Towards a Fourth Reich? The History of National Bolshevism in Germany

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NATIONAL Bolshevism represents a chapter in German-Russian relations since the First World War. As a policy advocating an Eastern orientation for Germany it is a most puzzling and at this day a very acute phenomenon. To those educated to observe the spectrum of political opinions in terms of Right and Left, with the extreme Right at the opposite end from the extreme Left, National Bolshevism seems a paradox. It suggests the meeting of extremes. More concretely the term stands for a rapprochement between German nationalism and Russian Communism. The story of National Bolshevism is the story of two "strange bedfellows."

In the effort to comprehend this upsetting pattern it might be recalled that modern psychology has in many ways succeeded in breaking down our traditional thinking about human relations. Love, for example, has lost its meaning apart from hate, which has become its *alter ego*. We might be tempted to translate this finding into political terms, and National Bolshevism would appear as an example of a political love-hate relationship. It might also be suggested that the further we get from the origins and the more insight we gain into the workings of the two twentieth century extremes — Fascism and Communism — the more we are struck by their affinities.[1] We grant that Fascism is nothing more than "doctrineless dynamism,"[2] whereas Communism goes back to the solid doctrinaire structure of Marxism. And even though European history since 1917 often threatened to lead up to an ultimate conflict between Fascism and Communism, the "transmutation" through which Marxism has gone in modern Russia has brought it ironically close to Fascism. It has become increasingly evident that the fight between the two was a mere sham battle. Both Fascism and present day Communism are really aspects of the totalitarian and irrational temper of our century; both repre-

1 Cf. on this subject Isaiah Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. xxviii (April, 1950), 351 ff.

2 Hermann Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism. Warning to the West* (New York, 1939), 191.

sent fake solutions for man's perennial religious needs. Though general observations such as these will not explain our problem, they might furnish a fitting perspective to our assumption that in the last analysis National Bolshevism is not quite so freakish as it may offhandedly appear to the historian.

In its objective of a German pro-Russian orientation National Bolshevism is connected with an elaborate background of nineteenth century precedents. Not without calculation did Karl Radek, the Communist architect of National Bolshevism, appeal to the spirit of Gneisenau and Scharnhorst, who together with Freiherr vom Stein laid during the Napoleonic period the foundations for a long history of German-Russian cooperation. In offering their services to Alexander I they were, to be sure, motivated by no other desire than to free Prussia, and indeed all of Germany, from the yoke of the oppressor. They were, in other words, realists. In comparison the policy of the Holy Alliance presents an interesting contrast: Alexander and, to a limited extent, his Austrian and Prussian fellow monarchs superimposed an ideological character upon their alignment. They made their covenant in the name of the Holy Trinity, in the name of monarchism and conservatism. In repeating this pattern of German-Russian cooperation, namely in seeking an ideological bond between the countries, our Unholy Alliance, that is National Bolshevism, ironically resembled the Holy Alliance. Bismarck's alignments with Russia were, of course, *Realpolitik* pure and simple; and it was predominantly this approach *sans phrase* to politics which shaped German policy towards Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century. The period after Bismarck's dismissal marked a low in German-Russian relations, and eventually led to Germany and Russia's facing each other in the First World War.

The last word on German-Russian relations during the Weimar Republic cannot be said until the German archives can be fully exploited, and the Russian documents are made available to researchers. So far the Russian policy of the Republic has been the subject of much conjecture. We know about the Commercial Treaty of 1921, about Rapallo (1922) and Berlin (1926). We do not know all about the military cooperation between the two countries, nor do we know to what extent it was condoned by the German Foreign Office, namely by Rathenau and Stresemann. The assumption that at least Stresemann was deeply involved also in the military aspects of the

negotiations has already been verified.[3] What the various engineers of a German Eastern orientation had obviously in common was the Bismarckian tradition. It had motivated Ludendorff in his strangest and shrewdest of all manoeuvers, the famous "sealed train" episode. It also motivated General von Seeckt, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, the Ambassador to Moscow, and Baron von Maltzan, the head of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office. Seeckt, who was the most extreme advocate of a pro-Russian policy, was perfectly confident that Germany could well endure such a course without danger to its domestic setup; "Germany will not be bolshevized, not even by an understanding with Russia in foreign affairs."[4]

Seeckt was right in this one respect: the Russian alignment neither preconditioned nor brought about a Soviet Germany. Though after the unsuccessful Communist uprising of 1923 the Third International had to acknowledge defeat in Germany, German-Russian relations continued on the economic, political and military levels. But in another respect Seeckt's very sober statement was not quite correct. German-Russian relations did not altogether remain so dispassionately schizophrenic. The Eastern policy bred National Bolshevism, a new political philosophy. As we have seen, National Bolshevism was, like the Holy Alliance, an ideological reflection of a German-Russian alignment; it was once more foreign policy *avec phrase*.

National Bolsheviks always like to refer back to Brockdorff-Rantzau, the German Foreign Minister of 1919, as their intellectual father. There is much misrepresentation and wishful thinking connected with this claim. Brockdorff-Rantzau was not an intellectual, ideologist, or the like. He was a public servant and statesman of the old school. Though a diplomatic combination of Germany and Russia seemed to him a matter of course, he considered the ideological lineup "a danger." But Brockdorff-Rantzau did warn in 1919 that the policy of the Western powers in Versailles might give rise in Germany to an ideology which would combine nationalism with socialism or Communism. Unlike Seeckt he foresaw the danger of National Bolshevism.[5] To his keen sense a German anti-Versailles movement and Russian anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism were

3 "The Boston Meeting, 1949," *The American Historical Review*, LV (1950), 738.

4 Memorandum of 9 September 1922 to Chancellor Wirth, *Seeckt. Aus seinem Leben, 1918-1936* (General Dr. Friedrich von Rabenau, ed., Leipzig, 1940), 317.

5 Cf. Graf Brockdorff-Rantzau, *Dokumente* (Charlottenburg, 1920), 146 ff.

closely akin. Although one thought in terms of nations and the other in terms of classes, both were *have-not* movements. For both the West was bound to appear as the common oppressor, the common enemy; both also were bound to discover their mutual affinity in terms of anti-Westernism and anti-cosmopolitanism.

National Bolshevism was, in part, a new psychology, a resentment towards the West and an intense love-hate relationship towards the East. Although rationally any such attitude would have seemed out of the question so soon after Brest Litovsk, and indeed ever since Russia had turned Bolshevik, it was this new psychology, as sketched by Brockdorff-Rantzau, which was the key to the paradox. Whereas resentment against the West in the first years after Versailles was more or less widespread among Germans of all classes and denominations, concern with the East became the unique feature of National Bolshevism and distinguished it from the other brands of German nationalism. In a way, the attitude of National Bolshevism in the post-Versailles world was much more consistent than, for example, the policy of the old-type nationalists of the German National People's Party (D.N.V.P.). The latter did not share that sweeping equation: anti-West equals anti-capitalism equals pro-East equals pro-Bolshevism. National Bolshevism approximated it. In this, National Bolshevism is a typical twentieth century movement. It seeks an emotional outlet through simplification of issues at the expense of sound reasoning. Indeed the National Bolshevik fascination for the East is pure irrationalism.

The metamorphosis of the psychology of National Bolshevism is particularly evident among the Freikorps troops in the Baltic in 1919. Whereas on all other fronts the German armies had been withdrawn and disarmed, the German troops in the Baltic were, according to the initial armistice terms, kept in position in order to stem the new Bolshevik danger. With the November Revolution of 1917 in Russia, of course, the whole picture of the war had changed, and the Western powers had to concern themselves increasingly with the problem of combatting Bolshevism. Surely in the mind of a man like Marshal Foch the World War assumed more and more the character of a war between the Whites and the Reds. And for the purpose of fighting the Reds even the former enemy was good enough. It was only on June 8 that the Supreme Council of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, meeting in Paris, decided to expedite

the evacuation of the German troops.[6] But not until some time in December 1919 did the German troops actually leave the Baltic.

The story of the German Baltic troops under General von der Goltz is one of the most colorful chapters of Freikorps history. The Baltic Freikorps defy definition. To label them as violently anti-Bolshevik would constitute a gross oversimplification. Their units fought neither for the Western powers nor for the German government whose authority they did not recognize. They were soldiers of fortune, they were no man's soldiers. Their Russian adventure was the escapism of a young generation of desperados who could not face the facts of Weimar and Versailles. Russia was their escape. In fact, they hoped to acquire Russian citizenship and rights to settle on Russian soil. As long as they fought the Reds, they did, whether they wanted to or not, serve the Western powers. But by doing so, were they not really, as Karl Radek suggested later at a crucial moment, "hirelings of the Entente against the Russian people"? Were they not all "wanderers into the void" [7] like the often singled out Albert Leo Schlageter, who fought with the Freikorps Medem and became a martyr of German nationalism during the Ruhr struggle? The position of the Freikorps was most ambiguous. Some of their leading spokesmen, like Ernst von Salomon, Ernst Jünger and others, finally admitted openly that the Freikorps had been exploited, that they had fought "on the wrong front." [8] The Freikorps then were neither Whites nor Reds; they were, as one of the popular interpreters of their fate, the novelist Edwin Erich Dwinger, suggested, "between White and Red." [9] They were political irresponsibles. In fact, the reasons which made them fight on the side of the Whites — adventuring and freeing Germany from the yoke of Versailles — could have been satisfied equally well or equally little by teaming up with the Reds.

The British Brigadier General A. J. Turner, reporting from Tilsit

6 *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (First series, vol. III, 1919, E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, eds., London, 1949), 19; cf. *ibid.*, 1.

8 Ernst Jünger, "Die Geburt des Nationalismus aus dem Kriege," *Deutsches Volkstum*, XXXI (1929), 578; cf. also Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, *Die Nation greift an. Geschichte und Kritik des soldatischen Nationalismus* (Berlin, 1933), 113 and Ernst von Salomon, *Nahe Geschichte. Ein Überblick* (Berlin, 1936), 24.

7 Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Recht der jungen Völker* (Hans Schwarz, ed., Berlin, 1932), 75-79.

9 Cf. Edwin Erich Dwinger, *Zwischen Weiss und Rot. Die Russische Tragödie* (Jena, 1930).

to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff was not mistaken when he described the "ostensible aim" of the German Baltic adventure — that of fighting Bolshevism — as "merely a red herring across the trail." [10] There are other persistent indications in the recently edited Documents on British Foreign Policy that the Germans in the Baltic fought on both sides[11] with the objectives of "the establishment of an autocratic régime both in Germany and Russia and a war of revenge with the Allies." [12] This strange mixture of feelings and attitudes in the Baltic was the seeding ground for National Bolshevism. Bolshevik Russia, which in the course of the civil war became more and more a political reality, began to attract the imagination of the young Freikorps fighter. Ernst von Salomon, while engaged in fighting the Bolsheviks in Riga, thus became fascinated by the "tremendous new force in the making" in the East. "Beyond the border," he admitted, "arises an amorphous but growing power, standing in our way, which we half admire and half hate." [13] Bolshevik Russia gradually emerged as a potential ally in the war against "the three times spit out phrases of the French Revolution." [14]

The same self-contradictory pattern of thought in relation to Russia can also be found in Germany proper in the early twenties among the younger generation of the German nationalistic intelligentsia. Most of its men were discharged officers or soldiers, many had been with the Freikorps. They gathered in various improvised organizations — like the Anti-Bolshevik Movement or the homeguard outfit Orgesch — and in innumerable clubs. They were as yet a political force outside the political party system and appeared to have little ambition to integrate themselves into the political life of the young Republic. They were on the whole opposed to Weimar and Versailles without, however, displaying any loyalty to the defunct monarchy. This generation of nationalists was thoroughly revolutionary. It was groping for new ideas and new solutions, it was con-

10 Report by General Turner (Tilsit), Tilsit, December 9, 1919, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, 249.

11 Cf. *ibid.*, 78, 164 and 228.

12 MM. Ulmnis and Meierovicz to Mr. Lloyd George, Riga, September 21, 1919, *ibid.*, 116.

13 Ernst von Salomon, *Die Geächteten* (Berlin, 1930), 66, quoted in Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism. A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), 284.

14 Jünger, "Die Geburt des Nationalismus aus dem Kriege," *Deutsches Volkstum*, XXXI (1929), 580.

servative and revolutionary, nationalistic and socialistic; it was also anti-Bolshevik and pro-Bolshevik at once. The Anti-Bolshevik Movement, a mass organization covering the whole of Northern Germany, reflects this pattern very clearly. It was founded and headed by Eduard Stadtler, one of the most active nationalistic publicists after the war.[15] Though Stadtler set out to fight Bolshevism, he could not help being impressed by the "new phenomenon" in Russia.[16] He advocated a "German Bolshevism" or "German socialism" "to safeguard for the twentieth century the anti-nineteenth century tendency of Bolshevism."[17] Not even the fact that the movement was able to obtain from German heavy industry enormous sums — 500 million marks according to Stadtler — deterred its leadership from its strange course.

In this connection a survey made in 1920 by the Association of German Scholars and Artists of its members' attitude towards Bolshevism is significant. This organization goes back to the early war years and among its members counted people of all political camps from the Right to the Majority Social Democracy. The poll showed the same strange indecision about Russia. Though no one consulted would have called himself a "Communist," many recognized the religious content of Bolshevism and saw in its socialistic message the wave of the future.[18]

It was this psychology which Karl Radek exploited when he developed his schemes for an active National Bolshevik movement in Germany. Radek was one of the main wirepullers of the Comintern. He had been together with Lenin on that crucial trip in the "sealed train" through Germany in April, 1917; he had been a member of the Russian delegation in the Brest-Litovsk negotiations. He was thoroughly familiar with Central European affairs. A co-founder in December, 1918 of the Spartacus League, he was soon after arrested by the German police and was confined until January, 1920 to the Moabit prison. This jail became, due to Radek's status as a priv-

15 Stadtler was an Alsatian by birth and originally a member of the Center Party; he saw frontline duty on Germany's Eastern front until taken prisoner by the Russians in 1917. After Brest Litovsk he stayed in Russia in charge of the Press Bureau of the German Embassy in Moscow.

16 Eduard Stadtler, *Als Antibolschewist 1918-1919* (Düsseldorf, 1935), 19.

17 Heinrich von Gleichen and Anneliese Schmidt, *Der Bolschewismus und die deutschen Intellektuellen. Äusserungen auf eine Umfrage des Bundes deutscher Gelehrter und Künstler* (Leipzig, 1920), 75 f.

18 Cf. Gleichen and Schmidt, *op. cit.*

ileged prisoner, the headquarters of National Bolshevism. Radek could freely receive visitors. He seemed to be connected somehow with all the different efforts at a German-Russian understanding. While imprisoned he saw representatives of the Reichswehr, Felix Deutsch, a close business associate of Walther Rathenau, and Professor Otto Hoetzsch,[19] a member of the D.N.V.P. and a persistent advocate of an Eastern orientation up to his death in 1946. Radek, we are also told, was on best of terms with Brockdorff-Rantzau and with Rathenau himself.[20] Through these relations Radek surely was in an ideal position to follow up his National Bolshevik schemes.

Two things should be stressed here. National Bolshevism acquired a political reality of some sort only on Communist initiative. As a political movement, however ill-defined, it was the work of Karl Radek. On the other hand National Bolshevism never became an official policy of the Comintern. Though it was backed by Bukharin and by the Soviet economist Eugen Varga,[21] it was consistently rejected by Lenin who blasted its "crying absurdities."[22] Lenin maintained that the signing of the Treaty of Versailles and the ensuing disorder would be much to the advantage of the revolution and that the Germans should accept Versailles the way the Bolsheviks had accepted Brest-Litovsk. But Radek who had disagreed with Lenin on Brest-Litovsk also disagreed on Versailles. His National Bolshevism was always a deviation from Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. Marxism was by definition incompatible with nationalism. The support of National Bolshevism was then as adventurous and paradoxical for the Marxist as this policy was for the German nationalist. And yet, even though deviationist, there runs through the history of the German Communist Party (K.P.D.) a persistent trend of National Bolshevism. Three times during the life span of the Weimar Republic was National Bolshevism launched in Germany — in 1919, 1923 and again in 1930; the last two attempts for certain were backed by the K.P.D. It is clear, therefore, that this "crying absurdity," even though it was not considered to fit into the plan of Leninist strategy, played a definite role at least in the framework of Communist tactics. It was a "grandiose diversion."[23] Indeed one feels that, as nothing

19 Fischer, *Stalin*, 207.
20 *Ibid.*, 192.
21 Fischer, *Stalin*, 196 ff.
22 Nicolai Lenin, *"Left" Communism. An Infantile Disorder* (no loc., 1920?), 56.
23 Fischer, *Stalin*, 96.

is more absurd and also more secretive than Communist tactics, Lenin's description of National Bolshevism was quite appropriate.

The 1919 phase of National Bolshevism was initiated by the leaders of the Communist Party in Hamburg, Dr. Heinrich Lauffenberg and Fritz Wolffheim. In October 1919 they made a pilgrimage to Moabit prison in order to win Radek's backing for a policy which was to concentrate on the liberation of Germany from the Treaty of Versailles. The two Hamburg Communists failed in their efforts and were expelled from the Party. And yet they were not deterred from continuing their project. They founded a party of their own, the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (K.A.P.D.), and various affiliated organizations, none of which was long lived.

In southern Germany also National Bolshevism flared up. The threat of the Red General Budenny to consolidate his advance through Poland into a "front from the Rhine to Vladivostok" was echoed in Munich by the Bavarian Soviet Republic with a demand for a "red front on the Rhine." This slogan was devised by Ernst Niekisch, then a Social Democrat and a minister of the shortlived Soviet Republic.[24] But the retreat of Budenny put an end to this dream.

No doubt the first phase of National Bolshevism was uneventful; it surely was passed over by the main currents of German history. It was marked by mutual suspicion on the part of the two protagonists, the Communists and the nationalists. Even Karl Radek found it expedient to come out with a warning against the Hamburg National Bolsheviks whose ventures he branded as opportunism endangering the future of Communism itself.[25] This move of Radek's was undoubtedly a concession to the Leninist point of view. On the nationalistic side the response was not much different. Count Ernst Reventlow, who showed most active interest in National Bolshevism, exposed in his newly-founded periodical *Der Reichswart* the "delusion of the so-called National Bolsheviks that Communism could turn towards nationalism."[26] Had the experiment been tried, he argued one year later, it would have become obvious that "Bolshevism would have swallowed the national element whole."[27]

24 Cf. Erich Müller, "Zur Geschichte des Nationalbolschewismus," *Deutsches Volkstum*, XXXIV (1932), 785.

25 Cf. Karl Radek, *Die auswärtige Politik des deutschen Kommunismus und der Hamburger nationale Bolschewismus* (Vienna, 1919?), 8.

26 "Nationalbolschewismus," *Der Reichswart*, I (1920), no. 6, 8.

27 "Wir und Russland," *Der Reichswart*, II (1921), no. 44, 4.

On the other hand even these first feelers were not without consequences. While Radek refuted Wolffheim and Lauffenberg he took the occasion to define the terms on which National Bolshevism was workable; he accepted it as a possible means to pierce the admitted isolation of Soviet Russia by capitalistic powers.[28] In effect Radek's ambiguity about National Bolshevism salvaged the efforts of Wolffheim and Lauffenberg and gave weight to the connections established between the extremists of the Left and the Right. In the north the most notable nationalists interested were — besides Reventlow — Schlageter and the brothers Gerhard and Albert Erich Günther.[29] Throughout 1920 Reventlow kept on negotiating with the Communists, including Karl Radek and Victor Kopp.[30] In spite of his reservations about the implications of National Bolshevism, it became for him an inspiring policy, a possible way of activating the post-Versailles German nationalism.

In the South the emergence of Niekisch marked the starting point of an unsteady and strange political career, not uncommon in the Weimar Republic. It was the career of an outsider, an extremist at all cost, to whom National Bolshevism became the one and only point of orientation. Niekisch also had negotiations with Radek; it is even recorded that he was sent by Seeckt on a mission to Moscow.[31] Throughout his life, as a Social Democrat and after leaving the Party in the middle twenties, he advocated a militant anti-Western variety of socialism. His violent opposition to the Fulfilment Policy of the Republic induced him to sponsor various minor political movements, until in the late twenties he created his influential National Bolshevik Resistance Movement (*Widerstandsbewegung*). He chose for it the nightmarish slogan "Sparta-Potsdam-Moscow" and an emblem consisting of a Prussian eagle, a sword, a hammer and a sickle. Niekisch's uncompromising and, one must admit, upright opposition to Hitler's National Socialism cost him in 1937 a lifelong prison term from which he was liberated in the spring of 1945 by Allied troops. Meanwhile Niekisch's political Odyssey has made him a

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28 Cf. Radek, *Die auswärtige Politik*, 8.

29 Cf. Graf Ernst Reventlow, "'Ein Stück Wegs?'," *Die Tat*, XXIII (1931-1932), 989 and Erich Müller, *Nationalbolschewismus* (Hamburg, 1933), 11 f.

30 Cf. Reventlow, "'Ein Stück Wegs?'," *Die Tat*, XXIII (1931-1932), 990 and Fischer, *Stalin*, 197.

31 Fabian von Schlabrendorff, *Offiziere gegen Hitler* (Zurich, 1946), 15.

member of the Communist-controlled Socialist Unity Party (S.E.D.) and a professor at the Communist University of Berlin.

If the immediate impact of Versailles produced such extremist political speculations among only a few nationalists, the following years were to carry the issue of National Bolshevism to a broader circle of intellectuals. The conclusion of the Rapallo Treaty obviously encouraged this trend; it represented after all the first real achievement of German foreign policy. And on the whole the new Republic continued to be identified with Versailles and also with the failure of the then popular socialization program. As Ernst Troeltsch commented, the struggle of the government to reestablish law and order was viewed unsympathetically by an "alliance between the Independents, Bolshevists, men of letters [*Literaten*], ideologists and Conservatives." [32] The resurgent wave of National Bolshevism appealed to these people. This time, however, it was a well-schemed Russian importation. There was the theory of Varga, elaborated in the early twenties, that Germany was being transformed into an "industrial colony" by British and French imperialism.[33] This theory became the basis for an elaborate campaign on the part of Radek, Bukharin and others who appealed to the German workers and also to the middle class — here the "grandiose diversion" comes in — to offer national resistance to this exploitation by the West. Radek, who had been released from prison in January, 1920, divided most of his time in the following years between Moscow and Berlin.

The Ruhr invasion of 1923 finally presented the welcome occasion for the Soviet agitators to launch their offensive. In June, 1923, at the meeting of the Enlarged Executive Committee of the Comintern, Radek delivered his now famous "Schlageter-oration" [34] in which he sought to exploit for Communism the martyrdom of Schlageter. Did Schlageter, facing the French firing squad, die as a stooge of German capitalism? Did he die in vain? Was he a "wanderer into the void"? Schlageter's prior Freikorps affiliations were subjected to a similar scrutiny. Appealing to the "nationalistic lower bourgeois masses" and to the "patriotic circles" in Germany, Radek called for

32 Ernst Troeltsch, *Spektator-Briefe. Aufsätze über die deutsche Revolution und die Weltpolitik, 1918-1922* (Hans Baron, ed., Tübingen, 1924), 50.

33 Cf. Fischer, *Stalin*, 196 ff.

34 "'Leo Schlageter, der Wanderer ins Nichts,' Eine Rede Karl Radeks," Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Recht der jungen Völker. Sammlung politischer Aufsätze* (Hans Schwartz, ed., Berlin, 1932), 75-79.

a common "front against the capital of the Entente and of Germany."[35] The so-called "Schlageter policy" of the K.P.D. produced mass meetings attended by Fascists as well as by Communists, political broadsides carrying both the swastika and the Soviet star. Even Ruth Fischer took it ungracefully upon herself to incite the students of the University of Berlin against both "Jew-capitalism" and "French imperialism." [36]

The response in the nationalistic camp to the Communist campaign was spectacular, sympathetic, but in the last analysis negative. A direct answer to Radek by Count Reventlow appeared, to everyone's surprise, not only in *Der Reichswart* but also in the columns of the Communist mouthpiece *Rote Fahne*.[37] Reventlow on the whole reiterated his earlier stand on the question, as he thought the middle classes not yet ready for the experiment. To the offer of the Communists to go together "part of the way" (*ein Stück Wegs*) Reventlow answered in the negative.

Moeller van der Bruck also took up the argument of National Bolshevism.[38] It was Moeller to whom Troeltsch referred as "the best counter-revolutionary writer of Germany" [39] who had conferences with Radek. He was a prolific publicist. In the June Club (*Juniklub*),[40] which was one of the very active and important political clubs in Berlin of the post-war years, his views were accepted as oracles. Moeller, like Stadtler,[41] Reventlow and Niekisch, did not really have a good mind; an analysis of his thought reveals him as little more than a muddlehead. But no doubt his intuitions are impressive and his style is electrifying. Early in 1923 he published his main book, *Das dritte Reich* (*The Third Reich*), which made him and his work widely discussed in Germany. Russia he recognized as

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35 *Ibid.*, 77 f.

36 Ossip K. Flechtheim, *Die Kommunistiche Partei Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik* (Offenbach a.M., 1948), 89; Ruth Fischer's attempts in her own work (Fischer, *Stalin*, 283) to explain away this episode are unsubstantiated and unconvincing.

37 Reventlow later explained that he chose to publish his own point of view in the *Rote Fahne* because the edition of his own weekly was not large enough; Reventlow, " 'Ein Stück Wegs?'," *Die Tat*, XXIII (1931-1932), 989 ff.

38 His three answers to Karl Radek ("Der Wanderer ins Nichts," *Gewissen*, 2 July 1923; "Der dritte Standpunkt," *Gewissen*, 16 July, 1923; "Wirklichkeit," *Gewissen*, 30 July 1923) are reprinted in Moeller, *Das Recht der jungen Völker* (1932), 81 ff.

39 Troeltsch, *Spektator-Briefe*, 269.

40 The predecessor of the famous Gentlemen's Club (*Herrenklub*).

41 He also was active in the June Club.

a pivot of an active German foreign policy, and even in "the labyrinth of Marxian theories and bolshevist dogmas" he would seek for "affinities with German ideas."[42] In a previous work Moeller had discussed Germany and Russia in terms of "young peoples" as against the "old peoples" of the West.[43] Moeller van den Bruck was one of Germany's most enthusiastic Easterners. And though his answer to Radek, like Reventlow's, amounted to a rebuff, the mere fact is significant that Moeller and Reventlow discussed publicly with Radek the National Bolshevik issue. Still, it is striking that, while Seeckt presumably was able to implement his Eastern policy in secret negotiations with Radek held in General von Schleicher's home,[44] the public disputations among the intellectuals were inconclusive.

By 1930 the attitude of the German Rightist extremists towards National Bolshevism had fundamentally changed. The final emergence of the National Socialists tends to obscure the fact that in those last crucial years before 1933 National Bolshevism had become a real domestic issue. The social developments accounting for the rise of National Socialism also favored the spread of National Bolshevism. Indeed, for many German nationalists even National Socialism came to mean a compromise solution, particularly for those who had suffered under the inflation. The inflation had brought the social problem to the doorsteps of the middle classes, and National Bolshevism with its rigorous anti-capitalism became very meaningful to the new proletarians. Also since Stalinist Russia had embarked upon its "Socialism in one Country" course, Moeller's original assumption that "each people has its own socialism" and that socialist Germany and socialist Russia could live peacefully side by side came closer to realization. One speculated that now Russia was on the verge of becoming a "national socialistic Russia"[45] and that Bolshevism had been purged of its international aspects;[46] given these premises even the ultra-Leftist pacifistic *Weltbühne* would admit the importance of National Bolshevism.[47]

42 Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (3rd ed., Hamburg, 1931), 26; cf. also *ibid.*, 162.

43 Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Recht der jungen Völker* (Munich, 1919).

44 Cf. *Seeckt. Aus seinem Leben, 1918-1936*, 309, 319.

45 Hans Schwarz, "Von deutscher Revolution," *Der Nahe Osten*, VI (1933), 246.

46 Cf. Dr. Adolf Ehrt, *Totale Krise—totale Revolution? Die "Schwarze Front" des völkischen Nationalismus* (Berlin, 1933), 41.

47 Cf. Kurt Hiller, "Linke Leute von Rechts," *Weltbühne*, XXVIII, 2 (1932), 154.

The K.P.D. exploited the situation in its "Program for the National and Social Liberation of the German People" of August, 1930. This new platform for the September elections, drawn up by Heinz Neumann, was introduced by a sharp attack on the Versailles "Peace Treaty," [48] the reparations settlement and the Young Plan. In the spring of 1931 this document was followed by a Communist program appealing to the German peasants (*Bauernhilfsprogramm*).

The Schlageters of 1930 were no more "wanderers into the void." A number of the leading representatives of the Freikorps mystique now declared themselves prepared for a deal with Communism. Above all Ernst Jünger, the popular interpreter of the so-called "war experience" and the erudite censor of the bourgeois age and prophet of a new "heroic nihilism," expressed his admiration of Stalin's Russia. In it he found the very spirit of "total mobilization" which he advocated in his spectacular book *Der Arbeiter* (*The Worker*).[49] "Russia," he conceded, "indeed belongs to the great destinations [*Reiseziele*] of our times." [50] Jünger was undoubtedly one of the most influential nationalistic writers in the nineteen thirties. Likewise, organizations dedicated to Freikorps traditions — such as the *Wehrwolf* and *Oberland* [51] advocated National Bolshevism.

The *cause célèbre,* however, of National Bolshevism during the early thirties was the one involving Wilhelm Scheringer, a young Reichswehr lieutenant who with two other junior officers in his regiment was arrested in February, 1930, on charges of spreading Nazi ideology in the army. The trial which began late in September gained so much importance and publicity because it was on this occasion that Hitler appeared as a defense witness and swore his famous legality oath. But Scheringer, once tried and imprisoned, forsook the N.S.D.A.P. and joined the K.P.D.[52] Scheringer's "conversion," as spectacular an event as the trial had been, was not

48 Quotation marks original; cf. Flechtheim, *Die K. P. D.*, 281 ff.

49 Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Hamburg, 1932).

50 Ernst Jünger, "Ein neuer Bericht aus dem Lande der Planwirtschaft," *Widerstand,* VIII (1933), 280.

51 The founder of the original Freikorps *Oberland* Joseph Römer (called Beppo Römer), a colorful World War I captain, joined the Communists, was repeatedly imprisoned after the Nazi seizure of power and finally executed in September 1944 on the charge of having plotted the assassination of Hitler.

52 For a formulation of Scheringer's views see the article written by him while in captivity: Lt. Scheringer, "Revolutionäre Wehrpolitik," *Die Sozialistische Nation,* I (1931), 69-72.

unique.[53] After all, the Chief of the Army Command, General von Hammerstein-Equord, found it necessary to repudiate officially National Bolshevism while admitting that it had at one time made serious inroads into the army.[54] And the prominent leftist publicist, Leopold Schwarzschild, wrote somewhat hysterically that "in all probability up to 90 per cent of the German youth consists of Scheringers of the Right and the Left." [55] They had to be taken seriously at least; they were a vital expression of the German crisis and they might conceivably have become those "forces of the future," as a French journal dedicated to German affairs described them.[56]

However important National Bolshevism was as an integral part of the political thinking of a great many young Germans, it never became a well defined political movement; thus it lost out against National Socialism. In the last analysis it was its inherent paradox which was never fully overcome. National Bolshevism could never quite become real; there always remained something infantile about it. And even its sternest advocates would shrink away from its full implications. Besides, National Bolshevism, like so many revolutionary efforts before 1933, dissipated itself in much petty sectarianism. There were the many groups of the sizable post-war Youth Movement to whom the Eastern orientation and also the acceptance of Communism always had been an attraction.[57] There were fraternal organizations, the so-called *Bünde,* such as the *Oberland.* Closely connected with the latter was Niekisch's radical and activist Resistance Movement which edited a number of rather influential periodicals.[58] Whereas all these groups implicitly or explicitly competed for the succession of Moeller van den Bruck, the strongest claim in this direction was maintained by the circle around the magazine *Der Nahe Osten,* headed by Hans Schwarz who was the editor of Moel-

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53 Lt. Wendt, one of Scheringer's co-defendants, left the Nazi Party for Otto Strasser's Black Front. Among the deserters of the N.S.D.A.P. for the K.P.D. we find Ernst von Salomon's brother Bruno who became prominent in the Communist peasants movement.

54 *Berliner Tageblatt,* August 30, 1930, referred to in Ernst Fraenkel, "German-Russian relations since 1918," THE REVIEW OF POLITICS, II (1940), 45.

55 Leopold Schwarzschild, "Jugend in Chaos," *Montag Morgen,* August 30, 1930, reprinted in *Die Sozialistische Nation,* I (1931) 9/10, 2-4.

56 Lipiansky, "Pour un Communism National," *Revue d'Allemagne,* VI (1932), 849.

57 Cf. in particular Alfred Ehrentreich, "Bündische Jugend gegen den westlichen Imperialismus," *Die Tat,* XXI (1929-1930), 382-386.

58 *Widerstand; Entscheidung; Das dritte Reich.*

ler's work. Other periodicals assumed around 1930 a definite National Bolshevist trend. The *Deutsches Volkstum,* published by a leading nationalistic publishing house,[59] took on as its co-editor Albert Erich Günther who had been in earlier years connected with Wolffheim and Lauffenberg. Most striking, however, was the role played by the *Tat* magazine which under the editorship of Hans Zehrer (1931-1933) became the most intelligent forum advocating National Bolshevism. "Politically oriented towards the Right, economically towards the Left," [60] the so-called *Tat*-Circle represented a group of intellectuals whose political influence can hardly be exaggerated.[61]

To test the extent to which all these groups came to represent a very distinct pattern of extremism we might examine the character of their relationship to the Nazi movement. Following the obvious ascendancy of the N.S.D.A.P. after 1930, they might have blended, as most other Rightist groups eventually did, into the general movement towards the "national revolution." However, they chose to maintain their identity. They recalled that their saint and hero Moeller van den Bruck, in his memorable one and only meeting with Adolf Hitler in the June Club early in 1922, had rejected an understanding as hopeless; [62] they consistently protested the use of Moeller van den Bruck — of his Third Reich slogan above all — for Nazi purposes. They found their semi-Marxist anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism irreconcilable with Hitler's half-hearted interpretation of the socialistic paragraphs of the official program of the N.S.D.A.P.[63] and with his half-hearted Russian policy.[64] Rather than give way,

59 Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt.

60 Hans Zehrer, "Der Fall Lambach," *Die Tat,* XX (1928-1929), 464.

61 Between 1929 and 1933 the subscriptions of the magazine had gone up from 1,000 to 20,000. The immediate political contacts of Zehrer with certain Reichswehr generals are generally mentioned in the meager literature about *Die Tat;* but in particular the role of *Die Tat* as a mouthpiece for General von Schleicher still awaits further elucidation.

62 For the accounts of the meeting cf. Max Hildebert Boehm, "Moeller van den Bruck im Kreise seiner politischen Freunde," *Deutsches Volkstum,* XXXIV (1932), 696; Paul Fechter, *Moeller van den Bruck. Ein politisches Schicksal* (Berlin, 1934), 78; Paul Fechter, "Das Leben Moellers van der Bruck," *Deutsche Rundschau,* vol. CCXXXIX (1934), 20; Rudolf Pechel, *Deutscher Widerstand* (Zurich, 1947), 279.

63 Cf. Konrad Heiden, *Der Führer. Hitler's Rise to Power* (New York, Boston, 1941), 93 f.

64 In a letter to Mussolini written on the eve of the German invasion of Russia, Hitler stated frankly that the partnership with the Soviet Union had all along been "very irksome" to him; and that breaking it meant relieving him of "mental agonies"; Letter from Hitler to Mussolini dated 21 June 1941. *Nazi-Soviet Relations 1939-1941* (Raymond James Sontag and James Stuart Beddie, eds., New York, 1948), 349 ff.

the National Bolsheviks threatened to make inroads into the N.S.D.A.P. itself. Ever since 1925 the Party was split into two factions, the Northern and the Southern one. The Northern group under the brothers Strasser and first also under Goebbels had strong National Bolshevik leanings.[65] But in 1926 Goebbels betrayed his friends by submitting to Hitler and was rewarded with the appointment as *Gauleiter* of Berlin. Hitler played his game of "divide and rule" well. One wonders whether four years later, at the height of the National Bolshevik wave, Hitler still would have been able to discipline and reorganize the leadership of his party without an open split.

But when in 1930 Otto Strasser was expelled from the N.S.D.A.P., the Party was strictly centralized and Munich-dominated. Not even Gregor Strasser dared follow his brother into opposition. At this point Otto Strasser founded his organization, the Black Front (*Schwarze Front*) which dedicated itself to the task of infiltrating the Party[66] and of integrating the numerous National Bolshevik groups under its leadership.[67] With Strasser the main effort of National Bolshevism became increasingly directed against the Nazi Party. After January, 1933 the term of the "second phase" of the revolution came up. Hitler, so Strasser argued, was a Girondist, whereas the Black Front equalled the radicalism of the Jacobins.[68] As the Old Bolsheviks in Soviet Russia considered themselves the real Bolsheviks, the National Bolsheviks in Germany considered themselves the true National Socialists. Their fate was an ironically parallel one: most of them were vilified, purged, persecuted and driven into exile. Toward the end of 1933 Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler's Baltic-reared Russia-hater, for the first time attacked the sacrosanct character of Moeller van den Bruck's reputation;[69] other writers

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65 Heiden, *Den Führer,* 284 ff.

66 Cf. Strasser's attempts to exploit for his purposes the Stennes secession of 1931 from the Party; Otto Strasser and Michael Stern, *Flight from Terror* (New York, 1943), 165 ff; Captain Stennes actually joined the Strasser movement temporarily in the name of the revolution of the "workers, peasants and soldiers."

67 Cf. Ehrt, *Totale Krise,* and Richard Schapke, *Die Schwarze Front* (Leipzig, 1932).

68 Cf. the various issues of *Die deutsche Revolution,* X (1934).

69 Alfred Rosenberg, "Gegen Tarnung," *Völkischer Beobachter,* December 8, 1933, reprinted in Alfred Rosenberg, *Gestaltung der Idee* (7th ed., Munich, 1938), 16 ff.

followed Rosenberg's example.[70] Also the official Hitler Youth organ *Wille und Macht* took issue with the Moeller cult and uncovered the connection between Moeller and the N.S.D.A.P. as an "artificial manipulation" of Conservatives and National Bolsheviks.[71] More drastically, Hitler's purge of June 30, 1934 was in part staged to strike out against National Bolshevism; the prize victim was Gregor Strasser. But the liquidation of National Bolshevism could not have been complete without an appropriate move by Soviet Russia; National Bolshevism was after all a courtship with Russia. And history had its logic. The other half, Russia, also struck when in the 1937 Moscow show trial, Radek was sentenced in acknowledgment of, we presume, the failure of his mission.

In 1934 one might have overlooked Otto Strasser's prophecy from exile that "the dead Moeller van den Bruck will win out against the living Adolf Hitler."[72] But now we are getting alarmed over the meaning of this very prophecy, at least as far as Moeller's National Bolshevism is concerned. Is it true, we ask, that National Bolshevism of the inter-war period has been "a testing ground for new political alignments in post-Hitler Europe"? [73] And if Hitler's Third Reich is dead — are we now heading for a "Fourth Reich" in Germany?

There is ample evidence pointing towards a revival of National Bolshevism in today's Germany, and the pattern is a very familiar one. It takes us back to 1943, to the foundation in Moscow of the Free German Committee and the Association of German Officers under the German Communist Erich Weinert and General Walther von Seydlitz respectively. They were, like Radek, expendables in the eyes of the Russians, but towards the Germans they appeared as new Freiherr vom Steins, new Gneisenaus, new Scheringers. In wartime Germany itself leading men within the opposition movement against Hitler reflected strongly National Bolshevist tendencies. Stauffen-

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70 Wilhelm Seddin, *Preussentum gegen Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1935) and Helmut Rödel, *Moeller van den Bruck* (Berlin, 1939). None other than Reventlow, who himself got into trouble with the Nazi censorship, published Seddin's book and wrote a foreword for it.

71 Wilhelm Seddin, "Nachwort zu Moeller van den Bruck," *Wille und Macht,* III (1935), 1.

72 Michael Kohlhaas, "Moeller van den Bruck und die deutsche Revolution," *Die deutsche Revolution,* IX, 33 (23 December, 1934).

73 Sigmund Neumann, *The Future in Perspective* (New York, 1946), 96.

berg, who placed the bomb on July 20, 1944, hated the West and its bourgeois traditions as much as he hated the Nazis. He — like his friend Count Fritz von der Schulenburg who was a Strasser-disciple — toyed with the idea of a revolution of the "workers, peasants and soldiers." [74] And in the post-war Germanies Communism succeeded from the very first days of the occupation in identifying itself with the cause of German "unity." The Eastern Zone consists of 18 million expendables, whether want-to-be or must-be Radeks. Old names like Niekisch and Scheringer have been salvaged, and, more important, old slogans are being tried all over again. As yet the Socialist Unity Party is allowed to follow a line which would generate charges of Titoism against any other European Communist party. And though it is as yet too early to assess the revival of National Bolshevism in Western Germany, recent reports, including one by the U. S. High Commissioner, make it a factor with which to contend.[75]

The consistency of its paradox is the striking feature of National Bolshevism. It has illustrated lucidly the similarities between Fascism and Communism and also of the intensity of German pro-Russian sentiments. The strength of National Bolshevism as a political potential is based on the combination of both factors. Not even National Socialism could prevent a recurrence of National Bolshevism; not even the establishment of the Oder-Neisse line and the fate of unnumbered German prisoners of war in Russia can put an end to it. The discovery of this stubborn paradox should lead to a reassessment of the conventional knowledge of causation. If the coming of National Socialism can be explained by the coincidence of very specific historical factors, the roots of National Bolshevism must lie deeper. What is, ultimately, the difference between Hitler's Third Reich and what we have called the "Fourth Reich" of National Bolshevism? National Bolshevism is more honest, more penetrating than National Socialism; it is National Socialism unmasked. Its two attributes, nationalism and Bolshevism, imply its conscious rejection of

74 Cf. Allen W. Dulles, *Germany's Underground* (New York, 1947), 170 f and Hans B. Gisevius, *To the Bitter End* (Boston, 1947), 513 f.

75 The High Commissioner's report stated that, in spite of their rejection of Marxism, a "number of Rightist leaders favor, for strategic reasons, an agreement with Russia." *New York Times,* March 4, 1950. A resolution of eight U. S. Congressmen pointed to "repeated evidence" of German nationalists seeking a "totalitarian axis with Soviet Russia." *New York Times,* April 18, 1950.

Western traditions, of the "so-called West."[76] The National Bolshevik is a "fellow traveller" to Russia, a Pan-Slav as well as a Bolshevik by choice. Russia — White or Red — has become his "destination," his myth. And it is not accidental that Moeller van den Bruck was the German translator of Dostoievsky's work. Dostoievsky's notion of Russia as an "eternal ally"[77] of Germany against the West was bound to become a terrible weapon in the hands of the twentieth century man to whom the Decline of the West is a foregone conclusion. The coming of the "Fourth Reich" of National Bolshevism would mean the establishment of a final paradox: the setting of the sun in the East.

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76 Hans Zehrer, "Die Frühjahrsoffensive," *Die Tat*, XXIV (1932-1933), 13.

77 F. M. Dostoievsky, *The Diary of a Writer* (New York, 1949), II, 913; cf. II, 727 ff.