RICHARD J. EVANS

HITLER'S PEOPLE

THE LEADER

The Dictator:
Adolf Hitler

THE INSTRUMENTS

The General: Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb
The Professional: Karl Brandt
The Killers: Paul Zapp and Egon Zill
The 'Witch' and the 'Beast':
Ilse Koch and Irma Grese
The Mother: Gertrud Scholtz-Klink
The Star: Leni Riefenstahl
The Denunciator: Luise Solmitz

THE PALADINS

The 'Iron Man': Hermann Göring
The Propagandist: Joseph Goebbels
The Soldier: Ernst Röhm
The Policeman: Heinrich Himmler
The Diplomat: Joachim von Ribbentrop
The Philosopher: Alfred Rosenberg
The Architect: Albert Speer

THE ENFORCERS

The Deputy: Rudolf Hess; The Collaborator: Franz von Papen; The 'Worker': Robert Ley; The Schoolmaster: Julius Streicher; The Hangman: Reinhard Heydrich
The Bureaucrat: Adolf Eichmann
The Loudmouth: Hans Frank

THE FACES OF THE THIRD REICH



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Hitler's People

The Faces of the Third Reich



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In memoriam John Dixon Walsh (1927–2022),
who taught me History

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Preface

Who were the Nazis? What motivated the leaders and functionaries of the Nazi movement and those who put their project into action? What had happened to their moral compass? Were they in some sense deviant, or deranged, or degenerate? Were they gangsters acting with criminal intent? Or were they 'ordinary men' (and a few women), or perhaps, more precisely, 'ordinary Germans'? Did they come from the margins of society, were they outsiders, or were they in some sense part of German society's mainstream? And how do we explain Hitler's drive to achieve dictatorial power? Was he a kind of empty shell, devoid of personal qualities and without a personal life, into which Germans poured their deepest political ambitions and desires? What made otherwise normal people carry out, or approve, terrible and murderous atrocities against Nazism's real and supposed enemies? Or were they perhaps not normal at all? Beyond this, why did so many leading Germans in responsible positions, in the key institutions of society, go along with dictatorship, war and genocide? And what did those of them who survived the war think about their conduct under the Third Reich? Did they gain a moral perspective on it, did they repent, did they come to an understanding of what they had done?

These questions are at the heart of the present book. And in the past few years, they have gained new urgency and importance. For, since shortly after the beginning of the twenty-first century, democratic institutions have been under threat in many countries across the world. Strongmen and would-be dictators are emerging, often with considerable popular support, to undermine democracy, muzzle the media, control the judiciary, stifle opposition, and undermine basic human rights. Political corruption, lies, dishonesty and deceit are becoming the new

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currency of politics, with fatal results for our fundamental freedoms. Hatred and persecution of minorities are on the increase, stoked by unscrupulous politicians. The future is bleak, the prospects for freedom and democracy uncertain.

How do we explain the rise and triumph of tyrants and charlatans? What causes someone to be gripped by a lust for power and domination? Why do such men – and they are almost always men – manage to gather round them disciples and supporters willing to carry out their commands? Is society's set of moral values so weak, or so warped, that their willingness to violate the conventional precepts of human decency comes to know no bounds? In this troubling situation, many people look to the past for answers to these questions. The paradigm of democracy's collapse and dictatorship's triumph remains the fate of Germany's Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis. Hitler and his circle have been understood in many different ways: as a group of psychopaths, a gang of criminals, a collection of outsiders, even a modern version of the most deranged and destructive Emperors of Ancient Rome and their courts. Not infrequently, they have been described as insane, or at least psychologically disturbed in some way. This book takes a close look at the people who overthrew the fragile democracy of the Weimar Republic, set up the Third Reich, kept it in power for over a decade, and drove it into war, genocide and self-destruction. Only by examining individual personalities and their stories can we reach an understanding of the perverted morality that made and sustained the Nazi regime, and, by doing so, perhaps learn some lessons for the troubled era in which we live.

Yet in the half-century after the war, the biographical approach was unfashionable, especially in Germany, for the obvious reason that the cult of 'great men' reached its disastrous climax under Nazism and turned out to be a dangerously undemocratic way of understanding human society. Leading historians of Nazism, such as the late Hans Mommsen, emphasized instead structural factors, institutions and processes. Mommsen even thought it would be easier to understand Nazism and the Third Reich if one left out individuals from the story altogether.[1] In Germany, more generally, an emphasis on the importance of individuals in the Nazi movement and the Third Reich too easily seemed to distract attention from the involvement of German institutions and traditions and, more generally, the German people themselves, in this darkest of all chapters of modern history. Pinning everything on

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Hitler, or even on his immediate underlings as well, looked too much like a kind of exculpation of the great mass of Germans.

In the last few decades, a vast amount of research has been carried out into the social and institutional history of Germany and the Germans in the first half of the twentieth century. Paradoxically perhaps, it has redirected historians' attention once more, in a different and more sophisticated form, onto the leaders and servants of the Nazi movement and the Nazi regime, posing the questions of who they were, what they were like, how much power they wielded, and in what ways they worked together to create and run the most murderous and most destructive regime in human history. They were, after all, individuals, often with sharply delineated personalities, whose thoughts and actions had a material effect, especially under a dictatorship that imposed few restrictions on their appetites, their desires, their ideas, their actions or their lust for power.

In recent years, therefore, major, deeply researched biographies have been published of virtually all the major Nazi leaders, and a great many studies have appeared of individuals lower down the ladder of power. Our knowledge of men like Goebbels, Speer, Himmler, Rosenberg, and indeed Hitler himself has been transformed by the publication of diaries, letters and memoirs, of annotated scholarly editions of documents, and of numerous previously unavailable sources of many kinds. We also know vastly more than we did half a century ago about the ordinary Germans of the Nazi era, including lower-level perpetrators, what motivated them and why they served the regime with such a lack of scruple. Here too, there have been publications of letters, diaries and memoirs, often of very humble individuals, that have yielded a rich and complex harvest of new material with which to deepen our understanding of the problems facing people in Hitler's Germany and the ways in which they tried to deal with them. The transformation of our knowledge of the Nazi movement and the Nazi dictatorship goes far down the scale of responsibility and complicity, and the biographical approach, often based on evidence presented in post-war trials, has emerged as a mainstay of 'perpetrator research' (*Täterforschung*) since around the turn of the century. The basis for an attempt at answering the questions with which this book began is now available to a far greater extent than it was even twenty years ago.[2]

The individuals who stand at the centre of this book range from top

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to bottom, from Hitler himself all the way down to the lowest ranks of the Nazi Party and beyond. The present work consciously takes as its model the classic study by the late German historian, journalist and broadcaster Joachim C. Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, first published in 1963 and reprinted many times since. Fest's book became an instant bestseller and was translated into many foreign languages. More than sixty years after its first publication, it is still well worth reading. Yet, as a book written several decades ago, *The Face of the Third Reich* has been overtaken by historical research in many matters of detail. Moreover, our overall understanding of Nazi Germany has also changed dramatically since the 1960s. Writing at the height of the Cold War, Fest saw the Third Reich as a 'totalitarian' society comparable to Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War in Europe has led to changes in perspective that have been backed by developments in the discipline of history itself. Our view of the Nazi regime has grown more sophisticated, and questions of what made people become 'perpetrators', 'bystanders' and 'victims' – to adopt categories which themselves need to be interrogated and applied in a nuanced and discriminating way – have to be understood within a wider context of coercion and consent; people did not, in other words, make decisions as morally autonomous individuals, acting in a vacuum unconstrained by their historical context, but neither were they automata deprived of the power of judgement and just doing what they were told. The reasons for the decisions they made have to be sought not simply in their psychological makeup as individuals, but also in their reaction to the situations in which they found themselves, and their relation to the wider society around them.[3]

Two decades ago or so, I tried to explain Nazism through a large-scale narrative history of the Third Reich. After the publication of the third and final volume in 2008, I moved on to other projects.[4] When I returned to working on Nazi Germany, I found that much had changed: new research, new archival discoveries, new, previously unpublished documents, had become available, new work had developed fresh perspectives and novel interpretations. The emergence in our own time of a class of unscrupulous populist politicians who do not care whether what they are saying is true, and the massive growth of the internet and social media, have fostered a much more widespread uncertainty about truth, coupled with a disdain for evidence-based statements and the

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work of scholars and experts. All of this has prompted reflections on my earlier work, and preparing the present book has provided the opportunity to revisit and in some cases reconsider the conclusions I reached in it. Coming back to the history of Nazi Germany from a different angle – the biographical – has been a fascinating and rewarding experience.

The book is structured in four parts. The first looks again at the career and ideas of Adolf Hitler, the Leader; in the second part, we turn to his immediate circle of subordinates; the third part tells the stories of the enablers and executors of Nazi ideology; and the fourth and final part surveys a variety of lower-level perpetrators and instruments of the regime. This is not a biographical dictionary, however; rather, it is a collection of interlinked biographical essays and reflections on individual personalities. Obviously, there is a certain arbitrariness about the selection; Joachim Fest, for example, included a chapter on Martin Bormann, but relatively little is known about this largely behind-the-scenes figure, who achieved importance only towards the end of the regime, so I have chosen to omit him. While Fest included a chapter on 'intellectuals' – mainly literary figures – I have included one on professionals – focusing in particular on medical practitioners. I have included coverage of ordinary perpetrators, who did not emerge clearly from Fest's survey either as a group or as individuals. Fest included a general chapter on women, but it is one of the weakest in his book, and I have focused instead on a series of particular women, ranging from fanatical supporters of the regime to 'fellow travellers' and profiteers from Nazi rule. Each chapter can be read on its own, independently of what precedes it, though this necessitates some repetition, which I have tried to keep to a minimum. The opening chapter, on Hitler, as well as being an exploration of the key figure in the whole story, presents a background narrative against which the following chapters have to be read, thus, I hope, avoiding going over the same ground time after time.

I began writing this book out of a sense of curiosity: over many years of teaching about and researching the Third Reich, I felt I knew far more about the bigger historical processes and impacts of the Nazis than I did about their individual leaders and followers, whose character in many instances I realized I did not fully understand. This volume is my attempt to explore the personalities of perpetrators, set in their social and political contexts; but I hope that at least some patterns and

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commonalities emerge as well. During my explorations I have received help from many individuals and institutions. I could not have even begun this enterprise without drawing on the vast resources of Cambridge University Library, whose holdings on modern German history are second to none. Many people have listened patiently to me as I tried to explain my approach, and I have benefited hugely from their encouragement. Working with Ella Wright, Helen Sage and the rest of the 72 Films team on *Rise of the Nazis* for BBC 2, and, across the Atlantic, Rachael Profiloski, Axel Gerdau and the team at Spectacle Productions, was an instructive and rewarding experience that taught me a lot. A number of friends and colleagues have read the typescript, and I am deeply indebted to Joanna Bourke, Niamh Gallagher, Jan Rueger, Rosie Schellenberg and Nik Wachsmann for their encouragement and their suggestions and corrections. Simon Winder at Allen Lane in London and Scott Moyers and Helen Rouner at the Penguin Press in New York have been exemplary editors, while Richard Duguid has been a pleasure to work with on the production of this book. Richard Mason has been a meticulous copy-editor and Cecilia Mackay an indefatigable picture researcher. Christine L. Corton has sustained me throughout the process of research, writing and production, as well as turning a professional eye on the proofs. I am deeply indebted to them all. As always, I alone am responsible for any errors.

The dedication to my tutor at Oxford reflects my gratitude for a wonderful introduction to the discipline of history that has lasted a life time.

Barkway, Hertfordshire, January 2024

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Prologue: The Lady at the Trial

The photojournalist Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier (1912–1996) was arrested in February 1942 for Resistance activities in France and sent to Auschwitz, where she was interned until her transfer to Ravensbrück concentration camp in August 1944. She gave the following evidence about what she had witnessed in Auschwitz to the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, under examination by the French prosecutor, Charles Dubost, on 28 January 1946.

> MME. VAILLANT-COUTURIER: . . . [W]e saw the unsealing of the cars and the soldiers letting men, women, and children out of them. We then witnessed heart-rending scenes; old couples forced to part from each other, mothers made to abandon their young [adolescent] daughters, since the latter were sent to the camp, whereas mothers and [small] children were sent to the gas chambers. All these people were unaware of the fate awaiting them. They were merely upset at being separated, but they did not know that they were going to their death. To render their welcome more pleasant at this time – June to July 1944 – an orchestra composed of internees, all young and pretty girls dressed in little white blouses and navy blue skirts, played [. . .] at the arrival of the trains, gay tunes such as "The Merry Widow," the "Barcarolle" from "The Tales of Hoffman," and so forth. They were then informed that this was a labor camp and since they were not brought into the camp they saw only the small platform surrounded by flowering plants. Naturally, they could not realize what was in store for them. Those selected for the gas chamber, that is, the old people, mothers, and children, were escorted to a red-brick building.
>
> DUBOST: These were not given an identification number?

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VAILLANT-COUTURIER: No.
DUBOST: They were not tattooed?
VAILLANT-COUTURIER: No. They were not even counted.
DUBOST: You were tattooed?
VAILLANT-COUTURIER: Yes, look. [The witness showed her arm.] They were taken to a red-brick building, which bore the letters "Baden," that is to say "Baths." There, to begin with, they were made to undress [. . .] before they went into the so-called shower room. Later on, at the time of the large convoys from Hungary, they had no more time left to play-act or to pretend; they were brutally undressed, and I know these details as I knew a little Jewess from France who lived with her family at the "Republique" district.
DUBOST: In Paris?
VAILLANT-COUTURIER: In Paris. She was called "little Marie" and she was the only one, the sole survivor of a family of nine. Her mother and her seven brothers and sisters had been gassed on arrival. When I met her she was employed to undress the babies before they were taken into the gas chamber. Once the people were undressed they took them into a room, which was somewhat like a shower room, and gas capsules were thrown through an opening in the ceiling. An SS man would watch the effect produced through a porthole. At the end of 5 or 7 minutes, when the gas had completed its work, he gave the signal to open the doors; and men with gas masks – they too were internees – went into the room and removed the corpses. They told us that the internees must have suffered before dying, because they were closely clinging to one another and it was very difficult to separate them.

After that a special squad would come to pull out gold teeth and dentures; and again, when the bodies had been reduced to ashes, they would sift them in an attempt to recover the gold.

At Auschwitz there were eight [*actually, four*] crematories but, as from 1944, these proved insufficient. The SS had large pits dug by the internees, where they put branches, sprinkled with gasoline, which they set on fire. Then they threw the corpses into the pits. From our block we could see after about three-quarters of an hour or an hour after the arrival of a convoy, large flames coming from the crematory, and the sky was lighted up by the burning pits . . .
DUBOST: Can you tell us about the selections that were made at the beginning of winter?

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VAILLANT-COUTURIER: ... During Christmas 1944 – no, 1943, Christmas 1943 – when we were in quarantine, we saw, since we lived opposite Block 25, women brought to Block 25 stripped naked. Uncovered trucks were then driven up and on them the naked women were piled, as many as the trucks could hold. Each time a truck started, the infamous Hössler ... ran after the truck and with his bludgeon repeatedly struck the naked women going to their death. They knew they were going to the gas chamber and tried to escape. They were massacred. They attempted to jump from the truck and we, from our own block, watched the trucks pass by and heard the grievous wailing of all those women who knew they were going to be gassed. Many of them could very well have lived on, since they were suffering only from scabies and were, perhaps, a little too undernourished ...

Since the Jewesses were sent to Auschwitz with their entire families and since they had been told that this was a sort of ghetto and were advised to bring all their goods and chattels along, they consequently brought considerable riches with them. As for the Jewesses from Salonika, I remember that on their arrival they were given picture postcards bearing the post office address of "Waldsee," a place which did not exist; and a printed text to be sent to their families, stating, "We are doing very well here; we have work and we are well treated. We await your arrival." I myself saw the cards in question; and the *Schreiberinnen*, that is, the secretaries of the block, were instructed to distribute them among the internees in order to post them to their families. I know that whole families arrived as a result of these postcards.

[Cross-examination by Dr Hanns Marx, attorney for Julius Streicher]

MARX: ... You said before that the German people must have known of the happenings in Auschwitz. What are your grounds for this statement?
VAILLANT-COUTURIER: I have already told you: To begin with there was the fact that when we left, the Lorraine soldiers of the Wehrmacht who were taking us to Auschwitz said to us, "If you knew where you were going, you would not be in such a hurry to get there." Then there was the fact that the German women who came out of quarantine to go to work in German factories knew of these events, and they all said that they would speak about them outside. Further, the fact that in all the factories where the prisoners worked they were in contact with the German

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civilians, as also were the female guards, who were in touch with their friends and families and often told them what they had seen.

(International Military Tribunal, Trial Proceedings, vol. 6, Forty-Fourth Day, Monday 28 January 1946, Morning Session)

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PART I

The Leader

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Introduction

There is no way of beginning this book except with a biographical essay on Hitler. Without Hitler, there would have been no Third Reich, no World War II, and no Holocaust, or at least not in the form that these calamitous events took. Yet Hitler has often been described as an enigma. We all know he was the dictator who started World War II and ordered the extermination of six million European Jews before committing suicide in the Berlin bunker on 30 April 1945. If we want a more detailed answer to the questions that surround him, however, we can turn to the series of biographies that have been published at intervals since the 1930s. Leaving aside the thousands of derivative potboilers, speculative fantasies, politically exploitative narratives, sensational but dubious 'revelations' and obsessive but unprovable theorizings that continue to flood the book market, the press, the internet and the media, we still have a number of serious, deeply researched, and carefully assembled lives of the Nazi leader. The first was penned during Hitler's lifetime by the liberal German journalist Konrad Heiden, a contemporary who witnessed Hitler's rise to prominence from Munich in the 1920s and early 1930s and, after he had fled Germany in January 1933, wrote a well-informed life linking Hitler's rise to power to the wishes and anxieties of the German people.[1]

It was not until after Hitler's death and the defeat of the Third Reich, however, that a fuller picture could be painted of the Nazi dictator's life. The first serious post-war biography was by the British historian Alan Bullock, a prominent intellectual in the Labour Party and well known to the British public through his contributions to BBC radio's *The Brains Trust*. His biography *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* depicted Hitler as a political opportunist, driven not by ideology or belief but by an

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untrammelled 'will to power'. Bullock was heavily influenced in this view by the disillusioned German conservative Hermann Rauschning, who saw Hitler's seizure of power as a 'revolution of nihilism', to quote the title of his penetrating analysis of the rise of Nazism. But Bullock's interpretation was quickly challenged by his fellow Oxford don Hugh Trevor-Roper, author of the classic investigative report *The Last Days of Hitler* (1947), who in his essay 'The Mind of Adolf Hitler' argued that Hitler was in fact driven by a coherent set of purposes.[2]

Despite the massive public success of Bullock's biography, it was Trevor-Roper's view that eventually prevailed. In 1969, as serious academic research into Nazism and its origins was just getting under way in Germany, the Stuttgart historian Eberhard Jäckel published a short book arguing that Hitler was dominated, not by a lust for power, but by two core beliefs: antisemitism, an exterminatory hatred of all Jews; and *Lebensraum*, 'living-space', the idea that Germany and the Germans needed to conquer East-Central and Eastern Europe in order to survive.[3] In the light of such arguments, Bullock eventually changed his mind and in his later work admitted to a strong degree of ideology in Hitler's mental make-up.[4] All subsequent biographies have indeed portrayed Hitler as an ideologue. But they have varied widely in approach and interpretation. The conservative German journalist Joachim Fest, an accomplished and knowledgeable historian, was first in the field, with a massive biography first published in English in 1974.[5] Like Rauschning, Fest also saw Hitler as a revolutionary, though one who incorporated reactionary elements into his world view. More than anyone else, however, it was Albert Speer whose picture of the Nazi leader exerted the most influence on Fest, who collaborated with the former arms minister on his memoir *Inside the Third Reich* and took up many of Speer's often-misleading interpretations in his biography. Fest was widely praised at the time for his psychological insights into Hitler's character, but today many of these seem vague and unsubstantiated. In linking Hitler's career to its wider historical context, Fest relied too much on sweeping psychological generalizations about 'the German people', the 'pathology' of the times, and the 'disorientation' of ordinary Germans that supposedly followed the defeat of 1918. Reviewers also charged that he underplayed the role of conservative elites in bringing Hitler to power and supporting him thereafter.[6]

It was not until the very end of the 1990s, however, that Fest's

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biography was superseded by another, even more voluminous one, in two volumes, by the British historian Ian Kershaw. Originally a medievalist, Kershaw had retrained as a historian of Nazi Germany at the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich. Here his mentor was the Institute's Director Martin Broszat, who focused above all on impersonal structures of power in Nazi Germany. Applying the Weberian concept of charisma to the German dictator's life, Kershaw portrayed Hitler as in part the creation of a 'charismatic community' of enthusiastic disciples whose adulation pushed the Nazi leader into an ever-stronger belief in himself during the 1920s. Initially sceptical about his own ability to lead Germany out of the chaos of the early post-war years, Hitler had become convinced by the mid-1920s of what his immediate supporters unceasingly assured him was his historic mission. He did not, therefore, as many commentators had implied, seduce people into following him: it was his followers who inspired him to lead them. After the 'seizure of power', Hitler's ideological drive began to be translated into policies, but, given his irregular work habits, his subordinates often had to guess at how this was to be done, 'working towards the Führer', as the phrase coined by one senior civil servant put it. Since they usually imagined that the policy he would have favoured was the most 'National Socialist', or in other words, the most extreme one, this generated a self-perpetuating process of radicalization to which Hitler generally felt obliged to conform.[7]

Precisely the opposite line was taken by the German historian Peter Longerich, author of a number of important biographies of leading Nazis including Joseph Goebbels and Heinrich Himmler.[8] Longerich declared that it was time to abandon the idea of Hitler as 'a man who stood in the shadow of his own charisma', the creation of 'social forces and the determinative structure of the Nazi system of rule'.[9] Instead, he argued, 'whether in foreign policy and waging war, terror and mass murder, church policy, cultural questions or the everyday life of the Germans, everywhere Hitler determined the policy of the regime in detail.'[10] Yet a reading of Longerich's book reveals numerous instances where his determination to ascribe everything to the workings of Hitler's will is something of an overreaction to previous attempts to depict Hitler as a 'weak dictator', the plaything of impersonal structural forces, reacting to rather than shaping events. And as the author of the latest major biography, the German journalist Volker Ullrich, an academically trained

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historian with a string of important books to his credit, points out, Longerich's claim that Kershaw's biography presented readers with a dictator who was 'basically interchangeable, redundant, at best weak' is unfair.[11] In fact, Kershaw avoided the twin pitfalls of 'intentionalism', ascribing everything that happened to Hitler's will, and 'functionalism', ascribing it all more or less exclusively to impersonal, structural factors, and focused instead on the interaction between the two, thus transcending this long-running debate.[12]

This indeed is the line taken by Ullrich himself in his biography of the Nazi leader.[13] But Ullrich also presented a more human Hitler than either Kershaw or Longerich had done. It is striking, beyond all the marked differences between the approach of his various biographers, how there seems to be a general agreement that Hitler was a man without a personal life, devoid of normal human feeling, who threw himself into politics not least as a way of escaping his inner emptiness. Such a view goes as far back as Konrad Heiden, who wrote that he 'lacked the courage for a private life'.[14] Kershaw wrote of Hitler's 'disturbed sexuality, his recoiling from physical contact, his fear of women, his inability to forge genuine friendship and emptiness in human relations'.[15] Longerich declared that 'a private Hitler outside his public role simply did not exist'.[16] Fest had also concluded that 'Hitler did not have a private life.'[17] Ullrich wrote in similar terms of Hitler's 'lack of an inner emotional compass'.[18] In reaching these conclusions, Hitler's biographers were, perhaps unconsciously, echoing Hitler himself, who insisted repeatedly that he had sacrificed his private life and happiness for Germany: single, and, as far as the public was concerned, without a life-partner, he was 'married to Germany'. In fact, however, both Ullrich and Longerich provided plenty of detail about Hitler's close friendships with other people throughout his life, his loyalty to staff with whom he had built a close relationship over many years, and the private life he led with his entourage, especially in his mountain retreat on the Obersalzberg. As for his sexuality, the fact that his medical records indicate that he took a sexual stimulant made from bull's testicles when he was with Eva Braun would seem to be convincing enough evidence for its existence.[19] Historians and others are sometimes criticized for 'humanizing' Hitler, but, as Ullrich argues, that is precisely what needs to be done. Hitler was a human being, and his life and career therefore raise difficult and troubling questions about what it means to be human.[20]

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Over the years, biographers of Hitler have had access to an ever-increasing quantity of information and documentation about him. If Konrad Heiden based his contemporary account of the Nazi leader on newspaper reports, interviews and personal observation, Alan Bullock was able to use the post-war transcripts and documents of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal, while the publication from 1962 onwards of Hitler's speeches between 1932 and 1945 in a compendious four-volume collection by the German publicist and writer Max Domarus, and an edition of his earlier writings from 1905 to 1923, published in 1980, provided an important basis for the studies by Fest and Kershaw.[21] The years since 1990 have seen a scholarly edition of Hitler's speeches and proclamations covering the period 1925 to 1933, an annotated reprint of his autobiographical tract *Mein Kampf*, the voluminous diaries of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, the office diaries of the SS chief Heinrich Himmler, the full journals of the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, and much more besides.[22]

One particularly controversial source is the so-called 'table-talk' in which the monologues to which Hitler subjected his lunch and dinner companions in 1941–42 are reported. In July 1941 Martin Bormann came up with the idea of recording these for posterity. Bormann entrusted the task to his adjutant Heinrich Heim, a Nazi lawyer. Hitler did not engage in casual conversation but treated his audience to monologues in which he expounded his ideas on a vast range of topics, and at the height of his power these words of wisdom surely demanded to be preserved, in the view of his acolytes. Heim accompanied Bormann to these meals and listened attentively to what Hitler said, immediately dictating notes to a secretary after the meal was over, sometimes revising them later. Bormann read the resulting documents shortly afterwards, and made a few additions and corrections based on his own memory of the respective monologue, then Heim corrected the typed-up version before the fair copy was produced and archived. During a break between 12 March and 1 August 1942 while Heim was away, his duties were carried out by Henry Picker, another legally trained Nazi official. Heim continued to write up the monologues until 7 September 1942. A few, less detailed, notes were taken on occasion in 1943–44, but they are a good deal less interesting. It was Picker who, after the war, first published an edition of what he called 'Hitler's Table-Talk', which also included the Heim records, together with a

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variety of testimonies confirming their authenticity and explanatory notes by Picker himself.[23]

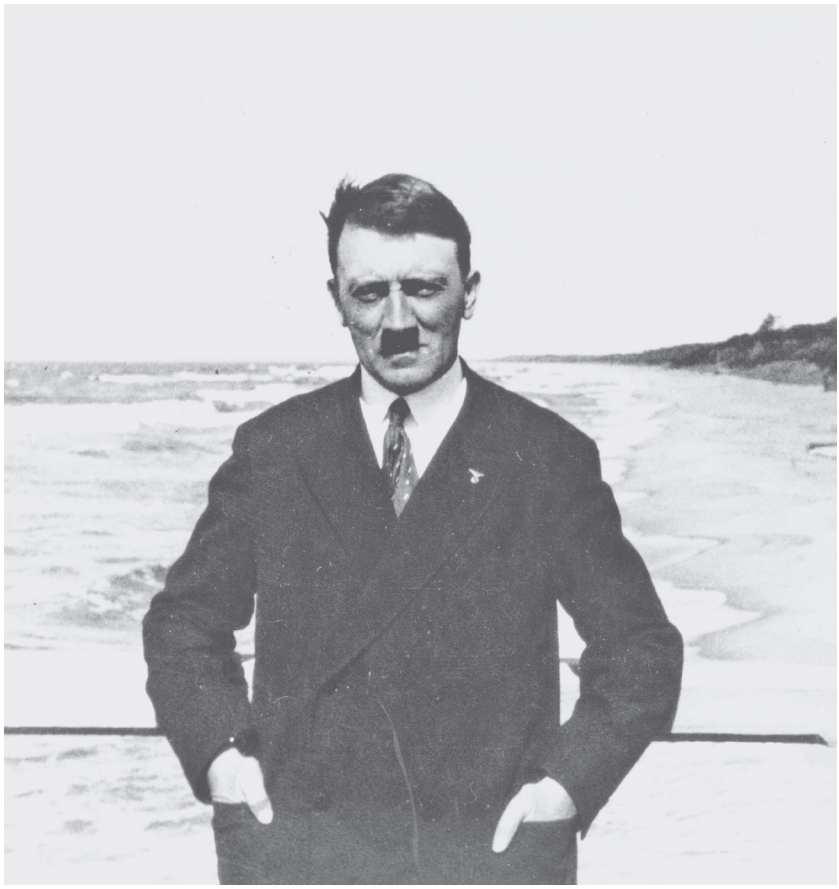
These were, then, not based on shorthand transcripts taken by Hitler's secretaries, as has sometimes been assumed, but written up after the event. How reliable are they? Obviously, they are not an exact record, and indeed Heim prefaced each of them with a phrase such as 'The boss expressed himself among other things, in effect, as follows.' Moreover, while Bormann was satisfied with Heim's reports, he was far more critical of Picker's, which contained numerous minor slips and even misdatings and mistranscriptions. However, there is no evidence that anyone, including Bormann, interpolated new material or inserted tendentious amendments in order to give readers a false impression of Hitler's views. After all, by 1941 Hitler was regarded, not least by his staff and by Nazi fanatics like Martin Bormann, as a kind of God, and the actual reason for recording the 'table-talk' was to put down his thoughts as a kind of sacred text, a guide to the imagined Nazi future. Altering the record in any significant way would have been tantamount to sacrilege. Of course, Hitler can hardly have expected his listeners not to repeat what he said to others, so his remarks were far from being private or confidential. But nothing in the 'table-talk' went in any way counter to Hitler's known views as expounded in his speeches and directives, and the frequent repetitions and revisits to previously discussed topics reveal complete consistency in what Hitler said during the period of time covered. They add details to what is already known but contain no startling revelations.[24] It does not follow from the fact that they were written up from memory that they did not more or less faithfully reproduce anything Hitler said, or distorted or misrepresented his thoughts.[25]

Many of the leading Nazis who survived the war, along with those who knew them, published memoirs, some of which have appeared only relatively recently. All this material has its problems, but taken together it provides an indispensable basis for assessing and reassessing Hitler's life and his part in the Nazi movement and the Third Reich. In addition, our knowledge of the wider context of Nazism and the Third Reich has been transformed by a veritable flood of scholarly articles and monographs in the past thirty or more years. The Nazi movement, and still more the Nazi regime, left behind an almost insurmountable mass of bureaucratically generated documentation, only a fraction of which has

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been published. So there is no lack of material with which to study the Nazi leader. And yet, despite all this, opinion among historians and biographers remains deeply divided. Understanding what motivated Hitler, and why he was able to exert such power and fascination over so many people, continues to pose real challenges to the historian.[26] The first chapter in this book addresses these challenges and tries to provide answers to them.

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I

The Dictator: Adolf Hitler

I

For the first thirty years of his life, Adolf Hitler was a nobody. He was born into obscurity in Braunau, Austria, on 20 April 1889, the son of a minor Austrian civil servant. The absence of information has been filled by speculation, most of it without any firm basis in the evidence, much of it driven by a misguided desire to find explanations for his later career in a supposedly warped individual pathology rooted in the experiences of his early years.[1] Nor can Hitler's own account in his autobiographical political tract *Mein Kampf* be relied on. He did not, as he suggested, grow up in poverty; nor does his father Alois seem to have been an alcoholic. Nevertheless, the use of corporal punishment by his father to keep him in line does appear to have been greater than was normal in late nineteenth-century Austria, and no doubt Hitler was telling the truth when he said he feared his father more than he loved him.[2] Still, his father was supportive of his desire to be an artist, contrary to the impression left in *Mein Kampf*. In 1900, recognizing his talent for drawing, his father enrolled him, not in the humanistic high school which would have qualified him for a career in the professions, but in a technical high school (*Realschule*).[3] Noticeably undisciplined at his school in Linz, the young Hitler spent much of his time drawing and painting, but when, in 1907, he applied to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, he was rejected on the grounds that he could not draw the human head. The Director told him to study architecture instead, but Hitler lacked the qualifications for entry. Still, he continued to think of himself as an artist above anything else.[4]

By this time, Hitler's parents had died, his father in 1903 and his mother, Klara, to whom he was much closer, in 1907. In February 1908

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he moved to Vienna, where he stayed for the next five years. Living off his mother's modest legacy, an orphan's pension and subsidies from his wider family, he did not feel it necessary to find a job. Instead he frittered his time away, drawing and sketching, reading – particularly Germanic legends, along with the Wild West stories of Karl May, with their curious atmosphere of doom, decline and redemption through violence – and going to the opera, above all to the music-dramas of Richard Wagner, based largely on medieval myth and sagas of knightly heroism, love and death. His later assertion that he became a follower of the extreme nationalist and antisemite Austrian politician Georg Ritter von Schönerer must be treated with scepticism. Similarly, his claim in *Mein Kampf* to have become a radical antisemite in Vienna was belied by the fact that he was on good terms with a number of Jews during his years there.[5] There is, in fact, no reliable evidence for his having been interested in politics or imbued with a hatred of Jews at this time. Hitler's best friend during his teenage years, the music student August Kubizek, who later became a professional violinist and theatre conductor, left a vivid impression of his character. Passionate, articulate and energetic, Hitler, he remembered, loved to talk, his conversation ranging across many subjects. What he required, however, was not an interlocutor but a listener. The two teenagers became friends because they were regular visitors to the Linz opera, and shared lodgings for a time. A serious young man, Hitler, remembered Kubizek, had little sense of humour, though he was fond of mocking people he knew. He kept his innermost feelings to himself, though Kubizek reported that he fell in love with a girl called Stefanie, but was too shy to do anything about it. Still, Kubizek gave it as his opinion that Hitler's sexuality was 'absolutely normal'. His strict bourgeois moral opinions, however, kept him away from the brothels and street-walkers that were so attractive to so many of his young male contemporaries. Obsessed with art and architecture, he spent a good deal of time in the imaginary redesigning of towns and cities, above all Linz, an occupation that stayed with him until the end of his life.[6]

By September 1909 Hitler had spent his savings and was getting into serious financial difficulties, not least because he was spending so much on going to the opera. He was forced to live in a men's asylum for the homeless for many months, and a second attempt to gain entry to the Academy of Fine Arts was brusquely rejected. Firmly convinced that he would become a great artist, he refused to compromise or settle for an

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ordinary life. At the suggestion of a friend in the asylum he prepared and sold paintings copied from picture postcards, earning him a small income, but it was not until his twenty-fourth birthday in April 1913 that he was able to come into a solid inheritance from a relative. With a modest but sufficient income assured, he moved to Munich, on 25 May 1913, abandoning the multicultural milieu in which he had recently been living in Vienna for a Germany that he clearly admired and to which he must have thought German-speakers such as himself truly belonged. He remained an Austrian citizen, however, and was ordered by the Bavarian police to return to Austria in order to begin his obligatory military service. When he turned up for enrolment, his medical examination certified him as physically 'too weak', and he was able to return to Munich. Here he continued his aimless existence for the next several months, sitting in the coffee houses in Schwabing, a district known as the haunt of artists and bohemians, selling his copies of postcards. Nothing about his life up to this point indicated a future career in politics. His life had been a failure, his ambitions unfulfilled, and his early social position, growing up in a solidly bourgeois family, had sunk about as low as it could get. Of all the Nazi leaders, he was the most déclassé, his social decline the most precipitous.

The outbreak of World War I at the end of July 1914 seemed to solve all Hitler's problems. He claimed in *Mein Kampf* that it was the greatest time of his life, and there is no reason to disbelieve him. Filled with the overwhelming German patriotism shown on his face in the famous photograph that caught him in the crowds gathering on Munich's Odeonsplatz on 2 August 1914 to cheer Germany's entry into the war, he enlisted in the Bavarian army on 16 August, following an initial rejection. In the chaotic rush of mass recruitment, no one seems to have noticed that he was still an Austrian citizen, or that he was physically not really fitted for combat. After undergoing some rudimentary training, he was sent with his regiment to the Western Front. He survived his baptism of fire in a fierce encounter with British troops, was promoted to the rank known as *Gefreiter*, and assigned duties as a messenger taking orders from field headquarters to the front. His promotion did not entitle him to order other soldiers about, like a real corporal did; he would best be described as a 'senior private'. The award to him of an Iron Cross, First Class, is often taken as evidence of exceptional bravery, but while his actual position as dispatch-runner for regimental headquarters did

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involve some exposure to danger, it mainly involved activities behind the front line. Serving at HQ brought soldiers like Hitler into close contact with officers who had the power to award medals, and such soldiers were greatly over-represented among those who won the Iron Cross.[7]

His fellow soldiers remembered him as neither outstandingly brave nor notably cowardly: he was said to have performed his duties calmly and efficiently. Something of a loner, he was regarded by his comrades as an oddity, 'the artist' as they called him. While they chatted and joked, smoked, drank, or visited brothels, Hitler did none of these things, but sat on his own, reading. Where they were cynical about the war, Hitler repeatedly reaffirmed his commitment to total victory, though he generally did this in private, as his surviving correspondence testifies. When members of his regiment took part in the spontaneous, football-playing 'Christmas truce' of December 1914, Hitler refused to join in. Like other soldiers, he was quickly disabused of the romantic, heroic illusions that had inspired him to enlist. In their place, Hitler learned to be hard and ruthless and to be indifferent to suffering and death. Military hierarchy and discipline gave a sense of order and structure to his life, though he did not seek promotion, nor was he considered suitable for a higher rank by his superiors. On 5 October 1916 he sustained a shrapnel wound in his thigh, but it turned out not to be life-threatening. He took part in the ultimately unsuccessful 1918 Spring offensive on the Western Front. A few months later, he was temporarily blinded in a mustard-gas attack and sent for treatment and recovery to a hospital behind the lines, in the Pomeranian town of Pasewalk. It was here that he learned on 10 November 1918 of the final German defeat, the overthrow of the Kaiser, and the outbreak of revolution, spearheaded by left-wing workers' and soldiers' councils.[8]

II

The workers' and soldiers' councils soon yielded to the established opposition to the Kaiser, the Social Democratic Party, which took over the leadership of the country and, backed by the liberals and the Catholic Centre Party, established a new political order, far more progressive than the authoritarian polity of Bismarck and the Kaiser. The republican constitution voted through at a constitutive National Assembly

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held in the cultural centre of Weimar, the city of the classical German poets Goethe and Schiller in the late eighteenth century, was a thoroughly democratic one, giving women the vote for the first time, and making governments answerable to the legislature and the electorate. The Weimar Republic, as it came to be called, had to contend with many difficulties. The Treaty of Versailles, which sealed the Allied victory in the war, took away around 13 per cent of German territory and population on the eastern and western borders, removed overseas colonies from German control, and restricted Germany's army to 100,000 men while also banning combat aircraft and ships. Germany had to pay large financial reparations, in gold, for the damage caused by its forces' occupation of Belgium and north-east France. Political stability was made very difficult by the fact that there were no fewer than six major political parties, reflecting deep-seated and long-standing divisions of class, region and religion in the electorate – the Social Democrats, the Communists, the Catholic Centre, the Nationalists, the right-wing Liberals and the left-wing Liberals. Many conservative, nationalist and far-right political groups refused to accept the legitimacy of the new Republic and yearned for the Kaiser's return. On the left, the Communists damned the Republic as 'capitalist' and worked for a revolution that would bring in a regime along Soviet lines. Under the new constitution, the proportion of the vote won by any given party translated directly into the proportion of seats it won in the legislature. All governments had perforce to be coalitions of different parties, but this was less the consequence of proportional representation than of the multi-party system the Republic had inherited from the Kaiser's reign.

Hitler's later claim that it was the 1918 revolution that made him decide to enter politics was a drastic oversimplification. His entry into the political world was a more gradual process. There is no reason to doubt his shock at learning of Germany's defeat and the terms of the Armistice, but it was many months before he began to take political action. Initially he rejoined the army, in the absence of any other kind of employment. He remained inactive after the Bavarian revolutionary workers' and soldiers' council leader Kurt Eisner was assassinated in Munich by a nationalist fanatic in 1919, to be succeeded by a short-lived anarchist regime and then a council of hard-line Communists, whose rule in Munich, the Bavarian capital, was ended in a bloodbath by volunteer 'Free Corps' troops sent by the elected, moderate Social

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Democratic government of Bavaria led by Johannes Hoffmann. Like many right-wingers in Bavaria, Hitler probably saw in Hoffmann the only immediate hope for the restoration of order; hence his willingness initially to support the Social Democrats. Elected by his fellow soldiers to represent them, he was chosen by the officers to investigate the conduct of the troops during the revolutionary events, and then to assist in counter-revolutionary 'education' courses for soldiers. Soon he was attracting attention with what one listener called his 'fanaticism' and his obvious popularity with his audiences. He had probably taken on these roles as a way of staying in the army, since he lacked any viable alternative way of supporting himself, but the result was that his identity as a soldier was giving way to a new self-consciousness as a politician. However, in many ways he continued to carry his military persona with him: for Hitler, politics was warfare by other means. In his self-presentation for the rest of his life, he always laid emphasis on his years as an ordinary front-line soldier, a man of the people in military uniform.[9]

Central to the thirty-one-year-old Hitler's emerging political world view after the war was a rabid antisemitism. The extreme right-wing nationalists who triumphed with the entry of the Free Corps into Munich regarded the revolution as the work of a Jewish conspiracy and the council regimes as the creation of Jewish subversives. Several of the revolutionaries, from Kurt Eisner to Ernst Toller and Eugen Leviné, were of Jewish origin, though almost all of them, as radical socialists, had repudiated their Jewish identity. But this gave a superficial plausibility to claims that the city had been living under 'Jewish rule' until the Free Corps arrived. Hitler's first expression of his newly extreme and obsessive hatred of Jews, in a letter to one of the students on his course, Adolf Gemlich, gave vent to his belief that for thousands of years the Jewish race had by its inner nature been characterized by subversion, cultural destruction and materialist greed. Rather than respond with violent pogroms, however, Hitler declared that a 'rational' antisemitism was more effective, meaning the removal of the Jews from the country by one means or another. It was important to realize, he told Gemlich, that 'Jewry [is] definitely a community of race and not religion.' The Jews were carriers of a 'racial tuberculosis of peoples'. All they wanted was money and power. Their ultimate aim was 'to rule the world': that was why they alone were 'international' in character. The governments that replaced the Kaiser and the German princes were mere tools of the

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Jews. So was the press. So were the banks. In speech after speech in the early 1920s, Hitler obsessively repeated these fantastical claims. There was nothing particularly original about them. They were a more extreme version of a generalized feeling among German nationalists and conservatives that Germany had somehow been cheated of victory in World War I, and that malign forces, mainly located on the left, were responsible. What was unusual was the vehemence and effectiveness with which Hitler now began to propagate these views.[10]

In the decade that followed the end of World War I, political campaigning was still dominated by public speaking in mass assemblies, either in a meeting-hall of some kind (beer cellars were a favoured location in Bavaria) or in the open air. Radio was still in its infancy, television in its early stages of development. Hitler discovered he had a talent for rabble-rousing with which no other political figure of the day could compete. Until 1928 he spoke without a microphone or loudspeaker. Even before they had the resources of the state at their disposal, the Nazis made sure Hitler's speeches were encased in a wide range of rituals, including music, uniformed Nazi activists' banners and flags; the audience's sense of anticipation was deliberately heightened by keeping them waiting until Hitler arrived, inevitably late in launching into his speech. His deep, resonant voice would first capture his audience as he began quietly, with long pauses, getting his listeners to focus on his words, before he expounded his views in short, simple sentences, building to a climax as he neared his peroration, his face shining, his arms and fists underlining his words in carefully prepared gestures. At the end, he would take his audience with him in a frenzy of emotion into a quasi-religious apotheosis. He reduced the complexities of politics to a series of simple formulae. Everything was a matter of good or evil, right or wrong, everything was absolute, all solutions final. He knew how to speak to ordinary people in their own language, learning from observing his audiences while he spoke what worked and what did not. Sometimes he would use quasi-religious language to project himself, promising for example an 'empire of strength, of greatness, and of glory' when he came to power, and confessing in pseudo-Christian terms: 'Yes, indeed, I will take on the suffering of my people.'[11]

Sarcasm helped reduce the political objects of his contempt to mere objects of ridicule: his friend Ernst 'Putzi' Hanfstaengl 'detected the language of Vienna writers' café jokes', 'a mocking humour that hit home

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without seeming fiery or rude'.[12] At the same time, Hitler developed during the 1920s an ability to go far beyond mere sloganizing and to impress audiences with his considerable command of detail. He prepared and rehearsed his own speeches, and spoke without a script, though with the aid of a few jotted notes, so that his words seemed to his audiences to come spontaneously from the heart. He had, he claimed, learned from the Austrian Socialist Party how to direct propaganda to the masses, whose limited intellectual capacities made them receptive to an emotional appeal. To capture them it was necessary to deploy simple slogans, repeat them endlessly, never qualify or deviate from the main message. The masses were feminine and needed to be dominated. As he began to engage in public speaking, Hitler quickly came to realize the extraordinary nature of his talent, and rapidly gained confidence in the new political world he was entering.[13]

This was the world of small far-right nationalist groups in Munich, flourishing and multiplying in the counter-revolutionary atmosphere of the early 1920s. Aiming to succeed where the Kaiser had failed, they saw the Social Democrats and Communists as the Jewish-dominated enemies of Germany and sought to win over the working classes from them with a mixture of pseudo-socialist, ultra-nationalist and anti-semitic policies and slogans. One of these groups, led by the locksmith Anton Drexler and calling itself the German Workers' Party (the key to its far-right character being the word 'German', deliberately pointing up a contrast with the avowed internationalism of the Left), seemed to Hitler's army superiors to be suitable for serving their counter-revolutionary purposes, so they sent him to a meeting on 12 September 1919 to see what could be done. Unable to resist raising his objections to some of the views expressed, he attracted the attention of the party's leaders, who soon began using him as a speaker. Before long, his success had enabled him to brush them aside, transforming the German Workers' Party from a tiny, conspiratorial sect into a public political movement, renaming it the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). 'Socialist' in this context, as he was keen to explain, had 'nothing to do with Marxism' because it valued private property and the individual, only demanding that National Socialist values should be maintained 'in consonance with those of the community'.[14]

He drew up a twenty-point Party programme which included the removal of citizenship rights from Jews and the confiscation of 'war

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profits', or in other words their economic annihilation. Parliamentary democracy was damned as corrupt, and the 'strengthening of the central power' pointed to the establishment of a dictatorship. The programme was declared 'unalterable', because Hitler did not want the kind of endless disputes that plagued normal political parties; it was soon afterwards largely put on ice, and the National Socialists ('Nazis' for short, analogous to 'Sozis' for Social Democrats) never put forward the kind of manifesto common to other political parties at election time. Hitler approved a design for the Party flag that cleverly combined the old Imperial colours of black, white and red, to appeal to traditional conservatives and monarchists, with the red background suggesting socialism, and the black hooked cross or swastika in a white circle denoting racism, ultra-nationalism and antisemitism. And from 7 August 1920 Hitler underlined the revolutionary character of the Party by addressing his audiences not, in the traditional bourgeois style, as '*Meine Damen und Herren*' ('Ladies and gentlemen'), but as '*Volksgenossen und -genossinnen*' ('Racial comrades, men and women'), deliberately playing on the use of 'comrade' by the left.'[15]

By the spring of 1920, the advent of a strongly right-wing government in Bavaria under Gustav Ritter von Kahr helped create more favourable conditions for the Nazis and other far-right groups. With a reactionary coup in Berlin only narrowly defeated by a general strike led by Social Democratic trade unions, and a series of assassinations of leading liberal and left-wing politicians by the young fanatics of the clandestine terrorist group the 'Organization Consul', the Weimar Republic seemed unable to overcome the troubles of its early months. Hitler's self-confidence grew with the ever-increasing size of the audiences he was attracting, and when others in the Party leadership proposed a merger with another far-right group, he resigned in protest. They knew he was indispensable, and caved in, admitting him back with dictatorial powers over the Party. As his growing prominence on the far right began to attract a circle of lieutenants around him – including Rudolf Hess, Hermann Göring, Heinrich Himmler, Ernst Röhm, Alfred Rosenberg and Julius Streicher, alongside some of his original sponsors such as Anton Drexler, Dietrich Eckart and Gottfried Feder – their undisguised admiration bolstered his confidence even further and finally convinced him that he would end Germany's humiliation and lead the country to a glorious future. By the end of 1922 party members were

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referring to him as the Leader (*Der Führer*) and were starting to use the greeting *Heil Hitler!,* which became compulsory within the Party in 1926.[16]

As soon as Hitler took charge of the Nazi movement, a new physical violence entered its political repertoire. The party already used bouncers at its public meetings, but in the course of 1921 they started to be more organized, becoming known informally as the *Sturmabteilungen* or 'Storm Divisions', led by Hans Ulrich Klintzsch, a young ex-member of the extreme right-wing assassination squad, the Organization Consul. They beat up and expelled protesters at Hitler's rallies, and, joined by ex-members of the Free Corps, armed themselves with knives, rubber truncheons, knuckle-dusters and even handguns and grenades to engage in pitched battles with the paramilitary units of other political parties, especially the Social Democrats. After leading one particularly bloody meeting-room brawl, Hitler and other Nazis were arrested, put on trial, and sentenced to three months' imprisonment for disturbing the peace. But the Nazis were by no means alone in their use of organized political violence. The militarization of politics was a consequence of four years of warfare, followed by a period of armed conflict in many parts of Europe, from Ireland to Silesia. The emergence of Communism, born in the violence of the Bolshevik Revolution and dedicated to the overthrow of 'bourgeois' democracy and the existing social order, further radicalized political antagonisms. In Italy, the former socialist Benito Mussolini led his *squadristi* in the violent takeover of northern towns and cities, culminating in a threatened 'March on Rome' that effectively blackmailed the political Establishment into conceding his appointment as Prime Minister in 1922.[17]

Mussolini's success left a deep impression on Hitler and the Nazis, who were strongly influenced by his style in a number of ways, including the adoption of the term 'Leader', the pseudo-Roman salute (right arm rigidly outstretched to be greeted by the Leader with the latter's right arm raised but bent backwards with open palm), and the carrying of standards at parades. The success of the 'March on Rome' seemed to Hitler and other leading figures on the far right in Germany an obvious model to follow as the country descended into chaos in 1923, with hyperinflation destroying the economy, French troops seizing assets in the industrial region of the Ruhr because of unpaid war reparations, and far-left parties threatening to take over in Saxony and Thuringia.

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There was another important influence on the Nazis as well, in the shape of the Turkish military leader and nationalist politician Mustafa Kemal Pasha, later known as Kemal Atatürk. His success in wars against the Greeks and Armenians between 1919 and 1922, and the preservation of a united Turkey in defiance of Allied attempts to dismember the country, led to the abolition of the Ottoman Empire, the acceptance of Turkish sovereignty in the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923, and the official establishment of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923. The Nazis were strongly influenced by Atatürk's decision to move the country's capital away from Constantinople, which he regarded as hopelessly corrupt, into the cleaner, purer environment (as he saw it) of Ankara. For Hitler, Munich was Germany's Ankara, Berlin its Constantinople.[18]

The trigger for action was the installation on 13 August 1923 of the moderate liberal Gustav Stresemann as Chancellor of a broad coalition of parties tasked with bringing Germany's multiple crises to an end. Over the following weeks, he introduced a policy of 'fulfilment' of the Treaty of Versailles, resuming payments of reparations and thereby getting the French to vacate the Ruhr. This was anathema to the Nazis, who secured the participation of the former World War I general, now a far-right enemy of the Weimar Republic, Erich Ludendorff, in an armed uprising in Munich on 9 November 1923. Hitler announced that he would march on Berlin after taking over the Bavarian capital, and establish a new national government with himself as its head. With overweening self-confidence he issued a public 'proclamation to all Germans', declaring the formation of a 'nationalist government' led by Ludendorff and himself, both with dictatorial powers. But the attempted *putsch*, launched in a beer cellar just outside the city centre, was dispersed in a hail of bullets as the Nazis, led by Hitler, tried to storm the Field Marshals' Hall on the Odeonsplatz. Fourteen Nazis were shot, and four policemen fell victim to Nazi fire. Hitler dislocated his shoulder in the mêlée, but escaped with the help of accomplices, only to be tracked down and arrested two days later, charged with treason. The dream of emulating Benito Mussolini and Atatürk and establishing a fascist-style regime in Germany was over – at least, for the time being. Inexperienced, full of illusions, and wildly over-optimistic, Hitler had failed to prepare the coup attempt properly, and neglected to secure the support, whether active or passive, of

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the ruling elite, the army, the civil service and the police. He would not make the same mistakes again.[19]

III

Hitler had now discovered an aim in life, one to which it soon became clear that his talents were ideally suited. But in the immediate aftermath of the failed uprising he was deeply depressed. For the first time, though not the last, he was recorded as considering suicide. Soon, however, he began to realize that his impending trial would present an opportunity to vindicate himself. The Bavarian government managed to get the court proceedings moved to Munich, and to appoint a politically sympathetic judge. This was Georg Neithardt, who had already shown remarkable leniency in presiding over the trial of Kurt Eisner's assassin, Count Arco-Valley, to whose supposedly patriotic motives he had paid homage. At the trial, which began on 26 February 1924, Neithardt allowed the Nazi leader to speak at enormous length in defence of his actions, which were, Hitler said, driven 'by a fanatically extreme nationalism of the highest ethics and morality'. The courts, Hitler declared, would not decide whether his actions had been justified: German history would decide. Among the numerous defendants, Ludendorff was acquitted, and the rest were given extremely lenient sentences. Hitler was condemned to the minimum sentence allowed, five years of 'fortress incarceration' (*Festungshaft*) in Landsberg Prison, 65 kilometres from Munich, with conditional release on parole allowed after six months. His actions in attempting the *putsch* were, the court declared, inspired 'by a pure patriotic spirit'.[20] Hitler repaid the judge by continuing his appointment after he came to power and laying a wreath on Neithardt's grave after his death in 1941. Meanwhile, the Nazis mythologized the *putsch* and instituted a cult of martyrdom around their fallen comrades. The elements of the later myth of sacrifice were already being assembled in the Munich courtroom.[21]

Recently published research has cast new light on the conditions under which Hitler served his sentence. Landsberg was a modern prison, built shortly before World War I, but besides ordinary inmates it also had a special section for those condemned to 'fortress incarceration'. Offenders sentenced in this category did not lose their civil rights, such

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as the right to vote, nor did they have to wear prison uniforms or carry out forced-labour duties. They could keep their own clothing, receive visitors, accept gifts, drink alcohol and smoke tobacco, and mingle with other prisoners in the same class. They had access to a garden and enjoyed many other privileges. Previously reserved for officers, aristocrats and men who had killed or injured their opponent in a duel, 'fortress incarceration' was frequently considered appropriate by the Weimar Republic's conservative judges for offenders who had in their view acted out of laudable motives and so did not deserve any form of punishment that dishonoured them. Hitler was one such. His prison files show that while he was in Landsberg, Hitler received no fewer than 345 visitors, on a total of 524 occasions. Erich Ludendorff came nine times, and Ernst Röhm seven, though most people, such as Hermann Göring, came only once. Many brought Hitler presents such as flowers, wine, cakes and books, or supplies he had purchased from outside, ranging from eggs, butter, coffee and noodles to crockery and saucepans. Conditions in the fortress were more like those of a hotel than a prison. Hitler's cell was referred to by some of his visitors as 'the delicatessen'. His fellow prisoners in 'fortress incarceration' included other participants in the beer-hall *putsch* such as Rudolf Hess; on 28 April 1924 a further forty members of the Nazi 'storm troop' were admitted. Most of their cells were decorated with swastikas and other political symbols, smoking and drinking were almost universal among the inmates (Hitler, a teetotal non-smoker, was an exception), writing facilities including typewriters and desks were available, and the prisoners could play games, correspond freely with the outside world, and arrange their day as they pleased. The prison became for several months the informal headquarters of the Nazi Party. However, Hitler kept his distance from all the communal sports, games and other activities on offer. 'A leader,' he said, 'cannot afford to be beaten by members of his retinue.'[22]

In the meantime, as letters of support for his stance during the trial came pouring in, and visitor after visitor expressed their admiration for his courage in launching the *putsch*, Hitler realized that the events of 1923–24 had catapulted him into a position of virtually undisputed leadership in the ultra-nationalist circles of the far right. Every visitor to Landsberg, every piece of fan mail, reinforced his self-belief and sense of mission. With several months of enforced leisure at his disposal, Hitler

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decided to work up the speech he had delivered at his trial, along with other writings, to compose a full-scale vindication. He had a typewriter and several reams of paper delivered to his cell, supplied from outside, and over the next few months put together an elaborate narrative of his life and justification of his actions and beliefs, often working late into the night. Gradually the project's scale grew until it also became an elaborate political manifesto, designed not least to underline his continuing claim to lead the Nazi Party, which was disintegrating into a mass of rival factions in his absence. After his release on 24 December 1924, having spent a mere nine months in Landsberg Prison, Hitler retreated to a boarding-house on the Obersalzberg, in the Bavarian Alps, which he had visited the previous year, and continued composing what became known as *Mein Kampf*, 'My Struggle' or 'My Battle'. A recently published scholarly edition has enabled us to learn more about the conditions of its composition, and take a fresh, critical view of its contents. It shows how, shifting parts of the text around, Hitler decided to split the book into two volumes, completing the first in time for publication on 18 July 1925. Hitler wrote only slowly, and volume two took a little longer, but in the later stages of composition he had the assistance of a secretary, who took down his drafts from dictation, speeding up the process and allowing it to be published on 10 December 1926. A one-volume popular edition appeared in 1930. Hitler's amanuensis and fellow prisoner Rudolf Hess and his wife Ilse, who had already carried out editorial work on the first volume, spent several months in total, together with Josef Stolzing-Cerny, a staff member of the Nazi daily newspaper the *Völkischer Beobachter*, correcting Hitler's untutored German and improving where possible his clumsy style. But the text itself was all Hitler's own work.[23]

For Hitler, who was legally banned from public speaking in these years, *Mein Kampf* was to a large extent a substitute for the speeches he would otherwise have delivered, and it was written very much in their style, with innumerable repetitions and exaggerations, appealing more to the emotions than to the intellect. His language was full of absolutes: decisions were 'unalterable', enemies would be 'annihilated', policies were 'unconditional'. Everything was reduced to simple dichotomies: good or evil, success or failure, triumph or disaster. All this reflected among other things the militarization of politics in 1920s Germany, beginning with the book's title and going on in the text to turn normally

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negative concepts like 'brutal', 'fanatical', 'ruthless' and 'barbaric' into positives. As in his speeches, Hitler called on religious expressions, popular proverbs and brief quotations from the classics to lend weight to his declarations. Particularly notable was his employment of the phrase *Sein oder Nichtsein* ('To be or not to be') from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* no fewer than six times in the book, to underline his 'all or nothing' approach to what he thought was at stake for Germany in World War I. Jews are reduced to a single collective ('the Jew', rather than 'the Jews') and described in dehumanizing terms as 'plague bacilli', or 'vermin', revealing the exterminatory core of Hitler's antisemitism from the very beginning.[24] Diatribes against their supposed degeneracy and subversiveness occupied a large part of the book.[25] Notoriously, towards the end of the second volume, he wrote of Germany's Jews: 'If one had on some occasion at the start of the war and during the war held twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew polluters of the people down under poison gas, like hundreds of thousands of our best German workers from all classes and professions in the army at the front had to suffer, then the millionfold sacrifices of the front would not have been in vain.'[26]

By the end of the book, Hitler has made it clear that he already sees himself as Germany's future leader, guided to historical greatness by 'fate' and 'providence'. Although he avoids going into too much detail about the policies he wants to implement if and when he comes to power, their broad contours are already apparent: suppression of all opposition, destruction of democracy, creation of a dictatorship (though he tends to avoid the word), military conquest of 'living-space', particularly in Eastern Europe, removal of citizenship from Germany's Jews, prevention of the eugenically 'unfit' from breeding, ruthless use of the death penalty to crush political resistance. Some of the more readable passages in the book are devoted to propaganda, where, in a projection of what Hitler thought were the unscrupulous methods of the Socialists in pre-war Austria and the British and their allies during the war, the masses are regarded with contempt as 'feminine', passive, easily swayed by repeated appeals to the emotions. The masses, he wrote, wanted the 'victory of the stronger and the annihilation of the weak or his unconditional submission'. 'The nationalization of our masses will only succeed if . . . their international poisoners are exterminated.' Winning over the people was necessary if Hitler was ever to achieve power, but,

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at the same time, it was necessary to employ exterminatory violence against the Social Democrats and Communists and the Jewish conspiracy he thought was steering them.[27]

The ecstatic descriptions in *Mein Kampf* of the bloody victories of Nazi stormtroopers in meeting-hall brawls with their 'Marxist' opponents and their provocative violence in a march through Coburg in October 1922 made it clear that mass violence would continue to be an essential part of Nazi tactics alongside the appeal to the masses to vote for them in elections and the behind-the-scenes wooing of German elites. The book breathes an overpowering spirit of hatred and resentment, a murderous extremism, a ruthless disregard for ordinary human decency, and a cynical contempt for the conventions of political life. Hitler reveals fully for the first time here the real core of his political persona – the dog-eat-dog principles of the gutter imported into the world of mainstream politics.[28]

Volume One of *Mein Kampf* sold reasonably well: the first printing of 10,000 copies was almost sold out by the end of 1925. The second volume was not nearly so successful, but the single-volume popular edition, published at a time in 1930 when Hitler was becoming nationally known, had sold 228,000 copies by the end of 1932. Nevertheless, the book did not have a major political impact before 1933, and was not widely read or understood. After Hitler came to power it was virtually compulsory to possess a copy; every newlywed couple was also presented with one by the government free of charge. Altogether, the book sold a total of 12,450,000 copies between its first publication in 1925 and the death of its author twenty years later.[29] It had already brought Hitler significant income before 1933 and it would help make him a wealthy man afterwards.[30]

Anyone looking for detailed plans and programmes in *Mein Kampf* will be disappointed. Many of its more programmatic statements, from the need to raise real wages and protect the workers from exploitation, to the desirability of defending the rights of the federated states against the encroachments of the central authority, or, in foreign policy, the intention to forge an alliance with Great Britain, were to be ignored or unfulfilled after Hitler came to power. What comes through nonetheless are Hitler's character and beliefs, and these are expressed in a manner so unambiguous that a careful reader would surely have realized in broad terms what he would do and how he would rule if he ever came

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to power. Early post-war claims in Germany that although huge numbers of people had purchased the book, hardly any of them had bothered to read it, were patently self-exculpatory: in fact it was not only repeatedly and extensively quoted by Nazi propagandists but also, while there was still a free press in Germany before 1933, frequently discussed in the mainstream newspapers, often at length.[31]

One of the many functions of *Mein Kampf* at the time of its publication was to establish Hitler's claim to lead the nationalist ultra-right in Germany by projecting an image of himself as a thinker as well as a man of action. During his enforced absence from politics from 1924 to 1926, he made no attempt to reconcile the warring factions that filled the gap; on the contrary, he encouraged the competition for power in the expectation that no single group on the far right would be strong enough to resist him on his return – a technique he was to use among his leadership cadre to great effect during the Third Reich.[32] In the two years after his release, however, he pulled the Party together, formally refounding it at the beginning of 1925. He did not scruple to use his stormtroopers to assault and intimidate his rivals on the far right, break up their meetings, and pressure them into joining him.[33] And he disposed of other real and potential rivals by sidelining them – most notably Ludendorff, whom he encouraged to stand in the elections for Reich President in 1925, in the knowledge that the general would fail to win more than a handful of votes, thus condemning him to political irrelevance. More than this, Hitler now worked hard to extend the Nazi Party from its Bavarian base across to the north of the country. Here he encountered a rather different kind of 'national socialism' from his own – more left-wing, more anti-capitalist. In a personal charm offensive, he won over its main proponents, Joseph Goebbels and Gregor Strasser, to his side. Recognizing Goebbels's abilities as a propagandist, and Strasser's as an organizer, he gave them responsibility for these aspects of the Party's activities. They did not wholly abandon their original views – nor did Gottfried Feder, also a member of the 'Nazi left', who was mainly responsible for the economic clauses of the 1920 Party Programme – but these became far less influential, the more so since Hitler was now redoubling his efforts to win over the business community to his cause.[34]

Yet one of the most striking features of *Mein Kampf* was its lack of political realism. The limitless self-confidence with which Hitler portrayed himself as Germany's future leader was an expression of

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willpower rather than the product of political observation. Its blithe disregard for the realities of the situation in which he found himself was to be repeated in the final months of World War II. He was still living in a fantasy-world, but one in which he was now a great leader rather than a great artist, or rather, perhaps, a great artist who had turned his attention now to remoulding and reshaping German politics. The book was written just as the Weimar Republic was beginning to stabilize itself. Hitler remained on the outer right-wing fringes of politics. In the Reichstag elections of 20 May 1928 the Nazis won a risible 2.6 per cent of the national vote, an even lower figure than they had managed four years previously. The elections brought a 'grand coalition' of centrist parties to power under the Social Democrat Hermann Müller. The Republic seemed finally to be entering the calm waters of political stability, economic prosperity and social peace. But all this was about to change, and more dramatically than anyone could have imagined.[35]

IV

In October 1929, share prices on Wall Street, long overvalued, began to plummet to unprecedented depths. 'Black Thursday' was followed by 'Black Monday'; and then 'Black Tuesday', as billions of dollars were wiped from the value of stocks and shares. Within three years, these had lost nearly 90 per cent of their value. Over 4,000 banks and other lending institutions were put out of business as investors withdrew their funds to try and make ends meet. For Germany, the effects of the Wall Street crash were particularly devastating, as the economic recovery following the end of the inflation in 1924 had been financed mainly by short-term American loans, which were now called in, leaving German banks exposed. They in turn called in loans to industry, while fearful investors rushed to withdraw their endangered funds. Tariff barriers went up everywhere, including in the United States, making things more difficult for exporters. On 13 July 1931 the Danatbank, a major German financial institution, was forced to declare bankruptcy. These events plunged the German economy into a deepening depression, with unemployment eventually affecting over a third of the entire workforce. Hermann Müller's 'grand coalition' government disintegrated as its partners disagreed on how to cope with the crisis.[36]

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The 'grand coalition' was succeeded by a conservative 'cabinet of experts' under Heinrich Brüning, a Catholic conservative appointed by the President, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg. Brüning's aim, supported by Hindenburg and his clique, was to sideline the Reichstag, rule by emergency decree, and pave the way for a restoration of the monarchy. He managed to get Germany off the Gold Standard, but, with the intention of demonstrating to the international community the injustice of reparations, he also made savage cuts in government expenditure, reduced benefits and raised taxes, causing further misery. The crisis was deeper, and lasted longer, even than the hyperinflation of the early 1920s. For many Germans, it proved the last straw. The unemployed, disillusioned with the Social Democratic Party's toleration of the Brüning government and its failure to do anything to protect them against the hammer-blows of Brüning's austerity measures, flocked to the Communist Party, which increased its vote in election after election, until in November 1932 it won 100 seats in the Reichstag. The Communists struck fear into the middle classes with their virtually daily demonstrations in the big cities, often accompanied by the violence of the paramilitary 'Red Front-Fighters' League', with their promise to create a 'Soviet Germany' and with their prediction of the imminent fall of capitalism. The October Revolution in Russia, followed by a campaign of terror, murder and dispossession against the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, was too recent to be ignored. Hitler believed this too, and he stoked these fears by focusing in his speeches on Communist acts of violence and murder. At the same time, he stressed his belief that Communism and Social Democracy were two sides of the same coin, subversive and dangerous, internationalist movements ('*Gesamtmarxismus*' or 'Marxism as a whole'), steered from behind by Jews, who were set on undermining Germany.[37]

But it was the Nazis who profited most from the economic crisis. They began to shift their efforts away from winning over the urban working class, an aim that had failed dismally to bring any results, and towards Protestant voters in the countryside, where they had done a good deal better than they had elsewhere without, so far, putting in any special effort. Downplaying the 'socialist' elements in their programme, and explaining their 'socialism' as no more than safeguarding the individual in a national community, they also started to woo the middle-class vote. This change in tactics quickly began to pay dividends.[38] Already at

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the beginning of 1930, regional state elections in Thuringia saw their support jump to over 11 per cent of the vote. In the summer of 1930 the Nazis' chance came when the Reichstag rejected Brüning's latest austerity measures. The Reich Chancellor promptly (and rather unwisely) called a general election, which was held on 14 September.[39] Sensationally, the Nazis increased their representation in the Reichstag from 12 seats to 107, voted in by 6.4 million electors.[40] This brought the Party into the centre of politics and made Hitler a major national political figure. In a series of regional elections, the Nazi vote also increased by leaps and bounds. The highest proportion of Nazi votes occurred in rural Protestant states such as Oldenburg, where they scored 48 per cent on 29 May 1932; Hesse, where they won 44 per cent on 19 June 1932; and in the similarly structured state of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, where they claimed a stunning 49 per cent on 5 June 1932. The Nazi vote was much lower in states with a strong Catholic element in the population, such as Württemberg (26.4 per cent of the vote on 24 April 1932). With the state having control over domestic affairs, from policing and security to culture and education, these were important results. By early 1933, the Nazis were already in power in five of the federated states, and starting to give a foretaste of how they would govern if and when they came to power on a national level.[41]

The kick-off for the election year of 1932 was provided by the constitutional requirement for Reich President Hindenburg to demit office when his seven-year tenure ended. First elected to the post in 1925 to the acclaim of conservatives who wanted a return to the days of Imperial Germany, Hindenburg, the leading German general of World War I, though deeply reactionary, had in the following years disappointed many of his followers by refusing to use his power to overturn the republican order. Unlike in present-day Germany, where the President is a mere figurehead, elected by the legislature, in the Weimar Republic the President was directly elected by the people and possessed very wide-ranging powers indeed, including the appointment and dismissal of the Reich Chancellor, the ability to dissolve the parliament and the right to rule by decree. These were to prove fatal for the Republic. Hitler noted the widespread disillusion of conservatives with the aged field marshal (eighty-four at the time) and put himself forward as the anti-Weimar candidate of the right. By the same token, the pro-Republic parties, most importantly the Social Democrats, reluctantly backed Hindenburg

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as the only viable way of stopping Hitler, who exulted in having driven them over to support of the arch-conservative field marshal. This gave Hindenburg nearly 50 per cent of the vote in the first round, but this was not quite enough to win outright, so a second round was held on 10 April. Although Hitler increased his support from 30.1 per cent to 36.8 per cent, Hindenburg managed to push his over the line, from 49.5 to 53 per cent, and was re-elected President. Hitler's repeated charge that the field marshal, despite his earlier achievements, was now too old to lead Germany into the future, had failed to have the desired effect.[42]

Upset by Brüning's failure to secure him an overall majority in the first round, thus necessitating a humiliating second subjection to the will of the electorate, and resenting the fact that he was the candidate of the centre and left when he had actually wanted to be the candidate of the right, Hindenburg forced Brüning to resign on 1 June 1932. He replaced him, on the advice of the army's key spokesman, General Kurt von Schleicher, with the conservative aristocrat Franz von Papen, who then proceeded to call an election with the idea of gaining more legitimacy from it. The result was a disaster for the conservatives. Held on 31 July, the election saw the Nazis win some 230 seats out of 608, and become for the first time the largest party in the Reichstag. With 13.7 million votes, or just over 37 per cent, they now eclipsed the pro-Weimar Social Democrats (22 per cent, or 8 million votes) and the Catholic Centre Party (12 per cent, or 4.5 million votes). Both of these parties more or less held their own, but the Communists continued to improve their position, winning 14 per cent, or 5.3 million votes. All the other parties were virtually annihilated. The bourgeois liberal and conservative parties lost almost all their support.[43]

Three key questions arise from these results. First, who voted for Hitler, and why? His campaigns centred on speeches delivered across the country, attended by huge crowds: on 27 July 1932, in the town of Eberswalde, for example, he spoke before an audience of 40,000, going on to speak to 20,000 in the town of Brandenburg and finally, in the evening, a packed Grunewald Stadium in Berlin, capacity 64,000. Within a few days he could deliver his message to half a million voters or more.[44] Hitler even flew from one meeting place to the next by aeroplane, enabling him to speak in several different venues in a single day, or was driven quickly from place to place in a particular region. He delivered no fewer than 150 speeches in the course of 1932. He even

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had a speech recorded so that it could be played at venues where he was unable to attend in person. No other politician could match this. His speeches presented the Nazi Party as the representative of the nation as a whole, whereas the other parties all stood for special interests. The Nazis were a movement, not a party in the old sense; they came from outside the political world, indeed in a sense they were anti-political.[45] They would end Germany's division into two camps, the 'Marxists' and the 'nationalists', and bring a decisive government to power that would take firm action to solve the multiple crises of the Republic. While the other parties dithered and temporized, the Nazis promised radical action.[46] The unrestrained extremism of Hitler's rhetoric appealed to the desperation of many voters. He made no secret of his determination to destroy the 'Marxist' Social Democrats and the 'Bolshevik' Communists, portraying them both as the tools of Jewish subversion, though overall he now tended to downplay his ingrained antisemitism because it had cut little ice with the German electorate in 1928. In speeches to Nazi Party members, duly reported in the press, he openly promised a geographical expansion of Germany that could only be achieved by war, asserting 'that the stronger, the better race, must expand its living-space'.[47]

And if he attacked big business, he was careful to insist that it was only Jewish big business he was criticizing. Hitler had always courted rich supporters, and been rewarded with the sponsorship of wealthy people like Helene, wife of the piano manufacturer Edwin Bechstein, the publisher Hugo Bruckmann and his wife Elsa, and the German-American art publisher, gifted pianist, composer of songs and socialite Ernst Hanfstaengl, known to his friends as 'Putzi'. Hitler went out of his way to reassure the overwhelmingly right-wing nationalist members of the business community that the Nazi Party had no intention of socializing private property, delivering no fewer than five speeches to business representatives in the Ruhr area in 1926–27, though with limited success. A speech to the exclusive Hamburg National Club on 28 February 1926 played down the antisemitism that permeated many of his other speeches, since he was aware that the Jewish business community in the city was closely integrated into the world of the mercantile and financial elite there. He took a similar line when he addressed an audience of industrialists in Düsseldorf on 26 January 1932, stressing his determination to eradicate 'Marxism' and promising a regeneration of German

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society. Normally in the early to mid-1920s wearing quasi-military dress and jackboots and carrying a whip, sometimes also with a pistol tucked into his belt, Hitler was on these occasions prepared to dress in bourgeois clothing, even, if required, in a dinner suit. He did succeed in winning over the steel magnate Fritz Thyssen, whose supposed memoirs – actually written by the American journalist Elmer Reeves from memories of conversations with the businessman – appeared under the sensational title *I Paid Hitler* (1941) and did much to underpin the claim that Hitler was financed primarily by big business. Originating in Communist propaganda, this was in fact a myth: most of the Nazis' financial support before 1933 came from membership subscriptions, sales and modest donations from small business, while big business continued to support bourgeois parties, notably the German National People's Party, which more or less collapsed in the face of the Nazis' electoral onslaught.[48]

Hitler's appeal was far broader than anything the capitalists could hope to achieve. With parades, razzamatazz and ceaseless activism, the Nazis projected an image of youthful dynamism and determination, contrasting favourably with the more sedate tactics of their colourless middle-aged rivals. More generally Nazi propaganda targeted specific groups of the population – women, workers, veterans, state employees, and so on – with promises to get Germany back to work, improve living standards, and end the chaos and humiliations of the Weimar Republic. The Nazi's use of visual media, posters and images carrying simple, strong messages to the public, was particularly powerful. The Party's unscrupulous propaganda, its barefaced lies and mendacious allegations against Hitler's opponents, frequently incurred libel suits by those it targeted; but this does not seem to have lost it significant support.[49]

All of this struck a particular chord with large parts of the electorate, especially the Protestant middle classes and rural workers in northern Germany, but the Nazis also won some support from unorganized industrial labourers, especially in small enterprises and small towns where the trade unions were not strong. Well over half of the Nazi Party's voters were from the middle classes, broadly defined. From their perspective, the Nazis might be violent, but they were also patriotic. They might be against democracy, but democracy had failed. They might not promise a return to the days of Bismarck and the Kaiser, but the Kaiser's son, 'Crown Prince' Wilhelm, had told them to vote for Hitler

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in the second round of the Presidential election because he thought Hitler might restore the authoritarian structures of the Empire. The 'Crown Prince' even claimed most of the credit for boosting Hitler's vote by two million between the two rounds. A new respectability was lent the Nazis by their co-optation into a campaign against the Young Plan, a scheme, fiercely debated in 1929–30 and eventually passed, to reduce the burden of reparations, anathema both to the conservative nationalists led by the press baron Alfred Hugenberg, and to the Nazis, who wanted reparations abolished altogether.[50]

Beyond this, millions of first-time voters flocked to the polls in support of the Nazi Party, above all women – the majority of the electorate by some margin, and far less likely to have voted previously than men – and the young. The Nazis gave them hope amid the gloom and despair engendered by Brüning's austerity cuts and promised to stem the rising threat of Communism. Of course, the prominence they gave to Hitler as their charismatic leader meant that millions voted for him personally, above all in the 1932 Presidential elections. But they also voted for the youthful dynamism of his Party, its determination to end the economic and political paralysis of the Republic, and its promise to restore Germany to what they felt was its rightful place in the world. Still, a vote for the Nazis was by no means a vote for all their policies. It was not even a vote for antisemitism. Hitler repeated *ad nauseam* his claim that the choice was simple: Nazism or 'Marxism': 'Either-or! *Germany is Germany or it will become Bolshevist.*' A vote for him was as much a negative vote as a positive one. The Nazi Party, as has often been observed, was a catch-all party of protest. To be sure, it ensnared some groups in society more than others, but its claim to unite all parts of German society behind it was by no means wholly false, and lent some plausibility to Hitler's oft-repeated promise to reconcile the country's warring parties in a new-found national unity.[51]

The second issue arising from the rapid growth in support for the Nazis in the early 1930s was the effect it had on the Nazi Party itself. Hitler's followers were now growing rapidly in number, until there were nearly 850,000 party members by the beginning of 1933. But the Party's rapid growth could not conceal the fact that there were serious internal stresses and strains that Hitler needed to resolve quickly. The first of these was the continuing problem of the 'Nazi left', now led by Gregor Strasser's brother Otto, who was committed to the nationalization of a

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wide range of businesses. Hitler was acutely conscious of the need to keep the business community onside, along with the country's social, military and administrative elites. Otto Strasser was forced to admit defeat and resigned from the Party on 4 July 1930, narrowly pre-empting his expulsion.[52] Beyond this, Hitler's twin-track approach of boosting the Party's electoral support while at the same time attacking its opponents by the use of ruthless violence on the streets threatened at many points to get out of hand. The threat was made unmistakably clear at the opening of the Reichstag on 13 October 1930, when the newly elected Nazi deputies appeared in uniform, while stormtroopers roamed the streets of central Berlin smashing the windows of Jewish-owned department stores. Incidents of brutal behaviour by Nazi thugs multiplied. In the winter of 1930–31 some young army officers in the south German town of Ulm were put on trial for breaching a general order not to engage in politics by joining the Nazi Party. Hitler swore on the witness stand that he intended to come to power legally and declared that he had tried to stop his followers from forming a quasi-military organization. Rightly, the court refused to believe him, declaring bluntly: 'The aim of the NSDAP is the violent overthrow of the existing form of the state.'[53] Further evidence to back up this judgement was provided by the police seizure and publication in the autumn of 1931 of the 'Boxheim documents', named after the Hessian inn where they were discovered: written by Werner Best, a young Nazi lawyer, they contained draft announcements to be issued after a violent seizure of power, including liberal use of the death penalty for anyone found resisting the Nazis. Hitler tried to distance himself by dismissing the documents as the expression of Best's private fantasies, but, he admitted, Best's plans might be necessary in the event of a Communist uprising. Hitler stated his real intentions from the witness stand at the Ulm officers' trial: 'When our movement is victorious in our legal struggle, there will be a German State Court and November 1918 will find its expiation, and heads will also roll.'[54]

Hitler's statements were disregarded by a good many of his followers. His uniformed paramilitaries – stormtroopers or Brownshirts – in Berlin, for example, led by Walter Stennes, repeatedly pushed for more power, better pay, and greater freedom to carry out acts of violence, at one point occupying the city's Nazi Party headquarters in protest. Hitler managed to bring them to heel, since they endangered party discipline, but he did nothing to curb the everyday violence of the stormtroopers:

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300 people were killed in street fighting in the year to March 1931, while in 1932, 155 people were killed in political clashes, most of them in June and July. Shootings, knifings, beatings with knuckle-dusters and rubber truncheons were a daily occurrence. Brüning barred the stormtroopers from wearing uniforms in December 1931, but they carried on marching anyway, dressed in civilian clothing. On 13 April 1932 he got Hindenburg to ban them altogether, but Brüning's successor as Chancellor from 1 June, Franz von Papen, lifted the prohibition.[55] Often largely unnoticed by the wider public, and not at all by the middle classes, the stormtroopers engaged in a ceaseless daily round of intimidation against their opponents, above all the Communists, whom they drove, stage by stage, out of their bases in the pubs and bars of working-class districts in Germany's cities. In December 1931 Hitler told the London *Times* of 'the bitterness and determination of the rank and file of his movement caused by the constant guerrilla warfare with the Communists, in which the Nazis had had 5,000 wounded and many killed in the first 11 months of this year'.[56]

On 17 July 1932 an intimidatory march by a large column of Brownshirts through a working-class district of the Hamburg conurbation was attacked by members of the Communist Red Front-Fighters' League; shots were fired, and the police responded by shooting wildly at the crowds: eighteen people were killed and over a hundred injured. Hitler backed the marchers and blamed the Communists. Papen used the events of this 'bloody Sunday' to remove the Social Democratic minority government in Prussia by a military coup, destroying the last bastion of democracy in Germany. Meanwhile the violence continued. On 10 August 1932 a gang of drunken Brownshirts murdered a Polish Communist in the village of Potempa in Upper Silesia; when five of them were found guilty in the subsequent trial in the nearby town of Beuthen and condemned to death, the Brownshirts rampaged through the streets, trashing Jewish shops and attacking newspaper offices. Hitler publicly condemned the verdict – subsequently commuted – and ostentatiously declared his support for the murderers. He had already made a cult of Nazi 'martyrs', notably Horst Wessel, a young Brownshirt responsible for leading a vicious attack on a group of Communists, shot dead by a Communist in retaliation in February 1930. 'Horst Wessel,' Hitler proclaimed to a huge demonstration that accompanied the inauguration of Wessel's gravestone in Berlin at the beginning of 1933, '*is not dead!*' He

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made no secret of his support for the use of extreme physical measures against his enemies. If he sometimes issued appeals for moderation, aimed at reassuring his middle-class supporters, they were always hedged about with qualifications that made it clear between the lines that he did not really want the violence to stop.[57]

The third question arising from the Nazis' stunning electoral successes in the early 1930s, and the fact that they were now the largest party in the Reichstag, was whether they should form a government. A vote of 37 per cent is often a strong enough basis for forming a government in a democratic political system. Hitler knew this, and he complained bitterly that the custom of asking the leader of the largest party to form a government had now been abandoned.[58] But even had it been honoured by Hindenburg, the Nazis would still have had to enter a coalition with another party or parties to form a majority with which to push legislation through the Reichstag. And therein lay the problem facing Hitler and other politicians in 1932. Hitler's declared intent was to destroy the Weimar Republic and create a dictatorship with himself at the helm. His was not the only right-wing party that wanted to dismantle the Weimar Republic; the conservative nationalists of the DNVP, the German National People's Party, nostalgic for the old days of the Kaiser, antisemitic and anti-democratic like the Nazis, shared this desire. In October 1931 the DNVP joined with the Nazis in a short-lived pact of right-wing associations known as the Harzburg Front. But the DNVP lost seats in July 1932 and could only attract just under 6 per cent of the vote, which together with the Nazis' 37 per cent still failed to make a majority. No other party was likely to go into a coalition with the Nazis. When the new Reichstag convened, the extremist parties cancelled each other out. Serried ranks of uniformed, chanting and singing Nazis and Communists confronted each other across the chamber, drowning out the voices of the remaining moderate democratic parties, notably the Social Democrats and the Catholic Centre. Walkouts of either the Nazi or the Communist deputies were common. It was obviously pointless even convening the Reichstag. In the six months following the July 1932 elections, it met for a total of only three days.[59]

Coming in the middle of an economic crisis of unprecedented severity, this stalemate was obviously untenable. While it continued, the Reich government carried on ruling by decree, so that the paralysis of

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the parliamentary system funnelled power up towards President Hindenburg and his coterie, which included his son Oskar, as well as Reich Chancellor von Papen, Schleicher and the head of the Presidential Office, State Secretary Otto Meissner, who had held the post since 1920. Led by Hindenburg, this group was determined to shift the political landscape sharply to the right by introducing an authoritarian regime, suppressing the left, and emasculating the legislature. But it needed a two-thirds majority in the Reichstag to be able to do this. And for this, the support of the Nazis was essential, in order to lend pseudo-democratic legitimacy to the continuing flow of Presidential decrees and provide the basis for the planned revision of the constitution. The manoeuvrings and secret meetings over the following months all centred on the question of how to do this. Initially at least, Hindenburg rejected the idea of appointing Hitler to head a national government. He could not accept his intolerance or his vulgarity or the violence of his supporters. Hitler's position was clear and simple. His self-confidence had been boosted by his election victories, and he declared that as the 'Leader', first of the Nazi Party and then potentially of all Germany, he would not enter a coalition government except in the position of Reich Chancellor. Not only did he reject Papen's offer to appoint him as Vice-Chancellor, he also sternly rejected a similar offer of a post in government to Gregor Strasser, the Nazi Party's chief organizer. Dismayed by his stubbornness, Strasser resigned from his party posts on 8 December 1932. Hitler quickly rallied his supporters in condemnation of this act of 'treachery', emphasizing yet again the need for unconditional loyalty to himself as Leader.[60]

By this time, a further national election had taken place, on 6 November 1932, in another attempt by Hindenburg, Papen and their circle to generate more support for the conservatives. The results came as a surprise. The Nazis lost two million votes, their share falling from 37.4 per cent to 33.1 per cent. The Communists' vote by contrast jumped from 14.5 per cent to 16.9 per cent, giving them 100 seats in the Reichstag. When combined with the vote for the Social Democrats, this gave the Left 37.3 per cent of the vote, more than the Nazis. The Nationalist DNVP improved its vote, winning just over 8 per cent.[61] But the Nazis' position was even worse than their losses suggested. They had recklessly overspent on the campaign and were now in deep financial trouble. The internal rows that culminated in Strasser's resignation were causing, or

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revealing, major divisions within the Party leadership. Hitler's intransigence was beginning to cause widespread dismay. On top of this, Papen, having failed again to deliver, was ousted by Kurt von Schleicher, the spokesman of the army, another right-wing political figure, who became Reich Chancellor on 3 December 1932. More clandestine meetings continued as the search for a solution to the political stalemate began again with fresh energy. But Schleicher fatally alienated Hindenburg, who owned a landed estate himself, with a plan for agrarian reform, while his repeal of benefit and wage cuts ordered by Papen alarmed influential business interests.[62]

The Nazis' weakness made this in the eyes of Hindenburg and his coterie the right moment to strike. It was particularly urgent because if the modest economic recovery that had evidently led to the decline in the Nazis' popularity continued, the Nazis might lose so many votes at the next election that they would no longer be able to provide the popular backing for an authoritarian revision of the Weimar Constitution. The solution mooted by Papen and Hindenburg was to concede Hitler's demand to be head of a new government, but to surround him with so many people of their own that he would be left with no room for manoeuvre. Frustrated by his own lack of support, Schleicher asked Hindenburg in effect to grant him dictatorial powers, but the aged President refused and instead continued negotiations – led by Papen, joined by Meissner from the civil service, and, significantly, Baron Kurt von Schröder, a banker and former army officer, who had already raised funds for the Nazi Party – to bring Hitler into government. On 30 January 1933 the Nazi leader was duly appointed Reich Chancellor in a coalition cabinet in which Papen was Vice-Chancellor, and all other posts went to members of his and Hindenburg's circle, except for the Ministry of the Interior, to which one of the leading Nazis, Wilhelm Frick, was appointed, and the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, held by Hermann Göring in an acting capacity while the legal issues around Papen's Prussian coup of the previous summer were still unresolved. From Hitler's point of view, these two posts were the crucial ones, since they opened the way to the pseudo-legal legitimation of the violence he was already unleashing on the streets. Everybody else involved in the negotiations felt a warm glow of satisfaction. Schleicher thought the army would now have a free hand to rule as a state within a state. Papen and Hindenburg thought they had got Hitler into a position where they could use his mass support to help

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put their own plans into effect. All of them were wrong. It quickly became clear that they had all fatally underestimated the Nazi leader. They were neither the first nor the last to make this mistake.[63]

V

By this time, in his early forties, Hitler had at last achieved something like a stable personal life. Far from being the cold, unemotional, asexual person imagined by many historians, he had always been susceptible to feminine charm. He was clearly close to a number of older, usually wealthy and well-situated women such as Helene Bechstein or Winifred Wagner, the English-born wife of the composer Richard Wagner's son Siegfried, a woman who ran the annual Bayreuth Festival after her husband's death in 1930 and allowed Hitler to turn it into something of a Nazi event. But there are also credible accounts of his admiration for younger, indeed much younger, women, such as Maria Reiter, who worked in a hotel where he was staying in the mid-1920s, or Henriette Hoffmann, daughter of his personal photographer Heinrich Hoffmann, and of his clumsy attempts to seduce them, which they seem uniformly to have rejected. More serious was his relationship with Angela ('Geli') Raubal, daughter of his half-sister of the same name. Just twenty years of age, Geli was his regular companion from 1928, accompanying him on trips and at political events. In October 1929 she moved into Hitler's apartment in Munich. But the jealous restrictions he imposed on her independence eventually became unbearable for her. On 19 September 1931 she was found dead on the floor of the apartment, blood streaming from a fatal gunshot wound to her lung, with a pistol next to her right hand. The autopsy left no doubt that she had committed suicide. Wild rumours about her relationship with Hitler began to circulate, encouraged by his political enemies, but Hitler and his entourage managed largely to keep them out of the media, claiming that she had accidentally shot herself while playing with the weapon (an unlikely story, since she seems to have been familiar enough with it). The damage-limitation worked. Hitler himself was briefly upset, but not suicidal: a few days later he was speaking to an audience of 10,000 supporters in Hamburg, before going secretly to lay flowers on Geli's grave, after which he barely mentioned her again.[64]

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From this point onwards, Hitler insisted that he had sacrificed his private life for his country, a claim too many historians have subsequently believed. The truth was very different. In the spring of 1931 he met and fell in love with Magda Quandt, the elegant, divorced wife of an industrialist. Magda was flattered, but she was already in a relationship with the Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels; indeed, the couple married on 19 December 1931. After an awkward discussion, the three of them agreed that Hitler would content himself with being a family friend, and use Magda as a kind of official companion on public occasions. Already by this time, however, Hitler had made the acquaintance of Eva Braun, a young woman (born in 1912) from a petty-bourgeois family who worked in the studio of Hitler's photographer Heinrich Hoffmann. After the death of Geli Raubal, they began an affair early in 1932, though not before Hitler had her ancestry checked out to make sure it was 'Aryan'. There can be little doubt that it was a sexual relationship. However, Hitler did not allow Eva to be seen with him on public occasions. Feeling both hemmed in and neglected, she twice tried to commit suicide, threatening another scandal. Hitler gave in, and began to allow her to appear with him in public, though as a 'secretary' or 'staff member', settled her into a flat in Munich near his own, and eventually provided her with accommodation in the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. Over time, she also came to play the role of hostess in his rural retreat in the Bavarian Alps, on the Obersalzberg, where she filmed home movies in colour showing him relaxing with his entourage. But her role, indeed her entire existence, remained carefully concealed from the public until the very end, and there was no question of marriage or children. He was, as he continued to insist, 'married to Germany'.[65]

Even before he was appointed Reich Chancellor, Hitler had established around him an aura of unquestioning obedience and unchallenged leadership. His growing staff, consisting of men such as Julius Schaub, who acted as a kind of personal factotum, his chauffeurs, valets, and others, often had military, Brownshirt and ultra-nationalist backgrounds, but they had neither personal nor political influence over him. His earlier political rivals had been sidelined or dismissed. Only men who regarded him as a genius were allowed to come close; critics were not tolerated. The constant identification in his speeches of his own life with Germany's – 'Hitler *is* Germany', as Rudolf Hess declared in his ecstatic paean of praise in Leni Riefenstahl's film of the 1934 Nazi Party

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