

**THE CRISIS
OF
GERMAN IDEOLOGY**

**INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS
OF THE THIRD REICH**

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Preface to the Schocken Edition

THIS BOOK attempts to analyze the history of Volkish thought and to define Adolf Hitler's German revolution. It focuses upon German nationalism at its most extreme, on those who advocated Volkish ideas and on how they penetrated into the population. To be sure, the curious notions analyzed in this book and the bizarre scholars who advocated them would have remained in well-deserved obscurity had Adolf Hitler not given Volkish thought pride of place in National Socialism. Yet Hitler would never have succeeded in demonstrating the political effectiveness of the Volkish world view had this perception of reality not already been shared by a great many Germans. True Volkish believers may never have represented the majority of the nation. Nevertheless, most Germans collaborated willingly enough with a regime based on Volkish foundations. This book attempts to analyze the development and dissemination of Volkish ideas from their beginnings through their realization in the Third Reich.

I want to touch briefly upon the chief criticisms which have been leveled against the book and at the same time indicate what I would do differently were I writing today. Some critics have objected to my central argument for the continuity of Volkish thought and the uniqueness of German fascism. I cannot, however, join them in regarding National Socialism as a break with the German past, as a unique response to specific events such as the lost war and the Great Depression. It seems to me that to concentrate solely on the play of social, political, or economic forces, as some historians have done, is to eliminate the difficult issue of personal responsibility. Why so many Germans possessed a false Volkish consciousness cannot be explained through such historical forces alone, for in the final analysis, a broad choice of political alternatives was available before Hitler's seizure of power.

* National Socialism was not an aberration; it was, rather, the product of a dialectical historic process of economic, social, and political forces on the one hand, and human hopes and longing for the good life on the other. National Socialism was successful as a mass movement precisely because it was able to turn long-cherished myths and symbols to its own purposes. Human beings seek a future bright with promise, yet they dread a flight into the wild blue yonder. Adolf Hitler mixed traditional and acceptable Volkish thought with his own obscure brand of racism, a form which up to that time had existed only on the margins of history. Men like Guido von List or Lanz von Liebenfels, to be met in this book, occupied the outer edges of politics; the racial theosophy to be discussed was an esoteric *weltanschauung* until it influenced Hitler's own thought. Others such as Julius Langbehn or Paul de Lagarde, discussed at some length in the book, were closer to the center of political debate. It was my foremost objective to explain how the obscure and irrational world view advocated by such isolated individuals or small groups could ultimately determine the political discussion of a nation. For this process to occur, Volkish thought had to penetrate into so-called respectable social circles, while a specific historical situation provided the proper environment.

* If I were to write this book today, however, World War I, which prepared the breakthrough of Volkish thought, would be given greater space. Not only because the myth of the war experience proved susceptible to Volkish ideas, but because, as a result of the lost war and its consequences, Germany became the nation in which the Volkish dream was to be realized. This could not be foreseen before the war. Racism and radical nationalism were, after all, also deeply rooted in France: if there had been speculation before World War I as to where the radical right would have a chance to gain power, the finger would have been pointed at France and not at Germany.

What, then, was unique about Germany? I attempted to distinguish the German from other forms of fascism in the last chapter of this book. This does not mean, however, that I negate the possibility of a general theory of fascism. (I later elaborated such a theory in *Man and Masses*.) Every country developed a fascism appropriate to its own specific nationalism. For example, the racist and Volkish component of National Socialism must be distinguished from Italian fascism. To be sure, similar currents existed in Italy, but the idea of "romantá" was never dominant and all encompassing, and racial thought came late and lacked a national tradition. To be sure, Volkish thought also influenced other Central and East European nations and even the United States with its populist tradition, its idealization of the frontier spirit, and its Ku Klux Klan. But Germany was the nation where Volkish thought had the greatest impact. The National Socialist government of Germany was the first Euro-

pean government in history to base its internal policies upon racism. Volkish thought and racism, however, were not necessarily identical. For example, some Volkish thinkers were willing to take Jews into the fold, provided they conformed in looks and manner. Racism as a scavenger ideology annexed diverse ideas, even those which, like early socialism, traditional Christianity, or some of the sciences, rejected a narrow Volkish outlook upon the world. In contrast to Volkish thought, racism could ignore the existence of individual nations for broader categories like "Caucasian" or "European." Yet in Germany the alliance between racism and Volkish thought triumphed. The anti-Jewish revolution, the climax of this book, was the unique result. One should not lose sight of this when reading about the eccentric scholars and the many organizations in these pages.

Surveying the latest research, I would have said more about *Bund* and eros, as I would have further explicated the relationship between Volkish thought and modern technology. The chapter on *Bund* and eros would have been expanded in order to place increased emphasis on the role of the male stereotype in the myths and symbols of Volkish thought. I had not yet realized that in the age of mass politics, symbols and political liturgies were of central importance in making abstract ideas effective and concrete. These were used by the National Socialists as a form of self-representation, and through them Volkish ideas were transformed into a new religion. As in all religions, ideals of beauty played a central role, and not least the ideal of classical male beauty. The new concern with nudity as part of the rediscovery of the human body, so popular at the turn of the century, was co-opted by nationalism in defining the purity and beauty of its male stereotype. More could have been said about the nationalist attempt to strip all sexuality from these Volkish symbols of manliness. (I have analyzed the relationship between nationalism, mass politics, and ideals of beauty in *The Nationalization of the Masses*.)

In addition, I argued in this book that the rejection of modernity was characteristic of Volkish thought. However, recent research has begun to emphasize the connection between Volkish ideas and technology. The Nazis made use of the most up-to-date technology in all fields, from transport to propaganda. Here we must distinguish between natural sciences and technology. National Socialists rejected the latest developments in physics as "Jewish," but their program "Beauty of Labor" modernized the work place. Pre-industrial forms were often applied to the industrial process as successful modernization: Volkish art, clear and simple architectural design, fresh air, lawns, and trees were to transform working conditions. The aesthetics of politics through rituals and symbols went hand in hand with the aesthetics of labor. Volkish ideology transformed the fear of the machine into a glorification of tech-

as the ideal in Hitler's & the masses

nology. We should not be tempted, however, to place this aspect of Volkish thought in the center of a basically anti-modernist nationalism. Were I writing today, I would have expanded this book in order to better define the complex relationship between Volkish thought and modernity.

Finally, this book appears to have left the impression among some readers that Volkish thought must inevitably lead to National Socialism. But that was not my intention. It could have continued to vegetate on the margins of history, or it could have come to power through some other nationalist movement. As I hope to show, German conservatives and their most important political party, the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, were deeply infected by Volkish thought. Moreover, Volkish thought was not necessarily aggressive or racist: it was possible to think in Volkish categories, and yet grant each people its own contribution to humanity, to accept the Volk, not as something that is eternally given, but as a step toward the unification of mankind. "Why," asked the anti-authoritarian socialist Gustav Landauer, "should we call for the end of all specific bonds and with them for the end to all differences among humanity?" The Volk as a democratic community among equals is an idea which also appears in this book. But Landauer's Volkish socialism found little echo in Germany. The relationship between Volkish and socialist movements remains to be properly investigated. Socialists of all countries made efforts to combine Volkish and socialist thought; had such a blend been successful, National Socialism might not have triumphed so easily.

After World War II, Volkish thought shared the fate of National Socialism. From the center of political events it was once again forced to the margins. Again the question arises: what could propel Volkish thought back into the center of politics? Are conservatives still susceptible to such ideas? Most post-World War II conservatives were good liberals who opposed Volkish tendencies. The youth movement no longer exists in Germany, unlike the student fraternities, which continue to carry on old traditions. While Volkish thought is no immediate threat in today's Germany, it is latent in all modern nationalism. By analyzing the Volkish triumph in the past perhaps we can prevent its victory in the future.

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The research for this book took me to three continents, a reflection of the dispersal of Volkish materials. In Germany the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich and the Bayrische Staatsbibliothek freely extended their facilities. Interviews with individuals were of great assistance, though some of them must unfortunately remain anonymous. I owe a special debt to the archives of the German Youth Movement at Burg Ludwigstein and to its learned archivist, Hans Wolf. The Bundesarchiv in Koblenz made it a pleasure to work on the materials there. In Jerusalem, both the Library of the Hebrew University and the Jewish National Archives were treasure troves for materials bearing on the Volkish movement. On this side of the Atlantic the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace and especially Mrs. Agnes F. Peterson greatly facilitated my researches. The substantial collections of the University of Wisconsin library were indispensable.

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is very great; indeed, it is difficult to see how without its generosity this book could have been completed

I have left to the last that institution where most of the spade work for this book was done and whose librarian, Ilse R. Wolff, put her vast knowledge freely at my disposal. To the Wiener Library in London, truly a scholars' home, I wish to dedicate this book.

G. L. M.

Madison, Wisconsin
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Introduction

THE HISTORY OF GERMANY in the past century has been discussed at great length by historians and laymen alike. All have wondered whether men of intelligence and education could really have believed the ideas put forward during the Nazi period. To many, the ideological bases of National Socialism were the product of a handful of unbalanced minds. To others, the Nazi ideology was a mere propaganda tactic, designed to win the support of the masses but by no means the world view of the leaders themselves. Still others have found these ideas so nebulous and incomprehensible that they have dismissed them as unimportant.

✓ This work will attempt to analyze these ideas, for it is a fact of history that they were embraced by many normal men. It is important to keep in mind that the Nazis found their greatest support among respectable, educated people. Their ideas were eminently respectable in Germany after the First World War, and indeed had been current among large segments of the population even before the war.

What differentiated the Germany of this period from other nations was a profound mood, a peculiar view of man and society which seems alien and even demonic to the Western intellect. Yet to understand the growth of such ideas, the role they played, and the longings they gratified during nearly a century of German life is to go far toward an explanation of Germany's unique development. Racial thought, Germanic Christianity, and the Volkish nature mysticism will all receive serious consideration here. Historians have not given them much serious attention, for they have regarded this ideology as a species of subintellectual rather than intellectual history. It has generally been regarded as a façade used to conceal a naked and intense struggle for power, and therefore the historian should be concerned with other and presumably more important attitudes toward

M. Breyer

life. Such, however, was not the case. It was precisely that complex of particularly German values and ideas which conveyed the great issues of the times to important segments of the population.

Much of this ideology has been characterized as "apolitical," and indeed, at first glance it is hard to see how one can justify calling nature mysticism, sun worship, and theosophy parts of a political ideology. But the problem here is one of perspective. For the ideologists who will be our chief concern, traditional politics was seen as exemplifying the worst aspect of the world in which they lived. They rejected political parties as artificial, and representative government was swept aside in favor of an elitism which derived from their semi-mystical concepts of nature and man. This type of thinking is only apolitical if "politics" is restricted to a description of traditional forms of activity and belief. If "politics" is so defined, then the ideology with which we are concerned is more properly termed anti-political, for the revolution it called for was to sweep away the old *Rechtsstaat* in favor of the thousand-year Reich, and the *Führer-prinzip* was to triumph over parliamentary forms of government. Ironically enough, an ideological movement which has been termed "apolitical" eventually came to define what was politically acceptable. That this occurred demonstrates the danger of applying stereotyped concepts to a case which is so clearly not part of the general pattern. It will be our task in this work to trace the unfolding of the ideology and thereby help to explain the transformation of German politics.

This approach to the German catastrophe does not deny the concrete factors which underlay the development of such attitudes. It is probably impossible to determine why people believe all the things they do, but certainly the transformation of Germany from a semi-feudal collection of principalities to a nation-state, and the parallel transformation of the regional economy from agricultural to industrial could not help but leave profound impressions on the psyches of German citizens. Both changes were remarkably rapid, and the change in perspective which they effected was consequently greater than it would have been had the rate of change been slower. Moreover, the unification of Germany had a special impact since it came after more than half a century of unsuccessful attempts.

Germany's prolonged quest for national unity had the effect of turning her best minds toward problems of national destiny. This unity could have come about at the Congress of Vienna after the fall of Napoleon, but instead a loose German Confederation emerged which left the individual German states to pursue their independent ways. As a result, those Germans who wanted unity looked increasingly to the formation of a cultural cohesion among their people,

rather than to a political unity which seemed far distant. They conceived this cultural unity in terms of national roots and of opposition to the foreigner. The revolutions of 1848, which seemed at first to give Germany another chance for unity, only resulted in frustration. The search for national roots, for a national stability upon which to form a true union was intensified between 1848 and 1870, and was accompanied by an increasing opposition to modernity. The modern world had denied to the Germans the unity which they had possessed long ago, and many felt that the movement for unity must draw its strength from those distant times rather than from the unpromising present.

When in 1871, at Versailles, Bismarck proclaimed the Prussian King to be the Emperor, unity seemed won at last. But the political unity of the new Prussian-dominated federation proved a disappointment to many Germans. It was prosaic, concerned with everyday problems, whereas the movement toward that unity had been highly idealistic and indeed utopian.

Experiences rarely, if ever, turn out exactly as anticipated, and this is especially true if the anticipation has gone on for a long time. For many German thinkers the anticipation of unity had grown to almost messianic dimensions, and the confrontation with Bismarck's bloodless *Realpolitik* was a tremendous disappointment. At first, the new Reich was greeted with great enthusiasm. But the kind of enthusiasm it received is more properly reserved for religious experiences, not political ones, and the business of government is hardly designed to produce a continuing state of ecstasy. Confidence in the newly won national identity was sapped by a feeling that Bismarck's Reich had failed to sustain the dynamic momentum which had led to unification. The preoccupation with the fate of Germany which had become a habit of mind before unification, could not suddenly be abandoned once this goal had been achieved. Indeed the problem persisted: it seemed that political unification had not brought with it that national self-awareness which many Germans had always desired. Instead the newly unified people engaged in material pursuits—making money and building up cities—and thus were destroying those ancient German traditions which to many minds had been the real driving force behind the movement for unification.

National unity triumphed at a time when the Industrial Revolution was rapidly cutting into German lands. The subsequent economic maladjustments added to the disappointment with national unification. A united Germany had not produced the good society for all of its people, but instead old problems had merely given way to new dilemmas. It was thus easy for many people to apply the

Key point

rejection of and urban society
 same cast of mind which had stood them in good stead during the struggle for unity to the new problems of industrialization. They now sought solutions by deepening and intensifying their Germanic faith as they called for a more "genuine" unity. It is small wonder that such men ultimately rejected industrial society altogether, believing it irreconcilable with national self-identification. In the end, they called for a "German revolution" to liquidate the dangerous new developments and to guide the nation back to its original purpose as they conceived it. In this manner political unity and industrialization produced a crisis in German thought which led directly up to the "German catastrophe" of our times.

Homeland in Jews
 This crisis had its actual starting point in the 1870's. By 1873 the pressures of the increased tempo of industrialization had already produced the first grave economic crisis. By this time, too, it seemed clear to many that the great promises of national unity had somehow gone sour. Modern industrial Germany was being born and rapidly propelled forward, and the cry for a new "German" revolution that accompanied this growth was a reaction to modernity. Although the ideology with which we are concerned can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, to the struggle for national unity, the events of the last decades of the century infused it with a new life and a new dynamic.

1870's
 The set of ideas with which we are concerned in this work has been termed "Volkish"—that is, pertaining to the "Volk." "Volk" is one of those perplexing German terms which connotes far more than its specific meaning. "Volk" is a much more comprehensive term than "people," for to German thinkers ever since the birth of German romanticism in the late eighteenth century "Volk" signified the union of a group of people with a transcendental "essence." This "essence" might be called "nature" or "cosmos" or "mythos," but in each instance it was fused to man's innermost nature, and represented the source of his creativity, his depth of feeling, his individuality, and his unity with other members of the Volk.

The essential element here is the linking of the human soul with its natural surroundings, with the "essence" of nature. The really important truths are to be found beneath the surface of appearances. An example—and one that is ultimately crucial in the development of Volkish thought—will serve to illustrate what is meant by this linking. According to many Volkish theorists, the nature of the soul of a Volk is determined by the native landscape. Thus the Jews, being a desert people, are viewed as shallow, arid, "dry" people, devoid of profundity and totally lacking in creativity. Because of the barrenness of the desert landscape, the Jews are a spiritually barren people.

* They thus contrast markedly with the Germans, who, living in the dark, mist-shrouded forests, are deep, mysterious, profound. Because they are so constantly shrouded in darkness, they strive toward the sun, and are truly *Lichtmenschen*. WNT

It has often been asserted that not until after defeat in the First World War and the founding of the Weimar Republic did the Volkish ideas really come into their own. To be sure, it was at this time that these ideas acquired a mass political base. However, the prewar developments were also of great importance, for it was during this period that the ideology was elaborated and diffused. The Volkish ideas were not spread primarily through organized movements, but rather through personal relationships and small groups which infiltrated the official establishment itself. Above all, this period witnessed the institutionalization of the ideas, a factor overlooked by those who see them as existing in virtual isolation before 1918.² In order to be truly effective, a system of ideas must permeate important social and political institutions. And before 1918 the Volk-centered ideology penetrated one of the most important of such institutions, the educational establishment.

Education and youth play an important role in our story. German youth had stood in the forefront of the struggle for unification. Ever since the time of Father Jahn and the founding of the fraternity movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the cause of national unity had aroused their enthusiasm. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, professor at the University of Berlin, had founded the fraternity movement (*Burschenschaften*) in order to propagate "Germanic culture" and to encourage young Germans to build up their bodies so that they could fight for their country's unity. This enthusiasm for unity reached its high point in 1817, when the fraternities assembled at the Wartburg castle to burn "foreign" books which had poisoned the genuine culture of the Volk.

For many young people such nationalism offered the only proper solution to the many social and economic problems that confronted them. Their disappointment with the results of the long-awaited unity, combined with the effects of the Industrial Revolution, produced a longing for a more genuine unity of the Volk. With the impatience characteristic of their age, youth became the vanguard of a truly Germanic revolution. The educational establishment constantly encouraged such a solution to the crises of German thought. The Youth Movement after 1918 continued the searching which the prewar Youth Movement had begun: a search for new social and political forms for Germany which would, to their way of thinking, correspond more truly to Germanic longings. This Youth Movement

was uniquely German, a microcosm of modern Germany. Starting around 1900, it captured the loyalty and imagination of youth until the Nazi seizure of power ended its story. At first the young people banded together for mere rambles in the countryside, but their activities soon became fraught with ideological purpose: to reconstruct the Volk along more genuine and natural principles than modernity offered. Before the war the youth groups had a membership of about 60,000; after the war this swelled to over 100,000. This was the elite of the bourgeois youth, and the Movement was a formative influence for many of the intellectual leaders born between the 1880's and 1920. The Youth Movement's influence was substantial among teachers and students, and we shall have occasion to devote much attention to it. *N.S. met the popular appeal of youth.*

These are some of the principal ingredients which provided the dynamic for the uniquely German developments of our century. Their link with National Socialism may, at times, have been indirect, but the Nazi movement developed out of this context, adopting the slogan of the "German revolution" and making good use of its popular appeal. Here the trend in German thought which demands an ideology as the basis of all concrete action becomes important. What the National Socialists shared with other Volkish groups and with many of the youth was their mood, which in turn depended upon the ideological presuppositions we are discussing. For these presuppositions gave men and women their idea of their place in their country and society. It determined their image of themselves and of the world in which they lived. Such considerations seem much more important than the search for some individual precursors of National Socialism, which historians have detected in various figures from Herder to Wagner and Nietzsche.

The basic mood of the ideology is well summarized by the distinction between Culture and Civilization which was constantly on the lips of its adherents. A Culture, to recall Oswald Spengler's words, has a soul, whereas Civilization is "the most external and artificial state of which humanity is capable."³ The acceptance of Culture and the rejection of Civilization meant for many people an end to alienation from their society. The word "rootedness" occurs constantly in their vocabulary. They sought this in spiritual terms, through an inward correspondence between the individual, the native soil, the Volk, and the universe. In this manner the isolation that they felt so deeply would be destroyed. The external was equated with the present, disappointing society; the state was opposed to the Volk, and the divisive parliamentary politics contrasted with that organic unity for which so many Germans longed. Moreover, the external signified a

bourgeois complacent.
 society which had forgotten its genuine, Germanic purpose in its rush to amass the benefits of the Industrial Revolution. This critique was directed at the comfortable and complacent bourgeois society, which was satisfied with Germany as it was and gave little thought to Germany as it should be. Their preoccupation with the external was materialistic, for those who had a true concern for the Volk believed in an inner spiritual revival which would bring about the true flourishing of the German Volk. *LMC! the key promulgator*

* The critique was that Civilization had captured the bourgeois, and yet it was the bourgeois themselves who had made this critique. To be sure, it was not the haut bourgeois or the newly rich who objected, but those whom the Industrial Revolution had squeezed to the wall—the retail merchant, but not the department-store owner; the small, tradition-oriented entrepreneur, but not the director of the expanding industries or of the large banks, in whose hands economic power seemed to center. These middle-class bourgeois were joined by the artisan classes, who were rapidly sinking to working-class status and who felt themselves isolated as early as 1848. For both, modernity threatened to destroy their bourgeois status. They found ready allies in the landowners who saw their food monopoly threatened by demands for a reduction of tariffs and for expanded world trade. Thus those who advocated a return to Culture, who embraced a "German revolution," did not come from the lower classes of the population. On the contrary, they were men and women who wanted to maintain their property and their superior status over the working classes. The notion of a genuine social revolution was anathema to these people, yet they were profoundly dissatisfied with their world. * The tension between their desire to preserve their status and their equally fervent desire to radically alter society was resolved by the appeal to a spiritual revolution which would revitalize the nation without revolutionizing its structure. Ultimately, the Nazi revolution was the "ideal" bourgeois revolution: it was a "revolution of the soul" which actually threatened none of the vested economic interests of the middle class. Instead Volkish thought concentrated upon another enemy within. This is why the Jews and the Jewish question will bulk so large in these pages, for the Jew was seen as the enemy. He stood for modernity in all its destructiveness. Thus we will find that Volkish thought sharpened and focused itself against, and in relation to, the supposed "Jewish menace." It can be justly argued that the attitude toward the Jew provided much of the cement for this thought and gave it a dynamic it might otherwise have lacked. The Jew, or rather the stereotype which Volkish thought made of him, is therefore central to any analysis and understanding of this ideology.

Nazi Rev. a "bourgeois revolution" spiritual, not economic

Moreover, in this instance the connection with National Socialism is a direct one. Hitler gave focus to his "German revolution" by making it into an anti-Jewish revolution. In a situation where revolutionary social and economic changes were excluded, the Jew became a welcome and necessary substitute toward which the revolutionary fervor could be directed.

ns. not relative
Gerhard Ritter, the German historian, was far from the mark when he asserted that the ideological evolution which led to National Socialism was not typically German and that other countries also contained such movements.⁴ Although anti-parliamentarianism was a general European attitude between the wars (as was the longing for a society that would be neither Marxist nor capitalist), it took different forms in different nations. As ideologies varied so did their results. German Volkish thought showed a depth of feeling and a dynamic that was not equaled elsewhere.

here it is!
* The Volkish movement triumphed in Germany because it had penetrated deeply into the national fabric. Rather than trying to explain away this fact, it would seem more profitable to ask how this could have been accomplished. This book will argue that the triumph grew out of a historical development, helped along by concrete causes, which resulted in an attitude of mind that was receptive to the solutions offered by Volkish thought; that January 1933 was not an accident of history, but was prepared long beforehand; and that if National Socialism had not taken the lead, other Volk-oriented parties stood ready to do so, for by that time Volkish ideas had captured almost the entire powerful German right.

Not that the triumph of a different section of the right would have led to the same results, or that the fall of democracy could not have been avoided. But democracy had faltered ever since its founding and millions had sought refuge in Volkish attitudes. To say that January 1933 was not an accident of history does not mean to deny the importance of the actual mechanism of the Nazi seizure of power. But the way was prepared and we must look beneath the actual political context to understand the attitudes which led both to support and to acceptance.

Those who have stated that Germany was "unprepared" for Hitler's sudden rise to power are reacting against attempts to see in this event the logical culmination of all of German history.⁵ Our object is not such historical determinism. It is rather to show how one trend of German thought could become so strong that millions of people accepted it as the only solution to Germany's dilemma. Moreover, Volkish attitudes permeated the entire German right. Only eventually did the Nazi movement blanket the diverse Volkish long-

ings of all those who saw their spiritual roots dislodged through industrialization and the atomization of modern man.⁶

Although, in this book, an attempt has been made to relate the unfolding ideology to the actual political, social, and economic developments in Germany, it should be kept in mind that there is no necessary, precise relationship between these events and Volkish ideas. The Volkish thinkers did not respond to "real" developments in the manner of political commentators. In fact, the nature of their ideas tended to detach them from real events rather than to compel them to take new developments into consideration.

TYPE OF INTS.
Volkish thought was, after all, heir to a long development in German thought which tended toward abstract rationalism and idealism. The combination of romanticism and the popularizations of German idealism produced intellectuals whose ideal was to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*. Their concern was hardly with mundane, day-to-day affairs. The Volkish thinkers were cut from the same cloth. If at times our discussion seems to be detached from the realities of the time, it is because the figures with whom we deal were so detached. Again, the paradoxical nature of Volkish thought forces itself upon us. An ideology that was only vaguely relevant to the real problems confronting the German people ultimately became normative for the solutions to those problems. As we shall see later, it was the genius of Adolf Hitler to wed the Volkish flight from reality to political discipline and efficient political organization.

Although millions of Germans, mostly of the left, were never captives of Volkish ideology, there were other millions who were, and these were the ones who triumphed in the end or who by their consent made that triumph easier. It would have been simpler to write a book such as this in the heat of moral indignation. However, such emotion might not only have obscured a serious historical analysis, but, what is worse, it might have given the impression that the ideas treated here were an aberration, something abnormal and indeed satanic. Yet the important fact to bear in mind is that many of the men and women who came to hold these ideas were normal in any usual definition, people whom one might have considered good neighbors. "Common" men think this way.

3540? In a sense this study is a historical analysis of people captured to such an extent by an ideology that they lost sight of civilized law and civilized attitudes toward their fellow men. Eventually a majority of the nation was taken in by such self-deception. That this was no mere accident or short-term reaction should be plain at first glance. Nor is our story necessarily over and done with. Volkish ideas are still with us, beneath the surface, ready to be used in those extreme crises

which mankind constantly manufactures for itself. In the United States, for example, extremist groups who want to segregate Negro from white at all costs embrace the Volkish ideology, fusing anti-Negro with anti-Jewish sentiment. They hope to penetrate the right in the United States as the Volkish groups penetrated the right in Germany. Quite consciously they steal much of their material from German sources, thus helping to keep them alive in a new environment.⁷ Moreover, isolated Volkish groups continue to exist in Germany itself. These attitudes of mind are easier to instill than to erase from the national ethos.

Yet it is said that all of these are small fringe groups who have no chance of coming to power. History, it is said, does not repeat itself. However, in the history of the Volkish movement it was never the actual size of the Volkish groups which counted, but rather the institutions they infected and the mood that they spread and maintained until the time was ripe. This also is worth remembering, however low the fires may be burning at a given time. We can only hope, but not predict, that nowhere in the world will the Volkish ideology again serve as a solution to a crisis in human thought and politics; that it did so in modern Germany has been catastrophic for Germans and non-Germans alike.

PART I

The Ideological Foundations