

CHAPTER III

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HITLERISM AS A RESPONSE OF THE LOWER MIDDLE CLASSES TO CONTINUING INSECURITY *

Since a political order which fails to coincide with an era of international prestige and domestic prosperity is endangered by the accumulating animosities of the community, it need occasion little surprise that a mass movement of protest swept aside some of the conventionalities of orderly government in Germany. Smarting under the humiliation of defeat, burdened by the discriminatory aftermath of Versailles, racked by the slow tortures of economic adversity, ruled in the name of political patterns devoid of sanctifying tradition, the German mentality has been ripening for an upsurge of the masses.

It is less the broad fact of mass action than the specific direction of discharge that demands explanation. The lower middle classes have become active factors in the struggle against the "proletarian" and the "Marxist" on behalf of an order of society in which the "profit system", though excoriated, is none the less protected. Powerful trades unions have been demoralized as potent instruments in maintaining wage scales; "Marxist" bureaucrats in public offices and private unions have given way to loyal National Socialists from the bourgeoisie; restless young men, usually sons of the impoverished middle classes, have been inducted into the violence department of the state; Jews have suffered personal outrage and economic boycott. The torrents of inflammatory rhetoric against the foreign enemies of Germany have culminated in no impulsive martyrdom in the Rhineland, or in Silesia, or along the Polish Corridor; it is obvious that the rearmament of Germany has not gone far enough to repel the French. The separately manufactured parts of heavy artillery and tanks require from six weeks to two months to assemble, and French arms could devastate the West at once. Most of those who were in material want before Hitler are in material want to-day, though many of the materially cramped have been emotionally rejuvenated by the crusade to regenerate the German nation. New meaning has come to life, symbols are welcome

* From *Political Quarterly* (London, 1933).

substitutes for bread, and a lowered standard of living is but a sacrifice to the cause of national resurrection. The vast discrepancy between promise and performance in high politics and emergency economics is worthy of attention, for it reveals the peculiar dependence of Hitlerism on abracadabra.

In so far as Hitlerism is a desperation reaction of the lower middle classes it continues a movement which began during the closing years of the nineteenth century. Materially speaking, it is not necessary to assume that the small shopkeepers, teachers, preachers, lawyers, doctors, farmers and craftsmen were worse off at the end than they had been in the middle of the century. Psychologically speaking, however, the lower middle class was increasingly overshadowed by the workers and the upper bourgeoisie, whose unions, cartels and parties took the centre of the stage. The psychological impoverishment of the lower middle class precipitated emotional insecurities within the personalities of its members, thus fertilizing the ground for the various movements of mass protest through which the middle classes might revenge themselves.

The insecurities of the class were reflected in the small bourgeois youth who furnished the basis of the German youth movement during its formative years. One of the first significant political expressions of the lower bourgeoisie was the Pan-German movement among German-speaking subjects of the Hapsburg monarchy. Pan-Germanism and Christian Socialism profoundly influenced Adolf Hitler during his years in Vienna; later he was able to adapt the nationalistic, socialistic and anti-semitic features of these agitations to his own uses.

Nationalism and anti-semitism were peculiarly fitted to the emotional necessities of the lower bourgeoisie. Rebuffed by a world which accorded them diminished deference, limited in the opportunities afforded by economic reality, the members of this class needed new objects of devotion and new targets of aggression. The rising cult of nationalism furnished a substitute for the fading appeal of institutionalized religion in a secularizing world. Anti-semitism provided a target for the discharge of the resentments arising from damaged self-esteem; and since the scapegoat was connected with the older Christian tradition, guilt feelings arising from lack of personal piety could be expiated by attacking the Jew.

Anti-semitism gave a plausible alternative to the uncompromising indictment of capitalism circulated by proletarian

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socialists. The proletarian doctrines offended the middle classes less by denouncing the extremes of wealth fostered by capitalism than by praising the "workers" and insulting the "bourgeoisie". The chief aspiration of the thrifty little manual worker, his self-esteem was openly wounded by the taunts, jibes and sneers of the proletarian agitators. He was often alienated from the political parties which were conspicuously identified with the older aristocracy and the new plutocracy, yet he could not endure the humiliation of associating with the "proletariat". He drifted uncertainly toward the democratic parties of the middle, but democratic republicanism coincided with want and humiliation in the post-war years. The lure of anti-semitism lay partly in the opportunity which it provided for discharging animosity against the rich and successful without espousing proletarian socialism. It was not capitalism but Jewish profiteering which was the root of modern evils. The international character of finance, with which the Jews were so conspicuously connected, was apparently irreconcilable with fervent nationalism, and the crusade against the Jew became a legitimate act of devotion to the idols of Germanism.

The prominence of the Jew in proletarian socialism enabled the lower bourgeoisie to rationalize its hostility to the wage earners as resentment against the Jew. This paved the way for a political alliance with those wage earners who were sufficiently "Germanic" to renounce Jewish doctrine, which could be distinguished from "socialism" by naming it "Marxism". Thus by hating "Marxists" middle-class elements were able to discharge enough hatred of the wage-earning class as a whole to permit limited co-operation with wage earners who would espouse a truly "national" form of "socialism". By adopting the word "socialism" in a vague, emasculated sense, the lower bourgeoisie directed some of its hatred against the bloodsuckers who ran chain stores and exacted high profits, without being constrained to join with the most insolent spokesmen of the wage earners. And it was evident that some flirting with the Left could improve bargaining relations with the Right.

The growth of anti-semitism also favoured political collaboration of the lower middle classes with the landed aristocracy, despite conflicting economic interests. The aristocracy cherished the old-fashioned hatred of money-making by the use of mobile capital. The hatred of modern capitalism by the aristocracy would be rationalized as hatred of the Jew, the money-lender of

tradition ; by hating Jewish capitalism the aristocracy is enabled to work off its hostility to capitalism as a whole, and to collaborate with some capitalistic elements. When the petty bourgeoisie utilized the Jew as a scapegoat, a common hatred favoured political association with the aristocracy. By flocking into a separate party, the lower bourgeoisie emancipated itself to some extent from the tutelage of the old order, but remained able to co-operate with it on the basis of common loyalty to "Germanism" and common hatred of "Semites".

In some measure the use of the Jewish scapegoat is an incident in the struggle for survival within the intellectual class, which includes many members of the bourgeoisie. The growth of the vast material environment in modern society has been paralleled by the unprecedented expansion of specialized symbolic activity. Medicine, engineering and physical science have proliferated into a thousand specialities for the control of specific aspects of the material world. Those who master the necessary symbol equipment are part of the intellectual class whose "capital" is knowledge, not muscle. There is a sub-division of the intellectual workers, the "intellectuals" in the narrow sense, who specialize in the symbols connected with political life. The growing complexity of modern civilization has created a vast net of reporters, interpreters, pedagogues, advertisers, agitators, propagandists, legal dialecticians, historians and social scientists who compete among themselves and with all other classes and sub-classes for deference, safety and material income. These specialists in the invention and transmission of political symbols can reminisce about history, argue about morals, law, philosophy and expediency, inculcate myths and legends, or exemplify rituals and ceremonies. Lenin dismissed the "intellectuals" as classless prostitutes hired out to the highest bidder. It is evident that a "brains trust"—to use a current American expression employed to describe President Roosevelt's expert advisers—is a useful form of political armament on all sides, but the tremendous growth of symbol specialists in The Great Society suggests that we have to do with the emergence of a potent social formation with objective interests of its own, some of which can be fostered, paradoxically enough, by encouraging symbolic warfare among its members.

During times of economic adversity the symbol specialists suffer deflation like the rest of the community, and if colleges, universities and other agencies for transmitting skill are not

proportionately curtailed, the difficulties of the "intellectuals" are accentuated. Weimar Germany abolished many limitations upon university training, and German universities pumped an increasing volume of trained talent into an overstocked market. The prominence of the Jew in law, medicine, acting, literature, journalism (indeed, in all branches of the intellectual arts) contributed to his vulnerability as an object of mass attack led by rival intellectuals, with or without the aid of other social classes.

The position of the Jew in German society has been further weakened by the frequency with which he has appeared as an enemy of the *mores*. His activity as an intellectual of necessity brought him into conflict with the conventional patterns of German bourgeois life. A Jewish physician in Vienna invented psychoanalysis, which scandalized, even as it fascinated, the middle classes. A Jewish physician in Berlin attained celebrity by identifying himself with the cause of the homosexuals. Jewish writers and actors have produced plays which horrified the provincial conscience. Indeed, one of the avenues to money, prestige and heightened self-importance which is open to the intellectual is sensationalism, which usually involves some defiance of accepted taboos. The Jew was relatively free from the parochial loyalties of gentile Germans, who were often bound to the sentiments of the separate cultural islands throughout the German-speaking territories. Less entangled by local tradition, the Jews were able to seize the opportunity to cater to the whole German market, and to supply many of the symbols which were capable of appealing to all Germans everywhere.

Modern urban culture is fatal to the simple prescriptions of the rural and provincial conscience; to the moralists of the hinterland the cities defy the laws of god and man. The middle-class code of sexual abstinence, thrift, work and piety crumbles before the blandishments and the concealments of the city. The vulnerability of the conventional code under urban conditions has resulted in crises of provincial conscience; these anxieties have been adroitly turned against "cultural Bolshevism", which means the urban, intellectual, Marxist Jew.

Hitlerism is a concession to cultural fundamentalism in a far deeper sense than that it defends property from communist expropriation. Hitler has come to stand for the re-affirmation of the cardinal moral virtues whose neglect has weakened the whole fibre of the German nation. Putrid literature, putrid drama, putrid practices are imputed to the foul Jew who dese-

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crated the homeland whose hospitality he so long enjoyed. The stress of battle, under-nourishment, inflation, and unemployment during these eventful years has exposed many men and women to temptations which they could not resist, and the accumulated weight of guilt arising from these irregularities drives many of them into acts of expiation. In some measure the "awakening of Germany" is a cleansing gesture of aspiration for a feeling of moral worth, and the Jew is the sacrificial ram.

Such is the meaning of the emphasis in Hitler's public personality upon abstinence from wine, women and excess; this is the clue to the appeal of the humourless gravity which is one of his most obvious traits. The irreverent urbanites of Berlin find Hitler dull, and his appearances have been relatively infrequent and as ceremonial as possible. The biting Goebbels is the darling of the city; the sober Hitler is the lion of the provinces. This pious deacon with the silver tongue is the articulate conscience of the petty bourgeoisie.

Hitler's appeal to the conservative mothers of Germany derives from their resentment against all the slogans which have been associated with a world in which their sons have been killed or demoralized since 1914. Through Hitler comes revenge against the immoral monsters who have defied the immutable principles of human decency and divine order. Through Hitler comes the hope of rescue for sons, who may learn discipline and self-respect in the uniform, the exercises, and even the dangers of the National Socialist movement. The sons of German mothers who were sacrificed in vain, betrayed by the alien Jewish cankers in our midst, are to be avenged. The traitors shall not go unpunished. The dawning day of resurrection is nigh. The organized might of German manhood shall rise to purify the state and to recover the honour of Germany on the field of battle. Our blood shall not have been shed in vain. The flesh of our flesh shall not decay; it shall live in the glories of immortal Germany.

There is a profound sense in which Hitler himself plays a maternal rôle for certain classes in German society. His incessant moralizing is that of the anxious mother who is totally preoccupied with the physical, intellectual and ethical development of her children. He discourses in public, as he has written in his autobiography, on all manner of pedagogical problems, from the best form of history teaching to the ways of reducing the ravages of social disease. His constant preoccupation with

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"purity" is consistent with these interests; he alludes constantly to the "purity of the racial stock" and often to the code of personal abstinence or moderation. This master of modern Galahadism uses the language of Protestant puritanism and of Catholic reverence for the institution of family life. The conscience for which he stands is full of obsessional doubts, repetitive affirmations, resounding negations and stern compulsions. It is essentially the bundle of "don'ts" of the nurse-maid conscience.¹

In yet another way Hitler has performed a maternal function in German life. The disaster of the 1918 defeat left the middle classes of German society shocked, dazed and humiliated. The "we" symbol which meant so much was damaged, and they were left shorn of means of revenging themselves upon their enemies. When an individual is suddenly deprived of his customary mode of externalizing loves and aggressions the resulting emotional crisis is severe. In extreme cases, the aggressive impulses which were formerly directed against the outside world are turned back against the personality itself, and suicide, melancholia, and other mental disorders ensue. Most thwarted people are protected from such extreme reactions by finding new objects of devotion and self-assertion. Emotional insecurities are reduced by hating scapegoats and adoring heroes, and in so far as politics provides the formulæ and the activities which satisfy these requirements, politics is a form of social therapy for potential suicides.

Hitler was able to say, in effect: "You are not to blame for the disaster to your personality involved in the loss of the war. You were betrayed by alien enemies in our midst who were susceptible to the duplicity of our enemies. Germany must awaken to the necessity of destroying the alien at home in order to prepare to dispose of the enemy abroad." The self-accusations which signify that aggressive impulses are turned against the self are thus no longer necessary; not the "sacred ego", but the Jews are to blame. By projecting blame from the self upon the outside world, inner emotional insecurities are reduced. By directing symbolic and overt attacks against the enemy in our midst, Hitler has alleviated the anxieties of millions of his fellow Germans (at the expense of others). He has also provided fantasies of ultimate victory over the French and Poles, and

¹ This analysis of Hitler's public rôle among middle-class conservatives carries no implications concerning his private life.

arranged marches and special demonstrations as symbolic acts of attack upon the outer as well as the inner enemies of Germany. Hitler has offered himself as the hero and Germanism as the legitimizing symbol of adoration. These partially overt but principally magical acts have provided many distraught Germans with renewed self-confidence either to ignore or to face the rough deprivations of daily life. From one point of view, Hitler's rôle resembles that of the nurse who tells her crying charge that the neighbour boy was very naughty to hit him ; but Hitler's reassurances stir up trouble within the household by diverting animosity against the Jewish fellow-national.

When realities do not facilitate the discharge of aggressive tendencies against the outer group, these impulses are often turned back against sub-groups within one's own community. This is one aspect of the larger proposition stated before that impulses which are denied expression in the outside world rebound against symbols more closely associated with the personality.

As aggressive impulses are turned against the self, those aspects of the personality are chosen which are deplored as particularly weak or immoral. Germans have long lamented the absence of a unified German nation, attributing this weakness in part to the dogmatic pride of opinion which is so deeply rooted in German pride of mind. Unity has been partially attained by the superficial co-ordination of external motions ; " the German national dance step is the goose step ". Beneath the façade of external harmony survive the legacies of disunion. Since the Germans hate most in themselves, as a collective unit, cultural diversity and intellectual virtuosity (qualities which they simultaneously admire), it is scarcely surprising to discover that they have turned upon the Jew as the most typical exponent of their own limitations. German devotion to the symbols of uncompromising nationalism is constantly threatened by contrasting loyalties and intellectual scruples. In the Jew, the eternal scapegoat, they can expiate their own sins against the collective god.

In the hope of contributing to the consolidation of the German nation many elements of German society have condoned the " excesses " of the National Socialists, and welcomed the vigorous centralization and inspired fervour of the movement. Accustomed to submissiveness within the hierarchy of home, army, bureaucracy and party, Germans have assumed the yoke of Hitlerism in the name of freedom, socialism and nationalism.

The appeal from the politics of discussion to the arbitrament of violence and dictatorship came readily in Germany. The symbols and practices associated with the Weimar Republic have meant comparatively little to anybody. The failure to liquidate the symbols of the old régime is shown in the battle over the national colours, and in the persistence of the older personnel in the universities, in the schools, and in the principal organs of administration. Civic training on behalf of the Republic has been formal and uninspired; for some time after the inauguration of the Republic, the schools continued to use the old Imperial textbooks. Perhaps no amount of skill and ingenuity could have built up a body of myths capable of sustaining the Republic under the unfavourable conditions of the post-war era, but in some measure the battle of Weimar was lost by default.

Just as the influential Jews failed to see the handwriting on the wall and lulled themselves into a false sense of safety, the nominal heads of the Republic neglected to intervene boldly and aggressively in the unfolding situation. The fear of the Communists by the bureaucrats of the Social Democratic party and the trades unions drove them into collaboration with their class enemies. Socialist and union officialdom denounced Communist workers to the employers; the Communists were frequently weeded out and superseded by National Socialists. The bureaucratizing tendency of the labour movement in Germany has long been notorious; a job in the union or in the party transformed the fervent agitator into a model bourgeois, anxious to keep his job by preserving discipline among the masses.

That the bourgeoisie of Northern Germany has never fought and bled for republican institutions is connected with the belated industrialization of the country. The English middle classes and the French struggled for responsible government, but the rising Prussian bourgeoisie first connected democratic internationalism with the French invasion; later they began to fear the proletariat as the menace on the Left, which drove them steadily to the Right. Thus national parliamentarism is not deeply enshrined in the loyalties of the classes most closely associated with it in the West.

The future of the middle classes in Germany depends on the success of the new ruling régime in improving their material prospects and psychological rewards. Unless this problem is solved, enthusiasm for the new symbols will gradually die away,

and the resulting disillusionment will gradually transform the middle classes into mere passive supporters of the reigning order of society. They will then conform more closely to the rôle which the older revolutionists expected the middle classes to play in the class struggle. Events in Italy and in Germany have given rise to the reflection that the political activism of the middle classes has been grossly underestimated, for they contributed sons to supply the sinews, money to defray the cost, and ballots to sustain the candidates, of potent alternatives to proletarianism.

The abandonment of so many of the forms of democratic government has corroborated the communist teaching that such trifles will be cast away whenever the class struggle seems to render it imperative for the protection of the profit principle. This convincing demonstration may be expected to dissolve much of the democratic romanticism which enabled the tiny bureaucrats of the older labour movement to drift and not to fight.

Communism may supply the symbol in whose name mass hostilities will ultimately discharge themselves against bourgeoisie and aristocracy. No doubt this is improbable, short of military defeat in war, or long-protracted war, when foreign war may be transformed into civil war. In the meanwhile, it is sound tactics to preserve the integrity of the term "Communist" by refusing to associate it with its near rivals. Small disciplined bands of revolutionaries may one day use the uncontaminated symbol and the technique of the *coup d'état* to ride the waves of mass discontent to the seats of power.

It is worthy of comment that the lower middle classes, stung from political passivity into political action, have been able to furnish their own crusading leadership. Hitler, the self-made semi-intellectual, son of a small customs official in the service of the Hapsburgs, stirs his own class to an unwonted spurt of political aggressiveness. Other social groups, like the wage earners, have so often been led by men who were social renegades from the older social strata that this self-sufficiency of the bourgeoisie inspires respectful interest.

Influential elements of the upper bourgeoisie of Germany have partially financed the Hitler movement in order to break up the collective bargaining system which was sustained by the powerful German trades unions. This was impossible in the name of the older parties of the Right, who were too intimately

connected with the plutocracy and the aristocracy. Only a movement thoroughly nationalistic and demagogic could stir the lower bourgeoisie to enthusiastic action, and make substantial inroads in the more passive elements of the wage-earning class. In general, the symbols of Hitlerism have assuaged the emotional conflicts of the lower bourgeoisie, while the acts of Hitlerism have lowered the labour costs of the upper bourgeoisie.