

Joseph Chamberlain gave a speech on the "True Conception of Empire" in which he outlined three periods of colonial history. The first he described as a time when the colonies were established as a direct source of profit.<sup>10</sup> He went on to the second stage to show the animosity against empire because free trade was successful following independence. The third stage pertained to the sense of obligation towards empire. He spoke of a national mission that could only have been justified if it enhanced the involved nations. He maintained that Britain did just that and introduced a peace and prosperity that the colonies had never seen before.<sup>11</sup> He did not say that British rule was perfect, but contended that it helped civilizations advance to heights never seen before. He spoke of the great British race which provided for the prosperity of all its inhabitants, as well as secured safety from potential danger.

William Greg added to Chamberlain's arguments favoring prosperity for the colonies. He argued that Britain's obligation was to protect the natives from slavery. He expanded on his point when he explained that if Britain abandoned the people of Jamaica that the United States would have converted them into slaves. His obligation was protection from potential harm and defense of the British empire.<sup>12</sup>

After analyzing the pros and cons of Britain's empire in the late 19th century, the position is clear. The British had no choice in the decision concerning colonialism, because if the colonies were not their acquisition, they would have been someone else's. The reality of the situation is apparent. Morally, cultures should not be subdued for political purposes, but for the time period, there was ignorance which lent the situation its fate. Britain was struggling for power during a time when it was up for grabs, and imperialism was a part of the package.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Chamberlain, "The True Conception of Empire," in *The Past Speaks*, 276.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>12</sup> William Greg, "Shall We Retain Our Colonies?," in *Ibid.*, 269.

## PROPAGANDA AND THE RISE OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

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Propaganda is the practice of spreading ideas, information or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring a cause. Today the term propaganda is seemingly distasteful to the population, this despite the fact that the origin of the word was most holy. Used by Pope Gregory XV, when he founded the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide in 1622, the term meant a vehicle for religious faith. The term today is more closely associated with the National Socialist party than the Catholic church, closer with Joseph Goebbels than with Pope Gregory XV.

It is the purpose of this paper to study the employment of propaganda in the National Socialist rise to power 1923-1933. There are two misconceptions commonly associated with propaganda. First, it is widely believed that propaganda implies nothing less than the art of persuasion which is designed to alter the current attitudes and ideas of those it is directed against. In fact propaganda is more concerned with reinforcing existing beliefs rather than persuading those non-believers. The second misconception is that propaganda has only a negative connotation and consists only of lies and falsehoods.

National Socialist propaganda was directed toward the German people in a variety of campaigns with several, often conflicting themes. It is often believed that National Socialist propaganda appealed largely to the irrational side of its audience. Although this statement is true, in order for any propaganda to be successful it must also appeal to the more rational side of humans. In the course of this study I will examine two highly successful campaigns that appealed to the "rational" German people, for it was with these campaigns that the National Socialist gained most of its increase support from 1930 to 1933. It seems that many historians would have one believe that millions of Germans, mesmerized by propaganda, supported the National Socialists even though they knew it not to be in their best interest. This also is a falsehood. Although many may have been caught up in the moment and adored the pageantry of the National Socialist movement, the majority cast their votes for them because they did believe that it

was in their best interest and that this party had solutions when other political organizations would not even address the issues.

Adolf Hitler viewed propaganda so importantly that he devoted two chapters to it in *Mein Kampf*. He also viewed the First World War as the starting point of modern propaganda and rightfully so. However, by 1917 Hitler was already a neophyte in the world of propaganda. Upon arriving in Vienna in 1907 young Hitler observed and studied, with great interest, the political power struggles between Karl Lueger and Georg von Schonerer. Lueger, the anti-Semitic mayor of Vienna, strongly influenced Hitler in his early years. As the co-founder and leader of the Catholic-dominated Christian Socialist party Lueger became an immensely popular political figure in Vienna. Extremely effective in his use of propaganda, he would exploit prevailing anti-Semitic sentiment for his own demagogic purposes. It is often believed that not only did Hitler model his future propaganda ideology after Lueger but that he also adopted many of his anti-Semitic views as well. Aligned in political thought with Schonerer, the Prussian loyalist, Hitler believed him to be a better and more profound thinker in questions of principles. But if Schonerer recognized the problems in their innermost essence, he erred when it came to men.<sup>1</sup> Hitler compared the styles of both men.

Dr. Lueger's strength was a rare knowledge of men and in particular he took good care not to consider people better than they are. Consequently, he reckoned more with the real possibilities of life while Schonerer had but little understanding for them. Theoretically speaking, all the Pan-Germans' thoughts were correct, but since he lacked the force and astuteness to transmit his theoretical knowledge to the masses - that is, to put it in a form suited to the receptivity of the broad masses, which is and remains exceedingly limited - all his knowledge was visionary wisdom, and could never become practical reality.<sup>2</sup>

This political power struggle between Lueger and Schonerer left a lasting impression on Hitler. He would later say of the Austrian Socialist-Marxist organizations "and I soon learned that the correct use of propaganda is a true art which has remained practically unknown to the bourgeois parties.<sup>3</sup> With this Hitler was determined in the second rise of the National Socialist German Workers Party to fully implement the lessons he had learned in Vienna.

It was in Vienna that Hitler not only learned propaganda but learned to hate

1 A. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, (Boston, 1971), p.99.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., p. 176.

as well. Again influenced by the writings of Lueger, Hitler developed many of his feelings toward Jews, Marxists, and democracy that he would later incorporate into the National Socialist ideology. Leaving Vienna for Munich in 1913 Hitler had dreams of a great and glorious revival of Germany which would one day overtake the ever declining Hapsburg Monarchy. He began to consider himself German and rejected all that was Austrian. Arrested in 1914 and returned to Austria for conscription into military service, Hitler was found to be "too weak and unfit to bear arms."<sup>4</sup>

When the war broke out in August 1914 Hitler enlisted into the 16th Bavarian Infantry. His service was gallant during the four years he participated in forty-seven battles while being wounded twice. It was while recovering from his last wound, inflicted by an enemy gas attack that Hitler began to develop another prevalent theme, one which would become the cornerstone of his hatred for democracy and the Weimar government, the conspiracy theory. Hitler described recovering in a Pasewalk hospital under the terror of blindness while trying to understand the great events of the hour. He recounted that the more he tried to understand the greater the shame burned. "I knew that everything was lost. Only fools, liars or criminals could hope for mercy from the enemy. In these nights my hatred grew against the men who had brought about this crime. I, however, decided to go into politics."<sup>5</sup>

While recovering Hitler had time to examine the propaganda techniques developed during the war. All belligerent countries had begun propaganda campaigns, which would be the first modern example of mass psychological warfare. Germany lagged behind the allies in these efforts. Focused mainly on the home front German propagandists erred in judgment more often than not. They chose to depict the enemy as a weak and inferior force which greatly demoralized young German troops when they first encountered a capable and well-trained enemy on the battlefield. Efforts by the German press to gain or maintain support for the war effort were equally devastating to the cause. Hitler believed the total miscarriage of the German Enlightenment service "stared every soldier in the face, and this spurred me to take up the question of propaganda even more deeply than before."<sup>6</sup>

4 K. Heiden, *Der Fuehrer: Hitler's Rise to Power* (Boston: Houghton & Mifflin Co., 1994), p. 74.

5 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 206.

The British in the meantime not only developed, under the direction of press barons Beaverbrook and Northcliffe, successful campaigns for the morale of their own fighting men, but waged an extremely successful international campaign against the enemy. Able to read public opinion and gauge reactions to possible campaigns, the British Propaganda Ministry could reinforce a public sentiment that was steadfastly against what it was convinced to be the German aggression and wartime atrocities.

At the conclusion of the war Hitler returned to Munich. Angered by the Communist attempts at revolution and the failure of the Weimar Republic, he began to develop techniques and a propaganda ideology which would serve his political rise to power. He believed that propaganda was a means and must therefore be judged with regard to its end.

"To whom should propaganda be addressed? To the scientifically trained intelligentsia or to the less educated masses? It must be addressed always and exclusively to the masses."<sup>7</sup> Hitler believed that the purpose of propaganda was to bring into the field of vision of the political uneducated issues which he had as of yet not seen.

Hitler made no attempt to hide his contempt for the masses; they were "malleable and corrupt by nature, they were overwhelmingly feminine by nature and attitude and as such their sentiment was not complicated but very simple and consistent."<sup>8</sup> In *Mein Kampf*, where Hitler outlined his beliefs on propaganda, he described:

The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. In consequence, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan.<sup>9</sup>

In the view of Hitler, unlike the Marxists in Russia, there was no distinction between propaganda and agitation. In Russia agitation was the influencing of the masses while propaganda was solely the education of the party elite. Hitler believed that propaganda would be as effective with party members as it would with the uneducated masses.

Hitler's politics was to work against the Treaty of Versailles and the new

6 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 179.

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, p. 180.

German democracy. Still working for his old regiment and sent to infiltrate radical political parties operating in the area, Hitler gained his first contact with the National Socialist German Workers Party in 1919. Joining the party as number 55 and executive committee member number 7 Hitler was now an aspiring politician with a party. The party adopted its twenty-five point platform on February 24, 1920. Hitler then began applying his personal ideology- anti-Semitism, extreme nationalism, contempt for liberal democracy, the concept of Aryan racial supremacy, and the principle of leadership-to the political aims of the National Socialist Party. He was able to shape the platform of the party to appeal to everyone with a grievance of some kind, despite the fact that many of the National Socialist principles, as interpreted by Hitler, were contradictory. With the failure of the Beer Hall Putsch and his subsequent imprisonment Hitler would ponder his mistakes and when released set off on a course for a legal revolution which would rely heavily on propaganda to gain the needed popular support.

With the resurgence of the National Socialist party it was time to refine the propaganda techniques to be used to gain power. Hitler understood that the masses would be "more receptive to an emotional appeal rather than a rational argument."<sup>10</sup> In Hitler's view there would be no place for gray, the themes had to be black and white with no chance for the masses to misinterpret the desired meaning, and campaigns should rely heavily upon the use of slogans, flags, banners and marches. Thus were born the two themes that would appear in almost all National Socialist propaganda efforts in the future, *Volksgemeinschaft* and the *Führer Cult*.

*Volksgemeinschaft* is defined as a national community, with harmony among the classes, which is racially pure and *Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz* (all citizens working for the common good of the state). The National Socialists seeing the fragmentation of German society due to economic distress, set forth a platform to restore Germany to greatness by creating a community where there would be no division. The old caste system would be abolished as everyone had a well-respected role in building the greater German Reich. As the National Socialists propagated this idea it was closely linked with the anti-Semitic

10 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

beliefs that there would only be room in this community for the superior Aryan race. The National Socialists would never achieve a *Volksgemeinschaft*, and many who study German history believe that they in fact brought about a social revolution and created a modern society or *Gesellschaft*. The Fuhrer cult, or as called by Ian Kershaw, the "Fuhrer Myth",<sup>11</sup> is the widespread belief that Germany was destined to be led by one great and powerful leader. This belief found its origins in the nineteenth century with the mythical visions of German leadership and the pagan pan-German symbolism used in conjunction with religious ceremonies. The Fuhrer cult was not invented by the National Socialists, in fact, it paralleled the rise of Hitler, and it was not until after Hitler became chancellor that the two paths began to join.

The term Fuhrer has often been described as "the savior", having its original meaning in religious vernacular. Others have defined it as "the healer" or simply as "The Leader". Regardless of which definition is used, within the National Socialist party there were many that sought to help build Hitler into the Fuhrer. Such unlikely candidates as the later disposed Gregor Strasser wrote in 1927 on the relationship between the party members and Hitler:

An utter devotion to the idea of National Socialism, a glowing faith in the victorious strength of the doctrine of liberation and deliverance, is combined with a deep love of the person of our leader who is the shining hero of the new freedom fighters... Duke and vassal! In this ancient German, both aristocratic and democratic, relationship of leader and follower, fully comprehensible only to the German mentality and spirit, lies the essence of the structure of the NSDAP... Friends raise your right arm and cry out with me proudly, eager for the struggle, and loyal unto death, "Heil Hitler!"<sup>12</sup>

Among those also shaping the Hitler image from an early date was Rudolf Hess, who in a private letter written in 1927 wrote that it was above all necessary

...that the Fuhrer must be absolute in his propaganda speeches. He must not weigh up the pros and cons like an academic, he must never leave his listeners the freedom to think something else is right... The great popular leader is similar to the great founder of a religion he must communicate to his listeners an apodictic faith. Only then can the mass of followers be led where they should be lead. They will then also follow the leader if setbacks are encountered; but only then, if they have communicated to them unconditional belief in the absolute rightness of their own people.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I. Kershaw, *The Hitler Myth*, (Oxford, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> J. Noakes, Pridham, G., *Documents on Nazism*, (London, 1974), pp 84-5

<sup>13</sup> Kershaw, p. 27.

By far the most influential person in creating the fuhrer cult' and combining it together with the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was Paul Joseph Goebbels. *Volksgemeinschaft* was Paul Joseph Goebbels. Goebbels, the son of a manual worker from the Rhineland, was raised in a strict Catholic family. Considered to be the brightest of all National Socialist leaders he was educated in various universities and earned a doctoral degree in literature. Goebbels joined the party in 1922 and later began work as the editor of the *National Socialist Briefe*, the publication of Gregor and Otto Strasser. Goebbels was soon in the middle of the controversy between the Strassers and Hitler on the extent that socialism should play in the party platform. Prior to 1926 Goebbels sided with the Strassers. Then he changed sides and became a staunch and even fanatical supporter of Hitler. Goebbels wrote Hitler, A true leader, he declared, was not subject to the whims of the masses, was not a parliamentarian but a liberator of the masses. With obvious pseudo-religious connotations, he spoke of the Fuhrer as "the fulfillment of a mysterious longing", and of a man "who showed them in their deepest despair the way to a faith and like a meteor before our astonished eyes" had "worked a miracle of enlightenment and belief in a world of skepticism and despair."<sup>14</sup>

Such words drew Hitler's favorable attention and in 1926 Goebbels was made Gauleiter of Berlin-Brandenburg. From 1927-1935 he edited his own weekly newspaper, *Der Angriff* (The Assault). In this paper and through his public speaking in Berlin he was able to spread the National Socialist philosophy to the nation's capital city. When Goebbels spoke it was obvious that he was a well-educated man and a truly gifted speaker. Hitler, once again impressed by the achievements in the area of propaganda, in 1929 appointed Goebbels as the *Reichspropagandaleiter der NSDAP* (Reich propaganda leader of the National Socialist party).

A master of modern propaganda, Goebbels applied many modern advertising and promotional techniques he learned from the American newspaper industry. But the true skill of Goebbels was in the establishment of a party propaganda apparatus. The main function of the early party organization was the transmittal of directives from higher to lower party headquarters. By 1930

<sup>14</sup> L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, (New York, 1989), p. 119.

Goebbels constructed a central organization employing more than 14,000 people. This he divided into specialized sections that could look after every aspect of propaganda.

The active propaganda section (Amt 1) formed the core of the propaganda organization. It was to deal with the execution of Political agitation, from the largest mass meetings (excluding the party day rallies in Nuremberg which were coordinated by an independent organization working directly for Goebbels), to the smallest meeting in the countryside. This directive also published *Unser Wille und Weg* (Will and Way), its own monthly magazine, founded in 1931, in which it would pass down to the *Gaue* instructions for upcoming campaigns.

From its origins, the meetings of the National Socialist were strictly controlled. Access was limited to supporters or those as of yet undecided. Political opponents were forbidden from attending, and if they were able to gain access and speak out with their dissenting view, they were dealt with harshly, either by verbal ridicule or more often than not physical abuse. Questions from the audience were not allowed and members of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) roamed the room to quell opposing outburst. Party meetings would begin late because it was felt that people were more receptive to radical ideas as fatigue and alcohol affected their system. Later these meetings took on an almost pageant-like quality as the choreography became more sophisticated.

A sub-section of the "active propaganda" department was one concerned with *Rednerwesen*, the directive for public speaking. By far the most effective weapon of the National Socialist Campaign, it was in full swing by 1930 while political opponents were still struggling with establishment of their organizations. A May 1930 memorandum of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior indicates the degree to which the National Socialist propaganda machine was functioning.

Hardly a day passes on which there are not several meetings even in narrowly restricted local areas. Carefully organized propaganda headquarters in the individual *Gaue* ensure that the speaker and subject are adapted to the local and economic circumstances. The Reichstag and Landtag deputies of the Party and many other Party speakers travel about every day to undertake and build up this agitation. Through systematic training courses, through correspondence courses and recently through a school for NSDAP speakers established on 1 July 1929, such agitators are trained for this task over a period of months, even years. If they prove themselves, they receive official recognition from the Party and were put under contract to give at least thirty speeches over a period of eight months and receive as an incentive a fee of 20 Reichsmarks or more per evening in addition to their expenses. Rhetorical skill combined with subjects carefully chosen to suit the particular audience, which in the countryside and in the small towns is mainly interested in economic matters, ensure, according to our observations, halls which are almost invariably overcrowded with enthusiastic listeners. Meetings with an audience of between

1000 and 5000 people are a daily occurrence in the bigger towns. Frequently a second or several parallel meetings have to be held because the halls provided cannot hold the numbers who attend... on such occasions the network of local branches is extended as far as possible or at all events contact men are recruited who are intended to prepare the ground through intensive propaganda by word of mouth for the spread of the movement which can be observed everywhere. Frequently such propaganda squads stay in a certain place for several days and try to win the local population for the movement through the most varied sorts of entertainment such as concerts, sports days, tattoos in suitable places and even church parades. In other places an outside propaganda speaker is stationed for a certain time with a car at his disposal; he travels systematically through the surrounding districts. National Socialist theater groups traveling from place to place serve the same purpose.<sup>15</sup>

By 1925 Hitler had perfected those qualities which set him apart from all other speakers of the era. He was not an impromptu speaker, preparing in advance and for hours practicing gestures in front of mirrors until achieving the desired effect. Hitler's power as a speaker lay mainly in that he would establish a rapport between himself and the audience. Beginning a speech Hitler would start slowly, his body stiff, almost feeling his way along. Gradually the pace would quicken and the words delivered with more force. Soon the body would loosen and what followed would be a torrent of facial and body gestures. The climax of his topic would be delivered with a high pitched passionate appeal and end abruptly. He would begin his next topic the same as the first, working himself into a feverish state. The onslaught to the audience was draining. They would leave the meeting physically and mentally exhausted and with the feeling that they had shared a great experience with the speaker.

The *Reichspropagandaleiter der NSDAP* had also established a department to control the written word; although largely limited to only National Socialist publications, efforts were coordinated to maximize the desired message. The National Socialist party's first newspaper was the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Racial Observer). Purchased in 1920 by Major General Franz Xaver Ritter von Epp

<sup>15</sup> Noakes, p. 71.

for 60,000 marks, it became the official party paper. It was published weekly until February 1923 when Hitler, with financial assistance from Ernst Franz Sedgwick Hanfstaengel, began to publish the larger formatted daily edition. The chief editor was the National Socialist racial philosopher, Alfred Rosenberg, who filled its pages with popular racial doctrines. He reproduced the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and other anti-Semitic materials. In 1923 25,000 Bavarian editions were published daily. After the failed Putsch the paper was banned until on February 26, 1925, with the headlines a "New Beginning" and a subscription of 10,000. By 1929 the numbers would rise to 26,700 per day. In 1930 the *Völkischer Beobachter* declared itself as a national newspaper with 84,500 editions published daily in Munich and Berlin.

Along with the *Völkischer Beobachter* the National Socialist party had the before mentioned *Der Angriff* published by Goebbels and *Der Stürmer* (The Stormer) owned and published by Julius Streicher, National Socialist party militant in Franconia. Streicher's hatred of Jews was legendary and *Der Stürmer* was journalism at its worst, filled with filth and endless attacks on Jews. The papers circulation was relatively small but engendered a constant state of Jewish hysteria among its readers.

If speaking was the strength of National Socialist propaganda, then the written press was the weakness. Because the party was unable to attract skillful journalists and writers, the written propaganda suffered. Goebbels stated, "only a few flames are burning in Germany. The others only reflect their light. With the newspapers it is worst; we have the best speakers in the world but we lack nimble and skillful pens."<sup>16</sup> The National Socialist party lacked support from the legitimate press, that is until 1927, when Alfred Hugenberg, press baron and leader of the National Peoples Party (DNVP), began to cover with favorable press the National Socialist movement.

The informal union with Hugenberg seemed to give legitimacy to the party in the years just prior to its rise to power. Hugenberg, viewed as Germany's Lord of Film and Press, owned nearly two-thirds of the nearly 4,700 newspapers nationwide, in addition to various publishing houses and the majority of the German film and newsreel industry. For his support of Hitler for Chancellor and his favorable treatment in the press of the National Socialists, Hugenberg

16 L. Lochner, *The Goebbels Diaries*, (London, 1948), p. 29.

was awarded with an appointment as Minister of Agriculture in Hitler's first cabinet.

Goebbels had a firm control on the activities of all of the propaganda departments; however, the one area in which he lacked control concerned the role that violence played in National Socialist propaganda. Seemingly by design Hitler would spread control and authority to his various subordinates. Often the areas of responsibility would overlap and create confusion among those vying for power and allow Hitler to maintain a controlling interest in all activities. For Goebbels the area in which he lacked control over was that of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA). Established early on as the private army of the National Socialist party, it would serve to protect the mass meetings and oppose rival political parties. Formed in 1921, largely from members of the *Freikorps* and consisting of veterans, the SA was described as the "fist of the propaganda arm." The SA was a motley bunch of street brawlers, thugs, and hoodlums who would roam the streets terrorizing political opponents and indifferent citizens alike. Many that may have been sympathetic to the plight of the National Socialist were repulsed by such open violence. During the ten days preceding the July 1932 Reichstag elections, while political activity was at a new height, the Prussian Interior Minister recorded 317 "political excesses" on Prussian territory in which 24 people lost their lives.<sup>17</sup> It is possible that these acts of violence and those that followed the election were reasons for the loss of votes for the NSDAP in November 1932. The Gau chief of propaganda in East Prussia stated: "The acts of terror, which were executed systematically in the entire province, have...repelled the population from us."<sup>18</sup> There is also evidence that Nazi violence generated support for the movement in some circles. Ian Kershaw has noted that the violent campaigns against the left in 1933, particularly those against Communists, helped bring popularity to the new regime and its leaders.<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult to study and analyze the propaganda efforts throughout Germany. As already pointed out, the National Socialists were extremely skillful in the development and implementation of campaigns directed against certain segments of the population in select regions of the country. I have selected two campaigns waged by the National Socialists, all in the state of

17 R. Bessel, "Violence as Propaganda", in T. Childers, *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency 1919-1933*, (New Jersey, 1986), p. 133.

18 *Ibid.*, p.137.

19 Kershaw, pp. 48-9.

Bavaria, the first being the economic campaign of 1930-31 and the second the rural campaign of 1930. These two campaigns are excellent examples of how the National Socialists adapted their programs to fit the needs of their audience. As the Weimar government struggled with the economic crisis of 1930, the National Socialist party was attempting to capitalize on it. As fragile as the German economy was, any shift in the world market would cause it to collapse. With the onset of the depression in the United States economic hardships were quickly felt in Germany. The number of unemployed increased at an alarming rate. 1,320,000 in September 1929, 3,000,000 in 1930, 4,350,000 in 1931 and finally 6,000,000 by early 1932. These numbers represented only a fraction of the total unemployed and were only those who registered at the labor exchanges; the numbers were actually dramatically higher.

There is without a doubt a parallel between the rise of unemployment and the rise of popular support for the National Socialists. However, unemployment alone did not cause people to vote for the National Socialists. Traditionally, Bavaria had high rates of unemployment and low percentages supporting National Socialism in the rural areas. During the depression years the principal electoral gains for the National Socialists were made in the rural areas and small towns as opposed to the more depressed urban areas. This can be explained because of the highly successful rural campaign which began in 1928 to increase National Socialist support in rural areas.

Why did the National Socialists manage to appeal to the rural voters more effectively than the less radical parties to the left? The main reason is because the National Socialists were quick to move, with a propaganda organization already in place. The Communists focused their efforts on the urban workers and chose not to compete with the National Socialists for the rural voters.

The second main reason for National Socialist support was that, as the economic depression worsened, the people's contempt for the Weimar government increased. The National Socialist platform was never for a modification of the current democratic system but rather a complete overthrow of that system.

In order to fully understand the appeal of National Socialism to rural Bavarians we must look at the way in which National Socialist propaganda exploited the depression. Geoffrey Pridham outlined five reasons in his 1973

work looking at the rise of the National Socialism in Bavaria in 1923-1933.

1. The need for a strong government to solve the crisis.<sup>20</sup>

As previously mentioned Hitler and the National Socialist never envisioned a compromise with its political enemy, the Weimar Republic. The National Socialists felt that it would take a dictatorial government with strong leadership to restore the greatness that was Germany. The theme of strong leadership was always a focal point of the National Socialists. Attacks on the "weak" or "traitorous" leaders of the Weimar government were never ending.

2. The claim that the government was ignoring the interests of the German people.<sup>21</sup>

This simply assumed that not only were the leaders of the Weimar government weak, but that they deliberately sought to turn away from the people and their plight. The National Socialists told the people that these officials of the "system of the November criminals" were taking advantage of their positions for personal gain and cheating the German people. An example of this approach was Gauleiter Wahl's speech to an audience in January 1930:

For a few years the Reich has followed a false economic policy and has treated the agricultural population abominably. Hilferding (Social Democratic Reich Finance minister), is taking up the post of director of a firm with a yearly income of 60,000 marks and does not shy at pocketing his ministerial pension of 24,000 marks as well, instead of giving it to the Reich for assistance. These are the gentlemen who enslaved the people for a generation through the Treaty of Versailles. Two Bavarian ministers would each have got 50,000 marks of state subsidy for furnishing a flat, but this was not sufficient. One of them claimed and received 53,000 marks, and the other a further 58,000 marks; in contrast, the poor victim of the inflation must beg for his monthly assistance of 25 marks. Just look at the work which these gentlemen do! All they do is to make promise before the elections, so they can safeguard their little post and their little sums.<sup>22</sup>

3. The claim that National Socialism had more in common with German traditions than did Weimar democracy.<sup>23</sup>

The National Socialists used various speakers to attempt to show the people that they had a lineage and heritage to the German past. Prince August Wilhelm, son of the last Kaiser, appeared on several occasions for the National Socialists. Although not a National Socialist, he was sympathetic to the

20 Ibid

21 Ibid., p. 230.

22 Ibid.

23 G. Pridham, p. 221.

nationalist cause for which they stood. To increase propaganda value, the Prince would always be paired to speak with a blue collar worker; the Hohenzollern Prince and the common man was often the theme. The effect that August Wilhelm had was insignificant at best. He was a poor public speaker and had a very thick northern German dialect that people found difficult to understand.

#### 4. The fear of Communism.<sup>24</sup>

The National Socialists always preached that Bolshevism was just around the corner and that if they were not placed into power it was only a matter of time before Germany would be under Marxist rule. With that rule would be the destruction of the middle class as well as the deprivation of individual rights.

#### 5. The promise of salvation.<sup>25</sup>

The only path for Germany to take and save itself was that of National Socialism. This belief would be coupled with wild promises made by the party. Julius Streicher told an audience at Eschenau near Nuremberg that Hitler had received a pledge from leading personalities, in England and Italy, who would bring an end to Germany's tribute payments (under the Young plan) once he came to power. Other claims included that a National Socialist state would free the citizens from all debt acquired during the depression.<sup>26</sup>

The Reichstag election of 1930 was unique in that the Bavarian Peasants and Middle Class League (BPMB) and the Nationalist Party (DNVP) in the rural districts of Southern Bavaria lost a large percentage of popular support. This could be attributed to the disillusionment of the peasants over the failing economic system.

The increase in support for the National Socialist party between the 1930 and 1932 elections can be attributed to the increase in first time voters and the increase in rural support. This support did not come as easily as one might expect. The peasants were less concerned with political theory than they were with immediate relief of their current economic crisis.

On 21 August 1930, Walther Darre, head of the new special department at party headquarters called the Agrarian Political Office, began his system of party agricultural specialists. These agricultural specialists would be located at the Gau and district level and would be subordinate to the political leadership in

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

their respective areas. Their mission was to create a favorable attitude among the agricultural population to National Socialism:

Every specialist must consider himself a herald of National Socialism, to whom the very special and honorable task has been allotted of making the agricultural population conversant with the spirit of National Socialism in his area of political work, to saturate them so much with this spirit that through their voluntary submission to National Socialism they become the most trustworthy nucleus of troops among the followers of Adolf Hitler. For it is the peasant, the farmer, and the agricultural worker who have always determined the decisive hours of history.<sup>27</sup>

The role of the agriculture specialist was a new one for National Socialism, to educate rural people rather than engage in straight political agitation.

Although the agricultural specialist role seemed clear enough, it often was the source of many conflicts. The specialist at the Gau level had no direct control over the specialist at district level. The mission of the specialist also conflicted with the local propaganda officials who felt that they no longer had the freedom to direct their own campaigns. Darre also explained that the urban mentality of leaders affected the specialists:

This difficulty derives from the fact that the party grew up originally in the cities, and correspondingly its speakers were selected from urban points of view.... These speakers either do not feel at home in the field of rural propaganda, or they do not even attempt it because they prefer to fight in the field of action to which they are accustomed, in which they are trained and the techniques of which they have mastered, than to trouble themselves with very critical attitudes of the peasant. Moreover, it is more easy to get thunderous applause at meetings in the cities.<sup>28</sup>

Many long-time propagandists had difficulties adapting to the rural campaign. The peasants demanded a campaign which was more that a condemnation of Weimar and hatred of the Jews. The campaign had to be positive and outline the benefits for the peasants under National Socialism. No longer was the mass meeting with all of its ceremony possible; the individual approach would become the norm. Goebbels's propaganda headquarters issued these instructions in July 1931 in *Wille und Weg*.

The first meeting in a village must be prepared in such a way that it is well-attended. The prerequisite is that the speaker is fairly well-informed about specifically rural questions. Then, it is most advisable to go to a neighboring village some time after but to advertise the meeting in the first village there as well, then many people will certainly come across. After this, one holds a big German Evening in a central hall for a number of villages with the cooperation of the SA

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 225.  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 227.



and the SA band .... The German Evening, provided it is skillfully and grandiosely geared to producing a big public impact, primarily has the task of making the audience enthusiastic for our cause, and secondly to raise the money necessary for the further build-up of propaganda. The preparation of the village meetings should best be carried out in the following way: most effectively through written personal invitations to every farmer or inhabitant. In the bigger villages by a circular, which is carried from farm to farm by party comrades. For the meeting itself, the money question has to be considered. We are such a poor movement that every picnicking counts. Therefore, it is necessary to hold collections during all discussion evenings as well as in the large mass meetings, if permitted by the police - either in the interval or at the end, even when an entrance fee had been taken at the beginning of the meeting. In this way, surprising amounts can sometimes be got out of a meeting, especially when plates and not caps are used, in which trouser buttons and small coins can disappear unseen.<sup>29</sup>

The successes that the National Socialists gained with the rural peasants were not uniform by any means. The young agricultural workers seemed to accept and support the National Socialists, while the older peasants still supported the Landbund. The National Socialists still had a difficult time breaking into the largely Catholic areas, mainly due to a poorly conceived and executed campaign to win the Catholic vote. The innovation and dedication of the Agrarian Political office can not be understated. The National Socialists won the support of the rural population because they were quick to understand the needs of the people and efficient in organizing a campaign to fit those needs.

It is difficult to gauge the true success of the National Socialist propaganda effort from 1923-1933. For at the time there were no exit polls as the voters departed the polling places and record keeping on voting results varied from region to region and town to town. One can now only look at oral histories or broadly interpretive statistics that can be twisted. For me the numbers are simple; one must only look to the election results to see the successes.

Compare the number of popular votes cast to the size of the National Socialist party. It is understandable that members of the NSDAP would support their own party, but why did so many others? The only answer is that they truly believed that the National Socialists had the solutions for the many problems plaguing the Weimar government. The propaganda machine convinced in 1933 44% of all Germans voting that National Socialism was the answer. From 1933-1945, as all governmental systems fell under National Socialist control, the propaganda control was tighter and the techniques became more efficient until it ensured that the German people would support, albeit passively, the dictatorship for another 12 years.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.