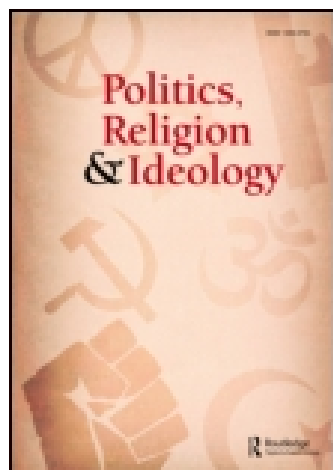


This article was downloaded by: [Linköping University Library]

On: 24 August 2014, At: 00:05

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Politics, Religion & Ideology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftmp21>

### Nazi Economic Thought and Rhetoric During the Weimar Republic: Capitalism and its Discontents

Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Loughborough University

Published online: 24 Sep 2013.

To cite this article: Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (2013) Nazi Economic Thought and Rhetoric During the Weimar Republic: Capitalism and its Discontents, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 14:3, 355-376, DOI: [10.1080/21567689.2013.820436](https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2013.820436)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2013.820436>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

## Nazi Economic Thought and Rhetoric During the Weimar Republic: Capitalism and its Discontents

CLAUS-CHRISTIAN W. SZEJNMANN\*

Loughborough University

**ABSTRACT** *At the heart of Nazism was a radical economic vision and rhetoric that provided the Nazis with an authenticity and legitimacy in their struggle to succeed the free-market capitalist economic system – this was crucial to their successful mass mobilisation and to becoming an acceptable party of government. While many of these views had deep historical and ideological roots in German society, they only became mainstream during the world economic depression. By then the Nazis' uncompromising political-economic demand that Germany could only prosper when overthrowing the Versailles peace order, looking after its national interests and doing things the German way had transformed from fringe view to mainstream consensus. At a time when capitalism's future and Germany's place in it looked bleak, many regarded the Nazis' economic vision entailing state control, autarky coupled with Grossraumwirtschaft and withdrawal from international cooperation in favour of nationalist policies as the most promising economic programme. Meanwhile Nazi rhetoric had become an integral part of a powerful anti-capitalist Zeitgeist, an 'anti-system' rallying cry that questioned the core principles of capitalism. Its proponents condemned its selfishness, materialism and unfairness, and instead demanded that the common good had to be protected from individual greed.*

### Introduction: The Age of Ideologies, National Socialism and Anti-Capitalism

The first half of the twentieth century is seen as an age of irrational extremes and of hatred. Most importantly, communism in the Soviet Union and national socialism in Germany unleashed a violent and revolutionary assault on the existing domestic and international order. The Nazis pursued a war of annihilation and committed unprecedented genocide, whilst Stalin's rule led to mass starvation, the Great Terror and the gulags. Yet, Jan-Werner Müller recently emphasised the importance of understanding historically the ability of communism and national socialism to mobilise and fascinate their populations.<sup>1</sup> Many contemporaries were shaped by the horrendous experience of the First World War, and they felt anxious about rapid changes taking place in a world without certainties and stability. This created unstable, in many respects, provisional societies that experimented with various political-economic systems, including Bolshevism, fascism, national socialism and Francoism. They all represented real efforts in their own right to respond to the problems of mass politics, industrialisation and social order.

---

\*Email: [c.w.szejnmann@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:c.w.szejnmann@lboro.ac.uk)

<sup>1</sup>Jan-Werner Müller, *Contesting Democracy. Political Ideas in Twentieth-Century Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

Why did so many 'ordinary' men and women, not just a few political activists, see national socialism as an answer to their problems? Nazis, like communists and other extremists, expressed a critique of the contemporary world they lived in, and promised to create something that functioned better than the existing liberal system which for many contemporaries seemed out-dated and bankrupt. To be sure, proponents of alternative ideologies and movements had to articulate and promote their cause during the new age of the masses. Yet, since the founding of the Nazi Party in 1919 many commentators have reduced Nazi ideology to little more than nihilistic and demagogic propaganda designed to deceive the population.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the discussion of Nazi ideology has often oscillated between 'trivialisation' (for instance when historian Hans Mommsen talked about an 'ideological simulation' in 1991), or 'demonisation' (for example, see the title of a 2012 BBC TV series and kindle book by Laurence Rees: *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler. Leading Millions into the Abyss*).<sup>3</sup> Eberhard Jäckel, who pleaded in 1969 to take Hitler's ideology seriously and focused on Hitler's aims in foreign and racial policies, was a notable exception to this.<sup>4</sup> It was only from the 1990s that the majority of scholars and the broader public started to change their perception of and approach to Nazism. This came about by the recognition that Nazism was not an 'alien' ideology and movement that had seduced German society, but that it had grown from within German society and had enjoyed considerable support for many of its visions and policies.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, to date challenges to the interpretation of Nazi 'irrationality' have not come far. For example, William Brustein's thesis that the Nazis crafted 'imaginative and proactive' economic programmes 'which appealed to the self-interest (particularly the material interests) of a broad section of German society'<sup>6</sup> – in other words, people voted for reasons of rationality and pragmatism for the NSDAP – has either been ignored, or scholars have emphasised opposite things: highlighting the contradictions and differences in economic views among the Nazi leadership;<sup>7</sup> pointing out that the NSDAP's economic programmes were based on the creative achievements of a few non-Nazi reformers, and that their actual content was 'vague';<sup>8</sup> or even arguing that because Nazi economic plans from 1932 were not implemented when Hitler came to power, they have to be regarded as 'empty phrases'.<sup>9</sup> In short, according to most scholarship, Nazi economic policies before 1930–1931 are regarded as 'a conglomerate of confusing ideas' without much relevance.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Influential for this interpretation was Hermann Rauschning, *Germany's Revolution of Destruction* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1939).

<sup>3</sup>Lutz Raphael, 'Die Nationalsozialistische Weltanschauung. Profil, Verbreitungsformen und Nachleben' in Günter Gehl (ed.) *Kriegsende 1945. Befreiung oder Niederlage für die Deutschen? Gedanken über die Hintergründe des Rechtsextremismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Weimar: Bertuch, 2006), pp. 27–42, here 27.

<sup>4</sup>Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung. Entwurf einer Herrschaft* (Tübingen: R. Wunderlich Verlag H. Leins, 1969); translated as Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View. A Blueprint for Power* (London: Harvard University Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup>Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, 'Perpetrators of the Holocaust: A Historiography' in Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (eds) *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers. Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 25–54.

<sup>6</sup>William Brustein, *The Logic of Evil. The Social Origins of the Nazi Party, 1925–1933* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 177.

<sup>7</sup>Udo Kissenkoetter, *Gregor Straßer und die NSDAP* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1978), p. 119.

<sup>8</sup>Detlev Humann, 'Arbeitsschlacht'. *Arbeitsbeschaffung und Propaganda in der NS-Zeit 1933–1939* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011), pp. 57, 114.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 114.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Hans-Erich Volkmann, 'Die NS-Wirtschaft in Vorbereitung des Krieges: I. Von der Weltwirtschaft zur Großraumwirtschaft' in Wilhelm Deist, Manfred Messerschmidt, Hans-Erich Volkmann and Wolfram Wette (eds) *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Band I. Ursachen und Voraussetzungen der deutschen Kriegspolitik* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1979), pp. 177–207, here p. 190.

With such damning assessments about Nazi economic competence it can hardly surprise that most experts have not taken seriously their critique of the existing economic system either. In the past, most scholars have either simply ignored Nazi anti-capitalism, or dismissed it as ‘nothing more than a propaganda weapon’,<sup>11</sup> or the pursuits of the so-called ‘Nazi left’ around Otto Strasser.<sup>12</sup> The Nazis’ violent anti-Marxism, the dominance of class analysis as an explanatory concept before and after 1945, and the tendency ‘to dismiss Nazi rhetoric on topics other than race and war’ as a smokescreen, have contributed to the portrayal of Nazism as the representative of middle-class or big capitalism smashing organised labour.<sup>13</sup> Since the 1990s, scholarship has largely turned its back on the relationship between Nazism and (anti-)capitalism. The terms ‘capitalism’ or ‘anti-capitalism’ hardly feature (in fact, most of the time they are not mentioned at all) in general books about the rise of the Nazis,<sup>14</sup> nor in more specialised works, including sociological studies about NSDAP members and voters, or Nazi propaganda,<sup>15</sup> nor in standard survey texts about the Weimar Republic.<sup>16</sup> This is surprising: after all, Weimar extremists fought fierce battles to replace the liberal-democratic-capitalist system with their alternative vision, in particular when the Great Depression called into question the future of capitalism per se. However, even survey texts that cover twentieth-century modern German history and beyond do not cover ‘capitalism’ or ‘anti-capitalism’.<sup>17</sup> Considering that these topics played such a central role in modern German history, this indicates a more general void. Is part of the explanation the decline of old paradigms and master narratives, such as class conflict and nation state building, and the emergence of new methodologies?

This piece then focuses on what has become a much-neglected and dismissed topic: Nazi economic thought and rhetoric. It cannot offer comprehensive coverage, focuses on the period of the Weimar Republic and builds on a few studies that have made important contributions in these fields. While some attention will be devoted to the Nazi concept and

<sup>11</sup>Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship. The Origins, Structure and Consequences of National Socialism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), pp. 120, 115.

<sup>12</sup>Kissenkoetter, *Gregor Straßer*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup>Christopher R. Browning and Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ‘Frameworks for Social Engineering: Stalinist Schema of Identification and the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*’ in Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick (eds) *Beyond Totalitarianism. Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 231–265, here p. 238. While a new generation of scholars took workers’ attraction to Nazism very seriously (see Conan Fischer, (eds), *The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996)), Marxist historians continued to dismiss Nazi anti-capitalist ideology and rhetoric as totally disingenuous. See Joachim Bons, *Nationalsozialismus und Arbeiterfrage. Zu den Motiven, Inhalten und Wirkungsgründen nationalsozialistischer Arbeiterpolitik vor 1933* (Pfaffenweiler: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1995).

<sup>14</sup>Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1989–1936: Hubris* (London: Penguin Press, 1998); Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup>Detlef Mühlberger, *The Social Bases of Nazism 1919–1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jürgen Falter, *Hitler’s Wähler* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1991); Gerhard Paul, *Aufstand der Bilder. Die NS-Propaganda vor 1933* (Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., 1990).

<sup>16</sup>Anthony McElligott (ed.), *Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ursula Büttner, *Weimar. Die überforderte Republik 1918–1933* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2008); Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Vierter Band. Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914–1949* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2008); Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (London: Routledge, 2005); Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar 1918–1933. Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1998); Hans Mommsen, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup>William W. Hagen, *German History in Modern Times. Four Lives of the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Martin Kitchen, *A History of Modern Germany. 1800–2000* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Mary Fulbrook, *History of Germany, 1918–2000. The Divided Nation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002).

semantics of anti-capitalism, the negative depiction in ‘anti’ should not distract that the Nazis juxtaposed their extreme rejection of the existing system with their positive vision and programme for an alternative future. In short, this piece aims to challenge the prevalent historiographical dismissiveness towards Nazi ideology and attitudes towards the economy in particular, and emphasises the Nazis’ attempts to offer concrete solutions. We argue that economic thought and rhetoric were crucial for Nazism before 1933: It was central to its success in mass mobilisation, and to becoming an acceptable party of government. The anti-capitalism campaign provided Nazis with an economic focus point, a revolutionary legitimacy and authenticity in their struggle to succeed the liberal system. At the heart of our investigation is the place of Nazi economic thought and rhetoric in German society. Why did the Nazis suggest certain solutions, and what were they? To what extent were they embedded in contemporary society, and how did contemporaries respond to them? Such an analysis requires a reconstruction of semantics in a historical context. The Nazis and their contemporaries used semantics to interpret modern society, developed what they perceived to be consistent solutions to overcome problems in society and implemented strategies for how their visions could be realised.<sup>18</sup> The first section compares the early economic views of Hitler and Gregor Strasser with Nazi economic policies in 1932. We argue that early on the Nazis adopted an economic vision that developed from fringe existence to putting them in the driving seat within nationalist circles to replace the capitalist economic system during the Great Depression. The second section discusses the Nazi battle for anti-capitalist authenticity with Marxists and the way the former exploited an existing set of language and metaphors to reload them with their own meanings and values to attract workers. The last section reflects on the Nazi use of anti-capitalist ‘crisis’ rhetoric and the terms ‘work’ and ‘performance’ that acquired additional significance during the world economic crisis. It argues that the Nazi vision of a biological-utilitarian *Volksgemeinschaft*, a ‘German socialism’ based on work and performance and subject to the principle of ‘*Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*’ (common good takes precedence over self-interest) was the Nazis’ key alternative to capitalism.

### A ‘German’ Economy that Serves the Common Good: A ‘National’ Anti-Capitalist Solution

A look at the evolution of early Nazi ideology reveals something that merits attention: Gottfried Feder’s well-known theory of ‘interest slavery’ suggests a distinction between ‘rapacious’ (*raffendes*) and ‘productive’ (*schaffendes*) capital (or, to put it differently, ‘parasitical Jewish finance capital’ and ‘creative national capital’). Importantly, this formed the basis of a powerful anti-capitalist concept that left property relations intact.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile Anton Drexler linked anti-Semitism with both anti-capitalism and anti-Marxism, and injected into Nazi ideology a long staple in the European tradition of Vacher de Lapouge and Francis Galton, that work and race are inextricably linked.<sup>20</sup> Hitler’s economic views were shaped by these core views. However, most scholars have

<sup>18</sup>Klaus Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus: Wissenssoziologie einer Weltanschauung*, new ed. (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2010), pp. 362–364.

<sup>19</sup>Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 190f. On Feder, also see Joan Campbell, *Joy in Work, German Work. The National Debate, 1800–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 244, 303; Albrecht Tyrell, ‘Gottfried Feder and the NSDAP’ in Peter D. Stachura (ed.) *The Shaping of the Nazi State* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 48–87, here p. 51.

<sup>20</sup>Campbell, *Joy in Work*, pp. 313f.

argued that the economy was secondary to Hitler who emphasised the 'primacy of politics'<sup>21</sup>; that Hitler hardly shared his thoughts about reshaping the economy beyond a small circle of confidants as he feared early on that this was potentially a divisive topic;<sup>22</sup> that his speeches on the economy before 1933 were very vague;<sup>23</sup> and finally, while noting that Hitler's early anti-Semitic speeches had an anti-capitalist element, scholars did not pay much attention to this phenomenon in later years.<sup>24</sup> Two historians stand out for adding a more complex analysis to this. Avraham Barkai's study from 1977 about the Nazi economic system and its ideological and theoretical foundation recognised that economic thinking occupied a firm place in Hitler's world view early on, and drew attention to the traditions of nationalist-etatist German economic thinking.<sup>25</sup> Rainer Zitelmann's Hitler biography from 1987 then added a detailed analysis of Hitler's social, domestic and economic policies, and presented what remains to date by far the most elaborate discussion about Hitler's anti-capitalist views.<sup>26</sup>

The way Hitler defined a capitalist state was crucial to Nazi ideology. To Hitler, private property and private ownership of production were central components of a capitalist economy, while 'political capitalism' (here he interchanged the term with 'political liberalism') was marked by individuals who governed according to their wishes and not in the interest of the *Volk*.<sup>27</sup> As the Nazis' priority was to pursue fundamental changes in the political sphere and they did not aim to abolish private property per se, they normally emphasised the need for a political rather than an economic revolution. Following Zitelmann we want to argue that (i) Hitler expressed a radical reshaping of the economy very early on and put it at the heart of his political programme; (ii) Hitler's vision was shaped by his core beliefs in the principle of competition (social Darwinism), the protection of one's race and the belief in personalities; (iii) Hitler's core economic vision demanded: (a) a replacement of the capitalist economic system with one that was dominated by state control and planning but allowed private initiative in a 'national economy' that served the common good (re-establishing the primacy of politics) and was free of Jews (racism); (b) opting out of crucial parts of the global free market economy and pursuing autarkic policies and expansion in a quest to secure agricultural land to feed one's own population and to secure raw material for industry (re-establishing a balance between agriculture and industry).<sup>28</sup> This radical economic vision tied in with the Nazis' blunt political-economic demand that only the complete overthrow of the Versailles peace order (including reparations) would overcome Germany's economic problems.<sup>29</sup> To them, a few economic reforms or some measures to raise credit or to save money would not make any difference. This radical stance stood out because it opposed a basic consensus in favour of international cooperation that lasted until around 1931.

<sup>21</sup>Werner Bührer, 'Wirtschaft' in Wolfgang Benz, Hermann Graml and Hermann Weiß (eds) *Enzyklopädie des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), pp. 108–122, here p. 108.

<sup>22</sup>Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *German Big Business and the Rise of Hitler* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 78–81.

<sup>23</sup>Rainer Zitelmann, *Hitler. Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs* (Stuttgart: Herbig, 1987), p. 228.

<sup>24</sup>For example, see Kershaw, *Hubbris*, p. 152.

<sup>25</sup>Avraham Barkai, *Das Wirtschaftssystem des Nationalsozialismus. Ideologie, Theorie, Politik 1933–1945*, new ed. (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, 1988 [original 1977]).

<sup>26</sup>Zitelmann, *Hitler*.

<sup>27</sup>Hitler, speech in Munich, 25 August 1920, in Eberhard Jäckel (ed.) *Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1980), pp. 205–219, here pp. 206, 217.

<sup>28</sup>Zitelmann, *Hitler*, pp. 69f.

<sup>29</sup>For this and the following see Albrecht Ritschl, *Deutschlands Krise und Konjunktur 1924–1934. Binnenkonjunktur, Auslandsverschuldung und Reparationsproblem zwischen Dawes-Plan und Transfersperre* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2002), pp. 24, 237.



It seems sufficient to document this only very briefly. By the time Hitler gave his famous speech on anti-Semitism on 13 August 1920 he already (i) elaborated on the work-race theme ('Aryanism signifies an ethical conception of work leading to . . . socialism, community consciousness, "*Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*" – Judaism means an egotistical conception of work and thus Mammonism and materialism, the absolute contrary of socialism.'<sup>30</sup>); (ii) distinguished between 'industrial capital' ('tools, workshops, machines or factories and working capital . . . bound to the state, to the *Volk*, dependent on the will of the *Volk* to work') and Jewish controlled 'international capital' that corrupted honest and moral work; and (iii) maintained that 'international capital' can only be broken by 'national power'.<sup>31</sup> In subsequent speeches Hitler did not tire of emphasising the importance of protecting the 'national economy' (the 'honest working economy') with the power of a 'national state' against Jews and Marxist leaders, who he described as the main supporter of 'internationalisation' and the exploitation of Germany.<sup>32</sup> Finally, Hitler's belief in social Darwinist principles led him to express support for an assertive and aggressive role in foreign affairs (conquest by force rather than by peaceful economics),<sup>33</sup> and the rise of a new elite within Germany.<sup>34</sup>

Did Hitler's core views about the economy match those of other Nazi activists? A comparison with Gregor Strasser promises to be revealing: Strasser was leader of the so-called Nazi 'left' in the mid-1920s, and second in command in the NSDAP by the early 1930s, when he spearheaded the NSDAP's economic policies during the Great Depression, until his disagreement with Hitler's strategy to get into power made him resign from his party duties in December 1932. To date scholarship has been equally dismissive about Strasser's economic views and policies and Hitler's.<sup>35</sup> It is striking how similar the core economic views of both Nazi leaders were, and how consistently they expressed them over the years. In what was the first ever speech of a Nazi in a German parliament, on 9 July 1924 in the Bavarian State Parliament, Strasser attacked the principle of the whole political-economic system that was based on the Versailles peace treaty, in particular Jewish 'bank capitalism' and interest and finance domination, materialistic attitudes and Marxism whose pacifism and internationalism sustained international finance capitalism ('Jewish Marxism'); he outlined the pillars of Nazi ideology: 'the internal and external protection of *Volk* and race' [that is, racism, CCWS], 'the reckless enforcement of social justice' [that is, punishment and exclusion of those who do not contribute to the common good, CCWS], 'the creation of a *völkisch* power' [that is, external assertion and internal racism, CCWS]; and finally he called for 'state socialism' [that is, state-controlled 'German Socialism', CCWS], and the protection of the 'German *Volkswirtschaft*' [that is, autarky, CCWS].<sup>36</sup> Strasser, like Hitler, again and again highlighted the loss of core ideals due to the 'primacy of economics' under capitalism. According to him, a 'change in spirit', 'a

<sup>30</sup>Quoted in Campbell, *Joy in Work*, p. 315.

<sup>31</sup>Hitler, speech in Munich, 13 August 1920, in Jäckel, *Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 184–204, here pp. 193f.

<sup>32</sup>Hitler, speech in Munich, 28 July 1922, in *ibid.*, pp. 656–671, here p. 661; Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Zwei Bände in einem Band. Ungekürzte Ausgabe (Munich: Frz. Eher Nachf., G.m.b.H., 851.–855. Auflage 1943), pp. 51, 234.

<sup>33</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1943), pp. 157ff.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 498ff.

<sup>35</sup>Peter D. Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 49, 51; Ernst Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe* (Munich: Blessing, 2005), p. 147. Less dismissive of Strasser as a person but still contemptuous about his policies are Kissenkoetter, *Gregor Straßer*; and Humann, 'Arbeitsschlacht'.

<sup>36</sup>Gregor Strasser, 'Speech in Bavarian State Parliament', 9 July 1924, in Gregor Strasser, *Kampf um Deutschland, Reden und Aufsätze eines Nationalsozialisten* (Munich: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1932), pp. 11–35. Also see Gregor Strasser, 'Nationale Wirtschaft. Zum Abschluss des internationalen Eisenkartells', 12 June 1925, in Gregor Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 43–49.

moral recovery', was required in which work, performance and responsibility were valued once more and measured in a way that benefited the nation. He contrasted this with liberalism that fostered and rewarded selfish attitudes of individuals who were seeking profits and advantages for themselves and were thus undermining deep-rooted human values and morals.<sup>37</sup>

In a next step we want to show the close similarities between these early core economic views and the NSDAP's economic policies and anti-capitalist rhetoric in 1932. In other words, describing Nazis' economic views as vague or as a propaganda exercise misses the crucial point that the Nazis consistently expressed a vision that became a winning economic programme and sentiment by 1932. As a programme, this encompassed state control, autarky and withdrawal from international cooperation in favour of nationalist policies.<sup>38</sup> As a sentiment it mirrored a growing rejection of materialism and the sense that the common good had to be protected from individual greed. While the exclusion of Jews and aggressive foreign expansion did not become part of the NSDAP's official economic programmes in 1932 and the Nazis undertook some efforts to water down previous rhetoric in this direction, it was an open secret that these remained core Nazi aims. In fact, anti-capitalism driven by anti-Semitism continued to play a major role, especially in internal NSDAP publications where Germany was depicted as a victim of a 'capitalist system of enslavement' (also 'Dawes capitalism', 'Young-capitalism', and so on).<sup>39</sup> However, during the second half of the 1920s the Nazis also started to express a more rationally-based anti-capitalism that engaged with various anti-capitalist trends and economic developments taking place in and outside of Germany (see below).<sup>40</sup> Finally, a whole range of ideas, initiatives and tools, such as work creation, deficit spending, or the creation of a German-dominated 'extended economic space' (*Grossraumwirtschaft*) within Europe,<sup>41</sup> were new (or in the latter case, became widely discussed and supported) and played an important role during the Great Depression. But the concept of 'work' and autarky had always been a key feature of Nazism, and deficit spending can be regarded as an economic tool to achieve economic goals. As in other areas, such as propaganda, the Nazis showed extreme flexibility and willingness to experiment with new ideas that fitted their overall vision.

In 1932, when the Nazis faced their most important electoral challenges during the Weimar Republic, they made a number of high-profile economic interventions, including Hitler's address to the Industry Club in Düsseldorf (27 January); Strasser's famous 'work and bread' speech in the Reichstag that outlined the NSDAP's economic programme (10 May); the publication of the Emergency Economic Programme of the NSDAP with which the Nazis campaigned in the July Reichstag election (Gregor Strasser, May 1932; published as a pamphlet with a print run of 600,000<sup>42</sup>); Strasser's two radio speeches on

<sup>37</sup>Gregor Strasser, 'Ziele und Wege', *Nationalsozialistische Briefe*, Nr 1, beginning of July 1927.

<sup>38</sup>There is a clear continuity between these visions and Nazi economic policies during the Third Reich. Adam Tooze argued that a 'nationalist programme of self-assertion ['foreign debts', 'currency and rearmament'] ... was the true agenda of Hitler's government'. See Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction. The Making & Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 33.

<sup>39</sup>Bodo Uhse, 'Mecklenburg vor der politischen Entscheidung – Gegen Paris. Für die deutsche Freiheit', *Niederdeutscher Beobachter*, 21 June 1929; 'Innerer Ruhrkampf', *National-Zeitung*, 15 December 1930.

<sup>40</sup>Zitelmann argued that Hitler distanced himself from Feder's crude theory towards the end of the 1920s, and that his critique of the capitalist system increased steadily in later years. See Zitelmann, *Hitler*, pp. 299, 304, and pp. 262, 494.

<sup>41</sup>For a Nazi proposal see for example Hans Krebs, *Panuropa oder Mitteleuropa?* (Munich: Verlag Frz. Eher-Nachf., 1931).

<sup>42</sup>Humann, 'Arbeitsschlacht', p. 55



14 June and 29 July (apparently more than 20 million people listened to the first one, and both appeared as a record<sup>43</sup>); and finally, the Economic Reconstruction Plan for the November Reichstag election (Gottfried Feder and Walter Funk, October 1932). While all these speeches or programmes had specific audiences and purposes, their core vision was extremely similar.

We want to focus on the NSDAP's two economic programmes. The Emergency Programme contained many of the trademark Nazi slogans such as 'capital does not create jobs, but rather jobs create capital', or 'freedom from capitalist exploitation'.<sup>44</sup> It attacked key features of the capitalist economy ('this economic policy has failed completely') and, instead, emphasised '(re)focusing on the domestic market' (the most widely used phrase in the programme), and called for a massive state-funded public works project based on deficit spending to establish full employment. Increased state control would ensure the restriction of imports and exports (imports harmed German producers while exports were vulnerable to the world market). The driver of this was the quest to establish autarky wherever possible, and in particular to boost agriculture (trade protection and land reclamation scheme). The Economic Reconstruction Plan has often been described as much more moderate as industry had lobbied Hitler against the Emergency Programme's strong tendencies of socialisation and nationalisation.<sup>45</sup> In fact, beneath the rhetoric aimed at appeasing anxieties about Nazi socialism ('we do not want a state economy, neither a state socialism along the lines of Marxist doctrine'), and some industry friendly reversals, the core vision hardly changed.<sup>46</sup> While the frontal attack on the capitalist system was replaced by a condemnation of the Papen government for attempting to rescue the German economy without changing its structure, the Nazis called for a 'new construction of the state and the economy based on National Socialist principles'.

The leap from vision to concrete programmes in 1932 was based on the forging of a pragmatic relationship after the September 1930 elections between economic reformers and proponents of autarky on the one hand, and the Nazis on the other hand: while the former needed political backing for what were then still marginalised ideas, the latter required economic expertise to formulate their core ideas into a programme. By 1932 policies of state socialism and autarky (based on a *Grossraumwirtschaft*) were supported by broad sections of society, including many employers, the ministerial bureaucracy and liberals.<sup>47</sup> While the Great Depression sparked off this 'conversion', it reflected specific traditions of German economic thinking (nationalist etatism) that went back well into the eighteenth century and that championed, among other things, a strong state, the right and duty of the state to organise the economy and to limit private initiative to favour the common good, a tendency towards autarkic self-sufficiency within a large European economic area and a romantic prioritisation of agriculture.<sup>48</sup> Nazis, but also conservative thinkers such as Othmar Spann, Werner Sombart, Oswald Spengler, or engineers and the *Tat* circle, drew upon anti-laissez faire and anti-capitalist economists such as Adam Müller (state economy), Friedrich List (state control), Wilhelm Roscher (national

<sup>43</sup>Paul, *Aufstand der Bilder*, p. 197.

<sup>44</sup>An English translation is available at <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/sofortprogramm.htm> [accessed 25 April 2013].

<sup>45</sup>Barkai, *Wirtschaftssystem*, pp. 47f.; Volkmann, 'NS-Wirtschaft', p. 202.

<sup>46</sup>The plan is printed in Gottfried Feder, *Kampf gegen die Hochfinanz*, 6th ed. (Munich: Verlag Frz. Eher-Nachf., 1935), pp. 371–382.

<sup>47</sup>See Humann, 'Arbeitsschlacht', p. 34; Volkmann, 'NS-Wirtschaft', pp. 178, 185ff; Ritschl, *Deutschlands Krise*. For a growing convergence between liberals and Nazis on economic matters see Eric Kurlander, "Between Detroit and Moscow": A Left Liberal "Third Way" in the Third Reich', *Central European History*, 44:2 (2011), pp. 279–307.

<sup>48</sup>Barkai, *Wirtschaftssystem*, pp. 25, 91. Also see Volkmann, 'NS-Wirtschaft', pp. 71, 190ff.

peculiarities), Adolf Wagner (state socialism) and Gustav Schmoller (central European *Grossraumwirtschaft*).<sup>49</sup>

Anti-capitalism was far from one-dimensional. It was a complex phenomenon with substantial differences in arguments, political and humanitarian ideals, economic theories and alternative visions.<sup>50</sup> During the world economic crisis anti-capitalism became a powerful rallying cry of ‘anti-system’ rhetoric because it promised economic and political ‘liberation’ at a time when the survival of capitalism seemed in doubt (away from the dependency on the fragile world economy and the peace settlements), it harboured deep historical and ideological roots (nationalist etatism) and it captured the *Zeitgeist* in terms of various sentiments. It makes sense to highlight the latter with a few examples of anti-capitalist opinions and rhetoric from groups outside of the NSDAP. What were the similarities and differences? To what extent did they shape each other? The journalist and author Friedrich Zimmermann was read and admired by the Nazis (and himself joined the SS (Schutzstaffel) in 1934), and worked for the influential journal *Die Tat* that ‘advocated a middle-class anti-capitalism directed against the “materialism” of both capital and organized labour and favoured authoritarian state intervention’.<sup>51</sup> In *Das Ende des Kapitalismus* (The End of Capitalism), published in 1931, Zimmermann depicts the Great Depression as a historic turning point, a world catastrophe (p. 17), in which the economic leadership fails and a new political leadership emerges that initiates a change from the free market economy to plan economy (p. 19).<sup>52</sup> Zimmermann criticises the soulless nature of money (p. 27), and uses metaphors such as the ‘dance around the golden calf’ (p. 34) – which Hitler had already employed in his famous letter to Adolf Gemlich in August 1919<sup>53</sup> – and the ‘idol capital’ (*Götze Kapital*, p. 38) to emphasise his point. Like the Nazis he depicts Social Democracy as a pillar of capitalism due to its support for the system and its internationalism (pp. 110, 114). In typical crisis rhetoric he portrays an ‘either-or scenario’ (*Entweder – oder!*) with only two paths available: a continuation of liberal capitalism that will lead to ‘economic collapse’ and other devastating upheavals in and outside of Europe, or a bright alternative, a chance to put things right:

This other path means: total renunciation of capitalism and liberalism. ... and further requires: giving up the idea of the world economy and the isolation of individual national economic spheres; not cancellation but discontinuation of reparation payments. Creation of high custom barriers around individual economic spheres, building up of cartels and trade unions and their incorporation into the state that thereby acquires a decisive economic foundation.<sup>54</sup>

While the Catholic Church and its networks were fierce opponents of Nazism during the Weimar Republic, its anti-capitalist rhetoric contained many similarities. Pope Pius XI’s Encyclica ‘*Quadragesimo Anno*’ from 15 May 1931 offered a damning critique of

<sup>49</sup>Barkai, *Wirtschaftssystem*, pp. 72ff; Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*.

<sup>50</sup>See Wolfgang Hock, *Deutscher Antikapitalismus. Der ideologische Kampf gegen die freie Wirtschaft im Zeichen der grossen Krise* (Frankfurt/Main: Fritz Knapp Verlag, 1960). This is the only brief survey on the topic. While it is useful, it is very dated and does not include the NSDAP.

<sup>51</sup>Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p. 25.

<sup>52</sup>Ferdinand Fried [alias Ferdinand Friedrich Zimmermann], *Das Ende des Kapitalismus* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1931).

<sup>53</sup>Adolf Hitler, Letter to Adolf Gemlich, 16 September 1919, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/NAZI\\_HITLER\\_ANTISEMITISM1\\_ENG.pdf](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/NAZI_HITLER_ANTISEMITISM1_ENG.pdf) [accessed 7 June 2013].

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 189.

‘uncontrolled’ international finance capitalism.<sup>55</sup> The German Jesuit Father Oswald von Nell-Breuning, who was one of the leading proponents and interpreter of ‘Catholic Social Teaching’ and whose PhD thesis at the University in Münster was about the ‘Basics of Stock Market Morals’ (1928), was instrumental in drafting the ‘Quadragesimo Anno’.<sup>56</sup> The Pope argued that the focus on economic things had caused deep-rooted harm: ‘there quickly developed a body of economic teaching far removed from the true moral law, and, as a result, completely free rein was given to human passions’. This had led to an ‘individualist spirit’ of ‘sordid greed’, a ‘passion for property’, ‘disordered passions of the soul’, ‘evil desires’ and capitalists who ‘were solely concerned with increasing their wealth by any means whatsoever’ and who ‘treated their workers like mere tools, with no concern at all for their soul’. The Pope claimed that the only way of overcoming the ‘ruin of souls’ and to ‘regenerate society’ was threefold: (1) man’s refocus on Gods commands; (2) state intervention to enforce vigorously ‘moral restraint’ and ensure that ‘the needs of the common good’ and ‘norm[s] of social justice’ are followed; (3) the establishment of an occupational order ‘in which the employers and employees of an identical Industry or Profession collaborate jointly’ for the ‘common good’.

Let us sum up the main findings: Hitler also detested ‘materialistic virtues’, and what he described as the ‘economicisation [*Verwirtschaftung*] of the German *Volk*’.<sup>57</sup> Economic interests, profit, greed, and so on, had torn the *Volk* apart and had led to a strangulation of what really mattered: the preservation of the own race and its ideals and virtues.<sup>58</sup> Strasser complained that ‘gold is the yardstick for everything in capitalism’, and warned that ‘the *Volk* has to be protected from “unrestrained” temptations’.<sup>59</sup> The frequent Nazi claim that parliamentary democracy was corrupt and ruled by capitalism, and that ‘socialisation got stuck in the corruption swamp [*Korruptionssumpf*] of parliamentary democracy’,<sup>60</sup> should not be quickly dismissed as empty slogans. In a speech on 13 November 1930 Hitler criticised the core principle of the free market economy by questioning whether the interest of the individual was really the most important thing – according to Hitler, the individual was an unlikely server of the common good.<sup>61</sup> This view was widespread. The left-wing member of the Centre Party and outspoken Nazi opponent Friedrich Dessauer raised exactly the same premise as Hitler: ‘Pure liberalism says: go out, find your business, your advantage as individual! Through the law of interaction . . . your individual economic pursuits will automatically become part of the community, becomes eo ipso cooperative.’<sup>62</sup> He too concluded that reality had proven rather different, and condemned the ‘provocation’ and ‘mockery’ that poor workers experienced due to the excessive wealth of bankers, industrial barons, estate owners and international traders, and asked: ‘Is our economic system,

<sup>55</sup>For this and the following see Quadragesimo Anno Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Reconstruction of the Social Order, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19310515\\_quadragesimo-anno\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html) [accessed 25 April 2013].

<sup>56</sup>For the Oswald von Nell-Breuning Institute see <http://www.sankt-georgen.de/nbi/institut/pater-v-nell-breuning-sj/> [accessed 7 June 2013]. Also see Franz-Josef Stegmann and Peter Langhorst, ‘Geschichte der sozialen Ideen im deutschen Katholizismus’ in Walter Euchner, Helga Grebing, F.-J. Stegmann, Peter Langhorst, Traugott Jähnichen and Norbert Friedrich (eds) *Geschichte der sozialen Ideen in Deutschland*, 2nd ed. (Essen: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2000), pp. 599–862.

<sup>57</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1943), pp. 168, 257.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 164, 168.

<sup>59</sup>Gregor Strasser, ‘Nationaler Sozialismus’, *Nationalsozialistische Briefe*, Nr. 34, 15 January 1927.

<sup>60</sup>Gregor Strasser, ‘Götzendämmerung des Marxismus’, 25 April 1926, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 117–124, here p. 119.

<sup>61</sup>Zitelmann, *Revolutionär*, p. 257.

<sup>62</sup>Friedrich Dessauer, ‘Bolschewismus und Weltbürgertum’, *Hochland*, 2 (1931), pp. 481–500, here p. 490.

our system of society, happy? . . . Is it fair enough?’<sup>63</sup> In fact, Dessauer questioned whether it made sense that ‘in the West billions are spent on the fashion of the world of women, thus for purposes that do not produce real goods and that do not improve the standard of living?’ To him, there was a sinister, money-making conspiracy: ‘Every year certain powerful circles of employers who are hidden from the general public “create” fashion that does not improve the taste or the attitude towards life, but that is largely conceived to make business and that is imposed on the world of women by an excellent functioning propaganda apparatus.’<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile the right-wing conservative Günther Gründel described the economy as ‘a refined and complex, money-generating apparatus that encompasses everything and that serves purely private, individual interests. Its strongest and nowadays nearly all-determining driving force is the general run after money.’<sup>65</sup>

In short, during the Great Depression proponents of different world views, whether they were Nazis, Catholics, conservative-nationalists or liberals, often used similar or even identical slogans and metaphors in their radical anti-capitalist rhetoric. While the symptoms were often depicted in the same way and expressed deep concerns about the modernisation process and a rejection of the perceived domination of materialism in society, there could be substantial differences in its explanations and the solutions put forward. Zimmermann’s discourse centred on ‘nationalist’ anti-capitalism and proposed a revolutionary solution; the Nazis added to this a racial and expansionist vision; whereas the Pope was largely concerned with Catholic faith and values, and advocated a solution within the existing system (‘faith and right reason’).<sup>66</sup>

### **The Battle for Anti-Capitalist Authenticity with Marxism: ‘International Socialism’ Versus ‘German Socialism’**

The Nazis’ aim to attract workers whom they idolised as strong, energetic and courageous, meant that they had to challenge Marxist parties and their supporters for being the most authentic anti-capitalist force. This was a key battle about who was best placed to replace capitalism with a viable alternative. The Nazis were ‘political late-comers’, which presented them with specific difficulties and opportunities. Marxists had already loaded terms such as ‘socialism’, ‘revolution’, ‘revolutionary’ and ‘capitalism’ with meanings and values, and they were able to refer to a long history of anti-capitalist ideology and action. Indeed, while Marxist and Nazi anti-capitalism were based on completely different belief systems, the Nazis adopted the same language and metaphors as the Marxists. In other words, they created a common platform for discussions across organisational boundaries in which both radicals talked to each other, in what historian Timothy Brown describes as a discourse of ‘social radicalism’.<sup>67</sup> Here, the Nazis reloaded terms and meanings with their own racist-nationalist values and visions. Strasser proclaimed in mid-1925:

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 499.

<sup>65</sup>Günther Gründel, *Die Sendung der jungen Generation. Versuch einer umfassenden revolutionären Sinndeutung der Krise* (Munich: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1932), p. 308.

<sup>66</sup>Similarly, Dessauer demanded ‘a cooperative economic system that has its place in a Christian social system’. See Dessauer, ‘Bolschewismus’, p. 490.

<sup>67</sup>Timothy S. Brown focused on the interaction between Nazis and communists at the grass-roots level and used the concept of ‘authenticity’. Among other things, he highlighted anti-capitalism as an important point of connection. However, Brown sees Nazi anti-capitalism as a phenomenon of the ‘Nazi left’ and largely restricted to ‘heartfelt rank-and-file’ anti-capitalism of radical working-class Stormtroopers. See Timothy S. Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2009), esp. pp. 12f, 53ff.

We have recognised that the capitalist economic system and its exploitation of the economic weak, and its theft of the labour of employees, and its immoral evaluation of humans according to property and money, instead of nobleness and performance, must be replaced by a new, fair economic order, by a German socialism!<sup>68</sup>

Strasser described the same symptoms of exploitation as Marxists, but then offered *völkisch*-German socialism ('our socialism, the true socialism'<sup>69</sup>) as a solution (based on race and performance). But of course the meaning of the term 'socialism' differed fundamentally even between the two Marxist parties: while the communists understood it as a 'social system based on the common ownership of the means of production and distribution', the reformist social democrats identified with it social reforms, improved working conditions and equal rights.<sup>70</sup> While Nazis, communists and social democrats all used the same language to fight battles over contemporary issues and their respective future visions, the Nazis were the most adaptable. They used Marxist language and metaphors when they talked to workers. Strasser criticised capitalism for its 'spirit of materialism', for the way machines have led to an uprooting of human work, and how this has led to a longing to free oneself from the degrading slavery.<sup>71</sup> When Nazis spoke to rural middle-class people they used the language of 'Christian socialism': Nazis in rural Protestant areas compared their 'socialism' with that of Jesus and his apostles Paulus and Peter.<sup>72</sup> There was thus an astonishing ambiguity of commonly shared terms and slogans. While this opened the door for a broad following, it was also a recipe for misunderstandings, disappointments and frictions. Timothy Brown has highlighted frictions between Nazi anti-capitalism from above and the way it interacted with anti-capitalism from below.<sup>73</sup>

Marxist interpretation of capitalism implied a negative value judgement and denoted a historical stage in which the capitalist bourgeoisie owns the tools of production while the proletarians only possess their labour power.<sup>74</sup> However, while communists fought an uncompromising fight to replace the capitalist economic system with communism and called for the elimination of the selfish pursuit of profit and private property, social democrats had in fact accepted many aspects of capitalism despite some Marxist anti-capitalist rhetoric, as in their Heidelberg Programme from 1925: they had given up revolutionary class struggle for government participation, pledged support for the Republic,<sup>75</sup> and believed that the development of cartels and trusts in the capitalist economy would lead to a transformation to a democratically organised economy with improved conditions for workers (Rudolf Hilferding). This was always wishful thinking but turned into a farce during the world economic crisis when other economists such as Emil Lederer

<sup>68</sup>Gregor Strasser, 'Wir und die anderen', 20. June 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 62–71, here p. 70.

<sup>69</sup>Gregor Strasser, 'Nationaler Sozialismus', *Nationalsozialistische Briefe*, Nr. 34, 15 February 1927.

<sup>70</sup>Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley (eds), *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, 2nd ed. (London: Fontana Press, 1990), p. 791; Otto Wels, speech dated 23 March 1933, *Verhandlungen des Reichstages. Stenographische Berichte*, vol. 457, Berlin 1933, pp. 32–34.

<sup>71</sup>Gregor Strasser, 'Die Lüge der Demokratie', 26 May 1926, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 124–128; Strasser, 'Gedanken über die Aufgaben der Zukunft', 15 June 1926, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 129–139; Strasser, 'Die Sozialdemokratie. Eine Abrechnung', 15 June 1926, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 191–197.

<sup>72</sup>'Kann ein Christ auch Nationalsozialist sein?', *Niedersächsische Tageszeitung*, 24 January 1931.

<sup>73</sup>Brown, *Weimar Radicals*.

<sup>74</sup>Bullock et al., *Modern Thought*, p. 106.

<sup>75</sup>Heinrich August Winkler, *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1918 bis 1924* (Berlin: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., 1985), pp. 437ff, 446ff; Heinrich August Winkler, *Der Schein der Normalität. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1924 bis 1930* (Berlin: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., 1988), pp. 321ff, here p. 324.



(social democrat) and Moritz Julius Bonn (liberal) stressed dysfunctional features of capitalism.<sup>76</sup> This ambiguous relationship with capitalism turned into a kind of Achilles' heel for social democrats in the anti-capitalism debate, and the Nazis exploited this ruthlessly: they regularly portrayed social democrats as Marxists, thereby exploiting their unwillingness to shed their Marxist heritage, and then blamed them for helping to prop up international capitalism and causing the exploitation of German workers through their support of parliamentary democracy, the Versailles Peace settlement, their belief in the majority principle, their pacifism, and most importantly, through their internationalism.

While the Nazis tried hard to turn Marxist theory against social democrats and communists (more about that later), even they were vulnerable to being measured by it. In fact, the Nazis' ability to counter a number of key accusations was crucial to maintaining their claim of anti-capitalist authenticity. Two examples serve to show this, one relating to being 'revolutionary', and the other dealing with the issue of property. Marxists described Nazis as 'reactionaries' because of their extreme nationalism, their closeness to employers and industry and their rejection of Marxism. This was a serious challenge as it made them appear 'backward' and comparable to traditional bourgeois parties.<sup>77</sup> However, to most Nazis, from Hitler as party leader at the top to rank-and-file Stormtroopers in Heidelberg,<sup>78</sup> a revolutionary vision and revolutionary claim was an essential part of their identity. But while Marxist ideology associated revolution with a radical change, an overthrow of the existing political, social and economic structure in society,<sup>79</sup> the Nazi use of the shared term was once again more flexible and adaptable: Fritz Sauckel addressed workers in industrialised Thuringia when comparing Nazis' 'revolutionary spirit' of 'work' and 'duty' with 'the despicable teaching of the Jew Marx'; and in Berlin Goebbels proclaimed to workers that 'this "bourgeoisie" ["philistine"] deserves our fist, deserves the fist of revolutionaries'; meanwhile Nazis in rural protestant Mecklenburg tapped into Christian theology by comparing their movement with Jesus' revolutionary sermon on the mount.<sup>80</sup> Because of their ambition to attract nearly all groups in German society, the Nazis faced the constant challenge of walking the 'tightrope between bourgeois respectability [see, for example, Strasser's radio speeches in 1932, CCWS] and revolutionary élan'.<sup>81</sup> And because this was never clear-cut, Nazism meant often rather different things to different people. This could encompass anything from labour-friendly anti-big business views, to attacks on middle-class 'Spießler' (philistine),<sup>82</sup> to rural conservative romanticism. And while some Nazis looked backwards and idealised the past, others marched firmly forward to usher in a new era: Nazis in Hesse proclaimed 'back to Bismarck!', while Nazis in Ulm announced: 'We are not past, not present, but the future.'<sup>83</sup> To many, Nazism promised to restore tranquillity and normality, in particular with respect to deep-rooted local cultures and traditions. Others associated it with a wide-ranging shake-up and declared: 'National Socialism does not merely want to be

<sup>76</sup>Winkler, *Normalität*, pp. 38–40, 730–732.

<sup>77</sup>'Für Mittelstand und Landwirtschaft', *Der Filter*, Nr. 16, 9 July 1932; 'Reaktion und Mittelstand', *Der Filter*, Nr. 16, 9 July 1932.

<sup>78</sup>«Die Strasse Frei". SA in Heidelberg. Rückblick', *Heidelberger Beobachter*, 10 January 1931.

<sup>79</sup>Bullock et al., *Modern Thought*, p. 745.

<sup>80</sup>Fritz Sauckel, 'Der Arbeiter und sein Recht auf eine soziale Revolution', *Der Weckruf*, 24 August 1928; Joseph Goebbels, 'Der Sieg am 17. November', *Der Angriff*, 24 November 1929; 'Bergpredigt', *Niederdeutscher Beobachter*, 4 June 1932.

<sup>81</sup>Brown, *Weimar Radicals*, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup>Otto Renz, 'Durch Überwindung des Klassenkampfes zur Überwindung des Kapitalismus', *Die Deutsche Zukunft*, 1 Jg, Heft 1, June 1931; Asendorf, 'Die Deutsche Revolution!'; 'Reaktion und Mittelstand', *Der Filter*, Nr. 16, 9 July 1932.

<sup>83</sup>'Kennst Du Deine Heimat?', *Der Sturm*, 30 July 1932; 'Politiker', *Ulmer Sturm*, 24 January 1931.

a party, but it wants to capture the whole German human being ... it wants to give the German human being new spiritual and cultural goods.’<sup>84</sup>

Nazi support for private property challenged Marxist doctrine head-on. When even Hitler regarded private property as a key feature of capitalism, how could the Nazis claim to be anti-capitalist? The Nazi answer to this was simple: By making private property subject to the principle of *Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*, their vision contrasted clearly with the ethos of capitalism as well as creating a deliberate alternative to Marxist socialisation of all property (also, of course, the Nazis considered the nationalisation of certain monopoly industries which consistently alarmed propertied classes and leaders of the economy, and gave them the reputation of being a ‘socialist’ party<sup>85</sup>). These arguments were essential in regard to the so-called ‘social question’, in other words, how to bind workers to the nation when capitalist societies experienced such an unequal distribution of wealth? The Centre Party had an impressive record of promoting social legislation and had close ties with Christian trade unions which approved of private ownership and free entrepreneurship and favoured a ‘social capitalism’.<sup>86</sup> During the world economic crisis members of that party expressed concern that workers would look favourably on the Bolshevik system because in the capitalist system a considerable portion of profits remained private while ‘great losses’ (‘speculative disruptions’, ‘false investments’) were ‘being socialised’ and thus ‘shifted onto the general public’.<sup>87</sup> The Nazis regarded property as a central part of human culture, and supported rewards for work and performance based on the same start-up chances across society (see below).<sup>88</sup> Strasser argued that Nazism would ensure a ‘happy mix between personal selfishness of humans, whose entitlement and driving force we consciously affirm, and the protection of the general interest’;<sup>89</sup> and Hitler went as far as ridiculing the abolishment of all personal property. To him this was not practical and would stifle the self-initiative and productivity of individuals. In a counter-punch against Marxist doctrine he painted nightmare scenarios about Russia where apparently millions had starved due to forced nationalisation, and where people lacked the enthusiasm to work for the so-called ‘interest of the proletariat’.<sup>90</sup>

Most of Hitler’s anti-capitalist rhetoric was directed at workers and the social democrats. Often this was less of a confrontation than an attempt to engage with and compete with Nazism’s main rival for the claim to be the most authentic anti-capitalist force in Germany.<sup>91</sup> Hitler often appeared to speak directly to workers and followers of Marxist parties who he frequently addressed as ‘my dear friends’. His preferred method was to ask straightforward questions, such as ‘What does Marxism actually want?’, and then to contrast its theory (‘the people should take over power, and capitalism, the source of the oppression of the *Volk*, should be exterminated’; Nuremberg, 9 June 1927) with what happened in practice in Germany (referring predominantly to Germany’s social democrats who stood for a ‘moderate Marxism’ and in 60 years had failed to realise their aims),

<sup>84</sup>Karg, ‘Dem Führer’, *Nationalsozialistische Führerbriefe*, 4, 1932.

<sup>85</sup>‘Staat oder Chaos’, *Uckermärkischer Kurier*, 11 September 1930.

<sup>86</sup>Winkler, *Normalität*, pp. 502ff, here p. 504.

<sup>87</sup>Dessauer, ‘Bolschewismus’, p. 494.

<sup>88</sup>‘Sozialismus und Eigentum’, *Der Angriff*, 14 November 1929.

<sup>89</sup>Gregor Strasser, ‘Nationaler Sozialismus’, 4 September 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 72–77, here p. 76.

<sup>90</sup>Hitler speech in Schleiz (18 January 1927), online at ‘Nationalsozialismus, Holocaust, Widerstand und Exil 1933–1945. Online-Datenbank. De Gruyter’ [all future references from this online database are ‘NS-Database’], Document-ID: HRSA-0235.

<sup>91</sup>For this section see in particular the following two speeches: Hitler speech in Nuremberg (9 June 1927), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0310; Hitler speech in Munich (3 June 1927), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0306.

but also in Russia (referring to the Bolsheviks who represented ‘radical Marxism’).<sup>92</sup> This then allowed Hitler to lay out the Nazi alternative vision of society. The same structure and engaging style was widely used among other Nazi speakers. It made them appear clear and logical, and allowed them to express sympathies with some aspects of Marxist theory (socialism, workers, working class), show understanding for workers’ concerns (exploitation, work, food), highlight and condemn their leaders’ failure to protect them from the effects of capitalism, and present Nazism as the only authentic anti-capitalist movement (getting rid of international dependence and exploitation, and looking after German workers and German work). In other words, beyond the much-emphasised physical and rhetorical confrontation between Nazis and organised labour there was a lively and engaging discourse with an emphasis on argument, persuasion and ‘conversion’.<sup>93</sup> As one Nazi put it: ‘It will not help to insult social democrats and their leaders, even a razor sharp critique of Marxism will not do’ – what was also needed was a positive vision of how the Nazis would solve the ‘social question’.<sup>94</sup>

The method of contrasting Marxist theory with practical failures allowed the Nazis to apply several of their rhetorical trump cards: mockery and metaphors. Hitler, in a speech on 6 March 1929 in Munich, addressed the social democratic leaders Hermann Müller, Albert Grzesinski, Carl Severing and Otto Braun as heads of the ‘anti-capitalist, socialist Republic’, a ‘socialist Republic that should enjoy measureless friendship in the whole world’.<sup>95</sup> According to Hitler, friendship indeed existed, but it was comparable to a thief’s friendship to a house without a fence where one can break in easily. This metaphor was greeted by ‘cheerfulness in the audience’ who knew what Hitler meant: Germany’s misery was based on international exploitation, and nobody helped Germany to overcome this situation. Finally, Hitler made sure that everyone in the audience really understood his key message, and reiterated the reason for Germany’s decline and misery: ‘The internationalisation of our whole *Volk*, of its thinking and life.’ This went to the core of Nazi anti-capitalism: their obsession with a healthy and strong Germany made them extreme opponents of internationalism<sup>96</sup> – hence the slogan: ‘German Socialism or International Socialism! . . . International Class Co-operative or National *Volksgemeinschaft*!’<sup>97</sup> In fact, even nationalist-bourgeois newspapers argued that the internationalism of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) meant that it was ‘not a German party’.<sup>98</sup> While the Nazis differentiated between international finance capital and national industrial capital, with the former running independent of the production process and as the actual source of exploitation, Marxism saw exploitation in the sphere of circulation and at the place of production, in other words, all capitalists were the same. The Nazis turned this skilfully against Marxism: under Nazism, German capitalists had the chance of redemption.<sup>99</sup>

The issue of nationalism versus internationalism involved an extremely muddled and complex web of claims and counter-claims between Nazis, communists and social democrats. One example serves to highlight this. The Nazis had campaigned against the

<sup>92</sup>Hitler, speech in Munich, 12 April 1922. In Jäckel, *Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 607–617, here p. 614.

<sup>93</sup>Brown, *Weimar Radicals*, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup>Alex Schilling, ‘Die Lösung der sozialen Frage im Geiste des Nationalsozialismus’, *Volk und Gemeinde. Monatsblätter für nationalen Sozialismus und Gemeindepolitik*, Folge 2 (1923).

<sup>95</sup>For this and the following, see Hitler speech in Munich (6 March 1929), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0575.

<sup>96</sup>For example, see Gregor Strasser, ‘Zum Abschluss des internationalen Eisenkartells’, 12 June 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 43–49; Gregor Strasser, ‘Wir und die Agrarzölle’, 18 June 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 49–55.

<sup>97</sup>*Reichswart*, Nr. 31, 30 July 1932.

<sup>98</sup>*Landsberger Generalanzeiger für die gesamte Neumark*, 22 May 1928.

<sup>99</sup>Dr Rosikat, ‘Völkische Gliederung und Propaganda’, *Nationalsozialistische Briefe*, 15 March 1926.

privatisation of the *Reichsbahn* (German Railway), the 'plunder of the German *Reichseisenbahn*', since 1921.<sup>100</sup> When the Dawes Plan in April 1924 set out to turn the *Reichsbahn* into an independent organisation under foreign supervision to raise repayment money through indirect taxes, in the Reichstag the communists attacked the bourgeois parties, but in particular the social democrats, for supporting the *Reichsbahn* bill. The communist Wilhelm Koenen described it as a symbol of 'international trustification' ('*internationale Vertrustung*') that was based on a reactionary deal between 'heavy industry, the agrarians and their international friends, the imperialists in France and England, the big capitalists in America'.<sup>101</sup> According to Koenen, the ensuing indirect taxes amounted to 'the plundering of industry' and 'the plundering of the broader masses of the *Volk*'. In fact, communists and Nazis joined ranks in the Reichstag, condemning the conditions of the Dawes Plan as the 'final enslavement of the German nation'.<sup>102</sup> One year later, Hitler attacked Marxist leaders for not having called a general strike to prevent 'this sell off of our national property to the international capital'.<sup>103</sup> As usual, he did not differentiate between communists and social democrats. Instead, Hitler presented this as clear evidence for the ongoing betrayal of the broad masses by their Marxist leaders. In short, Nazi and communist rhetoric was hyped-up, simplistic and manipulative. Like with many other examples, however, there was often a serious core behind it. In this instance, there were legitimate concerns about the sovereignty of the Reich, about the principal of selling national property or levying extra tax on it, and about the influence of foreign investment. The background to this was the complex issue of Germany's reparation payments; however, Nazis and communists rejected any cooperation on this.

To the Nazis, there was an inherent conflict between Germany's interest and that of international companies and investors. They questioned whether large international sectors such as heavy industry and their international partners would not follow, as Strasser put it, 'international profit opportunities without considering their national solidarity and national duty'.<sup>104</sup> In general, Nazi activists made efforts to present new supporting examples and evidence from in and outside of Germany. In a speech in Weimar in early 1931 Hitler warned about the consequences of outsourcing work into countries with cheap labour costs, and about the loss of markets for German exports because of the spread of industrial production into all corners of the world. This was based on contemporary theories about shrinking markets due to increased competition between the major industrial powers, the industrialisation of formerly agricultural nations and the development of overseas branches.<sup>105</sup> In typical fashion, Hitler elaborated on the latter two with a fictional story: he compared the value of a German company that builds

<sup>100</sup>Hitler, speech in Munich, 19 November 1921, in Jäckel, *Aufzeichnungen*, pp. 521–523, here p. 521; Zitelman, *Revolutionär*, pp. 277. Also see Gregor Strasser, 'Das Versailles der deutschen Volkswirtschaft', 13 September 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 78–81, here pp. 79f.

<sup>101</sup>Wilhelm Koenen, speech dated 29 August 1924, *Verhandlungen des Reichstages. Stenographische Berichte*, vol. 381, Berlin 1924, pp. 1068–1070.

<sup>102</sup>Reinhold Wulle (Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung), speech dated 29 August 1924, *Verhandlungen des Reichstages. Stenographische Berichte*, vol. 381, Berlin 1924, pp. 1068–1081, here p. 1078.

<sup>103</sup>For this and the following see Hitler speech in Zwickau (15 July 1925), 'NS-Database', Document-ID: HRSA-0060. Also see Gregor Strasser, 'Der Weg der Gewerkschaften', 15. September 1929, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 241–252, here p. 247.

<sup>104</sup>Gregor Strasser, 'In letzter Stunde. Warnrufe vor Locarno', 13 September 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 81–87, here p. 86. Also see Gregor Strasser, 'Zum Abschluss des internationalen Eisenkartells', 12 June 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 43–49; Gregor Strasser, 'Die Deutsche Volkspartei', 1 March 1928, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 206–212.

<sup>105</sup>For example, Alfred Weber (DDP) claimed that the nature of capitalism changed around 1880 when it became impossible to open up new spaces. See Alfred Weber, *Die Krise des modernen Staatsgedanken in Europa* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1925), p. 71. Also see Zitelman, *Revolutionär*, pp. 308ff.

1000 locomotives for export to China in Germany, with a scenario in which a German bank sets up a locomotive factory in Shanghai and builds them there. In other words, Hitler contrasted feeding 3000 German workers on the one hand, and feeding ‘3,000 *Kulis* [derogative for cheap Chinese day labourer, CCWS] for the dividend income of a small group’.<sup>106</sup>

### Nazi ‘Crisis’ Rhetoric: ‘From “I-Time” To “We-Time”’ – Anti-Capitalism Made in Germany

Anti-capitalism benefited from an anti-system dynamic, and was part of a widespread rhetoric of ‘crisis’ that set in motion a dynamic development of radicalisation and polarisation, in particular when the Great Depression unfolded from the late 1920s.<sup>107</sup> We have already seen that the unfolding world economic crisis from the late 1920s enhanced the Nazis’ anti-capitalist authenticity. While communists celebrated Marxist orthodoxy that capitalism would collapse due to its own contradictions, Nazis claimed that they had predicted ‘the catastrophe ... for a long time’.<sup>108</sup> They reminded everyone of their consistent warnings about much deeper and underlying symptoms (long-term decay), and the damaging effects of the ‘policy of compliance’ (*Erfüllungspolitik*) after 1918. They also claimed that many of their long-standing demands had meanwhile been adopted or were being pursued by the government, such as state control over banks, compulsory labour service, and the protection of German agriculture.<sup>109</sup> On 14 June 1932, when Strasser delivered the first radio speech by a member of the NSDAP, he portrayed himself as the representative of a movement in close touch with the mood of the nation and ready to rescue: he described ‘a great anti-capitalist longing’ in society and depicted national socialism as ‘the political expression of psychological distress’.<sup>110</sup>

The Nazis stepped up their anti-capitalist rhetoric and action in various ways during the world economic crisis, some of which we have already discussed, such as the formulation and presentation of economic programmes. The Nazis described the Great Depression as an epochal turning point that offered the unique chance for ‘renewal’ and ‘rebirth of the German people’, promising a positive future. They had always claimed that only decisive action and extreme measures could save Germany. In 1925 Strasser compared government policies with ‘compassionate little plasters seeking to heal the swollen wounds of the economy and of the *Volks*’. According to him, only the replacement of the capitalist system with a different one (he called for an economic revolution) could save Germany.<sup>111</sup> In 1931 Strasser proclaimed: ‘The system is fighting a last desperate fight for its existence.’ He described an era in which liberalism, capitalism, Marxism and pacifism were dying (he compared it with an illness) while a new ‘world view’ was establishing itself.<sup>112</sup> In the same year Konrad Studentkowski proclaimed that society was experiencing an ‘Epochal turn! From “I-time” to “We-time”’, and declared that the ‘I-time’ of

<sup>106</sup>Hitler speech in Weimar (8 February 1931), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0885.

<sup>107</sup>See Rüdiger Graf, ‘Either-Or: The Narrative of “Crisis in Weimar Germany and in Historiography”’, *Central European History*, 43:4 (2010), pp. 592–615; Rüdiger Graf, *Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik. Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008).

<sup>108</sup>Gregor Strasser, ‘Zwischenbilanz’, 5 August 1931, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 293–299, here p. 293.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 293–299.

<sup>110</sup>Gregor Strasser: first radio speech of a Nazi on 14 June 1932, printed in Gregor Strasser, ‘Die Staatsidee des Nationalsozialismus’, *Volks und Gemeinde. Monatsblätter für nationalen Sozialismus und Gemeindepolitik*, 7:32 (1932), pp. 89–96.

<sup>111</sup>Gregor Strasser, ‘Nationaler Sozialismus’, 4 September 1925, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 72–77, here pp. 72f.

<sup>112</sup>Gregor Strasser, ‘Der Letzte Abwehrkampf des Systems’, 1 January 1931, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 317–325, here p. 319, 327f.



individualism, liberalism and materialism was coming to an end and would be replaced by the 'we-time' of socialism, nationalism and idealism.<sup>113</sup> While the existing epoch had unleashed and uprooted individuals, the new national socialist epoch would bind Germans again to the community of the whole *Volk*, the family and God, and blood and race. More specifically, Marxism had not only failed to protect workers from the negative sides of capitalism, its internationalism and doctrine of class struggle had also robbed workers of their *Heimat* in the nation, which national socialism would provide in the form of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. At the same time the Nazis exploited bourgeois fears about their main anti-capitalist rival, the Marxist labour movement, by spreading horror stories about the Soviet Union: in one speech Hitler referred to 'Marxist assassins and human butchers' and claimed that nearly 20 million had starved to death in the 'Soviet Paradise' – the latter was an often-used juxtaposition.<sup>114</sup> Up and down the country national socialists proclaimed that their movement was the only viable world view able to rescue society from the collapse and chaos of a disintegrating liberal order and the threat of Bolshevism.<sup>115</sup> Finally, Stormtroopers targeted Jews in extremely brutal anti-plutocratic attacks, encompassing an anti-capitalist critique and polemic against the 'westernised' bourgeois lifestyle.<sup>116</sup>

The Nazis bombarded contemporaries with endless rhetoric on anti-capitalism. Extreme gloom and contempt about the current situation contrasted sharply with hope projected into national socialism. Negative slogans and metaphors attacked selfishness fostered by capitalism ('deification of the self', 'deification of the intellect', 'unleashing of single man', 'individualism tears up the nation as a whole'), and condemned materialism and mammonism with an underlying anti-Jewish message ('fat sack of money as a symbol of crass selfishness'; 'capitalism is the harrowing domination of the golden calf'; 'capitalism means that gold is the measure of all things'). Other slogans offered a forward-looking alternative, appealing to social and idealistic beliefs ('not the greed of individuals but the requirements of the whole *Volk*', 'rather an idea in the heart than a cheque book in the pocket'), and demanding action and solutions ('the whole *Volk* has to stand together against the exploiters', 'to break the rule of capital', 'exploiters do not belong to the *Volk*').<sup>117</sup>

Nazi anti-capitalism tapped into long-held views of a superior 'German' work ethic centring on notions of duty to the community, and the aspiration to combine hard and joyful work. Lively debates inside the Nazi movement – combining various strands and views, such as those from Gregor Strasser, Alfred Rosenberg, Walther Darré and Reinhold Muchow,<sup>118</sup> and of course Hitler – interacted with an amalgamation of ideas that were

<sup>113</sup>For this and the following, see Konrad Studentkowski: 'Zeitenwende! Zwischen Ich = Zeit und Wir = Zeit', *Die Deutsche Zukunft*, 7 December 1931.

<sup>114</sup>Hitler, Politik der Woche-Artikel (27 Juli 1929), 'NS-Database', Document-ID: HRSA-0629.

<sup>115</sup>Fritz Helke 'Brennendes Europa', *Die Deutsche Zukunft*, 9 February 1932, pp. 254f.

<sup>116</sup>Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt. Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Dietz, 1999), p. 254.

<sup>117</sup>Primary sources for this section and other parts of this article are based on a sample of 26 NSDAP newspapers from across Germany: *Der Allemanne* (Baden); *Der Führer* (Karlsruhe); *Heidelberger Beobachter* (Heidelberg); *Der Weckruf/Coburger Nationalzeitung* (Coburg); *Nationale Volkszeitung* (Hof); *Der Stürmer* (Nuremberg); *Braunschweiger Tageszeitung* (Brunswick); *Hessen-Post* (Darmstadt); *Nassauer Beobachter* (Wiesbaden); *Niederdeutscher Beobachter* (Schwerin); *Der Angriff* (Berlin); *Berliner Arbeiterzeitung* (Berlin); *Die Berliner Front* (Berlin); *Reichswart* (Berlin); *Die Schwarze Front* (Berlin); *Der Märkische Adler/Beobachter* (Berlin); *Niedersächsische Tageszeitung* (Hanover); *Niedersachsen Stürmer* (East Hanover); *Der Sturm* (Kassel); *National-Zeitung* (Essen); *Trierer Nationalblatt* (Trier); *Westdeutscher Beobachter* (Cologne); *Der Filter* (Paderborn); *Der Freiheitskampf* (Dresden); *Der Nationalsozialist* (Weimar); *Ulmer Sturm/Ulmer Tagblatt* (Ulm).

<sup>118</sup>Campbell, *Joy in Work*, pp. 308–320.

circulating in German society. Nazi slogans and metaphors, including ‘*Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*’ and the emphasis on ‘duty’ and ‘work for the common good’ (also: ‘ensoulment of work’; ‘right to work’; ‘love of justice’ or ‘love for the nation’) had always been a tenet of Nazi economic thought.<sup>119</sup> Fritz Sauckel, *Gauleiter* of Thuringia, declared in 1928:

Duty is inseparable from the term work. Only through loyal duty, in other words only through regular and punctual and meticulous performance will the organism of the state and economy of a *Volk* keep working reliably and will be the blessing of all. Each estate, profession and each category of workers depends necessarily on the performance of the others.<sup>120</sup>

Notions of ‘work’ and ‘performance’ acquired additional significance during the world economic crisis and the Nazis made strenuous efforts to capitalise on them. They resonated in particular at a time when fiscal austerity had eroded social welfare and unemployment benefits, when conflicts between capital and labour threatened to paralyse society, and when discussions about rationalisation and efficiency were widespread. In 1932 Hitler highlighted in his speeches the value of ‘work’, ‘diligence’, ‘efficiency’, ‘industriousness’ and ‘thrift’, and emphasised the capacity of work to utilise creativity, genius and talent.<sup>121</sup>

While notions of ‘work’ and ‘performance’ were vague, a close reading of Nazi rhetoric leaves no doubt that service for the community had nothing to do with egalitarianism or traditional labour values such as compassion, equality, solidarity, and so on: Humans were valued and measured according to their performance for the *Volksgemeinschaft*. To Hitler work was a ‘sacred commitment’ of members of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>122</sup> This meant that ‘a human is therefore [...] judged by the work he performs for his *Volk*’<sup>123</sup> – in other words, humans were only worth anything when they were performing work for the community, while ‘a loafer has no value’.<sup>124</sup> In a speech in Weimar in early 1931 Hitler imagined a Germany in which performance and work would be the cornerstone of society, and that those who would not contribute towards this would have no rights.<sup>125</sup> In short, he envisaged a society in which everyone enjoyed similar ‘start-up’ chances,<sup>126</sup> but where different performance levels created hierarchies within the *Volksgemeinschaft* with the best performers emerging as new leaders following social-Darwinist principles.<sup>127</sup> This was a core Nazi vision. In 1926 Strasser announced that performance would be at the heart of a ‘new world view, a new religion of the economy’.<sup>128</sup> He went on to emphasise that the inequality of humans was based on differences in performance which led to the ‘demand for an

<sup>119</sup>See Klaus Holz’s analysis of Hitler’s speech on anti-Semitism on 13 August 1920. Holz, *Nationaler Antisemitismus*.

<sup>120</sup>Fritz Sauckel, ‘Der Arbeiter und sein Recht auf eine soziale Revolution’, *Der Weckruf*, 24 August 1928.

<sup>121</sup>Max Domarus, *The Complete Hitler. A Digital Desktop Reference to His Speeches and Proclamations 1932–1945* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc., 2007), see speeches on 27 January 1932 and 15 June 1932.

<sup>122</sup>Hitler speech in Weimar (28 October 1925), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0081.

<sup>123</sup>Hitler speech in Schleiz (18 January 1927), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0235.

<sup>124</sup>Hitler speech in Landshut (17 June 1927), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0314.

<sup>125</sup>Hitler speech in Weimar (8 February 1931), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0885.

<sup>126</sup>Zitelmann, *Revolutionär*, pp. 122ff., 491.

<sup>127</sup>Hitler speech to HJ in Munich (15 November 1931), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-1044; Hitler decree Nr. 4 (28 November 1931), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-1049; Hitler speech in Jever (12 May 1931), ‘NS-Database’, Document-ID: HRSA-0946.

<sup>128</sup>Gregor Strasser, ‘Gedanken über die Aufgaben der Zukunft’, 15 June 1926, in Strasser, *Kampf*, pp. 129–139, here pp. 132ff.

unequal distribution of rights according to the performance for the state'. Baldur von Schirach proclaimed in 1931 that members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* would be split into 'socially acceptable', in other words those who worked (and here the Nazis were keen to point out that they valued manual and intellectual work equally), and 'socially unacceptable', in other words those who did not work.<sup>129</sup>

We want to argue that these well-publicised notions of *inequality* within the *Volksgemeinschaft*, and not only the Nazi promise of a homogenous racial nation free of tensions as emphasised by many historians,<sup>130</sup> were crucial to their success before 1933. In fact, it should not come as a surprise that a growing number of citizens welcomed Nazi notions of inequality and competition as exciting opportunities due to a number of developments in society that exacerbated during the Great Depression, including: the aforementioned long-standing discourses relating to 'work', 'duty' and 'community', and the distinct set of expectations and measurements associated with them; the impact of *völkisch* thoughts, and the spread and radicalisation of anti-Semitism, racism and racial-hygiene; the possibilities this seemed to open up for numerous groups, including 'newcomers' who felt disadvantaged by the local patronage of Catholic milieus, Protestants who expected a re-Christianisation of society in which Protestantism would become the dominant church, or young farmers who were pressing to overcome traditional hierarchies.<sup>131</sup> We know that during the Third Reich in particular the young generation equated the notion of social-Darwinist competition and struggle for survival with positive attributes of mobility, change, modernity and efficiency – all of which promised professional success and recognition and mobilised hopes and energies among men and women.<sup>132</sup> In other words, the Nazis' biological-utilitarian notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* harmonised individual performance with their appeal to *Gemeinschaft*. In fact, the Nazis promised in their 1932 *Aufbauprogramm* that individuals would be able to develop much more initiative under their new economic structure and that this would lead to a 'de-proletarianisation' of the broad masses of the working population.<sup>133</sup> When Gregor Strasser emphasised in his 10 May 1932 Reichstag speech that every German *must* have the right for work (and not *should* have, as stated in article 163 of the constitution, which he wanted to be amended accordingly) and went on to talk about compulsory labour service and support for the performance principle, the communist Joseph Schläffer turned to him and commented cynically and somewhat prophetically: 'Why don't you say: Whoever does not work, does not need to eat?'<sup>134</sup> Indeed, in 1929 a NSDAP paper had already demanded: 'Who does not work shall not eat.'<sup>135</sup>

<sup>129</sup>Baldur von Schirach, 'Baldur von Schirach', *Die Deutsche Zukunft Monatsschrift des jungen Deutschland*, 5 October 1931.

<sup>130</sup>Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, p. 347.

<sup>131</sup>Cornelia Rauh-Kühne, *Katholisches Milieu und Kleinstadtgesellschaft. Ettlingen 1918–1939* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke Jan Verlag, 1991); Manfred Gailus, *Protestantismus und Nationalsozialismus. Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Durchdringung des protestantischen Sozialmilieus in Berlin* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2001); Caroline Wagner, *Die NSDAP auf dem Dorf. Eine Sozialgeschichte der NS-Machtergreifung in Lippe* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1998).z

<sup>132</sup>Frank Bajohr, 'Dynamik und Disparität. Die nationalsozialistische Rüstungsmobilisierung und die "Volksgemeinschaft"' in Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt (eds) *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), pp. 78–93, here pp. 90f.

<sup>133</sup>Feder, *Kampf*, p. 379.

<sup>134</sup>Gregor Strasser, speech dated 10 May 1932, *Verhandlungen des Reichstages. Stenographische Berichte*, vol. 446, Berlin 1932, pp. 2510–2521, here p. 2514.

<sup>135</sup>*Der Nationalsozialist*, December 1929.

## Conclusion

At the heart of Nazism was a radical economic vision and rhetoric that provided the Nazis with an authenticity and legitimacy in their struggle to succeed the free-market capitalist economic system – this was crucial to their successful mass mobilisation and to becoming an acceptable party of government. While many of these views had deep historical and ideological roots in German society, they only became mainstream during the world economic depression. By then the Nazis' uncompromising political-economic demand that Germany could only prosper when overthrowing the Versailles peace order, looking after its national interests and doing things the German way had transformed from fringe view to mainstream consensus. At a time when capitalism's future and Germany's place in it looked bleak, many regarded the Nazis' economic vision entailing state control, autarky coupled with *Grossraumwirtschaft* and withdrawal from international cooperation in favour of nationalist policies as the most promising economic programme. Meanwhile, Nazi rhetoric had become an integral part of a powerful anti-capitalist *Zeitgeist*, an 'anti-system' rallying cry that questioned the core principles of capitalism. Its proponents condemned its selfishness, materialism and unfairness, and instead demanded that the common good had to be protected from individual greed. During the economic crisis most Germans, contemporary estimates put the figure at around 80 per cent, rejected capitalism as the source of all ill,<sup>136</sup> and the Nazis played a key role in fuelling this.

While extreme anti-Semitism and social-Darwinist expansion were key drivers for Nazi leaders and their core supporters, this was not necessarily the case for its broader constituency. From the late 1920s Nazi activists often did not discuss their economic vision and anti-capitalist sentiments within the context of a coherent and complex racial theory. The 'uncoupling' of various parts meant that 'outsiders' did not necessarily read and interpret these racially loaded terms in their original Nazi meanings. This opened up and made accessible Nazi semantics beyond core racist circles.

Discussions about the economy and the pros and cons of capitalism and potential alternatives occupied a central place in Weimar society, and were passionately discussed within the Nazi movement. While Nazi activists were united by a number of core premises, they often had diverse views about many other things and disagreed about strategies of how their visions could be realised. This article focused on the way Nazis engaged with the wider society and its culture and traditions, how they were influenced by it and themselves shaped lively and rapidly shifting debates. They negotiated themselves through shared values and visions, but also important differences and conflicts. Crucial in this was their use of a commonly shared language, slogans and metaphors, especially those originally shaped by Marxists and proponents of national etatism, which they reloaded with their own values and meanings. This has led to consistent misunderstandings about the nature of Nazism. Indicative of this is the complaint by contemporary communists: 'We must realise that a great part of the Nazi-proletarians are misled workers who really believe that they are fighting against capitalism and for socialism.'<sup>137</sup> Indeed, Nazis fought against *international* capitalism and for *German* socialism.

The prevalent historiography has been dismissive towards Nazi ideology, and attitudes towards the economy in particular. This piece aims to rebalance the debate by emphasising attempts by the Nazis to offer solutions to problems in society in an effort to *persuade* Germans. The Nazis' economic policies were central to their election successes from

<sup>136</sup>Büttner, *Weimar*, p. 478.

<sup>137</sup>Brown, *Weimar Radicals*, p. 97.

September 1930 onwards,<sup>138</sup> and they were the first political mass party in Europe that adopted unorthodox economic policies, including deficit credit expansion. Most importantly, in the fierce battle between ideologies during the interwar period they presented their 'German socialism' based on work and performance and subject to the principle of '*Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*' as the only viable alternative to international 'selfish' capitalism that looked broken and decadent, and to 'Marxist international socialism'. The latter was only really championed by the communists who were tainted by their links to Moscow and whose popular support was limited by widespread fears of Bolshevism that was hyped up during the crisis. The Nazis thus offered a genuinely new solution to the inherent tension in the pressure cooker of modern capitalism between the well-being and rewards for individuals on the one hand, and the whole society on the other hand. They managed to do this by pulling off a special balancing act: meeting widespread demands for radical change *and* longing for continuity and restoration. However, in free elections the Nazis only managed to secure the trust and support of around one-third of the electorate. While a growing number of contemporaries were mobilised by the Nazi vision of a biological-utilitarian *Volkgemeinschaft* and 'social justice' based on notions of *inequality*, the core constituency of organised labour and Catholicism clung to their traditional values and world views.

The Nazis engaged with and offered solutions to many key questions that societies have faced due to the spread of modernisation, industrialisation and globalisation, including: the balance between self-interest and the common good; the issue of national culture versus multi-ethnic cultures; the place of organised labour in liberal-capitalist democracies; the advantages and disadvantages of globalisation; and a sense of alienation in the modern world. The defeat of Nazi barbarity in 1945 helped to cement in the Western world widespread support for the democratic system, the notion of the equality of humans per se and a rejection of anti-Semitism and racism. However, the underlying critique of capitalism from the interwar period, voiced forcefully by Nazis and their contemporaries, continues to be relevant today and echoes in protest against, among other things, consumerism, celebrity culture, tax evasion and bankers' bonuses.<sup>139</sup>

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Benjamin Ziemann, Raimund Bauer and an anonymous reader for helping to shape this article.

### Notes on Contributor

**Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann** is Professor of Modern History at Loughborough University. His most recent book publications are (co-edited with Maiken Umbach), *Heimat, Region, and Empire. Spatial Identities under National Socialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); (edited), *Rethinking History, Dictatorships and War. New Approaches and Interpretations* (London: Continuum, 2009); (co-edited with Olaf Jensen), *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers. Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>138</sup>Theo Balderston, *Economics and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 84; Barkai, *Wirtschaftssystem*, p. 44; Brustein, *Logic of Evil*, p. 146.

<sup>139</sup>Since the late twentieth century the term 'anti-Capitalism' has been associated with a global movement that was born at the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organisation in December 1999. See Simon Tormey, *Anti-Capitalism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004), p. 1.