

CHAPTER FOUR

THE IDEOLOGY OF HITLER AND THE NAZI PARTY

Nazism was a vague, eclectic, rag bag ideology which drew on a wide variety of sources. It lacked the coherent, systematic economic foundations of Marxist-Leninist communism. It is even difficult to determine whether it was 'progressive' or 'backward looking'. Unlike Marxism, which aimed to destroy the existing economic and political system, Nazism was much more willing to collaborate with existing power structures, and to follow seemingly backward-looking ideas in pursuit of its objectives. Nazism also lacked the ideological backing and intellectual weight of a Karl Marx. In essence, Nazism was a rather ill-thought-out 'third way' between liberal democracy and communism. It grew at a time when mass democracy was being introduced in Germany for the first time and when the world economic system was greatly strained by the consequences of the First World War.

Nazism built its support by tapping into the negative feelings of certain sections of German society towards such things as the 'harsh' terms of the Versailles treaty, high inflation, the instability of democratic government, the economic position of Jews in German society and the growth of a vibrant communist movement. Nazi ideology pointed to the 'enemies' inside Germany: communists, socialists, trade unionists, democrats and Jews, and then suggested that the elimination of these groups from positions of power could only be achieved through a 'National Socialist Revolution' that would establish a strong state, led by a strong leader, who was determined to rebuild military power, shake off Versailles and make Germany, once and for all, the most dominant power in the world.

LINKS WITH FASCISM AND TOTALITARIANISM

Although Nazism had many unique characteristics, there has always been a tendency to bracket it under the general label of 'fascism', a term which invokes words such as 'violent', 'repressive' and 'dictatorial'. However, finding a general definition of fascism has proved extremely difficult. For a

start, there was no great philosopher who codified fascist ideology. This is hardly surprising given that fascism prided itself on being anti-intellectual and opposed to 'rational' thought. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that the statements and writings of the leading supporters of fascism are as dense as fog [Doc. 8]. The incoherence and anti-intellectual nature of fascism reflected the narrowness of the minds that supported it. The only explanation Mussolini, the Italian fascist leader, ever offered of the ideological basis of fascism was a short article published in an Italian encyclopedia, in which he defined a fascist as a fervent patriot for whom the preservation of the state is most crucial. To Marxists, the strident, uncritical, patriotic loyalty fascists expressed towards a powerful state was merely a 'bourgeois device' used by upper-class reactionary groups who wanted to crush mass democracy, communism and the growing labour movement in one fell swoop in order to safeguard their own threatened position at the top of society. This view is reinforced by the fact that authoritarian dictatorships in Germany and Italy were established through the existing legal and administrative machinery of these states, and supported by many upper-class elite groups in the army, civil service and big business.

A more sophisticated version of the idea of fascism being a sort of 'elite conspiracy' to crush communism and democracy was offered by the leading Italian Marxist writer Antonio Gramsci (who was executed by the fascists). He suggested that capitalism - especially in Europe - was going through a severe crisis in the early part of the twentieth century, in which the dominant classes of the nineteenth century were finding it increasingly difficult to manipulate the mass of the population to support their rule and were concerned that communism might sweep them away in a tidal wave of revolution. In these circumstances, fascism became the repressive means of restoring these classes' hegemony over society by offering the masses a seemingly popular form of rule, led by a dominant individual, when in reality this was merely a vehicle for destroying the threatening power of communism and the egalitarian principles of mass democracy. Of course, the problem with this view of fascism is that it attaches very little importance to the popularity of fascism among certain sections of German and Italian society, which, on this view, were manipulated.

Seymour Lipset, in his influential study *Political Man*, viewed fascism in a rather different way, portraying it as a genuine 'revolt of the middle classes' who felt trapped between the growth of big business and the revolutionary politics of the workers and thought the liberal democratic parties could not haul them out of the mounting economic distress after 1918 or restore the stability and order they so desired. On this view, fascism

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Lipset's interpretation, which concentrated on the German case alone, has been challenged by many studies of voting behaviour in Germany between 1918 and 1933, which have shown that the Nazi Party did not just gain votes from disaffected liberals, but drew the bulk of its support from small right-wing nationalist fringe parties, from prosperous members of the upper middle class, and from a significant number of voters in rural areas who had previously not voted for any other party (Fischer, 1995).

The problem of finding a general theory to explain 'fascism' is further complicated by the development of the concept of totalitarianism, which argues that communist and fascist dictatorships in power were different sides of the same coin. Carl Friedrich, for example, put forward a 'six point' test to evaluate a 'totalitarian' regime, consisting of: an official ideology, a single mass party, a terrorist police force, monopoly control of the media, a monopoly of arms, and central control of the economy. Totalitarian regimes of the communist or fascist variety made the masses conform to their rule or face dire consequences. The main problem with the totalitarian model is that it is a rather static model which views communist and fascist regimes as basically similar, thus downplaying the actual ideological differences and aims of Nazism in Germany and Bolshevism in the Soviet Union and failing to see the real economic differences and class relationships within each society.

The acceptance of a general theory of fascism has also encountered problems in gaining credibility among historians and political scientists. No single theory of fascism can possibly explain the different characteristics of the many different regimes and political parties which called themselves fascist and operated throughout Europe during the inter-war period. Even Nazism and Italian fascism exhibited major ideological differences. Race was of fundamental significance in Nazi ideology, but of comparative insignificance to Italian fascists. Mussolini gave open support to many aspects of modernity, while Hitler tended to stress the need to incorporate many lost medieval customs into German society. At the same time, there were many similarities between Italian fascism and National Socialism, including extreme nationalism, emphasis on strong dictatorial leadership, a strong anti-Marxism (which implied the destruction of working-class and Marxist organisations), ruthless repression of all opposition groups, contempt for democratic forms of government, the glorification of war, strong support for rearmament, a stress on the need for economic self-sufficiency, the use of propaganda, and, especially in the rise to power of Mussolini and Hitler, the forging of alliances with existing anti-democratic elites within the state, and the creation of paramilitary organisations of ex-soldiers to add to the sense of general chaos on the streets. In most respects, fascist ideology opposed existing 'established' religion, but at the same time it projected a messianic mission, which resembled a devotion to a religious faith. Fascism

was a sort of political religion, one which expressed a rather utopian vision of the future, in which a new state and a 'new man' would prosper. Fascism also stressed action and daring, which appealed to young people. Another key characteristic of Fascist ideology was its stress on male chauvinism and male domination over society. Fascist ideology had little interest in women's equality or female rights.

In spite of the similarities between the Italian and German versions of fascism, many historians do not accept that Nazism was simply a derivative version of Italian fascism, primarily because the differences between Italian fascism and National Socialism, when examined in detail, outweigh the similarities, especially the overarching race theory within National Socialism, to which all other aspects of Nazi ideology and policy were inextricably linked. Put this way, Nazism can be viewed as a unique phenomenon because its emphasis on race, and the anti-modern idea of the *Volkisch* state, differed greatly from the modernist ideas of Italian fascism. More importantly, Hitler's unique personality and ideological obsession with race gave Nazism specific German-Austrian characteristics which must be analysed in the context of the historical development of Germany.

THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF NAZISM

No major historical force emerges without some prior development, and the historical roots of Nazism stretch back into history. Nazi propaganda certainly acknowledged its debt to many past influences. Hitler claimed: 'A man who has no sense of history is like a man who has no eyes and ears' (Bullock, 1962: 397). A famous Nazi postcard, very popular in the period, featured Hitler's head alongside those of Frederick the Great, Bismarck and Hindenburg. Hitler also frequently claimed that the Third Reich represented continuity with the First Reich (the medieval Holy Roman Empire) and the Second Reich (established by Bismarck and ended by the 1919 peace settlement). Even in his bunker, right up until his suicide, Hitler kept a portrait of Frederick the Great, the eighteenth-century soldier-king, on a bedside table.

Some historians have suggested that Germany followed a special and unique historical path (*Sonderweg*), which glorified authoritarian rule, war and territorial conquest. National Socialism was a logical consequence of these German preoccupations. Many of Hitler's supposedly 'unique' foreign policy aims turn out, on closer inspection, not to have been so novel after all. The concept of *Lebensraum*, the acquisition of living space, not only had precedents in German history, but was mentioned frequently in most of the pre-1914 Pan-German League pamphlets. German dominance of eastern Europe – and the subordination of the Slavs – were key aims not only of Frederick the Great in the eighteenth century but also of the Kaiser during

the First World War. Most conservative nationalist groups in Germany, even in the Weimar period, advocated most of Hitler's foreign policy aims. On the other hand, many other historians have suggested Nazism had no deep roots in German history. Nationalism, anti-Semitism and social Darwinism, all regarded as key influences on Nazism, were actually ideas imported from outside Germany. A policy of systematic killing aimed at the Jewish population had no precedent in pre-1914 German policy.

It is, in fact, possible to view Nazism as a unique German response to specific problems thrown up by the First World War: as a reaction against modern and urbanised industrial society; a reaction against rapid technological change and innovation; a reaction against the growth of socialism and mass democracy; a response to the development of mass society; a response to deep economic problems, most notably high inflation; and a desire to restore confidence in a defeated nation. It is very difficult to isolate the long-term historical influences on the development of Nazism from the particular characteristics of the period in which it gained prominence.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Attempting to isolate the philosophical roots of National Socialism is equally difficult. A great deal of ink has been spilled trying to explain where Hitler got his ideas from. Although he was an avid reader, he did not read philosophical tracts in depth – and regarding him as some sort of ideological guru is quite absurd. Many of Hitler's ideas – especially in the period after the First World War – were borrowed from some of the leading members of the party. One important figure who influenced Hitler in the early days of the party in Munich was Dietrich Eckart, a poet, playwright and journalist whose best friend was a wine glass. Hitler described Eckart – a serious alcoholic – as 'a fatherly friend'. He claimed to have been greatly influenced by Eckart's second-hand nationalist and anti-Semitic ideas. Eckart was very fond of telling his fellow Nazi members to 'keep your blood pure', even though his own was always somewhat heavily diluted by alcohol. Eckart was the author of several early Nazi pamphlets from which Hitler undoubtedly drew inspiration, including a bitter attack on 'the Jews' entitled *That is the Jew*, which argued that the restoration of the German Volk could only be achieved through the 'removal of the Jewish menace' (Zalampas, 1989: 37). Eckart's virulent anti-Semitism, and his flaky eugenic theories concerning race, had a profound influence on Hitler's own ideas on these subjects. It seems that word-of-mouth ideas, received second-hand, exerted a greater impact on Hitler's ideas than any deep reading of philosophy.

While in the Landsberg fortress, Hitler claimed he read works by Nietzsche, Hegel, Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Treitschke, even

though those present at the time later claimed he rarely read such works in any detail. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect Hegel's view of the state having 'supreme power over the individual' in Hitler's writings and speeches. Heinrich von Treitschke, the German historian, did influence Hitler, in particular his view that 'war is the highest expression of man'. There is also little doubt that the work of Nietzsche, however assimilated, penetrated into Hitler's thinking. Nietzsche was a nineteenth-century German philosopher who was deeply disturbed by the dizzy pace of European social and industrial change. He predicted modern society would result in 'the death of God'. What Hitler latched on to in Nietzsche's writings were his fervent criticisms of democratic forms of government, his praise of violence and war, and his prediction of the emergence of the coming 'master race' led by an all-powerful 'superman', supported by a small elite, who together would 'rule the world'. The term 'Lords of the Earth', coined by Nietzsche, is constantly used throughout *Mein Kampf* and was repeatedly mentioned by Hitler – and most leading Nazis – during the era of the Third Reich. Nietzsche was certainly treated as a deep philosophical influence on National Socialism during the Nazi era, even if the nuances of his philosophy were way beyond the bar-room logic of most Nazis. There is equally little doubt that Hitler viewed himself as a 'superman', who had been marked out by 'providence' to lead Germany to the pinnacle of world power.

Hitler was very clearly attracted by the idea of the 'survival of the fittest', and a crude social Darwinism permeates a great deal of Hitler's writings and speeches. By the late nineteenth century, and in the early twentieth century, social Darwinistic ideas, derived largely from anthropological and zoological research, were extremely fashionable in Germany and Austria, and throughout most of western Europe. Such theories tended to reinforce the appeal of nationalism, especially in Germany and Austria. Hitler did believe life was a 'struggle between strength and weakness' in which only the strong would prevail, through the use of superior force. Although such ideas were influenced by the writings of Charles Darwin, there is no evidence Hitler ever read any of his work in the original. Even so, Hitler was unquestionably a social Darwinist, and this had a key ideological influence upon his ideas.

Closely related to social Darwinistic thinking were ideas about race, which was another crucial aspect of Nazi ideology. Modern concepts of discriminatory racism were postulated during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, in the writings of leading European geographers and anthropologists, but they grew more well known from the mid-nineteenth century. The thinker whose work greatly influenced future writers on race was Comte Arthur de Gobineau, who divided humanity into three basic races – white, yellow and black – and who put forward the view that race

was the key to the development of history. Gobineau argued that all higher forms of civilisation had flowed from the superior white race, and that the highest form of that race was the 'Aryan', the highest human species of all. According to Gobineau, the purity of the Aryan race had decayed over centuries due to racial mixing with 'inferior races'. The only means of creating a future master race, thought Gobineau, was to ensure that 'Aryans' only produced children in union with other 'Aryans'. Yet he was pessimistic about whether this could ever be achieved.

Other racial theorists rejected the pessimism in Gobineau's writings and called instead for eugenic policies to defend the so-called 'higher races'. Such ideas on race soon became popular in many parts of Europe and were particularly extensive throughout German-speaking central Europe. The greatest populariser of racist ideas in Germany and Austria was an eccentric Englishman who had settled in Germany: Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who was a leading figure in the German branch of the Gobineau Society. His famous book *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* (1899) became extremely popular with Pan-German groups in Germany, and provided the Nazis with the basis of their master race ideas. Chamberlain promoted the idea in Germany and Austria that the key driving force in historical development was race. At the top of the racial pyramid was the 'Teuton' ('the soul of our culture'), whose highest form was the 'tall, blond, blue-eyed, magnificent Aryan' which was found in its 'purest form' in Germany. It was through the development of the Aryan that Germans could become the 'masters of the earth'. The ultimate anti-Aryan and most 'bitter racial foe' was 'the Jew'. There is little doubt that, in Germany and Austria, the rapid growth in popularity of racial doctrines which eulogised the Aryan was always accompanied by anti-Semitism.

Another important influence on Hitler's ideas were the musical operatic works and political views of Richard Wagner. Hitler often claimed that anyone wanting to understand National Socialism fully 'must know Wagner'. He harboured a strong dislike of the Jews, and he venerated German nationalism in many of his operas (Shirer, 1961: 133). What particularly attracted Hitler to Wagner were his vividly staged operas which pitted German medieval heroes with tribal codes in a struggle against their enemies. In a very real sense, Nazism was not just about ideas – it was about putting ideas into action. Hitler viewed Nazi Germany as the enactment of some great real life theatrical opera, and the vast Nazi displays of pomp and ceremony, which characterised so much of the ceremonial life of the Nazi Party, owed a great deal to the inspiration of the operas of Wagner. Indeed, the end of *Götterdämmerung*, when Wotan, the leading character, sets on fire Valhalla, has great similarities to Hitler's flame-filled hell in Berlin at the end of the Second World War.

What these ideas on race tended to reinforce was a strong form of

defensive nationalism. There is little doubt that the intense feelings of nationalism that existed in Germany, Austria and among the upper classes throughout European society in the early part of the twentieth century were linked to fears about the consequences of the growth of internationalism, and especially the growing popularity of the anti-nationalist creed of Marxism. Though right-wing nationalist groups did not appeal for support to nationalism alone, it was a key aspect of their ideological thinking. Hence, Nazism can be viewed as a reactionary response to the growth of socialist forces, mass democracy and modern urban industrial society. Nazism sought to recapture the revolutionary potential of nationalism, which had first come to prominence during the era of the French revolution.

HITLER'S CENTRAL ROLE IN NAZI IDEOLOGY

Of course, the key to understanding the essence of Nazism does not lie only in isolating the various influences on National Socialism, but in grasping how these ideas were assimilated into Nazi ideology by Adolf Hitler. The major source for comprehending Nazi ideology is *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), written by Hitler and published in two volumes, the first of which appeared in July 1925, the second in December 1926. The original title, 'Four and a Half Years of Battle Against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice: Account Settled', was rejected as too long-winded by Max Amann, Hitler's publishing manager. *Mein Kampf* is part autobiography, part ideological tract, and part blueprint for political action. It is not a great work of political theory, running to 752 pages – in its original form – of verbose, subjective and repetitious prose which reads like the extended ranting of an extremely prejudiced person. In spite of these obvious weaknesses, *Mein Kampf* remains a very important book for understanding the essence of Nazi ideology because it outlines the most complete presentation of the fundamental principles of Hitler's *Weltanschauung* ('world view', or ideology), the techniques of Nazi propaganda, the plan for destroying Marxism and eliminating Jews from German society, the concept and policies of a future National Socialist state and Hitler's central foreign policy objectives. Between 1925 and 1945, *Mein Kampf* sold 10 million copies and was translated into sixteen languages. It made Hitler a very rich man and the world a poorer place.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FOREIGN POLICY

The central foreign policy aim of Nazism was to make Germany the most dominant power in Europe, and to gain revenge for the German defeat in the First World War. As a result, the largest amount of space in *Mein Kampf* is concerned with the aims of German foreign policy under Hitler's rule.

Hitler's first objective was to 'abolish the Treaty of Versailles'. To achieve this, he intended to revise the treaty by unilateral acts when suitable opportunities arose. If Hitler's foreign policy objectives had been merely limited to revising Versailles, the course of German history would have been very different, and Hitler would now be judged as one of the most successful German leaders in history. However, doing away with the 'hated' Versailles treaty was for Hitler just the essential prelude to a resurgence of German militarism of a more extreme variety than had existed before. 'To demand that the 1914 frontiers of Germany be restored', wrote Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, 'is a political absurdity'. In fact, Hitler – although often accused of being a counter-revolutionary – was deeply critical of pre-1914 German foreign policy, especially the aim of seeking a colonial empire outside Europe – the so-called 'World Policy' – and engaging in a wasteful naval rivalry with Britain. Instead, Hitler intended to concentrate his own territorial aims exclusively on the European continent. To begin with, he would incorporate all German speakers in Austria, the Sudetenland and Poland into a greater German Reich. Hitler knew these territorial acquisitions would meet with opposition from the French government. Hence, a war with France – 'the inexorable enemy of the German people' – was always implicit in Hitler's foreign policy thinking. As a counterweight to French hostility to German aims in Europe, he wanted to build close relations with Britain, thereby avoiding the severe Anglo-German antagonism that had characterised relations between the two countries in the years which led to the outbreak of the First World War. Indeed, Hitler hoped to persuade the British government to abandon its long-standing support for upholding a balance of power in Europe, and enter an alliance with Germany under whose terms the British Empire would be guaranteed in return for Britain allowing Germany a 'free hand' to gain territory in eastern Europe without interference.

The major aim of Hitler's foreign policy – closely linked to his racial ideas – was to gain *Lebensraum* (living space) for Germany in eastern Europe through a war of conquest against the Soviet Union. According to Hitler:

If land is desired in Europe, it could be obtained by and large only at the expense of the Soviet Union, and this meant the new Reich must set itself on the march along the road of the Teutonic Knights of old, to obtain by the German sword, sod for the German plough and daily bread for the nation.

The aim of *Lebensraum* was to defeat the Soviet Union in war, providing enough living space to assure German 'freedom of existence' and paving the way for a German population explosion in the newly acquired areas. The eventual aim was to create a Greater German Reich of 250 million 'racially

pure' Germans completely self-sufficient in food and raw materials. In Hitler's view, the task of gaining *Lebensraum* in the east had been made easier for the German army by the Russian Revolution which had 'handed over Russia to the Jews' and thereby weakened its military prowess. The war of conquest against the Soviet Union was, for Hitler, not only a clear and concrete aim, but also a crusade to rid eastern Europe of his two most hated enemies: Bolsheviks and Jews.

Of course, the concept of *Lebensraum* did not originate with Hitler. It was a term used by many groups on the right of German politics in the Weimar period. The idea featured very strongly in pre-1914 Pan-German League pamphlets, many of which we know were read by Hitler during his Vienna period. It appears to have been used interchangeably by those right-wing groups which desired a unification of all 'German speakers' (*Volksdeutsche*) who were scattered throughout eastern Europe and those groups (such as the Nazi Party) which used the concept to justify support for vast territorial conquest for Germany in eastern Europe, primarily at the expense of the Soviet Union. At the root of the concept was the idea of Germans not having enough land to live on, thereby reducing Germany's ability to become a dominant world power. The central aim of the future National Socialist state was to prepare the German people for a war of conquest in eastern Europe to gain *Lebensraum* at the expense of the Soviet Union.

THE CENTRALITY OF RACE

At the centre of Nazi ideology, and its dominant theoretical factor, was race. Hitler was not, as is often routinely argued, a mere 'German nationalist'. He often conceded – mostly in private – that the concept of the 'Aryan' race extended to many other people in central Europe, and even to England, to some 'Aryan' people throughout Europe and to Anglo-Saxons in the USA. Such revolutionary ideas, which became more apparent during the Second World War, would have frightened many Germans and weakened the appeal of Nazism before 1933, so Hitler kept quiet about them.

Hitler viewed all of human history not as a class struggle, but as a struggle for existence between strong and pure races over weak and mixed ones. War ('that great purifier') was viewed by Hitler as the means by which the strongest and purest race would dominate the weak. The question as to how Germans would become the strongest race on earth occupied a great deal of Hitler's attention in *Mein Kampf*. Hitler divided the world into three racial groups: (i) 'Aryans' – defined as those races who created cultures; (ii) the 'bearers of culture' – classed as those races who cannot create culture, but who can copy from Aryans; and (iii) 'inferior peoples' – defined as

those who have no capacity to create culture, or to copy from others, but can only destroy cultures. The key objective of Hitler's racial policy, therefore, was to create a racially pure 'Aryan' folk community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) of Germans, which, due to its alleged superiority, would have the right to subjugate 'inferior' peoples (Geary, 1993).

THE FUNCTION OF ANTI-SEMITISM AND ANTI-MARXISM IN NAZI IDEOLOGY

If the Aryan possessed all the positive qualities Hitler admired, the opposite was true of Hitler's two most hated enemies: Marxists and Jews. Hitler regarded the Marxist desire to foment a 'class war' as the chief threat to the unity of the nation. A virulent hatred of Marxism – and everything associated with it – runs through all of Hitler's writings and speeches [Doc. 11]. At the core of Hitler's ideological mission was a desire to eliminate Marxism within Germany, and then to exterminate Bolshevism during a war against the Soviet Union. At his trial for treason in March 1924, Hitler told the court he wanted to be 'the breaker of Marxism', and elsewhere he frequently spoke of his desire to 'annihilate' Marxism.

Hitler's anti-Marxism was interwoven with a virulent anti-Semitism. Whenever Hitler spoke of Marxists, he implied they were either 'Jews' or 'controlled by Jews'. Hitler defined 'the Jews' not as a religious group, but as a united race who were planning 'a world conspiracy' to undermine national unity. This far-fetched conspiracy was supposedly outlined in *The Protocols of Zion*, a forged document which was circulated widely in Germany before 1914 and outlined a Zionist plan for Jewish world domination. Hitler believed that, because Jews were a 'stateless people' (the state of Israel was not established until 1947), they sought to undermine the 'ethnic unity' and 'racial purity' of every state they inhabited. Hitler ascribed every ill in the world to 'Jewish influence'.

Anti-Semitism had two functions within Nazi ideology: it provided a very simple explanation for all the divisions and problems in German society, and suggested a full solution to those ills could only be achieved by 'eliminating' Jews from German society. In Nazi ideology, 'the Jew' was a universal scapegoat, responsible for Marxism, democracy, internationalism, pacifism, class war, freedom of the press, prostitution, venereal disease, modernism in art, and much else. Behind every anti-patriotic, disunifying force lay, according to Hitler, 'the eternal Jew', plotting and scheming to weaken the 'blood purity' and will of the Aryan race. Once again, the extreme radical nature of Hitler's anti-Semitism was toned down greatly, especially in the critical period 1928 to 1933 when Nazi voting strength was increasing. In reality, Hitler's anti-Semitism was demonic in its passion and formed a central aspect of his ideological thinking. He never fully

explained what he meant before 1933 about his desire to 'eliminate' the Jewish danger, but given his ideological mind-set there is little doubt he saw such an elimination as extermination, if he got the chance, especially on a pan-European scale.

THE FOLK COMMUNITY

When Hitler discussed the future shape of the Nazi state, he thought in terms of creating a popular folk (or ethnically unified) community, or *Volksgemeinschaft*, bound together by 'common blood' ties and guided by the will of an all-powerful leader. The idea of creating a folk community was a popular and nostalgic idea, supported by all sections of the German nationalist right. The German word *Volk* when translated into English is rendered usually as 'people'; but in German it possessed a much deeper meaning, denoting an idealised return to a primitive rural form of ethnic unity based on 'blood and soil', with a romanticised (and often mythologised) view of Germany's medieval past and a strong belief that there was an ethnic and unique race, the Germans, which had a shared set of values, deep bonds and blood ties stretching back into the lost mist of time. *Volkisch* nationalism tended to stress the unique and distinct aspects of 'German' people, culture and even the landscape. Most *Volkisch* writers claimed German medieval society was one in which tribes were bound together by shared language, feelings of loyalty, blood ties and love of working on the soil. The authority in such a society was passed down from a leader, who exercised power for the benefit of the whole community. The economy was based on self-sufficiency, home production, and fair barter between kith and kin in a romanticised folk community. When war came, so the *Volkisch* myth suggested, the whole community would be united in a struggle for its own people. It was the creation of a modern industrial society that broke this unity by placing profits, productivity and trade above natural kindred bonds. Such attitudes tended to reject Christianity in favour of a mystical view of the past, the cosmos and the environment. Not surprisingly, the idea of the *Volk* tended to be opposed to industrialisation, individualism, urbanisation, class conflict and cosmopolitan ideas; a 'return to the soil' was idealised as the answer to these problems. The goal of supporters of these *Volkisch* ideals was a harmonious united society which idealised rural life.

The appeal of such ideas before 1914 was strongest among the lower middle classes – among traders and merchants and small-scale farmers – but some elements in the landed aristocratic class who also felt threatened by the rapid growth of industrialisation and the liberality of thought which accompanied it were also attracted by these ideas. Not surprisingly, *Volkisch* groups felt that all 'modern' influences were related to 'Jewish

influence'. In pre-1914 German society, *Volkisch* groups were in a very small minority within the middle classes, with very limited representation in the Reichstag, usually in the form of small special interest parties with limited electoral support. What supporters of *Volkisch* ideas lacked before 1914 was a major political party championing these romantic ideals.

In the aftermath of the German defeat in the First World War, however, support for this nostalgic and utopian vision of a 'lost Germany' gathered in strength and was certainly a factor which pervaded Nazi ideology and helped to attract support for the Nazi Party from the middle classes as well as the rural community. Most supporters of the *Volkisch* myth wanted a return to a simpler, less complicated, greener society, based on principles such as hierarchy, patriotism, social harmony, order and obedience. The idea of the urban dweller being trapped by modernity was a very strong image in Nazi propaganda, which elevated a love of nature, the landscape and working on the land as the real means to a happy and contented life [Doc. 14]. The idea of creating a united national community in which individuals would unite in the service of the community, led by a powerful leader and supported by an elite (similar to the medieval Teutonic Knights), was at the centre of the Nazi appeal to the middle classes and to rural communities.

Hitler had a romanticised and utopian view of German culture, which he believed had been undermined by powerful 'non-German' forces. In Hitler's view, the rural and racial harmony between knights and peasants of medieval times had been destroyed by the rise of the bourgeoisie, the growth of industrial society, the rise of socialism and the influence of 'the Jews' in German society. The way forward, therefore, was to take Germany backward, to a simpler rural lifestyle in which each German could live on the land. The type of government needed by such a community would be an authoritarian one, with no majority decisions, no democratic votes, one where everything was decided 'by one man' and an 'elite of leaders'. The leader would give orders downwards, which he would expect to be obeyed. The individual in such a society would be expected to follow orders, without question or discussion. The future Nazi state would not promote equality, only equality of opportunity [Doc. 10]. Yet the individual who prospered would be expected to serve the 'common good', and be willing to be self-sacrificing in the service of the nation. Indeed, 'Common Good before Individual Good' was a key Nazi slogan. To the powerful *Volkisch* myth, Hitler added the idea of the front-line community (*Frontsgemeinschaft*), which consisted of the soldiers who had fought in a common struggle against the enemy in the First World War and who had been 'stabbed in the back' by socialists, war profiteers and Jews at home. Hitler attempted to suggest he would recreate the unity of the soldiers in the war in a German society under Nazi rule.

Hitler defined the folk community as a 'classless society' in which individuals would find their own 'natural level' through hard work, will-power and effort. Hitler did often speak of the entire German nation being of 'pure Aryan stock', but on closer inspection it is clear that Hitler felt it could be achieved by a process of selecting who should and should not have children in a Nazi-run society. The key aim was to get rid of all 'racial impurities' from German blood, thereby paving the way for a return to a *Volksgemeinschaft*, a 'blood pure' community of Germans living in harmony on the land. Yet Hitler believed that only a select group ('based on the aristocratic idea of nature'), meaning the stronger, the taller, the fitter and the faster, would become part of the Aryan elite. Those who did not match up to the Aryan ideal of perfection would have to content themselves with being loyal and patriotic members of the folk community. The Nazi elite were the nobility (the Teutonic Knights), the remainder were loyal peasants, and all were part of a united and contented folk community. In practice, Hitler was more pragmatic about *Volkisch* ideals than many of his followers. In his search for power, the anti-capitalist, anti-big business and anti-bourgeois aspects of Nazi ideology were downplayed, and it was 'Jews and Marxists' who became the chief and easy targets of Nazi abuse. Attacking 'the Jews' was easier than attempting to dismantle modern industrial society and returning Germans to the land.

In essence, Nazism wanted to create the conditions in which there would be equality of opportunity, but Hitler did not favour an equal society [Doc. 11]. It would be possible to reach the top in Hitler's society, not just with traditional academic qualifications but also with 'racial qualifications', which amounted to the ability to trace a long 'German' family tree, combined with the essential physical attributes of being blond, tall, fit and physically strong. The abilities of the 'self-made' businessman were also included in these criteria. Hitler promised the Nazi state would promote the 'victory of the better and the stronger', and demand the subordination of 'the inferior and the weaker'. German citizens were expected not to 'weaken' the 'purity of their blood' by having children with people of different races. If a racially pure, thoroughbred elite sort of German could be created, then Hitler believed it would be 'the highest species of humanity on this earth'. When Hitler spoke of 'race' and 'purity of blood', therefore, he was always thinking of the creation of a 'racial elite' (*Herrenvolk*) who would rule society. All Germans could aspire to be part of the 'master race', but in reality, Hitler realised, only a small proportion of Germans would be able to meet his exacting entry requirements. Outside the 'racial elite' in the proposed Nazi state were 'the masses'. Hitler spoke of 'nationalising the masses' through successful propaganda. He believed they could be duped into supporting just about any policy 'If the same message was repeated over and over again'. In Hitler's view the great mass of people 'will more

easily fall victim to a great lie than to a small one'. It seems clear 'the masses' had the same position as a private soldier in Hitler's mind: they were to follow orders, without comment. They were to support the policies of the Nazi elite – without comment. They were to accept the unequal nature of Nazi society – without comment. Nazism was, therefore, fundamentally a doctrine of equality of opportunity but one which accepted it was bolstering and strengthening a very hierarchical and unequal society.

THE FUNCTION OF SOCIALISM IN NATIONAL SOCIALISM

This helps to explain why Hitler was always extremely vague about where 'socialism' came into his proposed folk community. The issue of exactly what Hitler meant by 'National Socialism' caused enormous divisions within the Nazi Party before 1933, and much confusion outside it [*Doc. 11*]. Hitler claimed that National Socialism was a 'dictatorship of the whole community'. It would aim to create a society in which there were no class barriers [*Doc. 12*].

The idea of National Socialism had been an open topic of discussion among extreme German nationalists for many years before the advent of the Nazi Party. In the 1890s a liberal pastor, Friedrich Naumann, set up a National-Social Association which aimed to persuade industrial workers – who might be attracted to real socialism – to give support to the existing state. The terms 'German Socialism' and 'National Socialism' were used interchangeably by members of anti-Marxist and anti-Semitic *Volkisch* groups in Germany and Austria. These groups attempted to stress that National Socialism was concerned with the strengthening of the nation, not narrow sectional interests.

Hitler favoured this concept of socialism over the egalitarian variety espoused by 'real' socialists. Hitler defined his odd brand of 'socialism' in the following way:

Whoever is prepared to make the national cause his own to such an extent that he knows no higher ideal than the welfare of his nation; whoever has understood our great national anthem, 'Deutschland über Alles', to mean that nothing in the wide world surpasses in his eyes this Germany, people and land – that man is a socialist.

On this definition, National Socialism was a form of uncritical loyalty to the state. The 'radical' wing of the Nazi Party, led by Gregor Strasser, argued that a National Socialist state should control the economic life and resources of the nation, and then use them for the benefit of the whole community. Hitler realised such ideas would alienate business and army support. As a result, 'socialist' ideas were marginalised in the Nazi programme before Hitler came to power – and most of the supporters of these

ideas were brutally killed in the blood purge (known as the Night of the Long Knives) which took place in 1933.

As we have seen, much of Nazi ideology was borrowed from ideas long current in nationalist and anti-Semitic groups, which were themselves borrowed from the ideas of right-wing philosophers and social Darwinist writers. Nazism, like a very large sponge, soaked up these ideas, and then wrung them out to form the misty sludge known as National Socialism. Yet the importance of ideology for Hitler was not in the ideas themselves: most of them were mythologised and utopian dreams, unsuited to the practical realities of a modern industrial society, or were eugenic and racist mumbo jumbo which, if applied, would inevitably lead, even though the road might be twisted, towards genocide and war. Hitler could scarcely define either an 'Aryan' or a 'Jew', and he often admitted privately that most of his master race ideas had little chance of being achieved in his lifetime, if at all. What Nazi ideology could do successfully was to define – in exaggerated terms – both internal enemies – 'the Jews and the Marxists' – and external ones – France and the Soviet Union – all of which had to be 'destroyed' or 'eliminated' or 'exterminated' before the Germans could begin to create their *Volkisch* utopia. Yet in the period when Hitler rose to power, it was the optimistic and utopian dream of creating a harmonious *Volksgemeinschaft* of racially pure Aryans that struck the most responsive chord among those people who decided to vote for the Nazi Party. Such a utopian dream could only have prospered in the dark of a very black night.