THE POLITICS OF IRRESPONSIBILITY AND ANTI-SEMITISM OF THE RURAL PEOPLE’S MOVEMENT IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, 1928-1930

George C. Gerolimatos

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of History in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Chapel Hill
2010

Approved by:
Professor Christopher R. Browning
Professor Konrad H. Jarausch
Professor Terence V. McIntosh
ABSTRACT

GEORGE C. GEROLIMATOS: The Politics of Irresponsibility and anti-Semitism in the Rural People’s Movement in Schleswig-Holstein, 1928-1930
(under the direction of Christopher R. Browning)

An examination of an agrarian protest movement in northern Germany at the end of the 1920s allows us to realize that the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) did not have a monopoly on anti-Semitism in the political culture of the Weimar Republic. The Rural People’s Movement in Schleswig-Holstein is taken as symptomatic of the crisis of legitimacy of democratic form of government whereby political activists sought to discredit the regime through politics divorced from reality yet effective for mobilization. The corollary of Nazi success at the local level is that important social groups in Germany failed to use democratic means and accept pluralism to alleviate the considerable social and economic stresses facing the country during the Great Depression. The surprising and unprecedented voter support for the NSDAP in the September 1930 Reichstag elections is partially explained by the mass desertion of constituencies from all major political parties followed by support for single-issue parties and non-affiliated movements like the Rural People’s Movement.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction ......................................................................................................... 1
    Thesis .............................................................................................................. 2
    Situating the Thesis in the Historiography ..................................................... 3
    Key Concepts (Methodology) ...................................................................... 15
    Sources ......................................................................................................... 18

II. Narrative and Empirical Evidence .................................................................... 20
    Economic Origins of the Rural People’s Movement ................................. 20
    The Anti-Semitic Turn in the Rural People’s Movement ......................... 24
    Social Novels .............................................................................................. 37
    The Nazis competing with the Rural People’s Movement ....................... 46

III. Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 52
    Bibliography ..................................................................................................... 55
I. Introduction

Lewwer duad iis Slaav (“Better dead than slaves!”), an old Friesian motto, was employed by farmers in the late 1920s in Schleswig-Holstein to express their socio-political “plight.” They unwittingly underscored with such slogans of effrontery (the Weimar Constitution was one of the most progressive of its time and domestic policy did what it could to assist farmers) what the Weimar Republic was up against. Scholarship on Germany’s first attempt at democracy, particularly when focusing on the years 1929-33 operates under the assumption that certain groups and processes were responsible for its demise. It is very much a case of who “did Weimar in.” Focus on the rise of the political party that went to the greatest lengths to both discredit and dissociate itself from the Weimar “system,” the NSDAP, as the most obvious culprit was symptomatic of this.

But the demise of the Weimar Republic and the rise of National Socialism were not identical. The Republic had never enjoyed great popularity and legitimacy to begin with. Its constitution was a compromise to which many political parties and social groups attached negative associations. Certainly, the economic constraints following a lost World War were

---

* The author would like to thank his thesis advisor Professor Christopher Browning for all his help during this project. I would also like to thank committee members Professors Konrad Jarausch and Terence McIntosh for their comments and questions that strengthened the final product. A special thank-you extends to Dr. Elke Imberger at the Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, who put the pertinent documents at my disposal. Finally, I thank the staff at the ITS center at UNC for format issues.

considerable; but more important the failure of the Weimar “experiment”\(^2\) was due to a refusal across broad sections of the German population to accept parliamentary democracy as a legitimate form of government. Too many Germans (in the army, civil service, judicial system, politics, etc.) refused to make democracy work. This paper is about how influential elements in a certain geographic area of Germany contributed to Weimar’s self-destruction.

This lack of legitimacy felt throughout the country was compounded by specific, regional factors. In the case of Schleswig-Holstein, the severe agrarian crisis of the late 1920s has been recognized as a major contributor to the peasantry’s final rejection of Weimar democracy and acceptance of National Socialism.\(^3\) One in three employed persons in Germany’s northernmost state worked in agriculture and this social group was instrumental in securing the dubious distinction of making Schleswig-Holstein the first state in which the Nazis gained a majority in free parliamentary elections, in July 1932.

**Thesis**

On their swing to the right, the farmers in Schleswig-Holstein articulated their grievances in such a way that ultimately made National Socialism an obvious choice, but there was an important political “waystation” along the way in which they embraced both a non-party protest movement in the form of the Rural People’s Movement (*Landvolkbewegung*) and a key issue in the form of anti-Semitism. I argue in this paper that

\(^2\) Gerald Feldman suggested that the “experiment” paradigm is too optimistic: “Weimar as a gamble which stood virtually no chance of success,” Gerald D. Feldman, “Weimar from Inflation to Depression: Experiment or Gamble?” in Gerald D. Feldman (ed.), *Die Nachwirkungen der Inflation auf die deutsche Geschichte 1924-33* (Munich, 1985), 385.

the sociology of political discourse among farmers exploited vicious anti-Semitism to secure a groundswell of support against everything they took Weimar to be, parliamentary democracy above all. Anti-Semitism was a signifier that politics in this state among an important group had derailed from reality and into irresponsibility. Leaders of the Rural People’s Movement reacted to economic problems with specious political “solutions” that had no practical bearing on their situation, injecting emotion and bigotry instead of understanding and compromise. As a relatively well-off, often educated part of the middle-class committed to capitalism and self-government, such leaders should have known that resorting to inflammatory rhetoric did not address the extremely complicated economic issues facing German farmers in the 1920s. The “politics of irresponsibility” denotes the decision, conscious or not, to turn away from peaceful protest on the basis of rational discussion on the subsidization of agriculture to emotive, populist rhetoric that served to alienate locals from the central government and a minority (the Jews).

The farmers’ politics of irresponsibility presents the researcher with puzzling questions. Considering how high the percentage of votes cast for leftist and democratic parties in 1919 in Schleswig-Holstein was, how few Jews lived there, and the fact that Schleswig-Holstein lacked a tradition of anti-Semitism (which could be found in Franconia and Hesse, for example), the swing to the right within a decade unsettles. It suggests either that a profound change in political culture occurred or, more ominously, that most constituents in Schleswig-Holstein were never democratic to begin with. Why did farmers frame their political vocabulary in anti-democratic and anti-Semitic terms in the mid- to late-1920s? Did they merely copy the DNVP’s anti-Semitic slogans, or did farmers turn it into
their own? What was the function of anti-Semitism amongst the farmers in Schleswig-Holstein late 1920s?

Situating the Thesis in the Historiography

Local Studies

In line with their initial focus on the Nazi rise to power and before the Holocaust was recognized as a central issue, scholars in the 1960s studied how the NSDAP secured so much support at the local level. This paper takes as axiomatic that “an essential arena in the Nazi electoral surge and the seizure of power was on the local level.”


Voting in Schleswig-Holstein followed the broad patterns of the rest of the country, though the beginning and end points (1919 and 1932) were rather extreme. The radical swing of political sentiment from the left to the right that this region underwent began with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the even more radical Independent Socialists (USDP) gaining a combined forty-nine percent of the vote in Schleswig-Holstein in the *Reichstag*

---


elections of 1919. By July 1932 this had been almost halved to twenty-six percent, whereas
the NSDAP gained its first absolute regional majority in Germany with fifty-one percent. In
little over a decade the region that was the starting point of the revolution with a strong
Social Democratic basis of support had been transformed into a bedrock of support for the
NSDAP. Schleswig-Holstein is taken as a classic example for the crisis of legitimacy: “the
milieu raised itself against its own organizations and reached, in increasingly radical form,
for self-help, until finally it collapsed leaderless after bomb attacks and arrests.”

Whereas the Nazis had an uphill battle in “red” Hamburg (bordering Schleswig-
Holstein) or Berlin, in Schleswig-Holstein they had an easy time of vacuuming up
disgruntled voters. This alerts us to the importance of regional history in explaining the
uneven success of the NSDAP. One scholar went so far to say that there were thirty-two Gau
organizations, not one party.

The historiography on Schleswig-Holstein during Weimar and National Socialism
began in the 1960s and continues apace. The almost twenty year gap between the end of the
war and sustained attention to regional studies may be attributed to the partial destruction of
local records or their confiscation by the Allies and reluctance of many former National
Socialists to discuss their political activities – Schleswig-Holstein providing a case in point,

[References]

6 Rudolf Heberle, Landbevölkerung und Nationalsozialismus, 30, Table 4.

7 Dirk Dähnhardt, Revolution in Kiel: Der Übergang vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik, 1918/1919
(Neumünster, 1978).

8 M. Rainer Lepsius, Extremer Nationalismus: Strukturbedingungen vor der nationalsozialistischen
Machtergreifung, (Stuttgart, 1966), 22.

9 Peter Diehl-Thiele, Partei und Staat im Dritten Reich (Munich, 1969), 34.
since it was a haven for many war criminals. The historiography for Schleswig-Holstein may be roughly divided into three phases. The first phase was set in motion by Rudolf Heberle’s sociological studies. He believed the transition from liberalism to conservatism and then to National Socialism was a function not of an agricultural crisis but of anti-Prussian (i.e. Social Democratic) sentiment. The picture of anti-modern, rural, Protestant National Socialism became an important explanatory model for regional studies.

Gerhard Stoltenberg and others continued Heberle’s work from the 1960s through the early 1980s. These studies focused on Schleswig-Holstein as a whole, searching for ways in which local unrest and political culture paved the way for National Socialism. Most recount the successful infiltration by the National Socialists into farmer’s groups and artisans’ professional associations in order to widen their appeal among those groups. Lawrence Stokes’ work on Eutin contributed to our understanding of the social composition of the

---


11 Rudolf Heberle, *Landbevölkerung und Nationalsozialismus*.


NSDAP in that town by determining that a sizable element was from the working class.\textsuperscript{14} Rudolf Rietzler’s study is particularly important in that he disagrees with Heberle’s conclusion that there was a shift from liberalism to National Socialism. There were long traditions in \textit{völkisch} (racist, anti-democratic, nationalistic) rural ideology, Rietzler argues, which “owed nothing to Munich.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus the main historiographical argument revolves around whether Schleswig-Holstein had a strong liberal tradition that collapsed or its rural character manifested indigenous affinities for National Socialism early on.

W.S. Allen’s classic study was the point of departure for local studies of National Socialism. Although Allen’s book centered on the town of Northeim, Lower Saxony, his analysis of middle-class nationalism, fear of Socialists, and contempt for the Weimar “system” shifted focus from economic hardship described in Heberle to ideological issues for regional studies generally. Many of his findings have relevance to Schleswig-Holstein, since both were heavily Protestant and agricultural. Northeim’s pronounced middle class character (with many civil servants and relatively little industry) meshes well with the fictional town “Altholm” recounted in Fallada’s novel \textit{Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben} (considered further below) as well.

Allen’s main contribution lies in forcing the reader to realize that while National Socialism emerged in Munich and developed a highly disciplined, centralized party administration, its electoral successes and relative ease of \textit{Gleichschaltung} were \textit{local} phenomena. The NSDAP cell in Northeim exercised great initiative with seemingly little direction from the central Party leadership. Moreover, local conditions influenced what


\textsuperscript{15} Grill, “Local and Regional Studies,” 267.
aspects of National Socialism were stressed or not – in Allen’s case, he documents that anti-Semitism was not a widely shared among townspeople. Hence the local NSDAP “soft-pedaled” that issue.\(^{16}\) The Depression was less a factor of real loss of wealth and status among the middle class than a psychological threat of fear and uncertainty, dovetailing with the scholarship on Schleswig-Holstein, which has recently turned away from strict economic explanations for the ascendancy of National Socialism. Similar questions may be posed about how conditions in Schleswig-Holstein affected the political tactics of the NSDAP in that region.

While Allen studied a town of ten thousand people, Jeremy Noakes analyzed Lower Saxony as a whole, where Northeim was located. Noakes reiterates earlier findings that the Nazi breakthrough after 1928 occurred because the NSDAP was able to absorb the middle-class.\(^{17}\)

After a period of relative quiescence in the 1990s, the third phase in scholarship on Schleswig-Holstein has emerged. The attention has turned away from micro-histories back towards a more integrated approach. One issue that received little attention during the years of the Federal Republic has stirred controversy, namely how ex-National Socialists fled to Schleswig-Holstein at the end of the war and even gained positions at universities like Flensburg.\(^{18}\)


\(^{17}\) Noakes, *The Nazi Party in Lower Saxony 1921-33*.

Before farmers in Schleswig-Holstein joined the NSDAP or voted for it en masse starting in 1930 in Schleswig-Holstein, there was a short but important liminal period when, detaching themselves from political parties like the DNVP and traditional agrarian interest groups like the Landbund, populist farmer “generals” like Claus Heim and Wilhelm Hamkens attempted to harness discontent under the banner of the so-called Landvolkbewegung. This spontaneous, disorganized movement of farmers used both increasingly radical methods (eventually violence) and increasingly strident anti-Semitic rhetoric to reject the Weimar Republic while aiming for a new “organic” social and political order in which the farming Stand would play a prominent role.

Far from delving into the Sonderweg debate as it applied to large-scale farming in the agrarian sector (i.e. East Elbian Junkers, who opposed Weimar democracy on principle and demanded government support opportunistically), my work will focus on small- to medium-sized farmers who detached themselves from the Honoratiorenpolitik of established elites and employed modern methods of political agitation, above all using anti-Semitism to weld together an otherwise diffuse, nebulous movement and mobilize popular support. Their goal was bringing Weimar down. Their brand and intensity of political anti-Semitism hovered between the single-issue parties of the late Imperial period and the Nazis’ racist-biological anti-Semitism. Farmer leaders realized the power of the masses but were unable to achieve the kind of discipline and organization that the Nazis did. Above all, the Rural People’s Movement could not hope to match the Nazis efforts as a Sammlungsbewegung.

Unfortunately it seems that few have followed up on Peter Fritzsche’s suggestion to pursue the Rural People’s Movement more thoroughly.\textsuperscript{19} The historiography on the

\textsuperscript{19} Peter Fritzsche, \textit{Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilization in Weimar Germany} (New York, 1990), 114.
*Landvolkbewegung* and its anti-Semitism has assumed a rather smooth transition of frustrated farmers from this failed movement to the NSDAP. This interpretation has been summarized succinctly as: “The Nazis had successfully assaulted the strongholds of Germany’s agricultural elites, and their infantry in this assault were masses of angry and increasingly desperate small family farmers.”\(^2^0\) It is clear that farmers voted heavily for the NSDAP in Schleswig-Holstein in the early 1930s. What I wish to show is that the Rural People’s Movement had already outstripped the National Socialists in its anti-Semitic vitriol during its brief ascendancy, before its followers turned to the NSDAP. My focus is on the crucial role of the Rural People’s Movement in the early stages of the rise of the NSDAP in Schleswig-Holstein.\(^2^1\) However, disentangling radical farmers and Nazis is not entirely possible inasmuch as the farmers were often drawn to anti-Semitism and the Nazis appealed to farmers. While case studies of the rise of National Socialism abound, there are few regional studies devoted specifically to the milieu into which they installed themselves. Moreover, while studies on anti-Semitism have recounted how various political parties treated the “Jewish question,” there are fewer documenting how non-affiliated political movements did.

**The Historiography of Anti-Semitism in Weimar**

The first important studies on anti-Semitism in the 1960s that impact this study were those of Peter Pulzer and George L. Mosse.\(^2^2\) At that time anti-Semitism was taken to be a

\(^{20}\) Bessel, “Why did Weimar Fail?” 140.

\(^{21}\) See Rietzler, “Kampf in der Nordmark.”

movement of “reactionary” and anti-modern elements of society against Jews, who were seen as the symbol of virtually all aspects of hated modernity. More differentiated studies on anti-Semitism, employing a social psychology approach, were pursued by Werner Jochmann, Helmuth Berding, Bernd Weisbrod, and Reinhard Rürup. Ultimately, they reinforced the general thrust of Pulzer and Mosse, in that a common thread running through these works was the close connection between anti-Semitism and the socio-economic crisis of modernity. These more recent studies stressed that anti-Semitism was neither derivative of nationalism nor a mere epiphenomenon of economic distress.

Soon research on anti-Semitism turned to regional and local milieus. One conclusion was that the anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic in comparison to its pre-war manifestation was the pronounced “terroristic qualities” of the later period. Dirk Walter’s work on Weimar violence towards Jews shows a marked jump from the imperial era to a new radicalizing element in political culture. Sybille Morgenthaler concurred in detecting “ruptures in tradition” between anti-Semitism in the Kaiserreich and Weimar Republic, while Till van Rahden, using Breslau as a case study, assessed the qualitative changes in anti-Semitism over time.

---


Not all studies supported a conclusion of rupture over continuity. Notger Hammerstein looked at anti-Semitism in universities from 1871-1933, connecting to Heike Ströhle-Bühler’s work Michael Steinberg’s work on fraternities. Hammerstein concluded that the supposed bastions of free thought in Germany were discriminatory toward Jews on the basis of “cultural Protestantism” whereby universities closely identified with the Prussian-German state. The rupture of World War One, the defeat and revolution did not disrupt the persistence of cultural Protestantism into the Weimar Republic. While most professors dismissed biological-racial anti-Semitism as “bad science,” ingrained anti-Semitism provided a milieu in which more radical student groups could flourish. Steinberg explained how the political and ideological path of students in the twenties was deeply tied to the socio-economic crisis – getting into a university and finding a job once graduating were important factors in explaining exclusionist racism. The Weimar Republic guaranteed “autonomy and freedom” to the universities, which used this to consolidate oligarchic hierarchies and limit “mixing” (Einmischung). Of course there could be exceptions among students and faculty.

However, Dieter Gessner has commented that studies such as these (especially Hammerstein’s) have tended to downplay the level of anti-Semitism in their respective

---


27 Steinberg, *Sabers and Brown Shirts*, 11.

milieus by juxtaposing discrimination against Jews with Catholics. Oded Heilbronner argues that such “minimalism” in judgment stands in marked contrast to observations about the success of the NSDAP in Protestant areas of the Reich, which can be only explained by the popular effect of anti-Semitic campaigning that was shared by Protestant agitation. The agrarian milieu was also rife with anti-Semitism. The Landbund and its close partner the DNVP kept alive anti-Semitic traditions. However, there are few studies on the agrarian anti-Semitism of areas west of the Elbe.

Concerning the relationship between anti-Semitism and Nazi political success, Ian Kershaw has made two arguments. In the 1930-33 period Hitler downplayed anti-Semitism in favor of other issues that addressed the priority concerns of German voters (e.g. unemployment, the Marxist threat, Versailles), and that it was only after 1933 that the Nazis succeeded in distancing the German people from their Jewish neighbors. Hitler’s speeches in the early 1920s were dominated by vicious anti-Semitism, while in the late 1920s the question of “living space” figured more prominently. By the election campaign of 1930 Hitler seldom spoke of the Jews. Instead, he focused on the collapse of parliamentary

29 Gessner, Die Weimarer Republik, 71.


32 For a collection of Kershaw’s most important essays, see Ian Kershaw, Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution (Jerusalem/New Haven/London, 2008), especially chapter 7, “Reactions to Persecutions of the Jews,” where, for example, the “Nazis were most successful was in the depersonalization of the Jew” (184). I argue this process, already underway during the Weimar Republic, accelerated in Schleswig-Holstein in the late 1920s.
democracy. At least in Schleswig-Holstein, in contrast, it seems that anti-Semitism was already a priority issue and the rural population was alienated from Jews as fellow-citizens even before the Nazi ascendancy.

Despite the important contributions made to scholarship by Allen, Koshar, Stephenson, and many others to our understanding of the rise of Nazism as a local phenomenon as well as those who have documented anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic, work still remains to be done on where these historiographies intersect. This paper offers one avenue. According to a very recent overview of the scholarship and debates on the Weimar Republic “our knowledge of village and smaller cities is fragmentary, aside from a few examples. Not only is the socially finely divided rural population little known. We still know too little about the meaning of anti-Semitism in Weimar and how it prefigured the National Socialist terror.” Pointedly summarized, we know much about the “objects” of Weimar history, the framing conditions, institutions and processes. But the socially aggregated or individually separated Weimar “subjects” are relatively unknown.

Our knowledge about the thinking and feeling of smaller groups and individuals is paltry. We need studies that register the change in atmosphere from the Wilhelmine static society of order to more charged conditions of a brutalized post-war generation. A recent account of the Jews in Weimar asserts that “progress will require above all a multitude of


34 Gessner, *Die Weimarer Republik*, 106.

local and regional studies that only recently have begun to appear."\textsuperscript{36} This study aims to fill one such gap in the historiography and hopes to shed light on a specific milieu during a narrow time frame and show how the language of politics became un-tethered from democratic values, decency and responsibility.

While the rise of National Socialism in Schleswig-Holstein is well documented, the Rural Movement has been treated more as a footnote of modern German history, a prelude to the Nazi “seizure of power.” The best, indeed, \textit{only} monograph on the \textit{Landvolkbewegung} is an older, though still extremely valuable French work.\textsuperscript{37} As Peter Fritzsche pointed out in his excellent review article on the Weimar Republic as “failure,” it seems surprising that the Rural Movement in Northern Germany has received scant attention, considering that “insubordinate populism … remains a crucial part of the transformation of Weimar politics.”\textsuperscript{38} Insubordinate populism meant not only rejecting the Weimar state but rejecting older forms of politics, like farmers deserting the DNVP and the Rural League (themselves no friends of Weimar).

**Key Concepts (Methodology)**

Thomas Childers sketched out the enormous task of analyzing the “social vocabulary of everyday politics” in an important article.\textsuperscript{39} Written in an effort to break out of an impasse

\textsuperscript{36} Donald L. Niewyk, \textit{The Jews in Weimar Germany} (New Brunswick, 1980), xiii. The comment is from Niewyk’s introduction from 2001.

\textsuperscript{37} Le Bars, \textit{Le mouvement paysan}. The collection of primary documents at the end of the work are particularly valuable.

\textsuperscript{38} Peter Fritzsche, “Did Weimar Fail?” \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 68, no. 3 (September 1996): 638.

in the *Sonderweg* debate in the early 1990s, Childers noted how consistently political parties across the spectrum addressed voters in terms of occupational status (*Berufstand*). He concluded that analyzing the language of politics revealed vestiges of pre-industrial values in political culture. While I am also interested in the sociology of political discourse like Childers, I will analyze not parties but a movement. He summarizes the advantage of a local studies well:

> Because used on a day-to-day basis at the grass-roots level, the social nomenclature employed in such campaign and recruitment literature provides more compelling insights into the fundamental conceptualizations of social groups in Weimar Germany than do the parliamentary debates, editorials in the partisan press, or broad ideological pronouncements frequently cited in the traditional scholarship.\(^{40}\)

Benefitting from the studies of Shulamit Volkov,\(^{41}\) I will argue that anti-Semitism functioned as a “cultural code” whereby farmers in Schleswig-Holstein could use phrases like the “Jewish parliamentary system” to refer to an entire social, political and economic world view that they opposed. An anti-Semitic shorthand was politically expedient after the Rural Movement’s passive protest against agrarian policies failed. Farmers’ politics were irresponsible precisely because they used such language knowing (or not caring) that it had nothing to do with the actual economic crisis facing agriculture in Schleswig-Holstein in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Political language did not only define groups but carried evaluation with it. Mikhail Epstein calls such ideological language “ideolanguage,” pointing out that “the very usage of an ideological word frees the speaker from the necessity of logical

---

\(^{40}\) Ibid, 339.

proof.” In countless speeches I have examined, rural agitators brought up the alleged connection between Jews and the republic, most often to roaring acclamation. Even if the response was more muted in closed settings, audiences never seem to have demanded explanations of such connections.

Castigating the Weimar Republic as a “Jewish system” was politically effective irrespective of its falsity. This had disastrous implications for Weimar’s fragile democracy. As expressed pointedly by Richard Bessel: “As long as the public language of politics was based on misunderstandings and lies, responsible politicians remained at a severe disadvantage.” Other scholars have noted how the Landvolkbewegung marked a new destructive form of politics. Instead of grappling with the complex economic issues facing German farmers at the time, the Rural People’s Movement resorted to emotional vents like anti-Semitism. Prominent farmers like Heim and Hamkens should have known better. Debt, credit policies, and tariffs were not above the heads of certified agronomists (Diplom Landwirt).

Using anti-Semitism as a political platform in Germany was hardly new. A crucial element in the wake of World War I, the Revolution and years of quasi-civil war was the quantitatively and qualitatively different level of political violence and terrorism employed in


44 Hans-Ulrich Wehler describes the 140,000 people who assembled throughout the province on 28 January 1928 in Schleswig-Holstein in protest” the birthday of the farmers’ movement as a ‘destructive’ form of political expression of opinion,” Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte Bd. 4: Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914-1949 (Munich, 2003), 337; similarly Stephanie Merkenich deems farmers’ behavior during this time “a destructive form of political self-expression,” Grüne Front gegen Weimar: Reichs-Landbund und agrarischer Lobbyismus 1918-1933 (Düsseldorf, 1998), 249.
the 1920s. We shall see this applies in Schleswig-Holstein as well. Although I will not be
examining cases of violence against Jews in this region, the increasingly violent language
used against Jews and the real acts of violence against the state (identified with the Jews)
suggests that a process of desensitization among large sections of the German people took
place. Though not as extreme as the National Socialists were in obsession and verbal
violence (before physical violence) towards the Jews, I believe the farmers in Schleswig-
Holstein in the late 1920s had made a qualitative leap to a new, more modern, and dangerous
anti-Semitism than had been the practice in the Wilhelmine Reich.

The liminal space which I speak of – many farmers were quite willing to renounce the
Weimar Republic, but were not yet certain if joining or voting for the NSDAP was the
answer – is important for another reason. The key to the politics of irresponsibility which
they practiced was their use of anti-Semitism to mobilize support against the hated Weimar
“system” and all it stood for: parliamentary democracy. In his study of Northeim, Allen
concluded that Germans there were won to anti-Semitism because they were first won to
Hitler. In Schleswig-Holstein, just the opposite sequence occurred. How and why anti-
Semitism became central to the political protest rhetoric in Schleswig-Holstein, thus priming
the farmers eventually to opt for the NSDAP, is the question to be examined here.

Sources

The documents I shall make use of may be found in the main archive for the federal
state of Schleswig-Holstein, housed in the town of Schleswig.45 They include leaflets,
newspaper articles, police reports, memos, and trial records. Over the course of 1927 to 1930,

45 Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, hereafter LSH. I would like to thank Dr. Elke Imberger who put the
relevant documents at my disposal during the summer of 2009.
in Schleswig-Holstein, where economic woes were felt relatively early, one can document an obvious radicalization of the Rural People’s Movement, to unremitting rejection of the state and persistent anti-Semitism.

There are important aspects of the political discourse of anti-Semitism that are easy to overlook. In addition to examining what farmers said in front of crowds or judges, and wrote in the media, I shall look for unintentionally revealing statements on anti-Semitism, in particular in a novel by Hans Fallada, *Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben*, written just as the *Landvolkbewegung* was running out of steam and the NSDAP was making decisive inroads in Schleswig-Holstein. I do this in order to fit one piece of the puzzle of a *Gesamtgeschichte* of anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic which has yet to be written. Hans Fallada, a perceptive observer and not an anti-Semite himself, was able to gauge how far such attitudes penetrated in a social milieu of northern German, Protestant and rural area.\(^{46}\)

---

II. Narrative and Empirical Evidence

Economic Origins of Rural People’s Movement

The proximate cause for unrest that set the anti-democratic trend in motion among farmers in Schleswig-Holstein was economic, especially as the impact of the agrarian crisis was severe there even before the Wall Street collapse and onset of the Great Depression. The initial means of expressing discontent included refusal to pay taxes, resistance against foreclosures and property garnishments, and boycotts. It is clear by the summer of 1929 a line had been crossed into active resistance, including bomb attacks on magistrates’ homes and public agencies. In addition, there was a sharp increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric. What had begun as economic distress swelled into political resistance against the Weimar Republic. The leaders of the Rural People’s Movement, Claus Heim and Wilhelm Hamkens, had extensive ties to right-wing paramilitary organizations (such as Stahlhelm) and groups like the Artaman League (Bund der Artamanen) which espoused racist ideas of “blood and soil.”

Radicals like Ernst and Bruno von Salomon, Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, Otto Strasser and other persons difficult to classify politically were active publicists whose ideas influenced the Rural People’s Movement.

---

The first signs of the world agriculture crisis were felt in 1926, when grain prices dropped worldwide.\textsuperscript{48} New competition (Australia, Canada, and Argentina) was in part responsible for the drop in prices, along with the great grain export “offensive” heralded by Lenin’s New Economic Policy in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{49} However, East Elbian estate owners with political connections to the conservative establishment managed to keep wheat prices relatively stable even in the face of the Great Depression. Small- and medium-sized farms dependent on livestock, as in Schleswig-Holstein, had a vested interest in cheaper imported animal feed, so in this case East Elbian tariff lobbying directly hurt the farmers in other areas. Moreover, the widening price gap between industrial and agricultural products hit the middle- and small farmers the hardest.\textsuperscript{50}

During the spring these small- and medium-sized farmers concentrated in the western marshes (especially around the mouth of the Elbe River through to the major port city of Hamburg) would borrow money from banks to buy cattle. Having been fattened over the summer, the cattle were then sold for slaughter in the fall. In 1927 and 1928 the risk of this business, sensitive to price fluctuations, elastic demand, trade regulations, and government credit policy, revealed itself. The price of meat fell while the price for young livestock increased. Profit margins were reduced by high taxes (compared to the prewar level) to such


\textsuperscript{49} Merkenich, \textit{Grüne Front gegen Weimar}, 247.

\textsuperscript{50} Heinrich Becker, \textit{Handlungsspielräume der Agrarpolitik in der Weimarer Republik zwischen 1923 und 1929} (Stuttgart, 1990), 93-94.
an extent that farmers feared for their property itself.\textsuperscript{51} The credit burden was intensified by the changing form of debts. Before the war most of the credit was in the form of long-term mortgage loans (\textit{Hypothekarkredit}) on the land, but by the late 1920s short-term personal loans to cover annual operational expenses had become prevalent.\textsuperscript{52} Of course, increased indebtedness cannot be taken as a sign, in itself, for deteriorating economic conditions. It could indicate willingness to expand production by means of borrowing. As Timothy Alan Tilton points out, this was the case between 1925 and 1928 in Schleswig-Holstein.\textsuperscript{53} After 1928, however, farmers felt forced by economic desperation to incur debt on unfavorable terms.

Unlike the central moor (\textit{Geest} – a poorer region with sandy soil), western marsh farmers relied solely on grazing and lacked the flexibility to generate income in other areas in financially hard times. Farms in the eastern part of the province, mostly larger estates, managed to keep their heads above water longer by laying off day laborers or selling excess land.\textsuperscript{54} One of the most visible signs of distress was foreclosure. In the years from 1926 to 1928 nearly five thousand farms with an area of seventy-three thousand hectares were seized

\textsuperscript{51} Martin Sadek, “Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben: Realität und Roman,” in Rudolf Wolff (ed.), \textit{Hans Fallada: Werk und Wirkung} (Bonn, 1983), 54. Politicians reasoned that since farmers suffered relatively less than many others during the inflation of 1923 (much of their debt was wiped out by it), higher taxes could be imposed. Michelle Le Bars, “Die Landvolkbewegung in Schleswig-Holstein: Geschichte und Literatur,” in Gunnar Müller-Waldeck and Roland Ulrich (eds), \textit{Hans Fallada: Beiträge zu Leben und Werk}, (Rostock, 1995), 70-71.

\textsuperscript{52} Hjalmar Schacht, \textit{1933: Wie eine Demokratie stirbt} (Düsseldorf/Vienna, 1968), 35. Surely Schacht went too far saying that this credit problem was one of the main causes of Weimar’s downfall.

\textsuperscript{53} Tilton, \textit{Nazism}, 43. Tilton also points out that economic difficulty should not be accepted as a reason why so many farmers turned to the Nazis – Denmark and Norway were undergoing similar stresses in agriculture, but democracy was never threatened there. But, of course, neither country fought in much less lost the First World War, suffering the particularly difficult economic contraction wrought by it that Germany experienced.

\textsuperscript{54} Bernd Weisbrod, “Die Krise der Mitte,” 400.
throughout the country. In the last quarter of 1928, eighty-one properties were auctioned off in Schleswig-Holstein alone. In tiny Elmsdorf, in the central district of Rendsburg-Eckernförde, nearly eighty percent of farmers’ operations were sold at forced auction that year.55 In 1925, one of the few stable economic years during the Weimar Republic, sixteen properties were sold at forced auction in all of Schleswig-Holstein.56 The tremendous symbolic impact of being “driven from the soil” (Vertreibung von der Scholle) on farmers’ psychology is hard to overestimate.57

Decisive for the dramatic events in the winter and spring of 1928 were the lack of immediately visible results from the emergency measures enacted in Berlin58 and a speech delivered by the respected governor Dr. Adolf Johannsen in Rendsburg, which led to an attempted merger by the two farmers’ organizations, the Rural League (Landbund, representing estate owners) and the Farmers’ Association (Bauernverein, representing small farms and cottagers). This failed to produce more than proclaimed agreements to cooperate, but events were already moving beyond these groups’ control. In the west coast district of Dithmarschen, farmers had hashed out plans since the preceding October to lead a wave of demonstrations to unite the farmers, who could then take direct “self-help” measures. Otto


56 Heberle, Landbevölkerung und Nationalsozialismus, 125, Table 44.

57 Danker and Schwabe, Schleswig-Holstein und der Nationalsozialismus, 12.

58 The January demonstration took place before a campaign season for the Reichstag election of May 1928. The government managed to set up an emergency measure (Notprogramm) amid much bickering between the DNVP and a coalition of the SPD/Z. Eighty million RM were earmarked for credits and subsidies to rationalize operations, reorganize meat and livestock distribution, and establish cooperatives. Beyond that, the government would empower the Finance Minister to support agrarian credit institutions with a bailout plan of two hundred million RM in debt rescheduling. Stoltenberg, Politische Strömungen, 114.
Johannssen from Büsum took the initiative when the talks to merge the agrarian organizations stalled. The Rural League immediately welcomed the idea of demonstrations, whereas the Farmers’ Association expressed reservations.

Johannssen was able, by word of mouth and personal connections, to alert the entire province to the idea in the space of three weeks. One hundred forty thousand farmers, their families, and sympathetic town dwellers came from miles around, on foot, on horseback and bicycle, assembling in the marketplaces of a dozen cities and towns. Otto Johannsen addressed the largest assembly, numbering twenty thousand, in Heide.59 His speech betrayed the influence of the Rural League and oppositional parties on the right. His demands included a new direction in German trade policy, with self-sufficiency in foodstuffs a goal. He also called for drastic reductions in interest rates, throttling of the “profligate economy of expenditure,” and an official denial of Germany’s guilt for the war for good measure.60

The anti-Semitic turn in the Rural People’s Movement

After Johannssen lost influence due to infighting and the government’s unsatisfactory response to the rural crisis (from farmers’ point of view), Hamkens and Heim, both from the western marshes, stepped in, injecting a new radicalism to the movement. More than anyone else in the Rural People’s Movement, they practiced “politics in a new key” (Carl Schorske) that was decoupled from the actual economic difficulties facing farmers and those living in small towns who were dependent on agriculture. Hamkens and Heim practiced a different

59 In his unpublished, undated memoir (which must have been written after the Second World War from internal evidence), Claus Heim stated that the numbers at Johannsen’s speech were six thousand. Le Bars, Le mouvement, 281.

60 Ibid, 111. The officially raised demands are published in Jürgen Schimmelreiter (pseudo.), Unter der schwarzen Bauernfahne (Munich, 1929), 9.
kind of politics in that they neither founded a single-issue anti-Semitic party (as had occurred in the Wilhelmine Reich61) nor reverted to established networks of local “notables” (Honoratioren) who would meet once a year to set the political agenda for local communities, having little to do with constituents. Liberal politicians still remained locked in this form of deferential politics.62 Men like Hamkens and Heim were never part of the “system” and so were able to practice the politics of irresponsibility with impunity. They moved crowds with demagoguery and activism without feeling accountable to them. Anti-Semitism and eventually violence became the common denominator of the Movement under their control, so that by the early 1930s joining the NSDAP for many supporters of the “farmer generals” was almost anti-climactic.

Hamkens belonged to a respected family, served as a lieutenant in the First World War, and upon his return joined the Orgesch and Stahlhelm Westküste.63 Only thirty-two years old in 1928, he took over the leadership of the local agrarian group in Eiderstedt after the January demonstration but tried, at first, to keep himself out of the whirl of activity in the province. His goal was to set a völkisch movement in motion that not only lent voice to farmers’ demands as such but gathered people belonging to all walks of life.64 Hamkens advocated a strictly anti-parliamentary program of civil disobedience with the express goal of


63 The Stahlhelm or “Steel Helmet” was the largest paramilitary organization in the Weimar Republic before the Nazis’ Brown Shirts (SA) rose to prominence, and was a WWI veterans’ group.

64 He constantly used the word Landvolk, literally all the “people who lived in the countryside,” not just farmers, so I use this untranslatable term too. Hamkens’ biography from Stoltenberg, *Politische Strömungen*, 122.
changing the structure of the present state. He avoided debates over “monarchy” or “republic,” instead limiting himself to demands for a “strong,” “pro-agrarian” state. His desire for unity transcending class distanced him from extremist organizations like the Tannenbergbund. Hamkens’ anti-Semitism was of a pronounced anti-capitalist strain.

However nebulous Hamkens’ goals might have been, he was sure about methods: passive resistance and constant protest in order to change the economic and political course of the central government. He distinguished between his “movement” without sworn members or elected leaders on the one hand and “organizations” on the other. Hamkens rejected violent measures. He possessed a certain charm and rhetorical ability, enabling him to carry away crowds with a folksy turn of speech and a sense of mission.

Claus Heim was from a Dithmarschen family established in this district for centuries. This area was known for its jealously guarded tradition of self-administration. Serfdom had never existed. By the nature of livestock farming, farmers here were particularly entrepreneurial and involved in local government. A temporary emigrant to South America, Heim apparently had to defend his estancia, a pig farm in Paraguay in 1909/10 during a civil war. He returned to Germany to serve during WWI, but went back to Paraguay after the

---

65 See his open letter to the municipal leaders of Eiderstedt where he declared that most farmers in his community were not in a position to pay their taxes, lest they “fall to Jewish capital” and expropriation (wenn sie nicht gänzlich dem jüdischen Großapital und der Enteignung zum Opfer fallen sollen), Walter Luetgebrune, Neu-Preussens Bauernkrieg: Entstehung und Kampf der Landvolkbewegung (Hamburg, 1931), 27.

66 Stoltenberg, Politische Strömungen, 122-123.

67 Der Schleswiger from 23 August 1929 captioned an article with the words “Hamkens, the Gandhi of the Landvolk,” ibid, 123.

68 Danker and Schwabe, Schleswig-Holstein und der Nationalsozialismus, 14.
war. His farm now was totally bankrupt. He said much later that the main thing he learned in South America was that one could only rely on oneself. In 1923 he returned to Germany and inherited the one hundred twenty hectare family property in Österfeld. Four years later he was forced to sell one third of his property. Like Hamkens, Heim belonged to extreme right-wing paramilitary organizations which enjoyed strong support in Schleswig-Holstein. Our accounts of him present the same picture: he was a man of action. Losing so much of his property and his experiences in South America probably contributed his radical, self-reliant politics.

Of the two Heim was the more radical, turning to open violence and terrorism (in the form of bomb attacks on government buildings and politicians’ homes) in 1929. The two figures of Heim and Hamkens, with their different experiences and strengths (Hamkens was the gifted speaker while Heim was a daredevil), would come to be known as the “farmer generals.” They were representatives of a modern, capitalist class of independent farmers, wealthy and influential enough to found their own paper, Das Landvolk, and drove round the province in luxury cars, speaking to crowds and using populism to spread their message. Such figures do not fit easily into the Sonderweg conception of pre-capitalist, “feudal” farmers.

In early July 1929 Wilhelm Hamkens was sentenced to serve four weeks in prison for refusing to pay taxes. During the afternoon of July 1, while the police took Hamkens into custody, a large group of farmers (perhaps as many as three hundred) accompanied him through the streets of Husum, a town on the west coast and in Hamkens’ stomping ground. A squad of police officers was able to block the crowd from entering the courthouse with Hamkens, but not before sabers and rubber truncheons were drawn. According to the police

Cited by Le Bars, Le mouvement paysan, 291.
report, Hamkens addressed the crowd, saying that he was going to jail for them. He encouraged those standing before him to continue their fight against the “Jewish system,” which was met by shouts of agreement.70 The crowd then dispersed after singing the national anthem.

Another report, submitted by police chief (Polizeihauptwachmeister) Indorf, went into more detail on the meeting and subsequent march. He stated that Hamkens attacked the “Jewish parliamentary system” amid shouts of approval and that other prominent figures in the Rural People’s Movement, Paul Adam Roß and Johannes Kühl, uttered “libelous” statements about the Weimar Constitution, suggesting how judges interpreted Article 109 (which stipulated that all citizens were equal before the law) differently, depending on whether farmers, students, or Communists were on trial. Ironically, this was true, though opposite to what they meant. National-conservative judges came down very hard on any “leftist” infractions, while just slapping the wrist of those deemed patriotically-motivated “national” law-breakers.

Local newspapers give us a more rounded picture, in that two papers on opposite sides of the political spectrum both reported on the confrontation between the crowd of farmers and the police. The Social Democratic Schleswig-Holsteinische Volkszeitung in two articles described the events surrounding Hamkens’ arrest as a “riot” and concluded that “We hope this will give hot-heads the opportunity to study the problems of National Socialism in peace and quiet while in the slammer.”71 In an article from the previous day the same paper

70 LSH, Abt. 301 Nr. 4696 (Landvolkbewegung in Schleswig-Holstein 1929), II.


28
cast the actions of “the little rebel from Tetenbüll” (Hamkens) as serving the interests of the National Socialists. The author of the article urged vigilance and readiness of the Reichsbanner Red-Black-Gold to protect the Republic.

The Husumer Nachrichten, on the other hand, had a rather different take on the events. Lacking the sarcastic editorial tone of the Volkszeitung, this paper went into more detail on what Hamkens and others said. Hamkens accused “Jewish party politics of bleeding the country white” (Aussaugungssystem). There were two sides in the fight today: those for the “Jewish parliamentary system of leeching” and that of the “Landvolk.” In the same anti-Semitic vein, Hamkens’s associate Johannes Kühl threatened that “for every hair on Hamkens’s head that is bent out of shape [i.e. while in prison] a Jew will be bent out of shape.”

Local prominent farmers like Hamkens or Kühl could make such threats against Jews very easily while speaking to a crowd of sympathetic listeners. In 1925 there were 4,152 registered Jews living in Schleswig-Holstein, mostly concentrated in cities like Kiel or Altona. Agitators were diverting listeners’ attention from the real issue at hand – defaulting on tax payments – and railed against “enemies” using empty threats. Despite ostensible economic difficulties in the midst of the agrarian crisis, men like Kühl managed to find the time to travel to Pomerania to give speeches similar to the one in Husum, where he castigated the state as an “administrative apparatus.” A rejoinder in the Hamburger Anzeiger exposed

---

72 Husumer Nachrichten n.152, 2 July 1929, in LSH Abt. 301 Nr. 4696 (II). “Für jedes Haar, das Hamkens gekrümmt würde, würde ein Jude gekrümmt.”

such politics for what they were: farmers were demanding assistance from the state they
condemned.\textsuperscript{74}

It seems that Hamkens did not change his tune once released from his four-week
prison term. Speaking at a rally of farmers in Bad Segeberg on 26 August, he drew
unfavorable comparisons between the outbreak of World War One and 28 January 1928
(when nearly one in ten Schleswig-Holsteiners poured into the streets to voice concern about
economic distress) with the following: “The front from 1914 held, the one from 1928 did
not.” During the large protests in his province, he insisted that a state of war existed in
Schleswig-Holstein, a war against the “Jewish system of bleeding the people dry.”
Furthermore: “International big capital has turned many peoples in Europe into slaves, here
in the countryside too. The system we’re fighting is the Jewish-parliamentary-democratic
system.”\textsuperscript{75} Hamkens justified this by declaring that Berlin was swamped with fractious
political parties controlled by the “Jewish” press.

Throughout his speech Hamkens constantly drew comparisons between the lost war
and the present crisis. For example: “We went to the banks to get Jewish money and traded in
our capital assets for it. We lent our signature to the German guilt clause; now we have to
pay for as long as we are able.”\textsuperscript{76} He then answered the charge that farmers like him were
biting the hand that fed them (the state) with: “whoever feeds from the parliamentary system

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Hamburger Anzeiger} n.161, 13 July, 1929. “Tax Policies in Schleswig-Holstein: Repudiation of Unfair
Attacks – Objectionable Propaganda Tours,” in \textit{LSH} Abt. 301 Nr. 4696 (II). “Above all it seems to be a poor
way of going about things to demand help from the state whilst boxing the state’s ears!” (schlechteste Methode
zu sein, Hilfe vom Staat zu verlangen, indem man ihm gleichzeitig Ohrfeigen anbietet!)

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Segeberger Kreis- und Tageblatt} n.199, 26 August 1929. “A \textit{Landvolk} Rally in Bad Segeberg – Wilhelm
Hamkens Speaks,” in \textit{LSH} Abt. 301 Nr. 4696 (II).

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
is killed by it!” Hamkens accused the “Jewish press” of “inoculating the German people, drop by drop,” so that they falsely believed that democracy was the right political system. This speech shows the mixture of economic and traditional values of farmers (emphatic protection of property), nostalgia for the Augusterlebnis, and use of anti-Semitic slogans and catch phrases to mobilize a disgruntled audience. The politics of irresponsibility were learned on the basis of false appraisals of German unity at the beginning of World War One and the misperception of why she lost.

Though merely a speech delivered in a small town to a few hundred listeners, Hamkens’ utterances and actions were noticed by the state government. Regierungspräsident Wilhelm Abegg, emphatically pro-republican and an intelligent political observer, issued a long memo to Oberpräsident Heinrich Kürbis (SPD) in Kiel. In his extended analysis of the alarming situation in Schleswig-Holstein following bomb attacks on municipal buildings and the political agitation of Hamkens, Heim, and others, the governor expressed grave concern about the Rural People’s Movement. He specifically noted political connections that its leaders enjoyed with groups like the Stahlhelm and the Ehrhardt Brigade. Most revealing, when discussing the possible connection to the National Socialists, Abegg had the following to say:

The NSDAP as such will undoubtedly watch the activity of the Rural People’s Movement with much attention, in the hope that the Party may later benefit from this subversive activity (Wühlarbeit). The Party has no doubt already laid fertile ground for the Rural People’s Movement in its own agitation for the NSDAP. Agitators for the Rural People’s Movement are hard to tell apart from those in the NSDAP by their combative manner (in der Art des Kampfes) and their phraseology. Often their agitators surpass those of the NSDAP in the vehemence (Heftigkeit) of speeches.  

---

A clear case study corroborates what Abegg said. A trial of three farmers starting on 30 September 1930 shows how anti-Semitism pervaded sections of farmers and even the professional middle class in Schleswig-Holstein. Anti-Semitism was not just an opportunistic prop for charismatic speakers like Hamkens to exploit. Other studies have shown that local prosecutors refused to take stern action against Jew-baiters out of sympathy for their cause.  

Three men, Paul Heinrich Guth (from St. Annen-Österfeld, the same town as Claus Heim was from), Dr. Johannes Peters (from Tetenbüll, the same town as Wilhelm Hamkens), and Claus Wallichs (Lundener-Koog), were brought to trial for utterances (in Guth’s and Peters’ case, for defaming the Republic) made at a meeting in Rendsburg held nearly two years earlier on 22 December 1928. Guth on the stand claimed he went to this meeting because livestock treaties with Poland were on the agenda for discussion. On closer questioning he admitted that he had stated that “the constitution was not a German one, but a Jewish one designed by Preuss.” Guth also admitted to having verbally lashed out against Walter Rathenau, “who of course was a Jew.” Guth attested to his aversion of a German state ruled by “foreigners.” Chief Regional Judge (Landgerichtsdirektor und Amtsgerichtsrat) Staecker then asked: “are you against the Republic as such?” Guth answered with a non-answer: “No, I’m not. I support a true people’s state (wahren Volksstaat).” Guth’s defamation of the state was inextricably tied up with his anti-Semitism.

Peters (a doctor of jurisprudence) took the stand next. According to Judge Staecker:

You are on trial for incitement of class hatred (Aufreizung zum Klassenhass, § 130 Str.G.B.), that you as a speaker at the Rendsburg meeting directed hateful language against Jews. You said, in addition to claiming that the bomb attacks were the only

---


79 Trial records (Landvolk-Prozess und Landvolk-Kundgebung 30 Sept. 1930, in LSH Abt. 301 Nr. 4696 (II).
methods of self-help that would work, that if we [the justice system] were to take our hands out of our pockets, then we should only strike at the Jews (wenn wir die Hand aus der Tasche ziehen und sie niederfallen lassen, dürfe sie nur auf das Haupt der Juden fallen). You said it would be a shame to allow the German people to be ruled by a foreign race. If we are unified, you went on, then the Rural People’s Movement would have the means to victory. You said: “Death and ruin to the Jews and their cronies, death and ruin to foreign races must be our battle cry!” (Tod und Verderben dem Juden und Juden-genossen, Tod und Verderben der fremden Rasse müsse ihr Schlachtruf sein). 80

Peters did not deny saying these things and went into a long discourse on the history of the movement, eerily similar in its long-windedness and self-righteousness of Hitler’s statements when on trial for the Munich Putsch. Peters on the stand claimed that if he was on trial for violating §130 of the Civil Law Code, for instigating “class hatred, then this was inapplicable, since “Jews cannot be considered a ‘special social group’ as the law stipulates.” Peters further claimed that “If I called up the fight against social democracy and the Jews, then I didn’t mean to use violence – I warned against using such methods.”

After Claus Wallich was put on the stand for urging farmers not to pay taxes, Police Chief Inspector (Polizei-Oberinspektor) Ziems was called to the stand to explain his impressions of the meeting. “Dr. Peters at the end did call out ‘death to the Jews and their compatriots,’ but I can’t say these words had much of an effect. This phrase struck me as a general expression.” 81 Then a Dr. Gosch was called to the stand and asked to explain his impression of the meeting. Gosch’s stenographed notes were used to build the case against the defendants.

Both Guth and Peters were acquitted of defaming the Republic, while Wallich received one month in prison or a two hundred RM fine for public incitement to hinder tax collection, violating the Presidential Decree of 15 September 1923. The judge based Guth’s

80 Trial records (Landvolk-Prozess und Landvolk-Kundgebung 30 Sept. 1930, in LSH Abt. 301 Nr. 4696 (II).

81 Ibid.
acquittal on the dependence of the term “Jew-Republic” on context. This expression, stated judge Staecker, was not necessarily slander against the republican form of state. “Mr. Guth declared that he saw no libel in this word; rather, he wanted to indicate solely the tremendous influence (überragenden Einfluss) of the Jews and that this should be combated.” As for Peters, the crux of the case rested with his statement “death and ruin to the Jews and their comrades.” In the judge’s words, “However, to establish guilt, we must prove the defendant intentionally used the words to incite violence, that he knew at the time his choice of words could lead to violence against the Jews.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The case had not corroborated this intention beyond all doubt.

As for Wallich, the judge deemed his urging tax evasion to be the actual point of the Rural People’s Movement. Wallich said farmers would be willing to pay taxes based on income, but if the state garnered taxes from capital assets, then the farmers would respond to agencies “with their fists.” This form of disobedience (Ungehorsam) had to be punished, with a fine in this case.

The case of the three men illustrates that anti-Semitism was by no means restricted to the leadership of the Rural People’s Movement and that disputing the legitimacy of the Weimar Republic went hand in hand with it. From the statements of Guth, Peters, and the undercover police officers who were at the Rendsburg meeting in December 1928, it is clear that economic issues (trade agreements with Poland) were on the agenda, but in Guth’s and Peters’ case the occasion was used to get at the “real” issue: that of the lost war and the mockery of the Republic for which the Jews were responsible. From the police officers’ testimony it appears that anti-Semitic catch-phrases were general political code words to mobilize the group against the Republic, without intending to incite actual violence against
individual Jews. But the damage was done. Going about politics in such an irresponsible way, where a meeting’s ostensible agenda was used as a soap box to hammer away at long-festering grievances, contributed to alienating Germans from Jews. Like the statements from Kühl discussed above, verbally attacking Jews in this way was very easy considering the relatively few Jews in this northern province and the very few living in Rendsburg.\(^8^3\)

Whether Peters’ intention was to incite physical violence is debatable. But such language made it conceivable. The police officer’s statements suggest a level of desensitization in the audience, where words as part of a cultural code were taken as a “general expression.” The fact that Gluth and Peters said nasty things about the Jews did not move the judge to comment. His overriding concern was for possible libel against the state. The judge also willfully overlooked an important aspect of the Rural People’s Movement, focusing exclusively on the economic aspect of it. Administrators and officials confronted with the Movement’s rhetoric must have been aware of Hamkens’ anti-Semitic statements and its political message. A police report sent to the Oberpräsident detailing the meeting of October 2 1929 in Burg (Dithmarschen) mentioned Hamkens’s claim “that the struggle of the Rural People’s Movement was directed against the enslavement brought about by Jewish-international capital.”\(^8^4\)

The hair-splitting of defendants and the acceptance of their testimony by the judge invites comparison to other cases, such as in 1921 when a teacher, on trial for instructing members of a right-wing youth group to expectorate while passing a Jewish cemetery, was

---

\(^8^3\) According to Dohnke, *Nationalsozialismus in Norddeutschland*, 20, there were thirty-four registered Jews living in Rendsburg at the time of the 1925 census.

acquitted. The judge believed the defendant’s distinction: he opposed Jews on racial, not religious grounds. All the same this case cannot be taken as typical of German courts’ attitudes: severe penalties could be assigned to those desecrating Jewish holy places, explicit threats to lives and property, and boycotts. The court case described here illustrates what people could get away with. They exploited certain lacunae in Jews’ legal defense, such as an “insufficiently broad definition of Jewish corporate identity before the law.”

There is a consistency in the anti-Semitic rhetoric employed by leaders and followers in the Rural People’s Movement. Whenever the themes of democracy, the Republic, and parliament were raised, diatribes against Jews were sure to follow. The strident tone slid close to racist-biological turns of phrase, a hallmark of the Nazis. However, for the farmers, if Jews were brought up, it was usually in connection to their alleged predominant role in “international finance.” The so-called Ostjuden were never brought up. Although verbal violence was not followed by acting out against the Jews in this study, a certain type of discourse made persecution possible. This is a case in point corroborating Volkov’s argument that differentiating between “opportunistic” and “real” anti-Semitism is specious.

By using such language rather than getting to the bottom of the complexities of taxation, tariff policies, and international competition affecting prices, the leaders of the Movement plumped for an “enemy” who was abstract and could be put in distant Berlin. The

---

85 Niewyk, The Jews in Weimar Germany, 75.

86 Ibid.


comparison between the mythical unity of 1914 and the brief show of solidarity among farmers in Schleswig-Holstein in January 1928 suggests that the politics of irresponsibility was learned from faulty assumptions about the First World War.

Politics as practiced by farmers like Heim and Hamkens were irresponsible in other ways. Their platform was overwhelmingly negative: anti-Marxist, anti-democratic, anti-liberal. They offered no compelling vision for the future. Moreover, the economic difficulties the farmers faced in the late 1920s which gave rise to the whole movement in the first place pointed to very unrealistic expectations for what the state could provide. Farmers were happy to receive subsidies and tax breaks, but once international competition stiffened, they expected the Weimar government to lift German agriculture out of the economy and protect it in a hermetically sealed, corporatist fashion. That farmers’ groups often had Reich President von Hindenburg’s ear only kept the illusion alive longer. Though still speaking in terms of an allegedly unified *Bauernstand*, agitators refused to acknowledge how war, defeat, and inflation had all but destroyed old corporatist allegiances.

Social Novels

Archival sources provide invaluable insight into the Rural People’s Movement and its anti-Semitism. One problem with the documents entered into the record is that they were written by outside and often hostile observers, such as policemen or newspaper reporters. For purposes of criminal prosecution or newsworthiness, statements of an extreme or extraordinary nature were entered into the record, begging the question of what “ordinary” people felt about the Weimar state and its supposed control at the hands of the Jews. Social novels offer another perspective.
In another context, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* (1925) has been described as “an international source for American social history,” or, as the critic John Lukacs writes, “a gem, a historical cameo not of American thinking but of American feeling…suffused with the atmosphere and with some of the actual evidences and effects of the early 1920s… certain novels tell us more about a certain time and about certain people than even the best of histories.” Though perhaps not literature of the same caliber as *Gatsby* or even Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, written around the same time as Fallada’s books, his output has been recognized for its utility for the historian and has gained recent attention in translation. In a recent book review of his last book *Every Man Dies Alone*, Liesl Schillinger remarked:

> Critics of Fallada’s own era praised him for his “authenticity” and well-drawn characters but questioned his imaginative powers, often dismissing his writing as unpolished or workmanlike – as, in short, an overly literal interpretation of the New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) that overtook German arts and letters in the 1920s and ’30s in revolt against abstraction and expressionism. The weaknesses of Fallada as a novelist are a boon for the historian. He dispensed with complex allegory and symbolism allowing the historian to extract “artifacts” from his novels without resorting to deep literary analysis.

According to a recent survey of fiction’s use for the historian, Beverly Southgate has observed:

> For fiction represents and actually embodies some of the widely accepted social mores and intellectual presuppositions of its age; and so it often provides evidence, not

---


90 Liesl Schillinger, “Postcards from the Edge: A Novel about a Working-Class Couple in 1940s Berlin who begin a Campaign against Hitler,” *New York Times Book Review* 1 March, 2009, 10-11. I thank Professor Browning for bringing this article to my attention.
so much for historical periods in which its stories may be set, but for the time in which it was actually written (though, as in the last example, these may sometimes coincide).  

Hans Fallada (real name: Rudolf Ditzen), a journalist covering the Rural People’s Movement, wrote an important novel, *Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben* in 1929. It was during his time working for newspapers in northern Germany that Fallada gathered much of the material for it. Many details from his life may be found in it. The paper he worked for, as well as the one it was competing against, were owned by the same person. In such a cynical environment he learned the tricks of the trade and experienced the nastiness of small town politics first-hand. Traveling circuses that refused to place advertisements were savaged in articles. One of Fallada’s biographers notes that the author supplemented his own observations with newspaper clippings and interviews with local businessmen, fellow journalists and civil servants (though few farmers). Fallada not only injected biographical material from his life into his story (which he declared a work of fiction in his forward to it), he drew from historical events, like the proceedings from the trial of the farmers in Neumünster, with “minute precision.”

---


93 From Günther Caspar’s (East German) afterword to Fallada’s *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* (Berlin, 1964), 650, 652. Caspar takes Fallada’s lack of contact with farmers as a sign that he had little grasp of the realities of farm life, especially in the economic sphere (649), whereas Thomas Bredohl cites Fallada’s time as a laborer and accountant on estates in Mecklenburg, Pomerania and West Prussia as evidence that he was familiar with the hardship of rural life. Fallada, according to Bredohl, had originally conceived *Bauern, Bonzen und Bomben* without the farmers in mind but chose to focus on the corruption of small-town politics instead; Thomas Bredohl, “Some Thoughts on the Political Opinions of Hans Fallada: A Response to Ellis Shookman,” *German Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (October 1992): 525-524, here 527.

94 Caspar’s afterword, *Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben*, 653.
Fallada himself did not originally intend to write about the farmers at all, or at least so he wrote to his publisher in 1929, and to his sister in 1930: “I never intended to write a novel about the misery of German farmers.” Moreover, he declared to his parents that he did not sympathize at all with the Landvolk and its radical movement. Farmers themselves appear rarely and conform to the clichéd behaviors by which townspeople stereotyped them, such as slow movement and speech. Finally, in contrast to others who wrote about the Landvolkbewegung (like Bodo Uhse), Fallada kept his own opinions out of the novel:

After my first unloved books which were far too personal, in this one the author should not appear at all. He must not indicate what he thinks about the events which transpire in the book, even with a single word. Rather, he should leave the reader to his own devices.

Fallada does this by having the book driven forward by direct dialogue between characters, rarely stepping in as a narrator. He never intended to write a complete story of the Landvolkbewegung, though this did not necessarily mean that he did not understand some of its aspects or that he did not, in certain instances, sympathize with the farmers. But he left explicit statements of the latter to other publications.

Historians have tended to ignore this book or mention it briefly in footnotes as a good “poetic” or “literary” description of the “atmosphere” of small German towns in the late 1920s.

---

95 Letters to Ernst Rowohlt, 14 August 1929 and to his Elisabeth Hörig, 4 March 1930, cited in Bredohl, “Some Thoughts,” 527.

96 Letter to his parents, 3 November 1929, cited in ibid, 528.


98 Hans Fallada, “Landvolkprozess,” Die Weltbühne 25 (1929), 835. “[These] quiet people are in desperate need. Whether they created their own problems, still: they are in need.”
1920s.\textsuperscript{99} There has been controversy over the historical accuracy of this novel with regard to its treatment of the \textit{Landvolkbewegung}. The preponderance of scholarship has, however, concluded that it can serve as a useful window into the everyday life of small towns.\textsuperscript{100}

In Fallada’s account a few scattered remarks are made about Jews, which some have taken as a sign for a kind of mild but ingrained social anti-Semitism. Its taken-for-granted nature, since these scattered remarks elicit neither reaction nor further comment in the novel, arguably capture typical attitudes in rural areas of northern Germany.\textsuperscript{101} For example, in one scene the flag for the Rural People’s Movement is unfurled: a black field (“bereavement for the Jew republic”), a white plow (“our peaceful work”), and a red sword (“showing that we can defend ourselves”).\textsuperscript{102} The other farmers in the group were not moved to comment on this, suggesting tacit agreement. The main character of the novel, Max Tredup, a cub reporter who seems to have stood in for Fallada himself, reflected with disgust on the circus that

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{99} Those deeming Fallada as a good historical source without actually explaining how include: Detlev Peukert, \textit{Die Weimarer Republik} (Frankfurt a.M., 1987); Weisbrod, “Die Krise der Mitte,” Wehler, \textit{Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte}. One of the few historical works to make extensive use of Fallada is Le Bars, \textit{Le Mouvement Paysan}.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{101} Turner, “Fallada for Historians,” 486.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{102} Fallada, \textit{Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben}, 57-58.
\end{flushleft}
refused to place an advertisement as “gypsy insolence, Semitic, disgusting affectation.”

The new owner of the paper Tredup remarks during negotiation for another journalist’s salary that “I’m not a Jew to squeeze you.”

In another scene, assessor Meier, a minor official who represents the Social Democratic governor in “Altholm,” has a stereotypical Jewish “appearance”: “small, pale, very Jewish-looking, sweating a bit.”

The relative paucity of such statements in a long book and their brevity belies their significance. The figures in Fallada’s novel are usually richly characterized. When it came to statements about Jews, their supposed behavior or appearance, Fallada could dispense with longer descriptions. It was enough for his audience to read about a minor civil servant who looked “Jewish.” With a few deft, devastating strokes Fallada described a whole political culture. Fallada’s stated intention in the forward to his book was to capture the “atmosphere” of small towns in Protestant northern Germany. To do this he had to perpetuate the discourse employed by men like Hamkens, even though Fallada was a Social Democrat and certainly not an anti-Semite. The politics of irresponsibility could have serious consequences indeed.

Henry Ashby Turner describes the kind of language Fallada used with respect to Jews in his novel very well:

As [Kurt] Tucholsky pointed out, there are no Jewish scapegoats in Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben. Throughout the book, however, other characters make derogatory remarks about Jews, although none delivers what could be described as anti-Semitic diatribes. The Weimar Republic is several times referred to as “die Judenrepublik,” in some cases by the author himself in the course of evoking the poisoned political atmosphere. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, such words have a sinister ring, but one must keep in mind that Fallada was seeking to capture the realities of German life, and casual aspersions about Jews were one such reality in 1929. For historians, Bauern,

---

103 Ibid, 9.

104 Ibid, 143.

105 Ibid, 42.
Bonzen, und Bomben is informative precisely because of the opportunity it provides to learn about how some ordinary Germans spoke offhandedly about Jews in the years leading to that catastrophe.\footnote{Turner, “Fallada for Historians,” 486. Kurt Tucholsky was a prominent critic who wrote for the leftist journal \textit{die Weltbühne} (The World Stage), including a favorable article of Fallada’s book. Tucholsky, although sometimes critical of the SPD, held that only “rightist stupidity” would mistake Fallada’s novel for an attack on Social Democracy:Ignaz Wrobel [= Kurt Tucholsky], “Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben,” \textit{Die Weltbühne} 27, no. 14 (7 April 1931): 496-501.}

Fallada’s novel helps us understand the nature and extent of anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic. Nasty remarks about Jews peppered the speeches of both Nazi leaders and spokesmen for the Rural Movement, and are transmitted in Fallada’s novel. Yet it is difficult to gauge how much such rhetoric resonated with listeners. Social anti-Semitism, bland but ingrained, characterized the rhetoric of figures in Fallada’s novel, making them of a different quality than Lohse’s vicious remarks. This is not to excuse the former, but merely to point out that Fallada was committed to bringing small town existence to life, and this included unsavory aspects. The local National Socialists must have recognized that there was widespread anti-Semitism among the farmers, yet this, in itself, was insufficient to bring them over to the NSDAP. Fallada’s characters and his tone as a narrator may have expressed criticism of the weaknesses of the Social Democrats, but it would be going too far to say that he “appeared to be firmly on their [the extremists of the Rural Movement] side” or that he shared their anti-Semitic sentiments.\footnote{Shookman, “Making History,” 470.}

Hans Fallada’s account captures the immediacy of the violence in an August 1929 clash between marching farmers, on their way to greet Hamkens upon his release from prison, and the police. A closed, mute column of farmers, wearing dark clothes, caps, and walking sticks in hand (they would not be seen in public without them), is met by a young,
nervous police chief in over his head, as the mayor, “Gareis” (based on the real Social Democratic mayor of Neumünster, Lindemann) is away on vacation. Fallada avoids taking sides with either the police or the farmers. He seems intent on capturing the atmospheric detail. Sometimes we cannot be sure if the narrator is Fallada himself or not. For example, we learn that a marching band joins the farmers, playing *Fredericus Rex*, the *Deutschlandlied*, and then “the song of the Jew Republic which we don’t need.”\(^\text{108}\) The novel adumbrates the connection between physical violence against the state and hateful words against Jews, corroborating the parallel of violence and anti-Semitism from archival documents discussed above.

The arbitrariness of the police’s cries “make way!” and “clear the street!” is contrasted with their rage that the farmers will not surrender their flag and the suddenness of saber slashes and cracking pistol shots. After the event the farmers are just as upset. One of them laments, “The police should’ve tried this against the RKF [the paramilitary wing of the Communist Party], SA or even the *Reichsbanner* [the paramilitary wing of the SPD]. They’d have been brushed aside! Only the farmers are useless.”\(^\text{109}\)

While the level of violence in this instance was comparatively low, one could scarcely overestimate the disastrous effect of the police’s inept work on the already agitated farmers. After all, many of them considered themselves as bearers of stability, tradition, and rule of law, ever since the Revolution of 1918. Farmers were often called up (or volunteered) to serve in local police and auxiliary forces like the *Einwohnerwehr*. They maintained law and order, protecting property. Farmers were not easily mobilized for more “political”


\(^{109}\) Ibid.
actions, i.e., pitched battles with Social Democrats, Spartacists, and Communists. The clash in Neumünster mentioned earlier was only the beginning of rapidly escalating political violence in Schleswig-Holstein, which would reach its bloody climax on 17 July 1932, when eighteen SA, KPD, policemen, and even female bystanders were killed in the so-called “Altona Bloody Sunday” battle. The combination of NSDAP, KPD, SPD, and restive farmers rendered Schleswig-Holstein considerably more violent than the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern to the East and Lower Saxony to the South. In total nearly fifty people lost their lives in political violence in Schleswig-Holstein between 1928 and 1933. The Rural People’s Movement did its part to unite violence against the state and Jews.

From these cases physical violence was aimed at the state, in the case of clashes with the police or, later, bomb attacks on municipal buildings. Farmers, outraged at the police after the events in Neumünster, got together and declared a boycott of the city. In Fallada’s novel the farmers warn each other not to let their wives to go into “Altholm” (i.e.

---

110 Jens Flemming, Die Bewaffnung des “Landvolks”: Ländliche Schutzwehren und agrarischer Konservatismus in der Anfangsphase der Weimarer Republik, in: Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen 26 (1979), 7-39. Recent research for Saxony and Bavaria suggests that Einwohnerwehr protected villages and propert and were not employed for political tasks; Dirk Schumann, Politische Gewalt in der Weimarer Republik 1918-1922: Kampf um die Straße und Furcht vor dem Bürgerkrieg (Essen, 2001), 70-83; Benjamin Ziemann, Front und Heimat: Ländliche Kriegserfahrungen im südlichen Bayern 1914-1923 (Essen, 1997), 394-412. In general farmers have received little attention from scholarship with regard to the 1918 Revolution, and how they reacted to the various soldiers’ and workers’ councils (Räte). This is especially pertinent to Schleswig-Holstein, where the sailors’ mutiny in Kiel broke out in November 1918.

111 For a list of the casualties, see Dohnke, Nationalsozialismus in Norddeutschland, 32; for the comparison to other states ibid, 11. The bloodshed in Altona played a large part in Chancellor Franz von Papen’s (Z) decision to depose the Prussian state government. On 20 July 1932 Papen was granted effective dictatorial powers (Reichskommissar) for Prussia by emergency presidential decree. This unconstitutional act, which was a major step in the destruction of democracy in Germany, was the direct result of political violence in Schleswig-Holstein. The governor general of Schleswig-Holstein, Heinrich Kürbis (SPD), was replaced by Dr. Thron (DNVP). The police chiefs for Kiel and Altona were also fired. In November of that year, the pro-republican lieutenant Waldemar Abegg was replaced by a distinctly anti-republican Anton Wallroth.

112 Danker and Schwabe, Schleswig-Holstein und der Nationalsozialismus, 14.
fictionalized Neumünster) to buy from Jews.\textsuperscript{113} As if Jews were the only shopkeepers! Verbal violence against Jews and their alleged “wire-pulling” of the state served as an ominous backdrop. The casual, throw away anti-Semitic remarks uttered by fictional characters in Fallada’s novel recalls what the police officer mentioned during the trial of the three men discussed above. By the time the Nazis set about mobilizing the rural population in Schleswig-Holstein in the late 1920s with great success, much of the groundwork had been done for them. It was up to the Nazis to unite hatred of the Jews with physical violence.

The crux of Fallada’s novel was that it revealed that even a sensitive observer who was not an anti-Semite both captured by the casualness with which anti-Semitic remarks were commonly made and simultaneously failed to understand or reflect on the depth of anti-Semitism in the Rural People’s Movement. Like the listeners in the speeches given by Dr. Peters above, Fallada seems desensitized to anti-Semitism and underestimated its centrality in the movement. However much Fallada tried to keep his opinions and judgments out of his work, his own failures of perception crept in.

The Nazis competing with the Rural People’s Movement

The emerging Rural Movement did not exist in isolation. Some discussion of the NSDAP and its agitation is necessary in order to contextualize the anti-Semitism of the Rural People’s Movement. Though historians have been right in viewing the Movement as paving the way for the Nazis, there were contrasts between the two. While the NSDAP pursued a (dubiously) “legal” path after 1923, the Rural People’s Movement moved in the opposite direction, starting with protest and passive resistance, then moving to violent overthrow. Hitler’s early speeches were filled with anti-Semitism; once the party launched itself on the national scene, he toned them down. The Rural People’s Movement became more

\textsuperscript{113} Fallada, \textit{Bauern, Bonzen, und Bomben}, 177.
emphatically anti-Semitic as time passed. The NSDAP and the Rural People’s Movement intersected at the point in time (1930) where the former became a contender for leading the country and the latter devolved into senseless violence and spluttering anti-Semitism. Not only were the politics of the Rural People’s Movement irresponsible, they were unrealistic when disgruntled farmers alienated erstwhile sympathetic townspeople and shopkeepers by imposing boycotts on them. The regional approach warns against too hastily accepting that radical anti-Semitism was a virtual monopoly of the Nazis after 1930.  

The fledgling NSDAP, which had been reestablished in 1925 in Schleswig-Holstein, found its early growth in the cities of Kiel, Altona, and Neumünster. In 1925 there were twelve chapters of the NSDAP with about three hundred members. Hinrich Lohse (1896-1964) established himself early as the leading National Socialist in Schleswig-Holstein and ruled there as Hitler’s satrap uninterrupted until 1945. Lohse was born in Mühlenbarbek in the central moor near Itzehoe. He was from a small farming family but worked as a businessman and later for the shipping company Blohm and Voss in Hamburg. After war service and short stints in the Schleswig-Holsteinischen Bauernverein in 1919 and as a bank clerk in 1921, Lohse joined the NSDAP in 1923 in the Altona circle. He was put in charge of the region of Schleswig-Holstein for the NSDAP on 22 February 1925 by Gregor Strasser on Hitler’s orders. Orlow describes Lohse as “a lower-level white collar worker who aspired both to dominate and be dominated.” All the evidence suggests that Lohse ascribed totally to the Führer cult, at the latest, by February 1925.

114 Niewyk, The Jews in Weimar Germany, 52.


While the NSDAP could point to considerable successes in the province, its relationship to the Rural Movement was touch and go, especially with regard to their kinds of resistance, or even terror, tactics, including chasing officials away from impounding cattle for defaulted taxes, clashes with the police, and planting bombs in municipal buildings. Worst of all the Rural People’s Movement struck the Nazis as a disorderly, politically uncontrolled movement that threatened to draw off the NSDAP’s target constituency by its activism. In May 1929 regional boss (Gauleiter) Hinrich Lohse wrote to Munich that “the stupidities (Dummheiten) of these people are very dangerous for us.”117 The previous November Lohse directly attacked Hamkens in a speech in Itzehoe for participating in a movement bereft of a unified political will.118 More of a headache to Lohse might have been his Party’s organ, the Tageszeitung. While Munich demanded unconditional obedience to the Party line and forbade participation in the Rural Movement, Bodo Uhse, head of the local Nazi paper, surreptitiously used his contacts (Heim) with the farmers in order to secure a broad coalition of national revolutionaries. This in turn dovetailed well with the always restless SA and its more committed revolutionary stance.119 At one point the SA group in Albersdorf, an early bedrock of the NSDAP, mutinied against Gauleiter Lohse, accusing him of betraying the early ideals of the Party and failing to carry out Hitler’s express wishes.120

117 Stoltenberg, Politische Strömungen, 146. “Aber wenn ich sagen sollte, dass das irgend eine Einwirkung gehabt hat, so muss ich das verneinen. Ich habe das als eine allgemeine Redewendung aufgefasst.”

118 Itzehoer Nachrichten 268 (13 November 1928).

119 Of the twenty four new SA Stürme recognized at the Party Congress in 1929, four were in the Gau Schleswig-Holstein; Orlow, The Nazi Party, 112.

120 Dr. Grantz’s manifest, Albersdorf, 28 May 1930, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, cited in Le Bars, Le mouvement, 333-334. It is not clear whether this “Dr. Grantz” cited in Le Bars may have been the same SA leader “Dr. Glans” in Uhse’s account in Söldner und Soldat, but it seems likely. Another SA group, along with a
Lohse had to follow the leadership principle of the NSDAP, but in order to expand the NSDAP in his province, he had to utilize the political discontent – the farmers – and funnel it into support for the Party.

In his lengthy memorandum from September 1930, Regierungspräsident Abegg showed that he knew the NSDAP had internal problems centered around Bodo Uhse. Reichstag delegate Lohse as the leading figure of the NSDAP in the province had no apparent connection to the Rural People’s Movement. In the conclusion to a level-headed analysis, Abegg stressed that the Rural People’s Movement was largely a self-sustaining, if poorly coordinated, political movement. Its ideology and mobilization had nothing to owe to the National Socialists in terms of vehemence. If in retrospect historians can see that the Rural People’s Movement paved the way for future Nazi success, this was not apparent to Nazi leaders at the time. Instead, Lohse viewed it as an awkward rival that was both a threat to local Nazi unity and a serious challenger for the loyalty of those whom the Nazis viewed as their prime constituency.

In contrast to the casual and muted anti-Semitism in the dialogue of Fallada’s novel, anti-Semitic animus was pronounced in Lohse’s agitation, and his rhetoric was considerably more brutal. During the 1928 Reichstag campaign he addressed a crowd in Itzehoe as follows:

All of the banks are in Jewish hands. We don’t want to hang these Jews, but perhaps they could be used in the cultivation of barren land (Ödlandkultur). Those Jews who have entered the country since 1914 must be deported, others placed under Laws for Foreigners (Fremdengesetz) and deprived of their civil rights. Only a German People’s State (Volksstaat) with the power in its hands could bring these about. And

number of SS men in civilian clothes, crushed this rebellion violently. Grantz eventually left the SA for the right-wing Tannenbergbund.

---

National Socialism stands for this.\textsuperscript{122}

In the case of anti-Semitism, Fallada’s account, written in the early 1930s, seems deficient in explaining this vital shared aspect of the Rural Movement and the National Socialists to us. This reminds us that the context they were writing in attached no particular importance to anti-Semitism.

Since the province as a whole had even fewer Jews than the national average – Kiel, the province’s capital, with well over two hundred thousand people, had just six hundred Jews\textsuperscript{123} – many secondary sources downplay anti-Semitism’s importance in making the NSDAP appear acceptable to those in the Rural Movement. However, the relatively low concentration of Jewish inhabitants in a province is no reason to ignore the role of anti-Semitism in the political beliefs of the region. After all, the NSDAP caught on very quickly in rural areas of Bavaria, even though farmers there might never have encountered Jews, aside from some as cattle dealers. The absence of large numbers of Jews meant that Nazi agitation and the Rural Movement described Jews in distant, rather abstract terms, similar to results obtained by Allen in Northeim, Lower Saxony.\textsuperscript{124}

Unlike Hitler and the Munich group, which by this time ranted about “Judeo-Bolshevism,” the Rural Movement and the Strasser group linked Jews with the evils of capitalism. That writers like Fallada and Uhse did not devote much space to this fact could

\textsuperscript{122} Hinrich Lohse in an article for the \textit{Itzehoer Nachrichten} (19 May, 1928), cited by Rietzler, “\textit{Kampf in der Nordmark},” 417.

\textsuperscript{123} Dohnke, \textit{Nationalsozialismus in Norddeutschland}, 20.

\textsuperscript{124} Allen, \textit{The Nazi Seizure of Power}, 84.
imply that they either shared such sentiments or did not (Fallada), but found the anti-Semitism so widespread that it did not warrant special comment.
III. Conclusion

This study has documented how a rural movement became uncoupled from responsible and democratic forms of protest. Both leading figures and ordinary people made use of emotionally-laden bigotry instead of reasoned economic and political discourse to mobilize an important sector of society against the republican state. I believe the discourse analyzed in this paper strongly suggests that a vocal part of agriculture in Schleswig-Holstein harbored anti-democratic prejudice throughout the Weimar Republic. Heavy voter turnout for the PSD and USP in 1919 could be explained by the universal wish to end the war while keeping the Communists at bay. Anti-Semitism and violence were the common denominators of the Rural People’s Movement and National Socialism, explaining the enthusiastic support for the latter once the former ran out of steam. Farmers came to realize that instead of a regionally-based, disorganized movement like the Landvolkbewegung, a national, strictly organized political party that stood for national renewal and anti-Semitism, and also respected agrarian issues (such as private property) offered the best chance for “doing Weimar in.” The irresponsibility of the politics practiced by men such as Hamkens and Heim lay in not making an attempt to get at the real base of the problems facing farmers in good faith. Instead of pluralistic democracy they went for bigoted populism and demagoguery. Both archival documents and fictional accounts based closely on the events of the late 1920s in northern Germany corroborate this fact.
If peasants’ ideas of justice were integral to popular protest, then the farmers leading the *Landvolkbewegung* had a very peculiar sense of “justice.” They accused the state of endangering their subsistence, but were quite insistent to receive state subsidies and tax

---

deferments. More perceptive observers in the pro-republican milieu, such as Social Democrats, recognized this as a classic case of biting the hand that feed you.

The verbal violence wrought by figures like Hamkens made physical violence against the Jews conceivable. The picture that emerges from this study shows anti-Semitism to be widespread among farmers supportive of the Rural Movement, varying in intensity. But even lack of reaction on the part of listeners in speeches (real or imagined by Hans Fallada) suggests how “unobjectionable” anti-Semitism came to be in the late 1920s. Economic arguments about tax burdens, tariffs, and subsidies for agriculture gave way to purely political attacks against the state and its alleged connivance with the Jews. The increasing histrionics suggests that crowds warmed up to such rhetoric. Thus I would go so far to call the political trajectory of men like Hamkens that of “pseudo-democratization” as Hans Rosenberg concluded about the Junkers.126 This was a case of irresponsible populism.

If the Nazis did not gain sway among the voters primarily through anti-Semitism, then that did not mean that their forbears (like the Rural Movement) could not make use of it to bring Weimar down. Even if physical violence and anti-Semitism remained separate while the Rural Movement lasted, a certain mood in German politics was created paving the way for National Socialism to make decisive inroads. While the Rural People’s Movement achieved practically nothing in concrete political terms, it repays study because it heralded an ominous turn in political culture in Schleswig-Holstein. Unprincipled populists found out what resonated with their audience and tested the state by articulating hateful, palpably false ideas. Leaders in the Rural People’s Movement used other code words (such as the Weimar “system”) but it was anti-Semitism that formed the crux of their irresponsible way of doing

politics. Hamkens and Heim, prominent wealthy farmers, prepared the way for the Nazis by bringing racism and respectability into closer alliance.\textsuperscript{127}

Perhaps the biggest danger of approaching Weimar’s end from a “detective’s” point of view (ascertaining which groups or persons were most responsible) lies in reading cases of anti-Semitism from the vantage of the Holocaust, as Turner discussed above. The anti-Semitism of the Rural People’s Movement not only stopped short of violence against Jews (from which the Nazis would later not shirk) but as a cultural “code” for anti-Weimar fell far short of anti-Semitism as a lynch pin to a racial interpretation of history that ultimately mandated race war, demographic revolution, and genocide. Using anti-Semitism thoughtlessly (but not opportunistically), farmers would become easy prey for an anti-Semitic movement that made the “Jewish question” the basis of an ideology pursued not thoughtlessly but rather – in Hitler’s words – with “ice-cold” logic. Farmers were thinking in terms of casting off democracy which was protected minorities like the Jews from escalating persecution that led to mass murder. On the continuum between what Thomas Mann sarcastically called “cultured anti-Semitism” (\textit{Bildungsantisemitismus}) shared among many on the “old” conservative Right and the violent Jew-baiting (\textit{Radauantisemitismus}) that was the hallmark of the Nazis, the farmers in Schleswig-Holstein in the late 1920s were closer to the latter than the former.

Bibliography

Archival Sources

Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Schleswig, Abteilung 301 Nr. 4696, die Landvolkbewegung in Schleswig-Holstein, 1929, II.

Contemporary Literature

Baumgarten, Otto. Kreuz und Hakenkreuz. Gotha, 1926

—. Meine Lebensgeschichte. Tübingen, 1929.


Schimmelreiter, Jürgen (pseudo.). Unter der schwarzen Bauernfahne. Munich, 1929.


Secondary Literature


Gies, Horst. “NSDAP und landwirtschaftliche Organisationen in der Endphase der Weimarer


Mosse, George L. *The Nationalization of the Masses; Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic wars through the Third Reich.* New York, 1975.


