



Part 3. National Socialist Philosophy

6. *The Nazi Party Program*

The Nazi Party grew out of the D.A.P., the German Workers' Party. Its goal according to one of its founders, Gottfried Feder, "was to reconcile nationalism and socialism." It was a lecture by Feder in 1919 that attracted Adolf Hitler to the party. Within a year the party changed its name in order to have a name that expressed more accurately its core principles: The new name was the National Socialist German Workers' Party. At a rally in Munich in 1920 involving over 2,000 participants, the party announced its platform—a twenty-five point program.⁹ The main authors of the program were Feder, Adolf Hitler, and a third man, Anton Drexler. To understand what National Socialism stood for, the main points of the Program are worth looking at more closely.



Adolf Hitler

7. *Collectivism, not individualism*

A major theme of the Program is a stress upon collectivism and a rejection of individualism.

⁹ See Appendix 1 for the twenty-five point *Program of the National Socialist German Workers' Party*.

Point number 10 of the Program, for example, says “It must be the first duty of every citizen to perform mental or physical work. Individual activity must not violate the general interest, but must be exercised within the framework of the community, and for the general good.”

National Socialism thus consciously rejects Western liberal individualism with its emphasis on the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—all of which are individualistic rights. Nazism is collectivistic: it does not hold that individuals have their own lives to live and happiness to pursue. Rather, individuals should work for the community out of a sense of duty; they serve the general good, to which they subordinate their personal lives.

Point 24 of the Program returns to this theme and emphasizes it strongly: “THE COMMON INTEREST BEFORE SELF-INTEREST.” The bold print and capitalization are in the original, for emphasis.

8. Economic socialism, not capitalism

The second theme of the Program is a stress upon socialism and a strong rejection of capitalism.

Numerically, socialism is the most emphasized theme in the Nazi Program, for over half of the Program’s twenty-five points—fourteen out of the twenty-five, to be exact—itemize economically socialist demands.

Point 11 calls for the abolition of all income gained by loaning money at interest.

Point 12 demands the confiscation of all profits earned by German businesses during World War I.

Point 13 demands the nationalization of all corporations.

Point 14 demands profit-sharing in large industrial enterprises.

Point 15 demands the generous development of state-run old-age insurance.

Point 16 calls for the immediate socialization of the huge department stores.

And so on.

So strong was the Nazi party's commitment to socialism that in 1921 the party entered into negotiations to merge with another socialist party, the German Socialist Party. The negotiations fell though, but the economic socialism remained a consistent Nazi theme through the 1920s and 30s.

For example, here is Adolf Hitler in a speech in 1927:

“We are socialists, we are enemies of today's capitalistic economic system for the exploitation of the economically weak, with its unfair salaries, with its unseemly evaluation of a human being according to wealth and property instead of responsibility and performance, and we are all determined to destroy this system under all conditions.”¹⁰

Even more strongly, Josef Goebbels hated capitalism and urged socialism. Dr. Josef Goebbels was perhaps the most brilliant and educated of all the Nazi politicians. Once the Nazis came to power he was to be one of the most powerful of the very top Nazis—perhaps number two or three after Hitler himself. But Goebbels' commitment to National Socialist principles began much earlier. He received a wide-ranging classical education by attending five universities in Germany, eventually receiving a Ph.D. in literature and philosophy from



Dr. Joseph Goebbels

¹⁰ May 1, 1927; quoted in Toland 1976, p. 306.

Heidelberg University in 1921. During his graduate student days he absorbed and agreed with much of the writings of communists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Damning those he called “the money pigs of capitalist democracy,”¹¹ Goebbels in speeches and pamphlets regularly declaimed that “Money has made slaves of us.”¹² “Money,” he argued, “is the curse of mankind. It smothers the seed of everything great and good. Every penny is sticky with sweat and blood.” And in language that could be right out of the writings of Karl Marx, Goebbels believed fervently: “The worker in a capitalist state—and that is his deepest misfortune—is no longer a living human being, a creator, a maker. He has become a machine. A number, a cog in the machine without sense or understanding. He is alienated from what he produces.”¹³

The Nazi solution, then, is strong socialism.¹⁴ The state should control the economy, organizing its production and distribution in the collective interest.¹⁵

9. Nationalism, not internationalism or cosmopolitanism

This raises a question. So far the Nazi Program emphasizes that collectivism and socialism take priority over the individual—but which collective or social grouping has priority? Here the Nazi Program emphatically defines its collectivism and socialism in nationalistic terms. Individuals belong primarily to their ethnic and racial groups, those ethnic and racial groups giving them their core identities.

¹¹ Quoted in Orlow 1969, p. 87.

¹² Goebbels 1929, in Mosse ed., 1966, p. 107.

¹³ Goebbels 1932, “Those Damned Nazis” pamphlet.

¹⁴ See Appendix 2 for more quotations from Nazi leaders on the socialism of National Socialism.

¹⁵ This explains why the Nazi SA “staged joint rallies with the Communists and planned campaigns to win over the KDP members well into 1929 and 1930” (Orlow 1969, p. 210).

In the 1920 Program, seven of the twenty-five points speak directly to this issue. This issue is moderately complicated, because the Nazis have three enemies in mind against whom they want to distinguish themselves.

First they reject Marxist socialism or any socialism that puts economic groupings first. As much as the Nazis hate capitalism, they do not see the world as a battle between economic groups. The Marxists, as they see it, are obsessed with and too narrowly focused on money. To the Nazis money is only part of the battle—the *major* battle is between different racial and cultural groups with different biological histories, languages, values, laws, and religions. The battle is between Germans—with their particular biological inheritance and cultural history—against all other racial cultures.

Second, the Nazis reject cosmopolitanism, an ideal of Western liberals who believe that all humans are essentially the same wherever one travels in the world, and who believe that one should strive to be a citizen of the world, someone who can be at home anywhere.

The Nazis are *nationalists*, by contrast, and they reject any form of internationalism or cosmopolitanism.¹⁶

These themes explain the design of the Nazis' swastika flag, as a symbolic integration of the socialism and the nationalism. Red is symbolic of socialism, white is symbolic of Nationalism, and the swastika is, according to Hitler, representative of the Aryan struggle for racial and cultural supremacy against those who are trying to destroy the Germans.

Consequently, in the Nazi Program of 1920 we find many points about German national identity and asserting German needs and goals.

¹⁶ As Goebbels put it in his 1929 *Michael*, which sold well and went through seventeen editions: "Race is the matrix of all creative forces. Humanity—that is a mere supposition. Reality is only the Volk. Humanity is nothing but a multitude of peoples. A people is an organic entity" (Goebbels 1929, in Mosse ed., 1966, p. 106).

Point 1 demands the unification of all ethnic Germans into a greater Germany.

Point 8 demands that immigration by non-Germans be halted and that all those who have immigrated recently be expelled from the country.

Public offices can be open only to citizens, and Point 3 defines citizenship in terms of the possession of German blood.

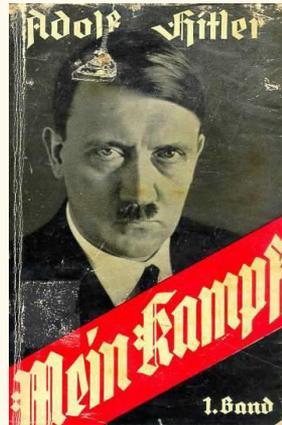
And the possession of German blood is defined carefully to reject a third target of the Nazis, those whom they hate even more than the Marxists or the liberal capitalists—and that is the Jews.¹⁷

Point 3 of the Program denies that Jews can be racial comrades of Germans, and this in combination with the other points in the Program effectively shuts the Jews out of German life.

A widely-used Nazi propaganda poster displayed a dragon with three heads wearing hats representing the communist, the international capitalist, and the Jew—the enemies the pure German warrior must defeat.

From the beginning of the Party in 1920 then, the pro-German nationalism and the strong anti-Semitic themes are, like the collectivism and the socialism, core Nazi themes.

While the 1920 Program only mentions the Jews twice and seems to advocate only that the Jews be forced to leave Germany, within a few years the Nazi leadership had clearly begun to consider harsher measures. In 1925, for example, Hitler published *Mein Kampf*, a book that sold increasingly



¹⁷ Michael Mack's *German Idealism and the Jew* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) is a study of the role German philosophers, historians, and other intellectuals, including Kant, Hegel, Marx, and others, played in developing and promoting anti-Semitism. See Appendix 3 for further quotations.

well as the Nazis rose to power. Hitler variously describes the Jews as an “octopus,” as “a parasite on the body of other nations,” as a “vampire,” as a “spider” that was “suck[ing] the blood out of the people’s pores,” and as having taken over the German state. To free the German *Volk*, consequently, Hitler calls for the “elimination of the existing Jewish one” and “the end of this parasite upon the nations.”¹⁸

10. Authoritarianism, not liberal democracy

So far we have three major themes in the Nazi Program: collectivism, socialism, and nationalism. The next question is: How do the Nazis believe this is to be achieved?

As early as 1920 the Nazis are clear that they are no friends of democracy, liberalism, or republicanism. They favor strong authoritarianism and centralized power.

Point 23 calls for censorship and government control of all newspapers.

Point 24 suggests limitations on religions that do not fit the Nazis’ goals.

Point 25 calls for centralization and unconditional power: “we demand the creation of a strong central power in Germany. A central political parliament should possess unconditional authority over the entire Reich, and its organization in general.”

These points in combination with the economically socialist points earlier are to give the government total control over all aspects of society.

Throughout the 1920s the Nazis are unapologetic about wanting to eliminate liberalism, democracy, and republicanism. Goebbels for example put it bluntly and publicly: “Never do the people rule themselves. This madness has been

¹⁸ Hitler 1925, pp. 623, 305, 327, 193, 453, and 327.

invented by liberalism. Behind its concept of the sovereignty of the people hide the most corrupt rogues, who do not want to be recognized.”¹⁹

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler agreed entirely: “There must be no majority decisions.” Instead, “*the decisions will be made by one man.*”²⁰ So, Goebbels continued, “We shall create a power-group with which we can conquer this state. And then ruthlessly and brutally, using the State’s prerogatives, we shall enforce our will and our programme.” Again from Goebbels:

History has seen repeatedly how a young, determined minority has overthrown the rule of a corrupt and rotten majority, and then used for a time the State and its means of power in order to bring about by dictatorship ... and force the conditions necessary to complete the conquest and to impose new ideas.²¹

The Nazis were very clear from the outset what they were in favor of, what they opposed, and how they planned to exercise power once they achieved it: socialism, nationalism, racial identity and purification—and a strong, centralized power to make it happen.

11. Idealism, not politics as usual

It is important to emphasize that the Nazis put their program forward forthrightly and as a noble—even spiritual—ideal to achieve. They promised not merely another political platform, but a whole philosophy of life that, as they and their followers believed, promised renewal. And they called upon Germans to exercise the highest virtues of altruism and self-sacrifice for the good of society to bring about that renewal.

Program point 10 urges individuals to put the common good of Germany before their self interest. Point 24 repeats it.

¹⁹ Goebbels 1929, in Mosse ed., 1966, p. 105.

²⁰ Hitler 1925, p. 449.

²¹ Goebbels 1927, quoted in Irving 1999, p. 117.

Hitler and Goebbels repeatedly urge Nazism as a spiritual and ideal vision in contrast to the usual power-grubbing politics of the day.

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler insisted that “All force which does not spring from a firm spiritual foundation will be hesitating and uncertain. It lacks the stability which can only rest on a fanatical view of life.”²²

He called upon individuals not to be egoistic but be willing to sacrifice: “the preservation of the existence of a species presupposes a spirit of sacrifice in the individual.”²³

In Goebbels’s autobiographical novel, *Michael*, a book that sold out of seventeen editions, the leading character is explicitly likened to Jesus Christ: Michael is the ‘Christ-socialist’ who sacrifices himself out of love for mankind—and Goebbels urges that noble Germans be willing to do the same.²⁴ A widely-used Nazi poster featured a religiously spiritual figure with its arm encircling a young Nazi soldier.



Hitler regularly praised Germans for their spirit of altruism: “this state of mind, which subordinates the interests of the ego to the conservation of the community, is really the first premise for every truly human culture.”²⁵ Altruism, he believed, is a trait more pronounced in Germans than in any

²² Hitler 1925, p. 222.

²³ Hitler 1925, p. 151.

²⁴ Goebbels 1929, in Mosse ed., 1966, p. 108.

²⁵ Hitler 1925, 298. Hitler distinguishes altruism from “egoism and selfishness” and also labels it “Idealism. By this we understand only the individual’s capacity to make sacrifices for the community” (1925, p. 28). Egoism and the pursuit of happiness he sees as the great threat: “As soon as egoism becomes the ruler of a people, the bonds of order are loosened and in the chase after their own happiness men fall from heaven into a real hell” (1925, p. 300).

other culture, which is why he claimed to be so optimistic about Germany's future.

This message of National Socialism as a moral ideal and a spiritual crusade was appealing to many, many Germans—and especially the young. By 1925 the party membership in the north was mostly young: two-thirds of the members were under thirty years of age, and in a few years the Nazis had attracted a large following among university students.

Goebbels especially called out to the idealistic young to be the heart of the Nazi future in Germany:

The old ones don't even want to understand that we young people even exist. They defend their power to the last. But one day they will be defeated after all. Youth finally must be victorious. We young ones, we shall attack. The attacker is always stronger than the defender. If we free ourselves, we can also liberate the whole working class. And the liberated working class will release the Fatherland from its chains.²⁶

12. Nazi democratic success

For the Nazis, the clear, firm, and passionate advocacy of their political goals, along with efficient organization and propaganda, brought them increasing democratic success in Germany.

After years of work, by 1928 the party had only twelve seats in the Reichstag, Germany's national parliament. But in the election of September 1930, they increased that number to 107 seats. Less than two years later, in the election of July 1932, they increased that number dramatically to 230 seats. A few months later they lost thirty-four seats in a November election and now had 196. But in January of 1933, Hitler was

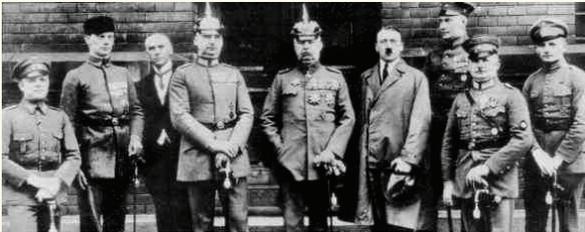
²⁶ Goebbels 1929, p. 111.

appointed Chancellor of Germany, one of the two highest positions in the land, and the Nazis were in a position to consolidate their power. In March of 1933 they called yet another election in order to get a clear mandate from the German people about their plans for Germany. The election had a huge turnout and the Nazis scored huge gains, winning 43.9% of the popular vote and 288 seats in the Reichstag. 288 seats are more seats than their next three competitors combined.

Table 1. Germany: March 5, 1933 election. Seats in the Reichstag:²⁷

NSDAP (National Socialist)	288
SPD (Socialist)	120
KPD (Communist)	81
Zentrum (Center, Catholic)	73
Kampfront SWR (Nationalist)	52
Bayerische Volkspartei	19
Deutsche Staatspartei	5
Christlich-Sozialer Volksdienst	4
Deutsche Volkspartei (Nationalist)	2
Deutsche Bauernpartei	2
Württembergische Landbund	1

By early 1933, the National Socialist German Workers' Party was in control.



Early NSDAP leaders

²⁷ Craig 1978, p. 576.