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Hitler's electoral support: recent findings and theoretical implications*

Richard F. Hamilton

Abstract. The orthodox explanation for Hitler's electoral successes in the last years of the Weimar republic focuses on the lower-middle class. That class, so it is said, suffered serious economic strains, faced a loss of status and, in desperation, reacted by abandoning the liberal middle-class parties in favor of Adolf Hitler and his party, the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). The prime motive was supposedly the party's promise to restore the lower-middle class to its former assured position.

This paper will undertake five principal tasks. The first of these will be to review some basic findings about the German elections of 1928, 1930, and 1932. The findings to be reported are sharply at variance with the lower-middle class explanation, pointing instead to a range of new explanatory questions that should be at the center of our thinking and research. The statement of these new questions is the second task of this paper. A third task is to provide a brief outline of an alternative explanation that accords with the evidence currently available. This provides a positive statement focusing on a different and more appropriate range of causal factors operating in those elections. The fourth task will be to provide some answers to the questions posed in part two of this paper based on the alternative lines of explanation offered here. A more wide-ranging discussion follows, reviewing the experience of other nations and of other times. The aim of this discussion, the fifth task, is to provide additional tests of the original theory and of the alternative offered here.

Résumé. L'explication classique des succès électoraux d'Hitler dans les dernières années de la République de Weimar se concentre sur la petite bourgeoisie. Cette classe, soutient-on, vivait dans une situation économique précaire, voyait son prestige décliner et décida en désespoir de cause de délaisser les partis libéraux des classes moyennes en faveur d'Adolf Hitler et de son parti, le *Parti nationale-socialiste des ouvriers allemands*. Son motif principal était supposément la promesse du parti de faire recouvrer à la petite bourgeoisie son ancienne situation privilégiée.

L'auteur de cet article s'est donné cinq tâches principales. En premier lieu, il analyse certains résultats de base au sujet des élections allemandes de 1928, 1930, et 1932. Les résultats en question divergent très nettement de la théorie de la petite bourgeoisie, indiquant plutôt tout un éventail de nouveaux éléments explicatifs qui doivent être au centre de nos réflexions et de notre recherche. C'est l'énoncé de ces nouveaux éléments qui constitue la deuxième tâche de cet article. En troisième lieu, l'auteur dresse les grandes lignes d'une autre théorie qui est conforme aux données dont on dispose présentement. Cet aperçu propose un éventail différent et plus approprié de

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facteurs déterminants au cours de ces élections. En quatrième lieu, l'auteur s'efforce de fournir certaines réponses aux questions soulevées dans la deuxième partie de cet article, à partir des autres explications proposées ici. Vient ensuite une discussion plus large qui fait état de l'expérience d'autres États et d'autres époques. L'objet de cette discussion est de vérifier de nouveau la théorie originale et l'alternative qui est proposée ici.

Hitler's electoral support

In 1929, in state and local elections, the National Socialists began once again to pick up votes. The commentators of the age had an explanation ready at hand — it was the reaction of the “petty bourgeois gone mad.” In another version, one spoke of *Panik im Mittelstand*, or panic in the middle class. The argument of an impoverished, proletarianized petite bourgeoisie is, without doubt, the leading “model” for the explanation of the rise of the NSDAP. It has, since 1929, appeared in endless repetition. Among those who have proclaimed this “truth” are Theodor Geiger, Harold Lasswell, Alan Bullock, Sigmund Neumann, C. Wright Mills, Seymour Martin Lipset, William Kornhauser, Joachim Fest, and Karl Dietrich Bracher. It would be easy to name dozens of others.¹

A serious problem with these statements is that the expression, lower-middle class, is rarely defined. In most instances only a listing of typical occupations is provided. The most important single occupation in such listings is “farmer” (or “peasant”). Small town and village middle-class populations, most of them shopkeepers, are also included as lower-middle class, petit bourgeois or *Kleinbürger*. And the poorly-paid salaried white-collar employees are also counted as members of the class.

1. “Panik im Mittelstand” is the title of a famous article by the German sociologist, Theodor Geiger (1930). He extended the basic claims, without supporting evidence, in an even more famous book (1932: 109-122). Lasswell presented the basic claims of this position in English in an influential article published in 1933. The best summary statement of the position in English is that provided by Seymour Martin Lipset (1960: Ch. 5). For a review of the claims with citations, references, and some initial discussion, see Hamilton, 1982: Chs. 1 and 2.

The lower-middle class thesis clearly involves a causal question. Something about the circumstance of people in the class induces strain and moves them to a given reaction. One could take the same data, on class and voting, and address a different question, a compositional one. The causal question asks about the response of a given class, the compositional question asks about the components of the response. The causal question asks: how did Class X vote? The compositional question asks: what part of the vote for a given party came from Class X and what part from other classes? Both are legitimate questions. But it is important to keep the two separate, to avoid confusion of the two distinct concerns. When one speaks of “the bulk” of the NSDAP voters being lower-middle class, one is addressing the compositional question, not the traditional thesis.

But a listing of occupations, the presentation of “typical” examples, is not a definition. And the absence of definition points to a serious failing — absence of research on the subject. Much of the previous discussion, in short, has been rather casual, depending on assertion and mutual agreement rather than actual investigation. The focus on the lower-middle class, moreover, does not have a commensurate discussion of its upper-middle equivalent. Most writers in this tradition have settled for a crude, one might even say a simplistic distinction, between bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie. For most, the “upper-middle class” simply does not exist (or, alternatively, is not worthy of attention). If one assumes a tiny bourgeoisie, following Geiger, something on the order of 1 per cent of the total, this procedure would leave the entire remaining non-manual rank as “the” petite bourgeoisie. But that would make little sense in terms of the received paradigm since many of them would not be marginal, insecure, facing proletarianization, and so forth.

Still another problem with most such formulations stems from their simple categoric character, as if the lines of distinction were patently obvious. But, unlike the “line” separating the manual and nonmanual employees, no sharp distinction runs through the broad middle class allowing the judgment that one position is unambiguously lower-middle and another upper-middle. The experience rather is one of a continuum, a series of small variations based on income, job security, or numbers under one’s immediate supervision or control. An upper-middle versus lower-middle dichotomy would inject an arbitrary division in what is essentially a continuous experience.

Although National Socialist electoral support has most frequently been described and explained in terms of “class,” specifically in terms of lower-middle class concerns and susceptibilities, the party’s support is in fact more accurately described by two other variables, religion and city size. Support for the NSDAP was sharply differentiated by religion: the Protestants, particularly in the small towns and villages, showed a marked attraction to Hitler’s party; the Catholics, in equivalent settings, showed an equally marked aversion. Overall, support for the party varied inversely with size of place, the large cities providing the lowest percentages of any German communities. Since those two factors interlink in an unexpected way, some further specification is necessary.

The level of support for Hitler’s party was very high in the rural communities and small towns of Protestant Germany. Support for the NSDAP fell off in the larger communities so that most of the predominantly Protestant large cities were well below the national figure. An opposite pattern appeared in Catholic communities, National Socialist support being very low in the villages and towns, then increasing somewhat in the larger cities. Some illustration will prove useful. In the hill country above Heidelberg, one finds a scatter of small farm communities, among which are Catholic Dilsberg and

Protestant Ochsenschlag. In the second round of the 1932 presidential election, those communities gave Hitler, respectively, 16.3 and 94.1 percent of the votes cast. Similar findings appear everywhere in rural Germany, a result, incidentally, that was immediately evident in the voting figures published on the Mondays following each of the elections of the early 1930s.

The religion linkage is one of the oldest and possibly the best-established of all conclusions on the subject. One would have to look far and wide in the literature on electoral behavior to find another disparity of that size and consistency anywhere in modern times.² That finding, in the ordinary course of things, should have led commentators to consider the implications of the religious linkage. But, strangely enough, they regularly neglected that obvious task and, instead, proceeded to “explain” the not-yet-established lower-middle-class “finding.”

Many commentators, upon hearing the religion finding reported once again, remark that it, of course, is nothing new. Although “known all along,” however, a significant implication for their preferred line of analysis has not typically been recognized. The religion finding means that the *general* claim, the conclusion that *the* lower-middle class — suffering economic strains, facing proletarianization, and so forth — was susceptible to the suasions of NSDAP demagogues, is unambiguously challenged by this “known” finding. The claim, at best, holds for one segment but not the other. Any theorizing that pretends to the least bit of realism must recognize that fact and provide some specification, some additional argument to explain the difference. One key question must be addressed: why did persons engaged in exactly the same lines of endeavor, facing the same markets, the same crisis, and threatened by the same fate, react in such diametrically opposed ways?³

2. See Hamilton, 1982: Ch. 3, for a more detailed review.

3. Many discussions in the literature make no reference at all to this “known” religious fact, focusing exclusively on class. Others make note of the Protestant tendency but then, within a few sentences (or, in discussion, within minutes) drop all further reference to it and, once again, return to their class analysis. The ready “explanation” tends to squeeze out the incompatible fact. The recognition of that fact and of its implication should, however, lead the responsible commentator to be all the more cautious — and to oppose that “theoretical drift” whenever and wherever it surfaces. Lipset, for example, recognizes the religious linkage at several points (e.g. “The ideal-typical Nazi voter in 1932 was a middle-class self-employed Protestant who lived either on a farm or in a small community...” (1960: 149). The point is even more clearly and forcefully stated in a footnote (p. 146): “All the studies agree that religion affected support of the Nazis *more* [his emphasis] than any other factor. The Nazis were weak in Catholic regions and cities, and secured majorities in many Protestant small communities.” The subsequent footnote restates the point and contains also the appropriate methodological conclusion: “Catholic affiliation constantly overrides class or other allegiances as a major determinant of party support in practically all election data for Germany, in both the Weimar and Bonn republics.” The conclusion drawn is that ecological analyses of mixed regions that do not hold religious affiliation constant are “relatively useless.” The lesson of the

The opposite religion-size of city correlations mean, clearly, that the differences by religion are attenuated in the larger cities. The extent of the collapse may occasion some surprise. The comparison of Protestant Berlin and Catholic Cologne, for example, finds a difference in the July 1932 Reichstag election of only a few percentage points, the respective figures being 29 and 24. Between Protestant Hamburg and Catholic Munich we find a similar result, those figures, respectively, being 33 and 29.⁴ Religion, which was such a powerful factor in accounting for the NSDAP support in the small towns and rural areas proves to be of only minor importance in the cities.

The two patterns of linkage with community size, like the religion tie, should also have been the subject of some effort at explanation. But having neglected the fact, the commentators had no incentive to provide explanation.

The urban context presents an important opportunity for research: it is another setting in which one may test the lower-middle class hypothesis. Within the urban context, for the reason indicated just above, some discount or neglect of the religious factor is justified. One may, therefore, proceed directly to the claims of the lower-middle class argument.

Until recently we have had no detailed analyses of voting patterns within the German cities. As a consequence, no systematic assessment of the lower-middle-class thesis in those settings had ever been undertaken. The principal finding of my review of voting records in fourteen of Germany's largest cities was a general tendency for NSDAP voting to increase with the class level of the district. In Hamburg, for example, where the party gained one-third of the vote in July 1932, the strongest support came from the three best-off districts, the percentages ranging from 41 to 48. The metropolitan area's most affluent suburban community gave the National Socialists 54 percent. With corrections, adjusting for the presence of Jews, Catholics, and working-class minorities, the figures for the remaining upper and upper-middle class voters would run well above the levels given here (Hamilton, 1982: Ch. 5).

Lower-middle-class families were not located in separate areas within those cities. Some appeared, as small minorities, in working-class districts. Others were located in mixed districts with roughly equal numbers of manual and nonmanual families. The voting tendencies of urban lower-middle-class populations, therefore, cannot be established with any certainty. None of the mixed districts, however, provided majority support for the NSDAP. Those areas typically voted NSDAP at a level approximately equal to that of the city as a whole, which was not at all distinctive.

footnotes, however, is not incorporated into the text. For other instances of such recognition-neglect juxtapositions, of the refusal to think through the implications of the religion factor, see footnote 24 below.

4. For details on Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, and Munich, see Hamilton, 1982: Chs. 4-6.

The only way the accepted claim could be valid in this context would be if workers in those districts had voted overwhelmingly for the left parties. That, in turn, would have meant “opposite” overwhelming majorities for the NSDAP provided by the middle-class groups living there. No such divergence of preferences was proved at the time, nor has such been proven in the intervening years. On the contrary, some evidence points instead to an alternative conclusion, namely, a general similarity of political outlooks (Neisser, 1930; Hamilton, 1982: 47-50). A fair-sized minority of the lower middle class in the cities, possibly as much as 35 to 40 percent, supported the left parties, principally the Social Democrats. Another fair-sized segment would have supported the *Zentrum*. And some, even in the late elections, would have continued to support the so-called middle-class parties. Some also, of course, supported the Conservatives. Taken all together, that would mean the majority of the urban lower-middle class did *not* support the NSDAP; only a minority responded to the suasions of the demagogues (Hamilton, 1982: 46ff.).

This conclusion indicates once again that the lower-middle class was not all of a piece in its voting behavior. It consisted of three rather diverse segments, each requiring a separate and appropriate line of analysis.

The working-class districts typically provided only minority support for the NSDAP, something on the order of 20 to 25 percent. However, because of the large number of such districts and their high population densities, those votes added up to a considerable part of the NSDAP strength, in some cities providing roughly half of the party's total. Those votes, moreover, had a clear immediate antecedent; they were cast by persons who, having previously voted for the liberal “middle class” parties or, to a lesser extent, for the Conservatives, were Germany's equivalent of the Tory workers. Any adequate theory of the rise of Hitler must recognize the quantitative importance of this working-class support and provide some explanation for it.⁵

The conclusions reported to this point are summarized in Diagram 1. It divides the electorate by community size into three roughly equal segments: villages, small towns, and cities. In the first and second of these segments a further division, by religion, has been made. Since religion plays such a limited role in the cities, it has been dropped there and replaced by the class fac-

5. It was the unemployed workers, according to one frequent claim, who turned to National Socialism in the course of the depression. A recent comprehensive statistical analysis indicates that this was not the case; unemployed workers generally turned to the Communists. For the basic presentation, see Falter et al, 1983. An earlier statement, one also based on a statistical analysis, had supported the handed-down claim (Frey and Weck, 1981) but this positive result has been rejected in a later analysis (Falter et al, forthcoming). The problem was one of aggregation level, whether the analysis depended on 13 or on 865 regions. For an English-language synopsis, see Lohmoeller et al, 1983.

tor. Lacking more precise information, the percentages given are plausible rule-of-thumb estimates of the NSDAP strength in the July 1932 Reichstag election based on the considerations outlined above.

Diagram 1. Estimates of National Socialist strength (1932) in various contexts.

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Villages</i>	<i>Small Towns</i>	<i>Cities</i>	<i>Class</i>
Protestant	70+%	50-60%	40-45%	Upper and upper middle
Catholic	10%	20%	25-35%	Lower middle
			20-25%	Working
	Less than 2000 persons	2000 to 99,999 persons	100,000 or more	

For a brief synoptic portrait, it is difficult to see how one could proceed with anything less than these three statements: that the vote of the NSDAP in Protestant communities varied inversely with size of community; that the vote in Catholic communities varied positively with size of community; and that, in the cities, the vote increased with the class level of the district. That “economical” three-statement account, of course, is no more than description; it does not begin to provide an explanation of the result. It does, however, indicate which results need explaining. That pattern, it will be noted, does not accord with any of the going accounts of the National Socialist electoral victories, not with the lower-middle-class theory, mass society claims, the cultural argument, nor the more recent psychohistorical accounts.⁶

6. For the mass society claims, see Lederer, 1940; Arendt, 1958: Ch. 10; and Kornhauser, 1959. For brief critiques of this position, see Hamilton 1972: 44-49 and Hamilton 1982: 433-437. Advocates of this position have made much of the mobilization of previous non-voters, pointing to the increased participation in the last Weimar elections. For a summary review of empirical studies evaluating the merits of the party-shift versus mobilization-of-the-periphery hypotheses, see Falter, 1979. Meckstroth has devised a statistical procedure for estimating the origins of the National Socialist voters in these elections. This indicates that less than a quarter of the 1930 NSDAP voters were 1928 non-voters. Despite the increased participation in July 1932, his estimate shows a falloff of the non-voter share. Approximately one in eight NSDAP voters at that point were 1930 non-voters (Meckstroth, 1971: 134-138, 178ff.).

There are dozens of works that have argued the cultural explanation, an older one being that of Butler, 1941 and a more recent version that of Shirer, 1960: 97-113. For the psychohistorical position, see Loewenberg, 1971. The basic problem with both is the lack of fit between the claims put forth and the actual voting results. The cultural argument must ex-

The new explanatory questions

The explanatory questions that must be considered — the second of the present tasks — are very much altered by these results. One must ask, first, why there was such heavy support for the National Socialists in the Protestant towns and villages. In some villages, the support ran to 100 percent. Where their support went to “only” 70 or 80 percent, most of the “non-conforming” votes went to the Social Democrats. Since the latter were likely to have been working-class votes, either commuting workers or farm laborers, the overwhelming majority of all other segments of provincial society, from the lower middles to the upper uppers (to borrow the now-antique terms of sociologist William Lloyd Warner) would have been voting very heavily for the NSDAP, at levels in the middle or high eighties. The differences between any of these segments would have been of trivial importance. That being the case, even here the focus on the *lower* middle class segment seems misplaced: the infection, clearly, was more widespread.

The second explanatory question that has to be addressed involves the Catholic towns and villages. The question is: why the near-complete absence of a reaction? Despite crisis, presumed status strains, and so forth, voting patterns there continued essentially without change.

A third question needing attention involves the city-size relationship, the principal problem here being the lower susceptibility (or heightened resistance) of the Protestant cities in face of the NSDAP siege. What was it that blocked their success in these contexts?

plain why the effects appear so pronounced in Protestant as opposed to Catholic Germany and why, in the former regions, they are so strong in the towns and villages. The psychohistorical school focuses on the war, on the absence of and loss of fathers as well as the wartime deprivations. The same locational questions have to be addressed there also. In addition, there is the problem of the same causes in World War II without the equivalent effects.

The previous discussion is focused entirely on the German case. A glance at the other “fascisms” indicates a wide variety of social bases which again cast doubt on the *general* argument, that the political tendency is uniquely rooted in lower-middle-class experience. See Linz, 1976; 1980.

The lower-middle-class formula, clearly, does not begin to describe the actual results in Germany. Some writers of late, recognizing the difficulty, have sought to make do with a substitute formula — that the NSDAP was a catch-all party (see Childers, 1983: 118, 127, 268). But that is no better than the original cliché. Taken literally, the party most definitely did not catch *all*. Prior to taking power it never took more than three of eight votes and, in some contexts, as indicated, was lucky to “catch” one in ten. Judging by usage it is clear that the new usage means “catch some” or, more precisely, to catch-some-everywhere, that is, in all contexts. This alternative has it that the NSDAP was more of a “people’s party” than a class party; it appealed to and was able to gain support from all segments. But this statement, by itself, tells us nothing about *which* groups were being caught. It exchanges the mock precision of the lower-middle-class claim for an extremely nebulous statement of cross-class support, one that is immune to or indifferent to number or proportions.

There is, of course, an obvious counterpart, a fourth question, namely, why did the National Socialists have somewhat greater success in the Catholic cities?

Within the cities one must raise questions about the various class segments supporting the NSDAP. A fifth question: why was there such pronounced support for the party within the upper and upper-middle classes?

Recognizing the existence of some urban lower-middle class support, one must raise a sixth explanatory question about the sources of the (probable) minority tendency. Was it the loss of position and the threat of proletarianization that moved them? Or was it something else?

A seventh explanatory question involves the voting of urban workers, particularly of the minority that "turned to the right." A standard cliché has it that "the workers" will move to the left as a result of the economic disaster. The catastrophe will "remove the veil," destroying whatever remains of false consciousness. The growth of the Communist vote in the last Weimar elections at first glance appears to confirm that claim. But most of those gains came at the expense of the Social Democrats. The overall vote for the left actually decreased in September 1930 and again in July 1932. The non-left minority of the working class, as far as we can tell, shifted to the National Socialists.⁷ A simple question arises: why did these workers shift to the right rather than, as was so widely anticipated, moving to the left?

An alternative explanation

The third task, as indicated, is the outline of an alternative explanation. The proposal begins with the assumption that individual political orientations are based in primary and secondary political socialization. One may think of voting decisions as products of early training as modified by subsequent influences. Parents typically provide children with basic political values and teach them appropriate party preferences. Later in life, people come to be located in settings that, in most cases, tend to reinforce those original directions.⁸ The German experience, however, is complicated by serious discontinuities

7. The combined SPD and KPD percentages for 1928, 1930, and July, 1932, respectively, were: 40.4, 37.6, and 35.9. In November 1932, there was a slight recovery, the combined left figure increasing to 37.3. The major shifts among the workers, as far as we can tell, were first, within the Marxist camp, a move from the SPD to the KPD, and second, among the "Tory workers," a shift from the right and center "bourgeois" parties to the NSDAP. Corresponding to the overall decline of the left, we have the following estimates from Meckstroth (1978): that 9 percent of the NSDAP vote in 1930 came from 1928 SPD voters, and, that 6 percent of the July 1932 NSDAP voters were 1930 SPD voters.

8. The basic presentation of this position appears in Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954: 88ff. For a summary, discussion, and criticism of the position, see Hamilton 1972: 49-63.

in these processes. Only two parties, the Social Democrats and the *Zentrum*, survived 1918; all others were new creations (although in most cases, close approximate substitutes had appeared). Then too, numerous catastrophes had occurred in the two decades prior to Hitler's accession. There was the war, the revolution, Versailles, *Putsch* attempts from left and right, inflation, border struggles and, ultimately, the world-wide depression, a collection of events that could easily loosen or break the tenuous party loyalties first formed in the early postwar period.

Many German voters, in short, could not have been guided by their early political socialization, the specific parties recommended by their parents (in most cases, by fathers) having disappeared. Weimar party loyalties were not as fixed or committed as most contemporary discussions of political socialization assume. Many voters were likely to have been guided by a general political direction or tendency rather than by a well-ingrained party loyalty. When a chosen party lost viability, thus stimulating a search for a more effective alternative, the choice, in most cases, would have been limited to parties having the same general political direction.

Those choices were not made solely on the basis of "individual" causes (unique personal judgments of current political events). They would have been channeled by a range of guiding influences touching the voters. The most important of the influences touching voters after their early political training may, for Weimar Germany, be divided into three categories: first, there would be the influence and direction provided by tradition notables (or opinion leaders). This category would include leaders of the "established" parties, religious leaders, employers, and, in general, persons of high status or reputation. There is a tendency to identify notables with parties of the right or center. But parties of the left also have their notables, Bebel and Liebknecht being the classic examples in the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which was also one of the "established" parties. The second guiding influence that might modify or change patterns of primary socialization would be the mass media, specifically the press. In the Weimar period newspapers constituted the only significant mass medium of communication; radio, mass-circulation magazines, and television all coming only in later periods. The third influence in the late twenties would be that provided by the National Socialists, the principal "new entry" among the political actors of the era.

The influences discussed to this point are all proximate in character, touching directly the various segments of the electorate. The possibility of two-step flows of influence should also be kept in mind; some voters would be influenced by the press or by the National Socialist activists and they, in turn, would pass on their new-found judgments to other voters.

Of the three influences — notables, press, and militants — the last is clearly the most important. No conversion of conservative or moderate

notables would have occurred without the efforts of the NSDAP cadres; and there would have been no heroics for newspapers to report, no grounds for favor and no reason for any conversion of newspapers. The militants, in short, were the decisive force, the key agency generating the electoral upsurge; the electoral victories would not have occurred without their efforts. For this reason, it is necessary to move back a step in the causal chain to account for both the numbers and capacities of these cadres.

We do not, of course, have precise measures of the quantitative development of party cadres during the fourteen years of the Weimar republic. The NSDAP undoubtedly had large numbers of devoted followers, both in the party itself and in its paramilitary force, the Storm Troops (*Sturmabteilung* or, for short, SA). These numbers showed rapid increases in the last years of the republic, beginning in 1929. Although the party aimed to break into the “Marxist” working-class ranks, its principal vote gains came from the so-called middle class parties. Although a massive shift in voter loyalties occurred, the same does not appear to have been the case with party cadres. Rather, so it seems, the “middle class” party cadres retired, gave up, or were immobilized; the NSDAP cadres represented a mobilization from different social bases.⁹

An array of monographic studies attest to the high level of organizational ability demonstrated by these NSDAP cadres. One author describes them as possessing “energy, efficiency and virtuosity,” traits certainly demonstrated in their electoral practice. Unlike the four or five week campaigns of their competitors, moreover, they engaged in continuous electioneering. Their efforts were accompanied by a regular two-way flow of information; local units were required to report their experience with various themes and tactics to party headquarters in Munich. Those reports were distilled and the results disseminated to local units across the land. The campaign effort, it should be noted, was self-financing. The party charged admission to meetings which covered expenses and generated a surplus for subsequent campaign efforts. Campaigning, for them, was a paying business. A speakers’ school trained and accredited orators, giving its trainees confidence, polish, and the appearance of a mastery of complex materials. How did the party come to have such numbers and such high-level talent and capability?

The NSDAP cadres had their origins in World War I. Four or more years of combat had trained men in “energy, efficiency, and virtuosity” — and also in ruthlessness — all of these traits being necessary for battlefield survival. At the time of the Armistice there was a widespread sense of having been cheated out of victory (or at least cheated out of a stalemate and a negotiated settlement). There was also the hostile reception given to troops, most especially to officers, on their return to their home cities.

9. For details on the deterioration of the center and right parties see Hamilton 1982: Ch. 10.

The Treaty of Versailles forced a major institutional change within German society with its requirement that the military establishment be substantially reduced. Some hundreds of thousands were thus turned out of the military ranks and forced into civilian careers. To those numbers must be added some other hundreds of thousands, those in younger cohorts who aspired to careers in the military. Many of these reluctant civilians sought out analogous occupations in the new Germany, many of them finding a first opportunity in the *Freikorps*, the hastily formed select military units intended to keep order at home and to secure the front in the border conflicts continuing in the East. With the dissolution of these units in 1920 the options were reduced to a limited range of private paramilitary organizations. The SA proved the ultimate winner, being the toughest, the most “resourceful,” the most aggressive of the various contenders. In the process, in this flow from one organization to the next, the “old fighters,” with some system, enlarged their ranks by recruiting from among the younger cohorts, picking up and training persons who demonstrated the requisite aptitudes and talents.

The people who followed this career line, clearly, were persons who in one way or another were very much committed to the military venture of 1914-1918. Recruitment for the *Freikorps* was heaviest among the lieutenants and, to a lesser degree, among non-commissioned officers. Many lieutenants took positions as NCOs, preferring that to their next best option, civilian life. Those persons obviously had considerable combat experience, and, more to the point, experience in leadership roles. They would have supplied the initiative, organization, and direction of front-line combat, that is, of small-scale, tactical struggle. A social Darwinist dynamic operates in such situations: survival depends on the development of commitment and the acquisition of tactical expertise. The requirement, in other words, is for “energy, efficiency and virtuosity.” Given the select character of such units and their recruitment of “war lovers,” it should come as no particular surprise that they proved to be lethal agencies.¹⁰

Other soldiers, those not devoted to military careers or interests, were demobilized and, either again or for the first time, took up civilian careers. Some of these, to be sure, would have been officers, some of them professionals, some reserve officers. A somewhat larger number would have been “lower middle class” but most would have been workers. Given the close correspondence of military and civilian ranks, most workers would have served as privates or lower-level non-commissioned officers during the war. The effects of sustained combat on a worker-turned-soldier would have been quite different from those experienced by the young officers. The ex-workers, on

10. For details on the moves from combat units to the *Freikorps* to various paramilitary units and ultimately to the SA, see Hamilton 1982: Ch. 12. The “energy, efficiency and virtuosity” quotation is from Noakes 1971: 211.

the whole, would not have developed the same commitment to the task. Foot-dragging, indifference, and pacifist sentiments would probably have been strongest in the ranks of the enlisted men. Most important for the later "inputs" to civilian life, these soldiers were followers; they were not trained to lead, plan, show initiative, or make quick decisions in tactical struggles. When some of them were later organized in leftist paramilitary formations, their orientations, accordingly, were defensive in character. They protected their "territory" from outside incursions. They did not invade or push into new territory. The "bastions" of the left did, on the whole, successfully resist the National Socialist siege. But they did not gain new recruits within "their" territory nor did they gain elsewhere. As noted above, the left suffered some overall losses, mostly of Social Democratic workers located outside the urban "bastions."

The National Socialist cadres, as will be seen, had their greatest success where they moved against traditional parties of notables, which is to say, against parties that were poorly prepared to defend themselves against a formidable onslaught. This was most clearly the case in the Protestant towns and countryside. The parties there consisted only of a handful of elderly notables. Political power, typically, was passed on from father to son. Campaigning there amounted to little more than "coasting along" with a routine of handed-down election procedures. The power of the notables would have been weakened by wartime losses; their sons, disproportionately, would have been among the fallen. Thus, when in the late twenties, the young, "tough," and "resourceful" NSDAP activists appeared on the scene, they were moving against a weakened coterie, persons with no staff, no bureaucracy, and no defense forces. At this time, as the economy deteriorated and the NSDAP attacks intensified, many traditional notables began to distance themselves, this being most clearly the case with the two liberal parties. Reflecting the same circumstances, those parties experienced a parallel disaffection of "their" newspaper support.

The argument delineated to this point may be summarized as follows. First, there is the social psychological component, the assumption of early political socialization as decisive for adult outlooks and party preferences. That primary socialization would, in all settings, be modified by subsequent experience. Four years of sustained front-line combat would, for many, result in significant transformations of those previous outlooks. Some additional "socialization" episodes were associated with the outcome of the conflict, these yielding a sense of illegitimacy both with respect to the result and with respect to the new regime.

One must recognize also an important social structural change. The Versailles Treaty, among other things, required a drastic reduction of the size of the armed forces; it demanded the dissolution of a large segment of a major social institution. That transformation, in turn, forced a considerable

amount of “social mobility,” injecting large numbers of unwilling “participants” into civilian roles.

It proved possible, nevertheless, for many of the most devoted ex-military men to maintain their ranks, to develop and “refine” their talents, and to add to their numbers. Ultimately the NSDAP proved the ideal agency for the harnessing of their energies. It was created by men of “the war generation,” a vehicle ideally suited for their aims, needs, and talents. The cadres, in summary, were created out of the wartime experience and the events accompanying its outcome — rather than being the product of lower-middle class life and circumstances.

Thus far, the account has sketched out the likely channels of social influence, both the routine or traditional ones and the newly arrived agency on the scene. Here it is necessary to add a further dimension, a “rational” or “issue-oriented” component. The NSDAP was an agency for the delivery of a message. It is necessary to give some consideration to the content of their communications. The “message” had to have a logic — or at least the appearance of a logic; they had to have some plausible answers for the concerns felt by their listeners. To address this problem, it is first necessary to review events in the later years of the Weimar regime.

After its refounding in 1925, the NSDAP achieved only a rather slow, erratic, and, on the whole, inauspicious growth. This was the case until 1929 when, just prior to the depression, they managed a remarkable “takeoff.” This surge came in the course of the Anti-Young Plan Campaign organized by Alfred Hugenberg and his associates. Hugenberg, the owner of a major press empire and also chairman of the Conservative Party, had formed a coalition of national forces to block further implementation of the Versailles Treaty. The idea was to run an initiative to block implementation of the Young Plan (which specified reparations terms and payment schedules). In a decision that was fateful for the Republic, Hugenberg brought the National Socialists into this coalition. His newspapers, wire services, and syndicated materials then, throughout the course of eight months of agitation, provided legitimation for Hitler and his party. Hugenberg, in short, made the National Socialists *salonfähig*, that is, socially acceptable. It was the first time since the 1923 *Putsch* debacle that they had such support and sanction from “respectable” forces. An informal division of labor developed in the course of the campaign; Hugenberg provided the press support, Hitler and his forces undertook the “grass roots” campaigning. Local observers reported that the NSDAP used the occasion primarily to advertise the merits of their own party. It was in the course of the eight months of the Anti-Young Plan Campaign that the party, as indicated by state election results, made its breakthrough, this before the onset of serious economic difficulties.¹¹

11. For a brief review of this history and for data on state elections of the period, see Hamilton 1982: 234-237.

Given the occasion, NSDAP propaganda was very much focused on the Versailles Treaty. The war guilt clause, understandably came in for heavy attack. Reparations also, of course, figured prominently in their repertory of complaint. The “guilty” regime, to be sure, was also the subject of considerable abuse. The unexpected calling of a Reichstag election in late Summer 1930, so soon after the end of the Anti-Young Plan effort, meant that the enlarged and “tuned up” NSDAP cadres could very easily shift over to a general election campaign. With the depression already at crisis level, it was easy for the party to re-run the themes used in the Anti-Young Plan Campaign, pointing to the reparations as the source of Germany’s economic disaster and, in the process, emphasizing the accuracy of their previous analysis.

The parties in power at this time, along with the SPD, were following a policy of “fulfilment” with respect to the Versailles obligations. For them, there was no easy response to the NSDAP attacks. Moreover, guided by the best available economic thought of the day, the governing parties followed a strict *laissez-faire* economic policy thus favoring deflation in the midst of what was already a serious deflationary crisis. On this issue too, therefore, they provided easy targets for National Socialist attacks. There was no equally easy, reasonable, plausible, or politically palatable defense of their position. The NSDAP, in short, was given a free field for their demagogery.¹²

Two years later, in 1932, Germany experienced a series of five elections. The sequence was: two rounds of the Presidential election, state elections (in a collection of states covering almost the entire nation), and then, the culmination point, a Reichstag election on July 31st. A second Reichstag election was held in November, this with a significantly different constellation of forces and choice of themes.

With the rising level of violence through to the July Reichstag election, much of it stimulated by NSDAP provocations, it was easy for them to communicate the sense of an impending revolution. They also, through their street fighting, sought to communicate the lesson that they were the only force working effectively to counter that threat. Other themes, used in earlier campaigns, were still invoked but now only in an ancillary role. Defense against “the Marxists” was the centerpiece of the offering. It was the central theme, as far as we can tell, in most National Socialist propaganda. It certainly figured prominently in the accounts of most bourgeois newspapers, in those that had, in effect, adopted the party and were giving it supportive coverage. In the few studies directly addressing the question of voter motivations, “anti-Marxism” also figures as the leading concern.

12. The best account of the Anti-Young Plan Campaign themes and the carryover of those themes to the 1930 election appears in Hackett, 1971: Chs. 2 and 4.

An important variation on this theme appeared in the small towns and farm villages. There too, the NSDAP dramatized the revolutionary threat. But that distant struggle, alarming as it was for many, did not have immediate personal relevance. In this context the major problem was debt relief and, accordingly, that subject, together with the entire farm question, was given appropriate prominence. Debt forgiveness was one solution promised, freedom from taxation was another.¹³

For any workers who might care to listen, the NSDAP had still another offering — job-creation programs. Although not likely to move supporters of the left parties (the Communists had a job-creation plan of their own), it is likely to have been important to workers who were not on the left, to those who supported the Conservatives or one of the liberal parties.

This discussion of themes has necessarily been brief and summary in character. One significant observation, however, must be added to the above discussion of the party's use of issues. The NSDAP showed extraordinary flexibility or, a better term perhaps, opportunism, with regard to "the" issues. Local units were allowed a considerable degree of autonomy in their choices and emphases. The National Socialists have been described as "feudal" in organization; it was a collection of semi-autonomous local units under the leadership of headstrong commanders, the "barons" of the system. Accordingly, there were limits to the party's ability to impose a definitive line or to discipline the units that deviated from it. Munich headquarters, in general, did not impose close controls on the local units. Munich provided "guidelines," these being distilled from experience elsewhere in the nation, but for the most part the local units were left to their own devices. The party allowed and encouraged "invention" with respect to themes and emphases. A theme would be used if it proved successful; it was abandoned if no response or failure were the result. A theme might, at a given time, be used in some areas and be taboo in others — because it "did not work" there. The architect of this thematic invention was Joseph Goebbels who declared that a National Socialist must "be able to ride in all saddles." Lamenting the restrictions imposed by the "unalterable" party program, he said he would have preferred having no program at all.

The explanatory questions reconsidered

The patterns of influence, the relative strength of the traditional notables, newspapers, and NSDAP activists, differs considerably in the contexts delin-

13. On the motives for support, see Hamilton 1982: 374, 376, 389-393, and 413ff. On the party's anti-Marxism, see 312ff., 325, and 374. Many NSDAP leaders wrote memoirs in the mid-thirties, accounts of their "years of struggle." These too focus on the wartime origins of the party cadres and have "anti-Marxism" as their central organizing theme. See, for example, Okrass, 1934.

eated in the above diagram. The new explanatory questions raised in the second part of this paper may be addressed in terms of the typical values and concerns present within each of those contexts and in terms of the conjunction of influences found there.

The first of those questions asked about the susceptibility of the Protestant countryside. The notables in Protestant villages and towns, typically, were affiliated with parties that, for many reasons, were discredited and losing support. Many notables, particularly those of a conservative, nationalist persuasion, found it easy to shift loyalties to the new, active, and “dynamic” NSDAP. Those “converts” came from the higher ranks of the society, including factory owners, members of the nobility, and ex-officers. The party’s success, as indicated previously, was by no means limited to the lower-middle class. Among those ready to vouch for the NSDAP, to attest to its merits, were members of the Protestant clergy. No church hierarchy intervened, as in the Catholic experience, to take “authoritative” stands against Hitler’s party. Indeed, many clergymen saw party, with its promise of “national renewal,” as a kindred agency, one with a great spiritual mission. In the Protestant towns, therefore, one found opinion leaders in all sectors and at all levels in the “status” hierarchy who either directly recommended the NSDAP or who, while recommending some other party, nevertheless spoke enthusiastically of the National Socialists.¹⁴

The Protestant towns typically had competing newspapers, these having loose ties to one or another of the so-called middle-class parties. As the depression worsened, those newspapers found themselves struggling for audience and advertising. Survival needs overwhelmed prior loyalties and many of them abandoned the “middle class” parties, doing what they could to gain National Socialist favor or, more precisely, advertising funds. Some editors and publishers made more than mere tactical shifts; some were clearly true believers.

Aided by the efforts of local notables and by the generous support of local newspapers, National Socialist activists, understandably, were able to make considerable headway in those communities. New recruits from among elites and masses were then able to convert the next groups of “leaning” voters. The continued erosion of the middle-class parties set the stage for defections of still more tactical voters, those looking for a more effective political agency.

The Catholic villages and small towns, turning to the second of the explanatory questions, were characterized, typically, by near-monolithic sup-

14. For discussions of the Protestant villages and towns, see Hamilton 1982: 364-371, 373-382; and Allen, 1965. For studies of the Protestant church, see Wright 1974, and Scholder 1977. For a portrait of one Protestant clergyman, a true believer, and his involvement in the political events of the age, see Kuessner, 1982.

port for the *Zentrum* (or in Bavaria, for the Bavarian People's Party). Virtually every notable in those towns, clergy and laymen alike, would have championed the Catholic party and, given the Church's position, opposed any NSDAP aspirations. Those towns typically had only one "bourgeois" newspaper, that too standing unambiguously behind the *Zentrum* (or BVP). In short, every influential (or "authoritative") person or political source in such towns (apart from a possible dissident working-class enclave) would have backed the "traditional" political direction and opposed the NSDAP insurgency. NSDAP activists campaigning in such settings gained little or no positive response. They were not able to convert notables; they could not gain press support; they could not recruit activists; nor were they able to find followers to undertake routine political leg work. Basically, they faced a wall of opposition there, one that was almost impenetrable.¹⁵

What is to be said about the two opposite city-size relationships? How can we account for those diverse patterns?

The inverse relationship in the Protestant communities, the third of our previous explanatory questions, may be explained in terms of the relative strength of the contending forces and in terms of newspaper content and recommendations. The National Socialists had their greatest successes where they faced weak or "soft" opposition. This was most pronouncedly the case with the classic "parties of notables," with the Conservatives, the two liberal parties, and a scatter of minor entries. Those parties had little organization to begin with and what little they had dwindled with the onset of the depression. The absence of staff, of speakers, of cadres, was problematic enough, but in a struggle increasingly dominated by paramilitary organizations, parties without adequate "defense forces" were hopelessly outmatched.

In the larger communities the NSDAP faced parties with adequate defense forces, or at least with forces vastly superior to those of the "middle class" parties. The left parties, Social Democrats and Communists, were "parties of integration," both at least attempting to build powerful, perma-

15. For discussions of the Catholic villages and towns, see Hamilton 1982: 371-373, 382-385. A useful vignette, one showing the strength of the personal influence factor, is reported in Peterson, 1969: 411. In the March 1933 Reichstag election, at a point when the NSDAP vote was increasing almost everywhere, a very capable charismatic priest in Warmisried (Bavaria) managed to reduce their votes to less than half of the already low previous level.

Although not focused directly on the present topic, German villages in the early 1930s, two studies have appeared that contain extremely useful findings from "parallel" experience. Maurice Pinard has given us a detailed account of the breakthrough of a third party to major party status (1971). For his discussion of the facilitating conditions in smaller communities, see his Ch. 11. Guenter Golde has provided us with a detailed study of the social characteristics of two adjacent German villages, one Protestant, one Catholic, this based on work done in the early 1970s. It is the kind of study that should have been done in 1930 — or in 1950 or 1960, before the surviving participants had disappeared from the scene.

ment, bureaucratic structures. Both had their own private armies; the SPD controlled the *Reichsbanner* and the Communists had their *Rotfront*. The NSDAP, therefore, in the larger communities, faced an opposition that, with considerable success, was able to defend its territory, its "base." In the villages and small towns, they could achieve the near-across-the-board sweeps. The most serious opposition found there was provided by the Social Democrats but, being relatively poorly organized in the countryside, there the SPD suffered serious losses to the NSDAP.

We do not have any systematic study of newspaper favor or voting recommendations by size of community. The rather sketchy impressionistic evidence available, a handful of cases only, suggests that the NSDAP also had a greater success in gaining newspaper support in the smaller communities. Most SPD and KPD newspapers were based in the cities, with largely urban working-class readership, and, of course, strongly opposed the NSDAP. No bourgeois newspaper in the very largest cities gave the National Socialists a direct recommendation; the newspaper recommendations were for the traditional "bourgeois" parties (and in the presidential election, for Hindenburg). This meant that the "bourgeois" parties did better in the cities, holding more of their previous strength than they did elsewhere, this also serving to limit the extent of the National Socialist advance in the cities.

Turning to the Catholic communities, the fourth of the explanatory questions, we have the opposite relationship, NSDAP strength increasing with size of city. In general, of course, the larger the community, the more differentiated, the more heterogeneous the population. In the Catholic countryside, it is no problem at all to find communities that were 100 percent Catholic and, given the exceptional pattern of social controls there, that were monolithic in voting pattern. But in the so-called Catholic cities, in Cologne, Munich, and Augsburg, for example, there would be some Protestants, a small number of Jews, and, some "unchurched" populations who had, for one reason or another, fallen away from the Church. The defections were in two directions: workers fell away to the SPD and, even more, to the KPD; middle-class populations went to a wide assortment of non-left groups. The NSDAP votes in the larger cities appear to have come from the Protestant minorities and from the disaffected middle-class Catholics. The proportions of those groups "available" for the NSDAP appeals were greater in the larger "Catholic" communities, hence the greater relative NSDAP successes. The NSDAP found it easier to campaign there; they would find at least some resonance there, support from local notables, and response to their membership appeals, unlike their experience in the Catholic villages.

How may we account for the differentiated response within the cities? Why was there such pronounced support for the NSDAP in the upper and upper middle class ranks? What were the sources of that minority support in the mixed districts containing many "lower middle class" voters? And how

are we to explain the votes of the so-called Tory workers?

National Socialist campaign strategies in the larger communities necessarily involved a more complex range of tactics and thematic offerings. Campaign efforts in the larger communities were more differentiated, being carefully tailored to the needs and interests of the diverse urban subcommunities. In the cities also, the party effort was aided by the testimonials of local and visiting notables; in this case, upper-middle class speakers for the well-off and/or educated, working-class speakers for the workers, and so on.

Outright recommendation of the NSDAP by bourgeois newspapers, as indicated, was a rarity in the major cities — but favorable comment, avuncular support, assertions that the NSDAP was a worthy member of the “national” coalition, were very frequent. Evidence attesting to the importance of the press appears with remarkable consistency in the urban voting results. In one smaller city, Braunschweig, the leading newspaper was for all practical purposes a NSDAP party organ, giving Hitler a direct, clear, and unambiguous recommendation. There the party gained 60 to 70 percent in upper middle class neighborhoods, the highest percentages yet discovered in any German city. But where the leading bourgeois newspaper provided serious opposition to the National Socialists, as in Cologne, Munich, and Frankfurt, the voting did not show the general pattern of increased NSDAP support with class level; there the upper and upper middle class districts were either average or even below average.¹⁶ Where a general-circulation popular

16. For accounts of newspaper treatments of the NSDAP and of their election recommendations, see Hamilton 1982: *passim*. For discussion of the pro-NSDAP newspaper in Braunschweig, see Hamilton, 1984.

Many accounts have focused on the high level of NSDAP support in Schleswig-Holstein, a region characterized by small farm agriculture and, overwhelmingly, Protestant affiliations. Overlooked in this discussion is the high NSDAP percentage in Kiel, the provincial capital. The 46 percent share received there in July 1932 was the highest of the thirty largest cities of the nation. It too was a city with a pro-NSDAP newspaper, the *Kieler Zeitung*, described in one source as the most prestigious and important of the region. Its influence appears to have extended throughout the province.

Some commentators, on first hearing of this differentiation of the press by city, are quick to offer a “structural” explanation — something about “the economy” of those cities. Cologne or Frankfurt for example, “must have” generated the pronounced liberal tendency of the press there. The actual facts, as far as I have been able to establish them, appear to be more commonplace, even accidental in character. I have not been able to discern any unique “structure” that made the press of those cities different from others. There is a simple alternative: that committed liberal publishers, the DuMont-Schauberg family in Cologne, for example, over the years trained their upper and upper middle class readers to think differently from their peers in other cities.

Historians in recent decades have spent much time working through the archives of major voluntary associations (white collar trade unions, artisan associations, farmers’ pressure groups, etc.). It would be useful to devote time also to the newspaper archives, to discover the bases of decision-making there. Were the managers of the *Kieler Zeitung* true believers? Did the newspaper convert the readers? Or was it a shift by the readers that led the newspaper to make an “appropriate” response? What was the direction of cause?

newspaper opposed the party, as in Dortmund, the overall support for the NSDAP suffered accordingly.

The cities were also the principal staging area for the party's basic provocative tactic. The procedure was very simple: the party announced meetings in the heart of working-class areas; there the Storm Troopers clashed with the forces of the left and, the next day, accounts of NSDAP "heroism" appeared in the sympathetic press. With increasing "evidence" of an impending civil war, readers could easily conclude that the Storm Troopers provided the only effective barrier to the threatened "Marxist" revolution. This effort, it will be noted, combines two types of influences, that provided by the militants and that by the newspapers. The provocative action "commands" press attention. A relatively small effort by activists before an immediate "audience" of some hundreds or, at best, a few thousand, could thus gain a secondary audience of tens or hundreds of thousands. On an active day in the early thirties, a sympathetic newspaper could easily report a half dozen such confrontations from across Germany.¹⁷

We may, at this point, address the fifth of the explanatory questions delineated above: why was there such pronounced support for the National Socialists among the upper and upper middle classes? One plausible argument, based both on the party's thematic stresses and the content of "bourgeois" newspapers, is "fear of Marxism," the fear of imminent revolution in Germany. Some voters apparently concluded that the NSDAP, or, more precisely, its fighting arm, the Storm Troopers, was the only force standing between them and Bolshevism. Some, no doubt, were true believers, who accepted the party's claims of national renewal, people's community, Versailles as the source of all problems, etc. Some others, possibly, may have given only tactical support — as their favored parties lost strength, they were led to this "second best" choice, to the NSDAP as the best "under the circumstances."¹⁸

What can one say with respect to the sixth of our previous explanatory questions, asking the motives of the urban lower-middle class supporters of

17. The prototypical case — presumably — of the provocative tactic is the Pharus Hall Battle. In 1927, Joseph Goebbels, recently appointed as Gauleiter of Berlin, marched his SA units across the city into working-class Wedding, there to appear in the Pharus Hall where, as advertised, he was to lecture on "Soviet Star versus Swastika." Predictably a brawl ensued and as a consequence, so it is said, Goebbels had "all the headlines he wanted." I have checked this claim in Berlin newspapers and find it grossly misleading; the event gained very little attention. Subsequent scholars and popular writers have been so taken by this "good story" that they overlooked the doubtful record of credibility of their source. See Hamilton 1982: 99-100 and 521-522 for details. Although the key fact in this specific instance has been erroneously reported, the basic mechanism was practiced successfully on countless subsequent occasions.

18. For an extensive review, see Hamilton, 1982: for Berlin 92ff., for Hamburg, 123ff., and passim. For discussion of the motives of upper and upper middle class voters, see Hamilton 1982: 393-419.

the NSDAP. Some two decades ago, William Sheridan Allen presented evidence showing real improvements in middle class living standards as the depression worsened, that conclusion being based on the experience of a single Protestant town. The explanation was simple; price levels fell more rapidly than salary levels. Although based on a small “sample of experience,” the finding indicated a need to rethink the motivational questions. Indeed, Allen offered a plausible alternative — fear of Marxism. That same motive may also have been present in the minds of some urban lower-middle class voters. They too, like the classes above them, may have feared a leftist overthrow. Seeing their traditional parties as weak and helpless, they too may have chosen the “tougher” and “more resourceful” alternative, the National Socialists. Other lower-middle class voters in the cities, of course, would have had an incentive to retain their previous party ties. The *Zentrum* and the SPD, after all, were still viable parties.

Allen’s finding of middle class economic gains has been neglected for most of the intervening years. Until recently it has not stimulated the appearance of any follow-up studies. It clearly has not been incorporated into current thinking on the subject. Where noted at all, it was treated simply as an “interesting” (or “curious”) exception to a still-unquestioned rule. It provides another instance of the power of a positive paradigm.¹⁹

One finds, in the social and historical sciences, a persistent refusal to consider the outlooks and behavior of conservative workers. They are treated, typically, as cases of arrested development; time, it is assumed, will remedy the disorder. Thus, there is no need for any special analysis of their circumstances; they will, ultimately, react like any other workers, only the pace of their maturation being different. That assumption might be accurate — or, of course, it might not be. One may, at least as an exercise, take the lessons from the few available studies of “Tory workers” and think through how they might apply in Germany of the early thirties.

The working classes of all nations are drawn from the countryside. Migrants to the city, ordinarily, carry with them values, attitudes, and outlooks learned in their home communities, bringing them to their new urban locations. In addition to an “inappropriate” party choice and some unexpected economic conservatism, one is also likely to find conservative cultural outlooks, a commitment to the nation, some respect for (or fond memories of) the monarchy, and, in all probability, some religious belief and involvement. Much of that “syndrome,” unquestionably, disappears in the urban milieu. But for many, even in the heart of the “mass society,” it is possible to retain such “false consciousness,” in some instances over generations. That is accomplished with the support of family members, of friends, of

19. Allen 1965: 12, 23-24, 69, 102, 132. The evidence showing real improvements — for some — appears also in national figures. See Hamilton 1982: 605.

neighbors, and co-religionists. Within self-selected urban subcommunities, one can, with considerable success, protect “traditional” values from the “secularizing” influences dominant in the larger milieu.²⁰

Another important ingredient was present in the German case. Conservative workers had retained those values in the face of persistent open hostility from Social Democratic and Communist activists, in the shops and in the neighborhoods.²¹ Given that history, it is rather naive to expect a “move to the left.” One would have to assume that those workers, in the midst of the crisis, would abandon the beliefs they had held and defended their entire lives. One must also assume they would move to support a party opposed to everything they had previously stood for, that they would embrace their previous tormentors. A more plausible scenario is that, as the traditional parties dwindled in strength they turned to the party that announced and “demonstrated” itself to be the only effective defender of the values they cherished. Conservative workers personally touched by the crisis may have found the NSDAP attractive by virtue of its job creation program (in contrast to the steadfast *laissez-faire* orientations of the Conservatives and both liberal parties). The four leading “bourgeois” parties all shifted to the right at this point, effectively telling their working-class followers that no aid was to be forthcoming (Hamilton, 1982: Ch. 10). Among these workers, as with other traditional or conservative segments of the society, one would also have found a kind of anti-Marxism. The sources of such sentiments for “Tory workers,” obviously, would be substantially different from those experienced by other citizens.

The larger experience

The fifth task of this paper is to review and assess the alternative explanations in the light of a larger range of experience. Since the lower middle class argument is general in character, one should find a similar “reaction” in all countries. The socialization-personal influence argument, in contrast, assumes differences both within classes and between nations. Those differences would stem from an assortment of historical determinants. It would mean, for intellectual purposes, that the principal line of generalization would have to stress commonalities of historical experience (rather than the shared experience in a contemporary “class”, as in the work of Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

20. See Hamilton 1982: 35, 57, 171, 264 and 387-389. The best studies of Tory workers are those of McKenzie and Silver, 1968, and Nordlinger, 1968.

21. It is easy to think of the social struggle in the Weimar period as one of workers versus bourgeoisie. But much of the actual struggle pitted one group of workers against another, the SPD-KPD confrontations being the most obvious case. In other instances, one finds workers joining with employers in efforts to keep the firms open in opposition to leftist strike efforts. See Hamilton: 1982, 169-170, 287ff., 295, 386-390.

The conventional arguments of “class” (or of “structure”) assume both a direct and a powerful impact. Those persons in a given “class position” are subject to a set of determinants and, struggle as they may, they will ultimately be influenced. A time dimension is necessarily involved in any such statement but that subject is usually handled rather cagily by the supporters of “class” arguments. The position argued here, in contrast, holds that it was the patterns of interpersonal influences (in conjunction with media influences) that proved decisive in determining responses in the early 1930s. Although Catholic and Protestant villages and towns, on the whole, were engaged in the same kinds of enterprise, had the same relationships to markets, faced the same crisis, and so forth, the populations reacted in diametrically opposite ways. Those ways were determined, it would seem, by the uniform opposition of notables in one setting and by the “permeability” of the same ranks to National Socialist influences in the other. In the one, Nationalist Socialists made no serious headway; in the other, they achieved their greatest victories. Put somewhat differently, outside of the cities, knowledge of “class position” predicted little about the political response; knowledge of social influences and media support predicted a lot.

This point about the decisive role of interpersonal influences gains support also from another range of evidence. The economic crisis of the 1930s was a general one. And yet the range of responses in democratic societies was about as diverse as one could possibly imagine. In England, the Conservatives increased their vote; in France and Spain, the electoral victories in 1936 went to Common Fronts of the left; in the United States the Democrats were the big winners; in Canada, it was a history of Conservatives followed by Liberals (in one province, Saskatchewan, a party of agrarian socialists made major advances, elsewhere very little changed); in Scandinavia, Social Democratic parties gained their greatest victories.

A brilliant analysis by Sten S. Nilson (1954) contrasts Schleswig-Holstein with equivalent farm areas in Norway. In the former region, the NSDAP achieved its greatest victories; in the latter, Quisling’s forces made only trivial gains, victory instead going to the Labor Party (i.e., to the Social Democrats). Why the difference? Quisling had no activists in the field; Social Democracy in Norway had activists and, not being hampered by Marxian “theory,” they made plausible, attractive appeals to the Norwegian farmers.

A similar proof of the role of the activists appears within Germany, also within the Schleswig-Holstein context. A group of National Socialist activists, members of the so-called left (or Strasser) group, defected from the party and formed their own “purer” organization. The Storm Troopers quickly broke up their feeble attempts after which some of the dissidents joined the Communists. Using the basic National Socialist grass roots campaign techniques in the small farm communities they demonstrated a level of

success in those “petit bourgeois” ranks that most “sophisticated” Marxists would consider unthinkable. The experience has been lost from view, the “superior” wisdom provided by advanced theory presumably providing a better guide to *Praxis* than any such “results.”²²

There is the question of the weight given (or assigned to) the presumed causal variables. In the typical formulations of the tradition under criticism, class is portrayed as a “powerful” causal factor. The tenor of those formulations, the absence of any consideration of modifying, cross-cutting, or extenuating factors, means that the authors expect very strong correlations between, say, class position and political attitudes and/or behavior. Although using the language of correlation, it is instructive that their writing never comes accompanied by research showing, for example, a Pearsonian coefficient of .89 for individual data. The explanation for this failure is very simple: that kind of result, to date, does not appear in any available research. A summary of studies done in economically advanced nations over the last few decades must report modest relationships with class to be the typical result. Given the expectation of high correlations (or of “powerful” or “profound” linkages), it is remarkable that most discussion of research on “class” has such a distinctive opposite character; it seeks to explain or account for the *weakness* of the linkages established in that research. Another procedure is always possible: one could reconsider the original theory and, for a variety of reasons, conclude that those high correlations are unlikely. That “paradigm shift” would have one distinctive advantage, consonance with available evidence on the subject.

Given the difficulty, the proponents of class theories must adopt one or another theory-saving device. The *ad hoc* explaining away of low correlations is, of course, only one of many possibilities. Another tactic involves an exclusion of the time dimension. The advantage of the “revolution will come” hypothesis is that without a time specification it is always viable; one can never reject the claim since the evidence will never be “all in.” It falls in the same

22. Hamilton 1982:450-451.

While on the subject of personal influences, some words on the influence of self-announced radicals, activists, and militants will not be out of place. While not a favorite hypothesis, one ought, nevertheless, to give consideration to the possibility that some “activists” have a negative impact; they repel rather than attract followers. The aggressive, hostile style, so favored by many on the left (at least from the time of Marx), is clearly not intended to convince. Whatever the underlying intent, it is easy for many observers, on hearing such “appeals,” to conclude that things could easily be worse under the direction of such people. The influence of the “negative” advocate, in short, might help to explain the modest predictive power of “class,” the presence of so much “false consciousness,” and, ultimately, the failure of the revolution. One should also reconsider the “false consciousness” question and ask if the rejection of the “offering” is in fact based on a “false” understanding. This line of argument, it will be noted, effectively amounts to a call for still another line of investigation, that of the psychology of the self-defeating activist. For a useful beginning see Krugman 1953.

category as the “it will rain” hypothesis; ten, twenty, or even thirty years of drought in the Sahara is not sufficient to invalidate the claim.²³

Another procedure involves what might be termed the evidence recode. One has a claim, for example, that the “history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” But that runs up against the evident problem of *absent* struggle, many epochs showing, for decade after decade, stable pacific relationships between the classes. The problem is handled with a gloss phrase, it is a “now hidden, now open fight....” The “now hidden” phrase, a marvelous Orwellian flourish, redefines the commonplace experience and declares peace (or perhaps passivity) to be struggle, to be conflict or fighting.

The routine low correlation of class and attitudes and behavior has another implication, the above paragraphs having spelled out only the “negative” case. If factor A is a poor predictor, then, given our usual scientific assumptions, some other factor (or factors) must be better predictors. Given that assumption, those better predictors should occupy a central position in one’s intellectual formulations, indeed, the core of the argument should be focused on those factors.

It is useful to consider a case in point, namely, the treatment or weighting of “class” in relation to the personal influence factor discussed here. The advocates of “class analysis” present embellishing comment that, without any evidential base, vouches for the merits of “class” and denigrates claims about the importance of personal influence. Class, so one is told, is a “big” factor; it is a “larger” concern. The analysis of the class structure (when properly understood) provides order, clarity, predictability. Social influences, by contrast, are “small,” minor, passing, or epiphenomenal in character. They are, moreover, extraordinarily complex, highly personal in nature, and, ultimately, unknowable; they provide no basis for prediction. Class analysis, therefore, is “scientific.” The analysis of social influences, at best, involves “mere description,” the tracking of a myriad of “meaningless” contacts, involvements, and so forth. In a more general formulation one finds the same legitimation/denigration in the preference for the “structural” expla-

23 Another possibility, of course, is a continuing revision of the time statements. For a partial listing of Marx’s revisions see Raddatz 1975: 220-222, 303.

The Revolution and Rain Hypotheses are not, of course, completely without merit. The class analyst can readily admit that “all the evidence goes against my claims,” providing generous *ad hoc* reference to historical residues, false consciousness, mass media influence (or manipulation), and so forth. The “bottom line” claim involves the idea that my theory’s “day shall come.” A simple question must be raised however: what does one want from a social science? Does one wish to “explain” events that are to occur some time in the distant future, at a point remaining forever unspecified? If so, the founders and defenders of such “theory” should recognize and state clearly that this “science” has no relevance at all for events in the “here and now” and none for events in the immediate foreseeable future. This is the science of the ultimate Saharan rain. It rather pointedly, stubbornly, and without explanation, neglects the much more frequent and more obvious present fact — Saharan drought.

nation as opposed to the (mere) social psychological. A simple question: given this persistent preference, why does social psychology (for example, political socialization) so systematically triumph over “structure” in empirical studies of individual outlooks?

In the social “here and now,” non-class factors prove to be dominant, that is to say, are the best predictors of those things that interest us. Class may “ultimately” have some immense causal weight, but here and now, in the short run, interpersonal influences outweigh the class factors by a heavy margin.²⁴ It is those influences that define an “objective” situation; they also

24. In 1961, Gerhard Lenski published a work entitled *The Religious Factor*. He established therein, with data, the greater importance of religion (as against class) in predicting a wide range of attitudes and reported behaviors. This finding has generally been neglected in the research and thinking done in subsequent decades. Some subsequent evidence on the importance of the religious factor appears in Hamilton 1972: Ch. 5; and Hamilton 1975: 116ff.

A comprehensive review of data for eight countries from 1970, one enquiring about “Predictors of Political Party Preference Ranked According to Relative Strength in Additive Model,” found the best predictor in six of the eight to be “parents’ party,” that variable in most cases holding a commanding lead over the next best predictor. In most instances church attendance and religious denomination came high on the list of predictors. Only well down on the list and making only a modest contribution did one find a familiar “class” variable — “occupation, head of household.” This is not to suggest that these findings (Inglehart, 1977: 246-249) are the last word on the subject. There are difficulties with the samples (see Wright, 1978) and also, no doubt, with the definitions of the variables. Nevertheless, the study does provide an empirically based result, one with a clear lesson. The study would certainly stand among the “best available” researches on the subject and should therefore, until superseded, figure prominently in our thinking and theory construction.

An earlier comparative study shows the effects of three variables on partisanship, this giving the percent of variance explained by occupation, religion, and region. This analysis deals with 15 countries, including, in addition to the Common Market countries of Inglehart’s study, the Scandinavian countries and three that were once linked to the British empire (Rose, 1974: 17). His findings are that occupation outweighs religion in five nations: Sweden, Norway, Finland, Great Britain (a small difference), and Australia. Data for religion was not available for Denmark but one suspects it too would follow the north European pattern. In the other nations, in eight of the total, religion was the stronger predictor. This result would indicate that some specification of the general claims about the importance of class is in order. The Rose volume does not contain information on parents’ party, hence the primary socialization factor cannot be assessed there.

One of the studies in the Rose volume provides a classic example of denigration and reconstitution of empirical findings. Discussing the Canadian case, the author states that “Of all the indicators of origin in our survey, religion is the greatest source of polarization for political parties.” One also learns that: “Occupational class turns out to be a poor predictor of class-based voting in Canada.” The final discussion of the “Relations Among Variables,” nevertheless focuses on class and mentions religion only in passing. “None of this,” one is told, “means that class cleavages, at least in the sense of economic differences, are not important.... Given the confused place of class in Canadian voting behavior, is it really worth the effort to continue to analyze voting data along this dimension? The answer is decidedly yes...” (from Schwartz, 1974: 579, 592-593). The variance explained by occupation in Canada is 1.7 percent, that explained by religion, 8.0 percent (Rose, 1974: 17).

prescribe responses. Those definitions and prescriptions are “what counts” rather than “the objective conditions” or some mystical (i.e. reified) “real” or “objective” interest. The focus on class, specifically on the “fascism”-lower middle class linkage, given the absence of evidence in its support, must be counted as an instance of stubborn theoretical prejudice. Given the difficulty, one may put a simple question: why continue to defend prejudice?²⁵

Should one reject the class variable entirely and focus instead on other variables? That would seem ill-advised since, as indicated, within the German cities there was a general relationship between class and NSDAP support. What then is to be said about this variable? Or, putting the question differently: what is the role of class? How does it work? How are the class-linked effects achieved?

It is useful to think of causal variables in terms of a simple dichotomy, active and passive. A social movement, a political party, a pressure group, or even a family, are normally active; they are agencies seeking to change some aspect of the human condition. Other variables — sex, age, community-size, income, home ownership, or that collection of events described with the term “objective class situation” — are passive; they *do* nothing. At best they provide a set of conditions; they yield an agenda of problems or concerns. But the distinctive characteristic of such passive (or latent) variables is that, by themselves, they carry no clear, obvious, or unambiguous political lesson. It is not the case, therefore, that time is the sole factor needed in order to “bring out” the import of such variables. To bring out the latent implications, an active or “educating” agency is required.²⁶

25. The claim, in short, has been accepted “on faith.” Putting the matter less politely, the claim has been passed along from one person to the next in exactly the same manner as backyard gossip, gaining acceptance through processes of “interpersonal dynamics” rather than through examination of evidence. It has been one large exercise of Groupthink.

Any knowledgeable commentator describing the late Weimar election results in Germany’s cities must focus on this tendency for the NSDAP vote to vary directly with class level. Any such report must also indicate that the presumed lower-middle class tendency was *not* evidenced in the immediately available results, those appearing in newspapers, in most instances, on Monday morning, the day after the respective elections. If strong lower-middle-class support for the NSDAP were hidden within the aggregate results, survey data would have been necessary to disaggregate the combined figures so as to lay bare the underlying pattern. Without that survey data, the lower-middle class thesis, as applied to the urban context, was and remains no more than an unsupported hypothesis. Other evidence, as indicated, points in an opposite direction; it is unlikely that the claim would have gained support.

26. See Hamilton 1967, *passim*, where, with data, this point is discussed in some detail. Even where some significant variation is found associated with the categories of a passive variable, with community size or income, for example, that result is likely to be spurious, one hiding the effect of some active variable (political socialization, that is, family influence, being the likely agency).

The claims presented in the previous paragraph amount to what might be termed an “indeterminacy hypothesis.” As opposed to the claims of close and ineluctable connections, this argument sees the links between social structures and attitudes (or behaviors) as not narrowly determined. Put positively, this means that a given situation would ordinarily be open to a range of plausible readings or interpretations. Which of the readings comes to be accepted as valid would depend on the social influences present. Once accepted, that reading would then govern subsequent reactions and responses. There are, doubtlessly, some “realistic” outer limits to this indeterminacy — it would be difficult to sell communism to the *haute bourgeoisie* — but apart from such extreme cases, it would be difficult to establish any other boundaries (at least through use of purely deductive methods). The diversity of national responses to the economic crisis of the 1930s attests to the openness of the crisis-political response linkage. That small farmers in Schleswig-Holstein “went fascist” while those in Norway “went socialist” when faced with the same crisis attests to the limited role of “class position.” In the latter comparison it was the activists who were decisive, who determined those very diverse outcomes. At best one may assume that the economic stresses created an openness to new alternatives. It made people willing to look for new solutions. But it did not predetermine the specific character of the options that would appear or the specific choices that individuals would make.²⁷

If class is a latent variable, if its import is dependent on some other fact, on the role of some mobilizing force(s), then the heart of one’s analysis should deal with the new agency. It should deal with the conditions giving

27. One may easily accept the logic of these limiting cases, but even here, it is instructive to consider some exceptions. Upper and upper middle class students at Bennington College in the 1930s, children of Republican parents, showed a remarkable conversion under the aegis of liberal and left professors. The percentages indicating Socialist or Communist preferences increased with every year in the institution (Newcomb, 1943: 28ff.).

Waldorf Astor, one of Britain’s richest men, has been described as “not antipathetic” to “the movement for intense socialism” that grew during World War II. *The Observer*, a leading intellectual journal which was owned by the Astors and edited by Waldorf’s son, clearly reflected these sentiments (see Sykes, 1972: 451, 490, 508). Abby Rockefeller, daughter of David Rockefeller (head of Chase Manhattan Bank), has been described as “a professed Marxist” (Teltsch, 1984: 16; for more detail, see Collier and Horowitz, 1976: 589-606).

Another “obvious” limiting case involves the “petite bourgeoisie” — it would, of course, be impossible to “sell” socialism to them since they, as everyone knows, are rightist or reactionary in orientation. One bit of evidence cited in this connection is the support for the Poujade movements shown in the French election of 1956. The table in question (Lipset, 1960: 225) does show the small business (“merchant”) support for Poujade as the highest of all occupations (a result that is not too surprising since the defence of small business was the main aim of the movement). What typically goes unnoticed in the same table is the small business support for the Socialists (21 percent) and Communists (7 percent). The combined merchant support for the left exceeds by half the support for Poujade (19 percent). For an extensive review of the American experience, see Hamilton, 1975: Ch. 2.

rise to new opinion leaders, to social movements, to the innovating forces. A complete analysis also requires investigation and consideration of the “traditional” agencies, those which, in a period of change, are seriously weakened or, as in the German case, are entirely eclipsed.

One kind of condition giving rise to a social movement, to a new set of “opinion leaders,” has been indicated here, that is, war.²⁸ This suggests a need for an expansion of the range of our thinking. Modern discussions of “class” are peculiarly incomplete. There is a class missing from most nomenclatures; that class, of course, is the military, the warrior class. Its development follows lines somewhat different from those affecting civilian classes. Normally that class is located apart from the civilian world, supported by “the surplus” taken from the civilian economy. It recruits enlisted men and some officers from among the civilian population. In addition to its task of maintaining (or extending) national boundaries, it was and continues to be the ultimate “peacekeeping” force within society. These propositions, of course, hold for capitalist and communist societies alike.

Our thinking, as reflected in leading theoretical orientations, has little to say about the impacts of wars, the principal “dynamic” factor in the lives of the warrior class. Our thinking (like our statistical series) usually segregates or brackets the wartime years, tagging them as exceptional or unusual breaks in the normal routines. That procedure, however, leads us to overlook possible spillover effects.

Military defeats, most especially those viewed as illegitimate, lead to the injection of “the military” into civilian affairs in new and different ways such that “normal” routines are disrupted. This was the case in Italy in 1922 (in this case it was a *perceived* defeat) and in Germany in the early 1930s. The defeat of the French military in Viet-Nam and later in Algeria led to the intervention of 1958 that brought down the Fourth Republic. The defeat of the Portuguese military in their colonial struggles in the 1970s brought down the Salazar-Caetano regime there. In the latter case, it should be noted, the armed forces brought down a rightist authoritarian regime which means the process is not unidirectional; it is not as if “the army” were inherently rightist, serving only to prop up conservative regimes. Another case of the same process, one having many parallels to the NSDAP case, involves the defeat of the Confederate States of America in 1865. The defeated veterans, the most committed of them, joined together in paramilitary units (some calling themselves “Redemptorists”) and they ultimately undid the Reconstruction regimes imposed by the victors.

28. There are obviously other kinds of mobilizing conditions. The cadres of the Labor Party in Norway, those discussed by Nilson, did not have wartime origins. Nor were the efforts of Cooperative Commonwealth Federation activists in Saskatchewan in the thirties and forties generated out of wartime experience or resentments (Lipset, 1950).

The basic lesson or need is for reorientation of our thinking toward a focus on “agencies,” on the active forces seeking, in one way or another, to direct social affairs. This focus on the “voluntarist” components of social life requires some reworking of our research instruments so as to allow us to pick up information on personal influences, social movements, organizational initiatives, and, broadly speaking, “effort” variables.²⁹ This is not to argue a neglect of traditional “class” concerns. The argument, rather, is to see those concerns *in conjunction with* these active directive efforts.

As a precaution, it should perhaps also be stated that this is not an argument against generalization (say, one in favor of unique, individual determinants). The argument is that we should draw the lines of generalization in different ways, that we generalize about mobilization (and de-mobilization) processes.

29. This kind of analysis is also possible in historical studies. For a brilliant, data-based reanalysis of the June Days in Paris of 1848, one focused on the organizational histories and dynamics of the two opposing “armies,” both of which were recruited from the same class, see Traugott 1985.

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