

# OCR Transcript: The Crisis of German Ideology (Excerpts)

**Author:** George L. Mosse

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## THE CRISIS OF GERMAN IDEOLOGY

of the early trials and achievements of the German people. The novel, overflowing with an enthusiastic passion for the Volk and the fatherland, was distributed by Dahn to isolated German communities in the Tyrol with the express purpose of preventing them from being Italianized and absorbed. The author's enthusiasm for the Germanic forebears, their beliefs and virtues, eventually caused the Catholic Church to charge him with responsibility for a revival of the Wotan cult in Germany. A conscientious Protestant, Dahn disclaimed any such purpose. We can easily believe that Dahn had no formal connections with the cult. However, he cannot evade responsibility for having drawn popular attention to a glorified German past in which the mythology, the moral, ethical, and social values, and the physical qualities of the Goths were extolled. It seemed to him and to his readers that these marks of distinction were sadly lacking in modern Germany.

Written just after Italy had achieved unification, the novel exhorted Germany to do likewise. Through its recital of the struggle for supremacy between the Goths and the Romans, it attempted to depict that celebrated national valor which had carried the Goths (used interchangeably with Germans) to victory. In the account of the German conquest of Italy during the Dark Ages, the novel's protagonist was, in fact, the entire Gothic nation. The blond, manly exterior of these people mirrored a purity of soul, which furnished the sufficient reason for their success (symbolically, the "Italianized" daughter of King Theodoric becomes infected with the debauchery of the Romans and eventually drowns in a Roman bath). Contained within this purity of race were also the elements of honesty and courage which, in the struggle against the rationality and calculating cleverness of the prefect Gethagus, caused the defeat of this Roman. But it was the physical prowess relentlessly employed in the pursuit of victory that distinguished the early Germans from the effete and debauched Romans, and enabled them to serve as models for modern Germany.

Diederichs claimed that the ancient Germanic virtues had been forged, tempered, and strengthened in this mortal and bloodthirsty conflict between the two peoples. Dahn doubtless would have concurred. Indeed, the idealized combat of old rendered more attractive the Volkish idea of the indispensability of the good fight, of the war that steeled the nerves and character of a nation. In a spirit similar to that found later in Löns' *Der Wehrwolf*, Dahn praised war as creating the heroes that are celebrated in legends, poems, and history. He also stressed an additional quality possessed by the ancients: their peasant roots. The reasoning again runs true to Volkish form; the

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Germans are inherently of peasant stock, as reflected in the fusion of the soul and historicity in the roots of the Volk. As one writer of the Nazi period expressed the thought: "At a time when the Semites were still searching for their promised land and Romulus and Remus were fighting each other, our fatherland already possessed a settled peasant culture." Both in the popular mind and in the Volkish movement, this fusion of peasant and ancient Germanic traits led to an adoration of a primitivism that encompassed such virtues as honesty and loyalty as much as it extolled the "righteous" power of the sword.

If Dahn, who styled himself a national liberal, hesitated to espouse the logical consequences of an idealization of the past, others did not. As the ancient Germans represented people closer to the roots of the Volkish tree than their modern counterparts, so the ancient religious beliefs, mythology, and gods also came to represent the unfailing source of primeval strength and genuineness, qualities that were lacking in modern religious doctrine. Consequently, ancient symbolism, such as the rune and the swastika, and old legends, such as that of Mittgart, a place believed to be the original home of Nordic man, assumed an immediate and urgent importance. The eminent sociologist Eugen Dühring only extended Dahn's passionate identification with the past when, in his bitter book against the Jews, *Die Judenfrage* (The Jewish Question) (1880), he wrote that the Nordic gods of antiquity were still sentient, vital forces residing in nature as of old. They had endured even through the years of neglect, years in which they were replaced by Christianity. Where men like Diederichs had indulged in talk about a Germanic Christianity, others, who actively longed to recapture the roots of Germanism, displayed a marked trend toward a committed heathenism.

As a central part of this growing paganism, solar occultism experienced a sharp rise in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. It played an important role in Diederichs' thought and had adherents as early as 1848. At that time, C. H. Carus reflected on solar symbolism and attributed the inequality of the races to the fact that some had a more positive attitude toward the sun than had others. A common explanation of the origin of sun worship contended that northern peoples, inhabitants of foggy regions, expressed a natural longing for the sun, which, to them, represented light, hope, and the conceptual center of the cosmos. Such is the tenacity of this simplistic argument, most popular at the turn of the century, that it has been invoked as recently as 1955. At that time it was succinctly restated by the National Socialist Johann von Leers, residing in secure exile in Egypt, a man who had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.

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Under the Nazis he was a guiding spirit in formulating their racial policy and the author of the violently anti-Semitic book *Juden sehen dich an* (Jews Look at You). He claimed that to Nordic peoples the cycle of the sun was symbolic of life in general, as proved by their own particular experience. During the foggy period when the sun was hidden from man it mirrored a brooding contemplative episode in man's inner self. When, however, it broke from the clouds, man's spirit would respond by joyfully and victoriously ascending toward the glowing orb. The gloom of night

had given way to the long-awaited festival of the changing sun; again its recurrence had marked the triumph of indomitable and eternal rebirth.

This symbolism of a reborn sun, in which the concept of karma (rebirth) played a central role, was found throughout the increasingly popular ancient sagas. The *Edda*, a very ancient collection of German legends, portrayed the old religion and its gods with a startling vitality. Indeed, the *Edda* was an even more popular inspirational source for Volkish ideology than was the *Nibelungenlied*. Brought out by a number of Volkish publishers, it was a special favorite of Diederichs and his followers. Throughout the 1920's, the *Edda* was itself supplemented by a special series of publications devoted to the Eddic religion and world view. Some of these studies transformed Christ into the Germanic sun god and the Virgin Mary into the mother of the Aryans. Others regarded the birthday of Christ as a celebration of the return of Baldur, the god of light, from the kingdom of darkness.

The many hypotheses that grew up around the sun cults and Germanic religion verged at times on the absurdly irrational. They entertained symbols that had lost all relation to a plausible reality—as, for instance, in the patently Volkish reasoning of Leers, who stated that since the sun rose to the right, it is little wonder that those who are degenerate call themselves of the left. Here, Leers did not skirt the edge of irrationality; he was in the center of it. Yet this nonsense was taken seriously, with a deadly seriousness that revealed some of the impact of New Romanticism. Wherever hostility to modern life took root, excesses flourished. What made such ideas attractive and plausible, however, was the popularity of occultist beliefs. The irrationality of these cults, as well as the anti-rationalistic romanticism then in vogue, made an astonishing number of men receptive to equally, and at times more, outlandish theories of national heritage, race, and religion. Occultism, in fact, became essential to another aspect of Volkish thought. For some thinkers it provided a link between the present and the past; it was a bridge that spanned a thousand years of neglect. The past, which Christianity had done its best to destroy, could be recovered and applied to the present needs of the Volk through occultism. Occultism was the chalice that quenched their thirst, and at the same time made irrelevant anything that historical scholarship might do to show events in an entirely different light.

The most influential of such occultist groups gathered in Vienna during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Their mentor was the Austrian Guido von List, a private scholar obsessed with the desire to prove that Vienna was the holy city of old. (Significantly enough, List's ideas originated in a German border region which was subject to constant interaction with the neighboring Slavic lands.) List, in a manner that should now be familiar, combined nature and history, with nature as the divine guide emanating a continuous life force. Whatever was closest to nature, so ran the formula, was closest to truth. The German Aryan past was closest to all that was true, to all that was laudatory and worthy of emulation. In this Germanic past, materialism and rationalism had found no sanction; indeed, they were purely modern afflictions.

But how was contemporary man to recapture the past? According to List, all that was required was immediate participation in the landscape that still bore the indelible traces of the glorious Germanic civilization. "We must read with our souls the landscape that archaeology reconquers with the spade... if you want to lift the veil of mystery that of the past you must fly into the

loneliness of nature." Nature was the guide to the divine, since the search for truth must of necessity follow in the footsteps of her creative will. This appreciation of landscape, however, required a more profound initiation. It was necessary that one become infused with the historical past of the Volk, with the most genuine part of the life force, ancient Germanic wisdom. The wisdom had been suppressed by the strictures of Christianity; indeed, that alien dogma had attempted to eradicate it as a vestige of paganism. But it still existed, permeated with the life force, though in a dormant state. The task of historians and Germanists was to revive it by deciphering the ancient script and symbols, and to convey its meaning to modern Germans. In furtherance of this end, List himself published a study of the runic symbols in 1908 as well as a two-volume work entitled *Deutsch-mythologische Landschaftsbilder* (German Mythological Landscape Pictures) (1891), in which he reconstructed Austria's Aryan past. The mythology in question was that of the German gods, who, during the Goths' conquest of the Western world, had determined the fate of man. One

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chapter, for example, dealt with traces of Germanic religious sites in the environs of Vienna evidence of the presence of ancient Germanic culture in the heartland of Austria.

In his investigation of the language that would pierce the centuries of Christian oppression, List boasted that he had discovered the *kala*, or secret language of the Germans. Since some of the *kala* words also occurred in the *Kabala* (a series of ancient books of Jewish mysticism), List also claimed that these works were part of the ancient German wisdom that had survived Christian persecution. His *Secret of the Runes* (1908) gave rise to the ideas of his disciple, Philip Stauff, an assiduous writer for German Volkish publications, who thought that this secret language had survived more tangibly in the wooden beams of old buildings. This theory was advanced in Stauff's book, appropriately entitled *Runenhäuser* (Rune Houses) (1913).

List's emphasis on using purely mystical means to arrive at a system of intuitive history brought him close to the ideas of the theosophists. Like Madame Blavatsky, List claimed to possess a "secret science" which, by means of the life force—in Blavatsky's case it was an omnipresent vital ether—unveiled the past. His emphasis on solar symbolism, a belief that all impressions necessarily come from an extrasensory world, and communication with the ghosts of a bygone age further reflected an especially close connection with theosophy. In some instances, both movements were linked by a common membership. Johannes Baltzli, the founder and moving spirit of the Guido von List Society, figured importantly in theosophical publications, while the chief financial supporter of the society was likewise an avowed spiritualist.

However, occultism affected List and his disciples in other ways as well. One of them was in the realm of political theory. List was associated with the Schönerer group of anti-Semitic pan-Germanists and contributed to their official publication. Like Schönerer, he dreamed of a political system that, sanctioned by natural and ancient custom, would revitalize the Volk and institute the appropriately Germanic form of government. At the center of this vision stood the figure of a leader, a "strong man from above," one whose advent was inevitable. He also

believed—another indication of the influence of occultism—that this leader would arise reincarnated, "reborn," from among the gallant dead of the ancient battlefields. List shared the concept of karma, which was basic to such a belief, with Madame Blavatsky, as shown in his account of his dream of the messianic leader published in the pages of *Prana*, a German theosophical journal. This idea of a Führer had added significance in that it supplied a goal for List's longings and provided a concrete way out in times of national disturbance and unrest. And it was indeed in the disoriented era of the 1920's that List enjoyed something of a revival. The largest union of white-collar workers, the *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen Verband* (German National Union of Apprentices), praised this "almost forgotten man" for having shed light and hope into the age of darkness.

From Austria, List's ideas filtered into Germany by way of one of those figures one encounters in the Volkish movement who are so difficult to explain to modern readers. Alfred Schuler was a *Luftmensch*, a man who never earned a penny and somehow managed to live in poverty without caring; above all, one who exerted great impact on his fellow men without ever publishing a line. Schuler's milieu was the artists' quarter of Munich, Schwabing, where a whole coterie of like-minded people had gathered at the turn of the century. The poet Stefan George was an important figure in the group, as was a promising young man named Ludwig Klages, later to be one of the ornaments of German philosophy.

This circle in which Schuler moved and was looked up to has been celebrated in Franziska zu Reventlow's autobiographical novel, *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* (Mr. Dame's Notebook) (1902). In it she describes the members of this esoteric group, who were known as "the cosmics." They distinctly frowned upon individualism and held the individual, along with his precious idiosyncrasies, in low esteem. Instead, the greatest value was placed upon the primeval substance common to all persons of the same race. It was a racial substance supposedly found in the blood of the peoples. This racial characteristic, in turn, was equated, on a philosophical level, with a cosmic principle that created the true life and was necessarily present in any worthwhile, creative personality. Like List, the members of this circle equated Germanism and race; the life spirit was identical with the racial characteristics exemplified by the common blood of the German Volk. The emphasis on blood was directly derived from the ancient German cult of the Druids, which this group attempted to revive. By so doing, they hoped to become infused with the primeval substance—though their eccentricity was not insignificantly affected by a desire to flaunt their heathenism. George, to be sure, in the end chose a different path, but Schuler and Klages remained loyal to their youthful convictions and experiences. Klages, in fact, went on to elaborate a more detailed cosmic philosophy, but we shall discuss that further on.

Supported financially by Gustav Freytag's son, Schuler eked out a meager existence while giving some public lectures in Munich and...

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Dresden. The most significant of these may have taken place at the Bruckmanns' private house in Munich in the year 1922. During this year, Adolf Hitler was a regular guest at the house and it is altogether likely that he heard some of Schuler's ideas from the Schwabing oracle himself. In his ideas and lectures, Schuler closely followed the concepts and hypotheses formulated by List. He too rejected all academic scholarship in favor of an inner correspondence with Germanic antiquity. Schuler, however, subtly twisted or reformulated some ideas; for example, he identified the life force inherent in nature more closely with that flowing in the blood. Moreover, he placed greater emphasis on the outward cultural expression of the Volk spirit. For instance, he claimed that the life force could be aroused and vitalized through a participation in heathen rituals and through the medium of spiritualism. He had earlier even tried to cure Nietzsche's madness by means of an ancient Roman rite of spirits.

In his lectures Schuler condemned urbanism and equated it with the intellectual's materialism which perverted true creative thought. In opposition to the cosmopolitan intellectual stood the adept whose "idealism" stemmed from the mysterious call of the blood, from the source of the genuine creative instinct. It was only through the ancient wisdom diffused in the blood, Schuler claimed, that he personally had "lived" antiquity, that he had known it intimately and had actually "seen" the life of long ago. His Germanic blood had allowed him to "see with his soul," to experience deeply what Christianity with its alien dogmatism had for so long repressed. However, this interaction with the Germanic past could not be attained in any meaningful way by the individual on his own. Life, as understood by Schuler and his fellow mystics, could only be lived meaningfully in unity with others, in concert with the "initiates"—that is, the members of the Volk. It functioned best on a wide basis, the way towns and houses together formed a part of the landscape. This organic unity had been known in the heathen times of old. It was the task of the contemporary generation of Germans to strive to recapture it.

Another link between List and Germany was supplied by an eccentric character named Tarnhari. Whereas Schuler was at least sincere, Tarnhari, in all probability, was simply a crook and an opportunist. He introduced himself to List as the reborn leader of the old Germanic tribe of the Völsungen. Enraptured, List attentively lent his ear to Tarnhari's ancient memories of tribal history and found that, "singularly enough," they corresponded with results from his own "research." That he believed Tarnhari itself speaks volumes for the quality of his thought. Tarnhari went on to make a career in the Volkish movement. He made an ideological contribution to the cause by publishing a *Swastika Letter* from Leipzig, whose title page displayed an astral figure with a sun-drenched swastika floating over a man kneeling in a landscape. The combination of sun worship, exaltation of nature, and Volkish faith could hardly have found a better representation. Like many members of the Volkish movement, Tarnhari, around the turn of the century, attempted to organize a sect. And like those of the others, it too broke down, since he quarreled with everyone involved instead of getting down to concerted action. To obtain funds, Tarnhari printed and sold small pictures that could be used as stamps. All were of a Volkish character. One such picture showed Baldur, the Germanic god of light, while another portrayed Thor, the god of action, of strength. (The pictures were executed for him by Ludwig Fahrenkrog, himself an eager advocate of a Germanic ideology, who, oddly enough, had been the favorite student of the Wilhelmine painter Anton von Werner, a model of respectability and

correct taste.) But Tarnhari, like Schuler, had his admirers and advocates. In fact, his principal advertiser was Dietrich Eckart, Hitler's mentor in the early days of the National Socialist party. And, indeed, the world view Hitler carried into office was not untainted by Schuler and Tarnhari's Germanic frame of reference.

But still we say that such beliefs verged on the magical, the irrational, the insane. What is important, however, is that at that time these viewpoints were acclaimed precisely because they were magical. Schuler himself admitted that the actual realization of the cosmic and primeval forces in a person could make that individual strong and powerful enough to be considered a magician. Not famous for his humility, Schuler attributed such powers to himself. One is reminded of Thomas Mann's *Mario and the Magician* (1929), which showed such ideas in their terrible reality. Was Schuler simply misguided or was he half mad? That either might be true is not really relevant and does not account for his influence. For Schuler was taken seriously by too many "intelligent" persons. Of course, one could go so far as to consider the sanity of the audience just as questionable; but that would fail to explain why such a large sector of respectable society likewise thought that these ideas did reflect reality and could in fact be implemented with honor and justice.

In Germany, List's ideas, spread by Schuler, intermingled with other Volkish precepts. Many people accepted them. Some made subtle changes or emphasized some points while ignoring others. But who participated, and in what manner, in deriving respectable, plausible political alternatives from these ideas? The Volkish movement...

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was like a spiderweb. The men who entertained these mystical ideas knew one another personally and borrowed from one another's works. Moreover, they contributed to one another's journals. When *Die Sonne*, a periodical advocating the Nordic world views we have discussed, was founded in 1923, its contributors represented a number of subtly varying viewpoints, but all were united in the common effort. Among them were the National Socialist Darré, the racial theorist Günther, the ardent Volkish novelist Kapherr, and the conservative *Deutschnationale* Dr. Paul Bang, who will occupy us later. Furthermore, once the Weimar Republic had been established, the small coteries in Jena, Vienna, and Munich broadened out to include much of the political right. Not all accepted the Germanic visions of a List or a Schuler, but it is astonishing how many did. Beneath the respectable mien of serious gentlemen in top hats coursed a mystical ideology of Germanism and race. The more desperately frightened they were by the direction the Weimar state seemed to be taking—into economic crisis and possibly eventually into Communism—the more they turned to the concepts, slogans, and rationale of the Volk and all that it signified.

Both literature and art effectively diffused the cult of Germanism among the population at large. By this route it penetrated the national bloodstream, especially in popular novels such as Hermann Burte's *Wiltfeber, der ewige Deutsche* (Wiltfeber the Eternal German) (1912). The hero rejected the bourgeois values of those around him and took up a search for the Volk, for those

of his people who could be vitalized with the true feeling of Germanism. He attempted to resurrect a world that was being strangled by modernity. The world of the past was more genuine and beautiful than contemporary reality. Its civilization was epitomized by the peasants who had tilled the soil for centuries past. In contrast, the hero felt that his own century had become debased, that the ugly was exalted instead of the naturally beautiful, that the herdlike masses dominated religious feeling and aesthetic taste. In Wiltfeber's eyes, this degeneracy symbolized the death of the Christian God and the dissolution of the covenant of the Old Testament. These had to be supplanted by a Germanic Christianity through which the springs of the Volk's salvation could flow again. A Germanic god must rule again; it only remained for Germans who still felt him in their souls to raise him to the appropriate stature. The narration of the story abounded in Germanic symbols and even contained a new version of the *Götterdämmerung*: the hero and his beloved die high on a rock, destroyed and consumed by a thunderbolt. Modeled presumably after the god Thor, Wiltfeber represented a Germanic hero leading a people who were still "healthy" enough to yearn for the Volk leaders and kings, and still opposed rule by the herd.

Burte went on writing, but none of his later novels ever attained *Wiltfeber's* popularity. Many of his works developed the sun myth, of which he made the Old Testament Samson a physical symbol; Samson was the superman whose power depended upon the strength he received from the warmth of the sun's rays. In his old age Burte became a supporter of Hitler; as Frederick the Great could enlist the admiration of Goethe, so he maintained Hitler should command the allegiance of great national poets. Burte felt that he was superior to Goethe in his grasp of the significance of the organic Volk.

To Hermann Burte we must add the younger Hans Friedrich Blunck, who, if not as popular as Burte, was certainly the most prolific of the Volkish novelists. His approach was similar to Burte's, though he relied more directly on the ancient German sagas. In his *Die Urvatersaga* (The Legend of the Primeval Father) (1934), the sun was portrayed as the mother of all life; according to legend, there existed such a sensitive relationship between the sun and life that when it receded at night the king would be subject to "bad hours." Blunck's heroes also sought after God, the God of German mythology, and it was on behalf of the German Volk that Blunck wanted to see a resurgence of the ancient godheads. "The Romantic who transcends the worldly, as the mystic did the scholastic, is the great contribution of our Volk to the idea of creation."

Blunck came to the Volkish movement as a youth. At school he founded, in 1903, an association called *Die Germanen*, whose purpose was similar to that of the contemporary Youth Movement—the re-establishment of spiritual and physical contact with Germanic nature. He often expressed a deep admiration for the Youth Movement and frequently published in its journal. Later he went on to contribute to Adolf Stöcker's various publications. His development was fairly typical of many young people who entered and later contributed to the Volkish movement. As we will shortly see in greater detail, Blunck mirrored the predominant radical turn to the right that was typical for German youth. He too went the whole gamut and eventually became the president of the *Reichsschrifttumskammer* (Corporation of Authors) under the Nazis. But not being a racist, as Burte was, he was never fully at ease in the Third Reich. For it was possible to



share Volkish attitudes without being a racist. This is a problem which will occupy us in future chapters, for some men and women believed in the Volk but also held that certain privileged and Germanically oriented Jews could become a part of this mystical whole. Blunck's anti-Semitism became muted and subdued and the...

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were able to infiltrate, and the people whose imagination they were able to capture but who did not necessarily join in any organized effort. Those who were daring enough to spurn the mores and comforts of society were also more outspoken and less apt to be intimidated by an unreceptive or even hostile audience. In this respect, and because of their relative popularity, the Artamanen impinged upon the consciousness of the rapidly growing National Socialist party in a manner not equaled by other utopian groups.

While the Artamanen Bund was more successful than the earlier utopias, it itself was surrounded by settlements which aspired to the same popularity but with a different ideological emphasis. Many of these were founded in reaction to the economic and social disorganization, especially as it broke in upon Germany after the First World War. Even the left tried to found settlements that accorded with Marxist ideology. But it is significant that their membership amounted to only a tenth of that achieved by the Volkish utopias. Unlike Marxism, the Volkish ideology lent itself readily to justifying the utopias. Some were directly inspired by Volkish thinkers. Using the ideas of Guido von List, tiny Briedhablik, near Danzig, which lasted from 1919 to 1924, styled itself as the "supernational Aryan union," adding vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, and nudism as pro-racial measures in order to supplement List's ideas. Donnershag, founded by Ernst Hunkel in 1919 and lasting but a few years, went a step further by incorporating the precepts of two prophets of Volkish thought: the economic theories of Silvio Gesell and the "Germanic faith" of Paul de Lagarde.

Here we have to deal with a problem, both practical and ideological, that all these utopias faced. Regardless of its explicit political association, a community whose members live together, work together, and share the produce of toil is open to the charge that it entertains some communist tendencies. In the practical sphere the problem is easily answered, in that the economics of communalism were not sufficient to support the inhabitants of the utopias. Too many factors (the market, prices, inflation, credits, etc.) were beyond their control. Economically then, the utopias could not survive on a communal economy. The political charge, however, that they were attempting to apply the economics of communalism, was more difficult to meet. Was not the establishment of these utopias precisely the socialism the Volkish theorists deplored?

There were many answers, some more sophisticated than others. Hunkel, the founder of Donnershag and chancellor of the Germanic Knights, who dedicated themselves to spreading Nordic beliefs,

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made it plain that only as much of the communist theory came into play as was necessary for self-preservation. In any case, this communism, it was asserted, was of a pure Germanic strain, practiced and perfected by the ancients. It was an emotional trait that came from the Volk soul and molded itself according to the needs of the Volk. Then too, there was a distinct element of anti-capitalism both in Hunkel's argument and in that presented later in the famous book written by Ferdinand Fried (Friedrich Zimmermann), *Das Ende des Kapitalismus* (The End of Capitalism) (1931), and published by Eugen Diederichs. Avoiding the Marxist mechanism of class struggle, they decried capitalism in its modern form, labeling it "Manchesterism." It was condemned, however, not for perpetuating a hierarchical structure but for its role in destroying the Volk. In some instances, as in Fried's book, this argument culminated in the defense of socialist communal arrangements insofar as they facilitated the goal of complete nationalization of the land. But in all instances the utopians proclaimed their anti-Marxist intention—which was certainly reassuring in Volkish circles—of erecting not a classless society but one organized in estates, enjoying a hierarchical structure, and tolerating only the racially fit. The utopias were communal solely to enhance relationships between their members which would encourage the propagation of a healthy racial elite. If this was insufficient to dispel the doubts of anti-communists, there was always the mystical, religious aura, and the concrete activities of many right-wing utopias, to assure them they were in the proper company.

In several instances the need to propagandize and defend these Volkish utopias led to the establishment of publishing houses. Hunkel was well equipped to initiate such a venture at his settlement. Prior to and during the First World War, he had edited the journal of the Eden colony, in which he espoused racial ideas and connected them with Nordic beliefs of a mystical nature. In this manner several organizations managed to exert an influence out of all proportion to the size of their membership (Donnershag numbered only 10 people) by disseminating ideas that were welcomed by many who were sympathetic but did not join.

As the Germanic utopias were in danger of being identified with communistic practices because of their communal philosophy, so some ethical and religious settlements, under the guise of a mystical humanism, actually veered toward the beliefs and practices of the Volkish settlements. The Vogelhof, established in 1910 at Hellerau in Saxony, was actually a pietistic foundation. However, its religious pietism advocated a spiritualized Christianity cleansed of foreign...

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just before the war, did most to propel the ideology in this direction, and with significant results. In 1913, in a famous article, he asserted that the Youth Movement was the only agency capable of restoring Germany to health. The age of science and reason which had done Germany serious injury had to be transformed into an age of culture, which under present conditions could be found only in the precepts of Germanism. Langbehn's prescription for a nation of artists found its echo here. Omitting reference to either Bismarck or Frederick the Great, Breuer cited Kant instead in his appeal for a Volkish commitment. The philosopher's principles of civic duty were read as Volkish cultural imperatives. The Volk was an organic growth basic to any

society. The Wandervögel should recognize their duty and become the conscience of the Volk. And this was the Wandervögel's conception of their task when they gave a cool reception to the ultra-patriotic proposals in the debates leading up to the Meissner meeting. It also formed the basis for their attitude toward Jews, and explains as well their soul-searching vacillation with respect to the humanist proposals of Gustav Wyneken.

Though the Meissner resolution of 1913 was vague in all respects, calling only for truth and responsibility, the underlying ideological currents of the Youth Movement became more explicit when faced with questions of immediate relevance. Such an opportunity arose in the framing of the policy on admitting Jews into the Wandervögel and in defining the role of the Jews relative to Germans. It was precisely in this area, in the confrontation with the Jewish question, that the Wandervögel gave expression to the Volkish substance which had underlain their ideological presumptions from the very start.

The exclusion of a Jewish girl from membership in the female branch of the Wandervögel in 1913 thrust the Jewish question into the open. This incident, however, was not the first of its kind. Rather, it served as a catalyst in opening up formal discussions of the issue after a long history of such incidents that had colored the approach of many of the Wandervögel groups. Now all of the Wandervögel chapters were compelled to formulate a definite policy. Essentially four positions were brought forward in the national and local debates that followed in the next few years. Some opted for allowing assimilated Jews to participate in the movement; another faction, vociferous and increasingly popular after 1918 and supported by the Austrians, held that Jews were racially inferior and therefore pariahs; a third point of view, endorsed by many of the leaders, favored recognizing the Jews as an autonomous and separate Volk that had merits similar to those of the German Volk; finally, a smaller group favored granting the Jews essentially unrestricted admittance.

## **THE YOUTH MOVEMENT**

But, however the final judgment was rendered, for the many local chapters the confrontation with the Jewish question sharpened the Wandervögel's consciousness of the Volk.

Those who would accept the assimilated Jew nevertheless regarded Jews as a whole as culturally and racially different from Germans. But they granted the possibility that the exceptional Jew might change. One writer emphasized this point when he stated that those Jews who could count several generations in the country could not be excluded if, in their appearance and soul, they had shed their "Jewishness." Obviously, the physical qualification here shows that the Germanic criteria were very much in force. This was, indeed, far removed from the liberal idea of a German-Jewish symbiosis. In this respect the Youth Movement clearly reflected the closing of the doors on the Jew as a Jew in Germany. There remained only a slight crack through which Jews who had acclimatized and transformed themselves, who had grasped the uniqueness of the German character, its landscape and tradition, could enter to participate in the revolt of German youth.

The exception made for the Germanized Jew was, however, of some moment, for it meant that a Volkish ideology could exist without a racist outlook that automatically barred Jews from

membership in the youth organization or the nation. Along with several local chapters and Wandervögel groups, the Neue Pfadfinder (New Pathfinders), a Volkish youth group established in 1920, adopted the policy of accepting assimilated Jews. Its South German branch admitted Jews on this basis. Nevertheless, it was not all that simple. As a pro-assimilationist Jewish periodical contended, the acceptance of Jews on the basis of Germanization affected "only those Jews who are more Nordic than the Nordic Aryans. Secretly they are made fun of all the same." Since the Neue Pfadfinder also entertained the cult of beautiful Nordic man, Jews who looked "Jewish" were not likely to be accepted. This attitude strongly indicates that the ideology was always determinant in defining the limits of toleration even among those groups that rejected total exclusion of Jews.

The idea that the Jew was racially distinguishable from the German Volk was first presented to the Wandervögel in the years before the First World War. Supported by only a small segment of the movement's leadership, the *Wandervogel Führerzeitung* discussed the Volk and the youth organization in racial terms. This paper was dominated by two of the faction's theoreticians, Friedrich Ludwig Fulda, a young teacher, and Dankwart Gerlach. Gerlach exhorted the youth to become familiar with the work and thought of the racist Lanz von Liebenfels, an intimate member of the Guido von List circle...

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## THE CRISIS OF GERMAN IDEOLOGY

The establishment of such a mythos was no mean task. Men of exceptional qualities were needed. The consensus, not collectively or consciously arrived at, among these disciples of Nietzsche was to look to an exceptional personality, a leader. In a sense, these longings can be explained by the times. Frustration, an extreme sense of disappointment, a deep discontent at a situation where change was necessary but no forces capable of implementing it seemed at hand, all led to solace in illusions. It was a time of prophets, of poetic seers; it was a time when only a charismatic leader seemed capable of ending the malaise of the intellectuals. Thus the intelligentsia looked to a heroic leader for release. The most vivid image of this leader was that exemplified by Willibald Hentschel, who saw the Germanic hero in Dürer's knight, who, in the forbidding company of death and the devil, nonetheless, tranquil and full of hope, rides toward the Holy Grail of Germany's future.

Arthur Bonus and Ernst Bertram likewise endorsed the idea of a new heroic personality who would embody the new mythos of Germany. For Bonus the hero had to possess a strong autonomous will, a sense of heroic determination that would replace the old Christian mythos, which had stressed the good and the bad, guilt and repentance. Bertram went a step further. He had discovered in Nietzsche the heroic personality capable of combining the new mythos with the aspirations of the nation. In his book on Nietzsche, Bertram claimed that a legend of the great man, imbued with his thoughts and goals, would be sufficient to serve as the basis of the new mythos. Great and heroic men, he claimed, generated a spiritual substance that persisted in the strivings of every man. To create this identity, however, it was necessary that the model be made intelligible to every man, that it be embodied in the forms most easily

appreciated by people at large. He claimed that this could be achieved through legends, relegating to the realm of spiritual experience the "quintessence" of the great man.

For Bertram's purpose, it was essential that Nietzsche be removed from his historical context. He had to be detached from the body of German philosophical thought and placed above its limitations. Thus Nietzsche was to be depicted as a philosopher who had transcended the pettiness of his people's thinking and raised himself to the stature of an *Oberdeutscher*, a climactic German. Moreover, certain of Nietzsche's pronouncements as well as his very person were to be construed in a manner favorable to this interpretation. Nietzsche was the knight who bravely traveled along his path of necessary horrors, oblivious of the surrounding dangers, in pursuit of his ends, while his anti-Germanism was read as a transcendence of the petti-

### **LEADERSHIP, "BUND," AND EROS**

ness of Germany and the grandiose fulfillment of a new German mythos. "Evidence" for this interpretation was taken from the philosopher himself. Had not the great man stated that all people had to pass through grave dangers before achieving the climax to which they were destined by the intensity of their despair and the courage of their suffering? This was read to apply to the contemporary situation in Germany, and Nietzsche was regarded as embodying leadership qualities that were to lead the nation to the greatness it deserved.

For Bertram, Nietzsche's prophecy was the grand gesture of a Germanism that aspired to rise "beyond itself," and, for the legend Bertram concocted to depict the new mythos, the philosopher himself represented the "lightning breakthrough of the self-knowledge of the Volk at the moment of its greatest inner danger—while, simultaneously, he also represented an awakening and development through the saving will and the saving instincts." According to the legend, Nietzsche had posited a new mythos and with it had created a youthful Elysian century.

Thus Nietzsche was declared to be a Nordic prophet. Bertram's interpretation was echoed by writers of more explicitly Volkish leanings. Alfred Bäumler, a popular philosopher, transmitted it to the Nazis directly. Today we recognize the error of this interpretation. Yet, to use Bertram's terms, the right and wrong of "shameless historicism" are beside the point, for, like a mythos, the image acclaimed by generations as the correct one, even though erroneous, transcends reason as it does good and evil. It mattered little that Nietzsche had ridiculed and rejected the intellectual material of Lagarde's works. In spite of it, he became a living mythos of the Volk. His rejection of things as they are, his statement of Germany's plight, were taken as a projection of a power of will which facilitated his transcendence of historical limitations. The Nietzschean mythos was finally fused, as noted earlier, with the image of Dürer's knight. This combination of the extraordinary will power of the philosopher with the endurance and courage of the knight produced the idealized version of the German leader. In addition, it appealed to those who, like Guido von List, expected the leader to "come from above." This had a considerable impact. Later on, Hitler was to give it additional currency when he had himself portrayed by Hubert Lanzinger as a medieval knight, astride a horse, wearing a look of determination as his gaze penetrated into the future. When beholding the picture of the knight, any initiate of the National

Socialists who believed in the lavish promises of future grandeur for the nation, drew the appropriate moral: courage in the face of danger and a steeled...

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## THE CRISIS OF GERMAN IDEOLOGY

Germany's largest white-collar union, the *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfen Verband* (DHV), also drifted toward the Volkish solution. To a large extent it followed the socio-economic views of Stöcker. Stöcker had opposed the concentration of economic power in the hands of the few, which he equated with a supposed Jewish domination of the economic forces in Germany. The removal of the Jews would restore economic well-being to the classes which had lost it. Stöcker also advocated a corporate state in which estates made up of professions would replace parliamentary government. The DHV admitted its debt to Stöcker as late as 1929, when a union leader asserted that "we felt ourselves to be Stöcker's successors." The union was founded in 1895 to organize commercial employees. It attained rapid success and was soon able to boast a large membership as well as considerable financial resources. The membership increased at a tremendous rate, practically tripling from 50,216 in 1903 to 148,079 on the eve of the war. Under the Republic its size doubled twice over, reaching 254,032 in 1924 and 409,022 in 1931. Its coffers increased at a similar rate, and its income was supplemented by careful investment in banks, industries, and small loans to members or organizations. Competently managed, the DHV's annual income had reached the impressive figure of thirty million marks by 1926. But these tangible successes only provided the background to the ideological impetus, dear to the heart of this Volkish labor union. This is illustrated by the way it used its resources.

The DHV, like the *Stahlhelm*, considered itself politically neutral, unaligned with any party, and welcomed all within its ranks. It thought itself above politics, motivated only by a sincere concern for the state of the nation's moral fiber. This did not mean, however, that it had no broad national goals, or ideas for improving the nation's culture, or an alertness to the dangers which threatened the German Volk. Prior to the war, the DHV had established close relations with the Pan-Germans, for both organizations were in favor of a more militant and imperialistic foreign policy. On the issue of nationalization of the land, it found itself on common ground with Damaschke's land reform movement. But, above all, it still entertained Stöcker's aversion to the Jews—an aversion it had brought up to date in the intervening years in the form of outright anti-Semitism—and approached national and Jewish questions from the racist point of view. The DHV was not simply a naive participant in racist issues. Its bookstores promoted Theodor Fritsch's *Handbook of the Jewish Question*, and its members listened to lectures of men like the Austrian racist Liebermann von Sonnenberg.

## VETERANS AND WORKERS

Volkish anti-Semitism was central to the organizational structure and existence of the DHV. Within its ranks the issue served to unite the members of several parties, such as the Catholic Center party and even the Democratic party, and provided them with a common denominator for action. All elements endorsed an anti-Semitic domestic policy that claimed to solve not only the problems of the nation at large but also those of the working man. And what the union

endorsed, it implemented. Jews were barred from membership, and in labor disputes employers that happened to be Jewish were fought with special vehemence. Jewish employers were charged with conspiring against the Aryan employees' welfare, with thwarting the employees' desire to better their conditions, with infringing on the employees' commitment to Christianity. One of the union's great attractions was its militant fight for a shorter work week, a struggle which was directed principally at Jewish businessmen who conducted transactions on Sundays.

But the DHV had other Volkish tendencies, in addition to its anti-Semitism. As we have noted, the organization, though many of its members came from a working-class milieu, had more exalted aspirations. None of these were very clearly defined and no particular trend dominated. While the organization fought to obtain for its workers better wages and working conditions, greater and more equitable insurance and welfare funds, it looked beyond this struggle for its real identity. The members of the DHV wanted to be considered bourgeois, not proletarian. They were commercial workers and therefore properly believed that they were not members of the "classic" working class. Their outlook was petit bourgeois, and they were obsessed with preserving their status and not slipping into the proletariat. It is significant, as we have mentioned before, that this union represented the deepest penetration of the Volkish movement among the lower classes and that even here it remained essentially bourgeois. In this light, it is easy to understand why the union looked beyond its economic function to the cultural life of the nation, to which it brought a Volkish emphasis.

With its ample resources, the DHV was able to provide many Volkish causes with financial support. In the 1920's it obtained control of leading Volkish publishing firms, the most famous of which was the Hanseatische Verlags-Anstalt of Hamburg. The various issues of its *Jahrbuch* are filled with articles praising "German loyalty and German heroism," and they contain information on Guido von List, Felix Dahn, and a whole series on Volkish writers. The Volkish ideology was important precisely because of the union's desire to be more than a mere working man's organization.

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## CHAPTER 17

### The Anti-Jewish Revolution

IN THE HANDS of Adolf Hitler the German revolution was transformed into an anti-Jewish revolution. A basic ingredient of the Volkish ideology had ripened to a point where it could be plucked by the Nazis to be successfully assimilated into their own political maneuverings and used to increase their popular appeal.

With the appearance of Hitler on the political scene, followed as it was by a successful dissemination of a whole political program, the theme of anti-Semitism acquired a new dimension. Although anti-Semitism had flourished for more than fifty years, Hitler transformed it into a political vehicle, and the soundness of his move was attested by its favorable reception by the public. Now not only were Volkish leaders lecturing on the incompatible spiritual qualities of the two peoples, and theologians of race stressing the anthropological differences, but a

political leader possessing a charismatic appeal was demanding that something be done about it, that, indeed, only if the Jews were eradicated could Germany regain her lost glory and achieve greatness in the future. What was the ideological store Hitler drew upon? Who were his immediate teachers and whom did he inspire to follow in his footsteps in a society which was already thoroughly drenched with the anti-Semitic stereotype? It is to these questions we must now turn by directing ourselves to the mind of Hitler, his immediate antecedents, and his disciples.

Many historians, seeking the source of Hitler's anti-Jewish obsession, have turned to the writings of the "classical" anti-Semites or to the ideologies of such people as Guido von List and Lanz von Liebenfels, both from Vienna. But to little avail—First of all, there is no evidence that Hitler read all the literature on the subject of the Volk and the Jews. It is more likely that he would listen to and be influenced by people who carried the message directly across the land and preached it at assemblies in Vienna, Linz, and other centers. And secondly, even if he did read books and journals on the subject, we do not know which ones. Thus, while he might have read Lanz von Liebenfels' *Ostara, Zeitschrift für Blonde* (Journal for Blond People), a notoriously racist journal, we really have no proof. Therefore it seems best to give full weight to Hitler's own testimony as to the development of his fanatical hatred of the Jews. For from whatever particular sources Hitler may have imbibed his ideas in his youth, much more important is the fact that he could have gotten them from the whole range of the Volkish movement. The interesting point is how he himself considered a system of thought which was already widespread and what he eventually made of it.

Hitler traced his anti-Semitism to an encounter with East European Jewry. Early in his life, as he traveled from the sheltered town of Linz to the metropolis of Vienna, he experienced, he claims, a horrible fright induced by the strange, forbidding dress and appearance of such Jews. He reacted with a feeling of horror to these strange beings who were crisscrossing the land to settle down, to multiply, and to dominate, displacing the genuine Germans. Consciously or unconsciously, the pages of *Mein Kampf* summarize the stereotype of the ghetto Jew as this had grown up in Volkish thought. Here was the "strangeness" which proved the existence of a Jewish world conspiracy, the lack of morality which was translated into an absence of "idealistic feeling." The Jews were not a people of culture, the soil was for them a mere object of exploitation, and lustfulness took the part of true and rooted beliefs.

This view of the Jews became bound up with Hitler's hatred of Vienna itself. He loathed the city, and precisely that part of it which was most civilized excited his greatest loathing. No doubt it is at this point that his anti-urbanism became basic to his attitude toward life. This took the usual Volkish forms, including the glorification of the peasant, but it focused on the Jewish stereotype.