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Hitler's Attitude toward Market and Planned Economy, Private Property, and Nationalization

Rainer Zitelmann

It is a paradox: as the temporal distance between the present and National Socialism increases, understanding of the essence of the National Socialist (NS) economic system does not seem to get better but worse, as illustrated by two very clear-sighted findings published by economists in 1941 and 1942. In political terms, these two economists had very little in common: one was a libertarian, staunchly capitalist economist, the other a left-leaning economist from the Frankfurt school.

The economist and sociologist Friedrich Pollock completed his doctorate on Karl Marx's theory of money and was a cofounder of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and a close friend of Max Horkheimer, one of the masterminds of the Frankfurt school. Ludwig von Mises is widely regarded as one of the most important representatives of the Austrian school of national economics, and as early as 1920, in his seminal essay "Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth" (Mises 1967, 87–130), demonstrated why a socialist planned economy could not function. Pollock and Mises were both steadfast opponents of National Socialism and emigrated to the United States.

Rainer Zitelmann (office-zitelmann@web.de) is a historian and author of the recently published book *Hitler's National Socialism*. All quotations from German-language sources were translated by Helmut Bogler and are taken from Zitelmann (2022). For more details on the sources cited in this paper, please refer to Zitelmann (2022, Section IV).

In an article on the National Socialist economic system published in 1941, Friedrich Pollock pointed out the following:

> I agree that the legal institution of private ownership was maintained, and that many attributes characteristic for National Socialism begin to manifest themselves, albeit still vaguely, in non-totalitarian countries. But does this mean that the function of private ownership did not change? Is the "increase of power of a few groups" really the most important result of the change which took place? I believe it reaches far more deeply and should be described as the destruction of all the essential traits of private ownership, saving one exception. Even the mightiest concerns were denied the right to set up new fields of business in areas where the highest profits were to be expected, or to interrupt a production where it became unprofitable. These rights were transferred in their entirety to the ruling groups. The compromise between the groups in power initially determined the extent and direction of the production process. Faced with such a decision, the title of ownership is powerless, even if it is derived from the possession of the overwhelming majority of the share capital, let alone when it only owns a minority. (Pollock 1981a, 113)

This is one of the most lucid analyses of the economic structure of National Socialism, and it corresponds with what Ludwig von Mises wrote in the *New York Times* on June 21, 1941:

> The German pattern of socialism (*Zwangswirtschaft*) is characterized by the fact that it maintains, although only nominally, some institutions of capitalism. Labor is, of course, no longer a "commodity"; the labor market has been solemnly abolished; the government fixes wage rates and assigns every worker the place where he must work. Private ownership has been nominally untouched. In fact, however, the former entrepreneurs have been reduced to the status of shop managers (Betriebsführer). The government tells them what and how to produce, at what prices and from whom to buy, at what prices and to whom to sell. Business may remonstrate against inexpedient injunctions, but the final decision rests with the authorities. . . . Market exchange and entrepreneurship are thus only a sham. The government, not the consumers' demands, directs production; the government, not the market, fixes every individual's income and expenditure. This is socialism with the outward appearance of capitalism—all-round planning and total control of all economic activities by the government. Some of the labels of capitalistic market economy are retained, but they signify something entirely different from what they mean in a genuine market economy.

The subject of this paper, however, is not an analysis of the National Socialist economic system, but an analysis of Adolf Hitler's economic policy ideas—based on a broad range of sources.

MARKET AND PLAN

The primary sources for this study are Hitler's writings, the texts of his speeches, and notes on his conversations. With regard to Hitler's speeches, the questions that continually surface are when he can be taken at his word and when—and to what extent—the immediate purpose of a speech, and particularly the addressee, is a primary consideration. It may certainly be assumed that Hitler's public writings and speeches were written and presented with a specific effect in mind, with the intent to achieve a specific objective. This is particularly true of Hitler's foreign policy speeches between 1933 and 1939, which disclose little of his actual objectives and almost exclusively served to deceive world public opinion. In contrast to these, however, in his early speeches and articles, as well as in his two books, Hitler speaks about his long-term domestic and foreign policy objectives with an astonishing degree of candor. This investigation confirms what Joachim C. Fest (1973, 457) already demonstrated in his Hitler biography; namely, that the commonly held opinion that Hitler had "promised everybody everything" in his speeches is untenable. Therefore, it is always appropriate to keep an eye on Hitler's addressee: it goes without saying that Hitler spoke differently at a May 1 rally than he did before a group of industrialists.

Since Hitler believed that the masses were stupid and incapable of nuanced thinking, his speeches are also composed according to the "black-white" and "good-bad" pattern, even if his own thinking about various topics was far more differentiated. This is demonstrated, for instance, by the positive remarks Hitler made about the Social Democrats and the Communists within his inner circle, as well as by his never publicly expressed criticism of Italian fascism and the reactionary Franco regime in Spain (see Zitelmann 2022, Section VII).

In many instances, an analysis of a document itself shows whether Hitler's statements were only tactically motivated or whether he should be taken at his word. When the purpose behind a statement is less clear, the threefold method below is used to distinguish between mere tactical statements (or those that were obviously only intended as propaganda) from his "programmatic" statements:

(a) The internal statements that Hitler made relatively free of tactical and propaganda considerations (e.g., the "monologues at Führer headquarters" or the "table talks") are compared

with his public pronouncements. Hitler's internal statements, including his remarks to his immediate associates, which this study frequently draws on, in many instances establish a pattern against which the nature of a given public statement can be assessed.

(b) The frequency with which Hitler repeated specific statements is considered, as well as the consistency and continuity with which he expounded a certain opinion.

(c) The inner conclusiveness of specific statements is considered: certain fundamental axioms that served Hitler throughout his life can be taken as the fixed points from which he derived his opinions on concrete individual problems. If a statement can be logically and stringently deduced from Hitler's basic principles, then there is a prima facie assumption that it is a part of his weltanschauung, which may be taken seriously, and not merely a statement designed for propaganda effect or only meant as a tactical ploy.

The most important of these fundamental axioms was Hitler's concept of the "eternal fight," which for him was founded in social Darwinism. "I regard fighting as being the fate of all creatures. Nobody can escape fighting if he does not wish to go under," Hitler said in a speech on November 23, 1939 (Domarus 1973, 1422). On May 30, 1942, he remarked:

> A highly serious statement by a great military philosopher says that fighting, and therefore warfare, is the father of all things. If you take a look at nature as it actually is, you will find this statement confirmed for all forms of life and all developments, not only on this earth but probably far beyond it. The whole universe appears to be ruled by only this one thought, that there is an eternal selection process going on in which in the end the stronger keeps his life and his right to live, while the weaker falls. Some say therefore that nature is cruel and without pity, while others will come to realize that nature is only obeying an iron law of logic. Naturally, the one affected will always have to suffer, but with his suffering and his personal view he will not be able to remove this law from this world as it is given to us. The law will remain. (Picker 1983, 491)

The American historian Henry A. Turner advanced the thesis that Hitler had "taken the liberal principle of competition as the foundation for his views of domestic business matters." Turner points to the connection between Hitler's fundamental social Darwinist convictions and his affirmation of the economic principle

of competition. According to Turner, Hitler had regarded free enterprise as being a special case of the fundamental social Darwinist principle according to which life is a constant battle in which the more competent and the more capable survive (Turner 1976, 95).

The Israeli historian Avraham Barkai disagreed with Turner's interpretation and advocated the theory that the most outstanding characteristic of Hitler's economic view was his "extreme anti-liberalism, the fundamental rejection of the *laissez faire* principle of the unrestricted free market economy initiative of the entrepreneur." Hitler had not rejected competition as a matter of principle, but he wanted, suggested Barkai, to "unconditionally subject the individual free play of forces in the economy to the authority of the 'national community' and the state." The attempt to reconcile these opposing forces was one of the most outstanding traits of the National Socialist economic concept (Barkai 1977a, 408–412).

Although Barkai's thesis is the more convincing, Turner's interpretation still has something to offer because it expressly refers to Hitler's position on the economy and society before 1933. In fact, to a certain extent Hitler's true position *before* 1933 can only be speculated because Hitler—as Barkai rightly points out—kept his plans strictly secret, primarily in order not to offend the businessmen. In his talks with Otto Wagener, the chief of the economic policy section of the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or National Socialist German Workers' Party), Hitler underlined the importance of keeping his economic plans secret time and again. In September 1931, for example, he said:

> The conclusion from this is what I have said all along, that this idea is not to become a subject for propaganda, or even for any sort of discussion, except within the innermost study group. It can only be implemented in any case when we hold political power in our hands. And even then we will have as opponents, besides the Jews, all of private industry, particularly heavy industry, as well as the medium and large landholders, and naturally the banks. (Wagener 1978, 321)

In the spring of 1932, Hitler explained to Wagener that although he was a socialist, at the moment he had to show consideration "for the men in business for political reasons." He was against a publication of the party's economic plans because "there only has to be *one* word in there which is not correct or can be falsely interpreted. All of our enemies will then seize upon that word, and will then not only drag your publication, but our whole party and all of its objectives, down

into the dirt" (Wagener 1978, 479). Time and again, Hitler expressly insisted that "for the time being all of these thoughts and problems are not to be discussed outside of a certain circle," as he put it in the early summer of 1930 (Wagener 1978, 116).[1]

In a conversation between Hitler and Wagener that took place in the autumn of 1930, the latter said:

> The economic self-administration structure I have recommended, and the control of the economy by the state which it makes possible, will bring these things [the overexpansion of export and the neglect of domestic food production] back into order automatically. I shall be curious to see when the first big industrialist will come to you and start ranting against this structure and against a planned economy—as they call this—and in the final analysis against me.

Hitler replied:

> That is why it is good that we decide these questions before we get into disputes with these people. And it is also appropriate that we keep our plans secret until we are sitting in the government. Otherwise they too [i.e., big business] will set the whole horde of uncomprehending industrial workers on us beforehand and we will never gain power. (Wagener 1978, 208 et seq.)

This conversation between Hitler and Wagener shows that it was precisely those plans aimed at state control of the economy that Hitler wanted to keep secret at all costs before the seizure of power. An undated record of a later conversation reveals that Hitler accused Wagener of underestimating the political power of the business leaders:

> You are underestimating the political power of these men, Wagener, and of business in general. I have the feeling that we will not be able to conquer the Wilhelmstraße against them [i.e., the Reich Chancellery, located in Wilhelmstraße in Berlin]. As much as I therefore consider your plans, which are also my plans, to be correct and necessary, to the same degree it appears to be necessary to hold back these plans completely until we are firmly seated in the Wilhelmstraße and until we have at least two-thirds of the German people firmly behind us. (Wagener 1978, 443)

For this reason, it is indeed difficult to determine Hitler's position on free enterprise or planned economy *before* 1933. One of

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[1] Wagener reported similar statements by Hitler. See Wagener 1978, 183, 206, 298, 335, 415.

the few sources that provide information about Hitler's economic concepts before 1933 is the notes made by Wagener, who had many talks with Hitler about economic problems. In September 1930, Wagener's overall impression of Hitler was that "he was obviously of two minds about this. . . . He was a socialist and deliberately so. But in his attachment to nature he was constantly able to observe the fight for existence, the struggle to defeat the other one, and to recognize this as a natural law" (Wagener 1978, 215). With Hitler, therefore, both elements of a planned economy and ones that emphasize the principles of competition and selection concur. In an autumn 1930 conversation with Wagener, for example, Hitler said, "That is what I keep saying, right from the start there is a lack of leadership in business, a lack of planning! Yes, there is even the lack of any consideration of this, the will to even think about it" (Wagener 1978, 204). In another conversation, in 1931, he attempted to reconcile the principle of state control with the independence of business:

> If, for example, industrial companies were to decide from a higher insight no longer to compete with each other but to form a community of interests, then each company in itself would remain independent. It would only be integrated into the community production-wise and sales-wise according to a higher plan and according to points of view of common sense and profitability. It will therefore have to relinquish *some part* of its sovereignty in the interest of the whole, and thereby also in its own interest. (Wagener 1978, 292 et seq.)

As he declared in early 1931, Hitler was looking for a "synthesis" that would lead to a "radical removal of all the bad results of industrialization and unrestricted economic liberalism" (Wagener 1978, 268).

All of these statements are expressions of a critical position toward economic liberalism. Hitler believed that unrestricted economic liberalism had become outdated and had to be replaced by a new economic system. "We are living in the middle of a turnabout, which is leading from individualism and economic liberalism to socialism," he said to Wagener in June 1930 (Wagener 1978, 353).

On the other hand, Hitler was a convinced social Darwinist: "In all of life anywhere, only a selection process will always be decisive. With animals, with plants, everywhere we look, the stronger, the better, will basically always impose itself," He declared in the early summer of 1930 (Wagener 1978, 106).

Hitler's main intention was obviously to reconcile the advantages of economic liberalism's principles of competition and selection (in the social Darwinist sense) with the advantages of a state-controlled economy. Although the state was to direct the economy according to the principle of "common interest before self-interest" and to set objectives, the principle of competition was not to be abolished within this framework because in Hitler's view it was an important mainspring for economic development and technical and industrial progress. What was important, however, was that Hitler did not share the beliefs of the advocates of "economic liberalism," according to which the common good would come about as a sort of automatic result of the play of the various self-interests. In a speech on November 13, 1930, he said:

> In all of business, in all of life in fact, we will have to do away with the concept that the benefit to the individual is what is most important, and that from the self-interest of the individual the benefit to the whole is built up, therefore that it is the benefit to the individual which only makes up the benefit to the community at all. The opposite is true. The benefit to the community determines the benefit to the individual. The profit of the individual is only weighed out from the profit of the community. . . . If this principle is not accepted, then an egoism must necessarily develop which will destroy the community. When somebody says that the present age will not stand for such an uneconomic way of thinking, then we have to answer him, a way of thinking is either right or wrong. If it is right, then any age will stand for it, and if it is wrong, then it will be wrong for any age. (Bundesarchiv Koblenz, NL Streicher 126, Blatt 16)

In Hitler's view, therefore, the economic egoism of the individual and the principle of competition are important mainsprings of economic life, but they must be bound by the state and not be allowed to unfold without restriction because the common good does not result from the individual's pursuit of special interests, as the adherents of free enterprise believe. This is the framework within which Hitler accepted private initiative.

In a speech at the Second Working Congress of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF) on May 16, 1934 (printed in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on May 18, 1934), the two sides of Hitler's thinking were clearly expressed. On the one hand, Hitler said, the free play of forces must be granted as broad and free a field as possible; on the other, this play of forces had to remain within the framework of the given human communal necessity; in other words, within the framework of the national community. In this same speech it again

becomes clear that Hitler was transferring his fundamental social Darwinist convictions to the field of economics:

> Free life is as natural as the battle out there in nature, which also does not have any compunctions and destroys many living beings, so that only what is healthy survives. If this principle were to be removed by nationalization, then the principles of civil administration would be applied to the structure of our whole economic life and we would experience a pitiful collapse. We cannot achieve any sort of human progress at all in a completely bureaucratic economy.

Hitler was therefore initially also skeptical of a planned economy, even though he believed in the need for state control of business. In a policy speech in the Reichstag on May 21, 1935 (printed in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on May 22, 1935), he declared that the task of making Germany economically independent could "only be solved by a planned economy," and then added that this was

> a dangerous undertaking because any planned economy was followed all too easily by bureaucracy and therefore the stifling of eternally creative private initiative. And in the interest of our nation we cannot wish that, with an economy approaching Communism and the dulling effect on productive energy this entails, the total productive achievement of our existing labour force is reduced, and thereby the standard of living experiences, instead of an increase, all the greater a decrease. This danger is even increased by the fact that any planned economy all too easily abolishes, or at least restricts, the harsh laws of economic selection of the better and destruction of the weaker, in favour of a guarantee of even the most inferior average at the expense of higher ability, greater diligence and value, and therefore at the expense of the common good. If we decided to go this route despite these insights, then we did this under the most harsh constraints of necessity. What has been achieved in the last two and a half years in the areas of a planned provision of jobs, a planned regulation of the markets, a planned structuring of prices and wages, would have been considered to be completely impossible only a few short years ago.

Hitler's reservations against a planned economy are therefore primarily an outcome of his social Darwinist convictions. He feared that the elimination of free competition could remove a mainspring of business life. On the other hand, from his fundamental principle of the "primacy of polities" and his concept of "the secondary role of the economy" he derived the stringent demands of state control of business because in the final analysis only state control would be able to enforce the state-defined common good against the private interests of the individual.

In view of the successes achieved by the government's economic policies in the years immediately after it came to power, Hitler's reservations against state planning of the economy gradually diminished. In an October 6, 1935, speech given at a harvest festival (printed in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on October 7, 1935), Hitler looked back on the economic successes achieved since his party's seizure of power and attributed these to planned economy elements and state measures:

> Certainly, and this is clear, we could not simply let things run on. Such a miracle would not have come about of itself. If Germany intends to live, then it must . . . run its whole economy in a manner that is clear and planned. . . . We cannot manage without a plan. If we were to let things run on according to the principle everyone may do as he likes, then in a very short time this freedom would end up in a terrible famine. No, we have to conduct our business and run our economy according to plan. . . . Therefore, the National Socialist government cannot be dependent on any individual interests. It cannot be dependent on the city or the country, not on workers and not on employers. It cannot be dependent on industry, on the crafts, on trade or on finance. It can only accept one obligation. . . . The nation alone is our master and we serve this nation to the best of our knowledge and belief.

How important Hitler considered state-controlled planning of the economy can be seen from the fact that in August 1936 he personally wrote a memorandum on the Four Year Plan. In this memorandum, Hitler expressed his admiration and fear of the Soviet system of planned economy: "The German economy, however, will learn to understand the new economic tasks, or it will prove itself to be incapable of continuing to survive in these modern times in which the Soviet state sets up a gigantic plan" (Hitler 1955, 209). As will be shown, Hitler was convinced of the superiority of the Soviet planned economic system over the capitalist economic system. This must be regarded as an essential reason why he so vehemently demanded and enforced the extension of state control of the economy in Germany as well. This motive—namely, Hitler's fear, clearly expressed in his memorandum, that if the German economy kept its system of free enterprise "in these modern times in which the Soviet state sets up a gigantic plan," it could no longer survive—has previously not been acknowledged by research.

In a speech at the culture meeting of the Reichsparteitag on September 9, 1936, Hitler finally declared that "the free play of forces" had ended in politics as well as in business. In his opening proclamation, he said that it was "a matter of course that the

lack of restraints of a free economy had to be ended in favour of planned direction and planned action." (Hitler 1936, 17, 20–21) The National Socialist leadership had always avoided exercising greater influence on business than absolutely necessary. Ahead of all other considerations, it had always been a matter of principle that the nation and business were not the slaves of capital "but that capital is only a business tool and therefore also subjected to the higher necessity of preserving the nation." Hitler then went on to set the objective for Germany of in four years' time becoming independent of other nations for all those materials

> which can somehow be provided by German ability, by our chemical and machine industries as well as our mines. . . . Maybe we will soon again be hearing the criticism from the mouths of the western democracies that we are now also no longer granting business the freedom to do as it likes, but are putting it into the strait-jacket of our state planning. But, my fellow national comrades, you must understand that this is not a matter of democracy or freedom, but of being or not being. The issue is not the freedom or profit of a few industrialists, but the life and the freedom of the German nation.

In his January 30, 1937, speech, on the fourth anniversary of his seizure of power, Hitler sharply attacked the idea of economic liberalism and expressed his conviction of the necessity of a state-controlled economy:

> There is no economic concept or economic view which can claim to be gospel. What is decisive is the will to always assign business the role of servant of the people and capital the role of servant of business. National Socialism is, as we know, the sharpest opponent of the liberalistic point of view that business existed for capital and the people for business. We were therefore also determined from the very first day to break with the mistaken concept that business could lead an unbound, uncontrollable and unsupervised life within the state. A free economy, in other words one completely left to itself, can no longer exist today. Not only would this be politically intolerable, no, economically too, impossible conditions would result. Just as millions of individual people cannot structure or perform their work according to their own ideas or needs, so also business as a whole cannot act according to its own opinions or in the service of egoistic interests. Because today it too is no longer able to bear the consequences of a mistake all by itself. Modern economic development concentrates enormous masses of workers in certain types of jobs and in certain regions. New inventions or the loss of markets can destroy whole industries in one blow. The industrialist may be able to close the gates of his factory, he may even attempt to find a new field of activity for his drive to be active. In most cases he will not go under so readily, and, apart from that, here we are only dealing with a few individuals. But facing these

> there are hundreds of thousands of workers with their women and their children! Who will take them and who will care for them? The national community! *Jawohl*! It has to. But then it cannot be accepted that the national community is only burdened with the responsibility for the catastrophe of business, without having any influence on, and responsibility for the direction and the control of business by which the catastrophe could be avoided! My fellow members! When in 1932 to 1933 the German economy appeared to be finally heading for complete destruction, the following became even more clear to me than in earlier years: the salvation of our nation is not a problem of finance, but exclusively a problem of the use and employment of our existing working forces on the one hand and the utilization of existing land and natural resources on the other. It is therefore first and foremost a problem of organization. We are therefore also not dealing with phrases such as "freedom of the economy"; the issue is rather to give the workforce the possibility of a production and a productive activity by all available means. As long as business, in other words the sum total of our enterprises, is able to do this, all the better. But if it is no longer capable, then the national community, in other words in this case the state, is obliged to take care of the employment of the existing workforce for the purpose of a useful production, or to take the appropriate measures for this. (Hitler, 1937, 21–23)

As he said in a speech on February 20, 1937 (printed in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on February 21, 1937), the crucial problem could only be solved by "a planned direction of our economy," which found its "most powerful expression" in the Four Year Plan.

Such statements clearly show that Hitler was gradually giving up his initial skepticism toward a state-controlled economy and formulating his criticism of the free enterprise system with growing sharpness and increasingly as a matter of principle. In Hitler's view, the free play of forces in the marketplace in no way automatically resulted in a functioning, orderly, and flourishing economy. This economic objective could only be achieved by means of state control. Although Hitler continued to believe that a general nationalization of the means of production was not necessary in order to organize total production rationally, he threatened—openly and otherwise—nationalization as a possibility if the free economy did not achieve the objectives the state had set.

On February 20, 1937, for example, at the opening of the International Automobile and Motorcycle Show, he said:

> In one to two years we will be independent of foreign countries in our requirements for fuel and rubber. . . . And there must be no doubt, either the so-called free economy is able to solve these problems or it will not able to continue to exist as a free economy! The National Socialist state

> will not capitulate under any circumstances before the laziness, nor the lack of intelligence, nor the malice of the individual German.

That the free economy must be able to solve the problems or "it [would] not be able to continue to exist as a free economy" was heavily emphasized in the new periodical *Der Vierjahresplan* (The Four Year Plan) (Ludwig 1974, 163). Hitler was soon to prove that this threat was quite serious.

On various occasions Hitler emphasized that there was no such thing in business as an untouchable dogma. Free enterprise was not gospel for him either. In his opening proclamation to the Reichsparteitag on September 7, 1937, he declared:

> Business is one of the many functions in the life of the nation and can therefore only be organized and directed under considerations of expediency and never treated according to dogma. As a dogma there is neither a socialist economy nor a free economy, there is only a committed economy, in other words an economy which has the overall obligation of providing a nation with the highest and best living conditions. In as far as it fulfils this task without any direction from above, only out of the free play of forces, all the better, and above all very pleasant for the government. In as far as it is no longer able to fulfil its task as a free economy in some specific area, the leadership of the national community has the obligation to give the economy those directions which are necessary in the interest of the preservation of the whole. But when in one or the other area an economy is completely incapable of solving the great tasks it has been set, then the leadership of the national community will have to look for other ways and means with which to satisfy the requirements of the community.

The closing sentences again contain a threat that is only lightly veiled. With his oft-repeated thesis that there is no such thing as dogmas in the field of business, Hitler wanted to make it clear to the business leaders that they had to fulfil the tasks assigned to them by the state and that should "the objective set" not be reached "by these means, the nation itself [would] take over this work."

Hitler wanted to exploit the advantages of a market economy, above all the principle of competition, as the mainspring for the constant growth of the economy but was very skeptical of the possibility of achieving an optimal economic process without state control of business. This skepticism grew, probably based on various negative experiences, and therefore Hitler's declarations that if private industry were incapable of fulfilling the tasks it had been set, other ways and means would be found to achieve the

necessary objectives. In the speech in the Reichstag cited above, he also emphasized that Germany could not tolerate "every individual" being "allowed to do what he likes" in business.

In Hitler's view, the requirements of rearmament in particular prohibited the making of investment decisions primarily on the basis of personal capitalistic considerations of profitability. Hans Frank (Reich leader and governor-general of Poland during the Second World War), for example, reports that addressing the problem of iron and steel production in a May 1938 talk with Benito Mussolini, Hitler had said:

> But if it should ever again come to war, then Germany's iron and steel production stands prepared for the highest achievements. I am grubbing around in the soil of Germany and where I can find even as little as one thousand tonnes I dig them out. But a procedure such as this can only be done by a state which, like Italy or us, has made itself independent of capitalist methods, for whom the exploitation of national raw materials is only important from the point of view of earnings, in other words so-called profitability. But these raw materials must be gained one way or the other, because what must be important is not whether a capitalist can make money with them but whether the power of the national economy can be increased. This alone is the task, for which—naturally—only the possible degree to which the general welfare can be increased is at all important in the end. (Frank 1953, 367)

In a speech on May 1, 1938 (printed in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on May 2, 1938), Hitler attributed the success of National Socialist economic policy primarily to state control of the economy:

> But this also required an organization of work which compelled everybody to put the interests of the whole ahead of his own. Here the National Socialist state imposed itself without compunction. Only thereby was it possible for us to install a unified leadership in our economy, which as a result produced those gigantic achievements which benefit the whole nation.

In a conversation with the Italian minister of justice Dino Grandi on November 25, 1940, Hitler criticized the governments of democracies: "They actually do no work but leave everything to civilian initiative and business. With this their problems are not only not solved but simply ignored" (Hillgruber 1969, 373). In table talks on July 27 and 28, 1941, Hitler said that "a sensible employment of the powers of a nation can only be achieved with a planned economy from above" (Hitler 1980a, 50). About two weeks later, he said: "As far as the planning of the economy is concerned, we

are still very much at the beginning and I imagine it will be something wonderfully nice to build up an encompassing German and European economic order" (Hitler 1980a, 56, emphasis added). The statement that the planning of the economy was still at the very beginning is important because it shows that Hitler was not thinking at all of a reduction of state intervention—not even after the war—but, on the contrary, intended to expand the instruments of state control of the economy even further.

On July 5, 1942, Hitler expressed the opinion in a table talk that if the German economy had been able so far to deal with innumerable problems,

> this was also due in the end to the fact that the direction of the economy had gradually become more controlled by the state. Only thus had it been possible to enforce the overall national objective against the interests of individual groups. *Even after the war we would not be able to renounce state control of the economy*, because then every interest group would think exclusively of the fulfilment of its wishes. (Picker 1983, 419)

Hitler's view of the Soviet economic system apparently also changed from strong skepticism to admiration. Already in Hitler's 1936 memorandum on the Four Year Plan, the beginnings of a positive view of the USSR's planned economic system were present, as has been shown. On the other hand, in a conversation with Joseph Goebbels on November 14, 1939, for example, Hitler was still very critical of the Soviet economic system, which he accused of being overcentralized, bureaucratic, and stifling private initiative and efficiency (Goebbels 1987, 641). Less than three years later, in a table talk on July 22, 1942, however, Hitler vehemently defended the Soviet economic system and even the so-called Stakhanov system, which he said it was "exceedingly stupid" to ridicule:

> One has to have unqualified respect for Stalin. In his way, the guy is quite a genius! His ideals such as Genghis Khan and so forth he knows very well, and his economic planning is so all-encompassing that it is only exceeded by our own Four-Year Plan. I have no doubts whatsoever that there have been no unemployed in the USSR, as opposed to capitalist countries such as the USA. (Picker 1983, 452)

Until now research has not recognized that Hitler's economic convictions, most notably his conviction concerning the superiority of a system of a planned over a free economy, were decisively shaped by his impressions of the superiority of the Soviet economic system. Hitler's admiration for the Soviet system is also

confirmed in the notes of Wilhelm Scheidt, who as adjutant to Hitler's "representative for military history" Walther Scherff and a member of the führer's headquarters group had close contact with Hitler and sometimes even took part in the "briefings." Scheidt notes (quoted in Zitelmann 2022, 302) that Hitler underwent a "conversion to Bolshevism." From Hitler's remarks, Scheidt says, the following reactions could be derived: "Firstly, Hitler was enough of a materialist to be the first to recognize the enormous armament achievements of the USSR in the context of her strong, generous and all-encompassing economic organization." Hitler's surprise, which also apparently struck Scheidt as well as the other members of the Führer Headquarters group, in view of their impressions of the effectiveness of the Soviet economic system, is expressed in Scheidt's subsequent statements:

> And, indeed, for any eye accustomed to European forms of economy, it was most compelling to see the differences that became apparent when one entered into Soviet territory. Even from an aircraft one observed the sudden change in the cultivation of the land. The many small fields that are characteristic for the European farmer disappeared and gave place to a wide-spaced but still rational division of land. The fertile plains of the Ukraine spread out in gigantic rectangles impossible to overlook, ordered and impeccably cultivated like a carpet of order and diligence, which could hardly be more impressively conceived. It was manifest that here something had been achieved and developed economically, *with which the forms of western economies could not compete in the long run*. This impression is confirmed by the detailed reports of agrarian experts. The same impression is repeated when inspecting even the destroyed industrial plants. Even from their ruins one could see that they had been equipped in the most modern fashion and had disposed a gigantic production capacity.

Scheidt writes that in view of such impressions, Hitler had recognized and expressed "the inner relationship of his system with the so heatedly opposed Bolshevism" and had had to admit that "this system of the enemy was developed far more completely and straightforwardly. His enemy became his secret example." The "experience of Communist Russia," particularly the impression of the alleged superiority of the Soviet economic system, had produced a strong reaction in Hitler and the circle of his faithful: "The other economic systems appeared not to be competitive in comparison." About the impression of the rational organization of farming in the USSR and the "gigantic industrial plants which gave eloquent testimony despite their destruction" Hitler, says Scheidt, had been "enthusiastic."

As he admitted during a conversation with Mussolini on April 22, 1944, Hitler had become convinced that "capitalism too had run its course, the nations were no longer willing to stand for it. The victors to survive would be Fascism, and National Socialism—maybe Bolshevism in the East" (Hillgruber 1967, 422 et seq.).

Hitler's Reichs press chief, Otto Dietrich, writes in his memoirs that Hitler had sensed that

> the economic requirements of human large-area development had outgrown the structure of the former self-regulating private capitalistic economic system and that common sense demanded a new, more efficient economic structure, in other words a planned overall management. The economic principle he was envisaging can be expressed as follows: private capital production based on a belief in the common good and under state control! (Dietrich 1955, 188)

It must be noted, however, that Hitler sometimes played with the idea of dispensing with the principle of private ownership and nationalizing important parts of industry—as will be shown below.

Hitler's chief architect, Albert Speer, reports that in light of such tendencies, which were analogous to an actual development in which the influence of the state on business continued to grow, serious "ill humour" began to spread among industrialists, including the representatives of the armaments industry, directed against the

> increasing spread of the power of the party machine on business. And, in fact, a sort of state socialism appeared to be gaining ground in the minds of numerous party functionaries. . . . Our system of controlling industry the war had caused, and which above all else had also shown itself to be very effective, was well suited to become the pattern for a state-controlled nationalized economic order, so that it was the industrialists themselves who by their improved results were, if you like, delivering tools for their own destruction into the hands of the party leaders. (Speer 1969, 369)[2]

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[2] Industry fears of the expansion of a system of planned economy that Speer reports on were also reinforced by several party statements. Herbst, for example, writes that the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the central organ of the NSDAP, "occasionally appeared to be not far removed from the idea a planned economy" (Herbst 1982, 329). Herbst also cites an article in the August 19, 1944, *Völkischer Beobachter*: "What is the sense today, when we are aspiring to new forms of the economy, of sitting like Iphigenia on Taurian shores and pining for the memories of the past. Economic forms are nothing more than a function of the amount of production, and since we are aspiring to a new dimension of production we must accept new economic forms." (Herbst 1982, 330). Herbst formulates many industrialists' misgivings in view of the increasing state direction during the war: "Were not many industrialists being set aside by the means of power of the state, which

This background information is required for us to understand the speech that Hitler gave on June 26, 1944, at the Obersalzberg to representatives of the armaments industry.[3] Speer had expressly requested that Hitler allay these fears of the industrialists in a speech, whereupon Hitler asked Speer to give him some cues. Speer reports:

> I noted down for him that he should promise the representatives of industrial self-administration that they would receive help in the times of heavy crisis to be expected, furthermore that they would be protected against interference by local party authorities, and finally an emphatic avowal of the "invulnerability of the private ownership of the production plants" even when these were temporarily moved underground as plants run by the state, free enterprise after the war, and a fundamental rejection of the nationalization of industry. (Speer 1969, 369)

None of this was at all in line with Hitler's true convictions. Nevertheless, he saw the need to follow Speer's advice and dispel the suspicions of the industrialists.

And indeed, in the speech there are several moments where he rejects any nationalization of the means of production, declares his respect for private ownership, and explains the economic principle of competition in terms of social Darwinism (Kotze and Krausnick 1966, 337 et seq., 341–43). Many of these statements are not to be taken seriously—even if they might have equated to some of his views in former years—because from Speer's report it is clear that the purely tactical objective of dispelling the suspicions of the industrialists was the overriding motive. And Hitler did not really succeed in presenting the assurances Speer had recommended

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could lead to the beginning of an expropriation? And was private property still secure, simply because a nationalization was not taking place? Was not a form of state economy announcing itself in this economic system under state control, which could renounce nationalization because it no longer needed it?" (Herbst 1982, 328). The forced closure of companies within the framework of "total war" also nourished such fears among small businessmen. While on the one hand, assurances were given that these factories could reopen after the war, on the other the suspicion that in fact "the war was being used as a motor for social changes" kept receiving new nourishment (Herbst 1982, 224). On February 14, 1943, for example, an article with the provocative title "Shops under the Magnifying Glass" appeared in the periodical *Das Reich*. It said, among other things, that "not all the owners of the companies closed down could expect that their factories would open again after the war" (quoted in Herbst 1982, 224).

[3] The dating to early June 1944 (Kotze and Krausnick 1966, 335; Domarus 1973, 2112) is incorrect. See Herbst (1982, 333n324).

convincingly and credibly. Speer reports on his impression of Hitler's speech: "In his speech, in which he kept to my cues, Hitler gave the impression of being inhibited. He made frequent slips of the tongue, stopped, broke off mid-sentence, lacked fluidity of expression and occasionally confused himself" (Speer 1969, 369 et seq.). Speer also attributes this to Hitler's state of exhaustion. What was more important, however, was that Hitler had been compelled to state views which were far removed from his true convictions, and to give a speech that, in contrast to his custom, had partially been written by someone else. And, as Speer noted, Hitler immediately relativized his statements.

At first Hitler rejected any ideological reservations "because there can only be one dogma, and this dogma says in short, the right thing is the thing which is expedient." With this Hitler reinforced his "pragmatic way of thinking and *took back all of the assurance given to industry*" (Speer 1969, 369 et seq.).

In fact, Hitler began his speech with the following:

> In the liberal state of yesteryear, business, in the final analysis, was the servant of capital, the people, in the opinion of many, a means for business. In the National Socialist state the people are the dominating factor, business a means in the service of the preservation of the people, capital a means of directing business. . . . In directing the fight for existence of a nation there can be only one dogma, namely to apply those means which lead to success. Any further dogma would be harmful. I would therefore not shrink back from anything if I knew that one or the other of these methods was failing. (Kotze and Krausnick 1966, 336)

This introduction by Hitler, as Speer rightly notes, was not at all appropriate for reassuring the industrialists. Only if looked at superficially is it an expression of "a pragmatic way of thinking." In reality Hitler's statement that there was no dogma in business, as has already been shown, functioned more as a warning that for him the system of free enterprise was not gospel. When he then added that he would "not shrink back from anything" if one or the other method were to fail, this too was only a thinly veiled threat that made all of his subsequent avowals in favor of private ownership and against nationalization worthless.

Hitler went even further and told the industrialists that state control of the economy would continue after the end of the war in order to maintain a relative autarky for Germany:

> This, gentlemen, is immediately an area where, in future as well, state control will have to intervene. It must intervene here from the vantage of a higher insight. It is an insanity to produce cartridges out of brass in times of peace and to know very well that after three months of war one then has to immediately convert to cartridges out of iron or steel, an insanity! But the brass cartridge is prettier, it is easier to manufacture and furthermore it is well introduced. This is where the task of state control begins, or where it receives its assignment, namely to assure that the higher insight of war is taken into account here. (Kotze and Krausnick 1966, 348)

In the end, the speech Hitler had given on Speer's advice and which Speer had helped to formulate had a completely different result from what Speer had imagined. As Speer summarizes: "The avowal of a free economy in times of peace, which I had asked of Hitler and been promised, came out far less clearly than I had expected." Nonetheless, said Speer, some of the statements in the speech had been noteworthy, so he asked Hitler for permission to file it in the archives—which never came about because Martin Bormann prevented it and Hitler remained evasive (Speer 1969, 371).[4]

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[4] Herbst misinterprets Hitler's June 16, 1944, speech to armaments industry leaders. In Hitler's statements, Herbst sees a "clear rejection of a planned economy" and states that Hitler, like Ohlendorf (Ministry of Economics) and Speer, believed that "the German economic order in the post-war era should be based on private ownership and private initiative" (Herbst 1982, 337). In contrast to this, Speer quite rightly pointed out that Hitler's avowal of a free economy had been "unclear" and that the speech had not fulfilled its purpose; namely, to soothe industrialist' fears of the continuation of the system of planned economy after the war. Herbst objects to Speer's interpretation and states: "Hitler clearly avowed his commitment to private property as the base for the future economic order and announced in the case of a German victory that 'the private initiative of the German economy will experience its greatest era'" (Herbst 1982, 335). Since Herbst does not take into account that the only purpose of this speech was to dispel the industrialist' fears, he finds it "strange" that Hitler refused Speer's request to have the speech published: "It must remain unclear whether it was the linguistic condition of the speech or its content which made it disappear in the safe" (Herbst 1982, 335). In our view, however, this is neither "unclear" nor "strange," not any more than the fact that Hitler frequently committed slips of the tongue and did not concentrate. In contrast to his usual custom, he had not completely prepared the speech himself but had primarily kept to Speer's notes. Herbst also fundamentally contradicts himself when he claims, on the one hand, that Hitler favored reduced state intervention and a free economy after the war but writes, on the other hand, that a National Socialist government "could hardly have taken the road into a free economy, even if it had wished to attempt this—something which cannot be assumed with any certainty" (Herbst 1982, 128–30, 433, 459). While the Ministry of Economics intended to reduce state direction after the war, Ohlendorf's criticism shows that Ohlendorf's middle-class ideology had nothing in common with

Hitler himself was convinced, as he emphasized in his last radio address on January 30, 1945, "that the age of unrestricted economic liberalism had outlived itself" (Domarus 1973, 2196). In his final dictations to Bormann about one month later, he said, in looking back: "The crisis of the thirties was only a crisis of growth, albeit of global proportions. Economic liberalism unveiled itself as having become an outdated formula" (Hitler 1981, 106).

Hitler's statements in the period from 1935 to 1945, but particularly from the 1940s on, show that he had become a vehement critic of the system of free enterprise and a confirmed adherent of the system of a planned, state-controlled economy. These convictions were logically derived from his thesis of "the secondary role of the economy." If Hitler hesitated to follow his convictions from time to time, this must certainly be attributed to his fundamental social Darwinist position, because of which he regarded the principle of competition in business as important. This was, however, by then no longer essential for Hitler's economic thinking; his conviction was that the system of economic liberalism had outlived itself and that the future belonged to the state-controlled, planned economy.

Hitler's views on the problem of "market versus plan" well demonstrate the degree to which the dictator's weltanschauung became reality. During the early years of National Socialist rule, as Barkai has written in his basic study *Das Wirtschaftssystem des Nationalsozialismus*, state intervention in the economy was "incomparable to any other capitalist country, including Fascist Italy, as far as degree and depth is concerned" (Barkai 1977b, 10 et seq.). In many aspects, the economic policy of the National Socialists was comparable to the recommendations of the "reformers" among economists, who during the global economic crisis of the 1920s had advocated the thesis that only an active stabilization policy could achieve the objective of reinstating full employment. But although most of the reformers saw their recommendations as emergency measures of limited duration, after which the economy, once back on track, could return to free market conditions, their theoretical

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Hitler's concept of National Socialism. Ohlendorf, who held an important position in the ministry beginning in December 1943, lamented that in all aspects of life the individual was being "equated" to the soldier, and he criticized the uniformity of life, the orientation of production to requirements, and "norming" and mass production. Fundamentally, he bemoaned the individual's "subordinat[ion] to the economy" under central planning (see Herbst 1982, 286 et seq.).

economic instruments in the hands of the National Socialists became "an ongoing economic and financial control of an economy being directed in the service of the 'primacy of polities'" (Barkai 1977b, 56).

Slowly but surely all the sectors of the economy were subjugated by the state. The "New Plan" set up in 1934 resulted in the complete and direct control of foreign trade. Every single import contract had to be approved by one of twenty-five "control authorities" organized by industry. Only on the basis of this approval would the regional "foreign currency office" allocate the importer the necessary foreign currency. For all practical purposes the "New Plan" was nothing but an almost "total state monopoly of foreign trade" (Barkai 1977b, 139; see also Kroll 1958, 477–96). The National Socialist state also created a comprehensive set of instruments for the direct control of investments. The control of raw materials in particular, which had been introduced in March 1933 and formalized by law in July 1934, was used for this purpose. The twenty-eight "allocation offices" also began to use the information they collected for the purpose of deciding on new construction or expansion of industrial plants. In July 1933, this power of confirmation and supervision was transferred to the Reich minister of economics. With this, for all practical purposes, the whole of private investment activity was subjected to state control. Decrees were then issued prohibiting investments for whole industries; for example, textiles, paper, cement, glass, and also segments of heavy industry such as lead and pipes.

Within the framework of National Socialist economic thinking, all of this was consistent:

> In the context of a state-directed economic concept, the creation of capital and investments assume a central role. What was at first sensed more intuitively here, namely the importance of investment for the cyclical process of the economy, was soon able to see itself confirmed by modern economic theory, that such an important factor for employment and the balancing of the economy could not be left to the free initiative and the desire to invest of the entrepreneurs. (Barkai 1977b, 155 et seq.)

Wages and prices, which in the capitalist free enterprise system are left to the free play of market forces to regulate, were state controlled in the Third Reich.

Although there had already been a Reich price commissioner in Germany since 1931, the creation of a new Reich commissioner for price formation at the end of October 1936 was, according

to Dieter Petzina, "more than just the reactivation of an already familiar office under a new name. Under the Four-Year Plan it developed into a central control institution for economic policy" (Petzina 1968, 159–63). The duties of the price commissioner did not consist of merely "controlling" and correcting market prices, but also of the "official formation of the price." The assignment of labor was also state controlled by means of various instruments and measures. A directive issued in 1936 within the framework of the Four-Year Plan, for example, required every company in the iron and metal industry and the building trade to train a certain number of apprentices as a means of reducing the lack of skilled workers (Petzina 1968, 159–63). In summary, the state created a comprehensive planning instrument and by a number of direct and indirect measures controlled the allocation of raw materials, investments, wages, prices, and in part also consumption.[5]

It would be too one sided, as both Petzina and Barkai have emphasized, to explain this policy of state control only in terms of the necessities of rearmament. The thesis according to which the regime only created these instruments of economic control for the pragmatic purpose of realizing an optimal rearmament misapprehends the fact that, completely independently of this, it was a key objective of the National Socialists to establish an antiliberal economic system and to abolish the economic system based on private capital (according to Petzina 1968, 10; Barkai 1977b, 171 et seq.). The restructuring of the economic order that had already begun in the early years of the Third Reich was pushed even further during the war. Within the system of the war economy, the state as the sole customer centrally decided what was to be produced, set the priorities, and allocated the raw materials, labor, energy, and transport capacity.

For Hitler none of this was in any way an emergency measure only required because of rearmament and war, but rather an instrument deliberately created to revolutionize the economic order and to establish a new economic system that was to be characterized by a synthesis between elements of free enterprise and state control, whereby the priority clearly lay on the aspect of state control that was to implement the "primacy of polities."

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[5] The forms of economic control are described in detail in Kroll (1958, 539–61); Petzina (1968, 153–77), and Blaich (1971, 10–18).

The fact that a planned economy could be installed in Germany so quickly was predicated on a variety of factors. Politically the dictatorship was able to break all opposition, even from the side of industry. Barkai rightly emphasizes that it is highly doubtful whether any democratic government of the day could have overcome opposition by the business interests, which were organized into political pressure groups, in order to implement a uniform unorthodox economic policy, even if it had been able to bring itself to theoretically recognize these necessities (Barkai 1977b, 177).

On the other hand, in German economic science there was a long "étatist" tradition that can be traced from Adam Müller and Friedrich List all the way to Werner Sombart (Barkai 1977b, 59–86). During the world economic crisis, which demonstrated in the eyes of many the failure of the capitalist system in view of the problem of full employment, the concept of a planned economy became popular. The Left, particularly the KPD (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands, or the Communist Party of Germany), was critical of, or even opposed, the capitalist system anyway, and propagated the planned economy as an alternative to the capitalist "anarchy of production." But even economists like Sombart proclaimed in presentations, articles, and popular brochures that the future belonged to the planned economy (Sombart 1932, 18–20).

Hitler was influenced by these concepts, which were widespread within the circles of the "conservative revolutionaries." They agreed with the basic premises of his weltanschauung, in which the freedom of the individual had no intrinsic value and everything had to submit to the "common good"—in other words, to the interests of the nation as defined by the Führer.

For Hitler, the—in his eyes—surprisingly effective Soviet war production appeared to confirm his thesis of the superiority of the planned over the free economic system. And when ideological premises, the economic principles derived from these, and the practical successes of an economic policy agree to such a degree, the assumption that after the war Hitler would return to the "old" system of free enterprise was mistaken. The opposite was true. Since the system of planned economy was in complete agreement with the premises of Hitler's weltanschauung, and seemed to be extremely effective in practice, Hitler would not choose the path of a gradual reduction of state intervention (as the industrialists quite

rightly feared) after the war but would most probably continue to extend this system consistently—and his statements indicate this.

PRIVATE OWNERSHIP AND NATIONALIZATION

The answer to the question of Hitler's position on private ownership and nationalization appears to be fairly simple. It is generally accepted that Hitler recognized private ownership of the means of production and rejected nationalization (Turner 1976, 95–96, 103–104). This study has already shown, however, that Hitler often quite openly used the possibility of nationalization as a threat. This section will go further and present several statements by Hitler, particularly from the early 1940s, in which he favors the nationalization of certain sectors of industry. These statements indicate that during Hitler's political rule many of his economic concepts underwent a radicalization or modification, similarly to his position on a planned economy in general. Hitler's statements on nationalization show that the succinct statement that Hitler was in favor of private ownership leaves the decisive question unanswered: What elements of private ownership remain in a planned state-controlled economy, in which the owner can no longer freely dispose of his property?

This paper began by citing the analyses of Pollock and Mises, both of whom very clearly recognized the essence of the National Socialist economic system. Their considerations are also relevant to an analysis of Hitler's position on private property. As is well known, Hitler's method rarely consisted of simply radically dissolving an institution or organization but rather of continuing to erode its inner substance until there was virtually nothing left of its original function or content. As a parallel, it is worth noting that that the National Socialist state never repealed the Weimar Constitution either but eroded its substance and intention little by little and thereby abolished it in practice.

In the twenty-five-point program of the NSDAP, which Hitler helped write and which he announced on February 24, 1920, it says under point 13: "We demand the nationalization of all the [already] socialized [trust] companies." Point 17 says: "We demand a land reform in line with our national requirements, the enactment of a law for the expropriation of land for public purposes without compensation. The abolition of interest on land and prevention of any sort of land speculation." At Hitler's instigation, this last point

was amended in the spring of 1928 to prevent competing parties in rural areas from turning the demand for the expropriation of land against the National Socialists (Turner 1976, 103–5). Although he did demand the "nationalization of all the banks and the whole sector of finance" on August 7, 1920 (Hitler 1980b, 177), for example, in his speeches he generally came out in favor of private ownership and was skeptical of nationalization. Below is an excerpt of his handwritten notes for an August 25, 1920, speech.

Germany as the only state which nationalized.

German model enterprises

I. **State administration** **Railway**
Tax administration etc. Postal service
Postal service etc. **Telegraph**

City administrations German co-operatives
Vienna—and Berlin—Munich and so forth H. Lueger

Nationalization requires: sense of responsibility
German **civil servants** Only in decades
German **state employees** to be formed
without employees with sense of responsibility
any total nationalization fraud. (S. Eisner) (Hitler 1980b, 206)

Later in these notes Hitler also came out in favor of private enterprise but demanded the "nationalization of mineral resources, of artificial fertilizers [and] chemical products," and he also rejected "socialist experiments" of "total nationalization" (Hitler 1980b, 206). The sense and context of these notes can be reconstructed from a report on the speech itself. In it, Hitler lauded "the nationalization of the postal and telegraph service" but rejected any "nationalization without deliberation" because this only meant "that the citizen has to pay higher taxes." Germany had "played the role of pioneer in all areas. That it had worked so well is a credit to the awareness of the civil servants that they had to work for the common interest. It takes years to educate people to the fulfilment of their obligations" (Hitler 1980b, 213, 217).

Hitler approved the nationalizations already carried out (for example, the railways and the postal service), but believed that any nationalization first required a sense of responsibility among the civil servants and state employees. This awareness, however, could only be formed in an education process lasting for decades. An immediate "total nationalization," not preceded by such a progress of education, was a "fraud" that would only lead to the citizens' having to pay higher taxes.

At an NSDAP rally on October 26, 1920, Hitler criticized "plans to communalize and nationalize" in general but also added that "they do not dare to go after the right places (banks, wholesale trade etc.)" (Hitler 1980b, 252). The demand for the nationalization of banks and the wholesale trade has to do with Hitler's early economic concepts (strongly influenced by Gottfried Feder), according to which exploitation only takes place in the sphere of distribution and not in the sphere of production.

In November 1921, the NSDAP started a campaign against the privatization of the Reichsbahn (the German Reich railways) conceived and directed by Hitler. In a November 19, 1921, party circular, Hitler wrote, "In view of the threatening squandering of the *Reichsbahn* for the benefit of private capital, we direct all local groups and sections to oppose this attempt [the privatization] in rallies and evening discussion meetings" (Hitler 1980b, 520). The same day, Hitler wrote a detailed article on the privatization of the Reichsbahn for one of the NSDAP informational publications. In it he said, among other things, that the "private capitalization of the *Reichsbahn*" already under consideration for several months, a "disposal of most valuable national property," was being rejected by a large sector of the people. "The work of enlightenment in recent days has caused a certain degree of attention even far into the Right, into the circles of the most imbecilic laziness of thought, as well as into the Left, into the masses of unlimited incitement" (Hitler 1980b, 521 et seq.). Unfortunately, Hitler noted, this "theft of German national property, its squandering for the benefit of private capital," was being regarded as being of minor importance by "numerous so-called national circles, yes, even among national parties" (Hitler 1980b, 521 et seq.). Hitler (1980b, 521 et seq.) argued against the privatization plans: "And do you really believe that the present deficit of the *Reichsbahn* will be made good by its new owners when ownership is transferred? Is it not completely

clear that in future these burdens will again be loaded on to the taxpayer alone, though in a different form, as higher rates, etc?"

He appealed to the whole party to give this question increased attention:

> The leaders of our local groups have the obligation to untiringly point out this new swindle by the international financial bandits at rallies and evening discussion meetings, and without rest or pause to arouse our nation to resist this squandering of its most valuable national property. Time and again the masses must have drummed into them that in the last three years hardly a day has passed in which the so-called social republic has not squandered German national property, which the so-called reactionary period once created for the German nation in 40 years of hard and thrifty work. The NSDAP opposes any sale, be it in part or total, of the *Reichsbahn* to private capital. It is convinced that the railways are only the beginning, and that the end will be the complete loss of even the last remnant of the German state economy. (Hitler 1980b, 521 et seq.)

At a rally on July 1, 1923, Hitler was again critical of privatization: "Instead of nationalizing, it [Marxism] is now prepared to deliver already socialized enterprises such as the *Reichsbahn* into the hands of private speculators" (Hitler 1980b, 941). On July 6, 1923, he declared: "Five years ago people were shouting, we want total nationalization, and what has become of it? Today they are getting ready to convert national companies such as the postal service, the railway, into private enterprises" (Hitler 1980b, 945).

In his early speeches, Hitler advocated the nationalization of land (as in Hitler 1980b, 915) but in principle still came out in favor of private ownership. On July 28, 1922, for example, he criticized the "Marxist theory" that

> property as such was theft, in other words, as soon as one moved away from the self-evident formula that only natural resources could and should be common property, and that that which somebody had honestly acquired and worked for was his own, from that moment on even the economic intelligence of a national persuasion could also no longer follow, because it had to say to itself that this theory would mean the complete collapse of any human culture at all. (Hitler 1980b, 660; in a similar vein, see Hitler 1980b, 719, 799, and 1219)

In the "Appeal of the National Fighting Union," which Hitler wrote on September 2, 1923, he said: "Private ownership as the basis for value-producing work will be recognized and protected by the state. Expropriation by means of tax laws is an abuse of

governmental power." He added, however, that "capital and business will not be permitted to form a state within the state" (Hitler 1980b, 992).

Hitler's positive position on private ownership led to a conflict within the NSDAP in 1926, when the wing led by the Strasser brothers wanted to support the referendum on the expropriation of the former nobility, which the Marxist parties had applied for. At a meeting in Bamberg on February 14, 1926, Hitler was able to enforce his rejection of any participation in the referendum. Goebbels, who at the time was still an adherent of the left-wing Strasser faction in the NSDAP, soon joined Hitler's side. He described this in his diary on April 13, 1926, with the following words: "Social question. Totally new insights. He [Hitler] has thought of everything. His ideal: mixture of collectivism and individualism. Land, what is on it and beneath it to the people. Production, because creating, individualistically. Concerns, trusts, end production, traffic etc. nationalized" (Goebbels 1961, 72).[6] Hitler also repeated this concept, said Goebbels, in a conversation on July 22, 1926 (Goebbels 1961, 92).

If this note by Goebbels reflects Hitler's view correctly, then it shows that Hitler's position on private ownership and nationalization cannot be summarized by a simple, catchy formula. Although Hitler favored private ownership in principle, he had already considered the nationalization of certain monopoly capitalist enterprises. It is understandable that such thoughts did not surface in his public speeches. As has been noted, Hitler always demanded that his associates keep the party's economic plans strictly secret because he feared running into the massive resistance of industry if they became known. If his economic views had not gone beyond the unequivocal recognition of private ownership he propagated in public, then this fear would have been unfounded. Because of Hitler's secrecy, the reconstruction of his economic

[6] Turner believes that it was quite possible that Hitler had deliberately exaggerated his position in order to secure the support of Goebbels, whose left-wing convictions he was familiar with. It is also conceivable that Goebbels, being influenced by his own wishful thinking, attributed more far-reaching concepts to Hitler than he actually had. Although this can certainly not be ruled out, Turner does admit that "there remains the remarkable discrepancy between Hitler's noticeable efforts not to address himself to concrete socio-economic questions in public and his obvious willingness to at least discuss radical changes within his private circle" (Turner 1976, 112 et seq.).

views before 1933 is difficult. We may, however, safely assume that Hitler continued to reject a "total nationalization"; in other words, a conversion of all the means of production into public property.[7]

As becomes clear from Wagener's notes, Hitler's skeptical position on nationalization had to do with his social Darwinist convictions. Wagener reports that in the early summer of 1930 Hitler had said:

> And when I look at the idea of collectivism, then I actually find that it contains and must entail a levelling down, which in a complete nation means nothing else except what is being demonstrated in the insane asylums and prisons. As far as this goes, the whole concept of nationalization in the form in which it has been attempted and demanded so far appears to me to be wrong, and I come to the same conclusion as *Herr* Wagener. We have to bring a process of selection into the matter in some way, if we want to come to a natural, healthy and also satisfying solution of the problem, a process of selection for those who should be entitled—and be at all permitted—to have a claim and the right to property and the ownership of companies. (Wagener 1978, 107)

Against the background that has been sketched so far, Otto Strasser—whose report on a dispute with Hitler on May 22, 1930, is unreliable on many points—may, after all, be believed when he states that Hitler rejected a general expropriation and advocated the view that "the strong state" would be able "to let itself be guided exclusively by great issues without regard to interests" (Strasser 1969, 65, 67). When Strasser referred to the party program in which nationalization of the socialized companies was demanded, Hitler replied that this *did not* mean "that these companies had to be nationalized, but only that they could be nationalized, namely if they offended against the interests of the nation. As long as they do not do this, it would simply be a crime to destroy business" (Strasser 1969, 65, 67). Hitler was therefore rejecting "total nationalization" but was reserving to himself the possibility of threatening nationalization of companies that did not unresistingly carry out the tasks or achieve the objectives set by the state. In order to abolish the shortcomings resulting from capitalism, one did not need (as

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[7] Compare Hitler's speeches on September 18, 1928 (Bundersarchiv Koblenz NS 26/55, Bl. 26); in the October 10, 1928, special issue of the *Völkischer Beobachter* (Bayerische Hauptstaatsarchiv, Presseausschnittsammlung 1172); in the October 10, 1928, Bavarian edition of the *Völkischer Beobachter*; on October 18, 1928 (Bundersarchiv Koblenz NS 26/55, Bl. 68); and the December 22, 1928, issue of the *Illustrierter Beobachter* (Institut für Zeitgeschichte München).

Strasser reports Hitler's view) to give the workers any co-ownership or codetermination: "This is where the strong state must intervene, which ensures that production only occurs in the interest of the nation. If this does not happen in individual cases, then the state takes sharp measures, then it expropriates such a company and continues to run it under the state" (Strasser 1969, 65, 67).

With this Hitler formulated his concept of the role of private ownership and the position of the entrepreneur in the National Socialist state with precision. After the National Socialists seized power, this definition of the role of the entrepreneur was legally fixed in the Law for the Structuring of National Labor (January 20, 1934).[8] According to this law, the "Betriebsführer" (company leader) was the "trustee of the state" and therefore obligated to the national community. This interpretation of the role of the owner or manager in the National Socialist state was more important than Hitler's formal guarantee of private ownership because, as the reality of the Third Reich—particularly in the war years—showed, this definition had far-reaching consequences. The Volksgerichtshof (People's Court, the highest penal court in the Third Reich), for example, handed down extremely harsh sentences against owners or managers who ignored the directives of the state plan (Blaich 1971, 18).

Even before the seizure of power, there had been worries among industrialists that if the National Socialists came to power, radical economic measures would ensue, leading to a restriction of entrepreneurial freedom. What worried the industrialists most was the particular radicalism of the NSDAP's socio-revolutionary demands. "In socio-economic matters," Henry Turner shows in his study on the relationship between the industrialists and the National Socialists, "the NSDAP frequently advocated positions which were practically impossible to separate from those of the extreme Left" (Turner 1985, 86 et seq.). On economic issues—for example, on tax laws—the National Socialists in the Reichstag often voted with the Communists and the Social Democrats (Turner 1985, 87 et seq., 157 et seq. and 164 et seq.).

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[8] Schumann interprets the respective legal clause as follows: "The entrepreneur was given far-reaching powers within his own company so that the various companies could be more easily employed via their management for the realization of National Socialist economic objectives" (Schumann 1958, 122).

For many industrialists, this "tendency to take up a position next to the Left on socio-economic questions" made the NSDAP appear to be a danger (Turner 1985, 87). The assessment of the National Socialists that predominated in industrialist circles found its expression, for example, in a series of guidelines that Paul Reusch, the founder of the influential Ruhrlade, issued in 1929 for the newspapers under his company's control. In these guidelines, the NSDAP were listed along with the Communists, the Social Democrats, and the unions as one of the moving forces of Marxism, of its destructive "class war concept" and of its "utopian Marxist objectives in the economic sector" (Turner 1985, 122). In an analysis that appeared in the periodical of the employers' association on the eve of the Reichstag elections of 1930, the NSDAP was criticized for its "aggressive hostility towards business" and the warning was given that National Socialism belonged to the conspiratorial, demagogic and terrorist elements of contemporary socialism (Turner 1985, 142 et seq.).

Hitler attempted several times to dispel the understandable reservations most of the business community had against the party. On such occasions he was at pains to emphasize his bold and simple recognition of private ownership. A well-known example is Hitler's oft-quoted speech to the Industrieklub in Düsseldorf on January 26, 1932, which he had apparently hoped would persuade the business community to support the NSDAP.[9]

It would, of course, be inadmissible to uncritically call a speech so clearly determined by political objectives a revelation of Hitler's "true opinions," just as it would be nonsensical to take every statement by Hitler in his May 1 speeches as being serious expressions of policy. Hitler's statements in the Industrieklub speech, whose intention of gaining the support, or at least the goodwill, of industrialist circles is so evident, can only be deemed to reflect his true convictions with reservation. This has not, however, prevented many authors from claiming that this speech was *the* programmatic statement by Hitler, the likely reason being that it can so easily support the image of Hitler as a serf of capitalism and a lackey of monopoly capital. Whatever the case may be, in the 1932 Industrieklub speech, Hitler of course stressed his affirmation of private ownership, and his line of argument can be traced:

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[9] On the effect of the speech, see the critical analysis in Turner (1972, 96 et seq.; 1985, 264 et seq.).

> You hold the opinion, gentlemen, that German business must be built up on the concept of private ownership. But you can only uphold such a concept of private ownership if it appears to have at least some sort of a logical foundation. This concept must derive its ethical reason from the insight into a natural necessity. It cannot only be motivated by simply saying: it has always been that way therefore it must continue to be that way. Because during periods of great national upheavals, the shifting of nations and changes in the ways of thinking, institutions, systems and so forth cannot simply be left untouched only because they have previously existed in the same form. It is characteristic for all the really great revolutionary epochs of humanity that they simply walk over such forms only hallowed by age, or only apparently hallowed by age, with an incomparable ease. It is therefore necessary to find reasons for such traditional forms which we intend to maintain upright, so that they may be regarded as being absolutely necessary, logical and right. And there, I must say, private ownership is only morally and ethically justified if I assume that the achievements of human beings differ. Only then can I say, because the achievements of people differ, the results of these achievements also differ. And if the results of the achievements of men are different, it is only expedient to leave the administration of these results to people in about the same ratio. It would be illogical to turn the administration of the results of achievements which are tied to a specific personality over to the next best person only capable of a lower achievement, or to a community which has already proved by the fact that it was unable to produce such an achievement that it cannot be capable of administering the results. With this we must admit that, economically, people are not all equally valuable, equally important, in all areas to begin with. Having admitted this, it is insane to say, in the field of business there are incontestable differences but not in the political area! It is nonsense to build economic life upon the concept of achievement, of the value of a personality, thereby in practice on the authority of a personality, but to deny this authority of the personality in politics and to set the law of the greater number, democracy, into its place. (Domarus 1965, 72 et seq.)

An analysis of Hitler's line of reasoning shows that here the issue for him was not the question of private ownership at all. He was only starting from the views held by the industrialists assembled before him: "You hold the opinion, gentlemen, that the German economy must be built up on the concept of private ownership." Hitler then argues that the fact that until now private ownership had been the foundation of business could not legitimize private ownership. Only the principle of achievement and the fact of the differences in human achievement could legitimize it. This, by the way, is an important concept for Hitler, leading him, as will be shown, to the demand for the nationalization of anonymous share companies, which in his view were no longer based on the differences in individual human achievement. To raise such a demand in front of an audience of

industrialists was far from Hitler's intent, however. The major issue for him was not private ownership, but the conclusion that if people are unequal in the field of business, if the *Persönlichkeitsprinzip* (personality principle) applies, then this must also be true in the political field. The whole sense of Hitler's statement does not lie in a justification of private ownership but, starting from industrialists' own professed beliefs and interests, in proving the senselessness of democracy to the industrialist. In the course of his speech Hitler paints the specter of communism:

> But if it is claimed on the other hand—and in particular from the side of business—that special abilities were not required in politics and that here there was an absolute equality of achievement, then one day this same theory will be transferred from politics to business. The analogy to political democracy in the field of economy is Communism. (Domarus 1965, 72 et seq.)

Hitler's reasoning was as follows. If one recognized private ownership—as his industrialist audience did—one also had to do this in the political field and make the personality principle (in this context what Hitler actually meant was the führer principle) the foundation of the political system. If one held fast to democracy, however, then its principles would soon be transferred to the field of business, and this would mean the introduction of communism. Basically, all Hitler's line of argument demonstrates is his ability to put himself into the minds of his audience and, setting out from certain of their basic convictions, to develop a (perhaps only apparently) logical line of reasoning that ends with the proof of the correctness of his political convictions.

Hitler affirmed private ownership not only in front of industrialists but also on other occasions, such as his speech on the Ermächtigungsgesetz ("enabling law") on March 23, 1933. This is another speech that Hitler primarily intended to camouflage his real intentions. When he promises in the same breath not to encroach on the independence of the *Länder* (the individual states making up the federal republic of Weimar), to respect the rights of the churches, not to aspire to autarky, and only to make use of the enabling law in exceptional cases, his declarations against "a business bureaucracy to be organized by the state" and in favor of "the strongest possible support of private initiative" and the "recognition of private ownership" are not particularly convincing (Domarus 1965, 231–37). In his closing address at the

Reichsparteitag on September 3, 1933, Hitler also justified private ownership by the inequality of human achievements. But in this speech, as in his speech to the Düsseldorf Industrieklub, he did not focus on private ownership but on the illogic of the democratic system (Hitler 1933, 35).[10]

On the other hand, Hitler frequently and emphatically stated that an industrialist's disposal of his property was in no way a private affair. In a speech on October 9, 1934, at the opening of the 1934/35 Winter Help Campaign, for example, he declared:

> Therefore, wealth in particular does not only have greater possibilities for enjoyment, but above all greater obligations. The view that the utilization of a fortune no matter of what size is solely the private affair of the individual requires to be corrected all the more in the National Socialist state, because without the contribution of the community no individual would have been able to enjoy such an advantage. (Hitler 1936, 7 et seq.)

On November 14, 1940, he said:

> In Germany, without my having touched private ownership in any way, we have still set limits on ownership, that is to say those limits which lie in the fact that no property can be used to the disadvantage of another. We have not permitted the amassing of capital out of profit on arms, for example; instead we set limits here: 6 per cent, and of these 6 per cent, the first 50 per cent are taxed away, and the remaining 3 per cent, this must be reinvested in some way, or else it too will be taxed away. Anything which exceeds that must be put into a capital deposit and is at the disposal of the Reich, of the state. (Bouhler 1941, 324; for the underlying facts, see Barkai 1977b, 157 et seq.)

On December 10, 1940, Hitler declared that the individual did not have "the right to dispose completely freely of that which must be invested in the interest of the national community. If he disposes of it personally in a sensible manner all the better. If he does not act sensibly then the National Socialist state intervenes" (Bouhler 1941, 345).

For Hitler, the formal maintenance of private ownership was not important. When the state has the unrestricted right to determine

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[10] Specifically, Hitler said: "Because it is illogical to declare private property to be morally justified because the ability to achieve is not equal in human beings due to their different talents, and therefore the results of these individual achievements are so different that in their administration one has to consider the ability to achieve, but then on the other hand to claim an equal ability for all in the total administration of life, in the field of politics."

the decisions of the owners of the means of production, the formal legal institution of private ownership no longer means very much. This is what Pollock (1981a, 113) is saying when he refers to the "destruction of all of the essential traits of private ownership with the exception of one." The moment the owners of the means of production can no longer freely decide the content, timing, and size of their investments, the essential characteristics of private ownership have been abolished, even if the formal guarantee of private ownership still remains. We know that Hitler preferred a slow erosion of existing rights and institutions in the political or constitutional sphere as well. In the field of economics, the formal legal title of ownership was relatively unimportant to Hitler as long as the state was able step by step to seize the actual power of disposal over the means of production and land.

In his table talks on September 3, 1942, Hitler said that land was "national property, and in the end only given to the individual as a loan" (Hitler 1980a, 385). In his speech to leaders of the armaments industry at the end of June 1944, Hitler spoke in favor of private ownership of the means of production—in part because Speer had asked him to do so in order to calm the industrialists—but also stated a restriction:

> However—and now we differentiate ourselves from the liberal state—these achievements of highly developed individuals must also lie within the framework of the benefit to all . . . the liberal state holds the view, everything is good which benefits the individual and is useful to the individual, even at the risk of it being harmful to the whole. The National Socialist state on the other hand has the idea, or advocates the recognition, that while the strength lies in the individual, the deed of the individual, the creative action of the individual must still lie in the sense of the benefit of the whole. . . . The highest achievements of the individual, but corrected by the interests of a community, which in the final analysis must by its actions and its commitment under harsh conditions, in other words in the war, also cover for and protect the achievements of the individual. It is therefore now only sensible and natural that the achievement of the individual is weighed to that degree to which this achievement benefits the whole. This *modification of the concept of private ownership* is not even the slightest restriction of the individual, individual ability, individual creativity, diligence and so forth, but, on the contrary, it gives the individual the greatest possibilities to develop. It attaches only one condition to this, that the development not be permitted to proceed to the detriment of the community, in other words, in the end, ahead of everything else stands the total interest of the whole. (Kotze and Krausnik 1966, 339, emphasis mine)

All of these statements by Hitler have in common that they—as he expresses it—modify the concept of private ownership. What does this "modification" consist of? Hitler only recognizes private ownership insofar as it is used according to the principle of "common benefit ahead of private benefit," which means, concretely, insofar as it is used within the framework of the objectives set by the state. For Hitler the principle of "common benefit ahead of private benefit" means that, if it is necessary in the common interest, the state has the right at all times to decide how, when, and to what extent private ownership is used, and the common interest is, of course, defined by the state.

This caveat, however, removes several important characteristics of private ownership. The moment the legal title of possession and the factual right of disposal separate—in other words, when the private person can, for example, no longer freely decide on the nature, size, and timing of the investments to be made, essential traits of private ownership have been abolished even though the legal institution formally remains in force.

This is the most important aspect of Hitler's position on private ownership. In addition, however, Hitler openly lauded certain nationalized sectors of the economy as being exemplary—the railway, for example—and cited them as proof that running a business rationally was possible not only on the basis of private ownership. In a speech on June 26, 1935 (printed in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on December 9, 1935), at the hundredth anniversary of the German railway, he declared that

> in the railway as it has developed in Germany, we [had to] see the first really large nationalized enterprise, as opposed to the point of view of the pursuit of purely capitalist individual interests. We recognize this first in the organization of railway traffic in itself. In its inner being, the network of the railway was socialistically felt and socialistically conceived. The unique trait of this enterprise is that at the head stands not the question of profit but the satisfaction of traffic requirements.

In other words, railway lines were also built in places where they were not profitable but where there was a need for a traffic link. "It would be an immeasurable step backwards if we were to entertain the thought today of closing down those lines whose profitability is not assured. This would actually mean a return to the worst and most capitalistic point of view." Hitler was therefore defining the essence of a company run along socialist principles as an absence

of profit maximization in making investments. Hitler's subsequent remarks in this speech carry the heading "A Warning":

> And secondly, we also see the socialist character of the *Reichsbahn* in something else. It is a warning about the exclusive claims of the doctrine of private capitalism. It is the living proof that it is very possible to run a nationalized enterprise without private capital tendencies and without private capital management. Because we should never forget, the German *Reichsbahn* is the biggest company, the largest customer in the whole world. The German *Reichsbahn* can stand any comparison with the railway companies built up purely on private capital. . . . We see the infinite successes of the capitalistic economic development of the last century, but in the *Reichsbahn* we also have the convincing proof *that it is just as readily possible to build up a company on another basis as a model and example for others*. (emphasis mine)

The inner organization of the Reichsbahn was also proof of its socialist character and convincingly refuted the false opinion that "management of a large business enterprise was not even conceivable without private capital tendencies" (ibid.). The Reichsbahn was a practical demonstration of the achievability of the concept that put the public good ahead of individual benefit. Hitler knew "that nothing in the world works at one blow, that everything needs time to develop. But [he was] convinced that such a development [was] possible, and that it [was Germany's] duty to pursue such a development everywhere" (ibid.).

Hitler's speech is very interesting in several respects. First of all, it is evident that he was not fundamentally opposed to nationalization. Hitler did not at all regard an economic system based on private ownership as the only, or necessarily the best, means of running a business, but even "warned" against this "doctrine." Of course, the Reichsbahn's hundred-year existence was not a very important event for him; it was only an opportunity to present his criticism of the capitalist system. The timing of the speech is also interesting; namely, the eve of 1936. The preceding section, which discussed Hitler's position on the market versus planned economy, concluded that Hitler had modified or developed his economic concepts sometime around 1935. After 1935, he expressed his criticism of the system of free enterprise more aggressively, more fundamentally, and more clearly than in the preceding years and increasingly became an adherent of a state-controlled, planned economy. Parallel to this, his position on private ownership and nationalization also

underwent a change. The bold and simple declarations that he stood for private ownership, so frequently made in previous years, became rarer, while his referrals to the limits to the right of free disposal of property, his threats of a possible nationalization, and his references to the nationalization of whole industries within his inner circle became more frequent.

Recall Hitler's 1936 nationalization threats:

> The Ministry of Economics only has to set the national economic tasks, and private industry has to fulfil them. But if private industry does not believe it is capable of doing so, then the National Socialist state will find its own way of solving this problem . . . German industry, however, will learn to understand these new economic tasks, or it will have proved itself to be incapable of continuing to exist in these modern times, in which the Soviet state sets up a gigantic plan. *But then it will not be Germany which will go under, it will at most be a few industrialists*. (Hitler 1955, 209)

Thus, Hitler's threat was quite open in his memorandum on the Four Year Plan of 1936.

On December 17, 1936, Hitler gave a speech to industrialists that showed, according to Louis P. Lochner (former member and later chief of the Associated Press Berlin office), how he "really saw the world of business and how he intended to deal with it once he was no longer burdened by tactical inhibitions." The speech equated to an ultimate demand to exploit even the most meagre raw materials for the benefit of the home country, leaving all considerations of profitability aside. Hitler would give industry a final chance to make those natural domestic sources of material (formerly not considered worth exploiting) flow on its own initiative—or else! "The word 'impossible' does not exist here!" he screamed at the meeting in a cracking voice. "I will no longer stand for the practice of capitalism to acquire titles to natural resources, which are then left lying unused because their exploitation appears not to be profitable. If necessary I will have such resources confiscated by the state in order to bring them to the utilization they merit." The manner in which Hitler spoke that day reminded one, said Lochner, of "an ill-tempered road construction foreman who is giving the workers in his column hell because they had not met their target" (Lochner 1955, 211 et seq.).

If Hitler spoke to industrialists in such a harsh tone, within his inner circle his position toward businessmen was expressed

without any reticence. Goebbels, for example, noted in his diary on March 16, 1937:

> Lunch with the *Führer*. Large group at table. The so-called industrial leaders are under heavy attack. They do not have a clue about real political economy. They are stupid, egoistic, unnational and narrow-mindedly conceited. They would like to sabotage the Four-Year Plan, out of cowardice and mental laziness. But now they have to. (Goebbels 1987, 80)

The following day Goebbels noted in his diary: "*Führer* heavily attacks the industrial barons who still practise a silent reserve against the Four-Year Plan," and on September 8, 1937, he summarized Hitler's statements at the party congress as being "strongly against high-handedness of business. Woe to private industry if it does not fall in line. Four-Year Plan will be executed" (Goebbels 1987, 81, 257).

In May 1937 Hitler declared:

> I tell German industry for example, "You have to produce such and such now." I then return to this in the Four-Year Plan. If German industry were to answer me, "We are not able to", then I would say to it, "Fine, then I will take that over myself, but it must be done." But if industry tells me, "We will do that", then I am very glad that I do not need to take that on. (Kotze and Krausnick 1966, 199 et seq.)

These threats can only be understood in the context of the conflict between the owners of the iron and steel industry and the National Socialist state, or rather the authors of the Four Year Plan, whose implementation was escalating at the time. According to the maxims of the Four Year Plan, the two major problems at the time were extending smelting capacity and increasing iron ore production. The expansion of the iron and steel industry, however, met with the severe opposition of the owners. Their reservations were primarily based on the fear that further exploitation of the iron-poor German mineral deposits would be uneconomic and would negatively affect the German industry's competitive global position in the export of iron and steel products. There was also the fear that too great an extension of smelting capacity would lead to sales problems as soon as the armaments boom was over (Petzina 1968, 102 et seq.). After a meeting with the most important representatives of the German iron and steel industry on March 17, 1937, the owners appeared to be prepared to follow Hitler's, or rather Hermann Göring's, directives. In fact, however, despite their agreement, during the ensuing

months nothing on the industrial side indicated that the extension of the ore base was occurring. On June 16, 1937, in a joint meeting of the Four Year Plan Committee, the Ministry of Economics, and the iron industry, Göring accused the industry of still resisting the exploitation of German ore. At the same time, he announced a new plant but left open the question of whether the state or private industry would become its owner. Like Hitler, he threatened the industrialists: "It has long been necessary to also exploit German ore . . . where this is not being done we will take the ore away from you and do it ourselves" (cited in Petzina 1968, 104).

That Hitler's and Göring's statements were not empty threats was clear to the industrialists after July 23, 1937, when Göring announced the formation of the AG for Ore Mining and Iron Smelting Hermann Göring. Göring's coup caused considerable bewilderment among the industrialists. Although parts of the industry still continued their attempts to steer a course independent of Göring's demands, other industrialists, under the impression that the situation was a fait accompli, and out of fear of more far-reaching measures, were now willing to cooperate. "Despite these events," Petzina summarizes, "the dispute remains remarkable enough because it demonstrates that the interests of private industry did not automatically agree with the interests of the regime, and that in case of a conflict the regime did not have any compunctions about realizing its objectives even against the opposition of parts of heavy industry" (Petzina 1968, 104 et seq.).

The development that had begun with Hitler's and Göring's repeated threats of state control finally led to the creation of the Reichswerke Hermann Göring, which by 1940 employed six hundred thousand people. The plant in Salzgitter ultimately became the largest in Europe. With this, the National Socialist state had shown that its oft-proclaimed "primacy of polities" was deadly serious, and that it would not hesitate to build up state-controlled enterprises in areas where private industry resisted the execution of state directives. The actions taken against the mining and smelting industry assumed the importance of a precedent for the National Socialist state. In the future, Hitler could count on private industrialists, out of fear of similar measures, to follow the directives of state planning more readily and without damaging objections.

Under such conditions a "total nationalization"—which Hitler continued to regard with skepticism—was, of course, no longer

necessary. On the other hand, in his speech of May 20, 1937, Hitler remarked that there were

> areas where I can say they are ripe for nationalization. These are the areas where I do not need any competition, where there is none anyway, where the age of inventions is past anyhow, and where in the course of many decades I have slowly been given a diligent civil service, above all where there is no competition, for example in transport and so forth. (Kotze and Krausnick 1966, 201)

Hitler was therefore quite prepared for nationalization in certain sectors of the economy, but only under certain conditions and premises. Hitler's reservations against "total nationalization," as noted earlier, resulted from his social Darwinist convictions, which he transferred to economics. The fear that a general nationalization would remove the mainspring of competition, and thereby one of the primary sources of economic development, kept him from embracing a comprehensive nationalization of all of the means of production (Kotze and Krausnick 1966, 201 et seq.; see also Speer 1969, 218).

Hitler remained true to his tactic of initially attempting to "win over" private industry for the realization of his projects and, if it could not be "convinced," of taking the matter into his own hands (as he often expressed it)—in other words, creating state companies to realize the project. Another example of this strategy is the foundation of the Volkswagenwerk by the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF), the NSDAP's labor organization. This was also preceded by a violent struggle with industry. Hitler believed that the automobile was the means of transport of the future, but only if an affordable "Volkswagen" could be successfully produced. He therefore immediately became enthusiastic about designer Ferdinand Porsche's idea to design such a car but set him the condition that the sale price, which Porsche had already calculated very modestly at 1,550 reichsmarks, had to be even further reduced. "It must be possible," he told Porsche, "to give the German people a motor car whose price is not higher than formerly that of a middle-range motorcycle" (Kluke 1960, 348). Although this project was technically and economically feasible, it was rejected by private industry. The German automobile industry tried to sabotage the project from the very beginning because it feared that it would be cultivating its own competition and thereby endangering the sale of the more expensive models. From 1934 to 1938, Porsche—whom

Hitler had commissioned—"fought a battle against the whole of the German automobile industry, a secret, subterranean battle" (Kluke 1960, 352; see also Quint 1951, 190 et seq.).

In several speeches, particularly at the annual automobile shows, Hitler criticized the industry for not realizing that if the automobile was really to become the means of transport of the future it would have to become a consumer article the masses could afford and not remain a luxury article for the few. When Hitler finally saw that he was not going to succeed in "convincing" the private industrialists, he installed a "plenipotentiary" for automotive transport within the framework of the Four Year Plan and founded the Volkswagenwerk, which under the authority of the DAF then proceeded with the project of creating a cheap vehicle. At the international automotive and motorcycle show on February 17, 1939, Hitler declared that he had come to the realization "that in the end industry could not come to such a structuring of their production on their own initiative. I therefore decided to install a plenipotentiary for this task in the person of Colonel von Schell, who within the Four-Year Plan will now issue the directives which are binding for all offices" (this speech appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on February 18, 1939).

In his biography of Porsche, Quint writes:

> The fact that the Volkswagen became a KdF car [*Kraft durch Freude*, or "Strength through Joy," an NS mass organization under Robert Ley that organized leisure activities for the masses], that finally the DAF alone took over the construction and the financing of the plant, and with this the responsibility for the car, that party comrade Ley, who knew devilishly little about automobiles, became the patron of this car, and his loyal assistant Dr Lafferentz played an important role in the planning from then on, that the state took over the *Volkswagen* concept so radically, all this was only the result of three and a half years of intensive attempts to set the *Volkswagen* on its wheels with the help of the German automotive industry, which had, via its national organization, initially welcomed and supported it pro forma—the initiative came from Hitler, the *Führer* of the state, and one hardly dared say "no" openly—but had in actual fact tried to prevent it with all of its might. (Quint 1951, 191)

These conflicts with private industry, which we have highlighted with the examples of the disputes with the iron and automotive industries, led to an increasing radicalization of Hitler's position. In a conversation with Goebbels on February 14, 1942, about the problem of increasing production, Hitler said:

> Here we have to proceed rigorously, that the whole production process has to be re-examined, and that the industrialists who do not want to submit to the directives we issue, will have to lose their plants without any regard to whether they will then be ruined economically. (Goebbels 1948, 86)

Although Hitler remained opposed to "total nationalization"—for the reasons already discussed—he no longer excluded the nationalization of important industries, for example, the "anonymous public share companies" of the power industry and other key industries. On March 24, 1942, he declared in a table talk:

> Private ownership as the property of the individual must be unconditionally protected! It is something quite natural and healthy when somebody takes a part of the results of his work and uses it to create family property. If this family property consists of a factory, then as long as the family has a healthy progeny, this factory will certainly be better managed, and therefore also more successfully managed for the national community, by a member of the family than, for instance, by a civil servant. Insofar I can readily emphatically advocate the security of private industry. But I oppose anonymous private ownership in the form of shares just as emphatically. Without having to do anything himself, the shareholder receives higher dividends when the workers of the share company are diligent than when they are lazy, or a brilliant engineer stands at the head of the company, or even when a crook handles the business of the share company. If the shareholder were then so clever in his anonymity to hold shares in several share companies, he would pocket the profits from pure speculation without having to fear losses which he could not compensate for on the other side. I have always rejected and fought against such easy speculation income. If there is anybody who has a right to such profits then it is the whole nation, the workers, the engineers, who work for the increased profits of such a share company and are otherwise not being paid according to their contributions. *The anonymous share company therefore belongs in the hands of the state*, and, for those who are looking for an economic investment for their savings, the state can issue state obligations which are uniformly valued and which carry a certain interest rate. (Picker 1983, 136, emphasis mine)

In short, Hitler was in favor of nationalizing the big share companies, the power industry, and all other branches of industry that produced "essential raw materials" (for example, the iron industry). He went on to declare that "already in his youth" he had occupied himself "with the problem of capitalist monopoly companies," with criticizing the "unclean . . . business methods of anonymous shareholders," and had sharply turned against the linking of political and economic interests (Picker 1983, 138 et seq.).

The following day (March 25, 1942), Hitler again addressed the topic of monopolies. He emphasized that

> the Reich also has to keep its hand on monopolies, and thereby on monopoly profits [in the occupied territories of Poland and the Soviet Union]. For some incomprehensible reason, consideration has already been given to leaving the tobacco monopoly in the occupied Eastern territories to *Herr* Reemtsma [Philipp Reemtsma, a tobacco industrialist in Hamburg]; I have forbidden that out of hand and emphasized that, from the outset, the tobacco monopoly can only be given to the Reich itself. In the Reich itself, as I have long demanded, a monopoly tobacco industry has to come soon! For the same reason, over there [in the occupied Eastern territories] the greater part of the cultivated land has to remain state property as before, so that the profits from agricultural production in this gigantic state domain will be to the exclusive benefit of the state and can be used to cover the war debts. Quite apart from that, the required surplus of agricultural products is only produced by large estates anyway. (Picker 1983, 141)

These statements about the economic organization planned for the occupied territories in the east are particularly important for the following reason. As *Hitler's National Socialism* has shown, the lebensraum to be conquered in the east was for Hitler primarily also a source of raw material, a market, and was not at all intended only for the settlement of farmers, as previous research assumed (Zitelmann 2022, Section V.1). This insight could, however, lead to the misconception that Hitler's war against Russia had been one of imperialistic expansion in the service of capitalism. The opposite is true: Hitler was, as the statements just cited above prove, in favor of the organization of the economy in the east being state controlled from the beginning.

When Hitler demanded the nationalization of large segments of German industry, he still had reservations because of the overcentralization that would result. Hitler was critical of overcentralization. With this position, however, he fell into a contradiction: both state control of the economy and the totalitarian political system he advocated had inherent centralistic tendencies.

Hitler gave voice to this contradiction when on July 26, 1942, he said in a table talk that the restructuring of the power industry should take place "neither in the form of socialism nor with a centralistic tendency." He went on:

> In the NS state the state administration intervenes quite naturally in the interests of every individual if this becomes necessary for the

> whole. Therefore, the NS state can grant private initiative a much greater freedom, because the state reserves itself the right to intervene at any time. But the state shall not take private industry into its own hands, because this would lead to a terrible over-administration and the paralysis of the areas controlled. On the contrary, the NS state shall foster private initiative as far as possible. Therefore, I am thinking of the following set of rules. In future, basically every farmer who has the right conditions shall provide himself with a wind motor. If his farmhouse lies on the banks of a stream, then the farmhouse should be readily connectable to the stream in order to generate the required electricity itself. The monopolies of certain companies, who today normally inhibit the private initiative of the individual national comrades in the area of power generation, have to fall as a matter of principle. Furthermore, it is readily possible for the communities to generate their own electricity, be it with coal, be it with water power they have at their disposal. The government will be glad when an individual village or the individual city takes care of their power generation themselves. The Gau self-administration authorities can also take care of electricity generation for their own areas if they have the possibilities of doing so. . . . It is therefore not at all desirable for all of the small and medium-sized power plants to be run by the Reich instead of by the communities and the Gau administrations. In addition it will also still be possible in the future that the owner of a mill, for instance, generates electricity for himself and his community. The state itself will only take over the administration of those great waterworks or power plants that are necessary to maintain the composite power system. (Picker 1983, 461 et seq.)

Hitler declared further that he had the strongest reservations against the centralization Speer intended. In the field of politics and the economy "any centralization is bound to stifle initiative out there in the country." The main thing was: "that the power industry is taken out of the speculation by private industry. But otherwise an individual mill owner or an individual factory is still allowed to generate their own electricity, and the mill or the factory also is permitted to give the superfluous electricity they do not need themselves to other consumers" (Picker 1983, 461 et seq.).

These statements by Hitler, which are based on previous recommendations made by the NS economic theorist and power expert Franz Lawaczeck (see also Ludwig 1974, 181) are partial contradictions of his plan, announced only a few months before, for the total nationalization of the power industry. Karl-Heinz Ludwig (1974, 182) also highlights the contradiction between these two statements.

Therefore, Hitler had two alternative concepts that could certainly be linked in theory but that were an expression of the fact that until the final years of his life he was caught up in a fundamental

contradiction. On the one hand, he was a vehement proponent of the concept of the "primacy of polities," or, as he expressed it, of the "secondary role of the economy." *One* means by which the "primacy of polities" could be enforced was the nationalization of large sectors of the economy. On the other hand, Hitler always retained his skepticism toward total nationalization. This skepticism was derived from another axiom of his weltanschauung. As a social Darwinist he valued the principle of competition as a mainspring of economic progress and growth and feared that "total nationalization" could lead to overcentralization and a stifling of private and local initiative. This was also a reason for his oft-emphasized recognition of private ownership—particularly noticeable in his speeches before 1935. The principle of private ownership, however, underwent substantial modifications with Hitler because he rejected the owners of the means of production's unrestricted right of decision with regard to the nature, amount, and timing of investments. Moreover, just as it can be ascertained that after 1935, and in particular after 1941–42, Hitler expressed his criticisms of free market economics ever more fundamentally, more sharply, and became a convinced adherent of state control of the economy, Hitler's increasing receptiveness toward concepts of nationalization can also be established.

The war was, of course, not the right time to implement radical concepts of nationalization such as Hitler discussed in his March 1942 table talks. He and other leading National Socialists were well aware of this, and they were already having difficulty dispelling industrialists' fears of nationalization. In an October 21, 1942, memo, for example, SS Führer Heinrich Himmler states that "during the war" a "fundamental change of our completely capitalistic economy is not possible." Anybody who fought against this would provoke a "witch-hunt" against himself (Himmler cited in Georg 1963, 146). Situations of war are the worst possible times to provoke conflicts of domestic policy, particularly with those groups on whom the effectiveness of the war economy happens to depend. Nonetheless, it was Himmler's SS that—through its forced development of the SS plants that were amalgamated in the gigantic Deutsche Wirtschaftsbetriebe concern—was attempting to create the conditions for a radical restructuring of the economic system and the reduction of private capitalism.

In a report prepared by an SS *Hauptsturmführer* (a rank in the SS equivalent to army captain) in July 1944, the question "Why does the SS engage in business activities?" was answered as follows:

> This question was raised specifically by circles who think purely in terms of capitalism and who do not like to see companies developing which are public, or at least of a public character. The age of the liberal system of business demanded the primacy of business, in other words business comes first, and then the state. As opposed to this, National Socialism takes the position: the state directs the economy, the state is not there for business, business is there for the state. (cited in Georg 1963, 145)

The degree to which Hitler's programmatic statements had become the guiding principle of practical politics at lower levels of government becomes clear here as well. According to Enno Georg, the creation of as encompassing an SS concern as possible extended the hope of being able, after the war, to direct the economy of the Reich even more strongly than before, toward an even more strictly organized "state command economy":

> There can hardly be any doubt, that with a longer continuation of the National Socialist regime, the process of expansion of the SS business enterprises would also have continued. The files contain a large number of projects which were to be undertaken after the war. But the longer such a development went on, the more the structure of private business—whose forms and legal rules the SS knew how to exploit opportunistically—would have been eroded. With the increasing accumulation of SS businesses, the path to a functional and structural change of important sectors of the German economy was already being trodden. (Georg 1963, 146)

Actual development was therefore moving—under the motto "The state commands the economy"—against private capitalism, and Hitler welcomed this trend.

This analysis has shown that the sweeping theory that Hitler was a confirmed believer in private ownership and an opponent of nationalization can no longer be sustained because it hides the contradictions—and also the development—of his economic concepts. Hitler was never a supporter of a free market economy. But as a social Darwinist, he valued competition and natural selection—and therefore had reservations about nationalizing all the means of production. Although he did not rule out nationalization, his preferred method was for the state to give entrepreneurs strict instructions on what to produce and how. For him, entrepreneurs were vicarious agents of the state—he called this concept the "primacy of polities." If companies did not follow the state's instructions, he threatened them with nationalization.

In the mid-1930s—and increasingly after 1940—Hitler became more and more an admirer of the Soviet planned economy. He believed that this system was far superior to capitalism. As far as economic planning was concerned, Hitler said, he was only at the beginning—after the war, he wanted to restructure the economy even more radically in the direction of a state planned economy.

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