

## SECTION ONE: NAZI GERMANY

**G**erman National Socialism was the leading authoritarian system. Of all the forms of totalitarianism, it had the more nearly complete ideology, and it was backed by the greater economic and military power. It carried the greatest influence even among totalitarian nations. Its ideology was the basis of Italian institutional reforms in 1936, and certain aspects of it were adopted in Japan. But it is as a threat to democratic societies that it concerns us.

National Socialism's roots lay in the history, traditions, and experience of the German people. Many of its social conceptions reached far back into the ages of Germanic barbarism and repudiated a thousand years of Christian, or "Western," culture. Other ideas are of more recent origin. But no one could fathom the appeal of this ideology to the German people without knowing something of the German intellectual heritage, nor could one hope to combat or eradicate it without some understanding of its roots in the past.

In the following pages we shall present a brief outline of the origin and development of salient characteristics of the Nazi ideology. The reader should be cautioned against concluding that the threads of German history we shall follow are the only ones. But these are sufficiently prominent to be considered by themselves, and they may even be regarded as the dominant strands in the skein of Germany's cultural evolution.

# 1 *Historical Background of National Socialism*

## *LUTHER*

Before the Protestant revolts of the sixteenth century, western Europe was a spiritually united Christian community. The pope of the Roman Catholic Church was not only the religious leader of Christendom, but he claimed to be the fount from which flowed the temporal authority of emperors and kings. Neither this claim, nor the temporal ideal of a Holy Roman Empire, was ever realized completely. Rival monarchs successfully challenged the authority of the emperor, and a protracted political struggle between pope and secular princes ended in favor of the latter. One decisive factor in this struggle was the creation of national churches, particularly Protestant churches, which were subject to the temporal power of the princes and quite independent of Rome. The outstanding German leader in this revolt from the church was Martin Luther.

Luther was an Augustinian monk who, having become skeptical of certain church dogmas, disgusted with the venality of the church hierarchy, and alienated by the papal pretensions to authority, openly criticized both the church doctrine and its leadership. Faith, Luther reasoned, was the only means to salvation, and faith was a personal experience which did not require the intercession of an organized church. The church, he concluded, was an invisible organization of all Christians, and each man was his own priest. The claim of the Roman Church that it was the sole dispenser of salvation was, therefore, according to Luther, unfounded.

When the church sought to use the temporal power of the emperor to have Luther silenced and his heresy suppressed, Luther found refuge and support with many minor German princes, and the revolt which he had commenced on grounds of religious dogma and practice rapidly assumed wide political and social implications. Its ultimate success not only divorced northern Germany from the cosmopolitan influence of the Catholic Church, but it contributed in many ways to the establishment of absolutism, and especially

the authority of the German princes. It strengthened them in their rivalry with the German, or Holy Roman, emperor; it gave them the wealth of the church with which to bolster their temporal regimes; and it provided the basis for civil regulation of both religion and education.

Luther's own motives were not altogether spiritual. Like many another non-Italian, he resented the luxury and profligacy of the Papal Curia, the constant demands for money payments to Rome, and the pretensions of the Italian court to temporal power in his homeland. This attitude appealed to the German princes and gave them additional reasons for resisting the emperor, who was acting as the church's defender and police agent in Germany.

Having criticized the Catholic Church for assuming political power, Luther concluded that any church, even his own, should subordinate itself to the temporal authorities. Luther approved not only of the establishment of Protestant churches by the lay heads of the German states, but of the right of each ruler to impose his own religion upon his subjects. Lutheran princes thus obtained control of the church, and the church in turn became a staunch supporter of their autocratic regimes.

Luther was no liberal nor an advocate of toleration. He denounced radical sects like the Anabaptists, and he had no sympathy at all for the peasants who rebelled against feudal restraints in 1525. He urged the princely governments who had sheltered him to stamp out ruthlessly these sources of social disturbance. The princes thus discovered again that Luther and his church were sturdy defenders of their interests.

In another way Luther's religious convictions and political inclinations served to strengthen the authority of secular government. Luther had concluded that the individual was his own priest and entitled to interpret the Bible for himself. But to do this, he must be able to read it intelligently and have it expounded to him by men whose training was not affected by the views of the Roman Church. Luther, therefore, translated the Bible into German, popularized this vernacular version, and recommended school reforms to teach the ordinary man to read and liberate the scholar from Rome. Such reforms had political as well as religious implications. The Catholic Church had done little about providing free educa-

tion of an elementary sort. Now Luther's recommendations were instrumental in the ultimate establishment of free schooling for the children of the masses in northern Germany long before other nations considered such undertakings. The foundation of Luther's ideal curriculum was to be the Christian religion, shorn of Romish trappings, and supplemented by instruction in the virtues of loyalty, efficiency, and patriotism—the whole program to be provided and supervised by the secular state. The consequence in Lutheran areas was an unusual opportunity for the state to control the cultural life of the people.

The spread of Lutheranism over northern and middle Germany laid the basis for a uniquely comprehensive absolutism. The largest and strongest of these north German states by the beginning of the eighteenth century was Prussia.

#### FREDERICK WILLIAM I

The Hohenzollern electors who ruled in Brandenburg had employed the fortunes of war and marriage to extend their domains until they emerged as kings of Prussia at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Frederick I was the elector who first assumed the title of "king," but it was his son, Frederick William I (1713–1740), who established the military and bureaucratic character of the Prussian state.

Frederick William's love for his army was notorious. In order to create it he dispensed with splendor and luxury in favor of a Spartan regime, and he imposed upon himself and his subjects an extraordinary regimen of sacrifice and discipline. With the help of Leopold of Dessau he reorganized and modernized the army, in the knowledge that Prussia could not play a strong role in Europe without it. Although twelfth in population among European states, Prussia stood fourth in military power when Frederick William died. Only France, Russia and Austria had larger armies.<sup>1</sup> In order

<sup>1</sup> The king had fostered the development of an officers' caste whose professional efficiency became the nightmare of European general staffs centuries thence. On the strength of this tradition, Bismarck's contemporaries Roon and Moltke created the famed General Staff Corps which became the nucleus of modern Prussian militarism and its arrogant defiance of the world. During the Weimar Republic, the Corps went underground but emerged again after Hitler had renounced the Treaty of Versailles. Its few thousand members exercised a formidable influence upon the leadership and administration of the German army.

to build this military machine, the king was accustomed to spend half, sometimes five sevenths, of the public revenue on the army—much to the disgust and apprehension of competing European monarchs. In reality, he instituted a war economy in time of peace. There was no major war during his reign, but he passed on a magnificent military machine to his son.

Another reform of Frederick William's concerned the civil service. Under his personal supervision, he created a highly disciplined and incorruptible bureaucracy. He consolidated the civil administration by subordinating hitherto diverse and independent departments to one supreme board of which he was the active and absolute head. His directions for the members of the board were rigid and more like military regulations than civil service memoranda. Local authorities were subordinated to the central administration which, in turn, depended entirely upon the king's will; and the appointment of every official was subject to the king's approval. Frederick William traveled tirelessly throughout his provinces to supervise and control both the army and the bureaucracy. He encouraged officials to report on each other, and he appointed inspectors to investigate the bureaus and submit highly detailed reports.<sup>1</sup>

The regimentation and discipline which Frederick William instilled into the army and the bureaucracy became Prussia's pride and a part of a hallowed Prussian tradition. Compulsory military service was established in principle at least, and the Prussian people learned to revere above all other virtues that of blind obedience—*Kadaver Gehorsam*, the obedience of a corpse.

In such a society there was no flowering of intellectual or artistic achievement. Even the elementary schools which Frederick William strove to establish for the children of the masses reflected the king's penchant for order and obedience. Discipline was taught to children as to soldiers with the rod, and the education they received was as primitive and anti-intellectual as the king himself. The burden of the curriculum was religion and Bible reading, for the king reasoned that if his subjects were God-fearing they would then be obedient and submissive to government "established by God."<sup>2</sup>

Frederick William was not a cultured man. He was narrow-

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Ergang, *The Potsdam Fuehrer*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1941, Chap. VII.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Ergang, *op cit.*, p. 144

mind and intolerant. He had no taste for art. His language was crude, his temper violent, and his requirements of sacrifice and obedience almost inhuman. If his own sons wished to study literature, they had to do so in concealment. The country's greatest contemporary philosopher, Christian Wolff, was expelled because the king was persuaded his doctrines would undermine military discipline. The Prussian Academy was scoffed at and abused. The Spartan ideals of obedience and service to the state dominated the Prussian scene.

The king was not so narrow-minded as to ignore the economic basis of the state's power. He did much to foster the industrial and commercial growth of his realm. He was aware that human labor, as well as money, was genuine capital; and for this reason, rather than for the satisfaction of any humanitarian impulse or religious conviction, he opened his frontiers to Protestants and Catholics throughout Europe who were expelled from their own countries by religious authorities. The interference of a monarch in the economic activities of his subjects was characteristic of the age, but the thoroughgoing nature of Frederick William's activity has prompted some critics to describe his program as socialist—if it is socialism to require citizens to merge their wills in that of the whole state.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there are striking similarities between many mercantilist practices of Frederick William's time and some of the principles of the National Socialists today.

#### FREDERICK THE GREAT

Frederick William expended his efforts in the creation of a strong militaristic state so that Prussia might play a great role in Europe, for he had little faith in diplomacy and much in force. However, he never used his army. It was his son, Frederick the Great, who did that. And he did it with the cynical disregard for the rights of weaker states and with the frank acceptance of the virtues of force that characterize what the Germans call *Realpolitik*. In his youth, Frederick had written an idealistic treatise, *Anti-Machiavelli*, condemning the amoral advice of the Florentine philosopher. But as king he did not hesitate to use force, or to ignore promises and treaties. For the aggrandizement of Prussia he was

<sup>1</sup> See Oswald Spengler, *Preussentum und Sozialismus*, Beck, Munich, 1920.

quite willing to start a war without the slightest moral justification—although his apologists declare that the interest of Prussia constituted the highest possible moral justification. The invasion of Silesia in 1740 and the partition of Poland in 1772 are cases in point. Whatever the ethics were, Frederick's policy resulted in an enlargement of the Prussian state, and it was therefore revered in Prussia as quite proper and laudable.

Frederick the Great was an "enlightened" monarch. He was impressed by the spirit of the French intellectuals, particularly Voltaire. He knew French better than German, which he disliked. He wrote verses in French, and he played the flute. He redeemed the cultural shortcomings of his father, reformed and patronized the Prussian Academy, and sponsored diverse artistic endeavors. But he remained a Prussian in politics. He was as much a martinet as his father, and he used the treasury, the army, and the efficient bureaucracy he had inherited to establish Prussia as one of the most respected kingdoms in Europe. And success made both him and his statecraft the hero and idol of successive generations.

Frederick and his father were the founders of the Prussian tradition, and their thriftiness, their sense of duty, their political ambition, their devotion to the state, their overweening patriotism, their idealization of discipline, obedience, and sacrifice, and their contempt for the comforts and amenities of civilization remain the core of "Prussianism" to this day. It was therefore a significant and symbolic act when Hitler opened his career as chancellor in 1933 by celebrating a service in Frederick's Potsdam *Garrisonkirche* (Garrison church) and by placing a wreath on Frederick's tomb.

With Frederick's death in 1786 the first great period of Prussia's growth was terminated. The little state had become a European power. Its military and administrative institutions and its diplomatic tradition were fixed. Succeeding kings were neither so strong nor so efficient as Frederick, and the country entered a period of material and political stagnation; but the state proved more resilient than its kings, and the crushing defeat administered by Napoleon in 1806 served only to revive and revitalize the kingdom. With the "war of liberation" against the French, Prussia began a second period of growth which ended with its domination of all Germany in 1871.

During the years of stagnation, however, the unique Prussian tradition and ideology were slowly fashioned and crystallized. Authors, philosophers, historians, musicians, artists, and journalists contributed to the formulation of ideas about the nature of the Prussian state; the relation between it and its individual subjects, and the place of the Prusso-German state in the world. This spiritual defense of Prussianism, this formulation of its political philosophy, and the metaphysical justification of it was the work of a number of gifted thinkers like Fichte, Hegel, or Treitschke whose intellectual achievements surpassed the political accomplishments of contemporary German rulers until the advent of Bismarck.

The philosophies of these men and their disciples grew steadily in popularity, even though opposition to them seemed overwhelming and the application of their principles remained unrealized. A brief review of the most important of their theses will indicate a rather clear line of thought extending from Frederick William's Prussianism down to Hitler's National Socialism.