

# **SOCIALISM OF THE RIGHT**

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**A HISTORICAL STUDY**

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**MARTIN GOLDBERG**

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By Martin Goldberg

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### *Dedication*

*For the valorous cause of peace, which is ever elusive, but absolutely worthy of dedication.*

# I. Introduction

In common parlance, the term “socialism” has become such a brazen caricature that it is now effectively meaningless. Anything bad or foreboding, particularly in the politics of the United States, is labeled with the socialist moniker, and even most leftists shy away from the term, opting to be called “progressives,” or “social democrats.” The rare cases of politicians like Bernie Sanders claiming socialism as a standard bearer are almost reliably sheltered by adding the word “democratic” in front of it, conceivably so as to establish a contrast with the evil boogeyman socialism that conservative media forces enjoy warning people about.

This tension around the word is so strong that it has become a powerful weapon in the hands of presidential contenders such as John McCain, who rallied the troops against Democratic Party policies by comparing them to socialism.<sup>[1]</sup> Furthermore, President Donald Trump notably declared during the 2019 State of the Union address that “America will never be a socialist country.” Giddy news camera then panned to Senator Bernie Sanders, whose face appeared rosier than a ripe bell pepper to the remark,<sup>[2]</sup> confirming cultural unease with the descriptor.

At the heart of these biting orations concerning socialism rests a decidedly stark (and lovably American) divide. The established center-right likes to cast itself as the embodiment of freedom and individualism, while tying the center-left to authoritarian, “nanny-state” agendas. Conversely, leftists see themselves defending the little guy’s liberty against unfettered corporate fascism through regulations and taxes for the wealthy. Though once more openly in favor of socialist policies, left-wing actors have increasingly married free market proposals with timid state intervention, perhaps best defined by the administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. Whereas in the past it would have been inconceivable for a leftist to

support curtailing government support programs, Clinton signed welfare reform into law, and Obama expressed a willingness to cut Social Security.<sup>[3]</sup> Even the more progressive politicians of the Trump era have proven wobbly on numerous issues impacting corporations, and engage in advertising to sell their principles as market-friendly. The permeation of capitalist sensibilities seems utterly complete.

As a consequence of this absolute division, it is virtually impossible to broach the topic of right-wing socialism without encountering immediate obstacles. Conservatives will haughtily dismiss the concept, claiming socialism is exclusively *left-wing* in nature. Progressives on the other hand insist any right-wing socialism was simply a propaganda mask for *corporate* socialism and ethnic cleansing. The more extreme leftists merely join conservatives in denying that such a concept exists, because, after all, there is only *one* kind of socialism.

Much as these fence lines may be convenient for our generally fast-paced and intellectually-lazy society, they do not corral the full extent of the historical record. In reality, socialism is a broad category that can easily make room for right-wing movements, which often displayed novel conceptions of both man and the economy. Distilling truths out to provide a better image requires scholars who approach the topic from a holistic, non-partisan perspective. This remains my central objective with the book, particularly given how scarce material on rightist socialism is in our present world. The result promises to be, if not utterly pleasing from modern perspectives, an elucidating walk down the streets of less-traveled history.

As controversial as the subject matter is, I am confident that gaining a better understanding of the notions behind it may assist modern society in combating the worst ideoes of extremism. When we develop clarity of comprehension on historical patterns, discoursing with others and nudging their passions in healthier directions becomes easier. On the other hand, immediately demonizing or de-

platforming those with troubling opinions can grant such individuals a martyr complex and cause them to feel further justified in that worldview.

It should be noted that this book will focus on *European* manifestations of rightist socialism. No one ought to take this and assume that related movements have not existed in other parts of the world; the geographical concentration merely helps focus a message which would otherwise be remanded to more of an encyclopedic creation. In addition, the dynamic breadth of Christian (or Catholic) socialism requires a personalized approach less suited to the text at-hand. Hence we will primarily be considering the varieties of religious socialism within or associated to larger right-wing groups.

For the purposes of clarity, the terms “right-wing socialism,” “socialism of the Right,” and “rightist socialism” shall be employed interchangeably to discuss movements and their adherents. A similar approach is used to describe left-wing varieties of socialism in the book, while the terms “liberalism” and “liberal” refer to the political and social culture occupied by both conservative and liberal parties.

Let me also offer sincere appreciation to the scholars cited in this text, and particularly George L. Mosse. With the already minimal studies available on our subject, their literary and academic creations have proven to be a lifeline in our struggle for complete historical comprehension of the matter. I hope that in some small way this book can add to the mountain of research and writing which they labored so long to create.

## II. What Is Socialism?

Before we can enter the right-wing realm, it is necessary to comprehend the origin roots of socialism, and more specifically the traditional leftist variety. Venturing back further than Marx, we come across the early socialist ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who famously outlined his conception of a “Social Contract” binding people within the state’s establishment. As the idea progressed, particularly alongside the European nationalist revolutions of the 1800s, it took on a form related to the struggle of the proletarian workers against employer classes and the bourgeoisie. Socialists associated the remaining European monarchs with the producer class and financial elites, making them naturally more inclined to the republican cause, although for some abolishing the sovereign was merely a first step ahead of the revolution to establish a socialist state. Early manifestations of socialist beliefs flourished in labor unions and associations which permitted the proletariat to agitate for higher standards of pay and safety in the workplace, usually through the employment of strikes.

Karl Marx pushed the envelope further by suggesting workers would eventually revolt against the internal contradictions of the capitalist system, replacing it with state (or commonly-held) control of the means of production, also known as communism. The triumphant revolutionaries would then labor in cooperation to create products for their individual use, instead of spending life in service to a corporate executive. Such added freedom provided by an elimination of the profit motive was seen by Marx as empowering people to become more creative and develop the “product of their own labor.”

But conflict soon reared its head. Within the Marxist movement festered a significant debate over the matter of syndicalist theory. Syndicalism as a term is drawn from the French word for labor union,

or *syndicat*,<sup>[4]</sup> although where socialism is concerned it took on a deeper, contrasted meaning. Philosophically, syndicalism presented the notion that, like Marx had long believed, every struggle must necessarily be based in the economic (materialistic) plane.<sup>[5]</sup> Its emergence in France was heralded by the *Bourses du Travail*, or labor associations, which syndicalists were determined to see serving as effective administrators of the economic and social state. Critical to this belief was the insistence on a rejection of *electoral* socialism,<sup>[6]</sup> wherein forces on the Left campaigned for positions of power to negotiate the revolution inside the safe trappings of the bourgeois establishment.<sup>[7]</sup> As syndicalists imagined it, the *Bourses du Travail* would focus on empowering workers through education and training in the revolutionary cause, whilst avoiding the risky subversions inherent to traditional politics. The unions and their schools of social economy held the mission of promoting extremism,<sup>[8]</sup> on the logic that continued instability of the market realm would help weed out the conservative influences generated by financial donations, especially in the world of political parties.

## **Syndicalism vs. Socialism**

How syndicalism differs from socialism depends largely on context and points of view. Supporters of the former perceived a “falling away” from tradition having occurred after the 1871 London Conference, where Marx and Engels authorized certain federations to engage in mainstream party politics.<sup>[9]</sup> During the two decades following this meeting, a split occurred between those socialists who wished to participate in democratic politics and the radicals, who saw such a move as conceding their revolutionary goals to gradualism.<sup>[10]</sup> According to economic purists, socialist parties stood to fail because a swath of career-seeking bourgeois leftists might enter the ranks, thus diluting the revolution’s objectives.<sup>[11]</sup> There is some truth to this, as the famed Italian Socialist Party featured wealthy reformist members like Giacomo Matteotti and Ivanoe Bonomi, along with more extreme Maximalists in favor of revolution. Even the early

National Socialist thinker, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, made similar observations in Germany about socialists swiftly becoming expert *politicians*, while revolutionary goals were sidetracked.<sup>[12]</sup>

Pro-electoral socialists on the other hand believed their parties could capture a majority and then promulgate revolution *through* the state. Syndicalists alternatively rejected the state wholesale or believed it would become secondary to a layered federation of unified labor unions representing the true power and aspirations of the working class.<sup>[13]</sup> Such a conception was predicated on the perception that traditional socialist inclinations towards industry-specific trade unions might lead to dissent and conflict,<sup>[14]</sup> something easily exploitable by the capitalist elite. The following is a summary of their broader position:

“Revolutionary Syndicalism is the confirmed enemy of every form of economic and social monopoly, and aims at its abolition by means of economic communes and administrative organs of field and factory workers on the basis of a free system of councils, entirely liberated from subordination to any government or political party. Against the politics of the State and of parties it erects the economic organizations of labour; against the government of men, it sets up the management of things. Consequently, it has for its object, not the conquest of political power, but the abolition of every State function is social life. It considers that, along with the monopoly of property, should disappear also the monopoly of domination, and that any form of the State, including the dictatorship of the proletariat, will always be the creator of new monopolies and new privileges; it could never be an instrument of liberation.”<sup>[15]</sup>

Syndicalism also differed from mainline socialism with its approach to policy matters. While socialists tended to advocate for higher wages within the standing political order, especially following their entrance into regular politics, syndicalist theory argued for the abject dissolution of the wage system, to be replaced with a model

governed by the principle of “Each according to his or her need.”<sup>[16]</sup> This stands in contrast to many socialist and communist parties endorsing the existing wage system, despite Marx’s personal opposition.<sup>[17]</sup> According to syndicalist thinkers, the influence of money and wages in a private market simply worked to oppress employees by means of cynical manipulation.<sup>[18]</sup> As demand ebbs or flows, employers may reduce pay, or even use the shield of retirement pensions as a disguise to hide planned cuts, whether in the older worker’s case or the wages of junior employees.

An interesting added concept foisted by syndicalist circles is the notion that money itself is an illusion. The crisp paper (or digital) bills we enjoy simply serve as the go-between to transfer value that previously came based upon a man’s skill or craft. Instead of negotiating directly for his own needs, he must wallow in the recesses of a wage pool chosen by the private market, often at great expense of personal time and quality of life. Providing his pay is not high enough due to existing demand in the labor force, his only hope is to either advance within that system or seek secondary employment, at the loss of personal time. What money he does earn is originated in a banking system hell-bent on endless printing of bills which inflate supply and lead to the impoverishment of working class people.<sup>[19]</sup> Here there is an important linkage around the question concerning money as deception, which we shall examine later with the works of Gottfried Feder, a German National Socialist who expressed similar views on the role of currency and labor.<sup>[20]</sup>

The added aspect of distinction between syndicalism and socialism, again based upon a certain point of view, relates to the organization of society. Activists in the former column actually argued they were approaching the debate from the producer’s perspective as opposed to the consumer, and would thus prosecute a policy of improving both the organization of labor and the *conditions* of the workplace.<sup>[21]</sup> While admitting that all socialist-leaning movements desired to abolish the existing capitalist system and private property, they also insisted on a unique interpretation of

who precisely would own the resulting means of production. In their assessment, collectivism gives that ownership to everyone (possibly through the state), anarchism grants it to no one, and syndicalism hands control over to organized labor.<sup>[22]</sup>

## **Syndicalist Methods**

The revolutionary underpinnings of syndicalism led its proponents to establish core strategies which might bring down the capitalist system. Chief amongst these would be the grand, general strike, though such a move enjoyed specific antecedents. To start, workers could elect for the use of boycotts and label campaigns, aiming to pressure firms which produce goods under unacceptable conditions. As an approach the boycott is more subtle, because it does not forcibly strive to unmake the entire system. Similarly, sabotage is a disruptive method outside the degree made by the larger strike movement. In this case workers make efforts to perform their tasks poorly, disable existing machinery, or ruin already completed products.<sup>[23]</sup> Another element involves following procedures to such a perfect extent that production slows dramatically, thus costing the employers money and sales. More extreme measures could incorporate the deliberate causing of accidents that harm people, although these were not necessarily sanctioned by the historical syndicates themselves.<sup>[24]</sup>

The matter of the general strike is essential for consideration because it involves the aspirations of both leftist and right-wing varieties of socialism. Use of the term “general” is crucial because it refers to a strike featuring all industries, not simply specific crafts or trades, another clear distinction from traditional socialism.<sup>[25]</sup> Followers of syndicalism believed such a large-scale event would have the effect of completely reshaping the economic system in one felling blow instead of relying upon incremental actions to extract concessions from the ruling class. The basic dynamic of the general strike implies a total (or large percentage of) workers refusing to perform their respective tasks, thus forcing the capitalist system into

a standstill, creating conditions wherein workers would become genuinely free.<sup>[26]</sup> Once capitalism collapsed, the society would be organized on the basis of a federalized union system serving needs rather than the profit motive.

It must be noted how the general strike concept was understood by right-wing socialists such as Georges Sorel. The Frenchman himself tended to view the extremity of the strike as playing into the realm of myth, an aspect to rightist socialism which we shall discuss later. Here the economic revolt is transformed into a glorious act of rebirth or change championed by those seeking to reconnect with the life purpose of their nation. Syndicalists theorized that worker control over goods would render capitalism helpless on this path.<sup>[27]</sup>

Opinions on the supremacy of the general strike were not universally shared among the Far-Left, however. Communists such as Vladimir Lenin for instance acknowledged its importance in the broader revolutionary struggle, but argued that the existing capitalist state had to be replaced by a workers government in order for genuine change to occur.<sup>[28]</sup> His contemporary Leon Trotsky would go further, noting that power could not be transferred through the strike alone:

“In the struggle it is extremely important to weaken the enemy. That is what a [general] strike does. At the same time a strike brings the army of the revolution to its feet. But neither the one nor the other, in itself, creates a state revolution. The power still has to be snatched from the hands of the old rulers and handed over to the revolution...A general strike only creates the necessary preconditions. It is quite inadequate for achieving the task itself.”<sup>[29]</sup>

Communists would proceed to indict the syndicalist column for perceived failures using the general strike model. Trotsky castigated French syndicalists for failing to appreciate the importance of

controlling government, suggesting the “state apparatus” was key to achieving revolution.<sup>[30]</sup> Italian communist figure Antonio Gramsci made similar conclusion, observing that simply changing the dynamics of the economic system would not prevent capitalists from still exercising authority over the military and public services, both which could be used to crush a worker uprising.<sup>[31]</sup>

In strong contrast, syndicalism’s post-revolutionary model reflects a commitment to reduction in the power of the state. It was been argued by syndicalist advocates that the Russian manifestation of socialism and communism were merely refashioning capitalist inclinations through the state, which syndicalism considered a purveyor of violence, as seen in spending levels on defense.<sup>[32]</sup> Some would go so far as to describe the state as a capitalist institution,<sup>[33]</sup> or dismiss Russia’s communism as creating a new tsar in the shape of leaders like Lenin or Stalin.<sup>[34]</sup> According to Angel Pestana, who witnessed the procedures of the Russian Bolshevik system:

“We have seen how the dictatorship of the proletariat... operates, and we have seen the people groaning under the most atrocious tyranny, enduring the most horrific persecution, subject to the foulest exploitation. And who was it that was tormenting, ridiculing and vilifying the people? The bourgeoisie? No. A party that was thrown up by the revolution and that claims to govern in the name of the most vilely oppressed class... Dictatorship of the proletariat? Dictatorship of those who have taken the proletariat for a long-suffering mule upon which they can rise with confidence.”<sup>[35]</sup>

Consequently, there is a strong undercurrent of anti-militarism and anti-police sentiment wound up in syndicalist thought. British activists endorsed the eradication of standing armies in favor of a workers militia tasked with keeping general order without creating further capitalization of control.<sup>[36]</sup> This was argued around the point that a police force which had at least in part reduced crime would

create offenses to prosecute in order to justify its own existence, much like hunters under Napoleon bred wolves in order to get paid bounties for ridding the land of them.<sup>[37]</sup> Furthermore, anarchist-leaning syndicalists suggested enforcement was a fruitless and ineffective policy, as many crimes are typically caused by social ills, and would disappear under their system.<sup>[38]</sup>

The call for a decentralized militia system is echoed in the works of the National Socialist Otto Strasser, who believed a critical barrier to social progress would be the military establishment of Germany. The Strasserite model promoted stark opposition to “Prussian Militarism,” the driving force blamed in some circles for Germany’s participation in World War I and II.<sup>[39]</sup> Instead, Strasser believed a smaller army or militia would be adequate, located within a larger federalist European state designed to promote cooperation and unity among member nations.<sup>[40]</sup>

This latter concept remains interesting in the broader context of Left and Right socialist movements, because military influence on revolutionary regimes is often so distinct, whether manifested in examples like Fidel Castro’s uprising or the National Legionary State of Romania. Some have even argued that the military can be self-sabotaging if they do not appreciate the dominant national leadership. Richard Tedlow for instance has suggested that Germany military strategy was continuously undermined by sabotage perpetrated through an officer class opposed to the National Socialist agenda, which included army reform.<sup>[41]</sup>

## **Socialism and Nationalism**

Part of the issue with our subject is the culture of simplifying concepts to meet their most digestible levels, especially in politics or the public education system. That practice requires us to devolve into analysis which seldom demands clarity as far as history has manifested itself, or been recorded in a biased manner. With socialism, the contemporary leftist view holds that Marx is the

beginning and end of the discussion, because it sets up a clear contrast with the capitalism of today. Socialism is by definition leftist because it *must* occupy a position against the employer classes, and nothing more. An immediate problem is unfurled here because socialism lacks consistency, even within the safe ideological palisades belonging to the Left. Devout progressives are particularly prone to missing this reality, usually at the cost of their own political objectives. To solve their errors in study, we must avoid treating the philosophy as a convenient monolith for good and evil, no matter how appealing the prospect may be.

The crucial aspect to be considered here is nationalism. Traditional interpretations of socialism assume it to be an internationalist cause governed by a determination to reject notions of patriotism and religion, replacing those sympathies with the class consciousness of workers overcoming their economic oppressors. Once leftist socialism took power in Moscow, however, it moved quickly to preserve Russian imperialistic nationalism in countries like Hungary, where the 1956 uprising was aggressively put down by a Soviet army insistent on maintaining the influence of Moscow across Europe. In addition, the Soviets fought a protracted war to preserve their dominion atop Afghanistan, a former colony of the United Kingdom. On the Right side of the socialist spectrum, a Fascist International was established, but Nazi Germany operated a number of puppet governments that granted only limited autonomy to the nationalist-leaning local leadership. Thus it is probably accurate to note that nationalism plays a role in all varieties of socialism, although typically to different degrees of extremity and importance.

### III. Principles of Rightist Socialism

Now that we have established a more concrete view of leftist socialism, it is necessary to outline preliminary points of belief where right-wing components are concerned. Although the movements in question were unquestionably diverse in terms of location and style, we nevertheless spot common characteristics across the board. There are also instances of “socialism to a certain degree” which confuse not only casual onlookers, but even hard leftists themselves. The clear example would be Stalinism as opposed to democratic or council-based socialism. Whether one is more socialist than the other, or indeed socialist at all, depends on point of view and context. Later on in the text we shall encounter this notion when dealing with a long-running debate over Adolf Hitler’s relative status as a socialist. For the time being, let us examine some core concepts:

**The Supremacy of Myth:** Where present day scholars reliably derail their analysis of right-wing movements is in the flagrant lack of appreciation for myth as a driving force. Because we are predisposed to associate the word “myth” with a falsehood, writers have even less reason to comprehend the notion, and may elect to leave it out entirely. This is a tragedy, because if one element most starkly divides Left and Right socialism, it would be the latter’s development of an absolute zeal in the direction of national or spiritual myths regarding man and soil. Joseph Campbell once described the broader cultural idea as: “the material of our life, the material of our body, and the material of our environment, and a living, vital mythology deals with these in terms that are appropriate to the nature of knowledge at the time.”<sup>[42]</sup> Referring to the mythical way Russians perceived their own country, the poet Fyodor Tyutchev noted it could not be understood in logical terms, only believed in.<sup>[43]</sup> Furthermore, according to Nazi theorist Alfred Rosenberg, a myth was a superior truth capable of shaping man and his collective destiny bestowed by a racial or cultural heritage. <sup>[44]</sup> Through it

nations are formed and people develop a racial consciousness, while countries without a myth passively move through history. The Aryan myth was contrasted by right-wing socialists with the Jewish myth, which is portrayed as being based on parasitism and an alienation from race.[\[45\]](#)

**Against Modernity:** Although the socialist Right held respect for advanced technology used to produce weapons of war, there is a pronounced sense of skepticism towards modernization and urbanism. They viewed cities as being centers where cosmopolitanism would begin to form, eventually spreading to envelope and subsume traditional cultures, along with the nation-state. As a result, we see a strong theme of rejection oriented towards urban zones, with higher emphasis on the rural farmer and land reform.[\[46\]](#) [\[47\]](#) [\[48\]](#)

**The Purity of Land and Nature:** In keeping with the prior position, rightist socialists viewed land through what is commonly termed the “blood and soil” perspective. Rather than imagining the nation in a civic sense, with artificially drawn borders, such socialists perceived men as possessing a distinct racial or spiritual connection to their native earthly grounds, a place where the destiny of the people could be safeguarded. Failure to maintain or possess such roots led to an extinguishing of the soul.[\[49\]](#) A striking cultural example lies in the German novel *Der Buttnerbauer*, in which a peasant goes into debt and loses his farm to a Jewish creditor. The downcast peasant proceeds to hang himself after realizing he has lost his precious connection with the land, with the last scene showing him gazing at the twilight of his farm.[\[50\]](#) This did not of course preclude the seizure of additional territory for incorporation into such a saga, as shown by German expansion into Eastern Europe, where *lebensraum* (living space) was available to grow the future race. On a related angle, Benito Mussolini extolled his followers to reject urbanization and colonize the countryside,[\[51\]](#) while the Nazis established special protections for native plants and

species, electing to exterminate others that were deemed invasive.  
[\[52\]](#)

**Anti-Conservative:** Socialism of the Right aligned with certain notions of traditionalism, but positioned itself in fierce opposition to the perceived ruling elite of the time, in most cases a monarchy and financial capitalist upper class. We even have examples in which conservative regimes violently put down right-wing socialist movements seen as a threat to national stability, such as in Romania.[\[53\]](#) At the same time, some of those in the broader category identified themselves as “conservative socialists,” albeit with ideas distant from the mainstream bourgeois conservatism of history.

**Anti-Liberalism:** We certainly find certain rare instances of alternative socialists endorsing free market liberalism, but otherwise, opposition to the broader “Liberal State” is a common theme. Liberalism was seen as promoting the prototypically bourgeois obsession with material gain and freedom for the sake of freedom, often drawn to destructive ends. One notable for instance writer argued that the philosophy was no longer about freedom, but rather egotism and self-interest “protectively colored” by the mask of parliamentary democracy.[\[54\]](#)

**Anti-Communism:** Right-wing socialism’s endorsement of certain state intervention did not mean commitment to communist ideals. Communism and Bolshevism were perceived by social theorists on the Right as missing the freedom imperative tied to land, and promoting a destructive internationalism to wipe out national cultures.[\[55\]](#) Instead, they pushed nationalistic socialism, something designed to uplift the people and protect their welfare in a *community* of nations, as opposed to one socialist order. As Arthur van den Bruck noted, socialism “has always taken heed of classes, but never of nations. There can be no justice for men if there is not justice for nations first. For men can only live if their nations live also.”[\[56\]](#)

**Against Financial Capitalism:** Depending on the model, right-wing socialism can usually be seen to have skepticism for business and capitalism, at least to the degree of moderate or reformist socialists on the Left. Like these actors, the rightist activists would focus their attention on certain aspects of the market economy without necessarily calling for wholesale nationalization. In particular, we see a tremendous dislike and opposition for the financial industry, perceived by many such socialists as being dominated by Jews or international interests. The debt and interest payments generated by big banks and firms were viewed by the right-wing socialists as slavery, and a means of earning money without performing physical labor, the stereotype historically applied to Jewish people. There is even a claim in German *völkisch* literature that Aryans care about business (hard work and purpose), while Jews obsess only over money.<sup>[57]</sup> A noticeable consequence of this mentality came in the form of a multinational campaign to nationalize the credit industry and offer interest-free or low-interest loans.<sup>[58] [59]</sup>

**In Favor of Harmony:** Right-wing socialism did at times promote complete nationalization, but often the message was one of harmonization and common struggle between the employers and workers. Thus negotiation and unity was advanced to prevent both strikes and the abuse of workers by capitalist bosses. Some figures went as far as to say the employer class in industrial capitalism was being equally victimized by the financial capitalist elite alongside workers.<sup>[60]</sup>

**Socialism of Race:** Another aspect we shall find in the broader Socialist Right is the imperative to defend *race*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, overtly racial components were generally tied to the existing geography and *zeitgeist* of the origin country. Germany and Romania for example featured some of the most radical purification programs directed against the Jews, while treatment in Hungary, Italy, and Spain was far less extreme. In Germany, pre-Nazi thinkers were so taken by the threat posed by Jews marrying or cavorting with Aryan women that they considered such females to be

permanently tainted, with future children bound to exhibit Jewish traits, even if she reproduced with an Aryan male.<sup>[61]</sup> <sup>[62]</sup> Thus we see the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws to protect the integrity of the German race through limitations on marriage and reproduction with non-Germans.

## IV. The French Connection

We shall begin our journey into the subject by examining manifestations of right-wing socialism in France. While the Parisian land may not have ascended a full regime with such ideological leanings (excusing Vichy France, which was more conservative in nature) it did house an especially renowned syndicalist movement adhering to similar principles. Furthermore, France was the birthplace of Georges Sorel, who would contribute a multitude of important political writings to the public debate on revolution and nationalism. From this foundation we extract (with great debt) a profound understanding of precisely what led to the development of alternative socialism.

Sorel was an odd character for a revolutionary thinker. He did not begin to gain great following until the early 1900s, by which time he had retired as an engineer from the French government after decades of service. Nevertheless, over a number of years dedicated to producing observations on political theory and the ethics of violence, he is now strongly associated with syndicalist ideas, a fact which draws skepticism from several scholars, with both Rudolf Rocker and Ralph Darlington claiming he operated from a distance and was not part of the movement itself.<sup>[63]</sup> <sup>[64]</sup> Despite such academic unease, Sorel is crucial to granting a more complete understanding of socialist ideas in general, if here distilled somewhat from their usual economic orthodoxy.

That latter point cannot be undervalued for the purposes of our study; while rightist socialism did entertain economic changes, they were viewed through a less dogmatic lens on the road to success than the broader national conception. In point, let us take up the Sorelian conception of life within the liberal state. The syndicalist writer reserved much disdain for what made up the cornerstone of cosmopolitan society in France. He labeled the intellectual circles

with exact venom, noting they “adopted the profession of thinking,” while bourgeois science in general is focused around serving as a mill to create solutions to human problems which are unneeded.<sup>[65]</sup> Of particular fault in the bourgeois liberal model is the general timidity demonstrated by that class in the face of rising threats, especially from revolutionaries. Indeed, Sorel argues the middle classes pursue a “chimera of social peace,”<sup>[66]</sup> attempting to mitigate threats from the socialist Left by handing out concessions in the form of social service legislation.<sup>[67]</sup> These schemes are destined to fail however, because revolution cannot be dismissed by mere acts of parliament.<sup>[68]</sup>

Sorel goes on to adopt a position we have already become acclimated to in the broader syndicalist category. Namely, that parliamentary socialist parties are ineffectual and at times even counterrevolutionary versus their syndicalist cousins. Parliamentary socialists are viewed as indecisive,<sup>[69]</sup> compromise-seeking fools who will continue giving ground to please everyone until they have assured the victory of capitalism over organized labor.<sup>[70]</sup> Even should a socialist party come to power, it will swiftly adopt the role of bourgeois administrator by using the criminal code to create crimes and hence become the very tyranny its followers sought to oppose.<sup>[71]</sup>

Returning to the general bourgeois category, Sorel predicts they will do themselves in through such corporal indecisiveness and fear which he has castigated the socialist parties for. He notes that “the most decisive factor in social politics is the cowardice of government.”<sup>[72]</sup> This dynamic is demonstrated by the bourgeoisie’s reaction when confronted with a legitimate threat, such as leftist violence. Rather than holding firm and denying revolutionary triumph, the State becomes captured in a web of hesitation:

“One of the things which appears to me to have most astonished the workers during the last few years has been the timidity of the forces of law and order in the presence of a riot:

the magistrates who have a right to demand the services of soldiers do not use their power to the utmost, whilst officers allow themselves to be abused and struck with a patience hitherto unknown in them.”<sup>[73]</sup>

Sorel’s assessment is remarkable when compared to other parts of history. Nazi leader Hermann Goering would make similar observations about the behavior of middle class-supported parties in the face of Marxist terror.<sup>[74]</sup> Other parallels, such as the submissive attitudes of state officials and police officers during the 2020 American race riots, help pinpoint the Sorelian perspective. In any case, the French syndicalist projected that visible manifestations of state weakness would, over time, lead to its collapse:

“A social policy based upon bourgeois cowardice, which consists in always surrendering before the threat of violence, cannot fail to engender the idea that the bourgeoisie is condemned to death and that its disappearance is only a matter of time.”<sup>[75]</sup>

Taken in the modern context, Sorel’s view might seem distant, yet it manages to strike chords in everyday matters. Democratic states often struggle with the question of force as a means to defend power because the system itself is predicated upon consent. Whereas a dictatorial model seizes and keeps control based on direct violence, democracies achieve this through voting, creating a complicated debate when state power must be deployed against dissenting citizens who voice their grievances using violent protests.

## **Violence**

It is on this basis that the theory of violence must be introduced. Right-wing socialists tended to emphasize direct action as a vehicle for achieving radical social change as opposed to the slower approach. The Sorelian viewpoint merely clasps this broader category and refines it to reflect how immediate and organized force

can turn the wheels of history in a way that parliaments cannot.<sup>[76]</sup> He explains how the preference for centralized states that “keep the peace” is not an indication of something new, but rather the latest version of a product created by longtime social norms to dispel efficiency in men and promote community-based justice.<sup>[77]</sup> More modern campaigns to diminish the role of violence are thus the consequence of stemming from specific moral attitudes, particularly those in the middle of society. Sorel outlines the unease of modernity with violence along several points:

1. Changes in the administration of schools, which were once governed by priests who exacted severe physical penalties on students as a part of their disciplinary regimen.<sup>[78]</sup> Over time, the state began opening its own schools under a kinder model, perhaps seeking to curb religious domination of the general education system. Clerical leaders then responded by lowering their own harsh practices to levels competitive with the government. (A similar phenomenon is pointed out in relation to labor unions; originally willing to suffer long in pursuit of their cause, the expanding influence of state reforms led to shifting opinions among workers as to how much physical abuse they were willing to suffer by resisting employers).

2. The next element to consider surrounds middle class culture’s perceptions of violence. Stability of the bourgeois lifestyle feels threatened by more aggressive rabble in the “dangerous classes,” and hence an effort is made to depict violent offenders as “abnormal.”<sup>[79]</sup> People are gradually acculturated to assess violence – even in the form of school discipline – as a sign of criminality or criminal origins.<sup>[80]</sup> Part to this dynamic is the unquestionable shift from an economic model where mental effort is seen to be more valuable. We witness a similar viewpoint in Western culture today, where conservatives, libertarians, and liberals alike happily justify lowering wages in physically-demanding roles by claiming those jobs are “not worth anything more.” There is also a clear bias against the

trades by our middle class society, with such vocations being categorized as filthy or socially undesirable, worthy only of the lower classes and their supposed inferior status, as Sorel's bourgeoisie saw their fellow Frenchmen. He goes on to contrast these feelings as a matter of cunning replacing ferocity as the dominant value.<sup>[81]</sup> While many intellectuals celebrate the shift, others point out how orderly traditional societies were when compared to the modern model:

“If we are revolted by the cruelty, the brutality of past times, it must not be forgotten that uprightedness, sincerity, a lively sentiment of justice, pious respect before holiness of morals characterized the ancient peoples; while nowadays we see predominant lies, duplicity, treachery, the spirit of chicane, the contempt for property, disdain for instinctive probity and legitimate customs – the value of which is not even understood. Robbery, deceit, and fraud increase in spite of legal repression more rapidly than brutal and violent crimes, like pillage, murder and rape, etc., decrease. Egoism of the basest kind shamelessly breaks the sacred bonds of the family and friendship in every case in which these oppose its desires.”<sup>[82]</sup>

The result of this moral shift is that crimes of less violent nature, particularly those committed by the middle class and rich, are not penalized in the same manner as the past, or at times not at all.<sup>[83]</sup> All which the bourgeoisie must do is buy favor with the government, and their sentences will be laid aside as serious crimes of fraud become, like one scholar puts it, “vulgar errors” or “gross clumsiness” that go unpunished.<sup>[84]</sup> An obvious modern parallel here would be the 2008 economic crisis, after which few countries bothered to prosecute those companies and executives who squandered investor money, instead giving them taxpayer-funded bailouts that would be used to pay for corporate bonuses.<sup>[85]</sup>

3. Finally, Sorel dedicates time to examining how the evolving relationship of the state and various “criminal associations” has

impacted perceptions of violence. These organizations at times have used violence themselves, yet depending on their orientation and manner the state either reacts, or alternatively co-opts, such activity to its own side. Certain actions by parties which would be assumed to carry great outrage on the part of the governing class are largely ignored, while others may in fact be used as a means to suppress opposing views.<sup>[86]</sup> One category singled out historically for intimidation by the state's forces are conservatives, who were seen as a threat to French leader Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau's power. In order to weaken his enemies, Waldeck-Rousseau planned to use certain labor syndicates as an effective (though not official) arm of the State, battering his political opponents into submission.<sup>[87]</sup> Central to the plan was a deliberate inciting of violent revolutionary elements and their displays of force.<sup>[88]</sup> So the state essentially evolved to construct a near monopoly on legitimate violence whilst maintaining respectful distance based in the supposed autonomy of the syndical associations.

### **The General Strike Mythos**

We have already established that the general strike was of utmost importance to the syndicalists as a masterstroke which could overthrow capitalism and create the trade union-led society. What is generally not mentioned in this discussion on the Left is the grander, almost spiritual role of the act. To be sure, many leftists would be inclined to dismiss such a conception on the basis of their own hostility to nationalist or religious interests, and here we see an important illustration separating Right and Left socialism. The former group has historically been reticent to abandon traditional cultures of legend which play well with national and ethnic communities. For Sorel, the paramount nature of the action itself—involving great revolution—is not to be stopped there, while only *material* ends can be realized. Instead, the general strike becomes a weapon transferring the very viewpoint on social structures and cosmopolitan modernity.

In his version, the syndicalist vision becomes a fundamentally *religious* one,<sup>[89]</sup> centered firmly around myth. Using modern terms, this would seem to imply something false or untrue, yet such an explanation is far from the mark. Myth (or mythos) in the Sorelian context represents an awakening of “great moral passion” which the age needs desperately. Within each person’s soul rests a “metaphysical-hearthplace” that can be brought out in the form of a grandiose, mythological act such as the General Strike.<sup>[90]</sup> As with many other syndicalists, Sorel traces his viewpoint back to Marx’s original ideal, something which has become corrupted by socialist parties:

“The myth is not suitable for division into successive slices of change which can be arranged in a series, and which, being spread over a long series of time, can be regarded as forming an evolution. This transformation is necessary in all action by a political party, and it has taken place wherever Socialists have entered into parliaments; it is impossible in the Marxian myth, which gives a revolution in a lump, like an indivisible whole.”<sup>[91]</sup>

Because of the myth’s nature, it is not possible to dilute or compromise the underlying process as parliamentary systems would seek to do. The event must be taken as one massive vision, unbridled by hesitation or petty machinations. This is comparable in many ways to Christian myths.<sup>[92]</sup> The general strike thus becomes more than a mere political or economic chess piece moved towards a strategy of victory; it is the complete purpose, transcending matters entirely:

“The preceding explanations have shown that the idea of the general strike (constantly rejuvenated by the feelings roused by proletarian violence) produces an entirely epic state of mind, and at the same time bends all the energies of the mind to that condition necessary to the realization of a workshop carried on by free men, eagerly seeking the betterment of the industry; we have thus recognized that there are great resemblances

between the sentiments aroused by the idea of the general strike and those which are necessary to bring about a continued progress in methods of production.”<sup>[93]</sup>

Sorel actually compares the general strike to a Napoleonic battle, where the end must be total defeat of the enemy, not simply a tactical victory.<sup>[94]</sup> By rallying the syndicalists to battle against the system, an ultimate goal is reached to suppress the state, which seeks to create wars and serve the interests of profit-seeking classes.<sup>[95]</sup>

If Georges Sorel sounds to some readers like a socially conservative socialist, this is not a unique perspective. Sorelianism and its followers have always maintained a complicated relationship with the mainline syndicalist movement, largely due to unease with the implications of those beliefs in the general leftist column. Andres Tridon for instance outlines the unorthodox nature of Sorel’s approach to sexual morality when compared with the typically radical liberation standpoint, in which chastity is seen as a nonsensical virtue used for capitalist ends.<sup>[96]</sup> Sorel even implies that Madame Rousseau’s negative influence on her husband stemmed from an inability to “subdue his erotic imagination.”<sup>[97]</sup> He notes:

“[...] the juridicial conscience cannot rise to any height in countries where a respect for chastity is not deeply rooted in people’s minds [...] and that, the world will only grow more just in the measure in which it will grow more chaste.”<sup>[98]</sup>

But his affiliation with certain conservative ideals goes beyond mere moral opinions; in the course of discussing the history of Marx’s intended revolution, Sorel makes reference to the possibility of the grand upheaval holding different underlying objectives than traditional socialist logic would assume:

“Marx does not seem to have asked himself what would happen if the economic system were on the down grade; he

never dreamt of the possibility of a revolution which would return to the past, or even social conservation, as its ideal. We see nowadays that such a revolution might eventually come to pass: the friends of Jaures, the clericals, and the democrats all take the Middle Ages as their ideal for the future; they would like competition to be tempered, riches limited, production subordinated to needs. These are dreams which Marx looked upon as reactionary, and consequently negligible, because it seemed to him that capitalism was embarked on irresistible progress; but nowadays we see considerable forces grouped together in the endeavor to reform the capitalist economic system by bringing it, with the aid of laws, nearer to the medieval ideal.”<sup>[99]</sup>

What makes Sorel’s discussion of conservative revolution so important is its emphasis on the return to a medieval form of administration. As I covered in the book *The Truth About Mussolini and Fascism*,<sup>[100]</sup> Italy’s system of corporatism was inspired in part by the older guild management system of medieval Venice, which featured economic organizations exercising substantial control over politics. Under the corporatist model, workers and business owners were brought together to hash out differences and promote national unity. This value is of tremendous interest to our study, as it plays directly into the primary idea of Yellow Socialism, which Sorel was closely associated with.

## **The Yellow Socialism Movement**

Although France never made it past the Nazi-supported Vichy regime in terms of a right-wing socialist government, it did host one of the most influential rightist labor groups in the early 1900s period: The Yellow Shirts (or *Les Jaunes*). The organization would manifest several distinct ideas proposed by French thinkers of the time, including their closely-affiliated harmonized socialism concept. We must highlight this variety of socialism because it would stand to

influence later systems, such as the aforementioned Italian model promulgated by Benito Mussolini.

Initially, our subjects in the *Les Jaunes* union were simple another group of workers bent on achieving change through traditional leftist methods. Their associated color label actually stemmed from the fact that members who refused to participate in strikes would use yellow paper to fill in union club windows smashed by strikers.<sup>[101]</sup> The Yellow Shirts have deeper philosophical roots in the legacy of General Ernest Boulanger, a conservative populist figure in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century who nearly overthrew the French government in 1889.<sup>[102]</sup> Individuals associated with him were labeled as “Boulangists” and included figures like Paulin Mery, along with many supporters of the Bonapartist system that previously governed France. Electorally, the general’s movement gained significant support in both national and local elections, although it went into decline by 1890.<sup>[103]</sup>

The spirit of the cause would be carried on by Paulin Mery and the Marquis de Mores, two figures who promoted changes to the French system which were both radical and reformist in nature. Instead of a total upheaval where workers would replace the entire capitalist system, they promoted the cooperative method which we see in systems like corporatism. Their proposed state was meant to endorse trade unions and job protections with forced employer coordination, while also encouraging the establishment of cooperatives for those who produced consumer goods.<sup>[104]</sup> At the same time, the forefathers of the *Les Jaunes* movement supported a plebiscite-based democracy governed by a powerful authoritarian leader. Differently from many socialists, the inheritors of Boulangism did not oppose the concept of workers gaining property and businesses for themselves, thus rising in the ranks of economic society.<sup>[105]</sup> So we see significantly less hostility to the class ladder amongst members of the French socialist Right.

Two figures in particular must be accounted for when dealing with the rise of *Les Jaunes*. We commence by considering Édouard Drumont (1844-1917), who gave the union much early publicity. According to Drumont, the nation's downward spiral could be traced directly back to the Jews, who he viewed as oppressors of ordinary Frenchmen.<sup>[106]</sup> He expressed certain general sympathies for socialism, while also viewing the movement as having become compromised by Marxism's preeminent position. Now Drumont feared the socialist political associations themselves had morphed into vehicles controlled by the bourgeois or Jewish influences of the upper classes.<sup>[107]</sup> He directed ire against Protestants and Freemasons as well, though his own tepid allegiance to Catholicism did not diminish a perception that the Church was also roped to Jewish power.<sup>[108]</sup> Like many other right-wing socialists, Drumont was fiercely against the financial system, which he naturally considered to be a further expression of the Jewish People.

By removing Jews from France through expulsion, he believed their property could be redistributed to the oppressed classes who led the revolution, thus generating social justice and national prosperity.<sup>[109]</sup> Drumont was less successful in his first attempt to lead an organization, the *Ligue Anti-Semite*, a smaller group that suffered from its domination by bourgeois and clerical figures. As a result, he drifted towards more radical tendencies in 1886:

“As late as 1871 I still believed that society deserved defending. Which institution, which social class is still worth defending today? [...] The Jews, were protected by the Freemasons [read Republic] but the workingman is shot for simply wanting to gain a few sous with which to buy bread.”<sup>[110]</sup>

Drumont would eventually gain influence over the Yellow Shirts in 1903, by which time it had over 100,000 members.<sup>[111]</sup> He exercised such control until 1908, by which time the union had partially collapsed. In many ways he would be ideologically succeeded by Pierre Bietry, the second figure of crucial importance for our study.

Bietry was an ex-revolutionary socialist who developed a disgust for the broader image of socialist methods and their destruction of the traditional unity of ancient corporations.<sup>[112]</sup> He advanced through *Les Jaunes* a less partisan movement that would seek to emulate the past, like Georges Sorel once alluded to. Rather than pursuing fruitless strikes or revolution, unions under Bietry's conception would actively negotiate with employers to resolve disagreements or grievances, creating a harmonious and unified model with no need for state intervention.<sup>[113]</sup> In tune with Drumont's ideas, Bietry insisted that a contrast be drawn between speculative and industrial capital.<sup>[114]</sup> The former was associated with non-physical labor and the Jews, while the latter embodied "real" work in factories, making it acceptable. We shall see similar opinions pervading other parts of rightist socialism, especially when land reform is introduced to the fold.

The Yellow Shirts would prove popular enough to inspire several novels based on their underlying values. These titles focused on the notion of one's duty to faith and nation (or fatherland) precluding the prospect of needless and self-serving strikes, especially if the workers could find common ground with employers.<sup>[115]</sup> Such a notion of cooperation was reflected in the methods championed by *Les Jaunes* leaders towards employers. Concerning strikes, the Yellow Shirts tried to avoid them, while establishing the precondition that industry be given a 15-day grace period to meet demands rather than plunging matters into chaos.<sup>[116]</sup> Despite its moderate tone, the policy is believed to have been engendered by a fierce resentment over the failure of previous strikes to extract desired concessions from employers.<sup>[117]</sup> Under Bietry, *Les Jaunes* broke with traditional socialist (and left-wing syndicalist) ideas by promoting an aggressive regionalist attitude. Hence negotiated reforms were argued on the basis of denationalized terms, with Bietry actively criticizing the push for an 8-hour workday by socialists. Instead, the question was expected to be settled privately and without state influence.<sup>[118]</sup>

Furthermore, any grandiose decision would be aligned carefully to avoid hurting jobs threatened by cheaper foreign competition.<sup>[119]</sup>

The Yellow Shirts enjoyed considerable membership and following amongst the following sectors:<sup>[120]</sup>

- Gas companies
- Omnibus companies
- Trash companies
- Laundry services
- Commercial firms
- Industrial workers.

As far as collective action is concerned, the union did at times break its own rules on strikes, usually to force the hand of the state, as opposed to employers. Examples include a 1906 strike in favor higher wages for workers, and another in 1909 pushing for postal employees to gain shares of overall profits.<sup>[121]</sup> Later instances from 1912 and 1914 were directed theoretically towards the Carmaux mining firm, yet *Les Jaunes'* real intent was to pressure the government to create a pension fund for miners.<sup>[122]</sup> Paradoxically, the Yellow Shirts spoke out against giving power to the greedy hands of politicians in the state, yet its own successes were largely derived from the government's participation in labor disputes or strikes. Their methods are similar to those of the Knights of Labor, a group active in America during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that eschewed strikes in favor of advocacy for social reform through legislation.<sup>[123]</sup> The larger experience is typical of socialist debates going back decades; while maximalists and many syndicalists believed revolution was the only acceptable method, others drifted towards politics, or advocated pressuring the state to act on revolutionary goals.

## V. The Matter of Italy

Yellow Socialism may not have manifested in the halls of Parisian government, but its impact cannot be ignored on the economic system advanced by Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement. Mussolini was of course a former member of the Italian Socialist Party, though he never entirely lost his proletarian leaning, even after the National Fascist Party seized power. To start, Fascism was conceived as an explicitly revolutionary ideology, not the conservative reactionary image modern academics have labeled it with. The original political platform of 1919 made stark demands for the establishment of an 8-hour workday, creation of a minimum wage, expansion of women's rights, the introduction of a tax on war profits, and abolition of the Italian Senate.<sup>[124]</sup> Mussolini was also a member of The Revolutionary League for International Action, which made the following argument:

“The reply cannot be in doubt for us revolutionaries, because, true to the teaching of our masters, we believe that the limits of national revolutions cannot be transcended without first reaching them, and for this reason the class struggle remains an empty formula, not a vital and fertile force, unless every people is first integrated within its own natural borders of language and race, and unless, once the question of nationality has been definitively resolved, and the historical climate has formed necessary for the normal development of the class movement, and for the progress and triumph of the ideas which inspire working class internationalism.”<sup>[125]</sup>

Over time, the *Duce* made some political sacrifices as part of his alliance with the Nationalist Party which reduced the sheer revolutionary leftism which had colored early Fascism. Nevertheless, modern portrayals of Fascism as a servant of the bourgeoisie and mega-rich do not play out in close historical record. We must

remember that Mussolini's movement was always a fusion endeavor by people united in love of country against various modern enemies. Founding members of the cause included after all the monarchist Cesare De Vecchi, Italo Balbo of pro-republican origins, and Michele Bianchi, a noted syndicalist. Bianchi is especially important for our study because he represents the most visible thrust of syndicalist philosophy into Fascism, even with his rather early death from tuberculosis in 1934. While he was unable to turn Mussolini's party into an avowedly pro-worker organization, Bianchi did manage to steer matters of policy towards that very cause.

The campaign would be furthered by Edmondo Rossoni, a labor activist from America who had early ties to syndical action.<sup>[126]</sup> Rossoni advanced working class protections in what would become the Corporate State, itself governed by what Mussolini called *corporativismo*. As I discussed in a previous book on Italy,<sup>[127]</sup> corporatism is actually traced back to the medieval merchant guilds, which exercised both economic and political authority. These bodies had an explicitly "administrative" nature, and were not greedy private sector firms wishing to undermine the working class. Likewise, Fascism's introduction of twenty-two corporations served as a means of organizing society and the economy. The reformist Socialist Ivanoe Bonomi described these corporations as creations of the Fascist Party,<sup>[128]</sup> while national legislation codified in 1934 defined them as administrative organs of the state.<sup>[129]</sup>

Structurally, the corporations were made up of an equal number of both labor and management representatives who would be tasked with hashing out disputes on pay or conditions, and making higher-level decisions concerning economic turbulence. In the event of a deadlock, the government-appointed council chairman could cast a tie-breaking vote and continue progress, eliminating the standstill caused by previous strikes. If the dispute was not classified as rising to corporate levels, workers had the option of appealing for review by the labor court system, which could rule in favor, against, or remand the case to arbitration.<sup>[130]</sup> Over time, the system of syndical

organizations and corporations that flourished in Italy resulted with the reimagining of the country's lower house of parliament as a Chamber of Fasci and Corporations. Mussolini's corporatist system would also serve in part as a model for the system implemented by Brazilian leader Getúlio Vargas during the 1930s,<sup>[131]</sup> as well as the one created by Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in the same period.<sup>[132]</sup>

Although historians are quick to dismiss the corporate model as befitting narrow private sector interests, they ignore numerous damning realities from available historical records which indicate otherwise. For one, the push to privatize railroads had mixed results insofar as certain localities were concerned. The project is generally viewed as a success,<sup>[133]</sup> yet in Cremona the ruling Fascist Roberto Farinacci refused to comply with national mandates on privatization, reflecting his own socialist roots.<sup>[134]</sup> In addition, the rich often found themselves on the receiving end of Fascist justice due to perceptions that they were insufficiently cooperative. For instance, the police prefect of Sicily openly reported about his arrest of fourteen millionaires,<sup>[135]</sup> and landlords who resisted Fascist-ordered rent controls found themselves sentenced to prison terms on Mussolini's island penal colonies.<sup>[136]</sup>

On the social front, Fascism made great strides towards expansion of social welfare for the general public. Italy at the time was plagued by the devastation of tuberculosis, a disease which took the lives of Michele Bianchi and Mussolini's own brother. In response, government policy established institutes to improve hygiene and introduced medical insurance to subsidize treatment.<sup>[137]</sup> <sup>[138]</sup> An additional reform approach enacted social insurance schemes to protect employees who lost their jobs or became too old and required pensions.<sup>[139]</sup> Unique here was the method of tax funding when contrasted with more capitalistic regimes: levies had to be paid by employers, who were prohibited from passing the charges along to their workers.<sup>[140]</sup> Fascism also created the *Dopolavoro*

program, a recreational offering intended to promote national unity through sports, entertainment, and community celebrations. This was concurrent to the creation of free summer camp programs to serve poor citizens and their children.<sup>[141]</sup>

We see an important parallel in the Italian colonial program. Stereotypically, colonists are portrayed as evil exploiters trying to benefit themselves at the expense of the native population. In contrast, Rome pursued a progressive approach to development in each of its major foreign holdings. To start, Governor Italo Balbo of Libya invested heavily in public services to better infrastructure and combat disease.<sup>[142]</sup> His planned Litorea Balbo, or highway across the North African coast, was constructed with partial native labor that enjoyed much higher salaries than in other comparative colonies.<sup>[143]</sup> Major strides were made towards the education of women,<sup>[144]</sup> a novel practice in conservative Muslim culture, child marriages were abolished,<sup>[145]</sup> and Balbo attempted to extend Italian citizenship to the natives.<sup>[146]</sup> Finally, he organized a settlement program to bring impoverished Italians into Libya and provide them with land so a future might be constructed in agriculture.<sup>[147]</sup>

To the east, Italy's takeover of Albania hardly resulted in what grim tidings colonial historians would assume. Rome removed the existing administration, which was viewed as corrupt, and put forward funds to help bring professionalism into the system.<sup>[148]</sup> A regular army was established, along with a parliament, and Italian citizenship was extended to the populace.<sup>[149]</sup> The civil service underwent reforms which reduced corruption,<sup>[150]</sup> while public health investments addressed related problems of malaria there as well.<sup>[151]</sup> Italians also introduced a common passport system to permit free travel between the two countries, while Albanian representatives were appointed to the Italian Senate.<sup>[152]</sup>

Perhaps most well-known in Italian colonial history is the invasion and annexation of Ethiopia. Scholars tend to dismiss the venture as a manifestation of Italian aggression, though this viewpoint remains

profoundly ignorant of the known prehistory, along with later internal reforms. For the purposes of this book, we will focus on the latter, though a full account is available in another text written by this author.<sup>[153]</sup> One of the prime motivations for Mussolini in seizing Ethiopia were the routine attacks by that country's tribesmen on Italian Somaliland, a target for slave labor.<sup>[154]</sup> The *Duce* fiercely condemned this practice, which Ethiopian King Haile Selassie had promised to end in 1923, but failed to follow through.<sup>[155]</sup> A first foray after the Italians assumed control in 1936 was to abolish slavery completely,<sup>[156]</sup> an act which impacted the estimated slave population of 2 million.<sup>[157]</sup> These substantial moves of progress would be interrupted by Britain's driving of Italy from East Africa in 1941, which resulted in Selassie's return to power until the communist Derg regime removed him some years later.

## **The Italian Social Republic**

In July 1943, an Allied bombing of Rome precipitated the removal of Mussolini as prime minister by the Grand Council of Fascism, Italy's supreme governing body. The *Duce* was then arrested, spending several months in captivity between various prisons throughout the mountains and islands of Italy. Although guards were instructed to shoot him in case of a rescue attempt, the German-led Gran Sasso Raid met with minimal resistance, ferrying Mussolini north to regroup and begin planning the creation of a new state. Mussolini's longtime antipathy towards the Italian monarchy had been heightened by King Vittorio Emanuele's decision to dismiss him as prime minister following the July 1943 vote. Consequently, the new government which operated out of Salo, Italy was explicitly christened with the name "The Italian Social Republic," often shortened to "RSI."

Mainstream scholars have a peculiar relationship with the Social Republic's history. Part of the cause for their general hostility or disinterest can perhaps be explained by the lack of historical accounts concerning its existence, combined with the Republic's

limited lifespan. At only eighteen months and set in the middle of a bloody war, specifics get thrown out in favor a strictly combat-based narrative. A further issue for consideration is the motivation these scholars have, being typically leftist themselves, to downplay any pro-working class concepts associated with Fascism's history. Richard Lamb provides one of the finest illustrations on this point when he describes Mussolini's orientation of the RSI in a more purely socialist direction as something of "no historical importance."<sup>[158]</sup> Ironically, Lamb proceeds to express amazement at the *Duce's* continued popularity as a leader despite the war's negative direction for Italy.<sup>[159]</sup>

Before accessing the ideological machinations of the RSI, let us establish a clearer record on matters of political support. It is crucial to dispel the classical myth that the RSI was a "puppet state" of the Axis. Due to Germany's military occupation of Northern Italy at the time, many writers glibly suggest Mussolini held no power, and was merely a figurehead ruler. Such a perception is belied by the fact of Mussolini specifically forming an army independent from the Germans to check their influence.<sup>[160]</sup> Simply merging his forces with the occupiers would have been easier if no authority was sought. We also have the record of Marshal Kesselring's order from September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1943, explicitly rescinding German sovereignty over the northern region to favor Mussolini's National Republican Army.<sup>[161]</sup> In addition, the Social Republic's cabinet revolted against proposed decrees manufactured by the Minister of Jewish Affairs, Giovanni Preziosi, that would have led to deportations of Jews.<sup>[162]</sup> Mussolini himself also intervened, securing passports for Jews to escape in violation of Hitler's wishes.<sup>[163]</sup>

Not only did Mussolini's government possess considerable autonomy; it was also supported by a larger portion of the public than scholars care to admit. The *Duce* was greeted by excited crowds in Milan after forming the administration,<sup>[164]</sup> an improbable event for someone loathed due to the war's eruption. Nazi propaganda minister Goebbels notes in his diary that his Italian

counterpart, Alessandro Pavolini, only managed to gather fifteen recruits for the national militia in Rome during the early days of the republic.<sup>[165]</sup> Although this figure implies distaste with Mussolini's regime, in the weeks that followed 250,000 Italians would rally to his side, with the Republican Army eventually growing past 700,000 recruits.<sup>[166]</sup> We must remember that such developments occurred during a period with high inflation, when Italians had the option to join the German Waffen SS for higher wages.<sup>[167]</sup> The figures thus suggest Mussolini commanded a larger swath of public loyalty than most writers acknowledge.

As we arrive at the topic of RSI economic reforms, careful adherence is necessary to showcase a rare example of right-wing socialism finding its way to mainline government policy. The word "social" was not included as a failed article of propaganda, like some historians may imply. Mussolini had long been in contact with Nicola Bombacci, a co-founder of the Italian Communist Party who was known as the "Red Pope."<sup>[168]</sup> Bombacci had earlier referred to Fascism's corporatist reforms by noting: "Everything is a socialist postulate."<sup>[169]</sup> He would later join the RSI as an unpaid assistant and eventually head of the Unified Work and Technical Confederation,<sup>[170]</sup> tasked with organizing Italy's transformation into a socialist state. If we take a glance at the Charter of Verona, the RSI's founding document, the traces of this theme are unmistakably distinct. Mussolini would proclaim them in a speech where he argued for "Italy, Republic, Socialization," all elements which the RSI pursued in effect.<sup>[171]</sup> Central to the Verona Manifesto is a commitment surrounding the end of plutocracy in Italy, while additional sections call for the provision of public housing and nationalization of industry.<sup>[172]</sup> Fascist Socialism does however make an exception to preserve private property, providing it does not exploit others.<sup>[173]</sup> It would be easy enough for an observer to still dismiss all these developments as mere paper promises, yet more proof of their sincerity exists. Bombacci is quoted in a letter to

Mussolini describing growing progress towards socialized industry in December 1944:

“I have spoken one hour and a half in a conquered and enthusiastic theater...the audience, composed mostly by workers vibrated, shouting: yes, we want to fight for Italy, for the Republic, for Socialization. In the morning I have visited the Mondadori, already Socialized, I have spoken with the workers that form the Management Council which I have found full of enthusiasm and understanding for this mission of ours.”<sup>[174]</sup>

Bombacci's letter was preceded by an act of Mussolini's cabinet in January 1944 that began the process to transform Italy's economy into a socialist model.<sup>[175]</sup> The socialization bill which came into effect gradually is summarized with a principal goal: “Enforcement of the Mussolinian conception on subjects such as; much higher Social Justice, a more equitable distribution of wealth and the participation of labor in the state's life.”<sup>[176]</sup> To examine the law more directly, let us consider Article 1:

“The company's management, either state-owned or of private property, is hereby Socialized. In it labor assumes a direct role. The Socialized companies' functioning is regulated by the present bill of law, by the statute or regulation of each company, by civil code norms and by the special laws insofar as they do not contradict present disposition.”<sup>[177]</sup>

At the heart of the new rules was a promotion of management councils which would be elected by employees and thus prevent domination by the profiteering class over industry.<sup>[178]</sup> These bodies are similar in theoretical nature to those promoted by the anti-state syndicalism advocates.<sup>[179]</sup>

Even at this stage it would be easy for skeptics to dismiss Mussolini's acts as toothless, the desperate ploy of a weakened man. However, we have surprisingly convincing evidence that the socialization took full flight, reaching some of the more prominent players in Italy's battered wartime economy. According to Erik Norling, Mussolini's nationalization and socialization campaign advanced to encompass 80 Italian companies which comprised 150,000 total employees.<sup>[180]</sup> Furthermore, in January 1945, shortly before Mussolini's assassination, the legendary automaker Fiat was socialized, revealing the extents of Fascist Socialism's reach before its demise.<sup>[181]</sup>

It must be understood also how the RSI advanced the cause of public housing, a significant position of the traditional socialist Left. The Verona Manifesto spells out clearly in Article 15:

“The Party includes in its program the setting up of a national institution for the people's housing projects. Which, absorbing the existent institutes and widening its action to the maximum shall facilitate house ownership to worker's families of whatever category, both by direct construction of new lodgements and the gradual amortization of the existent ones. One must emphasize the general principle of lease holding – one that capital has been reimbursed and the just profit paid for – constitutes an ownership title.”<sup>[182]</sup>

As with the socialization of industry, the public housing push was well underway by the RSI's end, with an adjudication process yet to be fully completed.<sup>[183]</sup>

It is difficult to gauge how successful the Social Republic might have become, largely due to its relatively brief existence as a state. The possibility that Germany would have continued to dominate Europe remains if the Allies had been pushed back through France after D-Day. One should remain aware that Mussolini had actually

attempted to peacefully hand over power to the communist-dominated rebels,<sup>[184]</sup> only to be rebuffed by those opposition forces and eventually killed while enroute to Switzerland. Italy proceeded with the holding of a referendum on the fate of the monarchy in 1946, resulting in its abolishment and the creation of a republic, though the vote itself is believed to have been fraudulent.<sup>[185]</sup> In any case, the succeeding government did not do away with many of Fascism's economic reforms, including the state-run companies and compulsory social insurance schemes.<sup>[186]</sup>

A final point is warranted in this section on Fascist Socialism. Much as we shall come to understand with German Strasserism, there is a view towards something along the lines of a federal European union meant to replace the bombastic war culture that colored the continent for generations.<sup>[187]</sup> Towards the end of his life, Mussolini, by this point diminished in stature, wrote of what an Axis Europe might have entailed under such a system. He envisions Germany having a sphere of influence in Northern Europe, while Italy would hold dominion over the southern portion, eventually rising to check Berlin's power through its growing population and colonial might.<sup>[188]</sup> Although this explicitly Fascist image was never fully realized, the European community would begin the process of creating a somewhat federalized system with the series of treaties that now makeup the modern doctrine of the European Union. So while the RSI and Fascism may have dissolved, the grander European vision came to fruition after World War II concluded.

## VI. Spain and National Syndicalism

The case of right-wing socialism in Spain is fascinating because it provides a clear-cut example to outline the broader belief structure, despite never coming to power as a political movement. Some observers will quite predictably use Francoist Spain to dismiss the notion, yet here the issue of theoretical ideology versus pragmatic politics reaches a head. We cannot deny that Francisco Franco did rise to national dominance leading the Falange, an important coalition of groups which included the more starkly socialist elements of the Spanish Right. Conversely, Franco was far from the revolutionary socialism espoused by José Primo De Rivera, the most prominent leader in the movement for National Syndicalism. The regime emerging after Republican Spain's defeat in the civil war can be well summarized as a conservative dictatorship with monarchist sympathies, though economically distant from the workers-based socialism dreamt of in certain circles. Franco at best extracted the Catholic spiritualism demanded by Rivera, along with some limited corporatist policies, crafting a sort of cultural and religious nationalism appropriately symbolized by the construction of a massive Cross to tribute those fallen in the Spanish Civil War. The dictatorship led by Franco was also responsible for the so-called "economic miracle" in the 1950s,<sup>[189]</sup> but only at the cost of certain market liberal policies that followers of National Syndicalism would find appalling.

Let us begin the discussion by considering José Primo De Rivera himself. The activist was born to General Miguel De Rivera, who ruled Spain as a military dictator from 1923-1930. José would serve in the cavalry and take up the field of law before becoming a major political figure and establishing the syndicalist *Falange Espanola* movement in 1933.<sup>[190]</sup> He would later fuse the Falange with Radmiro Ledesma Ramos' JONS, the shortened version of the *Juntas de Ofensiva de Nacional-Syndicalistas*, or National-

Syndicalist Councils of Action.<sup>[191]</sup> <sup>[192]</sup> Later in 1937, Francisco Franco brought the movement into a unified nationalist alliance, resulting in the establishment of *Falange Española Tradicionalista y de las J.O.N.S.*, which ruled Spain from 1939-1975.<sup>[193]</sup>

Understanding the uniqueness of National Syndicalism in the Spanish context requires us to carefully ascertain how Rivera and his followers advocated a sea change in the political system. While his father's dictatorship put a temporary hold on Spanish democracy, by 1931 the country was again operating under a semi-liberal structure controlled by the Cortes Generales, or parliament. It was by observing this model, along with other similar manifestations throughout Europe, that the National Syndicalists formed their views on administration. José Rivera concludes that the 1800s were wasted on trying to pursue the perfected form of government, with the consequence being a Liberal State free of any belief in absolute right and wrong.<sup>[194]</sup> By prioritizing the liberal concept of freedom and enfranchisement of men, politicians contributed to a dynamic wherein the majority would decide morality:

“Liberalism, is on one hand, the regime without faith, the regime that hands over everything, even the essentials of the country's destiny, to free discussion. For liberalism, nothing is ever absolutely true or false. The truth is, in each case, what the greater number of votes say. Thus, it does not matter to Liberalism if a people agrees upon suicide, provided that the proposed suicide is carried out in accordance with electoral practice.”<sup>[195]</sup>

This lack of belief is taken by Rivera to present the question regarding what liberalism has actually accomplished.<sup>[196]</sup> Furthermore, because the Liberal State is seen by National Syndicalists as simply acting like a policeman over public debates, the outcome involves its loss of general credibility. Hence the state

itself “perishes” whenever a more sincere movement backed by genuine belief rises to the occasion.<sup>[197]</sup>

Tangential to Rivera’s indictment of the Liberal State is a harsh condemnation for both the Left and Right.<sup>[198]</sup> Here the subject matter becomes compelling because it reveals one of the starkest divides between left-wing ideas, historical conservatism, and rightist socialism movements. In the case of leftists, Rivera views them as talented creatures too intent on casting individual men as being disconnected from their origins, and driven by a materialistic world.<sup>[199]</sup> <sup>[200]</sup> Leftism’s desire to dispense with historical structures and identity compromises its better intentions by turning matters towards destructive ends.<sup>[201]</sup> The internationalist bent of left-wing socialism is especially disconcerting because the ideology represents a foreign invasion, followed by the creation of a government which takes orders from the Communist International, thus turning Spain into a “colony or protectorate.”<sup>[202]</sup>

Marxist socialism is treated by the National Syndicalists as a concept with decent starting intent, albeit suffocated through underlying assumptions and leadership tendencies. Rivera himself concedes that Marx’s predictions about the fate of capitalism are being realized, while concurrently indicting the “German Jew” for his beliefs. He also points out how Marx possessed a low opinion of workers, who were to be used for revolution but otherwise despised.<sup>[203]</sup> Leftist socialism’s obsession with wiping out cultural values and replacing them with material focuses is granted further disagreement.<sup>[204]</sup> Rivera goes on to present a perspective accusing leftism of peddling anti-spirituality and hatred: “The spiritual element is dismissed: religion is the opiate of the people; the fatherland a myth with which to exploit the masses.”<sup>[205]</sup>

Here Rivera channels a line close to the beliefs of Giuseppe Mazzini, the famous Italian unification activist and writer. Mazzini was known for rejecting traditional socialism on the grounds of its abandonment of national or spiritual importance, considering leftists

to be shirking their moral duty.<sup>[206]</sup> The same methodology is employed by National Syndicalists to find fault in both the Right and Left.

## **Spanish Conservatism**

One critical error committed by historians of the pre-World War II period is to severely diminish opinions outside the usual liberal democratic model. Alternative political movements are thus depicted in the crudest and least-elucidating fashions, making them almost invisible to the curious young scholar. For instance, little is discussed regarding National Syndicalists because there is a general assumption that they all agreed with Franco. History is of course a better guide. In January 1936, Rivera issued a circular to members of his political organization that staked out a strategy for association with the broader right-wing alliance. There is an evident struggle occurring as he debates the merits of such a move, alluding to it possibly diluting National Syndicalism's ideological purity.<sup>[207]</sup> Ultimately, a set of guidelines are provided to help shepherd the process and avoid political compromise. Besides ensuring that structural and propagandistic schemes are not outsourced to other forces, the circular notes how the Junta will cooperate primarily on the basis of anti-Marxism and anti-nationalism.<sup>[208]</sup> While opposition to Marxism is understandable, the inclusion of a stance against nationalism will puzzle some readers. As it turns out, nationalism in the Spanish context means to Rivera the pro-independence movements by provinces like Catalonia. Fulfilling his role as an advocate of the unitary state, Rivera of course rejects these aspirations in favor the broader national idea.

In unison with his indictment of the conservative Right, the National Syndicalist leader expounds upon the anti-capitalist ideas which flow through his brand of socialism. He notes how the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was marked by a distinct shift from belief in unitarian values

such as faith or empire towards the establishment of relative values as absolutes.<sup>[209]</sup> The consequence was a release of uncontrolled freedom, which had once meant to serve good, but in fact created the harsh culture that led to the First World War.<sup>[210]</sup> Politicians proceeded along and lost any principle of continuity, swinging instead to favor whatever the masses willed. As a consequence:

“And the worship of undefined progress led to extreme industrialization, to capitalism (which is the outcome of the need for great economic power, imposed by free competition), to the dehumanizing of private property, replaced now by the technical monstrosity of impersonal capital, to the ruin of small-scale production, to the transformation of the masses into a shapeless proletariat, and finally to the terrible crises of recent years.”<sup>[211]</sup>

The average observer would be right to question why a supposed anti-capitalist might stand in defense of private property. Here we witness a central conundrum generated by modern thinking: the debate between two polar ends of ideology which disallows nuance where specific ideas are concerned. To many right-wing socialists, the growth of finance capital had separated man from the earth, from the immediate product of his own skills and ingenuity. Whether through interest creation or the trading of securities, economics had become too alien, and perhaps just as troubling, anti-national in nature. Groups like the Junta were thus determined to overthrow what aspects in capitalism were abhorrent, while not forcibly opting to erect a state-owned market for everything. Rivera gives an immensely brutal conclusion about the predominant capitalism of his time:

“Private property is the opposite of capitalism: property is the direct projection of the individual on matter; it is a basic human attribute. Capitalism has gradually replaced the property of the individual with the property of capital, the technical instrument of economic domination. With the dreadful and unfair competition between large capital and small private property, capitalism has

gradually annihilated craftsmanship, small industry and small-scale agriculture; it has gradually delivered everything—and is increasingly doing so—into the hands of the big trusts, of the big banking concerns [...] Workers, industrialists, technicians, and managers together make up the entire texture of production; and on the other hand we have the capitalist system which by means of expensive credit and the outrageous privileges of shareholders and stockholders takes the better part of production without doing any work, ruining and impoverishing employees, managers, and workers alike.”<sup>[212]</sup>

The rage of National Syndicalists against capitalism advances to a position of radical policy. Like similar groups at the time in Europe, they outlined a program bent on reclaiming control of the economy and land in such a manner as to serve the interests of the people. Looking at the *Twenty-Six Point Program of the Falange*, we see a deliberate attempt at reimagining the nature of the state itself. Points twelve, thirteen and fourteen inform the crux of the right-wing socialist agenda, following a pattern visible elsewhere. Twelve refers to national wealth being employed to “better the conditions of the people,” while also arguing it is unacceptable for some to prosper while their countrymen suffer.<sup>[213]</sup> That element is followed by language in thirteen which enshrines private property as a sacred ideal, but distinguishes between individual ownership and the ravaging forces of finance capital.<sup>[214]</sup>

Next, arguments in fourteen propose the nationalization of the banking industry, with designs to end interest slavery, a corrupt manifestation which causes men to lose their property based on loan foreclosure. A mention of using the corporatist system to nationalize utilities is also present,<sup>[215]</sup> creating an important linkage with the earlier populist Right campaign of Karl Lueger in Austria, whose Christian Social movement would also inspire Adolf Hitler.<sup>[216]</sup>

At a higher level, the National Syndicalist approach to credit nationalization deserves closer examination. Like Gottfried Feder,

Rivera views the entire concept of interest-based loans to be a corrupt hypocrisy. In particular, “finance capital” is simply used as a tool to manipulate people, often pitting managers against workers, dividing and conquering groups which might otherwise stay allied together.<sup>[217]</sup> And the finance capitalist system is a contradiction because it lends money for economic aid at a rate of 7-8 percent, but of course this money is extracted from the accounts of savers who earn only 1.5 or 2 percent interest on their funds.<sup>[218]</sup> By nationalizing banks, the National Syndicalists intended to eradicate interest charges entirely, thus preventing a man from being separated from his property on account of difficult financial tribulations.

Keeping with the right-wing socialist concern over alienation from land and small-scale agriculture, the system of twenty-six points outlines a plan to expand the state credit system to farmers, who are viewed as Spain’s spiritual and social backbone. Reform of finance capital frees smaller producers from the threat of losing their land due to conniving lenders who take advantage of down markets to gain property. The theme here is closely related to the *Buttnerbauer* story mentioned earlier, where a struggling farmer commits suicide after being foreclosed on by his Jewish banker.<sup>[219]</sup>

Part of the National Syndicalist program is a system of orders to divide up existing tracts of land held by large owners, who are seen as subverting the welfare of individual farmers.<sup>[220]</sup> Once these swaths of earth had been seized, Rivera and his followers wished to pursue an aggressive campaign of reforestation, while also granting pieces of land to aspiring farmers.<sup>[221]</sup> Rivera is clear in his criticism of the alternative, leftist land reform legislation. This approach by the national government was done on a compromise basis, yet to the right-wing syndicalists it simply resulted in an elaborate disaster which shielded the rich from any substantial discomfort.<sup>[222]</sup> Quite poignantly for our study, Rivera alludes to the feudalistic system of the past as being in some ways superior to capitalism, largely due to its treatment of workers and requirements that they are provided for, perhaps here referring to the “commons” system of that time.<sup>[223]</sup>

Capitalism by contrast is exploitive, and turns men into slaves.<sup>[224]</sup> We record a similar opinion on the matter from Otto Strasser, a rival to Hitler who advocated “state feudalism” in opposition to both communism and capitalism.<sup>[225]</sup>

As an important historical note, we should consider that Francisco Franco’s association with the Falange did not result in his adoption of Rivera’s farm proposals. The Spanish leader (*El Caudillo*) did initially employ a corporatist system somewhat modeled off of Italy wherein strikes were banned, independent labor unions lost their free status, and wages were fixed by the government.<sup>[226]</sup> Efforts were made to ban foreign products from Spain and pursue a system of economic autarky, but Franco’s model skewed towards his power base of large landowners and rich industrialists,<sup>[227]</sup> directly conflicting with the National Syndicalist concepts of land reform and dislodging wealthy interests. This rose against the *Caudillo*’s claim that he was supportive of “an integrating national Socialism,”<sup>[228]</sup> and was only enhanced by a shift towards pro-capitalist economics in the 1950s and 1960s. Hence Franco could be seen as another example of a conservative ruler staving off more genuine right-wing socialist reformers to defend the established elite classes.

## VII. Romania and the Iron Guard

The manifestation of rightist socialism in Romania provides perhaps an immeasurably authentic example of the trend, and one of the most pure. It is arguable that the latter aspect actually contributed to the movement's failure to properly take power, yet the illustration remains fascinating nonetheless. Although less well-known than other set pieces, Romania is vital to our study in its clear demonstration of how a reactionary and conservative regime could respond violently to threats presented in the form of the so-called "Far-Right."<sup>[229]</sup> This realization severely impairs suggestions that fascist groups were all simply tools of economic elites used to keep their grip on power versus vibrant left-wing socialist movements.

To understand the backdrop of Romania's flirtation with socialism of the Right, we must consider the outcome of World War I. The government in Bucharest had elected to side with the Allied Powers during the conflict, and, despite being ravaged by the war, the country emerged stronger than before. In particular, Austro-Hungary's collapse allowed Romania to absorb large parts of the former empire's territory, fulfilling the "Greater Romania" vision of some nationalists. Counterbalancing these gains in the eyes of the Right was the seizure of regions like Bessarabia with high Jewish populations, along with decades of migration by Jews from Eastern Europe into the country. The shifting demographics combined with a spread of communist influence created the conditions for a backlash embodied by groups like the Iron Guard.

### **National Christian Socialism and the Iron Guard**

The origins of the movement that would come to be known as the Iron Guard are rather disparate, but collective political ideas remain the same, revolving around a peasant and workers-based National Christian Socialism. Early political leaders included Constantin

Pancu, a tradesman, and A.C. Cuza, the nationalist professor who served as president of the National Christian Defense League.<sup>[230]</sup><sup>[231]</sup> The most dominant figure would however come in the form of Corneliu Codreanu. He was born in 1899 to Ion Codreanu, a soldier and later poet who descended from the layers of a family in the forestry guard profession.<sup>[232]</sup> During the First World War, the younger Codreanu journeyed to find his father on the frontline, and later attended infantry school, graduating as an officer just ahead of the conflict's end.<sup>[233]</sup> Without an immediate military career open, he enrolled in Iasi University to pursue a law degree, where conflict between student groups led to his expulsion from the main school, though the law faculty allowed him to continue studies.<sup>[234]</sup> Codreanu would later complete a doctorate in law at a university in France before returning to lead the burgeoning nationalist movement.

When it came into existence, the Iron Guard was simply the paramilitary branch of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, or Legionnaire Movement. Other subsets included a youth organization meant to prevent generational backsliding or corruption,<sup>[235]</sup> divisions for women, and the Legionary Worker Corps.<sup>[236]</sup> From these varied groups and their successors we can extract the legionary doctrine of National Christian Socialism, which Codreanu would aggressively promote until his death. Because of the somewhat limited material available on the philosophy and its succeeding movement, it could be tempting to dismiss Codreanu's followers as merely another offshoot of Hitler's National Socialism, where nothing unique extends outside the aesthetical sphere of politics. This would be a grave error, as both in policy offerings and enacted measures the Iron Guard featured an faithfully Romanian and vehemently socialistic nature.

## **Political and Economic Beliefs**

We will begin by examining the view on democracy. Much like Primo De Rivera, Codreanu ravages the notion that moral truth, or "right," can be handed over to whosoever pulls a larger proportion of

votes.<sup>[237]</sup> He suggests the outcome in terms of political balloting cannot be proven immutably by scientific reasoning to be correct, and yet it is accepted by the underlying principles of liberalism:

“Finding truth cannot be entrusted to majorities, just as in geometry Pythagoras’ theorem cannot be put to the multitude’s vote in order to determine or deny its validity; or just as the chemist making ammonia does not run to multitudes to put the amounts of nitrogen and hydrogen to a vote; or as an agronomist, who studied agriculture and its laws, does not have to turn to the multitude to convince himself of their validity by vote.”<sup>[238]</sup>

Democracy is also called out in the Romanian context for sheer hypocrisy. While founded on the principle of freedom and tolerance towards all opinions and factions, later Iron Guard leader Horia Sima claims those protections were not being extended at the time to the nationalist legionaries, who found themselves disenfranchised, physically attacked, and otherwise censored by the very forces committed to supposed liberties.<sup>[239]</sup> In contrast, the Iron Guard believed that the actual will of the people must be respected, even if it strayed outside the politically-desirable feelings of established parties. Thus the concept of the people’s will being represented at one moment by democratic mandate (though not at all times), becomes paramount. Should the people orient themselves and will an end to democracy, their decision must be honored, because the state is merely a modifiable garment placed over the Nation, which creates the covering and chooses how it appears.<sup>[240]</sup>

As with other right-wing socialists, the Iron Guard movement evaluated modern capitalism as a corrupt vehicle advancing the power of subversive Jewish foreigners. Where they break with others is in an overtly spiritual assessment of the system, along with real-life, organic solutions. Codreanu outlines how the Jews scheme to gain influence by bribing politicians and ingratiating themselves

within the leadership of corporations. Once entrenched inside a market sector, they double-team Romanian merchants by deliberately “underselling” goods, thus forcing their target out of business and proceeding to dominate sales through a monopoly of sorts.<sup>[241]</sup> To make up for temporary losses from their practice, the coordinating Jews get funds from the kabal, or Romanian Jewish community.<sup>[242]</sup> We have certainly seen this idea before, where the nostalgic “good” or “honest” capitalism gets overrun by a duplicitous method pushed to enrich corrupt foreigners.

The nationalists responded not merely with words, but in fact created their own “legionary commerce” based on National Christian Socialist principles. A 1935 circular spelled out the governing ethics of this enterprise, including:<sup>[243]</sup>

- The First Motto: “No poor quality goods are sold here.”
- The Second Motto: “Only the best goods produced by the Romanian people are sold here.”
- The Third Motto: “Legionary commerce sells at just prices. In respecting the customer, he respects himself.”

Codreanu recounts a lionizing tale related to the actions of his commercial group. He notes that Jews controlled the vegetable markets in Moldavia, so Legionary students swooped down on them and began offering produce at a lower price, thus disrupting the system.<sup>[244]</sup> Although it is difficult to say how widespread or effective Iron Guard business practices were, the mere notion presents a surprisingly organic cooperative strain not visible in other settings, where movements typically used the state to influence economics.

The centrality of Codreanu’s own religious zeal also contributed to the socialist conception for Romania. In particular, there was a martyr notion wrapped with the nationalist movement, illustrated by Codreanu casting himself in parallel to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ<sup>[245]</sup> and stating, “We kill ourselves in this world in order to build another, a higher one reaching heaven.”<sup>[246]</sup> This determination encouraged the Guard’s leadership to oppose

compromise<sup>[247]</sup> and remain financially independent of capitalist interests, which were seen as detrimental to ideological autonomy.<sup>[248]</sup> Codreanu likened big business financing to a medicine upon which one becomes dependent, and soon a slave. Instead, the Iron Guard attempted to fund itself through literature subscriptions and cooperative campaigns.<sup>[249]</sup> Codreanu would argue that it was not enough to beat Communism, for the workers had to be protected, and the oligarchies dealt with.<sup>[250]</sup> He would speak in parliament in response to the February 1933 railway shop strike massacre, arguing the workers were justified in protesting because they were starving.<sup>[251]</sup> Later writings by Codreanu reference elimination of the Jews from Romania's economy, the development of national productive power, and protections (tariffs or subsidies) for Romanian industries.<sup>[252]</sup>

As far as the economically socialist realm is concerned, the organization demonstrated remarkable allegiance to collectivist principles and planning, outlining National Christian Socialist policies along the following terms:<sup>[253]</sup>

- Workers encouraged have children.
- Insurance risk funds for employees.
- Collective storehouses with food and clothing for workers.
- Organization of national unions and syndicates.
- Social harmony based on class cooperation.
- Nationalization of factories, with workers gaining profit shares.
- Redistribution of land to the peasantry.

One must stress that the government reform program advanced by members of the Iron Guard was not limited to paper, "what if?" scenarios. Even against the wishes of government authorities, the legionaries made a concentrated effort to realize their dreams on a collective basis. In Ugheni, a town with a large Jewish population, Codreanu organized a group of his followers to gather supplies such as bricks and construct a "cultural camp," or meeting center for the

movement.<sup>[254]</sup> The entire building struggle was directed on a model of cooperative objectives, using individual workers and in-group donations to become successful.<sup>[255]</sup> At the heart of the concept was Codreanu's disbelief that intellectuals should be left to theorize, while seeing physical labor as being beneath them. In this way the simple worker could be held in higher regard than a bureaucrat, as the former was directly connected to the product of his own labor.

The camp model would spread to encompass twenty locations across the country, with each center incorporating 30-300 individuals.<sup>[256]</sup> They had the interesting effect of unifying Romanians of all classes under the guise of a common mission,<sup>[257]</sup> and especially so after Codreanu made passage through them a mandatory requirement for advancement in the organization.<sup>[258]</sup> Members of the Iron Guard would plan special activities out of the camp, such as caring for the sick or building a dike to prevent flooding, a project which government authorities tried to disrupt due to their political motivations.<sup>[259]</sup>

## **Jews and Racial Socialism**

Negative perceptions of the Jews had existed culturally in Romania for many years, but major divergences were brought to light by economic trends in society.<sup>[260]</sup> Jews often worked as entrepreneurs or bankers, occupying a position in the middle class starkly opposed to the large peasant population, where pro-nationalist sentiment was strong.<sup>[261]</sup> There were even hostile viewpoints generated around the logging industry, in which some Jews had started companies that were seen as "grabbing the forests" of native Romanian people.<sup>[262]</sup> If such an idea seems bizarre to modern readers, we must remember the crucial nature of myth and land being tied to race in a spiritual manner by right-wing socialist groups.

Jews struck a grim tone on two other fronts as well. Their predominance in the middle class created a large proportion making

up the university population versus native Romanians,<sup>[263]</sup> a fact deemed unacceptable by nationalist observers. The early response from such national activists came in the form of *Numerus Clausus*, or “Attention to their great number.”<sup>[264]</sup> Put simply, the campaign was designed to cap the number of Jews permitted in university slots and certain professions, with a professed goal to better represent the demographics of Romania. As Codreanu explained it, whatever percent Jews made up of the national population would serve as the ceiling for their access.<sup>[265]</sup> He does however allude to the move being only a partial step, for it leaves existing Jewish groups in place.<sup>[266]</sup> The later non-Iron Guard administration under Alexandru Vaida-Voevod would in fact adopt a similar policy known as *Numerus Valachicus*, which was less overtly anti-Jewish but with the same practical effect.<sup>[267]</sup>

In addition, Codreanu claimed that anti-Jewishness was not based in racial hatred, but instead justified on the basis of Jews violating natural and social laws:

“The Jewish problem in Romania, as elsewhere, consists of the infringement by Jews of this natural law of the territory. They trespassed on our territory. They are the infractors and it is not we, the Romanian people, who are called to bear the consequences of their infraction. Elementary logic tells us: the infractor must bear the consequences of the committed infraction. Will he have to suffer? Let him suffer! All infractors suffer. No logic in the world will tell me that I should die for the infraction committed by others. Thus, the Jewish problem is not born of ‘racial hatred.’ It is born of an infraction committed by Jews against the laws and natural order in which all peoples of the world live. The solution to the Jewish problem? Here it is: the re-entry of infractors into the universal natural order and their respecting natural legality.”<sup>[268]</sup>

This notion of Jews (and other minorities) being unwelcome or alien to the land of Romania was hammered home in a piece of

writing by Professor I. Gavanescul, who argued that his countrymen were being displaced in their country and its institutions by groups incapable of crafting the national Romanian identity.<sup>[269]</sup> Nationalist clubs also strongly opposed an attempt in 1923 by liberal associations to amend the nation's constitution and change Article 7, a section specifically barring foreigners from attaining citizenship and thus, by extension, the Jewish People.<sup>[270]</sup>

Another angle condemning Romanian Jews was tangential: Russia's communist revolution in 1917. Jews had long been affiliated with communism, rightly or wrongly, a perception only boosted by common availability of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* in Romania.<sup>[271]</sup> With the 1919 conflict between Bucharest and the communist government in Hungary, many average Romanians felt besieged and vulnerable to a spreading leftist revolutionary power.<sup>[272]</sup> Said conditions helped inform nationalist beliefs that a Bolshevik conspiracy was in motion to add Romania to the burgeoning Soviet bloc.<sup>[273]</sup> Jewish association with leftists, real or imagined, only served to enhance the harsh outlooks by the public, turning them against the minority group. It would also nudge the Iron Guard's leadership towards the Axis in the lead-up to World War II, with the alliance being viewed as necessary to prevent a Soviet takeover of Bucharest.<sup>[274]</sup>

## **The National Legionary State**

Codreanu's challenge to the later dictatorship of King Carol led to his imprisonment and murder in 1938. He was succeeded by Horia Sima, who eventually joined the National Legionary State government headed by military leader Ion Antonescu in 1941.<sup>[275]</sup> Details about the specific policies of the NLS are limited, perhaps in part due to its brief existence. A pogrom launched by the Iron Guard against Bessarabian Jews took place in early 1941, claiming 1,000 lives, and shortly thereafter the movement rebelled against

Antonescu himself. Hitler reportedly provided encouragement for the incumbent Romanian leader to eliminate the Iron Guard,<sup>[276]</sup> which Antonescu did during a bloody counterrevolution in 1941, destroying much of the organization. Thousands of members were arrested, and Horia Sima fled to seek exile in Germany.<sup>[277]</sup> Antonescu would rule until 1944, when the impending Soviet invasion resulted in his removal, along with later execution.

The information available concerning the NLS largely surrounds several major reforms, some of which extended into the administration of Antonescu's later conservative government. First, the cabinet made a push to eliminate corruption in both the private sector and state administration.<sup>[278]</sup> Part of this was achieved by abolishing local councils and replacing them with a corporatist-style system of committees staffed by government officials and representatives of various industries.<sup>[279]</sup> Furthermore, a policy of "Romanization" was enacted for the economy which required private businesses to replace their Jewish employees with Romanians by the end of 1941, although some Jews were excluded.<sup>[280]</sup> Additional rules banning Jews from certain professions and from renting pharmacies were also promulgated.<sup>[281]</sup> Next, Antonescu's regime proceeded to create the National Center for Romanization, an agency dedicated to managing the process of nationalizing Jewish assets so they might be distributed to benefit the nation at-large.<sup>[282]</sup> To fund the nationalization process, the government established a bank which could issue credit and speed the transfer of assets.<sup>[283]</sup> Due to the population disruption caused by war and Jewish deportations, Antonescu would authorize the issuing of state credits to Romanians wishing to start businesses or cooperatives in those depleted areas, offering a modified version of that socialism advocated by the Iron Guard.<sup>[284]</sup> The national government took added action to seize the forest holdings of all Jews as well,<sup>[285]</sup> honoring previously-mentioned concerns about tree being "stolen" by non-Romanians.

Ultimately, Antonescu failed to bring about the full range of Iron Guard proposals, and members of the latter movement faded into obscurity. The case remains crucial however because we see that it is entirely possible for a right-wing socialist movement to find conflict versus a government tightly aligned with conservative interests and nationalism. This observation will prove invaluable as we venture into the grim history of Romania's fellow participant in the Axis alliance: Nazi Germany.

## VIII. Germany and National Socialism

Germany carries with it an especially delightful appeal as we wade into the subject of rightist socialism. For many on the Left, it provides a clear-cut indictment of any proposed concept that alternative socialism exists, because they believe Adolf Hitler merely carried the water of the rich and privileged. As we shall soon come to understand, this perception is quite warped when compared against the historical facts. Hitler's socialism may have been warlike and destructive, but it did deliver a great advancement in the public welfare, albeit at the cost of many non-Germans. Before we broach this subject however, it is important to recognize what precisely National Socialism is, and all which remains separate from the philosophy.

### **The Other National Socialism**

The great tragedy of investigating World War II history relates to how profoundly sworn people are to their own biases on the conflict. Narratives and labels have become so absolute that the layman will associate one thing with the other (such a socialism), and changing his view requires a gargantuan effort. Even more devastating would have to be the term "National Socialism," which is immediately associated with the most extreme varieties of racial hatred and genocide. The problem with that perspective is that the term long predates Nazism, whether as a unique array of party movements like in France,<sup>[286]</sup> <sup>[287]</sup> or the nationalized socialism of Giuseppe Mazzini, who himself condemned certain forms of nationalism and racial chauvinism.<sup>[288]</sup> <sup>[289]</sup>

Mazzini deserves special mention here because of his influence. Though often outshined by the more well-known figures of Camillo Cavour and Giuseppe Garibaldi in the Italian unification movement, he contributed heavily to the pro-republican cause through decades

of article writing, along with the publication of multiple books. Otto Strasser would later describe him as someone who advanced the religious and national aspects of socialism, as compared to Marx's economic contribution and the nihilistic message of Bakunin, the latter described that way perhaps due to his association with anarchism.<sup>[290]</sup> In his seminal work, *The Duties of Man*, Mazzini argued for a republican image within the Italian sphere based upon duty to God and the enshrinement of education, which he saw as the "bread of the soul," and something denied to the poor based on their long hours of work to survive.<sup>[291]</sup> He further insisted that the cause of liberty would be undermined by those unable to afford or enjoy its benefits due to the economic system's design.<sup>[292]</sup> This perspective aligns well with Marx's own focus on liberating the working man to develop "the product of his own labor."

As a counterweight to the liberal thrust towards economic freedom, he believed such a pursuit without consideration of rights and aspirations for the common man would be unsuccessful.<sup>[293]</sup> Various principles, which we shall see adopted by the Strasserists, are employed in Mazzini's vision for Italy, including:<sup>[294]</sup> <sup>[295]</sup>

- Decentralization of power.
- Creation of public enterprises.
- Nationalization of the credit industry, with lending based on reputation, not assets.
- Land reform and redistribution.

Although associated with certain socialist viewpoints, Mazzini also condemned Marxism for destroying man's motivation to better himself and his opportunities to progress. This criticism would be echoed later by Otto Strasser as he drew a contrast between rightist socialism and Marxist socialism.<sup>[296]</sup> Furthermore, Mazzini would indict socialism as a whole for fixating on the materialistic interests of the workers while at the same time ignoring any sense of moral duty to the nation.<sup>[297]</sup> Instead, he suggests a model based on

harmonization, as we have already become familiar with in this study. Mazzini argues workers should join capitalists and labor together for the good of the country rather than seeing one another as enemies of the common interest.<sup>[298]</sup>

Some observers like to take Mazzini's economic ideas in tandem with an article he authored concerning the Mediterranean Sea's realm to link him directly with Italian Fascism.<sup>[299]</sup> There is no doubt that some Fascists were inspired by Mazzini, but his overall message is quite unique in the proposal for a league of nations to promote European cooperation and harmony.<sup>[300]</sup> Additionally, Mazzini's views on social justice are quite removed from many rightist socialists. He would come to the defense of black Americans in the 1850s by pointing out the contradiction of slave owners claiming blacks were inferior, while at the same time blocking their access to education.<sup>[301]</sup> Women were also viewed differently, with Mazzini encouraging his audiences to not mistreat the female sex. In fact, he went so far as to deny men and women existed, arguing that people should be viewed only as human beings, with none denied access to education.<sup>[302]</sup>

## **The Cultural Foundations of National Socialism**

The National Socialist split between more radical alternatives and a broader people's socialism under Hitler is the crowning subject for our study. It begins conceptually with a harkening back to the movement towards nature in romantic circles of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. During the same period, the administration of Otto Von Bismarck had unified the German states and instituted a national policy designed to undercut the rising socialist threat, implementing both pensions and social welfare.<sup>[303]</sup> From the aftermath of this political consolidation was birthed the *volkstaat* concept, which itself was an extraction of *völkisch*, or people's culture. Put simply, the *volkstaat* was a nature-based community meant to embody the unity of the people and their spiritual destiny. Völkisch thinkers tended to believe land had a unique effect on groups of people who were native to its

region, a view shared in part by the philosopher Georg Hegel.<sup>[304]</sup> Hence some viewed the forests of Germany as an encapsulation of mystery or spirituality, this contrasted with Jews, who originated in the desert and were seen to be barren, or devoid of higher values.<sup>[305]</sup> We must not however fall into the trap of painting all völkisch thinkers as a monolith. For instance, one writer known to express racially controversial opinions actually believed Jews represented the apex of Aryan culture.<sup>[306]</sup>

Contingent to the return to nature is a centrality for the role of myth. Race replaced reality with the mythos conception driving a people, directly rejecting the aesthetic and anti-spiritual ideas presented by the Enlightenment.<sup>[307]</sup> The prevailing *volkgeist* (people's spirit) myth served here as an eternal heritage,<sup>[308]</sup> so individuals could not transcend their past merely by embracing liberalism or the assumed equality of all groups. What emerged from this dynamic was metapolitics, itself an expression of the subconscious völkisch spirit of race, or secular religion.<sup>[309]</sup> In certain circles the Volk even represented a cosmic principle, embodying the positive aspect versus a Jewish negative one.<sup>[310]</sup>

Like we have seen before, the proclivities of liberal individualism were seen in a toxic light based on their corruption of culture and tradition. Some went so far as to define the Volk as God's kingdom,<sup>[311]</sup> while the writer Swedenborg believed each society featured its own unique version of heaven, set at varied distances from God based on their relative, earth-based intensity.<sup>[312]</sup> Early völkisch thinkers constructed alongside their derision for modernity a harsh view of industrialism and urbanism, both factors that would pollute the goodness and purity of the people.<sup>[313]</sup> At the same time, certain theorists perceived advanced military technology under the "beauty of labor" notion, allowing them to use such means to become powerful in the lead-up to the Second World War.<sup>[314]</sup> These differing outlooks would flare up even among the Nazi leaders, with Alfred

Rosenberg favoring a return to German medieval ruralism and Joseph Goebbels preferring modern industrialization.<sup>[315]</sup>

With the big cities being condemned as hives of spiritual decay and Jewish greed,<sup>[316]</sup> there was naturally an appreciation for the idealized rural setting. Peasants and farms were especially valued because they appeared to be the closest human link to nature and the soil,<sup>[317]</sup> both inseparable from the Volk. By defending the traditional way of life from encroaching Jewish capitalists and usurers, the German man would be denying further corrosion of his culture and people,<sup>[318]</sup> thus avoiding the rise of *gefühlsarmut*, or poverty of spirit.<sup>[319]</sup> The most immediate solution to this struggle came in the form of small, self-sustaining utopian models that could be relied upon to safeguard the Volk,<sup>[320]</sup> even to the extent of arguing for them “states within a state” and supporting revolution if the government acted against this principle.<sup>[321]</sup>

Through such models of radical departure from modernity the German National Socialists assumed they could design an idealized society to support the people, especially in the realm of race. An important influencer for the Germans on this topic was Comte George de Lapouge, whose literature promoted a socialist society grounded in the idea of racial purity, using a system of organized reproduction to ensure continuation of the people.<sup>[322]</sup> Nazi thinkers expounded on the issue by cautioning followers over the threat which racial betrayal posed through women. According to their line of theory, German women who had sexual relations with Jews would keep the traits of their ex-lovers, so even children produced later with a German man would bear Jewish characteristics.<sup>[323]</sup>

## **Early National Socialist Activism**

One of the first examples of the socialist utopian concept was the Peasant League of Hessa, which existed from 1885-1894. Led by Otto Bockel, the miniature state managed to deliberately threaten the entrenched interests of conservative farming groups with certain key

economic reforms of socialism and public education.<sup>[324]</sup> Bockel explicitly targeted the Jewish-heavy area of Hessa and helped organize rural cooperatives operated by peasants to provide a mass market for both agricultural and consumer goods.<sup>[325]</sup> He went further by starting banks offering interest-free loans, promoting natural resource nationalization, and excluding Jews from markets.<sup>[326]</sup>

An important figure that contributed to National Socialism shortly after Bockel's movement was the populist mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger, who served in office from 1897-1910. Although he maintained friendships with Jews, Lueger and his Christian Social Party led a campaign oriented around anti-Semitism to great political success in the Austrian capitol.<sup>[327]</sup> The Christian Social platform focused on a rejection of prior liberal administrations by expanding state control over public utilities like electricity and gas, which were previously owned by foreign businessmen. Lueger also made substantial investments to improve the municipal transportation system, while greatly expanding health and educational services for the urban poor.<sup>[328]</sup> More pointedly on the racial front, Christian Social officials denied residency permits to certain Slavs and Jews in order to protect the city's ethnic core.<sup>[329]</sup>

Such brands of nationalistic socialism would have tremendous impact on the intellectual development of Gottfried Feder. As an economic figure, Feder remains rather obscure, probably because of his association with the Nazi regime. In some respects this reality is lamentable, for he provides some interesting perspectives on the economy seldom proposed by regular conservative or liberal persuaders. His most famous work, *Manifesto for the Abolition of Enslavement to Interest On Money*, is a brief yet thought-provoking analysis of the broader market and banking system. Lying at the heart of this financial monolith is Mammonism, which according to Feder is the "heavy, all-encompassing and overwhelming sickness which our contemporary cultural sphere, and indeed all mankind, suffers."<sup>[330]</sup> More specifically, Mammonism is manifested by the

international money powers which stand above governments and sovereignty, driven to pursue avarice and destroy traditional moral ideas.<sup>[331]</sup> The primary weapon of these forces takes shape as interest on loans, which is used to control and subvert (or enslave) those caught up in the financial struggle. Feder thus advocates an end to the private banking system through a broad-based nationalization campaign. It is interesting to note here that National Socialist thinkers were cool to the then-dominant gold standard, which appeared to be a tool used by gold-heavy countries to weaken those with less, such as Germany.

In tandem with other right-wing socialists, Feder finds great criticism for traditional leftist socialism, which he sees as misguided. While concentrating so adamantly upon the revolutionary cause, Left socialists began demonizing German employers who were not the real threat, particularly given their role as captains of industry. Leftism also brought shame to the country with its assaults on militaristic tradition and culture. Feder goes on to distinguish between finance companies and factory heads, arguing the leftists fail to appreciate how crucial addressing the interest question is to bettering German lives.<sup>[332]</sup> This idealized socialism promoted as an alternative to leftism and capitalism is then defined as:

“the idea that man is not in the world only for himself alone, that every man has duties towards his community, toward all humanity, and that he is not only responsible for the momentary well-being of his family, of the members of his tribe, of his folk, but that he also has unshakable moral obligations toward the future of his children and his folk.”<sup>[333]</sup>

The outcome of these ideas was a nuanced set of economic proposals. To start, Feder suggests certain taxes could be replaced by simply nationalizing industries and sharing their wealth in common with the people's state.<sup>[334]</sup> Food and everyday necessities would be free of taxation, while the government would still institute a wealth tax to dislodge legacy capital held by rich individuals through

inheritance or financial maneuvering.<sup>[335]</sup> In response to critics who are uneasy with the seizure of accumulated wealth by governing authorities, he argues it is better to raise healthy children than to corrupt them through a large inheritance of money.<sup>[336]</sup> A tax is also maintained to fund social services, including disability pensions.<sup>[337]</sup>

Where Feder becomes fascinating is on the question of money itself. Towards the end of his tract there is a theoretical consideration regarding whether paper (fiat) money has any value, or is simply used as a means of control. Already we know how skeptical Nazis were of the gold standard, largely because Germany's lacking supplies put it in an inferior position versus other world powers. As for legal tender, people usually see a paper bill and assume it has value, as a *bill*. According to Feder, paper money is nothing more than a voucher which transfers the value of a (typically physical) act of labor. Thus a farmer who sells his crops and receives paper money is simply conveying the value inherent to his efforts to cultivate those foods.<sup>[338]</sup> Should he take the money and purchase a new shovel, he is exchanging his valued labor of production for another person's by taking the tool home.<sup>[339]</sup> The result of such thinking lies in the concept of a labor-backed currency, which popularly advanced by National Socialist officials. An overarching advantage claimed by such figures was that money backed by labor and technology for collateral could never be inflated, as the supply would remain contingent on what the country produced, not central bank printing or manipulated exchange rates.<sup>[340]</sup> <sup>[341]</sup>

It has been argued that Hitler's pursuit of a labor-backed currency drove the international financial order against his regime, though to what extent the Nazis actually adopted the model in their economy is unclear. We do know that by the war's end the German administration was printing large amounts of Reichsmarks to fund the production of armaments, and hyperinflation surged.<sup>[342]</sup> Whether this was caused directly by general policy or the urgent effort to win is still a matter up for debate.

## Strasserism

At last we arrive at the article of imperative consideration: the more stridently revolutionary National Socialism of Otto and Gregor Strasser. These two brothers played important roles in the foundation and growth of the Nazi Party, or NSDAP, ultimately meeting different ends as a consequence. While Gregor was immensely loyal to Adolf Hitler and stayed with him until the downfall of 1934, Otto cast himself as a longtime critic who saw the Führer in an overwhelmingly negative light. Otto, who was himself a former member of the Socialist Party,<sup>[343]</sup> would actually formulate an underground movement known as the Black Front to oppose Hitler's regime, which he believed had compromised the authentic socialism of the movement.

It should be recognized that many in the early days of National Socialism held Strasserist tendencies, but Hitler's desire to take power outweighed those inclinations in favor a less revolutionary approach. Joseph Goebbels for instance had once discussed the possibility of liquidating capitalists before changing his tune,<sup>[344]</sup> and was affiliated with Strasserism during the mid-1920s.<sup>[345]</sup> Ernst Roehm is generally associated with the revolutionary extremism of the SA, a predecessor organization to Heinrich Himmler's SS. Concurrently, Otto Strasser alludes to Roehm actually using Hitler as a pawn to infiltrate the Nazi Party on behalf of the military.<sup>[346]</sup> Furthermore, Hermann Goering finds himself portrayed as a ruthless individual obsessed only with the accumulation of power.<sup>[347]</sup> We should remember that Otto Strasser's work emerged after Hitler's involvement in Gregor's death, so the reliability of his character assessments is questionable. Nevertheless, the writings he produced provide valuable insight detailing specifics of the alternative socialist position.

As the Nazis began to gain strength on a national basis, differing opinions about how economics should be approached caused a rift in the party. The radical leftist proposal in the Hanover party

resolution to expropriate the property of German princes had begun to frighten the upper classes, who feared an expansion of this approach.<sup>[348]</sup> The matter became even more serious after a series of labor strikes in Saxony were endorsed by the Strasser brothers. Outraged business owners condemned the behavior and warned they would withdraw financial support, leading the Nazi leadership to deride the strike.<sup>[349]</sup> Otto Strasser viewed this move as an abandonment of the NSDAP's traditional position, which viewed anti-capitalism as the centerpiece of policy.<sup>[350]</sup>

While his brother Gregor elected to work inside the party machine and effect change, Otto increasingly drew contrasts with the Führer based in philosophy. A particularly crucial example of this would be on the very notion of a Third Reich. Literary foundation for the concept can be found in a book written by Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, who outlined three great eras established by German history. These included Charlemagne and the Holy Roman Empire, Otto von Bismarck and Kaiser Wilhelm, and finally a third model, intended to be a federalized Christian Europe.<sup>[351]</sup> Conversely, Hitler claimed to see a line running from Bismarck to the Weimar Republic, and finally himself.<sup>[352]</sup>

## **Conservative Socialism and Strasserist Influence**

Bruck is of undeniable importance to our study because he directly influenced many of Otto Strasser's political ideas and programs. Despite taking his life at a relatively young age, Bruck provided a written legacy that would fuel countless designs in the National Socialist movement, and especially those of the Strasserist column. His book, *Germany's Third Empire*, shapes the alternative socialist perspective:

“When we now talk of a German socialism, we do not of course mean the socialism of the social democrat in which the party took refuge after our collapse; neither do we mean the logical Marxist socialism which refuses to abandon the class war of the International. We mean rather a corporative conception of state and economics, which must perhaps have a revolutionary foundation, but will then seek conservative stability. [...] Socialism for us means uprooting, re-organization, gradation. International socialism does not exist.”<sup>[353]</sup>

In the same section, Bruck references how the guild system supported by his brand of socialism is taken from the Middle Ages, another consistent theme we have explored in the broader topic of this book.<sup>[354]</sup> There is also a sense that Marx’s ideas stripped away from workers their culture and traditional values:

“As a man of mere intellect he stood aloof from all national ties. As a Jew he had no country. So he assured the proletarians that they had no country either. He persuaded them that there was no such thing as a unity of land and nation; the only common tie between man and man was economic interest and that this tie—disregarding barriers of nation and language—united them with the proletariat of all other countries. He sought to rob the working classes of all those values which were theirs by right of birth; values which had been won for them by their fathers and their forefathers, and which were their inheritance also, since, though proletarians, they had not needed to form a part of the nation.”<sup>[355]</sup>

Complicit with other right-wing social theorists, Bruck was more sympathetic towards the system of capitalism insofar as its small-scale entrepreneurs or inventors were creating technology and *value*. He actually proceeds to castigate Marx for relying too much on crude stereotypes of industrialists or businessmen while never stopping to consider how the development of factories may have been in some way an answer to the needs created by population growth.<sup>[356]</sup> There is also an appeal for socialism to focus not on the

Marxian conception of distributing surplus value, but on the sharing out of “management-value,”<sup>[357]</sup> which could entail involvement of workers in administration or their encouragement to innovate and make the business better.

Later on in his text, Bruck speculates as to whether elements in the German working classes will be able to nudge the proletarian cause in a “national-socialist direction,”<sup>[358]</sup> and draws a clear line of distinction between reactionary politics and conservatism, where he seems to find an ideological home.<sup>[359]</sup> Here conservatism contrasts with the emptiness of reactionary ideas and the destruction of revolutionary aspiration, serving throughout time and history as a realist perspective and “the law of nature.”<sup>[360]</sup> Bruck does however note that German conservatives forgot the imperative of winning and constantly re-winning what they sought to conserve, thus causing the ideology to decline.<sup>[361]</sup> Conservative beliefs in this context are not necessarily free market liberalism, to be clear, but rather feature socialistic notions of their own. As Bruck notes:

“The conservative for his part overcame the mechanical socialism, which was purely theoretic, by an organic socialism which could be put in practice. He conceived a socialism that should start with the group, with the community, with the corporative unity of the whole nation. Such a socialism was familiar to the conservative from the idea of guilds and callings and professions which he had inherited from the specifically German past.”<sup>[362]</sup>

The national (or cultural) approach to socialism is also alluded to by German theorist Oswald Spengler in his famous essay, *Prussianism and Socialism*. Here he attempts to contrast the general idea of socialism with those notions of Marx, who he calls the “stepfather” of the concept:

“Socialism contains elements that are older, stronger, and more fundamental than his critique of society. Such elements existed

without him and continued to develop without him, in contrary to him. They are not to be found on paper; they are in the blood. And only the blood can decide the future.”<sup>[363]</sup>

Spengler continues by appealing for labor to “rid itself of its Marxist illusions” in favor of “Prussian socialism,”<sup>[364]</sup> under which a process can take place of transforming “the worker into an economic civil servant, of the employer into a responsible administrative official with extensive powers of authority, and of property into a kind of old-style hereditary fief to which a certain number of rights and privileges are attached.”<sup>[365]</sup> Such a position follows the trend we have witnessed previously, wherein rightist socialism endorses class ascension and development for workers while not entirely abolishing the capitalist system.

In fact, Spengler argues liberty will not be eliminated by his perspective: “In socialism the economic will remains as free as that of the chess player; only the end effect follows a regulated course.”<sup>[366]</sup> His model presumes that socialism is not focused on a divide between rich and poor, but “by rank as determined by achievement and ability.”<sup>[367]</sup> He concludes by warning conservatives that “there can be only conscious socialization or annihilation.”<sup>[368]</sup>

There is an obvious political impact on Otto Strasser caused by both of the aforementioned writers. In his most prominent work, *Germany Tomorrow*, Strasser outlines a version of National Socialism which attempts to differentiate itself from the version that ruled the Third Reich. Strasser notably describes his philosophy at one point as “Conservative realism”<sup>[369]</sup> and the individual actor pursuing political goals as the “conservative revolutionary.”<sup>[370]</sup> Once more, we cannot take the conservative label to imply complete agreement with traditional market liberal principles; in fact, one of the primary pylons supporting his position is that existing protections for private property must be modified so as to pursue the broader national cause.<sup>[371]</sup> He even goes on to outline a distinct break with traditional conservatives and nationalists on the socialism question:

“We start from the idea that a nation is made up of persons who have a community of fates. Now to have a community of fates signifies that there must be a community of needs, and if there is a community of needs there must be a community of bread.”<sup>[372]</sup>

Strasser’s quote is invaluable because it helps us understand a critical break in national socialism of different varieties. Right-wing socialists often spoke of their ideas applying to the collective *nation*, but did not always advance reforms to the materialistic, or state-provided level. We see this with Hermann Goering, who specifically indicted the Social Democrats for fixating on issues like food and wages at the expense of the more intangible notion of sacrifice in favor of the community.<sup>[373]</sup> We begin to reveal the most evident examples of the Strasserite contrast when policy positions are unveiled.

### **Strasserism as Economic Policy**

In regards to the political specifics of Strasserite ideology, it drew both from the cultural and racial aspects of National Socialism, although Otto attempts to play down the latter element throughout his writings. The crux is a land reform plan similar to those offered by the Spanish National Syndicalists and Romanian Iron Guard:

“In the economic field it was opposed alike to Marxism and capitalism. We foresaw a new equilibrium on the basis of state feudalism. The state was to be the sole owner of the land, which it would lease to private citizens. All were to be free to do as they liked with their own land, but no one could sell or sublet state property. In this way we hoped to combat proletarianization

and restore a sense of liberty to state property. No man is free who is not economically independent.”<sup>[374]</sup>

What remains rather interesting about this policy suggestion is its argument that state ownership of land promotes freedom. The Spanish and Romanian approaches incorporated interest-free loans and redistribution, but Strasser opts for an all-out socialization of agriculture, with the transformation of landed estates into “state fiefdoms.”<sup>[375]</sup> Central to the Strasserite objective in this regard is the diminishment of Prussian authority within the German state, and loosening the grip of the land-owning Junkers class from control of around 25 percent of agricultural land.<sup>[376]</sup> Because Strasser sought to establish a federalized German system, he believed it was necessary to prevent the historically paramount and domineering Prussian culture of militarism from leading his country towards authoritarianism and war.

The land reform concept further incorporates a patriarchal system of inheritance for leased state property. To start, farm sizes are limited, and the possessor is required to pay a land tax to the government for its use,<sup>[377]</sup> although his surplus production will be tax-free.<sup>[378]</sup> Should the farmer pass away, the expectation is that one of his sons will take over the operation and continue the tradition into a new generation. Otherwise the farm reverts back to the community, and local authorities oversee a process of doling it out to an aspiring agriculturalist.<sup>[379]</sup> Hence the soil connected to all German people can never be sold or occupied by foreigners, because the government will always be able to determine that it stays within the tribe or race. If this concept of man’s connection to land seems rather strange, we might benefit from citing the speech of Chief Seattle towards the American government in 1855:

“We know the sap that courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are a part of the earth and it is part of us. Perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The

rocky crests, the juices in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man, all belong to the same family. The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land you must remember it is sacred.”<sup>[380]</sup>

Strasserism also calls for the nationalization of “industrial inheritances” such as large natural resource-based companies or mines.<sup>[381]</sup> In regards to factory or capital property nationalization, Strasser proposed a model wherein the government would capture 41 percent of ownership, workers 10 percent, and the private sector owners 49 percent. Profits from production would then be distributed on the basis of 51 percent for workers and 49 percent for private owners.<sup>[382]</sup> Specific practices of management and profit-sharing would fall under the “Factory Fellowship” program, wherein workers and owners collaborate for their common interests.<sup>[383]</sup> Although less radical in composition than total nationalization, it did open the possibility of the workers and state colluding to override private interests on questions of management. There is also a break with Marxism and capitalism on the notion of labor:

“The conservative revolutionist regards labour as nothing but the means for the maintenance of life, an instrument which can only transcend narrow limits in the higher form of ‘creation.’ Consequently industrial work with its murderous monotony must somehow enable the individual worker to find a chance for ‘creation’ outside his daily round of toil, i.e. this daily round must not claim more than a fraction of his life. (But at the same time as much attention as possible must always be paid to the ‘spiritualization’ of daily labour itself).”<sup>[384]</sup>

With such models in both the industrial and agricultural sections of economy, an inevitable debate over private property materializes. On the one hand, right-wing socialists desired to remove private control over land, resources, and property, but on the other they speak of an imperative to “deproletarianize” the average German by

giving him access to possessions and allowing his creative energies to flow.<sup>[385]</sup> This latter objective is of course in keeping with rightist socialism's drive to permit class ascension as opposed to communist stagnancy. To harmonize the two dissenting aspects, Strasser makes a distinction of terms between *Eigentum* (private property) and *Besitz* (possession):

“To have a thing as one's ‘private property’ means that one can do what one likes with it — can sell it, injure it, or destroy it at will. To have ‘possession’ of a thing means usufruct, that one is entitled to use the thing, to exploit it, but subject to the will and supervision of another, the substantial ‘owner’, whose ‘private property’ it is.”<sup>[386]</sup>

If we consider the aforementioned reform concept of state feudalism, this somewhat whimsical understanding of property is more acceptable. Essentially, Strasserists believed one had to prevent the sectioning off of German land to foreign interests without ties to the soil by insisting on ownership in common, closely regulated by the state. However, the government would not be running farms and factories as one might expect in Soviet Russia; in fact, Strasser harshly condemns the notions of both State Socialism and State Capitalism. <sup>[387]</sup> Instead, the conservative realist model lets the state safeguard the resources and soil of the Germanic people, while not devolving into the debased materialism of pure capitalism or communism. The approach has the theoretical ability to allow individual citizens to lease land and produce crops or run businesses that channel their creative and entrepreneurial spirits, albeit without any risk of them selling out to non-German interests. There is an important linkage here with the traditional European principle of *extra commercium*, which barred nobles from offering up their lands for sale to protect the political and economic model of tenant farming.<sup>[388]</sup>

This notion of national sovereignty bleeds into the financial system and provisions of public assistance. Much like Gottfried

Feder, Strasser sounds off on the nature of money with an immensely skeptical tone towards the role of gold and paper. He argues that men actually strive to exchange one commodity for another, rather than enshrining worth within the physical currency. [\[389\]](#) Money thus becomes a means to an end rather than the finish point, and conservative realism calls for an end to mortgages, to be replaced by a reputation or vouching-based credit system without “concrete security,” [\[390\]](#) striking a common tone against the perceived injustices created by finance capitalism.

In regards to welfare, Strasserism insists on a level of consolidation to serve the German public. Rather than using individualized programs, he adopts a system of unified life insurance to cover issues such as childhood security, unemployment, accident, old age, and death, with the option of a supplementary voluntary insurance program for additional allowances. [\[391\]](#) Added provisions extend the pension system used by government officials to cover the entire population, ensuring they are not impoverished in old age. [\[392\]](#)

### **The Political Model of Strasserism**

Where the organs of statecraft are concerned, Strasserism elects for a model far removed from what eventually developed under Adolf Hitler. The government of Hitler operated under the *führerprinzip* idea, which held that the unifying leader’s word would be respected above all laws and division of power. In fact, Hermann Goering described their belief by noting that “so do we National Socialists believe with the same inner conviction that for us the Leader is in all political and other matters concerning the national and social interests of the people simply infallible.” [\[393\]](#) Strasser breaks from this approach by endorsing a devolved form of socialist administration designed to break centralized authority. His description of the state’s role is as follows:

“The State must originate out of the nature of the people; it should arrange the people’s life, and reduce internal friction to a

minimum, for then the outwardly directed energies will grow more powerful. [...] This conception of the State as the best possible organization of the people involves the rejection on principle of the demigod role which all dictators and would-be dictators ascribe to the State, and implies the frank avowal of the 'people's State.'"<sup>[394]</sup>

As a consequence of this understanding, political administration is developed in the fashion of Swiss-style cantons focused on the various tribes in Germany, each enjoying voluntary membership in the federal German Reich and possessing systems of self-government.<sup>[395]</sup> In line with Otto Strasser's long-running opposition to Prussian militarism, the national army would be abolished in favor of a state militia, to be possibly superseded at some future date by the federative *European* army of his envisioned supranational union.<sup>[396]</sup>

To administer the future state of Germany, Strasser advocated representation along the lines of a layered corporative parliament. These would scale upwards at various levels, beginning with the smallest unit (an administrative "circle") and up to the national, governing matters such as wages, work conditions, training, and the nomination of leaders to vacant posts.<sup>[397]</sup> The Strasserist vision features five primary economic groups:<sup>[398]</sup>

- Manual Workers
- Peasants
- Employees and Officials
- Manufacturers and Traders
- Liberal Professions

An additional measure is the creation of "joint chambers of estates" wherein the people themselves will exercise influence over the machinations of government.<sup>[399]</sup> These legislative organs would exist in staggered form from the national level to that of the state and

local,<sup>[400]</sup> with each higher body being elected by members of the lower vocational assembly,<sup>[401]</sup> effectively blocking the idea of eternal power by one organization or leader. In Strasser's estimation this design stands to prevent any future domination by Hitlerite National Socialists, the Communist Party, or the reactionary forces of Germany.<sup>[402]</sup> The estates system is designed in this manner:

“The Circle Chamber of Estates will consist of twenty-five persons elected by the vocational councils of that circle and three additional members nominated by the circle president. These nominees must be eminent and respected inhabitants of the circle. The Provincial Chamber of Estates will consist of fifty persons elected by the vocational councils of the province and five additional members nominated by the president of the province. The Reich Chamber of Estates will consist of one hundred persons elected by the vocational councils of the Reich and ten additional members nominated by the president of the Reich.”

The estates are specifically required to remain membership which is representative of the professions within its particular state. Thus a province with 25 percent of its population employed as peasants would need to grant the same percentage of seats to individuals from that background.<sup>[403]</sup> At the same time, no vocation is permitted to exceed 50 percent of the total membership in any chamber so as to prevent domination by one particular industry.<sup>[404]</sup> Finally, the presidium of each estate chamber is made up of the five chairmen of that level's respective vocational councils.<sup>[405]</sup>

On the national level, the Strasserist system is crowned by the Reich president, a figurehead elected for life with the power to appoint minister-advisors who can help him lead the federal government.<sup>[406]</sup> The Reich's president holds authority to appoint the president of each province (for 7-year terms) on the advice and consent of that province's parliament.<sup>[407]</sup> In sequence, the president

of a province appoints his equivalent to the presidency of an administrative circle (for a 5-year term) in this case with the approval of the circle's own assembly.<sup>[408]</sup> While circle and provincial presidents can see their mandates ended if they lose confidence in the local parliament,<sup>[409]</sup> Strasser does not clearly indicate whether the Reich president can be removed or otherwise forced to resign. The political dynamics operate in such a way however that a concerted effort by the other branches could stymie the executive's agenda, making him politically weakened.

Alongside the Reich president, national affairs are governed by the Great Council, a body incorporating all provincial presidents, five ministers of state, and the presidium of the Reich Chamber of Estates.<sup>[410]</sup> The Reich president theoretically influences the composition of the body based on his selection of provincial leaders, but because their terms may have begun prior to his administration, a check on power is created. Furthermore, The Great Council elects the Reich president through a majority vote, providing another guard against unlimited control in one person's hands.<sup>[411]</sup>

Coequal with the Reich president and the Great Council stands the Reich Chamber of Estates, which as we already know is elected primarily by the lower vocational body, along with a handful of seats being appointed by the Reich president. All three governmental forces hold considerable weight where national legislation is concerned, and at least two must concur for any law to become ratified or repealed across the country.<sup>[412]</sup> Strasser also warns of the tyrannical risks created by bureaucracy and "officialdom," dynamics which he sees as strangling the fundamental socialist principle of rule by the people.<sup>[413]</sup>

On the matter of supranational politics, a European federation is proposed to emphasize mutual respect and free trade, two principles at least *officially* associated with the European Union of today.<sup>[414]</sup> Strasser actually argues that the nationalist position should *oppose* involvement in wars or conquest, and advances the notion of a

unified European currency,<sup>[415]</sup> along with a customs union.<sup>[416]</sup> He further advocates the monopolization of all trade by the government as part of a scheme to promote the European idea.<sup>[417]</sup> Strasserist Nazism also demanded closer alignment with Russia, where the similar-minded National Bolshevik Party had gained some influence.<sup>[418]</sup>

Finally, Strasserism's assessment of racial socialism in the form of the Jewish People is somewhat inconclusive. While the Strasser brothers were believers in the existence of race and identity, they did not fall into the hardline positions of other Nazis like Hitler and Julius Streicher.<sup>[419]</sup> Otto tries to clearly differentiate his own movement from the Nazi regime, arguing that such racial notions can be transcended.<sup>[420]</sup> <sup>[421]</sup> It is possible that he was simply writing this way in the early 1940s to gain support of Allied forces for his anti-Hitler underground movement, the Black Front, but the separation is crucial nonetheless. In any case, he suggests the Jewish question could be handled through a combination of outmigration to the proposed Zionist state (this being prior to the foundation of Israel), or assimilation by way of them abandoning certain beliefs and practices to join with other Germans.<sup>[422]</sup> Taken as a whole, Strasser's ideas come off as a lot less hostile to Jews than those we see from members of Hitler's inner circle.

## **Hitler's National Socialism**

As clear as the preceding ideas sound, it is difficult to draw a firm contrast between the National Socialism of Hitler and that of Strasser, although both tried in their own ways to establish supremacy on the matter. Standing in the pro-Hitler column, Hermann Goering argued the joining of nationalism and socialism came about due to a confluence of middle class state actors attacking the Nazis, along with social democrats pitching socialism as a material fixation whilst dismissing the notion of service to one's community.<sup>[423]</sup> According to Goering, Hitler eliminated this problem by superseding the class and political war with a platform conducive

to the benefit of the workers, the upper classes, and the entire country.<sup>[424]</sup> Hitler would however employ a more hierarchical and pro-capitalist tune, condemning Strasser's ideas for risking the destruction of the economic system:

“What you call Socialism is just Marxism, and your whole ideas are just paper theories which have nothing to do with real life. By what right do the workers demand a part in ownership or even in management? Do you think my publisher here would allow his girl typist to tell him what to do? The employer provides his workers with bread. Our big industrialists are not concerned with making as much money as possible, with living as well as they can; responsibility and power are the things that matter for them. Their brains have brought them to the top, and this process of natural selection, which again proves their superior race, gives them a right to lead.”<sup>[425]</sup>

A common line by Strasserist sympathizers in the modern day is that Hitler betrayed the original cause with his allegiance to rich financiers. There is some truth to this claim, but largely on the basis of perspective. One generous author for instance casts Hitler as a silent revolutionary, while also trying to associate him with Strasserite objectives.<sup>[426]</sup> In truth, Adolf Hitler seems to have been a very effective politician who did what was necessary to seize power by placating powerful interests. He certainly was no democrat, having alluded to leaving office in four years if the citizenry passed judgment on the Nazis,<sup>[427]</sup> but then told an associate after the 1933 election that he would never leave the chancellor's office.<sup>[428]</sup> On socialism, his views were rather nuanced too, as shown in an address to Otto Strasser:

“I am a socialist, and a very different kind of socialist from your rich friend Reventlow. I was once an ordinary workingman. I would not allow my chauffeur to eat worse than I eat myself. But your kind of socialism is nothing but Marxism. The mass of

the working classes want nothing but bread and games. They will never understand the meaning of an ideal, and we cannot hope to win them over to one. What we have to do is to select from a new master-class men who will not allow themselves to be guided, like you, by the morality of pity. Those who rule must know that they have the right to rule because they belong to a superior race. They must maintain that right and ruthlessly consolidate it.”[\[429\]](#)

Two points must be made here. First, Hitler’s tone towards Strasser is slightly different from a notable speech he gave in 1933, where he claimed to be focused on “saving” the German farmer and worker,[\[430\]](#) along with other promises to create a “socially just state.”[\[431\]](#) Furthermore, the racial aspect and hierarchy to Hitler’s socialism, which Strasser casts as being anti-National Socialist,[\[432\]](#) is a break from traditional, leftist socialism.[\[433\]](#)

Upon taking power, the Führer’s approach becomes unquestionably complicated to discern. Over the last several decades two books in particular have emerged, each providing a formidable argument concerning how Hitler prosecuted his National Socialist agenda. First, Adam Tooze’s *The Wages of Destruction* portrays the Nazi state as a largely pro-business “dictatorship of the bosses” in which corporate profits skyrocketed, embarrassing the regime.[\[434\]](#) The main issue with Tooze’s approach is the employment of a broad, market liberal assessment of the regime, with minimal consideration of specific taxes or welfare programs. This presents a picture that is endearing to the spectating Marxist or libertarian observer, confirming their viewpoints about the fakeness of Nazi socialism. Unfortunately, it also fails to offer adequate explanation for the direct benefits foisted upon the German people themselves, and often only vaguely explains funding measures, leaving a somewhat lacking product in place.

The other volume of note is *Hitler’s Beneficiaries* by Götz Aly. This contribution relies heavily on German documentary evidence to

craft an argument that Hitler's regime was in fact vehemently pro-working and middle class, typically at the expense of the rich and privileged. More directly, Aly suggests that National Socialism advanced the welfare of the average German, although often the funding source was taxation or plunder of occupied territories, where individuals of all classes got victimized. Such a perspective melds well with the eminent contrast between internationalist socialism on the Left and the nationalist or race-centric socialism of the right-wing. For the interests of inclusivity, elements of both aforementioned books will be referenced in the following sections.

## **Public Works**

Upon entering office, Hitler inherited a massive economic crisis, with chronic unemployment as a central issue. The preceding Weimar Republic had already enacted a program of "work creation" worth 600 million Reichsmarks (RM), which the Nazis divided up between the national, local, and military budgets.<sup>[435]</sup> Under the influence of socialist-leaning labor and finance officials like Franz Steldte and Fritz Reinhardt, the administration began planning an aggressive program of job creation by the state. This would come into form as a 1 billion RM package designed to stimulate the flailing job market through involvement in ex-urban settlements, roads, and housing projects.<sup>[436]</sup> The effectiveness of the program varied based on location and the attitudes of fund administrators, but it did massively reduce unemployment in certain regions, largely by providing jobs termed to be "earth moving."<sup>[437]</sup> While we may be tempted to scoff at such seemingly pointless projects, it should be noted that part of President Barack Obama's 2009 recession stimulus plan included government-funded job creation focused on projects such as a "sidewalk to nowhere."<sup>[438]</sup>

Hitler also approved the creation of a program to build the modern highway system today known as the Auto-Bahn, a project which generated 38,000 jobs.<sup>[439]</sup> Later provisions in 1933 included a 500 million RM subsidy to fix buildings and 300 million RM in

mortgage interest coverage.<sup>[440]</sup> Local projects to construct increased housing and boost public works were also advanced in towns such as Northeim.<sup>[441]</sup>

As far as the impact of work creation, the scheme was employing 289,000 people in February 1933, rising to 1,075,000 in March 1934, at which point unemployment dropped by 2.6 million. Work creation is believed to have contributed to 30 percent of the decline, while private investment in construction helped as well.<sup>[442]</sup> By 1938, the economy had reached full employment, and a labor shortage existed in the market.<sup>[443]</sup>

## **Labour Program**

The Nazi regime is of course known for the establishment of the German Labour Front led by the former chemist Robert Ley. Officially, the organization was designed to provide a collective harmony in work and spirit for Germany. On a practical level, it succeeded the forced closure of union offices in May 1933, after which regional labor trustees were created to handle mediation between employers and Nazi shop representatives.<sup>[444]</sup> 1934 saw the introduction of national labor legislation, a move which strengthened the powers of bosses to restrict wages and increases, although pay did somewhat rise due to market restrictions.<sup>[445]</sup> Part of this was achieved by limiting *movement* within the labor force, especially regional migration, along with the military buildup, which actually put pressure on farm worker availability.<sup>[446]</sup> In addition, bans on wage increases led to workarounds where higher pay was granted based on quicker promotion, added training, or fringe benefits.<sup>[447]</sup>

Another policy initiated by the regime was a tax on the use of foreign labor, which many had to use anyway due to the deployment of German troops for the war.<sup>[448]</sup> The measure was diluted somewhat by Nazi use of slave labor, which of course did not fall

within the bounds of employment laws, though it helped the war effort substantially.<sup>[449]</sup>

## **State-Run Companies and Socialist Production**

Apart from the land reform we shall discuss shortly, two primary examples demonstrate Nazi commitment to a state-run economy. First, we have the nationalization (or effective nationalization) of certain materials and manufacturing firms. For instance, aircraft builders did maintain a relative state of private ownership, but their projects were the consequence of “state initiative, state funding, and state direction.”<sup>[450]</sup> One last holdout on this front was the business executive Hugo Junkers, who was imprisoned in 1933 until he relinquished control of his company to the government.<sup>[451]</sup> In 1937, Hermann Goering led an effort to nationalize the steel industry, establishing the *Reichswerke Goering*, a company that morphed into a massive conglomerate of iron ore and aluminum firms.<sup>[452]</sup> Goering would make further threats regarding expropriation of assets, suggesting in 1938 that he would not hesitate to confiscate whole businesses for use by the state.<sup>[453]</sup>

Although these aspects are brazen, the more evident examples would be tied up in projects generated to serve a socialist cause, officially categorized as *Volksprodukte*. An example here is the *Volksempfänger*, or People’s Radio, a model designed to come at price points well below the established norm of above 100 RM for regular consumers.<sup>[454]</sup> The model featured a price tag of 76 RM and would prove immensely successful as far as the buying market was concerned, selling over 1 million units in the first two years of production.<sup>[455]</sup>

In 1934, Hitler set about planning the introduction of the *Volkswagen*, or People’s Car. After some false starts in private industry caused by disagreements over cost, the Nazi regime chose to produce VW Beetles using a state-run factory. By the late 1930s over 250,000 people had signed up to receive one of the vehicles,

but none would ultimately be delivered for public consumption,<sup>[456]</sup> although the VW brand lives on to this day as a private company.

Finally, the Nazis adopted a public housing program as part of their administrative agenda. The practical starting effect of this move was a reduction in state-funded dwellings, but the creation of a mortgage guarantee program did reduce loan costs for aspiring homeowners.<sup>[457]</sup> Furthermore, state authorities planned the construction of basic housing units known as *Volkswohnungen* starting in 1935 which would alleviate the overcrowded conditions in many parts of the country.<sup>[458]</sup>

## **Land Reform**

As we already are aware, the role of peasants and agriculture was crucial to National Socialist beliefs, and naturally they played an important role in government policy. Key to this category was Richard Darre, a Nazi official who believed the Germanic race had been put at risk by Jewish interlopers attempting to seize land from farmers and promote an anti-nationalist trend.<sup>[459]</sup> Together with his close associate Herbert Backe, Darre advanced the *Lebensraum* concept which necessitated eastward expansion to provide additional land where German people might grow and thrive.<sup>[460]</sup> The emerging reformist proposal they issued in 1933 was designed to create a type of hereditary farm or *Erbhof* that would be preserved outside the capitalist fluctuations and financial scheming mentioned earlier.<sup>[461]</sup> Concurrently, the farms could not be treated as regular property and sold off, so here the officials certainly followed Otto Strasser's state feudalism in spirit.

The government would also set about to eliminate farming debts in exchange for a 1.5 percent payment each year by the farm's operator.<sup>[462]</sup> Due to pressure from private farming interests, the ultimate reform did not go forth with a complete debt relief program, and hereditary farms were banned from receiving loans, though they found workarounds through Darre's leadership.<sup>[463]</sup> The Nazi land

reformers went on to establish an office to regulate price and production in agriculture, effectively ending the free market in that sector.<sup>[464]</sup>

Otto Strasser would later condemn the Nazi farm legislation on multiple fronts. He argued the system of the “Patrimonial Farm Law” had been diluted to preserve the capitalist system by preventing any dislodgement of large landowners, or the debt-financed system which had placed peasants at risk in past times.<sup>[465]</sup> He further indicted the transfer of power to a centralized national bureaucracy, preferring a system of localized administration with emphasis on self-government.<sup>[466]</sup>

While Strasser’s criticisms have weight, they should be understood alongside other Nazi reforms. For instance, in 1934 the regime ratified a law designed to delimit the ability of creditors to pursue their debtors and seize property.<sup>[467]</sup> Legislation enacted four years later then moved to eliminate existing debts among the populace, in keeping with the stride against finance capitalism.<sup>[468]</sup> In addition, although the desires of some Nazi players like Feder to nationalize all banks failed, oversight was expanded, and the finance industry did not perform as well during the Third Reich period as other commercial sectors.<sup>[469]</sup>

## **Social Democracy**

The general authoritarianism of Hitler might well persuade a passive observer that any aspirations towards social democracy were quickly squashed. Tempting as it may be, this viewpoint rolls back the more substantive reforms provided by the Nazis for German citizens. To be clear, they have no monopoly on the creation of welfare by the Germanic state. As we already know, Otto Von Bismarck famously introduced retirement pensions and other benefits as a way to check socialist political threats.<sup>[470]</sup> Hitler would however push some rather novel variations on the usual set of government provisions. Firstly, the Nazi regime established a system

of paid vacation for most employees, offering two weeks as the standard,<sup>[471]</sup> which by European metrics at the time was competitive. Tandem to this was the “Strength Through Joy” program, an arrangement of recreational activities such as vacation trip tickets and community events meant to foster happiness and national unity.

Nazi officials provided a number of policies designed to encourage family production, including low-interest loans on housing and consumer goods. The credit was granted at below market rates to assist newlyweds with the cost of purchasing a home and furniture, but would be forgiven after the birth of a second child.<sup>[472]</sup> Such a plan is interesting, both for its underlying concept and the step closer to that abandonment of interest-based lending espoused by Feder. The early results of the program led to a housing boom, and an absence of property taxes helped save homeowners money.<sup>[473]</sup>

Other articles of consideration include an aborted attempt to double pension payments by the German Labour Front, which found its objectives defeated by disagreements with finance officials.<sup>[474]</sup> Nevertheless, a smaller increase was improved that repealed some of the cuts made prior to the Nazi regime.<sup>[475]</sup> The broader pension overhaul of 1941 also included the introduction of mandatory health insurance,<sup>[476]</sup> and the government offered other (often tax-free) payments to cover rent, insurance, coal, food, dental charges, and children’s education.<sup>[477]</sup>

## **Taxation and Corporate Policy**

In regards to Hitler’s approach to taxes and big business, an interesting image presents itself. Taxation took different forms, often depending on the particular context. For the business front, Nazi administrators expanded the Weimar-created corporate tax between 1936-1939 from 20 to 40 percent, while limiting tax depreciation allowances, and revenues from that source rose from 600 million RM

in 1935 to 2.4 billion RM in 1938.<sup>[478]</sup> This move was welcomed by the working classes,<sup>[479]</sup> and further stresses from war spending led to a boost in the corporate rate up to 55 percent by January 1942.<sup>[480]</sup> Although there is the previously noted indication about high corporate profits, other information from the early 1940s suggests a different outcome. The government actually introduced a 65 percent tax on remaining corporate profits, and one company featured a liability rising to 98 percent of overall profits between corporate tax, commercial profit tax, and excise tax.<sup>[481]</sup> Certain business leaders also claimed to be losing 80-90 percent of their profits to the government through taxes.<sup>[482]</sup>

Revenue extraction from the public at-large took an interesting route under the National Socialists. German bureaucrats had attempted to raise taxes on the bulk of the country's population, only to be undermined by Nazi leaders.<sup>[483]</sup> Pointedly, war preparation authorities created a 50 percent general wage tax to boost funding, but exempted about 70 percent of the population, and made a further 26 percent impacted only slightly.<sup>[484]</sup> Hence it was closer to 4 percent of the country's taxpayers -- the wealthy -- who shouldered 50 percent burden.<sup>[485]</sup> Hitler himself argued for limiting the incomes of wealthy people during military conflict, and claimed no one should profit from war while soldiers were dying.<sup>[486]</sup> Other levies on tobacco, beer, and wine were raised to 50 percent by the early 1940s, but these were flexible based upon the popularity of those items in particular regions.<sup>[487]</sup> Overtime pay was exempt from special war taxes, and attempts during the war to implement a 25 percent surcharge tax on lower-income workers was defeated by Nazi leaders.<sup>[488]</sup> The car tax would be eliminated in 1933, resulting in a growth of automobile ownership, but a gas tax was put into effect, albeit one roughly equivalent to that paid in the United States at the time.<sup>[489]</sup>

The collaboration of such policies resulted in wealthy Germans paying around 75 percent of the increased revenues generated by

Nazi rule.<sup>[490]</sup> Leaders in the regime would at one point in 1942 enforce payment of the Construction Debt Relief Tax, which was formerly instituted by the Weimar Republic in 1926. This tax was required to be paid in advance for the following ten years, and took in 8.1 billion RM.<sup>[491]</sup> Because the Nazis had also enacted price and rent controls, the burden fell heavily on the propertied and landlord classes, who could not increase prices to absorb the financial blow.<sup>[492]</sup> Measures to institute a windfall profits tax on stock earnings, caps on dividend payments at 6 percent, and caps on stock prices themselves, all primarily targeted the rich as well.<sup>[493]</sup>

Separate angles of taxation did feature in the lives of regular Germans more vividly. In order to maximize the amount of money under state control, the Nazi leadership created a system of savings banks which offered bonds to the citizenry. Although not nefarious by itself, the combined approach to price controls and rationing of regular goods prevented people from using those funds on consumer items, and thus large sums could be kept for national purposes.<sup>[494]</sup> Citizens were also targeted under a related foreign asset confiscation campaign that helped generate enough from private savings to tide over the government during a currency reserve crisis.<sup>[495]</sup>

## **Racial Socialism and Jews**

Germany's financial struggles compounded by its limited foreign currency reserves led to a campaign of taxation on those attempting to depart the country. Jews in particular were targeted because their collective wealth was estimated at 8 billion RM, and such a loss would have been considerable if large-scale emigration picked up.<sup>[496]</sup> Consequently, state officials spurred by Hermann Goering embarked on a campaign to extract as much revenue as possible from the Jewish classes. This began with a process of "Aryanization" directed at Jewish assets and businesses, similar to what we have already seen in Romania. Under the program, Jews were compelled to give up their assets for minimal compensation in the form of

government bonds, and proceeds from these seizures would go to the state.<sup>[497]</sup> The closely-related “atonement” penalty for Jews incorporated a mandatory surrender of 20-25 percent of their holdings, and resulted in revenue of over 1 billion RM, with some debate remaining as to the specific figure.<sup>[498]</sup> Furthermore, a fine of 1 billion RM was applied to Jews collectively to pay for damage caused by the 1938 *Kristallnacht* event, when Nazi followers enacted a pogrom against Jewish communities.<sup>[499]</sup>

Early on in the regime, officials implemented a civil service reform designed to gradually remove non-Aryans (especially Jews) from the government through forced retirements, dismissals, or denial of employment.<sup>[500]</sup> Jews were charged extra fees for using banking services to access their assets, which in some cases were frozen by the government.<sup>[501]</sup> Debts to Jews were canceled, their bonds seized by state bureaucrats, and items like jewelry or stamp collections got confiscated.<sup>[502]</sup> Goering created another program that required Jews to sell off their valuables at 10 percent of the market value, and then taxed that return 10 percent for administrative purposes.<sup>[503]</sup> Exchange rates for certain occupied territories were designed in a manner to be less advantageous for Jews as well.<sup>[504]</sup> During the war, taxes on the wages of what nominal amounts were granted to Jewish forced laborers were increased to 50 percent, providing a rather sadistic form of revenue extraction for the Nazi administration that could be used to fund war needs and welfare programs which served German families.<sup>[505]</sup> Jewish household effects were also taken from the occupied lands and used to compensate the German survivors of Allied air raids as the broader conflict expanded,<sup>[506]</sup> while in other cases Jewish homes were given to German veterans.<sup>[507]</sup>

### **So Was Hitler Truly a Socialist?**

It is not always wise to address politically-sensitive topics, but considering the manner in which this book began, we cannot afford to shirk from a final determination. When all has been taken into

account, it seems obvious that the Nazi state should be described as a socialist system, albeit of a separate variety than our traditional assumptions would perhaps imply. There can be no doubt that the policies of National Socialism were often social democratic in nature, and benefited the working and middle class *German* people, thus fulfilling underlying societal goals. This success however came at the great expense not only of Jews, but fellow Europeans and even some groups deemed to be “Aryan” by Hitler himself. Once the regime had exhausted its ability to extract revenue from citizens, it turned to war and occupation as a means of fueling the contentedness which many Germans relished. Hitler admitted in 1941 that his plans to build a post-war community of Germans would rely heavily on Slavic labor and taxation of occupied territories, without which an economic catastrophe would be created.<sup>[508]</sup> Goering also spoke openly of plans to “loot thoroughly” the conquered regions in order to provide popular goods for sale in Germany.<sup>[509]</sup> The Nazi tactic of manipulating exchange rates in occupied countries to give the Reichsmark strong purchasing power there provided an additional boon in this direction by allowing soldiers to buy luxury goods for cheap and ship them to their families back home.<sup>[510]</sup> To place it in perspective, none of the Western European countries controlled by the Nazis experienced any increased growth during the period of the war.<sup>[511]</sup>

Skeptics to the socialist moniker will undoubtedly point towards the continued existence in Nazi Germany of private capital. Although somewhat true, it rests on a matter of degree more than distinction. Nationalized goods and assets were indeed sold on the private market to German civilians, but only after the government had taken a rich chunk of the profits.<sup>[512]</sup> The aforementioned strong-arming of businesses towards nationalization, which caused many to relocate their headquarters abroad to remain independent, provide substantial obstacles to a sincerely pro-capitalist labeling. Perhaps the best way to describe the essence of National Socialism in Germany is to call it an exclusionary or group-based socialism, as

contrasted with the internationalist bent of Communism, itself a highly destructive ideology. Insofar as the specific model is concerned, Adam Tooze's summary of Nazi Germany as a state-directed economy with some relative freedom slipping towards a state economy based on centralized "coercion or idealism" seems acceptable.[\[513\]](#)

## IX. Conclusion

With the defeat of the Axis Powers at the end of World War II, right-wing socialism faded from prominence. In Germany, the short-lived Socialist Reich Party provided a potential revival of National Socialism with its anti-American and pro-Soviet platform, but a court found the organization unconstitutional in 1952.<sup>[514]</sup> A similar attempt to relaunch Nazi principles came in the form of the German Reich Party, yet it too struggled to gain a mass-based following, and was eventually superseded by the National Democratic Party.<sup>[515]</sup> Today, the closest the country reaches to National Socialism on an electoral level is the Alternative for Germany party, which remains far more socially liberal than prior rightist groups.

Southward in Austria, the Freedom Party for many years positioned itself as a nationalist alternative to the moderate People's Party, though it distances from our socialist subject on multiple counts. From the start, the Freedom Party always espoused a belief in liberalism and individual rights, melding such positions with culturally chauvinist beliefs. Quite directly, its leaders promote attitudes on taxes and welfare more akin to modern conservative parties than the national community principle of right-wing socialism. In fact, infamous leader Jörg Haider would eventually split off to create his own Alliance for the Future of Austria, an electoral force further inside the category of reformist liberalism.

Italy would have a more pronounced adherence to the socialist agenda, albeit for a limited time. Shortly after Mussolini's murder by communist partisans, a number of ex-officials from the Italian Social Republic banded together and established the Italian Social Movement (MSI), a vehicle to advance the Fascist Socialism of their former government. The MSI would garner 56 seats in the 1972 general election, although from there its influence waned, eventually becoming replaced by the less extreme National Alliance, which

joined a coalition cabinet with Silvio Berlusconi in 2001. The most direct successors to the MSI today would be Brothers of Italy, a national conservative party, and the small but controversial New Force association.

As for our other subjects, they vary in scope and significance. France of course hosted the aspirations of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front for years, though the party has gradually rebranded itself in a national conservative direction. Depending on the advantages of the time, support for economic liberalism versus protectionism and skepticism or endorsement of welfare has shifted majorly. In Spain, the collapse of Franco's dictatorship in 1975 failed to result in a resurgence of the genuine National Syndicalist idea. The most visible heir on a broader nationalist basis would be the Vox Party, though it adheres to market liberal policies. Finally, Romania has seen the expansion of the Alliance for the Unity of Romanians party, an organization known for its criticisms of capitalism and admiration for the Legionary movement, with nearly 10 percent of the lower house's legislative seats as of this writing.

Whether we shall see a future upsurge in explicitly socialist right-wing movements is difficult to say. Nevertheless, their distinct presence in history versus competing leftist, reactionary, and conservative powers is an important aspect of study for those seeking to become better stewards of history. The traditional approach, which involves merely dismissing outright or bundling every group into one simple category, does a tremendous disservice to our desire for academic truth. Careful appreciation of the nuances and separators can help society deal with such socialisms of the Right or Left on steady terms, and perhaps channel their energies in a safer direction.

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