
MANDARINS AND NAZIS

Geoffrey Barraclough

The centenary of the foundation of the Second German Empire in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles on January 18, 1871, was no occasion for celebration, but it provided at least an opportunity to take stock of the vast output of writing on recent German history and draw up a provisional balance sheet. My conclusion, after reading a score of recent books (some of which it is charitable to pass over in silence), is that we have gotten about as far as we are likely to reach along the road most historians have trodden since 1945, and that the time has come for new directions and new goals.

In saying this I am not, of course, presuming to pass judgment on a generation of historical scholarship. Nothing would be more arrogant or futile. Whatever else, the intense preoccupation of historians since 1945 with the Nazi experience—its origins and antecedents as well as its revolting brutalities—has brought together a mass of detailed information unequalled for any other comparable period of history. Whether it has brought more understanding is another question. In any case, we may ask whether the law of diminishing returns is not beginning to operate, whether historians are not starting to scrape the bottom of the barrel. When the Olympic Games of 1936 are dredged up and exhibited in full array as "an obscuring layer of shimmering froth on a noxious wave of destiny", it is time to call a halt and ask where all this is getting us.

I shall, no doubt, be told that there is always something to be retrieved from the inexhaustible reservoir of captured German documents. The question is, what and how much. In the end little is gained if their exploration becomes a mechanical industry providing raw material for an unending series of dissertations and monographs which only embellish and amplify what we already know. Everyone is aware of the beastliness of Nazism; a few more illustrative facts do not add to our loathing; on the contrary, if they are piled up incessantly, the effect may be to dull rather than heighten our revulsion. This is something Richard Grunberger might have borne in mind before he set about compiling his huge scrapbook of the horrors and absurdities of "The Twelve-Year Reich"; it is a bit late in the day for 500 pages of scorn, contempt, and hatred.

In the end even the richest vein of gold-bearing ore is bound to be exhausted. What I am suggesting is that we are reaching—if we have not already reached—the stage where the few remaining nuggets no longer justify the capital outlay, and it is time to sink new shafts in different territory. Furthermore, preoccupations and preconceptions that were understandable in the 1950s are no longer necessarily the best guide for the 1970s. Confronted

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The place of Fascism in European History ed. by Gilbert Allerdycce Prentice-Hall	Hitler: The man and the Military Leader Percy Ernst Schramm transl. by Donald S. Detwiler Quadrangle
The Scientific Origins of National Socialism Daniel Gasman American Elsevier	A History of Modern Germany 1840-1945 Hajo Holborn Knopf
The decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933 Fritz K. Ringer Harvard	The German Dictatorship Karl Dietrich Bracher transl. by Jean Steinberg Praeger

in 1945 by the horrifying reality of Auschwitz and Belsen, historians had every reason to concentrate on the central experience of Nazism. People not only wished to know how anything so beastly could erupt so suddenly; they also wished to know whether Nazism was an aberration or the end product of German history.

Thus the inquest on Nazism merged with the inquest on German history, and the whole period from 1871 to 1945 came under scrutiny. It would be absurd to suggest that the resultant controversies were unproductive, but it is also true that they were inspired as much by indignation, resentment and "parti pris" as by disinterested search for historical truth. English and American historians scoured German history for the "roots" of National Socialism; surviving German historians of an older generation indignantly rejected the suggestion that Nazism was inherent in German history and sought instead to show that Hitler's seizure of power was a misfortune that might befall any people in the modern age. Left-wing writers indicted the Nazis as instruments of German capitalism; the right wing maintained that, on the contrary, they climbed to power on the shoulders of the "masses", mesmerized and bamboozled by Hitler's demogogy.

When the dust settles, the verdict on these controversies is likely to be that they engendered more heat than light. Nor, more surprisingly, has much illumination come from the attempt to understand National Socialism by lifting it out of its historical setting and treating it instead as a particular manifestation of a world-wide trend toward fascist or totalitarian rule. The debate on fascism is justifiable in itself and has produced some lively writing; but one has only to read the useful collection of representative essays edited by Gilbert Allerdycce to see that, historically, it raises as many questions as it answers. For one thing, as Allerdycce points out, it is still an open question whether Nazism—as most writers have assumed—was the ultimate "fulfillment of fascist potentialities" or whether it was really "an aberration from fascist norms". And if it is agreed that fascism is an adequate characterization of Hitler's movement in 1923, there is still the question whether it accurately describes the Nazi dictatorship as it developed after 1933.

Until such basic questions have been thoroughly ventilated, which is not the case so far, it is unlikely that general studies of fascism will cast much

new light on the specific problems of German Nazism. What is necessary is a rigorous structural comparison of all different fascist (or putatively fascist) movements on the basis of a careful analysis of all available evidence. Unfortunately the pioneering efforts of Nolte and Weber to lay the foundations of such an analysis have not been systematically followed up.⁴ Instead, we have had a spate of endlessly repetitive accounts, loosely strung together, of the external history of different European fascist movements, of which H. R. Kedward's is the latest and arguably the worst.⁵ The trouble, as Allardyce says, is that historians, instead of relating the facts to an intelligible conceptual pattern, "use the term 'fascist' without agreeing how to define it", while sociologists, psychologists and philosophers "interpret fascism in terms of their own political beliefs" and "find in its sordid history confirmation of their own opinions". No wonder that Mr. Kedward ends his desultory survey with the chastening confession that all "the real difficulties of interpretation and historical understanding remain".

The current preoccupation with fascism has also reinforced the tendency, already strong, for historians to look for abstruse, recondite, and, if possible, psychological explanations of the German descent into National Socialism. There was a time when I was much impressed by this line of thought. Perhaps I was cajoled by the brilliance of its early exponents. Today I am not so sure. It is easy to see why writers struggling to distill the essence of fascism from a multiplicity of forms and variations should move away from the concrete to the abstract and from the historical to the psychological. But when I am told that fascism is, in the last analysis, a state of mind, my reply is that it is a long way from a state of mind to the concrete reality of Belsen and Auschwitz, and the road is not quite so direct or well signposted as people seem to assume. Nolte's famous definition of fascism as "resistance to transcendence" may be profound; but just what it tells us about the Nazi seizure of power is not self-evident.

It is now thirty years since Rohan Butler inaugurated the endless search in the great quarry of German history for the "intellectual origins" of National Socialism. Since then the intellectual historians have had a field day. Frütz Stern directed us persuasively to the cultural pessimism of Langbehn and Lagarde, the emergence of a pervasive Social Darwinism, and Moeller van den Bruck's vision of a "Third Reich"; Mosse turned our attention to the "Volkish interpretation of history" and the "Volkish ideology" of the German Youth Movement.

These were enlightening studies, but the question is where to stop. Search the libraries and you will find hundreds of obscure Germans who scribbled obscure and incriminating thoughts, among them Ernst Haeckel, the once famous exponent of an exploded pseudo-scientific mythology. Eventually his forgotten corpse was bound to be exhumed and exhibited as still another archpriest of German infamy, and this is what Daniel Gasman now has done. And then there is the great anonymous cohort of professors, the "mandarins" of the German academic establishment. As a body, perhaps, they were more conformist than wicked; but were they not, nevertheless, through their abandonment of "intellectual responsibility", the gravediggers of the Weimar Republic? So Fritz Ringer would have us believe, and he is a man of immense erudition. To me, I confess, it sounds suspiciously like blaming the defects of American education for My Lai. In a vague, transcendental way it may even

be true, but it is not very illuminating.

No one can fail to admire the erudition, ingenuity, and combinative skill of these recondite essays in intellectual history. The problem about them, as J.P. Stern has said, is that they depend upon "an aprioristic concept of causality whose actual working is shrouded in mystery." No one, for example, is likely to deny that the prevalence of crude "social Darwinist" beliefs among the educated (and semi-educated) German middle classes may have been a precondition—one precondition among many—for Hitler's success. But when Mr. Gasman describes it as "one of the most important causes for the rise of the Nazi movement" (the underlining is mine), I can only reply that he is making a gratuitous leap in the dark.

This is not to say that Mr. Gasman is not an intelligent and perceptive writer when he sticks to his last. If he had been content to give us an account of some of the aberrations of pseudo-science at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—there were plenty of them, in England and the United States as well as in Germany, every bit as absurd as the "monism" Haeckel offered as a solution to the "riddle of the univers"—we should be in his debt. It is when he tries to draw a line from Haeckel to Hitler that doubt creeps in. No one denies that Hitler picked up a smattering of Haeckel's ideas somewhere along the line. His mystical belief in the laws of nature, as P.E. Schramm has pointed out, was nothing but "a variant of the monism so common before the First World War." But it is another thing to argue, as Mr. Gasman does, that the "fundamental presuppositions" of Haeckel's evolutionary monism were "obviously" and "in all important respects identical with those of fascism and National Socialism" and that there is "an uninterrupted line of development from one to the other."

The "methodological fallacies" involved in this sort of argument have been pointed out convincingly enough in Schramm's book. As a study of Hitler's personality it may not be the last word; but it does at least make clear the futility of trying to "explain" Hitler by "focusing on his petty bourgeois origins" and "early environment", or of attempting "to locate Hitler in terms of intellectual history." Hitler's mind may have been a rag bag of the half-baked philosophies of his youth, but "his most essential characteristics", Schramm insists, "were singular and unique". It follows that "all attempts to trace Hitler's intellectual history from one or another source are foredoomed" to failure because the decisive factor was not the derivation of his ideas but the entirely personal "order and logic" he imposed upon them and the "grotesque combinations" into which "he arbitrarily forced them". Nothing is easier than to range through German history picking out individuals and movements and labeling them "proto-Nazi". Schramm shows—I think convincingly—that "the Hitler problem simply cannot be forced into that frame of reference". Anyone who looks closely at the evidence will soon discover that the most striking thing about the alleged precursors of Hitler is the way they either stopped short of his characteristic attitudes or were held at arms' length by the Nazis. Haeckel himself, Mr. Gasman concedes, "did not figure in Nazi propaganda as a major prophet of National Socialism." Furthermore, far from there being "an uninterrupted line of development," the Monist League which Haeckel founded in 1906 "underwent a significant shift from racism and Volkism in the direction of radical liberalism" between 1919 and 1933. Nor is Haeckel an exception. Moeller van den Bruck, unhesitatingly described by Mr. Gasman as a "proto-Nazi", had no use for Hitler, and the Nazis res-

van
in Jr.

Nu komt het speedig in orde!



Hitler bouwt aan zijn Derde Rijk.
De Notenkraaker, 11 februari 1933

1870-1871

ponded by repudiating any connection between their Third Reich and his. "Most members of the Youth Movement", Mosse observes, "were openly hostile towards National Socialism", and Mr. Ringer scrupulously records that "the orthodox mandarins did not actively desire the triumph of the Third Reich" and were not "to blame for the actual propositions of National Socialist propaganda". The honesty of these admissions is admirable, but they seem to me rather like sawing away the branch upon which you are sitting. If, as Fritz Stern concludes, Moeller's "direct influence on the National Socialists was not very great", and if he actually rejected Hitler, is it really meaningful to describe the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 as the "ultimate fulfillment of his prophecies"?

To many historians these observations will seem obtuse. The question at issue they will reply, is not direct affiliation but indirect influence. Moeller, the university "mandarins", and the rest may not have been direct ancestors of Nazism; but indirectly they fostered it by creating a climate of opinion in which the Nazis could exploit.

I cannot, with all respect, think that it is a very good answer. Of course there was a climate of opinion in which, given the right conditions, Nazism thrived; there is no mystery about that. The real question is whether it had to thrive, whether given that climate of opinion there could have been no other outcome but the Third Reich. To understand Nazism and its place in German history it is necessary to take account not only of the similarities but also of the observable dissimilarities. Even on so central an issue as anti-Semitism the range of difference is profound. How odd, for example, considering the role anti-Semitism plays in National Socialist ideology, that "the proto-Nazi writer" Moeller betrays scarcely a sign of it! And Haeckel's solution for the "Jewish problem" was assimilation. It is, to say the least, hardly the same as Hitler's, and I would submit that to bring both together under the common heading of "anti-Semitism", as though there were no difference between them, begs more questions than it answers.

I do not for one moment wish to suggest that the distinguished historians who have sought to lay bare the roots of National Socialism have taught us nothing. Far from it. If old-fashioned narrative accounts of the political events leading up to Hitler's seizure of power, such as Erich Eyck's "History of the Weimar Republic", no longer seem adequate, it is because they have shown us what we all felt that there was more to Nazism than could be explained in that way. This widening of vision is a major achievement, but it does not mean that the line of approach they have developed can profitably be used forever. The study of the intellectual origins of the Third Reich may be infinitely suggestive, but it is not infinitely probative. It makes us aware of a hundred reasons why National Socialism might suddenly erupt in Germany; but it does not explain why it did, or how it did, and certainly does not prove that it had to. As Mr. Ringer rather woodenly but perfectly correctly puts it, "at bottom it is based on an appropriate use of the logical sequence in historical explanation." Ralf Dahrendorf has written, more caustically, of "the tedious fog of arbitrariness" that overhangs all "quasi-literary" analysis of the German past. The point is not only, as Michael Hamburger has said, that "no history of ideas can possibly get to the heart of a phenomenon that consists

in the denial of reason".¹³ More simply, it is that writers of intellectual history, knowing the outcome, too often embark on "an erratic chase through the whole of German history" (the phrase is J.P. Stern's) for expressions of opinion which support their diagnosis. Perhaps we should not take too seriously a recent writer who assures us that "Hitler's later actions and attitudes were strongly influenced by his reading of Karl May", the German writer of Wild West fiction;¹⁴ but no one should be surprised if, confronted by such statements, we are tempted to echo Dahrendorf's description of intellectual history as "the catch-as-catchcan of historical scholarship, where anything goes because everything is arbitrary."

As Fritz Stern has recently pointed out, the study of German history has suffered from a surfeit of "exaggerated exegesis".¹⁵ That's why one turns with relief to Hajo Holborn and Karl Dietrich Bracher.¹⁶ Their books are not particularly exiting or original, but they are at least sober and well balanced. Their task, as they see it, is to sort and sift and set the record straight, not to propound challenging theories or novel interpretations. This may seem dull, but it is immensely useful. Anyone who has read Holborn and Bracher will know the considered verdict of modern scholarship on what traditionally have been regarded as the main issues. At the same time they provide a yardstick by which to measure the results of a quarter of a century of writing and research. The first thing to be said about Holborn and Bracher is that, taken together, they epitomize the liberal view of German history which has prevailed since 1945. In this sense, they set the seal on a whole period of historiography. They also complement each other admirably. Holborn was one of the wisest and most distinguished of the German liberal historians who took refuge in the United States after 1933. Bracher is by common assent the leading figure in the subsequent generation that after the war broke with the past both in method and in its unflinching resolve to subject the whole Nazi experience, both its immediate impact and its long-term implications, to pitiless analysis. They share a basic liberal philosophy, but it is a liberalism tempered by a keen eye for social realities. Bracher was one of the first to apply the analytical techniques of social science to the history of National Socialism, and Holborn criticizes his own teacher, Meinecke, for underestimating "the conflict of social forces" and overrating "the power of pure ideas."

It is characteristic of Holborn and Bracher, therefore, that while in no way neglecting the findings of intellectual history, they consistently resist the temptation to let it get out of bounds. It is only necessary to compare Holborn's brief, balanced, but entirely adequate remarks on Haeckel with Mr. Gasman's exaggerated exegesis to see the difference. And it is equally characteristic that, far from attributing the "lamentable weakness" of the German bourgeoisie in the face of autocracy and totalitarianism to the insidious influence of intellectuals such as Langbehn or Lagarde, he ascribes it without hesitation to "the strength of bourgeois class interest."

What Holborn and Bracher put before us, in short, is a reasoned, fair-minded liberal interpretation of German history, which carefully avoids all extremes. But it is also clear that the antithesis of liberal history for them is the conservative interpretation so prevalent in the Weimar Republic and still a powerful force in the Germany of Adenauer. This is their target, and their aim is deadly. One by one they demolish the myths upon

which the conservative view of German history rests -beginning, in the case of Holborn, with the old and ingrain myth that Hitler would not have come to power if the Versailles treaty had not imposed an intolerable burden of reparations on Germany.

In particular, neither Holborn nor Bracher has any sympathy with the once fashionable myth that Nazism was a revolt of the masses. They establish beyond doubt -Bracher naturally more specifically and in greater detail- that the hard core of Hitler's following was "the lower middle classes of town and countryside". It may be true that Nazism attracted "the drift-wood" of "young, unstable workers" who voted for the first time after 1930, but "the representation of workers" in the Nazi party was always "relatively small". Even in March 1933, after the seizure of power, Bracher points out, the Nazis in many working-class areas polled less than 20 percent and in some districts less than 10 percent of the votes, and as late as April, 1935, between 60 and 70 percent of the shop stewards voted against the Nazi ticket.

These facts are also an answer to the facile attempt to identify the German people with National Socialism. Holborn has little to say about popular resistance to Hitler, but he at least draws attention to "the network of small cells" built up by Social Democrats and Communists over "a major part of Germany". Bracher is more specific. He pays tribute to the "far flung, anonymous opposition" of the working classes, and at the same time questions the justification for the usual concentration on the military opposition which "did not consist at all" before 1936. Not that, in opposing the views of conservative historians such as Rothfels and Ritter, Holborn and Bracher have in any sense a left-wing approach. Their main characteristic, on the contrary, is their refusal to countenance doctrinaire, one dimensional explanations, from whatever side they come.

In the final analysis, Bracher insists, "Hitler came to power as a result of a series of avoidable errors." But these errors cannot be reduced, as both right-wing and left-wing writers have attempted to do, to a single formula or attributed to a single party. On the contrary, all parties and all segments of society were implicated. The Communists totally misjudged the situation. The Social Democrats were passive and inert, crippled by a "feeble power drive" which prevented them from taking over the reins of government in 1930 and led to their supine capitulation when Papen put through the coup d'etat in Prussia in 1932. On the other hand, the Nazi party would not have survived at all without the financial support of industrialists such as Kirdorf and Thyssen, and even at the end "Hitler probably could not have come to power" except for the intrigues and maneuvers of the slippery right-wing politicians around Hindenburg.

As this analysis shows, the essential point, both for Holborn and for Bracher, is the extreme complexity of the German situation and the impossibility of finding any satisfactory single explanation of the turn of events which brought Hitler to power. Bracher is explicitly, Holborn implicitly, committed to "the multi-causal nature of historico-political processes". On the one side, they repudiate the view that National Socialism was "the logical end-product of German historical development". On the other, they insist that Hitler's conquest of power was not, in Holborn's words, "a fortuitous event". When Bracher tells us that National Socialism "cannot be equated with German history" and yet at the same time was completely attuned to the German

situation", he is giving notice that we must not expect easy answers. What Holborn and Bracher are saying, in effect, is that the whole enterprise of explaining why Nazism happened - whether we seek the answer in the deep processes of the German mind or in the social and intellectual climate in the 1920s and 1930s - is doomed to failure and that the most we can do is to discover how it happened.

The result is a richly differentiated view of German history, marked by a deliberately empirical approach, a deep suspicion of dogmatic conceptual schemes, and an instinctive conviction that the truth lies somewhere in the middle ground between the conflicting interpretations. This is what Bracher calls "an integrating approach". It has already won the highest praise. Holborn's book has been described as "the finest study of Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in any language", and Bracher's book has been acclaimed as "a masterpiece of historical and political analysis" and "the most comprehensive and illuminating account of National Socialism to appear to date". I have no desire to cavil at these judgments. Granted their basic assumptions, neither book could easily be bettered. What I am less happy about are the basic assumptions. For Holborn and Bracher, like other historians, operate consciously or unconsciously within the frame of a particular philosophy of history which colors their intellectual approach and determines their methods. We may call it a liberal philosophy, and the question is the adequacy of its underlying presuppositions.

In the first place, one may question the adequacy of the methodological postulates which Holborn and Bracher adopt. To put the record straight is all very well; but is it enough? Admirable as is the cool empiricism with which Holborn and Bracher demolish right-wing and left-wing myths, this does not automatically guarantee the validity of their liberal approach. When Bracher, for instance, insists that Hitler's conquest of power was the result of "a series of avoidable errors", we may well reply, with Fritz Stern, that when we come across a business in which "avoidable errors" are always occurring, it is not unreasonable to conclude that there must be something fundamentally wrong with the whole enterprise. To know "how", in short, is no substitute for knowing "why", and one is left with the uneasy suspicion that liberal historiography, with its emphasis on the singularity of events, is leaving out a whole dimension.

Methodologically, again, one may question the validity of Bracher's "integrating approach". It looks at first glance like the straightforward application of the rules of common sense; but it is not, perhaps, the common sense of the schoolboy who was asked the square number of 2, and, with one well-wisher whispering 4 in one ear, and another whispering 8 in the other, cautiously plumped for 6? The truth is not a sort of half-way house between right and left, still less an assemblage of bits and pieces from the repertoire of intellectual, social, economic and political historians; and if Bracher's account of the German path into Nazi dictatorship is extraordinarily complex and intricate, the reason may not be that the facts are too complicated for clear-cut answers, but that he has failed to find, or deliberately abstained from seeking, the intellectual criteria which might have enabled him to cut a way through the maze.

The assumption from which Holborn and Bracher proceed is that the necessary preliminary work has been done and that their task is to sift and sort,

not to break new ground but to garner the fruits of a generation of liberal scholarship. But what if the last generation of historians, because of its preoccupation with such things as the intellectual roots of Nazism, has bypassed some of the central problems? It is useful to have the answers to the old controversies authoritatively set out; but as one by one the protagonists on both sides - Holborn himself and Gerhard Ritter - disappear from the scene, the controversies which so engrossed them begin to look stale and threadbare.

This is true, in particular, of their preoccupation with the genesis of National Socialism. There is no doubt that this, for Holborn and Bracher, is the central thread running through German history since 1870 and determining its pattern. Like the postwar liberal historians whose work they epitomize, they are haunted by the question of why German liberalism failed to withstand the Nazi onslaught. This is a perfectly legitimate question, but it is not necessarily an adequate yardstick for measuring a whole century of German history.

When Holborn tells us, for example, that the handbook of legal philosophy which Ihering wrote between 1877 and 1884 had "a devastating influence on the events of the Hitler period", the point is not only that this is a subjective judgment which can be neither proved nor disproved, but, more seriously, that the habit of looking forward to 1933 at every turn of German history is bound to result in distortion. Perhaps the most revealing fact about Bracher's book is that, although the subject is "The German Dictatorship", very nearly one-half deals with the period before there was a German dictatorship, and here again the question arises whether it is a sound approach to review a period of sixty or seventy years as though the only criterion of judgment is the Nazi terror which emerged at its close.

No one in his right mind is going to write off National Socialism as a mere episode in German history. What I am suggesting, rather, is that the almost obsessive preoccupation with the origins of National Socialism, particularly with its intellectual origins, has long outlived its usefulness. There are, after all, other questions about Nazism of equal if not greater importance - for example, its impact and lasting effects on the structure of German society - and it sometimes seems as though the ceaseless preoccupation with its origins is more a reflection of an uneasy liberal conscience than of an unflinching concern to examine it from every angle.

Though Holborn and Bracher are too experienced and level-headed to be carried away by the fashionable preoccupation with the intellectual background of Nazism, it remains true that their work is permeated and colored by a characteristically liberal emphasis on causes and origins. According to Bracher, the "ultimate cause" of National Socialism, reaching "back to the beginning of the nineteenth century", was "the deep schism between German and Western political thought." "If everything that happened in the past is held in some way to be responsible for everything that happened in the future, this statement is, perhaps, unexceptionable. In any other sense it rests, like Holborn's attempt to saddle Rudolf Ihering with responsibility for Carl Schmitt and Judge Freisler, on assumptions which can neither be proved nor disproved. For one thing, it assumes that the Western (English, French, American) form of political democracy was the only workable model and that the German "Rechtsstaat" was bound to "degenerate into self-destructive criminality". As Fritz Stern has pointed out, neither proposition is self-evident; but they

color Bracher's view of a century of German history. More fundamental, however, is the intellectual bias which such a statement reveals, the implication that the moving force of history is ideas, rather than social relations, or fundamental structural changes, such as were produced by the impact of industrialization. It would not be difficult, if one so wished, to trace the so-called "schism" between Germany and the West back to the twelfth century; but what to avail? The books of Holborn and Bracher reflect the positive qualities of liberal historiography at its best; but it is a mandarin view of history, and it is necessary that one be aware of its limitations. It has produced a lot of stimulating insights but no real clarification. As Gilbert Allardyce puts it, "our knowledge of what happened at Auschwitz has vastly increased, but not to our understanding."

The question that arises is why, after twenty-five years of assiduous research, this should be the case. One answer is that historians, led astray by what Marc Bloch once called the false idol of origins, have gone about their task in the wrong way. If the answers still elude us, the easiest assumption is that what is necessary is more fact, more information, more burrowing among the "roots" of National Socialism. It is the obvious answer but not necessarily the right one. If the jigsaw puzzle does not work out, the reason may be not that some pieces are missing, but that we have set it up wrongly. What is at issue, in other words, is the validity of the assumptions and methodology of the prevailing liberal approach to modern German history. My reservations about the books of Holborn and Bracher therefore shade off into a criticism of the liberal philosophy of history which they represent. I do not question their achievement; they mark in many respects a milestone in historiography. But when one reaches a milestone, it is the moment to halt, take stock of the road travelled, and make sure it is leading in the right direction. That is why reconsideration of the basic assumptions which have dominated the writing of German history for the last twenty-five years has now become urgently necessary. The questions historians are asking today are not the questions Holborn and Bracher were primarily concerned to answer. Among the younger historians change is in the air. In the second part of this review I shall try to indicate what form it is taking and how it differs from the conventional liberal interpretation.

Notes

- 1) Richard D. Mandell, The Nazi Olympics (Macmillan, 1971)
- 2) Richard Grunberger, The Twelve Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971)
- 3) The Place of Fascism in European History
- 4) I am referring, of course, to E. Nolte, Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche, (Munich, 1963, translated in 1965 under the title Three Faces of Fascism New American Library), and to E. Weber, Varieties of Fascism (Anvil Books, 1964)
- 5) Fascism in Western Europe (New York University Press, 1971)
- 6) The Roots of National Socialism (Fertig, 1941; reprinted 1968)
- 7) Fritz Stern, The Politics of Cultural Despair (University of California Press, 1961); George L. Mosse, The Crisis of German Ideology (Grossett & Dunlap, 1964)
- 8) The Scientific Origins of National Socialism
- 9) The Decline of the German Mandarins

- 10) J.P. Stern, Re-Interpretations, Seven studies in Nineteenth century German Literature (Basic Books, 1964)
- 11) Hitler: The Man and The Military Leader
- 12) Society and Democracy in Germany (Doubleday, 1967)
- 13) From Prophecy to Exorcism: The Premises of Modern German Literature (London: Longmans, 1965)
- 14) Richard Hanser, Putsch! How Hitler Made Revolution (Wyden, 1970)
- 15) Fritz Stern, The Failure of Eliberalism (Knopf, 1972)
- 16) Holborn, A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945;
Bracher, The German Dictatorship

Rectificatie: op de vierde pagina van dit artikel moet in de negende regel van boven tussen important en causes het woord "formative".

THE LIBERALS AND GERMAN HISTORY

For twenty-five years the history of modern Germany, as presented in our standard historical works, has been molded by the assumptions and preoccupations of liberal historiography. I have already discussed the preoccupation with Nazism, which is one of the more obvious characteristics of these studies. But there are other, more fundamental ways in which liberal assumptions have colored the interpretation of modern German history. If I return to the question, therefore, it is not to plough over old ground but to consider the adequacy itself of the liberal interpretation. The point at issue, of course, is not the substantive contribution of a generation of historians to the history of Germany between 1870 and 1945, but the postulates and tacit presuppositions with which they worked.

What are the basic characteristics of the liberal view of German history? For present purposes they can be reduced to three. The first, deeply embedded in the philosophy of German idealism, is the primary role of ideas in history and, therefore, by implication, of the makers of ideas, a belief that history is shaped by ideas rather than social relations and the interplay of economic interests. The second is a deep-seated elitist bias, an unspoken but unquestioning assumption that the so-called cultural and political elite is the element in any society that determines the course of events, and that the historians main task is to discuss their thought, attitudes, decisions and actions. Finally, and on a different level, there is an implicit endorsement of the German national state as it emerged in 1871, seen as the fulfillment of the liberal struggle in 1848 and 1849 for German unification. Bismarck's Reich becomes, as it were, a standard by which German history, before and later, is measured and judged.

If we wish to see how the writing of modern German history has been affected by these assumptions, we cannot do better than to turn to Hajo Holborn's "History of Modern Germany", for Holborn's book, as I indicated in my previous article, is the most judicious and authoritative epitome of a generation of liberal scholarship. Holborn's liberal assumptions, it is only fair to add, are tempered, far more than in the case of lesser historians, by a robust awareness of social and economic factors; but a residuary

A History of Modern Germany, 1840-1945	Germany in Our Time
Hajo Holborn	Alfred Grosser
Knopf	Praeger
Republic to Reich: The Making of the	The Twelve-Year Reich: A Social His-
Nazi Revolution	story of Nazi Germany 1933-1945
ed. by Hajo Holborn	Richard Grunberger
transl. by Ralph Manheim	Holt, Rinehart & Winston
Pantheon	Hitler's Weltanschauung: A Blueprint
Germany Since 1918	for Power
David Childs	Eberhard Jäckel
Harper & Row	transl. by Herbert Arnold
Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch	Wesleyan
Harold J. Gordon Jr.	Secret Conversations with Hitler
Princeton	ed. by Edouard Calic
	John day

liberal "Weltanschauung" is there nevertheless, subtly influencing the structure and balance of his work. It accounts for his allocation of space - well over a page to the Ems Telegram, forty lines to Haackel, only eighteen lines to Marx - and for the structure of his book, which mirrors unquestioningly the central place assigned to Bismarck's Reich in German liberal historiography.

For Holborn, liberalism and nationalism (the title of his first section) led inexorably to the founding of the new Reich in 1871: it was "consolidated" by Bismarck between 1871 and 1890 and the book ends with the destruction by Hitler in 1945. These are the familiar divisions of liberal historiography, the conventional political framework, neatly packeted by reigns, ministries and wars; the question, of course, is whether they are adequate. Holborn's liberal assumptions color his view of German history in other ways. It is scarcely accidental, for example, that he chose an article by Theodor Eschenburg on "the role of personality in the crisis of the Weimar republic" to open the volume of essays he put together shortly before his death. Characteristic, again, is the meticulous attention Holborn pays to the detail of foreign policy, particularly Bismarck's foreign policy, surely an implicit underwriting of the old German belief that war and diplomacy and the genius of statesmen are the determinative factors in a people's history.

And finally, his liberal bias is manifest in his warning against exaggerating the role of "social conflict" in the rise of Nazism (can it, one asks oneself, possibly be exaggerated?) and his insistence that the real trouble stemmed from a "decline of German education". This, as Ringer's "Decline of the German Mandarins" attests, is a fashionable theme among liberal historians; but need it be said that it is an unproven (and, to my way of thinking, implausible) hypothesis? According to David Childs, to whose admirable little book we shall shortly come, educational "standards did rise", if somewhat patchily, during the Weimar period, and (as one who underwent the experience) I know of no reason to believe they were worse, either in schools

De C.P.H. saboteert de boycot van Duitschland

Teekening van Albert Hahn Jr.



De C.P.H.: "Blijf van het meisje van m'n grooten broer af!"
De Notenkraaker, 27 mei 1933

De Oorlogsbond van Duitsland

15 maart 1941



De Oorlogsbond van Duitsland
Levensbeschrijving van de Oorlogsbond van Duitsland

or universities, in 1930 than they were in 1890.

In the long term, however, the most significant indication of the limitations of Holborn's conceptual framework is his implicit but unquestioning acceptance of the myth of Bismarck's Germany. Good historian as he was, he knew better than most how many chance factors combined to bring about Bismarck's solution of the German question in 1871, how much the outcome depended on Bismarck's own peculiar qualities, how precarious and fragile the structure of the new Reich was. But, faithful to the old liberal tradition, with its search, ever since 1813, for a national German state, he makes this Reich his yardstick. If he stops dead in 1945, the reason, as I have said, is that 1945 saw the destruction of its unity. The "brief history" of Germany after 1945, he tells us, "cannot be treated as a mere projection of the history of earlier epochs." And the reason? "The chasm created by the disaster of 1945," "the loss of one quarter of the territories belonging to the Germany of 1937" "the division of Germany into two separate political and social entities". These statements reveal so much that it is worth taking a second look at them. The "brief history", to begin with: but the history of Germany after 1945 is twice as long as the history of the Third Reich to which Holborn devotes more than 100 pages, and longer than the history of the Weimar Republic, which gets 179. The boundaries of 1937: but what is so sacrosanct about the boundaries of 1937, which most Germans in 1937 thought of as a temporary limitation imposed by hated conquerors? The division of Germany: but a divided Germany was nothing new, rather it was a return to the situation of 1870 which Bismarck had destroyed, not a break with the past but a reversion to the past much older and longer than Bismarck's Reich. And, finally, "the disaster of 1945": disaster for whom? Certainly not for Americans, still less for the peoples of Europe suffering under Nazi rule. But was it really a disaster for the Germans to be liberated (as they so quickly claimed they were pining to be) from Nazi tyranny? It will be said that I am making mountains out of molehills. I think not. For the liberal ideology, like all other ideologies, inevitably produces blind spots that stand in the way of historical understanding. Consider, as one last example, Holborn's characterization of Goebbels as an "offensive guttersnipe". I should not, admittedly, particularly have liked to have had Goebbels as a member of my seminar, but he was, after all, a graduate of Heidelberg University, and the German Universities in 1921 - as anyone can discover by reading the excellent first chapter of Mr. Ringer's book - were not renowned for opening their doors to guttersnipes. David Childs, as it happens, describes Goebbels as "intellectually very able", and though his description and Holborn's are not, perhaps, mutually incompatible, the difference is interesting.

But the only point I wish to make at the moment is that Holborn evidently found it difficult, in a book otherwise marked by almost excessive sobriety of judgment, to apply the same standards of scholarly objectivity to the Nazis as he does to the other obnoxious characters - Bismarck, for example - who stalk through his pages. Certainly his distaste of Goebbels is humanly understandable, but it is another question whether superciliousness and disdain are the best approach to the Nazi phenomenon. Liberal assumptions, the unspoken prejudices of "Bildungsbürgertum", may be an obstacle to understanding; and the suggestion I am making, with all respect, is that they are.

What if the liberal interpretation of German history, which has dominated for a quarter of a century, is in itself wrong? Or what if, to put it less

crudely, while it may reveal some part of the truth (which no one, I imagine, would seriously deny) it reveals less than the whole truth and perhaps obscures some aspects altogether? Or what, at least, if it sets the whole story in a false perspective?

Holborn's decision to end his book in 1945 is not really much different from arguing that the fall of the "Corsican" in 1815 - for contemporaries every bit as much an ogre as the "Bohemian corporal" - marked so complete a break in French history that the years after 1815 cannot (in Holborn's phrase) "be treated as a mere projection of the history of earlier epochs". In fact, of course, no one has suggested that they can; but did not prevent historians, with the passage of time, from raising the question of continuity and discontinuity in France before and after 1815 and finding a place for Napoleon in the longer perspective of French history. Is it not time, after twenty-five years, for a similar re-appraisal of German history? The point, of course, is not to exculpate the Nazis or dismiss Nazism as a temporary aberration - which it was not - but to find a vantage point for a better understanding of German history.

I ask these questions with the more assurance because it is evident that I am not alone in questioning the adequacy, in the 1970s, of the liberal interpretation of German history. No doubt the majority of historians still plods along, as the majority always does, in the old way; but there are heartening signs, mainly among the younger generation, that something at last is moving, and it is significant that the change is visible in all the major centers, in Germany itself, in France, in England, in the United States. In Germany the new generation includes Helmut Böhme, whose study of underlying economic trends of the age of Bismarck is one of the very few post-war books that really breaks new ground³. On a different level it includes Martin Broszat, the present director of the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich, whose book "Hitler's State" may be regarded as the postliberal counterpart to Bracher's liberal interpretation in "The German Dictatorship"⁴. It also includes some of the younger historians grouped around Broszat, a selection of whose work is contained in the useful volume of essays⁵ compiled by Holborn shortly before his death.

In England there is David Childs, whose little book on Germany since 1918 refreshingly avoids the opportunities for platitudes and mediocrity which the writing of an introductory survey presents. Paradoxically, the old pre-occupations are most tenacious in the United States. But here also a change is in the air. David Schoenbaum was one of the first, in the introduction to his book "Hitler's Social Revolution", which appeared in 1966, to voice the growing doubts about the validity of the standard historical approach. More recently Harold J. Gordon has criticized intellectual historians who credit their class with "more influence than it can legitimately claim" and "try to fit the National Socialists into shoes which they feel should fit them"⁸ instead of placing themselves in the shoes of the National Socialists.

When we look at this reaction more closely, what becomes immediately evident is that it stems from the alliance between historians and social scientists, which is one of the most hopeful developments in history today. Gordon uses the techniques of group analysis; Childs is by profession a political scientist. The same is true of Karl Dietrich Bracher and Alfred Grosser, both members of the "middle generation" which stands midway

between Holborn's old-fashioned liberalism and the new perspectives of the younger generation. Finally, in the United States, there is Fritz Stern, whose self-proclaimed intention, in the thoughtful, sensitive essays he has recently published, is to break away from the "conventions and abstractions", including the "conventional divisions of historical enquiry", which clutter our minds and distort our view of the German past.

We need only list the names of these scholars to see that we are not dealing with self-proclaimed iconoclasts, itching to tear down the old liberal idols; not even with the sort of self-consciously radical "revisionists" who are causing such tremors among the worthy members of the American Historical Association. The search of these scholars for new ways is still tentative and exploratory; but when their contributions are added together, they amount to a very different - and, I would say, far more authentic - view of the German past than that to which we have become accustomed. The first feature that distinguishes the new school from the old is its refusal to draw a line across the ledger of German history in 1945. Grosser's book is, of course, primarily important because it provides essential material for a history of Germany which spans the prewar and the postwar years. But one of its striking features is his unceasing concern with the question of continuity and discontinuity, and his refutation of "the notion of 1945 as an absolute zero". No one, to the best of my knowledge, has attempted to write a coherent history of Germany from 1871 to 1971, or from 1866 to the accession of Willy Brandt in 1969; but Grosser's pioneering work now makes this possible, and with the appearance of David Childs short history we have at least a scholarly account which covers half the period. In view of how much he has to cram into a short space, Childs has picked his way with originality and intelligence. Anyone daunted by the length and density of the works of Holborn, Bracher and Grosser may turn to him with every confidence; in some respects, particularly in the discussion of the German Democratic Republic, his account is as fair and balanced as anything we have.

The changes that come from the lengthening of our sights - from viewing the century that began in 1871 as a whole instead of cutting it up into self-contained packets - are more considerable than may appear at first glance. The first and most important is that Nazism appears in a different setting. As Fritz Stern points out, if we wish "to gain the proper perspective" it is necessary to "examine German history not at points of obvious divergence or extremity, such as Nazi Germany, but in periods of apparent normality and quietude". And Grosser puts his finger on one of the main differences between the younger and the older generations when he questions the long-standing tradition of treating Germany as "a country set apart by the inexorable fatality of its history", particularly by "the chain of events that led to Adolf Hitler". This is a rejection, politely expressed, of the tradition which underlies both Holborn's and Bracher's books. What is needed, and what the longer perspective available today makes possible, is a view of German history which neither magnifies nor minimizes the Nazi experience. This is probable the virtue of Childs book. Childs neither brushes aside the Third Reich as an unfortunate aberration nor elevates it into a central theme. He does not allow us to forget that, down to 1930, "Hitler was not making much impact on the masses". He finds space (which Holborn does not) for statistics showing that "many more Germans

than we gave credit for opposed the Nazis" and that "the unknown German worker" was "more typical of the German resistance than the officers of the July Plot". What he shows, in other words, is that, if there was a chain of events which led to Hitler, there was also a chain of events which did not, and that -as Grosser points out- institutions such as the churches and the Social Democratic Party, "despite their checkered history", can "point to a continuous evolution" that spans the Nazis period and links the years before 1933 with the years after 1945.

The question of continuity and discontinuity is, of course, extremely complex, and the only point I wish to make is that the suggestion that 1945 created a "chasm" in German history is a misleading simplification. When Holborn tells us, with the characteristic pathos, that the defeat of Hitler "made it possible for the Germans to recover their roots in their national past", the one thing that is certain is that this is what they did not do. Here at last was no continuity.

On the other hand, Grosser is surely right in speaking, at least in regard to the three western zones, of "a definite continuity of social organization and social values". But here again continuity was of different kinds, and if some threads lead back before 1933, there was also more continuity between the Third Reich and what came after than it is sometimes convenient to acknowledge. As Childs point out, General Heinrici, the commander of the German army opposing the Russians in the final stage of the war, "lived to tell, in peaceful retirement, of the last days of Berlin", and "Goering's and Hess' families spent the postwar years in comfortable obscurity in West Germany".

When a coherent, continuous account of the last century of German history comes to be written (as surely it will) the question of continuity and discontinuity before and after 1945 will play an important part, and it will be necessary to consider the Nazi years not only as a breach of continuity -which, in some respects, they were- but also as a stage on the road from the Germany of Bismarck to the Germany of Brandt. This is something liberal historians, revolted by the excesses of Nazism, have been reluctant to do. "It is essential", Bracher insists, "that we recognize that nothing basically new was evolving". In reality, as Broszat and Dahrendorf have made plain, a good deal that was new was evolving, even if it was due not to deliberate Nazi policy so much as to the shattering impact of the Nazi regime on the existing German social structure.

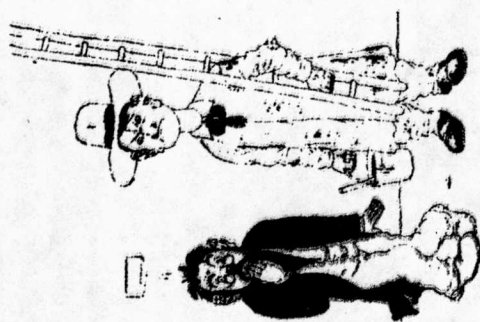
Predictably liberal historians have reacted with a good deal of hostility to the suggestion that the Nazis helped -even if blindly and unintentionally- to shape the structure of postwar Germany, and when David Schoenbaum published his book with the title "Hitler's Social Revolution" he was promptly rapped over the knuckles, in these pages as elsewhere. But Dahrendorf is surely right in his contention that National Socialism, by undermining and sometimes decimating the old elites, "removed the social basis for future authoritarian governments along traditional German lines" and so "abolished the German past" in a way the Weimar Republic had totally failed to do.¹²

Subsequent events -wartime destruction, wartime evacuation, and postwar expulsions- certainly contributed to make the change irrevocable. But it was the Nazis who set it off, and it is a fair criticism of liberal historiography that it has evaded the question. That is why Richard Grunberger's large volume is disappointing, in spite of occasional flashes of insight.¹³

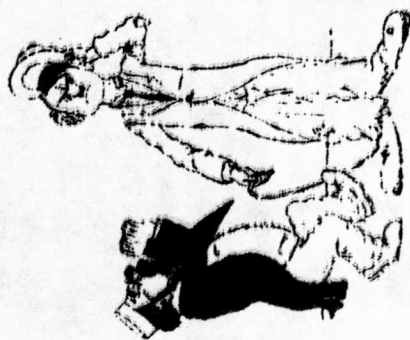


Hitler zoekt een costume voor 't gemaskerd bal

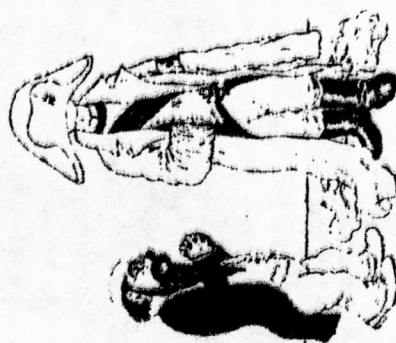
(Humanité, Parijs.)



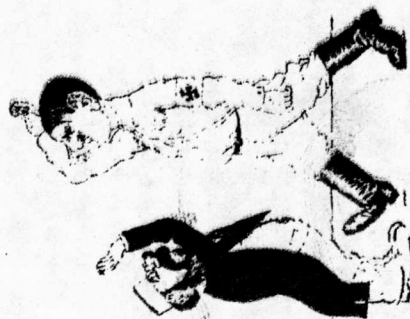
As huisschilder? ... Hm! ...
laten we daar maar niet over pra-
ten...



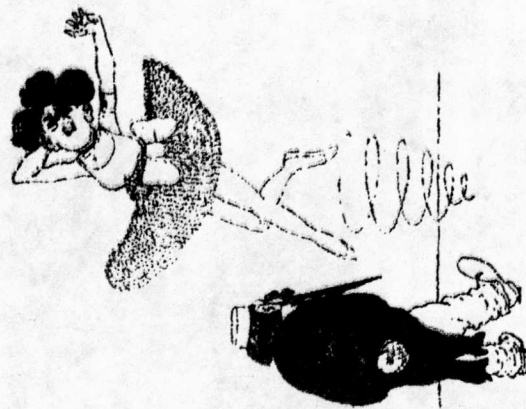
Charles staat je niet ... jij hebt
niet de juiste manier om de vol-
ken te laten lachen...



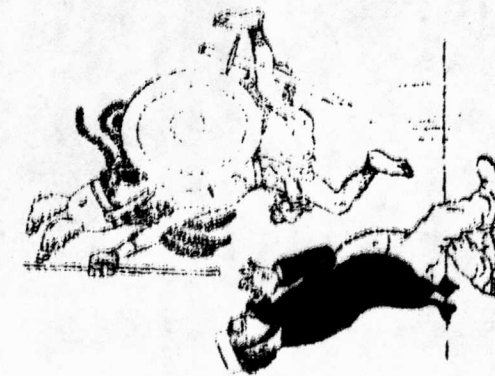
Kijk es hier: als Napoleon...
janmer, die was veel grooter dan
jij...



Zoo, Hitler, wou je je verklee-
den voor 't gemaskerd bal? Best!



Nee, voor danseres ben je niet
gracicus genoeg!...



Als „Wolkure“ ... dat is wat
oorlogszuchtig ... raadt iedereen
dadelijk, dat jij 'et bent!...



Daar heb ik 'et ... Als „Vredes-
engel“! Dan herkent geen sterve-
ling je!"

(Marianne, Parijs.)



There was room for a serious large-scale social history of Nazi Germany, but instead of systematic social analysis Grunberger prefers to entertain us with a welter of spicy and malicious anecdotes. Nevertheless he also concedes that Hitler "did drag Germany, half-heartedly kicking and screaming, into the century of the common man", and that, beneath a "penumbra of social demagoguery edged with farce", the Third Reich instigated "developments toward greater social equality, or at least upward mobility". During the six peacetime years of the Nazi regime, Grunberger notes, "upward mobility was double that of the last six years of Weimar". This may be an unpalatable fact for liberals to swallow, but it is too important to be shirked. In the longer perspective of German history (I am not speaking of European history or international history, which is quite another thing) it is possible that the social revolution the Nazis set in motion will appear as the most enduring legacy, perhaps the only enduring legacy of the Third Reich. If, as Mr. Ringer says, the present generation of "German intellectuals have adjusted to the mass and machine age" and "mandarin culture has become a distant memory", the changes brought about by twelve years of Nazi rule are one, if not the only, reason. We cannot just dismiss them as a relapse into savagery; and anyhow even a relapse into savagery may have positive results. No one judges the French Revolution just by the Terror and the "tricoteuses" sitting and crowing beside the guillotine; and sooner or later historians will have to take a corresponding attitude to the German revolution - for that, as Dahrendorf has said, is what National Socialism really was.

All this implies a change of attitude towards National Socialism which is the second great difference between the liberal and the postliberal historians. It is best seen in Broszat's meticulous analysis of the structure of the Third Reich, but I shall try to illustrate it, as briefly as possible, by reference to Gordon's book on the Hitler Putsch of 1923 and to some of the essays by younger German historians in the volume edited by Holborn.

There are two main aspects. First, the Nazi terror and the SS state, treated for so long as evils fit only for moral condemnation, are now being subjected to cool factual analysis which, because of its scrupulous authenticity, is far more damning than emotional denunciation. Secondly, whereas liberal historians were more interested in the roots of Nazism and how it came about - with the paradoxical result, as Carl Schorske has pointed out, that they paid more attention to the Weimar Republic, as the alleged seedbed of Nazism, than to the Third Reich itself - the younger generation is concerned with what Nazism was, with seeing how it actually operated after 1933, and with analysing its essential elements in depth. They do not underestimate Hitler's ideas and plans, but for them the essential point is to establish what happened when the time came to apply those ideas in practice. This is the difference Bracher has in mind when he writes that "contrary to general opinion, January 30 was rather a beginning than an end." Stated baldly, this seems so obvious a fact that to insist on it may seem unnecessary. The reason is the psychological blockage liberal historians experience when confronted by anything as alien to their mentality as Nazism. How otherwise shall we account, for example, for their reluctance to discard the view that the notorious Reichstag fire on February 27, 1933, was a deep-laid Nazi plot? Fritz Tobias showed, as conclusively as will ever

be possible that this was not the case;¹⁶ but his evidence accorded so badly with the traditional picture of the Nazis as unscrupulous, unprincipled villains that it left the majority of liberal historians (including Bracher) incredulous and resentful. For them, as Hans Mommsen says, the Reichstag fire was "a prize example of the terrorist methods employed by the National Socialists to take their opponents by surprise", and they were psychologically unwilling to accept the possibility that an incident which so clearly helped the Nazis to cement their rule can have been anything but the result of a carefully drawn up plan. In reality, Mommsen shows in his essay, the facts tell a different story. Unscrupulous Hitler and his lieutenants may have been, but the arrests that followed the fire and the manipulation of the elections six days later were "not the outcome of clear and purposive decisions" but of "spontaneous, unconsidered reactions". This is not merely a conflict over the interpretation of facts; rather it reveals two basically different attitudes toward National Socialism. Historians of the older generation approach the problem from a moral and ideological point of view. In asserting that the Nazis deliberately planned the Reichstag fire, they are proceeding not from an objective examination of the historical record but from a preconceived notion of the Nazis as evil terrorists who would stop at nothing to get their way. For the younger generation, on the other hand, what is significant is the speed and the vigour with which the Nazis reacted to a crisis that took them totally unawares; for we have only to contrast these qualities with the hesitancy and flabbiness of the German other parties - with what Julius Leber called "the whole inner weakness and indecision of the Weimar front" - to see how important a factor they were in carrying the Nazis from their original insecurity as expendable allies of the army and big business to a position of total domination.

If Mommsen's analysis of the Reichstag fire forces us to revise our view of the Nazis in 1933, Harold Gordon's new book undertakes a similar, even more far-reaching revision of their position ten years earlier, at the time of Hitler's famous beer-hall Putsch in 1923. The conventional picture of the beer-hall Putsch, as presented once again in Richard Hanser's racy, popular account, is of a "milestone" on Hitler's "road to power", and though minor characters abound, Hitler and his stormtroopers occupy the center of the stage. Gordon's achievement is to dissect this conventional picture step by step and show how deceptive it is. Even Bracher maintained that Hitler had arrived, in 1923, "at the point at which he decided to set out on the road to power". Nothing of the sort, Gordon replies. In reality, Hitler acted precipitately, unreflectingly, desperately, convinced that otherwise his followers would desert him and his movement would collapse. But that is not all. The reason the Putsch failed, Bracher argues, is because the various different groups were "badly coordinated". This implies an over-all plan, but in reality there was no plan. The different groups, Gordon shows, were not so much "badly coordinated" as "at loggerheads". The largest para-military organisation in Bavaria had no intention of following Hitler; the most redoubtable of all the free-corps leaders, Ehrhardt, stood ostentatiously aside. Far from being the leading figure, Hitler did not even "dominate the left wing, let alone the entire movement"; and nothing could be more misleading than "to look back on Bavaria in

1923 and see only the NSDAP".

Three points of general significance for the history of National Socialism emerge from Gordon's study. The first is the futility of the "standard" moralistic approach, which lays down that "the National Socialists were bad and they did bad things because they were bad", an approach, (as Gordon says) that "does not help the serious historian" who wants to know "why and how they got into a position" to do these things. The second is the "largely mythical" character of the "old, conspiratorial school of historical interpretation", which depicts Hitler and his associates as consummate schemers, "sitting down and coldly planning a putsch in a situation that left them free to decide their best possible course of action", when in reality they were driven by events to embark on an ill-considered, ill-prepared and extraordinarily incompetently conducted operation which never had one chance in a hundred of success.

But perhaps the most important point is the way our preoccupation with National Socialism has distorted our view of German history. Where others have trained the limelight on Hitler and the Nazis, Gordon places them in his historical perspective, and the result is that the beer-hall Putsch, instead of figuring as the inauguration of a carefully planned campaign leading step by step to 1933, is firmly set in its time, not the prelude to the Nazi revolution but the last -and by no means the most dangerous- of a series of attempts to overthrow the established order that had punctuated the troubled history of the Weimar Republic ever since 1919.

The results of this revision are a picture of Nazi reality far more differentiated and flexible than we have come to accept. Where the older generation demonized the Nazis, building them up to criminals of almost superhuman dimensions, the cumulative effect of the work of the younger generation is to de-demonize them. Broszat, in particular, has shown how little substance there is in the conventional interpretation of Nazi policy as the systematic implementation of long-term objectives laid down -in "Mein Kampf" or elsewhere- long before the seizure of power. The old picture of the Nazi state as "a perfect monolithic order" crumbles when confronted by the facts. Instead of a carefully planned and organized instrument of totalitarian domination, what we see is an almost haphazard tangle of overlapping and conflicting authorities, brutal and oppressive but also clumsy, wasteful and inefficient.

Nor is it true -as Bracher, among others, has suggested- that this confusion was deliberately created by Hitler as a part of a policy of "divide and rule" designed to make his own position unassailable. On the contrary, it simply grew up piecemeal, as a result of weak control, indecision and inertia.

Even on questions of art and culture there was no considered policy when Hitler came to power. Nothing is less true, as Hildegard Brenner has shown, than Holborn's statement that "Goebbels managed to subject the totality of publicly expressed opinions and cultural creations to his orders" in a few months during the summer and fall of 1933. In reality, the battle over modern art went on (that "guttersnipe" Goebbels supporting the modernists" throughout 1933 and was only decided -against Goebbels- in September, 1934. The episode is not so unimportant as it may seem, for it underlines the point made by Bracher and Hermann Mau that the Nazis, far from exercising planned dictatorial powers from the moment Hitler became chancellor in January, 1933, only finally consolidated their position after August, 1934. Indeed, if the

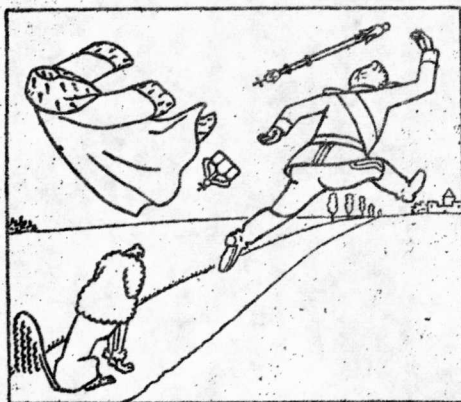
"institutional basis" of Nazism, as Bracher rightly maintains, was the SS and the Gestapo, it might be more correct to put the turning point in June, 1936, when Himmler was finally vested with dictatorial powers.

The revision of the conventional picture of the Nazi seizure of power has wider implications than may at first seem evident. No one in his senses today minds very much either way about the precise process by which the Nazis established control, and it is easy to lose patience with these painstaking studies of the detail of Nazi policy. But this is not the point. The point is rather that no realistic view of the last century of German history is possible until the myths surrounding the history of Nazism have been dismantled. It is in this wider perspective that the work of the younger historians should be seen. The last thing they intend is to exculpate the Nazis; but they realize that we never can hope to see German history in perspective until they have been cut down to size.

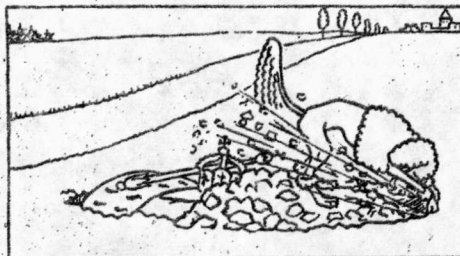
The corollary to the "de-demonization" of national Socialism is the "de-demonization" of Hitler. I confess it is a subject that leaves me cold, not so much because it is difficult to challenge current preconceptions about Hitler without appearing to whitewash him, but because it smacks too much of that preoccupation with personalities that seems to me to be one of the blemishes of liberal historiography. But it is probably true that here also there is room for new thought, and two at least make a start. One is Schramm's diagnosis of Hitler's personality as revealed in his table-talk in 1941 and 1942; the other is Eberhard Jäckel's analysis of his political ideas as expressed in "Mein Kampf" and the so-called "secret" book of 1928. Neither seems to me entirely satisfactory, if only because they leave out the central period of Hitler's life. Between the third-rate provincial politician of 1928, with no apparent future, and the apparently irresistible conqueror of 1941 lie the years of astounding success between 1930 and 1940, and it is hard to think that they contributed nothing to his development.

Schramm's book is, in effect, a reaction against the two stereotypes which have governed so much of the literature on Hitler: trivialization and demonization. Neither the familiar caricature of a psychotic, semi-educated petty bourgeois agitator, nor the picture painted by historians such as Meinecke and Ritter of a "demonic character", totally outside the norms of ordinary human experience, does justice to the baffling complexity of Hitler's personality. Schramm's essential point is that we shall never get within measurable distance of the problems Hitler poses if we dismiss him simply as a "terrible amoralist" or a "hyper-Machiavellian no longer inhibited by law". In reality, Hitler had his own "well-grounded and consistent" morality and his own "concept of legality", and the fact that we may find them repulsive is no reason not to take them seriously. This conclusion, which Schramm arrives at after a slow beginning, is the starting point of Jäckel's book. A member of the younger generation, Jäckel has fewer inhibitions than Schramm and pursues his analysis more systematically; but for him also the first step is to realize that Hitler "had principles" - "not moral ones in the usual sense...but...principles nevertheless" - and since it was according with these principles that "his policies took their course", we shall not get very far until we have subjected them to dispassionate analysis.

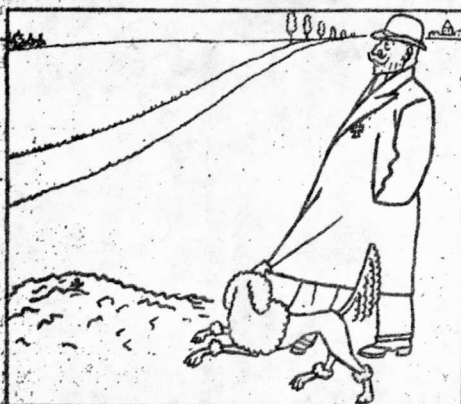
Sprookje voor kleine monarchistjes.



Er was eens een koning, die het record hardloopen wou verbeteren. Daarom ontdeed hij zich snel van zijn ongemakkelijke uitrustingsstukken.



De trouwe hond Fidel zorgde ervoor, dat de geheiligde voorwerpen niet verloren gingen, en hield er trouw de wacht bij.



Maar toen nu de koning niet terug wou komen, ging Fidel op zoek en bracht zijn heer eindelijk weer thuis.



Hij groef de kostbare voorwerpen weer op en rapporteerde ze het baasje met trouwen hondeblik.



Ontroerd door zooveel afhankelijkheid aanvaardde de koning scepter, kroon en mantel weer en beloonde Fidel door hem een zilveren hondenzweep te verleen.



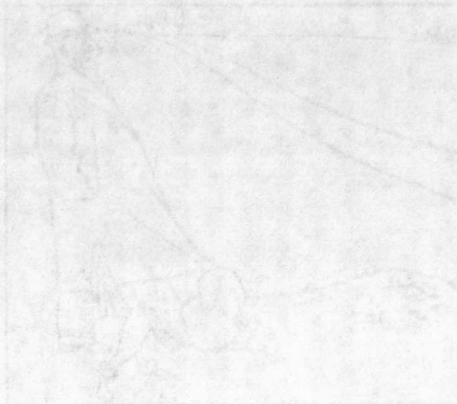
Als nu de trouwe hond later met deze zweep getuchtigd werd, kwispelstaartte hij vroolijk: „Leve de koning!”

(Simplicissimus, München.)



Sketch of a landscape with hills and a body of water.

Sketch of a landscape with hills and a body of water.



Sketch of a landscape with hills and a body of water.

Sketch of a landscape with hills and a body of water.



Sketch of a landscape with hills and a body of water.

Sketch of a landscape with hills and a body of water.

As Jäckel points out, the current image of Hitler is confused and inconsistent, and blurred by subjective moral judgments. Even Bullock, in his well-known biography, describes Hitler as "an opportunist entirely without principle", and then, almost in the same breath, speaks of the "consistency and astonishing power of will" with which he pursues his aims. On one side we are told that Hitler had no ideas, let alone a consistent "Weltanschauung", on the other that everything he did was clearly set out in "Mein Kampf". According to Rauschning, even Hitler's anti-Semitism was tactical; his only principle was power and domination for its own sake. At the same time we are bidden to believe that the aims which confronted us during the war were formulated by 1924 and were pursued from that time forward with unswerving resolution.

Jäckel's critique of the self-contradictions historical research has brought upon itself by abandoning systematic analysis and relying instead on intuitive judgments and other "obiter dicta" of ex-Nazis such as Hermann Rauschning is cogent and convincing. So also is his analysis of the development of Hitler's ideas from the "conventional foundations" with which he began in 1920. At the age of thirty, as Jäckel says, Hitler was still "a conventional anti-Semite and a conventional revisionist", mouthing commonplaces which had been claptrap of right-wing German politicians for a generation. Even his idea of conquering living space in the east was taken over lock, stock and barrel from the pan-Germans of the First World War. Countless other right-wing agitators had denounced the Jews, the Bolsheviks, and the Versailles settlement. Hitler's distinctive quality was his ability to take these separable threads and weave them together into a single, self-consistent "Weltanschauung". Separately, they were neither new nor original; but by combining them in a logically integrated ideological structure, he galvanized them into a powerful instrument of political action.

Jäckel is right to insist (contrary to the myth propagated by Hitler himself) how comparatively late Hitler's distinctive intellectual development began, but when he goes on to suggest that it was completed in all important respects, including the idea of the extermination of European Jewry, by 1928, if not earlier, the evidence he brings forward is less convincing. Moreover, two newly discovered interviews, which Edouard Calic has recently published, point in the opposite direction.²⁰ The importance of these interviews, which Hitler granted to Richard Breiting, the editor of the leading conservative Leipzig daily paper, in 1931, lies in the light they throw upon his ideas at the crucial moment of his career after the elections of 1930 had made him for the first time a serious force in German politics. It would be surprising if his astonishing success at the polls had not boosted Hitler's self-confidence and encouraged him to push his ideas to new extremes; and in fact, as Calic points out, the interviews unfold "plans for the future which could not have been deduced either from his speeches or from his book "Mein Kampf" or from the Nazi party's program."

And yet even at this date his views on a matter so fundamental as anti-Semitism were far more completely developed. Historians have assumed without question that the "final solution" was, in Calic's words, "the culmination of a long-prepared program.... announced in "Mein Kampf". In reality, it appears that Hitler's ideas only gradually crystallized after long gestation, perhaps not finally before 1938. To begin with, there is no doubt, as Jäckel shows, that the solution he foresaw for "the Jewish question" was emigration or deportation. The question, of course, is when this

attitude changed. Jäckel believes that it was in 1924, during Hitler's imprisonment in Landsberg, but the evidence he adduces is tenuous and inconclusive. It is also contradicted by the Breiting interviews. Hitler, in fact, told Breiting quite categorically that he did not "intend to massacre the Jews", and though Breiting came away convinced that Hitler's "tirades of hate against the Jews were no mere intimidation maneuver" and that he would persecute them if he came to power, he had no doubt that persecution, even at this late date, meant at worst expropriation and expulsion.

I am well aware that anyone who questions the view that the "final solution" was in Hitler's mind from the start of his political career is asking for trouble; it may also be said that it does not matter in the long run and certainly made no difference to the victims- whether the road to the "final solution" was longer and less direct than has commonly been assumed. The points I wish to make are different. The first is that Jäckel is surely right in insisting that we cannot pick and choose among Hitler's statements, rejecting those (for example, his statement to Breiting in 1931 that he did not intend to kill off the Jews) that do not conform to our pre-suppositions and accepting only those which tally with our preconceived ideas. The second is that it is all too easy to write as though anti-Semitism was rampant in Weimar Germany and all Hitler had to do to win support was to play upon it. In reality, the weight of evidence indicates that anti-Semitism was a liability rather than an asset in the Nazi program, but a liability that had to be accepted in deference to Hitler's ingrained prejudices.

No one doubts that an undercurrent of anti-Semitism was always present in Weimar Germany, welling up at times of economic distress - after 1918 and again after 1929 - and subsiding when conditions improved. But as Donald Niewyk has pointed out, it was an "irritant" rather than a major problem, and no one took anti-Semitism of the Nazis "very seriously" until long after 1933. The danger of exaggerating its importance in the light of after events - like the danger of exaggerating the importance of the Putsch of 1923 - is the distortion of German history which results. The Weimar Republic, as David Felix² has truly said, "was much more than an antechamber to the Nazi period," but that is how it appears when we make the search for the antecedents of Nazism our measure and criterion. That is why it is important to analyze such bitterly sensitive issues as anti-Semitism coolly and objectively.

The question that arises is whether these partial revisions of current orthodoxy add up to a new view of recent German history. My answer is that they do, but only if they are seen in a broader setting. If I have been concerned in the main with various aspects of National Socialist history, it is not because I think they are the most important but because this is the area dealt with by most of the books I have reviewed. In reality, the interpretation of National Socialism is only one area in which the traditional liberal approach to German history is under attack, and though it is obviously impossible on this occasion to consider other areas - for example, the events of 1918 and 1919 - it is important to emphasize that what is at issue is not our view of particular aspects of Nazi history but rather the adequacy of the liberal interpretation and its underlying assumptions. It is because the younger generation of historians has cast doubt on their validity that a new view of German history, unencumbered by liberal presup-

positions, has become so necessary. Recent research has altered our picture not merely of particular incidents and phases but of the whole course of German history from Bismarck to the present day. In a concluding article I shall try to draw the threads together and pick out at least the broad contours of the new pattern.

Notes

- 1) "Mandarins and Nazis", NYR, October 19.
- 2) Fritz K. Ringer, The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German academic Community, 1890 - 1933 (Harvard, 1972)
- 3) Helmut Böhme, Deutschlands Weg zur Grossmacht (Kiepenheuer & Witsch Cologne, 1966)
- 4) Martin Broszat, Der Staat Hitlers (Deutscher Taschenbuchenverlag: Munich 1969)
The German Dictatorship by Karl Dietrich Bracher (Praeger, 1970)
- 5) Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution
- 6) Germany Since 1918
- 7) Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933-1939 (Doubleday)
- 8) Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch
- 9) Bracher, The German Dictatorship; Germany in Our Times by Alfred Grosser
- 10) The Failure of Illiberalism by Fritz Stern (Knopf, 1972)
- 11) Heinz Luhasz, "Hitler's Welfare State", NYR, December 19, 1968
- 12) Society and Democracy in Germany, by Ralph Dahrendorf (Doubleday, 1967)
- 13) The Twelve Year Reich: A Social History of Nazi Germany 1933-1945
- 14) I shall refer specifically (and without any intended reflection upon the value of other contributions) to the following essays:
Hans Mommsen, "The Reichstag Fire and its Political Consequences"
Hildegard Brenner, "Art in the political Power Struggle of 1933 and 1934"
Hans Buchheim, "The Position of the SS in the Third Reich"
K.D. Bracher, "Stages of Totalitarian Integration"; and
Hermann May, "The Second Revolution".
- 15) Carl E. Schorske, "Weimar and the Intellectuals", NYR, May 7, 1970
- 16) The Reichstag Fire, by Fitz Tobias (Putnam's, 1964)
- 17) Putsch! How Hitler made Revolution, by Richard Hanser (Wyden, 1970)
- 18) Hitler: The Man and the Military Leader, by Percy Ernst Schramm (Quadrangle, 1971)
- 19) Hitler's Weltanschauung
- 20) Secret Conversations with Hitler
- 21) Socialist, Anti-Semite and Jew: German Social Democracy Confronts the Problem of Anti-Semitism, 1918-1933, by Donald L. Niewyk (Louisiana State U.P., 1971)
- 22) Walter Rathenau and the Weimar Republic: The Politics of Reparations by David Felix (Johns Hopkins, 1971)

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SO STANDAARD BOEKHANDEL

ZWANESTRAAT 41-43 GRONINGEN TELEFOON 126749

A NEW VIEW OF GERMAN HISTORY

I

Some twenty years ago Hans Kohn published a book called "German History: Some New German Views". It included some interesting contributions, but in retrospect we can see that the undertaking as a whole was premature. In 1952 the time was not ripe for a new evaluation of German history. What seemed important then and what the essays in Kohn's volume were concerned with, was the rehabilitation of the liberal interpretation which had been denied a hearing in the Nazi period. But the argument still revolved in the framework of the old conflict between liberal and conservative historiography. It was only ten years later that a new view of German history became possible, as a new generation of historians began to look critically not only at the work of conservative historians such as Gerhard Ritter but also at the assumptions underlying the work of Weimar liberals. For Weimar liberalism and Weimar conservatism both had their roots in the same soil, the soil of Bismarck's Reich and German idealism, and what concerned the younger generation of historians who grew up after 1945 was not whether the conservative or the liberal interpretation was more or less correct but the validity of their common assumptions. It is against these assumptions that the younger historians have reacted, and the distinctive feature of the new view of German history which has gradually taken shape in the last ten years is its emancipation from the orthodox liberal ideology.

For liberal historiography, in spite of its pretensions to strict empiricism, is in the last analysis no less firmly anchored in ideological preconceptions than is the conservative historiography it challenges. I have already indicated the nature of these preconceptions, using the standard histories of Hajo Holborn and Karl Dietrich Bracher² as my texts, and I do not propose to repeat or to amplify what I have said. A full analysis would require consideration of the liberal interpretation of the revolution of 1918, with its endorsement of the so-called "October revolution", which gave the liberals what they wanted—namely, constitutional reform and parliamentary government—and its rejection of the "November revolution", through which the working population tried to secure the sort of changes that would have marked a real break with the prewar social system.

A full analysis would also require consideration of the liberal interpretation of the resistance movement after 1933, with its emphasis on the small, upper- and middle-class component, particularly the military resistance, although (as Bracher rightly says) military resistance "did not exist at all" before 1938. Above all else, it would require critical examination of the liberal version of Weimar history, with its underlying suggestion that the difficulties and ultimate collapse of the Republic were due to factors for which the liberal middle classes could not be held responsible—reparations, inflation, lack of understanding on the part of the Allied powers, right-wing radicalism, the Depression. It would ask why this liberal history has neglected to probe the shortcomings of the policies pursued by the middle-class parties which actually held the key positions in government for eight crucial years, from 1920 to 1928.

The Failure of Illiberalism
Fritz Stern
Knopf

Etienne Balazs once said that Chinese history was written by mandarins, for mandarins, about mandarins. We shall not go far wrong if we say that liberal history is history written by the middle-class, for the middle-class, about the middle class. I am not, of course, suggesting that a liberal, middle-class view of German history should be replaced by a Marxist, working-class view of German history. That would simply be to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. But one does not have to be a Marxist to see that liberal historiography pays far too little attention to the reality of divergent class interests and social conflict, and that is one of the main reasons why the younger generation of historians finds its interpretation of the Second Empire and the Weimar Republic lacking in conviction.

The first requirement, if we are to see German history in the perspective of 1972, is a new chronological frame which takes in the whole century beginning in 1871 and does not stop short in 1945. No doubt it will be said that all divisions of history into periods are artificial and that it is waste of time to argue about them. But the way we divide history up, the events we select for emphasis, and the dates we pick out as turning points are important because they reflect our whole view of the past, and the liberal periodization of German history reflects an outlook we no longer share. It is geared to political events puts more emphasis on legal and constitutional forms than on social and economic relationships, and makes the national state its criterion. Fritz Stern, in his recent book "The Failure of Illiberalism", has shown how inadequate this frame of reference is, and his analysis indicates some of the main points any new view of German history must take into account.

Stern attacks the conventional view of modern German history at two decisive points, the beginnings of the new German national state after 1871 and the last years of the Weimar Republic. For Holborn, as we have seen - and in this respect of course, he is representative of historians of his generation - Bismarck's unification of Germany in 1871 marks the beginning of a new period. Stern rejects this facile equation. For him, it was "the triumph of industrial capitalism" rather than "the achievement of national unification" that "changed the reality of German life". In 1871, he writes, "Bismarck unified the German states, not the Germans", and what he "sought to save at the visible top of the political system, the spread of capitalism undermined at the largely invisible substratum". Where Holborn sees Bismarck's work between 1871 and 1890 as "the consolidation of the German Empire", Stern maintains that "he created a system of checks and imbalances destined not to work"; "the dominant note", he says, almost as if to contradict Holborn's formulation, "was conflict, not consolidation".

When we turn from the end of the nineteenth century to the Weimar period, the differences of interpretation are no less pronounced. Holborn begins his history of the Weimar Republic, characteristically, with an elaborate analysis of the machinery of the Weimar constitution and the party structure, and ends with the Nazi seizure of power on January 30, 1933. Stern, on the contrary, em-

Mussert's sof in Duitschland

Tekening van
Funke Küpper



De Musch(ert): "Die zegt dat ik niet anti-semietisch genoeg ben,
en dan moet je z'n kromme neus es zien!"
De Notenkraker, 20 mei 1933

phasizes that only "the form of the state, not the structure of society, was changed in 1918-19", and refuses to treat January 30, 1933, as the end of the chapter. It was "not Hitler's rise to power but his end", he insists, that "marked the true break in German history". Moreover, "the desintegration of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism were two distinct, if overlapping processes. By 1932 the collapse of Weimar had become inevitable; Hitler's triumph had not". This is clearly another way of saying that we should pause before we dismiss the Weimar Republic as (in David Felix's words) simply "an antechamber to the Nazi period".

The changes in perspective that Stern suggests are important because they alter the whole framework of modern German history. He does not, of course, stand alone. His view of Bismarck's Germany is closely related to the interpretations put forward by Helmut Böhme and Hans-Ulrich Wehler⁴, and his interpretation of the critical years after 1930 is similar to that of Mau and Bracher⁵. What we are witnessing, in fact, is a piecemeal assault on the conventional liberal interpretation of modern German history, and Stern's endorsement of the position of the younger generation marks a decisive stage in the confrontation. It signifies that the new view, which at least in the case of Böhme and Wehler has come under heavy attack from the liberal side, is at last finding general acceptance.

The essential difference is, of course, the precedence which the younger generation of historians give to social and economic realities. And with the rejection of the primacy of politics goes the dismantling of the old political mold in which German history has traditionally been cast. For Böhme the two decisive events in the period with which he deals were the slumps of 1857 and 1873; not the foundation of the Second Empire in 1871, and the real turning point, the "end of an epoch", came between 1876 and 1879 when Bismarck "re-founded" the Reich on foundations which were to last until 1917 and beyond.

Can we, on this basis, construct a new view of German history which is closer to reality than the old? I think we can, though I can do more than suggest the broad, tentative outlines. To begin with, a large questionmark overhangs the very concept of 1871-1945 as one self-contained period. But the main point is the inadequacy of the old political divisions, their failure to pick out the really decisive turning points. The dates that loom so large - 1871, 1890, 1918, 1933, 1945 - are not the dates that matter: not, at least, if what we are concerned with is the history of the German people and not the history of the German state.

The first step, decisive for all others, is to remove 1871 from the position it has so long occupied as the starting point of modern German history. The importance attached by liberal historians to 1871, and their view of the years between 1871 and Bismarck's departure from office in 1890 as a single undivided period, rests largely on myth: first, the notorious Bismarck myth, the legendary picture of the colossus bestriding Europe and guiding Germany's destiny, and, secondly, the liberal myth of the Second Empire as the fulfillment of the aspiration for German unity. Neither is true, and we should be grateful to Fritz Stern for exposing their falsity.

Bismarck after 1871 was buffeted by the gathering storms of an industrialism he did not understand, and was never in sovereign command. The imperial structure thrown together in 1871 was a hasty improvisation. Furthermore, the new Empire was a denial rather than a fulfillment of national unity, and even

before Bismarck left the scene the urge was stirring to gather together the Germans outside its frontiers, particularly the Germans of Austria, in a vast encompassing Reich stretching, as the liberals of 1848 had dreamed, from the North Sea to the Vistula and from the Baltic to the Adriatic.

Judged by realities and not by appearances, the events of 1871 were not the start of a new period in German history but rather a temporary halt, a provisional solution which could not last and did not last. It was later, in 1879, that the decisive realignment took place. For the younger generation of historians, the so-called "Gründerjahre", the period of rising industrial capitalism between 1852 and 1873, was the prelude to modern German history. Its real beginning was 1879 when Bismarck, in a sharp reaction to the economic crisis and the social antagonisms it called forth, particularly the growth of social democracy, engineered the coalition of Junkers and industrialists, the "militarist-Prussian-conservative" alliance, which was to exert so powerful an influence for the next sixty years.

The reason 1879 is significant a date and 1871 is not is that 1879 saw a radical redistribution of social and economic power, and 1871 did not. Until 1879 it was possible that Germany might make a peaceful transition to modern industrial capitalism; after 1879 that was no longer the case. The great overriding problems which dominated German history until Hitler liquidated them in an orgy of destruction all date from 1879. The alliance between Junker agrarians and heavy industry, preceded in 1878 by Bismarck's attack on social democracy, was the beginning of the "conservative counterrevolution" which came to a head in 1930 and reached its dismal end in 1944. The "presidential system" of 1930 looked back to Bismarck's schemes of nonparliamentary government in and after 1880 and a direct line leads from the projects put forward at that time for a "central European union" under German leadership to Hitler's annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938.

The second period over which the younger generation of historians has challenged the existing interpretation of modern German history is that between 1930 and 1934. Just as 1871 has been displaced by 1879, so 1933 has lost the place it has so long occupied as a pivotal date in German history. As Mau and Bracher have demonstrated, the view that January 30, 1933, saw the displacement of a parliamentary system by totalitarian dictatorship is wide of the mark. For the younger generation of historians, the breakdown of parliamentary democracy dates from 1930, the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship from 1934 or even later. These, and not 1933, are the real turning points.

This shift of emphasis has important implications for the history both of National Socialism and of the Weimar Republic. David Childs is right in saying⁶ that it is impossible "to pinpoint the moment when Hitler's dictatorship was finally and irrevocably established", but there is no doubt that it occurred later and more gradually than the older generation of historians would have us believe. In 1933 Hitler was the last of the series of "presidential chancellors" who had ruled Germany since 1930. His independent position was certainly not stabilized before the death of Hindenburg in August, 1934, probably not before 1936 when Himmler provided the dictatorship with a firm institutional basis in the form of the Gestapo and the SS. Martin Broszat has even maintained, in my view convincingly, that the great divide—the moment when the countervailing forces were eliminated and the Nazis took full control—only came in the winter of 1937-1938.

What is important about this change of attitude, of course, is less the exact

date than the abandonment of the old view of the Third Reich as a monolithic totalitarian order operating without break from 1933 to 1945. By dethroning 1933 from its pivotal position, the younger historians have put the history of National Socialism in a new perspective. The same is true of the Weimar Republic. As the older generation of historians saw it, the years between 1919 and 1933 constituted a single self-contained period characterized by the prevalence of the parliamentary system set up under the Weimar constitution. In reality, the period divides sharply in 1930, just as the period 1871-1890 divides sharply in 1879. Nor is this the only division. Harold Gordon has characterized the early Weimar years as "the era of Putsches", and this period, extending down to the end of 1923, is as different from the period that followed as that period is different from the period of authoritarian presidential government which commenced in 1930.

The result is a far more differentiated picture of Weimar Germany. The older historians saw the whole period between 1919 and 1933 as an uneasy interlude between Hohenzollerns and Hitler, almost as a steady progression to Nazism. For the younger historians the decisive factors were not the constitutional changes in 1919, but the restoration of economic stability following the stabilization of the currency at the end of 1923, which brought to an end the "era of Putsches", and the destabilization following the world economic crisis of 1929, which ushered in the period of "conservative counterrevolution".

After 1924 we can perceive a perceptible shift in power relations, reflected in the growing strength of social democracy and the success of the Social Democrats in the elections of 1928. It was fear that this redistribution of power, if consolidated, might become irreversible that inspired the conservative counterrevolution of 1930, just as similar fears accounted for Bismarck's change of course in 1879. That is why Stern calls the chancellorship of Brüning, which inaugurated the counterrevolution, "the hinge of Nazism". Just as Hitler's beer hall Putsch of 1923 was a typical manifestation of the "era of Putsches", so the so-called "seizure of power" on January 30, 1933, was part of the conservative counterrevolution—the self-styled period of "national concentration" or "national awakening"—that began in 1930.

II

These are some of the salient differences of interpretation that divide the younger and older generations of historians. Rather than pursue them further, let us draw the threads together and try, briefly and necessarily dogmatically, to set out the new view of German history they suggest.

First of all, for reasons already explained, is 1879 our starting point rather than 1871. The more difficult question is when the first period ends. Certainly Bismarck's dismissal in 1890 was not a turning point. Under his successors there was much reshuffling of the political cards, but no fundamental change in the structure of power. At the same time the system was becoming increasingly antiquated and unworkable. In 1871 the Social Democrats had polled 125,000 votes; in 1903 they polled over three million. The strains and stresses that resulted in a system designed to hold them in check and keep them out of power are obvious, and by 1909 at the latest they had reached the breaking point. As A.J.P. Taylor long ago pointed out, "The events of 1906-1909 reduced the Bismarckian constitution to chaos", and when Bülow resigned in 1909 the period that began in 1879 came to an end.

It was followed by a period which Taylor rightly calls an "interregnum". It runs without break from 1909 to 1917, and the traditional division in 1914 is as meaningless as that in 1890. If the German ruling classes decided in 1914 to run the risk of a great European war, the reason, as Halévy long ago pointed out, was their fear of revolution. After 1910 more and more voices are heard calling for war as the only outlet from the intolerable tensions at home. Whether victory would have saved the system we do not know, though it is unlikely; unsuccessful war ruined it. When in 1917 the tottering Prussian monarchy was displaced, in fact if not in name, by the dictatorship of Ludendorff, it was the end not only of a period but of a system of government. The revolutionary period that followed extends from the great strikes and naval unrest in the spring and summer of 1917, with no real break in 1918 or 1919, to 1923. Ludendorff's dictatorship had been a last desperate attempt - the last until Hitler - to stave up an obsolete social and political system. The fundamental question in the succeeding period was what should succeed it. The answer is mirrored in the Weimar constitution of 1919; no return to the prewar system, but also no genuine break with the past. The shortsightedness of the Social Democrat leadership in 1918 and 1919 left the Germans a bitterly divided, disunited people, in many ways more so than before 1914. Furthermore, the resuscitation of the forces behind the old order - above all, the officer corps and the bureaucracy - at a moment when they were totally discredited and could easily be swept away, stoked the fires of nascent civil war. The result was the prolongation of revolution and counterrevolution until 1923.

The period that followed, from 1924 to 1930, was nevertheless more than an interlude. David Felix has rightly protested in his new book against the tendency to write off the Weimar Republic as "an accident of history", foredoomed to failure. The revolution of 1918 may not have produced fundamental changes in the structure of German society, but the defeat of the Kapp Putsch in 1920, not to mention Hitler's fiasco in 1923, shows at least that the different elements in German society were more evenly balanced than before, and once economic stability had been restored at the end of 1923, there is plenty of evidence, as I have already pointed out, that the popular forces were making headway. Nazism at this period was a fringe movement of insignificant proportions, and after 1924 (as Felix says) the general assumption, even on the part of rightwing nationalists, was that the republic "would continue to exist". All in all, Grosser is almost certainly right when he says that, but for the onset of the world economic crisis in 1929, "the Weimar Republic would probably have succeeded in consolidating its strength".

The Great Depression and the divisions and hesitations of the left in confronting it gave the forces of reaction their chance and ushered in the period of conservative counterrevolution. Overshadowed as it is by the Nazi dictatorship, it can easily be regarded simply as the prelude to Nazism; but it has its own place in German history as the last fling of the old order, the last attempt by the forces Bismarck had put in the saddle in 1879 to turn the clock back. After 1930 National Socialism was certainly an important factor; but Hermann Mau is right to emphasize that the "central figure" during the period 1930-1934 was Hindenburg, not Hitler, just as in 1923 it was not Hitler but Ludendorff. The destruction of parliamentary government was the work of the conservatives, not of the Nazis, who were only cal-

led in at the last moment when it looked as though without them the counter-revolution would not succeed. Authoritarian government dates from March, 1930, not from January, 1933, the only question was what sort of authoritarianism it would be.

The answer hung in the balance for many months and was not decided before August, 1934, at the earliest, and probably a good deal later. As Bracher has shown, the so-called "seizure of power" is a piece of Nazi mythology, and the army demonstrated with the utmost clarity who was in command when it forced Hitler to turn on Röhm and the SA on June 30, 1934. Slowly, thereafter, the position was reversed. The years 1933 to 1945 are far from being one continuous period of history. Down to 1938 the conservatives might still have asserted control (though with diminishing prospects as time passed), but they were inhibited by their nationalist ambitions and their hostility to the left. After 1938, when they woke up to the danger, it was too late.

Whether we like it or not, Hitler was the first German politician to come to terms with the realities of mass politics. This was his strength and perhaps the main positive consequence of Nazism in German history. Though the conservative reaction gave him his chance, he had too much sense to identify his movement with it, and when the conservatives turned on him in 1944 he destroyed them without compunction. Hitler's social revolution was brutal, capricious, unplanned, but it was also real. By destroying the old conservatism as a coherent, organized political force, he freed Germany (as Dahrendorf puts it) from the "mortgage" of the past and "made modernity and liberalism a real possibility".

It is more difficult to map out the stages of German history after 1944. Grosser and Childs provide the facts in abundance, but it is less easy to articulate them. What both make clear is that the conventional view of 1945 as an "absolute zero" is misleading and unacceptable. Defeat was certainly more of a breach of continuity in 1945 than in 1918, but the German capitulation was only one point in a twilight period that began in June or July, 1944, and continued until 1948 or 1949. Once again, as after the First World War, it was economic rehabilitation - the currency reform of June, 1948 - that marked the beginning of a new period. This time it was accompanied by the division of Germany and the setting up of the Federal and Democratic Republics in 1949.

The succeeding period is best characterized as the time when the two Germanies established their separate identities. Neither in east nor in west was this the intention in 1949; it was a solution produced by the passage of time and by events. As after 1918 there were powerful, backward-looking tendencies, whose rallying cry was the rejection of the consequences of unsuccessful war. Nevertheless, restoration was impossible. In the west any idea of radically reconstructing German society was quickly jettisoned, political questions were shelved, and energy directed to economic rebuilding.

But all the time a silent social revolution was going on beneath the stagnant political surfaces. As Golo Mann has said³, German society changed more profoundly between 1949 and 1963 than in the whole previous century. In the east, the program of socialization went steadily ahead, bringing with it a fundamental shift in class structure. In the west, a strongly middle-class society emerged, but it was, in Mann's words, "a bourgeois society completely freed from the old hierarchy". That is why the numerous small right-wing parties in the Federal Republic were powerless. Unlike the extremist splin-

ter groups in Weimar days, they lacked the backing of a coherent conservative opposition, and even the most powerful of them, the National Democratic Party, founded in 1964, faded after a few years.

By the time Adenauer left office in 1963 this period was visibly drawing to a close. In the west, in particular, the stagnation of political life, especially the failure to carry through any real policy of social democracy, produced an atmosphere of disillusion. As the 1960s progressed, a new generation was taking over. In the Federal Republic, the so-called "economic miracle" had called forth a new business elite, largely self-made, which regarded the old class conflicts as outdated and self-defeating. In the Democratic Republic it was the new generation of students who graduated after 1952 that was responsible, as Davis Childs points out, for the remarkable economic progress of Eastern Germany after 1963. By 1964 the new generation had captured more than half the places on the central committee of the Socialist Unity Party.

With the succession of Brandt in 1969 and the recognition of the separate existence of the two Germanies, a new period of German history begins. The process of adjustment to modern industrial society was still in many ways incomplete, but the old problems which had haunted German history ever since the days of Bismarck and lingered on until the end of the 1950s had spent their force. As Dahrendorf put it, "The past as it was embodied in imperial Germany" had been "finally abolished"; which is another way of saying that the epoch which began in 1879 had come to an end.

III

Does this revision of the basic chronological framework of modern German history really matter, or is it simply a reshuffling of the cards? It matters, I think, in a number of fundamental ways.

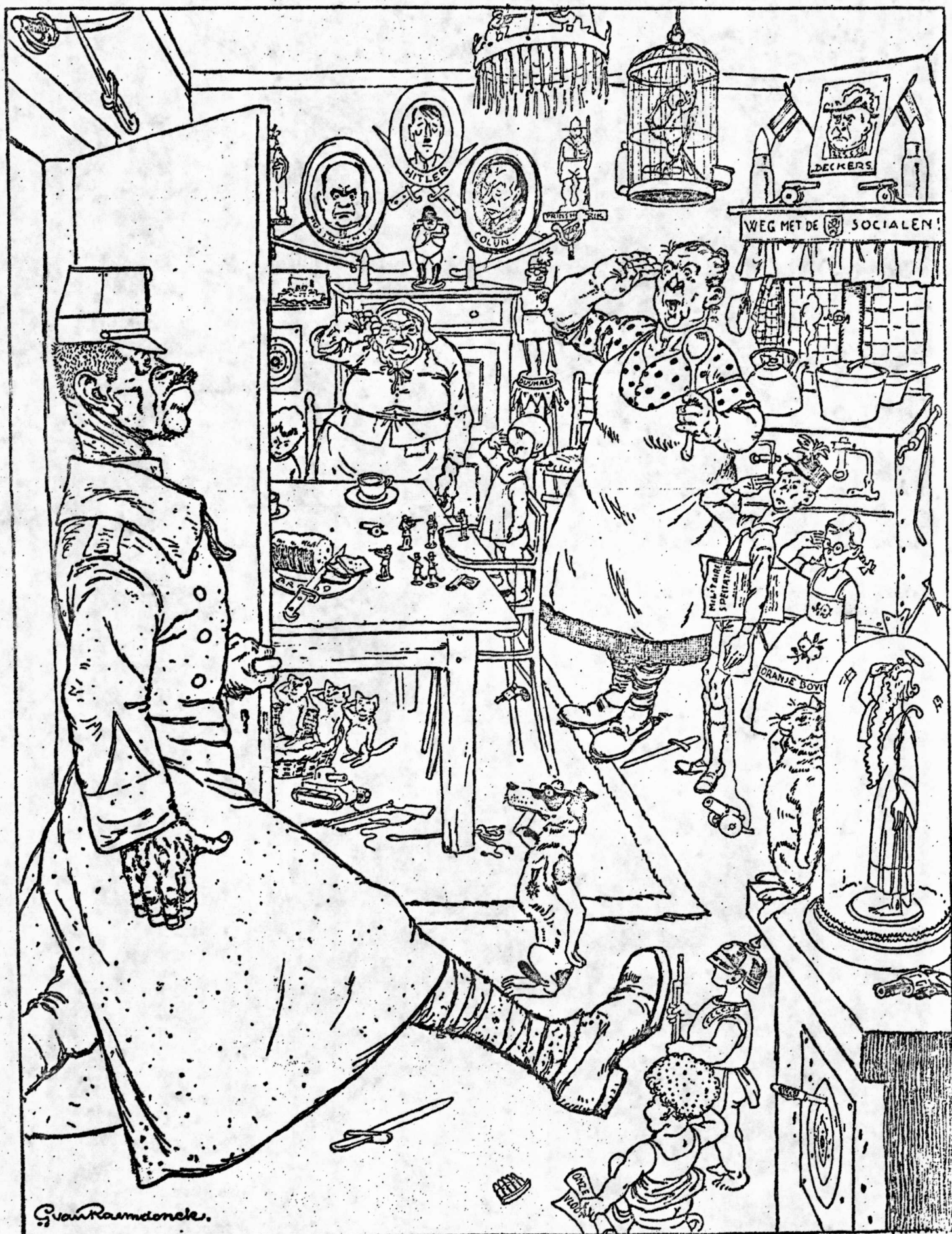
First, it gives due precedence to social realities. It emphasizes the central point Dahrendorf makes about the German question, that it is essentially not a political or national question, but a social question. The new generation of historians, as Stern says, "has foresworn the national-liberal traditions". Their standard of measurement, the central thread they see running through German history, is not the formation, consolidation, reconstitution, and ultimately the destruction of national unity, but the process by which Germany was transformed from a premodern, quasi-feudal into a modern industrial society. That is what Dahrendorf means when he says that they write history "from a social rather than a national point of view".

Second, their standard of measurement is not, like that of their liberal predecessors, legal and constitutional. When David Childs writes of the "limited value of constitutional devices", he is speaking for the new generation as a whole. Holborn could still suggest that Article 48 of the Weimar constitution was the fatal law enabling Hitler "to lay... the secure foundation of the Nazi dictatorship", and that the Enabling Act of March, 1933, was the "final step" making Hitler "the dictatorial ruler of Germany". Bracher rightly dismisses such arguments as "purely formalistic", because, (as he says) the character of any government is revealed not by its "legalistic facade" but by "analysis of the actual relations of power".

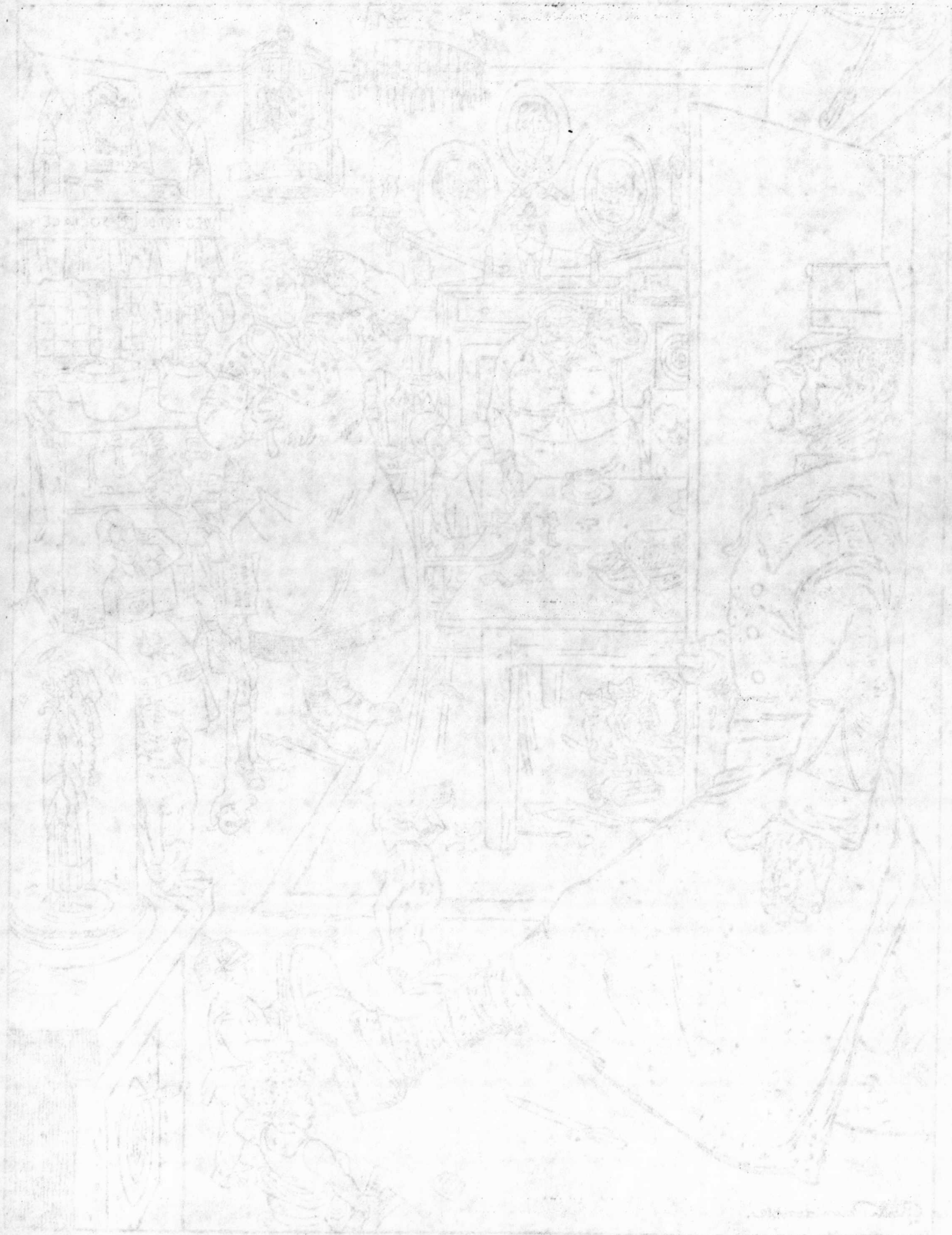
Third, the course of German history is no longer made to hinge on individuals and personalities. The older historians almost unanimously attributed the failures and vacillations of German history after 1890 to the personal

Het militaire huisgezin naar het ideaal van Deckers

Tekening van
G. v. Raemdonck



Vader komt thuis, moeder kommandeert: „In orde . . . staat!”



deficiencies of Bismarck's successors and of William II. In reality, the twists and turns of Caprivi, Hohenlohe, and Bülow, as they strove desperately to make an unworkable system work, are evidence of the growing discrepancy between the political superstructure and the social infrastructure, which was something that no one, including Bismarck himself, could have solved. The refusal to get bogged down in personalities is an important step forward. The time is past when anyone really cares whether Bethmann Hollweg and Brüning were honest and well-intentioned or not, and the interminable controversies between their detractors and their defenders - between Fischer and Zechlin and between Bracher and K.D. Erdmann - are a distraction rather than a help in assessing the objective factors in the situation.

Fourth, this rejection of interpretations based on personal factors sets new standards for research. It is a vital question, for example, how far the German people supported and how far they opposed Hitler, but what, over and above subjective impressions, do we know about it? As Erich Matthias has said, the older historians diverted the history of the German resistance into a "bibliographical blind alley".¹⁴

Concerned above all else to prove that there were "good" Germans in the ranks of the educated and professional classes, willing (as Holborn puts it) to "demonstrate by the sacrifice of their lives... that... humane values had not perished in Germany", they concentrated on the credentials and motives of the participants in the July plot of 1944.

The real point, needless to say, is quite different. What we need is a precise quantitative analysis, class by class and group by group, of the extent and nature of opposition on all levels, and this requires a new methodology.¹⁵ When we are told that "the Germans" in the 1920s yearned for "national greatness" we shall ask for detailed statistical evidence which we can test and check, and also for systematic group analysis indicating as exactly as possible which Germans yearned how much. No doubt, this means foregoing the sweeping moral judgments in which old-fashioned historians delight - and which to be fair is what the great reading public asks of history - but in compensation it will bring us, at last, face to face with the great unknown, German people, who in conventional accounts remain hidden, a faceless mass, behind a glittering façade of generals, politicians, professors, and business tycoons.

Fifth, the new view of German history makes German foreign policy intelligible by relating it to the internal situation. "Illiberalism at home", as Stern says, "prescribed an aggressive stance in German policy abroad". Wehler describes Bismarck's colonial policy as "a form of escapism" - escape from the insistent social problems at home - and the same is true of Bülow's "Weltpolitik" and of the pan-German pressures for expansion in east and southeast Europe. The frenetic, unstable, restless character of German foreign policy after 1879, inexplicable if analyzed (as Holborn does) in the framework of international diplomacy, becomes intelligible once we realize the extent to which it mirrors the internal tensions in German society.

Sixth, we are enabled to see the way in which these tensions, arising in the wake of the depression of 1873, and only gradually assuaged after 1945, are a key factor - perhaps the key factor - in modern German history. For the younger historians, the central theme is not the rise of Nazism, but the incipient class conflict, the deepening antagonism between a powerful but increasingly anachronistic authoritarianism and a growing democratic democra-

tic movement. This is the thread which lends unity to the period 1879-1969, and Nazism is only one strand in it. Class conflict, of course, was endemic in other countries, but Stern has analyzed the factors - the peculiar "German ambivalence to wealth and capitalism" and the uncompromising intransigence of the privileged classes - which made it particularly unrelenting in Germany.

Seventh, emphasis on the long-term social dichotomies (instead of smoothing them over) puts National Socialism into historical perspective. The obsessive preoccupation of the older historians with the rise of Nazism, as though it were the main content of German history since Bismarck, was bound to result in distortion. The younger historians have restored the balance. No doubt, if our concern is to explain the beastliness of the Nazis after they came to power, we shall still have to probe below the historical surface. But Nazism is as a historical rather than a psychological phenomenon is only intelligible when related to the tensions and antagonisms of German society since Bismarck.

I do not mean simply that the conservative counterreaction in its blindness called in forces which destroyed that society (though that also is true). What I mean is that the conservative counterrevolution was bound eventually to trigger off a widespread popular movement, a rebellion of the deprived, disinherited, exploited and deceived. That is why Stern is right to emphasize "the idealistic appeal of the Nazis". Nazism was the German revolution, the German equivalent of 1789, the substitute for the revolution that failed in 1918, the product of all the tensions bottled up since 1919, the ultimate revulsion, all the more radical because it was delayed, against the old, authoritarian, semi-feudal society foisted on Germany by Bismarck. That is its place in German history, seen in the longer perspective which has opened out after twenty-five years.

Finally, the new view enables us - and it was high time - to fit the post-war period into the mainstream of German history. Contrary to commonly accepted opinion, 1945 was not (in Holborn's words) "a new beginning". The German revolution did not stop dead in its tracks, still less go into reverse, with the elimination of the Nazi leadership at Nuremberg in 1946, any more than the French revolution stopped dead with the execution of Robespierre and his supporters in 1794. I have no desire to propound specious parallels, but, looked at from the vantage point of the present, the Federal Republic after 1949 plainly appears to represent what Crane Brinton called "the Thermidorian reaction", when gradually "the politically proscribed are amnes-tied and come back" and "the new ruling class, ¹⁶"settles down to do as good a job as" - by its mundane standards - "it can". The question today is whether the period which opened in 1969 will see a real effort to come to terms with the many social problems brushed aside between 1949 and 1969, or whether - in the west at least - the German revolution has played itself out. In 1972, it must be confessed, the latter looks more likely.

Twenty-five years after the end of the war a new view of German history was long overdue. It may be that I have not presented it as clearly or persuasively as possible, but that does not detract from the importance of the work of the younger historians who have made it possible. The liberal interpretation of German history was a loaded interpretation, loaded with the burden of guilt and the emotional associations of 1945. The younger historians, who do not share these emotions, necessarily look at the German past

from a different angle.

Bracher took Ritter to task for complaining of historians' "unending fascination with the horrors of the Hitler dictatorship"; but there is a sense in which Ritter was right. As David Felix says, Germany today "lives in a new long run"-- "beyond Weimar and Nazi Germany"-- and our view of German history must take account of this fact. Politically, the German question has burned itself out; but it continues to haunt our history books. The new view is important because it shifts attention to other aspects, particularly to the long-term social and economic realities.

This is sometimes described as the substitution of "the primacy of internal policy" for the characteristically liberal emphasis on the "primacy of external policy". We shall probably do better to avoid such simplifying formulations. What it signifies, in fact, is that the unifying thread of modern German history, including its foreign policy, is seen to have been its response to the rise of modern industrial capitalism. In this respect its history is not basically different from that of other countries in other parts of the world, and one of the main consequences of the change of perspective is that it enables us to view the German past (as Grosser puts it) "in the light of those coherent principles that may be applied to all political systems", instead of treating Germany as a pariah among nations, whose aberrations have to be condemned or explained away.

That does not mean, of course, that the German response to the impact of industrial capitalism was "normal" --whatever "normal" may be-- though one has only to look round the world today to see that it was less abnormal than at one time it seemed. What it does mean is that Germany has at last completed what Dahrendorf calls the "revolution of modernity"--not very successfully, perhaps, but unmistakably, both in the Democratic and in the Federal Republics. This is what Grosser has in mind when, almost regretfully, he describes contemporary Germany as "normal to excess". If, as is often said, Germany from Bismarck to Adenauer was weighed down by the burden of the past, since 1963 it has cast the burden off--except in the minds and writings of a handful of liberal historians. This, again, is part--a substantial part--of the German revolution.

Paradoxical though it may sound at the end of this long--some will say over-long--survey, my conclusion is that we have suffered in the last quarter of a century from a surfeit of German history--or at least the wrong sort of German history. Now that every minnow in the muddy Nazi pool has found its biographer, the time has surely come to call a truce. I do not mean that there is not still plenty to do. On the contrary, the preoccupation of the older historians with the highlights of German history has left many blind spots and dark corners. There was another Germany, not the "other Germany" of which we hear so much, the Germany of humane liberalism, but the Germany of people not concerned with "national greatness" but with jobs and wages, with the eight-hour day and equal opportunities for their children. About that Germany historians so far have had little to say. It is time the balance was redressed. Since 1945 the world has moved on, at a stupendous pace, and historians must move with it. Happily, there are signs, that some, at least, are beginning to do so.

Notes

- 1) Holborn, "A History of Modern Germany" 1840-1945 (Knopf, 1970) and Bracher, "The German Dictatorship" (Praeger, 1970).
- 2) NYR, October 19 and November 2.
- 3) The classical liberal view of the events of 1918-1919 is critically examined in "Vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik", edited by Eberhard Kolb (Cologne, Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1972).
- 4) "Deutschland's Weg zur Grossmacht" by Helmut Böhme (Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1966). "Bismarck und der Imperialismus" by Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1969).
- 5) Hermann Mau, "The Second Revolution" and Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Stages of Totalitarian Integration" in "Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution" edited by Hajo Holborn (Pantheon, 1972).
- 6) "Germany since 1918" by David Childs (Harper and Row, 1972).
- 7) "Der Staat Hitlers" by Martin Broszat (Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1969).
- 8) "Hitler and the Beer Hall Putsch" by Harold J. Gordon Jr. (Princeton, 1972).
- 9) "The course of German History" by A.J.P. Taylor (London, 1945 and many subsequent reprints).
- 10) "The World Crisis of 1914-1918" (Oxford, 1930) reprinted in "The Era of Tyrannies" by E. Halévy (Anchor Books, 1965).
- 11) "Walter Rathenau and the Weimar Republic: The Politics of Reparations" by David Felix (Johns Hopkins, 1971).
- 12) "Germany in Our Time" by Alfred Grosser (Praeger, 1971).
- 13) "The History of Germany Since 1789" by Golo Mann (London, 1968).
- 14) Erich Matthias, "The Downfall of the Old Social Democratic Party in 1933" in "Republic to Reich" edited by Hajo Holborn (Pantheon, 1972).
- 15) Two recent books make a beginning: "Gegen den Nationalsozialismus" by Kurt Klotzbach (Hannover, 1969) a study of the resistance in Dortmund, and "Widerstand und Verfolgung in Essen" by Hans-Josef Steinberg (Hannover, 1969).
- 16) "The Anatomy of Revolution" by Crane Brinton (revised edition, Random House, 1952).