequence, a particular merit of this important study that workers' behaviour is examined without the customary blind leftist subservience to the notion of their putative envelopment by socialist or marxist ideology. Fischer is also undoubtedly correct to emphasize the SA and, to a much lesser extent, the National Socialist Factory Cell Organization (NSBO), as an important conduit for attracting young, unemployed workers to the party during the depression.³⁷ The study does not provide, however, either a satisfactory statistical aggregate of working-class support for the NSDAP or a clear definition of what is meant by the term 'working-class nationalism'. What the workers themselves understood by this term is also not clarified. Rather more needs to be made of this concept than merely referring to a growing desire among some sections of the working class before the First World War to be integrated into the mainstream of German society and the state – an attitude which ensured working-class support for the German war effort and which was continued in the SPD after 1918. Moreover, the extent to which working-class nationalism influenced the policy of the KPD, if at all, is a matter of some doubt. KPD supporters did not want to be integrated into the Weimar state, which, of course, they rejected. They looked instead to the 'socialist fatherland', the Soviet Union. And were not KPD responses to events in Germany from the late 1920s, at the very latest, dictated by Moscow, in the interests of Soviet foreign policy? The KPD's adoption of the 'social fascist' policy *vis-à-vis* the SPD is the starkest example of this reality. Even if it had wanted to, the KPD would have lacked the scope to incorporate a 'working class nationalism' into its agenda. As regards the allied but admittedly vexed question of working-class racism, Fischer is uninformative. Finally, queries are bound to arise about his heavy reliance on communist party records for his examination of the KPD's reaction to National Socialist efforts to attract workers. How trustworthy are these accounts?

As Mühlberger shows, an understanding of the NSDAP's social composition can be deepened by examining the makeup of the party's ancillary groups. Earlier studies of the SA and Hitler Youth have revealed, though not uncontroversially, a preponderant working-class membership in respect of the rank-and-file.³⁸ On the other hand, the leadership of the SA became progressively more middle class the higher the position of command, as indicated by Jamin's monograph.³⁹ While no one has yet seriously questioned that other ancillary organisations, such as the *NS Lehrerbund* (Teachers' League), *NS-Schülerbund* (Grammar School Pupils' League) and the *Bund NS Deutscher Juristen* (Lawyers' League), were anything other than solidly middle class, the class status of the NSBO has been subject to review by Gunther Mai⁴⁰ and, more especially, Volker Kratzberg, in a well-researched and illuminating study.⁴¹

The NSBO's genesis lay in a series of local initiatives in the late 1920s by 'left-wing' party members in different parts of the country who were keen to extend National Socialism further into the ranks of the factory proletariat to the detriment of marxism.

³⁷ Ibid. pp. 130–1.

³⁸ Fischer, *Stormtroopers*; P. D. Stachura, *Nazi youth in the Weimar republic* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 57–62. But see some reservations on the figures for the Hitler Youth in G. Rempel, *Hitler's children. The Hitler youth and the SS* (Chapel Hill, 1989), pp. 13–15, 280–1 (notes 45, 47).

³⁹ M. Jamin, *Zwischen den Klassen. Zur Sozialstruktur der SA-Führerschaft* (Wuppertal, 1984).

⁴⁰ G. Mai, 'Die Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation (NSBO) von der Gründung bis zur Röhm-Affäre (1928 bis 1934)', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, xxxi (1983), 571–613.

⁴¹ V. Kratzberg, *Arbeiter auf dem Weg zu Hitler? Die Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellen-Organisation. Ihre Entstehung, ihre Programmatik, ihr Scheitern 1927–1934* (Frankfurt/Main, 1987). See also an earlier work, H.-G. Schumann, *Nationalsozialismus und Gewerkschaftsbewegung. Die Vernichtung der deutschen Gewerkschaften und der Aufbau der 'Deutschen Arbeitsfront'* (Hanover, 1958), esp. pp. 36ff.

Its creation in March 1931 was part of a programme of organizational expansion promoted in the National Socialist movement by Gregor Strasser which also included the establishment of the Agrarian Office, the *NS-Frauenshaft* (Women's Association) and the *NS-Auslandsamt* (Foreign Affairs Office). But the NSBO immediately occupied an uneasy position between the rival forces of capital and labour. Although it propagated a crude form of anti-capitalism, it also gave vociferous expression to the standard nationalist-racist line of the NSDAP. The NSBO's demagoguery drew limited support: only 294,000 members by autumn 1932. A late surge in the last few months before the party's advent to power, however, pushed that figure to nearer 400,000.⁴² Kratzenberg produces compelling evidence, much of it relating to the situation in Berlin, which challenges the long-established view that the large majority of the membership was made up of lower-middle-class white-collar employees in industry and commerce. In fact, the blue-collar working-class representation was far greater than believed until now.

The NSBO attracted members from a wide cross-section of industry, commerce, municipal and public service, and from large to medium-sized and smaller enterprises. It was particularly strong in banking, insurance and construction circles, as well as in the metal, machine-making, and electricity industries. A noteworthy following was also carved out in transport, hotels and catering.⁴³ Kratzenberg argues that, while in its early stages the NSBO recruited mainly from white-collar employees, its radicalization during the course of 1932 enabled it with increasing success to break into the ranks of the working class, especially its younger age groups, in public sector employment, such as the railways, post and local government. In Berlin, workers who had recently migrated there from the countryside were also attracted in large numbers. Further recruitment in the capital was made from members of the Christian, *völkisch* and liberal trade unions and, to a lesser degree, from disillusioned, usually unemployed, members of the KPD and the communist factory trade union organisation, the *Revolutionäre Gewerkschafts-Opposition* (RGO).⁴⁴ If he is less clear about the reasons for workers joining the NSBO in increasing quantity – it seems some at least did so for the novelty – Kratzenberg's central thesis of a substantial working-class membership is well-founded.

The new point now reached in the historiography of the NSDAP's social composition before 1933 is that the '*Mittelstand*' thesis has been rendered completely untenable by the recently published monographs so far discussed in this review. A mass of fresh empirical evidence relevant to this theme has been advanced and analyzed, invariably by computer-related quantitative techniques, in convincing fashion. The NSDAP was a genuine *Volkspartei*, with a significant working-class component, not a *Mittelstandspartei*. It is also worth recalling in support of this interpretation that after it had gained power, the NSDAP did not pursue policies that were necessarily of benefit to the situation and material interests of many middle-class groups, notably, small businessmen, artisans and peasants.⁴⁵ Big business took priority, particularly given the

⁴² Kratzenberg, pp. 99–111.

⁴³ Ibid. pp. 175–95.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 204–24, 245–63. See W. Müller, *Lohnkampf, Massenstreik, Sowjetmacht. Ziele und Grenzen der 'Revolutionären Gewerkschafts-Opposition' (RGO) in Deutschland 1928 bis 1933* (Cologne, 1988).

⁴⁵ H. A. Winkler, 'Der entbehrliche Stand. Zur Mittelstandspolitik im "Dritten Reich"', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, xvii (1977), 1–40; A. von Saldern, *Mittelstand im 'Dritten Reich'. Handwerker-Einzelhändler-Bauern* (Frankfurt/Main, 1979); A. von Saldern, "'Alter Mittelstand" im "Dritten Reich"', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, xii (1986), 233–43.

exigencies of the ambitious rearmament programme. It has been pointed out, however, with reference to the studies by Falter, Mühlberger, Kratzenberg and others which have been considered, that while the working-class dimension of the NSDAP and a number of its ancillary groups has now been well-documented, the reasons why so many workers elected to follow a radical right-wing party before 1933 were not satisfactorily addressed. This important gap has been filled to a large extent by a further corpus of recent monographic literature which specifically examines the conditions of the German workers in the last years of the Weimar republic and in the early period of the Third Reich.

In volume III of his monumental trilogy on the history of the German working class and labour movement in the Weimar era, Winkler pinpoints what might be regarded as the basic reason for some workers' eventual susceptibility to the blandishments of National Socialism: the decline of the working class as a major, independent political force under the devastating impact of the depression and the policies of successive authoritarian governments from Brüning, through von Papen and von Schleicher to Hitler, culminating in the *Gleichschaltung* (compulsory co-ordination) programme in 1933.⁴⁶ He charts not only the failure of the SPD and socialist trade unions to lend the republic muscular support when it needed it most, and the KPD's destructive activity, but also the Left's unrealistic and complacently-informed attitude to National Socialism.⁴⁷ The SPD's policy of toleration towards the Brüning cabinet effectively meant its tacit support for the deflationary strategy which made much worse the material distress and sense of despair among the working class. The same party's ponderously legalistic response to the Papen coup against the constitutional government of Prussia in July 1932 (*Preussenschlag*) further poignantly illustrated its supine defence of the democratic order with which it had been so intimately associated since its inception in 1918. The battered trade unions, bereft of many millions of members and reduced to virtual impotence by 1932, increasingly adopted thereafter an opportunistic approach which led them to seek a rapprochement with Hitler's regime in spring 1933.⁴⁸ With such useless leadership, it is little wonder that in the early 1930s the proletarian political constituency fragmented, accentuating old divisions and creating new ones, for example, between the employed and unemployed. Millions of workers were consequently exposed to the siren calls of political extremists on the left and on the right.

Michael Ruck's analysis of working-class reaction to the NSDAP in the early 1920s, indicates the vulnerability of this class to right-wing radicalism where adverse economic and political conditions prevail alongside the complacency of the traditional left-wing parties.⁴⁹ If he is unsuccessful in showing precisely how far the NSDAP was able to attract workers in 1922/3 – there is a dearth of reliable statistical data⁵⁰ – Ruck

⁴⁶ H. A. Winkler, *Der Weg in die Katastrophe. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1930 bis 1933* (Berlin, 1987).

⁴⁷ Compare the different conclusions in W. Pyta, *Gegen Hitler und für die Republik. Die Auseinandersetzung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie mit der NSDAP in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1989).

⁴⁸ H. Potthoff, *Freie Gewerkschaften 1918–1933. Der Allgemeine Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1987) usefully discusses the political role of the union, pp. 302–14. See also M. Schneider, *Die Christlichen Gewerkschaften 1894–1933* (Bonn, 1982) and W. L. L. Patch, *Christian trade unions in the Weimar Republic, 1918–1933. The Failure of 'Corporate Pluralism'* (New Haven, 1985), pp. 185–215.

⁴⁹ M. Ruck, *Bollwerk gegen Hitler? Arbeiterschaft, Arbeiterbewegung und die Anfänge des Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne, 1988).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 74–81.

does make the point that in suitably disturbed circumstances a positive relationship could emerge between the working class and National Socialism. Winkler, in volume I of his trilogy,⁵¹ comes close to endorsing this thesis when he argues that despite some shows of strength in the early 1920s by the SPD and trade unions – thus, in defeating the Kapp Putsch and helping the republic survive the hyperinflation crisis three years later – they needed to gather other sources of support if the republic were to be successfully defended in the longer term.⁵² The German labour movement in 1932/3 could no longer be described legitimately as the strongest, best-organized and most disciplined in Europe. It had been shattered by mass unemployment (six million officially registered, plus up to another two million unregistered, by mid-1932) and its multifarious social and economic repercussions, including the collapse of the public welfare system (*Sozialstaat*).⁵³ A once powerful, distinctive network of proletarian culture had been gravely undermined even prior to the depression by the dissemination by an expanding popular media of a mass, modern culture.⁵⁴ Politically and culturally disorientated, fearful and profoundly disillusioned, the working class in 1932/3 faced an uncertain future.

The vital importance of the depression to an appropriate comprehension of the workers' response to National Socialism following the *Machtübernahme* is accentuated in Wolfgang Zollitsch's excellent contribution,⁵⁵ which elaborates on a number of themes previously adumbrated in controversial, 'revisionist' articles by Gunther Mai and Ulrich Herbert.⁵⁶ He argues that the working class offered much less resistance to the regime than many contemporaries and the National Socialists themselves had expected because of the deprivation, insecurity and passivity induced by the depression. This rude experience made large sections of workers reasonably pliable and led to their integration into the *Volksgemeinschaft* of the Third Reich. This hypothesis is illustrated with reference to four industrial case studies, comprising chemical workers at IG Farben, steelworkers and machinemakers at Krupp, electrical workers at Siemens and miners in the Ruhr, which he rightly claims is as good a sample of the German working class at that time as is possible. Zollitsch's view is, of course, diametrically opposed to

⁵¹ H. A. Winkler, *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1919 bis 1924* (Berlin, 1984).

⁵² A point tacitly endorsed by the generally pessimistic assessment of Weimar's prospects given in H. Mommsen, *Die verspielte Freiheit. Der Weg der Republik von Weimar in den Untergang 1918 bis 1933* (Berlin, 1989).

⁵³ Comprehensive coverage of the impact of the depression in R. J. Evans and D. Geary (eds), *The German unemployed. Experiences and consequences of mass unemployment from the Weimar republic to the Third Reich* (London, 1987); P. D. Stachura (ed.), *Unemployment and the great depression in Weimar Germany* (London, 1986).

⁵⁴ For a useful overview, W. L. Guttsman, *Workers' culture in Weimar Germany. Between tradition and commitment* (Oxford, 1990).

⁵⁵ W. Zollitsch, *Arbeiter zwischen Weltwirtschaftskrise und Nationalsozialismus. Ein Beitrag zur Sozialgeschichte der Jahre 1928 bis 1936* (Göttingen, 1990).

⁵⁶ G. Mai, "Warum steht der deutsche Arbeiter zu Hitler?" Zur Rolle der Deutschen Arbeitsfront im Herrschaftssystem des Dritten Reiches', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, xii (1986), 212–34; G. Mai, 'Arbeiterschaft und Nationalsozialismus in der Phase der Machtergreifung', in K. Malettke (ed.), *Der Nationalsozialismus in der Macht. Aspekte nationalsozialistischer Politik und Herrschaft* (Göttingen, 1984), pp. 85–109. See reply by J. W. Falter, 'Warum die deutschen Arbeiter während des "Dritten Reiches" zu Hitler standen', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, xiii (1987), 217–31. U. Herbert, 'Arbeiterschaft im "Dritten Reich". Zwischenbilanz und offene Fragen', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, xv (1989), 320–60.

that articulated by marxist historians, most recently by Wisotsky,⁵⁷ who maintain that the workers in one way or another resisted or opposed the Third Reich, which is portrayed as fundamentally anti-working class in outlook.

Zollitsch stresses the regime's achievement in eliminating mass unemployment by the mid-1930s as a means of attracting the working class.⁵⁸ Although accompanied by generally low wage rates, this success restored a sense of purpose and optimism to a working class grateful simply for a job, around which they could bring at last a degree of order and orientation to their lives. Several other significant influences must also be taken into account, according to him. He does not ignore the National Socialists' use of repression and control, especially in connection with the destruction of the principal organizations of the left in 1933 and their replacement by the state-directed German Labour Front (DAF), as well as the abrogation of workers' legal prerogatives, exemplified by the 'Law on the Regulation of National Labour' (*Gesetz zur Ordnung der nationalen Arbeit*) of January 1934, and the introduction of 'work books' (*Arbeitsbuch*) the following year.⁵⁹ But this could not be the only response of the regime to the situation of the workers. If only for its own long-term security it had also to be positive and constructive. Zollitsch interestingly explains the workers' integration into Hitler's state with reference to an ongoing programme of rationalization in German industry after 1933, which involved moves to split the workers through a process that promoted individualism and neutralization.

He examines changes in the workplace, wage rates and the works councils, showing that in response to increased pressures faced by workers, employers developed a paternalistic social policy, including the provision of Christmas bonuses, health care, sports facilities, better canteens, a more salubrious factory environment, subsidised housing, paid holidays and retirement benefits.⁶⁰ Organisations such as '*Kraft durch Freude*' (Strength Through Joy) and '*Schönheit der Arbeit*' (Beauty of Labour) were conspicuous in this field.⁶¹ Moreover, he asserts, the regime opened up more

⁵⁷ K. Wisotsky, *Der Ruhrbergbau im Dritten Reich. Studien zur Sozialpolitik im Ruhrbergbau und zum sozialen Verhalten der Bergleute in den Jahren 1933 bis 1939* (Düsseldorf, 1983), pp. 78ff., 144ff., 167–79, 250–64. See also T. W. Mason, 'Die Bändigung der Arbeiterklasse im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland. Eine Einleitung', in C. Sachse et al. (eds), *Angst, Belohnung, Zucht und Ordnung. Herrschaftsmechanismen im Nationalsozialismus* (Opladen, 1982), pp. 11–53. See also I. Kershaw, "'Widerstand ohne Volk'", Dissens und Widerstand im Dritten Reich', in J. Schmäddeke and P. Steinbach (eds), *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus. Die deutsche Gesellschaft und der Widerstand gegen Hitler*, (Munich, 1985), pp. 779ff.; D. J. K. Peukert, *Inside nazi Germany. Conformity, opposition and racism in everyday life* (London, 1987), pp. 101–18. Contrast Wisotsky's views, however, with those expressed in J. F. Gillingham, *Industry and politics in the Third Reich. Ruhr coal, Hitler and Europe* (Stuttgart, 1985), and P. Hayes, *Industry and ideology. IG Farben in the nazi era* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁵⁸ Zollitsch, op. cit., pp. 103ff.

⁵⁹ See A. Kranig, *Lockung und Zwang. Zur Arbeitsverfassung im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart, 1983), and T. W. Mason, 'Zur Entstehung des Gesetzes zur Ordnung der nationalen Arbeit vom 20. Januar 1934. Ein Versuch über das Verhältnis "archaischer" und "moderner" Momente in der neuesten deutschen Geschichte', in H. Mommsen, D. Petzina, and B. Weisbrod (eds), *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf, 1974), pp. 322–51.

⁶⁰ Zollitsch, op. cit., pp. 19–36, 72–107. See also T. Siegel, *Leistung und Lohn in der nationalsozialistischen 'Ordnung der Arbeit'* (Opladen, 1989); M. Rüter, 'Zur Sozialpolitik bei Klöckner-Humboldt-Deutz während des Nationalsozialismus. "Die Masse der Arbeiterschaft muss aufgespalten werden"', *Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte*, xxxiii (1988), pp. 81–117.

⁶¹ Good coverage in H. Vorländer, *Die NSV. Darstellung und Dokumentation einer nationalsozialistischen Organisation* (Boppard, 1988); P. Zolling, *Zwischen Integration und Segregation. Sozialpolitik im 'Dritten Reich' am Beispiel der 'Nationalsozialistischen Volkswohlfahrt' (NSV) in Hamburg* (Frankfurt/Main, 1986); W. Buchholz, *Die Nationalsozialistische Gemeinschaft 'Kraft durch Freude'*.

opportunities for workers to better themselves and seek promotion by obtaining further qualifications and training, and they were encouraged to identify, not with a class, but with their own factory or workplace, thus to evolve a *Betriebsgemeinschaft* (factory community) as a stepping stone to the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁶² Whatever had survived the depression of workers' solidarity and class consciousness was swept away in this fashion. After all, the German working class had always been a highly differentiated entity, in which the urban-based large factory proletariat – the hard core of the working class – was a small minority, and the depression merely accelerated its further atomization. Even the *Deutschland-Berichte* compiled by the exiled SPD (Sopade) contain frequent acknowledgement of how the regime was winning over large numbers of workers to its side.⁶³ The standard marxist line on the material immiseration of the working class in the Third Reich cannot match the impressive empirical basis which Zollitsch offers and must be regarded, therefore, as invalid.⁶⁴

The National Socialists' motive in developing this efficacious 'carrot-and-stick' policy of material benefits alongside repression had, of course, less to do with humanitarianism and more to do with naked political calculation. To be in a position to pursue its far-reaching aims over rearmament and foreign policy, the regime, ever fearful of a second 'November 1918', that is, a 'stab-in-the-back' and a working-class revolution,⁶⁵ needed a quiescent workforce. As it transpired, there was exiguous public, organized resistance, while active, clandestine resistance was confined to a small minority of workers, composed largely of younger elements who were probably motivated by a natural distaste for regimentation rather than by political or ideological commitment.⁶⁶ Most workers made their peace with the regime without necessarily becoming staunch National Socialists.

Zollitsch might have expatiated on his thesis by considering the impression made on the working class by the regime's pro-worker propaganda, which was designed to enhance their self-esteem and status in society. Rousing slogans and flattering images were in plentiful supply, and it is not inconceivable that a positive reaction was engendered. Furthermore, the impact on their patriotism and nationalist pride of Hitler's dramatic successes in foreign policy is well worth detailed study. It has also been shown, after all, that the *Führer* personally enjoyed a high degree of popularity among workers.⁶⁷ This gap concerning the broadly ideological posture of the working

Freizeitgestaltung und Arbeiterschaft im Dritten Reich (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Munich, 1976); C. Friemert, *Produktionsästhetik im Faschismus. Das Amt 'Schönheit der Arbeit' von 1933 bis 1939* (Munich, 1980); H. Lampert, 'Staatliche Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich', in K. D. Bracher (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Diktatur 1933-1945. Eine Bilanz* (Bonn, 1983), pp. 177-205; H. Spode, "'Der deutsche Arbeiter reist.'" Massentourismus im Dritten Reich', in G. Huck (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit* (Wuppertal, 1980), pp. 281-306.

⁶² Zollitsch, op. cit., pp. 41-71, 108-14, 165-78.

⁶³ *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands* (Sopade), (Frankfurt/Main, 1980), Erster Jahrgang 1934, April/Mai, p. 29, and Mai/Juni, p. 107; Zweiter Jahrgang 1935, Januar, p. 137, and Juli, p. 882.

⁶⁴ As given in J. Kuczynski, *Darstellung der Lage der Arbeiter in Deutschland von 1933-1945. Die Geschichte der Lage der Arbeiter unter dem Kapitalismus* (East Berlin, 1964), vol. 6.

⁶⁵ T. Mason, 'The legacy of 1918 for national socialism', in A. Nicholls and E. Matthias (eds), *German democracy and the triumph of Hitler. Essays in recent German history* (London, 1971), pp. 215-39.

⁶⁶ Zollitsch, op. cit., pp. 242-3.

⁶⁷ I. Kershaw, *Popular opinion and political dissent in the Third Reich. Bavaria 1933-1945*. (Oxford, 1983), p. 75.

class in the early years of the Third Reich is filled instead by Heuel's timely and provocative analysis.⁶⁸

The image of a powerful, self-conscious and ideologically-committed German working class valiantly resisting the Third Reich, which has been assiduously propagated by left-wing historians, has no basis in reality. It is an unadulterated myth, rooted in an idealized, romantic notion of the working class. Those workers who were genuinely committed socialists or communists at any time during the Weimar era constituted an unrepresentative minority of their class. The rest, the overwhelming majority, may have paid lip-service to ideological positions, but were far more interested in their material situation, particularly during the depression. In addition, the history of the leadership of the SPD, KPD and socialist trade unions after 1918 is replete with evidence of self-centred opportunism, power-broking and pusillanimity. Few can be readily singled out as having been above such conduct, which left precious little room for honest adherence to ideological and political principles. By 1932/3, rank-and-file disillusionment with left-wing leaders and organizations was widespread. Consequently, the Third Reich's restoration to the working class of jobs, hope, and self-respect contrasted so sharply with what had not been delivered by the SPD, KPD and trade unions before 1933 that, inevitably, a mutually supportive relationship came quickly into place. Demonstratable achievement rather than vacuous ideology is what mattered for most of these workers.

The importance which Zollitsch attaches to the long-term rationalization and modernization process in German industry, resulting in a new dynamic of decentralization and individualism being extended to the workforce, is confirmed by Rüdiger Hachtmann's richly documented, revised doctoral dissertation.⁶⁹ Drawing heavily on industrial archives, such as those of Thyssen AG, Krupp, Siemens, Hoesch and the Gutehoffnungshütte, this study encompasses the development of the new working practices, including assembly-line production, new ways of determining pay in the absence of collective bargaining, and increased specialization, which were introduced into industry, with emphasis on the metal and textile branches: mining is excluded from consideration. The manipulative industrial policy of the National Socialist regime was revealed by its insistent demands for greater efficiency and productivity, and by its allied strategy of rewarding some groups of workers – principally those engaged in rearmament – and keeping wages at a low level for other groups, for example, in the consumer industries.⁷⁰ It was a calculated 'divide-and-rule' policy that promoted competition at every level. A socially split and disciplined working class, sections of which enjoyed higher standards of living and promotion prospects, posed no threat to the political order and grandiose ambitions of the Third Reich. Hachtmann endorses Zollitsch's argument about the regime's determination to foster the notion of a *Betriebsgemeinschaft* as the focus of workers' loyalty.⁷¹ This point is all the more compelling because it usefully extends the hypothesis adduced some years ago by Dahrendorf that the Third Reich witnessed a 'push into modernity' within a framework of political reaction – thus, perhaps a 'reactionary modernism', to quote Herf's phrase – and by Schoenbaum, who posited

⁶⁸ E. Heuel, *Der unworbene Stand. Die ideologische Integration der Arbeiter im Nationalsozialismus 1933–1935* (Frankfurt/Main, 1989).

⁶⁹ R. Hachtmann, *Industriearbeit im 'Dritten Reich'. Untersuchungen zu den Lohn- und Arbeitsbedingungen in Deutschland 1933–1945* (Göttingen, 1989).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 54–89, 90–153.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 303.

the concept of a 'social revolution' under the National Socialists.⁷² In promoting the growth of industrial society, the regime destroyed the traditional class system bequeathed by the Weimar republic and encouraged social mobility on an unprecedented scale. The main reservation to be made about Hachtmann's thesis is that it takes account only of materialist factors in assessing the National Socialist – working-class symbiosis. For the equally important ideological and political dimension, Heuel's work has to be consulted.

This survey has indicated that the 'Mittelstand' thesis regarding the social composition of the NSDAP before 1933 has been superseded by the well-documented argument that the party was socially heterogeneous, with a substantial working-class presence. Further research into the nature of the party's following among both membership and electorate at a local and regional level, particularly in the politically crucial provinces of Saxony and Thuringia, is required. In heavily industrialized central Germany, the working class is likely to have been an important component of the NSDAP's support, but has to be statistically evaluated with computer-related methods.

The tantalizing concept of a 'working-class nationalism' is in need of sharper definition, and investigators could begin by looking at its influence in the catholic trade-union movement, where its foremost leader, Adam Stegerwald, may be seen as the personification of this outlook. The topic of working-class racism and anti-semitism is to date a virtually unploughed field. There is certainly evidence to hand, not least in the ranks of the SPD, several of whose most prominent leaders in the Weimar republic displayed militantly anti-Polish sentiments that were founded on racist stereotyping. Among others, Otto Braun, minister-president of Prussia for many years and with a reputation as a committed democrat, and his colleague, Otto Landsberg, one-time Reich minister of justice, fall into this category.⁷³ The racist attitudes of German workers in Silesia towards their Polish neighbours reveal a striking example of a phenomenon which was without doubt more widespread in that class. A populist anti-Polish and anti-Slavic racism, expressed in beer-hall songs, everyday jokes, graffiti and the like, was widely broadcast in central and eastern areas of the Reich. It continues to the present day in what has been since 1990 the eastern part of the Federal Republic. Furthermore, during the Second World War, working-class Germans serving with the *Wehrmacht*, not to mention the SS, in Eastern Europe, often displayed an attitude of racist superiority. Foreign slave labour forcibly transported to Germany experienced similar treatment.⁷⁴ Anti-semitism was to be found in various sections of

⁷² R. Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (Munich, 1965); J. Herf, *Reactionary modernism. Technology, culture and politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984); D. Schoenbaum, *Hitler's social revolution. Class and status in nazi Germany 1933–1939* (London, 1967). For a recent critical view of the Dahrendorf and Schoenbaum theses, see J. Alber, 'Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, xLI (1989), 346–65. Some recent ideas may be found in R. Smelser, 'How "Modern" were the nazis? DAF social planning and the modernization question', *German Studies Review*, xiii, 2 (1990), 285–302.

⁷³ P. D. Stachura, *Political leaders in Weimar Germany. A biographical study* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), pp. 17, 113, 168ff.

⁷⁴ U. Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter im Dritten Reich. Politik und Praxis des 'Ausländer-Einsatzes' in der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft* (Berlin, 1985); C. Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die Sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (Stuttgart, 1978); K.-J. Siegfried, *Das Leben der Zwangsarbeiter im Volkswagenwerk 1939–1945* (Frankfurt/Main, 1988). For a general survey, M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The racial state. Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 1991), esp. pp. 23–73.

the SPD before 1914 and was unlikely to have disappeared in the party or in the working class as a whole in the Weimar period. After all, the conservative and authoritarian personality and psychological traits which might have nurtured more radical attitudes were discovered by Fromm to have been much in evidence among the working class prior to Hitler's ascent to power.⁷⁵ In short, the genesis and history of working-class racism (*völkisch* nationalism?) in Germany before 1933 deserves, therefore, thorough and urgent examination.

The ways in which individual industrial and commercial firms and their workers responded to the Third Reich is a seam of research which should be continued. It may well be right to surmise that untapped archival and other primary documentation exists which would lend additional support to the hypothesis relating to working-class acceptance of and integration into the Third Reich. In turn, this might result in a more satisfactory theory of modernization, incorporating the role of the German working class, thus allowing scope, perhaps, for comparisons to be made with the working class/industrial capitalist relationship in other contemporary European countries.

⁷⁵ E. Fromm, *The working class in Weimar Germany. A psychological and sociological study* (Leamington Spa, 1984), esp. pp. 205-48.