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GREGOR STRASSER AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE  
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Stanford University, Ph.D., 1966  
History, modern

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GREGOR STRASSER AND THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NAZI PARTY, 1925-32

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
AND THE COMMITTEE ON THE GRADUATE DIVISION  
OF STANFORD UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

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June 1966

I certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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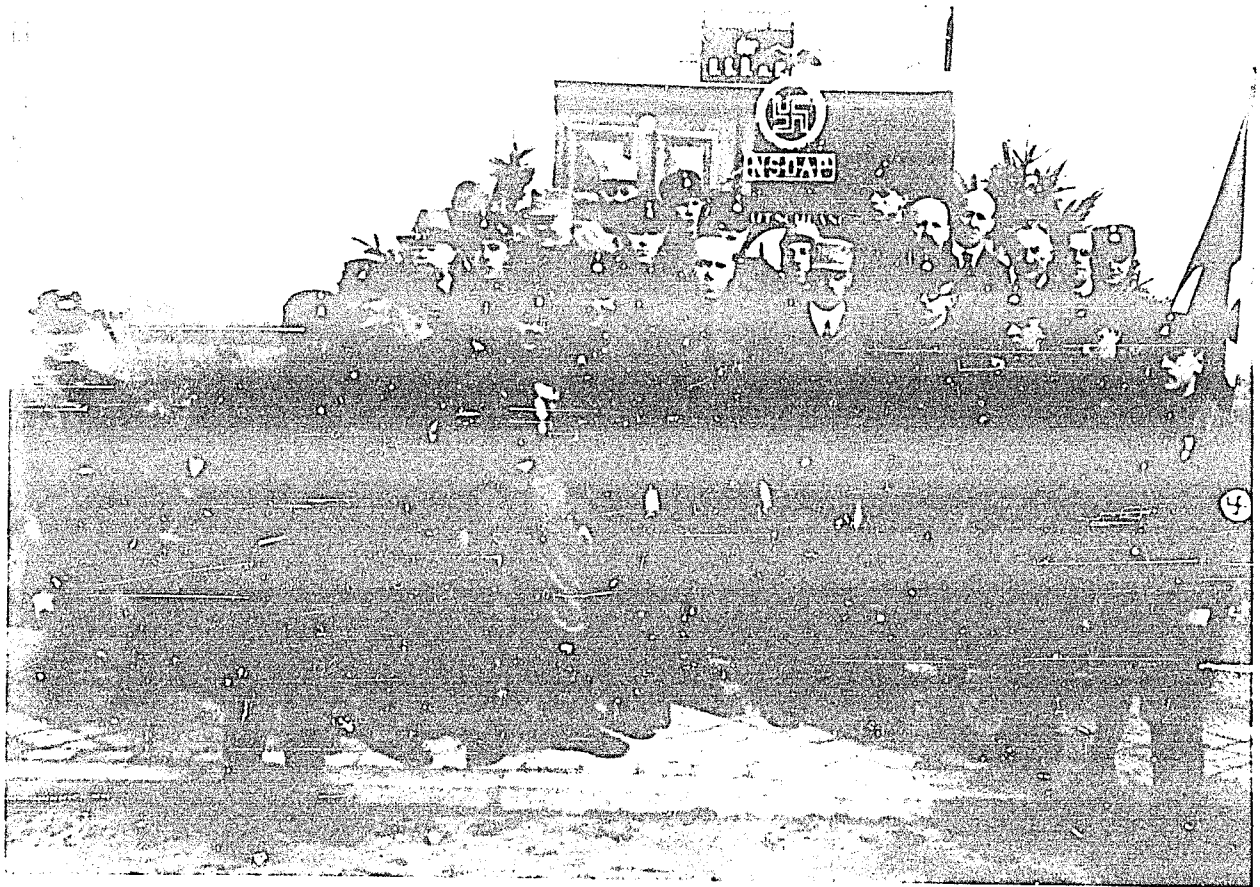
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Gregor Strasser at Platling, Lower Bavaria, September 9, 1926.  
(sixth from right)

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| AG           | Arbeitsgemeinschaft--working association.   |
| AGNW         | Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nordwest Deutschen Gauleiter--working association of the North West German <u>Gauleiter</u> . |
| Bundesarchiv | German national archives located at Koblenz.  |
| DAF          | Deutsche Arbeiterfront--German Labor Front.   |
| Hauptarchiv  | Main archives of the NSDAP  |
| Hann.        | Hannover--Archives of Lower Saxony located at Hanover.  |
| IFZG         | Institut für Zeitgeschichte located at Munich.  |
| NS           | Nationalsozialistische--National Socialist.   |
| NS Briefe    | Nationalsozialistische Briefe--National Socialist Letters.  |
| NSBO         | Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation--National Socialist Factory Cells.                                  |
| NSDAP/NAZI   | Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei--National Socialist German Workers Party.                             |
| NSDAV        | Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterverein--National Socialist German Workers Association.                        |
| NSFP         | Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei--National Socialist Freedom Party.   |
| SA           | Sturmabteilung--Storm Section, Storm Troops.  |
| SS           | Schutzstaffel--Protection Corps, elite guard.   |
| USchIA       | Untersuchungs und Schlichtungsausschuss--Office for arbitration for the liquidation of conflicts within the Party.    |
| VB           | Völkischer Beobachter.  |

SECTION I

GREGOR STRASSER AND THE NSDAP PRIOR TO 1925

Gregor Strasser, the most significant organizer of the Nazi Party from 1928 to 1932, was born on May 31, 1892, in the small Bavarian town of Geisenfeld.<sup>1</sup> As an intensely active political worker he assisted in the development of the National Socialist German Workers Party and witnessed its growth from a minuscule group of right-wing political agitators to a full-fledged authoritarian party. Strasser, who devoted eleven years to the party, and who helped build it into the monolithic structure which it became, fell by the wayside, ironically, just prior to Hitler's assumption of power. As late as December 7, 1932, Strasser ranked as number two man, after Adolf Hitler, in the party hierarchy. However, by January 30, 1933, when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, Strasser was not more than a simple party member who had, by a mere fifty-two days, missed his opportunity of becoming one of Germany's rulers.

Physically Gregor Strasser was a large, powerful man, endowed with a penchant for hard work. He was one who would undertake any task, no matter how difficult, and devote his entire energy to it until he had completed it satisfactorily. There is no question concerning Gregor Strasser's ability to organize, but one can rightly doubt his ability as a politician.<sup>2</sup> His

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard Strasser, O. S. B. , Gregor and Otto Strasser. Privately published memorial, n.d. , p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny. (New York: Bantam Books, 1961), p. 254.



political career was marked by devoted, exhaustive work rather than any brilliant coups. One can on the contrary, state with assurance that Gregor Strasser made mistakes, which undoubtedly contributed to bringing about his murder. Still, whatever he lacked in brilliance as a politician he compensated for by his sustained effort in the Party's behalf. At least up to his withdrawal from active politics, Strasser was one of the most popular speakers in the entire Nazi movement.<sup>3</sup>

For most of his adult life Gregor Strasser was an avowed Nazi, and although he hated, and was hated by, many of those in Hitler's immediate entourage, he usually had an excellent relationship with Hitler himself. There were times when he appeared to be not only Hitler's devoted servant but also his friend. One need only mention the occasion when Strasser spent much time comforting Hitler after the suicide of his niece Geli Raubel. According to some sources Gregor actually prevented Hitler, at that time, from taking his own life.<sup>4</sup> Yet on other occasions Strasser and Hitler seemed to be at loggerheads concerning policy. Often Strasser represented what would be considered the left wing of the Party, and in many instances he questioned

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<sup>3</sup>In reading through his speeches, however, one sees the definite influence of his brother Otto on Gregor's thought, and generally speaking one can say that Gregor was not the intellectual equal of Otto Strasser.

<sup>4</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), pp. 201-02.

the wisdom of Hitler's decisions. In 1932 he felt that Hitler was bypassing him in favor of Goebbels and G<sup>o</sup>ring, a development which he considered intolerable.<sup>5</sup> Finally, completely disappointed and disillusioned, he resigned from all his offices in the party and returned to its ranks.

Strasser's association with the Nazis began very early in the 1920's - probably in 1921, though his brother Otto has stated that it was in 1920.<sup>6</sup> At that time Gregor had gone to a political rally and was deeply impressed by the ideas and emotional intensity of the main speaker—Adolf Hitler. Here, Strasser felt, in this leader of the infant Nazi party, was a solution to the whole German problem. True, the Nazis were just getting on their feet. Nationally they were of no significance. But in strife-torn Bavaria they had begun to make a difference, and Strasser had been looking for something similar to what Hitler promised. Strasser had, after all, served loyally in the German army during the First World War, fought for a cause in which he believed, and attained the rank of Lieutenant in the First Bavarian Foot Artillery regiment.<sup>7</sup> The easy-going Bavarian had proved to be a good soldier: he could follow orders; he could lead men; he was brave; and he was thoroughly devoted to the German cause. After the cessation of hostilities

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, Letzte Aufzeichnungen (Göttingen: Plesse Verlag, 1955), p. 146.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Strasser, p. 3.

he was rewarded for his service to his country with the Iron First Class and several other decorations.<sup>8</sup>

But his return to civilian life marked a difficult time in his career. He had to cope with the usual problems accompanying release from military service: the resumption of the old life, being an ordinary civilian once again. Strasser also picked up the threads of his study of pharmacology, given up when he left the university in 1915 to join the army. Two of his brothers had also fought in the army, and both had been wounded. Paul, the younger, had decided to become a priest, and after the war was accepted into the Benedictine order as Father Bernard. Otto Strasser had set out to be a lawyer, and he completed his Ph. D. in National Economy and Law at the Universities of Berlin, Munich and Würzburg.<sup>9</sup>

Bernard was content with his religion, but Otto and Gregor, both craving action, could never remain far removed from politics. They had grown up in a family with intense political interests. Their father busied himself in his spare time with the study of national economy and history. The senior Strasser wrote on political subjects and published a small essay entitled The New Way. Bernard Strasser maintains that "This little book contained the core of the cultural and political aims which Gregor and Otto were to represent and champion later on, curing the ills brought resulting from

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<sup>8</sup>Michael Geismaier [pseud.], Gregor Strasser (Lipzig: P. Kettler, 1933), p. 11. Otto Strasser told the author that he had written this work.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

international, liberal capitalism by the introduction of a form of socialism at once nationalistic and Christian."<sup>10</sup> The essay contains views of Adam Smith, Adolf Wagner, and Friedrich List, and combined them with the elder Strasser's own ideas concerning Christian Socialism. Frau Strasser, however, did not share her husband's enthusiasm for politics and dissuaded him from future publication.<sup>11</sup>

The war destroyed the political structure under which Gregor Strasser had grown up, leaving unrest and indecision in its wake. Peace had not brought stability with it; on the contrary, post-war German politics was unsteady and explosive. Strasser and many of his countrymen smarted under the ruthless wording of the Treaty of Versailles, and felt that Germany had been betrayed. The treaty, they maintained, was a vindictive document designed to humiliate and ruin the Fatherland, and Strasser vowed to fight against it until it was destroyed.

Then, too, the Marxist coup which took place in Munich on November 7, 1918, caused Strasser much anxiety. Strasser and most other soldiers returning from the front hated the Marxists and would not tolerate a Red regime in Munich. His training made him sure that the only way to free Munich from the Communists was to fight them, and he could not very well

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 1

<sup>11</sup>Letter from Otto Strasser to the author, Munich, May 15, 1965. Also Michael Geismaier, p. 9.

fight alone. Moved to action, Strasser joined General von Epp's Free Corps, bent on the expulsion of the "traitors" from Bavaria.<sup>12</sup>

The struggle ousting the Communists from Munich was a bloody one. Kurt Eisner, the leader of the November revolution in Munich, was murdered in February, 1919. His place and regime were taken over by a Social Democratic government led by Johannes Hoffmann which lasted only until April 6th of the same year, when leftist groups proclaimed a Soviet Regime for Munich.<sup>13</sup> A combination of regular troops and the Free Corps rose up. On May 1, 1919 they combined with Noske's troops moving in from Berlin and managed to overthrow the "Republic of Traitors" before it had held office a month.<sup>14</sup> Hoffman's government was restored, but a great wave of suppression followed. The citizens of Munich and of all Bavaria were badly frightened and hoped to crush all possibility that the Red Regime would be allowed to return. Indeed, the events of May, 1919, revealed a decisive swing to the Right in Bavarian politics.<sup>15</sup>

The leftist Putsch in Munich left Strasser more sure than ever that the future of Germany had to lie with the rightist nationalist groups, not with

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<sup>12</sup>Bernard Strasser, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup>S. William Halperin, Germany Tried Democracy: A Political History of the Reich from 1918 to 1933 (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1965), p. 124.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid

any leftist political organizations. At the same time, he felt that the present government would indeed be hard pressed to provide for the necessities of the New Germany. It had no vigor, no direction, no organization. Strasser was seeking a political group potentially able to push Germany ahead, help her once again to take her rightful place among nations. A strong leader would be necessary for such a task, and after hearing Hitler's fiery orations, possibly at a political rally, Strasser was convinced that here was the man Germany needed. Thus it was that he pledged his future to the Nazi cause.<sup>16</sup>

Strasser himself was the kind of man Hitler could find very useful. His qualifications were excellent: an experienced army officer, a fighter in the Free Corps, a good organizer, and an ardent nationalist. He was just the man, then, to extend the Nazi organization outside of Munich. Strasser warmed to his task. In 1919 he founded in Landshut the National Association of German soldiers, a para-military group modeled after the general pattern of the Epp Free Corps.<sup>17</sup> (Later, Strasser was to take his organization as a body over into the ranks of the SA,<sup>18</sup> the military wing of the

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<sup>16</sup>The name National Socialist German Workers' Party was first used at a joint meeting of Bavarian and other national socialists in Salzburg in 1920. Hitler's group in Munich adopted the name shortly after the Salzburg meeting. Bullock, p. 42. The National Socialist German Workers' Party hereinafter referred to as NSDAP or Nazi.

<sup>17</sup>Bernard Strasser, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Storm Section or Storm Troop, hereinafter referred to as SA.

Nazi Party). Next, Strasser became the leader of a branch of the Association of German Soldiers which he called the Storm Battalion of Lower Bavaria.<sup>19</sup>

Through his association with this and other military groups, Strasser eventually came to know such important leaders as General Ludendorff, probably the most politically-oriented of German generals. No one is sure of just how the two men met. Otto Strasser writes that quite possibly they became acquainted during the May Day parade of 1920 in Munich or perhaps at the time of a review by Ludendorff of the para-military units of Bavaria held in Nuremberg in 1920.<sup>20</sup> Ludendorff supposedly asked each leader of the various patriotic organizations assembled there how many members he had under his command, in order to ascertain just how many men he, himself, as unofficial "protector" of the Bavarian para-military organizations, could count on. "As usual, all indulged in impressive numbers: 10,000, 8,000, 12,000 . . . Then it was Gregor's turn. 'How many men have you, Strasser?' asked the Field Marshall. Gregor replied modestly, 'Nine hundred fifty.' 'So few?' exclaimed Ludendorff. 'yes, Your Excellency,' rejoined Gregor, 'but these represent real, live men . . . not just fancy numbers.' 'The same old story!' murmured Ludendorff."<sup>21</sup> Strasser

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<sup>19</sup>Bernard Strasser, p. 3. See also Ernst Deuerlein, Bayrische Dokumente zum 8./9. November 1923 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1962), p. 620.

<sup>20</sup>Letter from Otto Strasser to the author. Munich, May 15, 1965.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

had great respect for Ludendorff and later worked very closely with him.

Along with his military activities, Strasser branched out into politics with such ability that Hitler scrutinized his political work as closely as he did his organization of the military forces in Landshut. By May, 1921, Strasser had succeeded in bringing all of the small groups of National Socialists in Bavaria together to form the Gau Lower Bavaria.<sup>22</sup> As might be expected, the Gauleiter came to be Strasser himself. Strasser and his group became integral parts of the still very small but now expanding Nazi machine. He enjoyed the feeling of being in on the ground floor of party organization outside Munich.<sup>23</sup>

The SA, which Strasser's National Association of German Soldiers was to join, had a short but active history. It grew out of strong-arm squads organized during the summer of 1920 and later converted into a Gymnastic and Sports Division for the party. Finally, in the fall of 1921, the group decided to call itself the Sturmabteilung. Most of the members were former Free-Corps men who were tired of languishing as civilians and hoped that the

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<sup>22</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 18. Gau, the old German term referring to administrative district or province. The term was revived by the National Socialists and used to refer to the geographic divisions of the party. See also Edgar Schmidt-Pauli, Die Männer um Hitler (Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1932), p. 118.

<sup>23</sup>According to Hans Volz, Daten der Geschichte der NSDAP (Berlin, Leipzig: Verlag A. G. Ploetz, 1935), p. 3, Rosenheim was the first group organized outside of Munich.



SA could provide some action. After its organization, Strasser became a member and was soon head of the group in the Landshut area, a position he held from January, 1922, to November, 1923.<sup>24</sup>

As a whole, the troops under Strasser's command formed an elite group. His Storm Battalion consisted of 650 enlisted men and twenty-three officers. Eleven of these men had received gold and silver medals for bravery during the First World War, and thirty of them had been awarded the Iron Cross First Class.<sup>25</sup> These 673 men formed a personal army which former Lieutenant Strasser loyally placed at Hitler's disposal, should he ever have need of it. Hitler oversaw the political activities of the party, while General Ludendorff informally commanded the NSDAP's military functions. Strasser's services to both were to be valuable. Because of his previous military experiences, his training, and his unique ability to organize, he was eminently qualified for his roles as commander of the Storm Battalion and later SA leader for Lower Bavaria.

Strasser's men saw their first military activity as supporters of Adolf Hitler on May 1, 1923, at the Oberwiesenfeld, a mammoth drill field in Munich. A rally planned by the Social Democrats had been scheduled to take place that day, and Hitler felt that he must stop it or at least protest against it. Thousands of SA men met at the Oberwiesenfeld fully equipped

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<sup>24</sup>Schmidt-Pauli, p. 118.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

with weapons and prepared to march against the Social Democrats' rally. The police, however, were ready for trouble and with some members of the Reichswehr they surrounded the SA men and persuaded them to give up their weapons.<sup>26</sup> What Hitler had hoped would have been a rousing demonstration against the Social Democrats and perhaps even the beginning of a nationalist revolution simply fizzled out. Instead of breaking up the rally as they had planned, Hitler's men had themselves been humiliated.

Despite this fiasco, Hitler had learned that he had an invaluable supporter in Strasser. Strasser and his men had answered Hitler's call; Hitler knew he could count on their loyalty in future operations, too. Hitler was never one to be idle, especially during the formative years of his movement. So, still smarting from the Oberwiesefeld defeat, he began to plan a full scale Putsch against the Bavarian Government. This came to be the famous Beer Hall Putsch of November 8-9, 1923, and, just as Hitler had hoped, Strasser and his troops rallied to the summons of their Führer.

Strasser received a telegram on November 7, 1923, from the party leaders summoning him to Munich.<sup>27</sup> He left Landshut immediately, and upon arriving in Munich he went directly to Schellingstrasse 39, headquarters of the NSDAP. Here he received orders to bring 150 men from Landshut to

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<sup>26</sup>Hans Hubert Hofmann, Der Hitlerputsch: Kriesen Jahre deutscher Geschichte 1920-1924 (München: Nymphenburger Verlaganstalt, 1961), p. 26. See also Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 46.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

the small town of Freising, a suburb of Munich.<sup>28</sup> The troops were to be in Freising on Thursday, November 8, to protect a National Socialist meeting from any possible disturbance. Strasser did as he was commanded and took his 150 armed men to Freising on the appointed day. There he waited in vain for the arrival of Hitler and for the meeting which was supposed to take place.

Near midnight, a courier arrived from Munich with a message from Hitler stating that the government of Bavaria had collapsed and that a dictatorship had been proclaimed. The courier ordered Strasser and his men to go immediately to Munich for further instructions. So strasser loaded his troops into trucks and drove into the city proper. At 6:00 a. m. on November 9, Strasser arrived at the " " Burgerbrau Keller, the temporary headquarters of the Putschists.<sup>29</sup> He was ordered to take his men to posts occupying the Wittelsbach bridge, one of the major spans across Munich's Isar River. Hitler crossed the Isar at this point on his flight to Rosenheim after his rebels had been dispersed by government troops at Odeonsplatz in the center of Munich. After Strasser's men realized that the Putsch had failed they too tried to escape to Rosenheim, but their way was blocked by police barriers. Government troops stripped them of their weapons, but finally allowed

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<sup>28</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 51, states that the number of Strasser's men from Landshut was 350.

<sup>29</sup>NSDAP Hauptarchiv, Roll 5, Folder 114, Documents 16-17. Hereinafter referred to as Hauptarchiv. See also Hans Hubert Hofman, p. 148.

Strasser to return to Landshut with his men.<sup>30</sup>

Again they had met disaster. This double failure must have occupied Strasser's thoughts as he traveled with his men from Munich to Landshut after the Putsch had failed. He must have been greatly concerned for Hitler and the other leaders of the party, but he wondered too about his position in the party apparatus. Questions of the future were undoubtedly uppermost in his mind. What was to happen now?

The reports concerning Strasser's position immediately after the abortive Putsch vary somewhat. Otto Strasser maintains that Gregor was arrested and sent to the Landsberg Prison the day after the Putsch took place.<sup>31</sup> Ernst Deuerlein, on the other hand, states that Gregor was not actually arrested until February of 1924, and then was not arrested for his participation in the uprising, but for trying to recruit a member of the local Landshut police force to serve the Nazi party as a courier. Only then, says Deuerlein, did Strasser go to prison.<sup>32</sup> Within two months he would be followed by his Führer.

Strasser's role in the Putsch was not considered of major significance. He was not yet important enough to be included in the famous Hitler

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<sup>30</sup>Hofmann, p. 148. See also Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 57.

<sup>31</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup>Deuerlein, p. 626.

trial which opened in Munich on February 16, 1924. Instead, he and other minor participants were charged with treason in a separate trial opening in March, 1924.<sup>33</sup> At his trial Strasser testified that he was convinced that the Putsch in Munich was simply the beginning of the "National Revolution" which was to sweep all Germany.<sup>34</sup> He stressed that he believed the uprising was to be carried out in cooperation with, not against, the Reichswehr. When asked whether he was convinced that the Munich uprising would have spread to Berlin, Strasser answered, "Of course."<sup>35</sup>

The prospect of a prison sentence which would cut short his political career was a difficult one for Strasser to face. His depression lifted somewhat when he discovered that he would be in the company of such Nazi celebrities as Julius Streicher, the future Gauleiter of Nürnberg, and Rudolf Hess, a man destined to become Hitler's deputy and cause great turmoil within the party after his quixotic flight to England during World War II. Max Amann, future business manager of the Völkischer Beobachter and the party publishing house, and Edmund Heines, notorious homosexual and confidant of Ernst Röhm, were also sentenced with Strasser and the others.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Volz, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup>Photocopy of Strasser's testimony at his trial March 4, 1924, p. 898. Institut für Zeitgeschichte document collection. MA-212/1.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Volz, p. 10.

Strasser's prison term was to be fourteen months in the Landsberg prison, and other Nazi leaders of the Putsch received similar sentences.

But Strasser was fortunate. Not many men can manage to be elected to office while serving prison terms. Fewer still would be released from prison to take up the new post. Strasser, however, accomplished just that. On April 6, 1924, he was elected a member of the Bavarian Landtag as a representative of the Völkisch<sup>37</sup> bloc of Bavaria, a political group formed by National Socialists joining the ranks of the Deutschvölkische on January 7, 1924, in Bamberg.<sup>38</sup> Actually he only served a small part of his prison sentence, for as a result of the elections he was released to take office.

The election itself was unusual. Because the NSDAP was outlawed after the failure of the November Putsch, many Nazis went over to one or another of the various Völkisch groups. The Völkisch bloc of Bavaria received approximately 100,000 votes in this particular election, which indicated that many of the leaderless Nazis were now voting for Völkisch candidates.<sup>39</sup> In fact, many of the candidates themselves were former members of the NSDAP. The net result of the election was an increase of

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<sup>37</sup>Völkisch according to Bullock, p. 94 is "A difficult word to translate: it combines the idea of nationalism with those of race (the Volk) and anti-Semitism. The Völkisch groups constituted an extremist wing of the German Nationalists of whose middle-class 'moderation' they were often critical."

<sup>38</sup>Volz, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup>Walter M. Espe, Das Buch der NSDAP (Berlin: G. Schönfeld's Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933), p. 217.

twenty-seven seats<sup>40</sup> for the Nazis, a gain which materialized despite Hitler's opposition to having his followers sit in any parliament at all, or even participate in the elections.<sup>41</sup> Hitler felt that Parliamentary democracy reduced government to nothing more than political jobbery, "it puts a premium on mediocrity and is inimical to leadership, encourages the avoidance of responsibility and sacrifices decisions to party compromises. 'The majority represents not only ignorance but cowardice . . . The majority can never replace the man."<sup>42</sup> And even if Hitler had allowed his followers to hold a mandate in a Parliament at this time he would not have authorized them to campaign while he sat in prison unable to control the campaign, and to guide it along the lines he wished it to follow.

All this was a timely victory for Strasser personally. To step directly from prison into a seat in the Bavarian Landtag was no mean accomplishment. To do it when Hitler himself was still in prison was a political miracle so far as Strasser's own future career was concerned. He had not planned events that way, but he was not a man to refuse opportunity. His election to the Bavarian Parliament had freed him to go unhindered about his work.

Hitler's career, unlike Strasser's, reached a low ebb after the

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<sup>40</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 65.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Bullock, p. 18.

Putsch. His arrest, conviction, and ultimate imprisonment produced grave crises within the Nazi ranks. Hitler was now powerless, and the entire party leadership had been scattered. Some, like Hitler, were arrested and imprisoned until they could be brought to trial for treason. Nazi officials such as Pöhner, Röhm, Weber, Frick, Brückner, Wagner, Drexler, and Eckart were all incarcerated at Landsberg, Neudeck, and Stadelheim prisons. Others had left the country to escape the same fate. Göring, who had been severely wounded during the Putsch, was whisked across the border into Austria and later found refuge in Sweden. Rossbach, Gottfried Feder, Hermann Esser, and Berchtold had also gone into exile rather than face arrest and possible imprisonment. Only General Ludendorff was allowed to go free after the Putsch, and only because he gave his word as a Prussian officer that he would not leave Germany prior to his trial.<sup>43</sup>

The disintegration of organized leadership was calamity enough for the Party to endure. But equally serious was the action taken by the Reich government and especially General von Seeckt, the German Commander-in-Chief. Seeckt received his authority to deal with the Putsch in Munich through President Ebert's action on September 26, 1923, invoking Clause 48 of the Weimar Constitution and conferring emergency powers upon the Minister of Defence, Gessler, and Seeckt, Commander-in-Chief. They

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<sup>43</sup>Volz, p. 9.



retained these powers until February, 1924, when the state of emergency ended. During this period the Army assumed the executive functions of the government and safeguarded both the Reich and the Republican Constitution.<sup>44</sup> First, they outlawed the NSDAP altogether and then dissolved the SA. Finally, they forbade the printing of the Völkischer Beobachter, the primary Party publication.<sup>45</sup> All three moves were devastating blows to the Nazi fortunes. With Party leaders scattered or imprisoned, and the party itself outlawed, the Reich government must have felt that the Nazis could no longer offer any resistance to the State. It was wrong. For a time the National Socialists stumbled about in chaos. But it was not to be too long before the party members began to regroup their forces and to rise again in a movement of dynamic political significance.

After the failure of the Putsch in November and the subsequent outlawing of the Party, Hitler realized that his own position was extremely weak. However, being the master of propaganda that he was, he decided to make the most of his trial for treason. Here he proved his genius. His able defense actually aroused favorable sentiment and publicity all over Germany. Moreover, sympathetic judges—although they found him guilty of treason—gave him the relatively light sentence of only five years.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>44</sup>Bullock, p. 75.

<sup>45</sup>Volz, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

verdict proclaiming his guilt was read on April 1, 1924, and on the same day Hitler was transferred back to the Landsberg prison to begin serving his term.

With the outlawing of the Party and the imprisonment of the Führer, one of the most complex and fascinating periods in the entire history of the NSDAP began. This was the period known as the Verbotzeit (time of prohibition), lasting approximately from November, 1923, to February, 1925, when the National Socialists reorganized. For the Party, this was a time of confusion, compounded by the hurried and uncertain organization of splinter groups trying to replace the original NSDAP. Crushed by the loss of their leaders and by von Seeckt's harsh edicts, Hitler's followers split into two main factions. One, led by the party philosopher Alfred Rosenberg, called itself the Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft (People's Great German Association). It purported to be a direct continuation of the outlawed NSDAP, but soon fell under the domination of Hermann Esser and the notorious Jew-baiter, Julius Streicher.<sup>47</sup>

The other important splinter group was the Völkischer Block (People's Bloc). It too claimed to be the successor to Hitler's party, but began strictly as a local organization of Bavarian National Socialists. Soon, however, it began to branch out on a national basis, which threw it into direct opposition to the Rosenberg-Streicher group. The importance of

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

the Völkischer Block moved sharply into focus on January 7, 1924, when the Bavarian Nazis united with the Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei (People's German Freedom Party), whose membership included many former Nazis.<sup>48</sup>

At first it had seemed that the Verbotzeit would mean an irreparable defeat for the Nazis. Fruitful political activity could hardly flourish in such an atmosphere of oppression. But now Strasser, along with other members of the outlawed Party, began to see glimmerings of a hopeful future in the general Völkisch movement. They were elated by the resounding success of the movement in the Bavarian Landtag elections of April, 1924. Strasser and twenty-two others from the Völkisch group gained seats in the Landtag<sup>49</sup>—even though, all during the election, Strasser was serving his time in prison. The only plausible explanation for this sudden surge of confidence was Hitler's shrewd, much-publicized defense at his trial, and the favorable impression it created on those Bavarians who, even though they were not Nazis, definitely followed Völkisch ideals.<sup>50</sup> Gregor Strasser's election to the Bavarian parliament released him from the Landsberg Prison before he had completed his sentence. This fortunate circumstance, coupled with his general ability and experience as a political leader and as chief of a small military group, catapulted him into a position of eminence

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

in the Völkisch movement, and soon after his election the ambitious Strasser emerged as leader of the entire bloc of Völkisch representatives.

The new combination of National Socialist and Völkisch appeared to be functioning well; in national elections for the Reichstag a month later (May 4, 1924), their combined list received thirty-two seats out of a possible 472—and this meant a total of 1,924,000 German votes.<sup>51</sup> Three National Socialists, Ernst Röhm, Gottfried Feder, and Wilhelm Frick, were among those elected to the Reichstag. Indeed, although von Seeckt had outlawed the NSDAP as a party, he had not been able to halt the individual successes of some of its members. The showing did appear small when compared with Germany as a whole, but it was still a showing, and it proved to many Nazis that their movement still retained life and a measure of power.

The leaders of the united bloc were General Ludendorff and Albrecht von Graefe, the latter a gentleman farmer who had been prominent in Völkisch circles in Northern Germany. Wishing to create the illusion that they also had Hitler's sanction and support for their activities, they used \_\_\_\_\_ his name along with theirs on many orders issued during this early period. For instance, when Graefe and Ludendorff published a plea for unified action from all members of both political groups, Hitler's signature was published with it. The announcement, dated May 25, 1924, appeared in the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

Frankfurter Zeitung, one of Germany's most influential newspapers.<sup>52</sup> It asked the Völkisch group and the former Nazis to work together and present a united front.

The new bloc made its first political move of real consequence on June 12, 1924. A new Party organ was being printed to take the place of the abolished Nazi newspaper, and on this date party leaders announced in the Völkischer-Kurier that those in charge of the outlawed NSDAP—members of the Bavarian Völkischer Bloc and the Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei—had taken place on May 26, 1924, said the Kurier, and those attending had agreed to unite their groups for greater effectiveness in coming elections. Furthermore, the leaders announced that the new unified party was to be designated the Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei (National Socialist Freedom Party).<sup>53</sup> This union of former Nazis and North German members of the Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei proved extremely annoying to the Rosenberg-Streicher group, who themselves were battling for ascendancy.

It was Gregor Strasser rather than Hitler who—along with Ludendorff—could be called the real representative of the NSDAP in the National Socialist Freedom Party.<sup>54</sup> As Strasser's prestige grew, he became closely

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<sup>52</sup>Hauptarchiv, Roll 69, Folder 1504, Document 7.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., Document 4. Nationalsozialistische Freiheitspartei. Hereinafter referred to as NSFP or Freedom Party.

<sup>54</sup>Hitler withdrew from active politics and thereby left his position as a member of the leadership of the NSFP open. Strasser then took his place. Werner Jochmann, Nationalsozialismus und Revolution: Ursprung

associated with the group's activities as a whole. The bloc agreed to let the combined forces of Ludendorff, Graefe, and Strasser cooperate on major issues, but each organization wished to retain its independence, and proclaimed that on policies not pertaining specifically to elections each could continue to follow its own separate course.<sup>55</sup>

One of the most important of the many organizational and propaganda conferences the group held was a meeting in Weimar on July 20, 1924. At this meeting the Nazi members of the new organization recognized the demise of the old NSDAP the party which Hitler had originally created.<sup>56</sup> Prominent among the eighty representatives present was Gregor Strasser, who in fact conducted most of the sessions. Alfred Rosenberg and several members of the early Nazi organization in Northern Germany (the North-West German Directory of the NSDAP) were also present; notably Adalbert Volck, Reinhard Sunckel, and Ludwig Haase. This triumvirate had dominated Nazi activities in Northern Germany until the November Putsch and the subsequent Verbotzeit. The Weimar meeting was also attended by Dr. Römer, Hitler's representative in Berlin; Ludendorff, Streicher; Esser; Schlange, a prominent North German Nazi; Mücke, the official Nazi representative in

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und Geschichte der NSDAP in Hamburg 1922-1933 (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963), p. 78. Hereinafter referred to as Jochmann.

<sup>55</sup>Jochmann, Document 9, "Staatliche Pressestelle Hamburg: Mitteilung über die Verhaftung des nationalsozialistischen Ortsgruppenleiters Klant," p. 47.

<sup>56</sup>Jochmann, Document 30, "Dr. Adalbert Volck: Verthraulicher Bericht über die nationalsozialistische Vertretertagung in Weimar am. 20. Juli 1924," p. 98.

East Saxony; Kellerman, who occupied the same position in Bremen; and Klotz, Hitler's representative for the state of Baden.<sup>57</sup> Yet of them all Gregor Strasser's light seemed to shine most brightly. It was obvious that he was the top NSDAP man in the Nationalist Socialist Freedom Party, and along with Ludendorff and Graefe the most forceful power with which its general membership would have to reckon.

One of the main purposes of the Weimar meeting was to draw up some sort of uniform program for the new bloc to follow. Without an organized plan of action, this rather shaky union could easily become unglued and splinter off again into quarreling factions. Most of the delegates recognized this potential danger, and hoped that Ludendorff's presence would lend an air of dignity and impart cohesion to the proceedings. The admiration and deference rendered him by most Germans might encourage closer cooperation among the various divisions of the outlawed NSDAP, some of which fought each other bitterly. Ludendorff insisted publicly on the unification of all National Socialists with the Freedom Party and their submission and obedience to it, and to its bloc of representatives in the Reichstag.<sup>58</sup>

This announcement was not greeted favorably by everyone. Dr. Adalbert Volck, attending the Weimar meeting in his official capacity as

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 98-99.

chairman of the Directory of the Northwest German National Socialists (party members located in Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, East Hanover, South Hanover, Bremen, and Westphalia), politely refused to go along with Ludendorff's proposal.<sup>59</sup> Although he had the greatest respect for the General, he said, he considered the Directory—with himself as chairman—the trustee for Hitler and the Nazi movement in Northern Germany.<sup>60</sup> Further, the Directory would continue in its position as trustee until such time as Hitler would be freed from the Landsberg prison and could personally resume his leadership. The Nazi movement would come into its own again. In the meantime, in accordance with Hitler's wishes, the members of the Directory would have to refuse to participate in any parliamentary elections. Therefore, Volck stated, he and those members of the party within the areas represented by the Directory must refuse any unification with the Freedom Party.<sup>61</sup>

Others in attendance were not so polite. After a great deal of debate—which very often degenerated into name-calling—the delegates tried a final proposal. Each person present would declare whether he was, or was not, willing to unite with the Freedom Party; and further, whether he

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid. , p. 101.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.



would, or would not, recognize the combined leadership of Graefe and Ludendorff. It was a crucial moment. This proposed "vote of confidence" might have brought the new political organization to an end, invalidating all the months of working for unity. Fortunately for the future of the Freiheitspartei most of the delegates answered in the affirmative. Volck, however, cast a negative vote for himself and for the members of the Directory, as did two or three others, thereby preventing the hoped-for unification of the groups which supported and supposedly succeeded Adolf Hitler.<sup>62</sup> And although Volck declined to fight in public, his action indicated a clearly-defined breach between the members of the Directory and the Freedom Party.

Despite this disappointment at the Weimar meeting, the Freedom Party went ahead. On October 27, 1924, some of the first official information concerning the formation of the Party and what had taken place in Weimar appeared in the Völkischer-Kurier. A signed statement by Ludendorff, Strasser, and Graefe gave this version of the events which had occurred:

In complete consciousness of our responsibility toward the movement and our Adolf Hitler, we declare . . . that the unanimously proposed unification of the organizations and supporters of the existing National Socialist and Völkisch philosophy, at the meeting in Weimar in August—which has already become a fact in many provincial groups—finally has been completed under the name: Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

Grossdeutschlands (National Socialist Freedom Movement of Greater Germany).

We request all already existing organizations of our movement and all followers to join under this name and to submit to the Reichsführerschaft (National Leadership) and to the provincial and Gau leadership selected by it.

(signed) Ludendorff, Gregor Strasser, v. Graefe<sup>63</sup>

It is significant that by the time this statement was issued, in October of 1924, Strasser was recognized as a national leader in the Freedom Party, while Dr. Adalbert Volck had doomed himself to political oblivion. Strasser's position of importance was clearly announced in the October 28, 1924, issue of the Völkischer-Kurier, in an article reporting the decisions that the representatives of the Völkischer Bloc had set in a Munich meeting: "The Völkisch movement in Bavaria is united in one organization under the name 'Der Völkische Block, Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung Grossdeutschlands (Landesverband Bayern) (The Völkisch Bloc, National Socialist Freedom Movement of Greater Germany, Section of Bavaria)'". This organization recognizes the national leadership of Ludendorff, Strasser, von Graefe."<sup>64</sup> By then, Strasser was not only one of the top three officials in the Freedom Party, but he also headed the movement for Bavaria, signing its directives and announcements and conducting official meetings.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Hauptarchiv. Roll 69, Folder 1504, Document 46.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., Document 14.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., Document 17.

People like Volck, however, had wondered how Strasser could maintain allegiance to Hitler and yet follow the course he was taking. Speaking at a meeting on October 26, 1924, held in the Hofbräuhaus in Munich, Strasser explained his position toward Hitler and gave his reasons for becoming part of the national leadership of the Freedom Party. Because Hitler had not been released from prison on the first of October, 1924—as Strasser claimed he had expected—the movement obviously had to make decisions and continue to function independently of the Führer.<sup>66</sup> For an indefinite period, it seemed now, Hitler would be unable to act. Strasser went on to emphasize the importance of unified action between the Völkisch and the National Socialist movements in the coming elections. The group stood behind him. The Völkisch bloc in the Landtag had recognized the national leadership of the Freedom Party, and agreed to the unification of all Völkisch organizations in the National Socialist Freedom Party after October 1, 1924.

Strasser, therefore, proposed that the Völkisch bloc accept its incorporation into the national organization of the Freedom Party and place itself under the national leadership of that party without restriction or reservation. He noted, further, during the Munich meeting, that no other Völkisch movements would be recognized in Bavaria.<sup>67</sup> Naturally, this

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid. ; Document 19.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

step would increase Strasser's political power immensely. Thus, far from ending his political career, the failure of the Hitler Putsch of 1923 had forced him into the highest ranks of party prominence.

The actual program of the National Socialist Freedom Party, announced in the Reichstag by its leaders as early as May 26, 1924, presents a strange conglomeration of Völkisch and National Socialist ideology. The new party was concerned with every aspect of human endeavor, dedicating itself to what it termed "the welfare of the entire Volk."<sup>68</sup> Although this ideal necessarily branched out into many areas, its political purpose was centered on one goal: to win absolute power in both domestic and foreign affairs—no small undertaking. Understandably, the movement was pledged to the extinction of "parliamentarianism," or at least to the destruction of that variety of parliamentary government which, it felt, suffered from the domination of Jews. The leaders of the Freedom Party agreed that there could be no possibility of salvation for the state emanating from the Reichstag nor from any of the parties in the Reichstag, if allowed to operate unchecked, could possibly destroy the Völkisch movement or, worse still, the entire Volkstum.<sup>69</sup> To prevent such a catastrophe, Ludendorff, Strasser, and von Graefe urged their followers to participate actively in all elections.

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<sup>68</sup>Volk is used here to refer to the entire Germanic peoples.

<sup>69</sup>Volkstum, the body of Germanic culture.

They felt that they would better achieve their aims by undermining the government from within than by remaining aloof from the elections, as Hitler had suggested. Specifically, they wished to destroy the Dawes plan, feeling that it would cause the economic enslavement of the German people. Then too, they hoped that any support given the Freedom Party would insure its preservation against the extremist elements, by which they probably meant any group who did not actively support it, and who, they felt, were attempting to destroy it.<sup>70</sup>

To v. Graefe, Ludendorff, and Strasser the Freedom Party represented much more than just another political organization. It became practically a weird religious cult, at least so its program would indicate. They tied many of their goals so inextricably to the very nebulous term "Deutschtum"—the totality of the German country and people—that for them the Party did assume all the emotional intensity of a religion. The Freedom Party, they argued, would never countenance any opposition to organized religion, and if such opposition developed then it would have to be artificially created, and to this they were opposed. In the program v. Graefe, Ludendorff, and Strasser stated, "We rest on the foundation of . . . Christian philosophy and demand a life in accordance with it, and for this reason we

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<sup>70</sup>Rüstzeug der Nationalsozialistischen Freiheitsbewegung Grossdeutschlands (Berlin-Lichterfelde-West: Arbeitszentrale für völkische Aufklärung, 1924), pp. 2-3. Hereinafter referred to as Rüstzeug.

also decidedly reject the use of religion for political purposes."<sup>71</sup>

Although there was to be no conflict between religion and what they termed "Deutschtum," these three leaders of the Freedom Party clearly did not feel that organized religion had a right to meddle in politics.<sup>72</sup>

The new program stated that every German had definite obligations toward his countrymen, with special emphasis on each man's responsibility to his own children, for he had, after all, given them life. The physical and spiritual development of future generations should be one of the most important concerns for every German. Germany would, as everyone knew, be only as strong and healthy as its citizens. Such a belief led to the definitive current of almost Puritan temperance running through the Freedom Party's ideology. For a Bavarian to advocate temperance seems highly unlikely—especially if beer were frowned on—but Strasser stood firmly behind this resolution. The leaders did not stop at condemning alcohol. They launched a campaign against sexual immorality and demanded further that all members of the movement recognize the sanctity of "moral marriage," i.e., marriage legally constituted between "healthy" persons.<sup>73</sup> (One sees here a foretaste of the philosophy of eugenics, practiced later during the Third Reich). Women were to occupy a position equal to that of men in all

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

party functions. Furthermore, it was not only the right of women, but also their duty, to participate fully in every aspect of the Völkisch way of life.<sup>74</sup>

Just as each of its component parts had done prior to its establishment, the Freedom Party also promulgated a decided racist philosophy. It stressed the importance of marriage, and the attempt to retain the "purity" of the German people prompted the leaders of the new organization to reject what they termed "the mixing of German blood with foreign races and with foreign-blooded people." In fact, Germans by blood were the only ones who could be called Germans at all, and these were to provide the foundation for the future German race of world leaders.<sup>75</sup> Jews, of course, were "foreign-blooded," and had no place in Germany's plans for the future. Anti-semitism was not new to Germany, nor to either the Nazi or the Völkisch groups who made up the Freedom Party. The leaders frowned on any association whatsoever with Jews.

Jews, according to the program, were responsible for the economic problems which were now besetting Germany. In foreign affairs it was the Jews who were trying to keep Germany from once again becoming a great power. The battle against German as well as international Jewry was to be fought like a crusade and could not be limited to public life. The crusade

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

was, in fact, a Kulturkampf. "We must finally understand that Jewry is not a religion but a racially cultivated people. The Jews are an inferior race and have as their religion the Talmudic laws and teachings, whose object is the permeation, destruction, and domination of the people of the world."<sup>76</sup> The power of the Jews must be destroyed, no matter what the price might be.

The program, as outlined, also devoted a large section to the subject of education. The leaders felt that the primary duty of their new organization was to preserve the sanctity and completeness of the German Volkstum. Education, according to the party, should have as its primary goal the bringing of the younger generations to a fuller consciousness of their Germanic culture and its philosophy. But such a task was impossible to fulfill in any of the existing democratic Gemeinschaft schools, much less the confessional schools. Therefore, special schools should be established to prepare the youth in Völkisch social ideology." They would teach Germanic culture in its entirety, and only those teachers best steeped in Völkisch ideals would be permitted to teach at all. The new educational system, said the program, was to be for the benefit of all German children except Jews. The Jews were responsible for their own welfare, and the Freedom Party stated clearly that no public funds could nor would be expended for the purpose of

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid. , pp. 22-23.



educating Jews.<sup>77</sup>

The program then switches from education to economics, and one sees that here too the Freedom Party had much to say. It proclaimed that according to the philosophy of the new movement the underlying principle of all economic life should be this: human society was to be founded on the guarantee of individual rights and property—a surprisingly liberal statement. Marxism and its offshoots, especially that branch called "Communist Bolshevism," would lead only to the destruction of business. Just as potent a destructive force would be high finance in the rampant capitalist sense. Such a variety of capitalism would cause an overlordship of concentrated wealth, and for the majority of Germans that would mean nothing but eventual slavery. National Socialism, with the Freedom Party as its successor, would set itself as a bulwark against both of these systems. (The program did not elaborate on how this objective was to be accomplished). The party would recognize the existence of private property and would stand behind the free farmers—those who owned their own land. Furthermore, it would support the free craftsman and the independent tradesman.<sup>78</sup> One can see that the party program was aimed at winning over the substantial middle- and lower-middle classes by offering them its support and by attacking their prime enemies: the big-business capitalists, and the communists.

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<sup>77</sup>ibid., p. 8.

<sup>78</sup>ibid., pp. 11-12.

Because of Germany's disastrous inflation of 1923, the Freedom Party demanded, as one of the main planks in its program, the immediate nationalization of all banking and credit facilities. Since these institutions would then be brought directly under the control of the state, they would be relatively free from abuse. A second step toward economic stability, with prosperity to come later, would be the forbidding of existing loan agencies or other lending facilities the proceeds to be used for the financing of public works. The leaders of the Freedom Party realized that something must be organized to take the place of the loan agencies, so they advocated the establishment of socialized banks, which would be used particularly for construction projects and for business schemes of a temporary nature.<sup>79</sup>

Concerning social questions, the program also proclaimed the ideas of the national leadership, which were supposed to prevent any dissatisfaction among the workers. Business exists for the people, said the program, and not the people for business. The very best capital any state could have was a "healthy, happy, productive man," and in order to keep this hypothetical man healthy, happy, and productive, a scheme of unemployment compensation and social insurance would be necessary. For his benefit too, the working day would be limited by law to no more than eight hours. And finally, the program set forth a plan quite in keeping with the best of socialist

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<sup>79</sup>ibid., pp. 12-13.

doctrine: the worker would share in all profits realized by any particular business, and he would also share in the ownership of the work itself whenever the nature of the business permitted.<sup>80</sup>

Switching from economic and social questions, the program for the Freedom Party then concerned itself with a question of top priority: foreign affairs. First above all other aspects of foreign policy, the program advocated the establishment of an independent "pan" (whole) Germany, with its rights to independence recognized by all other peoples and nations. Not only was this the main tenet of the section on foreign policy, it also underlay nearly every other consideration. And, like all nationalist parties in Germany at this time, the Freedom Party urged the negation of the Treaty of Versailles and swore to destroy the Dawes plan. The party's national leadership stated that "All foreign policy springs from the question of self-interest, and all claims to world conscience, humanity, culture, internationality, and civilization are secondary." This was probably as clear a statement of Realpolitik as one could find in the programs of the German political parties.

Since the organization believed that all national powers were, unfortunately, dominated by world capitalism, the National Socialist foreign policy would have to be every bit as anti-capitalistic as its domestic policy. A Völkisch foreign policy could never become doctrinaire, but should be

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

free to use every means available to achieve its purposes, striving to be an active rather than a passive policy, one existing as an entity complete within itself. Because the League of Nations was a part of the Treaty of Versailles, the Freedom Party felt that joining it would constitute a new acceptance of the treaty's validity, and so refused to recognize the League.<sup>81</sup>

Soon after the elections of May, 1924, Freedom Party deputies made certain demands in the Reichstag which reveal some of the basic philosophy underlying the party's program. They first proposed a vote of no confidence raised against the national government. But since their bloc represented so few votes in the Reichstag, no one saw their proposals as much of a threat. A second demand proved to be much more surprising. The deputies asked for the immediate election of a constitutional national president. The fact that a group of former Nazis, men imbued with the Völkisch doctrine, would even agree to the election of a president bound by the Weimar Constitution, and go on to advocate it as a basic part of their program, was difficult to believe. The Weimar Constitution did state that the president of Germany was to be elected by the whole German people. But the details remained vague. The constitution left everything to a national law, largely because the Constituent Assembly could reach no agreement. A national law of May 4,

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-21. The rest of the program deals with the relationship of the Freiheitspartei to other parties. See pp. 23-26 and 26-30. See also Hauptarchiv Reel 69, Folder 1504, Document 5.

1920, had adopted a plan for the election of the president, but it was not put into effect.

This proposal was an attack on federal President Friedrich Ebert, who had been selected as the president of Germany by the Constituent Assembly in 1919, and was re-elected by the Reichstag for a three-year term on October 22, 1922.<sup>82</sup> The Reichstag vote was 314 for, 76 against, 1 abstention. (This had not been a popular election, as later presidential elections were). The Völkisch and National Socialist groups never missed an opportunity to vilify Ebert, whom they hated as one of the very worst of the "November criminals."

The deputies of the Freedom Party also demanded the lifting of the Decree for the protection of the Republic resulting from Chancellor Wirth's proposal which President Ebert had put into effect under Article 48 of the Constitution upon the assassination of Walther Rathenau.<sup>83</sup> The decree included penalties for anyone who glorified, encouraged, or approved acts of open violence against the republican form of government or the members of a republican regime. The decree empowered the governments of the various German Länder (states) to forbid public meetings if fear of their revolutionary nature seemed justified. Of course this was an infringement

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<sup>82</sup>Erich Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic trans. by Harlan P. Hanson and Robert G. L. Waite, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1962), pp. 225-26.

<sup>83</sup>Hauptarchiv, Reel 69, Folder 1504, Document 5.

on the freedom of assembly and could be invoked at any time to limit or curtail the activities of the Freedom Party.

Among their other demands was a request for amnesty for certain prisoners, and although no names were mentioned, the reference was undoubtedly to Hitler and his followers, who were still imprisoned. They advocated the lifting of the ban on certain political organizations—meaning the NSDAP. Then too there were certain general demands made by the deputies of the Freedom Party in the Reichstag. They demanded the trial for treason of all those who had helped to bring on the collapse of 1918 and also of anyone who had cooperated with Soviet Russia during the same period—referring, of course, to those who established the Soviet in Munich at the end of World War I. The anti-semitic feeling of the Freedom Party was apparent in the demand that all Jews who had immigrated to Germany after 1914 be expelled from the country, and further that the government write special legislation which would pertain only to the Jewish people. Although the deputies of the Freedom Party proclaimed their views as loudly as possible, they won little acclaim in the Reichstag.<sup>84</sup> Still in helping to draw up the Party program Gregor Strasser received some extremely valuable experience which was to assist him later in his career. Not only was he able to express many of his own views in this program, but he was able

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

to incorporate them with those of v. Graefe and Ludendorff in an attempt to appeal to the greatest number of people. While the program of the Freedom Party is not exactly the same as the one which Strasser and Goebbels worked out for the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Northwest, it did provide Strasser with his first opportunity to show his talent as a political theoritician as well as strictly a party organizer.

During Gregor Strasser's association with the Freedom Party he traveled constantly throughout Bavaria and into other areas of Germany, organizing branches of the Party and spreading its propaganda wherever he went. As the Landesführer of Bavaria, member of the Bavarian Landtag, and one of the movement's three national leaders, he was in great demand as a speaker at Party meetings, and he spent most of his time during the summer and autumn of 1924 speaking and campaigning on behalf of the Freedom Party. Strasser won a reputation for being an excellent campaign speaker, and whenever elections were held he was requested to campaign for the Party's candidates. At such a meeting held in Munich he announced that he had been successful as a candidate in the elections held on December 7, 1924, and had been elected to the Reichstag. Because he was personally opposed to holding a double mandate, Strasser announced his resignation from the Bavarian Landtag.<sup>85</sup> He was careful, however, not to relinquish his position

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid. , Document 89.

as leader of the Freedom Party in Bavaria. The total number of votes which the Party received in the elections of December 7, 1924, was only 900,000. This meant that the Freedom Party won fourteen out of a possible 493 seats in the Reichstag, a loss of some eighteen seats from the very successful election of May 4, 1924.<sup>86</sup> It seemed to many that the Freedom Party was already on the wane. For Strasser, however, the important fact was that he had won his seat in the Reichstag. He remained a member of that body from December 1924, until he voluntarily gave up his seat in December 1932.

The month of December 1924 was exceptionally important for the fortunes of the Freedom Party. Far more crucial than the December elections was the freeing of Hitler from the Landsberg prison on December 20. His release caused many questions to arise concerning the role Hitler was to play in the Freedom Party, if any. The function of the Party as an unofficial trustee for the imprisoned Hitler had no basis after his release from prison, and, therefore, the Party had to undergo some radical changes. Ludendorff, Strasser, and von Graefe viewed their positions as the leadership of the Party in a somewhat different light after Hitler had been freed, and consequently on February 12, 1925, they dissolved the national leadership of the Freedom Party. Shortly thereafter the three laid down their

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<sup>86</sup>Fritz Maier-Hartmann, Dokumente der Zeitgeschichte (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf., 1942), p. 200 gives the results of the election of December 7, 1924 as 907,242 votes. See also Volz, p. 12.



reins of authority, and the movement split into two distinct segments: the NSDAP, which Hitler reorganized in Munich on February 26, 1925, with its seat of power in southern Germany, and the Deutsch Völkisch Freiheitspartei (German Völkisch Freedom Party), which had its center of activity and the majority of its support in northern Germany.<sup>87</sup> The National Socialist deputies in the Reichstag withdrew from the Freedom Party and formed their own bloc which they named the Völkische Vereinigung. (Völkisch alliance)

The split in the Freedom Party prompted Esser and Streicher to try to win over its former members to their Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft. In Bavaria, some of the members of the National Sozialistische Freiheitspartei Bayerns (National Socialist Freedom Party of Bavaria) brought their parliamentary organization in Bavaria, the Völkischer Block, back to life once again. This time, however, it was led by Dr. Glasser, Anton Drexler, and Dr. Buttman. The NSFP finally disintegrated into many local groups, most of which were eventually absorbed into the newly reorganized NSDAP. A few splinter groups, however, did not return to the NSDAP; but for all practical purposes the NSFP and the groups which sprang from it were politically impotent, especially after Ludendorff, Strasser, and von Graefe relinquished their positions and dissolved the national leadership of the Freedom Party.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>Volz, p. 12.

<sup>88</sup>Hauptarchiv, Reel 69, Folder 1504, Document 171.

During this early period in the development of the NSDAP, Gregor Strasser had tried out his political wings and discovered that he could be a leader. The fiasco of the Hitler Putsch in 1923, rather than causing the end of his political career, had on the contrary practically forced him into positions of leadership and renown. Hitler's release from prison in 1924 resulted in a substantial decline in Strasser's political activity in southern Germany. But Gregor Strasser shifted his activities to the North and there soon became embroiled in the machinations of the many Völkisch and National Socialist groups. Eventually he assisted in bringing some order out of the chaos of these small groups and brought most of them back to the NSDAP and the control of Adolf Hitler.

SECTION II

THE NORTHERN ORGANIZATION PRIOR TO STRASSER

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The period of the Verbotzeit in northern Germany forms an important chapter in the history of National Socialism, and it is this time which directly precedes Gregor Strasser's activities in the North. To obtain any clear picture of what Strasser accomplished in northern Germany it is necessary to look more closely at the party organization in that area prior to his arrival. There had been many nationalist groups in northern Germany when the NSDAP was established in the South. The North also was a stronghold of various Völkisch movements. Some of the small political organizations there recognized Hitler, at least to some extent, as their national leader; many, however, were completely independent and did not especially want to recognize Hitler nor anyone else who might try to dictate policy to them. After Hitler's imprisonment in 1924 those groups which had supported him were in a quandry trying to decide what course of action they should take—whether they should follow Rosenberg or the Ludendorff, v. Graefe, Strasser group, or whether they should form a separate group of their own—until Hitler should be released from prison and capable of actively leading them once more.

There is a dearth of information concerning the development of these early political organizations in northern Germany, but by 1923 the NSDAP was represented by small groups in nearly every significant North German city. Its membership, however, when compared to the membership of the Party in southern Germany remained relatively small.<sup>1</sup> Since

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard Schildt, "Die Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nord-West:

the NSDAP was forbidden in most of northern Germany the Nazis there could not refer to their organizations as the NSDAP, but had to use other names, hence some of the difficulty in trying to trace their development. Among themselves, however, they did use the name NSDAP.<sup>2</sup> Most of the northern groups were fiercely independent and generally did not recognize the leadership of the Völkischer-Sozialer-Block nor of the Directory consisting of Ludendorff, v. Graefe, and Strasser. In fact, most of the Gauführer were practically independent of any control and had hardly any ties to a central organization.<sup>3</sup>

One of the northern leaders, the young student Joachim Haupt from Greifswald, who was Führer of the National Socialist Student Organization, set down certain guiding principles concerning the continuation of party work in northern Germany by the National Socialist groups there. Haupt wrote these principles in an attempt to keep the northern Nazis independent of the control of the German Freedom Party and various German Nationalist groups. He was, in fact, one of the most formidable opponents of the German Freedom Party in northern Germany. Haupt's attack was aimed primarily at

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Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der NSDAP 1925/26," (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation Philosophische Fakultät, Albert-Ludwigs University, Freiburg i/Brsg.) p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 34. Interview Gerhard Schildt with Karl Kaufmann and von Pfeffer. von Pfeffer told the author virtually the same thing in an interview on July 28, 1965.

the Freedom Party, but included other groups which were formed after the outlawing of the NSDAP. He opposed any cooperation between the North German Nazis and the southern German parties. These would, he felt, only destroy the independence of the entire National Socialist movement, and would not benefit it in any manner. A union between the northern Germans and the Freedom Party or any of the other nationalist parties would serve only to widen the gap between them and what he termed "the true National Socialist Movement."<sup>4</sup>

Haupt's primary arguments centered on this proposition: it was highly improbable that the Völkisch groups which he felt were being pushed into cooperation with the German Nationalists could get along with the Nationalists in a single group, because each was operating on a widely disparate set of principles. In his memorandum to his colleagues, most of whom were members of former Nazi cells, he asked them to note that when one mixes fire and water, the result is merely steam—not a unified

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<sup>4</sup>Werner Jochmann, Nationalsozialismus und Revolution: Ursprung und Geschichte der NSDAP in Hamburg 1922-1933. Dokumente (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963), document 16 "Joachim Haupt: Über die Organisatorischen Massnahmen zur Fortsetzung der Nationalsozialistischen Parteiarbeit in Norddeutschland " p. 69. Dr. Jochmann was kind enough to allow the author to use all of the documents cited prior to their publication in his book. Since Jochmann gives the source of each of his documents, only the document number, title, and page of the book where it is found will be cited. The entire collection will be hereinafter referred to simply as Jochmann.

political front.<sup>5</sup> Changing the figure, a union of the German Nationalists and the Völkisch groups might produce only a great deal of hot air.

If the northern groups were to unite with any other political organization, the true National Socialists, especially the workers, according to Haupt, would leave the party, "with a curse because of the treason against the Führer."<sup>6</sup> Haupt contended that the party's organizational work of the past years would simply disintegrate, leaving only the parliamentary framework of the Freedom Party, and this was precisely what he was trying to prevent. In order to preserve the NSDAP as it existed in the North, Haupt made several specific proposals: (1) restore the independence of the National Socialists; (2) end participation in any parliamentary coalition or government; (3) recommend very cautious action for National Socialist parliamentary deputies; (4) establish a North German Directory to create a firm organization; (5) work out a program of action which would be consciously based on the true Völkisch groups (farmers, workers, middle class) rather than on the Völkisch political movement itself.<sup>7</sup>

Haupt's differentiation between the members of the Völkisch class

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<sup>5</sup>Jochmann, Document 16, "Joachim Haupt: Ueber die Organisatorischen Massnahmen zur Fortsetzung der Nationalsozialistischen Parteiarbeit in Norddeutschland," p. 69.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

(Stand) and the Völkisch movement (Bewegung) is significant. The Völkisch class was that "healthy" indigenous remainder of the real German people (Volk), i. e., the independent farmers, the hand workers, the laborers (insofar as they had permanent homes and jobs), and the "healthy" part of the middle class. The Völkisch movement, on the other hand, was composed of those without property: the landless farmers, the proletariat, the civil servants. Haupt's proposed reorganization of the party in the North would insure the position of the Völkisch class, he hoped, and, wherever possible, give land and property to those without any—a noble though difficult ambition.<sup>8</sup>

But of all Haupt's suggestions, his fourth proposal, the election of a North German Directory, came to have the most significance and was also important for Gregor Strasser once he began his activities in northern Germany. In enlarging upon this general proposal, Haupt recorded a specific plan. Instead of attempting to receive authority from any of Hitler's successors, the North Germans must turn directly to Hitler himself and get their authority only from him. In other words, they were not to recognize the leadership of Rosenberg or of Ludendorff, v. Graefe, or Strasser while Hitler was imprisoned. Further, this Directory was to have exactly the same power to operate in the North that the central party organization in

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 70.



Munich utilized to function in southern Germany.<sup>9</sup>

Haupt wrote that the primary responsibility of the North German Directory would be twofold: first, to assume political leadership of the NSDAP in northern Germany, and second, to establish a workable program binding on all Nazi organizations operating in the North. He suggested the establishment of a news service to provide party members with bulletins of party functions and periodic aids for the improvement of their work. The Directory itself would become the central business office for the entire Party in the North and would arrange for the exchange of speakers; coordinate the issue of all press releases; manage the publication and distribution of broadsheets, placards, and other propaganda material; and establish a library for the use of all National Socialists. Haupt also wanted to establish an economic work union (wirtschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft) to increase the cooperation among National Socialists. Most probably the work union was to be some type of labor exchange through which National Socialists could find work if they needed it. Since he did not elaborate, it is difficult to know exactly what Haupt did have in mind. The final function of the Directory, however, was clearly stated: it would prepare courses of instruction to indoctrinate members of the party in politics and insure them of a unified and thorough education in the basic concepts of National Socialism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid. , p. 71.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid. , p. 72.

Haupt's work did not go unnoticed. On May 24, 1924, while Hitler was still in prison, several prominent North German National Socialists met in Hamburg to discuss another Haupt memorandum entitled: "The Crisis in the Völkish movement."<sup>11</sup> Both of his memoranda so impressed them that they agreed to accept these as the basis of their future work. They wanted to form a more tightly organized group which they called the North German Verbände (groups) and wanted to create their own Directory to lead the Verbände. However, they did not feel that they could carry on without Hitler's permission, and so on May 26 and 27, 1924,<sup>12</sup> Josef Klant, Gauführer from Hamburg, Bernhard Rust from Göttingen, Richard Sunkel from Greifswald, and Joachim Haupt himself went as emissaries from the North German group to see Hitler in the Landsberg prison. They wished to take him the memorandum personally and present to him the views of the North German National Socialists. The delegation was actually able to meet with Hitler twice, and during these sessions they informed him of their problems and presented their ideas to him.

It is assumed that Hitler agreed to let them go ahead, for after they returned to North Germany the members of the delegation called a meeting for June 3, 1924, in Hamburg. Here Klant, Rust, and Sunkel

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<sup>11</sup>Jochmann, Document 17, "Bericht Über die Bildung Eines Direktoriums der Norddeutschen Nationalsozialistischen Verbände in Hamburg," p. 73.

<sup>12</sup>  
Ibid.

reported on the success of their meetings with Hitler, and announced the official creation of the Directory for the North German groups of National Socialists. As members of the governing body for this new organization they selected Richard Sunkel, Ludolph Haase from Göttingen, and Dr. Adalbert Volck from Lüneburg. Volck was to become Strasser's bitter opponent at the important Weimar meeting of July 20, 1924,<sup>13</sup> where the Völkisch groups and the National Socialists in the German Freedom Party united to form the new National Socialists Freedom Party. Volck, it may be recalled, refused at this time to allow the North German groups which he as chairman of the Directory represented to go along with the plans of Strasser and Ludendorff.

This was not surprising, however, because once the new Directory had been organized it severed all ties with the central organization of the NSDAP, located in Munich. Ludolph Haase, the National Socialist leader from Göttingen, writing to Dr. Volck on June 4, 1924, stated that the meeting of the North German Verbände in Hamburg had "freed" their group from the Munich leadership, and in its place had erected their own party apparatus—the Directory.<sup>14</sup> In this same letter, Haase notified Volck that he would be one of the three members of the governing body of the Directory.

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<sup>13</sup>See above Section I, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup>Jochmann, Document 18, "Ludolf Haase an Dr. Adalbert Volck," pp. 74-75.

Haase concluded significantly that it would be well to reconstruct all of the local North German Nazi organizations along the lines of dictatorial principles. The Directory, he felt, should issue an order to that effect. Haase also indicated in his correspondence with Volck that the National Socialist Freedom Party opposed the organization of the Directory, and had sounded the alarm for an attack upon it.<sup>15</sup> The members of the Directory would fight back by holding group meetings which would propagandize their new organization.

Volck understood very well the concepts involved in the leadership principle (Führerprinzip). In the very first order of the Directory bearing his signature he wrote that several of the local organizations would undergo immediate and thorough reorganization, carried out "along dictatorial lines."<sup>16</sup> The reason for this move was past experience in Bremen, Hanover, and Frankfurt. This had shown Volck and the other Nazi leaders in North Germany that wherever leadership had not been in the hands of a single powerful individual practically every Völkisch organization had fallen apart. Therefore, Volck gave explicit directions concerning how the reorganization was to be accomplished.

At the head of each major state organization (Landesverband) there

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. , p. 74.

<sup>16</sup>Jochmann, Document 22, "Direktorium der Norddeutschen Verände: Befehl I," p. 83.

would be a leader with absolute authority. This leader would name certain Party members to advise him and assist him with Party work. The same pattern would carry through the next three groups, the Gau, the Kreis, and the Ortsgruppe, smallest of the organizational units. The chain of command would run from the state or land leaders of the Party (Landesverbandführer) to the county leaders (Kreisführer), and on down to the leaders of the local groups (Ortsgruppenführer). All of the Landesverband leaders were responsible to the Directory, but need not follow the strict chain of command in working with Party members at lower levels. If necessary they could deal with any Party member at any level of the organization.<sup>17</sup>

Ludolph Haase soon notified Hitler of the events which took place at the Hamburg meeting. In a letter dated June 11, 1924, he reported to his Führer that the leaders of the Party from Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Bremen, South Hanover, East Hanover, and Westphalia had decided to form a "more closely organized association," and had, therefore, founded the Directory.<sup>18</sup> This association, Haase continued, made it unnecessary for the North German groups to join the German Völkisch Freedom Party, and consequently those at the Hamburg meeting had decided against any move to unify the two groups. Haase concluded by reassuring Hitler

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Jochmann, Document 19, "Ludolf Haase an Adolf Hitler," p. 77.

that the leadership of the new organization, headed by Dr. Volck, had affirmed its loyalty to the Führer.<sup>19</sup>

This course of events was not exactly what Hitler had had in mind. Within five days he sent a letter to Haase in which he claimed that the North German delegates who had visited him in prison had misunderstood his (Hitler's) position concerning the NSDAP splinter groups. It was not correct to say that he had completely rejected a fusion of these parties. On the contrary, if the parties met certain conditions, among them the establishment of what he considered an "ideal leadership," as well as a unified functioning body, he would accept such a union.<sup>20</sup> However, certain events had occurred which had made Hitler's acceptance more difficult. He had asked Graefe, leader of the Freedom Party, to visit him in order to discuss the proposed union. Graefe did not come at this time. Instead, a "disloyal" article had appeared which Hitler at first believed Graefe had written. Hitler admitted that this had been a mistake on his part, and Ludendorff had been able to convince him that a meeting with Graefe was still not out of the question. Hitler went on to say that the meeting had indeed taken place—but with "negative" results.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Jochmann, Document 20, "Adolf Hitler an Ludolf Haase," p. 77.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Ludendorff, unwilling to give in so easily, had arranged still another meeting with Hitler and Graefe. At this time Ludendorff recognized Hitler's conditions for the unification of the parties to be at least "theoretically" correct, and he promised to carry them out. Graefe apparently altered his originally "negative" feelings enough so that a union would have been acceptable. Since all of the arrangements were still not final, Graefe asked Hitler to make certain that no disputes in the meantime would destroy the progress already made.<sup>22</sup> Hitler acquiesced and wrote a special appeal to his followers presenting Graefe's sentiments.

Hitler's letter to Haase went on to say that the above mentioned events proved to him that a great many local organizations in his Party were refusing to cooperate with the Freedom Party. Also, among other things, he had learned that several of the old party members had been ousted. He could hardly see to the correction of such matters in his present condition. Therefore, Hitler informed Haase, he was withdrawing from active politics until such time as he had regained his freedom and once more had the opportunity of being a "real" Führer.<sup>23</sup> In his conclusion, Hitler stated that from now on no one possessed the right to act in his name, to utilize his authority, or to issue any statements in his name. Furthermore, he requested Haase, on the receipt of his letter, to refrain from sending him

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

any more letters of a political nature.<sup>24</sup> Hitler had officially withdrawn from active politics.

As a result of Hitler's action, Joachim Haupt and others in the North German Directory felt they must clarify their position concerning Graefe's Freedom Party. Haupt wrote an extensive memorandum discussing Hitler's decision, and what course the North German National Socialists would pursue because of it. First of all, he thought it necessary for the North German Verbände to begin anew to rebuild the National Socialist party organization for themselves. He felt that they should sever all ties with the other Nazi organizations and build something which would reflect the wishes of the northern Party members, while at the same time remaining essentially Nazi. The construction of such an organization would require the North German organizations to agree to the following conditions: (1) Recognition of the national and parliamentary leadership of the Freedom Party as valid only for the Freedom Party itself—not for the NSDAP as a whole. (Individual National Socialist representatives who considered themselves authorized spokesmen for their party could choose by a written declaration whether or not they would submit to the Directory). (2) Refusal to participate in parliamentary elections, and rather than campaign in future elections, spread anti-parliamentary propaganda. (3) Publicize the deleterious influence of some Völkisch representatives. (4) Agree to consider

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



the North German organizations as the official National Socialist German Workers Parties of North Germany, and recognize the Directory as the lieutenant (Platzhalter) of Hitler until Hitler should be released from prison. (At that time, the leadership of the organizations would return to the Führer). (5) Agree that only the Directory could decide what relations the Verbände would have with other organizations (including those in Berlin and Munich), and that any unification with the leadership of Völkisch groups and the Directory was impossible and would only be to the detriment of the northern groups. And finally, agree that only the Directory could decide on affiliation with other National Socialist groups.<sup>25</sup>

Haupt's conditions were favorably received, and the immediate result was that North German Party members were able to establish a northern Nazi Party under the leadership of the Directory, which was completely independent of any of the other National Socialist or Völkisch groups. At the same time, the Northerners felt an intense loyalty to Adolf Hitler but realized as he did that he could not effectively run a political party from a prison cell. The North German Nazis could direct the Party efficiently through the Directory, and in fact they had organized into a party for that specific purpose. Still the Directory remained a rather loose organization.

The Directory itself was to have the definitive word in matters

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<sup>25</sup>Jochmann, Document 21, "Joachim Haupt: Die Folgen des Hitler Briefes für den Nationalsozialismus und die Forderungen der Norddeutschen Verbände," pp. 81-82.

pertaining to the growth and development of the Party in the North. Accordingly, representatives of the North German Verbände from Pomerania, Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, East Hanover, South Hanover, and Westphalia met in Harburg (a suburb of Hamburg) on July 13, 1924, to confer on matters the Directory considered vitally important to the new movement. Many of those present felt that Hitler had not completely surrendered his position and authority in the Party, but had merely suspended his activity until his release from prison. They also seriously questioned Gregor Strasser's membership in the Freedom Party as meaning that he was Hitler's official representative.<sup>26</sup> To clarify these problems, the representatives asked Adalbert Volck to write to Hermann Fobke, who had accompanied Hitler to Landsberg and acted as Hitler's part-time secretary, to ascertain whether or not Hitler had in fact laid down the reins of Party leadership, and if so, whether or not he had actually named Gregor Strasser as his successor. This reference to Strasser is one of the first made by the members of the North German Verbände, but from this time forward Strasser played an increasingly important role in the affairs of the North German Nazi organizations.

General Ludendorff's position in the Nazi hierarchy also came up for discussion at the Harburg meeting. Those present did agree to recognize

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<sup>26</sup>Jochmann, Document 27, "Vertretertagung der Nationalsozialistischen Verbände in Harburg am 13. Juli 1924: Beschlüsse," p. 93.

him as the military leader of the Party. The Directory, however, maintained strict control over any association between Ludendorff and party members under its jurisdiction. No dealings with Ludendorff were to be made without the knowledge and permission of the Directory. Further, the Directory alone would have the power to place any North German storm troopers under Ludendorff's command.<sup>27</sup>

After the Harburg meeting disbanded, Volck, in accordance with his instructions, wrote to Fobke. The latter answered him in a letter dated July 18, 1924, and stated that Hitler had indeed withdrawn from the leadership of the movement for the entire period of his imprisonment, and furthermore, that it was Hitler's express desire to remain apart from any political activity. Hitler's self-imposed withdrawal from politics would, however, last only as long as his confinement, and Fobke assured Volck that Hitler would definitely assume active leadership of the Party as soon as he was released from Landsberg.<sup>28</sup>

Fobke went on to say that Hitler had named neither Strasser nor anyone else to serve as his representative or successor. As the insistence of Ludendorff, Strasser had been called to serve as the representative of Bavaria in the National Leadership (Reichsführerschaft) of the Freedom

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Jochmann, Document 28, "Hermann Fobke an Dr. Adalbert Volck," p. 94.

Party. Fobke pointed out that Hitler really had nothing to do with this appointment, although it had undoubtedly been made with his permission. In a handwritten note attached to his letter, Fobke added that he had inquired further about this matter and discovered his surmise to be correct: Hitler had agreed to the appointing of Strasser to the Reichsführerschaft.<sup>29</sup>

Fobke addressed another letter to Volck on July 29, 1924, informing him that Hitler found it necessary to remain independent of any organized party group. By so doing he could better reorganize the NSDAP after his release, not being bound by any previous attachments or commitments. Fobke added that Hitler had regretted Ludendorff's selection of Strasser to serve in the leadership of the Party, because that brought Strasser directly into the prevailing strife. Fobke felt that after Hitler's release from prison Ludendorff hoped eventually to move Strasser into a position second only to that of the Führer.<sup>30</sup> This desire conflicted directly with Hitler's plans, for he wanted to place only those free from associations with any particular faction in the Party into positions of leadership. Fobke wrote that Hitler might have to change these plans. Later events were to prove him correct.

In this same letter, Fobke reported that any union of the Party groups with the German Freedom Party was out of the question so far as

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Jochmann, Document 33, "Hermann Fobke an Dr. Adalbert Volck," pp. 122-23.

Hitler was concerned. Fobke also expressed Hitler's views on the establishment of the Directory. He felt no appreciation for the "desperate fight" (Verzweiflungskampf) of the northern National Socialists, and planned to make use of only that organization which he himself would create after his release from Landsberg. As a point of departure, he would look first to Bavaria as he had done before. Hitler's attitude towards the North German activities had never been more clearly stated. He had considered southern Germany his chief source of support in the past, and southern Germany would remain so in the future.<sup>31</sup>

Since Fobke's letters made it clear that Hitler had not named Strasser directly as his agent, the members of the Directory and the entire North German organization felt justified in refusing to recognize his authority, "his excellent qualities notwithstanding."<sup>32</sup> Ludendorff and his associates wasted no time in publicizing their own reaction to the establishment of the North German Directory. In a declaration issued by the national leadership (Reichsführerschaft) of the Freedom Party, dated Munich, August 25, 1924, Ludendorff, Strasser, and v. Graefe wrote: "A Directory of the National Socialist Worker's Party has been created by Volck, Haase, and Sunkel. This Directory possesses no valid authority from Hitler, and it

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>32</sup>Jochmann, Document 34, "Dr. Adalbert Volck an Hermann Fobke," p. 125.

will not be recognized by the following. (signed) Ludendorff, Strasser, von Graefe."<sup>33</sup> The situation then, was this: the Directory refused to recognize Strasser, and Strasser and his colleagues refused to recognize the Directory. Each camp gave the same argument as its reason for refusal to recognize the other, namely that Hitler had not given the other valid authority. Each side also feared that the other was encroaching on its specific territory, and would endanger its own authority; hence the impasse.

The Directory was very active politically and tried to get and keep hold of the Party members in that area. In spite of all its declarations, documents, and memoranda, the Directory experienced difficulty in maintaining its hold over the North German NSDAP. As early as August 23, 1924, cracks started to appear in this supposedly solid organization. On this occasion a letter from Hinrich Lohse to Adalbert Volck gave some of the first evidences of disunity. The letter contained Lohse's report on the Party meeting held by the National Socialist Freedom Party, which he had attended in Weimar in July, 1924.<sup>34</sup> The meeting was held under the \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>33</sup>Jochmann, Document 39, "Erklärung der Reichsführerschaft der Nationalsozialistischen Freiheitspartei: Der Fall Volck, Haase, Sunkel," p. 138.

<sup>34</sup>There is some question concerning the date of the Weimar Party Day. Volz, p. 19, gives the date as 16-17 August 1924 and Gerd Rühle, Das Dritte Reich: Dokumentarische Darstellung des Aufbaues der Nation. Die Kampffahre 1918-1933. (Berlin: Hummelverlag, 1936), p. 111 gives the same date. However, the July date is documentary correct. See Jochmann, Document 30, "Dr. Adalbert Volck: Vertraulicher Bericht über die Nationalsozialistische Vetretertagung in Weimar am 20 July 1924," pp. 98-102.

direction of Ludendorff specifically to announce the unification of the Völkisch movements with the NSDAP—despite some sharp differences of opinion which still existed between the two groups.<sup>35</sup> While at Weimar Lohse changed his opinion of Ludendorff radically, and he reported to Volck the feeling that Ludendorff stood firmly behind Hitler and was not simply a pawn of Graefe. He went on to say that his opinion had been confirmed by discussions with Strasser, Gansser, Tittmann, and others attending the meeting, and he was not alone in his new views. It was true, Lohse added, that the National Leadership of the Freedom Party had not recognized the Directory. Lohse explained to the delegates at Weimar that the only purpose of the Directory was to unite the northern Germans, and he pointed out that it had been denounced neither by the Party leadership in Munich, nor by Hitler himself.<sup>36</sup>

The letter was not warmly received by Volck. He opposed Lohse's recognition of the National Leadership of the Freedom Party, and reminded Lohse that if he truly stood behind Ludendorff and his associates, he would be in opposition to the Directory and the principles he had agreed to uphold.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Volz, p. 11.

<sup>36</sup>Jochmann, Document 40, "Hinrich Lohse an Dr. Adalbert Volck," p. 139.

<sup>37</sup>Jochmann, Document 41, "Dr. Adalbert Volck an Hinrich Lohse," p. 141.

Perhaps Volck saw that division in the North German ranks had begun in earnest.

An additional step in the organization of the party in northern Germany came in a meeting held in the city of Harburg on September 7, 1924. The meeting was held under the leadership of Volck and the Directory and attracted representatives of the Party from all over northern Germany. Volck conducted it personally, and after discussing the political situation in Germany he launched into a defense of the position which he personally had taken in leading the Directory. He was well aware, he said, that his opponents felt he was using the Directory as a means of gaining personal power. But those who accused him of such action should remember that he had not attended the meeting at which the Directory itself was organized, and that those who had been there had come to him and asked him to accept a position in its leadership. He considered himself only to be the lieutenant of Hitler, and he emphasized that the North German organization would be placed directly under Hitler upon his release from prison. Volck possessed dictatorial power as far as the North German Party organization was concerned, but he never did consider himself as the Führer of the entire movement; this honor he reserved for Hitler.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Jochmann, Document 43, "Joachim Haupt: Bericht über die Tagung der Norddeutschen Nationalsozialistischen Verbände in Harburg am 7. September 1924," p. 145.



Concerning organizational matters the North German Nazis attending the Harburg meeting took an important step. They decided to unite all those Party members who opposed participation in parliamentary elections and who also did not want to unite with any other parties which had split off from the NSDAP during the Verbotzeit into a single organization. After a period of discussion they agreed to give this opposition movement a name and decided to call it the Nationalsozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (National Socialist Working Party or Association, hereinafter referred to as Arbeitsgemeinschaft).<sup>39</sup> Adalbert Volck was the leader of the new Arbeitsgemeinschaft every bit as much as he was one of the leaders of the Directory. From the time of its organization, however, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft seemed to replace the Directory to some extent, and yet the Directory itself was not formally disbanded. In a report of the meeting held by the representatives of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft in Uelzen on November 2, 1924, reference was made to the Directory, and also to its leader, Volck. The matters discussed at the Uelzen meeting pertained mainly to the position of the members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft concerning future parliamentary elections. Although Ludendorff's name was mentioned, Strasser's name apparently did not come up in this meeting.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>40</sup>Jochmann, Document 56, "Reinhard Sunkel: Bericht über die Tagung der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeitsgemeinschaft in Uelzen am 2. November 1924," pp. 172-79.

However, Strasser's influence in northern Germany had increased after the Weimar meeting of July, 1924, which Lohse had attended. As Strasser's authority expanded, Volck's position gradually deteriorated. On February 3, 1925, Volck admitted his problems as one of the leaders of the Directory and of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, feeling that he ought to decline responsibility in a situation where he could neither offer advice nor take any decisive action.<sup>41</sup> In a final outburst of northern patriotism, he declared that no outsider could ever be taught what should be done in the North (implying that this knowledge was instinctive). The power of the entire National Socialist movement lay in the North, he believed, but those who did not comprehend the northern psyche could never expect to set it in motion. "Strassers and Essers would do better to try to serve their fellow southerners."<sup>42</sup> He hoped that a meeting with Hitler would help to solve these problems, but he was by no means certain that he, Volck, would succeed.

Like the National Socialist Freedom Party, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft saw its demise soon after Hitler's release from Landberg. In two circulars sent out in February, 1925, to the members of the Landsverbände and the Ortsgruppen of the former Nationalsozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft,

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<sup>41</sup>Jochmann, Document 60, "Dr. Adalbert Volck an Professor . . .," p. 192.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

Hermann Fobke announced that Hitler had asked him to go to the North to labor in the Party's behalf.<sup>43</sup> The second circular told of the dissolution of the North German organization. Fobke wrote that it was the will of the Führer that all members, regardless of whatever allegiances they had made during the Verbotzeit, now recognize his leadership and work closely with him toward the re-establishment of the NSDAP. Fobke declared that "this will must be law for us."<sup>44</sup> His appeal was directed towards certain organizations in the North which had caused trouble in bringing this new rule into force, especially those groups which had been closely associated with the Freedom Party, even though they had finally agreed to recognize the leadership of Hitler.

Fobke continued his circular with a discussion of the meeting held in Harburg on March 22, 1925, in which Strasser as Hitler's representative in the North took over most of the positions of leadership in the northern organization.<sup>45</sup> This was done in the presence of the leaders of the former Arbeitsgemeinschaft. It was at this meeting on March 22, 1925, that Gregor Strasser, acting under the authority of Adolf Hitler, first

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<sup>43</sup>Jochmann, Document 61, "Hermann Fobke: Rundschreiben an die Norddeutschen Nationalsozialisten," p. 193.

<sup>44</sup>Jochmann, Document 62, "Hermann Fobke: Rundschreiben an die Ehemaligen Landesverbände und Ortsgruppen der Früheren NSAG," p. 195.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

played a significant role in northern Germany.

Since the Harburg meeting was held under the direction of Fobke and Strasser and not Adalbert Volck, the latter decided to leave the Party. He resigned not only from his position as a member of the Directory and of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, but from the NSDAP as well. He gave the reasons for his action at the Harburg meeting, but later wrote that he entertained many doubts as to whether those present had truly understood why he had been forced to make this move. In his resignation from the Directory, he wrote that "those who presented themselves as the truest of true followers, among them Strasser, had just a short time before been enemies of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft and the old Nazi Party."<sup>46</sup>

Volck had indeed misjudged Strasser's ability to understand the "northern psyche." Now Strasser, not Volck, was an important influence in the northern organization. After the disbanding of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, most of its leaders either actively supported Strasser or withdraw from the Party altogether. Thus Strasser, working as Hitler's agent in northern Germany, found his path unobstructed. He could go ahead now to assist in rebuilding the Party in northern Germany.

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<sup>46</sup>Jochmann, Document 63, "Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen Dr. Adalbert Volcks," p. 202.

SECTION III

GREGOR STRASSER IN NORTH GERMANY

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Following Hitler's release from prison in December of 1924, it was anyone's guess what he planned to do concerning the reorganization of the NSDAP. For two months he remained relatively inactive, but then on February 26, 1925, he announced the reorganization of the Party in the first issue of the new edition of the Völkischer Beobachter.<sup>1</sup>

On February 27, 1925, Hitler delivered his first speech of the new era. He asked for unity within the Party, and deplored the numerous grievances and petty antagonisms of the leaders who had assumed direction of the NSDAP's splinter groups, informing them that these must now be set aside. The National Socialist Freedom Party had already dissolved its National Leadership on February 12, 1925, and the Völkische bloc along with the Grossdeutschvolksgemeinschaft had returned to Hitler's leadership at approximately the same time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, February 26, 1925. Because many of the newspaper articles used in this thesis were clippings which had been micro-filmed during the filming of the Hauptarchiv and had no page number given the author has selected to omit all page numbers when citing newspapers. Only the title and the date will be given.

<sup>2</sup>Volz, p. 24. Although the German Freedom Party did not disband on February 12, 1925, Graefe organized a separate organization, the Deutschvölkisch Freedom Party which was limited territorily to northern Germany. The formal organization of this new party was on February 17, 1925. Ibid. On February 12, 1925, Ludendorff made a statement in which he announced his resignation from the National Leadership of the German Freedom Party and stated that Strasser and Graefe had done the same. Völkischer Kurier, February 13, 1925, found in HA Reel 69, Folder 1504, Document 123.

The official meeting for the reorganization of the NSDAP took place in the Bürgerbräu Keller in Munich, and was attended by such party dignitaries as Feder, Frick, Buttman, Esser, Streicher, and Dinter. Strasser did not attend the meeting, because he was already busily at work in northern Germany, attempting to bring the various NSDAP factions in that area under the unified control of Hitler. Otto Strasser, however, maintains that Gregor did not attend because he disapproved of the turn in events which had taken place since Hitler's release from prison.<sup>3</sup> But as will be shown below this was not the case.

But Hitler by no means completely ignored Strasser. He recognized Strasser's ability and knew of his popularity among most party members. Otto Strasser often speaks of his brother's winning manner. Gregor Strasser did create a good impression. He was a large man and had an excellent Bavarian sense of humor. He was a hard worker and had definite ideas, but was not doctrinaire.<sup>4</sup> Strasser seemed to have the knack of making friends and of inspiring confidence in those with whom he came in contact. Even some who opposed him as a member of the Directory of the Freedom Party wrote that they liked Strasser as a person. After his first meeting with Gregor Strasser, Volck wrote that it was a great pleasure for him to

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<sup>3</sup>Bullock, p. 104. Also personal interview with Otto Strasser by the author, May 11, 1963.

<sup>4</sup>Schildt, p. 58.

meet Strasser, who made an impression inspiring trust such as one seldom finds.<sup>5</sup> A short time later Volck stated that he felt Strasser was a person of the best qualities—an interesting statement from one who so often had bitterly opposed Strasser's political activities. Fobke was often more critical of Strasser, but nevertheless wrote that Strasser was "honest, extremely diligent, even though not especially gifted."<sup>6</sup> Goebbels, however, has left probably more information concerning his early impressions of Strasser than anyone else. In his diary he makes many references to Strasser: "A splendid fellow. A massive Bavarian. With a wonderful sense of humour."<sup>7</sup> "I have come very close to him as a man . . . Strasser is not nearly such a bourgeois as I thought at first. Certainly he is a little ambitious, however often he may assert the contrary . . . It is easy to work with him."<sup>8</sup> "Strasser is a dear fellow. He still has a lot to

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid. See also Jochmann, Document 32, "Dr. Adalbert Volck an Hermann Fobke," p. 121.

<sup>6</sup>Schildt, p. 58. See also Jochmann, Document 66, "Hermann Fobke: Aus der Nationalsozialistischen Bewegung. Bericht über die Gründung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nord- und Westdeutschen Gaue der NSDAP," p. 208.

<sup>7</sup>The Early Goebbels Diaries 1925-1926, ed. Helmut Heiber, trans. Oliver Watson (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 29. Hereinafter referred to as Goebbels Diaries.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 38.



learn, and he will learn."<sup>9</sup> "He is a good loyal fellow."<sup>10</sup> "Strasser is a real man."<sup>11</sup>

The Esser-Streicher supporters—not the Strasser-Ludendorff group—were the ones whom Hitler took into the central administration of the newly reorganized Party. He selected Hermann Esser as chief of the propaganda section. Philipp Bouhler took charge of the Party business office, Franz Xaver Schwarz became official Party treasurer, and Max Amann received the office of chief of the Party press. The Strasser-Ludendorff faction had no representation in the administrative positions of the Party, and their permanent eclipse by the Esser group seemed certain.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps even more important for his future career than his popularity was Strasser's membership in the Reichstag. Through his seat in the Reichstag Strasser was protected by parliamentary immunity and could speak anywhere in Germany. Hitler did not have this privilege, for since the meeting re-establishing the Party, at which he had spoken, he had been silenced by a Redeverbot (prohibition to speak) in practically all of Germany. Heinrich Held, Minister President of Bavaria, slapped the Redeverbot on Hitler on March 9, 1925, because of his speech at the reorganization of the

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>12</sup>Volz, p. 12.

Party. With the exception of Württemberg, Thüringen, Mecklenburg, Schwerin, and Braunschweig, all of the German states refused to allow Hitler to make public speeches.<sup>13</sup> The Redeverbot, however, proved to be very useful to the Nazis who used it as the subject of many of their propaganda attacks. In the long run it did not seem to cause Hitler any great difficulty. Strasser's position in parliament not only protected him from such a Redeverbot, but also provided him with a first-class railway ticket good anywhere in Germany. At a time when money was extremely scarce in the Party, this meant that Strasser could travel freely throughout the country and was not dependent on the meager funds the Party might be able to command. (Later Strasser maintained that he gave up his mandate in the Bavarian Landtag because it provided him with only a third-class railway ticket, whereas members of the Reichstag could travel first class).<sup>14</sup>

Strasser used both his railway pass and his parliamentary immunity to the advantage of the Party. He spoke at meetings throughout most of Germany and helped reduce the chaos of Party organization in the northern part of Germany to an ordered if not perfect whole. He was responsible for bringing a large number of National Socialists in the North back to Hitler, and he also assisted in organizing the North into a bastion which later became one of the greatest sources of Nazi strength—just as Volck had predicted.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Hauptarchiv, Reel 69, Folder 1504.

<sup>15</sup>See above Section II, p. 58.

Early in 1924 the members of the National Socialist Arbeits-  
gemeinschaft had expressed doubt as to whether Hitler had in fact given  
 Strasser the authority to work in his name in their part of Germany,<sup>16</sup>  
 but by early 1925 this skepticism seems to have entirely disappeared. The  
 northern Nazis, for the most part, came to accept him as the person to  
 whom Hitler had given the task of organizing North German NSDAP groups  
 into Gaue and other such bodies, which would in turn encompass the entire  
 area, including all northern members of the party. At a meeting held in  
 Hamm on February 22, 1925, prior to actual reorganization of the NSDAP  
 itself, those in attendance referred to Strasser as the authorized repre-  
 sentative of Hitler.<sup>17</sup> The evidence that he definitely acted under Hitler's  
 authority in the North seems to be conclusive, although there is no directive  
 from Hitler stating that he had given Strasser the authority to work in his  
 (Hitler's) name.<sup>18</sup>

The Hamm meeting was the first in which Strasser acted in his  
 official capacity as Hitler's personal representative. Strasser conducted  
 the meeting, which was attended by the Gauleiter from Westphalia, Rhine-  
 land-North, Rhineland-South, Hanover, Pomerania, and 100 other

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<sup>16</sup>See above Section II, p. 60.

<sup>17</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, July 3, 1926, p. 6. See also Hann. 3101  
 I A8, as appears in Schildt, Appendix.

<sup>18</sup>Jochmann, Document 62, "Hermann Fobke; Rundschreiben an die  
 ehemaligen Landersverbände und Ortsgruppen der Führer SNAB," p. 195 and  
 Document 63, "Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen Dr. Adalbert Volcks," p. 202.

Bezirksleiter (local leaders) from the above Gaue.<sup>19</sup> As Hitler's agent, Strasser had not only the authority to transact all business, but also to make changes in Party organization if necessary or to reorganize the existing Party structure. Strasser's main goal at Hamm was to secure the recognition of Hitler as the undisputed leader of the NSDAP by the North German Party members and leaders. Undoubtedly he discussed the political situation in Germany and the reorganization of the Party with these North German Nazi leaders. Those assembled at Hamm pledged "unshakable faith and adherence to their Führer Adolf Hitler."<sup>20</sup>

The meeting at Hamm had certain socialist overtones. In one of the few reports of it, which unfortunately is unsigned, there is the statement that those Nazis attending the meeting saw "in National Socialism . . . the only way to the emancipation of the German worker and thereby to Germany's renewal."<sup>21</sup> Goebbels later wrote in the Völkischer Beobachter that Strasser not only laid down the basic principles for the reorganization of the Party, but also spoke about Schleswig-Holstein, and in fact clarified the whole political situation for the Nazis in northern Germany.<sup>22</sup> Strasser also informed the Party members attending the Hamm meeting of the

<sup>19</sup>Schildt, p. 56.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., from Hann 3101 I A8.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., See also Völkischer Beobachter July 3, 1926.

regulations which Hitler had established for the reorganization of the Party.<sup>23</sup>

These regulations appeared February 26, 1925 in the first issue of the Völkischer Beobachter published anew after the ban on it had been lifted. Hitler meant these guide lines to be binding on the entire Party wherever it existed in Germany, not just in the Munich Branch. In these principles Hitler set down the basic philosophy of Party organization and the position of the leaders of the organization. He spelled out clearly what the relationship of members and various leaders should be to the central organization. According to the new regulations, all members of the old NSDAP (the Party as it existed prior to November, 1923) must be reinstated in the new Party before they would be recognized as legitimate members. Existing political organizations could join the NSDAP only with the approval of the Führer, and rather than simply try to gather up large groups of Party members, Hitler noted that his basic concern was to secure from its very inception unity within the movement.<sup>24</sup>

Hitler insisted on the absolute subordination of the members of the

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<sup>23</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, July 3, 1926, p. 6. Although Strasser is not mentioned by name in Hann 3101 I A8, he is in the above issue of the Völkischer Beobachter. All available evidence points to Strasser as being the person who conducted the Hamm meeting. See also Bradley Smith, "Hitler and the Strasser Challenge 1925-1926," (unpublished MA thesis, University of California), p. 8. Hereinafter referred to as Smith.

<sup>24</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, February 26, 1925.

Party to its leadership. Throughout the entire reorganization scheme, each individual was to come under the direction of the Party leadership. All lesser organizations were to be created by the leaders, not by the members. Hitler also stressed that it was essential to remember the order of things in the creation of larger political divisions: first the Führer and then the organization, not the other way around. The organization was not created for its own purposes, but as a means of fulfilling another more important purpose—to carry on the struggle and political agitation of the movement as a whole. The Party was, in other words, to be organized on the leadership principle (Führerprinzip).<sup>25</sup>

Gregor Strasser basically agreed with Hitler's ideas. Even though he disliked many of the men who made up the Party's central organization in Munich, he still admired Hitler. Strasser was an avowed National Socialist and stated that when he "lived" for an idea he would follow the one who, in his opinion, was the most energetic in pursuing that same idea, the one who had the greatest chance of success. "Even if I see people surrounding him who are dangerous for the idea, then I tell myself, the idea above everything. For that reason I have placed myself at Hitler's disposal."<sup>26</sup> Strasser became even more impressed with Hitler as time went on. Lohse reports him

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<sup>25</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, February 26, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Konrad Heiden, A History of National Socialism (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1934), p. 188.

as saying after a political meeting held in Weimar, that he was very impressed by Hitler and that he had seen that the "motor" of the Party could only be Hitler. Lohse concluded that one could see a certain air of resignation about Strasser. He had been an equal of Ludendorff and v. Graefe, but he was now second once again. Adolf Hitler was, and remained, the first.<sup>27</sup>

One month after the Hamm meeting Strasser held another conference of North German Nazi leaders. This meeting was held on March 22, 1925 in the city of Harburg. Unfortunately we know very little of the Harburg meeting beyond a general outline of what took place. At this meeting Gregor Strasser attempted to consolidate the Party in the North even further. He was working with an organization which was already in existence, as was the case at the Hamm meeting. Most of the leaders of the northern Nazis were at the Harburg meeting, and Strasser discussed the work they were to do as Gauleiter. The delegates to the Harburg meeting came from all over northern Germany: Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Hanover, Braunschweig, Bremen, and Oldenburg.<sup>28</sup> Some at the meeting, especially, Adalbert Volck and Schröder from Berlin, argued against

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<sup>27</sup>Heinrich Lohse, "Der Fall Strasser" unpublished memorial, p. 4. The original is available in the Forschungsstelle für die Geschichte der Nationalsozialismus in Hamburg. Dr. Jochmann, its director, generously gave the author a carbon copy of the Lohse memorial. Hereinafter referred to as Lohse.

<sup>28</sup>Schildt, p. 56. See also Smith, p. 14 and Völkischer Beobachter, April 7, 1925, p. 3.

Strasser. They did not feel that he officially represented Hitler in this northern area, and openly accused Strasser of usurping powers which legitimately belonged to them.<sup>29</sup> The details of this struggle at the Harburg meeting remain unknown, but Strasser did emerge the victor and won the allegiance of most of those in attendance.

Strasser recognized the Gauleiter of the various Gaue in northern Germany. Lohse was Gauleiter of Schleswig-Holstein and Professor Vahlen led Pomerania. Klant remained as leader of Hamburg, and Hildebrandt took over in Mecklenburg. Volck was supposed to be selected Gauleiter of Lüneburg-Stade, but because of his resignation from the Party this position went to Otto Telschow. Haase and Fobke remained as leaders of Gau<sup>30</sup> South Hanover, and Rust maintained his position as Gauleiter for North Hanover.<sup>31</sup> These men had been long associated with the Nazi or the Völkisch movements in northern Germany and Strasser simply recognized them and confirmed their positions of leadership. Generally the Gauleiter

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<sup>29</sup>Jochmann, Document 63, "Vertrauliche Aufzeichnungen Dr. Adalbert Volcks," p. 202.

<sup>30</sup>Gau an old German term meaning district, province, or administrative district. This term was revived by the Nazis and used to refer to the largest unit of organization (territorial) in the NSDAP. Gauleiter, regional leader of the NSDAP. The term has been adopted in English although, strangely enough, Gau has not.

<sup>31</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, April 7, 1925, and April 16, 1925. Concerning Volck see Völkischer Beobachter, September 22, 1925, and also Smith, p. 14.



were independent. They had been local leaders of the nationalist groups in the North and certainly did not owe their offices to any particular individual.<sup>32</sup> After the Harburg meeting Gregor Strasser wielded considerable influence in northern Germany. The area in which he had been working extended from Lower Saxony, including some of Germany's richest industrial sections, through Westphalia, and all across North Germany to Berlin. Von Pfeffer was Gauleiter of Westphalia and had been closely associated with the Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft of Esser and Streicher during the Verbotzeit, and so had Schlange, the Gauleiter of Berlin. By 1925, however, both men had become ardent supporters of Strasser. Although Strasser did not create an organization which was completely free from the central Party in Munich, the North German members of the NSDAP did feel a certain independence. They were interested in freeing the Party from the "Munich Clique" and Esser's influence. The North German Nazis felt a close affinity to Strasser. He visited nearly all of their local organizations in his attempt to assure their return to the NSDAP. He listened to their problems and attempted to help them reach some sort of a solution. The Party's central administration in Munich had just come into existence and did not always work to the satisfaction of all of the Gaue. Hitler himself

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<sup>32</sup>Schildt, p. 61 from interview with Karl Kaufmann. von Pfeffer told the author approximately the same in an interview, July 28, 1965.

hardly bothered to answer any letters.<sup>33</sup> Undoubtedly Strasser would have become much more firmly entrenched in the affairs of the Party in North Germany at this time had he not been ill from the latter part of May to July; as a consequence he was not in the center of events as they continued to develop in the North.<sup>34</sup> The Party headquarters in Munich recognized Strasser as one of the foremost authorities on the northern organization. He did have a much clearer idea of events in the North than did anyone in the Munich headquarters and was often called upon to supply it information.<sup>35</sup>

During the fall of 1925, and in January 1926, Gregor Strasser and Joseph Goebbels held a series of meetings which were more important than any they ever conducted.<sup>36</sup> It was at these meetings, the first held in Hagen on September 10, 1925, the second in Hanover on November 22, 1925,<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Schildt, p. 58, from interview with von Pfeffer.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>35</sup>Letter Parteileitung to Karl Kaufmann, Munich, February 23, 1926 from Schumacher collection, Bundesarchiv, Koblenz. See also Schildt, p. 62. Also letter Gregor Strasser to the Parteileitung, March 5, 1926 from Schumacher collection.

<sup>36</sup>Smith, p. 16.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid. See also Völkischer Beobachter, March 7, 1925 and Goebbels Diaries, entries for September 11, 1925, p. 34, and November 28, 1925, p. 51. The author of this dissertation has taken the liberty of altering some of the translator's spelling to the American rather than the British usage and also of changing some words which he felt could be more accurately expressed.

and finally the one of greatest consequence, also held in Hanover in January, 1926, that they established the new organization for the NSDAP in northern Germany and set it into motion—The Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the North West German Gauleiter.<sup>38</sup> Nearly all of the information available concerning the Hagen meeting comes from Goebbels through his diary or the special report which he wrote Strasser to inform him of the developments of the meeting, although Hermann Fobke wrote a memorandum entitled "Out of the National Socialist Movement: Report Concerning the Founding of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the North and West German Gaue of the NSDAP" that gives a fairly complete account of the Hagen meeting.

Goebbels, who had become Strasser's chief assistant in the North, first alluded to the approaching meeting on September 7, 1925, when he wrote: "On Thursday big meeting at Hagen to form a West German Working Party (Arbeitsgemeinschaft) . . . Consultation on the Hagen meeting next Thursday." And: "Mad haste and excitement. Hitler will not come. Urgent letters. Off to Hagen tomorrow . . ." Finally on the day after the meeting he made this entry: "Yesterday at Hagen . . . We got all we wanted. The North Gau and the West Gau will be merged. United Leadership (Strasser). United office (Elberfeld). United management (moi). Publication of a fortnightly news sheet (National Socialist Letters), publisher

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<sup>38</sup>Hereinafter referred to as Arbeitsgemeinschaft or simply AGNW.

Strasser, editor moi.<sup>39</sup>

Hermann Fobke maintained that Strasser's desire to discuss a major Party crisis led to his summoning of the various northern Party leaders to Hagen.<sup>40</sup> This crisis which Strasser felt had developed originated in the central Party organization, and centered in the person of Hermann Esser. Upon the reorganization of the Party in February, 1925, Hitler had selected Esser to be one of the closest associates and placed him high up in the Party leadership. Many of the Party members still hated Esser because they felt he had attempted to destroy the remnants of the NSDAP during the Verbotzeit, when he sided with Streicher against Rosenberg in the struggle to determine which of the former Nazi groups would succeed Hitler during the period of his imprisonment. Because of their feelings against Esser many members of the northern Party organization felt even less sympathy with the southern Party leadership than before. Fobke reported that groups within the Party in Munich itself had withdrawn to form independent units because of their intense dislike of the man Esser. Their motto was: "With Hitler, but without Esser."<sup>41</sup> After Hitler regained his freedom in December 1925, they hoped he would replace Esser, but instead Esser's

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<sup>39</sup>Goebbels Diaries, p. 33. . . .

<sup>40</sup>Jochmann, Document 66, "Hermann Fobke: Aus der Nationalsozialistischen Bewegung. Bericht über die Gründung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nord- und Westdeutschen Gaue der NSDAP," p. 208.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

position became more firmly entrenched. The upshot was that a great many of these anti-Esser Nazis actually left the Party.

This feeling against Esser was not the only conflict brewing within the central Party apparatus. Alfred Rosenberg and Hitler had experienced a falling out which was not to be smoothed over until much later. Hitler, busily finishing the second volume of his book, Mein Kampf, seemed to be rather unconcerned with the mounting feeling against Esser and two others: Streicher and Dinter. These men had been useful to Hitler at a time when he needed them, and he felt justified in overlooking the present opposition to them, even though many felt that this power struggle might destroy the entire Nazi Party.

In his report of the Hagen meeting, Fobke explained that Strasser had called the meeting in order to create a force which could put a limit to Esser's power. Hitler's indifference to the rising opposition to Esser was horrifying to Fobke, who warned that such an attitude might be all right in Bavaria, but elsewhere could be disastrous ~~so far as~~ the Party was concerned.<sup>42</sup> The feeling against the Esser "dictatorship" was growing throughout most of Germany. Therefore, Strasser had called the Hagen meeting in order to create a new force to act as a counterbalance to Esser's power. Strasser had originally planned to direct all the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

discussion at the meeting personally, since he wanted to form an opposition force against the "corruptible" Munich branch of the Party.<sup>43</sup>

Supposedly only Goebbels, Rust from Göttingen, and a man whose name was unknown to Fobke knew anything about Strasser's particular purpose. But just prior to the meeting Strasser sent Goebbels the following telegram: "Impossible to come. My mother taken very ill. Follow through with the conference. Arrange new meeting."<sup>44</sup> It is interesting that Strasser placed family matters before this "crisis" within the Party. Because Strasser did not attend the meeting the discussion concerning the Esser question was postponed until a later date.<sup>45</sup>

The only people attending the Hagen meeting mentioned by Goebbels in his diary were Dr. Ley (who, according to Goebbels, "felt called upon to make mischief, but was later very meek"), Professor Vahlen, Lohse, von Pfeffer, Haase, and Fobke.<sup>46</sup> Fobke lists still others. He states that Professor Vahlen represented Gau Pomerania; while Schleswig-Holstein was represented by Lohse; and Hanover-Braunschweig by Major (retired) Dinklage, who was taking the place of Rust, the Gauleiter; Gau South Hanover

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Goebbels Diaries, p. 34.

by Haase, Uhlendorff, and Fobke; and Gau Westphalia by von Pfeffer. Dr. Ley, accompanied by Haake, represented Gau South Rhineland; Telschow was Gauleiter of East Hanover, and Goebbels was present for Gau Rhineland.<sup>47</sup> In his report to Strasser Goebbels adds the names of Bauschen from Duisburg and Dr. Elbrechter from North Rhineland, who conducted the meeting.<sup>48</sup>

A good part of the discussion at Hagen centered on participation in any of the elections about to take place. Whether they were for the Kreistag, Provincial Landtag, Landtag, or Reichstag did not seem to matter. Haase was the only person who wanted some decisions made on this extremely controversial question, now becoming even more crucial because of the threat of elections to be held in Prussia. Fobke wrote that Telschow, Lohse, Haase, and he himself were against participation in any election, while Haake and Vahlen supported participation in all elections. Although Rust was not present at the meeting, those attending knew that he also opposed election activity on the part of North German Nazis. Haase stated under no circumstances should those supporting his position participate in any elections, no matter what instructions the Munich leadership should happen

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<sup>47</sup>Jochmann, Document 66, "Aus der Nationalsozialistischen Bewegung. Bericht über die Gründung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nord- und Westdeutschen Gaue der NSDAP," pp. 208-209.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., Appendix VIII.

to give.<sup>49</sup> This statement evoked a period of shocked embarrassment, according to Fobke. In the ensuing discussion, however, there was general agreement, and the meeting unanimously passed a statement to be sent to Hitler, stressing that the several Gauleiter meeting in Hagen absolutely refused to participate in any elections.<sup>50</sup>

They also discussed the formation of a tighter organization of the Gaue represented at the meeting. As Strasser and Goebbels had planned, it was to be an Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the North West German Gauleiter of the NSDAP, and those attending the Hagen meeting would be the Gauleiter of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft North West.<sup>51</sup>

The main purpose of the new Arbeitsgemeinschaft, as stated at the meeting, was very similar to the final purposes which were worked out for it at later meetings. The organization would provide a service for exchange of speakers, arrange for any type of organizational help which might be needed, and would publish the Nationalsozialistische Briefe (National Socialist Letters), a semi-monthly magazine to provide instructions for the leadership of the Party. This magazine would also provide explanations of basic problems and questions, and become a sounding board for a free

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 209.



exchange of opinions. Gregor Strasser was to head this new Arbeitsgemeinschaft.<sup>52</sup>

In concluding his report of the Hagen meeting, Fobke noted that the newly organized Arbeitsgemeinschaft North West would make its influence felt in the National Socialist movement, and that Haase, who agreed with all that Fobke had written, wanted to use the newly created organization to discuss the question of Esser. Just as those present at the meeting had passed a resolution concerning participation in elections, they should pass another censoring Esser and thus make use of this unique opportunity to straighten out the entire NSDAP.<sup>53</sup> This, however, they did not do.

So, according to Goebbels, Strasser got just what he wanted from the Hagen meeting. Goebbels wrote in his diary of a meeting which was held in Dusseldorf on September 27, but it was simply to clarify the situation in Gau Rhineland North. Ripke, the Gauleiter, was released from his position and replaced by Karl Kaufmann. The Arbeitsgemeinschaft North West began its activities and functioned very well, though there was "still a great deal to do."<sup>54</sup>

Once Strasser created the Arbeitsgemeinschaft he had an instrument with which he could accomplish his purposes within the Party, whatever they

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>54</sup>Goebbels Diaries, p. 37.

happened to be. As seen above he was anxious to rid the central Party apparatus of the Esser-Streicher group. There is also evidence that he wanted to use the Arbeitsgemeinschaft as a means of establishing his socialist views in the doctrines of the Party.<sup>55</sup> With the creation of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Strasser quite naturally strengthened his own personal position within the North German Party organization. Still, this did not mean that he was the head of a recognized separate Nazi organization for the North, and it did not mean that the various Gauleiter in North Germany would do everything that Gregor Strasser wanted them to do. They remained a group of independent men, and undoubtedly Strasser found working with them not quite as easy as he might have first imagined.<sup>56</sup>

It is difficult to ascertain exactly what Strasser's position toward Hitler was during his sojourn in northern Germany. Nevertheless one thing is certain: the members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft North West did not choose to become an anti-Hitler organization.<sup>57</sup> Kaufmann states that the most Strasser hoped to do was to free Hitler from some of his advisors and his surroundings. This does not mean that the Arbeitsgemeinschaft did not criticize Hitler from time to time, but their criticism was directed primarily

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Appendix

at his personal politics and nothing more.<sup>58</sup> v. Pfeffer, however, reports that at this time Strasser was not too convinced of Hitler's ability as a leader; not that Hitler was not capable, but Strasser questioned the possibility of his ever becoming a great leader. Strasser admitted that Hitler was an excellent speaker, but he had never been an officer in the army and seemed to lack what Strasser called any great "male image" (Mannesbild).<sup>59</sup>

With the evidence available it is difficult to say whether Strasser was consciously working against Hitler or even attempting to gain influence for himself. Schildt maintains that the development of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft shows that even in 1925 and 1926, the Gauleiter, despite their criticism of the Party leadership, were still prepared to follow Hitler. Any struggle against him would have been not only very difficult but probably hopeless, and it is very questionable if Strasser had planned such.<sup>60</sup>

Within a month after the Hagen meeting, Goebbels and Strasser had worked out the details concerning the organization of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, and on October 9 they issued a statement entitled: "Statutes of the

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 139. Interview von Pfeffer with the author, July 28, 1965.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 140.

Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the North and West German Gaue of the NSDAP."<sup>61</sup>

Although some of the details are practically identical with those developed at the Hagen meeting, others differ. In their statutes, Goebbels and Strasser stated that the Arbeitsgemeinschaft consisted of the following Gaue: North Rhineland, South Rhineland, Westphalia, Hanover, South Hanover, Hessen-Nassau, Lüneburg-Stade, Schleswig-Holstein, Greater Hamburg, Greater-Berlin, and Pomerania. Under goals and purposes, they wrote that the body's main aim was to unify the member Gaue in their organization and propaganda. They were to exchange speakers, strengthen personal unity among the Gauleiter themselves, write exchanges of opinion on political and organizational questions, hold regular meetings, and follow the Party's stand on problems of current politics. The official organ of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft North West was the NS Briefe, published by Gregor Strasser and edited by Goebbels. An interesting statement was made in Section 4 of the Statutes: that the Arbeitsgemeinschaft and the NS Briefe existed with the express permission of Adolf Hitler. Article 5 confirms Strasser as the leader of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, and Goebbels as business manager. Meetings were to take place in large cities of the member Gaue on a rotational basis. In order to ease the work of the individual Gauleiter, and in general to simplify all work, each Gauleiter was to

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<sup>61</sup>Jochmann, Document 67, "Statuten der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nord- und Westdeutschen Gaue der NSDAP," pp. 212-213.

pledge himself to make fifteen copies of every important matter—information, suggestions, press notices—and to send them to the business office of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft North West for further distribution to all members of the organization. The final article is a plea for each Gauleiter to work for the united effort and to put down any selfish desire or purpose, to work in the true spirit of the National Socialist idea, and to serve their Führer, Adolf Hitler.<sup>62</sup>

Actually as early as August 16, 1925, Goebbels had written in his diary: "In September, the big job begins." Three days later, he added: "We are waiting anxiously for fall and winter. Then we shall again see the beginning of a new stage of the final struggle."<sup>63</sup> The final struggle, however, was to be far different from what Goebbels had first imagined it would be.

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Goebbels Diaries, p. 29.

SECTION IV

THE ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT NORTH-WEST

After the establishment of the AGNW at the Hagen meeting, Strasser and Goebbels found their work cut out for them. First, they were responsible for the publication of the NS Briefe,<sup>1</sup> which appeared on October 1, 1925. Then they began activity to bring about the special reforms of which they had spoken. Not surprisingly, Goebbels recorded in his diary that he had "big jobs to do next month."<sup>2</sup>

On November 14, 1925, the Goebbels diary has the short notation that the Hanover working community (AGNW) would meet the next Sunday. "No doubt a lot of things will be aired."<sup>3</sup> The day after the Hanover meeting, Goebbels added this cryptic entry: "Sunday. Working community. We go for it. Programme to be ready in January."<sup>4</sup> And that was the extent of his diary comments about the first Hanover meeting.

Smith terms the meeting "a rather innocuous gathering," and by and large it was just that.<sup>5</sup> A great deal of confusion has resulted from the Hanover meeting, making it seem more important than it actually was, because

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<sup>1</sup>The Nationalsozialistische Briefe are the bi-monthly papers published by Strasser and edited by Goebbels. Hereinafter referred to as NS Briefe.

<sup>2</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 37..

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, p. 46.

some writers mix it up with the more significant gathering also held in Hanover, but some two months later, in January of 1926.<sup>6</sup>

Although Goebbels gave this Hanover meeting something less than extensive coverage in his diary, he did report in an article published in the NS Briefe on the business which took place in November.<sup>7</sup> First, Goebbels gave a complete list of all who attended the meeting: Gregor Strasser, Lohse from Schleswig-Holstein, Schultz from Hesse-Nassau, Schröder from South Hanover, Kaufman and Elbrechter from North Rhineland, von Pfeffer from Westphalia, Schlange representing Greater Berlin, Wahlen from Pomerania, Viereck from Harzgau; and Bark, Dincklage, Rust, and Homann from Hanover. Strasser conducted the meeting and started off with a vow of allegiance "to our Führer Adolf Hitler." He then went on to discuss internal politics, and reiterated the twelve guiding principles adopted at the Hagen meeting as a basis for cooperative work within the AGNW.<sup>8</sup>

After some discussion of the possibility of enlarging the NS Briefe, those at the meeting turned their attention to the program for the AGNW

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<sup>6</sup>See Otto Strasser, Flight from Terror, pp. 113-116, Hitler and I, pp. 85-86. The date that has been most widely used is November 22, 1925, the date of the first Hanover meeting: Heiden, Führer, p. 287; Volz, p. 14, and Riess, p. 28. See also Smith, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup>NS Briefe, Nr. 5, "Bericht über die Tagung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Nord- und Westdeutschen Gauleiter in Hannover am 22. November 1925," December 1, 1925.

<sup>8</sup>See above, section III, p. 85.



which Strasser was drawing up, but which he had not yet completed. Strasser was to finish the draft and then submit copies of it to all of those in attendance at the meeting. Kaufmann and Goebbels were also designated to work out a draft program and submit it to the Gauleiter. They would make a detailed critique of the programs, then return them to the AGNW business office by January 24, 1926, and all questions which had arisen concerning the programs were to be discussed at this meeting.<sup>9</sup>

The assembled Gauleiter also considered the questions of the relationship between the Vaterländische Verbände and the AGNW. They took the unanimous stand that National Socialism was the political movement of the future, and that its power must not be unfavorably influenced nor weakened by any other organization. For this reason, they refused to allow any cooperation with the Vaterländische Verbände. They also discussed the question of a National Socialist union and concluded that only the central organization of the Party would be able to set up an effective union, and since the establishment of such a body was already a concern of the National Socialist leaders, the AGNW decided to keep out of it entirely.<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly the most important item discussed at the first Hanover meeting was the establishment of an AGNW program. Smith feels that the reasoning was this: once Strasser and Goebbels had formulated a definite

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<sup>9</sup>NS Briefe, Nr. 5, December 1, 1925.

<sup>10</sup>NS Briefe, Nr. 5, December 1, 1925.

program of action for the AGNW, they could open their attack on the clique in Munich which was ruling the NSDAP there.<sup>11</sup> There is evidence to support this view, for on October 2, 1925, Goebbels wrote in his diary: "Once the working community has become sufficiently big, we shall launch a general offensive. It is a question of National Socialism and nothing else."<sup>12</sup> And, as early as September 30, 1925, Goebbels had reported: "Strasser has come . . . Strasser made a smart and robust speech. He still has a lot to learn and he will learn. But he will accept anything that adds radical content to the idea. He is to be our battering-ram against the Munich bosses. Perhaps the battle will flare up very soon. The working community protects our rear."<sup>13</sup>

Strasser's draft of the program was completed by at least December 14, 1925, for on that date copies went out to various party members for their perusal. Strasser entitled his working program "Der Nationale Sozialismus," and in the cover letter accompanying the program he requested that it be regarded as highly confidential. Furthermore, his letter asked that any comments or criticism of the draft be sent in writing, in at least fifteen copies, back to him. Or if someone receiving the program had designed a program of his own, he could send that out also, again in fifteen

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<sup>11</sup>Smith, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 38.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

copies. The letter informs those receiving draft copies of Strasser's plan that Strasser did not maintain to have drawn up an infallible program. On the contrary, his outline was simply meant to provide a base upon which the AGNW members could build their further work. Since the instructions specifically request fifteen copies of everything concerning the draft, it would appear logical that at least fifteen people were to receive it.<sup>14</sup>

More information on Strasser's draft program is found in a letter Joseph Goebbels sent out to sixteen National Socialists, explaining that it had been impossible at that time for him to get the promised draft program out to the various Gauleiter as Strasser had instructed him to do. He told these men that their copies of the program would definitely be ready for them on January 24th, the date of the second Hanover meeting. Those who received copies of this letter--or at least were listed as recipients of it--were: Ley, von Pfeffer, Vahlen, Telschow, Dincklage, Schultz (Cassel), Lohse, Haase, Klant, Hildebrand, Gregor Strasser, Gottfried Feder, Munder, Wagner, and Viereck.<sup>15</sup> These, then, were undoubtedly those who received copies of the finished program, whereas there were certain others who had received at least one copy of Strasser's first draft as early as the middle of December, 1925.

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<sup>14</sup>Unsigned letter to Kerrl dated Dec. 14, 1925. Hann 310 I AG.

<sup>15</sup>Letter to each of the above named Gauleiter from Dr. Goebbels, dated Jan. 5, 1926, Reichsschatz Ministry Ord. 153.

From a letter that Otto Strasser wrote to Goebbels we learn a little more about events at Hanover. Gregor Strasser had asked Otto to write to Goebbels, requesting that he prepare a short report which would give an insight into the business of the meeting. (Evidently, events at Hanover were difficult to clarify for all concerned.) Otto then listed the individual points which Gregor wanted Goebbels to include in this report.

The first point dealt with the publication of newspapers. Those at the meeting unanimously (according to Otto Strasser) agreed to the choice of "Der nationale Sozialist" as the name for their publication. Furthermore, it was the absolute duty of all Gau members to subscribe to this newspaper. After the first of February 1926, Gregor Strasser himself would take over this publication.

The second point which Goebbels was to include in his report was the position taken by individual members of the AGNW meeting concerning the expropriation of royal properties, a problem which had suddenly burst onto the political scene. Goebbels was to write that at Hanover there was a universal agreement to adopt the resolution which all members of the AGNW had in their possession. Most probably this was the resolution that there should be expropriation of royal properties without any compensation whatsoever.

Concerning the stand of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft toward the Vaterländische Verbände, Goebbels was to repeat the conclusions reached at the

Under the date of December 14, 1925, Goebbels records this entry in his diary: "Letter from Ludendorff. Greetings and thanks for programme draft."<sup>16</sup> Ludendorff would have had to receive the copy of the draft on at least December 10th or 11th in order to have sent a letter back to Goebbels on December 14. The important point is that copies of the draft were out prior to the second Hanover meeting, so that members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft had ample time to write their criticism of Strasser's work as well as to write complete program drafts of their own, if so inclined.

Completion of the finished program was necessary before the AGNW could embark on any independent action. Goebbels, too, worked diligently on the draft of the program. As early as December 18 he must have had in his possession a copy of Strasser's early plan, because he commented on its flaws.<sup>17</sup> Again on December 23 he reported that he had been working every day on a comprehensive program for National Socialism.<sup>18</sup> Finally on January 6, 1926, Goebbels succeeded in completing his draft of the program. "My programme draft is finished after much effort and work. In the end I grouped everything in twenty-four basic demands. But I shall have to

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<sup>16</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

fight a sharp battle with the working community (AGNW). Though they won't be able to find any serious arguments against what I have said."<sup>19</sup>

This program draft was of the utmost importance, because the Gau-leiter had decided at the first Hanover meeting that Strasser's draft would become the program for the AGNW's future actions, and furthermore, they wanted it to become the outlined program for the entire party. So several different drafts of a program were prepared, but no final decision on any was to be made until the second Hanover meeting.

Still, careful as both Strasser and Goebbels had been in drawing up the program, they ran into difficulty even before the proposed second Hanover meeting. Strasser learned from Rust that Feder had received a copy of the draft program and was outraged because it had been circulated without Hitler's knowledge or consent. This meant as Strasser realized that Feder would of course show the draft to Hitler, so he quickly decided to pacify Hitler by sending him a copy of the draft program himself, with the added note that he (Strasser), acting in an unofficial capacity, was gathering the views of different party members for a possible program to be enacted at a later date. Strasser then warned Goebbels that it would be necessary to send out a circular to the members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft in which he was to caution them that the

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<sup>19</sup>Jochmann, Document 71, "Gregor Strasser an Dr. Joseph Goebbels," p. 220.

program dealt with a collection of ideas which, while not obligatory was nevertheless controversial and was, therefore, to be shown only to Arbeitsgemeinschaft members who held similar opinions. Since the program was not to represent any official change in the party philosophy Strasser felt that utmost discretion was desirable.<sup>20</sup>

Goebbels' diary reveals his great anticipation of the second Hanover meeting. He felt that it would be not only important but decisive for the future of the entire National Socialist movement.<sup>21</sup> On January 13, 1926, he wrote: "More of it (travelling) next week, then working community Hanover . . ."<sup>22</sup> and on January 18, 1926: "Decision about the programme in Hanover next Sunday."<sup>23</sup> On January 20 he noted: "Sunday Hanover, big programme decision. Nothing will happen."<sup>24</sup> And finally on January 23, 1926, he finished with: "Off to Hanover. Into battle!"<sup>25</sup> It seems that Goebbels realized full well that there would be some at the meeting who would raise objections pertaining to the adoption of the new program, but

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<sup>20</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup>Smith, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

he stated that he, Strasser, and von Pfeffer were definitely in agreement concerning it.<sup>26</sup>

Because of the dearth of any specific minutes or records of the second Hanover meeting, it is difficult to piece together what actually occurred there. Certain letters and Goebbels' diary are helpful in ascertaining at least some of the items the Gauleiter in attendance discussed. No complete record exists of all those who were present at this second Hanover meeting, yet from the evidence available one can draw up a short list of some Gau-  
leiter and other leaders who were known to have assembled there. A partial attendance would include Goebbels' list of Elbrechter, Hildebrandt, Kaufmann, Lohse, Ludendorff, Pfeffer, Gregor Strasser, Vahlen, von Salomon, Schlange, and Robert Ley. Gottfried Feder turned up most unexpectedly at this meeting, and his presence there irritated Goebbels considerably.<sup>27</sup> In all probability Rust, Brückner, and Otto Strasser also attended the Hanover meeting. Otto Strasser claims that Kerrel was there, and adds that approximately 24 persons

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<sup>26</sup> von Pfeffer, however, did not completely agree with Strasser's views as put forth in the Strasser Program. He felt that Strasser's program was much too mild. Pfeffer himself wrote his own views into a draft program during the late fall of 1925 or early in 1926. This program was signed by "Frederick," a nom de plume used by von Pfeffer. For a copy of the Pfeffer program and also an explanation of "Frederick" see HA Reel 44 Folder 896. The author asked von Pfeffer if he were "Frederick" and he stated that he was. Interview with von Pfeffer, July 28, 1965.

<sup>27</sup> Goebbels' Diaries, pp. 62-63.



were present.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the above list, Smith lists Lutz, a Berzirksleiter from Westphalia, as being present.<sup>29</sup>

To add further to the confusion surrounding this Hanover meeting, no one really seems to know where it took place. Goebbels spoke of "the Hubertus,"<sup>30</sup> which was probably a hotel in Hanover. Curt Riess claims that the meeting was held in the Hotel Hanoverscher Hof,<sup>31</sup> but fails to document it, and Heiber says it took place in the home of Gauleiter Rust.<sup>32</sup>

Still, the most important facts are not the location of the meeting, nor who was in attendance, but lie with the issues discussed there. Goebbels wrote that they talked over "small resolutions, press (there was a heated debate over whether members should call themselves National Sozialists or Nationalsozialiste), compensation for princes, etc. Then the program . . . Feder speaks. And then a confused debate without end--then Russia . . ."<sup>33</sup> So it would seem that a great variety of questions were on the docket.

<sup>28</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 96. Otto Strasser further substantiated this in an interview with the author, May 11, 1963.

<sup>29</sup>Smith, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup>Curt Riess, Joseph Goebbels (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1948), p. 28.

<sup>32</sup>Helmut Heiber, Joseph Goebbels (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1962), p. 51. See also Otto Strasser and Michael Stern, Flight from Terror (New York: Robert M. McBride and Co., 1943), pp. 113-116, who say that the meeting took place in Rust's home.

<sup>33</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 63.

first Hanover meeting.<sup>34</sup> Finally, and most important, Otto Strasser wrote what Goebbels should include in his report of questions dealing with the new program. General agreement about the necessity of having such a program had been expressed, but it was necessary to go into more detail than the draft program presented at Hanover had done. Goebbels was also to publish the resolution adopted by the Gauleiter at Hanover which read as follows: "Recognizing that the general directional guiding principles of the Twenty-five Theses, especially with respect to the penetrative power of our propaganda for the ever more critical political situation, need the supplementation of a more detailed plan of action, the meeting of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft in Hanover on the 24th of January is turning the suggestions submitted by various party members over to a study commission under the leadership of Gregor Strasser to be clarified and processed, with the assignment to transfer the sorted material to the central body of the party for further evaluation."<sup>35</sup>

The expropriation of the royal properties and the question of the adoption of the program were definitely the most important items on the meeting's agenda.<sup>36</sup> The question of expropriation had come up even before the second Hanover meeting: ever since the revolution of 1918, German courts

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<sup>34</sup>See above p. 97.

<sup>35</sup>Jochmann, Document 72, "Dr. Otto Strasser and Dr. Joseph Goebbels," pp. 221-223.

<sup>36</sup>Heiber, p. 51.

and certain states had taken legal action concerning the expropriation of all property belonging to the former ruling houses. In November and December of 1925 the German government, along with the state government of Prussia, announced a plan to solve the question of Prussia's claims against the Hohenzollern family. Prussia, according to this scheme, was to receive great sections of the Hohenzollern lands, but the old dynasty would be allowed to retain much of its property, four palaces, and also much jewelry. In addition, the Prussian state agreed to pay the Hohenzollerns an indemnity of thirty million marks.<sup>37</sup>

The greatest problem concerning the expropriation of the royal properties was that it forced many of the members of the NSDAP to take a firm stand, and it proved to be most embarrassing for some members when they had to choose between ideas concerning the inviolability of private property and the socialist views which they had propagated for so long.<sup>38</sup> The stand any particular party member took would show clearly whether or not he leaned toward socialism. The issue first became acute in December 1925 when the Communists in the Reichstag demanded expropriation without any compensation to the princely families. Most of the members of the AGNW supported expropriation and also stood firmly against any type of compensation. Thus the AGNW found itself in a rather embarrassing position--it was advocating

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<sup>37</sup>Smith, p. 58.

<sup>38</sup>Schildt, p. 165.

precisely what the Communists were, and, of course, the AGNW had no desire to be associated with the Communists on this or any other issue.

Both Gregor and Otto Strasser advocated expropriation without compensation, and Goebbels supported them.<sup>39</sup> This did not mean that the rest of the members of the AGNW agreed with the Strassers. That there were differences of opinion on this issue was apparent at the conference held in January 1926 in Hanover. Those members of the AGNW with socialist views had worked out a resolution concerning the question of expropriation, but it was not accepted by the membership as a whole. Only after they had made some changes in the resolution did they adopt it.<sup>40</sup> One of the additions made to the resolution by the AGNW members was that in case of the acceptance of the Marxian view concerning the expropriation, all property of eastern Jews who had emigrated into Germany since August 1, 1914, be confiscated. They also recommended the confiscation of all of the great profits made by the banks and stock exchanges.<sup>41</sup>

The whole issue of the expropriation of the princes was clouded by these other demands. The resolution itself recommended neither the abandonment nor the support of the issue of expropriation. The end result then was

<sup>39</sup>Nationalsozialistische Briefe, Number 6, February 15, 1925.

<sup>40</sup>Jochmann, Document 72, "Dr. Otto Strasser and Dr. Joseph Goebbels," p. 221.

<sup>41</sup>Schildt, p. 173. See also NS Briefe No. 9, February 1, 1926.

insignificant and definitely confusing. It was apparent that the Arbeitsgemeinschaft did not want to take any specific stand on this significant issue unless it received instructions concerning a particular course of action from the party central.<sup>42</sup>

The greatest surprise to the organizers of the Hanover meeting was the unexpected arrival of Gottfried Feder, the author of the Twenty-Five Theses of the NSDAP. Feder's attendance showed clearly that Hitler did not plan to allow the members of the AGNW to make any decisions on their own initiative. Smith concludes, and rightly so, that "the sudden appearance of Feder decided the whole future of the AGNW, because it was a clear indication that Hitler was not willing to allow the northern group a free hand. By the simple device of sending a personal emissary, Hitler seized the initiative and placed the northerners in a real dilemma. If they listened to Feder, they would have to abandon their hopes for a program and an organization, and if they opposed Feder, they would also oppose his master."<sup>43</sup> Smith then concludes that Strasser and Goebbels met this problem by ignoring it and instead proceeded to occupy themselves with the business of the meeting.<sup>44</sup>

Goebbels recorded his feelings about Feder's presence at the meeting in his diary. "Suddenly Gottfried Feder turns up, the servant of capital and

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<sup>42</sup>Schildt, p. 174.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

interest, the revaluation shit [sic], and the principal programme drafter of the movement . . . . Then the programme. Feder speaks. Intelligent, but obstinately dogmatic. And then a confused debate without end. Lord, what a to-do."<sup>45</sup> Here the meeting seems to have become rather frenetic in tone. Goebbels concludes his diary entry with: "Then stormy agreement. We have won . . . . End of meeting: Strasser shakes my hand. Feder very small--self-effacing."<sup>46</sup>

Strasser was aware that Hitler opposed any attempt to change Feder's Twenty-Five Theses which had served as the basic program of the NSDAP. Hitler had stated clearly that no one must be allowed to spread his personal ideas among the party members. If this were allowed it would result only in complete confusion.<sup>47</sup> Although Strasser and the members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft knew of Hitler's opposition to the development of programs for the NSDAP they went ahead with their plans and did write a new program which they wanted to adopt and hoped would serve as a program for the entire party as well. There is some question concerning the author of the new program, but it is generally conceded that Gregor Strasser wrote it. Otto Strasser states that Gregor was the author, and that he (Otto) had assisted him.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, pp. 62-63.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>47</sup>Schildt, p. 154. See also IFZG FA 88 Fasc. 59, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>Interview Bradley Smith with Otto Strasser. See Smith, appendix.

A basic part of the program was Strasser's plan for a complete change in Germany's administrative structure. The chief executive would be a President to be elected for a seven-year term. His primary duties would be the selection of the presidents of the Landschaften which would replace the Reichslander or German States. The President would form a ministry and would conclude all treaties including declarations of war and peace. Within the executive branch of the government would be a Reichsministerium (Reich Ministry) which was responsible only to the President and in certain cases to the Reichsständekammer (see below). The President would direct the affairs of the Nationalrat (National Council) which was to consist of the presidents of the Landschaften and the members of the presidium of the Reichsständekammer. Strasser compared the position of his President with that of the President of the United States even though the German President was to have practically dictatorial powers.

More important than either the Ministry or the National Council was the Reichsständekammer (Reich professional or class chamber) which was selected through indirect elections from Germany's five main working classes: agrarian, industrial and business, laboring, official and white collar, and free professional. The Nationalrat and the Reichsständekammer elected the Reich President. The Reichsständekammer had the legislative rights of calling for information, interpolation, and initiative, and regulations were to be established whereby it could force the withdrawal of any legislation.

If the cabinet received two votes of no confidence within one year's time then it must step down.

Strasser's governmental scheme was strictly authoritarian. The President and the cabinet had practically all of the power. The President's strength was enhanced since he named the Landschaft presidents and also ten of the one hundred members of the Reichsständekammer. The other ninety members were to be elected indirectly. Still, there were some democratic elements present in the Reichsständekammer as Strasser would organize it. It consisted of the various classes which he felt made up "productive society" and was thereby, at least to an extent, democratic. One thing Strasser overlooked was that members of the various classes could differ in their outlook concerning government and its legislation as much as political parties could, and therefore he was not ridding the government of the problem of political disunity as he undoubtedly thought he was.<sup>49</sup>

The economic aspects of Strasser's program are not as socialistic as one would expect considering Strasser's own socialist views. All land was to belong to the state, but buildings on the land were considered private property. Those families who occupied farms of 1000 Morgen<sup>50</sup> would be

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<sup>49</sup>Schildt, p. 158.

<sup>50</sup>A Morgen is a unit of measure for land. The German Ar is equal to 100 square meters. In Prussia the Morgen was 25 $\frac{1}{2}$  Ar, in Bavaria 34 $\frac{1}{2}$  Ar. The term Morgen is seldom used today.



allowed to remain on them and could leave them to their sons provided the latter were capable and willing to manage such a farm. Farms over 1000 Morgen would be divided into smaller units and would be parcelled out to those who were working them, provided they were of German nationality. Farm produce would not be sold in the free market, but would be processed and sold only through cooperatives.

Strasser would divide the control of industrial concerns in a rather unusual way. For those industries which he considered key industries such as weapons factories, banks, the chemical and electrical industries, he would leave 51% of the ownership in the corporation and would divide the rest so that 30% went to the Reich, 10% to the workers, 6% to the Landschaft, and 5% to the community in which the particular industry was located. Industries which were not key industries would retain 49% of their stock and the rest would be divided by giving 30% to the Reich, 10% to the workers, 5% to the Landschaft and 4% to the community. Strasser's division of the ownership of these corporations was hardly socialistic, especially considering that the workers received only 10% of the control of the corporation.

Some of the most far-reaching proposals in Strasser's program were those dealing with foreign affairs. He advocated the unification of all Germans in "Middle Europe" in a single greater German Reich which would include Austria, South Tyrol, and the Sudetenland. Then too Germany was to have her African colonial empire restored to her and would take over the

Congo, Portuguese colonies, and French colonies to a certain extent. One can see Strasser's strong nationalist sentiments in both of the above proposals. Probably the most surprising aspect of his entire program was the advocacy of the establishment of a United States of Europe and a customs union with most of the European countries, but especially with France.<sup>51</sup> Although Strasser makes no mention of the U.S.S.R. in his proposals for the establishment of a United States of Europe, one cannot help but wonder just how he would have fit the Soviet Union into his scheme. While Strasser often attacked Bolshevism he felt that it was necessary to consider the East, particularly the Soviet Union in attempting to devise some type of a meaningful foreign policy.<sup>52</sup> Nearly everything else Strasser advocated was in keeping with the ideas of the Party. The unification of all Germans was certainly no new idea. The Pan-German League established in 1891 had advocated this, and practically every völkisch group throughout Germany held the same view. Gottfried Feder, in number one of his twenty-five points, wrote: "We demand the union of all Germans in a Pan German State (gross Deutschland) in accordance with the right of all peoples to self-determination."<sup>53</sup> Nor was there anything very startling about Strasser's recommendations for the

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<sup>51</sup>The Strasser program. Art. 25. See Smith appendix.

<sup>52</sup>Geismaier, pp. 20-21.

<sup>53</sup>Heiden, National Socialism, p. 15.

creation of an authoritarian state based upon industrial and professional organizations. This idea was in direct keeping with the Nazi ideology and was also a part of Feder's program. His point number twenty-five reads: ". . . we demand the creation of a strong central authority in the State; the unconditional control by the political central parliament of the whole state and its organizations. The formation of professional committees, and committees representative of the several estates of the realm, to insure the laws promulgated by the central authorities being carried out in the individual States in the union."<sup>54</sup> But the establishment of a United States of Europe was highly unusual and the very weak manifestation of socialism in the program was surprising.<sup>55</sup>

The program discussed at the Hanover meeting had far-reaching consequences for Strasser and the AGNW. As drawn up, it was a program which demanded social revolution--something Hitler had always shied away from.<sup>56</sup> Hitler knew of the program, not only through Gottfried Feder's report of it, but also because Gregor Strasser had sent him a copy as early as January 8, 1926.<sup>57</sup> But Strasser's efforts to stay in his Führer's good graces

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 18. For a discussion of the twenty-five points see Heiden, pp. 14-18.

<sup>55</sup>Schildt, p. 158.

<sup>56</sup>Smith, p. 64.

<sup>57</sup>Jochmann, Document 71, "Gregor Strasser and Dr. Joseph Goebbels," p. 220.

by means of this conciliatory maneuver were not entirely successful. Hitler was thoroughly angry about the whole thing. Goebbels recorded in his diary under February 6, 1926, the following note: "Much news. Gregor away. Hitler is in a rage about the programme."<sup>58</sup>

And Hitler was not alone in his opposition to the new program. Strasser had submitted copies to AGNW Gauleiter prior to the Hanover meeting, and many of them withheld their approval. The strongest argument voiced against Strasser's version of the program was that it was too "mild," and general in nature; it lacked detail. On January 19, 1926, Hermann Fobke expressed his own disapproval of the draft in a letter to Ernst Brändel. He sent Brändel a copy of the program along with the comments that Haase had made concerning it. Fobke noted that "There will undoubtedly be battles today before we convince Strasser of the fact that he has reproduced complete goat manure."<sup>59</sup>

Thus it is obvious that although Goebbels claims that those favoring the Strasser program "won" at Hanover, their victory--if a victory at all--was in any case a modest one. In a letter dated February 1, 1926, and signed simply "Gau North Rhineland" (though most probably written by Goebbels), there is a request for the return of all the copies of the Strasser draft which had been distributed. "Because of the preliminary work for a more comprehensive program of action following the recommendation of the AGNW meeting

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<sup>58</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 65.

<sup>59</sup>Letter Fobke to Ernst Brändel 19 Jan. 1926, Hann 310 I G5.

in Hanover, on January 24, 1926, should be completed by a smaller group, I ask you at the request of Herr Strasser to return . . . the Strasser program drafts which . . . were placed at your disposal."<sup>60</sup> Strasser realized, after the long debate over the program at Hanover, that he had perhaps been premature in issuing draft copies. There was still a great deal of work to do. Thirty copies of the program had been made up, and nineteen of these distributed. One had been returned and the other twelve most probably had never been distributed.

Many criticisms of the program were leveled at Strasser even before the Hanover meeting. Attacks upon or enlargements of the program began to appear rather suddenly, and one signed Frederick<sup>61</sup> was dated Christmas of 1925. Other replies, mainly by Elsner V. Gronau, and by Haase and Fobke, probably antedated the Hanover meeting also, though no dates are given for them. In all of these suggested new programs Strasser was attacked for being too moderate, and the proponents made proposals that were far more radical than his.

Hitler had recognized the development of a growing danger in the North. The attempts of the northern group to formulate its own party philosophy

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<sup>60</sup>Letter to 18 Nazi officials signed NSDAP Gau Rheinland-Nord, dated 1 Feb. 1926, HA/NSDAP 153 III in the Forschungustelle fur die geschichte der NSDAP in Hamburg.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>See above Footnote 27.

necessarily pulled them further away from his own central leadership, which was the last thing he desired. He did not intend to sit idly by and watch this breach widen. He countered the threat in the best way he could--by first calling a meeting of Gauleiter in territory he controlled, and then by packing the meeting with loyal supporters he could easily influence. It would not be hard for him to dominate such a meeting himself.

So, on February 4, 1926, Strasser received word that Hitler had called a meeting of the Gauleiter to be held on Sunday, February 14, in the Bavarian city of Bamberg. Strasser immediately grasped the reason for this meeting, and what it could mean to his plans. In a letter requesting Rust to accompany him to Bamberg, he made the following statement: 'I have just heard from Hitler that tentatively a Gauführer meeting . . . will be held Sunday the 14th of February, mainly dedicated to the discussion--that means the damnation--of the program. Feder has apparently won along the entire line.'<sup>63</sup> Strasser went on to say that he would recall the copies of the program (but Goebbels had already done so on February 1st) and would explain to Hitler that this whole matter simply resulted from his (Strasser's) taking the initiative to clarify some important problems.<sup>64</sup> Pertinent information concerning the Bamberg meeting is once again provided by Goebbels' diary entries for the

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<sup>63</sup>Letter Strasser to Rust, dated 4 February 1926, Hamburg: Des. 310 1A II.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

early part of February. On February 6, 1926, he wrote: "Next Sunday Bamberg. Invitation from Hitler. Stand up and fight!. That will decide."<sup>65</sup> And again on February 8, 1926, he noted: "Tomorrow Hanover, next day Brunswick. In between meeting with Strasser. As to Bamberg. That will produce a pretty mess!. 'To the sword and chariot--fight!.' Feder, you nightingale, sing!"<sup>66</sup> On February 11, 1926, he wrote: "So I too shall have to go to Bamberg. Leaving Saturday morning. In Bamberg we shall have to act the part of the prudish beauty and lure Hitler on to our territory."<sup>67</sup> And on February 12, as the meeting drew ever nearer: "Tomorrow Hitler is to address the Gau leaders. I shall see Strasser a few hours earlier. We shall decide on the plan of action . . . . To Bamberg!. Let's hope for a new stage!"<sup>68</sup>

At the meeting itself, Goebbels did not "act the part of the prudish beauty," nor was he able to lure Hitler over into the Strasser territory. In spite of his aggressive diary entries and his call to arms, he actually did nothing at Bamberg either to support Strasser or to attack Hitler. Yet his diary is one of the most important sources of information for this meeting, which was to be so crucial to Strasser and his followers.

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<sup>65</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 65.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

In Goebbels' account, he lists Ernst (first Gauleiter from Halle Merseburg), Esser, Feder, Hitler, Klant, Lohse, Rust, Schlange, Strasser, Streicher, Vahlen, Dr. Ziegler (deputy Gauleiter in Thuringia after 1925), and of course himself, among those assembled. Haake (member of the Prussian Diet) travelled to Bamberg with Goebbels, and probably he also attended the meeting.<sup>69</sup> To this list the official police report of the Bamberg meeting adds the following: Holz and Ertel from Nürnberg, Dr. Glanz from Hamburg, Hildebrand from Mecklenburg, and Lob, a member of the Landestag. The police report states further that from 60 to 65 persons attended the meeting.<sup>70</sup>

The actual meeting took place much as Hitler had intended. He himself held the floor between four and five hours, leaving a modicum of time for discussion or for other speakers. Ordering the entire Party to oppose expropriation of the princes, he thereby showed the northern group that he took a dim view of independent action on this--or any other matter.<sup>71</sup> Hitler spoke out very strongly against the foreign policy advocated by the Strasser program. Whereas Strasser wanted to strengthen Germany's ties with France Hitler explained that France was not only the nearest potential enemy which Germany had, but was also the greatest enemy which Germany would face. Instead of allying with France, Hitler felt that the Germans would do well to form a

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-67.

<sup>70</sup>Smith, p. 131.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 71.



close tie with England.<sup>72</sup> Hitler also disagreed with Strasser on the question of South Tyrol. Strasser had written that the South Tyrol should become a part of the greater German Reich, Hitler, however, was adamant in his belief that the South Tyrol, even though it was German speaking, must be left with Italy. Germany's relations with Italy were far too important to sacrifice over the question of Tyrol.<sup>73</sup> In case Strasser had any plans concerning Russia Hitler dashed them at Bamberg. Hitler emphasized that any agreement with Russia was unthinkable and would result only in the Bolshevizing of Germany. Rather than making agreements with Russia, Germany must do everything within her power to strengthen her eastern border and only by so doing would the Germans who lived in that area have any chance to recover what they had formerly occupied.<sup>74</sup> Hitler forbade any further discussion of the Strasser program. The twenty-five points were to remain inviolable, and anyone undermining them was betraying the Nazi Weltanschauung.<sup>75</sup> After Hitler's speech Strasser knew that any further discussion of his program was impossible.

"I am almost beaten," Goebbels wrote in his diary.<sup>76</sup> This was true, although, perhaps hoping to salvage something, he did write that "the program

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<sup>72</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, Feb. 25, 1926.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 67.

would do, Hitler and the others were happy with it. A half hour's discussion followed four hours of speech."<sup>77</sup> Strasser, too, seemed to be feeling the pressure, for Goebbels' further reaction was quite emotional. "I cannot say a word'. I am stunned . . . Strasser is quite beside himself . . . . My heart aches . . . I feel like crying . . . . A horrible night'. Probably one of my greatest disappointments. I can no longer believe in Hitler absolutely. That is terrible. I have lost my inner support. I am only half myself."<sup>78</sup> The half that was left liked the smell of success, however, for a short time later Goebbels was to abandon Strasser for Hitler.

Strasser and his group did not accept the defeat at Bamberg gracefully. They refused to admit Hitler's victory, and kept hoping against hope that they would somehow be able to piece together what was left of their organization after the Bamberg meeting, work hard, and in the long run come out not much the losers. Goebbels even proposed that he, Strasser, and Kaufmann go "to Hitler to impress on him that he must not allow those rogues down there to tie him hand and foot."<sup>79</sup> Those rogues, of course, were the members of the Munich clique, the central party apparatus. When Goebbels returned to Elberfeld, he found a telegram from Lohse, Strasser, and Vahlen admonishing him to do nothing hasty.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Goebbels' Diaries, p. 67.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

In order to lessen the sting of the Bamberg defeat, Strasser called a meeting to be held in Hanover on February 21, 1926. Accordingly, most of the AGNW leaders gathered there to hold a long conference. They concluded with a renewed determination "to be strong." Goebbels wrote: "Let the men of Munich enjoy their Pyrrhic victory. Work, get strong, then fight for socialism. Good."<sup>81</sup>

But even determination and hard work availed nothing. The Arbeitsgemeinschaft never really recovered from the blow at Bamberg. Hitler had effectively killed the program, making it a thing of the past. On March 5, 1926, Strasser personally sent out letters to the members of the AGNW in which he admitted that he had found it necessary "because of special reasons" to have the copies of the "so-called 'Strasser Program' draft" returned to him. He concluded his letter with the statement: "I must beg immediate compliance with my request, because I have pledged my word to Hitler that I would bring about the immediate recall of the drafts."<sup>82</sup>

There is a possibility that Strasser may have wanted to rebuild his position after Bamberg. He called a conference for March 6 and 7 in Essen. The original announcement of this meeting in the press stated that it was to

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>82</sup>Jochmann, Document 74, "Gregor Strasser an die Mitglieder der Arbeitsgemeinschaft," p. 225.

be a Party Congress (Parteitag). However, on March 5, 1926 the Party Leadership in Munich countered with another announcement in the press stating that the meeting scheduled for Essen had been mistakenly titled a Parteitag, and its correct nomenclature should have been Gau congress of the two Gaue North Rhineland and Westphalia. The official announcement told the party members that the purpose of the meeting was specifically to inform the Ortsgruppenleiter and others of the NSDAP instructions concerning both domestic and foreign affairs as Hitler had proclaimed them in Bamberg. Finally, to assure the general party members that the meeting was strictly a local affair, the announcement from Munich noted that "Adolf Hitler will not be present at the meeting in Essen."<sup>83</sup> Had Strasser entertained any hopes of turning the Essen meeting to his advantage, this flat statement from the Party Leadership would have smashed them at once. But since Strasser had recalled all the copies of his draft program on March 5, 1926, one may assume that he had already bowed to the will of Adolf Hitler and did not intend to oppose him further.

Three days after the Essen meeting, an accident occurred that may well have been at least in a political sense to Strasser's benefit. Strasser and his driver were travelling to a speaking engagement when their automobile ran through a railroad barrier and was struck by a train. Both men were seriously injured, Strasser not quite so badly as was thought at first, but the

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<sup>83</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, March 5, 1926.

Party press announced that he would not be able to take up his duties for at least six months.<sup>84</sup> Actually, he was forced out of political activity for some two or three months, but this forced withdrawal from politics saved him much public grief, for he was "removed from the necessity of making a public disavowal at a time when his former statements and activities were embarrassingly fresh in the minds of his Party comrades."<sup>85</sup>

Nine months after his accident, Strasser publicly opposed the issue of expropriation of the royal property, but by then it was no longer an important issue in German politics. "The accident permitted him to ride out the period of his immediate defeat in silence. He did not give up his party offices, nor did he declare himself in favor of the ideas he had opposed."<sup>86</sup>

Although the AGNW for all practical purposes ceased to exist after the Bamberg meeting, it was not until October 1926 that Strasser finally announced its dissolution. By this time, however, he had accepted a position within the central Party organization, the office of Reichs propaganda leader, which had been filled by Hermann Esser until September 16, 1926. Now Strasser was intimately associated with the inner workings of the party and felt that he should officially dissolve the AGNW. In the twenty-fifth issue of the National Socialist Letters, Strasser announced that in accordance

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., March 11, 1926.

<sup>85</sup>Smith, p. 74.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

with Party regulations, specifically those of July 1, 1926, "the Arbeitsgemeinschaft of the North West Gaue, whose work played an important part in the successful march of the idea of Adolf Hitler in the North, has dissolved itself."<sup>87</sup> Goebbels and Pfeffer also benefitted by supporting Hitler. Goebbels became the Gauleiter of Berlin and Pfeffer the chief of the SA. The AGNW had played a significant role in the development of the career of Gregor Strasser. It served as a sounding board for his ideas, but when a showdown came between his loyalty to the AGNW and to his Führer, Adolf Hitler, Strasser sided with Hitler without much hesitation, and thus without his (Strasser's) support the AGNW quietly expired.

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<sup>87</sup> NS Briefe, Nr. 25, "Rückblick und Ausblick!" October 1, 1926.

SECTION V

GREGOR STRASSER AS REICHSORGANISATIONSLITER

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Aside from his organization of the AGNW, Gregor Strasser's most notable contribution to the Party occurred while he was associated with its central administration. Although this period from 1926 to 1932 was one of the most fruitful in his entire career, yet it is during this time that Strasser becomes a controversial figure. Certain scholars state that Strasser was busily creating a separate organization within the Nazi ranks, a party which in the long run would be loyal to him and not to Hitler,<sup>1</sup> While others maintain that Strasser had no intention of creating any type of opposition to Adolf Hitler, and to think that he did is to misinterpret historical evidence.<sup>2</sup> In order then to evaluate Gregor Strasser's work one must look in some detail at three areas: First, Hitler's views concerning Party organization, next, Strasser's role within it, and finally the conflict which Strasser's activities generated.

As early as February 26, 1925, Hitler had stated in the Völkischer Beobachter his ground rules for the re-establishment of the NSDAP.<sup>3</sup> Here Hitler clearly espoused his leadership principle, or the leadership principle

<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Schäfer, NSDAP: Entwicklung und Struktur der Staatspartei des Dritten Reiches ("Schriftenreihe des Instituts für wissenschaftliche Politik in Marburg/Lahn," Nr. 3, Hannover and Frankfurt/Main: Norddeutsche Verlagsanstalt O. Goedel, 1957). See also works by Otto Strasser listed above.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph L. Nycmarky, "Factionalism in the National Socialist German Workers Party, 1925-1934" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Dept. of Political Science, University of Minnesota, 1963). Also interview with Franz von Pfeffer, July 30, 1965.

<sup>3</sup>See above Section III, p. 72.



(Führerprinzip). According to this theory, the leader always ranked first in importance and the organization second. Hitler stressed the view that it should never be the other way around.<sup>4</sup> At the Bamberg meeting the idea of the primacy of the leader over other party elements which might offer a threat, either immediate or in the future, had been clearly restated and had been accepted by those attending the meeting, including Gregor Strasser and Joseph Goebbels. The North German faction, realizing that it could not win Hitler over to its position, had then surrendered to him completely. Hitler had met the challenge to his leadership, and three months later, at the meeting of the National Socialist German Workers Association which was held in Munich on May 22, 1926,<sup>5</sup> he consolidated his position so that a future challenge could not possibly arise.

Because the NSDAP was the political party of the National Socialist German Workers Association, or the National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Verein (hereinafter referred to as NSDAV) the Bavarian government required it to hold a general membership meeting at least once a year, just as it did all political associations. Since Hitler was the recognized head of the association he could address its meeting, even though at this time the Redeverbot was still in effect. At this Munich meeting Hitler emerged as the undisputed

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<sup>4</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, Feb. 26, 1925.

<sup>5</sup>For an excellent discussion of the Munich meeting see Bradley Smith, pp. 94-101.

leader of the association and its political party. He tightened the general organization of the association and announced that new rules for expulsion from the party had been effected: A member could be expelled from the NSDAP for slander, for any action deemed detrimental to the party, or for causing a scandal because of his morals. Furthermore, any member could be expelled for repeatedly causing strife in the Ortsgruppe or Gau organization, for failure to pay his party dues for a period of three months or more, and/or for loss of interest in the NSDAP.<sup>6</sup> A committee for examination and arbitration (USchIA)<sup>7</sup> was to be established and would order all expulsions. In case it was necessary, the USchIA would work in cooperation with the chairman of the local group concerned, or with a meeting of the local party members, with the Gauleiter, or with the leader of the association, who was Hitler himself.<sup>8</sup>

So that those expelled from the party would know of the action taken against them they were to be notified officially in writing, and the expulsion would have immediate effect. A party member who had once been expelled could petition for re-admittance to the party, but only after a waiting period

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<sup>6</sup>NSDAP Jahrbuch 1927, (Munchen: Franz Eher Nachf., 1927), pp. 79-80. See also Smith, pp. 93-94.

<sup>7</sup>USchIA the abbreviation for Untersuchungs- und Schlichtungsausschuss (National Socialist Office of Arbitration for the liquidation of interior conflicts within the party. See Paechter, Paetel and Hellman, Nazi-Deutsch (New York: Office of European Economic Research, 1943), p. 226. Hereinafter referred to as Nazi-Deutsch.

<sup>8</sup>NSDAP Jahrbuch 1927, pp. 79-80. See Smith, pp. 93-94.

of at least eight days. Probably the most important of all these regulations was Hitler's statement that the decision of the party chairman was to be final. In the event of any irregularities affecting local groups as a whole, the chairman of the party, in cooperation with USchlA, was empowered to expel the whole group from the party, while the property belonging to the expelled group was to be transferred automatically to the Party itself.<sup>9</sup>

Hitler created an impregnable position for himself within the Party by incorporating these new rules for expulsion into its basic regulations. By deft combination of rather vague reasons for expulsion with the power given him personally to be the final judge Hitler could be assured that any potential opponent could be ousted before he could harm either Hitler personally or the Party as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

At the Munich meeting Hitler made several other important gains. Besides the expulsion orders were two motions that had great significance. One was a double motion which read that: "The leadership of the Association is at the same time the party leadership of the NSDAP." And secondly: "The leadership of the Ortsgruppe Munchen lies in the hands of the Reich leadership."<sup>11</sup> By this simple action the Munich group was guaranteed

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, p. 94.

<sup>11</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, July 22, 1926.

dominance over the party and Hitler was guaranteed a similar dominance over the Munich group.<sup>12</sup> The other amendment which was likewise a double motion read: "Ortsgruppen that are supported by party leadership may be organized in Gaue," and continued: "The Gauleiter will be appointed by the Reich leadership,"<sup>13</sup> which reserved for Hitler the final decision concerning the establishment of the new Gaue and the appointment of any of the Gauleiter. By these relatively simple motions Hitler could guarantee his position as the leader of the party and could prevent the establishment of Gaue or the selection of Gauleiter who might prove detrimental to his position as Führer. An organization such as Strasser had built up in northern Germany would be impossible under these regulations.<sup>14</sup>

Those attending the Munich meeting adopted still another motion which strengthened Hitler's position. The annual general membership meeting would be called between Easter and Whitsun and always be held in Munich. Such a motion practically eliminated the possibility of a revolt forming around a membership meeting which might have been outside of Hitler's immediate control.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Smith, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, July 22, 1926.

<sup>14</sup>Smith, pp. 100-101.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 98. See also Völkischer Beobachter, July 22, 1926.

One other motion which was accepted at the general membership meeting stated that: "To alter the purpose of the association a unanimous vote of the membership is required." The Bamberg meeting and his assertion of the role of the leader within the party gave Hitler political control, and now the Munich meeting provided him the machinery which corresponded to the supremacy he already enjoyed.<sup>16</sup> In order to prevent the creation of any new party program and to "prevent any schoolmaster or editor in the North from again creating disorder on the pretext that the party program was not good enough, Hitler decided in the Munich meeting that Feder's program of twenty-five points--about which Hitler had long ceased to concern himself--was immutable."<sup>17</sup> There was simply no room in the Party for any other program, such as the one drawn up by Goebbels and Strasser and presented to the members of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft.

Prior to the Munich meeting, Hitler had set down some of his basic ideas concerning party organization. Above all he felt that the term should be used synonymously by party members with "organism." That is, the party organization should be real; it should be a living, expanding entity.<sup>18</sup> The party was not to be identified with the term "mechanism," for that did

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<sup>16</sup>Smith, p. 100. See also Heiden, Führer, p. 291.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>IFZG, Fa. 88, Fasz. 55, p. 1.

not convey any idea of life or development. Certain organizations existed throughout German history which Hitler admired, though from a strictly structural point of view. He saw the Prussian army as a practically perfect institution and admired the structure of the Roman Catholic Church. Hitler made it perfectly clear, however, that this alone was not sufficient and that the Nazis had a much greater task than just adding another organization to those already in existence. They must strive to change the entire ideology of the German people. It was important especially to slant all German civic life toward the Nazi concept of race. Race itself was in fact to play a dominant role in everything the party undertook, especially in its educational policy.<sup>19</sup> Naturally, only Arians would be allowed to participate in any organization in Germany; Hitler considered non-Arians totally incapable of worthwhile accomplishments.<sup>20</sup>

Of more importance than either ideology or organization was the principle of leadership (Führerprinzip). "True, the idea is the most worthwhile and fundamental, but the unity of the idea will be guaranteed through the unity of the organization and the recognition of an authority."<sup>21</sup> So, in the last analysis, it was that leadership principle which was of most significance.

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

Inherent in Hitler's conception of organization was the subordination of all individual ideas to the basic doctrine of the party. Naturally, in many instances there would be individuals in subordinate positions who might be thinkers, even better thinkers than the particular leader who was organizing the movement. But the essence of an organization is such, according to Hitler, that the more it subordinates the individual will, the greater its force will be.<sup>22</sup> Obviously a leader could make a mistake, but even the poorest directive would lead to victory sooner than complete freedom of action with its wasted effort and lack of leadership.<sup>23</sup> Hitler stressed that this was one of the essential conditions to be met by the NSDAP if it were to exist. Once again Hitler had proclaimed the doctrine of the primacy of the leader and made it clear that the movement could not tolerate any dissenting opinion.

As to actual mechanical processes of organizing the party, its development would be allowed to follow expediency.<sup>24</sup> For everyone who wanted to help in building the Party there would be work. Hitler continued: "We value the work in the way in which a person performs it."<sup>25</sup> A discoverer

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

was more valuable than a laborer, but the worth of the individual and his value to the community would finally be determined through the form in which that individual completed his task.<sup>26</sup> The most worthwhile worker for the movement was the one who carried out in the most exacting manner whatever was assigned to him.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, Strasser proved to be one of the Party's most "worthwhile" workers, for throughout the remainder of his Party career he completed his assignments scrupulously and succeeded in establishing a strong organization.

Although Hitler insured the monolithic structure of the Party at the Munich meeting of May, 1926, he had given specific regulations which concerned the details of its organization as early as August, 1926. These were spelled out more explicitly than the ones published in the Völkischer Beobachter on February 26, 1925, when he first announced the NSDAP's reorganization.<sup>28</sup> In these August regulations Hitler restated that the leadership of the NSDAV and the NSDAP were one, and that the Ortsgruppe Munich, as the mother group, would spread the movement through Germany. Various other Ortsgruppen would remain under the direct control of the central leadership.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>See above p. 130.

<sup>29</sup>IFZG, Fa. 88. Fasz. 91, p. 1.



As it became necessary, they could be united into larger divisions, such as Landesverbände or even Gauverbände.<sup>30</sup> The Ortsgruppen and the entire vertical structure of the Party would be subject to the commands of the chairman. They would, however, have their own local organization and would each be headed by a leader who was responsible for the direction of the Ortsgruppe. The chairman of the whole association was its responsible leader and had legal jurisdiction over the entire movement.<sup>31</sup> Thus Hitler bolstered the strength of his position, and also put his ideas concerning the leadership principle (Führerprinzip) into actual practice.

On this occasion Hitler not only discussed the organization of the Ortsgruppen, but he also outlined the basic positions within the central leadership of the Party. The chief administrators would be the first and second chairmen of the Party, the first and second secretaries, and the first and second treasurers--all of whom would be elected by a committee selected in the general membership meeting for that purpose.<sup>32</sup> In speaking of the secondary organization within the central Party apparatus, Hitler made it definite that the position of chairman of the Party was superior to

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<sup>30</sup>Gauverband, a unit made up of more than one Gaue. Combination then of various Gaue into a larger administrative body. Landesverbände a combination of different Länder into a larger unit or units. See Nazi-Deutsch, pp. 54, 159.

<sup>31</sup>IFZG, Fa. 88, Fasz. 91, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

any of the committees within the party, responsible only to the general membership meeting of the association and to no one else.<sup>33</sup>

To make the organization of the Party as functional as possible and to insure the possibility of its growth and expansion, Hitler stated that committees other than those selected in the general leadership meeting could be created, and they would assist the administrators with all of their duties.<sup>34</sup> These committees were the ones which eventually became integral parts of the Party organization, such as the propaganda committee, which would deal with all problems arising from publicity or propaganda. As early as October, 1925, Hitler called Gregor Strasser to head this committee.<sup>35</sup> Other committees to be organized would deal especially with questions concerning finance, youth organizations, and sports and gymnastics. The most important was the investigative committee, with the specific obligation of examining all proposals for Party membership and making recommendations for expulsion from the Party. In order to solve any dispute which might arise among Party members and to smooth out difficulties between the central and local Party apparatus, Hitler organized what he called an arbitration

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Volz, p. 14. See also Smith, p. 113.

board or office (Schlichtungsamt), and charged it with the task of peacefully settling any problems which arose within the Party or the parent association.<sup>36</sup>

With the publication of this organizational scheme Hitler established the basic pattern which the NSDAP was to follow until his assumption of power in January, 1933. Throughout the remainder of the 1920's and into the 1930's he continued to tighten it and to centralize it. Hitler's primary objective was to create a strong Party organization which would be completely dependent upon him, and in this he succeeded admirably.

After the general meeting held in Munich in May, 1926, it was clear that Hitler was the most important leader and the ultimate source of power in the Nazi movement. He had broken with the Deutsch Völkische movements in March, 1926, and was determined to spread the influence of his Party throughout all of Germany, and particularly into the northern area. While not all of the northern extremist groups supported Hitler, some of the most important ones did.<sup>37</sup> And after Gregor Strasser formally disbanded the AGNW there was little or no discussion in the North concerning the feasibility of weaning Hitler away from the "Munich Clique." The area of the party's chief strength was slowly shifting away from Munich to the North, and representatives of the northern groups were being taken into the central party organization, so to some extent the opposition against the Munich group was

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<sup>36</sup>IFZG, Fa. 88, Fasz. 91, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup>See above Section , p. , for discussion of North German support of Hitler.

more academic than real. Munich was to remain the "spiritual" center of the Party, but more and more Berlin became its center of activities, especially after Hitler selected Goebbels as Gauleiter of Berlin on November 1, 1926.<sup>38</sup>

A comparison of the number of Ortsgruppen--one of the smallest organizational units of the NSDAP in existence in 1923--with those of 1925 illustrates the significant shift in party membership from the South to the northern part of Germany, and to some extent testifies to the work done by Strasser in the North during the period in which the Nazi Party was forbidden. In numbers of members the southern groups still had the predominance, but many more Ortsgruppen were organized in the North during this period than in the South, and in many cases there were fewer Ortsgruppen in 1925 in some of the southern Gaue than there had been in 1923. Partly because of the impression Hitler made at his trial, and also because of the work which Strasser did in the North, the real life force of the party came out of northern Germany and not out of southern Germany.<sup>39</sup> (See Chart B).

By 1928 the main organizational units within the party had grown to twenty-five Gaue, two independent Bezirke, and one Landesverband (Austria). The number of Ortsgruppen and Stützpunkte (loosely translated as "footholds")

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<sup>38</sup>Volz, p. 15. Schäfer, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup>Schäfer, p. 11.

CHART A  
DEVELOPMENT OF ORTSGRUPPEN 1923-1925<sup>a</sup>

| Gau                      | Number |      |
|--------------------------|--------|------|
|                          | 1923   | 1925 |
| Bayerische Ostmark       | 75     | 57   |
| Oberbayern               | 22     | 16   |
| Württemberg-Hohenzollern | 37     | 20   |
| Schwaben                 | 32     | 20   |
| Mainfranken              | 24     | 13   |
| Franken                  | 22     | 18   |
| Düsseldorf               | 10     | 20   |
| Essen                    | 3      | 9    |
| Berlin                   | 1      | 9    |
| Kurhessen                | 5      | 15   |
| Mecklenburg              | --     | 14   |
| Osthannover              | --     | 11   |
| Pommern                  | 3      | 10   |
| Sachsen                  | 27     | 88   |
| Südhanover               | 8      | 40   |
| Thüringen                | 14     | 46   |

<sup>a</sup>Source: Schäfer, p. 11, Partei-Statistik. Vol. III, p. 40.

CHART B  
 THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS,  
 1925-1928<sup>a</sup>

| Districts              | Number of Local Party Organizations |      |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|
|                        | 1925                                | 1928 |
| A. Southern Districts: |                                     |      |
| Baden                  | 31                                  | 62   |
| Bayerische Ostmark     | 57                                  | 115  |
| Franken                | 18                                  | 36   |
| Oberbayern             | 16                                  | 32   |
| B. Northern Districts: |                                     |      |
| Düsseldorf             | 20                                  | 21   |
| Essen                  | 9                                   | 11   |
| Berlin                 | 9                                   | 28   |

<sup>a</sup>Source: Nyomarky, p. 205, Schäfer, p. 12.

by this time totaled 1,378.<sup>40</sup> The Party's loss of ground in southern Germany, however, was largely made good by 1928. But still it was northern Germany which was now the most significant geographic area in the party. In the western industrial areas of Germany the Party made very little progress and in fact gradually stagnated.<sup>41</sup> Part of the reason for this undoubtedly lies in the strong influence of the Communist party among the workers of the area.

Hitler formulated the basic philosophy which underlay the organization of the party, and from the time he reorganized it in 1925 until the period of its assumption of power in 1933 his ideas remained paramount in the formulation of organizational policy. But as was shown above, Hitler only enunciated basic generalizations concerning organization and did not give explicit instructions on the implementation of those ideas. As long as those who were associated with the organizational section of the Party complied with the basic policy laid down by the Führer, they could organize the party in the manner they thought best. Gregor Strasser eventually became Hitler's chief organizer and spent much time reworking the central Party apparatus. It is obvious that Strasser followed no great preconceived plan in bringing about his many changes. The Party seemed rather to be in a state of continual flux and growth.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

Long before Strasser became head of the Party's organizational section, he demonstrated a clear understanding of the fundamental principles and procedures of organization and administration. From the time he was a young man living at home with his parents, he had been interested in politics, but it was only after World War I that he discovered he had real talent as a political writer and speaker.

As an officer during the war, Strasser had the opportunity to command men. This experience contributed to his success in establishing his own para-military group in Landshut, after the war, which was undoubtedly his first actual attempt at any type of organizational activity. He proved to be a capable leader; so capable, in fact, that Ludendorff recognized Strasser's ability and called him to serve as a member of the Directory of the German Freedom Party during the summer of 1924, after Hitler had withdrawn from active politics. This meant that Strasser could assist in the structuring of that party's organization, and could actively work to spread its message throughout Germany. In addition, a position in the Bavarian Landtag had enabled him to observe first hand the work of various German political parties, another valuable experience. The time from the first World War until December, 1924, when Hitler was released from prison, was, in a sense, a training period for Strasser. During these years he developed into an able politician and obtained actual practice in the intricacies of party organization



as well. He capitalized on this knowledge when he went to northern Germany to assist in bringing the Völkisch political groups there under the control of Adolf Hitler.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly the NSDAP was primarily the result of Hitler's labors, but Strasser proved to be one of his most valuable co-workers--especially in his efforts to establish the Party on a firm organizational base.<sup>43</sup> Strasser had a definite influence, either direct or otherwise, on the development of nearly all the Party structure from 1927 until the Nazi assumption of power, with the exception of the SA, which was primarily the work of von Pfeffer.<sup>44</sup>

Long before Strasser became head of the organizational section of the party he had proved that he understood the fundamental principles of administration and organizational procedures. Primarily because of his ability as a writer and speaker Strasser became a politician, but he became a leader within the Party primarily because of his ability to organize. This was revealed during the post-war period when he built up his military movement in Landshut. Then, while he was in northern Germany, Strasser successfully brought together into the AGNW the Völkisch groups in the North which held his same beliefs. Although the Party was still primarily the

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<sup>42</sup>Geismaier, p. 69.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid. Also interview with von Pfeffer July 30, 1965.

result of the work of Adolf Hitler, his most important co-worker in establishing it on a firm organizational base was unquestionably Gregor Strasser.

As noted above, Strasser received an office in the Party headquarters in October, 1925, when he succeeded Esser as the head of the propaganda section.<sup>45</sup> However, because of the great growth of the party by 1927--the membership increased from 27,117 in 1925 to 72,590 in 1927<sup>46</sup>--Strasser gave up his position in the propaganda section and took over the organization office, which was to play an important role in the growth of the central Party administration and in the extension of the Party itself. The official announcement of his leaving the propaganda section appeared on January 2, 1928.<sup>47</sup> When Strasser went into the organizational office it consisted of two divisions: Angriff and Aufbau. The "attack" (Angriff) section was directly under his control, and through it he administered the party's foreign organization, the press section, and the main organizational office itself. His chief function was to coordinate all organizational programs and especially to keep a special watch over the party's vertical organization. By working in this office Strasser came into contact with most of the local party officials throughout Germany. It was a significant position. The other division of the organizational office created in this basic change in 1928 was the "extension"

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<sup>45</sup>Volz, p. 14.

<sup>46</sup>Schäfer, p. 11. See also his FN 26, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, Jan. 4, 1928.

(Aufbau) section headed by Constantin Hierl. This special section was in charge of questions concerning race, agriculture, culture, domestic affairs, justice, technology, and public works. In actual fact, this second section represented the primary planning bureaucracy of the NSDAP. It was also charged with the very important task of maintaining internal security within the party.<sup>48</sup>

This certainly is not to suggest that Strasser and Hierl had complete control of the party organization and could operate unchecked. Actually the contrary is true. Hitler retained one especially significant office for himself. He made Walter Buch, one of his staunchest supporters, the chief of the investigative bureau (USchLA), and by so doing retained for himself the decisive influence in the party bureaucracy.<sup>49</sup> Then too, in the consolidation of the party apparatus Hitler built up a loyal bureaucracy which recognized his, and only his, authority as being absolute. Hitler could depend upon having the general membership of the party recognize him as the leader, and thus he could control the vast net of Ortsgruppen throughout Germany and prepare them for the assumption of power.<sup>50</sup>

Although important organizational developments had taken place in the party prior to 1930, the most far-reaching changes with which Gregor

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<sup>48</sup>Schäfer, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

Strasser was associated were those occurring between 1930 and 1932. This was to be expected, since this was the period during which the Nazis were engineering their takeover of power. The party's rapid growth during this time also offers a natural explanation for the further evolution of its organization. In 1928 the entire party consisted of only 108,717 members, but by 1932 that number had shot up to 1,414,975. In the Reichstag elections of 1928 the Nazis polled 810,000 votes, and out of 491 seats they secured only twelve.<sup>51</sup> In the chamber the Nazis ranked number nine. By 1930, however, they polled over 6,400,000 votes and secured 107 seats in the Reichstag. They became second only to the Social Democrats in relative strength.<sup>52</sup> The greatest growth came in the election of July, 1932, when the Nazis became Germany's strongest single party. Of the total vote cast they polled 13.7 million votes or 36.9%, and of 608 seats in the Reichstag the Nazis won 230 or 37.8%.<sup>53</sup> These election statistics not only illustrate the growth of the Party from 1928 through 1932, but also show the reason why Strasser and the others within the Party administration felt that the its organizational apparatus must be altered to accommodate the growth in membership. Then too, there was always the need of expanding the general structure of the

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Volz, p. 21.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

party, and altering as well any specific part which might become obsolete or simply too unwieldy to handle efficiently the varied problems of administering a party of that size.

The reason why many members of the NSDAP joined the party was not because of its enunciation of any particular program, but because it offered an alternative to much which existed in the government of the Weimar Republic. The appeal was primarily negative rather than positive. From its earliest years the Nazi party was less a party of protest than a party of resentment, and the Nazis learned that they could win support by promising to correct anything a German might resent. The NSDAP did give the prospect of a better future, and to many that faint glimmer of hope was sufficient to have them turn against the Weimar Republic which had engendered nothing but resentment and doubt. This high degree of emotion fused the majority of the party members, yet it also explains the great amount of fluctuation within the party and the loose party structure.<sup>54</sup> They relied further upon the propagation of the idea of the leadership principle and the relationship of the member to the Führer.<sup>55</sup>

With this emphasis upon the growth of the vertical organization, and with many new members flocking to the party, Strasser had to organize new

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<sup>54</sup>Schäfer, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

Ortsgruppen. In 1928 there were 3,586 Ortsgruppen in the party, but by 1930 the number had grown to 4,964. The increase is even larger than the growth in Ortsgruppen between 1930 and 1932, when the total number approximately doubled.<sup>56</sup> The leader of an Ortsgruppe was elected by the members of his organization; however, Strasser issued an order dated June 1, 1931, in which he stated that the Ortsgruppenleiter would no longer be an elected official, but would be selected by the Gauleiter.<sup>57</sup> After 1931 there was no attempt at all to have any type of an elected official holding a position within the party, no matter how minor. The party had subjected itself to the Führerprinzip.

Throughout 1931 and most of 1932 Strasser worked very energetically, strengthening the party and organizing its various sections into manageable units. In addition, he spent much time and effort establishing the women's groups. Strasser made his first announcement concerning the women's section of the party in the Verordnungsblätter dated July 13, 1931.<sup>58</sup>

Although he kept the leader, Frä. Elsbeth Zander, whom Hitler had selected, it was clear that this organization would be completely new, and not just a continuation of the many women's societies which had existed previously within the Party. Frä. Zander would be directed by the Political

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Verordnungsblatt der Reichsleitung der NSDAP, Folge 1. June 1, 1931, p. 3. Hereinafter referred to as VoBl.

<sup>58</sup>VoBl. Folge 3, July 13, 1931, p. 7.

Section I of the party, but she would have complete freedom to organize whatever committees or groups she needed to assist her in carrying out her assigned duties.

Each Gauleiter would select a woman to lead the women's groups within his Gau. This selection was subject to the approval of the Central Women's Organization of the party. Bezirksführer would make the selection on that level.<sup>59</sup> In addition, Strasser clearly outlined the functions of the Women's Organization. The basic duties were three: (1) To give economic assistance to needy Party members in the form of soup kitchens for the jobless, sewing rooms, and other such services; and to fulfill what Strasser termed a "sanitary function," which included taking courses in hygiene, practical nursing, and other related subjects. (2) To assist in "spiritual, cultural, and pedagogical duties," which Strasser does not elaborate, and (3) to provide instruction in economics for housewives, who had the largest segment of the German income pass through their hands because they did most of the shopping.<sup>60</sup> Later in 1931, Strasser admonished Nazi women to forego membership in other groups. As members of the Women's Organization, they had ample opportunity to serve the Party and Germany.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Folge 3, July 13, 1931, p. 7.

Strasser's last orders dealing directly with this organization were given in April, 1932, when he restated the basic elements of its structure and duties.<sup>61</sup>

Strasser also examined non-Nazi political groups which might come to be of political consequence to the Nazis. He had to approve or forbid membership of Nazis in them; however, if the organizations had a "nationalist" leaning, Strasser generally gave them approval. A Catholic union was formed on June 10, 1931, and since it was a nationalist organization and had as one of its chief functions "the struggle against the Center Party which had become Marxist," Strasser allowed all members of the NSDAP who were Catholics to choose whether they wanted to join this union or not.<sup>62</sup>

Probably the most important Party units which concerned Strasser at this time were the factory cells (Betriebszellen), made up of all people who came under the definitions of the labor laws (Arbeitsrecht), which meant all "workers" (generally construed to mean laborers, hired personnel, and private officials).<sup>63</sup> The Betriebszellen were first just local units which would act as propagandizing and recruiting agencies in factories located within any specific Gau, and mention of them is made in the early summer of 1928, and then again in January, 1930.<sup>64</sup> The idea of having a national

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., Folge 3, July 13, 1931, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>VoBL, Folge 5, August 19, 1931, p. 13.

<sup>64</sup>Parteistatistik IV, p. 66.



organization of the Betriebszellen gradually led to action, and Strasser was behind this growth. Interestingly enough, its center was not to be Munich, but Berlin.<sup>65</sup>

The development of the NSBO (National Socialist Factory Cells)<sup>66</sup> was actively used to counteract the power of the Communists and to recruit workers for the NSDAP. All industrial plants in Germany were divided into three types: small plants employing up to 250 men, middle plants having from 250 to 1500 men, and large plants employing over 1500 men.<sup>67</sup> The NSBO itself was to consist of three separate steps or subordinate organizations, the "Industrial Groups," the "Specialist Groups," and the Betriebszellen themselves. Of all these organizations Strasser considered the Betriebszellen the most important, because they were the center of the entire movement and touched directly upon the workers themselves. The Betriebszellen had distinct functions to perform in each industrial plant. Their primary purpose was to propagandize and proselyte for the NSDAP through word and printed material, spreading National Socialism among the workers of any particular plant. The cell was responsible for the publication of a plant newspaper which would perform an important service in

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<sup>65</sup>Albert Krebs, unpublished diary entry for Jan. 24, 1931, p. 32. See also VoBl, Folge 5, August 19, 1931, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup>NSBO. Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation. National Socialist factory cells. Later referred to as Werkscharen, Nazi-Deutsch, p. 224.

<sup>67</sup>IFZG Fa. 88, NSDAP/HA 283, p. 8.

the dissemination of propaganda. Rather than remain aloof from workers' organizations within the plants, the members of the cells were to participate in any elections, especially in those for the plant council. If necessary the cell members could participate in strikes for higher wages. But above all they were to work to destroy the influence and terror of the Marxists. Through the Betriebszellen the Nazis were definitely attempting to become the Party of the workers, as they had long claimed to be.<sup>68</sup>

The infiltration of various factories with cells of Nazis had another aspect. What was to be the position of the Party concerning labor unions and other labor organizations already in existence? As usual it followed the pragmatic approach in answering this question. All depended upon the politics which the particular union was following. National Socialism, according to Strasser, did not want to crush the power of the Christian and national unions, nor even of the free unions, but would fight against any union which did not follow its own general political philosophy.<sup>69</sup>

Because a considerable amount of confusion developed concerning the NSBO and its membership, Strasser issued a regulation in June, 1932, in which he elucidated his previous regulations. Again the chief criterion for membership was whether or not one came under the work law that included

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-12.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

independent workers, as well as laborers, hired workers or people who were dependent upon another for their livelihood. It did not matter whether the particular person was a member of the NSDAP or not; as long as his sympathies coincided with those of Nazis he could belong to the cell.<sup>70</sup>

The NSBO was the central organization in the whole net of Betriebszellen which had been set up throughout Germany. On January 1, 1932, these cells had a membership of 43,730. By January of 1933, at the takeover of power by the Nazis, the cells had 265,459 members. Five months after Hitler assumed power their membership had grown to 1,418,289.<sup>71</sup>

Much of the growth of the cells can be attributed to Strasser's efforts, and his attempt to gain access to the workers of Germany through them proved to be remarkably successful. The cells provided not only an entree into the labor movement in Germany, but also presented an alternative to the advantages offered the workers by the Communists. As such the Betriebszellen played an important role during the period when Strasser was Organisationsleiter of the NSDAP. But by the time they reached their peak, Strasser had left the party and no longer had any say concerning their future development. To complete the story of the NSBO one need mention only that it was absorbed by the German Workers' Front (Deutsche Arbeiter

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Parteistatistik IV, p. 66.

Front or DAF), and its members became the foundation of that new organization, providing a nucleus for its leadership.

Strasser not only spent time working with the NSBO during the last years of his activity with the Organization Section, he also further defined the policies of the agricultural political (Agrarpolitisch) apparatus headed by Walther Darré. In case of difficulties and lack of unity over any particular policy Strasser himself would make the final decision among the district counselors (Kreisfachberater), while on the lower level the Gauleiter would make the final decisions for the town counselors (Ortsgruppenfachberater).<sup>72</sup> In further centralization of the party apparatus Strasser ordered in August, 1932, that the Film and Radio Sections of the party be joined to the Reichsorganisationsleitung.<sup>73</sup> He then went so far as to order that no member of the Party could give a speech over the radio which had not first been cleared by his office. Thus he had the power of censorship over not only the radio broadcasts themselves, but also over all manuscripts, which prospective speakers submitted for his approval.<sup>74</sup> A final organization with which Strasser became involved just prior to his leaving the party was the Nazi

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<sup>72</sup>VoBl. 27, July 27, 1932, p. 62.

<sup>73</sup>VoBl. Folge 30, August 31, 1932, p. 68.

<sup>74</sup>VoBl. Folge 27, July 27, 1932, p. 61.

Student League (NSDAP Studentenbund). In fact, his regulations concerning membership in the Student League were the last of his orders to appear in the Verordnungsblätter. In these regulations Strasser simply mentioned that the organization was founded in 1926 for the purpose of spreading the National Socialist ideology and taking over the German Universities and other specialized schools. He stressed that all members of the party attending such institutions were to belong to the Student League. Further, all Ortsgruppenleiter were to register all university students from their districts and make sure that they joined the student organization.

Thus during 1931 and into 1932 Gregor Strasser played a most significant role in the centralization and the strengthening of the horizontal Party apparatus. As Reichsorganisationsleiter he was in a perfect position to build up the Party as such, and to enhance his own position within the Party itself.

All of the organizational changes discussed above relate to the horizontal structure of the Party, and although Strasser initiated many of these changes, he was also closely associated with the development of its vertical organization. Just as the period of 1931 and 1932 saw an extension of the power of the organizational apparatus at the center of the Party, it also saw the coordination of the local units of Party structure, and much of this

was the work of Gregor Strasser. By changes within the central organization Strasser definitely secured his own position. He realized that a further consolidation of the Party was necessary before it would be prepared to assume power, and this he attempted to accomplish with his reorganizational scheme for the Reichsleitung, which he published in June of 1932.<sup>75</sup>

The complete structure of the Reichsleitung was announced for the first time on August 31, 1931.<sup>76</sup> At that time it consisted of the following officials: the Reich's Treasurer (Reichsschatzmeister), the Propaganda Leaders I and II (who controlled the entire Propaganda Section of the Party), the Chairman of the Committee for Youth, the two Organization Section leaders, who could be called the chairmen or managers of the entire Party structure, the Chairman of the Committee on Sports and Gymnastics of the SA, the Investigative Division (USchlA),<sup>77</sup> the legal section, the personnel office, the business manager, and the director of the Party's central publishing house.<sup>78</sup>

In this early announcement of the Party organization only the sections I and II and the Reich's Treasury were grouped into smaller divisions. The

<sup>75</sup>Schäfer, p. 19.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>77</sup>See above Foot Note 6.

<sup>78</sup>VoBl, Folge 6, August 31, 1931, p. 16.

following offices were subordinated to the Reichsorganisationsabteilung I, which was headed by Gregor Strasser; the foreign section (dealing strictly with Party members living in foreign countries or travelling in countries other than Germany), the Press Organization, and the NSBO. Strasser also presided over all Party leaders who were concerned with civil service problems, municipalities, and the war wounded who were Party members. One of his most significant functions was to publish all of the internal Party information sheets.<sup>79</sup>

Constantin Hierl, chief of the Organization Section II, controlled the Economic and Agricultural Political Section (Agrarpolitisch), and the section dealing with race and culture. The Reich's Treasurer, Schwarz, administered the Reich's Ordnance works and the National Socialist welfare fund, a type of insurance for members of the SA. Added to these three sections of the party was a group of special workers in the Reichstag bloc, though they were bound in only personal union to the general leadership of the party.<sup>80</sup> A further change in the Reichsinspektionen of the Organizational Section I came about at the end of 1931 when the former united, thereby creating a centralized organization which was not in the vertical structure of the security section in the Reichsleitung.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>VoBl, Folge 13, Dec. 12, 1931. See also Schäfer, p. 21.

Of all the offices created within the Reichsleitung, only four, the USchlA, the Treasury, the Organization Section I--including the sections on press, Women's Organization, and NSBO--and the Propaganda Section I had created subordinate divisions in the vertical structure of the Party. The USchlA had only a section on the Gau level and nothing further down the line. Wherever necessary, however, the parent organization could send specialists to the Gau or lower levels, which happened often, especially when the Organization Section II sent agricultural specialists to the Gaue.<sup>82</sup>

As was true throughout much of the history of the NSDAP, the jurisdiction of the various offices was never too clearly defined. This was especially so concerning the province of both of the organizational offices. Strasser headed the Organization Committee of the entire Party and carried more weight than did Hierl. Basically Section I had the greatest influence, acting as an organizational coordinating body and also controlling the vertical organization to a great extent. The primary function of Section II, at least prior to its extension at the end of 1931, rested essentially on planning. This division of labor was definitely broken in the future development of the party when there was a branching out of the collective organizations, and the ultimate result was an extremely unsystematic structure.

Colonel Hierl resigned his position as the head of Organization Section II and Hitler combined his functions with those of Organization Section Leader

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<sup>82</sup> VoBl. Folge 4, July 27, 1931. See also Schäfer, p. 21.



I, Gregor Strasser, and reformed the entire structure into the Reich's Organizational Section. (Reichsorganisations-abteilung). Strasser's official title then became Leader of the Reich's Organization (Reichsorganisations-leiter).<sup>83</sup> In this same order Hitler reserved for Walther Funk all organizational functions dealing with economics.<sup>84</sup>

Strasser administered the party's vertical organization by dividing it into two distinct units: the Reichsinspektion, which was a division encompassing the entire nation, and the Landesinspektion encompassing only a single state.<sup>85</sup> These national inspections reflected both Strasser's and Hitler's influence in the vertical organizational divisions of the party. Paul Schulz, Strasser's close confidant, led Reichsinspektion I and thereby controlled all of the Gaue which were subordinate to it. The organizational scheme ran from the Reichsorganization down to the Landesinspektion and five such Landesinspektionen were included under Reichsorganization I: (1) Landesinspektion East consisted of the following three Gaue: Silesia (which included Oppeln, Breslau, and Leignitz), East Prussia, and Danzig; (2) Landesinspektion Berlin, which had no subordinate Gaue under it; (3) Landesinspektion Central Germany and Brandenburg and Ostmark; (4) Landesinspektion

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<sup>83</sup> VoBl. Folge 25, June 17, 1932, p. 53.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Nazi-Deutsch, p. 75.

North consisting of Gaue Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg, and Pomerania; and finally (5) Landesinspektion Lower Saxony consisting of the following Gaue: South Westphalia, North Westphalia, Weser-Ems, East Hanover, and South Hanover Braunschweig.

Robert Ley, no great friend of Strasser's, headed Reichsinspektion II and had four Landesinspektionen and one Landesleitung,<sup>86</sup> Austria, under his direct control. These were: (1) Landesinspektion Bavaria, consisting of Gaue Upper-Bavarian-Munich, Lower Bavaria, Upper Pfalz, Swabia, Middle; Upper- and Lower-Franconia, and also Rhine-Pfalz; (3) Landesinspektion Saxony-Thuringia, consisting of Saxony and its three dependent Gaue, Chemnitz-Zwickau, Leipzig, and Dresden-Bautzen, Thuringia; and finally (4) Landesinspektion West, consisting of Gaue Essen-Düsseldorf, Cologne-Aachen, Koblenz-Trier, and the Saar.<sup>87</sup> The centralization of the vertical organization had begun to take place. The chain of command ran from Strasser to the Reichs Inspectors, and from there down to the Landesinspektors and then on down to the various Gauleiter throughout Germany.—

Along with the Reichsinspektionen were other significant divisions within the Reichsorganisationsabteilung. The most important was the main division III (Haupt-Abteilung), which Strasser headed. It also was divided into subordinate sections: (1) Internal Politics, (2) Political Law, (3) Engineering

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<sup>86</sup>Austria was considered a Landesleitung, or a separate division of the party existing in foreign countries.

<sup>87</sup>VoBl. Folge 25, June 17, 1932, pp. 53-54. See Schäfer, p. 87.

(4) People's Health, (5) People's Education, (6) Defense and Foreign Politics, (7) Municipal Politics, (8) Military Welfare (Kriegsversorgung), (9) Civil Service, (10) German Women's Organization, (11) Betriebszellen, (12) Foreign Section, and (13) Press Section. Added to the above were also special sections for lawyers, teachers, and doctors.<sup>88</sup>

Main Division IV was charged primarily with the direction of the economic well-being of the party and was led by Dr. Otto Wagener. This section consisted of six different groups. The final section in the organization of the party was Main Division V, the Agricultural Section led by Walther Darre,<sup>89</sup> which was divided into eight separate agencies.

In his original order reorganizing the Party Gregor Strasser wrote further explanations of the organizational scheme. The essential idea behind the entire reorganization was to make the sections of the Party fit their various geographic locations, and thereby Strasser hoped to eliminate some of the confusion which must have existed. From this time on the Gaue and the Untergaue each were to correspond to a German electoral district. The only exception was Gau Berlin which would include the entire city, even though it consisted of more than one electoral district, and the Gaue in the electoral districts of the states of Hesse-Nassau and Bavaria.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>VoBl. Folge 25, June 17, 1932, p. 54.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid. See VB June 15, 1932.

<sup>90</sup>VoBl. 25, June 17, 1932, p. 55.

Strasser issued the following instructions to further systematize the structure of the Gaue in the entire Reich: The Gaue themselves would be divided into Kreise (circuits or districts), and each Kreis or district would occupy the same area as the geographic divisions of the Prussian Landkreis, a Bavarian Bezirk, a Württemberg Oberamt, a Saxon Amtshauptmannschaft, or a city of 500,000 people.<sup>91</sup> The political leader of the Kreis was to be called the district leader (Kreisleiter) throughout the entire country. Strasser also ordered that any geographic division which existed previously in the vertical organization of the party between the Gaue and the Ortsgruppe such as the Bezirk with its Bezirksleiter<sup>92</sup> would no longer function. The same was true of the office of Gau commissioner.<sup>93</sup>

The leader of the local area, the Ortsgruppenleiter, was to be restricted to a specific area. However, Strasser felt that it would be impossible to have a geographic breakdown into administrative areas based upon large cities, small cities, or villages, so he decided that the most efficient means of determining the boundaries of any particular Ortsgruppe would not be its geographic base, but rather its population. An Ortsgruppe could consist of from 300 to 1000 members of the party. The Ortsgruppe was

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Bezirksleiter, leader of an area generally smaller than that of the Kreis. Equivalent of a precinct.

<sup>93</sup>VOBL, Folge 25, June 17, 1932, p. 55.

further divided into sections (Sektionen), which consisted of from 50 to 300 members each,<sup>94</sup> and each section was broken down into cells consisting of 10 to 50 members each. The last division within the whole vertical party structure was the block, which was a subdivision of the cell. Each block had up to 10 members. These divisions were binding on large as well as small cities and were not to be altered in any manner whatsoever.<sup>95</sup>

Strasser ordered that large cities of over 500,000 population (with the exception of Dortmund) were to serve as the headquarters of the Gau Leadership (Gauleitung) and also the subordinate Gau Leadership (Untergauleitung). He wrote that in the large cities this would guarantee a unified political line. Schematically Strasser's new division for the development of the vertical organization of the NSDAP appears as follows: (Chart C).

With the reorganization of the party, Strasser felt that certain significant objectives would be attained. In the first place the same titles would designate the same positions no matter where they were found throughout Germany, which meant that any official within the party could be transferred at any time without damaging the organization, because, as Strasser wrote: "The organization in all Gaue has been brought to a common denominator."<sup>96</sup> A politically unified policy would be guaranteed because the party organization

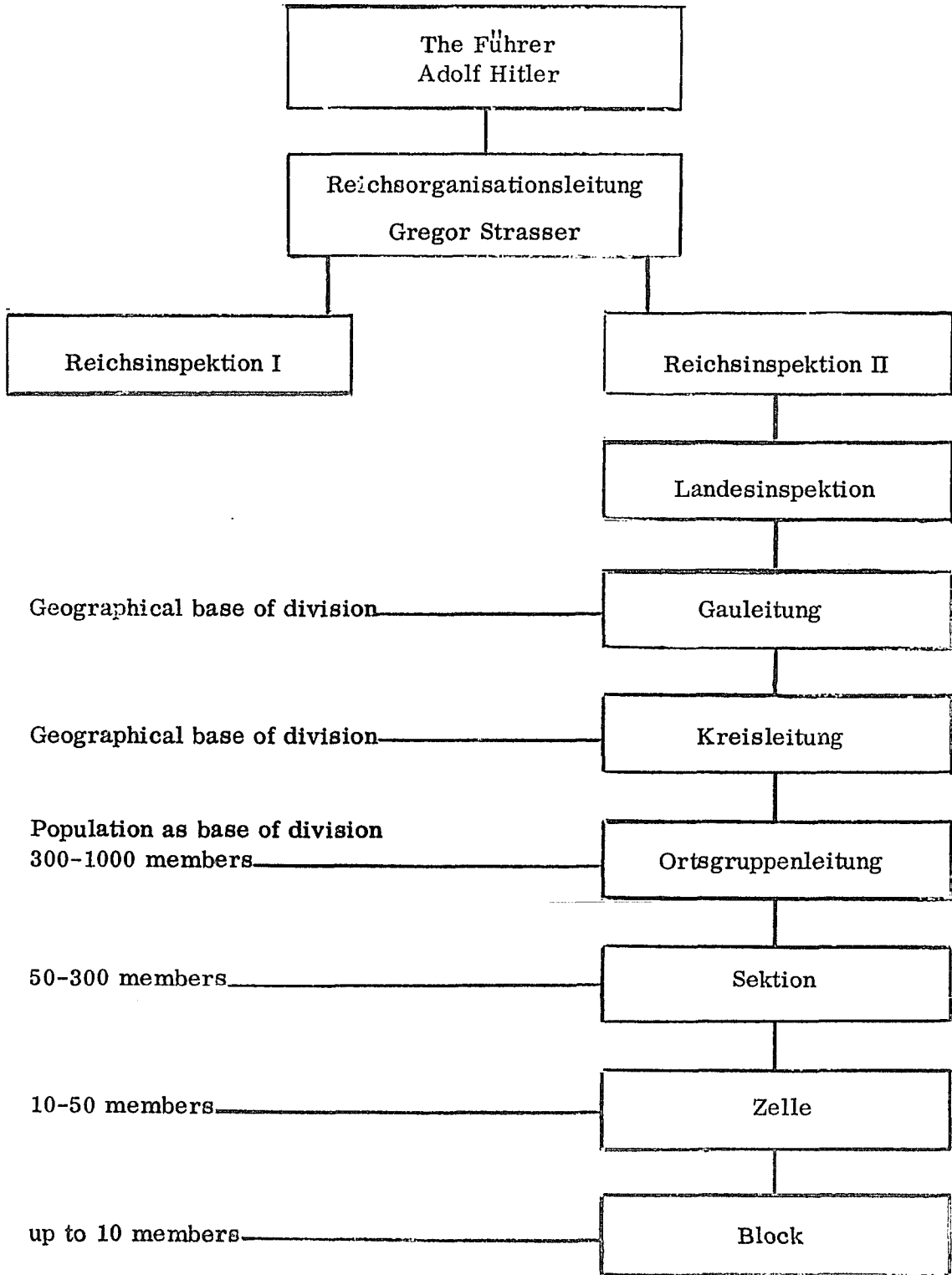
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<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>VoBL, Folge 25, June 17, 1932, p. 55.

Chart C. Chart illustrating vertical organization of the NSDAP, 1932



would be supported by the administrative areas of the state. The control of the organization was perfect because, though simple, it was firm and yet pliable. He termed the relative size of the divisions within the party "healthy," by which he meant that none of them was too large or too small in comparison with the organization directly over it. That administrative detail which is so important to any organization was firmly anchored in one of the various divisions outlined by Strasser, and because it would be controlled from above it was not subject to individual interpretation.<sup>97</sup> Strasser's directive left no question concerning the superiority of the Party organization over the individual member. There was little if any opportunity for individual expression and, so it would seem, the centralization of the vertical Party apparatus was complete.

Strasser was never able to make a complete test of his scheme for the reorganization of the party. With his fall from power<sup>98</sup> and with the placing of the greatest emphasis on internal party security, his preparations for the centralization of the main apparatus were shoved into the background. Hitler published the reorganizational scheme in the VB on December 16, 1932. Under this new plan the Reichsinspektionen I and II were eliminated and the entire organization of the Party was placed under a central commission

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>98</sup> See next section, pp. 203-206.

for political affairs (PKZ). Hitler established three new commissions under the PKZ: The commission to advise and control the parliamentary activity of the Nazis in the provincial parliaments and also in the municipal governments; the commission for the control of the press; and the new commission established to deal particularly with economic affairs and problems which might arise from them.<sup>99</sup> These new commissions formed a supervisory body, which had absolute control over the entire party structure. The former Reichsorganisationsabteilung was extended, and its various associations were controlled by the highest offices of the political organization (PO). Dr. Robert Ley was named as chief of the Organization Office in the Political Organization.<sup>100</sup>

Not only did the Central Party apparatus undergo significant changes after Strasser's fall, the vertical organization was altered as well. Hitler created the new position of political commissar and gave those who held this office special duties, particularly presiding over the affairs of the Party in certain definitely prescribed districts. The Commissar for the East was Helmut Brückner, who was at the same time the Gauleiter of Silesia. Martin Mutschmann, the Landesinspektor of Saxony-Thuringia, was elevated to the position of Commissar of that area. Heinrich Lohse, the Landesinspektor for the North, became Commissar of the North. The other Commissars

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<sup>99</sup>Volkischer Beobachter, Dec. 17, 1932, See Schäfer, p. 88.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 22.



were Friedrich Wilhelm for Magdeburg-Anhalt, Bernard Rust for Lower Saxony, Jacob Sprenger for South Germany, and Heinz Haake for the West. The work of these commissars stood immediately under the direction of the Rechsleitung and more specifically under Adolf Hitler, who worked through the staff leader of the Political Organization.<sup>101</sup>

Whenever Otto Strasser wrote of his brother Gregor, he stressed an opinion which has become decidedly controversial. Otto suggests that Gregor became dissatisfied with his position, attempted to form a rival organization to Adolf Hitler, and actually aspired to become the Führer of the Nazi movement himself.<sup>102</sup> Until recently, most other authors have trusted Otto's authority and based many of their own findings on Otto's works. But new studies of the so-called "Strasser-Clique" are generally divided on the subject of a Hitler-Strasser rivalry. Two of the more significant writers are Joseph Nyomarky and Wolfgang Schäfer, who represent both sides of the controversy.

Schäfer goes along with the generally accepted thesis that Strasser was indeed striving to establish his own rival organization in opposition to Hitler, and would have taken over power had the time been ripe. Nyomarky, on the other hand, feels that the significance of the Strasser Clique has been overestimated; at no time did Strasser actually pose a direct challenge to

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<sup>101</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, Dec. 16, 1932.

<sup>102</sup>For an excellent coverage of Otto Strasser's works see Schild.

Hitler.<sup>103</sup> The arguments of Schäfer and Nyomarky will serve as representative examples of the two general lines of thought concerning Strasser and his work in the Party's organizational section.

Otto Strasser set down the basic premise which Schäfer follows. According to Otto, once Gregor Strasser became a member of the Organization Section he was in a position to create an empire for himself which could have rivaled Hitler's.<sup>104</sup> Schäfer maintains that by 1928 Strasser had achieved enough importance to allow him to control with ease the leaders in the lower levels of the Party's vertical structure, through the creation of cadres which would give him a remarkable--though not complete--power over the apparatus.<sup>105</sup> Yet although the "struggle" between Hitler and Strasser had not been completely decided by 1928, Hitler had a clear advantage.<sup>106</sup>

The important thing here is the term Schäfer uses to express the relationship between Strasser and Hitler. He feels it is a "struggle," and he maintains this belief throughout his study.

In 1930, Otto Strasser had a final falling out with Hitler, but Gregor remained in the Party and retained his position of leadership as well. Schäfer states that Strasser stayed because he hoped to use his influence to separate

<sup>103</sup>Nyomarky, pp. 264-276.

<sup>104</sup>Interview with Otto Strasser, May 11, 1963.

<sup>105</sup>See above pp. 125-132.

<sup>106</sup>Schäfer, p. 12.

Hitler from Hugenberg and the Harzburg Front.<sup>107</sup> But, says Schäfer, the real struggle was won by Hitler after all, because he induced Strasser to give up the publication of his many newspapers in the Kampfverlag, through which he had formerly voiced his own opinion, since these publications were independent of party control.<sup>108</sup>

Schäfer explains Strasser's reorganization of the party in June of 1932 as a further attempt to accumulate more control for himself.<sup>109</sup> At the same time, he was preparing the party itself for the takeover of the German government when the precise moment came.<sup>110</sup> Schäfer sees all of Strasser's activities in the light of these two goals: to accumulate personal power, and to prepare the party for the eventual assumption of power. There is a real conflict between Hitler and Gregor Strasser, and he sees Gregor's eventual break with Hitler as an attempt to unite the social revolutionary wing of the NSDAP into a coalition with Schleicher, and thereby advance his own position.<sup>111</sup>

Nyomarky has another point of view. He sees no real evidence that Strasser was anxious to split the party. The big problem which developed

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<sup>107</sup>Harzburg Front. A group of rightest elements formed at a meeting held in Harzburg in Brunswick on October 11, 1931. Representatives of the Nazis, Nationalists, Pan-Germans, Stahlhelm, and Junker Landbund attended. Also generals, admirals, members of princely families and great industrialists. The general purpose was to unite all right-wing elements to oust Bruening. For a detailed discussion see Halperin, pp. 466-67.

<sup>108</sup>Schäfer, p. 15.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

between him and his Führer was not so much a "fundamental question of policy" as it was a question of tactics.<sup>112</sup> Nyomarky feels that Strasser's murder was simply the end product of a separation which began earlier in 1926 with the establishment of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Nordwest.<sup>113</sup> He believes that the movement in northern Germany was an attempt to win Hitler over to its way of thinking, to have him adopt its program, and to wean him away from the "Munich Clique"; not to challenge the leadership of the Party.<sup>114</sup> Nyomarky, then, feels that Otto Strasser and Schäfer have interpreted the evidence incorrectly; Strasser was not envisioning himself as the leader of an opposition movement to Hitler.

The evidence seems to substantiate Nyomarky's opinion. Although Gregor Strasser was an excellent organizer and Party worker, although he was sometimes an idealist, he was realistic enough to know he could not cause a real split within party ranks. It is true he tried desperately to win Hitler over to his views concerning the assumption of power, but again the question was one of tactics, not fundamental policy. Strasser steadfastly maintained that Hitler was the Führer of the Party and that he, Strasser, was only one of his men.<sup>115</sup> Hitler had Strasser's acceptance and respect, even though

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<sup>112</sup>Nyomarky, p. 267. See also Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, and Gerhard Schulz, Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung: Studies zur Errichtung des totalitären Heerschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933/34 (Köln und Opladen: West deutscher Verlag, 1960), p. 381.

<sup>113</sup>Nyomarky, p. 263.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>For a further discussion see following section.

they were not always in agreement. As Gregor Strasser told Alfred Rosenberg: "As a Hitler man I fought; as a Hitler man I want to go to my grave."<sup>116</sup>

In spite of the clash of opinions over Strasser and his role during this period, one fact stands out clearly: Strasser functioned as the Party manager and he functioned well. His excellent talent for organizing made him well known throughout the Party. In the administrative hierarchy, he was second only to Adolf Hitler. His position gave him an enormous amount of power which he used most effectively, but one must not lose sight of the fact that he was still only second to Hitler; he never could have replaced him.

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<sup>116</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, p. 273. See also Nyomarky, p. 276. See Strasser's letter to Adolf Hitler, appendix.

SECTION VI

STRASSER'S ROLE IN 1932

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In the history of the Nazi Party, the year 1932 was one of the most crucial. It was during this single year that the tide turned time and again both for and against the Nazis. Hitler's party reached a peak at the polls in the elections of July, but then its popularity started to decline. This was especially apparent in the elections of November 1932. Hitler, throughout most of 1932, often felt that he was about to be handed the reins of the government, but just as often they slipped away from him before he could actually assume power.

Strasser's role in the Party during this period was not consistent. During the elections he worked vigorously throughout Germany, campaigning for Hitler and for the Nazi candidates for the Reichstag, yet at other times he seemed to work against Hitler, attempting to put the Nazis into power even though it meant their entering a coalition rather than forming a strictly Nazi Government such as Hitler had always demanded. Strasser, who had worked so hard during the late twenties at building up the Party organization, feared that if Hitler did not make some sort of a compromise his chances of assuming power would dwindle disastrously and all the gains made by the Party would be lost. He struggled to find any path which would lead the Nazis to victory, but in the end he was not successful, and instead of putting the Nazis into power in a coalition government, he practically caused a schism within the Party. In the last analysis it was Strasser, not Hitler who lost out.

The year prior to Hitler's assumption of power can be divided into distinct periods. The first lasted from Brüning's resignation on May 30, 1932, to the Reichstag election on July 31; the second from the Reichstag elections in July to those on November 6, 1932; the third from the Reichstag elections of November to the beginning of Schleicher's chancellorship on December 2, 1932, and the final period from Schleicher's chancellorship to Hitler's assumption of power on January 31, 1933.<sup>1</sup> During this entire period there came to be two separate sets of rivals for power: Papen vs. Schleicher on the one side and Hitler vs. Strasser on the other. In the end it was Hitler alone who was to be victorious.

Strasser had campaigned diligently for Hitler in the two presidential elections of March and April, 1932, and although Hitler had made an excellent showing at the polls he still was not able to command a majority of votes, and Hindenburg was re-elected President of Germany for another seven year term.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the elections showed the German people the great growth of Nazi power, and the elections for the Reichstag held in July, 1932, proved that the Nazis were the strongest single Party in Germany. Although they fell short of the clear majority which they had hoped to attain still they polled 37.3 % of the vote and had 230 deputies in their block in the Reichstag.<sup>3</sup> Hitler supposed that he was in an excellent

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<sup>1</sup>Bullock, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup>Volz, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



position to bargain, but Papen and Schleicher were also masters of bargaining, and Hitler found them extremely formidable opponents. It was only in January, 1933, after the Nazi success in Lippe<sup>4</sup> and after Hitler had received financial aid from wealthy German industrialists that Schleicher, who could not maintain a government himself, decided to throw his support to Hitler rather than Papen as the next chancellor of Germany. Schleicher preferred Hitler to Papen because he calculated, incorrectly as so many others did, that once Hitler had become chancellor he would mellow, and the old power groups, especially the army, would be able to control him easily.<sup>5</sup> Schleicher feared that by putting Papen in office he would open the doors for a Nazi revolt. The army would have supported Schleicher against Hitler, but it would never have supported Papen. The resulting crisis would leave the way open for Hitler to step in and take over. Consequently, it seemed wiser to side with Hitler. Schleicher and the other generals believed that Hitler would recognize the dominance of the army and would continue to allow them to exercise some control over him, and that if he did not, they would be able to dispose of him. This was the greatest mistake in the history of the Prussian army, and for the German nation it was the most tragic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See below, pp. 216-17.

<sup>5</sup>Gordon A. Craig, The Politics of the Prussian Army (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 464.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 467.

Strasser's role during this entire period of intrigue is of the utmost importance to anyone studying his career. His actions at this time led to his political eclipse, and to his murder two years later. Once he had set up the political organization of the Party so that it functioned smoothly and accomplished the goals he had set for it, he mustered all his energies to assist in the takeover of the German government.<sup>7</sup> By the autumn of 1932 he felt that, since he could not do it with Hitler, then perhaps he should attempt to bring the Party to power without Hitler. It was for this reason that Goebbels called him a traitor, and it was also for this reason that Strasser relinquished his important position within the Nazi hierarchy.

The first months of this fateful year found Strasser exerting a great deal of effort to win the German working classes over to the Nazi cause.

Thus, in the Reichstag on May 10, he argued that:

The rise of National Socialism is the protest of a people against a State that denies the right to work and the revival of natural intercourse. If the machinery for distribution in the present economic system of the world is not capable of properly distributing the productive wealth of nature, then that system is false and must be altered. The important part of the present development is the anti-capitalist sentiment that is permeating our people, that has by now laid hold of something like 95 percent of our people, consciously or unconsciously. This anti-capitalist sentiment is not in the least a refusal to recognize property acquired by personal labor and thrift and formally justifiable. Above all, it has no connection with the senseless or destructive tendencies of the International. It is the protest of the people against a degenerate economic system; and it demands from the State that, in order to secure its own right to live, it shall break

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<sup>7</sup>" Schäfer, p. 22.

with the demons Gold, World Economy, Materialism, and with the habit of thinking in export statistics and the bank rate, and shall be capable of restoring honest payment for honest labor. This anti-capitalist sentiment is a proof that we are on the eve of a great change—the conquest of Liberalism and the rise of new ways of economic thought and of a new conception of the State.<sup>8</sup>

This speech presents nothing new and is somewhat softer than anything Goebbels would have had to say on the same subject.<sup>9</sup> Its real significance, however, lies in Strasser's attempt to state his Party's case in a way that would appeal to the broadest mass of people. His mild statements concerning the public works projects advocated by the socialistic labor unions were most surprising and indicate an all-out effort to entice the workers to vote for the Nazis. He proclaimed the necessity of a comprehensive labor policy for Germany and stressed that it must have precedence over all financial considerations.<sup>10</sup> Now, instead of stressing the motto "capital creates work," Strasser emphasized a newer motto: "work creates capital." Such pronouncements once again shoved the pseudo-socialistic elements in the Party into the foreground.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Strasser attached Chancellor Brüning only half-heartedly,

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<sup>8</sup>Heiden, History of National Socialism, p. 188. See also Bracher, Auflösung, p. 507.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. For full text of the speech see Gregor Strasser, Kampf Um Deutschland, pp. 345 ff.

<sup>10</sup>Heiden, History of National Socialism, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., Also Bracher, Auflösung, p. 508.

despite the fact that Brüning was under severe criticism from nearly every political group in Germany at this time. Strasser appeared to be looking for support from any area, including the labor unions, the socialists, and the existing government. Obviously he was one Nazi leader who was willing to work for some type of coalition government in spite of the necessary compromises.<sup>12</sup>

During the summer and into the autumn of 1932, Strasser did his best to attract kindred spirits from the leftist parties to the National Socialist program. He was not particularly interested in seeing them become actual Party members, but he wanted their votes and those of any political enthusiasts without regard for Party.<sup>13</sup> Determined not to lose the advantage the German populace had given the Nazis at the polls, Strasser suggested various schemes for cooperation with other German political parties. Frick joined him on a trip to Berchtesgaden on August 9, 1932, to confer with Hitler. There they discussed their chances of joining with the Center Party, for although the Nazis were the strongest single group in the Reichstag, they were not strong enough to take power legally without the support of other parties. Partly because of continuing bloodshed in German cities between the Communists and the Nazis, and partly because of wild

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<sup>12</sup>Bracher, Auflösung, p. 508.

<sup>13</sup>Heiden, p. 190.

election and post election statements that the Nazis were making, many Germans began to question their fitness for power.<sup>14</sup>

Opinions concerning entry into a coalition varied greatly among the Nazi leaders. Goebbels and other radicals felt that a policy of alliance would be disastrous. In contrast, Gregor Strasser was fighting for a compromise course. In June, 1932, he told a friend of Papen that he did not believe in the Nazi's ability to win an absolute majority in the July elections and reckoned with their entrance into a Reichs government in the fall of 1932, if they could win enough support from the other political groups. He did not expect an absolute majority even by fall.<sup>15</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Hitler did not actively oppose Strasser's proposition that the NSDAP cooperate with the Center Party as long as it was only for the purpose of toppling the Papen government. Strasser, on the other hand, saw such cooperation as a means of attaining power.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the Nazi success at the polls in July, Hitler was convinced he would be named Chancellor, even though his Party, as Strasser had feared, did not win an absolute majority. Nevertheless, the Nazis had

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 48. See also Bullock, p. 182.

<sup>15</sup>Bracher, Auflösung, p. 622 footnote 93 letter Humann to Papen June 24, 1932 from Schleicher Nachlass, p. 163.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 622 footnote 92 discussion with Vockel, former secretary of the Center Party.

made a remarkable showing, and it was a bitter defeat when on August 13, 1932, Schleicher and Papen offered him only the Vice Chancellorship—nothing more. Hitler, of course, refused.<sup>17</sup> And when Hindenburg summoned him to explain that he had promised to support a Papen government, Hitler's disappointment turned to rage.<sup>18</sup>

The defeat and humiliation of both Hitler and his Party seemed complete. Strasser must have felt his reasoning vindicated, for here was the realization of his most pessimistic predictions. Even so, the Nazis had made gains at the polls which must be maintained. Strasser renewed his efforts to persuade Hitler to join a coalition with the Center Party. According to Goebbels, Strasser was strongly influenced by Paul Schulz, one of his closest friends, and head of the Reichsinspektion I. Goebbels reported that Schulz not only advocated a compromise with the Center Party, but also recommended that the Nazis work out a plan to win the support of the German trade unions, especially the Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen Verband.<sup>19</sup> Goebbels maintained that Schulz was "driving" Strasser toward such an idea, but this was highly unlikely. Strasser and Schulz had been associated for a long time and agreed on most political maneuvers. It is

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<sup>17</sup>Bullock, p. 183.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 185

<sup>19</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 125.

highly improbable that one had to "drive" the other in any direction.

Strasser was working for a better relationship between the trade unions and the NSDAP, as his speech of May, 1932 revealed. Then too, during the spring of 1932, Strasser appeared to be dissatisfied with the Nazi policy. Whether this resulted from his disagreements over tactics and his conviction that the Party would crumble if it were not soon rewarded with victory; or whether he had deeper ideological and personal differences with the other members of the Party leadership, is difficult to ascertain. More than likely, his dissatisfaction contained elements of both. He felt that the true will of the people was not being recognized; that the Party was now catering to the industrialists and monied interests. The workers were being neglected, and they, after all, were to be the greatest source of the Party's strength. In speaking with Albert Krebs, an old Party worker from Hamburg, Strasser mentioned his fear that the Nazis were emphasizing politics too much, instead of the needs of the lower classes. He added that the people's wishes could be better expressed through organizations which represented them directly, i. e., political representation through unions and other trade organizations rather than strictly through the political parties,<sup>20</sup> which was a rather startling position for a high Nazi official to hold.

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<sup>20</sup>Albert Krebs, Tendenzen und Gestalten der NSDAP: Erinnerungen an die Frühzeit der Partei (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1959), p. 191.

Furthermore, these organizations, rather than party government, would form the foundations of a new social and political order.<sup>21</sup> Here Strasser seems to be advocating a syndicalist approach to government.

By early September the Nazis realized that new elections were necessary if they were ever to assume power. They had to press every possible advantage now, in an attempt to gain an absolute majority. Hitler would not accept Strasser's plans and refused to enter into any type of coalition or to seek help from outside his own Party. Strasser, however, was still exploiting every possibility in his attempt to secure support for a coalition which would allow the Nazis to take power. In October 1932 he delivered a speech to a group of representatives of the NSBO in the Berlin sports palace, in an undisguised attempt to win the support of the German working class, and warm the hearts of the socialists as well. After a short introduction Strasser stated: "We will only understand the problem of our struggle and the problem of our generation if we know that the Weltanschauung of the French Revolution is foundering and that out of the experience of the war a new Weltanschauung has returned to life, a Weltanschauung of the casual relationship between nationalism and socialism, a Weltanschauung which expresses itself in the movement created by the worker Adolf

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



Hitler."<sup>22</sup> Strasser attacked the liberalism which first issued from the French Revolution. He defined capitalism as liberalism in business and then tied both in with international Jewry.<sup>23</sup> National Socialism, however, was something completely different from Liberalism: Strasser defined it as: "The affirmation of manhood (Mannstum), the affirmation of fellow countrymen (Volksgenossentum), the affirmation of the principle of performance (Leistungsprinzip), of discipline, of self defence (Wehrhaftigkeit) . . . National Socialism is the opposite of what we have today."<sup>24</sup> Strasser then discussed his views concerning socialism, and more important for the future of the Nazis, why Hitler did not accept the Vice-Chancellorship when it was offered to him on August 13. He concluded: "Our line is clear. National freedom and social justice. Internally, German socialism, and externally, nationalism, to our defence of our work. Whoever wants to go along with us is welcome."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Speech delivered by Strasser on October 20, 1932, in the Berlin Sports Palace. Reproduced in Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Werner Jochmann, Ausgewählte Dokumente zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus: 1933-1945 (Arbeitsblätter für politische und soziale Bildung IV, Bielfeld: Verlag Neue Gessellschaft GmbH, 1961). The Nazis themselves made no mention of this speech and did not print it. However, it was privately printed as a pamphlet.

<sup>23</sup>Bracher, p. 622, footnote 92.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

Here is evidence of Strasser's determined effort to gain the votes of both the workers and the socialists in the next elections. He tried to alleviate fears that the NSDAP had made a deal with the industrialists and no longer represented the workers' interests. Through organizations such as the NSBO, Strasser hoped to win over the laboring class. He was starting to implement the policy he had suggested to Albert Krebs. In addition, his speech was unusual in its forthright acceptance of socialism for Germany. Partly as a result of this speech, Strasser was labeled as the leader of the NSDAP's socialist wing. Throughout the fall of 1932, Strasser continued to emphasize the role of socialism as a basic part of Nazi ideology.

The speech was well received by the members of the NSBO and by others of socialist leanings, but it caused some consternation among many Party officials because it frightened the powerful German industrialists at a time when their support was desperately needed. A speech from an important Nazi official stressing internal German socialism understandably annoyed the capitalists. Although it was calculated to win election support, it was never officially published, which indicates that the Party was not especially pleased with it. Goebbels states that the speech aroused great indignation throughout the Party.<sup>26</sup>

Admittedly Strasser's open appeal to socialists and laborers was a

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<sup>26</sup>Goebbels, Fight, p. 186.

drastic step. But he was not the only Party leader who thought that only vigorous action would help the Nazis to gain power. Hitler felt that new elections were in order and that the earlier a decision was reached the better it would be for his Party. The step which brought about the elections scheduled to be held in November, 1932, was Göring's dissolution of the Reichstag after a vote of no confidence in the Papen government.<sup>27</sup> Yet despite violent campaigning on the part of the Nazis, including a whirlwind visit to fifty different German cities by Hitler himself, they did not win an absolute majority in the Reichstag. In fact they slipped from the position they had achieved in July and actually lost votes and Reichstag seats. Whereas in July the Nazis had won 37.8 % of the seats, after the November election they had only 33.5 %. The Nazis apparently had passed their peak of power—just as Papen had calculated. They had spent vast sums of money in their campaigns and were now deeply in debt. To add to their dismay, both the German Nationalists and the Communists had increased their strength. The Nazis, it seemed, had lost whatever hold they had over the working class.<sup>28</sup> Strasser's speech making had been to no avail. Nor was he able to gain Hitler's approval of a coalition with other parties which seemed even more necessary after the November elections. In the meantime, Schleicher was named Chancellor of Germany on

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<sup>27</sup>Bullock, pp. 189-190.

<sup>28</sup>Volz, p. 32. See also Bullock, pp. 193-194.

December 2, 1932.

The new Chancellor was to be ultimately responsible for the split between Hitler and Strasser,<sup>29</sup> although he had long wanted to bring the Nazis into the government and after the July elections of 1932, had actually urged Hindenburg to accede to Hitler's demands for the Chancellorship.<sup>30</sup> He saw no other way of warding off Nazi revolutionary tactics. But when he realized that Hindenburg would not agree to name Hitler Chancellor, and that Hitler would accept no other office, he changed his position.<sup>31</sup>

His new tactic was to work through Gregor Strasser. He knew of Strasser's interest in the working classes and especially of his attempts to win the labor unions over to the Nazi cause. According to Theodore Leipart, Schleicher was also trying to relax the tension which existed between the unions and his government,<sup>32</sup> and he was convinced that Schleicher would work for the best interests of the workers.<sup>33</sup> While Schleicher maintained that he sided with neither the capitalists nor the socialists, he did advocate an extensive public works program which would have definitely

<sup>29</sup>Nyomarky, p. 269.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 268. See also Thilo Vogelsang, "Schleicher und die NSDAP 1932," Vierteljahresheft für Zeitgeschichte, VI (January, 1958), 105. Bracher, Auflösung, p. 669.

<sup>31</sup>Nyomarky, p. 268.

<sup>32</sup>Heiden, Führer, p. 502.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 503.

aided the workers; consequently he won considerable support among union leaders.<sup>34</sup> Strasser knew of Schleicher's following among the moderate leftists and especially among the members of the trade unions, and Schleicher in turn was well aware that Strasser favored a compromise policy. It seemed certain that an agreement between Schleicher and the Nazis would not have been at all repulsive to Strasser.<sup>35</sup>

Since Strasser was chief over the vast Party apparatus and knew most of its leaders on the local level and especially since he had been continually disappointed in his attempts to see Hitler come to power, Schleicher hoped that he could capitalize on that disappointment; by using Strasser he felt he could drive a wedge into the Nazi ranks. He sought to unite the entire corps of Nazi functionaries under Strasser to support the Schleicher government. Had this succeeded, he would then have had the support he so desperately needed to keep his government in office, and he would at the same time have destroyed the main source of his opposition. Schleicher put his plan into concrete form and started his efforts to bring Strasser over to his side.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 512. See also Eric Eyck, A History of the Weimar Republic. Translated by Harlan P. Hanson and Robert G. L. Waite, Vol II. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 450.

<sup>35</sup>Nyomarky, p. 269.

<sup>36</sup>Bracher, p. 669. Thilo Vogelsang, "Schleicher und die NSDAP 1932," Vierteljahresheft für Zeitgeschichte, VI (January, 1958), 105. Nyomarky, p. 271.

Schleicher had begun his campaign to win the Nazis to his position as early as the last part of November, when he communicated with Hitler through Strasser. His specific purpose was to sound out the Nazis to see how they would respond to the possibility of joining a cabinet in which Schleicher, not Papen, was the Chancellor.<sup>37</sup>

Hitler declined Schleicher's offer and called a conference of some of the chief Nazi leaders at Weimar on December 1, 1932. Goebbels, Goering, Frick, and Strasser attended this meeting. Strasser adamantly contended that the only hope for the Nazi Party was to cooperate with a Schleicher cabinet. He pressed his point home by reminding those present of their wretched financial state: the NSDAP was 12 million marks in debt.<sup>38</sup> Disillusionment in the face of debt and failure was spreading throughout the movement. In order not to lose everything, the Nazis had to enter the government immediately. But again Hitler brushed his arguments aside and accused him of being excessively gloomy. He was told to abstain from making the worst of things.<sup>39</sup>

In the elections held three days later in Thuringia, Strasser was given more reason for gloom. The Nazis suffered heavy losses at the

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<sup>37</sup>Bullock, p. 197.

<sup>38</sup>Heiden, p. 199.

<sup>39</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 178.

polls,<sup>40</sup> but still no one admitted his opinions had any validity. Goebbels blamed both Strasser and the Party in general for neglect and laziness.

"Strasser, for instance, made no speech at all," he accused.<sup>41</sup>

Strasser was no longer expecting to convince the Party leadership of anything. Even before the elections in Thuringia, he had decided to take matters into his own hands and met with Schleicher to discuss the possibility of entering into a Schleicher cabinet himself. Originally, Schleicher had viewed Strasser as an avenue of access to Hitler, and was concerned mainly with getting Hitler's support. But when Hitler refused to yield, Strasser took on a new importance for Schleicher, who calculated that Strasser and his following might have enough influence in the NSDAP to help him maintain his government without having to worry about Hitler.<sup>42</sup> He was even prepared to offer Strasser the post of Vice-Chancellor, supposedly under the condition that Strasser would agree to allow Theodore Leipart, chairman of the General German Labor Federation, to participate in the same government.<sup>43</sup> Such a government, including representatives of the more moderate

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<sup>41</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 178.

<sup>42</sup>This was assuming there would be a split within the ranks of the NSDAP, a split which, as later events showed, failed to materialize.

<sup>43</sup>The whole scheme was supposedly suggested by Hans Zehrer who stated that Schleicher should establish a new national front based on the trade unions and trade union leaders. Such a front would reach from Leipart on the left to Strasser on the right. Sefton Delmar, Trail Sinister (London: Secker and Warburg, 1961), p. 168.

members of the Nazi right, represented by Strasser, and of the leftist trade unions, represented by Leipart, would have given Schleicher the broad base which he needed to maintain power.

On December 3, the day after Schleicher became Chancellor, he sent for Strasser and is reported to have made an offer to the Nazis. Since he could not get Hitler to agree with him, Schleicher offered Strasser the position of Vice-Chancellor and that of Minister President of Prussia, Germany's largest and most important state.<sup>44</sup> One report says that Schleicher also proposed to give Strasser the Ministry of Labor.<sup>45</sup> If Strasser had accepted he could have taken over Schleicher's plans for dealing with unemployment and would have cooperated closely with the trades unions.

The offer to Strasser was a clever move on Schleicher's part. Not only was it attractive to Strasser as a way out of the Party's difficulties, but it would almost certainly split the Party leadership. In that case if Hitler stood out, Strasser might agree to come into the Cabinet on his own responsibility, and carry his following out of the Party.<sup>46</sup>

Schleicher's plan, however, had no opportunity to develop. Ernst Hanfstängel, one of Hitler's Munich intimates, learned of Strasser's meeting with Schleicher and informed Hitler of what had taken place.<sup>47</sup> Hitler

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<sup>44</sup>Bullock, p. 200.

<sup>45</sup>Meissner, Staatssekretär, p. 251.

<sup>46</sup>Bullock, p. 200.

<sup>47</sup>Delmar, p. 41.



then acted quickly to counter Strasser's moves. He held a meeting of his highest Party officials in the Hotel Kaiserhof, his Berlin headquarters, on December 5. At this meeting Hitler laid down the terms for discussion with Schleicher and in so doing eliminated Strasser from any negotiations. Instead, Goering and Frick (or in another version, Goering and Röhm) were the only Party leaders authorized to deal with Schleicher.<sup>48</sup>

According to Goebbels' evidence, which is far from reliable, Strasser's association with Schleicher was simply the culmination of a series of anti-Hitler activities beginning early in 1932. Goebbels gives these opinions in a diary covering that eventful year. They are worth noting because they reflect his position towards Strasser at this important period in his career. But since the book was not published until 1934, after Strasser's fall, we must be careful in accepting Goebbels' accusations at face value.

Goebbels voiced suspicion of Strasser as early as May 18, 1932. At least, this is the date he gives to his diary entry. He wrote that from the Strasser side there was a sort of "guerilla warfare" in progress. Goebbels had accidentally heard that Strasser intended to speak with Brüning, an action he would definitely oppose as being contrary to the NSDAP's best interests.<sup>49</sup> "That would be quite like him. We succeed in scotching

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<sup>48</sup>Bullock states that Hitler was deliberately excluded from all negotiations. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>49</sup>Goebbels, *Kaiserhof*, p. 82.

the possibility."<sup>50</sup>

Goebbels also attacked Strasser's reorganization of the Party. He wrote that Strasser had organized a Party machine of his own, a group which would be loyal to him rather than Hitler. "During the remodeling of the Party, Strasser organized a group for himself (a 'machine') somewhat like a hot-house plant, fat and swollen, but without firm members; thought out at the writing table, not brought into being through the stress and strain of things as they really are."<sup>51</sup>

Throughout the remainder of 1932, Goebbels continued to assail Strasser in his diary. But it was not until August that he mentioned Hitler's knowledge of the so-called Strasser clique, and the danger it presented.<sup>52</sup> After Hitler's failure to obtain the Chancellorship on the 13th of August, he held a conference on September 1, 1932, in an attempt to restate his position and recoup before another try for power. Goering, Frick, Strasser, Kube, Kerrl, and Goebbels attended. Again, as so often, the only available report is that of Goebbels.<sup>53</sup> Those at the meeting discussed the problems plaguing the Party and the tactics they should now employ to deal with these unsettling events. According to Goebbels, Strasser and his group

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Goebbels, Fight, p. 91.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>53</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 129.

raised certain objection to Hitler's point of view. (Unfortunately, he does not tell us which ideas Strasser took issue with, nor what questions he raised concerning them). Goebbels maintained that Strasser was alone in his questioning; his ideas did not represent those of the Party as a whole. Moreover, Hitler himself was aware of this. "The Führer judges things clearly. The opposition against him is exclusively nurtured by Strasser. The arguments used by the group he represents are narrow-minded. His ideas lack inspiration, and have no effect on the leader, who is a master of the stuff in which he works. If Strasser thinks of crowning his destructive efforts in the Party by his personal defection, he will suffer the most fearful defeat ever witnessed."<sup>54</sup>

In the entry for November 9, 1932, Goebbels wrote: "The attitude towards Strasser is aggressive and hostile throughout the whole leadership of the Party. Nobody trusts him any longer. We are all convinced that he will go his own way at a critical moment. We must pay great heed lest we be taken by surprise."<sup>55</sup> But despite his warning, Goebbels and the entire Party were badly shaken when Gregor Strasser resigned from all of his Party offices.

The final break between Strasser and Hitler came after Hitler had

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

refused to allow him to have further dealings with Schleicher. Strasser realized that the Party, because of its wretched financial state, had to face an extremely important decision: it could either join a coalition government thereby restoring the confidence of its creditors, or it could rely on funds provided by private industries. If the first alternative were accepted it necessarily meant cooperation with Schleicher, and if the second were accepted the Party would then become dependent on heavy industry and finance. Strasser realized that any breach with Schleicher would force the Party to adopt the second alternative, and this, undoubtedly, was one of the primary motives which led him to his decisive discussions with Hitler.<sup>56</sup>

The final discussion took place in the Hotel Kaiserhof on December 7, 1932.<sup>57</sup> The meeting was a highly emotional one and was filled with mutual threats, reproaches, and accusations of betrayal.<sup>58</sup> Hitler attacked Strasser for negotiating with Schleicher and accused Strasser of trying to cheat him (Hitler) out of the Chancellorship and the Party leadership and of trying to split the Party itself.<sup>59</sup> "Strasser angrily retorted that he had been entirely loyal, and had only thought of the interest of the Party."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Heiden, A History of National Socialism, p. 219.

<sup>57</sup>Bullock, p. 201. See also Heinrich Lohse, "Der Fall Strasser," (unpublished memorial essay. Carbon copy of typescript). Hereinafter referred to as Lohse.

<sup>58</sup>Heiden, Der Führer, p. 504.

<sup>59</sup>Bullock, p. 201.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

After their discussion a dejected Strasser left Hitler and returned to his own rooms and in complete disgust at what had taken place sat down and wrote Hitler a letter in which he resigned from all offices which he held in the Party, including his seat in the Reichstag. He did not, however, resign from the Party itself, although certain authorities say that he did.<sup>61</sup>

Strasser wrote that he could no longer carry out his organizational duties which, because of the uneasy political conditions in Germany and the critical internal state of the movement, of necessity demanded the strictest of authoritative leadership. Hitler had undermined the movement by sabotaging his own directives, working behind the backs of those he had selected to be Party administrators and bypassing the channels he himself had organized. Strasser accused Hitler of playing favorites when those he favored had little or no administrative ability. Such a situation was, he told his Führer, "unendurable to my soldierly mind."<sup>62</sup> Since Hitler had now designated others to carry out the organizational duties which had formerly been Strasser's province, his task had become impossible.<sup>63</sup>

Apparently in their meeting of December 7, Hitler had attacked some of Strasser's organizational changes, because in his letter of resignation,

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<sup>61</sup>Lohse, p. 22. See Strasser letter, appendix.

<sup>62</sup>Letter Gregor Strasser to Adolf Hitler, December 8, 1932. See Appendix.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

Strasser wrote that since Hitler had deigned to call his entire effort false, he would no longer have anything to do with organizing the Party.<sup>64</sup>

After Hitler, Strasser continued, he had probably had most influence as a speaker for National Socialism and he had the right to say that the NSDAP in his opinion was not only becoming a religious world philosophy, but was a battle movement, which must strive for power in the state in every possible way.<sup>65</sup> He concluded:

I was never in my life anything other than a National Socialist and I will never by anything else. For this reason I step back, without regard to my person and without personal resentment, to the ranks of the simple party members, and make room for the counselors who at the present time are in a position to advise you successfully.<sup>66</sup>

This was the most difficult decision Strasser had made in his entire life.<sup>67</sup> As his successor he suggested Konstantin Hierl. Further, he informed Hitler that he absolutely refused to be the leader of any opposition movement, and to prevent this from happening he was not only leaving Berlin immediately but planning to leave Germany too, for a time.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

Further information on the resignation of Strasser is given by Heinrich Lohse, the former Gauleiter of Schleswig-Holstein. In an unpublished memorial written about Gregor Strasser, Lohse reported that he (Strasser) had summoned all of the Landesinspektoren who were in Berlin to a meeting in the Reichstag early in the morning of December 8, 1932.<sup>69</sup> Strasser came to the meeting with Paul Schulz, and after a short greeting to those present (Ley, Rust, Haacke, Sprenger, Mutschmann, Lohse, and Loeper), he immediately took up his reasons for calling them together. First he spoke of the seriousness of the meeting and told the Landesinspektoren that after a difficult struggle with himself he had finally realized he could no longer remain in his official position within the party and had that morning sent a letter to Hitler in which he resigned from his offices.<sup>70</sup>

Strasser's chief reason for his action was explained simply: he agreed with the goals Hitler had set, but he could no longer endorse the faulty methods Hitler was using to gain power.<sup>71</sup> Hitler's policies had become muddy and confusing after he was passed over for Chancellor in August, 1932. "Hitler is clear only in one thing, and this is that under all circumstances he will become Reichs Chancellor."<sup>72</sup> Hitler should have

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<sup>69</sup>Lohse, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

realized two significant facts: the post was being denied him from all sides, and there was no prospect of his ever attaining it even in the long run.<sup>73</sup>

But six weeks after Strasser's resignation, Hitler was the new Chancellor of Germany.

How could Strasser have made such a serious miscalculation? Either he underestimated the ability (and determination) of the man Hitler, or he had no clear picture of Germany's developing political situation. According to Strasser, the Party simply could not impose another election on its general membership. No more hardships must be placed upon the Party members.<sup>74</sup> They had already suffered everything they could be called upon to bear, and in order to keep the Party intact, it was absolutely essential to compromise in some way and to enter a government rather than remain in opposition. Strasser was convinced that otherwise the rank and file members would start to drift away, which was just what their opponents had been hoping for.<sup>75</sup>

Strasser offered two solutions to the problem. If the Nazis were to gain power legally, Hitler must accept the offer of the Vice Chancellorship which Hindenburg had made him in August. Then Hitler could use his position to bring other Nazis into the government.<sup>76</sup> If Hitler waited until

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 21.



he was summoned as Reichs Chancellor, the collapse of the Party would surely have taken place.<sup>77</sup> The Führer was obligated to make sure the cabinet understood that without the good will of the National Socialists there would be no possibility of a stable government in Germany. If he could not accomplish this, he had no right to try to assume power in the first place and the Party's collapse would be justly deserved.

But the acquisition of power did not necessarily have to be legal. History, after all, would never ask about the legality of the method, but only about the success of the movement.<sup>78</sup> The SA and the SS were still intact and ready to move upon command. Strasser admitted that he would be willing to go along with outright revolt. No matter how bloody, this method, at least, had some prospect of success.

One of Strasser's greatest problems was trying to get past the select coterie of henchmen which Hitler always kept around him. Strasser mentioned this at the meeting of the Landesinspektoren, and stated that because of this inner group it was practically impossible to see Hitler and to discuss the solution of pressing problems.<sup>79</sup>

I have no desire to rank behind Goering, Goebbels, Röhm, and others, if these are summoned, I must also expect

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

that I will be honored with such an invitation: that has never occurred from the Führer. I find this a degradation, a humiliation of my person, which I have not earned and I am no longer willing to accept.<sup>80</sup>

Strasser was in a position to make history, but he cast his lot and missed.<sup>81</sup> The question naturally arises as to whether he was really in such a position. While it is true that he was number two man after Hitler in the Party, without Hitler he was politically impotent, as his subsequent career proved. Strasser simply was not as flexible as were other close associates of Hitler, and he ultimately found his position in the leadership of the Party untenable.

One can well imagine the great furor created by Strasser's resignation. The opposition press made the most of it and used it as evidence of the breakdown of the discipline within the NSDAP. The first official mention of the whole affair appeared December 10, 1932, with the following terse announcement: "With the permission of the Führer Pg. Gregor Strasser has begun a sick leave which will last three weeks. All further rumors and conjectures are pointless and have no basis."<sup>82</sup> Hitler assumed control of the Party's political organization and named Dr. Ley as chief of staff, the position with Strasser had formerly held.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid. , pp. 21-22.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid. , p. 22.

<sup>82</sup>Völkischer Beobachter, December 10, 1932.

Goebbels recorded the general feeling within the Party itself upon Strasser's resignation. In his diary entry for December 8 he says that there was deep depression within the organization, and because of the lack of money it was impossible to do anything thoroughly.

There are rumors that Strasser is planning a revolt. I have not as yet been able to find out details about it . . . at mid-day the bomb explodes: Strasser has written a letter to the leader informing him that he gives up all his posts in the party, but gives very poor reasons for doing so. The moment, he considered, had arrived to lead the party to the State, to give in; the party was ruining itself by useless opposition. He could not any longer approve of this course and was obliged to decline responsibility. The reasons of course were not sound. But they prove that with Strasser the ambition to be a Minister is stronger than his loyalty to the Leader and to the Party. It is not difficult to recognize von Schleicher in this letter. All the leaders of the Party are with the Führer. They all look gloomy; their rage and indignation is [sic.] vented against Strasser and his adjutant, Lieutenant Schulz [sic.].<sup>83</sup>

The first indication in Goebbels' newspaper that not everything in the high Nazi circles was in order came in the issue of the Angriff for Friday, December 9, 1932. In this issue, the Angriff quoted the press notice given out by the Party press center concerning Strasser's "vacation." "Whether a Gregor Strasser is going on vacation or not can never change the fact that the NSDAP will go along its way without compromise."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, pp. 180-183.

<sup>84</sup>Angriff, December 9, 1932.

As one might expect, the opposition papers vigorously played up Strasser's defection. The Communist Rote Fahne stated that he had exposed the "sump of corruption which the Nazi Party actually was."<sup>85</sup> Otto Strasser's paper, the Schwarze Front, also gave much coverage to the Strasser affair and provided material which other papers published.<sup>86</sup> The Schwarze Front reported that Strasser had broken with Hitler largely because of the debt of the NSDAP. In addition, he was supposed to have told Hitler that the new elections would cost the Nazis another two million votes, and castigated Göring for having dissolved the Reichstag at a time when the Nazis could least afford it. The Schwarze Front maintained that Strasser had recommended a fundamental change in the Party's course: a return to the old revolutionary National Socialism.<sup>87</sup> In continuing its attack against the Nazis the Rote Fahne reported: "The trouble between Hitler and Strasser resulted from which tactic one should use to climb fastest to officialdom. Strasser is every bit as much a fascist as Hitler, Goebbels, and the others. He feared the collapse of the Nazi Party. Only for that reason did Strasser turn against Hitler."<sup>88</sup> After quoting the official statement about Strasser's

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<sup>85</sup>Rote Fahne, December 18, 1932.

<sup>86</sup>Hauptarchiv, Reel 69, Folder 1508.

<sup>87</sup>Quoted in the Rote Fahne, December 18, 1932.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

leave the influential Frankfurter Zeitung went on to comment:

In the late afternoon hours rumors were spread in political circles that the National Socialist representative Strasser had written in a letter to Adolf Hitler that he gave up his offices as party manager of the NSDAP—they even wanted to know if Strasser, in his judgement of the political situation found himself in such complete opposition to Hitler that he already had declared his withdrawal from the party.

At one moment it is impossible to prove the veracity of these rumors, yet it must strike one that Gregor Strasser who took part for the past two days in the Reichstag discussions is now beginning a three week vacation even before the Parliament has closed its deliberation.<sup>89</sup>

The silence maintained by the Völkischer Beobachter, except for a few short official announcements, stands in marked contrast to the complete coverage given Strasser's resignation by the other newspapers in Germany. All of the papers made much of the letter which Strasser sent to Hitler, yet it is clear from a comparison of their reports with the contents of the letter itself that they had not seen it and did not know exactly what it contained; yet they did have an approximate idea of its contents and knew of its tone in general.<sup>90</sup>

Information concerning Strasser's defection leaked out to the press prior to his official resignation. Hans Zehrer wrote in an article in the Tägliche Rundschau concerning Strasser's leaving his Party offices, and this appeared in the morning edition of the paper on December 8, 1932.

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<sup>89</sup>Frankfurter Zeitung, December 9, 1932.

<sup>90</sup>See Appendix.

Zehrer headed the influential "Tatkreis," a group of right-wing intellectuals and journalists in Berlin who wrote for Die Tat and Der Widerstand.<sup>91</sup> Zehrer often acted as Schleicher's press spokesman<sup>92</sup> and very possibly was reflecting Schleicher's ideas in his article. Goebbels insists that Zehrer wrote of Strasser's resignation in such detail he could only have learned his facts from Strasser himself. Goebbels continues that Zehrer proclaimed Strasser as the great man of the Party and mentioned him as the one who alone was in a position to steer the entire Nazi movement through all of the confusion. The jist of the whole article was that Strasser rather than Hitler should be named the head of the Party.<sup>93</sup>

Goebbels' diary provides more information concerning the reaction to Strasser's leaving the Party. "The press is full of the events. The Jewish papers can hardly hide their satisfaction at Strasser's step. The leader and the Party are given up by all. 'Hitler's star has faded' is the refrain of Jewish jubilation."<sup>94</sup>

Doubtlessly, Strasser's withdrawal had placed Hitler in an unenviable position. To some it seemed as if the entire Nazi movement were collapsing, but Hitler, in his characteristic manner, struck out to minimize the damage

<sup>91</sup>Halperin, p. 472.

<sup>92</sup>Heiden, Der Führer, p. 526.

<sup>93</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 180.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

Strasser had caused. To forestall any wholesale desertion, he called a meeting of those who had attended Strasser's earlier meeting. Lohse states that the first to leave the Strasser meeting to report to Hitler was the Landesinspektor of Lower Saxony (Niedersachsen), Gauleiter Bernard Rust from Hanover. Hitler and all who had attended the Strasser meeting (with the exception of Strasser himself and Paul Schulz) met at 12:00 noon on December 8th, in the Hotel Kaiserhof.

Hitler greeted those he had summoned, without even offering them a seat, and exhibited the utmost reserve in his manner. One could observe that he had been deeply upset by Strasser's defection.<sup>95</sup> He looked very carefully at each of those present as if to ask whether the person had remained with him or if he had defected to Strasser.<sup>96</sup> After a short time he began to speak slowly. After receiving notification of Strasser's intentions, he said, it was essential for him to know exactly where each of his supporters stood.<sup>97</sup> Those present were, after all, the "pillars of the movement," and even if one pillar broke it was not necessary that the entire structure should collapse.

When one person becomes disloyal and leaves the party I can bear that and even overcome it. But if you all want to desert me then my life's work and the struggle for it no longer has

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<sup>95</sup>Lohse, p. 23.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

any meaning, for then the movement will collapse. Outside of this movement, which has been my life's project, I have nothing else . . . which could still bind me to this earth. I will take the consequences and only ask that my body and my casket be buried with the flag which I once created as a symbol for the movement and for a new Germany. Since Strasser himself did not find it necessary to discuss with me the reasons for his incomprehensible step, I ask you, since you yourselves heard his reasons from him this morning, to tell me openly and honestly what he has against me, and what, if such be the case, you also have against me personally and against my policies . . .<sup>98</sup>

Dr. Ley then repeated what Strasser had told the Landesinspektoren, and when he had completed his report Hitler replied that he had thought Strasser to be more intelligent than that and that he was completely shaken by his stand. Hitler then went into a harangue on why Strasser was mistaken and why he did not clearly understand the political situation which he, Hitler, faced. He attacked Strasser's arguments concerning seizure of power and concluded with answers to minor problems Strasser had considered as personal insults. As Hitler continued he became quieter and friendlier. He realized that he did not have a full-scale revolution with which to cope, but that Strasser had acted alone.

At first the Landesinspektoren were shocked by the pale and agitated Hitler who stood before them. But by the end of his two-hour speech he had regained his composure. He was calmer, self-assured, and much friendlier. Lohse wrote that as Hitler spoke, the image of Strasser faded further and

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.



further from his mind.<sup>99</sup> As Hitler warmed to his subject, his listeners became more at ease. He succeeded in convincing them that despite the Party's defeats, his way was correct and Strasser was in error. The speech had its desired effect on the Landesinspektoren: not a single one deserted Hitler for Strasser. According to Lohse, Hitler's speech proved that he "was the master and Strasser the apprentice."<sup>100</sup> Within two months Hitler had shown that he, not Strasser, had correctly assessed the political situation in Germany. The Landesinspektoren remained with Hitler: there was no revolt.

Despite the early panic which hit many of the members of the Party after Strasser left on his "vacation," events within the Party slowly started to settle and resumed a normal course. Goebbels wrote that there was wild excitement in the Reichstag and everywhere: "the rats flee from the sinking ship. Among them are the hyenas (Leichenfledderer) of the battlefield, who come to wolf up the scraps that remain."<sup>101</sup> There were a great many rumors floating around concerning Strasser's defection, and it was the talk of the day. There was a feeling of depression among the members of the Nazi block in the Reichstag. Those few who knew of the situation and its

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 182.

details gathered small groups of representatives around them and explained as best they could exactly why Strasser had left.<sup>102</sup> There were those whom Goebbels called "pessimists," but the Nazi members of the Reichstag remained firm and stood behind Hitler rather than Strasser.<sup>103</sup> By the end of his report for December 9, 1932, Goebbels records that spirits among the Nazi representatives in the Reichstag have improved and that Strasser is gradually losing ground. Goebbels' tone becomes more confident. Strasser did not collect any large body of supporters of any significance around him. "His experiment has failed, and he has failed along the whole line. This reshuffle of the cards will be of advantage to us in the long run . . . This is very good, since it gives us a chance to reorganize the Party."<sup>104</sup>

While Goebbels does not mention the meeting Hitler called in the Hotel Kaiserhof, he does speak of one held in Göring's palace. Here Hitler met with all of the Nazi members of the Reichstag, the Gauleiter and the Landesinspektoren. Hitler addressed himself to each group and in all of his discussion he attacked Strasser and accused him of working sabotage within the Party. The meeting was very successful and the Party remained intact. According to Goebbels, it was an emotional occasion:

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

Old Nazis who have fought for years in the Party have tears in their eyes, tears of anger, pain, and shame. The evening is a great success for the unity of the movement. At the end, the District leaders and deputies burst into spontaneous ovations for the Führer. All shake hands with him, promising to carry on until the very end and not to renounce the great idea, come what might. Strasser now is completely isolated, a dead man . . . 105

In summarizing the Strasser affair Kurt Lüdecke saw clearly the effect it had.

Strasser whose disapproval of Hitler's 'rule-or-ruin' attitude and distrust of his entourage was no secret, may honestly have believed that his alliance with Schleicher was the only means of forcing Hitler into line and saving the party from collapse. His resignation from all his offices seems the quixotic act of an outraged man whose motives had been misinterpreted. Such an ebullition of feeling would have been natural to the Gregor Strasser I knew. And yet his withdrawal may have been due to over-confidence; too sure of the outcome, he may have decided that for events to come he preferred to be clear of the charge of abuse of his position as Hitler's chief executive. Whatever his motives, his resignation and subsequent inertia in the most critical phase of his career, at a time when he needed every ounce of energy and every advantage of his position as second in command in the Nazi Party, shows bad judgment and an absurd naivete. 106

There is, naturally, the possibility that had Strasser remained in Berlin and had he offered concentrated resistance against Hitler, he could have carried at least some members of the Reichstag with him and possibly also some of the leaders within the Party organization itself. He did not,

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Kurt Lüdecke, I Knew Hitler (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 550.

however, remain in Berlin, but went off into Italy for a vacation or at least for a period of rest away from the hubub and intrigues of the capital. Although Hitler was worried about the results of Strasser's defection would have upon the Party, he knew how to handle him. Past experience had shown that Strasser lacked toughness. He had capitulated to Hitler on important issues in the Bamberg affair of 1926, when Strasser decided to destroy the organization of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Northwest rather than oppose Hitler. Had he planned to stand up now he would have remained in Berlin to direct a revolt, but instead he vanished without a word.<sup>107</sup>

The first indication that Strasser had returned to Berlin after his "vacation" comes from an entry in Goebbels' diary for January 4, 1933. Quite understandably he was curious to know whether Strasser would enter a Schleicher cabinet or not.<sup>108</sup> Strasser remained the focal point of most of the important high level Nazi conversations during the crucial first two weeks of the new year, and Goebbels believed that if Strasser entered a Schleicher cabinet the ultimate victory of the Nazis would be postponed by at least two months.<sup>109</sup> The press in Berlin seemed to substantiate

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<sup>107</sup>Bullock, p. 201. Also interview with Karl Wahl, July, 1963.

<sup>108</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 194.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

Goebbels' fears.<sup>110</sup>

Strasser had an interview with von Hindenburg on January 11, 1933, which caused a great commotion within the Nazi camp. The visit with Hindenburg was recognized officially on January 12, and the comment given in the report was that the meeting was solely for the purpose of orienting the Reichspräsident concerning Strasser's personality.<sup>111</sup> Undoubtedly, Hindenburg was interested in far more than mere personalities. The interview was probably an attempt to see if Strasser might be able to enter into a Schleicher government. Schleicher still needed Nazi support to remain in power, and Hindenburg, who violently opposed Hitler, would have done anything necessary to keep him out of the government. Strasser, then, presented an attractive alternative.

The Gauleiter attending a meeting in Weimar debated the whole Strasser affair. They had been deeply shocked by his defection and presented many serious complaints against him.<sup>112</sup> Goebbels recorded on January 16, 1933, that the most serious threat Strasser offered was diminishing. "The papers are clearly dropping Strasser. He has lost his game . . . His shares are not quoted any longer . . . Now he is

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<sup>110</sup>Frankfurter Zeitung, January 15, 17, 24, 1933.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., January 13, 1933. von Papen, Memoirs, p. 232.

<sup>112</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 200.

subsiding into the NOTHING from which he came."<sup>113</sup>

The reason for this change and for the confidence which Goebbels starts to show once again is accounted for by the victory of the Nazis in the small North German state of Lippe. Because of the great problems besetting the Party, the Nazi officials knew that a defeat in Lippe would practically spell the demise of the entire movement. They, therefore, campaigned in Lippe with every possible resource they could muster. A success in Lippe would raise the low party morale and would give the Party members the confidence they had lacked ever since August 1932, when the fortunes of the Party began to decline. Naturally the Strasser crisis was also strongly tied to the necessity of a Nazi success. Goebbels stated that everything depended on the outcome of the Lippe election. If the Nazis could score a success there they could cause the downfall of the cabinet.<sup>114</sup> With a vote of 100,000 the voters of Lippe determined the future of the Schleicher experiment and also the political future of the 68 million people in Germany.<sup>115</sup> The Nazis and their supporters the DNVP (Harzburger Front) were able to win—45.6% of the vote. This success in Lippe gave them that which they needed—victory at the polls. The Nazis celebrated their achievement and then

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>115</sup>Bracher, Auflösung, p. 701.

started putting even more pressure on the Schleicher government. Overnight the situation of the party changed fundamentally. The prestige of the NSDAP was enhanced and all "sensible people" already had lost faith in the von Schleicher cabinet.<sup>116</sup>

The Strasser crisis had sunk into relative unimportance, with the threat of internal disorganization eliminated. The Nazis could now concentrate their efforts on the seizure of power, and once Hitler had been named Chancellor, Strasser as a potent political leader went into eclipse.

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<sup>116</sup>Goebbels, Kaiserhof, p. 200.

SECTION VII

EPILOGUE



Reporting a chance meeting with Gregor Strasser just after he had relinquished his party offices, Alfred Rosenberg recorded his impressions:

That [Strasser's defection] was a heavy blow. I remembered the many speeches which he had always brought to a close with these words: "I fought as one of Hitler's men and as one of Hitler's men I want some day to go to my grave." That was all over now. He probably lacked the clear vision necessary for a clean-cut rebellion, quite aside from the fact that he undoubtedly was deeply attached to our movement. He left. Hitler didn't take any disciplinary measures against him. After the Machtübernahme (accession to power) Strasser by Hitler's direct order was never molested.<sup>1</sup>

Rosenberg was correct in one detail; after the Machtübernahme Strasser was not molested. In fact, he became a member of the Schering-Kahlbaum firm,<sup>2</sup> a leading pharmaceutical company in Berlin, where he acted as an adviser on labor relations.<sup>3</sup> Strasser, incidently, earned much more in this new position than he had ever earned as a politician and naturally had greater security. For a man with a wife and family that meant much to him.<sup>4</sup> Before going into business, however, Gregor Strasser had been compelled to promise his employers that he would not dabble in politics.<sup>5</sup>

Yet within eighteen months after he had broken with Hitler, Strasser, along with Schleicher, Röhm, and an indeterminate number of other former

<sup>1</sup>Alfred Rosenberg, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup>Walter Gorlitz und Herbert A. Quint, Adolf Hitler, Eine Biographie (Stuttgart: Steingrueben-Verlag, 1952), p. 427.

<sup>3</sup>Heiden, Führer, pp. 748-49.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

stalwarts of the party and leading politicians, was dead. The story of his assassination and the purge of June 30, 1934, is one of the bloodiest episodes in the history of the development of National Socialism, and marks the final chapter in Gregor Strasser's career.

The real motive behind Strasser's murder remains an enigma today, and one can but conjecture as to why he was assassinated. Politically speaking Strasser had been relatively inactive since that fateful 8th of December when he resigned his party offices and went to Italy for his "rest cure." There was some question concerning his entering a Schleicher government prior to the Nazi assumption of power, but this amounted to nothing.<sup>6</sup> Hitler may have hoped to be reconciled with Strasser again, but this does not seem too likely. After the assumption of power, especially in the early months of 1934, there was talk concerning the possibility of Strasser's entering Hitler's government as Minister of Economics.<sup>7</sup> One source, though, says that Hitler planned to make him Minister of Interior in place of Frick.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>See above, Section VI, pp. 189-196.

<sup>7</sup>Görlitz und Quint, p. 427. Alan Bullock makes some very interesting comments concerning Strasser's role during this period. "No part is more difficult to trace in this confused story than that played by Gregor Strasser--if indeed he played any part at all other than that of victim. Hitler had apparently renewed touch with Strasser earlier in the year, and, according to Gregor's brother Otto, saw him the day before he left for Venice, in order to offer him the Ministry of National Economy. Strasser, always a poor politician, made the mistake of imposing too many conditions, demanding the dismissal of both Goering and Goebbels." Bullock, pp. 254-255.

<sup>8</sup>Görlitz und Quint, p. 427.

All of this, however, remained strictly talk, and no concrete results ever came from it. One must never forget that Strasser had some very powerful enemies within the Nazi hierarchy who would have done practically anything to prevent his reconciliation with Hitler. Goebbels, G"oring, and Himmler quite naturally feared the reappearance of this man who had displayed so much ability, especially if there were any question that this ability might be used at their expense.<sup>9</sup>

Rumors circulated widely that Strasser would assume other positions in a Nazi government. Supposedly Rudolf Hess, acting as a contact between Hitler and Strasser, offered him the leadership of the German Work Front (DAF) in place of Dr. Ley.<sup>10</sup> The same source reports that Strasser was possibly to have been offered the office of Prussian Minister President replacing Hermann G"oring.<sup>11</sup> All of this helps explain why Strasser was killed on June 30, 1934. The official Nazi accounts of why he was murdered state that he was associated with R"ohm and Schleicher in a conspiracy against Adolf Hitler. But if Strasser were associated with any conspiracy to enter a government then it was most probably on the side of Hitler and Hess against G"oring and Ley, and not with anyone against Hitler.<sup>12</sup> That Strasser had

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Weissbuch Über die Erschiessungen des 30. Juni (Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1934), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

feelers out to Röhm is highly unlikely, and Otto Strasser maintains these rumors were a pack of lies.<sup>13</sup> During 1933 and 1934 Strasser made no attacks of any kind against Hitler, and he never did join his brother's clandestine political organization, the Black Front, which, had he decided to oppose Hitler actively, he undoubtedly would have done.<sup>14</sup>

One question remains above all others when one considers Strasser's death: who actually ordered it? Probably no one at this time can really say, but that Hitler did seems unreasonable.<sup>15</sup> Strasser's long struggle with Goebbels is well known, and it is apparent that there were rumors of Strasser's replacing Göring in at least some of his party offices, so either of these men could have ordered that he be shot. Heinrich Himmler also hated Strasser and could have given the order to have him liquidated. Strasser is reported to have told Hans Frank in November, 1932: "It seems to me that Hitler is completely in the hands of his Himmler and Himmlers."<sup>16</sup> Rosenberg suggests that Hitler had nothing to do with the order given for Strasser's execution and that he even went so far as to begin an investigation after the

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. Also interview with Otto Strasser, May 11, 1963.

<sup>14</sup>Nyomarky, p. 276.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. Hitler ordered a pension given to Frau Strasser, so it does not seem likely that he ordered Gregor Strasser's death.

<sup>16</sup>Hans Frank, Im Angesicht des Galgens (München-Graefeling: Friedrich Alfred Beck Verlag), p. 108 as quoted in Nyomarky, p. 275.

purge to bring Strasser's murderers to account. Just a few days before he was shot Strasser received his Honor Medal (Ehrenzeichen) number nine from the Party. This would indicate that his relations with Hitler were no longer terribly strained.<sup>17</sup>

Even Strasser's death has brought forth a considerable amount of conflicting opinion, but the controversy here is strictly detail rather than interpretation. The accounts come from two sources: Otto Strasser, who received his information from an anonymous person present at the time Gregor was murdered and who later joined Otto Strasser's Black Front, and Hans Bernd Gisevius, who received his information from a prisoner who was in a cell next to the one in which Strasser was shot.<sup>18</sup> Otto Strasser now repudiates his early description of Gregor's death in which he stated his brother was trampled to death in Berlin's Grūnewald.<sup>19</sup>

Gregor Strasser was at lunch with his family when members of the Gestapo appeared at his home in Berlin and arrested him on June 30, 1934. No reason was given for the arrest, and Strasser was whisked away to the

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<sup>17</sup>Hans-Günther Seraphim (ed.), Das politische Tagebuch Alfred Rosenbergs (Göttingen: Musterschmidt-Verlag, 1956), p. 36 as quoted in Nyomarky, p. 276.

<sup>18</sup>See Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, pp. 197-98 and Hans Bernd Gisevius, To the Bitter End (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), pp. 156-58.

<sup>19</sup>Frederick L. Schuman, The Nazi Dictatorship (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), p. 442. Schuman uses this earlier version from Otto Strasser. Strasser himself in giving later versions of Gregor's death switches to that given in Hitler and I. See above Footnote 18 also interview with Otto Strasser, May 11, 1963.

Prinz Albrechtstrasse prison.<sup>20</sup> Gisevius in writing of the incident states that he was first told that Strasser committed suicide and only later learned that he had been murdered.<sup>21</sup> The accounts given by both Otto Strasser and Gisevius are probably correct though they do differ in detail. By the time Gregor arrived at the prison approximately one hundred SA officers who had also been arrested were crowded into a single large room. Because they knew nothing of the shootings going on in Munich and in Berlin they were inclined to take the whole affair in a rather humorous light, and even cheered Strasser when he was brought into the room.<sup>22</sup> Otto Strasser, however, maintains that Gregor was kept in a cell by himself and was allowed to see no one.<sup>23</sup> At any rate, Strasser was called out of the main room and was then taken to a cell where he was shot. Gisevius reports that his source said Gregor was shot from behind by a single SS killer, and Otto Strasser says that there were three present at the actual time of the murder, one of whom was Heydrich.<sup>24</sup> Otto Strasser and Gisevius agree that Gregor did not die immediately, but was left to bleed to death. Later a coup de grace may have

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<sup>20</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, pp. 197-98.

<sup>21</sup>Gisevius, p. 157.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 198.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. See also Gisevius, p. 157.

been delivered by Heydrich according to Otto,<sup>25</sup> but Gisevius' source of information reported that he heard Strasser thrashing about on his cot for nearly an hour and that no one paid any attention to him. Only then did Heydrich enter the cell, and the prisoner heard him say, 'Isn't he dead yet? Let the swine bleed to death.'<sup>26</sup>

All of the bodies of those eliminated in the purge, with the exception of those killed in out of the way places, were cremated at once and after the ashes were returned to their families only private funerals for the victims were allowed. No one really knows the number of those murdered in this "night of the long knives," but estimates range from the seventy-seven acknowledged by Hitler in his report to the Reichstag, to at least 262, the number on the urn returned to the family of Hoffmann-Stettin, one of the victims.<sup>27</sup> Schuman sets the figure which he feels is reliable at 1,186.<sup>28</sup> When Strasser's family received the urn containing his ashes the only marking on it was the

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<sup>25</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 198.

<sup>26</sup>Gisevius, p. 158.

<sup>27</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 199.

<sup>28</sup>Schuman, p. 443. See also Bullock, p. 262.

number 16 and the simple statement: "Gregor Strasser, Born 31 May 1892, died 30 June 1934."<sup>29</sup> Gregor Strasser's ashes still exist today. His widow has never buried them.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, p. 199.

<sup>30</sup>Interview with Otto Strasser, May 11, 1963. In discussing Gregor's death Otto Strasser told the author that he was trying to convince his sister-in-law Gregor's widow, that it would be a wonderful propaganda device to have a ceremony on the 30th of June 1964, to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the purge of 1934. At this time Otto wanted to bury the urn containing Gregor's ashes and have a great many political speeches given. He mentioned, however, that his sister-in-law did not see the matter in the same light. Whether Otto's plans were carried out or not the author cannot say.



SECTION VIII

CONCLUSIONS

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The story of Gregor Strasser is far from complete. Any historical undertaking is experimental in nature, and such probing into the past often unearths more puzzles than the information at hand can resolve. Sometimes there is a dearth of available material; at other times the material itself is contradictory. For these reasons, one of the most important questions which should be answered here is necessarily controversial: would the history of the Nazi Party have been essentially altered without a Gregor Strasser? And a second question grows from the first: since contradictions and controversies still abound, which areas of Strasser's life and work might be most fruitful for further research.

The first question involves Strasser's ultimate significance to the NSDAP. In spite of disagreements, few students of the movement would deny Strasser's crucial role during the Party's beginnings. To a great extent, he was responsible for the creation of the Party structure, and his personal efforts kept it functioning smoothly. At first he had much freedom in this respect, since the Führer did not like to concern himself with organizational matters. He preferred to deal in sweeping generalities; the minutiae bored him. On the other hand, Strasser's "soldierly mind," handled the tedious details of Party management with ease and skill. Thus, while Hitler made all of the really significant decisions, Strasser was left to implement them.

Strasser's official position in the Party--if one believed the organizational charts--was second only to that of Hitler. In actuality the office carried little essential power. Even though Strasser was the Party manager and worked with its functionaries on almost every level, Hitler was the focus of all activity. He was not a man to share control. He alone remained the nucleus of power and the binding central force. Quite naturally, high Party officials sought his presence directly, and became impatient with intermediary channels. Often, Strasser was bypassed completely. It would thus be unsound to conclude that Strasser came close to overshadowing Hitler in those early years. Certainly Strasser himself does not seem to have thought so or even to have hoped so. Strasser's voice was a small one except during the few months when the Führer was safely in prison.

It is evident from the documents that Strasser was not unwilling to take second place. Even though he questioned some of the decisions Hitler made, he was one of his most devoted followers. He often disagreed with Hitler over tactical procedures and ideological questions and had a mind of his own. Yet, whenever a final decision had to be made--at least until his resignation in December, 1932--Strasser always sided with Hitler. Even at that crucial time, he did not break with the Party nor with Hitler personally.

The resignation itself was a mistake. His defection just at this time seems incomprehensible. The theory that he intended to organize a new group within the NSDAP and establish himself as its head seems doubtful in view of

the facts. The logical time for such a faction to emerge would have been immediately after his resignation. Yet Strasser told Hitler he had no desire to become the leader of an opposition group, and instead of remaining in Berlin where he could sway other Party officials to his cause, he went off to vacation in Italy. It seems unlikely, then, despite the accusations of Goebbels and others, that he resigned to organize a splinter party of his own.

We can only guess at the real reasons behind Strasser's actions. Had he remained where he was, he probably would have been appointed to a high position in the German government when Hitler came into power. Perhaps he had given up hope that Hitler would ever achieve his goal. Perhaps a lack of political insight caused him to misread the signs. Perhaps his action was designed to jolt the Party leaders to their senses, to start them moving towards some kind of coalition government before all the members became discouraged and began slipping away. Perhaps he was reacting out of hurt pride and a sense that his own position in the Party was being undermined, bypassed, ignored. Whatever his reasons, the resignation cost him his political career, and his life as well.

Many of the riddles of Strasser's life remain unsolved. Originally, this dissertation hoped to include a more complete biography of the man, but the greatest obstacle here was a lack of materials. Strasser's defection annoyed Party leaders to such an extent that pages of books containing his name were often cut out or pasted over, and many valuable documents concerning

his activities were deliberately destroyed. Even limiting the subject to Strasser's work in the organization of the Party presented difficulties which could not be resolved.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for a definitive biography of Gregor Strasser, and his role in the early development of the NSDAP requires closer examination than has been possible here. The Hauptarchiv, the Schumacher collection, the Reichsschatzmeister collection--all available at the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz--contain material on Strasser, but it is not adequate to form a basis for a truly comprehensive study.

It is unfortunate, moreover, that the Strasser family does not possess any important papers or documents, and can only provide general information and anecdotes. Also most of Strasser colleagues are either dead or lost their papers during the war. According to Otto Strasser, Paul Schulz at one time had many of Strasser's papers in his possession, and it is from Schulz that the author received the copy of Strasser's letter of resignation, reproduced in the appendix. Schulz did mention some other papers, but he has since died and attempts to contact his family have not been successful. Unless the papers supposedly in his keeping are brought to light, many details of Strasser's career must remain a mystery.

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## APPENDIX

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The following document is a copy of Strasser's letter to Hitler in which he resigned his Party offices. The author saw two copies of the letter, one hand written with marginal notes, and one a carbon copy of the letter sent to Hitler. The letter reproduced here is a copy of the carbon. Both of the letters were in the possession of Paul Schulz, and he generously allowed the author to use them on July 27, 1963.

Gregor Strasser

den 8. December 1932

Herrn

ADOLF Hitler  
z. Zt. Berlin  
 Hotel "Der Kaiserhof"

Sehr geehrter Herr Hitler!

Mit diesem Schreiben bitte ich Sie zur Kenntnis zu nehmen, dass ich mein Amt als Reichsorganisationsleiter der Partei niederlege und gleichzeitig meinen Verzicht auf mein Reichstags-Mandat aussprechen werde.

Zur Begründung dieses von mir nach schweren inneren Kämpfen unternommenen Schrittes führe ich folgendes an:

Es ist mir unmöglich, in einer Zeit, die infolge der politischen Verhältnisse und des inneren Zustandes der Bewegung straffste autoritative Führung zur allergrössten Notwendigkeit macht, die Organisationsarbeiten durchzuführen, wenn der Führer der Bewegung die von ihm unterzeichneten Anordnungen den wenigen die erhöhte Kontrolle mit Recht führenden

Gauleitern gegenüber heruntersetzt und sabotiert und dadurch diese Gauleiter, die durchweg zu den schlechten Verwaltern ihres Amtes gehören, zur offenen Meuterei auffordert. Das ist für mein soldatisches Denken unerträglich.

Nachdem Sie auch Dritten gegenüber die von mir durchgeführte Neu-Organisation der Partei als prinzipiell falsch bezeichnen, ist meine organisatorische Aufgabe unlösbar geworden und ich ziehe daraus die Konsequenzen.

Ich glaube, dass kein Redner der Partei ausser Ihnen so stark die weltanschaulichen Fragen des Nationalsozialismus in den Vordergrund gerückt hat wie ich.

Darum habe ich das Recht zu sagen, dass die NSDAP nach meiner Auffassung nicht nur eine zur Religion werdende Weltanschauungsbewegung ist, sondern eine Kampfbewegung, die die Macht in Staate in jeder Möglichkeit anstreben muss, um den Staat zur Erfüllung seiner nationalsozialistischen Aufgaben und zur Durchführung des deutschen Sozialismus in allen seinen Konsequenzen fähig zu machen.

Die brachiale Auseinandersetzung mit dem Marxismus kann und darf nicht--dem Einzelnen überlassen--in dem Mittelpunkt der innerpolitischen Aufgabe stehen, sondern ich sehe es als das grosse Problem dieser Zeit an, eine grosse breite Front der schaffenden Menschen zu bilden und sie an den neu geformten Staat heranzubringen. Die alleinige Hoffnung auf das Chaos als die Schicksalsstunde der Partei halte ich für falsch, gefährlich und nicht im gesamtdeutschen Interesse liegend. In



allen diesen Fragen ist Ihre entscheidende Meinung eine andere und damit ist meine politische Aufgabe als Abgeordneter und Redner der Partei unlösbar geworden und ich siehe daraus die Konsequenzen.

Ich war in meinem Leben nichts anderes als Nationalsozialist und ich werde nie etwas anderes sein, darum trete ich--ohne Rücksicht auf meine Person und ohne persönlichen Groll--in die Reihe der einfachen Parteigenossen zurück und mache den Platz frei für die Ratgeber, welche Sie zur Zeit mit Erfolg zu beraten in der Lage sind.

Dieser [sic.] mein Entschluss ist der schwerste meines Lebens; denn ich habe der Bewegung und Ihnen 11 Jahre lang treu gedient.

Da ich unter allen Umständen ablehne, irgendwie der Mittelpunkt von Oppositionsbestrebungen oder auch nur Erörterungen solcher Art zu werden, verlasse ich heute noch Berlin und anschliessend für längere Zeit Deutschland.

Als meinen Nachfolger schlage ich pflichtgemäss den früheren Leiter der Organisationsabteilung II Herrn Oberst Hierl vor.

Von diesem Brief erhalten nur Sie Kenntnis. An die Presse werde ich keine irgendwie gearteten Erklärungen meines Schrittes geben.

Mit deutschem Gruss

stets Ihr ergebener

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