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Reviving Germany: The Political Discourse of the German Fatherland Party, 1917-1918

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Troy Christopher Dempster entitled "Reviving Germany: The Political Discourse of the German Fatherland Party, 1917-1918." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

Vejas Liulevicius, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Denise Phillips, David Tompkins

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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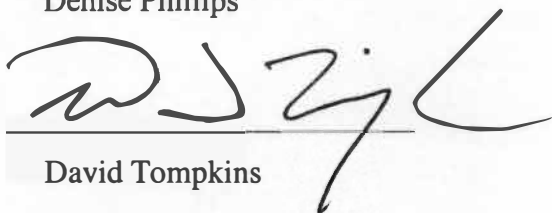


Vejas Liulevicius, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:



Denise Phillips



David Tompkins

Accepted for the Council:



Vice Chancellor and Dean of Graduate Studies

Thesis
2006
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Reviving Germany: The Political Discourse of the German Fatherland Party, 1917-1918

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Troy Christopher Dempster
May 2006**

Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my wonderful wife, Tara, who has supported me throughout my journey and my three beautiful children, Christian, Liam, and Asher, whom remind me everyday of what is important in life.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank all those who have helped me complete my Master of Arts degree in History. I would like to give special thanks to Dr. Vejas Liulevicius for overseeing this project and for his continual support and belief in my work. I would also like to thank Dr. Denise Phillips and Dr. David Tompkins for their support and for agreeing to serve on my M.A. Committee.

Abstract

This study will inspect the propaganda of the German Fatherland Party found in rightist newspapers published in Berlin, the capital of the German Empire. This propaganda explained the goals of the party, which included a desire to win a *Siegfrieden* (Victory Peace), to increase the *Siegeswillen* (Will for Victory) within the German population, to annex vast territory in the East and West, and to create a unified block of citizens within Germany by reviving the ancient myth of *Deutschtum* or an essential “Germanness.” In response to this new nationalistic party, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) organized its own anti-Fatherland Party propaganda, which successfully prevented the leftist working class from joining the Fatherland Party. This study is important because it illustrates the significance of public opinion and explains how the German population became politically active and radicalized during the First World War.

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Chapter I

Introduction

The German Fatherland Party (*Vaterlandspartei*) was an extremely conservative, anti-parliamentary political party founded in September 1917, at the start of the fourth year of the First World War. This party is extremely important to German history because it was the first mass party of the Right. Rightist parties, prior to the formation of the Fatherland Party, were small, exclusive bastions of the landed elite and powerful industrialists more given to small debates than mobilizing the masses. In contrast, the Fatherland Party attempted to create a more populist right-wing political organization, which would bring together all aspects of German society. The hidden legacy of this new, more radical conservative party is staggering: it dominated the political culture in Germany for over a year and its ideas and beliefs have haunted Germany ever since.

Nationalist activists Wolfgang Kapp and Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz led the party with the financial support of many wealthy businessmen and industrialists such as Alfred Hugenberg and Carl Siemens; other important members included Prussian landowners, Protestant ministers, and university professors.¹ Kapp and Tirpitz founded the Fatherland Party in 1917 to bolster patriotism and the will for victory within Germany and to fight the growing peace movements in the Reichstag, which had recently passed a Peace Resolution. During the course of the next year, the Fatherland Party, which claimed that it recruited over one million members (making it on paper the largest party in German

¹David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914-1918: The Sins of Omission* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 200.

politics), created a powerful propaganda machine aimed at manipulating public opinion in order to stop the peace movements within Germany and to promote wide annexationist goals in Eastern and Western Europe. The historian Friedrich Meinecke, a contemporary and critic of the Fatherland Party, wrote in 1946 that the “Pan-Germans and the Fatherland party are an exact prelude to Hitler’s rise to power.”² Although Meinecke did not offer further explanation, this statement prompted the debate, which continues ever since, on whether the Fatherland Party was a pre-fascist organization and a precursor to Nazism, or instead a holdover of an earlier politics of notables.

Yet, in spite of these stakes, the historiography of the German Fatherland Party is sparse, including only two monographs, one unpublished dissertation, a few articles, and casual mentions within wider ranging histories.³ Much of the historiography revolves around the key question of whether the Fatherland Party was a precursor to the Nazis. In *Die Erben Bismarcks*, published in 1970, German scholar Dirk Stegmann concluded that the Fatherland Party was pre- or proto-fascist because of the later Nazi connections of one of its members, Anton Drexler.⁴ Drexler, a locksmith working at the Munich railway yards, joined the Fatherland Party shortly after its conception, but quickly grew disillusioned with what he saw as its lack of genuine interest in the plight of the working class. However, before Drexler officially left the party, he made contact with Wilhelm

²Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections*, translated by Sidney B. Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 30.

³George Etue, “The German Fatherland Party, 1917-1918” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1959); Heinz Hagenlücke, *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei. Die nationale Rechte am Ende des Kaiserreiches* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1997); Jay Hatheway, “The Pre-1920 Origins of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 3 (July, 1994): 443-462; Hans Peter Müller, “Die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei in Württemberg 1917/18 und ihr Erbe: Besorgte Patrioten oder rechte Ideologen?,” *Zeitschrift für Württembergische Landesgeschichte* 59 (2000):217-245; Karl Wortmann, *Geschichte der Deutschen Vaterlands-Partei, 1917-1918* (Halle, 1926).

⁴Dirk Stegmann, *Die Erben Bismarcks. Parteien und Verbände in der Spätphase des Wilhelminischen Deutschlands Sammlungspolitik, 1897-1918* (Berlin: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1970).

Wahl, who was a member of the German Fatherland Party and founder of the Free Committee for a German Workers' Peace. This war-aims committee, headquartered in Bremen, actively recruited workers by printing "its pamphlets at government cost" and passing "them out in factories."⁵ Early in 1918, Wahl contacted Drexler, urging him to open a Munich branch of the Free Committee for a German Workers' Peace. In March 1918, Drexler agreed. After the war, Drexler's branch of the Free Committee for a German Workers' Peace in Munich became the basis for the German Worker's Party (later renamed the NSDAP at Hitler's urging), creating a direct link, or so Stegmann argued, from the Fatherland Party to the National Socialists.

In 1997, Heinz Hagenlücke, another German scholar, published *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*, the most recent monograph on the subject.⁶ Hagenlücke argued that the Fatherland Party was in fact not proto-fascist because "the party was explicitly founded as a party and not a movement, members reflected the typical picture of high Wilhelmine society in contrast to the lower class organizations of the Weimar Republic, which sociologically reached the lower-middle class, soldiers, and the youth."⁷ In addition, the Fatherland Party "was lacking the *Führerprinzip*, which had a tremendous impact on the NSDAP," and the party's abstention from the use of violence was not representative of the later record of the Nazi regime.⁸ However not all historians agree with Hagenlücke's assessment, such as Hans Peter Müller, who argued that "the prehistory of the Nazi movement did not begin in 1920," but "when the Pan-German

⁵Jeffrey Verhey, *Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 184.

⁶Hagenlücke, *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*.

⁷*Ibid.*, 408.

⁸*Ibid.*, 408.

ideology in the Fatherland Party found a mass base and a popular following” during the last year of the Great War.⁹

In addition, American scholars such as Raffael Scheck, Jeffrey Verhey, and David Welch have done research on the Fatherland Party. Welch, in *Germany, Propaganda and Total War 1914-1918*, wrote that the Fatherland Party was reactionary in nature, meaning that it was “determined to maintain the *status quo* at home... while waging an aggressive agitation campaign, for a ‘peace with victory’ and large-scale annexations in the East and the West.”¹⁰ Welch agreed with Hagenlücke that the Fatherland Party was not a precursor for the Nazi Party. In *The Spirit of 1914*, Verhey likewise argued that the Fatherland Party was not a precursor to Nazism because it failed to achieve its stated aim of reaching the working class, although this criterion is problematic since scholars still debate how much success the Nazis themselves in fact achieved in reaching the working class. Nevertheless, Verhey did conclude that the party “was a pregnant failure,” because members of the party, such as Anton Drexler, went on to form more radical conservative parties that were capable of gaining mass support.¹¹ Scheck, in *Alfred von Tirpitz and German Right-Wing Politics, 1914-1930*, agreed with recent scholars of the Fatherland Party that the party was not proto-fascist. However, he disagreed with Hagenlücke’s belief that Kapp was the prime mover of the party; he assigned this role to Tirpitz.¹²

Regardless of who actually controlled the direction of the Fatherland Party, this new party indisputably aspired to influence public opinion in a more populist way by

⁹Hans Peter Müller, “Die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei in Württemberg 1917/18,” 245.

¹⁰ Welch, *Sins of Omission*, 30.

¹¹Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, 184.

¹²Raffael Scheck, *Alfred von Tirpitz and German Right-Wing Politics, 1914-1930* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1998).

feeding its propaganda into the sympathetic, rightist press. These politically affiliated newspapers performed the extremely important function of attempting to direct public opinion in early twentieth-century Europe, as the population at large became more politically aware and active. According to Peter Fritzsche in *Germans into Nazis*, the experience of the First World War fundamentally changed the German public, making it more politically active and willing “to fashion its [own] national and economic destiny.”¹³ In essence, by 1918, “Germany’s political future had now become the people, the great curbside republic of soldiers, workers, and consumers.”¹⁴ Astute politicians and other forward-looking leaders of Germany recognized this new political entity and attempted to control it using propaganda. Propaganda, according to French sociologist Jacques Ellul, is “a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization.”¹⁵ This definition described perfectly the techniques of the Fatherland Party, because the organization attempted to guide the actions of a “mass of individuals,” the German population at large.

The propaganda of the German Fatherland Party advocated holding out for a *Siegfrieden* (Victory Peace), increasing the *Siegeswillen* (Will for Victory) within the German population, and creating a unified block of citizens within Germany by reviving the idea of *Burgfrieden* and stressing the empowering myth of *Deutschtum* or an essential “Germanness.” In order to create a unified block, the leaders of the Fatherland Party

¹³Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 82.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁵Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men’s Attitudes*, translated by Konrad Kellen (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 61.

attempted to gain recognition among the working classes. However, these efforts were handicapped as many socialist and leftist newspapers refused to print the party's announcements and advertisements. Nevertheless, this situation did not mean the Fatherland Party could not succeed in reaching portions of the working class. According to Alex Hall, in *Scandal, Sensation, and Social Democracy*, unemployed workers did in fact read non-socialist papers, in particular to find job advertisements, since employers were unwilling to place employment announcements in socialist publications, thus making them susceptible to the Fatherland Party's propaganda.¹⁶ In addition, it needs to be remembered that not all workers in Germany were socialist or even sympathetic to the socialist cause. For instance, in the early twentieth century, there were approximately twelve million workers in Germany and during the pivotal Reichstag elections of 1912, the SPD polled only a little over four million votes. This meant that the socialists, at best, only received one third of the working-class vote.¹⁷ Thus, the working classes, whether sympathetic to the socialist cause or not, encountered conservative newspapers, even if they did so with skepticism.

Based on the evidence above, there was definitely an opportunity for a right-wing party to gain influence among the working classes, although the Fatherland Party did not. However, this does not mean that the party was a complete failure. In fact, if one

¹⁶Alex Hall, *Scandal, Sensation and Social Democracy: The SPD Press and Wilhelmine Germany 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 36. Hall explicitly deals with the question of organized workers and their reading habits.

¹⁷See W. L. Guttsman, *The German Social Democratic Party, 1875-1933: From Ghetto to Government* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), especially chapter three; Susanne Miller and Heinrich Potthoff, *A History of German Social Democracy: From 1848 to the Present*, translated by J. A. Underwood (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 294; Mary Nolan, *Social Democracy and Society: Working-Class Radicalism in Düsseldorf, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), especially chapters eleven and twelve.

considers that the Fatherland Party's real goal was to rally all aspects of the middle-class behind the war effort, by creating the image of a desperate, hungry, and revolutionary working class that would emerge in Germany if the war ended in failure, the party did achieve some success.¹⁸

As the Fatherland Party agitated against the policies of the Reichstag Majority (consisting of the SPD, the Progressive Party, and the Catholic Center Party), the party was inevitably going to make many political enemies. However, none was more vociferous than the SPD, which was initially deeply troubled by the Fatherland Party's aim of recruiting a mass following, along with its attempt to destroy the Peace Resolution of July 1917 and break up the Reichstag majority. Moreover, once the leaders of the SPD realized that the threat of the Fatherland Party siphoning off support from the working class was minimal, a shift occurred: they began to use the image of the Fatherland Party, produced in their media, as an enemy-image to unify the fragmented socialist movement. These reasons motivated the Social Democrats to organize their own anti-Fatherland Party propaganda that in part successfully prevented the leftist working class from joining this new nationalistic party and even inspired a popular movement against the Fatherland Party.

In order to comprehend this conflict fully, one must understand the political milieu from which the German Fatherland Party and its counter-movement emerged.

Although many of the conflicts between the right and left had their origins prior to 1914,

¹⁸This idea came out a discussion with Dr. Denise Phillips, assistant professor of German history at the University of Tennessee, as we were discussing the Fatherland Party's lack of insight into the needs of the working class. We came to a tentative conclusion that the party may have been really trying to create an image of a resentful and revolutionary working classes to unite the middle-class (out of fear) behind the goals of the Fatherland Party.

a new political atmosphere coalesced with the declaration of war on 1 August 1914, as the Kaiser called for a domestic peace (*Burgfrieden*) and the troops marched off to Flanders in hopes of a quick victory. As reality set in and hopes for a quick victory diminished, the *Burgfrieden* began to disintegrate in large part over the emerging war aims debate.

Chapter II

The War Begins: *Burgfrieden* and German War Aims

In August 1914 crowds of citizens cheered Germany's entry into the war against the Allied powers.¹⁹ Crowds formed in all the great cities of Germany. Participants gathered in hopes for a glorious war; they hoped to crush their enemies by Christmas. Many Germans viewed the war as a cultural struggle against "the English shopkeeper mentality, Gallic shallowness, and Slavic barbarism" in stark contrast to the glories of German *Kultur*.²⁰ On 1 August, Kaiser Wilhelm II proclaimed from the balcony of the Royal Palace that "when it comes to war, all parties cease and we are all brothers. This or that party has attacked me in peace time, but I forgive them now whole-heartedly."²¹ Then, three days later, shortly after Great Britain declared war on Germany for violating Belgium neutrality, the Kaiser pronounced from the throne in the White Hall of the Royal Palace in full military uniform that "I know no more parties, I only know Germans." These two speeches ushered in the *Burgfrieden* (Peace of the Castle), when all the factions of German society (in theory) united to defeat their common enemies.

Although recent scholars have questioned the alleged universal unanimity of the 'spirit of 1914' and the early success of the *Burgfrieden*, there was nevertheless substantial support for the war in the population and among the political parties of

¹⁹This celebration was by no means universal within the German population, but the outbreak of the war did create wide enthusiasm at the beginning of the war.

²⁰Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, translated by Kim Traynor (New York: Berg Publishers, 1985), 213-214. For a detailed explanation of the differences between German *Kultur* and Western Civilization, see Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1982).

²¹Ralph Lutz, ed. and trans., *Fall of the German Empire*, vol. 1 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1932), 4.

Imperial Germany.²² For instance, the “spirit of 1914” even swept up the Social Democratic Party (SPD), as the party disregarded its established position as a revolutionary opposition party and abandoned its traditional anti-military stance. The SPD believed it was supporting a defensive war and hoped to end Russian despotism. To complete the *Burgfrieden*, the Progressives, the Catholic Center, and the Conservatives also rallied behind the Kaiser and the Reich.

This peace did not last. General von Moltke’s failure to execute adequately the Schlieffen Plan (if it was indeed even possible to do so) ended the expectation of a quick victory over France. The failure to secure a quick victory caused fractures in the *Burgfrieden*, as the emerging debate over war aims, which began in earnest after the government lifted the ban on discussing war aims in 1916, destroyed the illusion that the conflict was defensive in nature. Fritz Fischer argued that the *Burgfrieden* succeeded because all parties in Germany agreed on the need to gain territorial and economic advantages from the war.²³ This view has come under fire by recent historians, who claim that there was in fact a serious divide in opinion over the conduct of the war.²⁴ One scholar claimed the debate over war aims “polarized society into two camps: those supporting a war of self defence [sic] and those demanding total victory with annexations.”²⁵ This polarization led to the collapse of the domestic peace and a

²²For the most recent scholarship on the issue of the August madness and the domestic peace, see Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914*.

²³Fritz Fischer, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton and Company, Inc., 1967).

²⁴For an excellent summary of Germany’s war aims, see Holger Herwig, “Tunes of Glory at the Twilight Stage: The Bad Homburg Crown Council and the Evolution of German Statecraft, 1917/1918,” *German Studies Review* 6, no. 3 (1983): 475-494. For a more recent view on this argument, see Welch, *Sins of Omission*, Chapter 3.

²⁵Welch, *Sins of Omission*, 65.

reenergized desire for internal political reform by the leftist parties in the Reichstag. However, before the confrontation between these two opposing sides reached its climax, the Right and Left both experienced splits in their respective groupings.

The radical left wing of the SPD, led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, officially struck a blow at the already crumbling *Burgfrieden* by refusing to vote for the fifth war bill in December 1915, because they no longer believed the government's claim of waging a defensive war. This led to the SPD's ejection of their insubordinate members in March 1916. This group ultimately formed the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD) in April 1917. Roger Chickering stated, "this momentous event signaled the death of working-class solidarity in Germany," as both parties "competed for the loyalties of German workers."²⁶ Although this statement has some truth, the majority of the socialist workers, while possibly supporting the highly critical and vehement criticism of the government espoused by the USPD leadership, still mostly thought of themselves as members of the majority SPD and voted accordingly.

At the same time as the socialist movement was splintering, the conservatives were experiencing a schism in their own ranks. The radical-nationalist wing of the conservatives consisted of members from the national pressure groups of previous vintage, most notably the Pan-German League, the Navy League, the Agrarian League, and the Defense League. This group of conservatives was, for the most part, populist (they wanted to create a grass-roots movement not necessarily for institutional, elite conservatives), and highly critical of the Imperial government for its perceived passivity.

²⁶Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 159.

These radicals believed the government should not work with the socialists, nor support any peace proposal that did not advocate substantial annexations. One radical nationalist, Wolfgang Kapp, director general of the East Prussian Land Bank, circulated a memorandum, in May 1916, highly critical of the Imperial government, especially the Imperial Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg.

Kapp sent out his memorandum to influential members of the government. It was entitled “The National Groups and the Imperial Chancellor,” and blamed Bethmann Hollweg for the political discontent of the German population, for ending unrestricted submarine warfare, for vacillating on war aims, and for his stance on internal reforms. Kapp claimed that “the most faithful-minded groups of our people and specifically those who possess the most political instinct” were discouraged, not because of “the army, the navy, or the victorious prosecution of the war,” but due to the political ineptitude of the chancellor.²⁷ Kapp ridiculed Bethmann’s call for unity, saying that unity now meant to “be silent, keep quiet, believe and hope everything, but lock your worries in this greatest, most beautiful, and darkest hour in Germany history in your breast.”²⁸ Kapp compared this statement to an older precedent: when the military governor of Berlin, Count von der Schulenberg, told his subjects (after Napoleon’s capture of the city), “quiet is the citizen’s first duty,” which effectively ended the dream of a popular uprising against the French in 1806.²⁹ Moreover, Kapp argued that ending the U-Boot war in fact lengthened the overall conflict and allowed America to dictate German war strategy. Another reason for Kapp’s discontent was the issue of war aims. He desired to annex Belgium and the

²⁷Lutz, *Fall*, 84.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*

Baltic provinces “for the safeguarding of the future of our nation.”³⁰ However, Kapp claimed that Bethmann had forsaken Belgium already to British domination and wanted to fight for the independence of Poles and other non-Russians under the “Tsarist yoke”, to which Kapp replied, “We do not fight for the Poles or for other foreigners.”³¹

On the issue of political reform, Kapp rejected any constitutional reform of Prussian’s three-class suffrage laws, but instead claimed that “the basis of a truly political freedom is the economic independence and the economic self-determination of the individual” and warned not to let internal political disagreements destroy progress in this direction.³² Kapp concluded his letter with the following warning: “The Fatherland is in danger! Therefore it is the right and duty of every German to break this oppressive silence before it is too late.”³³ This incendiary note led Bethmann Hollweg to call Kapp the “pirate of public opinion” and eventually produced Kapp’s firing as the director of the East Prussian Land Bank.³⁴ More importantly, this memorandum caused two further developments of far more importance to the history of Imperial Germany. On the one hand, attacks of this sort prompted the increasing dependence of the government on non-conservative members of the Reichstag. On the other, it spurred the movement of the far right to make its voice heard, culminating in the founding of the German Fatherland Party in September 1917.

By publicly calling for the removal of the chancellor and demanding that people be able to voice their opinions, Kapp helped undermine the power of the government and

³⁰Ibid., 94.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., 106.

³³Ibid.

³⁴“Behördliche Werbung für die Vaterlandspartei,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 24 Sept. 1917.

the emperor and helped to undermine the idea that nationalism and the crown were intertwined. In effect, Kapp helped create the milieu in which rightist opposition could flourish. Ironically, it also created the environment for his enemies to flourish, as the government had to rely on its traditional antagonists, the center and leftist parties, for support.

Flexing their muscles, the traditional opposition parties (the SPD, Center, and Progressive parties) in the Reichstag began to assert themselves by demanding political reform and an end to the war, giving voice to popular desires (a new role they saw as implicit in the *Burgfrieden*). Specifically, the leaders of the Reichstag advocated that the Imperial government at last abolish the unrepresentative wealth-based three-class voting system of the Prussian *Landtag*, which dated back to 1850 and effectively kept power in the hands of the traditional elite (while the national Reichstag was elected by universal manhood suffrage). The Kaiser, under pressure from a disgruntled population, published his Easter Message on 8 April 1917 that promised to reform the Prussian suffrage system, albeit after the successful completion of the war. The Kaiser's announcement failed to satisfy the left and almost completely alienated the extreme right.

Furious over Bethmann Hollweg's decision not to consult the German Military High Command (OHL) about the Easter Message, Ludendorff and Hindenburg (who ascended to the OHL in August 1916) began to pressure the Kaiser to replace the current Chancellor, who served at his pleasure. The OHL claimed that Bethmann had "not succeeded in maintaining solidarity and enthusiasm for the war in the nation" and was

allowing the Left to direct domestic policy.³⁵ By July 1917 the Reichstag delegates, the OHL, the radical right, and many heavy industrialists were all asking for the head of Bethmann Hollweg, although it was not until Hindenburg and Ludendorff threatened to resign on 12 June 1917 that the Kaiser made Georg Michaelis the new chancellor. Michaelis was a little known Prussian civil servant, who became a puppet of the OHL.

The newly formed Reichstag majority, consisting of the SPD, the Catholic Center Party, and the Progressive People's Party, promptly voted on the Peace Resolution of 19 July 1917, creating even more angst in the OHL. This plan, according to its proponents, stipulated a peace in which no country would be forced to pay reparations and no annexations would be made. However, the resolution "was deliberately couched in vague terms" that allowed the German government to pursue its "precise war aims," which the later Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 exemplified perfectly.³⁶ Even though the peace resolution lacked definitive terms and in practice (as it turned out) allowed German officials to achieve almost any peace, it galvanized the German right out of its passivity, as it began a campaign to counter the peace and reform movements inside of Germany.

In late July 1917, on the heels of the passing of the Peace Resolution, Ludendorff began his propaganda "campaign to uplift army morale" and win over public opinion on the home front. According to Ludendorff, the two were intertwined.³⁷ This program was originally called 'enlightenment service' (*Aufklärungsdienst*), but was changed to 'patriotic instruction' (*Vaterländischer Unterricht*) in September 1917. According to David Welch, Ludendorff's program stressed four ideas:

³⁵Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, 394.

³⁶Welch, *Sins of Omission*, 194.

³⁷Jürgen Förster, "Ludendorff and Hitler in Perspective: The Battle for the German Soldier's Mind, 1917-1944," *War in History* 10, no. 3 (2003): 321-334.

1) *The Causes of the War*. The economic development of Germany, its importance and consequences of a lost war, particularly from the point of view of the working class.

(2) *Confidence in Final Victory*. The war was turning decisively in Germany's favor and devotion to duty and manly pride are to be encouraged.

(3) *The Necessity and Importance of Leadership* (the army, the Government, civil administration, industry and commerce). Hence the necessity for authority and it [sic] corollary, obedience. There must be unflinching confidence in the Emperor and the princes of the federal states, as well as military leaders.

(4) *The Enemy*, who is placing all his hopes on our economic and political collapse must be convinced that we cannot be beaten in the field.³⁸

As will be shown later, Ludendorff's propaganda ideas were remarkably similar to the aims of German Fatherland Party, a symmetry which many historians have noticed.

Gerald D. Feldman, in *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany, 1914-1918*, claimed outright that the OHL created the Fatherland Party and more specifically, that it was "the brainstorm of the Chief of Military Intelligence, Lieutenant-Colonel Nicolai."³⁹ Feldman argued that Ludendorff encouraged his associates on the right to create a mass party to increase morale on the home front, acting as a supplement to his "patriotic instruction" in the army. Feldman's view of Ludendorff's guiding hand in the formation of the Fatherland Party did not win many converts among subsequent historians. Many historians see a similarity between Ludendorff's "patriotic instruction" and the goals of the Fatherland Party, but they do not believe Ludendorff was directly involved in creating the party.

For instance, Martin Kitchen, in *Silent Dictatorship*, argued that Ludendorff and Hindenburg matched the Marxist definition of a Bonapartist regime (a form of dictatorship created when the middle-class acquiesces in ceding its political power to

³⁸Welch, *Sins of Omission*, 207-208.

³⁹Gerald Feldman, *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany, 1914-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 429.

protect its material wealth from the working class), which was backed politically by the Fatherland Party.⁴⁰ More specifically, the Fatherland Party “became the organized mass political support for the policies of the OHL, thus formalizing the pseudo-democratic dimension of the bonapartism of the OHL.”⁴¹ In addition, Kitchen explained that the Fatherland Party used the propaganda apparatus of the OHL to further its own aims, not the other way around, as claimed by Feldman. Gatzke, in *Germany’s Drive to the West*, and Kocka, in *Facing Total War*, recognized the similarity between the propagandist aims of both organizations but neither claimed there was an official connection between the two.⁴²

In spite of these debates, the key point is not whether there was an official connection between the Fatherland Party and the OHL, but that they were similar in spirit and both tried to direct and influence public opinion in Germany through their propaganda. The most significant aspect of the Fatherland Party, not previously explored in detail, is the effect its propaganda had on public opinion within the German population. Since the Fatherland Party was critical of the government, it could no longer claim validity from traditional rightist sources, such as the Kaiser and his government, and had to gain popular acceptance to have any legitimacy in German politics. In this study, the focus is on the Fatherland Party’s propaganda, in order to understand how it tried to obtain this legitimacy. The Fatherland party attempted to create an image of itself

⁴⁰Martin Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916-1918* (London: Croom Helm, 1976).

⁴¹Ibid., 139.

⁴²Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany’s Drive to the West: A Study of Germany’s Western War Aims During the First World War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1950), 216; Jürgen Kocka, *Facing Total War: German Society, 1914-1918*, translated by Barbara Weinberger (Leamington Spa, Warwickshire: Berg Publishers, 1984), 131.

as an organization for every German; it did not want to be viewed as the racist, anti-Semitic, conservative, or an anti-worker organization that others (then and now) have explained it to be. This issue of self-depiction is important because the party is usually portrayed as an extension of the national pressure groups. In reality, the party presented itself very differently.⁴³

⁴³By this I do not mean that the party's espoused aims were all its true goals, only that historians need to look at how the party wanted to be seen, not only how its enemies described it, because only then can we come closer to understanding it and how the Fatherland Party affected public opinion in the German population.

Chapter III

“The Undersigned Men of East Prussia”: The Founding of the German Fatherland Party

Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz and Wolfgang Kapp founded the German Fatherland Party on 2 September 1917 on the 47th anniversary of Sedan Day, a holiday that commemorated the German victory over France in 1870. The event took place in the Yorck room of the city hall in Königsberg (Yorck was a famous “patriotic rebel” who in 1812 had called for Prussians to overthrow Napoleonic rule in Prussia).⁴⁴ This date and location were chosen by the leaders of the Fatherland Party to evoke the strongest sense of patriotism and nationalism in the German populace by linking the party to a Prussian-German tradition of patriotic revolt and mobilization.

Admiral von Tirpitz came from the Prussian upper-middle class, although he was ennobled in 1900 at the age of fifty-one by the Kaiser “as a mark of favor,” and occupied the position of Secretary of State for the Navy from 1897-1916.⁴⁵ Identified with the new *Weltpolitik*, he initiated Germany’s naval build-up and modernization, which fueled the naval competition between Great Britain and Germany. Tirpitz resigned his post in 1916 in protest at the Imperial Government’s decision to stop unrestricted submarine warfare. During his year and a half as Chairman of the Fatherland Party, he tirelessly preformed his duties, but after the war and the dissolution of the party in December 1918, Tirpitz

⁴⁴Both Jeffery Verhey and Hans-Ulrich Wehler claim that the Fatherland Party was actually founded on 3 September, but regardless of the actual date of its founding, the party clearly wanted the German population to believe that it was founded on the symbolically potent Sedan Day.

⁴⁵Robert Massie, *Dreadnought: Britain, Germany, and the Coming of the Great War* (New York: Random House, 1991), 166.

spent the next years formulating plans to overthrow the Weimar Republic. However, none of his plans reached fruition and in 1924 Tirpitz accepted a seat in the Reichstag as a delegate of the German National People's Party (DNVP), successor to the conservative party. He led the party until his death on 6 March 1930.

Wolfgang Kapp was born on 24 July 1858 in New York City; his father had fled to America after the failed German revolution of 1848. In 1870, Kapp moved to Germany to finish primary school and later to attend college. After completion of his baccalaureate, he decided to pursue his law degree, which he earned in 1882 from the university in Celle. After completing his law exam, Kapp rose quickly through the bureaucratic system of Imperial Germany, becoming Prussian Agriculture Minister in 1900 and director general of the East Prussian Land Bank in 1906. As co-leader of the Fatherland Party, he was instrumental in the policies of the party and later he became notorious for his failed attempt to overthrow the Weimar Republic in 1920.

Both Tirpitz and Kapp were associated with many middle-class rightist groups and in particular, the Pan-Germans (although neither were members of the Pan-German League). The Pan-Germans, founded in 1893, were a group of super-nationalist, völkisch (denoting a special commitment to the German people and their connection to the German lands, usually used for racist organizations believing the German race to be superior), imperialist, and radical activists. Although a small group, numbering around 22,000 on the eve of the First World War, it had (ironically, since it was opposed to the government) connections and influence out of proportion to its size.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886-1914* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 2.

After the disappointing summer of 1917, Kapp “had the fantastic idea to stimulate a mass movement that would not only rally the Germans behind the war effort but ‘raise Tirpitz on the shield’ and show that the ‘people’ called for him.”⁴⁷ Tirpitz, urged on by Kapp and other prominent rightists, decided to lead this new movement. Tirpitz was a great choice for the new leader because of his earlier experience with populist propaganda techniques that he acquired while trying to pass his naval bills, which would become useful during his tenure as First Chairman of the Fatherland Party. Tirpitz helped make the navy a popular idea in the early 1900’s by sponsoring tours of new ships for the public, pressuring schools to explain the importance of a strong German navy, and hiring authors to write “novels and pamphlets.”⁴⁸ This feat was even more impressive because all the money for Tirpitz’s propaganda campaign for his naval bills came from private donors. After much deliberation, the leaders finally settled on naming the new party the German Fatherland Party, after considering other possible names including the “Hindenburg Party” or “Bismarck Party.”⁴⁹ However, both of these names “would have been considered a snub of the Kaiser” and were rejected. The party’s first manifesto, which was published in many rightist newspapers of Germany (it appeared in the *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten* three times, twice on 10 September and once on 12 September), illustrated how the leaders of the new party wanted to portray themselves to the German public.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Scheck, *Alfred von Tirpitz*, 66.

⁴⁸Grand Admiral von Tirpitz, *My Memoirs* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, Inc., 1919), 146.

⁴⁹Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, 65.

⁵⁰This manifesto was published in many newspapers in Berlin, but has been translated from the German newspaper, *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, by Ralph Lutz in *Fall of the German Empire*, 368-370.

The manifesto of the Fatherland Party opened with the statement: “Large sections of the German public are not in agreement with the attitude of the present Reichstag majority regarding the most vital questions of the Fatherland.”⁵¹ The Fatherland Party claimed that the Reichstag majority did not represent the wishes of the people on the issues of national unity, peace resolutions, and the state of the war.

The manifesto claimed that the German public viewed “the endeavor to place conflict on constitutional questions in the foreground as a danger to the Fatherland and an advantage to the enemy.”⁵² Although the leaders of the Fatherland Party portrayed sympathetically the German people’s desire for peace, the manifesto described the current peace proposals as “nervous and weak,” which “only postpone peace” and made Germany appear inconsequential to its enemies.⁵³ In even more bitter terms, the party program denounced the Reichstag peace resolution as a prelude to a “starvation peace” and pleaded with patriotic Germans, “If we willingly bear through distress and deprivation, the German people will gain a Hindenburg peace.”⁵⁴ Although the Hindenburg peace was not defined clearly (but it would be later in the party’s propaganda), the manifesto did reassure Germans that it “will adequately repay the price of victory, terrible sacrifice, and exertion.”⁵⁵

In an attempt to re-create the alleged Spirit of 1914, the manifesto urged the German people to be “united in the will to victory” and in the spirit of *Burgfrieden* aimed “at welding together the whole energy of the Fatherland without distinction of party

⁵¹Lutz, *Fall*, 368.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 369.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 369-370.

politics,” working “hand in hand for the confirmation of the will to conquer and to overcome difficulties.”⁵⁶ This new party depicted itself as the only hope for the German people, promising to rescue Germany from the machinations of the Reichstag majority and the SPD in particular. The last words are particularly poignant:

To all who subscribe to these views we appeal to join the German Fatherland Party. Anyone wishing to help is welcome. The aims of the party must be realized at once. Not a moment is to be lost.

Germany’s salvation, honor, and future is at stake!⁵⁷

The platform also contained certain unconscious ambiguities and perplexing statements. For example, the writers denounced the British for thinking of the First World War as a “matter of business,” but they later appealed to the material interests of the German people by stating that the “starvation peace” impeded “our position in the world and accompanying intolerable burdens would destroy our commercial situation and all the prospects of our working classes.”⁵⁸ Moreover, the founders of the party declared that they represented all Germans, but placed emphasis on their own Prussian heritage by writing that “the undersigned men of East Prussia... have founded the German Fatherland Party” and continuously referred only to the Prussian greatness of Germany.⁵⁹ For instance, they did not mention the heritage of Charlemagne or any other great Holy Roman Emperor, but only wrote about Germany’s recent Prussian and non-Catholic tradition, “calling to mind with gratitude our first beloved Emperor of undying memory and his iron Chancellor,” who waged a “titanic struggle against destructive party strife.”⁶⁰ The Fatherland Party’s concentration on Germany’s Prussian past was used by its

⁵⁶Ibid., 368-369.

⁵⁷Ibid., 370.

⁵⁸Ibid., 369-370.

⁵⁹Ibid., 368.

⁶⁰Ibid., 368.

enemies, especially the Center Party, to claim that the Fatherland Party did not represent all Germans.

In addition, the constant mention of Bismarck and the “first beloved Emperor” usually occurred in patriotic leagues that opposed the new Kaiser and Chancellor Leo von Caprivi after the dismissal of Bismarck in 1890.⁶¹ This was a way of veiling criticism of the present monarch and his government. According to Roger Chickering’s study of the Pan-Germans, “Bismarck in retirement endowed with his own enormous symbolic capital a populist ‘German-national’ ideology which he had, as chancellor, resolutely opposed.”⁶² How could the party claim to be patriotic and at the same time oppose the current administration in the time of war? The leaders of the Fatherland Party, as described by Eley’s definition of “national opposition,” believed that anyone opposed to their ideals, even the Kaiser, was unpatriotic.

After the publication of the original manifesto, the leaders of the party released a second shorter manifesto, which was published in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (a newspaper affiliated with the Agrarian League) and twice in the *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*. The declaration appealed to all “German citizens” to follow the lead of the “sorely tired and robust” men of the Eastern Mark, who “during the Freedom Wars a hundred years ago” led Germany to victory, in “gathering all the patriotic forces together” to defend the Fatherland.⁶³ The manifesto asserted that Germany’s “enemies led by President Wilson know that they cannot defeat us in war; therefore they rely on the

⁶¹Ibid., 368.

⁶²Chickering, *We Men*, 46.

⁶³“Aufruf der neugegründeten Deutschen Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), no. 463, 11 Sept. 1917.

German ignorance [of the actual state of the war] to swindle their way to victory!”⁶⁴ “But they are wrong,” because the German army and navy remain victorious, and the U-Boots, the manifesto announced resolutely, are “draining the life-blood out of our enemies.”⁶⁵ The leaders of the Fatherland Party admonished Germans not to surrender “what Bismarck fought for and Hindenburg preserved” by accepting a “hunger peace, which would create unbearable burdens and shackle Germany for many centuries,” but instead to fight for a peace that would assure Germany’s “free development and a new flourishing” after the war.⁶⁶

On 14 September, Conrad von Wangenheim, the leader of the Agrarian League and member of the executive committee of the German Fatherland Party, published his own personal appeal to the people of Germany. Wangenheim encouraged the German people to put aside their differences caused by “occupation, religion, and party,” in order to protect the Fatherland in its time of need.⁶⁷ He also demanded that the “members of the Agrarian League join, en masse, the German Fatherland Party and to support it with all their might,” because the Fatherland Party stands for “Germany’s rescue, honor, and future.”⁶⁸

Following these three announcements, the executive committee of the Fatherland Party scheduled its first public rally on 24 September in the Berlin Philharmonic. The party spared no expense in advertising for the rally, placing advertisements in newspapers

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷“Ein Aufruf für die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), no. 470, 14 Sept. 1917.

⁶⁸Ibid.

throughout Berlin.⁶⁹ The rally met with enthusiastic support as hundreds of Berliners crammed into the Philharmonic. The first speaker was Duke Albrecht of Mecklenburg, the president of the Colonial League and the titular head of the Fatherland Party. Albrecht was greeted with long, animated applause as he reached the podium. His speech harkened back to August 1914, when all of Germany was said to be united in spirit for a German victory. He asked the German people to rediscover this solidarity in order to secure victory, which was within reach. Germany, stressed Albrecht, had “achieved victories both on land and in the air such as the world has never seen,” and it was only due to England’s venomous propaganda that Germany had to fight “people of all races and colors [and] murder instruments of all kinds.”⁷⁰ Albrecht continued triumphantly, stating that “we will defeat them, all it takes is for the German people to unite in the same way as the soldiers at the front.”⁷¹ Some in the crowd responded by shouting, “That’s right.”⁷² Triumphantly, Albrecht told the audience that the Fatherland Party was a

center for all faithful Germans who have this one goal: to achieve a peace that will secure our position in Europe and the world, that will allow our people to recover from horrendous losses and sacrifices, that will allow Germany to develop freely, and that will assure that no one will dare attack us again. (Vivid approval.)⁷³

⁶⁹The advertisement for their first rally appeared on 16 Sept. 1917 in the *Vossische Zeitung*, on the 19 and 23 Sept. 1917 in the *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten*, the *Germania*, the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Vossische Zeitung*; and in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* on 23 Sept. 1917.

⁷⁰*Deutsche Vaterlandspartei, Deutsche Ziele: Reden bei der ersten öffentlichen Parteikundgebung* (Berlin: Karl Curtius, 1917), 3.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 3.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*, 4.

Albrecht ended his speech with an appeal for every German man and woman to “gather around the Fatherland Party to become a strong union like our heroes at the front! Heil Deutschland!”⁷⁴

Grand Admiral von Tirpitz followed Duke Albrecht, and his speech focused on three issues: the plight of the working class, Germany’s enemies, and the aims of the Fatherland Party. Tirpitz explained that the horrible effects of the war had created a need to “provide for the poorer classes, to secure their social position, and to increase tremendously their participation in state and community issues.”⁷⁵ He added that Germany must force the Allies to pay reparations, in order to foil the “victory of Anglo-American capitalism” and guarantee the security of the working classes.⁷⁶

Shifting the subject, Tirpitz described the enemies of Germany and the Fatherland Party. Although England (the name Great Britain was never used), France, Russia, and (beginning in 1917) America were Germany’s enemies, surprisingly the Fatherland Party did not include any references to Russia in its propaganda and only vaguely mentioned France, explaining, “If France is against us in this [World War One], the reasons are historic and pathological.”⁷⁷ The party reserved most of its propaganda for England and its purported puppet, America.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., 6.

⁷⁶Ibid., 12.

⁷⁷Deutsche Vaterlandspartei, *Ziele*, 8; I found no references to Russia in the party’s descriptions of the enemy in the rightist press. This could be because in the fall of 1917, the Fatherland Party no longer viewed the Russians as a major threat and decided to focus all its attention on England and America. Moreover, France was only mentioned once in the propaganda I studied.

The Fatherland Party maintained that the English was “the originator of the world conflagration.”⁷⁸ It announced that England started the war because Germany was a “strong economic competitor and they did not want to compete peacefully,” for all Germans know that “for the English the war is a matter of business.”⁷⁹ The party also accused England of wanting “to kill the soul of the German people” and of fighting the war “in a devilish manner by attempting to kill our innocent women and children through hunger to force our men to their knees.”⁸⁰ This argument is significant because it revolves around the common idea of German *Kultur*, as opposed to Western Civilization. Germany, before the First World War and later the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, prided itself on its distinct cultural superiority, which Germans referred to as *Kultur* that stood in stark contrast to the Western idea of civilization. To the Germans, Civilization represented mundane and artificial phenomena, such as economics and technology, while *Kultur* represented more lofty ideals. In effect, the propaganda of the Fatherland Party tried to reinforce an already current image of England as an aggressive, materialist, greedy civilization attacking and trying to impose its beliefs on the more spiritual, cultured German people.

Moreover, the Fatherland Party blamed England for forcing or tricking other countries into the war against Germany, especially America. Tirpitz, at the party’s first rally, exclaimed that America had declared war on Germany because it “has become the puppet of Anglo-Saxon capitalism,” for Germany “from the birth hour forward” has only

⁷⁸Lutz, *Fall*, 369.

⁷⁹Deutsche Vaterlandspartei, *Ziele*, 7; Lutz, *Fall*, 369.

⁸⁰Deutsche Vaterlandspartei, *Ziele*, 3 and 8.

been friendly towards America.⁸¹ Tirpitz declared that “if Washington could descend from Heaven, he would not tolerate America’s move.”⁸² Furthermore, the Fatherland Party stated that “Germany is leading the fight for freedom of the entire European continent against the tyranny of Anglo-Americanism that is devouring everything.”⁸³

On the topic of the Fatherland Party’s aims, Tirpitz claimed that the party wanted to “gather all the forces of Germany to accomplish one great cause [a victorious end to the First World War] and it did not identify itself with any single organization.”⁸⁴ Acknowledging that in order to successfully end the war, the German people needed to come together, Tirpitz announced triumphantly that “military and political victory is already ours; all we need for victory is to join together with all our hearts and will power.”⁸⁵

Agrarian leader Conrad von Wangenheim’s speech began where Tirpitz left off, stressing the importance of unity. Wangenheim claimed that Germany’s enemies were trying to shatter the unity of the German people. Therefore it was the obligation of the Fatherland Party “to unify all classes, all parties, and all religions” in Germany to ensure a victorious peace.⁸⁶ Wangenheim hoped that “through the fires of war the German people would form an unbreakable block” to act as a pillar of support for the soldiers at the front and the government.⁸⁷ Wangenheim stressed that parliamentarians (the Reichstag majority) had lost touch with the German people and do not understand “how

⁸¹Ibid., 8 and 9.

⁸²Ibid., 8.

⁸³Ibid., 15.

⁸⁴Ibid., 14.

⁸⁵Ibid., 15.

⁸⁶Ibid., 24.

⁸⁷Ibid.

to use the people's determination and willingness to sacrifice" to achieve a victory peace that would secure Germany's future.⁸⁸ Wangenheim concluded his speech with a passionate appeal for German "inner unity, such as the army is showing in battle" and exclaimed: "Kaiser, listen to your people; they will sacrifice anything, endure anything to achieve victory."⁸⁹

Wolfgang Kapp, the last speaker of the rally, followed the lead of the previous speakers by emphasizing the importance of German unity. However, Kapp began his speech by reading telegrams from the supporters of the Fatherland Party throughout Germany. One telegram, from Bremen carpenter Heinrich Spener, the president of the Free Committee for a German Workers' Peace (the same organization that Anton Drexler would join before creating the German Workers' Party), stated:

The new Committee for a German Worker's Peace announces that all of its 65,000 members have joined the Fatherland Party. We promise to educate our working people in order to strengthen their will to endure until our final victory. We trust Hindenburg and the U-Boats. We trust the national spirit within the German working people and despite all sacrifices, we will endure the hardships of war until Hindenburg declares the job done.⁹⁰

Another telegram, from the town council of Gross-Mellen (a small city in the state of Brandenburg), simply read, "We do not want an Erzberger-Scheidemann peace."⁹¹ Since Erzberger and Scheidemann were the leaders of the Catholic Center and Social Democratic parties respectively, this statement made clear that the leaders of Gross-Mellen opposed the Reichstag Majority's peace proposal.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid., 25.

⁹⁰Ibid., 44.

⁹¹Ibid.

Next, Kapp told the audience that ninety local chapters of the Fatherland Party had already been created all over Germany. According to Kapp, this tremendous response and the fact that the Fatherland Party in such a short time recruited “one-third of the people behind Scheidemann,” completed the unification of the German people behind the aims of the Fatherland Party and in opposition to the parliament.⁹² Although Kapp exaggerated greatly the success of the party, its future did indeed seem promising. The enemies of the Fatherland Party, Kapp insisted, were the parties without “any faith in Germany’s might and endurance.”⁹³ In contrast to its enemies, the Fatherland Party wanted to “strengthen the German people’s will for victory” and to “silence the spirit of party politics and disunity.”⁹⁴ Moreover, the Fatherland Party desired to create “peace between the city and country and between the middle class and the working class, which until now has shattered the unity of the German people,” by instead emphasizing a common Germaness.⁹⁵ In closing, Kapp told the audience to fight against the Reichstag’s “starvation peace”, repeated his desire to strengthen the people’s will for victory, and advised everyone to advertise for the party. “Long live the German people, long live the Kaiser,” Kapp shouted as he left the podium, to which the audience responded by singing “Deutschland über alles.”⁹⁶

These opening publications and speeches describe the ideas of the Fatherland Party about its own character, which exemplifies the difference of this party to the old parties of the right, which had followed a “politics of difference,” as elite bastions of

⁹²Ibid., 45.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid., 46.

⁹⁶Ibid., 47.

social notables rather than as rallying-points for politically energized masses. The traditional Conservative Party was unable to transform itself into a mass party, because the “legacies of Prussianism, agrarianism, and anti-intellectualism imposed burdens on the party that were too heavy to permit the flights of fancy engaged in by Pan-Germanists and others in the right-wing vanguard.”⁹⁷ However, in 1917, this “right-wing vanguard” realized its goals with the creation of the Fatherland Party, which became the first mass party of the right. In addition, this new party’s belief in the importance of propaganda and its effect on public opinion, has more in common with the European fascist regimes of the post-war period than the old-style traditional conservative politics of Imperial Germany.

⁹⁷ James N. Retallack, *Notables of the Right: The Conservative Party and Political Mobilization in Germany, 1876-1918* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 4.

Chapter IV

“Germany Wake Up!”: The Print Propaganda of the Fatherland Party

The organizers of the Fatherland Party were new in the intensity of their belief that propaganda was crucial in controlling public opinion within Germany. The party administration organized priests, journalists, and teachers to act as traveling lecturers spreading the message of the party throughout the Reich. They were sent to specific regions according to their religion and place of birth, the better to make contact with the masses. For example, a Catholic Bavarian would be sent to Bavaria to address a predominantly Catholic audience. Kapp even suggested letting “several lecturers speak at once in order to reach a broader audience.”⁹⁸

The party also founded a press department under the control of Dr. Klemens Klein, a professional historian and the chief editor of the *Düsseldorf Zeitung* from 1907-1915, that disseminated propaganda via newspapers and other printed media. In order to reach the broadest audience possible, the party wanted to publish its propaganda in leftist and liberal newspapers, but many of these newspapers were not willing to print the Fatherland Party’s announcements. As a result of this (scarcely surprising) refusal, the majority of the Fatherland Party’s propaganda was found in rightist papers. This study only focuses on newspapers published in Berlin, the capital of the Reich and headquarters of the Fatherland Party. The propaganda contained in these conservative and right-wing newspapers highlighted themes similar to those initially found in the party’s first manifesto and public rally, such as the need to unify the people of Germany, to increase

⁹⁸Hagenlücke, *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*, 176.

the will to victory within the German population, to ensure the future prosperity of Germany by achieving a victory peace, and to reassure the citizens that the German military remained strong and triumphant in the field.

The idea of unity was one of the most frequently recurring topics found in the Fatherland Party's propaganda. The party portrayed itself as a patriotic grouping open to all Germans regardless of class, race, or party. One article announced that "in the German Fatherland Party, a tremendous movement of the people emerges that raises the flag of victory as a unifying symbol over all internal conditions."⁹⁹ In an attempt to appeal to as many people as possible, the party claimed that it was "neither conservative nor liberal, neither agrarian nor heavy industrialist, neither Army League nor Pan-German" and that "everybody who wants to help save Germany is welcome!"¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the party claimed that "members of the German Fatherland Party come from all circles of the working, earning (*Erwerbenden*), and creating people and from all parties."¹⁰¹

To add to its appeal, the Fatherland Party linked itself to the Supreme Command and the Kaiser to create a comprehensive image of patriotism and obedience to authority excluding the Reichstag. The party hoped this stance would be mimicked by the public. Field Marshall von Hindenburg, a popular war hero, stated in a letter to the Fatherland Party that the hope of "starting a new *Burgfrieden*" should "stir every German's heart, no matter what party they belonged to, and should weld them together in a steady patriotic

⁹⁹"Deutsche Vaterlandspartei," *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* (Berlin), no. 11, 20 Nov. 1917. This article can also be found in the 22 Oct. 1917 issue of *Die Welt am Montag*, the 21 Oct. 1917 issue of *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the 13 Oct. 1917 issue of *Vossische Zeitung*.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹"Aufruf! Landesverein Gross-Berlin der Deutschen Vaterlandspartei," *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* (Berlin), no. 1, 1 Jan. 1918.

block (*Vaterlandsblock*).”¹⁰² Even though some members of the Fatherland Party were openly critical of the Kaiser (such as Heinrich Class, who had written a scathing book in 1913 entitled “If I Were the Kaiser”) in their attempt to achieve German unity, the party used the name and the idea of the Kaiser to further its goals. In a telegram to the Kaiser, the Fatherland Party claimed that its ultimate goal was to “preserve Germany’s welfare” and it pledged support to the Kaiser and his “kaiserlich” politics, which would lead to victory.¹⁰³ Although Wilhelm II did not reply as warmly as Hindenburg did to the compliments by the leaders of the Fatherland Party, he did officially thank the “East Prussian men who gathered to support the welfare of the German Fatherland.”¹⁰⁴

In March 1918, at the acme of German military success in the war, the executive committee of the Fatherland Party sent the Kaiser another telegram congratulating him on the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Russia. It stated that they supported in “rock-steady faith” their supreme commander, who will lead Germany to a victorious peace that “will steadily build Germany’s future at home and abroad.”¹⁰⁵ This time, the Kaiser’s response to this telegram was much more enthusiastic, as he expressed his “highest gratitude” to the men of the Fatherland Party.¹⁰⁶

The Fatherland Party wanted to be seen as actively supporting the OHL, the Kaiser, and to link itself to the greatness of Germany’s past (as seen in the original manifesto), in order to form a nascent “folk community” within German society by

¹⁰²“Hindenburg an die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), no. 474, 17 Sept. 1917.

¹⁰³“Aufruf der neugegründeten Deutschen Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.

¹⁰⁴“Ein Aufruf für die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.

¹⁰⁵“Der Kaiser an die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), no. 130, 12 March 1918.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

stressing a unique essential Germandom (*Deutschtum*). Tirpitz warned Germans not to let their enemies “yet again succeed in defeating” them through civil war, as defeat in the current “world struggle would lead to the unstoppable downfall of *Deutschtum*.”¹⁰⁷ Tirpitz admonished the Germans to be aware of their own “inherited evils,” especially a propensity to internal strife, and encouraged “everybody to use their personal force for the sake of the whole, not for personal, selfish gains.”¹⁰⁸ While both men and women were important to this new community, women, according to Tirpitz, needed to ensure in particular that their children learned about “*Deutschtum* inside and outside of school.”¹⁰⁹ This idea of “essential Germaness” was a means to foster a united “folk community,” creating an environment where all Germans, regardless of class, region, or religion, could come together to work for Germany’s common good.

In order to attract ordinary Germans, especially the working classes, the Fatherland Party warned them that the Reichstag majority’s peace resolution would jeopardize their own economic fortunes and labored to refute the ideas that the Fatherland Party wanted to continue the war and opposed internal political reforms. The party’s propaganda stated that only “a Hindenburg or victory peace” would ensure the safety and security of Germany and its people. The Fatherland Party asserted that the Peace Resolution of July 1917 was a “peace of renunciation” (*Verzichtfrieden*), which would

¹⁰⁷ Admiral von Tirpitz, “Wenn es den Feinden wie in alten Zeiten wieder gelingt,” *Berliner Neueste Nachrichten* (Berlin), no. 514, 10 Oct. 1917.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Vaterlandspartei und Frauen,” *Vossische Zeitung* (Berlin), no. 532, 18 Oct. 1917. Ironically, this newspaper was an organ of the Progressive People’s Party. The Progressive Party was a member of the Reichstag Majority that created the Peace Resolution of 19 July, which the Fatherland Party adamantly opposed. This newspaper contained numerous advertisements and propaganda from the Fatherland Party and exemplified perfectly how the Fatherland Party affected many political parties of Imperial Germany.

cause “Germany’s downfall.”¹¹⁰ This downfall would economically cripple the German working class and would damage Germany’s “position in the world.”¹¹¹ Moreover, during the Fatherland Party’s rally in the Berlin Philharmonic, Hamburg businessman Mr. J.C. Jensen, the self-proclaimed advocate of the working classes, explained that the “sacrifice peace” would destroy the economic viability of the German people and the working classes would be especially hard-hit.¹¹²

The most damaging critique of the Fatherland Party was that it was reactionary and therefore against all political reforms, which hurt the party in winning the masses to its side. However, the party realized this danger and tried to assure the German population that it was apolitical and not reactionary. The leaders of the Fatherland Party (whether candidly or not) claimed to stand aside in all political debates and professed that internal reforms were not important now that only the will to win to the war was vital to Germany’s survival. Kapp and Tirpitz’s avowed ultimate goal was to end party strife and unite the people behind them in a unified block. They argued that the majority parties were only attacking the Fatherland Party out of fear because each of these parties was “losing its members to the Fatherland Party.”¹¹³ Moreover, the Fatherland Party decreed that it had “no internal political goals” and did not want “to revive the times of class battles.”¹¹⁴ Contradicting a socialist attack that claimed that the Fatherland Party desired to deny “constitutional reform for the German people,” General Friedrich Wilhelm Freiherr von Bissing, a member of the Fatherland Party and former German Governor-

¹¹⁰“Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*.

¹¹¹Lutz, *Fall*, 370.

¹¹²Vaterlandspartei, *Ziele*, 43.

¹¹³Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

General of occupied Belgium, responded that these allegations were untrue and that he “would leave the party if these accusations were correct.”¹¹⁵

While General von Bissing made the most forceful response to the Fatherland Party’s critics, Georg von Below, a professor of history at the University of Freiburg, had the most imaginative. He announced that the Fatherland Party did not believe that constitutional reform was the most pressing issue to discuss during war. In fact, Below compared the discussion of internal reform during wartime to a man discussing frivolities while watching his house burn down. However, even this man had more sense than those demanding political reform because houses “have fire insurance but the German state does not.”¹¹⁶

In response to the claim that one member, Lieutenant-General von Kluge, said the Fatherland Party was against constitutional reforms in Germany, the party administration issued a statement claiming Kluge “simply said, ‘The Fatherland Party is being fought by such people who are striving only for immediate democratization, instead of for a final German victory.’”¹¹⁷ The Fatherland Party, the statement continued, “refuses any statement concerning inner political questions” and “merely strives for that one aim, namely to strengthen the will for victory in the German people.”¹¹⁸

This will for victory meant, for the leaders of the Fatherland Party, to “wake up” the German people, to make them understand that Germany must emerge from the fires of war victorious and stronger than it was at the beginning of the war. For this to occur,

¹¹⁵“Die Angst vor der Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), no. 503, 21 Oct. 1917.

¹¹⁶Georg von Below, *Das gute Recht der Vaterlandspartei* (Berlin: Deutsche Vaterlandspartei, 1917), 15.

¹¹⁷“Das Zeil der Deutschen Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), no. 584, 15 November 1917.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*

all Germans must be willing to sacrifice for a 'Hindenburg peace.' To gain this "Hindenburg peace," the Fatherland Party had to "shatter the Reichstag majority" and by implication weaken the Reichstag itself.¹¹⁹

Ironically, the propaganda of the Fatherland Party stressed the hardships and sacrifices the people had already made for the war effort, in order to increase the will to victory within Germany. The propaganda explained that the "horrendous sacrifices" of the past years would be for naught if Germans accepted the "hunger peace" of the Reichstag and claimed that only "a peace of victory" could redeem these sacrifices.¹²⁰ The leaders of the party announced "that after three years of war the determination of the German people to fight for a victory peace has not weakened," and expressed their joy in the fact that nothing would destroy "the will to win" in the German people.¹²¹ Although the leaders of the Fatherland Party focused on these serious themes to boost the will for victory, they were not against using attempts at levity and melody to spread their message. For instance, the following ponderous tune adequately summarized the Fatherland Party's message regarding the will to victory:

Serious obligations are calling us in these hard times.
Therefore we are willing to personally sacrifice.

But we cannot in the final hard and heated fight
Politically sacrifice the reward of a German victory.

We announce this yet again
And we announce it frank and free
And stand with German Faithfulness

¹¹⁹"Deutsche Vaterlandspartei," *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*; "Die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei," *Vossische Zeitung* (Berlin), no. 577, 11 Nov. 1917. This second piece was also found in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* and the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.

¹²⁰"Aufruf! Landesverein Gross-Berlin der Deutschen Vaterlandspartei," *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* (Berlin), no. 1, 1 Jan. 1918.

¹²¹*Ibid.*

Behind the Fatherland Party.¹²²

The will to victory was supposed to achieve a peace for Germany that would protect “what Bismarck fought for and Hindenburg preserved.”¹²³ However, in reality, the victory peace championed by the Fatherland Party aimed for much more. The victory peace was intended to ensure Germany’s future prosperity, economically and defensively, providing all that “Germany needs for its development after its horrible bloodletting” during the First World War.¹²⁴ The Fatherland Party couched its annexationist aims in terms of its vision of a victory peace. For instance, the opening announcement of the Brandenburg Provincial Branch of the Fatherland Party stated that in order for “our sons and grandsons” to live in “a proud, free country,” “Belgium must not again become a vassal state of England”; instead, it must come under German influence.¹²⁵ In even more clear terms, the Fatherland Party announced that it expected the following things to be achieved during the peace negotiations with Russia:

the military security of our borders, the necessary lands for settlements in order to strengthen the power of the people, which has been weakened by the tremendous blood sacrifice of the war, the steady positioning of the German forces at the Baltic Sea, the freedom of movement for all Germans and the secure protection of the cultural and economic work of our neighbor countries.¹²⁶

Yet again, Professor von Below provided the most eye-opening statements regarding annexations in his pamphlet *Das gute Recht der Vaterlandspartei*, where he outlined the annexation designs of the Fatherland Party in the Eastern and Western

¹²²“Gruss der Deutschen Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung* (Berlin), no. 503, 21 Oct. 1917.

¹²³“Aufruf der neugegründeten Deutschen Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.

¹²⁴“Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*.

¹²⁵Lutz, *Fall*, 372.

¹²⁶“Die Vaterlandspartei über die Verhandlungen mit Russland,” *Vossische Zeitung* (Berlin), no. 628, 9 Dec. 1917.

Europe. He proclaimed that “the Fatherland Party demands the guarantee of a tremendous German influence in the East,” which included the lands of Kurland, Lithuania, and Estonia.¹²⁷ Analyzing the argument of the Progressive Party’s representative in the Reichstag Georg Gothein that Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania should be given to Poland, Below replied that this plan would be harmful to Germany’s future, because it would “sacrifice good agricultural land, which could also be used for German settlements.”¹²⁸

On the issue of Belgium, Below explained that the Fatherland Party desired to control the Flemish-speaking areas, which had always been a goal of Alfred von Tirpitz. Tirpitz believed that Germany had to gain control of the Flanders coast to achieve naval parity with England. The Fatherland Party, following a plan by General von Bissing, hoped for hostility between the Flemings and Walloons (French-speaking Belgians) in Belgium, because influential members of the party believed that once the Flemings achieved independence, they would naturally, “in order to have a bright future,” join the Reich.¹²⁹

In addition to territory, the Fatherland Party demanded reparations from the Entente to ensure Germany’s economic viability. Professor Below wrote that the German government should demand war reparations to guarantee “a flourishing development” of the German economy after the war and anyone who disagreed was a “Dummkopf.”¹³⁰ In

¹²⁷Below, *Das gute Recht*, 3-4.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 8.

conclusion, Below warned the German people that a peace without reparations or annexations would make Germany appear weak in the eyes of its enemies.¹³¹

One of the main problems facing the Fatherland Party in its mission to improve the will for victory and achieve a “Hindenburg peace” was the belief held by some discouraged sections of German society that World War I was turning in the favor of the Allies. While this sentiment might have been accurate, as exemplified by America’s declaration of war on Germany in April and the success of the British blockade, there was also seeming evidence to the contrary. For instance, during the summer of 1917 French troops went on strike (although not known at the time by Germans), the Third Battle of Ypres gained no considerable advantage for the Allies, and American troops had yet to arrive on the continent in force (German naval officers promised to prevent all American landings). Moreover, on 3 December 1917, following the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Lenin’s government signed an armistice with Germany. Hence, there was ample evidence that could be exploited to make the German people believe that victory was within grasp and this was exactly what the Fatherland Party did with its depictions of the German military as strong and victorious in the field of battle.

The leadership of the Fatherland Party explained that the war was going well for Germany as “our armies are fighting victoriously at the front, our navy is unshakeable, and our U-Boats, being certain of victory, are draining the life-blood of our enemies.”¹³² Backing up this statement, Hindenburg told the German people excitedly during the fall

¹³¹Ibid., 9.

¹³²“Aufruf der neugegründeten Deutschen Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.

of 1917 that victory was in the air.¹³³ Furthermore, the Fatherland Party proclaimed that, “out in the fields, heroism and the sacrifice of our brothers shines with a brighter brilliance and the helplessness of our enemies becomes more and more apparent as the efficiency of our U-Boats and Luftwaffe becomes more and more deadly.”¹³⁴ The Brandenburg Provincial Branch of the Fatherland Party described, in even more detail, the state of war in November 1917:

After the forcible occupation of Riga and Ösel, after the incomparable stroke of genius in the break-through from the Isonzo to the Tagliamento, with its immeasurable military and political results, and considering the inflexible resistance of our heroes on the Western front, we at home have really now only one duty—not to jeopardize the victorious issue by our behavior. It is not for Germany and her allies but for the enemy to speak now if they want to negotiate. We can afford to wait for that after the brilliant results of the Seventh War Loan, and knowing that our economic supplies are assured. Russia is done for, and Italy will soon be done for, too. France has half bled to death in England’s service and England herself is full of apprehension and is fighting our submarines, watch in hand.¹³⁵

It is not difficult to understand how many German people could be duped into believing that victory was within reach with these vivid descriptions of the glorious state of the German military. The fact that the German people endured through the fourth year of the war, facing increasing destitution, without any massive riots or revolutions shows that at least a significant portion of the population trusted this type of propaganda. Another belated testament to the strength of this propaganda is that many Germans were unwilling to accept defeat even years after the First World War ended as shown in the wide-spread belief in the stab-in-the-back legend and the cult of the military that later flourished in the Weimar Republic.

¹³³“Hindenburg an die Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.

¹³⁴“Deutsche Vaterlandspartei,” *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*

¹³⁵Lutz, *Fall*, 371.

The Fatherland Party's propaganda that emphasized unity and a powerful military did have a profound effect on the German population, as represented by the fact that the Fatherland Party gained an impressive number of members (although likely not as many as claimed). Moreover, after the formation of the Fatherland Party, the Reichstag Majority did not make any more peace overtures. Although there were many other reasons for not issuing other peace proposals, such as the lack of a favorable response from the international community to the first announcement, the fact that it received an unfavorable reception from parts of society inside of Germany also played a role. What would be the outcome of the Fatherland Party attacking the majority parties in an attempt to win the battle of public opinion? In an attempt to answer this question, one must examine the countermovement the Fatherland Party inspired.

Chapter V

Eight Months of Agitation: The Social Democratic Party's Clash with the Fatherland Party

The Fatherland Party, with its attack on the political systems of the Reichstag, attracted criticism from many fronts. The National Liberals, although split by the formation of Tirpitz's party, did voice some opposition, as shown in the creation of the People's Association for Freedom and Fatherland, whose "spiritual leaders were Berlin Professors E. Troeltsch, Meinecke, and Herker."¹³⁶ This organization wanted to recreate the *Burgfrieden* of 1914 and, unlike the Fatherland Party, supported internal reforms. However, this association never gained more than one thousand members and "even attempted to merge with the German Fatherland Party" in the final days of the war.¹³⁷ The People's Association failed, according to Meinecke, because "many bourgeois elements at this time joined the Fatherland Party with lively enthusiasm, under the illusion that it represented the true national interests."¹³⁸

One would assume that the three parties that formed the Reichstag Majority and drafted the Peace Resolution of July 1917 would stand firm against the Fatherland Party, which strongly and vehemently agitated against their resolution and desire for internal reforms. Yet, surprisingly, this was not exactly the case. Both the Progressive Party and the Center Party in fact responded ambivalently towards the Fatherland Party. Although the Progressive Party urged its members not to join the Fatherland Party, some prominent

¹³⁶Wortmann, *Geschichte*, 94.

¹³⁷Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, 182.

¹³⁸Meinecke, *Catastrophe*, 29.

Progressive Party members, such as Dr. Körte and Dr. Direchlet, were among the first to join it.¹³⁹ Even more shocking, one of the Progressive Party's official newspapers, the *Vossische Zeitung*, published propaganda from the Fatherland Party in abundance. The party's other paper, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, while not covering the Fatherland Party warmly, did not speak out against it harshly either. It only contained one article that represented the Fatherland Party negatively.

The Center Party stated in its party newspaper, *Germania*, that the Fatherland Party was "not a unifier because it caused internal fragmentation" and explained that the name "Vaterland" implied that only ethnic Germans were welcome.¹⁴⁰ The issue of ethnicity was important to the leaders of the Center Party because some of the party's members came from non-German Catholics, such as the Poles, living within the borders of the Germany. The Center Party also "explicitly declared that each and every committee member of the Center refused and will continue to refuse to join the German Fatherland Party."¹⁴¹ Even though no "committee" members enlisted in the Fatherland Party, "a number of prominent Centrists, mostly of the aristocratic right wing, became members of Kapp's organization."¹⁴² Moreover, *Germania* published some propaganda and advertisements from the Fatherland Party, although not as extensively as the *Vossische Zeitung*.

In contrast to the Center and Progressive parties, the SPD responded vigorously and fervently against the founding of the Fatherland Party from the beginning, for a number of reasons. First, the SPD did not have many members join the Fatherland Party.

¹³⁹Wortmann, *Geschichte*, 104.

¹⁴⁰"Zentrum und Vaterlandspartei," *Germania* (Berlin), no. 477, 14 Oct. 1917.

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Gatzke, *Germany's Drive*, 211.

Second, the SPD, unlike the Centrists and Progressives, had no major internal disagreements over the Peace Resolution of 19 July. Third, the SPD reacted violently against the Fatherland Party's trying to recruit members from the working class, the traditional strength of the SPD (even though only roughly one-third of German workers were socialists). Lastly, once the SPD realized that the Fatherland Party was not making inroads into the working class, it began to use the negative image of the Fatherland Party, which the SPD had created in its propaganda, as a means to try to repair its own internal schism of March 1916. For these reasons, the SPD's propaganda campaign against the Fatherland Party was massive and quite successful in shaping socialist workers' opinions of Tirpitz's party.

A conceptual tool from sociological theory that helps explain why the SPD's propaganda may have been successful in shaping the socialist workers' opinions is Ellul's theory of "psychological crystallization." This theory explains the attitudes of individuals already under the influence of an ideology or set of values. Ellul states that this process in an individual "closes his mind to all new ideas" and this "usually takes on an ironic aspect: the man who has been successfully subjected to a vigorous propaganda will declare that *all new ideas are propaganda*."¹⁴³ "Psychological crystallization" applies to the members of the SPD and other sympathetic workers because they were already pre-indoctrinated by socialist ideology and therefore would tend to view the statements of the Fatherland Party as propaganda.

The SPD's counter-propaganda against the Fatherland Party was disseminated in large part on the pages of *Vorwärts*, the official party medium. Ellul's theory of

¹⁴³Ibid., 166.

“psychological crystallization” applies to this propaganda because “the SPD press preached to the converted... it was bought and read largely by party members.”¹⁴⁴

Moreover, *Vorwärts* had a wide readership, because it had a print run of 165,000 copies daily in 1912 and other smaller socialist publications reprinted its articles and propaganda.¹⁴⁵ The propaganda found in *Vorwärts* characterized the Fatherland Party as the class enemy, by stating that the new party was just a new name for an old foe, the Pan-Germans, and describing the party’s elite in terms that workers would understand and reject, such as forceful bosses and intolerant religious authorities.

On 8 September 1917, the first article about the Fatherland Party appeared in *Vorwärts*. The article, entitled “The New Party! A Masquerade of the Pan-Germans,” used the analogy of an actor changing costumes to describe the new party. The title activates “psychological crystallization,” because previous prewar socialist propaganda had already much earlier identified the Pan-Germans as antagonists. The Pan-Germans had earlier contended that “Social Democracy was simply the most ominous thing conceivable, the original evil, the repudiation of order.”¹⁴⁶ The SPD did not want workers and other members of the party to be fooled by the “new costume” of the Pan-Germans.¹⁴⁷ The article continuously followed this theme, explaining to the cadres of the SPD that they would “realize at first sight, we are once again faced with a metamorphosis of the Pan-Germans. Proof is the names of its leaders.”¹⁴⁸ These leaders were recognized as Admiral von Tirpitz and Wolfgang Kapp and the piece reminded its

¹⁴⁴Stefan Berger, *The British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 104.

¹⁴⁵Welch, *Germany*, 265.

¹⁴⁶Chickering, *We Men*, 92.

¹⁴⁷“Die neue Partei!,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 8 Sept. 1917.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*

audience of their past involvement in the Pan-German League. Another story described “Mr. Kapp as the soul of the new party” who “tries to stir up the new Chancellor against the Reichstag.”¹⁴⁹ The Socialists and their allies dominated the current Reichstag, so Kapp and his new party’s machinations to destroy this coalition placed them in direct opposition to the goals and aims of the SPD. In essence, the Fatherland Party became the new archetypal enemy of the socialists, stepping into the role earlier played by the Pan-Germans.

Despite harsh treatment in the socialist press, the Fatherland Party still attempted to place advertisements in the *Vorwärts* and other workers’ publications, fully expecting to be denied access to this medium and make capital of their exclusion, and indeed, the editors of socialist newspapers refused to print the advertisements for the Fatherland Party. However, the editor of *Vorwärts* did print the party’s statement about the denial. The Fatherland Party crowed that socialist “papers feared their own readers and prefer caution over bravery.”¹⁵⁰ The author of the article replied, “This, of course, is an impertinent misrepresentation,” because the *Vorwärts*’s staff covered the founding of the party earlier, even explaining their aims and goals.¹⁵¹ The editor of *Vorwärts* went on to clarify: *Vorwärts* and other publications “only refused to print the advertisement of the German Fatherland Party to avoid any suspicion that they could be corrupted by the money that the Fatherland Party throws around right and left.”¹⁵²

Socialists also began to complain about religious figures urging their flocks to enlist in the new Fatherland Party. To show the crude nature of such propaganda, the

¹⁴⁹“Wer ist Kapp?,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 10 Sept. 1917.

¹⁵⁰“Die gekränkte Vaterlandspartei,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 19 Sept. 1917.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

SPD actually printed the appeal by the pastor of a church in Niederschönhausen (a section of the Pankow district in Berlin) in *Vorwärts* without any commentary or abridgement. The announcement read as follows:

And what are you doing for Germany's great hour?

1. Give your gold to the Fatherland

And

2. Sign the 7th War loan

And

3. Are you already a member of the German Fatherland Party?

No—no—no? How will you pass in front of your Fatherland, your conscience, and your God?

Well, who is not yet a member of the Fatherland Party, cannot pass in front of Niederschönhausen or in front of his God. And remember, at heaven's gate they check the membership books [of the Fatherland Party].¹⁵³

Soon after the founding of the Fatherland Party, concerned workers began to write to SPD leaders, complaining of industry managers pressuring them to join the new party. One concerned employee wrote that his boss at a local government agency “conducted a survey among his subjects about who wanted to attend the founding gathering of the German Fatherland Party.”¹⁵⁴ The “subject” went on to explain that the fliers for the event contained on the back a membership card; in desperation the distraught worker “asked what one could do against such forceful actions.”¹⁵⁵ The editors of *Vorwärts* replied, “no man shall be forced to join a political party and that no honorable man would allow himself to be forced.”¹⁵⁶ Another story related how the management of the Berlin-based Fatherland Coffee Shop tried to persuade its employees to enlist in the Fatherland Party and offered to pay for their employee's membership dues. The article announced

¹⁵³“Der liebe Gott für die Vaterlandspartei,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 4 Oct. 1917.

¹⁵⁴“Behördliche Werbung für die Vaterlandspartei,” *Vorwärts*.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

enthusiastically, “Nevertheless, not a single waiter has signed!”¹⁵⁷ The SPD stated it would take the issue of governmental sponsorship of advertisements and employers’ pressure to join Tirpitz’s party before the Reichstag.

On 6 October 1917, Otto Landsberg, a socialist deputy, made a speech in the Reichstag against the Fatherland Party’s dissemination of its propaganda in the army and other governmental institutions without governmental censor. He spoke to support the recent “Socialist interpellation concerning Admiral von Tirpitz and the new German Fatherland Party.”¹⁵⁸ Landsberg complained:

clergymen and the State authorities agitated among the population on behalf of the Fatherland Party, and ... army officers, by speeches and the distribution of pamphlets, carried on a propaganda among the soldiers against the Reichstag [peace] resolution.¹⁵⁹

To reinforce his argument against officially sanctioned party propaganda, he informed the Reichstag that the government had censored socialist publications, while “the Pan-German agitations, however, were regarded with favor.”¹⁶⁰ Echoing earlier socialist propaganda, Landsberg called the Fatherland Party a mere front for the Pan-Germans and said that “at the head of this party there are men who hitherto—I will use parliamentary language—have not suffered through the war,” but only wished to profit from it.¹⁶¹

These profits included annexations and inflated dividends from producing war materials,

¹⁵⁷“Kaffee—Vaterlandspartei!,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 27 Sept. 1917.

¹⁵⁸“Reichstag Uproar Against Ministers,” *New York Times*, 7 Oct. 1917. I am using the *New York Times* as a supplementary source because it extensively covered the political infighting that occurred in Germany during the last year of the war. In addition, the *New York Times* and the *Times* of London were useful in gleaming information about the German strikes at the end of January 1918 and the beginning of February 1918, because the German government censored most liberal and socialist newspapers shortly before and immediately following the strikes. Despite the obvious biases of newspapers published in countries at war with Germany, their value as a source outweighs any of these problems.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰Lutz, *Fall*, 132.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, 132.

since the leaders of the new party were members of the landed aristocracy and upper-middle class industrialists. Landsberg provided numerous examples of military officers actively soliciting for the Fatherland Party and even in passing mentioned the notorious appeal from the pastor of Niederschönhausen. Landsberg ended his speech by appealing to the Imperial Chancellor “not to allow the direction of affairs to be taken out of his hands” and warned that the “welfare of the Empire will depend to a very great extent on his attitude.”¹⁶² Landsberg’s speech elicited cheers from the Socialists and outrage from the Conservatives.

By applying Ellul’s theory of “psychological crystallization,” we can better understand how the socialist propaganda likely affected the indoctrinated socialist in regards to the Fatherland Party. The first two months of socialist propaganda in the *Vorwärts* (which reprinted the speeches given in the Reichstag regarding the Fatherland Party and its propaganda) laid the foundation for how members of the SPD were supposed to view this new party. The rhetoric used in the socialist propaganda created a profoundly negative stereotype of the Fatherland Party. Socialists should now think of it as merely a new embodiment of the old Pan-Germans, who opposed socialism on principle, and wanted to destroy the Reichstag majority and the Peace Resolution of July 1917. In addition, the socialist propaganda presented the leaders of the Fatherland Party in old terms familiar to workers, as bosses who pressure their employees, in this case to enroll in the Fatherland Party. According to the concept of “psychological crystallization,” the indoctrinated socialist should regard the Fatherland Party as the enemy and therefore, could be motivated to oppose this new party, while even further

¹⁶²Ibid., 138.

cementing his socialist commitment. The fact that socialist propaganda changed its trajectory, becoming more action-driven (meaning that the propaganda was intended to invoke a response in the targeted subject, after the original announcement and descriptions of the Fatherland Party) proves the usefulness of Ellul's theory in regards to the effectiveness of socialist propaganda.

The SPD's propaganda became more action-driven in early November 1917 as it came to the conclusion that the Fatherland Party was not succeeding in reaching the masses. However, the creation of the Fatherland Party, along with the SPD's powerful anti-Fatherland Party propaganda, instigated a grass-roots movement against this new right-wing party, which the SPD was quick to take advantage of in order to repair the damage done to the socialist movement by the formation of the USPD. This instructive propaganda urged SPD members to protest and break up Fatherland Party meetings, which later escalated into the radicalism expressed during the general strike in Berlin and throughout Germany at the end of January 1918. Moreover, the editors of *Vorwärts* used the anti-Fatherland Party propaganda to solicit new members and hopefully win the loyalty of some USPD members. Out of the four advertisements bidding people to join the SPD found in the *Vorwärts*, from October 1917 through April 1918, three dealt exclusively with the Fatherland Party, while the theme of the fourth was the unequal distribution of the tax burden to pay for the war.

In mid-October 1917, the SPD ran an advertisement encouraging workers to join the SPD that read as follows:

The Fatherland Party and its hypocritical propaganda are poisoning the German political life. It is the obligation of the working classes to close ranks and

to fight for peace and progress; therefore in defiance of the Fatherland Party become members of the Social Democratic Party.¹⁶³

The passage explicitly urges the working class to “close ranks” or in other words to reunite the two socialist movements into one mass organization that could defeat the Fatherland Party. This theme continued for the next seven months, but became more streamlined. Later, the advertisements actually functioned as membership registration forms as well. An announcement in February, which was much more passionate than the first, read:

It is our enemies who under the misleading name of the Fatherland Party want to continue the war for eternity. We have to defeat them! And we will defeat them, if we unite in the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Anyone who wants this please fill out the following.

I hereby declare that I am joining the Social Democratic Party of Germany:

Name:

Occupation:

Address:¹⁶⁴

The third advertisement had the same theme as the first one that appeared in October, but in addition, it too contained a membership registration at the end of the advertisement. The fact that seventy-five percent of the announcements urging readers to enroll in the SPD used the name of the Fatherland Party goes a long way to proving that the appeal was effective and that the rank and file of the party opposed the idea of this “patriotic party.” It would seem that socialist propaganda succeeded in establishing the desired stereotype in regard to the Fatherland Party and used it as a motivation to action, in the direction of outbidding their opponent’s claims to mass legitimacy.

¹⁶³*Vorwärts* (Berlin), 14 Oct. 1917.

¹⁶⁴*Vorwärts* (Berlin), 25 Feb. 1918.

The political clash between the Fatherland Party and the SPD reached a climax between November 1917 and February 1918. These two parties fought for influence within the Imperial bureaucracy, and even more importantly, struggled over the ongoing negotiations at Brest-Litovsk, as the newly formed Bolshevik regime in Russia agreed to a cease-fire. The negotiations continued until 3 March 1918, when after a massive German advance, the Bolsheviks finally signed the dictated and harsh peace treaty. The national leadership of majority SPD abstained from voting for the treaty, but did not vote against it because they “were not prepared for a showdown with the Imperial government over war aims” and, in reality, many SPD members actually supported the treaty, due to the fact that a strong right wing had developed in the party after the many leftist members joined the USPD.¹⁶⁵ The terms of the treaty seemed to parallel the annexationist aims of the Fatherland Party, which desired the Baltic lands and frontier territories inhabited by Poles. Although the members of majority SPD silently supported the treaty of Brest-Litovsk (only the Independent Socialists rejected the treaty), throughout December and March, *Vörrwärts* continuously agitated against the dictatorial tone of the peace talks.¹⁶⁶ While this agitation failed to influence the outcome of the peace settlement, it did arouse popular feeling at home.

During these months, the management of *Vörrwärts* crafted propaganda that warned the working classes that if the “complete program of annexation in the east and west” were realized, it would cause “inner political consequences,” which would “have

¹⁶⁵ John L. Snell, “Wilson’s Peace Program and German Socialism, January-March 1918,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (Sept., 1951): 188.

¹⁶⁶ Holger Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary, 1914-1918* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1997), 384.

[an] enormous [negative] effect on the working classes.”¹⁶⁷ Additionally, the socialist press warned its readers that the Fatherland Party wanted “to fight democracy, parliamentary reform, and the equal right to vote. In short any improvement or progress when it comes to inner politics.”¹⁶⁸ The reference to inner politics referred to the Kaiser’s tepid Easter promise of 1917 to reform the Prussian suffrage system, which had not yet come to pass, and was an issue that the Fatherland Party agitated against. Another propaganda article referred to Tirpitz’s party “acting like a bull in a china shop” at a meeting in Berlin discussing the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk by demanding a powerful German presence on the Baltic Sea for the “military security of Germany’s borders.”¹⁶⁹ The article advised the government not to “follow the Fatherland Party because there would not be peace, only shattered china.”¹⁷⁰

At the same time this political conflict raged, the more active socialists began protesting at and disrupting Fatherland Party meetings and rallies throughout Germany. On 15 January 1918, a Fatherland Party rally of about three thousand people in Mannheim “was frustrated by the Socialists” and later “dispersed by the police amid Socialist cheers.”¹⁷¹ On the same day, socialists interrupted another meeting in Jena and “after passing a vote for ‘a general peace by understanding’ threw out the members of the Fatherland Party.”¹⁷² On the following day, “as soon as the Chairman of a big meeting that had been called in Frankfurt mentioned the Fatherland Party a tumult broke out and rioting followed. The

¹⁶⁷“War of Factions Grows in Germany,” *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 1918.

¹⁶⁸“Die innere Politik der Vaterlandspartei,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 6 Jan. 1918.

¹⁶⁹“Die Vaterlandspartei im Porzellanladen,” *Vorwärts* (Berlin), 9 Dec. 1917.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁷¹“War of Factions Grows in Germany,” *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 1918.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*

police finally had to disperse the meeting.”¹⁷³ Two weeks later, on 27 January, an article in the *New York Times* stated:

The most interesting feature of the German situation today is the campaign of the Fatherland Party and the great popular countercampaign [sic]. In countless cases, and in all the big cities, the meetings of that organization have been broken up, to the accompaniment of shouts for peace and singing of the ‘Marsellaise.’¹⁷⁴

This popular mass mobilization of the socialists, of which the clashes with the Fatherland Party were a part, culminated in an attempt at a general German strike at the end of January and the beginning of February. The Imperial government continuously banned or censored *Vorwärts* and other liberal newspapers throughout January and February 1918 because it feared these newspapers would entice the German workers to strike in support of the Austrian work stoppage that began on 16 January 1918. Therefore, most of the news regarding the strikes was found in foreign newspapers and non-leftist publications within Germany.

The German government was right to worry over the possibility of a strike in Germany, because the day after Independent Socialist Adolf Hoffmann told the Prussian Diet “Let events in Austria be a warning,” the strikes began.¹⁷⁵ The strikes started at the Torpedo Yard in Kiel and in only a few days spread throughout Germany. At the Krupp works in Essen, it was alleged that “200 strikers forced 60,000 workers to strike,” and on 29 January workers at the Vulcan shipyards in Hamburg went on strike.¹⁷⁶ In Berlin, discontented workers protested for immediate ratification of the Prussian suffrage reform bill. Foreign newspapers reported that throughout Germany 500,000 workers were on

¹⁷³“German Factions in Truce on Spoils,” *New York Times*, 17 Jan. 1918.

¹⁷⁴George Renwick, “Peace Riots Halt Tirpitz Meetings,” *New York Times*, 27 Jan. 1918.

¹⁷⁵“German Socialist Protest,” *Times* (London), 25 Jan. 1918, p. 6.

¹⁷⁶“Hindenburg Warns Strikers in Berlin, Who Issue Ultimatum to Government; 500,000 Now Out; Papers Suppressed,” *New York Times*, 31 Jan. 1918.

strike; however, the “Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung insists that only youths are on strike” and official government reports declared that the strikers never exceeded 185,000.¹⁷⁷ However, *Vorwärts* later claimed that there were in excess of 300,000 strikers. Regardless of the size of the work stoppage, the strikers had four demands that they stated in the media of the Central Committee of trade unions:

First—An answer by the German Government to the speech made by Lloyd George to the deputation of English trade unions.

Second—The fixing of German war aims in the west.

Third—The serious attention of the Government to the demand that in the peace negotiations there shall be direct representation of the working-class interests in full proportion to the representation of capitalistic interests.

Fourth—No further postponement of Prussian franchise reform.¹⁷⁸

The second, third, and fourth demands are extremely important, because the SPD and the Fatherland Party were currently fighting over these issues. The second demand clarified the workers’ opposition to the Fatherland Party’s desire to annex Belgium and Flanders, because the workers claimed that they “only supported the war because they believed it a war of defense” and they were not “bleeding and dying for Courland, Lithuania, Longwy, and Briey, [or] for the destruction of Belgium’s independence.”¹⁷⁹ The third and fourth stipulation explained that the working class wanted more representation in the government. As another testament to the workers’ hatred of the Fatherland Party, Wilhelm Dittman, an Independent Socialist on trial for treason for instigating the strikes, “declared that the strike broke out as the result of a ‘social elemental event,’ the reaction... against the policy of the Fatherland Party and the Pan-Germans.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷Ibid; Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, 225.

¹⁷⁸“Hindenburg Warns,” *New York Times*, 31 Jan. 1918

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰“Causes of German Strikes,” *Times* (London), 7 Feb. 1918, p. 6.

Furthermore, Dittman claimed that “the German workers considered Admiral von Tirpitz the intellectual originator of the strike.”¹⁸¹

Despite the fact that the majority SPD joined with Independent Socialists in support of the workers, the strikes never attained any unity, and with this failure any hope of once again unifying the socialist movement died. However, these disruptions throughout Germany worried Hindenburg and Ludendorff, to the point that they threatened to use military force to quell the strikes. On 3 February, the military commandant of Brandenburg, General von Kessel, released the following statement: “Employees failing to resume work will be tried by court-martial, which is authorized to impose the sentence of death, execution to take place within twenty-four hours of the time of sentence imposed.”¹⁸² The strike ended the next day without any concessions by the government.

Despite the fact that the popular counter-campaign against the Fatherland Party failed to influence the government to change its course in the war, to enact political reform, or unify the socialist movement, it is still a testament to the importance and effectiveness of the socialist propaganda. The SPD’s propaganda disseminated in its official newspaper, the *Vorwärts*, taught its cadres how to view and think about the Fatherland Party. Next, the Socialist Party used this propaganda as negative reinforcement to call workers to action, either to join SPD or to break up meetings of Tirpitz’s party. Moreover, socialist leaders used the extreme militarism and elitism of the Fatherland Party to unify workers in attempting a general strike in order to achieve its

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²“Work or Be Shot, Strikers’ Choice,” *New York Times*, 4 Feb. 1918.

real economic and political goals. These goals included “more food at lower prices, an end to the black market, prosecution of war profiteers,” a quick end to the war and democratic reforms in Prussia.¹⁸³

¹⁸³Herwig, *First World War*, 381.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The study of this new, active political public, represented paradoxically by both the German Fatherland Party and the countermovement it inspired, is crucial to understanding how the disintegration and fragmentation of German politics during World War I led to the later political conflicts that defined the Weimar Republic. As implicit splits that had opened during the war deepened, members of the extreme left faction of the Socialist Party went on to found the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) on 31 December 1918, whose goal was to create a communist regime similar to Russia's in Germany. The radical right, which had formed the core of the Fatherland Party, also caused later disturbances in Weimar Germany. For example, Kapp attempted (but failed) to overthrow the newly formed democratic German government in a miserable coup in March 1920. Furthermore, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) under the leadership of Adolf Hitler, but earlier founded by Anton Drexler, a former member of the Munich branch of the Fatherland Party, tried to bring down Germany's representative government in the ill-fated Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. Ten years later, the machinations of the Nazis and Communists, in large part an outgrowth of the earlier conflicts between the Fatherland Party and the Left in the First World War, would shut down the parliamentary system, ultimately leading to the appointment of Hitler as German Chancellor.

Obviously, the main players in both the extreme-radical fringe of the right and left caused disruptions during the Weimar years, but how far back did their radicalism go?

And more importantly, at least for this topic, was the Fatherland Party proto- or pre-fascist as so many historians have argued? To begin with, since the terms proto- or pre-fascist lack a single definitive definition, they are not useful as conceptual tools. It is best to simply ask whether the Fatherland Party was itself fascist or at least had fascist characteristics. In order to answer this question, a useful definition of fascism is needed. Drawing on works on fascism by Hannah Arendt, Martin Blinkhorn, and Ian Kershaw, one can categorize fascism as a political movement led by extreme nationalist revolutionaries who desire a national rebirth, aim to create a party above parties that gains mass appeal, and plan to implement authoritarian rule.¹⁸⁴ Following this definition, examination of the Fatherland Party's propaganda shows that the party did in fact contain fascist elements. For example, the leaders of the Fatherland Party claimed to be above party politics and to be a movement of the people aiming to create a rebirth in German society. However, because the party never achieved power, it would be hard to define the party as fully, functionally fascist. Moreover, to argue that the party was a precursor to Nazism would in a sense be to assume perversely that Nazism was the only outcome possible in postwar Germany.

However, while there are certain aspects of the Fatherland Party, such as ideology, organization, and propaganda that contained fascist elements, the entire debate over the party's status as a precursor to Nazism is not a valid one for a variety of reasons. Most important is the fact that while there was an ideological foundation for Nazism present in Imperial Germany, Nazism could not have evolved without particular events in

¹⁸⁴Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1994); Martin Blinkhorn, *Fascism and the Right in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2000); Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

the post-war period, including the Treaty of Versailles, the stab-in-the-back legend, the Great Depression, and the political infrastructure of the Weimar Republic.¹⁸⁵

Regardless of how important the earlier discussion on the Fatherland Party's relationship to Nazism is to German history, scholarship on the Fatherland Party needs to move beyond a fixation on this stalemated traditional argument, since it can never be completely resolved, in order to gauge other vital issues surrounding the party. The fact that the majority of the rightist voluntary associations of Imperial Germany joined together to form a mass movement that ostensibly desired to create a cohesive, unified German public is essential to understanding the evolution of the German Right from an exclusive bastion of the nobles and the landed elite to the more popular and radical notions of the Right in the Weimar years. Moreover, evaluating the attempt to direct public opinion through the Fatherland Party's propaganda is critical to understanding why the German population was willing to endure through the last grueling years of the First World War.

David Welch argued, in *Sins of Omission*, that Germany's propaganda during the First World War was in fact, in contrast to the long-held view of its ineffectiveness, sophisticated and able to meet the needs of the people. This seems to be true for the propaganda of Germany's two largest political parties as well, as both the propaganda of the Fatherland Party and the SPD resonated with many Germans, which led to a polarized political landscape in wartime Imperial Germany. Princess Evelyn Blücher, the English-born wife of Count Blücher, the German Ambassador to England, aptly described this

¹⁸⁵On the ideological origins of Nazism in the Second Empire, see George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: The Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1964).

volatile situation by writing in her diary that "All internal disputes and disagreements are disappearing for the moment, being swallowed up in the vital conflict of the two great parties, the democrats [SPD] and the 'Vaterlandspartei,' which is daily increasing in vehemence."¹⁸⁶

This clash, thus, helps to explain why the representatives of the Right and Left were unable (or unwilling) to form a viable and functioning coalition in 1919, which could have been the foundation for a stable, democratic Germany. It also sheds light on the evolution of the German masses from a politically passive group into an active and vibrant political body, to which the most successful and dynamic political parties of the Weimar period, the radical right, represented by certain members of the Fatherland Party, and the far left, appealed for support. The leaders of these new political parties, who reached their maturity in the First World War, had their political experience formed by observing intense intra-party conflicts, of which the largest and most public was the conflict between Fatherland Party and the SPD. This unique experience of mass mobilization surely led to the radicalization of politics in 1920's and helped speed along all the tragedies that produced Germany's ultimate defeat in 1945.

¹⁸⁶Princess Evelyn Blücher, *An English Wife in Berlin* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1920), 185.

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