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Hi e Peasants

Gustavo Corni





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Hitler and the Peasants

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Hitler and the Peasants

Agrarian Policy of the Third Reich, 1930-1939

Gustavo Corni

Translated by David Kerr



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Abbreviations

AA-Archiv=	Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn
AA=	Agrarpolitischer Apparat
ADAP=	Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik
AfS=	Archiv für Sozialgeschichte
AH=	Agricultural History
APSR=	American Political Science Review
BA=	Bundesarchiv, Koblenz
BdL=	Bund der Landwirte
BüL=	Berichte über Landwirtschaft
CEH=	Central European History
DAF=	Deutsche Arbeitsfront
DGFP=	Documents on German Foreign Policy
DIHT=	Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag
Diss. =	Dissertation
DLR=	Deutscher Landwirtschaftsrat
DNB=	Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro
DNVP=	Deutschnationale Volkspartei
DZAM=	Deutscher Zentralarchiv, Merseburg
DZAP=	Deutscher Zentralarchiv, Potsdam
FAH=	Familien-Archiv Krupp, Essen
GG=	Geschichte und Gesellschaft
GHH-HA=	Gutehoffnungshütte Hist. Archiv, Oberhausen
GSR=	German Studies Review
GWU=	Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht
Habil. =	Habilitationsschrift
HJ=	Historical Journal
HZ=	Historische Zeitschrift
JCH=	Journal of Contemporary History
JEEH=	Journal of European Economic History
JFG=	Jahrbuch für Geschichte
JHI=	Journal of the History of Ideas
JMH=	Journal of Modern History
JWG=	Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte
LBF=	Landesbauernführer
LBS=	Landesbauernschaft
M.A. =	Master of Arts dissertation

List of Abbreviations

MGM=	Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen
MWT=	Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftstag
NI=	Nachlaß
NPL=	Neue Politische Literatur
NSDAP=	Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschland
NSLP=	Nationalsozialistische Landpost
QGSH=	Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins
RDI=	Reichsverband der Industriellen
RLB=	Reichslandbund
Rgbl.=	Regierungsblatt
RNST=	Reichsnährstand
SA Goslar=	Stadtarchiv, Goslar
SHOec=	Studia Historiae Oeconomicae
SW=	Sonderreferat Wirtschaft
VB=	Völkischer Beobachter
VfS=	Vierteljahreshefte für Statistik
VJP=	Der Vierjahresplan
VSWG=	Vierteljahreshefte für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte
VZG=	Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte
WPD=	Wirtschaftlicher Pressedienst
WTB=	Wolff's Telegraphen Büro
WZU=	Wissensch. Zeitschrift d. Universität
ZAGAS=	Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie
ZdR=	Zeitungsdienst des Reichslandbundes
ZfG=	Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft

Foreword

In my judgement this study by Gustavo Corni is the most balanced and comprehensive study which exists in any language on Nazi agricultural policies and on German agriculture in the decade between 1930 and 1939. The author gives a full account of the decisive rural support for the NSDAP between 1930 and 1933, and of the agrarian ideology elaborated by Darré on behalf of the party in order to give form and focus to this mass support. The partial translation of this ruralist ideology into new land legislation and new marketing arrangements after 1933 is charted with great care; Corni brings out well the unrealistic qualities inherent in the most extreme Nazi ideas about the establishment of a new 'peasant aristocracy'. He insists, that is, upon the strong economic constraints which governed Nazi policies from the start, and in an increasingly transparent manner from 1936 onwards; every stage of his discussion is marked by acute analyses of the economics of agricultural production. The reasons for the relative failure of the 'battle for production' in the pre-war years are laid out with great clarity, and in an especially original chapter the author points to Nazi Germany's growing dependence upon agricultural imports from the Danubian and Balkan states in the late 1930s. This study is thus truly comprehensive in that it deals with ideology, with the dynamics of state policy making, with the new institutions for the regulation of agriculture, with the progress of production, and with the place of agriculture in Germany's foreign trade. Nor is Corni blind to the distinctive personalities of the leading individuals: his book contains perceptive character sketches of Hugenberg (on whom he has many new things to say), Darré, and Darré's increasingly powerful deputy, Backe. The book concludes with a highly suggestive comparison between the agricultural policies of Nazi Germany and of the Italian Fascist regime; this chapter marks an interesting addition to a new literature which is attempting, by means of various *empirical* comparisons, to reconstitute a generic concept of Fascism which will avoid those weaknesses characteristic of the theoretical discussions of the 1960s.

In the long hours during which I have discussed the text of this book line by line with the author, I have been impressed in particular by the enormous amount of scholarly research which Gustavo Corni has done, but has had to withhold (for reasons of economy, readability and balance of presentation) from this final published version. As do all really distinguished works of history, his book represents a careful distillation of a knowledge of the subject which is much more vast than is apparent to the reader. Behind one example in the text lie dozens, unquoted, and although the book is not short it is in fact a condensation and an interpretative summary of an exceptionally broad and detailed project of research into published and unpublished sources. Such authorial control over vast and difficult research materials is rare.

As I have said, this study is both comprehensive and complex, and it is for this reason somewhat artificial to single out any one theme for special emphasis here. However, the author points to one possible conclusion which is implicit rather than explicit: the possible connection between the severity of the crisis of German agriculture in 1939 and the war of annexation and plunder which the Nazi regime launched in that year. That German agriculture was indeed in acute crisis in 1939 the author leaves us in no doubt: favourable state interventions were a thing of the past, and now price policies increasingly favoured the urban consumer, but most seriously hundreds of thousands of agricultural labourers, some of them skilled workers, left the land to take up jobs in the enormously expanding armaments sectors of industry, and still others were recruited for military service. The labour shortage was a direct cause of declines in output in 1939, and of reversions from intensive to extensive farming. That this crisis would come about had been clear since at least 1936, but the Nazi regime was quite powerless to take effective steps to meet it – there were no practical steps which could be taken by a regime which was *both* committed to forced re-armament *and* was very nervous about its popularity among the mass of urban consumers. In the event, the massive plunder of foreign labour power provided the only possible solution. It is a noteworthy fact that already in October 1939 almost a quarter of a million Polish civilians and, above all, prisoners of war, were employed on Prussian farms and estates on most urgent work with the last of the season's harvests. Thereafter the very survival of the agricultural sector became dependent upon ever-growing supplies of forced labour.

I do not wish to burden Gustavo Corni's book with a debatable thesis concerning the component of socio-economic imperialism in

Foreword

the Nazi war effort. But I do wish to underline the fact that his study is a study of the failure of a set of policies in a vital sector of public and economic life. The author lucidly analyses the many causes of this failure. It was, however, a failure which had enormous consequences as the Nazi leaders tried to improvise policies of *Lebensraum* over all of conquered Europe from 1939 to 1944 in order to ensure that the German people had enough to eat, which had not been the case during the First World War. By the time of the invasion of Poland it had become doubtful whether Nazi industrial, trade and agricultural policies would continue to permit the state to feed the people in the manner to which they were accustomed. This fundamental weakness lay at the root of much of the barbarism of the Nazis' imperial 'new order' in the war years.

Tim Mason[†]

Rome, September 1987

Introduction

The literature on the history of National Socialism, both as a movement and as a regime, is now so immense that a single researcher cannot hope to have an adequate command of all that has been written on the subject. The topic dealt with in the present study, however, can be numbered among the few themes that have not yet received sufficient attention: the history of the relations between the National Socialist Party and the rural population. This field has been surprisingly neglected, especially considering the deep consequences of agrarian policy on society and economy. Above all, it must be remembered that even in the 1930s almost a third of the entire German people as well as of the active population lived in the countryside and depended on farming for its income. Although agriculture had been losing ground with the onslaught of industrialisation and urbanisation, it still had a significant economic role and an even greater political importance.

It is no accident that the ruling class of estate owners, the Junker, featured prominently in German history and held on to considerable political power right up to the collapse in 1945. This power was based on their links with the bureaucracy, the armed forces and the political class. But the farmers and peasants themselves were also an important element on the German scene thanks to their widespread and long-standing tradition of representative associations. Another important aspect of the 'National Socialists and the Peasants' theme is that Hitler's sweeping, and in many ways unexpected, electoral successes with the rural masses from 1930 to 1932 were to be the springboard for his rise to power at the head of a mass party able to catch votes irrespective of social, regional and religious barriers. Finally, from the point of view of both ideology and organisation, the National Socialists were more successful in preparing the ground for the conquest of consent in the rural world than in any other sector. Thanks above all to the organisational and ideological activities of Richard Walther Darré, the future Minister of Agriculture, the National Socialist Party delivered a very concise and simple ideological message: the 'theory' (if it can be called such,

given the lack of cultural dignity in Darré's doctrine) of *Blut und Boden*, based on the key concept that the racial health of the German people depended on strengthening the peasantry. From the organisational point of view too, Darré and his assistants prepared the way for the construction of the enormous agricultural producers' corporative organisation, known as the Reichsnährstand, which was to be the cornerstone of the regime's agrarian policy.

These are the main themes considered in the present study, which sets itself the task of defining the role that agriculture and, more specifically, agrarian policy played within the Third Reich. At this point it must be said that I began with a working hypothesis which assumes the polymorphic and polycratic nature of the Hitler regime, seen – at least in a model way – as the ground of conflict and relations for the many pressure groups whose aims often differed. Agrarian policy is examined here not so much *per se* but as a sphere in which demands interacted in a more or less conflictual way. Therefore, contrary to common practice, special attention has been given to the positions adopted by the regime and the business and financial world concerning the options involved in major agrarian policy decisions.

The working hypothesis, which I feel has been substantiated, sees agrarian policy as having a rather 'residual' aspect compared to more important issues. At any rate it occupied a very low position in any list of the regime's priorities. And Darré and the advocates of an implausible 'ruralism' seem to me to have been aware of this. I see no reason therefore – although many other experts have – for considering their story in terms of the defeat of a 'ruralist' utopia in the face of accelerated industrial growth for the purposes of war. Although those proclaiming the indispensable role of the peasantry may well have been in good faith, I would say that all the efforts made by Darré and his organisation were directed at making this process as painless and as smooth as possible. In doing so they guaranteed a certain degree of consent and seemed to cater to the interests of a wide and important sector of the German population. At the same time, I have disproved the widespread thesis that the Nazi regime aimed to modernise agrarian production and the rural world.

What emerges is a very complex history full of indecision and countermoves as the ruling groups within the regime fought over the dying body of an important productive sector which was no longer really of great interest to National Socialist leaders given their plans to exploit conquered territories. But in the *short term* it was of vital importance for both economic and political reasons.

This is why the present study has been limited to the pre-war period when all the possible options were still open. Once the war was under way and the plan to create a 'New European Order' was enacted, the situation changed radically.

I should like to make it clear from the outset that this book is not intended as a social history of the rural world – even though in that area too there are still huge gaps in our knowledge. But rather, it aspires to be a study in the 'social' history of politics, based on legislative and political debates and the activities and proposals of the various pressure groups. At the same time it takes into account, in as rigorous a way as possible, the socio-economic data which reflect the concrete effects of agrarian policy decisions and their repercussions on peasant life.

It is customary for an author's introductory note to summarise not only the logical unfolding of a research project but also its concrete genesis. Apropos of this I should like to mention that the project began in 1980 thanks to the generosity of Prof. Karl O. v. Aretin, the director of the Mainz Institute of European History and at the time co-ordinator of an ambitious international study group assembled to examine the interdependences in the political and economic evolution of the domestic and foreign policies of European countries between the two wars. Thanks to Prof. Aretin's friendship and respect I was able to begin my research with funding from a Volkswagen Foundation grant. The horizon of my project was subsequently broadened when I joined up with a group of young scholars expertly assembled by Pierangelo Schiera for a research project entitled 'Costituzioni sociali, teorie dello stato, ideologie in Germania. Secoli XVIII–XX', financed by the Italian Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche and supported by the perfect organisational machinery of the Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico di Trento.

The long and intense hours spent in archive research – the basis of this project – were made lighter by the kindness of the staff in a number of institutions: the Koblenz Bundesarchiv, the Potsdam and Merseburg sections of the Deutscher Zentralarchiv, the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bonn, the Goslar City Archive and the two splendid private archives of the Guthoffnungshütte in Oberhausen and Krupp in Essen. I am indebted to these institutions and their staff. I should also like to thank the staff of the many libraries I used: above all the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice whose international lending service demonstrates that Italian libraries are much more efficient than is often believed. My research work led me to highly profitable encounters with Horst Gies and Domenico

Introduction

Conte whom I should like to thank here. Tim Mason, who honoured me by writing the foreword to the book, was prodigious in his observations, criticism and suggestions as he read the various manuscripts. He also offered valuable advice during the translation of the book, skilfully executed by David Kerr. This English edition of my book is dedicated to the memory of Tim Mason, who was both a distinguished scholar in the field of German history and a personal friend.

Finally, I should also like to dedicate this work to my daughter Elisa whose birth made its writing such a joyful time.

Gustavo Corni

The Structural Crisis in German Agriculture from the End of the First World War

Once in power, the National Socialists had to reckon with a situation in agriculture that had developed out of the decisive turn to protectionist policies in the late nineteenth century. For a general picture of this situation the historical evolution of agriculture must be seen in terms of *continuity*, especially as far as two aspects are concerned: firstly in production, where structural reforms had been wholly lacking,¹ and secondly in the internal social stratification which – despite recent ‘revisionist’ historiographical claims² – shows that until 1940–5 the caste of large landowners in the east (aristocratic or otherwise) continued to exercise a hegemonic role from a social and politico-cultural point of view, rather than from an economic one.³

In this sense, important episodes, such as the First World War or the establishing of a republican-parliamentary regime, were not a disruptive influence. A long-term approach means going back to the turn of the century when, because of rapid industrialisation, agriculture began to lose its pre-eminent economic position. Thanks to a protectionistic regime, imposed by means of the so-called ‘corn and steel’ alliance,⁴ agriculture enjoyed a fairly long period of internal prosperity which lasted until the outbreak of war. Total output increased by 60 per cent between 1883 and 1913, creating a considerable parallel increase in the value of production and farmers’ net incomes per capita.⁵ And this was despite the fact that the rapidly changing international context had caused a shift in the terms of trade in favour of the new large overseas producers, (USA, Canada, Argentina, Russia and Australia), thus giving rise to a definitive crisis in European cereal production, and particularly in Germany. The prosperity, artificially sustained by an almost isolationist protective regime, was thus only apparent and temporary.

Within Germany, industry grew at such a rate that an increasingly wide gap opened up between the two sectors: the number of

people employed in agriculture dropped from 42.7 per cent in 1882 to 28.4 per cent in the 1910 census, and agriculture's share of the gross national product (at steady 1913 prices), which until 1870 had been above 40 per cent, dropped to an average of 23.4 per cent in the four-year period 1910–13, whereas industry, now the predominant sector, contributed 40.9 per cent.⁶ The growing split between the two sectors also showed in the German farmers' increasing inability to meet the demand for foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials from a continuously and rapidly growing urban population. By 1910, in fact, of a total population of 65 million only 25.8 million still lived in the country, whereas a quarter of the population was concentrated in cities of over 100,000 inhabitants. Germany, which until the last decades of the nineteenth century had been a net exporter of cereals, had to resort to increasingly large imports, so much so that by the eve of the war it was buying more than 20 per cent of its total food requirements abroad.⁷

These deep changes generated a negative response in the rural world and especially in the well-organised and efficient network of representative bodies. To fight the new urban and industrial civilisation, they tried to turn back the wheels of time, invoking the myth of an impossible 're-ruralisation',⁸ or adopted attitudes of cultural pessimism and anti-urbanism.⁹

The crisis was heightened by the consolidation of structural imbalances: the East–West split deepened with the consequent inexorable emigration from the land and the worsening backwardness of the eastern provinces. At the same time there was a growing polarisation of small and big business. According to the 1907 agricultural census, as many as 58.7 per cent of farms comprised less than 2 hectares, but these accounted for only 5.7 per cent of the total land farmed. On the whole these were not self-sufficient productive units, for their proprietors had to seek other sources of income to maintain their families. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the estate owners continued to lead the way as far as mechanisation and output were concerned, but they too had serious problems.¹⁰ In particular the change in the balance of world production relations had made the cereal-beet monoculture, on which most of the large eastern farms relied, more inflexible and uneconomical than ever. These farms continued to thrive, however, thanks to legislative measures in their favour, especially in the form of trade protection generously granted to them by the state from Bismarck on. But relying on state intervention and even demanding – as the most representative of the agricultural pressure groups did on several occasions – a social sharing of the economic risks

through guaranteed incomes for cereal growers were signs of a serious rejection of an economic rationale.¹¹

Although the medium-sized and medium to large peasant holdings had grown more powerful in the period prior to the war, they were not a real alternative capable of bridging the gap between the increasingly stagnant big estates and the 'proletarian' smallholdings. In fact most peasant farmers were subject to the politico-ideological hegemony of the eastern Junker group. Through the widespread propagandistic use of a vocabulary based on nationalistic and corporatist slogans, the eastern landowners were able to maintain consensus in broad sections of the peasant farmer classes despite the divergence of their objective interests, exercising strong political pressure on the government and its bureaucratic apparatus.

This was crucial in determining a serious and irreparable delay in bringing into being those mechanisms for the planning and distribution of production that would have at least attenuated the serious state of unpreparedness in which the German economy, and in particular agriculture, had to confront a war of unexpected proportions. The so-called *Zwangswirtschaft*, or 'controlled' economy, which aimed at regulating output flows and the distribution of foodstuffs and raw materials, was introduced only in May 1916. Administered with a great deal of uncertainty, it achieved only rather feeble results. In spite of this, the liveliest reaction to it came from agricultural producers who were just as liable to ask for state intervention on their behalf as they were to make accusations of unwelcome interferences: they reproached wartime planning as unilaterally favouring the interests of consumers. The undermining of the labour market, due to the conscription of the youngest generation, coupled with a reduction in the means of production (chemical fertilisers, draught animals, skilled labour, etc.), caused a dramatic fall-off in agricultural output: total production, calculated in cereals, dropped from 234.3 million tonnes in 1912 to 174.5 million in 1918, thus making the population's food supply highly precarious.¹²

Subsistence-level diets and a widespread chaotic black-market economy dramatically laid bare German agriculture's inability to meet the requirements of the domestic market. The war was thus an important factor in the crisis in agriculture, depriving it of its role as fulcrum of the state, economy and society – a role which it had held so tenaciously for the whole of the previous century. The rural world went to war in the optimistic belief that it was the central pillar of the German 'model of development'. This idea was soon brushed aside by the spectre of famine, the black market and defeat.

The reaction in the agricultural world – and this is the second important consequence of the 1914–18 war – was one of greater intolerance and disillusion both with the state, whose intervention had a negative effect on production, and with urban and industrial society. Moreover the city–country contrast had been heightened by the deep resentment felt by the urban masses, lower middle classes and workers, towards farmers, accused of having speculated on hunger. Thus with the loss of the war, the gulf between state and farmers, as well as that between agriculture and the industrial urban world, grew deeper.¹³

An apparently ephemeral consequence of the radicalisation of the agricultural world was the spread of revolutionary ferment which led to the attempt to create a system of soviets, based on the Bolshevik model,¹⁴ in country areas (at least in some regions like Bavaria and Pomerania). Similarly, class-conscious farm workers' unions grew in strength, whereas previously they had struggled to survive because of police intimidation and the powerful presence of paternalistic attitudes.¹⁵ These rebellious phenomena were soon absorbed into the network of traditional social relations, but they may well have left deep feelings of malaise. Existing representative organisations also had to be renewed to cope with the more general mass mobilisation in country areas in the immediate post-war period. The Bund der Landwirte (BdL) was forced to ally itself with the Landbünde which had sprung up in many provinces, giving rise to a new and wider *Verband*, the Reichslandbund (RLB), in which the hegemony was initially still held by the traditional ruling class.¹⁶

Thanks both to their well-tryed tactical skill and to the wavering policies of the new Republican governments, whose parties were fully aware of how little consensus they were able to muster in the rural world, the traditional élite managed to neutralise the reformist potential or attempts at rationalisation inherent in the new republican system. In particular, the new labour legislation, abolishing many of the anachronistic and unjust laws rooted in pre-capitalist forms of production was largely disregarded through the foundation of 'yellow' unions and the acquiescent and ineffectual bureaucratic methods of supervision.¹⁷ The principle enacted in articles 153 and 155 of the Weimar Constitution, stipulating that 'it is the duty of the landowner towards the collectivity to work and use land. Any increase in value of land obtained without the use of labour or capital must be of use to the collectivity', also remained a dead letter. The main concrete consequence of this principle – i.e. the law on internal settlement of 11 August 1919, providing for the

long-term concession of a third of the total land of estate owners to create holdings for the landless – was, as we shall see later, only partially and very slowly implemented.¹⁸

A direct consequence of the war had been the loss of extensive territories, both in the east and west, containing 10 per cent of the population but 14.6 per cent of the total acreage in the Reich. This further worsened the already difficult productive conditions. At the time, only one factor worked to agriculture's advantage: hyperinflation. Debts amounting to RM13 billion, accrued by farmers in the previous decade, were wiped out in one fell swoop. But it turned out to be of artificial and ephemeral benefit, for the sudden freedom from debts created a euphoric rush of reckless investments. This had particularly harmful consequences for the serious crisis in both the internal and international credit systems. Thus in the winter of 1923/4, when because of a bad harvest farmers had to resort to loans to stock up and prepare for the next year, the spiral of indebtedness started up again. By 1926 the total debts of German agriculture again amounted to RM8 billion, a quarter of them being short term.¹⁹

This dangerous renewal of the spiral of indebtedness, which initially hit small and medium-sized farms, was also evidence of how the internal imbalances in the sector had not been rectified in any way. They also affected production levels which, despite growing mechanisation during the 1920s, could not equal pre-war figures (Table 1.1).

Livestock herds also failed to reach 1913 levels, harming above all small and medium-sized peasant holdings which relied on livestock and their derivatives for most of their income. The relevant figures for yields (Table 1.2) fluctuated a good deal, and are another proof of the failure to reach a balanced production.²⁰

The gap between industry and agriculture continued to grow: values derived from the gross national product show how the difference between the two sectors had increased, industry now accounting for 65.3 per cent of the gross national product com-

Table 1.1. Main crops 1913–1926 (millions of tonnes)

Year	Wheat	Rye	Potatoes	Beet
1913	3.93	7.71	17.62	17.79
1926	2.20	4.22	11.70	10.75

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 293.

Table 1.2. Average yields 1910–1928 (quintals per hectare)

	Year		
	1910	1924	1928
Wheat	19.0	21.0	22.3
Rye	17.0	16.1	20.2
Barley	18.0	19.9	24.2
Potatoes	132.0	158.3	159.3
Beet	281.0	260.3	242.3

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 280f.

Table 1.3. Values of agricultural yield, excluding seed and animal feed (RM million at 1913 prices)

1913	19.740
1925	9.198
1926	8.619
1927	9.559
1928	10.975

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 310.

pared to 43.4 per cent in 1913. Furthermore, whereas before the war the annual output per employee in agriculture was 50 per cent below that of industry (RM1,020 compared to RM1,560), in 1925 this difference was over 100 per cent: RM730 per employee in agriculture compared to RM1,470 in industry.

Among the causes for the decline in German agriculture, international factors are of primary importance: in the post-war period output in non-European countries increased considerably, their production costs being well below those of farmers on the old continent. Because of badly organised markets and weak domestic demand, caused by unemployment linked to the reconversion processes from a wartime to a peacetime economy, world agriculture had serious problems of overproduction with a consequent fall in prices, which steadily continued until it became part of the general depression of 1929.²¹ Table 1.4, showing prices in some of the principal world markets, is very revealing.

In this context German agriculture had very strong internal imbalances. As for the distribution of land, a comparison of the censuses of 1907 and 1925 reveals a large increase in the total number of farms, rising from just over 5.7 million to 6.2 million,

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Table 1.4. World agricultural prices (RM per quintal)

Year	Wheat	Rye	Oats	Cattle	Pigs	Butter
	Rotterdam	Rotterdam	London	Copenhagen	Budapest	Copenhagen
1928	22.64	22.20	20.65	82.96	123.33	352.87
1930	16.33	10.50	8.84	80.43	99.12	276.64
1932	8.81	7.81	7.22	27.83	56.53	141.82

Source: *Statistisches Jahrbuch des Deutschen Reiches*, 1933, pp. 143, 145.

whereas the total land farmed had dropped from 31.8 to 30.1 million hectares (based on post-war borders). The fragmentation of land was further accentuated by a large increase in the number of very small farms (under 2 hectares). In the post-war period their number rose to nearly three million but they farmed as little as 4.2 per cent of the total acreage. At the same time the number of medium or medium to large holdings (20–100 hectares) fell, the percentage share of the total land farmed dropping from 29.8 per cent to 26.4 per cent. At the other end of the social scale, 3,061 estates with over 200 hectares accounted for an overall surface area of 3,914,416 hectares, i.e. 12.7 per cent of the total land farmed. On examining the other available economic indicators, we find further proof of the relative strength of the large eastern estates compared to the peasant farm economy and of the growing proletarianisation of the rural population. For example, the distribution of the labour force shows an increase in the average number employed on farms over 100 hectares in size: on farms of up to 200 hectares the average labour force rose from 28.6 in 1907 to 32.1 in 1925, and on farms of over 200 hectares it increased even more sharply, from 71.3 to 78.2 in the post-war period. At the same time the figures for smaller farms show a sharp drop in permanent and seasonal workers, excluding family members (Table 1.5).

Table 1.5. Percentage of non-family staff employed

	Farm size (ha)			
	Less than 2	2–5	20–100	More than 100
1907	12.2	14.9	74.3	98.6
1925	5.4	8.1	72.9	97.3

Source: R. Berthold, 'Zur sozialökonomischen Struktur des kapitalistischen Systems der deutschen Landwirtschaft', *JWG*, vol. 9, 1973, p. 113.

Further evidence of the internal imbalances in German agriculture can be deduced from the distribution of machinery: of the more than 400,000 agricultural transport machines available according to statistics for 1925, on average farms of over 100 hectares had three, whereas small farms had none; peasant holdings of 20–50 hectares were relatively better provided for.²²

Faced with these internal imbalances and the worsening international agricultural crisis, the still powerful farmers' pressure groups vainly tried to create a protective wall of almost insurmountable tariffs. Already within Germany this strategy, traditionally used by farmers to protect their interests, had met with considerable hostility from industrial circles which, especially in the years of 'relative stability' (1924–8), had aimed at maximising exports. In this way the industrialists turned out to be potential allies of the unions and the Social Democratic Party, whose main concern was the interests of the consumer.²³

At an international level, however, the rush towards protectionist policies, which was not only the prerogative of Germany, did not keep pace with the growing depreciation in the value of foodstuffs (Table 1.6). The existing problem of serious overproduction was aggravated by the 1929 depression²⁴ which hit internal demand but also shook the whole financial system with grave consequences for farmers' indebtedness. For example, German agriculture received credits for a total value of \$135 million from the Dawes plan, which dealt with the delicate question of war reparations, but because of the crisis, repayment was suddenly and urgently requested.²⁵ Here we must reiterate that the depression of 1929 was not a decisive turning point in the long evolution which brought deep changes to the structures of agriculture everywhere, and particularly in Germany; but it certainly made things worse by

Table 1.6. Agricultural retail prices 1928–1934

Year	Index (1926/27 = 100)
1928/29	98.5
1929/30	94.0
1930/31	79.9
1931/32	66.4
1932/33	57.5
1933/34	62.7

Source: V. Klemm, 'Ursachen und Verlauf der Krise der Landwirtschaft von 1927/28 bis 1933', Habilitation, Berlin, 1965, p. 106.

accentuating the highly emotive state of deep unrest and the dissatisfaction of the great majority of farmers.

In keeping with world trends, as illustrated previously, in Germany too there was a much more dramatic drop in livestock product prices (Table 1.7). This was partly due to the fact that livestock peasant farmers exercised less influence on government legislative and protectionist measures.

The exceptional intensity with which the depression hit all sections of agriculture is demonstrated by another fact: the gap between the cost of indispensable industrial equipment and farmers' incomes. The price scissors increased yearly, causing a steady fall in farmers' real incomes. The seemingly arid sequence of facts and tables in this chapter is actually indispensable for an understanding of the general factors which caused the rural population's growing distrust of the republican parliamentary 'system' and favoured its sudden political shift towards right-wing radicalism.

Table 1.8 clearly shows how, despite a sharp reduction in expenditure and investment, gross incomes and net earnings continued to fall: even increased output could not reverse this trend, and in fact it

Table 1.7. Agricultural prices 1929–1933

Year	Index (1928/29 = 100)	
	Cereal products	Livestock products
1929/30	87	89
1930/31	86	76
1931/32	85	65
1932/33	71	59

Source: M. Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe: Crisis and Adaptation since 1880*, London, 1964, p. 198.

Table 1.8. Incomes and expenditure in agriculture 1928–1933 (RM million)

Year	Gross income	Expenditure	Net income
1928/29	10.228	8.033	2.195
1929/30	9.808	7.881	1.927
1930/31	8.646	6.920	1.726
1931/32	7.350	6.127	1.223
1932/33	6.405	5.514	0.891

Source: M. Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe: Crisis and Adaptation since 1880*, London, 1964, p. 198.

Table 1.9. Output in agriculture and industry, 1928–1932

Year	Index (1927/28 = 100)	
	Agriculture	Industry
1928/29	103	98
1929/30	107	97
1930/31	109	80
1931/32	108	65
1932/33	109	58

Source: E. Hennig, *Thesen zur deutschen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte 1933–1938*, Frankfurt, 1973, p. 51.

Table 1.10. Indebtedness per hectare 1927 (1924 = 100)

Farm size (ha)					
5–20	21–50	51–100	101–200	201–400	More than 400
212	233	316	430	407	493

Source: F. Kneer, *Die Stellung von Bauernwirtschaften und Großbetrieben in der deutschen Krise*, Dissertation, Berlin, 1931.

only lowered prices still further. It is significant that, whereas agricultural output continued to increase during the depression years, industrial indices fell away strongly (Table 1.9).

The consequences of the overproduction crisis, considerably aggravated by mass unemployment (in 1928 the unemployed accounted for 6.3 per cent of the active population, two years later it rose to 14 per cent, and in 1932 it reached a maximum of 29.9 per cent),²⁶ were devastating, from both the material and the psychological points of view. Agriculture's total indebtedness rose from RM8 billion in 1925 to RM11.6 billion in 1930, most of the loans being short term, and this, combined with high interest rates, stifled farmers' economic activity. As far as the distribution of debts among various sizes of farm was concerned, the largest share was held by the biggest farms, who got into debt at a much faster rate. However, the available statistics do show – in contrast to what many maintained at the time – that as early as 1924 not even the small and medium-sized farms were debt-free, and that their circumstances deteriorated each year, albeit at a relatively slower rate. A comparison of indebtedness per hectare for various farm sizes in 1927 with a base index of 1924 provides the data on unitary indebtedness given in Table 1.10.

The rising number of public auctions (many of which were not

Table 1.11. Average levels of indebtedness 1928 (RM per hectare)

Farm size (ha)	West Germany	East Germany
5-20	36	43
21-50	36	47
51-100	37	59
101-200	44	71
201-400	46	71
More than 400	-	62

Source: F. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor in Germany*, Princeton, 1955.

even attended) and foreclosures shows that, at least until 1930, these drastic measures mostly hit large farms: in 1930 in Prussia, over 70 per cent of foreclosures concerned farms of over 100 hectares. But from that year onwards we see a growing number of foreclosures of small and medium-sized farms and, although fairly limited, a reduction in auctions of large eastern estates. In the two-year period 1931-2 for the whole of the Reich the number of auctions of farms of under 2 hectares rose from 2,164 to 2,530, and there was a similar rise in the number of foreclosures of farms in the class size of 2-20 hectares: from 2,413 to 3,300. There was a drop in foreclosures of large estates from 382 to 302 - even if in absolute terms the amount of land involved in these foreclosures was obviously far greater than that of peasant holdings.²⁷

In short, the depression tended to spread at a social level, and increasingly affected all social classes in country areas. And as its effects grew harsher, it also spread to areas which initially had been relatively immune. Whereas in the early stages it had affected above all the East Elbian regions, from 1930 indebtedness and foreclosures in the west and north also increased and the situation became more serious. The initially worse state of eastern agriculture can be seen in Table 1.11.

There were many causes for these divergences and they must be seen within the general context of the internal imbalances in German agriculture which we briefly examined above. On one hand, in the eastern regions prevalently extensive farms, based on a cereal monoculture, survived in very difficult geo-pedological conditions, not so much because of a capacity for technical innovation and managerial skills but because of the brutal exploitation of the seasonal Slav workforce and the inheritance of a political position which allowed them to enjoy a higher customs protection and better legislative treatment. On the other hand, this must be seen in

Table 1.12. Average agricultural income per unit 1928–1930 (RM per hectare)

Farm size (ha)	West Germany	East Germany
5–50	170	82
51–200	52	–5
More than 200	–8	–20

Source: H. Raupach, 'Der interregionale Wohlfahrtsausgleich als Problem der Politik des Deutschen Reiches', in W. Conze and H. Raupach (eds.), *Die Staats- und Wirtschaftskrise des Deutschen Reiches 1929/33*, Stuttgart, 1967, p. 21.

conjunction with the disadvantages which derived from their distance from markets and the absolutely inadequate infrastructure (the situation was even more serious in eastern Prussia after the territorial changes imposed by the victorious powers).²⁸ Moreover in the 1920s, the great eastern estates were worse hit by increased production costs than peasant holdings, which could draw on family resources with greater ease.²⁹

The combination of all these factors caused a substantial and increasingly serious state of economic and social backwardness in the regions that were once the fulcrum of absolutist Prussian power. Now they found themselves in a humiliating position of backwardness that accentuated the contrast between their economic condition and the political influence that the *Junkertum* were still able to exercise (Table 1.12).

Statistics on indebtedness show that from 1930/31 more and more farms were being affected in other German regions: Rhineland, Schleswig-Holstein, Hesse, Bavaria and Württemberg. Even small and medium-sized holdings, which in a crisis were able to draw on the labour of relatives and members of the family and to maximise savings, were on the verge of losing their economic independence. This is a highly significant factor if we wish to understand the frustration and the potential for rebellion that was building up in the rural population.

The economic crisis was interwoven with, and reciprocally conditioned by, the crisis in the traditional forms of political representation in the rural world. The break-up of the Wilhelminian system and the arrival on the scene of powerful new actors – workers' unions and the Social Democratic Party – weakened the political strength of the conservatives, which to a large extent was based on the farmers. In the Republic's last chaotic phase of life, when Hindenburg stripped the parliamentary system of its auth-

ority, substituting it with authoritarian forms of government, the conservatives undoubtedly went a long way towards winning back the power that they had previously held. Thus, the Papen government (June–December 1932) was rightly described as a ‘cabinet of barons’, and the other presidential governments also brought together many names from the conservative élite. It should be borne in mind, however, that the ‘revival’ of this aristocratic-conservative élite at the level of leadership corresponded to a weakening of its hegemony amongst the masses: the consequences of the economic crisis had also caused a breaking up of the power base on which this élite had built its hold over the rural population. Let us consider some aspects of this changing situation.

(1) The ineluctable decline of the National People’s Party (DNVP),³⁰ the political heir to the conservative party on which the Bismarckian–Wilhelminian political system was based, was marked by a loss of the votes gained in the various elections held from 1924 onwards. The majority of the votes lost by the DNVP went to small regional or corporative professional parties (mostly based in country areas). Their ephemeral but significant success in the second half of the 1920s is further proof of the break-up of the agricultural front into a series of centrifugal forces, which increasingly moved in the direction of corporative organisations concerned with economic claims.³¹

Furthermore, the conservative party underwent a series of splits. The most important of them, on the eve of the 1928 elections, gave rise to a new party, the Christlichnationale Bauern- und Landvolkspartei. It is no accident that this new party was led by the RLB chairman, Karl Hepp. The identity crisis in German conservatism during the Weimar Republic revolved round the problem of whether or not to respect the new rules of the game. That is, whether to make new use of traditional forms of pressure in a completely different and less favourable institutional and political set-up, or firmly carry on with a radical opposition across the board to all aspects of the ‘system’.³² In the DNVP it was ultimately the

Table 1.13. Votes cast in Reichstag elections 1924–1930 (million)

	DNVP	Regional parties
1924/I	5.697	0.666
1924/II	6.206	0.545
1928	4.382	1.025
1930	2.458	2.373

latter opinion which prevailed, and this was personified by the leadership of the press magnate Alfred Hugenberg, who liked to think of himself as the 'saviour of the fatherland'.³³

(2) In the face of worsening economic conditions, the 'disintegration of the traditional forms of political representation'³⁴ engendered increasingly radical reaction. The event which caused the greatest stir in public opinion, revealing the extent of peasant bitterness, was the so-called *Landvolksbewegung*. Set up in Schleswig-Holstein in the early months of 1928,³⁵ it also highlighted the deep gulf between the leaders and the rank and file. Schleswig-Holstein had a solid peasant economy based mainly on livestock. When a slump in this sector caused a series of foreclosures, the peasants reacted, creating a broad mass movement which soon took on terrorist forms and bluntly refused any kind of mediation by the parties and traditional organisations. The *Landvolksbewegung*, which found inspiration for its ideas in the sixteenth-century peasant uprisings, demanded (in a very vague way) the radical transformation of the status quo. Although it was highly successful and spread to other regions, the movement was short lived. But the seeds that it had sown, or rather the problems that it had raised, did not go away. So much so in fact that Schleswig-Holstein, which up until then had republican and democratic leanings, gave the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) its biggest percentage vote (27 per cent) in the September 1930 elections. And this was the first step of Hitler's party towards winning mass consensus.

(3) On an ideological level too the tendency to self-absorption, which Gessner aptly described as 'agrarianism',³⁶ steadily strengthened during the 1920s. In the Republican and post-revolutionary context, the more extreme and radical currents took a stronger hold in the varied scene of rural ideologies. It should be pointed out, however, that highly diverse movements and groups, from the aristocratic conservatives to Max Sering's social reformists or even the radical racialist utopianists, all came together on one essential point: the central role of agriculture and the inescapable need for its restoration, as the only way out of the shallows of parliamentarianism and the conflicts between interest groups. This convergence explains how, in the years of their rise to power, the National Socialists were able to bring together both rank and file impatience and the demands of traditional pressure groups.³⁷ The agricultural crisis was seen as a crisis in civilisation – a total drama. The prevalent climate, with its refusal of possible rational answers, was reflected in the widespread hopes for a solution in total or

weltanschaulich terms. This was to be the promise held out by the ideology and propaganda of the National Socialists.

Notes

1. H. J. Puhle, *Politische Agrarbewegungen in kapitalistischen Industriegesellschaften*, Göttingen, 1975, p. 40.
2. See, in particular, the essays by D. Blackburn, 'Peasants and Politics in Germany 1871-1914', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 14, 1984, pp. 47-75; J. C. Hunt, 'Peasants, Grains and Meat Quotas: Imperial German Protectionism Re-examined,' *CEH*, vol. 7, 1974; and R. G. Moeller, 'Peasants and Tariffs in the Kaiserreich: How Backward were the Bauern?', *Agricultural History*, vol. 55, 1981.
3. Cf. the fundamental studies by H. Rosenberg on the historical evolution of the *Junkertum: Bureaucracy, Aristocracy and Autocracy: The Prussian Experience*, Cambridge, Mass., 1958; *Große Depression und Bismarckzeit*, Berlin, 1967; and *Probleme der deutschen Sozialgeschichte*, Frankfurt, 1969.
4. Of the abundant literature on the protectionist turn and its key role in subsequent German history, see L. Rathmann, 'Bismarck und der Übergang zur Schutzzollpolitik', *ZfG*, vol. 4, 1956; H. Böhme, 'Big Business Pressure Groups and Bismarck's Turn to Protectionism' *HJ*, vol. 10, 1967; and I. N. Lambi, *Free Trade and Protection in Germany, 1868-79*, Wiesbaden, 1963.
5. Cf. S. Dillwitz, 'Die Struktur der Bauernschaft von 1871 bis 1914', *JWG*, vol. 9, 1973, p. 49; W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 331.
6. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum*, p. 33.
7. Cf. F. Aeroboe, *Der Einfluß des Krieges auf die landwirtschaftliche Produktion in Deutschland*, Stuttgart, 1927, p. 24.
8. On the debate concerning the feasibility of a return to the prevalence of agriculture over the by now advanced *Industriestaat*, see the excellent study by K. D. Barkin, *The Controversy over German Industrialisation*, Chicago, 1970.
9. On the main ideological currents in the rural world, in addition to the more traditional approach of H. Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, vol. II, Munich, 1958, see K. Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, Meisenheim a.G., 1970, and A. Lees, 'Critics of Urban Society in Germany 1854-1914', *JHI*, vol. 40, 1979.
10. I. Ballwanz, 'Der Zusammenhang zwischen der Produktionsentwicklung und der Betriebsgröße in der deutschen Landwirtschaft', *JWG*, vol. 14, 1978.
11. I am referring in particular to the bill presented by the RLB at the end of the century to create a state monopoly in cereals that would defend growers from all price fluctuations. On the policy of this very powerful organisation, see H. J. Puhle, *Agrarische Interessenpolitik und preußischer Konservatismus im wilhelminischen Reich*, 2nd edn, Bonn, 1975.
12. On the development of agrarian policy during the war and its repercussions, see A. Skalweit, *Die Kriegsernährungswirtschaft*, Stuttgart, 1927, and the monograph by M. Schumacher, *Land und Politik*, Düsseldorf, 1978, pp. 15-130.
13. Cf., in general, Aeroboe, *Der Einfluss des Krieges*, pp. 86ff., and the recent local studies by E. D. Kohler, 'Inflation and Black Marketeering in the Rhenish Agricultural Economy 1919-1922', *GSR*, vol. 8, 1985, pp. 43-64; R. G. Moeller, 'Winners as Losers in the German Inflation: Peasant Protest over the Controlled Economy 1920-1923', in G. Feldman (ed.), *Die deutsche Inflation: Eine Zwischenbi-*

lanz, Berlin, 1982, pp. 255–88, and by the same author, 'Dimensions of Social Conflict in the Great War', *CEH*, vol. 14, 1981, pp. 142–68; J. Osmond, 'Peasant Farming in South and West Germany During War and Inflation' in Feldman, *Deutsche Inflation*, pp. 289–307; and G. Feldman, 'Contadini e piccoli commercianti di fronte all'inflazione', in P. Hertner and G. Mori (eds.), *La transizione dall'economia di guerra all'economia di pace in Italia e Germania*, Bologna, 1983, pp. 347–78. Moeller has recently published a well-documented monograph: *German Peasants and Agrarian Politics 1914–1924: The Rhineland and Westphalia*, Chapel Hill, 1986.

14. On the origins of the farmers' soviets in country areas and their rapid re-absorption by the traditional élites, see H. Muth, 'Die Entstehung der Bauern- und Landarbeiterräte im November 1918 und die Politik des Bundes der Landwirte', *VZG*, vol. 21, 1973; and E. D. Kohler, 'Revolutionary Pomerania 1919–1920', *CEH*, vol. 9, 1976.

15. Membership of the socialist-inspired Deutscher Landarbeiterverband rose in two or three months in 1919 from a few thousand to more than 262,000, and the following year even reached 695,000. Thus it included around a third of the labour force which for decades had been almost passively subdued by the large landowners, especially in the east. Although the initial enthusiasm soon waned, it provides an important index of impatience with inhuman pre-capitalist living and working conditions. Cf. F. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor in Germany*, Princeton, 1955; J. Flemming, 'Landarbeiter zwischen Gewerkschaften und "Werkgemeinschaft"', *AfS*, vol. 14, 1974; K. Saul, 'Der Kampf um das Landproletariat', *AfS*, vol. 15, 1975, and 'Um die konservative Struktur Ostelbiens: Agrarische Interessen, Staatsverwaltung und ländliche "Arbeiternot"', in D. Stegmann, B. J. Wendt and P. C. Witt, (eds.), *Deutscher Konservatismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Bonn, 1983, pp. 129–98.

16. On the problems of the political reorganisation of the rural world in the post-war period, see the thorough works by Schumacher, *Land und Politik*, and J. Flemming, *Landwirtschaftliche Interessen und Demokratie*, Bonn, 1978.

17. Cf. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor*; the extensive documentation in H. Hübner, *Lage und Kampf der Landarbeiter im ostelbischen Preussen*, Berlin, 1977; and E. Voss, 'Probleme des Kampfes der Landarbeiter gegen die Großgrundbesitzer', *WZU Rostock*, vol. 17, 1968, pp. 114ff.

18. On the law encouraging internal settlement, see F. W. Boyens, *Geschichte der ländlichen Siedlung*, 2 vols, Berlin–Bonn, 1960. On the philosophy of Max Sering, who promoted the bill, see the far from impartial article by G. Heitz, 'Max Sering oder die Apologie der inneren Kolonisation', *WZU Rostock*, vol. 17, 1968.

19. See Schumacher, *Land und Politik*, pp. 270ff.

20. Along with these rather disappointing results there was a definite rise in investments: motorised machines rose from 1,000 in 1913 to over 7,000 in 1925 and 25,000 four years later. The use of chemical fertilisers also increased: cf. M. Nussbaum, *Wirtschaft und Staat in Deutschland während der Weimarer Republik*, Berlin, 1978, pp. 222f.

21. See the conclusions of the Société des Nations. Comité Economique, *La crise agricole*, vol. I, Geneva, 1932, pp. 12ff.

22. Calculations from *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1933, pp. 64f.

23. Of the wealth of literature available on inter-sectoral conflicts in the 1920s see, for example, A. Panzer, 'Das Ringen um die deutsche Agrarpolitik', Dissertation, Kiel, 1970, and D. Stegmann, 'Deutsche Zoll- und Handelspolitik 1924/25–1929', in H. Mommsen, D. Petzina and B. Weissbrod (eds.), *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik*, 2nd edn, Düsseldorf, 1977, pp. 499f., and the controversial but interesting work by D. Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis*, Princeton, 1981 (rev. edn, New York, 1986).

24. M. Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe: Crisis and Adaptation since 1880*, London, 1964, pp. 117ff.

25. Nussbaum, *Wirtschaft und Staat*, p. 224.

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26. D. Petzina, W. Abelschäuser and A. Faust, *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, vol. III, Munich, 1978, p. 119.
27. *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1933, pp. 386ff.
28. See D. Hertz-Eichenrode, *Politik und Landwirtschaft in Ostpreussen*, Cologne-Opladen, 1969; H. Schmidt and G. Blohm, *Die Landwirtschaft von Ostpreussen und Pommern 1914/18-1939*, Marburg, 1978.
29. Agricultural wages, in particular, had risen. This was partly due to the fact that tighter legislation restricted the practice of payment in kind. According to the figures provided by Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum*, pp. 494f., in the period from the eve of the war until the 1930s average agricultural wages doubled. Total agricultural costs at current prices rose from RM2.749 million in 1913 to RM3.491 million in 1925 and to RM4.516 million in 1930. This was above all due to the considerable increase in prices of industrial products, Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum*, pp. 318f. In general, cf. H. Raupach, 'Der interregionale Wohlfahrtsausgleich als Problem der Politik des Deutschen Reiches', in W. Conze and H. Raupach (eds.), *Die Staats- und Wirtschaftskrise des Deutschen Reiches 1923/33*, Stuttgart, 1967, p. 21, which is one of the clearest analyses of the by then unbridgeable gap between the 'two' Germanies.
30. On the DNVP and German conservatism in the 1920s in general cf. M. Dörr, 'Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei 1925-28', Dissertation, Marburg, 1964; L. Hertzman, *DNVP: Right Wing Opposition in the Weimar Republic*, Lincoln, 1963; and D. P. Walker, 'The German Nationalist People's Party: Conservative Dilemma in the Weimar Republic', *JCH*, vol. 14, 1979, pp. 627-47.
31. According to T. Childers, the rise of the small regional parties was a form of ideological reaction against the Republican system and an intermediate step towards the further rural radicalisation which took place in the following two years: *The Nazi Voter: Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany 1919-1933*, Chapel Hill-London, 1983, p. 263.
32. Cf. D. Stegmann, 'Vom Neokonservatismus zum Proto-Faschismus: konservative Partei, Vereine und Verbände 1893-1920', in Stegmann, Wendt and Witt, *Deutscher Konservatismus*, pp. 199-230.
33. On the figure of Hugenberg and his political career, see the works of J. Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg: The Radical Nationalist Campaign against the Weimar Republic*, London-New Haven, 1977, and H. Holzbach, *Das 'System Hugenberg': Die Organisation bürgerlicher Sammlungspolitik vor dem Aufstieg der NSDAP*, Stuttgart, 1981. K. P. Hoepke kindly allowed me to consult his detailed and as yet unpublished biography.
34. K. D. Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik*, 4th edn, Villingen, 1964, p. 312.
35. On the politics and electoral matters in this region, the following two works are considered exemplary for their analysis of the causes of the rapid rise to power of the NSDAP: R. Heberle, *Landvolksbewegung und Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart, 1963; G. Stoltenberg, *Die politischen Strömungen im schleswig-holsteinischen Landvolk*, Düsseldorf, 1962. There is also a recent but disappointing monograph by M. Le Bars: *Le mouvement paysan dans le Schleswig-Holstein 1928-1932*, Berne, 1986.
36. Cf. D. Gessner, *Agrardepression, Agrarideologie und konservative Politik in der Weimarer Republik*, Wiesbaden, 1976; Barrington Moore's reflections on the subject are still of fundamental importance: *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston, Mass., 1966.
37. On the cultural and ideological situation in the rural world, see among others G. L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, New York, 1964; K. Sonthheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*, Munich, 1958; D. Lützhof, *Der nordische Gedanke in Deutschland*, Stuttgart, 1971; and with a more literary interest, G. Schweizer, *Bauernroman und Faschismus*, Tübingen, 1971. Although a wide range of political positions emerges from these studies, they can ultimately be reduced to a few main conceptual guidelines.

National Socialist Ideology and Peasant Protest before the Accession to Power

The first lists containing details on the social profile of the members of the small Deutsche Arbeiterpartei show that they were mainly from an urban background. In 1920 this party, one among many in the constellation of post-war right-wing German radicalism, was to be denominated the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei. But as early as 1923, when we have the first complete lists of members of the NSDAP for the whole of the Reich, we see that the percentage of peasants (7.3 per cent) in the party was about the same as the percentage of peasants in the total active population (7.7 per cent).¹

In fact the NSDAP, which had made great advances after the entry of the crowd-swaying orator Adolf Hitler, was essentially concentrated in Munich and in the small towns around, where it won the support of the lower middle classes by responding in fairly vague terms to their frustrated aspirations and perennial discontent. Their policy programme, published in February 1920, contained twenty-five points which Hitler solemnly declared 'inalterable'. The programme clearly bears signs reflecting the radical tendencies of Gottfried Feder, whose totally vague theories called for an overthrow of the capitalist system.² Very little room, however, was given to agriculture. Only the seventeenth point, taking up the so-called *Bodenreformer* theories inspired by Damaschke, called for reform: 'We demand a property reform, responding to the national needs, the passing of a law for the expropriation of land for collective purposes, and the elimination of property taxes and all property speculation.'³

This is not the place to analyse just how far Hitler supported this programme, which was never actually put into practice in the years to come. Nor do we wish to get involved in the debate as to whether Hitler had his own political programme which he coherently sought to implement, or whether with a great sense of opportunism he cleverly adapted to changing circumstances.⁴ Here we need only mention his opinions concerning the peasant ques-

tion, bearing in mind that at least until 1933 the real content of Hitler's political ideas and 'obsessions' had little influence on the German masses. Hitler undoubtedly had an important role as a 'drummer' in the NSDAP election successes thanks to his demagogic talents, but his own political ideas remained in the background until 1933. Only then did they begin to play an essential part in the life of the Third Reich.⁵

The racial question was fundamental to Hitler's vision,⁶ and he interpreted the problem of the lack of space, which was supposed to afflict the German people, in racial terms. In contrast to the deracinated Jews, the Germans were seen as having a primordial need for space in which to carry out their superior 'cultural' activities. And this lack of space was a determining factor in Hitler's perennial and imperative drive to expand. This is why, in a speech held in Munich on 27 April 1923, he reinterpreted the point on property reform as the 'political will to expansion'.⁷

In *Mein Kampf* this apocalyptic vision of the conflict between races is crystallised in a veritable *Weltanschauung*. The equation involving *Bauernstand* and expansion is very effectively underlined right from the first pages: 'The plough thus becomes the sword and from the tears of war comes the survivors' daily bread.'⁸ Hitler clearly defines how the German people must satisfy its need for *Lebensraum*; the idea of setting up a new colonial empire is resolutely dismissed, as is the alternative of an internal redistribution of property relations:⁹ 'If land is needed then it must only come from Russia. The Reich must take the path that the knights of the German Order followed in their time to give the German plough land by means of the sword, and thus give the nation its daily bread.'¹⁰

Synthesising, in a highly original way, conventional ideas from various ideological currents – geopolitics, antisemitism, *völkisch*, anti-urbanism, etc. – Hitler stresses the importance of the peasants as the 'best defence against the social diseases that afflict us'.¹¹ But above all he entrusts the peasants with the mission of accompanying the warriors, whose task is to wipe out the Slavs in the east and supplant them with German culture. It is obvious then that Hitler's approach to the problem is to gloss over the internal contradictions by proclaiming great expansionist objectives. For our purposes we must bear in mind two fundamental points: (1) Hitler had no particular interest in providing an attractive ideology purporting to solve the problems in the peasant world; (2) until 1933 his theoretical writings had no widespread effect and did not work for (or against) the electoral rise of the National Socialists. A brief examin-

ation of Hitler's ideas, however, is indispensable for an understanding of the failure of R. W. Darré's project to make the 'agrarian question' the key issue in the Third Reich.

This lack of interest in the peasants is reflected in the party's political strategy after the unsuccessful Munich *putsch* and the party reorganisation in 1925, when the NSDAP dedicated its resources to creating a following in the urban lower middle classes to such an extent that Orlow has gone so far as to speak of an 'urban plan'.¹² There were plenty of consistent groups of Hitler's followers in country areas and, as recent research has shown,¹³ many National Socialist exponents spoke out on the problems and possible solutions for agriculture. In particular, the followers of Gregor Straßer, united in what Kühnl has rather simplistically described as the 'left' wing of the movement,¹⁴ devoted a good deal of their press space to these problems; they pushed for a re-agrarianisation of Germany and for a reduction of the eastern estates. Others, however, defended the principle of private property and, anticipating the later 'reinterpretation' of point seventeen of the programme, wanted expropriation to apply only to 'speculators'. These propaganda spokesmen included Erich Rosikat, Georg Kenstler (founder of the magazine *Blut und Boden*), Hinrich Lohse, Karl Hildebrandt and Werner Willikens, who was elected to the Reichstag in 1928 and became the party spokesman on agricultural issues.¹⁵ None of these figures departed greatly from the traditional anti-urban and ruralistic currents which came into being at the end of the century as a reaction to the collapse of the old value system, precipitated by incipient industrialisation and urbanisation.¹⁶

Thus although there are good grounds for emphasising a certain continuity in National Socialist propaganda aimed at the rural population – a continuity that means attributing less importance to the 'turning point' in policy when the special agrarian apparatus was created in the party in mid-1930 – it should also be pointed out that these spokesmen and National Socialist groups in the country had very little effect until the turning point of 1930. Hitler's party was still underrepresented in rural constituencies in the two elections in 1924 and in 1928. For despite a change in course, the farmers' growing dissatisfaction and economic insecurity during the depression were channelled into the regional and interest-group parties.¹⁷

The failure of the so-called 'urban plan', based on the prospect of mobilising cadres in the cities and among the working class, was evident in the 1928 Reichstag elections. On this occasion the NSDAP touched rock bottom in its brief electoral history, receiv-

ing only 2.6 per cent of the votes compared to 6.6 per cent in the elections of May 1924, and 3 per cent in those of December of the same year. In some regions, however, like Franconia, Schleswig-Holstein, the Palatinate and Lower Saxony, the results were far better.¹⁸ As early as April 1926 the NSDAP political leadership, under attack from other groups on the radical right, considered that the time was right to issue an official reinterpretation of point seventeen in the 'inalterable' party programme. This reinterpretation was clearly aimed at eliminating what was left of the initial radicalism, thus opening the way to collecting the potential consensus of a rural population which believed strongly in the principle of the inviolability of private property. This is how the declaration went:

[I]n the face of our enemies' false interpretations of point seventeen of the NSDAP programme the following specification is necessary. Since the NSDAP is in favour of private property, it follows that the term 'uncompensated expropriation' is only intended to promulgate those laws required to expropriate land that has been obtained illegally and which is not used to the common good. It is particularly intended for Judaic companies engaged in property speculation.¹⁹

Having obviated this obstacle to winning sympathy among the rural middle classes, the NSDAP changed its political strategy, shifting to formally legalistic grounds in search of the maximum electoral consensus possible; to this end the party's division into *Gaue* was modified to coincide with electoral constituencies, and it was also decided to set up an apparatus of professional speakers who were particularly well informed on agricultural issues.²⁰

There is no doubt, however, that the NSDAP campaign to penetrate country areas moved up a gear when Richard Walther Darré was co-opted into the party leadership. Darré was born in July 1895, of recently emigrated parents in Belgrano, Argentina. His studies, which were to have led to a specialisation in colonial agriculture, were interrupted by the outbreak of the war, in which he distinguished himself. Like many of his generation who were later to become leading figures in the Third Reich, Darré found difficulty in fitting in professionally after the war. He did, however, manage to complete his studies in agronomy and zootechnics at the University of Halle. In the late 1920s he was employed in agrarian departments of government offices and he made a name for himself by producing a series of publications on livestock selection, which he almost mechanically extended to anthropological and racial theories.²¹

Fully immersed in ruralistic and irrationalist currents,²² Darré worked out a closely argued organic theory, exalting the *Bauerntum* as the racial fulcrum of the German people; especially from a human and spiritual point of view, the defence of agriculture was for Darré the essential prerequisite to restoring racial integrity to the German people. This integrity was seen as being seriously threatened by industrialisation and its consequent breaking up of national entities in favour of a 'world economy'.

It was Darré who adopted Kenstler's expression *Blut und Boden*, which stood for the substantial nexus between racial strength and links with the land, intended as working the land. This is not the place to go into all the aspects of Darré's theoretical writings before his political involvement; I will limit myself to the essential points. It should be remembered that his two books, *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der nordischen Rasse*, published by the Munich publisher, Lehmann, in 1929, and *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden*, of the following year, were certainly not greeted with unanimous approval, but they were widely read in right-wing scientific and intellectual circles. This goes to show that Darré's theories, which to my mind appear very ill-founded if not ridiculous, fitted in perfectly with the ideas of a certain German cultural milieu at the beginning of the century.²³

In *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der nordischen Rasse*, Darré set out to show how the fundamental qualitative difference between the Germanic race and the Slav races was the permanent geographical position and deep-rooted peasant nature of the former. He constructed his theory using a multidisciplinary approach and according to an apparently rigorous scientific method. In the second book he examined the internal organisation of the ancient (and mythical) Germanic society, intended as a model to be re-created. In this work he pointed to a social division between *Adel* and the peasantry, which did not imply any inequality, but rather a harmonious sharing out of roles. Thus according to Darré the hatred for the city and 'urbanised mass-man' welled up from the deepest roots of the Germanic character. There was only one possible way out: restore the original features of German civilisation and therefore select a new 'nobility' (not to be confused with the existing *Junkertum*) and a new *Bauerntum*, which would enjoy the greatest economic security and would be self-governing.

This racial regeneration would be possible only on a new basis, or rather by rigorously selecting the new generations: this qualitatively new aspect of Darré's ideas was to lead to close contacts with Heinrich Himmler and the SS. In fact, for a long time Darré was

head of the SS racial office, with the task of finding the appropriate selective mechanisms which would make the SS the new heart, the new *Adel*, of the Germanic races.²⁴ This utopian idea was left in the background in daily party propaganda, making way for a more general exaltation of the *Bauerntum*, which actually existed. But these two ideological aspects starkly contrasted with each other: the prospect of creating divisions (which were never really made explicit) between the peasants and an élite was not at all in the electoral interests of the NSDAP, which wished to obtain the widest possible consensus among the rural masses. But Darré's profoundly racist philosophy²⁵ cannot be overlooked, as many recent studies have tried to do, by isolating him from National Socialism and 'reappraising him' or excusing him simply as being a follower of the anti-urban ruralistic currents, which in fact he did draw on fully. Darré was a National Socialist in all respects, both ideologically and politically. After having been an active member of the Artamanen youth group (where he met Himmler among others) and of the paramilitary Stahlhelm organisation, Darré came into contact with the NSDAP in 1928 through the architect Paul Schultze-Naumburg, a leading figure among right-wing intellectuals.²⁶ But thanks to the name he had made through his scientific publications, he soon entered Hitler's favour, and in May 1930 he was appointed head of the V section of the political department of the party, even before he held the NSDAP party card, which he only received in July of the same year.

Meanwhile, however, in March 1930, the party's political department, led by Konstantin Hierl, had drawn up a programme to which Willikens, Himmler and Gregor Straßer all contributed. This was to be the last official statement on the subject of agriculture until the seizure of power.²⁷ The document begins by generally exalting the role of the peasantry, which was considered fundamental both economically, because it guaranteed the nation's self-sufficiency in food, and racially, in so far as it was the 'life-source of the people and the breeding-ground for the armed forces'. After closely examining the general causes of the current crisis in agriculture, the document concluded that the necessary condition for a way out of the depression consisted in doing away with the parliamentary system which was in the hands of international finance.

In concrete terms, the National Socialists pledged that the 'new German state' would defend private property and its inheritance, especially as far as small and medium-sized holdings were concerned, but 'in a healthy relationship with them the large estates

also had a role to play'. The state, however, would reserve the right to expropriate 'parts of estates not farmed by their owners, and to settle free peasants on them'. Straßer's influence in this programmatic document is clear from the protection it offered small farmers. It also promised easy credit facilities, the annulling of debts, reductions in interest rates and in the costs of the means of production – all vote-catching ingredients.

It cannot be said, however, that the extraordinary NSDAP results in the subsequent election, brought forward to 14 September 1930, were the direct consequence either of the programme, which given the organisational weakness in country areas was still on the drawing board, or of Darré's activities as head of the newly established propaganda apparatus.²⁸

Without wishing to enter the debate as to when the Weimar Republic ended and when the dictatorial phase began, this election undoubtedly constituted a point of no return for the crisis in republican institutions. The parties of the so-called 'Weimar coalition', which in the previous two-year period had held the reins of government, suffered a clear-cut defeat, as did the traditional conservative party. The emergence of two powerful new political forces contributed to the further destabilisation of the political scene: the first was Hitler's NSDAP, which polled 6.4 million votes (going from 2.6 per cent to 18.3 per cent) and won as many as 102 seats in the new Reichstag, which made it second only to the SPD (143 seats); and the second was the Communist Party which won 77 seats and 4.5 million votes (1.3 million more than in the previous election).

The NSDAP was particularly successful in country areas where, despite the fact that Darré's propaganda network was still only at the planning stage,²⁹ Hitler's party made considerable gains, especially at the expense of Hugenberg's DNVP. In rural constituencies, on average, the NSDAP polled 4.1 per cent higher than in urban or industrial areas.³⁰ When percentage increases in votes for the NSDAP are compared to DNVP losses in some of the latter's most traditional East Elbian strongholds, the figures are particularly significant (Table 2.1).³¹

In areas of mainly Protestant peasant holdings the swing to the NSDAP from the DNVP, by now in decline, was even greater. But Hitler's party made little headway in Catholic rural communities. Despite the difficulties involved in drawing precise conclusions, many factors suggest that the National Socialists' electoral success, or at least the extent of its success, which even came as a surprise to the party leaders themselves, was due mainly to the

Table 2.1. NSDAP and DNVP electoral swings on 14 September 1930 compared with the preceding election of 1928

Electoral constituency	Electoral swing (%)	
	NSDAP	DNVP
Eastern Prussia	+21.7	-11.8
Pomerania	+22.8	-16.8
Schleswig-Holstein	+23.3	-17.7
Breslau	+23.3	-14.1
Liegnitz	+19.6	-15.9
Frankfurt on Oder	+21.7	-16.4

instinctive 'pre-political' and negative mobilisation of large strata of the rural community badly hit by the depression and an identity crisis. Very many of the more than six million people who voted for Hitler's party had been called to the polls for the first time or had not voted in the previous elections.³² A swing of such an enormous number of votes was also the outcome of a long process of radicalisation of the electorate, which had been gradually moving further and further to the right. This benefited the party that appeared to be offering solutions completely new and different from those of the establishment: significantly, in Schleswig-Holstein, the spontaneous peasant movement which had sprung up in 1928 refused any contacts with traditional parties and organisations out of prejudice, but was on excellent terms with the National Socialist Party, which was able cleverly and fully to exploit the situation for its political ends.

The NSDAP now had to tackle the crucial problem of how to manage their success, bearing in mind both the political traditionalism of the peasants,³³ and the difficulty of getting them to participate in any way. Even before the elections, Darré had presented Hitler with a plan to set up an 'Agrarpolitischer Apparat' (AA) consisting of a network of advisers chosen from among farmers themselves. These advisers had to be chosen from well-respected figures within the community; they would become the mouthpiece of unending demands, complaints and pressure from below, and they would naturally also furnish suitable answers from the party, consisting of propaganda messages as concrete and as plausible as possible. The AA was to be organised in a strictly vertical structure with local offices in all areas, within an organisation that was independent of but parallel to the party apparatus. Alongside this strategy of close contact with ordinary farmers,

Darré suggested the infiltration and taking over (*Gleichschaltung*) of the traditional representative organisations to use them as a further means of putting pressure on the government and the conservative ruling class, which had come to the fore again during the presidential governments.³⁴

At this stage Hitler had complete confidence in Darré and gave him *carte blanche*. Showing a remarkable talent for organising, in a few months Darré put into practice his ideas for a socially pervasive apparatus. It was officially consecrated during a conference held in Weimar on 8 February 1931, attended by the Führer himself. But more generally Darré set up an efficient propaganda machine which had branches in the remotest corners of the country and was able to mobilise the rural communities in a way unheard of until then. A recent view has sought to tone down the effectiveness of propaganda in winning consensus, and to revise the traditional image, fostered even at the time by Goebbels and other National Socialist leaders.³⁵ Although the empirical findings are uncertain and ambivalent, the fact remains that in the period 1930–2 many more peasants and their relatives joined the NSDAP than in the past: the percentage of peasants among new members rose to 12.6 per cent, making them the third highest group in the list of social categories.³⁶ It has also been shown that, at least in certain areas, the number of NSDAP propaganda initiatives far exceeded those of the other political formations.³⁷

The party press began to dedicate more space to agricultural problems than in the past: the party's daily paper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, included a twice-weekly special page on agriculture, beginning with no. 118 on 28 April 1931. Edited by AA functionaries, it was entitled *Im Kampf um Blut und Boden*. On 6 September of the same year came the publication of the *Nationalsozialistische Landpost*, a new weekly entirely dedicated to agriculture. Edited by Darré himself, the magazine dealt with various themes organised in special pages: space, women, youth, economy, religion and entertainment. Appealing to a very wide public, it reported on even the smallest of incidents which directly concerned peasants and their families, as well as problems of international and domestic politics. Finally, the *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*, a more theoretical journal, began publication in July 1932.

I feel an analysis of the ideology spread by these and other propaganda means, albeit only of the main points, is indispensable for an understanding of the reasons why the NSDAP not only maintained its initial and unexpected electoral success, but even consolidated it in the following years. This meant that they cleverly

held on to an instinctive protest vote, to turn it into a lasting and flexible political instrument.

The theoretical premise to the rural ideology of the National Socialists must be clearly delineated. Mainly racist and historico-anthropological in nature, it draws on the theoretical studies carried out by Darré in the late 1920s. In this premise – if it can be called such – the National Socialist movement was presented as being outside the logic of party politics. Thus it was said to reflect not sectoral interests, but the global interests of the people. This firm identification with the truest demands of *Deutschtum* meant that the primary objective of National Socialism was to save the peasant world, in so far as the ‘destiny of the German people depended on the destiny of the *Bauernstand*’.³⁸ The vital laws of the peasant world are also the vital laws of the whole people. National Socialism presented itself with racist arguments, claiming to be nearer to the true nature of the people than any other theory: ‘Inequality between peoples and races is necessary to sharpen their abilities in the reciprocal struggle and to grant victory to the more talented people’.³⁹ *Blut* is the essential concept for the National Socialist movement and therefore also for the peasant classes – the heart of the race.

These statements of principle were supported by wide-ranging historical ‘proofs’ which went back to the dawning of Germanic civilisation to demonstrate its deeply democratic nature. Family, house and fields were, according to Darré,⁴⁰ the key concepts in the *Weltanschauung* of this civilisation, and its socio-political structure followed the laws of nature in as far as they reflected the natural diversity of men within a form of ‘self-government’ from below.⁴¹

Darré was probably aware of the contradiction implicit in the idea of a society that was both hierarchical and egalitarian. In fact he added that ‘the true freedom of the German peasant depended on the fact that the unit of measure was not the tribe but the family’.⁴² Thus he avoided tackling the complex organisation of the social sphere in favour of the simpler and more readily understandable notion of the family. Even after 1933, this continued to be one of the leverage points of National Socialist ideas and agrarian policy. The premise of the agrarian ideology was thus based on the concept of race, or rather *Blut*. And a recovery in agriculture could take place only through a drastic racial change, given that ‘the concept of *Blut und Boden* was opposed to economic concepts’.⁴³

This is the point of departure for one of the main developments in Darré’s thought: racial selection in the form of a new political élite whose task was to realise the historic destiny of the German

people by expanding eastwards. Party propaganda, however, never allowed this aspect to come to the fore. Thus the view of Darré as just one of many agrarian ideologists, who cleverly used the tools provided for him by the party to redeem the German peasants, overlooks the fundamental importance of his vision. Over and above the official functions Darré performed in the SS, in the summer of 1932 as leader of the AA he also made a report to a secret National Socialist leadership conference on the future eastern policy of the Third Reich.⁴⁴ On that occasion he painted a picture of a complete demographic and economic change in the neighbouring Slav regions. This was to include depopulation in order to favour the setting up of large agricultural estates (*Adelhöfe*), in which the manual work was to be carried out by the subjugated native population.

These plans, which were to be implemented in 1940 under the guidance of Himmler, were not included in AA propaganda; there were only occasional references to the aggressive nationalist theme, and they were attenuated by couching them in terms of a 'drive for economic expansion'.⁴⁵ But the peasants were presented to the masses as the 'cornerstone of the German state', as its 'most faithful sons',⁴⁶ the 'strongest custodians and bearers of the healthy physical and spiritual inheritance of our people'.⁴⁷ The whole propaganda machine, conceived by Darré, sought to flatter the peasants, offering them at least future rewards and answers to the profound identity crisis into which they had been plunged for some time by the inexorable process of mechanisation and industrialisation. Salvaging many traditional rural values, National Socialist ideology emphasised the more radical aspects – especially the racial ones – which responded to the profound nature of the crisis. Praise heaped on the peasant community was always contrasted by a Manichean vision of the urban world. The following passage is an example of the clear-cut way in which this contrast was expressed:

On one hand we have the strong, robust virile peasant, moulded by the eternal struggle with nature and the land. A product of the earth, a fighter, a born warrior. At his side is a German woman, a peasant woman, his faithful companion and proud mother of their children through whom the future and history will be made. On the other hand, the debased city-dweller, weak, effeminate and cowardly. Beside him his wife, masculinised in body and spirit, deliberately childless and therefore self-debased, and instead of healthy descendants he inherits only spiritual conflicts. They are products of concrete.⁴⁸

Antisemitism went hand in hand with this anti-urban feeling, for

the city is seen as catering for the natural inclinations of the Jews, an essentially rootless race in contrast to the peasant classes.⁴⁹ But it should be added that antisemitism was not a particularly significant part of the rural ideology that we are examining. It was more often used in an economic context to attack the role of the middleman or creditor, which Jews had always played in country areas.⁵⁰ Anti-Jewish statements in a racial key were much rarer.

In the propaganda, the ideological premise, including antisemitic notions, increasingly became a cliché as politico-economic issues arose; they became 'magic' catchphrases solemnly pronounced before tackling the themes of political or economic debates.

Economic themes were also seen in terms of the opposition between two antithetical conceptions of the world: one Germanic and the other descending from liberalism and the 'ideas of 1789', which had given rise to a *Weltwirtschaft* in the service of Jewish finance.⁵¹ These economics, which follow 'abstract', 'inorganic' laws, are opposed by a *Volkswirtschaft* based on German economic self-sufficiency, especially as far as food was concerned. By eliminating the concept of individual profit, which is substituted by that of 'reward for work done for the good of the national community',⁵² National Socialism still wished to stress the importance of the individual in an economic context.

The proposed simplified model of 'natural economic organisation' definitely goes back to the tradition of List's *National-ökonomie*, and more directly to the theories of Gustav Ruhland, an economist who, at the end of the century, had opposed the Manchesterian political economy when he worked as a consultant with the BdL.⁵³ Central to his theories was the productive unit of the self-sufficient family, and on a larger scale a national economy free of any dependence on the outside world.⁵⁴ There were no incomprehensible economic laws but 'ethical' dictates, deeply rooted in the peasant soul, such as a 'fair price'.⁵⁵

Behind its apparent and seductive simplicity, there were a number of internal contradictions in National Socialist ideology. In Chapter 6 we will consider at greater length the contradiction between the hallowed nature of private property and the desire to redistribute land, offering the chance of social advancement to the landless. Another latent contradiction concerns the role of the state. At times it is reduced to regulating economic relations, but on other occasions it has more incisive duties.⁵⁶

The vital role of the state, the preservation of the landed estates for strategic purposes, and imperialist expansion (which was much more a response to the deeply rooted demands of the *Junkertum*

than a move in the interests of the peasants) – these were all muted notes in the ‘leitmotif’ which ran through Darré’s ideology; they must be borne in mind, however, if we wish to understand the later developments in the National Socialist agrarian policy. Similarly, it should also be stressed how propaganda campaigns devoted most of their energy to describing, with a few well-tryed phrases, how they would save the whole German *Bauerntum*. Lastly, much importance was attached to engaging in political controversy. National Socialist propaganda organisations carried out bitter and provocative attacks which were often personal. Variations in tone in these attacks reflected strategic changes in Hitler’s efforts to take power.

In fact after the unexpected electoral success in 1930, Hitler concentrated all NSDAP resources on entering the political game, given that by now it no longer took place in parliament but on the basis of agreements, and pressure from close-knit antagonist groups. At the same time the AA had very successfully continued its tactics of infiltration into representative organisations. Thanks to the appeal of well-balanced propaganda messages and the extraordinary activity of his assistants, Darré was highly successful in the elections to the Agricultural Chambers. These public institutions were very important links between sectoral demands and the state apparatus. The elections were held towards the end of 1931. A high percentage of NSDAP representatives were elected in all regions, both Protestant and Catholic, as well as in those where the hegemony was formerly held by the large estate owners. The NSDAP won an outright majority in Saxony, Oldenburg, Hannover, Halle-Merseburg, Magdeburg and Thuringia. In Brandenburg it did not get the majority, but won more votes than the RLB. The most powerful and oldest representative organisation managed to hold on to a much-reduced margin in Pomerania, East Prussia and Hesse; significantly, the AA managed to win a quarter of the seats even in a Catholic area like the Rhineland, despite the entrenched presence of the Christliche Bauernvereine.⁵⁷ As a natural consequence of this success, which may also have been due partly to the fragmented way in which the various farmers’ associations presented themselves to the public at the elections, Darré managed to force the RLB to accept his faithful assistant Willikens as a board member.⁵⁸ Furthermore it should be remembered that Darré’s political propaganda machine was a completely new phenomenon. Up until then the situation had been characterised by a wide gap between the radicalism and the fundamentally impractical demands of the rank and file on one hand,⁵⁹ and the weak proposals of the

traditional organisations on the other. The latter were often more intent on arguing amongst themselves than on forming a common front against the adverse economic interests. In fact the actual attempt to form a 'green front',⁶⁰ better able to represent the interests of the sector, was doomed to fail in no time.

Thus Darré arrived on a scene of uncertainty and inaction, with a frenetically active organisation whose message was clear and attractive. And at a time when morale and the economic depression were at their worst, image and psychological impact counted much more than realistic proposals:⁶¹ from this point of view the youthful image and the radical departure from existing values (a move with which most peasants did not agree) proposed by the organisation headed by Darré contrasted sharply with the uncertainty and prudence of the functionaries in the traditional *Interessenverbände*, who were locked into the same old worn-out political manoeuvres.

In the presidential elections of March 1932, the RLB officially backed Hitler in both polls against Field Marshal Hindenburg – a Junker and symbol of conservative rural Germany. This was the first clear sign that by now Darré, and therefore Hitler, had taken over the most important agricultural lobby. The remaining conservative rural strongholds soon fell: in the April 1932 elections for the board of the East Prussian Agricultural Chamber, the National Socialists won 50 of the 75 seats.⁶²

The NSDAP electoral successes reached a climax in the elections of July 1932 when traditionally strong country right-wing parties touched rock bottom: politically this was the same process as that mentioned above, pushing aside the oldest and most consolidated representative organisations. Hitler's party polled more than 13.7 million votes (37.2 per cent), i.e. as many as 230 seats in the now redundant Reichstag. The excellent results of two years earlier had already been more than doubled. Hugenberg's party suffered a further setback: a drop from 2.5 million votes to 2.17 million, from 7 per cent to 5.9 per cent, there actually being a sharper fall in country areas where it had long held the hegemony.

In 1928 the DNVP had won a relative majority in two constituencies (Pomerania 41.4 per cent and East Prussia 31.4 per cent) and had polled over 20 per cent of the votes in seven other predominantly rural constituencies of the east. In the elections four years later the DNVP only just managed to hang on to more than 10 per cent of the votes in Pomerania (15.8 per cent) and Potsdam II (10.9 per cent). In contrast, the National Socialist Party achieved its most conspicuous successes in the very same constituencies, as is shown by Table 2.2.

Table 2.2. NSDAP share of the vote, 1928 and 1932 (%)

Region	1928	1932
Schleswig-Holstein	0.8	51.0
Frankfurt on Oder	1.0	48.1
Pomerania	1.5	48.0
Liegnitz	1.2	48.0
East Prussia	0.8	47.1
Breslau	1.0	43.5
Merseburg	2.7	42.6
Potsdam II	1.8	33.0

Source: A. Milatz, 'Das Ende der Parteien im Spiegel der Wahlen', E. Matthias and R. Morsey (eds.), *Das Ende der Parteien 1933*, Bonn, 1960 (reprinted 1979), pp. 760ff.

The 1932 elections marked the by now definitive decline of the conservative party, which under Hugenberg's leadership had sought to compete with the NSDAP on the same ground – the radicalisation of the political conflict and of ideological differences. But 1932 also marked the decline, or rather the disappearance, of the regional corporative parties, which in the previous years had catalysed much of the rural community's frustration and discontent. Even in the various local administrative elections these parties, despite being rooted in a definite social context, registered a sharp decline in votes.⁶³ Lists which two years before had polled an overall vote of 5.5 million, or 10.3 per cent of the votes (49 seats), obtained only 3.2 per cent of the votes, losing more than 4.7 million votes and 40 seats.

Thanks to this success, the NSDAP had now clearly established itself as the most important peasant party. It was the first to have obtained a fairly large share of the vote in sectors which differed greatly in religion, social standing, etc. And indeed Gies is quite justified in claiming that 'under the direct or indirect guidance of Darré, the whole of agriculture seemed united in the struggle against the last representatives of the German republic'.⁶⁴ Summarising the results of our study so far, it can be said that this success was due above all to a widespread ideological and propaganda machine which hammered home emotive slogans and, after demolishing all that had gone before it, promised a future that was far from vague (the creation of the Third Reich) and the 'resurrection' of the peasant classes, who had lost out in the convulsive process of economic progress which had been a feature of the German Reich since the end of the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The National Socialist ideology offered a way out of the crisis of identity which affected not only the peasants but also farm workers and estate owners. And it did so by exalting their role as the historical and racial foundation of the German people. In the depths of the depression, the AA propaganda conjured up the vision of life on a human scale that was rid of the most disturbing aspects of urban and industrial society. The package of measures defending German agricultural output (tariff protection, autarky, guaranteed prices, debt relief, etc.) flaunted by Darré and his followers was nothing particularly new when set beside the demands that pressure groups had been making for many years. None the less, they seemed particularly appealing because they were part of a closely argued ideological discourse that contrasted with the failure of previous policies.

I would submit that basically – to use Franz Neumann's concept⁶⁵ – the 'anxiety' in the peasant world was initially heightened by the unmitigated condemnation of past policies, but was then dispelled by the incessant pressure of a few clear certainties hammered home in propaganda messages:⁶⁶ the individual producer's dignity was to be restored in the face of the anonymous *Weltwirtschaft*. The rural community, whose integrity and harmony were based on 'good old customs', was to triumph over the mass standardisation of the cities, and harmony and peace in family and economic life over the alienation and conflicts of urban society.

But the symbiotic coexistence of National Socialist propaganda and the interests and aspirations of much of the rural community was not destined to last long: in fact the tenuous nature of the relationship was revealed in the second round of elections in November of the same year, when Hitler's party lost more than two million votes, his share of the vote dropping from 37.2 per cent to 33 per cent. The losses were due partly to a letting-up in the economic crisis, as well as to a certain weariness on the part of the electorate, which in the previous two to three years had been subject to an unprecedented and exhausting politico-ideological mobilisation.⁶⁷ The distribution of the losses shows a similar pattern throughout typical industrial constituencies like Cologne and Württemberg, but also in predominantly rural regions: Mecklenburg – 21.5 per cent, East Prussia – 19.9 per cent, Pomerania – 16.9 per cent. Milatz has pointed out that the drop in NSDAP votes is closely correlated to a partial recovery of Hugenberg's DNVP. The very fact that the NSDAP was a catch-all party capable of collecting votes from a great variety of religious and geographic positions was also the source of perennial uncertainty concerning its electoral

performance. The volatile nature of a consensus based mainly on resentment and reaction meant that by the end of 1932 events were clearly building up to a decisive turning point which would have drastically reduced the political danger which Hitler represented for the democratic system.⁶⁸ But history is not made by 'ifs'; it only took a few months of political manoeuvring by an industrial and agrarian élite profoundly hostile to the republic for Hitler finally to lay hold on that political power which he had failed to obtain either by means of a *putsch* or through the ballot box.⁶⁹ From then on it was up to Darré and his organisation, destined to become pillars of the Third Reich, to administer the difficult inheritance of a widespread consensus won by such labile means.

Notes

1. Cf. M. H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders 1919-1945*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 241f.

2. See B. Miller-Lane, 'Nazi Ideology: Some Unfinished Business', *CEH*, vol. 7, 1974, p. 11.

3. Published in G. Feder, *Das Programm der NSDAP*, Munich, 1938, pp. 190-3.

4. For a general idea of the discussion about the role of the Führer and the relevance or (even existence) of his political 'programme', see E. Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung: Entwurf einer Herrschaft*, Tübingen, 1969; W. Carr, *Hitler: A Study in Personality and Politics*, London, 1985; J. Fest, *Hitler*, Frankfurt, 1973; A. Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, London, 1952; A. Hillgruber, 'Tendenzen, Ergebnisse und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Hitler-Forschung', *HZ*, vol. 226, 1978, pp. 600-21; and J. Hiden and J. Farquharson, *Explaining Hitler's Germany*, London, 1983, pp. 9-32 (a wide-ranging historiographical survey).

5. I. Kershaw, 'Ideology, Propaganda and the Nazi Party', in P. D. Stachura (ed.), *The Nazi Machtergreifung*, London, 1983, pp. 166f. In general I. Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford, 1987.

6. In the so-called *Zweites Buch*, probably drafted in summer 1928 but never published (ed. G. L. Weinberg, Stuttgart, 1961), Hitler wrote: 'Politics is the art of engaging in the vital struggle for a people's material existence. Foreign policy is the art of guaranteeing a people its *Lebensraum* which it requires for its dimensions and resources. Domestic policy is the art of obtaining the power that corresponds to the racial value and number of a people' (p. 62).

7. Quoted in N. H. Baynes (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, 2 vols, London-New York, 1942, vol. I, p. 64.

8. *Mein Kampf*, economic edn, Munich, 1939, p. 9.

9. *Zweites Buch*, p. 54: 'Whether the land is divided up between the large and small landowners or in small new settlements would not change, for example, the fact that on average 136 people live in a square kilometre.'

10. *Mein Kampf*, p. 154.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 151. In the *Zweites Buch*, p. 61, Hitler condemned, as one of the worst consequences of the discrepancy between available *Raum* and the population,

the crowding of great masses into the cities. This was not only very harmful to the Germanic race but created a situation in which Jews thrived. A careful and convincing examination of Hitler's thoughts on the peasants and *Lebensraum* is given by R. Zitelmann, *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*, Leamington Spa, 1987, pp. 272–315.

12. D. Orlow, *A History of the Nazi Party 1919–1933*, vol. I, Pittsburgh, 1969, pp. 88ff.

13. J. H. Grill, 'The Nazi Party's Rural Propaganda before 1928' in *CEH*, vol. 15, 1982, pp. 149–85; E. N. Todd, 'National Socialist Agrarian Policies 1919–1928', M. A. Thesis, University of Florida, 1974.

14. R. Kühnl, *Die Nationalsozialistische Linke*, Meisenheim, 1970. See also the recent (rather disappointing) biography by P. Stachura, *Gregor Strasser and the Rise of Nazism*, London, 1983.

15. For the writings of these militants see, in particular, W. Willikens, 'Nationalsozialismus und Landvolk', in *NS-Jahrbuch*, 1929; H. Lohse, 'Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Landwirtschaft', *ibid.*, 1927; E. Rosikat, 'Die Vernichtung des Bauerntums durch den jüdischen Händlergeist', in *Der Weltkampf*, vol. 3, 1926; and K. Hildebrandt, *Nationalsozialismus und Landarbeiterschaft*, Munich, 1930. The latter, a Gauleiter in the Pomerania, was the fiercest defender of better wages for farm workers: Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, p. 200.

16. Along with the aforementioned works by Mosse, Bergmann, and Sontheimer on the cultural background to the ruralist ideology, see D. Conte, 'Note su dinamica elettorale, associazionismo agrario e ideologia ruralistica tra anni Venti e Trenta in Germania', in G. Corni and P. Schiera (eds.), *Cultura politica e società borghese in Germania fra Otto e Novecento*, Bologna, 1986, pp. 285–314.

17. T. Childers, *The Nazi Voter: Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany 1919–1933*, London, 1983, pp. 70ff., 263.

18. Cf., as an example, J. Noakes, *The Nazi Party in Lower Saxony 1921–1933*, London, 1971.

19. In Feder, *Das Programm*, p. 33.

20. Cf. Orlow, *History of the Nazi Party*, p. 153.

21. See the official biography by H. Reischle, *Reichsbauernführer Darré*, Berlin, 1933, and the well-documented monograph by H. Gies, 'R. W. Darré und die nationalsozialistische Bauernpolitik', Dissertation, Frankfurt, 1966.

22. For Darré's philosophy see C. Lovin, 'Blut und Boden: the ideological basis of the nazi agricultural program', *JHI*, vol. 28, 1967, pp. 279–88; W. Heinrich, 'Richard W. Darré und der Hegehofgedanke', Dissertation, Mainz, 1980.

23. For reviews of these two books in important scientific journals, see Lovin, 'Blut und Boden', pp. 280f. Each book was reprinted as many as seven times after 1933, evidence of the large number of people interested in such ideas.

24. Himmler, another agronomist by profession, was very active in the 1920s producing articles and speeches on the agrarian question. He and Darré met when they were both members of the Artamanen group. Cf. M. H. Kater, 'Die Artamanen: völkische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik' in *HZ*, vol. 213, 1971, pp. 577–638. At the invitation of the head of the SS, Darré took charge of the Rasseamt when it was set up in December 1931. He drew up very severe measures concerning marriages and also collaborated on other 'cultural' initiatives of the SS, aimed at establishing it as the nucleus of future Germanism. Cf. M. H. Kater, *Das 'Ahnenerbe' der SS 1935–1945*, Stuttgart, 1974, pp. 24ff.; H. Gies, 'Zur Entstehung des Rasse- und Siedlungsamtes der SS', in *Paul Kluge zum 60. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt, 1968, pp. 127–39.

25. According to E. Vermeil, Darré's theories were based on 'sheer racism': *Les doctrines de la Révolution Allemande*, Paris, 1938, p. 320.

26. On Schultze-Naumburg see H. Brenner's excellent book, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus*, Reinbeck, 1963.

27. The text of this *Sofortprogramm* was published in the *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, no. 7, 1930. Contrary to Lovin's claim in 'Farmers and Nazis', *Proceedings of the South Carolina History Association*, 1972, pp. 14f., Darré did not have a hand in the drafting of this document: Gies, 'R. W. Darré', p. 33. Straßer's influence is clear from the emphasis on autarky and the defence of small farmers.

28. This turning point has been highlighted by many electoral studies on a regional scale and surveys in summarised form. Cf. Noakes, *Nazi Party in Lower Saxony*; E. Schön, *Die Entstehung des Nationalsozialismus in Hessen*, Meisenheim, 1972; G. Pridham, *Hitler's Rise to Power: The Nazi Movement in Bavaria*, London, 1973; Z. Zofka, *Die Ausbreitung des Nationalsozialismus auf dem Lande*, Munich, 1979; C. Schaap, *Die Endphase der Weimarer Republik im Freistaat Oldenburg*, Düsseldorf, 1978; the aforementioned works by Heberle and Stoltenberg on Schleswig; E. Faris, 'Takeoff Point for the National Socialist Party: The Landtag Election in Baden 1929', *CEH*, vol. 8, 1975, pp. 140–71; and J. H. Grill, 'The Nazi Party in Baden 1920–1945', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan, 1975. See the latter author's recent and very informative study, 'Local and Regional Studies on National Socialism', *JCH*, vol. 21, 1986, pp. 253–94.

29. But for Eastern Prussia, cf. R. Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism*, New Haven–London, 1984.

30. Gies, 'R. W. Darré', pp. 30ff.; Childers, *Nazi Voter*, p. 158.

31. E. Fiederlein, 'Der Deutsche Osten und die Regierungen Brüning, Papen und Schleicher', Dissertation, Würzburg, 1966, pp. 137f.

32. The historiographic debate on the causes and size of the electoral swing at the end of the Republic is so dense that I can mention only a few works which deal directly with the vote in country areas: C. Loomis and A. Beagle, 'The Spread of German Nazism in Rural Areas', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 11, 1946, pp. 724–34; J. Pollock, 'An Areal Study of the German Electorate 1930–1933', *APSR*, vol. 38, 1944, pp. 89–95; W. Angress, 'The Political Role of the Peasantry in the Weimar Republic', *Review of Politics*, vol. 21, 1959, pp. 530–50; A. Milatz, 'Das Ende der Parteien im Spiegel der Wahlen', in E. Mattias and R. Morsey (eds.), *Das Ende der Parteien 1933*, Bonn, 1960, reprinted 1979, pp. 3–21; T. Schnabel, 'Wer wählte Hitler? Bemerkungen zu einigen Neuerscheinungen über die Endphase der Weimarer Republik', *GG*, vol. 8, 1982, pp. 116–33; a monographic issue of *CEH*, vol. 17, 1984, with essays by Hamilton, Roloff, Childers, Allen and Orlow; and the more recent exhaustive monograph by Childers, *Nazi Voter*.

33. Rural traditionalism has been documented in the aforementioned monograph by Zofka (for Bavaria) and by Heberle and Stoltenberg (for Schleswig–Holstein); see also W. P. Shively, 'Identification, Voting Stability: The Weimar Case', *APSR*, vol. 66, 1972, pp. 1203–25, and D. Urwin, *From Ploughshare to Ballotbox: The Politics of Agrarian Defence in Europe*, Oslo, 1980, pp. 150ff.

34. Cf. H. Gies, 'NSDAP und landwirtschaftliche Organisationen in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik', *VZG*, vol. 15, 1967, pp. 541–76.

35. Cf. R. Bessel, 'The Rise of the NSDAP and the Myth of Nazi Propaganda', *Wiener Library Bulletin*, vol. 33, 1980, pp. 20–9.

36. Kater, *Nazi Party*, p. 250. On the internal structure of the party in the period before the rise to power, cf. also J. P. Madden, 'The Social Composition of the Nazi Party 1919–1930', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1976.

37. In Hesse, for example, from April to August as many as 1,910 political meetings were organised by the NSDAP and 1,129 by the communists, many more than by the other political organisations: Schön, *Die Entstehung*, p. 199.

38. In the first issue of the *NS Landpost*, 6 September 1931.

39. Cf. Darré in *VB*, 28 April 1931.

40. Darré, 'Bauer und Landwirt', *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*, no. 2, August 1932.

41. Darré, 'Die Lebensgrundlagen des deutschen Volkes', speech of 9 January 1931.

42. Darré, 'Blut und Boden als Lebensgrundlagen der deutschen Rasse', speech of 22 June 1930.

43. Darré in *VB*, no. 118, 28 April 1931.

44. Cf. H. Rauschnig's account, *Gespräche mit Hitler*, Vienna, 1943 (original edn, 1940), pp. 40f. But see also the confidential circular on the same problem, issued by Darré in November 1930 and quoted in Grill, 'The Nazi Party's Rural Propaganda', p. 163.

45. *VB*, no. 129, 9 May 1931. See also another quote which is a combination of reassurances and threats: 'we are the most peaceful nation in the world as long as there is no noose around our neck and no one wishes to rob us of our necessary living space'; *NS Landpost*, no. 4, 27 September 1931.

46. J. Dorner, *Bauernstand und Nationalsozialismus*, Munich, 1930, p. 6.

47. Cf. for example, *NS Landpost*, no. 32, 7 August 1932.

48. *VB*, no. 9, 9 January 1932.

49. Cf., for example, *NS Landpost*, no. 9, 31 October 1931. The Jews were often mixed in with other factors (especially liberalism and Marxism) accused of having caused the crisis in peasant farming. Cf. Darré, *Landvolk in Not. Wer hilft? Hitler!*, Munich, 1932: 'Liberalism has destroyed the sacred bonds that existed in the Germanic world between blood and soil' (p. 8), and again 'Blut und Boden is the clear expression of the concept opposed to liberalism and the ideas of 1789' (p. 32). See also Dorner, *Bauernstand*, p. 75: 'The forces of evil are money, Mammon, liberalism, parliamentarianism, ultramontane forces, the Freemasons and all the other artificial Jews.' The peasants were thus exempt from all responsibility for their own predicament.

50. Von Wedel-Parlow, in *NS Landpost*, no. 3, 17 January 1932, rewrote the history of the Jews as if they were a race that had always only reared animals in a speculative and parasitic way.

51. *VB*, no. 129, 9 May 1931.

52. Cf. H. Backe, *Deutscher Bauer erwache!*, Munich 1931. Backe, who also came from the Artamanen and was soon to be one of Darré's principal assistants, came to the fore by producing booklets mainly on economic themes.

53. Ruhland's philosophy, which drew on Rodbertus' criticism of Ricardian theories on the tendency of agricultural profits to fall, tended to deny the inevitable decline of the agricultural economy by using racial and ethical arguments rather than economic ones. On this intellectual, who was well known in his time, see the contemporary biography by J. Frost, *Gustav Ruhland: Ein deutscher Bauerndenker*, Berlin-Hamburg, 1936. Darré proudly acknowledged his debt to Ruhland in a speech 'Warum würdigen wir Gustav Ruhland', published in *Um Blut und Boden: Reden und Aufsätze*, 5th edn, Munich, 1942.

54. This theme was incessantly repeated: e.g. in *NS Landpost*, no. 7, 18 October 1931; no. 12, 20 March 1932; no. 24, 12 June 1932; and no. 25, 19 June 1932.

55. Cf. B. Luxenberg, *Der Existenzkampf des deutschen Getreidebauers*, Munich, 1931, p. 17.

56. The state was given important supervisory functions in monetary policy, incentives for co-operation, and settlement schemes to stem the flight from the land. Cf. A. Pfaff, *Der Wirtschaftsaufbau im Dritten Reich*, Munich, 1932, p. 12; E. Schach, *Nationalsozialismus und Gennossenschaftswesen*, Munich, 1931. This booklet is a clear example of the contradiction in the National Socialist idea of the role of the state. Despite the fact that the emphasis is on the self-determinacy of economic subjects, the need for state intervention is mentioned on several occasions. But the attacks on Russian state intervention were very bitter indeed: cf. *NS Landpost*, no. 8, 25 October 1931; *VB*, no. 60, 13 March 1930.

57. On Catholic peasant organisations, see H. Barmeyer, *Andreas Hermes und die Organisation der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Stuttgart, 1971; K. Müller, 'Agrarische Interessenverbände in der Weimarer Republik'. *Rheinische Vierteljahresblätter*, vol. 35, 1971.

58. Gies, 'NSDAP und landwirtschaftliche Organisationen' is still the fundamental study on these political manoeuvres. Willikens, a member of the conservative right-wing and a big farmer, was one of the first to spread propaganda and proselytise in country areas in 1925-6, albeit with poor results: cf. Noakes, *Nazi Party in Lower Saxony*, pp. 94, 106.

59. See, for example, the requests made by the various public and private representative organisations in the last year of the Republic: in *DZAM*, Rep. 87B, vols. 7899, 13402, 13431, 13485, 13569. On the radicalisation of sectorial demands see D. Gessner, *Agrarverbände in der Weimarer Republik*, Düsseldorf, 1976.

60. On the cartel agreement known as the 'green front', which turned out to be non-existent given its internal divisions, see the incisive polemical essay by E. Topf, *Die Grüne Front: Der Kampf um den deutschen Acker*, Berlin, 1933.

61. Cf. Noakes, *Nazi Party in Lower Saxony*, pp. 108ff., and K. Holmes, 'The Forsaken Past: Agrarian Conservatism and National Socialism in Germany', *JCH*, vol. 17, 1982, pp. 67ff.

62. Cf. D. Hertz-Eichenrode, *Politik und Landwirtschaft in Ostpreußen*, Cologne-Opladen, 1969, pp. 79f.

63. Cf. Milatz, 'Das Ende der Parteien', pp. 760ff. On the emergence and decline of the small pressure-group parties see L. E. Jones, 'Crisis and Realignment: Agrarian Splinter Parties in the Late Weimar Republic', in R. G. Moeller (ed.), *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany*, Winchester, Mass., 1986, pp. 198-232.

64. Gies, 'NSDAP und landwirtschaftliche Organisationen', p. 371.

65. F. Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, New York, 1957.

66. L. Winkler, *Studie zur gesellschaftlichen Funktion faschistischer Sprache*, Frankfurt, 1970, pp. 50ff., shows how the main features of Hitler's language were (1) frontal contrasts, (2) the repetition of ideas until they became 'hypnotic formulas', (3) recurrent tautologies, and (4) denunciatory forms. The same can be said of Darré's ruralistic ideology.

67. Cf. Milatz, 'Das Ende der Parteien', p. 784. 'Growing public apathy had been clearly signalled by consistently low attendance at nazi meetings and rallies throughout the autumn, especially in crucial rural areas': T. Childers, 'The Limits of National Socialist Mobilisation: The Elections of 6 November 1932 and the Fragmentation of the Nazi Constituency', in T. Childers (ed.), *The Formation of the Nazi Constituency 1919-1933*, London, 1986, p. 237.

68. Cf. Childers' very pertinent remarks in *Nazi Voter*, pp. 266ff.

69. The already classic text on the end of the Weimar Republic is K. D. Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik*, original edn, Villingen, 1955. A more up-to-date analysis is provided by V. Hentschel, *Weimars letzte Monate: Hitler und der Untergang der Republik*, Düsseldorf, 1978.

Interlude: Alfred Hugenberg, 'Dictator of the Economy'

In an attempt to create even a small popular base for his 'cabinet of barons', Chancellor von Papen dissolved the Reichstag. The ensuing elections on 6 November 1932 show that by now, in terms of electoral consensus, the National Socialist Party was on the wane. The grip of unemployment and the depression had begun to slacken, and people were tired of the unprecedented political mobilisation in the previous two years. Even within the NSDAP itself, distrust and weariness spread due to the realisation that excessive militancy served no great purpose. All of these factors played a part in the electoral losses which might have led to a political turnabout involving a scenario whose nature is extremely difficult to envisage.

But as is known, through deals made in the corridors of power, a political class, further removed than ever from the problems of the country, contrived to offer Hitler the Chancellery on a silver plate. Considering it the key to the door of political power, this is what Hitler had intermittently aimed for throughout his political career. Although the details of the last political dealings of the Republic need not detain us here, it is worth taking a closer look at the figure of Alfred Hugenberg, leader of the National People's Party (DNVP) and Minister of Agriculture in the first Hitler government. His appointment was a consequence of the attempt to bridle the crowd-swaying demagogue and his movement – both of them were seriously underrated – by surrounding him with conservative ministers. The fact that Hugenberg had been made Minister and not Darré, who had so effectively directed the propaganda campaign in country areas, gaining massive support for National Socialism, clearly shows how the composition of the Hitler-Papen cabinet had been decided in the 'corridors of power'. And all the plotting and scheming had been round the decisive political figure of the aged President, Paul von Hindenburg. Papen's offer on 29 January 1933, providing Hugenberg with the chance to become the 'Dictator of the Economy' by uniting the ministries of Agriculture

and Economics, was certainly a decisive factor in his decision to enter, even in a decidedly subordinate position, the cabinet being formed after the brief parenthesis of the government led by General Schleicher. Hugenberg realised that this was his last chance if he did not wish to be left out of developments in a political situation which saw the increasing isolation of the DNVP.

But for a fuller understanding of the political behaviour of this tenacious politician and brilliant entrepreneur from January to July 1933, we must first describe, albeit briefly, his career.

Born in Hanover in 1865, Hugenberg entered political life in 1890 and became one of the founders and leaders of the ultra-nationalistic conservative organisation, the *Alldeutscher Verband*.¹ Although clearly in favour of consolidating the peasant class by large-scale settlements, he stood out from the openly pro-Junker positions typical of most conservatives because of his experience both as a civil servant in the *Königliche Ansiedlungskommission*, set up in Posen by Bismarck to strengthen the German ethnic element through expropriation of Polish land, and subsequently as director of the *Raiffeisen* co-operative bank (from 1901) in the same province. Strongly influenced by the *Kathedersozialisten*, Hugenberg had a 'petit-bourgeois-capitalistic' outlook² which led him to seek to ease the tensions between agriculture and industry which had become particularly acute in recent years, just as they were to be at the time of the Weimar Republic. He viewed a solid domestic market based on a healthy *Bauerntum* as the mainstay of the economy. This approach clearly emerges in the speech on 11 February 1933, given on his taking up office in the two ministries; Hugenberg considered their union to be the basis for settling the inter-sectoral conflicts which had been so detrimental to the whole German economy.³

Hugenberg's *Weltanschauung*, in fact, was a strange mixture of idealism and healthy pragmatism. The former is reflected in the way he cherished projects of wholesale reform for the socio-economic set-up, and the latter, combined with his ambition and iron will, accounts for his success in the business world. After having been an influential board director of F. Krupp AG from 1909 to 1918, by the war years Hugenberg had already begun ably and tenaciously to build an empire in the press and mass media, especially in the cinema. During his years at Krupp he had established a network of links with the great German entrepreneur class which, however, never fully accepted him, while he in turn stuck to his independence of action and judgement: in short, he was an *Einzelgänger*.⁴

From the 1920s on, Hugenberg dedicated himself to politics. In October 1928 he succeeded in getting himself elected as president of the DNVP on which he left his own indelible mark: an a priori refusal of parliamentary dialectics and the creation of a 'movement' to imitate and possibly engulf the National Socialist Party – these then became the objectives of the DNVP's new policy. At the time Hugenberg could count on the unconditional support of Hans Joachim von Rohr-Demmin, an important landowner and vice-president of the Pomeranian Landbund, whom he appointed Secretary of State for Agriculture on 3 February 1933. Having had experience with 'yellow' unions during the 1920s, Rohr was made responsible for the 'professional-corporative' reorganisation of farming, aimed at easing the conflict between landowners and employees.⁵

Despite internal divisions and reservations within the party, and a steady loss of votes, Hugenberg strove to make the DNVP, or rather his 'personal party', the most radical opposition platform to the Weimar Republic, even in its 'presidential' version.

The unsuccessful Harzburg meeting on 11 October 1930 was in fact an attempt by Hugenberg to create and lead a broad conservative and opposition front which included the National Socialists in a subordinate position.

Hugenberg's political project, however, had a very weak footing: as far as mass consensus was concerned, the DNVP showed up poorly compared to the well-organised and less scrupulous propaganda apparatus of the NSDAP. The ruling class too were very wary of this parvenu obsessed with his own ambitions. From Silverberg,⁶ an exponent from the most enlightened area in the entrepreneurial world, to Krupp, none of the major entrepreneurs openly supported Hugenberg at the time; on the contrary, as can be seen from Paul Reusch's papers, in the summer of 1932 there was widespread agreement among agriculturists such as von Oldenburg-Januschau and von Batocki, as well as among industrialists of the rank of Reusch and Krupp, to remove Hugenberg from the party leadership.⁷ With no confidence in the DNVP leader's economic programmes, his critics intended to propose Carl Goerdeler, who was mayor of Leipzig and close to Krupp, as a future Minister of Economics.⁸

Hugenberg's appointment to the key position for the economic policy of the new Hitler-Papen government was greeted with a mixed response in industrial circles. In private Ludwig Kastl, General Secretary of the Reichsverband der deutschen Industrie, raised objections to the uniting of the two ministries, maintaining

that it should only be a temporary solution.⁹ Wilmowsky, Krupp's faithful assistant and political adviser in Berlin, was even more severe. Disheartened, he commented: 'On the subject of Hugenberg (Minister of Agriculture, the Economy and half of Labour) I'd rather remain silent. How difficult it will be to deal with him!'¹⁰ On the other hand, there were many positive opinions expressed in public. On behalf of the *Deutscher Industrie und Handelstag* (DIHT) directors, who met on 1 March, their president Bernhard Grund expressed the hope that the unification of the two ministries entrusted to Hugenberg would constitute a favourable basis from which to settle the traditional conflict between agriculture and industry.¹¹ In a long article published on 19 February, the influential *Berliner Börsen Zeitung* also made a positive assessment of the ministerial shuffle: even in their initial declarations Hugenberg and State Secretary in the Ministry of Economics, Paul Bang, had shown – according to the writer of the article – that they fully understood the needs of the business world. But the newspaper reminded its readers that, in the present phase, German industry was totally against experiments such as the nationalisation of some sectors, and demanded that Hugenberg should stick to the economic policy already outlined by the Papen government.¹²

In its general assembly on 5 April 1933, the *Deutscher Landwirtschaftsrat* (DLR) also showed its approval of the unification of the two ministries as an important turning point for the recovery of the whole German economy, and especially of agriculture.¹³

This climate of expectation, which was not always favourable to the DNVP leader, can be explained by bearing in mind that, on one hand, many people had high hopes of the 'national' government but, on the other, relations between agriculture and industry or at least those between the representative bodies from the two sectors, were disastrous.

At the end of 1932 and in the first few weeks of the new year, the RLB had made unusually harsh attacks on the steel industry and on Krupp in particular, although the Essen entrepreneur was one of the main supporters of an agreement between the two sectors.¹⁴ RDI representatives who had been chosen to speak at a conference in Bad Oeynhausen organised by the *Friederich-List-Gesellschaft* even refused to participate because the RLB president, von Kalkreuth, one of the main advocates of a radical policy for the sectoral claims of the rural world, had also been invited to speak.¹⁵

Wilmowsky's papers clearly show how uneasy big business was when faced with the radical nature of farmers' demands, by now completely incompatible with the general economic framework.¹⁶ I

would suggest, however, that even this bitter conflict did not lead to a drastic break in the historical alliance between heavy industry and agriculture. It was rather a symptom of the fact that, in addition to the effects of the crisis, the traditional ruling class also suffered from radicalisation from below, fomented by National Socialists in competition with Hugenberg. Significantly, Wilmsky complained that the situation had become unbearable after the RLB had been infiltrated by members of the NSDAP and the DNVP, both parties which had known how to exploit the confused aspirations of the peasantry.¹⁷

At the centre of the controversy was trade policy, which, given the drastic shrinkage in international markets, moved between the clear-cut alternatives of autarky and maintaining an open door to foreign markets, and between the related choice of a regime of low prices favourable to the consumer and subsidised prices, artificially supporting producers.

Hugenberg's style and political ideas were ill-suited to settling the existing conflicts or to finding a policy for a balanced economy which would pay greater heed to the pre-existing relations between the different sectors in the economy. It is no accident that Hugenberg did not belong to any of the various, more or less informal, groups which brought together the heads of industry and agriculture: the 'Industrie und Landwirtschaft' group, founded by Reusch in 1926,¹⁸ the so-called 'Ruhrlade' group which brought together the main entrepreneurs of the region,¹⁹ the Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftstag (MWT), interested above all in the Balkan area, and the so-called 'Esplanade-Kreis' named after the famous Berlin hotel where some of the most prestigious and influential members of the German ruling class used to meet.²⁰ Their aim was to offer a forum for discussions and confrontations 'between gentlemen', and they often had a concrete influence on German economic policy.

Hugenberg's agricultural policy programme, which can be deduced from his numerous writings and speeches in the previous two-year period, gives an even better idea of the reasons for his isolation at a time when, potentially, he had the destiny of the whole German economy in his hands. On the crucial subject of trade policy, as early as 1928 Hugenberg expressed his clear preference for the unilateral introduction of quotas to protect agriculture.²¹ Although he believed the objections to his methods by representatives from industry to be partially valid, and while he refused the principle of an autarkic closure to the outside world,²² he did consider the introduction of trade barriers inevitable, given the state of economic crisis at the time. At the beginning of 1933 the

official DNVP standpoint as to what form this protectionism should take was still vague: 'To protect the specialised peasant economy, foreign imports must be restricted so long as it is in the interests of German firms and for the well-being of the economy.'²³

If attempts to apply quotas to imports had failed up to now, in Hugenberg's view this was due to the fact that one-sided and conflicting interests dominated economic policy;²⁴ there was nothing wrong with the method itself.

Although rather schematic, Hugenberg's ideas on the other main themes of agricultural policy were just as clear: high prices should be guaranteed to producers not through state monopoly interventions, but by means of spontaneous associations that, according to the Minister, should unite and bring into being a general kind of corporative representation. To achieve this, a streamlining of the cumbersome bureaucratic apparatus was indispensable. Hugenberg also asked for drastic cuts in interest rates, and for a truly radical and effective move to relieve farmers' debts and grant them easier credit terms.²⁵

These were certainly not original measures. In fact they were already widely advocated in many sectors and by many pressure groups in the rural world. But a minister proposing a radical overall economic recovery based on the central importance of agriculture (an importance founded on ideological rather than rational grounds) could not be looked upon favourably in industrial circles. The fact that Hugenberg chose the Ministry of Agriculture for his headquarters, dedicating more time to it than to other sectors of the economy, is significant of his outlook. He justified his decision in a speech given in Kassel on 27 February: 'It should come as no surprise that my first actions as Minister have been concentrated in the field of agricultural policy. Agriculture is in fact the fundamental basis for a recovery in industry. Only a healthy agriculture can provide the army of consumers and purchasers that will revitalise the industrial sector.'²⁶

It is not easy to grasp the guidelines of Hugenberg's economic policy, and especially their effects, given that he was at the helm of the German economy only for a few months, and that part of this time was taken up with the political elections of 5 March 1933. There can be no doubt, however, that the initial reservations expressed by the most influential members of the industrial world soon changed into open hostility.²⁷ This does not, however, validate the interpretation of East German historians who simply considered Hugenberg an agent for landed-property interests and maintained that he was destined to disappear because of his old-

fashioned policies which could not meet the needs of modern 'monopolistic' capital.²⁸ In fact Hugenberg was only pursuing – though with an even more radically 'physiocratic' approach – the policies already initiated by the succession of conservative ministers who had gone before him in the Brüning and Papen presidential governments. Such policies had been drawn up to meet the increasingly insistent demands from organised farmers.

The first series of legislative measures introduced by Hugenberg concerned the safeguarding of the property of farmers in difficulty. By adapting and enlarging the possibilities offered by emergency legislation (especially the fourth presidential decree of 8 December 1931), Hugenberg issued a decree on 14 February which froze all farm foreclosures until 31 October of the same year.²⁹ The moratorium was subsequently prolonged until 31 December 1933 by his successor Darré in a law dated 25 October 1933. Even as it was being formulated, this decree had raised widespread objections: the Berlin press, in particular, put forward fundamental objections, implying that indiscriminate moratorium measures would break up the credit system and more generally the whole economic apparatus. The *Berliner Tageblatt* pointedly commented that the measure faithfully reflected the demands of the RLB, the government being considered its 'confidential organ'.³⁰

In fact the very day Hitler took office, he actually received an urgent request from Kalkreuth, president of the RLB, calling for a moratorium on all bankruptcies, but with a three-month limit.³¹ Thus Hugenberg, by adopting an extremely drastic measure on such a delicate subject, had even exceeded the expectations of the farmers themselves.³²

In the weeks before and after the law was issued, protests against a widespread moratorium rained on to government desks, especially from trade and crafts organisations, the categories most affected by farmers' debts.³³ Strong protests were also made by fire insurance companies.³⁴ Even in the rural world the proposed moratorium was not unanimously supported: during a cabinet meeting on 3 February, the minister of Justice, Franz Gürtner, supported Hugenberg's bill by arguing that representative organisations which had been consulted had all expressed favourable opinions,³⁵ but the very next day the same minister had to admit that leading figures from the peasant sector, like Andreas Hermes, leader of the Christliche Bauernvereine, were raising serious objections as to the suitability of a measure which rewarded the least able farmers and damaged the legitimate claims of creditors.³⁶

For their part, the National Socialists tacitly approved of the

measure, and even insinuated that they had forced Hugenberg into its implementation.³⁷

Unperturbed, Hugenberg continued his course, issuing a law on 22 April that froze all notices on leases running until 31 October and prolonged all expired leases by a year.³⁸ The government was later to go some way towards rectifying unilateral protection of leaseholders by introducing as an exception the possible termination of a lease where the proprietor himself wished to manage the farm.³⁹

But in early 1933 the most important legislative measure aimed at protecting farmers was undoubtedly the law regulating debt relations, issued on 1 June. The origins of this measure go back to 1929, when the problem of agricultural borrowing was considered a very important political question. At that time, with specific reference to the eastern provinces, two opposing proposals were put forward. The first, made by the influential industrialist Paul Silverberg, was later to be implemented in the *Osthilfe* law of 31 March 1931. Its aim – at least on paper – was to pay off the debts of recoverable farms without the state's financial aid simply being a donation of funds to less able farmers. The second proposal, made by Hugenberg, was very different in spirit: state intervention should not affect land ownership, and in particular should not involve any sacrifice on the part of the farmers concerned. The assignment of land to encourage settlement was, according to Hugenberg, still a secondary issue, to be left to the free choice of those concerned.⁴⁰

Now also under pressure from RLB leaders, Hugenberg tried to hurry through a debt-relief law for farmers by means of state intervention that helped settle debts and their related interest payments. This proposal meant that government funds should lower indebtedness to a minimum safety level, the so-called *Mündelsicherheit*, fixed at around two-thirds of property value.⁴¹ The bodies entrusted with executing the new legislation were to have been the *Entschuldungsstellen*, in which civil servants were to work alongside farmers' representatives. In this way Hugenberg proposed the highest possible degree of *Selbstverwaltung*, thus alleviating costly and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures. The bill, which on the whole was widely backed by many sectors in the rural world, provided Darré with the long-awaited chance to clash with the Minister.

The leader of the NSDAP's agrarian organisation had been very disappointed when, for political purposes, he had been ignored in favour of Hugenberg at the time of Hitler's entering into coalition

with other national-conservative forces. He made his disappointment quite clear in a long, confidential (not precisely dated) memorandum sent to Hitler in March. In it, after recalling the AA's great successes in the party's positive showing in the elections, Darré acknowledged that on grounds of political expediency he could not be rewarded with the title of Minister. In spite of this, Darré pointed out that his being left out of a position of power could provoke a loss of momentum in the party apparatus, or even the disaffection of some of the more militant elements. As a temporary solution he suggested that Hitler name him his 'deputy, adviser or call it what you will', thus giving him and the AA at least an indirect political responsibility.⁴² It is not known whether Hitler replied to his assistant, but his proposal was certainly not taken up. This memo clearly reflected, however, the widespread frustration in the party's ideologico-propagandist apparatus. Over the past two years they had become accustomed to an exhilarating series of successes but now, just when their goal was in sight, their position of strength had been called into question. So much so, in fact, that at the Führer's instigation Darré had to order the propaganda apparatus to refrain from direct attacks on the government and from personal attacks on Hugenberg and Rohr. This was a particularly heavy restriction to bear in the case of Rohr, who had a harsh feud with the National Socialist Party in Pomerania for years.⁴³ General criticism was to be aimed at the 'peasant front', yet at the same time making clear who the real targets were.⁴⁴ According to his diary, Darré felt in a weaker position than Hugenberg, whom he thought still enjoyed the support of the President of the Reich. Only after having reassured Hindenburg that he had no intention of threatening the big landowners was the National Socialist leader sure – still according to his own words – that he had gained the upper hand over the Minister.⁴⁵

At the same time the AA incessantly collected real or presumed proof of discontent with Hugenberg's measures in the rural world, as is shown by an internal circular letter, dating from the beginning of February. The circular urged the gathering of data on the effectiveness of the moratorium law, with the purpose of creating new pitfalls for the Minister.⁴⁶ Darré's apparatus also continued to infiltrate the *Interessenverbände*, further to isolate the DNVP leader and to undermine what was left of the 'conditional' trust in him on the part of the RLB and the main exponents of agrarian conservatism. Kalckreuth, for example, published an article in the *Neue Preussische Kreuzzeitung* of 28 February condoning Hugenberg's line, since it was the same as the RLB's had always been, and

stressed that the presence of Rohr in the government was a guarantee of absolute reliability.

The successful National Socialist policy soon changed the situation, leaving Hugenberg completely exposed on the front of those who, in theory, should have supported him.⁴⁷ On 4 April 1933 Darré managed to bring together the main associations in the sector in a fairly informal top-level *Reichsführergemeinschaft*, politically significant given that it united the whole sector under National Socialist control. Similarly, the tactics of infiltration from below and pressure from above bore fruit within the organisation which united the agricultural co-operatives, the *Reichsverband der deutschen landwirtschaftlichen Genossenschaften-Raiffeissen*, and the *Deutscher Landwirtschaftsrat*. On 12 May the latter gave up its powers to Darré who was appointed temporary commissioner.⁴⁸ Hugenberg's hopes for substantial electoral gains in the 5 March Reichstag elections, on the basis of his agrarian legislation, were also completely dashed, although the outcome was definitely distorted by powerful National Socialist terror tactics. Exploiting a rise in the number of people eligible to vote and the so-called 'Führer effect', the NSDAP increased its vote from 33 per cent to 43.9 per cent, whereas the number of deputies in Hugenberg's party remained the same at 52, without there being any significant change in its share of the vote (8 per cent compared to 7.2 per cent in the previous election).

Darré seized the opportunity offered by Hugenberg's debt-relief bill to launch a fierce press campaign against him. In fact the terms of the clash were pretty vague and openly instrumental. On one hand Darré argued that the bill still operated within a liberal-capitalistic logic which he opposed – invoking one of the Führer's favourite themes – with an approach based on *Blut* or racial purity. But the National Socialist leader never clarified the principle on which his objections rested.⁴⁹ Many press organisations turned on Hugenberg, including that of the RLB which accused him of not following economic criteria, especially where creditors' interests were concerned.⁵⁰

Another object of Darré's criticism concerned the level of interest rates that borrowers would have to pay the state for financial support received. After sending a telegram to Hitler on 16 April,⁵¹ making dramatically clear the deep dissatisfaction that the debt-relief bill had created in farming circles, Darré requested that he and his experts be called in to discuss the draft with Hugenberg and to make improvements where necessary. At the meeting, which took place on 11 May, Darré confidently played a game of facile dema-

gogy, demanding that the interest rate, set at 4.5 per cent in the draft (a much-discussed point within the government because it was considered too low by some), be reduced to 2 per cent.⁵² This was obviously a ruse aimed at landing the Minister, who called himself the 'peasant's friend', in difficulty, and at the same time stirring up an emotional following for National Socialist demands whose content differed from Hugenberg's proposals only in their exaggeratedly radical claims.⁵³

During an audience granted him six days later, Hugenberg even complained to the President of the Reich about how Darré exploited all their meetings to spread distorted accounts in the press, aimed at portraying him in a bad light. The latest example cited by the Minister was the request to halve the interest rate, which would lower it to an unacceptable level. But the aged President reaffirmed his faith in the Chancellor, substantially rejecting Hugenberg's allegations.⁵⁴ Within the government, too, the most keenly debated aspect of the bill concerned interest rates: during a cabinet meeting on 26 May, Hugenberg's draft was attacked and rejected pending a more complete study because, according to Schacht and Papen, it did not reflect the slightest criterion of economic rationality.⁵⁵

In the next meeting on 31 May, however, the interest rate, which according to Hugenberg should not be lowered below 4.5 per cent, came under fire from Hitler and the Minister of Justice, Gürtner, who wanted a further reduction. Despite being heavily attacked on all fronts, Hugenberg managed to get his way, and the government passed the bill in the form that he had given it. The law provided for the appropriate allocation, by the state, of RM 600 million as a contribution to paying off farmers' debts. There are no documents that give definite proof of why Hitler and the National Socialists accepted this humiliating defeat at the hands of the DNVP leader when they could easily have reacted otherwise. Their passivity is all the more remarkable given that, for various reasons, in the bill stage the law had raised objections and perplexities in such a wide spectrum of political forces. Representative associations from agricultural machinery manufacturers protested, demanding more decisive state intervention capable of getting the peasant economy back on its feet again.⁵⁶ Objections were also raised by creditors who wished to be directly involved in the management of funds.⁵⁷ Aspiring to greater economic rationality, an article in the conservative *Kreuzzeitung* objected to the bill, demanding that interest rates be raised and better suited to German industry.⁵⁸ Other press comments criticised Hugenberg for neglecting the settlement problem, claiming that the debt-relief scheme ended up unilaterally favouring

large landowners, irrespective of their economic efficiency.⁵⁹

Protests from the opposite direction came from the farmers' pressure groups, which by now had been so thoroughly infiltrated by the National Socialists that they sided with Darré, demanding a much more drastic cut in interest rates.⁶⁰

On the other hand, however, in an editorial of 26 May, the influential *Ruhr und Rhein*, mouthpiece of the great Rhine-Westphalian industrial interests, minimised the conflict between Hugenberg and Darré in the hope that the present 'slight' divergencies would be overcome in the overall interest of the German economy.⁶¹

No less controversial were the various measures introduced by Hugenberg to regulate the domestic market, from the point of view of both production and foreign imports. These measures were devised to counter rising producer prices, and Rohr directed his efforts accordingly. But the leading conservative's proposal of considerable price increases was the source of fierce debate. Particularly significant was the indirect criticism made by Otto Wagener, an exponent of the *mittelständisch* wing of the Hitlerian movement: in a circular dated 17 May, he maintained that it was not through price rises that agriculture would make a recovery, but through increased productivity. On this basis, he invited manufacturers to be realistic and to exercise self-restraint in their own demands.⁶²

In this difficult sector, Hugenberg's policies were again in line with interventions made by the presidential governments before 30 January 1933, and were an important springboard for the subsequent, more organic policies of Darré. For this reason, criticism of the measures was due not so much to radical divergences of opinion as to a clash of political interests.

A vital part of the so-called *Marktordnung* legislation (which will be analysed in Chapter 5) was the 'fats plan', personally worked out by Rohr. The plan's purpose was to use drastic measures for imports and consumption to meet the crisis in the German livestock industry, which from the beginning of the century had been unable to supply the basic requirements for high-nutrition animal fats. Pushed aside by foreign competition, which was able to produce margarine and oil at much lower prices, the national production of fats had fallen off, at a time of increased domestic demand due to overall improvements in the standard of living. From 1925 to 1930, for example, annual butter consumption had risen from 6.5 kg to 8 kg per capita, and margarine from 6 kg to 8 kg. In terms of overall domestic consumption, margarine, which had only 22.6 per cent of

Table 3.1. German butter imports 1924–1933 (thousands of quintals)

	1924–28 (average)	1929	1930	1933
Butter imports	965	1,355	1,332	591

Source: L. B. Bacon and F. C. Schloemer, *World Trade in Agricultural Products*, Rome, 1940, pp. 228f.

the market in 1913, had risen to 42.6 per cent in 1932, thus overtaking butter, whose market share of over 51 per cent before the war had dropped to 38.6 per cent.⁶³

The pressure from a low-cost, widely consumed food product like margarine, produced by a few multinationals, had also caused a fall in the producer price of the butter: with an index of 100 in 1914, by 1932 it was down to 68, despite repeated attempts to protect national production by means of import tariffs. But this protectionist tactic in favour of the peasant dairy farmers, known in specialist jargon as *Veredelungswirtschaft*, was weak for two reasons. Firstly, German tariff policies had a definite bias towards cereal producers, who formed a stronger political lobby. Secondly, the main butter exporters to Germany were countries like the Netherlands and Denmark, both of which bought large amounts of German industrial products. Thus the Germans had very little room for manoeuvre when it came to tariffs.

The main consequence of this situation was that Germany, the second biggest world importer of butter after Britain, considerably increased its imports of the product until 1930, the year in which mass unemployment caused a sharp fall in consumption.

In the four-year period 1929–33, the percentage of imports in the total butter requirement was on average 17.5 per cent, as against 20 per cent in previous years.⁶⁴ As far as animal feed was concerned, livestock farmers also suffered from the high cost of protected cereal production; thus at the beginning of 1933 they found themselves in particularly troubled straits.⁶⁵

In the early 1930s, to stimulate butter consumption and reduce competition from margarine, compulsory measures to mix a certain quantity of butter with margarine were introduced in the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway. There were two objectives: the reduction of margarine imports and an increase in the producer price for butter, given that it would be used for a more widely consumed product which would then stimulate production.

With a law of 23 December 1932, this solution was also adopted

by Germany, even if the measure was never concretely enacted by the Schleicher government because of the controversy that it had aroused.⁶⁶ The main opposition to compulsory mixing came from the margarine-producing industries, which feared negative repercussions on consumption and therefore on profits, given the reduced buying power of most Germans.⁶⁷ This powerful lobby launched a widespread press campaign against the decree, using a line of reasoning that was deeply felt by consumers and acknowledged by industrial circles:⁶⁸ enriched margarine would cost more, thus making fats inaccessible for less well-off members of the population.⁶⁹ In agrarian *Interessenverbände* circles, however, the decree was considered a necessary measure, and some even thought it not incisive enough.⁷⁰

But on this occasion too Hugenberg and his Secretary of State followed their own convictions. An initial series of decrees, on 23 and 24 February,⁷¹ imposed strict obligations to use quotas of national raw materials in the production of cheese and oils. In early March the Minister presented a bill to the cabinet, aimed at making the mixing of butter and margarine compulsory. The draft envisaged centralised controls on the domestic market and on imports by a *Reichsstelle*, which was to regulate import flows according to price trends and the state of the market. In a meeting on 11 March, it was the Chancellor himself who criticised the proposed measures. Hitler's main allegation was that Rohr had refused to listen to his experts (National Socialists) on such a delicate issue. Hitler thus made clear his lack of confidence in the Secretary of State. The Chancellor then went on to say that the proposed price increase for margarine, from 30 to 54 pfennigs per 100 g, would be intolerable for the less well-off members of the population. The ensuing discussion revolved round the problem of how to establish who was entitled to margarine at reduced prices, without, however, any agreement being reached. It was clear that Hitler's main concern was for the serious repercussions that this further burden on the cost of subsistence might have, whereas Hugenberg was pressing for a compromise in the interests of the producers. Konstantin von Neurath, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, also got involved in the clash between the two. He feared negative consequences for German trade if import quotas were introduced.⁷² Discussion was postponed until 20 March when Hugenberg wound it up with a few peremptory comments, gaining yet another ephemeral victory. Hitler demanded, however, that he be kept regularly informed about the implementation of the decree and about any possible social repercussions.

The decree, issued on 23 March, also included provisions for the setting up of a Reichstelle für Milcherzeugnisse, Öle und Fette, whose precise functions were more clearly defined in a second decree of 4 April,⁷³ as well as for the fixing of a quota for margarine to be produced with imported raw materials, amounting to 60 per cent of the production for the period October–December 1932: this was the fixed quota to be tried out during the trimester April–June. By means of an extra tax of 50 pfennigs per kilo of margarine produced, the state aimed to cover the costs of the subsidised margarine, which was available at reduced prices for less well-off citizens with allowance cards.

As in the previously mentioned debt-relief law, here too Hugenberg's perseverance is not enough to explain why Hitler yielded when he could count on the support of such a wide spectrum of political forces, including Gauleiter, the general consumers and industry. Apropos of the latter, a highly significant article was published in the *Deutsche Führerbriefe*, founded by Paul Silverberg. In its account of the initial debate between ministers, the weekly paper commented with satisfaction that the defeat of Hugenberg might mean a change in direction of economic policy towards a greater opening to international markets.⁷⁴ The available literature does not allow us to pinpoint the motives of the actors in play. Hitler's behaviour must certainly have been affected by the need for caution in his early dealings with his DNVP ally and with the conservatives in general.

In any case, despite all the restrictions resulting from its experimental nature, the decree was enacted and its initial success gave rise to much positive comment, including a favourable assessment by the doyen of German agronomists, Max Sering.⁷⁵ Another positive comment is to be found in an article published in the review *Ruhr und Rhein*, press organ of the powerful Rhine and Westphalia industrial circles.⁷⁶

Naturally enough, the price rise was greeted with discontent by the less well-off, and this forced the state continually to extend the costly system of allowance cards; the margarine they bought, however, was of poor quality and it could not always keep up with demand, especially since producers and retailers had little incentive to deal in it.⁷⁷ But the rise in demand for this kind of 'popular' margarine entailed further drawbacks: because demand tended to shift towards this kind of margarine, the legislators' initial intention of stimulating domestic butter production was thwarted. The consequences of the 'fats plan', however, reach beyond the brief period under Hugenberg's management, to which our analysis is confined.

A further measure, concerning milk production, also aimed at centralising and rationalising agricultural output, and was another move in the direction of 'planification' later to be brought about by National Socialism. The law of 11 May 1933 modified an earlier provision of 31 July 1930: the management of the apparatus which brought together the whole of the highly fragmented sector of dairy production was entrusted to the Ministry and no longer to regional bodies.⁷⁸

The great public interest in the 'fats plan' should not overshadow the fact that Hugenberg and Rohr, advocates of the urgent need to strike a new balance of power between cereal growers and livestock farmers,⁷⁹ also dedicated a great deal of attention to the former sector. In particular, because of the exceptionally good harvest, the government stepped in several times to lighten the load on the domestic market and to raise the very low prices. To this end, the *Getreidehandelsgesellschaft*, founded as a semi-private firm in 1926, was radically transformed. On 30 May 1933 a *Reichsstelle für Getreide und Futtermittel* took over from it, incorporating the *Reichsmaisstelle* founded by Brüning in March 1930. The new agency's tasks were to control imports and fix prices according to market zones.⁸⁰

Other main government interventions as part of its traditional policy of supporting cereal production included:⁸¹ the purchase and stocking of excess harvest quotas at the government's expense; the eosination of rye for animal feed to alleviate market pressure;⁸² and the granting of special permits for wheat imports in exchange for rye exports.⁸³ But after a few months the cumbersome nature of this policy was underlined by the chairman of the *Reichsbank* who began to tighten the purse-strings.⁸⁴

At the same time, however, the international consequences and the repercussions on Germany's trade policy apparently caused by Hugenberg's protectionist measures began to provoke increasingly harsh opposition from the advocates of a more active international role for Germany. Thus the bill to stimulate horticulture, presented by Rohr on 19 May, was brusquely dismissed, despite tenacious arguments put forward by the presenter and Hugenberg. The bill made provisions for a massive reduction in horticultural imports, about 30 per cent of the quotas at the time, and a unilateral break with existing trade obligations whenever necessary. Furthermore the government was to commit itself to rationalising the market, regulating the quality and quantity of commodities on sale.⁸⁵

This time the opposition front, ranging from Frick, Neurath, Papen and Schwerin von Krosigk to Hitler, had its way: the draft

could not possibly be approved in such a delicate international climate without incurring dangerous countermeasures on the part of the countries directly affected (the Netherlands, Italy and Hungary). Rohr's threatening line of reasoning – how would peasant farmers react when they learnt that their interests had been sacrificed to *raison d'état*? – was to no avail. Hitler was unmoved. He replied that it was up to Goebbels' propaganda apparatus to convince them with a well-aimed indoctrination campaign. It must be added that the Chancellor's determination, which had been totally absent during the discussions on the consequences of a rise in the price of margarine, was strengthened in this case by the fact that Hugenberg was now a general without an army, given that the agricultural representative bodies were firmly in the hands of the trusty Darré.

The part of Hugenberg's agrarian policy that aroused most direct criticism and ill-feeling in industrial circles concerned trade. Since Germany had re-acquired in 1925 the right to draw up trade agreements – a right she had temporarily lost at the Treaty of Versailles – agriculture and industry had once more been locked into a potentially explosive conflict.

Whereas industry, or at least that part of it most interested in world markets, had attempted to make the most of the favourable international economic climate, agriculture had been struggling with structural problems which – according to many – required a high degree of trade protection. The trade policy implemented in the second half of the decade was in some ways an unsatisfactory compromise for both parties.

The subsequent economic crisis aggravated the contrast, and the 'historic' alliance between agriculture and big industry on which the social constitution of the Bismarckian Reich rested grew even weaker.⁸⁶ With the passing months, the conflict became more embittered: farmers' protectionist demands grew increasingly more radical and unrealistic, while leading industrialists, although wishing to settle the dispute, refused to accept the idea of an independent trade protection regime for agriculture. There were many who considered that Germany's already difficult hold on many important markets would suffer as a consequence. But more generally, writers on the side of industry, such as Pietrkowski,⁸⁷ argued that holding on to, or increasing, export industries would have a beneficial effect on the whole economy, including agriculture, thanks to an increase in the population's purchasing power. Industrialists' proposals for a peaceful settlement with the *Interessenverbände* from the other sector received only a lukewarm hearing.⁸⁸

in a press release on 27 January, the RLB leaders bitterly attacked advocates of the primacy of exports. Insisting that such an approach would create unemployment, they called for a 'no loopholes' protection from agricultural imports as well as for complete freedom for Germany from the restrictive clauses in existing trade agreements.⁸⁹

Ten days after the new government took office, the RLB publicly warned that a totally different approach had to be adopted as far as trade policy was concerned.⁹⁰ Moreover, as we have already seen, the new Minister of Agriculture seemed unlikely to meet industry's demands. On 9 February a meeting took place between Hugenberg and an RDI delegation, which had presented a memorandum accepting the principle of setting up a limited protectionist policy but at the same time reiterating the indisputable need to defend German exports and the refusal to hear of agriculturists' demands for an independent trade policy based on quotas.⁹¹ The outcome of the meeting left the industrialists cautiously optimistic. Hugenberg had kept his distance from hard-line agriculturists' arguments, professing his desire to balance out the demands of both sectors. He also showed his sensitivity to electoral issues, claiming that his basic task was to halt the radicalisation of the rural world, which was working entirely to the advantage of the National Socialists.⁹²

But the representatives of industry soon realised that, in terms of concrete actions, Hugenberg's priorities were definitely with agriculture: thus, in spite of their detailed requests to maintain the clause of the most-favoured nation as the fulcrum of his policy,⁹³ in a cabinet meeting on 2 March he pressed for the introduction of a quota system as the basis for an overall increase in prices to balance the books of peasant farmers.⁹⁴ Hugenberg's stand raised predictable objections from the Foreign Minister, von Neurath, but Hitler sided with the DNVP leader, sharing his desire to free agriculture from the snares of the world market in order to balance out costs and profits.⁹⁵ Hitler did emphasise, however, that the protectionist policy should be gradual and should not irreparably damage relations with other countries.

In a previous cabinet meeting on 16 February, when the storm with Foreign Minister Neurath was brewing, Hugenberg had proposed setting up an interministerial committee to tackle the details of the problems connected with the drafting of a new trade agreement with the Netherlands.⁹⁶ This was the trickiest trade knot that Hugenberg had to unravel. The Netherlands were, in fact, one of Germany's main trading partners, and exchanges between the

two countries had flourished, particularly after the 1925 tariff agreement. Subsequently, growing German closure had created considerable problems, causing a decrease in trade between the two countries.⁹⁷

Schleicher had already set up negotiations to bring into being a new agreement, but right from the start there was an obvious conflict between agricultural and industrial interests.⁹⁸ Industry – as the Krupp papers show – carefully followed the progress of the negotiations.⁹⁹ As early as a cabinet meeting on 27 February, Hugenberg revealed what his line of action would be concerning the negotiations with the Netherlands: horticulture and peasant farmers specialising in the dairy sector were to be protected before all others.¹⁰⁰ This he justified by the need, in view of the imminent elections, to signal to farmers that the new government genuinely intended to help them.¹⁰¹

Supported by the government, at least according to the minutes of the successive meetings of 22 and 25 April,¹⁰² Hugenberg signed the agreement on 10 May. It turned out to be a compromise between his initial standpoint and industrialists' demands,¹⁰³ and was to run for a one-year trial period. In a published comment on the agreement signed, Rohr obviously emphasised the government's success, reasoning along lines which bring us to the last point in this chapter: Hugenberg's resignation. Rohr had pointed out that the concessions made to Dutch agriculture meant less dependence on the more unstable overseas markets.¹⁰⁴ Here we see in outline the programme for a continental economy centred on Germany that Hugenberg presented at the London Economic Conference with such unfortunate timing.

The DNVP leader stubbornly rushed to meet his fate. In a number of articles and speeches, from 19 to 21 May, he hammered home in patently clear terms his intention to raise farmers' incomes by any possible means.¹⁰⁵ Five days later, a letter sent to Reusch by H. Wolz, a member of the R. Bosch AG management, gives an idea of the widespread disapproval in the industrial world of the Minister who, by unilaterally favouring agriculture, left the way open for 'socialist elements' in the management of economic policy. Concerted pressure should be applied by the leading figures of German capital to persuade the Chancellor to rid himself of his by now embarrassing ally. Reusch rejected the proposal, saying that eliminating Hugenberg would play into the hands of the left wing of the NSDAP.¹⁰⁶ There are no other documents on how this initiative developed, but it demonstrates the full extent of Hugenberg's isolation.

National Socialist pressure on Hugenberg and Rohr also became more intense: from late March to late April, authoritative figures from the rural world spoke out, demanding that the position of Prussian Minister of Agriculture, temporarily occupied by Hugenberg, should be given to the National Socialist, Werner Willikens. Behind this move was the demand that the institutions should reflect the unanimous consensus in favour of National Socialism in rural areas.¹⁰⁷

In early June it was Meinberg's turn to direct a violent campaign against Rohr, who was accused of having been involved in financial scandals and of being an enemy of the peasant in so far as he was an 'exponent of the East Elbian *Junkertum*'.¹⁰⁸

It should be borne in mind, however, that Hugenberg's economic policy was in no way contrary to the subsequent policy implemented by his successors, Darré and Schacht. In a letter to Hitler, dated 16 April, the Minister gave a general outline of what Germany should propose and ask for at the London conference. Until the home market was reorganised and regulated, the main point should be the protection of national agricultural product. But in the long term he envisaged a *Mitteleuropa* centered round the German economy and based on a bilateral system: foodstuffs and raw materials in exchange for finished products. In other words, Hugenberg had outlined both the *Marktordnung*, on which Darré was later to pride himself, and the trade policy based on clearing agreements which were to be introduced in 1934 with Schacht's 'New Plan'.¹⁰⁹

Just before he left for London with the delegation led by Neurath, Hugenberg once more put forward his thesis, this time at a cabinet meeting on 5 May. But Hitler and the other ministers rejected it, maintaining that it was inopportune to present such proposals given the difficult climate.¹¹⁰ What followed is well known: ignoring the Chancellor's instructions, Hugenberg did present a memorandum expressing his views, which stirred up strong feeling in European diplomatic circles. On his return home, Hugenberg stubbornly got himself involved in a further dispute, and came off worse. This is clearly demonstrated in a written exchange between Rohr and Lammers, head of the Führer's Chancellery. The conservative State Secretary, Rohr, had complained that he had not been given enough radio space to illustrate publicly the main points of his agricultural policy because Goebbels had opposed it. Lammers replied by quoting Funk's view that by now the breach between Hugenberg-Rohr and the peasant farmers was so deep that giving space to Rohr would also have meant

giving it to Darré, thus highlighting the evident lack of confidence in the two men in charge of the Agriculture Ministry.¹¹¹ At the same time there was a growing demand by local organisations in the sector for Darré and Willikens to become the Minister of Agriculture for the Reich and Prussia respectively.¹¹² After three years the AA leader's long-cherished moment had finally come. Abandoned by his crumbling party and isolated from the more influential pressure groups, Hugenberg was forced to tender his resignation to Hindenburg on 26 June.

In conclusion, Hugenberg's five-month management of agrarian policy was not a parenthesis, but was in keeping with what had gone before and with later decisions. Although an individualist, Hugenberg reasoned according to a logic commonly found in the German right: he wanted agriculture to be the core of the economy. Although his was a 'cultural' notion, it was not a racial one, and he did work towards protecting and strengthening agriculture.¹¹³

His measures, at times drastic, such as the debt-relief scheme, or trade policy and price regulation in the domestic market, all complied with a 'ruralistic' point of view. This he shared with his predecessors (from Schiele to Magnus Fhrh. von Braun). Even Darré was to work along similar lines, albeit with a much more radical ideological vocabulary.

Hugenberg was defeated on terrain that in later years was to become central to the regime: the project of establishing an economically and strategically independent *Großbraumwirtschaft*. It is no accident that, in commenting on the results of the London conference, Ferdinand Fried, a member of Tat-Kreis and a close assistant of Darré, gave a positive view of the fact that a nationalistic vision had prevailed over liberal plans for an open *Weltwirtschaft*. He thus reasoned along lines similar to those in the Minister's untimely memo.¹¹⁴ The reasons for Hugenberg's downfall are to be sought in terms of political strategies, not economic ones. Hitler no longer needed conservative guardians like von Papen and Hugenberg; but whereas the former was removed by promoting him to a prestigious but powerless position, the DNVP leader was far too cunning and ambitious to have around during victory celebrations.

By now, in any case, the 'Dictator of the Economy' no longer had any allies to help him. Industrial and financial circles were largely hostile because he had given precedence to his agriculture policy. His dramatic 'sortie' at the London conference had lost him credibility abroad. Representative agricultural organisations had been eliminated or tamed by Darré, who was able to count on them at the right moment and so strip his rival of the one remaining

jewel in his crown of successes: the job of Minister. It must be added, however, that it was not the violent press campaign orchestrated by Darré from the end of April to June which led to the Chancellor's loss of confidence in his ally and Minister, but general political factors extraneous to the rural situation.

Thus, in this case too, it is clear just how far agriculture was a secondary issue, subordinate to the overall political evolution of the Third Reich.

Notes

1. For the history of the Alldeutscher Verband, see R. Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League 1886-1914*, London, 1984.

2. Cf. K. P. Hoepke, 'Alfred Hugenberg: Aus dem Lebenslauf eines romantischen Bürgers', unpubl. Habilitation, 1978. In 1912 Hugenberg was co-opted on to the board of directors of the Gesellschaft für innere Kolonisation, at Sering's wish (p. 194). See also the well-documented political biography by J.A. Leopold, *Alfred Hugenberg: The Radical Nationalist Campaign against the Weimar Republic*, London-New Haven, 1977.

3. BA, NI Hugenberg, vol. 128.

4. K. P. Hoepke, 'Alfred Hugenberg als Vermittler zwischen großindustriellen Interessen und DNVP', in H. Mommsen, D. Petzina and B. Weisbrod (eds.) *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung*, Düsseldorf, 1974, p. 919. For a nuanced evaluation of Hugenberg's function in the social and political situation of the Weimar period see H. Holzbach, *Das 'System Hugenberg': Die Organisation bürgerlicher Sammlungspolitik vor dem Aufstieg der NSDAP*, Stuttgart, 1971.

5. Cf. J. Flemming, *Landwirtschaftliche Interessen und Demokratie*, Bonn, 1978, p. 283. Also cf. DZAM, rep. 87B, vol. 330.

6. Cf. R. Neebe, *Großindustrie, Staat und NSDAP 1930-1933*, Göttingen, 1981, p. 134.

7. See GHH-HA, vol. 400101290/39.

8. Wilmowsky's note to Krupp, 3 May 1932, in FAH IV E, vol. 23/496.

9. Kastl to Krupp, 31 January 1933, *ibid.*, vol. 203.

10. Wilmowsky to Krupp, 30 January 1933, *ibid.*, vol. 23/507.

11. GHH-HA, vol. 40010123/33ab.

12. The article was entitled 'Der neue Wirtschaftskurs'. In the issue of 5 February, the more liberal *Vossische Zeitung* expressed its perplexity, fearing that Hugenberg would allow agricultural interests to have precedence over industrial ones, especially in trade policy.

13. As early as 31 January the board of directors made known a resolution warmly welcoming the cabinet changes, hoping that it would mark a long-awaited turning point in the search for a solution to the serious problems of agriculture: DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3169.

14. Cf. the letter by the director Theodor Baudissin, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 20587.

15. GHH-HA, vol. 4001024/3a and the RDI circular of 12 January, in BA, NI Silberberg, vol. 363.

16. FAH IV E, vol. 203: Kastl to Krupp, 27 January.
17. Cf. FAH IV E, vols. 503, 503, 505 *passim*, and in general, D. Gessner, *Agrarverbände in der Weimarer Republik*, Düsseldorf, 1976.
18. Cf. the wealth of archive material in GHH-HA, vol. 40010124.
19. Cf. H. A. Turner, 'The Ruhrlade: Secret Cabinet of Heavy Industry', *CEH*, vol. 3, 1970, pp. 195–228;
20. U. Nocken, 'Corporatism and Pluralism in Modern German History', in D. Stegmann, B. J. Wendt and P. C. Witt (eds.), *Industrielle Gesellschaft und politisches System*, Bonn-Bad Godesberg, 1978, pp. 49f.
21. Cf. the article published in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, 28 February 1928.
22. See the text of a speech given in Bremen on 10 July 1932; agrarian policy was the main theme throughout the electoral campaign.
23. Cf. the declaration published in the *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, 4 January 1933.
24. Article in *Der Tag*, 14 December 1932, in BA, N1 Hugenberg, vol. 129.
25. Cf. his programme speeches in *Der Tag*, 15, 16 August, in BA, N1 Hugenberg, vol. 127. This volume also includes many of Hugenberg's political rough drafts and transcripts. See also the DNVP's agrarian policy programme made public on 13 December 1932, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 196.
26. BA, N1 Hugenberg, vol. 128.
27. Cf. Neebe, *Großindustrie*, pp. 151ff.; D. Stegmann, 'Kapitalismus und Faschismus 1929–1934: Thesen und Materialien', in D. Stegmann, *Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Marxschen Theorie*, Frankfurt, 1976, vol. 6, pp. 61f.
28. Cf. H. Denecke, 'Die agrarpolitischen Konzeptionen des deutschen Imperialismus', Dissertation, Berlin, 1972, pp. 263; R. Jäckel, 'Die faschistische Politik gegenüber der werkrätigen Landbevölkerung in Deutschland', Dissertation, Berlin, 1979, p. 23.
29. In Rgbl., p. 63 and the related decrees of 14 February, 19 March, 27 April and 26 May, *ibid.*, pp. 64, 104, 231, 309.
30. 'Zerstörung des Kredits', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 4 February. Similar criticisms are to be found in the article entitled 'Erster Vierjahres-schritt', *Berliner Börsen Courier*, 2 February.
31. In BA, R 43 II, vol. 196.
32. The Minister's anxiety to win favour with peasant farmers even induced him to propose, contravening the civil code laws, that bankrupt peasants should keep both their passive and their active right to vote in Agricultural Chambers; cf. his letter to the Chancellery, 13 April, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 203.
33. Numerous letters, reports and exposés for and against the draft bill are to be found in BA, R 43 II, vol. 196 and in DZAP, 31.01, vol. 14953. According to RDI and DIHT leaders, the moratorium damaged creditors and therefore the whole German economy. As a protest against the measure the Minister was presented with a wide-ranging and detailed statement in March 1933. See the minutes of the meetings in RDI, 'Geschäftliche Mitteilungen', in FAH, IV E, vol. 187.
34. See the letter of 23 February, sent to the Minister of Economics, who agreed with the protests and took steps to make them known in the other ministries: BA, R 2, vol. 18253.
35. BA, R 43 I, vol. 1459.
36. From an internal report on the German industrialists' organisation, in FAH, IV E, vol. 181. See also Gürtner's telegram sent to Hitler on 4 February, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 196.
37. See the significant letter from the head of the AA administrative office to an East Prussian farmer, dated 16 February, in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2029.
38. Rgbl., p. 221.
39. Cf. the decree of 23 June. Von Papen's advisers argued that it could only further weaken landowners' rights: BA, R 53, vol. 25; the interministerial debate in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1463. The text of the law did not depart greatly from NSDAP

proposals, as is clear from Darré's circular of 28 April in which he asked the Führer's opinion concerning a proposal by the Bavarian LBF Holzmann, which was similar in tone to the subsequent law: SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 138.

40. Cf. H. Prehn, 'Die Rolle der Siedlungspolitik in der Zeit der Weltwirtschaftskrise 1929 bis 1932', *WZU Rostock*, vol. 22, 1973, p. 214. Hugenberg's proposals were formalised in the bill discussed in December 1930.

41. The main points of the draft bill can already be grasped from a speech given in Liegnitz in July 1932, in BA NI Hugenberg, vol. 126.

42. BA, NI Darré II, vol. 54.

43. Cf. especially an extremely harsh article written by Darré in an issue of the *NS Landpost*, 29 January 1933. In it he attacks the 'arch-conservative' Rohr for being totally alien to the notions of *Blut und Boden*. Darré, defending his fellow party member Bloedorn, threatened outright war against Rohr and the Pomeranian Landbund which he controlled.

44. Circular, 29 March, in SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 140.

45. Cf. diary entries dated 16 and 18 May 1933, in SA Goslar.

46. Circular and replies in SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 138.

47. Cf. the exhaustive study by H. Gies, 'Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung auf dem agrarpolitischen Sektor', *ZAGAS*, vol. 16, 1968, pp. 210–32.

48. On the takeover of the co-operative sector, see K. Bludau, *Nationalsozialismus und Genossenschaften*, Hanover, 1968, chap. 2.

49. Objections made in one of Darré's letters to Hugenberg in late March, in SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 140.

50. *Zeitungsdiens*t RLB of 10 May. Similar in tone is the article, 'Die letzten Barrikaden müssen fallen', *Der Jungdeutsche*, 14 May.

51. Darré to Hitler, 16 April 1933, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 192.

52. An account of the meeting, from the ministerial side, is in BA, NI Hugenberg, vol. 36.

53. The instrumental use of the conflict, which seemed fairly insignificant from a quantitative point of view, is stressed by Hugenberg himself in an article entitled, 'Die Rettung der Bauern', *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, 20 May.

54. The minutes of the hearing are in BA, NI Hugenberg, vol. 38. More generally the DNVP leader denounced the overtly intimidatory climate created around his party by the National Socialists.

55. Cf. the correspondence with Papen and the critics from his staff in BA, R 53, vol. 24.

56. Cf. the letter of 8 February, sent by the Verband deutscher Landmaschinenindustrie in BA, R 2, vol. 4373, and that of the 13 March, sent by the Süddeutscher Maschinenhändlerverband, in *DZAP*, 31.01, vol. 14953.

57. See the letter sent by the banker, H. Linse, to Hugenberg, dated 4 May, in BA, R 2, vol. 4374 and the protests by the Templin agricultural creditors association, on 24 March, in *DZAP*, 31.01, vol. 14953.

58. The article published on 19 May was entitled 'Schafft wieder Vertrauen!'

59. Cf. the articles published in the Catholic *Der Deutsche*, 3 May, and in the *Deutsche Bauernzeitung*, 14 May.

60. See the demands made by the Lower Silesian Agricultural Chamber during the annual general meeting on 28 March, in *DZAM*, Rep. 87B, vol. 13485. Cf. also the article, 'Um die Neuorganisation der Landwirtschaft', *Tägliche Rundschau*, 10 May.

61. Cf., for example, the articles in the RLB's *Grüne Wochenschau*, 25 February, in the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 February, and in the *Berliner Tageblatt*, 24 February.

62. *DZAM*, Rep. 87B, vol. 3192.

63. Cf. U. Teichmann, *Die Politik der Agrarpreisstützung*, Cologne, 1955, pp. 482ff.

64. Of a world total of 490,000 tonnes in 1929, Britain alone accounted for 320,000 tonnes and Germany for 135,000 tonnes: K. Brandt, *The German Fat Plan and its Economic Setting*, Stanford, 1938, p. 3.

65. Cf. Teichmann, *Die Politik der Agrarpreisstützung*; W. Fisch, 'Die Bedeutung der inländischen Speisefette in der deutschen Ernährungswirtschaft', Dissertation, Cologne, 1935, p. 16.

66. Industrialists in the sector raised objections of a technical nature which turned out to be unfounded, maintaining that the mixture could not be conserved for long: cf. Teichmann, *Die Politik der Agrarpreisstützung*, p. 492.

67. Cf. the detailed memo of the Verband deutscher Ölmühlen, 14 February, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3338, and that of the association of independent producers of margarine, 3 February, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 199.

68. Two years earlier, wishing to defend the market from state interference, the RDI had already passed a negative judgement on the proposed compulsory mixing: cf. a memo, 28 April, in I. Maurer and U. Wengst (eds.), intro. by G. Schulz, *Politik und Wirtschaft in der Krise 1930-1932*, Düsseldorf, 1980, p. 617.

69. Cf. the opinion expressed in a memo in early March by Reusch's political adviser, Scherer, GHH-HA, vol. 40010124/3a.

70. Cf. the stands taken by the Agricultural Chambers, East Prussia (3 January), Pomerania (30 January), Saxony (23 January), in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3338, and the peremptory moves made by the RLB chairman in the Chancellery between 13 and 16 February, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 192. Werner von Alvensleben was also highly critical in a letter to Darré, 30 March 1933, in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2029. As is clear from a statement by Reischle on 9 January, the group headed by Darré was also against mixing, claiming that it would only harm consumers with no substantial benefits to producers, BA, R 16 I, vol. 2029.

71. Rgbl., pp. 80, 81, 93.

72. Cf. the minutes of the meeting in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1460. The draft had already been discussed by the ministers on 7 March, without agreement being reached. Cf. undated note of the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressing strong doubts about Hugenberg's measure and asking that he be consulted to avoid any repercussions on German trade relations: AA Bonn, Sonderref. W., Öle und Fette, vol. 2.

73. Rgbl., p. 143. The decree is *ibid.*, p. 166.

74. The article, entitled 'Die Vertagung des Fettmonopols', was published on 17 March.

75. Cf. M. Sering, *Deutsche Agrarpolitik auf geschichtlicher und landeskundlicher Grundlage*, Leipzig, 1934, p. 151.

76. K. Schacht, 'Probleme des Fett-Planes', *Ruhr und Rhein*, no. 26, 30 June 1933.

77. See, for example, the Breslau police report, 1 July, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3338, and the protests made by the Berlin Chamber of Commerce, 30 June, *ibid.*, vol. 13402.

78. Rgbl., p. 261. The related papers are in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1459. The same policy of centralised state administration was implemented for butcher's meat in a law of 5 May: BA, R 43 I, vol. 1461. In DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3205, there are many documents concerning the urgent requests on behalf of regional bureaucratic bodies calling for prices to be regulated in this delicate sector.

79. Cf. Rohr's article, 'Die Agrarlage', *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 20 August.

80. Proposal made by Rohr, 19 May, in BA, R 54, vol. 24.

81. Cf. V. Klemm, 'Ursachen und Verlauf der Krise der Landwirtschaft', *Habilitation*, Berlin, 1965, p. 175; E. Bohringer, *Die Getreidemarktpolitik in Deutschland von Beginn des ersten Weltkrieges*, Gießen, 1971, p. 165; and D. Walz, *Die Agrarpolitik der Regierung Brüning*, Erlangen-Nuremberg, 1971, p. 132.

82. The decree of 9 March is reproduced in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3233. The

extent of the demands in this direction is documented in BA, R 2, vol. 18018. The overall cost of cereal subsidies to the state was fixed at over RM160 million p.a.: cf. the enclosed documents for the cabinet meeting of 16 February, in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1459.

83. Whereas Germany was deficient in wheat production, it produced more than its national requirement in rye. Moreover, given the high cost of transport from the eastern provinces where production was concentrated, growers found it more viable to compete with Poland and export surpluses to Scandinavia.

84. Board of the Reichsbank to the Minister of Agriculture, 1 June, and related correspondence in BA, R 2, vol. 18021.

85. The draft, presented on 22 April, and the related interministerial correspondence are in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1462.

86. Cf. among others, D. Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis*, 2nd edn, New York, 1986; D. Stegmann, 'Deutsche Zoll- und Handelspolitik 1924/25–1929', in H. Mommsen, D. Petzina and B. Weissbrod (eds.), *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik*, 2nd edn, Düsseldorf, 1974; and D. Gessner, 'Agrarian Protectionism in the Weimar Republic', *JCH*, vol. 12, 1977.

87. Cf. E. Pietrkowski, 'Industrie und Landwirtschaft', a report drawn up in November 1932 for the RDI board of directors.

88. From the documents in the Krupp archive it emerges that it was primarily the influential Essen entrepreneur, together with his son-in-law and adviser Wilmosky, who pressed to settle the conflict.

89. DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 7899.

90. 'Reichslandbund rügt', *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 10 February 1933. In its general assembly on 5 April, the DLR also expressed its clear preference for customs duties: DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 20587.

91. The memo is in FAH, E IV, vol. 185.

92. The minutes of the meeting, from the industrialists' side, are *ibid.*, vol. 181.

93. Cf. the RDI board of directors' press release on 18 February, in GHH-HA, vol. 400101220.

94. BA, R 43 I, vol. 1460. Similar in tone was his letter to the Chancellery, 27 February, reproduced in K. H. Minuth (ed.), *Die Regierung Hitler*, Boppard, 1983, part 1a, p. 125.

95. A few weeks later, during a hearing with some forestry experts on 3 April, the Führer stated his firm intention to free Germany from onerous trade restraints as soon as possible; in the meantime, however, caution was required: *ibid.*, p. 283.

96. BA, R 43 I, vol. 1459.

97. In general, cf. C. Beukering, 'Der deutsch-niederländische Handel und die deutsche Agrareinfuhr in den Jahren 1920–1940', Dissertation, Bonn, 1953.

98. Ministry of Agriculture to Schleicher, 5 January, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 192. In a statement sent to Hindenburg at the end of 1932, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, von Bülow, had pointed out the serious negative repercussions of protectionist moves against the Netherlands and Italy, and the danger of a trade war: DZAP, 06. 01, vol. 19773. Neurath too, during a cabinet meeting on 16 February, had illustrated the possible damage to the German economy if negotiations with the Netherlands and Sweden were interrupted. Hugenberg disagreed: BA, R 43 I, vol. 1459.

99. Cf. FAH, IV E, vols 184, 185.

100. In 1932 the Netherlands sent 8 per cent of its agricultural exports to Germany for over RM172 million; but German industrial exports to the Netherlands were worth more than RM485 million in a trade balance which was always favourable to the German partner: Beukering, 'Der deutsch-niederländische Handel', p. 62.

101. BA, R 43, vol. 1460.
102. BA, R 43, vol. 1461.
103. The text is in Rgbl., II, p. 162. The agreement included provisions for the setting-up of a bilateral committee to control pig-lard imports, using a formula that was to be widely applied in subsequent years. An industrialists' note, 26 April, considered the mediatory role played by Hugenberg in the negotiations in a fairly positive light: FAH, IV E, vol. 816.
104. Rohr, 'Grundsätze der Zollautonomie gewährt', *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, 28 April.
105. The minutes and transcripts for these speeches, including one given at the opening of an international conference on agriculture, are in BA, N1 Hugenberg, vol. 129.
106. GHH-HA, vol. 400101290/43. On industrialists and National Socialist manoeuvres to eliminate Hugenberg, cf. Stegmann, 'Kapitalismus', pp. 61ff.
107. Cf. letter from Kalkreuth to Hitler, 24 April, in BA, N1 Hugenberg, vol. 37, and an article by Meinberg, 23 March, in DZAP, 61 Re 1, vol. 306.
108. Cf. Gies, 'Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung', pp. 229ff.
109. ADAP, series C, vol. 1/1, pp. 293ff. See also Hoepke, 'Alfred Hugenberg: Aus dem Lebenslauf eines romantischen Bürgers', vol. II, p. 28.
110. ADAP, series C, vol. 1/1, p. 332. See also J. Heineman, 'Constantin von Neurath and German Policy at the London Economic Conference of 1933: Backgrounds of the Resignation of Alfred Hugenberg', *JMH*, vol. 41, 1969, pp. 160-88.
111. Letters of 2 and 27 June, in Minuth, *Regierung Hitler*, pp. 544, 603.
112. Cf. the important press review in *Grüne Wochenschau*, 29 June 1933.
113. Typical of this approach is Hugenberg's opposition to the Prussian *Erbhof* law, drafted by the Secretary of State for Prussia, Willikens, a collaborator of Darré, and the Minister of Justice, Kerl. The law was enacted without Hugenberg even being consulted. Cf. F. Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Hamburg, 1979, p. 35.
114. 'Die Umbildung der Handelspolitik', *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*, vol. 2, 1933, pp. 307f.

The Reichsnährstand in the National Socialist Power System

Within two weeks of taking over from Hugenberg as Minister of Agriculture, Darré prepared and had approved an initial series of laws and decrees aimed at bringing into being a mass organisation that would unite in a single corporation, under the iron supervision of the party-state, all agriculture producers, their families and anyone involved in the processing or commerce of agricultural products and foodstuffs. This organisation was known as the Reichsnährstand (RNS).

The idea of setting up a form of representation that united agricultural interests had often been proposed in the highly effective AA propaganda campaign piloted by Darré in the three years before NSDAP accession. In his second theoretical work, the National Socialist leader had already hinted at the possibility of creating a representative apparatus for the sector which would provide farmers with a 'united front against other professions'. The leader of this organisation, which Darré called the Reichslandstandkammer, was to represent the whole professional category 'against all the other professional categories and even against the government of the Reich'.¹

The attraction of a corporative body was undoubtedly an important incentive, inducing many farmers to vote for Hitler's party. It also convinced many leaders of professional associations and agrarian interest groups to back National Socialist proposals and to accept – when they did not enthusiastically welcome – the various stages in the *Machtergreifung*, described in Chapter 3.

The idea of a united front of representation, able to push adequately farmers' arguments and interests, had become a permanent part of ruralistic ideologies from the late nineteenth century onwards, that is from the time when agriculture had suddenly begun to lose its force and political influence to overriding industrial interests. It is no accident that Darré explicitly referred to Gustav Ruhland, a late-nineteenth-century 'physiocratic' economist and adviser to the Bund der Landwirte, the most powerful and

well-organised agrarian pressure group that German history had ever known.² But there were strong corporate leanings in all the political and cultural groups on the varied scene of rural Germany. Among them were Catholics advocating the organic models reiterated in the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pope Pius XI (1931).³

First exposed in the war years, then in the period immediately after the war and during the depression of 1929, the dramatic nature of the continuing structural crisis in agriculture had rekindled hopes for a total form of corporatism that would completely change the liberal system and would lead to new relations between state, economy and market. On this subject, alongside the aforementioned tradition of sectoral *Interessenverbände*, which were institutional components in the German political system,⁴ the influence of the Prussian tradition of intermediate economic organisations should also be remembered: the industrial-commercial and agricultural Chambers, responsible for mediation between rank-and-file demands and decisions made by the state.⁵

More generally, the theoretical political debate, which had been fairly lively throughout the early consolidatory phase of the new regime and in which very varied options seemed possible, also tended to favour a reorganisation of the whole economy along corporative lines. At the same time the need for economic planning was also stressed. The state should be able to count on methods that would attenuate or even eliminate all sudden fluctuations caused by economic crises or circumstances which were harmful not only economically but also in social and political terms.⁶ The founding of the RNS must be situated in a context where ideas of state intervention and self-management (*Selbstverwaltung*) were almost inextricably mixed. And to my mind this context helps explain the support that the project received – at least in the early stages – from the rural world. I should stress, taking up again the initial quote by Darré, that the hostile tone in the face of divergent interests and the definite desire to bring the right political weight to the negotiating table were an inherent part of the proposal. Similar ideas were present in the ‘green front’ (*grüne Front*), backed by leaders from the rural world, who often had a very different cultural and political background from Darré’s. Created in February 1929, the *grüne Front*⁷ had an almost minimal effect. It is considered here because, despite the profound divergences, it was a kind of first step towards joining the RNS, or at least it was the expression of the desire of farmers of all political leanings to create an organisation that went beyond traditional, religious, social or regional divisions.⁸

The coming to power of a national coalition government, promising a future Third Reich based on the profound values of Germanness, rekindled the debate on corporative reforms and appeared to offer the ideal conditions to realise many projects entertained previously. Naturally enough, the debate was many-sided: for example, National Socialist ideologues, like Gottfried Feder and Otto Wagener, who drew on the strongly anti-capitalistic and corporative aspects of the NSDAP programme, aimed at refounding a *mittelständisch* form of economic representation with the purpose of reducing the hegemony of big business. The latter, on the other hand, advocated corporative reforms with the secret intent of maintaining or even further consolidating their own representative organisations and pressure groups.⁹ In the end, the law of 27 February 1934 – ‘to prepare the organic construction of the German economy’, as the heading went – sanctioned the substantial defeat of the ‘socialistic’ projects to which the then Minister of Economics, Hugenberg, had given some rein. Point twenty-five of the ‘inalterable’ National Socialist programme, which had been drafted by Feder in 1920 and which made provision for a corporative kind of transformation of the representative bodies, was officially declared impracticable in the present situation, given that such a radical reform would require a long and patient education programme for the population. The law was the outcome of a great deal of preparatory work, begun in April of the previous year when Hugenberg had appointed a special commission within the Reichswirtschaftsrat, which basically sanctioned relative autonomy in the economic sphere. The commission included some of the most prestigious figures from the business world and its task was to draw up a bill for the corporative organisation of the whole economy.¹⁰ But the Minister of Labour and the leader of the extreme right-wing militia, Stahlhelm, Fritz Seldte,¹¹ had also set up an expert interministerial commission, whose task was to prepare a systematic plan for the founding of a corporative state. The commission actually presented a draft of proposals which – according to a Prussian civil servant – had a very limited economic outlook and gave effective power to the state.¹²

But the outcome of the debate on the corporatisation of agriculture was of a different nature, given that not only the AA but many other members of representative bodies in the sector openly supported this solution. Thus in the early months of the Hitler-Hugenberg government, Catholic organisations put forward proposals to create a corporative structure that would be independent of the state and based on interclass criteria.¹³ The Prussian con-

servatives, on the other hand, advanced a series of detailed proposals through the Berufsständische Arbeitsgemeinschaft whose promoter was the Secretary of State, Rohr.¹⁴ He drew on the example of the Pomeranian Landbund. Since the 1920s it had tackled the burning issue of land workers fairly successfully through their integration into para-corporative institutions. But these were ultimately dominated by farmers. At the beginning of 1933 Rohr and his assistants were busy presenting proposals, which were all very vague and general, for a corporative reorganisation of the sector. Ignoring the political objections that came from various sources,¹⁵ Rohr made resolute moves to realise his plan in a very short time.

But in fact he never really managed to start up a thoroughgoing political debate on the issue, in that his main interlocutor, that is the office headed by Darré, appeared to have absolutely no intention of debating or finding grounds for discussion with anyone whatsoever.¹⁶ Significantly, the RLB, once the most powerful representative organisation of agricultural interests, expressly refused to consider Rohr's proposals or give them a public airing.¹⁷ The only occasion on which an opening of discussion seemed possible came with the publication of a book of various essays edited by Karl Vorwerck, an expert from the Arbeitsgemeinschaft. Included in the volume was an unsigned article which the editor described as being 'from a National Socialist viewpoint'. The article brusquely dismissed the debate on corporative *Selbstverwaltung* by referring to the priority need, at that particularly difficult moment of political transition, for the state to take the initiative with the compulsory creation of an organisation which brought together all the workers in the agricultural world, irrespective of their party differences and interests.¹⁸

The questionnaire that Rohr had distributed among a select number of influential leaders in the sector, including some National Socialists, also showed his intention of finding a compromise with the Nazi Party.¹⁹ In fact I would say that Darré's firm desire to manage unconditionally the envisaged reform himself, with the aim of constructing the corporative apparatus according to the needs of the Third Reich, was of more importance in determining the outcome of the affair than their undoubtedly different approaches. (Rohr and his assistants attributed a less incisive role to the state than that which Darré was later to give it, and they still thought in terms of a corporation only for farmers.) As I have already mentioned, Darré's political determination corresponded to the widespread expectation in the rural world for a complete

renewal, and the Reichsbauernführer's ambitious plans were much more in keeping with this mood than were the conservatives' proposals.²⁰

In any case, as soon as he was appointed Minister, Darré suddenly broke off any discussion about theory or principles and presented a bill that gave the Reich, and consequently the Minister of Agriculture, discretionary powers to fix the criteria by which the whole sector, from production to processing and sales, was to be reorganised in corporative forms. Evidently – even if we have no direct proof – Darré had already prepared his bill before taking over from Hugenberg in the coveted post of Minister.²¹ By now the ideologue of *Blut und Boden* had a great deal of power, which derived both from the favour he enjoyed with Hitler and from the popular consensus he had mustered in the rural world, and this was reflected in the positions he held: head of the party AA, most important member of the newly organised Reichsführergemeinschaft, which had bestowed on him the grandiloquent title of Reichsbauernführer, head of the powerful organisation of rural co-operatives, and, of course, Minister.

This great bargaining power – it was perhaps the only time he really had such power – allowed Darré to get his reform through during a cabinet meeting on 12 July without it being examined. The law passed on that occasion and made public on the 15th of the same month gave the Reich cabinet *carte blanche* to make laws for the future organisation of the rural world and the agricultural market, annulling existing laws made by the Länder. The next 'fundamental' law of 13 September specifically gave the Minister of Agriculture the discretionary power to settle the issue as a 'temporary measure'. It goes without saying that – as in many other cases during the Third Reich – the measure introduced became definitive.²² These were outline laws which had to be filled out with a considerable number of decrees.

Vice-Chancellor Papen did actually object to Darré's bill. First during a cabinet meeting of 4 September and then by means of memos written by his assistants, he tried to block the bill, claiming that it was too drastic a measure from above and that it would be wiser to revitalise existing organisations.²³ But Darré's 'corporative revolution' was not seriously hampered, at least not at government level.

The two aforementioned laws defined the RNS as a 'self-governing corporation under public law' whose only formal link with the state and party offices was the fact that Darré was head of all three organisations. As Reichsbauernführer he was appointed

directly by the Führer and only had to answer to him in person; but at the same time, as Minister his duties entailed the 'supervision' (*Aufsicht*) of the whole corporative apparatus.

There was a good deal of confusion concerning the various areas of competence due to the fact that Darré held so many positions, in keeping with the leadership principle on which all the institutions of the Third Reich were based, but the independence of the RNS turned out to be a mere façade: the power to fix prices or tariffs with the force of law even for outsiders; wide-ranging powers of administrative policing; compulsory subscriptions for all agricultural producers, their families and anyone involved in the sales of foodstuffs – all lead us to conclude, in agreement with Gies,²⁴ that the RNS must be considered an executive organ of the will of the party-state. But this did not prevent many RNS officials and members from viewing it as a genuine form of independent representation for the rural world.²⁵

It would be incorrect, however, to give credence to the juridical fiction on which the apparatus bosses staked their defence to avoid penal sentences after 1945.²⁶ They argued that the RNS was simply a *Selbstverwaltung* body, even claiming that it was the most highly developed, wide-ranging and effective form of representation that farmers had ever created in their secular struggle. There can be no doubt that the RNS aimed at representation, or rather at a very widespread and detailed form of protection (*Betreuung*) which went beyond the purely professional sphere; but these aims seem to have been directed at a highly ambitious and systematic project to organise and make the most of all those working in the food and agricultural sector as well as their families, within a vertically organised body whose feeble forms of *Selbstverwaltung* were 'purely decorative'.²⁷

A typical example of this was the position of the Reichsbauernrat and courts of honour which brought together the most prestigious and respected representatives of the rural world, giving them no real power to intervene on decisive questions. The importance that the RNS leaders attached to external forms of glorifying the peasantry was particularly evident in the annual harvest festival that took place on the Bückeberg in late autumn, amidst great pomp and a good deal of propaganda. The mountain was near the small town of Goslar, which Darré chose as the headquarters for the peasant apparatus and named Reichsbauernstadt thanks to its central geographic position and its important reminders of the Imperial age. During this festival – as photographic and film documents show – every available iconographic means and the presence of the

Führer himself were used to exalt the central role of the peasantry in the Third Reich. Because of a chance circumstance (a livestock epidemic) and general policies (the decline of Darré's star and of agricultural policy in general in the regime's scale of priorities), this traditional event was cancelled in 1938 and never held again. A letter from Darré to Hitler, warmly inviting him to speak in some way at the festival to thank the peasants for their efforts and to encourage them further, shows the importance that the Reichsbauernführer attached to these gratifying and acclamatory events.²⁸

The following significant facts emerge from a comparison of the leadership structure in the RNS and in the Ministry. Personal links between the RNS and the Ministry were very close, and the same can be said of those between the AA and the party. The leading positions in all three organisations were held by National Socialists. A sociological profile of the intermediate cadres is more difficult to draw, partly because of the lack of appropriate sources. It would seem to be the case, however, that many 'technicians' with different political allegiances, drawn through loyalty to their kind and the possibility of working with a large degree of individual initiative, joined forces to work in the RNS, leaving other existing organisations in the sector. Moreover, the National Socialists needed trained technicians to manage the difficulties involved in the policy of *Marktordnung*. Wilmowsky's bitter comment in a letter of 30 December to his father-in-law, Krupp, that 'no one who had previously been active in the sector of agrarian policy has the slightest power today'²⁹ would basically appear to be justified. It may be said, therefore, that the policies drafted both by the RNS and the Ministry were made by party members who held key power positions despite the fact that there was often interpersonal friction and conflicts over the areas of competence of the two organisations.³⁰

It should also be borne in mind that the RNS was a political body of considerable importance in the Third Reich: the expansionistic tendencies inherent in the initial programme to regulate and manage the agricultural sector and all the ancillary activities clashed with similar tendencies typical of the 'polycracy' in force in the National Socialist constitutional system.³¹ The deep-seated conflict between the RNS and other 'separate bodies' cannot be interpreted simply as the expression of a contradiction in principle between a traditional corporation and the atypical National Socialist mass organisations, even if Darré's ideology and the new ruling class dominating the RNS were very closely linked to the independent ruralistic tradition of the peasantry. Nor, to my mind, is it possible

to try to distinguish between pacific representative agricultural organisations, interested only in establishing a power base, and a militaristic and aggressive regime seeking to impose its own perverse objectives by defeating the 'green' utopia of the RNS.³²

In this sense Darré's declarations on 25 January 1939 to the commission on NSDAP economic policy appear to be highly significant: 'The RNS and the food policy, which we have realised through this tool since 1933, was aimed at saving the German people from fate [that of economic suffocation] and providing the Führer with the indispensable respite, no matter what the cost, to guarantee the necessary war preparations for the country.'³³

Even the title of the RNS casts light on the relationship between the organisation created by the National Socialists and the existing organisations in the sector: there is no reference to farmers as a class or social group, but the emphasis is on a concern with food supplying in general.

But before examining in greater detail the role that Darré sought to create for the corporation within the Third Reich, a brief reminder is required of the internal organisation of the RNS and how it grew.³⁴ I have already mentioned that a substantial number of decrees were required to define the nature and extent of the authority of the RNS. The first decree of 8 December defined the internal organisation and sanctioned the principle making the RNS the direct and legitimate heir of existing *Selbstverwaltung* bodies which were abolished and had their property confiscated. Even earlier, in a circular of 10 July, Darré had managed to have sanctioned that no regional government could interfere with the corporative rebuilding of agriculture which was to be carried out only by his own Ministry.³⁵

A decree of 15 January 1934 went into specific details concerning the absorption of co-operatives and rural banks. The subsequent decrees of 16 February and 6 July established which commercial categories were to be incorporated in the RNS. A fifth decree of 4 February 1934 established the Reichsbauernführer's powers to control and appoint within the internal bodies of the RNS. A decree of 13 September 1934 established the obligatory membership fee of a two-thousandth of the turnover to be paid annually by all firms and businesses in the corporative organisation. But it was only with a decree of 24 April 1936 that the parameters for payment of the obligatory subscription were established for wage earners. A decree of 8 June 1935 defined the powers of the RNS, which were based on administrative sanctions that it could inflict on transgressors of the laws and decrees pertaining to the sphere of agricul-

tural production. Finally, the complex constituent phase came to a close with a decree of 14 September 1936 that fixed the wages and salaries for RNS employees.³⁶

The Bauernführer at all levels, local, district, regional or national, was a purely honorary post with a suitable expense account. This further refinement – in Darré's view – was intended to emphasise the corporative nature of the RNS and underline its independence from the party, as well as from the state apparatus.³⁷ According to the figures presented by the Reichsbauernführer at the sixth annual convention in November 1938, the RNS consisted of 20,800 paid officials, plus an unstipulated number of honorary posts and almost ten million members (including family members). In a letter to Göring of 2 June 1938, Darré provided the following, more detailed figures: 57,410 honorary posts, 16,227 paid officials and 17,349 employees as part of the four-year plan. Given that the letter's purpose was to defend the RNS from accusations of having an overabundant staff, we may assume that these figures were rounded down.³⁸ The cost for the whole apparatus rose from RM56 million in 1933/34 to over RM70 million in 1938/39.

Starting from the aforementioned series of decrees, a powerful apparatus was consolidated. This was done according to the *Führerprinzip*, which meant that bosses at various levels were appointed or co-opted from above. During his trial after the war, Darré maintained that he had intended gradually to change the system of appointments from co-opting to the free choices of rank-and-file members, but that his proposal had been blocked by Hitler. In fact there is no documentary evidence to back up these claims. On the contrary, RNS leaders praised the validity of the *Führerprinzip* on all public occasions.³⁹ As Reichsbauernführer, Darré was at the top of the pyramid and his powers were practically unlimited. His deputy was Reichsobmann Wilhelm Meinberg, who was given special powers over the *bäuerliche Selbstverwaltung*; by this term was meant the honorary bodies that were headed by the Reichsbauernrat with similar figures at a local level. The latter was an advisory body made up of farmers, chosen because they were representative, to 'protect' and 'preserve' – but without any real power – the honour of the profession.

From the point of view of the working of the apparatus, the Stabsamt and the Verwaltungsamt were much more important; the former was the real political nerve-centre of the RNS. Divided into numerous sections which covered the whole range of activities and relations with the party, the state, the SS, etc., the Stabsamt served as a centre for making the policies which the RNS was later to

implement. The administrative office was subdivided into sections that were usually for administration and accounts, and into four Hauptabteilungen, whose task was to concern themselves with ideological training (the office known as 'Der Mensch'), the peasant economy ('Das Hof'), the organisation of the market ('Der Markt') and the co-operatives. The latter was abolished, however, during 1934 and incorporated into the third department. These offices were executive organs for high-level decisions and were developed with the help of the Stabsamt. The three administrative sections and the four main departments of the Stabsamt all had local offices. The base of this pyramid, which was to consist of offices throughout the whole of rural society, was made up of 515 Kreisbauernschaften and as many as 55,000 Ortsbauernschaften. It can be said, therefore, that the RNS was present in every German village and town.⁴⁰

Darré had an aggressive and expansionist approach to the RNS right from the start, considering it as a pressure 'union' which should be as strong as possible. This, together with the organicist tendency implicit in his thought,⁴¹ meant that, especially in the early years, the RNS was involved in a long, hard struggle with other mass organisations of the regime to determine their reciprocal areas of competence. A first level of criticism that Darré had to fight off concerned the quality of RNS personnel. These were mainly covert or indirect criticisms which clearly emerge from Darré's self-defence; on several occasions he admitted that the Bauernführer were not of the highest standard. But they were – in his words – 'Frontschweine', cannon-fodder, or rather solid, disciplined, committed and simple soldiers always ready for action; and according to Darré the pre-1933 liberal political class could in no wise be described in these terms.⁴²

In the early stages we can say that the RNS took the initiative, especially concerning the incorporation of craft and sales sectors linked to the world of food and agricultural products. Darré's arguments in justifying the extension of RNS areas of competence moved on two planes: on one hand, the RNS must keep its capacity for planning, right down to the retail sales of agricultural products and their derivatives, and on the other hand, the peasantry should not be broken up in any way that would weaken its organic unity.

One cause of friction was whether or not craft and industrial producers should belong to the RNS; whereas, at least in the early stages of conflict, the Minister of Economics, Kurt Schmitt, and the Reichsführer des Handels, Adrian von Renteln, when faced with the RNS's aggressive policy, tended to try and come to some

kind of agreement, the numerous archival sources available clearly show Darré's continuous refusal to compromise the independence of his 'union'. The RNS almost immediately broke the interministerial agreement of 2 November 1934 which called for a truce.⁴³ In the end they agreed on double membership: a firm dealing in foodstuffs had to answer to the RNS for all problems pertaining to the market, but to the Reichsgruppe Industrie for all other aspects of their business.⁴⁴

But the agreement, signed by the two ministers, raised a chorus of protest from the firms involved. They did not wish to be subject to a costly double subscription and pointed out the many misunderstandings that this double membership would be liable to create.⁴⁵

The debate in the commercial sector was much more complex. It was made up of many small firms and mixed sales points in which the share of agricultural products sold varied greatly in the individual turnovers for each firm. Von Renteln, who was responsible for the corporative restructuring of the economy along the lines of the existing Industrial and Agricultural Chambers, fought to keep the sector united.⁴⁶ In the end, however, he had to give in, despite the support he had received from the Minister, Schmitt. On 15 May 1934 the professional unions of wholesale and retail traders for horticultural and food products (with the exception of businesses which sold mainly colonial products) were definitively incorporated into the RNS.⁴⁷ But – as the considerable correspondence between the various parties concerned shows – the issue could not be settled finally until at least the end of the year. In its 'expansionistic' campaign, the RNS did not hesitate to use the same unscrupulous methods (slandering personal attacks, trumped-up controversies and demagogic appeals) that the AA had used in the years of its electoral successes.⁴⁸

Basically it can be said that the RNS succeeded in its aim of extending its sphere of influence to the detriment of those middle-class sectors which the regime had already left to their own devices.⁴⁹

The conflict with other more solid and more aggressive mass organisations was much tougher. On two occasions Darré had even proposed – albeit timidly – to extend the RNS corporative model to other production sectors, stressing its exemplary viability. At the same time, however, he was at pains to point out that the RNS should not be considered the first step towards a general corporative reorganisation of the German economy.⁵⁰ His proposal was met with a cold, if not hostile, response from indus-

trial circles: Hjalmar Schacht, the Minister of Economics at the time, took a significant stand in a speech given in Leipzig on 4 March 1935: the 'absurd idea' of an industrial *Erbhof*, or rather the restricting of industry's potential in a rigid corporative corset, was definitely to be rejected given that industry was based on freedom of initiative and the responsibility of the individual entrepreneur.⁵¹

Previously, on 13 September 1933, in the heat of an interministerial debate on the RNS bill, Hitler's economic adviser, Keppler, was called upon to reject Darré's line of reasoning. Keppler claimed that the differences between agriculture and industry were so great that extending the corporative model guided from above would only have the undesirable consequence of weakening the entrepreneurial spirit.⁵² Similar arguments were put forward in an editorial of November 1934 in the authoritative industrial review *Der deutsche Volkswirt*. Taking issue with a recent stand made by Ferdinand Fried, one of Darré's main ideological advisers, it maintained that industry was so different from agriculture that it had no need whatsoever of rigid planning.⁵³

Leaving aside the question of the RNS's relationships with industry, which we will examine more thoroughly in another chapter, we shall now consider the main 'fronts' of conflict on which the RNS had to fight to maintain and possibly extend its sphere of influence. Even its position with respect to the NSDAP was at times ambiguous, despite the fact that the RNS was firmly controlled by National Socialists. Applying to the letter the original NSDAP dictates on how the movement was supposed to dissolve itself in the state,⁵⁴ Darré practically neutralised the party AA which had so brilliantly supported him during the previous three years. By centralising the politico-ideological management of the agrarian policy in the Stabsamt of the RNS, he left the party apparatus with a desultory supporting role,⁵⁵ and only in 1938, after it had been renamed the Reichsamt für Agrarpolitik, did he reconsider the problem of the kind of function it should serve. On this occasion he reiterated the political supremacy of the Stabsamt, and suggested that the party office should confine its activities to working out the *Blut und Boden* ideology which the RNS and state should implement jointly.⁵⁶

Marking the end of Darré's brief political career, it was Backe, his successor, who once more attributed a fundamental political role to the Reichsamt, especially with a view to the preparations for war. A decree of 30 May 1942 abolished the first section of the RNS which was supposed to deal with ideological issues, integrating it into the Reichsamt.⁵⁷ This move, which was emblematic of the

definite politico-ideological differences between the two leaders of the agrarian sector, should not, to my mind, be unduly stressed and used to prove Darré's independence from the party on one hand and his successor's complete alignment with National Socialist orthodoxy on the other: by then there was a profoundly different economic background and the certain consciousness that the RNS had failed to mobilise the rural population and keep it united.

The conflict with the Gauleiter, to whom Hitler had given a great deal of independence, was particularly acrimonious: the clash was fuelled by friction over areas of competence as well as over differing ideas on the contents of the agrarian policy implemented by Darré. Many Gauleiter, considering themselves the indisputable and absolute leaders of their regions, attempted either to subject the local office of the RNS to their own will, giving rise to internal scissions, or to create their own party offices, which were supposed to deal with agricultural problems.

Among the fiercest opponents of the independence of the RNS were Gauleiter Koch (East Prussia), Karpenstein (Pomerania),⁵⁸ Kube (Brandenburg), Bürckel (Saarland), Terboven (Rhineland) and Telschow (East Hanover). They tried to impose their own rule on all the party or para-party organisations within their provinces.

Openly undermining RNS public initiatives, the Gauleiter issued decrees contradicting those of the agrarian apparatus, even going as far as to denounce the presence of 'anti-party' groups, who found shelter and support in the RNS.⁵⁹ They reproached the RNS not only with wishing to defend its independence of action but also with wishing to assume political responsibilities which, according to them, were the duties of the party alone.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the provincial leaders of the party were generally very critical of Darré, and considered his policy a failure which harmed both the producer and the consumer. Darré reacted very strongly to these attacks, reiterating that the RNS depended directly on the Führer. It was a *Reichsangelegenheit*, and the demands of the party could in no way interfere with it.⁶¹

The Gauleiter not only criticised at a regional level, but on two occasions gave vent to collective criticism: in the plenary conference of provincial leaders of the party on 14 July 1934 and in the conference of leading National Socialist political cadres in December of the same year.⁶² The criticisms put forward concerning Darré, an authentic motion of no confidence, were dismissed, partly due to the direct intervention of Hitler. Darré had appealed to the Führer – it was normal practice for certain procedures in the Third Reich – urgently requesting him to come to his defence.⁶³

But the conflict continued and was not even settled by a decree issued by Hess on 9 January 1935 which forbade all party organisations from interfering in any way with the activities of the RNS. The decree stressed the need for closer and more harmonious co-operation between the party and the agrarian apparatus, but gave the former theoretical supremacy. From then onwards the appointments at all levels of the RNS were to be approved by the Gauleiter concerned. According to Hess's decision, the RNS should maintain its independence, but only as a professional organisation in the sector. Darré's aspirations suffered a severe setback. In March of the same year, in a letter to Hess, he again complained of being judged as a 'second-class National Socialist'.⁶⁴ But the conflicts with the regional bodies went on: in the summer of 1938, for example, Darré had to fight off the Gauleiter of the Saarland and Schleswig-Holstein, Bürckel and Lohse, who proposed setting up an agrarian apparatus that was completely independent of the RNS.⁶⁵

It is interesting to note, however, that along with the friction over competence and power some conflicts were often of a practical nature. Firstly, many Gauleiter were hostile to, or openly criticised, the policies implemented by Darré and his assistants. They claimed that such policies were an ineffectual way of achieving their goal of providing consumers with low-price foodstuffs. In this sense the Gauleiter were the mouthpiece of widespread dissatisfaction which was building up in the population, especially in the two years 1934 and 1935.⁶⁶ Hostile NSDAP political cadres, who did not wish to lose public consensus, joined forces with Schacht, who bitterly attacked Darré's policies. The Minister of Economics maintained that they were too concerned with unilaterally satisfying farmers' demands and that they neglected the country's general economic situation.⁶⁷

A second serious cause for dissent was the impatience of many Gauleiter, especially in the East Elbian provinces, with the caution exercised by Darré in tackling the problem of settlement, or the granting of holdings to the landless. This theme will be dealt with in a later chapter.

The conflict between the RNS and the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF) founded by Robert Ley, who was also head of the party's Politische Organisation, was also over the stubborn defence of areas of competence.⁶⁸ Ley's objective was to unite all workers in his organisation no matter what productive sector they belonged to, and he had been supported in this by a decree issued by Hitler on 24 October 1934.

The friction with the RNS over competence concerning farm wage earners was inevitable, especially since the DAF had an economic, if not downright classist, vision of social relations: in fact the DAF had been created to win over the German working class, which at a political and union level boasted solid traditions of class struggle. Darré had a completely different approach to the problem of employers and employees: he conceived of the farm as an organic unit, as a community governed by interpersonal relations, rather than by relations of work and wages. The RNS should accord priority, therefore, to creating a 'relationship of trust' between the *Betriebsführer* and the *Gefolgschaft*, to use the non-classist vocabulary in vogue at the time.⁶⁹

A study made by Ley's organisation brusquely dismissed the views of the RNS ideologues, in so far as they were based on the expectation, considered unrealistic by the DAF, of substantially increasing the chances of improving the social standing of wage earners by means of settlement. According to the authors of the report, priority should be given to a 'general reorganisation of wage conditions and remuneration in all sectors'.⁷⁰ The Minister of Agriculture relied above all on the enthusiastic volunteering of German youth, which was to take on the work of labouring in country areas, thus offering a remedy to the increasingly serious emigration from the land. Therefore the DAF approach to the problem of farm labouring, based on wages and social conflict, must have been a complete anathema. Furthermore, it should be remembered that the RNS was definitely conditioned by the interests of the farmers in holding down wages. And the RNS (especially bearing in mind the background of its leaders) intended to give priority to these interests.⁷¹

Evidence of the growing tension between the two organisations comes from, among other sources, the reports sent by the various *Landesbauernschaften* (LBS) and central inspectors at the end of 1934 and the beginning of 1935, especially in the regions with a high concentration of wage earners, like Mecklenburg and Brandenburg.⁷² Friction was only partially attenuated by the leadership agreement drawn up in October 1935, which had been preceded by similar agreements at a regional level.⁷³ The agreement seemed to give supremacy to the DAF, in that the RNS section dealing with wage earners and their working conditions ended up being subject to the organisation led by Ley. But in fact the agreement did not eliminate the real causes of the conflict and the RNS remained an interclass body, based on the principle of corporative complementarity between the various social subjects living in the country. If

anything, given the growing problem of the lack of labour, the disagreement between the RNS and DAF worsened. It came to a head when Ley actually attempted to eliminate the RNS in order to set up a mega-organisation involving all producers. Ley justified his proposal by bitterly attacking the RNS's inability to solve the serious social problems that were at the root of emigration from the land. He claimed that the RNS hid behind 'external' explanations which attributed emigration to wage differences and unfair competition from industry. Darré reacted strongly: he rebutted the charges, accusing the DAF of constantly trying to extend its own areas of competence. He also claimed that it was untrue to say that his organisation 'had done absolutely nothing up to now for the agricultural *Gefolgschaft*'.⁷⁴ But Ley's plan certainly did not fail only because of the opposition of the Minister of Agriculture.⁷⁵

The clashes provoked by the RNS with two particular mass organisations, the Hitler-Jugend and the NS-Frauenschaft, dealing with the sectors of youth and women respectively, ran a similar course. Darré's aspiration to exercise authority over all subjects active in agriculture was basically frustrated: the agreement of 26 February 1935, signed by Darré and Getrud Schlotz-Klink, head of the National Socialist women's organisation, entrusted the latter with the duty of protecting women peasants. The RNS would deal with them only in their role as economic subjects in the market. As far as young people were concerned, a law of 1 December 1936 formally gave the movement led by Baldur von Schirach authority over all young people whether they lived in the country or not.

Summing up, we see that Darré's political corporative plan, or rather his semi-corporative plan, was limited by the acute and complex state of conflict between the various mass organisations created during the Third Reich. On one hand, the RNS was bent on defending, as far as possible, the autonomy of the rural world and on giving it a central role. But on the other hand, it was subordinate to the general lines of political and economic evolution of the regime. The result was a kind of half-way measure: the corporation was too blatantly controlled by the National Socialist leadership to be able to satisfy fully the demands and frustration of a rural population shaken and defeated by the upheavals of the war and the post-war period. But at the same time – as we shall see more clearly in the following chapters – its partial independence prevented the regime from fully realising the general aims it wished to impose on the rural world.

Notes

1. Darré, *Neuadel, aus Blut und Boden*, Munich, 1930, p. 114.

2. Darré explicitly acknowledged this debt in his introduction to F. Bülow, *Gustav Ruhland*, Berlin, 1936. H. J. Puhle seems to go too far, however, in *Politische Agrarbewegungen in Kapitalistischen Industriegesellschaften*, Göttingen, 1975, p. 77, where he claims to establish a line of perfect continuity between the organisations during the Wilhelminian period and the RNS, classifying them both under the rather general category of 'prefascism'.

3. On corporative ideas in the Catholic world, cf. A. Barmeyer, *Andreas Hermes und die Organisationen der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Stuttgart, 1971, and more generally, W. Hock, *Der deutsche Antikapitalismus*, Frankfurt, 1960.

4. Cf. T. Nipperdey's classic study, *Interessenverbände und Parteien in Deutschland vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, first published in 1961 and most recently in T. Nipperdey, *Gesellschaft, Theorie, Kultur*, Göttingen, 1976.

5. Cf. W. Facius, *Wirtschaft und Staat: Die Entwicklung der staatlichen Wirtschaftsverwaltung in Deutschland*, Boppard, 1959.

6. For the contemporary debate on corporatism as a solution to the economic crisis, cf. A. Barkai, *Das Wirtschaftssystem des Nationalsozialismus*, Cologne, 1977, pp. 59–87 (English-language edn, *The Nazi Economy: Ideology, Theory and Policy 1933–1945*, Oxford, 1990); C. D. Krohn, 'Autoritärer Kapitalismus: Wirtschaftskonzeptionen im Übergang von der Weimarer Republik zum Nationalsozialismus', in D. Stegmann, B. J. Wendt and P. C. Witt (eds.), *Industrielle Gesellschaft und politisches System*, Bonn–Bad Godesberg, 1978, pp. 113–29.

7. Cf. E. Topf, *Die Grüne Front: Der Kampf um den deutschen Acker*, Berlin, 1933.

8. In their report on the causes of the agrarian crisis and possible solutions, the League of Nations experts stressed that the grouping together of producers into solid sectoral organisations (syndicates) under the aegis of the state would provide the best basis for overcoming the crisis: Société des Nations, Comité Economique, *La crise agricole*, Geneva, 1931, vol. 1, p. 63.

9. Cf. H. A. Winkler, 'Unternehmerverbände zwischen Ständeideologie und Nationalsozialismus', *VZG*, vol. 17, 1969, pp. 341–71. In May 1933 a draft corporative reform of the economy, drawn up by Otto Most from the Niederrheinische Industrie und Handelskammer, went round Rhineland business circles close to Paul Reusch. The plan, greeted favourably by Reusch and his colleagues, included the idea of a single large corporative body which would unite all sectors of the economy: GHH-HA, vol. 40010123/30a.

10. DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1861. On 10 May Papen also presented a very schematic draft for a general corporative reform, giving the maximum freedom to economic actors and a 'supervisory' role to the state: *ibid.*

11. From a letter sent to Rohr from the board of the Stahlhelm on 23 March, it emerges that the paramilitary organisation was directly involved in attempting a corporative reorganisation of the economy. For this purpose it had established contacts with the Reichslandarbeiter Verband to create a joint body that would include both employers and wage earners, based on the usual Pomeranian model. Nothing more was heard about this project, which was intended to be in open competition with National Socialist schemes: DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1861.

12. Letter from F. C. von Savigny to Rohr, 20 April 1933: *ibid.* The proceedings of the commission chaired by Min. Rat Pohl are contained in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 2052.

13. The proposal by the Rheinischer Bauernbund (30 April 1933) is in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 2052, and the project by F. von Lüninck, who took over from Hermes at the head of the Catholics' Bauernvereine, is in BA, R vol. 99. See also the memo sent to Rohr in March, presumably by the Landarbeiterverband, aimed at overcoming the state of social conflict. The authors asked that the RLB promote a constituent

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assembly to create a new corporative set-up: DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1861.

14. It had been founded in 1926: cf. R. Berndt, 'Agrarkonservatismus und Faschismus', *WZU Halle*, vol. 31, 1982, pp. 95–9.

15. For example, in a letter sent to Hugenberg on 8 April (DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1861), the Minister of Internal Affairs disapproved of Rohr's initiative, maintaining that corporative reforms of agriculture should be part of a more general reform of the economy.

16. On this subject see the circular of 11 April sent by Darré to all LBF ordering them not to waste time discussing general plans for the overall reorganisation of agriculture. Priority should be given to infiltrating and taking over all the top positions in organisations in the sector: SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 140.

17. RLB press agency despatch, 21 April. See Rohr's deeply felt reaction in a circular of 24 April, sent to all the local sections of the RLB, in which the Secretary of State forbade the RLB to monopolise discussion on this topic: DZAP, 36.01, vol. 2052.

18. The article entitled 'Der Reichsbauernstand', in K. Vorwerck (ed.), *Die berufsständische Wirtschafts- und Sozialordnung*, Berlin, 1933, pp. 53–7.

19. According to the aforementioned circular of 24 April, which summarised the main points of the survey, its value was that it attempted to establish points of contact between corporative ideas and the National Socialist ideology: DZAP, 36.01, vol. 2052. Of similar tone was the letter sent by Rohr to the members of the DNVP parliamentary group on 8 May: he described the Arbeitsgemeinschaft projects as an attempt to combine the Pomeranian Landbund positions and the more state-centred conceptions of the National Socialists: BA, R 53, vol. 99.

20. Cf. H. Gies, 'Der Reichsnährstand: Organ berufsständischer Selbstverwaltung oder Instrument staatlicher Wirtschaftslenkung?', *ZAGAS*, vol. 21, 1973, pp. 216–33. Gies even uses the term 'zero hour' to describe the climate of expectation in rural organisations in favour of Darré's programmes.

21. According to a post-war declaration made by Hermann Reischle, as early as 1932 he had discussed guidelines for a single corporative organisation of agriculture with Darré: DZAP, 99 US 7, Vol. 557, p. 31.

22. In Rgbl., pp. 495 and 626 respectively.

23. BA, R 43 I, vol. 1464 and R 53, vol. 25 for the comments of the advisers to Vice-Chancellor Papen. Objections of a different nature were put forward – at least according to a survey carried out by Min. Dir. Koehler – by other ministries which were either jealous of Darré's increasing power (like the Ministry of Labour) or, in principle, against the creation of new bureaucratic monsters outside state institutions (like the Ministry of Justice). The report of 13 July is in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 2052.

24. Cf. H. Gies, 'Die Rolle des Reichsnährstandes im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem', in G. Hirschfeld and L. Kettenhacker (eds.), *Der 'Führerstaat': Mythos und Realität*, Stuttgart, 1981, pp. 273f. I. Eisenwein-Rothe expresses a similar opinion in *Die Wirtschaftsverbände 1933–1945*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 20f.

25. According to H. Reischle, one of Darré's chief assistants, the RNS was the "expression of the purest corporatism, but it did not merely defend sectoral interests": H. Reischle, *Die deutsche Ernährungswirtschaft*, Berlin, 1935, p. 11.

26. See, in particular, Darré's own defence during the so-called 'Wilhelmstraße trial', when he appeared before a military tribunal to answer to serious charges of complicity with the leaders of the Third Reich: DZAP, 99 US 7, Vol. 167. See also statements in similar tone made by his assistants, von Zeppelin, von Rheden and Meinberg: *ibid.*, vols 546, 547 and 553. Some sections of the RNS were even kept in function by the occupying powers for a few years after 1945.

27. O. Nathan, *The Nazi Economic System: Germany's Mobilization for War*, Durham, 1944, p. 91.

28. See Darré's letter to Hitler, 15 November 1938, in DZAP 06.01, vol. 315/1.

29. For an initial survey of the degree of continuity in the management personnel

in the RNS, see H. Gies, 'Revolution der Kontinuität: Die personelle Struktur des Reichsnährstandes', in G. Franz (ed.), *Bauernschaft und Bauernstand 1500-1970*, Limburg, 1975, pp. 323-30. Wilmowsky's letter is in FAH, E IV, vol. 23/509.

30. Cf. Gies, 'Rolle des Reichsnährstandes', pp. 275f.; Gies, 'Konfliktregelung im Reichsnährstand: der Westfalen-Streit und die Meinberg-Revolte', ZAGAS, vol. 30, 1982, pp. 176-204. But D. Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party, 1933-1945*, Pittsburgh, vol. 2, 1973, p. 37, claims (without conclusive proof) that the driving force in this triad was the Ministry.

31. The bibliography on the question of whether Hitler's dictatorship was centralised or 'polycratic' is unending, but see, in particular, the reviews by M. Funke, 'Führer-Prinzip und Kompetenz-Anarchie im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem', NPL, vol. 20, 1975, p. 66, and T. Mason, 'Intention and Explanation: A Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism', in Hirschfeld and Kettenacker, 'Führerstaat', pp. 23ff., as well as the essay by P. Hüttenberger, 'Nationalsozialistische Polykratie', GG, vol. 2, 1976, p. 417. The thesis of the essentially chaotic and polycentric nature of the regime finds its most radical expression in H. Mommsen, 'Hitlers Stellung im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem', in Hirschfeld and Kettenacker, 'Führerstaat', pp. 43-71.

32. The main advocate of the 'revisionist' interpretation, which considers the RNS and Darré's political project to be completely independent of the regime, is A. C. Bramwell, 'National Socialist Agrarian Theory and Practice: with special reference to Darré and the Settlement Movement', Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford, 1982. But see also K. Verhey, 'Der Bauernstand und der Mythos von Blut und Boden im Nationalsozialismus', Dissertation, Göttingen, 1966.

33. R. W. Darré, *Um Blut und Boden: Reden und Aufsätze*, Munich, 1940, p. 514.

34. Cf. the contemporary manual by H. Reischle and W. Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau des Reichsnährstandes*, Berlin, 1934.

35. Rgbl., p. 1060. The circular is in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 2052. In this case, too, it is clear that the political initiative was in the hands of government office and did not come from grass-roots pressure.

36. For a description of the numerous legislative measures, cf. W. Tornow, *Chronik der Agrarpolitik und Agrarwirtschaft des Deutschen Reiches*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1972, p. 32.

37. According to one National Socialist commentator, a sign of RNS independence was the fact that at all levels the management included farmers in honorary positions: M. Busse, 'Die Neugestaltung des Bauern- und Bodenrechts und der Aufbau des Reichsnährstandes', in K. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1939, pp. 219-239.

38. BA, R 43 II, vol. 202a.

39. Darré's statement in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 181, p. 59.

40. For the internal structure of the RNS, see Reischle and Saure, *Aufgaben und Aufbau*; W. Herfehrt, 'Der faschistische Reichsnährstand und die Stellung seiner Funktionäre im Bonner Staat', ZfG, vol. 10, 1962, pp. 1046-76; and J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-1945*, London-Beverly Hills, 1976, pp. 71-86.

41. See, in particular, Darré's press conference on 18 September 1933, presenting the second constituent law for the RNS: on this occasion he claimed that this was the only possible way of competing with existing representative organisations in other sectors: WTB despatch in BA, R 43 II, vol. 193.

42. Cf. Darré, *Aufbruch des Bauerntums: Reden auf den Reichsbauerntagen*, Berlin, 1942, pp. 30-65: 'This corps of leaders is perhaps not a parade troop.' See also the interview in VB, 23 January 1936, where Darré justifies these shortcomings on grounds of the short time his organisation had existed.

43. DZAP, 36.01, Vol. 1806.

44. An agreement of 15 January concerning bread, oil and cake manufacturers,

and of 7 February for the sugar, beer and milling industries: DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1729.

45. Cf. DZAP, 31.01, vol. 9044. It is interesting to note the total impotence of the Ministry of Economics. The ambiguous nature of the constituent law meant that Darré had wide-ranging and ill-defined powers. In January 1935 the RDI sent the new Minister, Schacht, a detailed report of all the serious problems caused by the RNS' authority over many industrial firms. They asked for a reduction in the Bauernführer's powers of intervention, but their request was ignored. Ibid.

46. V. Renteln to the Ministry of Agriculture, 6 March 1934, in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1729.

47. Ibid., vol. 1784.

48. See the bitter complaints in the letter sent by Schmitt to Darré on 28 June 1934, in DZAP, 31.01, vol. 1729. In the letter he asked for a 'truce' to be established between the two organisations.

49. In general, see H. A. Winkler, 'Der entbehrliche Stand: Zur Mittelstandspolitik im Dritten Reich', *AfS*, vol. 17, 1977; and A. von Saldern, *Mittelstand im 'Dritten Reich': Handwerker – Einzelhändler – Bauern*, Frankfurt–New York, 1979.

50. I am referring, in particular, to the lecture entitled 'Aufbau und Wesen des Reichsnährstandes', given by Darré when invited by the board of the RDI on the 11 January 1934, and first published in the *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft*, 19 January 1934. The lecture had been organised at Darré's request after he had approached Herle, the secretary of the RDI. See Herle's letter to Krupp of 21 December 1933 in FAH, E IV, vol. 220. In his brief introductory speech, Krupp made only passing mention of the fact that, from an organisational point of view, the RNS experience might be of interest to other sectors of the economy: FAH, E IV, vol. 206.

51. H. Schacht, 'Deutschland in der Weltwirtschaft', a speech given in Munich on 17 December 1935, p. 27. In general, for moves by Darré and the RDI to re-establish dialogue, which in the previous years had almost become non-existent, cf. the proceedings in FAH, IV E, vol. 206.

52. Minutes of the meeting, compiled by Sabath from the office of Papen's economic advisers, in BA, R 53, vol. 25.

53. It emerges from industrial sources that the RDI was keen to be on the best terms possible with this newspaper: cf. FAH, E IV, vol. 220, and Wilmowsky to Krupp, 18 November 1935, *ibid.*, vol. 23/510.

54. G. Feder, *Das Programm der NSDAP*, Munich, 1938, p. 8, and Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Munich, 1939, pp. 672ff.

55. Letter from Darré to Hitler in which he proposed making the party apparatus a filter for all requests from local offices to the Ministry of Agriculture: BA, NI Darré, vol. AD 29.

56. Cf. the circular of 10 January 1938, issued by Darré as head of the Reichsamts, in BA, NS 35, vol. 2.

57. Gies, 'Rolle des Reichsnährstandes', p. 300.

58. The rivalry between Darré and Karpenstein went back a long way and was connected to the latter's close links with Darré's enemy Rohr, an authoritative political presence in the province. Cf. von Friederich-Quitzerow to Darré, 13 February 1932, in BA, NS 22, vol. 360. The Gauleiter was eliminated in June 1934 as he was too close to the leaders of the Schutzabteilungen.

59. For a more thorough study of these conflicts, see the following documents: the clash with Karpenstein, BA, R 43, vol. 2053 (June 1934); the clash with Koch, BA, R 43 I, vol. 1860 (March–April 1934), as well as R 16 I, vols 2116 and 2141 and R 43 II, vol. 207 (April–May 1934). One of the arguments used by Koch to get the upper hand over Darré was that the latter was not an 'old National Socialist'.

60. On 30 June 1934, therefore, the district leaders of the NSDAP in Cammin, Pomerania, instructed its members to supervise all events organised by the RNS and to interrupt them whenever they departed from the specific field of economics to

deal with political questions: BA, R 16 I, vol. 2141.

61. Internal RNS circular of 20 June 1934 concerning the clash over areas of competence with Karpenstein: BA, R 16 I, vol. 2053.

62. Cf. Meinberg's statement under oath in the trial against his Minister in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 553, pp. 21f., and Darré's entry in his diary on 14 July in SA Goslar. A. Schweitzer, *Big Business in the Third Reich*, Bloomington, 1964, p. 269, tells of a third top-level clash in August 1936 in which the provincial leaders were backed by Schacht.

63. Cf. his letter to the Chancellery of 27 April 1934 (BA, NI Darré II, vol. AD 24), in which he comments that the Gauleiters' attacks received indirect support from the Führer's apparent loss of confidence in his Minister. For a general view of the decision-making structure in the Third Reich and of the role of provincial party leaders, cf. P. Diehl-Thiele, *Partei und Staat im Dritten Reich*, 2nd edn, Munich, 1971, pp. 44ff.

64. Quoted in J. Petzold, *Die Demagogie des Hitler-Faschismus*, Berlin, 1982, p. 413.

65. Cf. BA, R 43 II, vol. 194.

66. Questions concerning the difficulties and shortcomings of the battle for production will be dealt with in Chapter 8.

67. Cf. Bormann's circular to all Gauleiters of 8 January 1936, inviting them not to make public their grievances over Darré's policy to avoid giving the foreign press fodder for provocation: BA, NS 22, vol. 850.

68. On the subject of the DAF see T. Mason, *Sozialpolitik im Dritten Reich*, 2nd edn, Opladen, 1978; R. Smelser, *Robert Ley: Hitler's Labor Front Leader*, Oxford-New York, 1988, pp. 160f., 183.

69. Cf. the interview published in *Niedersächsische Tageszeitung*, 17 November 1935.

70. *Die Landarbeiterfrage: Soziologische und lohnpolitische Untersuchung*, Berlin, 1939.

71. Cf. the Hessian RNS report, 8 November 1934, in DZAP, 36.03, vol. 116, as well as a memo on the mood of the peasants, drafted in summer 1934, *ibid.*, vol. 58.

72. Cf. BA, R 16 I, vol. 2116, and DZAP, 36.03, vols 59 and 60.

73. The text of the agreement and the related preliminary correspondence are in BA, R 16, vols 2053 and 2059. Local agreements had been signed in Saxony-Anhalt on 27 June 1934 and in Halle-Merseburg on 3 January 1935.

74. Letter from Darré to Göring of 3 March 1938 and the transcription of a telephone call of 15 February in BA, NS 10, vol. 35; letter from Darré to Hess of 20 May (*ibid.*, vol. 65); Gies, 'Rolle des Reichsnährstandes', pp. 281f.; and BA, R 43 II, vol. 194. From a note of 14 February 1938 in Darré's diaries, it emerges that Ley intended to incorporate the more specifically ideological first section of the RNS into the DAF. The diaries, however, are not very reliable given that, at the behest of Frau Darré, they were edited and 'summarised' after Darré's death by Hans Deetjen, an assistant at the RNS. They are now kept in SA Goslar.

75. Mason, *Sozialpolitik*, pp. 257ff.

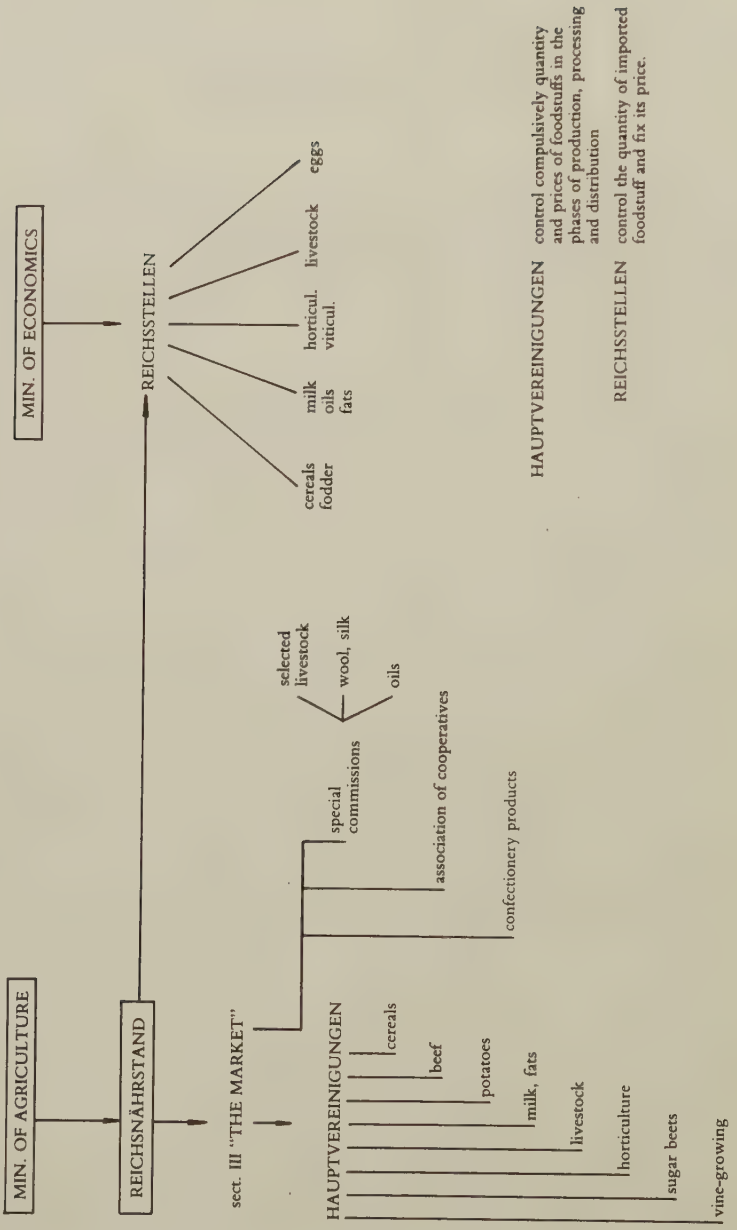
The *Marktordnung*

The *Marktordnung*, to which the present chapter is dedicated, was one of the most important fields of intervention for the RNS and a fundamental instrument used by the regime to implement its agrarian policy. This policy had to both meet the need to strengthen and balance farmers' incomes and maintain a flow of foodstuffs at acceptable consumer prices.

The National Socialist leaders believed the propaganda value of a centralised 'ordered' market to be one of the most significant and original aspects of National Socialist economic theory. It was the means of regulating the irrepressible, even desirable, private initiative within a planned framework whose main aim was to satisfy the general interest. In fact there is much evidence to indicate that private initiative in the sphere of decisions concerning production was in no way to be cramped or disturbed by forcefully imposing general interests. 'The *Marktordnung* is not a state economy. The state should not regulate the economy, but only give it the necessary stimuli.'¹ Or as Darré put it in a speech given at the third *Reichsbauerntag* in November 1935: 'The *Marktordnung* does not interfere with private initiative, but orders it within the common good.'² In the same speech, the Minister admitted, perhaps unwittingly, that the radical transformation in the organisation of the free market was not so much the product of a conscious theory, previously formulated by men like Gustav Ruhland or even Franz List, as the answer to particular circumstances simply provided by 'sound common sense'.

Moreover many of the measures taken by the National Socialist government simply followed in the footsteps of laws issued by the presidential governments in the early 1930s³ and by Hugenberg in his brief spell as Minister.⁴ And in general in most industrialised countries, now that agriculture had become a weak and delicate sector highly vulnerable to economic fluctuations, interventions in the market were often made to keep supply and demand under control.⁵ In a comprehensive comparative survey published in 1940, the economist Karl Schiller pointed out how the National Socialists' *Marktordnung* system stood out on the international scene

Figure 5.1 The *Marktordnung*



for its original and more systematic forms of intervention.⁶ Today historians generally agree on two points: the continuity of policies with the Weimar presidential governments and the international spread of the phenomenon of state intervention in the market for agricultural products. Two quotes may serve as examples. According to Gies, 'Even before the National Socialists were able directly to determine German agricultural policy, much of the work had already been done in establishing an agricultural economy directed and administered by the state.'⁷ Agreeing with this view, Kluge writes, 'The new methods of government in Germany did not have their roots in National Socialist ideology but developed out of a policy for organising the market whose origins go back to the presidential governments at the time of the depression.'⁸

The fact that intervention measures were being legislated for in many countries was stressed by lawyers and witnesses in defence of Darré in the so-called 'Wilhelmstraße trial'.⁹ It is clear that this position was blatantly instrumental, although it is true that one of the main reactions to the international crisis of the 1920s was state intervention in the economic sphere. Similarly, regime propaganda constantly played on the genuinely national-socialist inspiration of the *Marktordnung* legislation, presenting it as the successful synthesis of respect for the economic freedom of the individual and a defence of common interests.¹⁰ According to propaganda, it was a first decisive step in the direction of freeing the peasant, by nature more inclined to cultural and sentimental values,¹¹ from those 'iron laws of economics' which had brought him to the verge of extinction.¹² Finally, legislation to regulate the market was in the Minister's view a way of reducing the economic importance of the Jews.¹³

Although they were very cautious in using concepts like 'planning' or 'socialisation' and went to great lengths to stress the radical differences between the German and Soviet systems (the National Socialists claimed that the differences lay in the fact that they retained the concept of private property and did not intervene in the sphere of production),¹⁴ the National Socialist ideologues could not avoid placing the emphasis on the central role of the state and the pre-eminence of general interests over those of the individual.

It is no accident that the most significant and authoritative criticisms concerned this crucial point: from Max Sering who, in a speech at an international conference at Bad Eilsen in August 1934, warned that state intervention should not be allowed to spread too far, to Wilmowsky who, in a confidential report of the same

period,¹⁵ called for a return to a fully independent market. On the other side, as early as 1934 – that is before the introduction of the four-year plan tightening the state's hold – Konrad Meyer, one of the regime's most prominent agronomists, openly expressed the hope that the *Marktordnung* would also intervene in decisions concerning choices of crops and production, to exploit the maximum soil potential.¹⁶ A few years later the same agronomist clearly defined the *Marktordnung* system's alleged superiority/neutrality when compared to traditional concepts of 'liberty' and 'coercion', describing it as an 'organisation at the service of the whole population'.¹⁷ Thus even at a theoretical level the basis was laid for the subsequent increase in severity of the *Marktordnung* which was never able to stand completely outside of sectoral demands. At the same time this increase in severity led – as we shall see – to a gradual but clean-cut break in the whole of the National Socialist agrarian policy. Initially, the *Marktordnung* and its offices were presented as a more refined and powerful form of 'pressure group' whose purpose was to give more effective expression to the demands and interests of the producers. But later stagnant production and growing domestic food requirements imposed a policy which, making use of the same structures, primarily defended consumption levels and lowered the cost of food products for the public, to the detriment of the interests of farmers. This turnabout, although gradual, accompanied an equally gradual acceleration in production rates which took place after the implementation of the four-year plan. Assessing the situation in a completely different tone, K. Haushofer made a clear distinction between the National Socialists' systematic policy which aimed at containing possible overproduction and therefore was more concerned with the farmer and his work, and planning policies which, according to him, simply aimed at imposing increases in production.¹⁸

As has been said, the initial form of the *Marktordnung* did not depart greatly from traditional forms of *Interessenvertretung* policy, but made the most of them. Darré himself told the press that the organisation of the market now being realised was the only possible way that agriculture, the weakest sector of the economy, could compete with the growth of monopolies and trusts. Only by relying on sufficiently solid planning mechanisms could agriculture hope to resist the onslaught of industrialism.¹⁹ Pursuing this logic even further, Ferdinand Fried, one of Darré's chief assistants for ideological matters, went as far as to claim that there was a need to introduce similar mechanisms of organisation and socialisation in other sectors of production to smooth out the existing differences

in prices which were strictly controlled in agriculture but were free in industry and the services sector.²⁰ As we have seen, however, the RNS was unable to find a way of imposing its model on the other sectors of production. In fact the proposals put forward by its ideologues met with very negative reactions in the most important sectors of the economy. I need mention only two typical examples. In its monthly report for September 1933, the Deutsche Bank, after commenting positively on how the new measures of the agrarian policy had already yielded good results, demanded, however, that the freedom of entrepreneurs in other, completely different, sectors should in no way be impaired.²¹ In an article entitled 'Planwirtschaftliche Enklave' in the *Deutsche Führerbriefe* of 26 September, the negative comment was even blunter. After also expressing his satisfaction with the smooth working of the new legislation for the market, the writer recalled that it should only be a temporary measure that would later give way to free market forces. The columnist ended by openly declaring that a situation should not develop where 'against the general will this enclave of planned economy be allowed to intrude further into the private sector of the economy'. It is interesting to note the crude terminology in this anonymous contribution written for an influential paper close to big business.

But coming back to the initial aims of the *Marktordnung* policy, it must be pointed out that the main function of the first offices to be set up, the so-called Reichsstellen, was to control the flow of agricultural imports, fixing limits on the import of stock that might upset the balance of the market. These organisations had long been desired by producers: the state assumed the enormous burden of protecting domestic production and prices. As tariff protection was ineffective and harmful because of the negative international repercussions,²² the state bought up and stocked import quotas and put them on the market only when there was no danger of negative effects.

The other main structures set up by Darré for the *Marktordnung*, that is the compulsory unions of producers, were also initially presented as the pure expression of farmers' *Selbstverwaltung*, in keeping with the fiction that, as we have seen, characterised the RNS and the whole National Socialist apparatus responsible for agrarian policy.²³ But the legal-legislative basis for the whole of market organisation revealed the underlying ambiguity between centralisation and corporative autonomy: the fundamental legal tool was the law of 15 June 1933²⁴ which made provisions for the Ministries of Agriculture and Economics to set up cartels or com-

pulsory producers' unions. Incidentally, this outline law was only ever implemented in agriculture and not in other production sectors. Decrees subsequent to the institutional law for the RNS established wide discretionary powers for the Ministry to set up the managerial bureaucracy required to regulate the market.²⁵ The third and fourth decrees in particular, both of February 1934, further extended the area of RNS intervention, leaving the Ministry with only general supervisory powers. The responsibility for the sector was entrusted to the third section of the RNS, 'Der Markt', headed by Karl Vetter.

Apart from the legislative aspects, the details of the decision-making processes which led to this sweeping change in agrarian policy in the Third Reich are not known. The direct cause can very probably be attributed to the overproduction of cereals in the summer of 1933. Darré's article in *Odal*,²⁶ quoted above, would seem to support this theory: opposing Secretary of State von Rohr's proposals to reduce the overall acreage of wheat,²⁷ Darré would seem to have opted for market controls.

Furthermore, it was the consequent differences of opinion over the form that intervention in the cereal market should take which provided Darré with the long-awaited chance to get rid of this awkward conservative who had remained tenaciously in office even after Hugenberg's dismissal. Rohr had publicly and unexpectedly declared his differences of opinion with the Minister's policy in a speech in Essen on 10 September. This obviously greatly irritated Darré, especially since the press gave these criticisms wide coverage. Darré turned to Hitler, informing him that he no longer wished to have Rohr as his assistant, and by mid-September he eventually managed to obtain the longed-for resignation.²⁸

According to the one-sided evidence given by Darré's chief assistants at his trial, it appears that Hitler's decisive approval of this turning point in policy was obtained only during a meeting held in Obersalzberg in the autumn of that year. It had been especially difficult to convince the Führer to accept the introduction of fixed prices.²⁹ Unfortunately, this evidence – which was not always unequivocal³⁰ – does not go far enough to explain Hitler's persistent doubts and nor does it illustrate the arguments used by Darré to finally convince him.

There are some signs, however, that point to the existence of widespread opposition within the party to the introduction of planning controls from above, which would harm market freedom. For example, F. Nonnenbruch openly intervened. Writing in the *Völkischer Beobachter* of 11 August, he firmly rejected farmers'

claims that the NSDAP should support them and introduce a regime of guaranteed fixed prices. He ended by definitely saying, 'the Führer's government will on no account interfere in the economy, dictating prices and wages'.³¹

In any case, strengthened by the wide powers given him, Darré began to set up two completely different organisations. Firstly, together with the Ministry of Economics he created a series of bodies which were directly responsible to the state: the above-mentioned Reichsstellen, whose direct dependence on the state – according to Gebhard and Merkel, authors of the most authoritative guide to market legislation – was due to the fact that they had jurisdiction over a very delicate sector, namely trade and diplomatic relations with other countries. They were 'corporations under public law', which were to function like mobile sluice-gates regulating the import of foodstuffs. The Reichsstellen were supposed to intervene by buying up excess quotas at current world prices, then add a tariff that brought them up to the domestic price. Food products could never be put on the German market without the authorisation of the competent Reichsstelle which established the price for the sale of the foodstuffs. Quotas that were not allowed on to the market were stocked at the state's expense and then later put on the market at a suitable time or processed into canned food, etc.³²

The additional costs, mostly borne by the state, were largely diverted from tax revenues and then partially off-loaded through consumer prices fixed at compulsory levels by the competent Reichsstelle. The Reichsstellen were gradually set up in the following order: cereals and feed (30 May 1933) milk, oils and fats (20 December 1933), eggs (the same date), cattle and derivatives (23 May 1935) and finally two separate agencies for fruit-horticultural products and wine (both on 30 September 1936). These bodies became an integral part of the so-called 'New Plan' launched by Schacht in autumn 1934 to regulate trade policy, of which more will be said later.

The second kind of body set up to intervene in the market were the compulsory cartels to which all producers and processors of agricultural products had to subscribe: these were the *Wirtschaftliche Vereinigungen*, created between 1933 and 1935 for all the main production sectors and later replaced by similar organisations called *Hauptvereinigungen*. In the last years of the republic there was already an obligatory cartel for milk producers, introduced by the 'law on milk' of 21 July 1930. A year later it was the turn of the sugar industry, which was subject to a compulsory consortium establishing quotas limiting production to avoid overproduction

and thus price cuts.³³ These, then, were organisations to which anybody involved in the production, processing and sales of a given number of products had to belong. They established the prices, quality and quantity of foodstuffs to be placed on the market at a local level.

Although formally based on the principle of self-management (officially justified by the weak argument that its managerial organs were mainly made up of producers),³⁴ in fact these agencies were strictly subordinate to the RNS, which from the point of view of regional organisation wanted their districts to coincide with individual *Landesbauernschaften*. Furthermore, the apparatus headed by Darré went to great lengths to defend this independence from the threat of interference from the ministerial apparatus.³⁵ The *Marktvereinigungen* were financially independent thanks to the obligatory subscription fee and the proceeds from a number of services which they carried out on behalf of their members. Other organisations set up within the *Marktordnung* were the so-called 'associations of supplies and provisions' (*Liefer- und Versorgungsgemeinschaften*) which forced all producers and traders of a given product to come together in one local market.

The late-nineteenth-century farmers' dream of establishing a genuine self-managed domestic monopoly protected by the state³⁶ had finally taken a 'perverse' concrete form³⁷ in this conglomeration of formally autonomous bodies. But in fact they were subject to the plethoric bureaucracy of the RNS which in turn was strictly linked (often involving conflicts) to state bodies. In any case there was no alternative: apart from the totalitarian vocation of the National Socialist movement and the traditional tendencies of 'new bureaucracies' like the RNS to expand in all directions, Darré's apparatus could not leave in the hands of the producers a policy which increasingly favoured the interests of the consumer at the expense of the former. The variables were so highly complex and the problems that the *Marktordnung* apparatus had to deal with so delicate that a large number of officials were absolutely indispensable. At least this was the case until it was decided actually to use forms of self-management involving the producers themselves. The bureaucratic apparatus created soon proved to be slow and inefficient, thus partially frustrating the complex objectives which the National Socialist *Marktordnung* had set itself: to forecast and establish the quantity and quality of foodstuffs that would be put on the market at any one time, bearing in mind the overall requirements of the local population; to establish and modify prices according to the season, quality and geographical position in order

to satisfy the slightest demands of producers without burdening local consumers; to influence indirectly and also to indicate directly the direction to be taken in modifying the productive set-up of individual farms, increasing the output of the more requested crops and discouraging others by means of the price lever;³⁸ and finally, to condition and guide consumption to a certain extent using similar methods. The ultimate overall aim was thus to reach the highest possible degree of self-sufficiency in food without damaging the interests of the producers or depressing consumer demand.

Before going on to examine some of the more serious shortcomings that emerged over the years, we should briefly consider the specific forms of control introduced in the various sectors, each with its own special characteristics. I shall begin with cereals, not only for its objective importance, but also because it was in this sector that the first control mechanisms were introduced in the summer of 1933. As I have already said, in the same year the government had to face up to a dangerous situation of overproduction which in a free market would certainly have brought prices down.³⁹ In September Darré, supported by Hitler,⁴⁰ managed to obtain: (1) the fixing of minimum prices for wheat and rye, the aim being to protect cereal growers (with the law of 26 September); (2) the creation of a compulsory cartel for the milling industry to reduce market speculation; and (3) the granting of the possibility of exporting excess rye in exchange for deficit corn without involving any cash outlay.⁴¹ Thus the basis was laid to realise one of the most important points in the *mittelständisch* economic programme which had allowed Darré and National Socialism to win such a large number of votes: cereal production and its remuneration were freed from the speculative practices of the powerful milling industries and of the corn stock exchanges.

At the same time the profit margins of the latter were considerably reduced, thus partially attenuating the tension between producers and consumers.⁴² As a contemporary commentator wrote, the regime demanded that the former 'serve' the collectivity and no longer simply 'earn' a living.⁴³ But private traders do not seem to have suffered greatly from this policy, which ultimately was not wholly against them. This is shown by the fact that the regime firmly dismissed the idea of privileging the co-operatives in the supplying of commercial services.⁴⁴

As far as prices were concerned, ten categories were established for wheat and nine for rye, based on regional divisions which took into account, as far as possible, geographical similarities and traditional market outlets. The borders of these administrative div-

isions were further refined and changed in the years to come, thanks to the gradual awareness of the nature of the drawbacks, at times serious, such as the temporary shortage of a product in a given market thus favouring a nearby one which had been assigned a higher price category.⁴⁵

The following year there was an upheaval in the cereals market: a fall-off in domestic production and an increase in demand completely changed the direction of the *Marktordnung* policy, which now had to give priority to supplying foodstuffs to consumers in sufficient quantities at acceptable prices.⁴⁶ To this end the following measures were taken: (1) obligatory deliveries were made to Hauptvereinigungen deposits of a set quota of a product; (2) a strict ban was introduced on using bread cereals for feed (the previous year eosination had been used to make surpluses unfit for human consumption and thus slacken market pressure); and (3) minimum prices were transformed into fixed prices to favour consumers. This last measure, which was to assume a central role in the management of the cereal market, was not meant to upset unduly producers who, although handicapped, were guaranteed a basic security and regular payment for their work.⁴⁷ In addition, barley and oats, initially excluded, were now also included in the *Marktordnung*. On the whole this policy achieved positive results. Producer prices remained stable, as did the cost of bread for the consumer throughout the 1930s. There was a slight increase in producer prices for rye (+12 per cent from 1935/36 to 1938/39) and for oats for feed (+5 per cent over the same period). But other cereals did not undergo any substantial change. The price index for bread remained stable until the outbreak of war, as did that for wheat, whereas the index for rye increased by 10 per cent following a large increase decided in 1937 – as we shall see in Chapter 11.⁴⁸ One of the consequences of this was that nearly all the rye produced was destined for human consumption, which led to a worsening of the situation for feed.

In the following years, the set of measures aimed at organising the cereal market basically remained unchanged. It was only further added to by instructions concerning the standardisation of products and controls at all stages of sales, processing and delivering to stockpiles of grain. In 1935 certificates were introduced describing the origin and the destination of each lot of grain. The decrees banning the use of bread cereal for feed became more rigid and the penalties for infringements could lead to the forced closure of a business or the confiscation of the product.⁴⁹ These penalties were directly inflicted by RNS offices, which also had the status of

administrative police.⁵⁰

From 1937 onwards the RNS stepped up its widespread campaign to convince producers to contribute greater quotas to stocks than the minimum requirement. At the same time controls were tightened on checks to verify the reasons given by many producers who did not contribute the required quota.⁵¹

In short, despite a certain improvement in domestic production, the regime was not in a position to be able to loosen constraints. This was also because of the increasingly pressing need to build up strategic stocks.⁵²

In the other main sectors the basic aims and the kind of intervention essentially remained the same, even if there were variations due to the particular sales techniques required for individual products. Thus, for example, in the dairy sector the existence of a very disparate marketing and processing network forced the regime to intervene – in keeping with the guidelines established by the aforementioned law of July 1930 – to rationalise and centralise the network of processing centres for milk so that the quality could be standardised and the part of the overall product directly processed by the dairy farmers, the qualitatively variable and uneconomic *Bauernbutter*, could be eliminated.

To regulate this complex question a special commission was created through a decree of 31 July 1933, and it remained in force until the beginning of 1935. The commissioner, von Kanne, a top RNS official, issued strict instructions on compulsory stocking. Likewise, compensation was awarded to producers who were handicapped by their remoteness from big consumer markets and often had to send their milk for industrial uses for which they received much lower prices than for fresh drinking milk. Controls on quality and standardisation were also set up.⁵³

The whole RNS policy in this sector thus favoured the big producers and large processing plants, and harming the traditional small farmer with – according to Jäckel⁵⁴ – a consequent spread of ill-feeling among the latter. In fact, whereas in 1932 co-operative dairies accounted for 40 per cent of the market, by the eve of the war their share had risen to 60 per cent and the number of milk processing plants had fallen drastically from 10,000 to 6,000, following a radical rationalisation of the sector.⁵⁵ As far as prices are concerned, milk remained stable for a long period and was only increased in the autumn of 1938 by two pfennigs a litre (an increase of 15 per cent) with the financial intervention of the state. Producer prices for butter were fixed but consumer prices varied according to quality: consumer prices for average-quality butter rose slightly

from RM2.71 per kilogram in 1933 to RM3.16 in 1939. In the cheese sector, however, the great variety of types and quality meant that prices could not be fixed.

The decision to legislate in the dairy and egg sectors was 'triggered off' by the need to clear the way of possible obstacles to the signing of a delicate trade agreement with the Netherlands, after the aforementioned provisory agreement signed by Hugenberg: Darré saw a cast-iron regulation of the domestic market as the indispensable basis to ensure that the inevitable imports required to satisfy important trade partners would not create excessive disturbances damaging producers and consumers.⁵⁶

The egg sector was characterised by strong seasonal fluctuations in supply and by considerable differences between producers. To regulate this sector it was essential to issue a considerable number of laws and decrees, which included measures on the standardisation of quality, the delimiting of local markets (the so-called *Einzugsgebiete*) to which the various producers had to adhere, and lastly to enact a measure ensuring that new poultry farms or extensions to existing ones had the approval of the Hauptvereinigung, set up in November 1935.⁵⁷

As for the policy concerning margarine, which as we have seen was mainly produced from imported raw materials, the measures already taken by Hugenberg in the form of the so-called 'fats plan' were retained by Darré without any significant changes. The compulsory mixing of a certain amount of butter from domestic production with margarine was continued and even intensified. Similarly, the system of allowance cards, permitting the less well-off to purchase a limited quantity of low-quality margarine at a 'political' price, was continued and further developed in December 1936. The difference in price was paid by the state with revenues from other sources of taxation.⁵⁸ The same decree also established that customer lists be compiled for each supplier, including the number of members of each family. Margarine was then allocated on this basis.

It is quite obvious that this was a thoroughgoing rationing system, typical of a wartime situation. The regime was not particularly proud of these forms of rationing, which tarnished its image of efficiency and strength both within the country and in the eyes of the outside world. Furthermore, the National Socialist leaders were just as concerned to ensure that the mass of the population, which was emerging from a difficult economic crisis, had at least a minimal supply of fats.⁵⁹ In fact, in November 1933 the measure introducing margarine allowance cards, which were

originally only for workers, had to be extended to all middle-class families with modest incomes.⁶⁰ In the summer of the following year, the Ministry of Agriculture's proposal, discussed in a cabinet meeting of 30 May, to abolish allowance cards and resort only to a relationship of trust with the citizens was rejected, despite the fact that Hitler himself had made known his decidedly hostile views on allowance cards.⁶¹ In fact a further increase to the quota of subsidised margarine (the so-called *Haushaltmargarine*) was decided to meet growing demand. The decree of 27 October 1934 increased the low-quality subsidised margarine quota by two-thirds to 75 per cent, thus establishing a consumer cost at almost half the price of better-quality margarine. Moreover, pains were taken to attenuate the social differences between those able to buy large amounts of fats and those who almost did not have the necessary minimum: 'The more privileged social strata must be prevented from buying as much fats as they like and the less well-off members of the population must be able to meet their basic requirements'. To this end, the aforementioned list of customers was introduced in the (trouble-fraught) attempt to make a census of all the millions of fats purchasers.⁶²

The system in itself was very muddled. This was due partly to the fact that checks on the suitability of demands for allowance cards for *Haushaltmargarine* were the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, whereas the management of quotas and the seasonal distribution was the responsibility of the Ministry directed by Darré. Because of this the system had many shortcomings, as the Minister of Agriculture himself had to admit:

The hopes based on the introduction of allowance cards for low-price margarine have not been realised. It has not been possible to find a distribution system to meet the requirements of a regulated market throughout the Reich, preventing on one hand a useless extension of the margarine quota and on the other an adequate appraisal of the social conditions of consumers.⁶³

At times there were shortages of subsidised margarine in the shops, but then on other occasions there might be no high-quality margarine available.⁶⁴

In a long letter of 25 June 1934 to the Minister of Propaganda, Darré defended the 'fats plan'. He maintained that, rather than merely privileging the interests of producers, it had actually made possible good results as far as supplies were concerned, without any great increases in consumer prices. Furthermore, it had allowed favourable trade agreements to be drawn up with the Netherlands,

Denmark and the Baltic countries.⁶⁵ At the end of 1933 it was also decided to introduce compulsory mixing of a certain quantity of lard (at first 5 per cent and then 10–15 per cent) with margarine, a process which had been made possible by new technology: the so-called *neutral lard*. In this case too the aim was to help livestock producers, or to be exact pig producers,⁶⁶ without harming minimal levels of consumption. But only a year later an about-turn was made as pigmeat prices began to move dangerously upwards.⁶⁷

As far as the compulsory cartel was concerned, in the case of margarine the Hauptvereinigung, set up by a decree of 23 July 1934, had two particular features: firstly, it only affected producers (and not also processors and tradesmen), and secondly, it did not depend on the RNS but was directly answerable to the Ministry. It was thus the only body of its kind which had some independent management, personified by its board of directors. The special nature of this body was probably due to the considerable political influence that the margarine producers, all large firms and often multinationals, had within the Third Reich.⁶⁸

The livestock sector was also characterised by special features due to the great quantitative and qualitative differences between producers, who often butchered the animals that they had reared. Moreover, the sector could not fully meet domestic demand and had particularly suffered from the fall in prices during the economic depression of the previous years. Balancing out the interests of producers and consumers thus appears to have been particularly difficult: in this sector too there was a gradual shift in the *Marktordnung* in favour of the consumers, whereas the initial concern had been primarily to defend livestock producers.⁶⁹

For this purpose a Reichsstelle was set up on 24 March 1933. Its task was to ensure that foreign imports of livestock or butchered meat did not generate negative consequences for producers. As in the previously mentioned cases of milk and eggs, what triggered off state intervention in the livestock sector was the debate concerning a trade agreement, this time with Denmark. To reassure German producers, Darré thought it opportune to introduce a way of filtering imports, something which they had been demanding for some time.⁷⁰ Alongside this measure, maximum prices were introduced. These were to be highly detailed so as to cover the wide range in quality of the various kinds and cuts of meat. The Hauptvereinigung, set up on 9 June of the same year, was given powers to fix the quota of livestock to be butchered. It then went on to rationalise the network of slaughter-houses and introduced a number of controls on the origin and destination of goods. These

controls were aimed at containing domestic slaughtering and channelling almost all slaughterable livestock into *Marktordnung* institutions.

The local *Viehwirtschaftsverbände* set up by the RNS in early March 1935, had the delicate task of supervising slaughtering and trading, as well as selecting dealers. The latter were allowed access to a given local market on the basis of their reliability.⁷¹ If the graduation of maximum producer prices had required considerable legislative flexibility, the fixing of very detailed tariffs for retail butcher prices was even more difficult and delicate an issue: on one hand, butchers had to be guaranteed a certain margin of profit, but on the other, very severe controls were required to prevent or stamp out fraudulent practices whose persistent spread was reported by consumers.⁷²

I shall not dwell on the principal legislative acts carried out in all the other sectors. But it should be borne in mind that the *Marktordnung* had the same basic aims wherever it operated: to establish ceiling prices, reducing the incidence of seasonal or speculative fluctuations, and to rationalise distribution and optimise national production, eliminating as far as possible the disturbances caused by foreign food imports. There were many drawbacks in those years, at times considerable, especially concerning the even distribution of basic foodstuffs. These drawbacks were due partly to badly divided market zones, creating situations where a given area appeared unattractive to its producers because of price levels established from above. Timely and flexible corrective measures were thus required from the RNS.

Nor – as we shall see later – was a really decisive increase in production possible through propaganda, or the offer of better prices. The *Marktordnung* made no impact on the structural limits of German agriculture. The most delicate area in which it could actually make inroads was the price sector. Initially, the state-controlled mass media let it be thought that the regime had no intention of imposing fixed prices which would interfere with individual free enterprise. For example, right on the eve of the introduction of the measures to regulate the cereal market, the Ministerial Direktor, Moritz, published a long and reassuring article denying that the Führer had any intention of restricting individual free enterprise: ‘The supreme leader of National Socialism desires that individual responsibility and free enterprise develop fully as vital factors in the German economic reconstruction, but clearly only after the degenerate thought and action of the private economy have been eliminated.’⁷³

Subsequently, once the ice had been broken for state intervention in economics, efforts were directed towards drawing up a thoroughgoing economic theory which would justify and fully exploit this important new dimension introduced by the National Socialist agrarian policy: prices which now had an active function in determining economic policy⁷⁴ were to constitute a point of common accord between the interests of producers and consumers, the synthesis of a 'fair producer price' and a 'social consumer price'. To realise this aim a great deal of flexibility was required, bearing in mind the regional, qualitative and seasonal variations. Bands of price fluctuations were created, and a certain number of 'special cases' or exceptions introduced, which, although making it possible to meet the demands from below, ended up considerably limiting the scope of management throughout the *Marktordnung* apparatus.⁷⁵

In any case, the National Socialist leaders knew full well that a policy of purely artificial prices, which did not take into account the real economic situation, was merely wishful thinking.⁷⁶ Similarly, the exclusive use of restrictive and punitive means could not guarantee the efficient working of the fixed-prices system which fundamentally required very strong self-discipline by all economic operators at the various stages. The ideal of a 'fair price', although subject to the absolute priority of the 'general interest', could not ignore the economic subjects in the field, or their demands and expectations – especially given that the National Socialist Party was indebted to the rural population after the great electoral successes of 1930–2 which had paved the way to taking power.

Of course it was much more difficult actually to bring about a balanced synthesis of these different and divergent options than to point out the need for them on paper. Even more so, given that in practice these divergences were expressed in different administrative bodies: on one hand, the RNS with its enormous apparatus and power, but on the other hand, a commissariat to control prices. The latter, an inheritance from the years of the great depression, had the primary task of defending consumer interests. Before briefly examining the dispute over consumer prices, mention must be made of two other factors which made the management of the *Marktordnung* a difficult and complex affair. Firstly, there was a tendency to take the heat out of the tensions between consumer and producer by reducing traders' profit margins. But these could not be cut far without alienating another important section of the *Mittelstand*.⁷⁷ Secondly, there was the increasingly urgent problem of the difference between agricultural product prices, subject to a

rigorous system of controls and limits, and the prices of industrial goods and services necessary for agricultural production. These prices were not regulated in any way and tended to rise as a consequence of the general improvement in the German economy. Thus dangerous price scissors began to open up, which, as usual, damaged the weakest sector: agriculture. The problem of these price scissors will be dealt with at greater length in Chapter 11. For the moment we will concentrate on the tension between consumer prices and producer prices, and on the parallel friction between the RNS and other state bodies.

By a decree of 5 November 1934 a Reichskommissar für die Preisüberwachung was appointed. The post was filled by the Leipzig Bürgermeister, the conservative Carl Goerdeler, but it was quite simply a new version of an old inspectorial body that had already existed in the last years of the Republic, with Goerdeler himself at its head. This appointment must be seen as an attempt to keep the delicate sector of retail prices under control during a period of economic recovery which, however, was characterised by a number of contradictions and in which the recently established regime needed to win the consensus of the population at all costs. The aforementioned decree gave the Commissioner potentially very wide-ranging powers, given that all goods in commerce at the various stages of distribution came under his jurisdiction. The appointment was desired by Schacht, a close friend of Goerdeler, but was also supported by Hitler who, fearing a loss of political stability for the regime, shared the new Commissioner's hostility to indiscriminate price rises. It was opposed from the outset, however, by Darré, who saw it as a direct and very dangerous attack on his agrarian policy.⁷⁸ The source of this hostility was the overlapping of areas of competence with *Marktordnung* bodies responsible for fixing prices at various levels. Another cause of friction was the radical difference in outlook between Schacht and Darré. This will be dealt with again later. In his first circular of 7 November, Goerdeler clearly set out his own political programme: no new bureaucratic apparatus but a flexible network of controls based on co-operation between all state bodies, with the aim of keeping consumer prices as low as possible.⁷⁹

An advocate of the return to the rules of the game of the market economy and therefore the freedom for economic subjects to work untrammelled,⁸⁰ from the beginning of his career Goerdeler became the *bête noire* of the RNS.⁸¹ On several occasions he accused the RNS of slow working and excessive red tape, which made it an inefficient bureaucratic monster incapable of achieving the goals it

set itself. In his opinion, the costly measures introduced by Darré had led only to the undesirable situation in which the less efficient producers were protected and there was a general decline in the quality of production.⁸² During his year in office, Goerdeler set up a widespread control of prices for foodstuffs, discovering and punishing with heavy fines and administrative sanctions the many infractions committed by both producers and tradesmen at the various stages of marketing. This did not prevent complaints and accusations from multiplying on both sides. Nor did it stop the continual, albeit gradual, rise in prices. It should be borne in mind that Goerdeler, who was one of those conservatives prepared to co-operate with the regime, was politically very weak and able to count on the support only of Schacht. Consequently, a year after its creation, the post of Commissioner was abolished. Hitler, partly because of pressure from Darré,⁸³ did not grant Goerdeler the full powers that he maintained were indispensable if prices were to be effectively held down. It was only in November 1936 that a new post of Commissioner for the supervision of prices was created, and this time as part of the four-year plan.⁸⁴ The very name of the new Commissioner, Josef Wagner, former Gauleiter for Silesia, is evidence of the fact that by now the Commissioner was fully integrated into the regime and could therefore enjoy much greater powers than his predecessor.⁸⁵ Despite this, the conflict with the Ministry of Agriculture over the limits of the respective areas of competence did not come to an end: in fact Darré continued to claim the right to control prices.⁸⁶

But over and above these differences of a political-administrative nature, the fact remains that the National Socialist policy of *Marktordnung* did not satisfy anyone: neither the farmers whose hard-earned income dropped yearly compared to other social groups and who had to put up with heavy-handed interference in the running of their businesses,⁸⁷ nor the consumers, especially the less well-off, who had to bear the brunt of rising agricultural prices. This is not the place to analyse the varying extent and aspects of social discontent involved in the prices problem. References on this subject are spread in various regional studies, but there are no detailed comprehensive studies available. It is possible only cursorily to recall how farmers' complaints and discontent over low prices clearly emerge from the RNS local office reports, from police bulletins on the morale of the population and from various other sources.⁸⁸ This has to be weighed against protests made by local authorities, the provincial Oberpräsidenten, the Ministry of Labour and press organs close to the industrial world which, by highlighting con-

sumer interests, complained that the agrarian policy unilaterally favoured farmers.⁸⁹

In a memo drafted in December 1941 to an unknown addressee, Darré severely criticised the whole National Socialist economic policy which, by establishing two completely different price regimes for agriculture and industry, had effectively thwarted his efforts to regulate agricultural prices and production. Along with these criticisms, however, Darré acknowledged that the *Marktordnung* itself had not been incisive enough.⁹⁰ This belated self-criticism undoubtedly hit the mark: the *Marktordnung* was too respectful of farmers' independence. But at the same time, available sources lead us to conclude that many producers felt that it was too incisive and oppressive and that this created a certain reluctance to struggle to defend their production. Moreover, their productive efforts appeared ill-rewarded as we shall see in Chapter 6.⁹¹ In very summary form, then, these were the various widespread reactions which considerably weakened the effectiveness of the *Marktordnung*.

Before ending the chapter, all that remains is to supply some data on how consumer and producer prices actually evolved (at least in so far as the statistics really reflect the objective situation). The general index of agricultural producer prices during the years of the regime shows a substantial recovery compared to the disastrous fall during the depression years of 1928–32. This recovery was followed by a period of stable prices, without any further wild rises, whereas the general world index for the same period remained at a much lower level. We can match the two series of indices, even if their composition is different and thus renders them not entirely comparable (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. German price index versus world price index

Germany (1913 = 100)		World (1925–29 = 100)	
1927/8	130	1930	67.4
1933/4	84	1933	34.8
1934/5	94	1934	33.4
1935/6	102	1935	33.8
1936/7	101	1936	37.5
1937/8	102	1937	43.2
1938/9	104	1938	35.0

Sources: A. Hanau and R. Plate, *Die deutsche landwirtschaftliche Preis- und Marktpolitik im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1975, p. 24; L. Zumpe, *Wirtschaft und Staat in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945*, Berlin–Vaduz, 1980, p. 450.

It must also be pointed out that, thanks to regulating mechanisms for the market, the National Socialist policy managed to avoid the dramatic price fluctuations which were a feature of agriculture in other countries throughout the decade. Table 5.2, however, reveals that National Socialist propaganda claims that the regime had guaranteed perfectly stable incomes for farmers were not entirely sound.

There was, therefore, a relative stability for prices and incomes. Consumers also benefited from this situation even if they had to give up some products whose import, for strategic or currency reasons, was severely restricted. Consumer prices, as can be seen from Table 5.3, tended to rise, especially for meats and fats.

The rigidly autarkic policy was accompanied by an incessant campaign aimed at regulating (or at least reducing qualitatively) consumption. In fact, leaving aside the depression years, until then the overall population had been used to one of the highest standards of consumption in the world both for foodstuffs and for other goods. The combined effect of the autarkic policy and the propaganda campaign ensured that living standards did not worsen, but neither did they improve. This was contrary to what one would have expected, given both the brilliant economic recovery and the great hopes that the population had in the new regime.⁹²

Statistical surveys on consumption are generally partial and not very significant. Thus the data used here are only for reference purposes. Firstly, a very aggregate datum: bearing in mind the considerable rise in population (from 62.4 million in 1925 to over 69 million in 1939), the average price values for food consumption seem to indicate a tendency, although slight, to an increase in consumption per capita which, however, did not reach the highest levels of the 'golden years' prior to the depression of 1929. Using 1922, 1930 and 1938 as reference standards, consumption per capita (at fixed prices) fell from RM370 per annum to RM346 and then RM339 in the last year considered.

Some rather disaggregate data concerning the trends of the main food products give a much more detailed picture, showing a drop in consumption for some important goods and a rise for others (Table 5.5).

The data from a wide-ranging survey conducted in 1927-37 on samples of workers' families by the Institut für Konjunkturforschung also reveal a great deal of fluctuation in consumption of products whose qualitative and quantitative value varied so greatly within the population's diet that they cannot be compared. In the light of this data, the protests which I mentioned earlier, and which

Table 5.2. Producer prices 1933-1939 (crops RM per ton; livestock products RM per quintal)

	Wheat	Rye	Oats	Peas	Fruit	Potatoes	Beet	Beef	Pork	Milk
1933	192.0	156.0	126.0	247	102	26.8	30.5	112	97	12.0
1934	194.0	159.3	152.0	450	94	44.3	30.5	118	108	12.5
1935	207.4	168.2	183.1	517	128	47.3	30.5	149	113	13.0
1936	210.9	172.4	188.5	381	145	47.3	31.0	158	118	14.0
1937	209.5	182.3	188.2	361	127	48.1	31.5	158	118	14.0
1938	208.2	189.2	187.8	373	127	48.5	32.0	159	119	14.0
1939	220.0	192.1	191.7	190	—	48.7	32.0	164	121	14.0

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 554.

Table 5.3. Retail prices 1933-1938 (pfennigs per kg)

	Wheat-flour	Potatoes	Vegetables	Sugar	Rice	Fruit	Margarine	Beef	Pork
1933	54	6.9	14	76	45	26	154	143	152
1934	52	9.1	16	77	45	24	169	146	164
1935	53	9.3	16	78	43	32	167	158	167
1936	53	9.1	16	77	49	36	168	165	170
1937	53	8.8	16	77	50	32	172	167	163
1938	49	10.0	17	77	50	58	174	162	163

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 585.

Table 5.4. Food consumption at fixed prices 1928–1939 (RM million)

1928	27.192	1936	20.597
1933	18.976	1937	21.912
1934	18.619	1938	22.298
1935	20.487	1939	22.621

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 649.

Table 5.5. Consumption per capita 1938 (1929 = 100)

Flour	93.2	Rye Flour	102.6
Meat	106.5	Butter	110.0
Margarine	86.1	Milk	95.7
Eggs	88.0	Potatoes	106.5
Rice	120.0	Sugar	103.8
Vegetables	115.0	Coffee	121.1

Source: O. Nathan, *The Nazi Economic System: Germany's Mobilization for War*, Durham, 1944, p. 356.

continued throughout the war years, would seem to be somewhat justified: when considered with the hopes for a recovery that had been raised in 1933, the relative stability created by the government was unsatisfactory for many producers, and by the same token many consumers complained that the Third Reich was unable to guarantee consumption standards of the previous years (and decades). The theoretical model of the National Socialist *Marktordnung* was based on the assumption that, given constant income, the purchasing power of the public could be increased only by lowering prices, and this was possible only within a planning system that rationalised production and distribution.⁹³ In fact the direction that the economy actually took completely contrasted with this model: re-armament created a wage rise (real weekly wages went from an index of 91 in 1933 to 108 in 1939, even though their percentage incidence in the national income continually diminished, decreasing from 63 per cent in 1933 to 57 per cent in 1938).⁹⁴ The *Marktordnung* did not succeed in containing consumer price rises needed to cover the cost of farmers' incomes. According to official statistics, the index (1913/14 = 100) for the foodstuff costs rose from 113.3 in 1933 to 122.8 at the eve of the war.⁹⁵

In the domestic market, therefore, there are not significant progresses to record, or rather it progressed only in an ominous direction: the further stepping-up of re-armament and then the use of the enormous accumulated arsenal for war.

Notes

1. Cf. L. Gebhard and H. Merkel, *Das Recht der landwirtschaftlichen Marktordnung*, Berlin, 1937, p. 5.

2. Darré, *Aufbruch des Bauerntums: Reden auf den Reichsbauerntagen*, Berlin, 1942, p. 52.

3. Anxious to cool the conflict between industry and agriculture, especially over cereals, Chancellor Brüning had created a state monopoly in March 1930 to meet producers' demands. He also issued a decree to protect rye producers in July of the same year. At the same time he set up a cartel for potato starch and took a number of measures to guarantee the quality and quantity of milk. These laws provided for associations between producers and had the same aims of regulating the market as the laws later to be issued by the National Socialist government. Cf. V. Klemm, 'Ursachen und Verlauf der Krise der Landwirtschaft von 1927/28 bis 1933', Habilitation, Berlin, 1965, pp. 175ff.; D. Walz, *Die Agrarpolitik der Regierung Brüning*, Erlangen-Nuremberg, 1971, pp. 132ff.

4. See above, pp. 44f.

5. Cf. G. Mackenroth, 'Der Marktordnungsgedanke in der Weltwirtschaft', *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, vol. 97, 1936, pp. 612ff. M. Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe: Crisis and Adaptation since 1880*, London, 1964, p. 15, stresses that, given the totalitarian nature of the regime, National Socialist policy was much more radical than other countries' policies: 'Few countries developed a coherent policy for agriculture; the main exception was Germany under the National Socialist regime.' For a comparison, see the Austrian case in U. Kluge, 'Organisierte Agrargesellschaft im Schrittpunkt der Verfassungs- und Wirtschaftskrise 1933', *Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 3, 1984, pp. 259-87, and the Swiss case in M. Steiner, *Die Agrarpolitik in der Schweiz und Deutschland von 1933 bis 1939*, Breitenbach, 1953. For a comparison with Italian Fascism, cf. G. Corni, 'Die Agrarpolitik des Faschismus: Ein Vergleich zwischen Deutschland und Italien', *Tel Aviv Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. 17, 1988, pp. 391-424.

6. Cf. K. Schiller, *Marktregulierung und Marktordnung in der Weltagrarnwirtschaft*, Jena, 1940, p. 34.

7. H. Gies, 'Von der Verwaltung des "Überflusses" zur Verwaltung des "Mangels"', in D. Reberentisch and K. Teppe (eds.), *Verwaltung contra Menschenführung im Staat Hitlers*, Göttingen, 1986, p. 316.

8. Kluge, 'Agrargesellschaft', p. 280.

9. Book 2 of the defence in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 547.

10. In particular, cf. W. Meinhold's hagiographic work, *Grundlagen der landwirtschaftlichen Marktordnung*, Berlin, 1937, pp. 49ff.

11. Cf. H. J. Seraphim, 'Landwirtschaftliche Eingliederung als ökonomischer Machtausgleich auf ständisch-korporativer Grundlage', *BüL*, no. 19, 1934, p. 225. The economic action of the peasant does not necessarily follow economic logic. It does not make sense, however, to pursue a utopian economic policy of no money and no market; it is more a question of reconciling the economic system to the specific customs and needs of the *Bauerntum*.

12. Darré, 'Ein Jahr Reichsnährstand', *Odal*, vol. 3, 1934/35, pp. 82ff.

13. Cf. the report entitled 'RNST und Judentum', sent by Darré to Rosenberg, 18 May 1935, in DZAP, US 7, vol. 389, pp. 66ff.

14. Cf. Darré's article, 'Die Erfüllung des Agrarprogramms', *Odal*, vol. 4, 1935/36, pp. 348ff. 'The farmer is basically free to choose what to grow. It is up to him to decide the best balance between the needs of his farm and the general economic interest': W. Abel, 'Der Preis in der landwirtschaftlichen Marktordnung', *JNS*, vol. 145, 1937, p. 25.

15. For Wilmowsky, cf. FAH, E IV, vol. 23/511.

16. K. Meyer, 'Das bodenständige Prinzip in der neuen Agrarverfassung', *Odal*,

vol. 3, 1934/5, pp. 382ff.

17. K. Meyer, *Gefüge und Ordnung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1939, p. 210.

18. 'Marktordnung und Landwirtschaftliche Erzeugung', *Nationale Wirtschaft*, no. 5, 5 July 1935.

19. Speech of 19 September 1933, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 193. Similar arguments were used by Seraphim, 'Landwirtschaftliche Eingliederung', pp. 232ff.

20. Articles entitled 'Der Wesenswandel der Wirtschaft' and 'Die Preisfrage', both in *Odal*, vol. 3, 1934/35, pp. 466ff. and 631f. respectively. A similar approach is used by H. Merkel in 'Die Lehren der Marktordnung des Reichsnährstandes für die gewerbliche Wirtschaft', *Nationale Wirtschaft*, no. 12, 5 December 1935.

21. Quoted in an article significantly entitled 'Grundsätze, die für die übrige Wirtschaft nicht anwendbar sind', *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 14 October 1933.

22. Meinhold, *Grundlagen*, p. 91.

23. K. Schiller, 'Weltmarktpreisangsteig und agrare Marktregelungen', *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft*, vol. 97, 1936/7, pp. 640f. RLB requests were also in this direction: at the 9th annual assembly in 1932, the chairman, Schiele, called for voluntary corporative forms that would encourage greater control over the market by producers. He stressed that only in the current situation of total chaos should the state temporarily intervene. Quoted in H. Kretschmar, *Deutsche Agrarprogramme der Nachkriegszeit*, Berlin, 1933, p. 67.

24. In Rgbl., 1933, I, p. 488.

25. The law of 13 September 1933 and the decrees of 16 February 1934 and 4 February 1935 are described in W. Tornow, *Chronik der Agrarpolitik und Agrarwirtschaft des Deutschen Reiches*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1972.

26. Cf. note 14 above.

27. See Rohr's article, 'Die Agrarlage', *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 19 August 1933.

28. The proceedings are in BA, N1 Darré, vol. AD 24.

29. Book 2 of the defence in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 547, pp. 24f.

30. According to Reischle, Hitler had actually agreed to the introduction of a fixed-price system, given the situation of overproduction. He did, however, criticise the *Erbhof* law and Darré's idealisation of the peasantry: Book 6 of the defence in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 653, p. 29.

31. The article was entitled 'Noch einmal die Mindestpreise für Getreide'.

32. Cf. Tornow, *Chronik*, pp. 105f., and Gebhard and Merkel, *Recht*.

33. Gies, 'Von der Verwaltung', p. 305.

34. K. Schiller, 'Die Ordnung der landwirtschaftlichen Märkte', in K. Meyer, *Gefüge und Ordnung*, p. 640.

35. Gies, 'Von der Verwaltung', pp. 310ff..

36. I do not think it is possible to agree fully with Puhle who sees an absolute continuity between the Junkers' demands at the end of the nineteenth century and the introduction of the *Marktordnung* (H. J. Puhle, *Politische Agrarbewegungen in kapitalistischen Industriegesellschaften*, Göttingen, 1975, p. 95). In fact the *Marktordnung* meant a loss of autonomy for the Junkers; the National Socialist policy was similar to other general responses to the international crisis in the late 1920s.

37. Rather severe charges of inefficiency were made of the agrarian policy bureaucracy by the Rechnungshof in his budget report to the Minister of Agriculture in 1937: DZAP, 23.01, vol. 3082. It should also be borne in mind when dealing with the *Marktordnung* that the Ministry's financial burden became much heavier. Expenditure rose from RM369 million in 1936 to RM736 million two years later, while income was only just over a RM100 million: DZAP, 23.01, vols 3080/ 3081 and 3082.

38. Direct measures to combat overproduction of crops for the domestic market were introduced only for tobacco; hops and beet. The measures concerning tobacco were obviously a concession to the conditions laid down in the trade agreements with the Balkan countries, which were big producers.

39. See the first draft of the bill which was later passed, in a report by Darré to the Chancellery on 8 September: DZAP, 06.01, vol. 19774.
40. In a cabinet meeting of 12 September: references in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1465.
41. A bill presented by Darré and von Krosigk on 7 July 1933, in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1464.
42. In 1934 retail profit margins for wheat were cut from RM6 to RM4 per tonne.
43. A. Beckmann, 'Die Auswirkungen der neuen Agrarpolitik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Brotgetreidepolitik', Dissertation, Cologne, 1936, p. 77.
44. Cf. a fourth section RNS circular of 4 December 1933, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 7496.
45. For example, see the complaints and proposals in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3244.
46. Cf. the reasons for the bill of 23 June, in BA, R 53, vol. 29.
47. Cf. W. Facius, 'Die Stellung des Getreidehandels im Reichsnährstand', Dissertation, Berlin, 1938, pp. 50f. In general for measures concerning cereals, see the well-documented contemporary study by H. Leichthammer, 'Die Entwicklung der staatlich geregelten Erzeugerpreise für Weizen, Roggen, Gerste und Hafer im Deutschen Reich', Dissertation, Erlangen, 1937; R. Stisser, 'Die deutsche Getreidemarktordnung', *Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv*, vol. 47, 1938, pp. 322–72.
48. The statistics are from A. Hanau and R. Plate, *Die deutsche landwirtschaftliche Preis- und Marktpolitik im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1975, pp. 42, 50.
49. F. Sohn, 'Deutschland: allgemeiner agrarpolitischer Bericht', *BüL*, vol. 21, 1937, pp. 266f.
50. Cf. the ministerial circular to all local police chiefs, 29 October 1934, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3193.
51. Cf. the information supplied to the DNB press agency, 11 January 1937, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 202.
52. Cf. the statements of some top ministerial civil servants from the Ministry and the RNS in Book 5 of the defence, in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 552, pp. 8ff.
53. Cf. Hanau and Plate, *Preis- und Marktpolitik*, pp. 74f.; A. Matthies, 'Probleme der deutschen Fettwirtschaft', Dissertation, Hamburg, 1937, *passim*.
54. Cf. R. Jäckel, 'Die faschistische Politik gegenüber der werktätigen Landbevölkerung in Deutschland', Dissertation, Berlin, 1979, pp. 91f.
55. J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928–1945*, London–Beverly Hills, 1976, p. 78.
56. Cf. the reasons for the law presented, 15 December 1933, by Darré during a cabinet meeting, in BA, R I, vol. 1467.
57. Tornow, *Chronik*, pp. 92f.
58. Cf. the aforementioned decree of 3 December.
59. But see the proceedings concerning the setting aside of special funds to supply fats to miners and workers in heavy industry after a shortage of several weeks: BA, R 2, vol. 18062.
60. Government decree of 10 November 1933 in BA, R 2, vol. 18054.
61. Cf. BA, R 2, vol. 18732.
62. Cf. the information given by the DNB agency, 3 December 1936 in BA, R 43 II, vol. 200.
63. Ministry of Agriculture report, 28 May 1934, in AA-Archiv, SW, Öle und Fette, vol. 4.
64. According to Sohn, 'Deutschland', p. 756, that year there were over 22 million card-holders (including their families). Furthermore, as many as 8 million Germans still received *Winterhilfe* subsidies: cf. T. E. DeWitt, 'The Economics and Politics of Welfare in the Third Reich', *CEH*, vol. 11, 1978, pp. 256ff. The family rationing system was continued into 1938: despite the relative success of the policy for the sector, the ministerial heads concerned considered the accumulated shortfall still too high. Cf. the internal note of 19 November 1937 in BA, R 2, vol. 18062. See

also the lengthy circular from Darré's office to all local RNS branches, listing all the drawbacks that had emerged until then. The circular concluded by claiming that they would soon be eliminated by timely measures: BA, R 16 I, vol. 2040.

65. BA, R 16 I, vol. 199.

66. Pressure from lard producers to obtain the same privileges is documented in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3338.

67. Ministry of Finance note on the draft decree for margarine, 19 November 1934, in BA, R 2, vol. 18732.

68. See also the harsh attack on the powerful multinational Unilever corporation by the Vereinigung of German producers, 4 April 1935, in AA-Archiv, SW, Öle und Fette, vol. 2.

69. Cf. L. B. Bacon and F. C. Schloemer, *World Trade in Agricultural Products*, Rome, 1940, p. 649.

70. Cf. the cabinet meeting on 27 February, the law of 23 March and the decree of 24 March, in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1468.

71. Tornow, *Chronik*, pp. 83ff.

72. For example, see the proceedings in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3328.

73. Article entitled 'Das Getreidepreisproblem', *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 5 August 1933.

74. Abel, 'Preis', p. 29.

75. On the theoretical problem of a 'fair price', see the arguments in Abel, 'Preis', Leichthammer, 'Erzeugerpreis', and K. Schiller, 'Ordnung'.

76. See Backe's actual words quoted in the article, 'Die Ernährungslage', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 30 August 1935, and the highly critical, unsigned article entitled 'Die Sicherung der Lebensmittelpreise', *Nationale Wirtschaft*, 5 October 1935.

77. On the more general theme of the *Mittelstand* cf. A. von Saldern, *Mittelstand im 'Dritten Reich': Handwerker – Einzelhändler – Bauern*, Frankfurt, 1979; H. A. Winkler, 'Der entbehrliche Stand: zur Mittelstandspolitik in Dritten Reich', *AfS*, vol. 17, 1977. The debate between these two historians has continued recently in GG, vol. 12, 1986, pp. 235–44, 548–57. See also the detailed protest sent by the Wirtschaftsgruppe Einzelhandel to the Ministry of Finance, 22 August 1935, in BA, R 2, vol. 18276. A survey of the really rather modest reduction in retail profit margins in Berlin was carried out by the Institut für Konjunkturforschung in autumn 1934: DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3196.

78. Diary entry, 18 October 1934, in SA Goslar.

79. Cf. the documentation in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3193.

80. On Goerdeler's politico-economic ideas at a time when he collaborated fully with the regime, cf. M. Krüger-Charlé, 'Carl Goerdelers Versuche der Durchsetzung einer alternativen Politik 1933 bis 1937', in J. Schmäddecke and P. Steinbach (eds.), *Der Widerstand gegen den Nationalsozialismus*, Munich–Zurich, 1985, pp. 383–404.

81. For the friction between the Commissioner and the Minister, see the contemporary comments by the Austrian ambassador in G. Otruba, 'Die Agrarpolitik des Nationalsozialismus 1933 bis März 1938 in der Berichterstattung des österreichischen Gesandten', ZAGAS, vol. 29, 1981, pp. 147ff., and the coeval article entitled 'Goerdeler–Darré', *Prager Tageblatt*, 9 November 1934.

82. See the two memos, November 1934 and November 1935, quoted in Farquharson, *Plough and the Swastika*, pp. 83f., and in D. Döring, 'Deutsche Außenwirtschaftspolitik 1933–1935', Dissertation, Berlin, 1969, pp. 22ff.

83. Cf. Krüger-Charlé, 'Carl Goerdelers Versuche', p. 393.

84. The documentation is in BA, R 43 II, vol. 318a.

85. W. A. Boelcke, *Die deutsche Wirtschaft 1930–1945: Interna des Reichswirtschaftsministeriums*, Düsseldorf, 1983, pp. 132f.

86. Ministry of Agriculture circular, 14 November 1936, in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2060.

87. 'Since the peasant has always believed in the principle that he is the supreme authority in his own house, and since he only very unwillingly bends to any form of restriction', he considered restrictive and therefore negative any government measures aimed at regulating the market: Köslin police report, 6 January 1936, published in R. Thévoz et al. (eds.), *Pommern 1934/35 im Spiegel von Gestapo-Lagerberichten und Sachakten*, Cologne-Berlin, 1974, vol. II, p. 193. From a very different political point of view, the Social Democratic Party in exile reported that 'The refusal of the peasants against the coercive economy is rooted not only in his conception to remain *Herr im Haus*, but also in heavy material reasons': *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands 1934-1940*, 7 vols, Frankfurt, 1980, pp. 1155ff. (October 1935).

88. Among others, see the reports by the Schleswig-Holstein LBS, November 1934 (DZAP, 36.03, vol. 62), by the Silesian *Gau*, 11 August 1933 (DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3496), by the Pomeranian Gestapo (Thévoz, *Pommern 1934/35*, vol. II, pp. 155, 186), by the Silesian LBS, July 1933 (DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3169), by the Bavarian State Secretary for Agriculture, 2 August 1933 (BA, R 16 I, vol. 2028) and by the Regierungspräsidenten, at the end of 1934 (DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3256). Highly significant cases of peasant discontent in Bavaria have been analysed at length by I. Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945*, 2nd edn, Oxford 1984, pp. 42ff. The conclusion of a police report from Hildesheim (Lower Saxony) is very gloomy: 'The peasants are absolutely incapable of adapting to the planned market, especially as far as the dairy sector is concerned' (K. Mlynek (ed.), *Gestapo Hannover meldet*, Hildesheim, 1986, p. 528). (See other cases in *ibid.*, pp. 159, 209, 218, 240, 312.) There is general agreement in the references in social democratic sources on the hardship suffered by the peasants. See the above-mentioned *Deutschland-Berichte*. On the subject of the complaints from provincial administrative offices, Darré wrote to Hitler twice, recalling that he had held numerous meetings to clear up the controversial points. At the same time, he defended the whole *Marktordnung*: letters of 9 October and 27 December 1934 in BA, R 43 II, vol. 193.

89. DAF report, 1 August 1935, in BA, R 2, vol. 18276; numerous protests were made by the Ministry of Labour in the same year, *ibid.*, by the Silesian Oberpräsident on 27 September 1934 and by the Rhineland Oberpräsident (same date), (both in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 3194), by the Cologne Bürgermeister, 25 July 1934, *ibid.*, and by the united Chambers of Commerce of Westphalia in a detailed statement of May 1934 (BA, R 43 II, vol. 199). See also 'Das landwirtschaftliche Marktgesetz', *Deutsche Führerbriefe*, 19 September 1933, and the untitled article by K. Schacht in *Ruhr und Rhein*, no. 26, 30 June 1933.

90. Cf. BA, NI Darré II, vol. 27.

91. See the detailed criticism by H. Gies, 'Aufgaben und Probleme der nationalsozialistischen Ernährungswirtschaft', *VSWG*, vol. 66, 1979, pp. 490ff.

92. See I. Kershaw's analysis in *Der Hitler-Mythos: Volksmeinung und Propaganda im Dritten Reich*, Stuttgart, 1980, pp. 46ff., on the importance of the population's hopes in Hitler and the radical innovations that they expected from him. In Kershaw's opinion, the difficulties in foodstuff supply contributed to reduce the share of 'Ja' votes in the plebiscite of 19 August 1934, called to legitimate the institutional changes since Hindenburg's death (p. 68).

93. Gebhard and Merkel, *Recht*, p. 6.

94. D. Petzina, W. Abelschäuser and A. Faust, *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, Munich, 1978, vol. III, p. 98. The 'underconsumption' interpretation made by orthodox Marxists, which attributed the reduction in individual consumption to the cost of re-armament, thus appears forced and untenable. Cf. as an example D. Gittler, 'Der "Neue Plan" und seine Auswirkungen auf die ökonomische Aufrüstung in Deutschland', Dissertation, Berlin, 1970, pp. 228ff.

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95. See the recent statistically based study by R. Hachtmann, 'Lebenshaltungskosten und Reallöhne während des "Dritten Reiches"', *VSWG*, vol. 75, 1988, pp. 32-73 (the quoted data at p. 33).

Internal Colonisation Versus Preservation of the Large Eastern Estates

The *Junkertum*, the large landowning class in the eastern provinces of the Reich, was an alien body in modern industrial society. Its anomalous nature clearly emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century, especially after agriculture had definitively lost its role as economic leader, and the dream of turning back the hands of the clock of history had faded.¹ None the less, thanks to its many privileged relations with government bureaucracy and military, the large landowning class continued to exercise an important political role even in the face of its own economic decline. In fact the Junkers had had a considerable influence in determining Germany's protectionist trade policy from the 1870s onwards, which had overvalued the cereal industry from the point of view of the other agriculture sectors and the consumers. The decision to go to war in 1914 was also in part a response to the aspirations and interests of the Junkers, and the course of the Weimar Republic was greatly affected by their reactionary, anti-democratic attitude.

As is clearly illustrated by the episode of Chancellor Brüning's dismissal, caused by a Junker plot, the influence of the class went from strength to strength as parliamentary and republican institutions were gradually undermined by presidential governments eventually paving the way for the rise of Hitler.² Without wishing to enter into the controversial debate as to whether the alliance between the Junkers and Hitler's movement was based on actual involvement, I would suggest that these relations ought to be seen in terms of an instrumental and temporary alliance between two colliding power groups. In a recent study of the social composition of Hitler's party, Kater has shown how the East Elbian estate owners were fairly unenthusiastic about joining.³ With hindsight the attempt to 'tame' the fortunate demagogue, Hitler, within a coalition cabinet, vouched for by President Hindenburg and with a majority of conservative ministers, appears symptomatic of the old ruling élite's failure to grasp the new elements in the twentieth century that had been so well understood by Hitler's movement.

Table 6.1. Percentage of agricultural land owned by farms of over 100 hectares in eastern districts according to the 1933 census

Reich (average)	37.9	Königsberg	55.2
Mecklenburg	64.7	Potsdam	52.8
Stettin	59.1	Posen	52.0
Köslin	56.6	Frankfurt on Oder	50.6

Source: G. Schulz, 'Deutschland und der preußische Osten', in H. U. Wehler, *Sozialgeschichte heute*, Göttingen, 1974, p. 146.

Despite attempts to prove otherwise, relations between the big landowners and the National Socialists were fairly cool right from the start. Both the mentality and the mode of action of the deracinated storm-troop politicians whom Hitler had attracted into the ranks of the NSDAP were irreconcilable with the conservative outlook.⁴ And in fact they shared only the temporary, but substantial, interests which found expression in the will to abolish the democratic republic and defeat organised labour. As far as agrarian policy was concerned, the programme that was spread so successfully among the peasantry by National Socialist mass media offered little comfort to the Junkers. Darré's long-term proposal was to create a 'new nobility', based on the peasants and able to regenerate the whole German people in a rural mould. Even in vague terms, this was seen as a danger by the nobility, whose main interest was in maintaining the existing social pyramid. According to Darré it was *Blut*, or rather racial purity, and not birth that should be the main criterion for the selection of the new nobility which was to form the basis of the utopian regeneration of German agriculture.⁵

Darré considered the SS to be the best recruiting ground for the future élite. This was partly due to the good relationship he had established with Himmler on the basis of deep ideological affinities. One of the first fruits of their co-operation was the creation, in 1931, of an SS Rasseamt. Headed by Darré, the office was to concern itself with the racial consequences of the internal selection of the SS, and in particular the marriages of its members. At the same time, Himmler issued a decree obliging all blackshirts to apply for consent from the Rasseamt before signing a marriage contract, and in fact this consent depended on a number of strict racial conditions.⁶

As early as 1926 – as we have already seen – by issuing an official statement the NSDAP sought to mitigate the more radical tone of its original programme, drafted six years earlier, where it spoke of 'property reform' and 'a law for the expropriation of land for

collective purposes'.⁷ In the only other official manifesto, the *Sofortprogramm*, published in March 1930 for the political elections, mention was made of the need to maintain a balanced relationship between farms of differing sizes, but at the same time the strengthening of the peasantry was also considered desirable. The latter was to be achieved by dividing up 'parts of estates that were not directly farmed by the owners themselves' and distributing them to landless younger sons of peasants.⁸ In the official declarations a fundamental ambivalence belied the will to avoid appearing too radical. But on the other hand, appearing too moderate would mean losing the consensus of all would-be farm owners. In later years too the incessant National Socialist propaganda campaign was never free of this ambivalence,⁹ which found expression in the formula of a 'healthy mix' of productive units of different sizes. There was no lack, however, of declarations clearly in favour of the peasantry, advocating reductions in the eastern estates, the main purpose being to create a human wall against the Slav peril.¹⁰

Given that there were only few and vague statements on the subject of the fate of the eastern estates, one has the definite impression that National Socialist propaganda sought to ignore the question as far as possible. Or rather it aimed at outlining a general programme to redeem the *Bauerntum* and, given the critical conditions of the latter, it won considerable electoral support. This caution was obviously part of the legitimist tactics that Hitler had formally adopted to win power, and for which he needed the backing of conservative circles.

Furthermore, the Führer's ideas on the crucial question of the shortage of farmland for domestic food requirements can clearly be deduced from the two programmatic books he wrote in the late 1920s. According to Hitler, whose *Weltanschauung* was rooted in an 'ingenuous and crude ruralism',¹¹ the imbalance between population and farmland could not be rectified simply by changes, no matter how radical, in the distribution of property. Nor did he attribute particular importance to the racial value of the peasantry, or he did so only on ritual occasions in such unconvincing terms as 'A strong stock of peasants and farmers is the best defence against the evils which now afflict us.'¹²

This position, which was radically nationalist, and therefore close to the traditional anti-Slav position of the Junkers,¹³ combined with the little store which Hitler set by the concept – so dear to Darré – of the *Bauerntum* as the primary regenerative cell of the German race, was probably popular with the defenders of the status quo. In fact in his dealings with them, Hitler's cast-iron ideology

and his shrewd tactical sense came together: after 30 January 1933 he chose the way of non-conflict with the conservative élite on the two crucial issues of settlement and *Osthilfe*, which we shall now examine in detail. The Republican regime had issued a fundamental law concerning the first problem on 11 August 1919. This had played down the nationalistic tones intrinsic to the settlement policy begun by Bismarck,¹⁴ aiming rather at a gradual re-equilibrium of internal relationships in agriculture, by reducing the estate owners' hegemony. Its actual implementation, however, affected by the political and social importance of the Junkers, disappointed its advocates, among them the doyen of German agronomists, Max Sering.¹⁵

By the end of 1932 a total of 57,288 settlement holdings had been created, forming a total area of 958,821 hectares; but especially by the mid-1920s settlement holdings were very small and had poor soil, and there was thus a high rate of bankruptcy. With the growing agricultural and economic crisis, settlement was seen by many in the liberal-socialist area as a way out of the crisis, for it would create employment. At the same time, however, farmers were becoming more aware of the need to defend their own position. It is no accident that agrarian policy and especially *Siedlung* became the subject of fierce political debates, contributing to the fate of both the Brüning government, which fell under pressure from farmers who feared the possibility of severe measures over the problem of expropriation of indebted estates, and the Schleicher government, whose recovery programmes also provoked an angry reaction from Junkers.¹⁶

Within the varied Hitlerian movement that came to power, the problem of the eastern estates was not aired much, but opinions on it were far from unanimous. From the outset many Gauleiters, anxious to hold on to the consensus won in the previous three years, advocated a more severe policy of expropriation, at the same time calling into question Darré's cautious policy, which doggedly defended the independence of the Reichsnährstand. In the first months of the new regime, the Brandenburg Gauleiter, Kube, presented a very radical settlement plan.¹⁷ The Silesian Gauleiter and Oberpräsident, Brückner, and the East Prussian, Koch, also spoke out in a number of harsh attacks on the conservative circles and big landowners who were openly hostile to the National Socialist policy of redividing landed property in favour of the peasants.¹⁸

A few years later Koch took up the fight again with a plan to revitalise agriculture through expropriation and the annexation in

settlements of large tracts of big estates.¹⁹ All of these proposals were only the visible part of the widespread discontent among National Socialists with their awkward conservative allies and the desire, which was actually very vague, to give a 'socialist' content to the economic policy of the National Socialist regime. But their suggestions fell on deaf ears because, at least until 1943–4, the regime needed to maintain good relations with the aristocratic landowner class which supplied many bureaucratic cadres especially for the officer caste. It should be remembered that between 1933 and 1945 the aristocracy, who filled the highest ranks, supplied as much as 18 per cent of the German officer corps, and almost half of them were sons of officers. Even in the bureaucratic world there was no significant decline in the incidence of nobles after the National Socialists took power.²⁰

This general political influence, which was particularly important while Hindenburg was alive, continued even after his death. We only need mention one significant example: in August 1934 Rohr, who was Secretary of State first with Hugenberg and then briefly with Darré, sent Hitler a very detailed memo criticising the agrarian policy and demanding, among other things, a greater involvement of aristocrat estate owners in RNS organisations. The Chancellor seems to have taken Rohr's objections very seriously, even though the latter no longer held office, and demanded a thorough reply from Darré.²¹

There was another kind of consideration which led many in the National Socialist ruling class to wish to maintain the blatant imbalances in the distribution of land in the eastern provinces: this was strategico-productive in nature. The views of the agronomists of the time and present-day agriculture historians are not unanimous, especially since geological and pedological differences must be taken into account. Some of the studies made at the time, especially by H. L. Fensch, tend to emphasise that the market quotas produced by peasants and small farmers were not below average.²² Like many others, therefore, he was for a 'healthy mix' of various sizes of farms throughout the country so that their different capacities would complement each other.²³ This intermediary position had to steer a course – in both economic and political terms – between radically opposed groups: the extreme 'ruralist romantics' who, giving more weight to considerations of a racial nature, claimed that the big estates had to be drastically reduced;²⁴ and equally official authors, such as the authoritative agronomist Konrad Meyer. In fact he claimed that, from the point of view of production, the large estates offered advantages that should be

borne in mind when deciding which policy to adopt. 'The ideal, which has prevailed up to now, of individual peasant independence in the form of a self-sufficient family economy is no longer enough' was how Meyer put it in 1939.²⁵ This statement was, in fact, a clear attack on the whole of Darré's policy, and it came, not by chance, at a time when the Minister's star was palpably beginning to wane – as we shall see later.

These obvious differences of opinion among experts reflected the variety of interpretations, which were more than mere nuances, within the ruling group of the NSDAP. In a hearing on 27 April 1933 with Reichsgrundbesitzerverband representatives, worried about the threat implicit in the intentions expressed by some party members about the future of the large estates, Hitler himself literally stated that 'the whole structure of the economy must be considered a ladder that rises from the bottom upwards. The large estates were needed to feed the population. But for demographic purposes large estates unable to survive will be colonised.'²⁶ The Führer's position was shared by Göring, who used almost the same words in a speech to the Pomeranian Landbund on 17 March 1935.²⁷

As for Darré, when asked in an interview given just after his appointment about the kind of policy he would implement, he spoke of a 'reasonable redistribution of the size of German farms' to be realised through a kind of boycott: in other words, the government would do absolutely nothing to help large estates in difficulty. But at the same time, he would respect the fundamental principle, proclaimed by the Führer, concerning the inviolability of private property and individual enterprise.²⁸ Speaking on 11 May of the following year at Starkow (Pomerania), in a region that had suffered greatly from the hegemony of aristocrat estate owners, the Minister was even more radical: although claiming that 'the agrarian policy of the new Germany does not intend to eliminate all the large eastern estates', Darré still maintained that priority racial needs demanded that the eastern peasants be given back the land which the large estates had so arrogantly wrung from them in previous centuries.²⁹

Looking back on the episode during his post-war trial, Darré stressed that the eastern estate owners were amongst his fiercest rivals, precisely because of his pro-peasant policy. This also soon led to his being opposed by Herbert Backe, his chief assistant and successor, who turned out to be an advocate of the 'Göring line' which privileged the productive potential of the large estates.³⁰

Most other leading members of the RNS and the Ministry, like

Reichsobmann Meinberg and the heads of the settlement policy Granzow and Kummer, followed in the footsteps of Darré: as I have already said the National Socialists did not nourish any preconceived or radical animosity towards the big landowners, they simply wished to privilege the peasant element, giving as much space as possible to settlement, especially in the eastern provinces. The selection criteria for maintaining a large estate or not varied according to different interpretations, depending on the level of indebtedness, or the racial purity of the owner, or the length of time he had been associated with the land in question.³¹

The widespread opinion within peasant organisations controlled by the National Socialists was, therefore, largely hostile to the estate owners who, having lost the important backing of Hindenburg, were kept mainly on the defensive. Only rarely did the advocates of an indispensable role for the Junkers come out into the open, either in the press or with publications seeking to justify their existence or to legitimise their economic and national importance or their irreplaceable function as a breeding ground for the bureaucratic and military classes.³²

Any explicit declaration defending the large landowners naturally provoked a bitter reaction from the regime press and National Socialist circles, giving rise to an unusually lively debate.³³ Here is an example of one of these polemical replies: 'The large landed-property owners, the enormous big-estate economy in eastern Germany, which from the economic point of view has no place within the new organ, will have to give way before the great task of settlement.'³⁴

Despite this widespread attitude, 'general political reasons' – as the RNS leaders described them³⁵ – prevented a law being issued to stipulate precise and severe norms for the expropriation of the large eastern estates. Darré's approach to the settlement problem meant abandoning the perspective of private enterprise which had dominated until then, and an independence from the spoil system typical, in his opinion, of the Republican period. To mark the change Darré coined a new definition: instead of *Siedlung*, the regime now spoke of *Neubildung des deutschen Bauerntums*; thus the accent was placed more on populationist and racial aspects, leaving aside the viability of settlement holdings.

With the law of 14 July 1933, issued a few days after he had been appointed Minister, Darré entrusted this sector to his own Ministry, thus taking over from the Minister of Labour who, especially in the last three years of the Republic, had been one of the most active in the organisation of settlement. In doing so, Darré sol-

emly proclaimed settlement to be a question of primary importance for the nation.³⁶ He then proceeded fairly boldly along the tricky path of legislation to obtain the necessary land, so as not to disappoint expectations within the party. His next bill, debated in winter 1933/34, gave the state wide powers to intervene and expropriate private land, thus going beyond the norms established in 1919 by the *Reichssiedlungsgesetz*, which provided for the cession, with adequate compensation, of a third of the total farmland of the large estates.³⁷ Darré's bill actually concentrated on land belonging to public bodies and the state; only in the last resort, and on payment of generous indemnities, would there have to be forced purchase of privately owned land. The bill was attacked from various quarters and for different reasons: for its vague nature and for the wide powers that it gave to the Ministry of Agriculture to the detriment of the other ministries,³⁸ and of other decentralised administrative bodies.³⁹ The criticism put forward by the Prussian Minister of Finance, Popitz (of the DNVP), seems to be particularly enlightening: how could such an important law be passed without making explicit the overall plan of which it was a part? Popitz invited Darré (in vain) to clarify once and for all the concrete goals that his policy wished to achieve.⁴⁰ Presented, after various modifications, during the cabinet meeting of 8 December 1933, the bill was rejected.⁴¹

At the same time the Minister had issued a circular for the *Osthilfe* commissioners, containing severe measures against large estates which sought debt relief. From now on they would be forced to sell up to 25 per cent of their agricultural land (for estates over 1,000 hectares). But less than a month later, Darré had to back down, adding that these measures were to be considered guidelines and should be implemented bearing in mind the specific needs of each individual farm. The idea of *Osthilfe* – the Minister claimed – was in fact to preserve existing productive units.⁴²

As we shall see later, farmers' political pressure, through bureaucracy, the parties and representative organisations, ensured that from the outset *Osthilfe* was stripped of its reformist potential and was reduced to a straightforward relief organisation. The eastern estates, which on average, for a variety of reasons, were deeper in debt,⁴³ received huge sums, diverted from a paralysed economy almost without any conditions or controls whatsoever. The climax of this self-centred and sectoral public intervention came with a decree issued by Hugenberg on 14 February 1933. This not only froze debts and foreclosures, but involved all farmers in bearing the costs of salvaging indebted farms, thus further discouraging individual

initiative. Despite being inundated by criticism, the Minister continued along the same lines and a subsequent law of 1 June set aside another RM600 million for debt relief, again without there being any conditions.⁴⁴

Darré did not abandon this policy, he merely hoped for a severe law which would serve at least as a deterrent.⁴⁵ As late as October 1938 – judging from a note in his diary – the Minister was planning an outline law on settlement to accompany the *Erbhof* law, to which we shall return in Chapter 7. But later events reveal that the project was never realised.⁴⁶

The way more or less being closed for a quantitative change in the settlement programme, the National Socialist regime staked everything on the ‘qualitative’ aspects: in particular, agrarian policy strategists announced that the primary objective was to create holdings that were large enough to be self-sufficient and suitable as basic cells for the regeneration of the German people.

A great deal of care was taken, however, in the selection of settlers. From now on this task was to be entrusted no longer to private *Siedlungsgesellschaften* but to special RNS offices.⁴⁷ To achieve the goal of re-ruralisation, it was decided that at least 25 per cent of new settlers must come from western regions and that priority must be accorded to farm workers and non-inheriting farmers’ sons.⁴⁸ Both of these new aspects in the National Socialist settlement policy – larger holdings and the selection of potential settlers on a racial and political basis – were by no means free of contradiction, as the RNS leaders themselves were soon to discover. The first criterion not only strongly limited farm workers’ and other poor country dwellers’ chances of obtaining a small lot to help in their subsistence or to round out what they already had, but it was also dangerous from an economic point of view. According to a Ministry of Finance report, medium to large farms were more vulnerable to changing economic circumstances. Furthermore, the larger a holding the more resources (machines, cattle, cash, etc.) the settler had to allocate to work the farm.⁴⁹

The statistics concerning the previous occupations of settlers from 1934 to 1938 show, in fact, that the majority came from landowning peasant families (and the percentage actually increased yearly); the proportion of wage earners, on the other hand, decreased from 29 per cent to 16 per cent in 1938.⁵⁰ This was in stark contrast to the widespread notion that the land should be repopulated by giving priority to people from the weakest social categories.⁵¹ Moreover, the statistics show all too clearly how the regime’s pledge that at least a quarter of the settlers should come

from western Germany, to strengthen the area racially, was not maintained.

Apart from the odd exception, most settlers were locals, and at times were even ex-workers of the same estates that had been divided up.⁵² From this point of view, there had been a greater movement of new settlers from the west to the east during the Republic, whereas during the Third Reich *Neubildung* only strengthened the existing eastern peasantry, giving younger sons and all those left out by the *Erbhof* law a modest chance of economic advancement.

But in any case this approach to the settlement problem could in no way slow down the massive exodus of labour from the land due to the attraction of work, higher wages and better living conditions in the cities. In fact, in this respect, all approaches to settlement from the beginning of the nineteenth century had a basic flaw: Sering, von der Goltz, Oppenheimer and even Max Weber, the principal advocates of settlement as an antidote to rural depopulation, all underestimated the decisive influence of new factors (industrialisation, urbanisation, etc.) and essentially passed the blame on to the large estates. This is clearly demonstrated in the studies carried out by Peter Quante, who demolished the equation 'more peasant holdings = more inhabitants' and with it the whole myth of re-ruralisation. He called instead for a rationalisation of the agricultural economy, which necessarily involved a numerical reduction in the rural population.⁵³

But returning to settlement, the severity of the criteria for racial selection ended up backfiring on the proposed objectives. According to Kummer, many potential settlers held back or reacted diffidently when faced with the strict controls. Because of this, he proposed a more flexible use of the criteria, at least temporarily.⁵⁴ Candidates had to produce certificates proving Aryan descent back to the early nineteenth century both for themselves and for their wives. They had to prove they were in perfect physical condition, had attended training courses and had adequate personal resources. They were also carefully screened for political reliability.⁵⁵ Only after having passed these tests could a would-be settler receive a certificate which gave him the right to join the waiting list for a holding: the *Neubauernschein*.⁵⁶ This did not mean, however, that once a candidate had passed these tests he was sure of getting a holding, given that until 1939 three times as many certificates were issued as holdings assigned.

In effect, having ruled out the drastic measure of expropriating the big estates, there was little alternative for procuring land for

settlement: the voluntary cession of lands (*Landespende*) by estate owners, or the breaking-up into holdings of state property which was very extensive, especially in Prussia, or even the cultivation of marginal or untilled land. The first 'solution' was supported by pressure and demands from the National Socialist leaders, among them the Silesian Landesbauernführer Freiherr von Reibnitz, himself a large landowner, as well as by some large landowners anxious to receive recognition and, if possible, immunity. For having made a 'generous gesture', they hoped to obtain that the act on entailments, or *Fideikomnisse*, which protected the large estates by guaranteeing provisions for dependants and obligations to the Junker families, should not be abolished as the Weimar Constitution foresaw.⁵⁷ In fact, the farmers were unsuccessful in their attempt to eliminate article 155, still in force from the Weimar Constitution, which provided for the dissolution of *Fideikomnisse*. This was a fervently debated issue since the institution of the *Fideikomnisse* was a symbol of the rural constitution which had emerged after the Stein and Hardenberg reforms in the early nineteenth century. Thanks to manoeuvres of which we still know very little, the estate owners were only able to hold up the issuing of the final act of abrogation, which was eventually made public on 6 July 1938.⁵⁸

Moreover – as Krupp's son-in-law, Thilo von Wilmowsky, an influential figure in conservative circles, openly admitted – the cession of (often fairly unprofitable) land by estate owners to round up the size of small settlement holdings was from the former's point of view an excellent solution, even if it went against Darré's policy of *Neubildung des deutschen Bauerntums*.⁵⁹

How much land was ceded by estate owners in this way is not known, but it is almost certainly a trifling amount in the context of the ambitious project of re-ruralisation that the RNS was attempting to pursue. The second possible 'solution' – the breaking up of state property into holdings – did not fare any better. Here the efforts of National Socialist leaders ran into the rigid opposition of Göring who, as the Prussian Ministerpräsident, was in control of the vast state property which the Hohenzollern kings had patiently and shrewdly accumulated since the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁶⁰ According to the 1933 census, state property (excluding forests) was more than 504,000 hectares, or 1.9 per cent of total farmland. But in Prussia, state property was more than 2.7 per cent of farmland. Göring's opposition intensified following the implementation of the four-year plan: as efforts to pool resources for war intensified, Göring and his assistants, including Backe, stressed

the importance of the priority of maximising output.

Although initially exceptions had been envisaged, by 1938–9 a complete ban was imposed on creating holdings out of state property, for Göring considered the latter to be vital in view of the coming war. On the subject of state-owned land, it is interesting to note that its management fell into the hands of Backe, who as head of the agricultural section of the *Vierjahresplan* pursued a policy which was opposed to that of his own Ministry.⁶¹ This contradiction reflected the detrimental conflict between different agencies and options, a permanent feature of the agricultural sector which was further accentuated after 1936.

The results concerning state property made available for settlement (therefore not actually broken up into holdings) in Prussia speak for themselves: in the greatly scorned Republican years the annual average of state-owned land assigned for settlement was 4,550 hectares, whereas in the six years before the war, despite the great (verbal) commitment and the massive incessant propaganda campaign, this average rose only slightly to 5,251 hectares per year, a derisory figure given the ambitious nature of the plans drawn up.⁶²

The land available for agriculture not only did not increase, it was actually reduced by the growing need for land for military purposes. In fact, in December 1936 the Minister was forced to take measures to ensure that land confiscated from Jews on grounds of the racial laws was given over for holdings not to 'new' farmers but to those who had lost their farms through expropriation for military purposes.⁶³ According to Darré, 200,000 hectares had been expropriated for the Siegfried line alone, whereas a general estimate has a total of 750,000 hectares taken from agriculture for priority military needs, and this only to the end of 1937.⁶⁴ The *Neues Bauerntum*, the official gazette of the Gesellschaft für innere Kolonisation, even claimed that in 1939 as much as 112,000 hectares bought for settlement purposes had been re-routed for preponderant military needs.⁶⁵

Thus we come to the last solution open to the advocates of a massive repopulation of the land: the reclamation and cultivation of waste and untilled land. It must firstly be pointed out that this solution meant that the eastern estates would no longer be the centre of attention, as untilled areas were to be found throughout the country. This geographical shift clearly emerges from the statistics: whereas in 1933 the percentage of new holdings created in the western provinces amounted to 23.5 per cent, five years later this figure rose to 44 per cent and by 1941 it was as much as 54.8 per

cent. But the project did not get beyond the planning and theoretical stage, in which opinions of experts on the concrete possibilities of success varied greatly. In any case, both those in favour of the use of large uncultivated tracts and those sceptical about the whole idea of 're-ruralisation' agreed that it was too long and costly an operation, and thus unfeasible.⁶⁶ Only in the event of a long-term plan involving reorganisation on a national scale would significant progress be made, and the government had neither the time nor the desire for such a programme. In fact, the only step taken was to set up a Reichstelle für Raumordnung in March 1935. Headed by the former Prussian Minister of Justice, Hanns Kerrl, it was basically an empty office whose main concern was finding land for military purposes⁶⁷ and setting in motion a few grandiose model projects which were never completed, such as the creation of holdings in some coastal areas in Schleswig-Holstein. The reclamation works to create the Adolf Hitler-Koog and the Hermann Göring-Koog were run directly by the party and begun as early as 1933. The ultimate aim was to set up an ideal reclamation scheme based on the Italian model: for this purpose settlers were chosen according to very severe racial and political criteria. Much less land was actually reclaimed than had been planned in the original project. But the whole scheme served very important propaganda purposes, and the reclaimed land was visited by countless foreign delegations.⁶⁸

Thus in this overall scheme of things the problem of rural settlement, presented by the regime as of supreme importance, ended up being rather low in the list of priorities: it comes as no surprise that the RNS leaders, especially Darré, were very disappointed and frustrated by this state of affairs, in which they saw the key point in their propaganda gradually lose importance. To make matters worse for the settlement policy, there were conflicts over areas of competence both with the Ministry of Finance, which demanded to be jointly involved in its management, and with the Gauleiters.⁶⁹ Within the Ministry too the lack of clearly defined roles seems to have created considerable friction between Kurt Kummer and Walter Granzow. The latter was given a 'special appointment' in the Ministry for the *Neubildung*, but at the same time he was head of the analogous section in the RNS. There were even comments that were not, on the whole, pessimistic about what had been achieved up until then, although these were sometimes accompanied by complaints that the press gave little coverage to the government's agrarian policy.⁷⁰ But these fairly optimistic assessments of the situation were far outweighed by negative comments which culminated in Darré's explicit declaration of

Table 6.2. Number and size of settlement holdings established per annum 1919–1940

Period	No. of holdings per annum	Size (ha)
1919–25	2,401	20,957
1926–32	5,806	65,058
1933–40	2,188	45,305

Source: H. Denecke, 'Die agrarpolitischen Konzeptionen des deutschen Imperialismus beim Übergang vom bürgerlich-parlamentarischen System zur faschistischen Diktatur', Dissertation, Berlin, 1972, vol. II, p. 153.

defeat in a speech to the sixth *Reichsbauerntag* in 1938. In it, he admitted that the results of settlement had disappointed both numerically and, above all, from a methodological point of view, in so far as the policy had been unsuccessful in its attempts to eliminate the residual private-capitalistic mentality. To get round these structural limits, on this occasion the Minister simply hoped to lay the basis, which he did not further define, for the search for a 'new way'.⁷¹

Let us examine, then, the statistics on the number of settlement holdings created from 1933 to 1940 and their sizes. On the whole, in the eight years of National Socialist rule (during the war settlement ceased completely), fewer than 22,000 new settlement holdings were created, involving a total area of 362,442 hectares. As for the average number of settlements set up annually, some comparative data with the Republican period are given in Table 6.2.

The average size of individual holdings grew constantly: from 8.7 hectares to 11.1 hectares and then to 16.3 hectares in the three periods considered. In fact, whereas during the Republican period approximately 30 per cent of new holdings were less than 2 hectares and 11.2 per cent were 2–5 hectares, the percentage of these very small farms dropped drastically in subsequent years to 5 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively. But this trend had already begun in 1929 and the National Socialist regime only accentuated it.

In the case of the *Anlieger*, that is the portions of land added on to supplement existing productive units, there was also an increase in both their average size (1.2, 1.8, 2 hectares) and their number and total acreage, despite the fact that Darré's programme was against adding on to existing farms rather than creating new independent holdings able to become *Erbhöfe*. In a breakdown of the eight years

Table 6.3. Size and number of settlement holdings 1933–1939

Year	No. of holdings	Size (ha)	Average size of holding (ha)
1933	4,914	60,297	12.3
1934	4,931	74,192	15.0
1935	3,905	68,338	17.5
1936	3,308	60,358	18.2
1937	1,894	37,594	19.8
1938	1,456	27,834	19.1
1939	846	14,503	17.1

Source: H. Denecke, 'Die agrarpolitischen Konzeptionen des deutschen Imperialismus beim Übergang von bürgerlich-parlamentarischem System zur faschistischen Diktatur', Dissertation, Berlin, 1972, vol. II, pp. 153f.

Table 6.4. Size and number of *Anliegersiedlungen* 1933–1939

Year	No.	Size (ha)	Average size of holding (ha)
1933	8,480	17,047	2.0
1934	13,654	27,056	2.0
1935	13,156	23,145	1.8
1936	10,782	22,044	2.0
1937	10,793	21,400	1.9
1938	7,610	16,400	2.2
1939	6,906	14,503	2.2

Source: H. Denecke, 'Die agrarpolitischen Konzeptionen des deutschen Imperialismus beim Übergang von bürgerlich-parlamentarischem System zur faschistischen Diktatur', Dissertation, Berlin, 1972, vol. II, pp. 154ff.

examined (Tables 6.3 and 6.4), the figures reveal how the initial spate of new settlement holdings and *Anliegersiedlungen* lasted only until 1934: the following year all the indicators show a definite falling-off, and this at a greater rate for genuine holdings.⁷²

Of interest too is the way in which the overall land used for holdings was distributed over the various regions. The eastern provinces continued to provide most of the land for new holdings, but their percentage share dwindled constantly: from 74 per cent in 1933–5, to 66 per cent in 1936–8 and then to 41 per cent in 1939–41. At the same time, the percentage of land settled in western and southern regions rose from 7 per cent to 19 per cent to 33 per cent. Finally, as far as the kind of land used for new holdings is con-

cerned, significantly, the percentage of land taken from private or state property of over 100 hectares rose only minimally compared to the Republican period, going from 85.6 per cent to 86.1 per cent. Along with these far from brilliant quantitative results, the unsatisfactory qualitative outcome must also be mentioned: numerous settlers went bankrupt and had to abandon the new holdings, and others delayed payment of financial commitments.⁷³

A survey, carried out at the end of 1935 by the Statistics Office of the Reich, on all the new holdings set up in 1929, gave a rather more positive picture of the economic stability of the new productive units. Yet after six years, more than 11.5 per cent of the 1929 settlers had given up and left. A similar survey, carried out in 1939 on settlements set up in 1933, shows that the percentage of farmers giving up had decreased only slightly to 10.7 per cent.⁷⁴

The results clearly appear very slight indeed, if we consider, on one hand, the importance of the re-ruralisation plans and consolidation programmes for the *Bauerntum* in Darré's propaganda, and on the other hand, the raw data of the 1939 agricultural census, which shows that the number of estates over 100 hectares (34,843 in 1933) had not substantially changed: 33,791. Even their overall size had been only slightly reduced, dropping from 15,709,176 hectares (37.92 per cent of total land) to 15,588,960 hectares (36.78 per cent). As far as farmland was concerned, there was a similar slight decrease for the same size category, which had 5,310,616 hectares (19.94 per cent) in 1933 and six years later still had 5,074,938 hectares (18.6 per cent). Thus only a small part of the more than 1.3 million hectares used for settlement holdings from 1919 onwards came from the large estates in the way that had been foreseen in the original spirit of the *Siedlung*. Land ownership had therefore been almost completely unaffected by settlement.

Alongside this essentially unchanged proportion of large estates, the 1939 census brought to light another significant problem which was a source of worry for National Socialist leaders: small and very small holdings, which could not be considered self-sufficient, had considerably increased compared to six years earlier. This figure – according to the always rather unreliable census statistics – rose from 834,014 to 940,822, whereas their total area increased only slightly: from 934,087 to 1,002,720 hectares. In other words, the average size of these 'proletarian' productive units only rose from 0.89 to 0.93 hectares.⁷⁵

These developments appear even more serious in that one of the cardinal points of National Socialist ideology and policy was the economic strengthening of this class. The large estate owners had

not only managed to emerge unscathed from the regime's rural policy, whose declared aim was to strengthen the *Bauerntum*, but they also continued to enjoy considerable privileges granted them by the special legislation generally known as the *Osthilfe*.⁷⁶ By playing on the usual nationalist string and insisting on the urgent need to aid the relatively backward and rural eastern provinces,⁷⁷ from the early 1920s pressure groups had demanded and gradually wrung out of the Republican governments a number of special financial contributions. The main objective of these contributions was to cure the ills of agriculture and the economic fabric of these regions which had played such an important part in German history.⁷⁸

The election of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg as President of the Republic in 1925 led to a new outburst of demands by farmers. With the worsening economic crisis, which had hit the eastern provinces particularly badly, demands for increasingly large contributions had multiplied. And thanks to a change to a more authoritarian situation where the cabinet depended directly on the president, they were wholly successful. The presidential decree on *Osthilfe*, issued in 1931, was the climax of the special legislation both in scope (the funds to be set aside were RM2 billion over a five-year period) and in the very favourable conditions concerning debt relief, as well as in the direct involvement of industry which, after much hesitation and despite the open conflict with farmers especially over trade policy,⁷⁹ saddled itself with a part of the heavy burden of this scheme to support eastern agriculture.

As is known, the way in which *Osthilfe* was implemented was openly partisan and favoured the big landowners. The special bureaucratic bodies to be set up were partly formed by those directly concerned, in keeping with the principle of self-management so tenaciously defended by farmers. The attempt to introduce economic criteria into this pure relief organisation (for example, subsidies were given only to farms that guaranteed a possible recovery and with the obligation to give up land for settlement as a condition for the granting of aid) not only provoked angry reactions from the Junkers, but also contributed to the collapse of the Brüning government, paving the way to the National Socialist victory.

Even if, after 31 January 1933, nothing came of the conservative agriculturists' political programme to recover their hegemony, Hitler's regime was unusually respectful of this 'caste'. As far as *Osthilfe* was concerned, Hitler's government saw to it that the scandal which broke out in 1932, over the fraudulent way in which

subsidies were extended, ended as painlessly and quickly as possible. At the Führer's behest, the parliamentary commission dismissed the accusations of embezzlement and corruption which had tainted some of the most prestigious names in the Prussian aristocracy, despite the fact that these accusations were well founded and proven by other official bodies.⁸⁰ The commission declared that there was no scandal and that it had simply been invented by the opposition for base political motives.⁸¹

From the available data, it seems that under the new regime there was no real change in the ways in which the law was implemented, even if the key positions in its management were now held by National Socialists. Furthermore, as provided for in the 1931 law, the subsidies were gradually phased out until, apart from those still in course, they ended on 31 December 1936. The subsidies, which until 1934 had been as many as 31,560, fell to 5,124 in 1934/35, to 3,319 in 1935/36, to 1,258 in 1936/37, and then to only 174 in 1938. The distribution of funds clearly reveals to just what extent the large estates continued to receive preferential treatment (Table 6.5).

This unfair distribution appears even more significant considering that – according to Drescher's careful study – the indebtedness of small peasant farms grew so quickly in the 1930s that it exceeded (in RM per hectare) that of the large estates themselves: RM20 to RM15 in 1938 – naturally these figures refer to those regions involved in the *Osthilfe*.⁸²

Despite this enormous injection of money, calculated at a total of more than RM1 billion, by 30 June 1938 overall indebtedness in German agriculture was around RM11 billion, that is only a billion less than at the time of the great depression.⁸³ The figures for foreclosures, indicative of the general trend of indebtedness, show a turning point in 1935, when the clearly decreasing tendency of the previous years was reversed, even if the absolute values are lower.

Table 6.5. Percentage of subsidies given to farms of over 125 hectares

Year	%
Until 31 March 1934	47.4
1934/35	58.7
1935/36	53.2
1936/37	63.1
1937/38	88.9

Source: L. Drescher, *Entschuldung der ostdeutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1938, p. 20.

Table 6.6. Percentage indebtedness over unitary value of farms

Reich (average)	53
Pomerania	94
East Prussia	81
Brandenburg	76
Silesia	66
Mecklenburg	65
Bavaria	55

Source: H. Bente, *Landwirtschaft und Bauerntum*, Berlin, 1937, p. 153.

Significantly, in a classification of indebtedness based on the average percentage against the unitary value of farms, the top places go to the five East Elbian provinces (Table 6.6). With values way above the national average, they are followed at a considerable distance by all the other provinces.

These figures, despite the difficulties involved in disaggregating them according to size categories, clearly reflect a lack of structural reforms which could have restored the balance in agriculture. What also emerges is the permanent state of crisis of the large eastern estates, which continued to enjoy countless privileges under the Third Reich, including a regime of high stable prices, especially in the crucial sector of cereals. Not only *Osthilfe*, but also the legislation encouraging debt relief introduced by Hugenberg, was further strengthened by the decrees of October 1933 and May 1935, drawn up by Darré: by graduating debt moratorium contributions through a system of credit at low rates, they primarily favoured larger farms. It should be added that this legislation did not include all the widespread 'floating' debts with local craftsmen, shopkeepers and moneylenders, which were certainly more common among small peasant farmers.⁸⁴

To sum up, the agrarian policy of the Third Reich does not seem to have made much impact on long-term existing imbalances, nor would it seem to have taken decisive steps in reducing the traditional hegemony of the Junkers. This contradicted the aim of the AA led by Darré: the strengthening of the peasants and smaller farmers for racial purposes. The need for a regular domestic output in the two vital sectors of cereals and potatoes, in which the large estates had a pre-eminent role,⁸⁵ and more important 'general' political factors led the regime to refrain, until late on in the war, from undermining the power of this troublesome ally, which had always stood aloof, divided by a gulf of rivalry and cultural diversity.

The crunch came only much later, with the bloody purges after the failed assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944. The size of the purges reflects the extent of the widespread (belated) rebellion against the regime, and Hitler's hatred of those who had disdainfully referred to him as the 'Bohemian corporal'. But in fact the real and final crunch did not come until after 1945, when the new communist regime occupying the eastern provinces wiped off the face of the earth the wealth of landed property accumulated by the Junkers in the previous centuries, eliminating with it a social class, by then one of history's lugubrious wrecks.

Notes

1. On the political and theoretical debate concerning the appropriateness of turning again towards an *Agrarstaat*, cf. K. D. Barkin, *The Controversy over German Industrialisation*, Chicago, 1970.

2. A. Gerschenkron, *Bread and Democracy in Germany*, New York, 1966, seems to go too far, however, when he claims that the *Junkertum* was the determining socio-political factor in twentieth-century German history. F. Fischer, *Bündnis der Eliten*, Düsseldorf, 1979, also very much tends to place the emphasis on the continuity of the ruling élite and its aims.

3. M. H. Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 105f.

4. Cf. K. Gossweiler and A. Schlicht, 'Junker und NSDAP 1931/32', *ZfG*, vol. 15, 1967; and K. Gossweiler, 'Junkertum und Faschismus', *WZU Berlin*, vol. 22, 1973, pp. 19-25. A wholly different approach is adopted in the only specific study available in the Federal Republic on relations between the regime and the nobility: G. Kleine, *Adelsgenossenschaft und Nationalsozialismus*, *VZG*, vol. 26, 1978, pp. 100-43.

5. In addition to Darré's works mentioned in Chapter 2, see also an exhaustive study by D. Conte, 'Ruralismo nella crisi della Germania weimariana: processi politici e dinamiche ideologiche', Doctoral Thesis, Naples, 1987.

6. Cf. M. H. Kater, *Das 'Ahnenerbe' der SS 1935-1945*, Stuttgart, 1974; A. C. Bramwell, 'National Socialist Agrarian Theory and Practice: with special reference to Darré and the Settlement Movement', Ph.D. Thesis, Oxford, 1982.

7. In G. Feder, *Das Program der NSDAP*, Munich, 1938, p. 33.

8. One of the places where the text is to be found is in *NS-Monatshefte*, no. 7/1930.

9. But even in the period before 1930, when the NSDAP had not yet fully established an ideological and propaganda presence, the exaltation of the settlement principle in epic-romantic tones fell silent when it came to suggesting where the necessary land should come from: cf. J. H. Grill, 'The Nazi Party's Rural Propaganda before 1928', *CEH*, vol. 15, 1982, pp. 149-85.

10. H. Backe, *Deutscher Bauer, erwache!*, Munich, 1931: 'Rather than hope for a healthy mix of various farm sizes, the accent should be placed on the peasants who have strong bonds with the land.' In a booklet intended for agricultural workers, K. Hildebrandt, *Nationalsozialismus und Landarbeiterschaft*, Munich, 1930, had painted a

very rosy picture of the future for them. The land was to be provided by the redistribution of excess quotas from the eastern estate owners. Cf. the article full of promises written by W. Willikens in *Der Pommersche Landarbeiter*, no. 14, 23 December 1932, quoted in R. Berndt (ed.), *Lage und Kampf der Landarbeiter im ostelbischen Preußen*, Berlin-Vaduz, 1985, pp. 192ff.

11. H. A. Turner, *Die Großunternehmer und der Aufstieg Hitlers*, Berlin, 1985, p. 96; and E. Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung: Entwurf einer Herrschaft*, Tübingen, 1969, pp. 40f.

12. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Munich, 1939, p. 151.

13. R. Zitelmann, *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*, Leamington Spa, 1987, pp. 171f.

14. Cf. R. L. Koehl, 'Colonialism inside Germany 1886-1918', *JMH*, vol. 25, 1953, pp. 255-72; and the fundamental study by F. W. Boyens, *Geschichte der ländlichen Siedlung*, Berlin-Bonn, 1959.

15. Sering's position in favour of a drastic reduction in large estates, albeit over a long period of time, is illustrated in the collective volume that he edited: M. Sering (ed.), *Die deutsche Landwirtschaft unter volks- und weltwirtschaftlichen Gesichtspunkten*, Berlin, 1932. This book brings together a number of studies aimed at showing the superiority of the peasant holding in every respect.

16. From the wealth of literature on the last days of the Weimar Republic and the role played by the agriculturists, see T. Kitani, 'Brünings Siedlungspolitik und sein Sturz', *ZAGAS*, vol. 14, 1966; U. Wengst, 'Schlange-Schöningen, Ostsiedlung und die Demission der Regierung Brüning', *GWU*, vol. 30, 1979; and the handy summary, D. Gessner, *Das Ende der Weimarer Republik*, Darmstadt, 1978.

17. Article by Kube in the *Märkischer Tageblatt*, 6 December 1933. Kube's article alarmed estate owners, who turned to their protector, Hindenburg. Evidence of this comes from a letter sent with the latter's knowledge from the Chancellery of the President to that of the Führer: in BA, R 43 II, vol. 207.

18. In the 1920s Koch had been a member of the 'Strasserian' wing and he never completely relinquished a certain radical anti-capitalist position: cf. his 'Die Reaktion ist am Werk!', *Junges Deutschland*, 23 June 1933.

19. The plan, sent to the appropriate ministries in April 1937, was inconclusively debated the following summer: BA, R 2, vol. 18019.

20. On the subject of the army, see R. Stumpf, *Die Wehrmacht: Rang und Herkunftsstruktur der deutschen Generale und Admiräle*, Boppard, 1982, p. 283. For the bureaucratic apparatus, see H. Mommsen, *Beamtenum im Dritten Reich*, Stuttgart, 1966.

21. See the letter from the Secretary of State for the Chancellery, Lammers, to Hitler, 20 January 1934. The letter contained the texts of many harsh letters sent to Hindenburg by vaguely defined 'friends' of the President: BA, R 43 II, vol. 193. The problem raised by Rohr concerned the eastern estate owners' holding on to their hegemony within the new organisations set up by the Third Reich. There can be no doubt that in this period the traditional rural hierarchy was overturned and a new ruling class emerged. This was partly the expression of a grass-roots tendency, but it was above all due to the will of politicians. The RNS staff did include, however, a considerable number of estate owners: of the 45 regional advisers, ten were owners or tenants of large estates. At the Landesbauernschaften and Kreisbauernschaften level of the RNS, out of 132 managers, nine were aristocratic landowners and 26 had large estates.

22. Of the abundant literature on the subject, cf. H. L. Fensch and K. Padberg, *Eigenverbrauch und Marktleistung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1938; H. L. Fensch, 'Die Entwicklung der Betriebsleistungen der deutschen Landwirtschaft', in K. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1939, pp. 679-711. For a review of the positions of those calling for greater productivity from farmers, see Bramwell, 'National Socialist Agrarian Theory', pp. 159-94.

23. Cf. H. Hamann, 'Wirtschaftliche Grundlagen und Leistungen von Landvolk und Wirtschaft', in K. Meyer (ed.), *Landvolk im Werden*, Berlin, 1941, pp. 175ff.

24. K. Bornhagen, 'Großgrundbesitz oder Bauernbetrieb', *Wille und Macht*, vol. 4, 1936, pp. 1-6. F. Fried even maintained that, as in the collapse of the Roman Empire, the estate owners would cause the collapse of the Third Reich: F. Fried, *Latifundien vernichteten Rom*, Goslar, 1938. Liberal agronomists, led by Sering, shared the same cultural roots when it came to exalting the importance of the peasant holding over all other types of productive unit. Of the various comparative studies on different farm sizes, see those by R. Bräuning, *Die Leistungsfähigkeit des Siedlerbetriebes im Vergleich zum Großbetrieb*, Berlin, 1934 (on Eastern Prussia), and H. J. Seraphim, 'Landwirtschaftliche Markteingliederung als ökonomischer Machtgleich auf ständisch-korporativer Grundlage', *Berichte über Landwirtschaft*, vol. 19, 1934, pp. 220ff. (on Mecklenburg). The studies prove that there were high levels of productivity for peasant holdings, although mainly only in the livestock sector.

25. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung*, p. 27. An unsigned memo, presented to the political leadership of the regime in 1937, confuted with a number of statistics the optimistic prognosis of the supporters of the small farmer, maintaining that they could no longer meet the growing overall demands of the economy: BA, R 43 II, vol. 863b. Another authoritative economist and pupil of Sering, Constantin von Dietze, intervened in favour of the larger estates on several occasions: cf. his article, 'Großgrundbesitz', published on the front page of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, 13 March 1935.

26. Cf. K. H. Minuth (ed.), *Die Regierung Hitler*, Boppard, 1983, pp. 399f. On the proceedings for preparations for this meeting, cf. BA, R 43 II, vol. 192.

27. Quoted by H. Männel, 'Die grundsätzliche Kritik der Öffentlichkeit an den Osthilfemaßnahmen', Dissertation, Leipzig, 1934, p. 67.

28. 'Bauernprogramm', *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 19 July 1933.

29. Cf. the report on the first page of the *Kölnische Zeitung*, 12 May 1934. C. Gustav von Platen replied to Darré in an article published in the *Adelsblatt* of 2 June. He both defended and praised the role that the aristocracy still played. This then sparked off a salvo of very fierce reaction contrived by the RNS. In a letter of 30 January 1934 to Hindenburg's secretary, Meissner, Darré reiterated that his policy aimed to privilege the peasantry without the expropriation of large estates. Darré was more inclined to enforce the measures concerning expropriation for debt relief: DZAP, 06.01, vol. 324/1.

30. DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 164, pp. 38, 46, 67.

31. Cf. Meinberg, 'Siedlung in Ketten', *Zeitungsdienst RLB*, 21 June 1933; 'Bauernpolitik und Großgrundbesitz', *Georgine*, 9 November 1934; and 'Deutsche Bauernpolitik nicht expansiv', *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 18 May 1936. See also Kurt Kummer, 'Das neue Siedlungswerk', *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 25 July 1933; the inaugural speech made by Medrow on the *Reichsbauerntag* 1936 (in DZAP, 36.03, vol. 166); and the letter, dated 13 March 1933, sent by Granzow to Hitler protesting about estate owners sabotaging the settlement policy (BA, R 43 II, vol. 204). A few months earlier Granzow, as Ministerpräsident of Mecklenburg, had already clashed with the provincial leadership of the RLB over the crucial question of breaking up the large estates into holdings: DZAP, 61 Re1, vol. 4250.

32. See the articles by the member of parliament Franz S. v. Stauffenberg in the *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 28 February and 2 March 1934, and the front-page article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* of 2 February 1936. 'Latifundien, Fideikommiss, Großgrundbesitz', an article by the lawyer Vollert, who broke a lance in defence of the large estates, was published in *Deutschlands Erneuerung*, a magazine published by eminent members of the conservative area, such as Bang and Class. See also C. G. von Platen, 'Bauerntum und Großgrundbesitz', *Adelsblatt*, vol. 6 October 1934, and the publications edited by H. O. von Rohr, *Bodentreuer Adel: Eine Statistik*, Berlin, 1936,

and *Großgrundbesitz im Umbruch der Zeit*, 3rd edn, Berlin, 1935, as well as H. J. v. Gadow, *Ritter und Bauer in Mecklenburg*, Berlin, 1935. These articles tried to prove that the large estates were not formed from the beginning of the nineteenth century during the so-called *Bauernbefreiung* thanks to legislation allowing them to expropriate peasant holdings, but were part of a very old tradition of harmonious coexistence with peasant holdings.

33. Among the many articles, see W. Claus, 'Bauer und Großbetrieb im Kampf um die Nahrungsfreiheit', *Odal*, vol. 3, 1934/35, pp. 739ff., and 'Zur Frage der Betriebsgröße', *NS Landpost*, 5 January 1935; G. Pacyna, 'Erhaltung der Latifundien', *Odal*, vol. 5, 1935/36, pp. 975ff., and 'Erhaltung der Latifundien oder Neubildung des Bauerntums', *Neues Bauerntum*, vol. 7, 1937, pp. 319ff.

34. F. Gehrman, 'Völkische Bauernpolitik', *Der Deutsche*, 21 May 1933.

35. In this respect, the correspondence between Kummer and local representatives of both the party and the RNS is very interesting. The top civil servant constantly invited them to be realistic and warned against adopting measures that were too drastic and of a 'Russian nature' for the large estates. Thus Kummer accused the Pomeranian LBF, Bloedorn, of being heavy-handed in his handling of deeply indebted estates which were reluctant to cede the quotas of land stipulated by the law of 1919. Kummer wrote in February 1934, 'Unfortunately, for political reasons, the law on finding land for settlement will have to stay at a standstill'. BA, NI Darré II, vol. 56.

36. The law, discussed in a cabinet meeting on 4 July and later drawn up in a final version with the assistance of the Ministry of Justice (BA, R 43 I, vol. 1464) is published in *Rgbl.* 1934, p. 517. The internal reasons are to be found in BA, R 43 II, vol. 207.

37. According to Kummer, in a letter of 9 February 1934 sent to Eggeling, a member of the Staatsrat, the bill was not even original. Darré had drawn it up from drafts made by his predecessors: BA, NI Darré II, vol. 56. The same high official sent a circular to all bodies affected by the *Osthilfe*, dated 30 January 1934. In it, he asked the party and local authorities to concentrate their efforts on the procedures for checking the solubility of indebted estates so as to proceed to breaking them up as quickly as possible: *DZAP*, 23.01, vol. 3105.

38. Protests by the Ministry of Labour on 27 and 30 November 1933, and criticism by Vice-Chancellor von Papen's economic advisers in BA, R 53, vol. 27. Other proceedings related to the cabinet-level discussions are in *DZAP*, 06.01, vol. 324/1.

39. Cf. the objections put forward by the Osnabrück Regierungspräsident on 1 November 1933, in *DZAP*, 31.01, vol. 3503.

40. Letter from Popitz, 19 November, *ibid.*

41. Cf. Bramwell, 'National Socialist Agrarian Theory', pp. 212f. One of Papen's economic advisers, Sabbath, pointed out that if the bill were passed Germany would find itself on a par with the much-criticised Slav countries – and they expropriated from German citizens without any guarantees. He asked for state intervention to be limited as far as possible, especially since estate owners had declared that they were willing to cede fair-sized portions of land (see the minutes of the Reichsgrundbesitzerverband, 13 October 1933, in *DZAP*, 31.01, vol. 3503): BA, R 53, vol. 27. According to a communication made to Hitler's Chancellery by the Ministry of Agriculture in July 1934, the bill had been shelved for good: BA, R 43 II, vol. 207.

42. Cf. the proceedings in BA, R 43 II, vol. 23.

43. Indebtedness as a percentage of the net value of farms over five hectares:

Size	Year			
	1924	1929	1932	1935
Small	20	43	48	49
Medium	18	41	44	41
Large	29	63	68	63

Source: H. Bente, *Landwirtschaft und Bauerntum*, Berlin, 1937, p. 152.

44. The decree and its extensions are commented upon in W. Tornow, *Chronik der Agrarpolitik und Agrarwirtschaft des Deutschen Reiches*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1972, pp. 21f. See also RLB president Count Kalkreuth's timely request to Hitler, on the day he was appointed Chancellor, to obtain a broad protective measure. For criticism of the measure, see the extensive documentation in DZAP, 31.01, vol. 14953 and BA, R2, vol. 18253. The law of 1 June is in Tornow, *Chronik*, pp. 32f.

45. Cf. the tone of cabinet-level discussions held on 16 January 1934, in BA, R 2, vol. 19069. See Kummer's explicit request to Darré that the new debt-relief law would ensure that those asking for credit would automatically have to cede land for settlement: letter, 12 May 1933, in BA, NS 26, vol. 492. For a regional survey of how the National Socialists carried out their policy of debt relief for the large estates, cf. R. Hube, 'Auswirkungen des sich in Deutschland entwickelnden staatsmonopolistischen Kapitalismus auf dem mecklenburgischen Großgrundbesitz', Dissertation, Rostock, 1970.

46. Cf. the diaries in SA Goslar, 27 October 1938.

47. Ministry of Agriculture circular, 21 November 1933, in BA, R 2, vol. 19046. See the new general measures issued by the Ministry to implement the *Neubildung des deutschen Bauerntums* plan on 1 June 1935: BA, R 43 II, vol. 207, now published in R. Berndt (ed.), *Lage und Kampf der Landarbeiter in ostelbischen Preußen (1919-1945)*, Berlin-Vaduz, 1985, pp. 218ff.

48. See the measures of 23 October 1933, in BA, NS 26, vol. 493. A year later it was acknowledged that the minimal quota had not been reached, partly because of would-be settlers' fears when faced with the prospect of such a great change of life: R. Eggers, 'West-Ost-Siedlung', *Neues Bauerntum*, no. 27, 1935. It must also be said that the government plan also ran up against the aspirations of eastern farm workers, whose living conditions were generally abysmal and who wished to be first in line for holdings which in some way would make them independent: cf. the demands of the farm workers' union, in June 1933, before it was forced to break up, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 204.

49. Report of 11 May sent to the Ministry of Agriculture: BA, R 2, vol. 19081.

50. F. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor in Germany*, Princeton, 1955, p. 183.

51. Cf. E. Eichweber, 'Zur Frage der Reagrarisierung Deutschlands', Dissertation, Cologne, 1937, p. 42. A much more authoritative account was given by a Ministry of Finance official in an internal note. The writer commented on the RNS proposal to finance large two-family holdings to be given in the first place to agricultural workers. According to the note, this proposal would founder because of the limited financial resources of potential settlers and the main objective of settlement itself, that is to create the largest number of holdings possible: BA, R 2, vol. 19081.

52. J. G. Smit, *Neubildung deutschen Bauerntums: Innere Kolonisation im Dritten Reich*, Kassel, 1983, p. 144.

53. P. Quante, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen bäuerlicher Siedlung', *Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik*, vol. 139, 1933; P. Quante, *Die Flucht aus der Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1933.

54. Cf. his letter of 4 September 1934, quoted in K. Groth, 'Der Aufbau des Adolf-Hitler-Koogs', *QGS*, vol. 81, 1983, pp. 309–31, at p. 313. Another member of the RNS, Dr Rechenbach, admitted that the severe criteria for racial selection were the cause of much disappointment, but he considered them justified given the noble nature of the aims of settlement: 'Neubauernsiedlung und die Auswahl deutscher Bauernsiedler', *WPD*, 12 January 1935. The rigid racial criteria also incurred the hostility of the Catholic population, as is clear from an alarming report by the LBS of Rhineland–Westphalia, 8 March 1934, BA, R 16 I, vol. 2116.

55. According to a circular of 24 November 1933, sent to all LBFs, priority was to be given to members of the SS, SA and the army: BA, NS 26, vol. 492. It seems that this general criterion was not satisfactorily applied. One SA official complained bitterly to Darré about the evident RNS 'hostility' towards the brownshirts when it came to assigning settlement holdings (letter from Krauser to Darré, 24 May 1934, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 207). Although Darré had been an adviser in Himmler's SS for a long time, the ideas that gradually took root in the organisation diverged radically from those of the Reichsbauernführer. In view of the future expansion into the neighbouring Slav territories, the SS heads drew up an ambitious plan to construct a series of fortified holdings where peasant-warriors (the so-called *Wehrbauern*) were to defend the Germanic race. Darré, who in 1933 had expressed similar ideas, dismissed the project as being impractical: cf. R. L. Koehl, *RKFDV: German Resettlement Policy*, Harvard, 1957.

56. Cf. W. Gebert, 'Der Weg zum Neubauern', *Neues Bauerntum*, vol. 29, 1937, pp. 113ff.

57. See the appeal published by the press on 19 October 1933 and Reibnitz's letter to Granzow, 31 August 1934, in BA, NI Darré II, vol. 56. Among the various declarations of willingness to co-operate from the association of landowners or groups of estate owners, see in particular those published in the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 5 September 1933, and in the *Ostpreussische Zeitung*, 23 August. A typical example is provided by the two letters sent by Albrecht zu Stolberg-Wernigerode to Hitler, 11 December 1933 and 4 February 1934, in which he proudly declared that he was willing to part with some of his land: BA, R 43 II, vol. 207.

58. See the proceedings of the long debate on the abolition of the *Fideikomisse*, in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1473, and R 43 II, vols 192 and 193.

59. Article by Wilmowsky, 'Siedlung durch Aufteilung oder Abverkauf', *Deutsche Tageszeitung*, 17 July 1932. For his part, Kummer recommended that any land ceded by large landowners should be destined for new settlement holdings: letter to the Pomeranian LBF, Bloedorn, 4 November 1933, in BA, NI Darré II, vol. 56.

60. On this point too Kummer's correspondence (see note 59) is very interesting. He clearly shows that he was aware of the need to use state property given the basic lack of land forthcoming from the private estates.

61. Many documents on this question are to be found in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1636, in BA, R 2, vol. 19072, and in NI Darré II, vol. AD 20. It was only as late as 1941 that Darré explicitly asked that Backe be removed from his post in the Four-Year Plan, but by then it was too late.

62. The figures are taken from DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1636.

63. Ministerial circular of 23 December 1938, in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 389, pp. 258ff.

64. Cf. J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928–1945*, London–Beverly Hills, 1976, p. 176.

65. Smit, *Neubildung deutschen Bauertums*, p. 136.

66. Of the many authors who participated in the debate, see in particular E. v. Borsig, 'Reagrarisierung Deutschlands?', Dissertation, Stuttgart, 1934 (one of the more sceptical); Eichweber, 'Zur Frage der Reagrarisierung'; H. J. Held, 'Die Möglichkeiten der Reagrarisierung Deutschlands', Dissertation, Breslau, 1935; and C. v. Dietze, 'Um die Reagrarisierung Deutschlands', *Deutscher Volkswirt*, no. 20, 26 January 1934.

67. Cf. Wunderlich's analysis in *Farm and Labor*, pp. 175ff.; G. Schulz, 'Die Anfänge des totalitären Maßnahmenstaates', in K. D. Bracher, G. Schulz and W. Sauer (eds.), *Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung*, Frankfurt, 1974, vol. II, pp. 250ff.

68. Cf. Groth, 'Aufbau', and BA, R 16 I, vol. 2039. In Gauleiter Hinrich Lohse's plans the province was to become a 'second Netherlands'.

69. See, respectively, the proceedings in BA, R 2, vols 19047 and 19081, and for the clash with Koch, a Gauleiter who jealously guarded his own independence, see BA, R 43 II, vol. 107.

70. See, for example, the article by the top RNS official, H. J. Riecke, 'Der Stand der bäuerlichen Siedlung', *Neues Bauerntum*, no. 30, 1938. On the harmful role of the press, see Kummer's circular, 5 August 1939, in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1636. There was such widespread criticism that Darré was forced to intervene, censoring the defeatist arguments of 'hypercritical' elements: in a letter from Kummer to Reibnitz, 18 October 1934, in BA, NI Darré II, vol. 56.

71. Darré, *Aufbruch des Bauerntums*, Berlin, 1942, p. 122. A questionnaire sent to all LBFs towards the end of 1934 produced some interesting results, especially as regards the key question of where to find land for settlement. This negative opinion is also shared by historians: Farquharson, *Plough and the Swastika*, pp. 148ff., and D. Schoenbaum, *Die braune Revolution*, Cologne-Berlin, 1968, p. 219.

72. Of the 16,815 holdings set up on the basis of the 1919 law in 1925, more than half were under 2 hectares, and were therefore unable to support a farmer and his family: *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1928, p. 77.

73. Cf. the alarming Ministry of Agriculture circular to all LBFs, 11 October 1935, in BA, R 2, vol. 19055. But see also the regional reports anxiously describing peasant discontent over the slow developments in the settlement policy: DZAP, 36.03, vol. 59 (from Kurmark) and the report by Halberman, an internal inspector in the RNS, in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2196. For a good deal of empirical evidence of delays, shortcomings and the general low profile of the National Socialists, see the monograph by J. G. Smit (cf. note 52 above) and K. Fehn, 'Ödlandkultivierung und ländliche Neusiedlung in der preußischen Rheinprovinz', *Rheinische Vierteljahresblätter*, vol. 48, 1984.

74. Cf. the data in *Vierteljahreshefte f. Statistik*, 1936, pp. 45ff., and 1940, p. 21.

75. See the detailed study by M. Jatzlauk, 'Untersuchungen zur sozial-ökonomischen Struktur der deutschen Landwirtschaft zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen', Dissertation, Rostock, 1983, *passim*.

76. See Farquharson, *Plough and the Swastika*, pp. 107-40. In his theoretical writings before 1930, Darré had spoken of the *Hegehof* as the primary cell for the regeneration of the people that would begin from the country. To achieve this the *Hegehof* was to benefit from special protection. Cf. W. L. Heinrich, 'Richard W. Darré und der Hegehofgedanke', Dissertation, Mainz, 1980, pp. 50ff. This project was the direct inspiration for the *Erbhof*, which Darré wished mainly to serve racial purposes.

77. Percentage income per capita in the three East Elbian regions compared to the average in the Reich:

Region	Year		
	1913	1926	1934
East Prussia	63.4	69.4	76.1
Silesia	78.7	84.0	82.0
Pomerania	75.2	81.4	86.7

Source: Quoted in R. Bessel, 'Eastern Germany as a Structural Problem of Weimar Germany', *Social History*, vol. 4, 1978.

78. Cf. G. Schulz, 'Deutschland und der preußische Osten: Heterologie und Hegemonie', in H. U. Wehler (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte heute: Festschrift für Hans Rosenberg*, Göttingen, 1974, pp. 86-103.

79. On the relations between agriculture and industry in the last phase of the Weimar Republic, see D. Gessner, *Agrardepression und Präsidialregierungen in Deutschland 1930-1933*, Düsseldorf, 1977; D. Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis*, 2nd edn, New York, 1986.

80. See the conclusions reached both by the top state accountancy office, the Reichsrechnungshof, in November 1933, and by the State Procurator-General in March 1934. Both documents included long lists of corruption of public officials and favouritism. Although veiled in extremely cautious language, the absolute economic irrationality that had accompanied the introduction of the *Osthilfe* comes through strongly: BA, R 43 I, vol. 1284, and DZAM, Rep. 87 B, vol. 19461. For a historiographic analysis, see B. Buchta, *Die Junker und die Weimarer Republik*, Berlin, 1959.

81. The report of the commission, which had excluded opposition party representatives, is in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1284.

82. Cf. L. Drescher, *Entschuldung der ostdeutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1938, pp. 75ff.

83. Cf. Zumppe, *Wirtschaft und Staat in Deutschland*, Berlin-Vaduz, 1980, p. 109. Interest rates had dropped considerably from 13.3 per cent in 1932/33 to 5.9 per cent in 1937/38.

84. Cf. H. J. Puhle, *Politische Agrarbewegungen in kapitalistischen Industriegesellschaften*, Göttingen, 1975, p. 99, note 305.

85. Through a survey of the books of more than 40,000 farms, the group of researchers led by Fensch produced the following table, which shows market share according to size category: there was obviously a mutual specialisation between large and small farms.

	Farm size			
	5-20	21-50	51-100	More than 100
Percentage of total acreage	44.6	25.4	8.8	21.8
Market share (%)				
Cereals	31.1	24.0	10.7	34.2
Potatoes	34.7	19.4	9.1	36.2
Beet	19.5	17.5	13.0	50.0
Cattle	54.1	26.4	7.3	12.5
Milk	50.0	26.8	8.7	14.5

Source: H. L. Fensch and K. Padberg, *Eigenverbrauch und Marktleistung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1938, p. 100.

The *Erbhof* Law: Myth and Reality of the New Peasantry

One of the most characteristic and significant ideas in Darré's political theory concerned the *Erbhof* law, that is the law of hereditary entailment, guaranteeing a single heir to farm property, issued on 29 September 1933. This law had the same background as all the other anti-urban and ruralistic theories from the end of the nineteenth century. In Darré's particular case, the idea of security of tenure for peasant holdings, the primary regenerative cells of the people, was bound up with the idea of racial selection to form a future élite from the German *Bauerntum*, destined to become the ruling class: the *Neuadel*.¹ Moreover, the idea of the *Erbhof* was widely supported by those in favour of consolidating the peasantry. Historically, the idea had a solid legal tradition that already ensured the undivided inheritance of holdings, or at least safeguarded their economic and productive integrity, in many areas in Germany. In fact, forms of undivided inheritance were prevalent in nearly all of the southern, north-central and eastern regions. The exceptions were the western and south-western provinces, where the French tradition had taken root during the Napoleonic occupation.

The *Erbhof* law was preceded by a law of 15 May, issued by the Prussian government and drafted by National Socialist leaders in the Ministry of Agriculture (Backe and Secretary of State Willikens) and in the Ministry of Justice (Kerrl). Although they had consulted Darré, they had gone behind Hugenberg's back, the Minister having actually expressed a number of objections on the subject.² The text of the first law took into account existing traditional local laws in various areas, given that it was made obligatory only in areas where traditional forms of undivided inheritance already existed. Elsewhere it was optional, that is on request of interested parties. Furthermore, compared to the later law, this act gave the testator much more freedom to decide, even allowing him to ignore the fundamental principle of inheritance through the male line and the first-born. But this law essentially contained the principles that were to be implemented later in a

stricter law enforced throughout the Reich: the single heir had definite privileges compared to the other children; the definition of the *Bauer* (with all its attendant privileges) was closely linked to racial criteria; and the economic freedom of the owner of a holding was strictly limited by a number of protective clauses.³

As soon as he was made Minister, Darré drafted a much more drastic bill: the state's need for a healthy *Bauerntum* prevailed over all other considerations. After publicly expressing his desire to issue a law that would completely and definitively protect the peasantry, he personally assumed the responsibility for drawing up the bill – as is clear from a letter sent to Backe on 5 August 1933.⁴ The fact that Darré drafted the bill without even consulting the other ministers and regional governments involved gives an indication of its importance for him.

The main points of the law were: holdings were indivisible, to be handed down to the oldest or most deserving son; the inheritance hierarchy, specifically defined by the law, placed the testator's sons and the sons of his children's sons first, then parents, followed by brothers and their sons; wives, daughters and their daughters came fourth and were followed by sisters and their children and lastly by other female heirs. From the economic point of view the *Erbhof* had a very special status: it could not be bought or sold, and neither it nor its parts could be mortgaged. In his economic and financial activities, the owner could make use only of his net revenue, and only on this basis could debts be contracted. On no account was property to be involved. The smallest size of *Erbhof* was to be the equivalent of an *Ackernahrung* (approximately 7.5 hectares), which was defined as the size of allotment 'indispensable to feed a family independently from the market and the general economic situation'. The maximum size was not specified, although as a rule it was estimated at about 125 hectares – but there were many exceptions.⁵ The dignified position of *Erbbauer* could be held only by individuals of Germanic breeding and flawless moral conduct.⁶

For non-inheriting children the law provided only for the payment of compensation. But this sum was far too small to permit them to set up their own economic activity in the way that had actually been foreseen by article 30 of the law itself. As some commentators pointed out, the law froze all possibility of upward social mobility for non-inheriting children, at least until a radically new impetus would be given to settlement.⁷

To get round this drawback, whose dangers were obvious right from the earliest stages of the enforcement of the law, the Ministry of Agriculture hastily specified that, in cases of proven need, the

Erbhof special courts (we shall return to them later) could overrule the principle of indivisibility. At the same time it was stressed that new settlement holdings would be considered *Erbhöfe*, with all the related advantages.⁸

In fact, the law was essentially based on a very limited concept of 'private property', in that the prerogatives of the owner took second place to the priority needs of the *Gemeinschaft* or the *Volk*. The peasant or *Erbbauer* had definite duties towards the latter, as regards both his family and economic life.⁹

The draft bill, debated in a cabinet meeting of 26 September, inevitably aroused fierce objections and raised issues which later turned out to be the actual weaknesses in the law. According to critics, peasants exempted from the normal functioning of the market were subject to a special protective regime which harmed not only the others (especially creditors, whose rights were annulled by the *Erbhof* principle of non-mortgageability) but even themselves: *Erbhofbauern* would not have access to credit facilities and therefore would lose the possibility of improving their economic position. Furthermore, the fundamental objection was raised that the law went against the whole existing legal system by introducing the unacceptable notion of a privileged status. For his part, the president of the Reichsbank objected that the law paid little heed to the economic efficiency of individual producers: this would cause a dangerous loss of enthusiasm among peasants. Moreover, the cost of implementing the law, to be borne by the community, would be so high as to make it impracticable, especially at a time when the country's economy was far from healthy.¹⁰ But Darré and Hitler, who agreed on the demographic and racial need for the law, had their way, and the bill was approved with very few modifications.¹¹

But the attacks on the *Erbhofgesetz* continued at a ministerial level. In April 1941 Darré complained about the Secretary of State for Justice, Huber, who had proposed bringing *Erbhöfe* back into the domain of normal mortgage jurisprudence, thus ending their special status. On this occasion too the Minister recalled the Führer's unequivocal position in favour of the law.¹²

Despite the widespread cultural traditions favouring forms of undivided inheritance, the contents of the new law appeared radical even to the advocates of 'ruralism'. For different reasons, businessmen were also suspicious of it, in so far as it took a large slice of landed property off the market and therefore outside the normal working of the capitalist economy, creating the basis for a static society made up of self-sufficient family productive units.

The impact of such a 'revolutionary' law (although it would be more accurate to describe it as reactionary) was so great that Darré was forced to order a temporary ban on public debates, supposedly illustrating the law but actually generating a good deal of bitter criticism.¹³ Representatives of the large eastern estates demanded to receive similar protection,¹⁴ and the press close to industrial and financial circles objected (really rather feebly) against the freeze on credit for production purposes.¹⁵ But by far the most significant criticisms were put forward by Max Sering, the doyen of German agronomists and a great defender of the peasant world.¹⁶ Starting from the same aims and a very similar cultural model to that of Darré, Sering maintained that the law was alien to the true peasant tradition and too rigidly privileged existing land ownership. Openly opposing Darré, Sering argued that the legal-constitutional model chosen, privileging the single heir over the younger children, was the expression of an élitist 'aristocratic right' totally alien to the peasant mentality, which was based on the internal strength of the extended family.¹⁷ In his opinion the law would not achieve its goals, which he basically shared, but would only further heighten the demographic and economic crisis of the peasantry: indivisibility would discourage the traditional *Geburtenfreudigkeit* of the rural population, thus restricting demographic growth; and from the economic point of view, the elderly expert maintained that the law was too rigid and would freeze both the entrepreneurial freedom of the peasant and the possibility of a social dynamic from below. Significantly, Sering criticised excessive state interference in a sphere that should be ordered primarily by old customs and the predominant sensibility in the rural world. He proposed revising the original draft, making it more flexible and more like the previous Prussian law for which he had been an adviser. In particular, the illustrious agronomist demanded that the testator be given greater freedom of choice, and that husband and wife be allowed to leave each other land. This would bring back the principles of the Civil Code (BGB), and disinherited children would receive greater protection.¹⁸

At the time of the debate on the draft bill, the Prussian Minister of Finance had put forward criticisms of a completely different nature – but these were more to do with the balance of power within the National Socialist political leadership than anything else. He was of the opinion that the peasantry (meaning the RNS) would be given too much freedom.¹⁹

Another authoritative conservative also spoke out, criticising the new law. In a memo presented to Hitler in August 1934, the former

Secretary of State von Rohr – whose backing Darré had even sought when the bill was going through the decisional centres²⁰ – declared it to be abstract, schematic and harmful to farmers' entrepreneurial spirit. He predicted that it would create a new social figure: the confident, well-protected peasant who was wholly inactive, even from a demographic point of view.²¹

The criticism from such a prestigious expert as Sering was a severe blow to Darré's plans, and even more so because it was widely covered by the national and foreign press. The Minister reacted very strongly: after rejecting (with rather vague reasons) the objections put forward by the economist, he set in motion a systematic slander campaign aimed at isolating whoever dared criticise this cornerstone of *Blut und Boden* ideology. According to Darré, Sering's criticisms were dangerous for two reasons: firstly because they coincided with, and legitimised through scientific reasoning, the widespread incomprehension of those directly involved, and secondly because they were openly exploited by foreign enemies of National Socialism. He insisted on both of these points, and repeatedly asked Hitler and the Minister of the Interior, Frick, that the elderly economist be punished.²²

Eventually he had his way: the research institute directed by Sering lost its government funds and the economist was accused of having Jewish blood. Despite the support of Schacht and other members of the business world, for whom he had become the opposition standard-bearer against Darré,²³ Sering gradually disappeared from the scene and died in oblivion in November 1939, abandoned by all. Only two papers in the German press mentioned his death: the *Frankfurter Tageszeitung* of the 14 and 22 November and the *Weltwirtschaft Braunschweig* of 14 November. Other publications, such as the SS's *Das Schwarze Korps* of 7 December, sullied his memory, blaming him for the mistakes in the agrarian policy implemented during the First World War, and pejoratively describing him as 'der Schweinmörder', which was a reference to the drastic cuts in the pig herd made during the war because of the shortage of feeding-stuffs.²⁴

The radical nature of Sering's criticisms allows a very clear distinction to be made between the racist ideology of *Blut und Boden* and its background of ruralistic and *völkisch* ideas. The ideology, in fact, was soon to take a much more extreme form.²⁵ Here we see the distance between Sering's *Bauernfreundlichkeit*, which was shared by the whole of German agronomical science at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, and the élitist approach of Darré and his assistants who – as we have seen –

made the settlement programme and SS racial selection its concrete expression.²⁶ Sering had become the spokesman of a pro-farmer conservative outlook which radically criticised the measure. This criticism was backed by negative reactions or distrust in large sectors of the population who considered that the law clearly harmed many members of peasant families. Police reports and other regime sources offer a definitely one-sided account of the incomprehension that the *Erbhof* law met with throughout the country.²⁷ It is significant that as late as November 1935, two years after the intense systematic education campaign which Göring considered essential if the peasantry were to accept the new legislation and its radical innovations,²⁸ Darré still felt the need publicly to defend the law and reject criticism, which accused the law of being abstract and 'romantic'.²⁹

Another aspect of the ill-concealed hostility towards the new legislation (in addition to objections to the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures required) was the clear discrepancy between the number of holdings that, according to provisional calculations, should have been classified *Erbhöfe* (more than a million farms – a total area of approximately 18–19 million hectares) and the number of *Erbhöfe* actually recognised: 689,635 – a total surface area of just over 16 million hectares. Moreover, the sources do not allow us to establish whether the number of *Erbhöfe* was smaller than expected because of the severity of the selection criteria or because those who were entitled to, did not apply for recognition. The category with the lowest percentage of farms applying to be included in the list of *Erbhöfe* was that of the small holdings: only 12.9 per cent of holdings from 5 to 10 hectares (15.5 per cent in terms of the total land in the category). The number of large estates applying was also low: 33.2 per cent of farms from 100 to 200 hectares (29.1 per cent of the total surface area). These figures show how loosely the criteria concerning the minimum and maximum size of the *Erbhof* were applied. As many as 5,916 farms of over 100 hectares (a total surface area of 783,563 hectares) plus 2,661 holdings of under 5 hectares (a total surface area of 8,193 hectares) were classified as *Erbhöfe* – a rather large number of exceptions to the law.

The regional distribution of the *Erbhöfe* shows a significant number of variations from area to area: the density of this new kind of holding was obviously greater in regions where a law on undivided inheritance was already in force. But the small number of *Erbhöfe* in central-western and East Elbian regions very clearly shows how little impact the new law made on age-old traditions and behaviour.³⁰

One of the most conspicuous consequences of the law was the freezing of credit flows, caused by the special hyper-protected legal position of farmers. As it was impossible to touch farm property, creditors found they could not recoup debts from *Erbbauern* in arrears. On the National Socialist side, the head of the sector in the RNS leadership, Arthur R. Herrmann, suggested that the peasants united to form *Verbände*, which could collectively meet the costs of debts contracted by individual members. In this way, creditors would have some kind of guarantee.³¹ Industrialists, on the other hand, asked that severe penalties be introduced for defaulting farmers and that the qualitative standard of would-be *Erbbauern* be subject to more rigid controls.³² The various positions – as can be seen – were rather divergent. This was also because in Darré's view, as well as in that of the advocates of 'peasant socialism', the exemption of the *Erbhof* from the laws of the market, and especially from the mechanisms of indebtedness, constituted an irrevocable milestone in the age-old and now finally victorious struggle against the 'Jewish spirit'. In this sense, it was an example to be emulated and applied to other sectors of the economy.³³

In fact, many farmers exploited this situation to get into debt, often in unproductive ways, seriously harming creditors. The RNS attempted to combat this disturbing trend by issuing a circular, reminding farmers that they were responsible for meeting their obligations and settling debts contracted in purchasing seed and fertilisers. These debts were to be paid out of the harvest (the so-called *Früchtepfandrecht*) – otherwise all faith in the system would be irremediably shaken.³⁴

The other side of the coin was that *Erbbauern* could not obtain credit facilities for business purposes. It was primarily Schacht who, after having already opposed Darré's agrarian policy, prevented the *Erbbauern* from obtaining access to credit facilities. In so doing he influenced the whole banking system, whose distrust of essentially irresponsible economic actors meant that it was practically impossible for *Erbbauern* to obtain medium- or long-term credit. From the tribune of the *Reichsbauernstag*, held in Goslar in November 1937, Darré went so far as to denounce publicly a manoeuvre aimed at destroying the very principle of the *Erbhof*: 'I have established that completely debt-free farms, which were perfectly entitled to receive business credit facilities, were not given them, because it was hoped that in this way the very principle of *Erbhof* would be weakened and the law itself demolished'.³⁵ The lack of credit facilities obviously reduced the possibilities for farm improvements. Only after considerable pressure from the banks

and the Minister of Justice did Darré yield on the basic principle of the irresponsibility of the farmers and on the immunity of farm property: a decree of 21 December 1936 specifically limited the privileges of the *Erbbauer*, making it easier for a farmer to be replaced whenever he proved incapable of running his holding from an economic point of view.³⁶

This was a more severe application of the concept of *Abmeierung*, already provided for in the draft of the 1933 law. What was meant by this category, also derived from old German law to accentuate further the 'traditional' veneer which the regime wished to give the new law, was quite simply that the peasant lost not so much his right to his property, which in theory he kept, as his right to make use of it.³⁷

In the case of the moratorium measures for the difficult property situation affecting many would-be *Erbhöfe*, in view of the consequences of the serious agricultural crisis, Darré attempted to impose a solution that completely guaranteed the *Erbbauern*, by reducing taxes to a minimum.³⁸ He presented a draft bill, which provided for sharing of responsibility by all farmers, and thus basically rewarded those in debt (whether it was their fault or not) rather than those who had managed to keep their books balanced.

In an attempt to make up for this obvious unfairness, the RNS ideologues suggested rewarding farmers who were less in debt, by giving them bonds for the purchase (in an unspecified future) of settlement holdings for their disinherited children at very favourable conditions.

There was a unanimous reaction to this proposal: the Ministers of Finance and Economics, as well as the head of the Reichsbank, violently attacked the bill, forcing Darré to withdraw it.³⁹ What Grundmann defined as 'a victory for the conservatives and their traditional notion of profitability'⁴⁰ was, however, short-lived. For with a decree of 20 June 1936, the *Erbhöfe* also became subject to debt relief at very advantageous conditions: as much as 80 per cent of debts could be written off through loans at very reduced rates, and farm property could still not be touched. The decree did include, however, at least two conditions imposed by the advocates of economic 'rationality': firstly, debt relief would only be given after a favourable opinion had been expressed by the local offices of the RNS, which had to evaluate the economic solidity of the farm; secondly, debts contracted after a farm had become an *Erbhof* could not be written off – this was intended to win back the confidence of the credit system.⁴¹

The problem of access to credit facilities, vital for any modernis-

ation of the productive set-up of peasant farms, was never solved, given that the banks were still rather reluctant to take risks with producers who were protected against having to repay. Similarly, it cannot be said that the massive contributions made towards reducing *Erbhöfe* debts produced very positive results. Despite the billions that the government shelled out for debt-relief schemes for this kind of holding,⁴² their financial situation improved for only a short time. According to the statistics, as early as mid-1936 the *Erbhöfe* were deeper in debt than other farms in the eastern and north-eastern regions.⁴³ It cannot be established how far this high level of indebtedness was due to the special conditions in which these farms had to work, or to a general decline in the agricultural economy. The fact is, however, that the problem of credit and debt relief was never solved, despite government intervention. Thus Darré's plan to create an economic category completely protected from the 'diabolical' mechanisms of the capitalist market was thwarted.

The social contradictions which emerge in the law were to some extent solved or at least attenuated by the activities of special courts, the *Anerbengerichte*, created to settle controversies arising out of the enforcement of the law. They were divided into three levels of appeal courts, the supreme court being held at Celle, and were made up partly of professional judges and partly of farmers, chosen for their honesty and moral uprightness. Although appointed by the Ministry of Justice, these judges were mainly members of the RNS and in theory had to safeguard its interests. But they actually made many rulings which were exceptions, and by bending the over-severe law they met many peasants' requests. These exceptions mainly concerned decisions which had been unfavourable to female heirs, and the courts took more heed of local customs which varied greatly from area to area. Many appeals concerned the right to buy or sell land and to obtain credit for improvements to the economic structure of farms. Again, the courts often tended to meet the genuine economic needs of the *Erbbauern*, rather than applying the law to the letter.⁴⁴

The large number of appeals (from 1935 to 1939 there were as many as 24,000, an average of one for every 29 *Erbhöfe*) gives an idea of the complex work the courts had to tackle, as well as the intense reaction which the law had aroused by interfering with rigid schemes in the complex and long-standing structure of rural society. The activities of the courts paved the way to a gradual acceptance of the law, whose main points were partly negated by some of the rulings made by the special courts. An internal RNS

report dated September 1934, concerning Mecklenburg, read as follows: 'The law is more fully understood when farmers realise that court rulings correspond to their own ideas.'⁴⁵ From the outset, RNS bodies were at pains to spread the idea that the principles in the law were not rigid, but should be considered as 'guidelines'. And this statement also helped to dispel the gloom.⁴⁶ Lorenzen-Schmidt's comments on Schleswig-Holstein can be cited as an example: 'Despite the opposition of the rural population, the *Erbhof* law has been accepted in the region, thanks primarily to the fact that it has been enforced in fairly reasonable ways.'⁴⁷

The enormous work involved in the legislative and judicial revision of the *Erbhof* law clearly shows how German farmers resisted Darré's project for a static, immutable, subsistence economy. It can be said, therefore, that the project of the Minister and theoretician of *Blut und Boden*, whose utopian vision was very far from the concrete real-life needs of the peasant economy, was a failure.

But there were also particularly negative consequences for the National Socialist regime. The law worsened the position of disinherited sons and daughters, whose chances of acquiring any form of property were very limited. In part, this was also due to a slowing-down in the settlement policy – examined in Chapter 6. In the end, despite the lack of accurate information and the brief time the law had to make its effects felt, the National Socialist leaders themselves had to concede (naturally, not in public but in their bureaucratic correspondence) that the law had played a part, along with causes of a more general nature, in the inexorable decline of the rural population.

The weighty correspondence containing answers from Landesbauernführer and members of the Reichsbauernrat to the memo-questionnaire sent to them by Darré in view of the coming 1939 census⁴⁸ reveals that the local leaders were fully aware of the harmful consequences of the *Erbhof* law for demographic growth. They called for both a greater flexibility in enforcing the law and more concern with disinherited sons, for whom vocational schools ought to be created and the chances of obtaining a settlement holding improved. These proposals were made, however, in February 1938, which was too late, for by then much less heed was paid to the demands of agriculture. In fact, the deep qualitative changes caused by the war and its imperative productive needs meant that the *Erbhofgesetz* was suddenly shelved, and with it the underlying ruralistic ideology.

Notes

1. See Chapter 6, note 76.
2. Cf. J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-1945*, London-Beverly Hills, 1976, pp. 107ff., and especially the well-documented monograph by F. Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Hamburg, 1979. In fact Hugenberg publicly stated that he had had to accept a law that, in his opinion, gave too much power to the state: letter published in *Der Nationale Wille*, 10 June 1933, in BA, NI Schmidt-Hannover, vol. 75.
3. Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik*, pp. 36f.
4. In BA, NI Darré II, AD vol. 20.
5. Darré had deliberately ruled out any extension to the upper limit of the range of farm sizes which could apply for the status of *Erbhof*. This can be explained by his prejudice against the estate owners. Initially, however, he did consider making the upper limit 300 hectares: letter from Wagemann, Prussian Minister of Justice, 13 June 1933, in BA, NS 26, vol. 952.
6. According to the Minister only those who worked as a duty to the race and the people could be considered *Bauern*. Whoever worked in agriculture with the main purpose of making money should be considered *Landwirt*. Quoted in H. Krietenstein, 'Die Stellung des Nationalsozialismus zum Problem der deutschen Agrarverfassung', Dissertation, Bochum, 1937, p. 65.
7. Cf. H. Weigmann, *Siedlung und sozialer Aufstieg der Landarbeiter*, Berlin, 1934, p. 134. But F. Wenzel, in an article entitled 'Reichserbhofgesetz und Siedlung', *NS Landpost*, 16 December 1933, optimistically claimed that the law would considerably help disinherited sons to become owner-occupiers. He did not, however, explain his reasons for this conviction.
8. Circular from Kummer, 6 March 1934, in BA, R 2, vol. 19047.
9. The Germanic concept of 'property', intended as *Gemeinnutz*, as opposed to *Eigennutz* (i.e. that whose aim was private, individualistic profit), is described by H. Merkel, 'Eigentum', *Odal*, no. 4, 1935, pp. 550ff.
10. Cf. the letter from the board of the Reichsbank to Darré, 29 September 1933, in K. H. Minuth (ed.), *Die Regierung Hitler*, Boppard, 1983, vol. I, pp. 875ff.
11. The proceedings of the debate are in BA, R 43 I, vols 1465 and 1301. Hitler had already spoken out in favour of the law strengthening the *Bauernrum* in a speech given before the Landwirtschaftsrat on 5 April: DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 20587. The proof that Hitler agreed with the bill makes the statements of Meinberg and Reischle for the defence in Darré's trial really rather unconvincing. They claimed that the Führer had stubbornly opposed the *Erbhof* bill, which over-idealised the peasantry, in a top-level meeting in September 1933 at Obersalzberg, and that it was only after a great deal of insistence from Darré that Hitler finally consented: Book 6 of the defence, DZAP 99 US 7, vol. 553, pp. 20, 29.
12. BA, NI Darré II, vol. 27.
13. Circular of 11 October 1933, in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2051.
14. See letters to the Führer from Albrecht zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, 16 October, and the Deutsche Adelsgenossenschaft of 18 October, asking for an increase in the upper limit for farms eligible for *Erbhof* status. Darré brusquely dismissed any proposal to modify the law in this way: BA, R 43 I, vol. 1301.
15. BA, R 43 I, vol. 1301. Cf. J. Sinz, 'Die deutsche Bauernhöfe', *Wirtschaftsdienst*, 8 December 1933; G. Kokotkiewicz, 'Der Agrarkredit nach Erlaß des Reichserbhofgesetzes', *Deutsche Bergwerkzeitung*, 28 December 1933, and 'Neue Weg der Agrarpolitik', *Deutsche Führerbriefe*, 12 September 1933.
16. M. Sering, *Erbhofrecht und Entschuldung unter rechtsgeschichtlichen, volkswirtschaftlichen und biologischen Gesichtspunkten*, Leipzig, 1934.
17. One of Sering's most important followers, Constantin von Dietze, was of a different opinion. He had no difficulty in collaborating with the regime and even

carried out important duties as an international representative. See his article, 'Das Anerbenrecht und das preußische Erbhofgesetz', *Der Ring*, 26 May 1933.

18. Sering, *Erbhofrecht*, pp. 37ff.

19. Cf. the minutes from the cabinet meeting, 26 September 1933, in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1465.

20. Cf. the correspondence between Darré and Backe in August 1933, in BA, NI Darré II, vol. AD 20.

21. Cf. the text of the memorial, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 193.

22. For the subsequent ostracism of Sering, see the proceedings in DZAP, 61 Re 1, vol. 442 and BA, R 43 I, vol. 1301.

23. According to the later evidence of Dietze, Schacht gave Sering his full backing. For example he printed, at his own expense, the aforementioned booklet criticising the law and ensured that it was widely read and in the right places. The financier's aim was to demolish Darré's policy, which he considered abstract and unrealistic: cf. E. N. Peterson, *Hjalmar Schacht*, Boston, 1954, p. 244.

24. But two years earlier his eightieth birthday had been given wide coverage by the press, which paid homage to him along with leading figures such as Schacht and top military men like Blomberg and Raeder.

25. On the long-term evolution of ruralistic ideologies, see D. Conte, 'Note su dinamica elettorale, associazionismo agrario e ideologia ruralistica tra anni Venti and Trenta in Germania', in G. Corni and D. Schiera (eds.), *Cultura politica e società borghese in Germania fra Otto e Novecento*, Bologna, 1986, pp. 285–314. A more traditional account is given by H. Haushofer, *Ideengeschichte der Agrarwirtschaft und Agrarpolitik in deutschen Sprachgebiet*, vol. II, Munich, 1958.

26. It would appear to be somewhat simplistic to trace a direct line of descent from the ideas of Sering to the ideology of Darré, as G. Heitz has done in the article, 'Max Sering und die Apologie der inneren Kolonisation', *WZU Rostock*, vol. 17, 1968. Even when the bill was being drafted for Prussia, Backe had suggested adopting an even more élitist approach so as to create an almost hand-picked body of peasants, bearers of the supreme values of the *Volk*: cf. his letter of 15 April 1933, in BA, NI Darré I, vol. 66.

27. See the reports from the RNS in Mecklenburg and Hanover in autumn 1934, in DZAP, 36.03, vols 58 and 60, and a letter from the Baden LBF, November 1933 (in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1871). For Bavaria, see I. Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, 2nd edn, Oxford, 1984, pp. 43f. Cf. also the numerous reports made by police offices in Hanover. Throughout 1935, they record widespread complaints about the law and about a number of specific aspects such as the difficulty in getting credit facilities and the marginalisation of female heirs: K. Mlynek (ed.), *Gestapo Hannover meldet*, Hildesheim, 1986, pp. 84, 119, 145, 159, 426. Grass-roots critics of the law are also reported by the *Deutschland-Berichte der SOPADE 1934–1940*, 7 vols, Frankfurt, 1980, pp. 50ff., 465ff., 887f.

28. Cf. the letter to Darré, 3 August 1934 (BA, R 43 II, vol. 143), in which the sender expresses his profound anxiety about the mood of the peasants as described in the Regierungspräsidenten reports.

29. *Reichsbauerntag* speech, 17 November 1935.

30. Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik*, pp. 66ff.

31. Lecture given in Goslar, 12 November 1934, in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2051, and his article 'Vorschläge zur Frage des Erbhofkredits', *Wirtschaftsdienst*, 20 December 1935.

32. Editorial in the *Deutsche Volkswirt*, no. 35, 27 May 1938.

33. See the article full of praise by the principal theoretician of 'romantic economics': Gottfried Feder, 'Das Kernstück der Bauernbefreiung', *VB*, 29 January 1934.

34. Fourth section RNS circular, 15 December 1933, in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1729.

35. Darré, *Aufbruch des Bauerntums*, Berlin, 1942, p. 57.

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36. Rgbl., I, p. 1082.

37. Decree of 21 December 1936, in Tornow, *Chronik der Agrarpolitik und Agrarwirtschaft des Deutschen Reiches*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1972, pp. 39f.

38. Even in the text justifying the *Erbhof* bill, the Minister had stressed it was essential that all existing debts should be annulled: BA, R 43 I, vol. 1465.

39. The proceedings concerning the modalities for credit facilities for these holdings are in, among others places, DZAP, 36.01, vol. 1729, and BA, R 43 I, vol. 1301. See also the different positions expressed by G. Kokotkiewicz, *Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft des Agrarkredits*, Berlin, 1934; A. Feige, 'Die künftige Kreditversorgung der Erbhöfe', *Deutscher Volkswirt*, 16 November 1934; the editorial in no. 35 of the same publication, 27 May 1935; and W. Fork, *Das deutsche Agrarkreditproblem der Gegenwart*, Würzburg, 1937. In general, see Grundmann's critical reconstruction, *Agrarpolitik*, pp. 80ff.

40. Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik*, pp. 50ff. The quotation is from p. 54.

41. 'Was bringt die Erbhofentschuldung?', *Wirtschaftlicher Pressedienst*, 25 June 1936.

42. Grundmann's estimate, *Agrarpolitik*, p. 87.

43. Indebtedness in RM per unit of land on 1 July 1936:

Region	Smaller than Erbhof	Size Erbhof	Larger than Erbhof
East Germany	—	771	619
Central Germany	—	715	781
North-West Germany	—	575	566
South-West Germany	497	449	—

Source: *Probleme des Agrarkredits*, Berlin-Stuttgart, 1939, pp. 210f.

44. Cf. Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik*, pp. 145ff.; Farquharson, *Plough and the Swastika*, pp. 125-40.

45. Cf. the first section RNS report, July 1934, in DZAP, 36.03, vol. 68, and the article by the Landesgerichtsdirektor, Wilhelm Saure, whom Darré appointed ministerial adviser for the *Erbhof* law on 5 October 1933 (BA, R 16 I, vol. 2051): 'Falsche Behauptungen und ihre Widerlegung', *Deutsche Zeitung*, 17 June 1934.

46. Cf. DZAP, 36.03, vol. 60.

47. K. Lorenzen-Schmit, 'Landwirtschaftspolitik und Landwirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Schleswig-Holstein', *QGSH*, vol. 8, 1983, p. 285. In Bavaria too, as is clear from a speech by Frank, temporary measures had been issued to accustom people gradually to the new law: DZAP, 25.01, vol. 2064.

48. The extensive correspondence is in BA, R 16, vol. 1272 and in BA, NI Darré II, vol. 4. On the subject of the declining population, see E. Wiegand, 'Die bevölkerungspolitische Lage im Bauerntum', *Odal*, vol. 7, 1938, and C. v. Dietze, 'Bäuerliches Erbhofrecht und Bevölkerungspolitik', *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*, vol. 2, 1933, pp. 7ff.

The Battle for Production

Following the deep changes in the world market for agricultural products in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, Germany had become an overall importer of foodstuffs: whereas in 1880 food imports amounted to RM377.6 million (at current prices) and exports were RM588.4 million, by 1900 the trade balance had been completely reversed. Exports, cut by the insuperable competition from extensive agriculture outside Europe, had dropped to RM487.7 million, whereas imports had risen to RM917 million. The deficit increased annually in both the cereal and dairy sectors. Similarly, German dependence on imported oils and fats also grew: from RM46.7 million (again at current prices) in 1880 to RM163.2 million in 1900, and RM537.5 million on the eve of the war. This radical reversal in the German food balance, which saw the end of the traditional vocation of the large East Elbian estates as a cereal exporter, was also due to an enormous increase in domestic food requirements stemming from a growth in the average standard of living in the wake of industrialisation.¹

Germany's food deficit, 28 per cent of protein requirements and 20 per cent of calories, seriously threatened the war effort, in so far as it considerably undermined powers of endurance both on the front and at home (in later years Hitler was never to lose sight of the gravity of the 1917–18 food crisis). Even during the Republic, when the economy had gradually begun to pick up again, the situation did not change much: in 1927/28 the food deficit was 56 per cent for fats, 36 per cent for eggs, 38 per cent for vegetables and 21 per cent for cereals. Although the great depression greatly reduced consumption because of widespread unemployment, it offered no relief for the trade balance, which also suffered greatly from the serious lack of currency reserves. In 1932 food imports cost as much as RM964.7 million (plus RM320.6 million for edible oils) against RM183.3 million worth of exported agricultural products.² Imports accounted for 26.8 per cent of national food consumption. According to a different source, in 1933 internal production supplied only 81 per cent of overall domestic requirements.³ On the eve of the National Socialists' accession, the

food deficit, in nutritional values, consisted of 12 per cent of the proteins, and 20 per cent of the calories from vegetable products, and 20 per cent and 23 per cent respectively from products of animal origin.⁴

The most delicate sector was still cereals, where imports of the four main crops (wheat, rye, barley and oats) amounted to 1.27 million tonnes in 1933, that is 18.4 per cent of overall domestic consumption for that year, followed by edible fats and oils (a deficit of over a million tonnes, equivalent to 59.4 per cent of requirements),⁵ and to a lesser extent livestock products. There was also the inevitable need for imports in the sector of Mediterranean fruit and vegetables, which could not be grown in Germany for climatic reasons. In 1933 general fruit and vegetable imports cost RM256.8 million, at current prices, for a total domestic consumption amounting to RM848 million. Thus it can be said that all the main sectors of agriculture, from the large eastern estates to peasant holdings, were involved in the food deficit.

This situation was particularly disturbing for Hitler's regime from many points of view. The continual drawing on precious currency from the scanty national reserves diverted it from other possible uses; from a military-strategic viewpoint, such a strong dependence on foreign supplies rather tied Hitler's hands as far as his foreign policy, intent on military expansionism, was concerned.⁶ Moreover, this food deficit affected the morale both of farmers, which National Socialist ideology and propaganda took such great pains to exalt as the irreplaceable foundation of the economy and the nation, and of consumers, mindful of the disastrous collapse of the 'home front', (mistakenly) considered the cause of defeat in the First World War. Thus Hitler and the other National Socialist leaders were anxious to maintain normal levels of consumption.⁷

The National Socialist Party, even before its rise to power, had stressed the imperative need to find a way out of this situation, which in their eyes was a genuine slavery for the German people, severely restricting their freedom of action. Thus the agrarian policy programme, published in March 1930, read: 'An improvement in the performance in agriculture on a national scale is a vital question for the German people.'⁸ The 'emergency' economic programme, presented during the electoral campaign of summer 1932, optimistically claimed that 'within a few years' arable land would have improved so much and would be worked so much more intensively that Germany would become independent from foreign food imports.⁹ Once in power, the National Socialists set

about solving the priority problem of how to achieve that *Nahrungsfreiheit*, so vital for any foreign policy projects.¹⁰ The real possibilities of achieving a satisfactory state of self-sufficiency in food were much discussed in political and academic circles. Based on abstract and theoretical calculations, these discussions even reached the conclusion that such a goal was unattainable.¹¹

None the less National Socialist policy initially aimed to increase domestic output as far as possible, thus reducing dependence on foreign countries, without, however, 'tightening the belt too far': that is without aggravating the existing tensions and imbalances in agriculture which the regime did not intend to remedy. The so-called 'battle for production', which from 1934 onwards characterised the regime's agrarian policy, was directed above all at mounting propaganda pressure to encourage farmers to increase their productive efforts. With the setting-up of the Four-Year Plan – which will be dealt with in Chapter 11 – National Socialist policy took a decisive turn towards increasing production, that is towards one of the two opposing poles of National Socialist economic theory. On one hand, in fact, the whole approach of the *Blut und Boden* ideology tended towards a stable, static peasant economy. Rather insensitive to economic problems, it aimed at preserving cultural and racial values, and was based on the model of the multivalent independent *Bauernhof*,¹² in which production played only a supporting role to other much more important cultural and racial activities.

But on the other hand, a state-centred vision, which placed the interests of the state above individual economic activity, had spread within the National Socialist Party itself. Accordingly, appeals made to farmers were in terms which mixed 'duty' with 'idealistic voluntarism'. The following quotes, from Darré and Backe, are intended to show how it is not entirely correct to associate them – as A. Bramwell has done¹³ – with these two ideological tendencies as if they were two completely distinct lines within the regime.

At the press conference introducing the law founding the RNS, on 19 September 1933, the Minister declared: 'A farmer must always consider his activity as a duty towards his family and his people, and never simply an economic venture from which he can earn money.'¹⁴ Almost three years later, speaking at the opening of the annual RNS exhibition in Frankfurt, Backe declared: 'Thus the battle for production is a conscious appeal to the idealism of German farmers and peasants, to their willingness to commit themselves and to their will to achieve significant performances.'¹⁵ In both of these authoritative statements, we find the same unre-

solved ambiguity that was at the heart of the RNS: a self-governing sectoral pressure group, but also a tool with which the state wished to achieve ulterior aims to be imposed on the mass of farmers from above.

Given this fundamental contradiction, the 'battle for production' could not attain its very ambitious objectives. This was also partly because Darré did not wish to tackle systematically the structural imbalances in agriculture by enforcing thoroughgoing reforms. Thus the imbalances in the distribution of property – as we have already seen – were not rectified, nor were improvements made in production in the host of very small holdings. Thanks to the *Marktordnung*, prices did remain stable – as we saw in Chapter 5. But they were still below those in other sectors, and this meant that farmers' work was increasingly devalued.¹⁶

Let us now examine the concrete developments in the 'battle for production', which was definitely modelled on Mussolini's *battaglia del grano*.¹⁷ Following the disastrous 1934 cereal harvest (rye and wheat were down 25 per cent compared to the previous harvest, which had, however, been a particularly good year),¹⁸ at the second *Reichsbauerntag*, held in Goslar in November, Darré was forced to launch the battle for production to increase output in the most difficult sectors. To this end, an intense and incessant propaganda campaign was organised round the usual exaltation of the virtues and decisive role of the *Bauerntum*.¹⁹ According to newspaper sources, a month after the official proclamation as many as 60,000 RNS officials had held over 420,000 meetings and had distributed millions of leaflets and booklets, spurring on productive efforts.²⁰

Following the Italian example, productivity competitions were organised. An inspectorate was created to supervise and co-ordinate all state activities in the sector, and honorary technical consultants were appointed to advise producers.²¹ But these measures came too late (nearly all of them after the Four-Year Plan was already under way) and were utterly marginal. In the early years, crucial for a series of crises in food supplies, the RNS concentrated its efforts almost exclusively on propaganda and advisory services.²²

The first consequence of the slowness of the National Socialist administrative apparatus in moving from triumphant and exhortative proclamations actually to implementing concrete policies to encourage production was that the greatly feared balance of trade deficit gave no sign of relenting. Thus Darré was forced to clash with Hjalmar Schacht's very cautious monetary policy. Head of the Reichsbank, Schacht took over from Schmitt as Minister of Econ-

omics in August 1934. Historians have varied greatly in their opinions of this able financial expert (but perhaps less able politician). Those who consider him *the* principal ally of the National Socialists and the privileged intermediary with industrial and financial circles, where he was highly respected and deservedly known as the 'saviour of the mark', have judged his economic and trade policy as a direct precursor to, and the indispensable preparation for, the subsequent overt policy of re-armament, begun in 1936. Others, however, although acknowledging that Schacht consciously climbed on to Hitler's bandwagon before 1933, and in some ways helped in the process, maintain that Schacht had an approach to economic policy completely different from the autarkic and expansionist policy implemented by Göring, who after being appointed 'dictator of the economy' in 1936 gradually supplanted him.²³

I shall not attempt to settle these historiographical controversies here, but an assessment must be made of Schacht's political activity because it did have consequences for agrarian policy. From this point of view, Schacht's personality and his loyalty to the dictates of economic rationality make it difficult to conceive of someone further removed from Darré, who placed *Weltanschauung* before all economic considerations.²⁴ One delicate point over which they clashed was the validity of the RNS. Schacht viewed it as a cumbersome and inefficient bureaucratic monster, whose sole aim was to defend farmers' incomes.²⁵

But the main source of conflict between the two ministers was Schacht's firm opposition, on grounds of strict monetary compatibility, to Darré's incessant requests for currency to make up the German food deficit in the crucial sectors of cereals and fats. As far as the former was concerned, we have already seen how 1933/34 and 1934/35 were characterised by a series of bad harvests due to drought. In 1933 the cereal harvest reached a good level (25.5 million tonnes for the four main cereals). The following year this quota dropped to 22.2 million tonnes and then did not improve much the year after that (23.07 million tonnes).²⁶ Along with an increase in import requirements, this led to a cut in the livestock herd due to a shortage of feeding-stuffs: cattle were reduced by 2.5 per cent and pigs by 9.8 per cent from 1934 to 1935.²⁷ This, albeit the import of animal feeding-stuffs had been increased by 152 per cent over the same period due to the dramatic fall-off in cereal production.²⁸

Given this difficult situation,²⁹ the alternatives were to give free rein to imports to appease domestic demand, or drastically to

tighten up consumption levels, which were rising after the general economic recovery. Urgently needing to safeguard and possibly to improve farmers' incomes,³⁰ Darré opted for massive imports. He was supported in this by Hitler, who did not wish to lose the consensus of the masses.³¹ Schacht, on the other hand, defended the need for a strict control on currency, describing cereal imports as a waste. A large number of local party offices also spoke out, criticising the uncertainties in Darré's agrarian policy, accused of contributing to the general conditions which were creating price rises for the main food products. This, in turn, was said to have damaged the morale of the population, which had just got over a grave economic crisis and had placed high hopes in the Third Reich for a continuing recovery.³² Schacht and the other advocates of currency controls were, in fact, supporting the notion that industry should take precedence. This was summed up by Fritz Nonnenbruch, a famous editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, in the slogan: 'First work then butter!'³³

The opposition between Darré and Schacht in the wider political and economic context gave rise to a long struggle, full of lively clashes and attempts at mediation, especially by Göring. In a cabinet meeting of 7 June 1934, Darré had assured his colleagues that there were sufficient cereal stocks to avoid any future food crisis.³⁴ Thus it came as a great surprise when, in another meeting held on 21 July, the Minister asked for a huge outlay of currency, to provide RM1.6 million a day until the end of the crisis.³⁵

But Schacht's opposition to his demands³⁶ left no room for a compromise. Schacht even asked that the enormous cereal reserves be sold off, and abroad if necessary. Darré, who had been responsible for stocking, did not want them to be put on the domestic market for imperative strategic reasons, which also reflected, in his opinion, the wishes of the Führer.³⁷ But Schacht had his way, as is clear from a comment in Darré's diary, dated 18 October 1934, claiming that the strategic cereal reserves had been sold off through a 'masonic plot' led by the two non-National Socialist ministers, Schacht and Schwerin von Krosigk. In another meeting,³⁸ held on 15 October of the following year when grain shortages on the market began to make themselves felt,³⁹ Hitler and Göring seemed to move nearer to Schacht's position, although Hitler insisted that the population's average food requirements should not be reduced.⁴⁰

On this occasion the Minister of Economics made more widespread criticisms. He bluntly levelled accusations of inefficiency at the clumsy and costly machinery of the RNS and *Marktordnung*, which at the first signs of a crisis was liable to give.⁴¹ Darré's

provocative answer, calling on Schacht to defend himself for having stressed the need for massive state intervention, placed the accent on the importance of his controlling the whole agrarian policy, without dividing up areas of competence.⁴² Even a third meeting, held on 5 February 1936, did not lead to a conclusive outcome, despite Hitler's mediation. But given that the cereal supplies situation was still very serious, Schacht had to concede half of what Darré had demanded.⁴³

Darré defended himself against Schacht's criticism as well as against the obvious tensions in the markets in a number of optimistic letters and memos to the Führer.⁴⁴ In them, he reiterated the validity of his organisation's efforts in considerably reducing the large food deficit. But while the Reichsbauernführer made a great show of confidence and optimism, his administrative office was discussing, or even taking, special measures to guarantee adequate regular supplies and to prevent a drastic reduction in livestock due to the shortage of feeding-stuffs.⁴⁵ In a speech given in Leipzig at the end of 1935, Wilhelm Meinberg, one of Darré's chief assistants, even warned that, although there was no reason to fear a worsening of the food situation, in the near future the distribution of resources might have to be dramatically modified, using 'socialist methods' to ensure that each citizen received enough food.⁴⁶

Darré, however, could not avoid asking for more currency: in the summer of 1935 he requested as much as RM300,000 a day for the import of indispensable fats. In the second half of the following year the Minister calculated that currency requirements for the purchase of foodstuffs would amount to RM850 million, double the sum forecast in the budget.⁴⁷ Circumstances were rapidly turning against Schacht, and not only because he was not a party member – as Barkai claims.⁴⁸ Thus his proposal to re-unite the Ministry of Agriculture and his own Ministry fell on deaf ears.⁴⁹ The gradual removal of Schacht from positions of power would, however, seem to have been due to the fact that he did not agree with the rigidly autarkic and productionist economic policy that Göring and others were now imposing.

Probably prompted by the conflict between the two ministers and the dangers of dwindling food stocks,⁵⁰ in August 1936 Hitler drew up a secret memorandum for a 'second' Four-Year Plan. In fact, it was really the first, but the Führer had also counted the public works plan, which had been implemented immediately after taking power to solve the very serious unemployment problem. In this memo Hitler attacked the free-marketeers, who still believed in the validity of the international market and its laws. Countering

them (Schacht was obviously seen to be at their head), Hitler proposed a new set of priorities to be realised through intense voluntarist action. To sustain and win the next world war, autarky was to be achieved no matter what the cost: 'We are not faced with the problem of what we would like to do, but what we are able to do' was how Hitler described the situation, and he also set a maximum period of four years for both the army and the economy to be *kriegsfähig* – ready for war. Hitler acknowledged that 'our agricultural output will not increase significantly. Similarly, it is impossible to create or substitute synthetic substances for the lack of individual raw materials.'⁵¹

Darré immediately congratulated the Führer, warmly welcoming his change in policy and the appointment of Göring as sole head of the Four-Year Plan. This decision, in fact, marked the definitive defeat of Schacht.⁵² Darré's victory, however, was short-lived: he did not realise what a radical change this autarkic and openly aggressive choice would bring to the delicate balances in the agricultural world. It meant a further industrial boom and greater production pressures, drastically reducing the room for manoeuvre which had allowed the RNS to hang on to the consensus of the rural population. In his memorandum, Hitler had explicitly made the point that 'if we wish to avoid giving the whole German economy a terrible or even mortal blow, it will be impossible to use the currency, set aside for raw materials, to buy imported food products. In any case it is impossible to carry out such operations at the expense of national re-armament.'⁵³ At the same time the Four-Year Plan put an end to all aspirations to self-sufficiency in agriculture, which was to be sacrificed to the predominant needs of the war machine. Thus the solution to the domestic food deficit lay elsewhere, but Hitler did not give any further indications.

Another reason for tracing the course of the conflict between Darré and Schacht until the turning point of 1936 is to highlight the importance of agriculture and its productive capacities within the National Socialist economic and political system. Table 8.1 shows how the shelving of the policy, supported above all by Schacht, caused a return to paying out foreign currency for food imports.

For a full assessment of this turning point, another factor must be borne in mind. Thanks to the favourable economic circumstances of re-armament, the German economy had gradually begun to recover and was soon able to shake off the economic and currency difficulties of the great depression. Thus it should be remembered that the considerable increase in absolute terms of the value of imports does not mean that the national deficit continued to increase

Table 8.1. Value of imports of food products and oils and fats 1933–1939 (RM million at current prices)

Year	Value	Year	Value
1933	912.6	1937	1,201.2
1934	878.1	1938	1,296.2
1935	807.9	1939	1,162.5
1936	811.7		

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 528.

Table 8.2. Consumption of food products 1930–1938 (RM million at current prices)

Year	Consumption	Year	Consumption
1930	25.016	1935	20.597
1931	21.960	1936	21.912
1932	18.976	1937	22.298
1933	18.619	1938	22.621
1934	20.487		

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 649.

Table 8.3. Index of the volume of agricultural imports 1928–1938

Year	Index (1913 = 100)	Year	Index (1913 = 100)
1928	94.4	1936	46.5
1933	50.5	1937	60.5
1934	47.6	1938	67.6
1935	41.0		

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 538.

as a function of the inefficiency of producers. At the same time, in fact, there was also a considerable increase in consumption (Tables 8.2 and 8.3).

Viewed from a different perspective, that is from the proportion of domestic agricultural products in overall food consumption, it can be seen that the degree of German self-sufficiency, which in 1928 was at an all-time low of 71 per cent, definitely rose by about 10 per cent under Darré's management to reach an annual trend that fluctuated between 80 and 84 per cent.⁵⁴ No matter from what

viewpoint it is considered, this was an utterly disappointing result, especially considering the aspirations and the high-sounding optimistic previsions of those responsible for the National Socialist agrarian policy. If we look at the incidence of food products on overall German imports, we see that they increased both as a percentage (from 22.45 per cent in 1933 to 28.48 per cent in 1939) and in absolute terms. In other words, the contribution made by the 'battle for production' was not enough to allow imports to be concentrated in the priority sectors of raw or semi-worked materials needed to accelerate re-armament.

Moreover, it should be remembered that these results were also achieved through reducing the export of German food products which, if 100 in 1913, fell to 52 in 1930, 15.1 in 1934 and 3.8 in 1938.⁵⁵ In fact, the potential for expansion in German agriculture was very limited. Thus an increase in one sector led to another being damaged, and the problem was simply shifted elsewhere.

In particular, the serious shortage of animal fats could not be remedied because of a shortage of feeding-stuffs, whereas if meadows and pasturage were increased other sectors would be damaged, especially cereals.⁵⁶ Because of the precedence accorded to military needs, large tracts of land were requisitioned to build aerodromes, motorways, factories, training grounds, etc. Utilisable farmland declined in absolute terms from 29.039 million hectares in 1932 (excluding Saarland) to 28.537 million hectares in 1937 (including Saarland) and likewise arable land fell from 20 million hectares to 19.177 million hectares.

The greatest commitment of the National Socialist *Erzeugungsschlacht* was in the sector of highly nutritive animal and vegetable fats. By means of very high tariff barriers, which freed domestic prices from the downward course of world markets,⁵⁷ Darré sought to offer incentives for domestic production. But as we have seen, the crucial problem of shortages of feeding-stuffs could not be solved.⁵⁸ During the 1930s there was a reduction in farmland given over to producing feeding-stuffs, such as summer barley and oats (with a drop of 14.1 per cent and 12.7 per cent respectively in 1939, compared to the four-year period 1929–33).⁵⁹

At the same time the import of feed grain (except for oats), which during the depression had reached minimum levels, began to rise again from 1936/37 onwards, reaching 2.7 million tonnes in 1937/38 and 1.6 million tonnes the following year – the equivalent of 37.3 per cent and 20.7 per cent of overall domestic consumption.⁶⁰

Moreover, pursuing the objective of eliminating the importation

of feeding-stuffs and increasing domestic production was not only difficult but inopportune, given that – as one magazine pointed out⁶¹ – the bilateral clearing agreements with the Balkan countries were largely based on the import of oil-seed feeding-stuffs. In the lively debate in the press and specialised publications at the time, the problem of the lack of available land for forage and feeding-stuffs continually came to the fore.⁶² According to a contemporary statistical extrapolation which calculated agricultural output based only on domestic feed, the index value (1927/8–1928/9 = 100) rose during the first four years of the regime to reach 123 in 1936/7, but with fluctuations.⁶³ The way out of the dilemma was seen to lie in cultivating previously untilled land, but I shall deal with this question later. It must be admitted, however, that the National Socialist government's efforts did lead to an increase in the number of silos for stockpiling feed: their volume rose from 650,000 cubic metres in 1932 to as much as 6.6 million cubic metres in 1937.⁶⁴ The policy of containing the fats deficit did make provisions, from as early as Hugenberg's so-called 'fats plan', for a rigid quota system for margarine sales to encourage the output and consumption of butter. At the same time – as we have seen – concessions were made for a certain amount of low-cost margarine for the less well-off, given that butter was a good deal more expensive. This system of allowance cards, involving in the early years of the regime millions of families at low income levels, continued till the end of the decade. Overall, it made possible considerable reductions in the fats-sector deficit, reducing it from 62.8 per cent in 1928 to 52.8 per cent in 1938,⁶⁵ mostly because of fairly significant improvements in output in all sectors: animal fats, vegetable fats and oil seeds.

As far as the latter was concerned, government action was aimed at giving new life to domestic production which, since the period from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century when it had thrived, had been almost completely abandoned because of much more competitive foreign prices. Thus in 1933 imports of oil seeds amounted to almost 2.34 million tonnes at a cost of RM268 million, and represented about 100 per cent of domestic requirements.⁶⁶

To encourage domestic output of linseed, colza, rape, soya and sunflower, the government fixed very advantageous prices, the so-called *Erziehungspreise*, which were way above prices on the international market, the difference being paid by the state.⁶⁷ The idea was to convince farmers to change some of their crops. Thus there was a yearly increase both in land sown and output. For

example, land sown in colza and rape went from 5,100 hectares in 1933 to 55,000 hectares in 1936, and linseed went from 4,900 hectares to 41,000 hectares. The respective outputs rose from 7,400 tonnes and 3,200 tonnes in 1932/33 to 128,000 tonnes and 22,800 tonnes in 1938/39. Overall, the output of oil plants and seeds rose from 8,000 tonnes in 1933 (the lowest point in the recent history of the sector) to 140,000 tonnes in 1938. But on the whole these are modest figures given that imports continued to rise at the rate of 5 million tonnes a year, and by 1938 cost RM231 million.⁶⁸

But to encourage production in this area in a truly significant way would have required totally unrealistic conditions: much more land (even if some did attempt to intensify land exploitation),⁶⁹ given that the existing land had a variety of contenders for priority crops, and larger financial resources from the state. And in fact, given the price differentials, the state was forced to make expensive contributions to encourage farmers to grow unprofitable crops which were also outside German traditions.

Most experts⁷⁰ were also of the opinion that the attempt to achieve self-sufficiency in this sector was completely utopian. Despite the undeniable progress made – as we have seen, output was multiplied in just a few years – there continued to be a large deficit. The consumption of edible oils and fats, after a fairly significant drop in 1934/35 stemming from supply difficulties, rose to 1.5 million tonnes (measured in net fat); similarly, the percentage share of domestic oils and fats rose from 37.1 per cent in 1928 to 44 per cent in 1934 and to 48.3 per cent in 1938.⁷¹ The question, however, gradually became of secondary importance thanks to the rapid economic and commercial penetration into countries like the Balkans, which offered a way of making up the domestic deficit in the sector of the more noble foods. But this aspect will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 9.

I will now turn to some more concise information on output in other sectors. Livestock – as has been mentioned several times already – suffered from a basic lack of feeding-stuffs. Furthermore, given that it requires relatively more labour, it was particularly affected by the growing lack of manpower, and especially of specialised staff. It should be added that in the 1930s price trends did not depart from the tradition of favouring cereal growers (Table 8.4).

Contemporary commentators all agreed in underlining the fact that the livestock sector did not show such a positive trend as cereals and vegetable products in general, as can be seen from an aggregate index (Table 8.5).

Table 8.4. Index of producer prices for main products 1933–1939

Product	1933	Index (1913 = 100)	
		1935	1939
Wheat	97.0	104.7	106.1
Rye	96.3	103.8	118.6
Potatoes	70.5	124.5	128.2
Beet	144.2	146.6	153.8
Beef	64.0	85.1	93.8
Pork	64.7	75.3	80.7
Milk	90.9	106.1	106.1

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 552.

Table 8.5. Producer index prices 1928–1938

Year	Vegetables	Index (1913 = 100)	
		Meat	Other livestock products
1928	151.7	110.7	148.5
1933	96.8	64.1	96.7
1936	116.8	84.6	111.2
1938	123.8	84.8	114.7

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 562.

Given these limits to profitability, specialised livestock products grew but not to such a great extent: all types of butchered meat rose from 3.36 million tonnes in 1932 to 3.77 million tonnes in 1939, dairy milk from 21.97 million tonnes to 23.29 million tonnes,⁷² butter from 420,000 tonnes to 549,000 tonnes, and speck and lard from 316,000 tonnes to 378,000 tonnes.⁷³

The size of the livestock herd fluctuated yearly, but the overall trend was towards a slight increase, especially in pigs (Table 8.6). The outcome was that domestic production, which almost reached 100 per cent of national requirements in the early 1930s, fell to 94.9 per cent by 1937 because of increases in consumption.⁷⁴

Let us now take a brief look at output trends for cereals. The most striking feature is the great variation in output from one year to another: wheat harvests fluctuate from a minimum of 4.9 million tonnes in 1936 to a maximum of 6.3 million tonnes in 1933. There are equally large fluctuations for rye (7.6 million tonnes in 1937 to

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Table 8.6. Pig and cattle herds 1913–1938 (millions of head)

Year	Pigs	Cattle
1913	25.6	20.9
1928	20.1	18.4
1933	23.9	18.1
1936	25.9	18.4
1938	25.2	18.4

Source: Statistischen Jahrbücher des deutschen Reiches.

9.6 million tonnes in 1933), and for barley and oats. At the same time, consumption continued to rise for all indices, both general and per capita, returning to the highest levels in the second half of the 1920s, both for basic products and for costly luxury commodities such as coffee, Mediterranean fruit, and meat. The consumption of flour-bread and other cereal-based products rose from 6.9 million tonnes in 1933 to 7.8 million tonnes in 1938 – a percentage rise of 13.4 (in 1927 the consumption had been 7.35 million tonnes). There was a similar trend for values of cereal consumption (at constant prices): from RM3.03 million in 1933 to RM3.45 million in 1938 (up 13.1 per cent). The cereal deficit thus stayed high, but fluctuated a great deal from 0.25 million tonnes in 1935/36 to 2.5 million tonnes in 1938/39,⁷⁵ with parallel fluctuations in the cost, at current prices, of the imports needed to make up the deficit (Table 8.7).

Table 8.7. Values of imported cereals 1933–1939 (RM million)

Year	Value	Year	Value
1933	153.4	1937	392.0
1934	155.1	1938	397.7
1935	94.4	1939	271.4
1936	392.0		

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts, Berlin, 1965, p. 526.

Not even the opportunity of importing cereals from the Balkan countries at very advantageous conditions, given that actual cost in currency was minimal, was enough to ease the situation for decision makers and producers, as the serious circumstances at the beginning of 1937 demonstrate. Back at work after a long conva-

lescence, Darré had to tackle an unexpected and strong tension on the cereal markets, although in the event he passed the buck to his assistants, and in particular to the Ministerial Direktor Moritz, head of the sector, who was 'sacked' after having been accused of plotting behind Darré's back. This was the beginning of a number of purges, part of Darré's vain attempt to recover his hegemony in the RNS, which he had lost some time previously.⁷⁶

Because of price differences, in this period there was a shift from rye to wheat, which through the *Marktordnung* received higher prices. Careful observers, however, denounced the fact that the emphasis on quantity caused a fall-off in quality, despite government efforts to improve seeds.

To reduce dependence on foreign markets another indirect course was taken: consumption was to be contained by replacing certain scarce commodities with lower-quality substitutes that were easier to find. Despite the dictatorial and repressive nature of the Third Reich, this policy was pursued very cautiously, the emphasis being on persuasion. Propaganda concentrated on fats, meat and eggs, to be replaced where possible by potatoes, sugar and jams, fish and cheese. But these were only palliative measures, at least until propaganda was abandoned in favour of real prohibitive measures. Anxious not to alienate the population, the regime did not take this final step until the war was well under way; thus the campaign to influence consumption would not seem to have had much effect on the population's diet.⁷⁷

As for the grand schemes for land reclamation and improvements, supposed to create more farmland, they never got beyond the drawing board through lack of funds.⁷⁸ Evidently this kind of project was low on the regime's list of priorities. Even so, countless ambitious schemes, requiring considerable government funding, were presented and discussed, especially in the early years as part of the plan for large-scale public works intended to end mass unemployment.⁷⁹

Following the Italian example of the *legge Mussolini*, a bill described as 'Lex Adolf Hitler' was presented in August 1935. It was intended to encourage private land-reclamation consortiums and made provisions for considerable financial facilities for anyone wishing to carry out reclamation and land-improvement works.⁸⁰ But this, like other initiatives with similar aims, was opposed by Schacht and his colleague, the Minister of Finances, Schwerin von Krosigk, who had very little time for agriculture.⁸¹ Even the aforementioned Reichsstelle für Raumordnung, which was supposed to plan the reorganisation of arable land in a more rational

way, dedicated its efforts to strategic and military operations right from the beginning of its activity. It was not until 1937 that a fixed sum of RM200 million was expressly set aside in the budget for draining works and land improvement. This sum, however, was considered inadequate by the head of the RNS Landeskultur section, Rieke.⁸²

Just as the National Socialist regime did not make great steps forward in exploiting available resources in the field of reclamation and land improvement – naturally enough in the few years they had available – their policy concerning mechanisation, the fundamental tool for rationalising production, was similarly very cautious. On this topic it should be remembered that German agriculture started from a stronger position than that of other European nations. Since the end of the nineteenth century Germany had been a pioneer in agricultural engineering, and its agricultural machinery producers had long had an important share of international markets. In the late 1920s, at the time of greatest growth, more than 55,000 people worked in the sector, usually in medium-sized firms. Encompassing 1,461 firms, it had an annual turnover of approximately RM400 million, most of which came from exports.⁸³ This large sector, therefore, had great potential for growth, especially in the domestic market.⁸⁴ It is no accident that from June 1928 the head of the Reichskuratorium für Technik und Landwirtschaft (RKTL), a body created on the joint initiative of the Ministries of Agriculture and Economics, was Krupp's son-in-law, von Wilmowsky, an important figure in the Ruhr-Rhineland industrial circles and a 'specialist' in maintaining contacts with agriculture.⁸⁵ The great significance that industrial circles attached to strengthening the RKTL, a technical and advisory body, through tax benefits for mechanisation is unequivocally demonstrated by the importance of RKTL affairs in the private papers of Wilmowsky, which also testify to the backing (even financial) that he received from various figures such as Reusch, Poensgen and Krupp.⁸⁶

These papers show, in particular, the patient reconciliation operation that Wilmowsky undertook, with a fair degree of success, after the *Machtergreifung*, when he had been replaced (October 1933) by Walter Granzow, one of Darré's chief assistants, also responsible for settlement problems and at the same time Ministerpräsident of Mecklenburg. As is shown by his introductory speech to the plenary assembly of 2 February 1933, Wilmowsky was at pains to stress that technology was not a threat to peasants. The obvious reference was to the widespread notion among National Socialists that mechanisation was, on one hand, cold and inhuman and

therefore in clear opposition to the ethical-idealistic essence of the *Bauernstum* and, on the other hand, a threat to employment levels.⁸⁷

The distrust of the industrial *Weltanschauung* was an important element in the *Blut und Boden* ideology and was solidly rooted in its characteristic anti-economics outlook. Any talk of 'profitability' among supporters of modernising agriculture was in stark contrast to Darré's racial and *völkisch* vision, which opposed the values of economic rationality with those of the family and cultural and racial solidity.

Attempts to expand the RKTL, which sought to combine research and applied technology, met with considerable difficulties because of the ideological positions of the new men in power.⁸⁸ For example, Granzow threatened to break off the close links with industry which the RKTL had built up under the chairmanship of Wilmowsky.⁸⁹ The direct involvement of leading members of the German business world, who put the question of relaunching mechanisation on the agenda at the RDI-RNST summit meetings held at the beginning of 1934,⁹⁰ seems to have smoothed out the contrasts – as is clear from the more relaxed tones of Wilmowsky's letters and comments from spring 1936 onwards. Furthermore, the RKTL was even allowed to set up its own stand at the annual RNS Fair, beginning with the one in Frankfurt in 1936.

Despite RKTL efforts, the results of the mechanisation campaign, especially as far as peasant holdings were concerned, were not as brilliant as Wilmowsky had hoped. This clearly emerges from a long report that he sent to Reusch in September 1940, in which he spoke, above all, of a potential yet to be realised.⁹¹ In the same report, Wilmowsky denounced another serious obstacle to mechanisation: growing requirements for steel, rubber and other raw materials had to compete with the increasingly urgent priorities of re-armament.⁹² Instead of tractors, the regime needed to produce tanks and armoured cars for its grandiose war plans. Moreover, despite the experiments carried out by the RKTL and others, the sizes and therefore the costs of the most important agricultural machines were prohibitive,⁹³ given the traditional lack of a co-operative spirit and especially since the *Erbhof* law and the law freezing debts meant that it was much more difficult for small and medium-sized peasant holdings to obtain credit facilities.⁹⁴

Only very late on, when resources had become scarce, did Darré seem completely convinced that the only real way to modernise agriculture was through large-scale mechanisation. This only became the catch-phrase as late as 1939, at the fifth RNS Fair held in Leipzig.

Table 8.8. Overall number of chief agricultural machines (census figures)

Machinery	Year		1939	Difference: 1933-39 (%)
	1907	1933		
Tractors	3,000	23,902	68,239	+185
Hoeing machines	15,820	122,314	200,144	+63
Sawing machines	184,820	667,692	806,452	+21
Reapers	301,000	1,119,721	1,676,470	+50
Threshers	848,510	973,376	973,169	0
Mills	-92,270	456,478	691,555	+51
Potato lifters	10,792	343,720	458,559	+33

Source: 'Technisierung der Landarbeit', *Deutscher Volkswirt*, no. 17, 1939.

Table 8.9. Investments in fertilisers and machinery 1928-1938 (RM million at 1913 prices)

Year	Fertilisers	Machinery	Percentage of Investments on net product (%)
1928	947	756	15.5
1933	813	785	13.3
1934	923	866	14.5
1935	1,108	876	16.7
1936	1,066	886	16.4
1937	1,300	909	17.9
1938	1,472	988	19.3

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 320.

A summary comparison (given that there were technical changes and different kinds of machine available) of the 1907 and 1939 censuses shows how most farms of under 20 hectares still did not have agricultural machines. The large increase in the fleet of machines in the period (Table 8.8) benefited above all the medium and large farms, especially in East Elbian Germany.⁹⁵ Thanks to the (belated) measures taken at the beginning of 1938 to reduce the price of the most important agricultural machines, public expenditure in the sector rose rapidly, as can be seen from Table 8.9. This was indeed important progress, but it affected only slightly most small farmers, who were the source of income for millions of families.

In any case, at constant prices, the capital value of machines and equipment in German agriculture rose from RM7.8 billion in 1933

Table 8.10. Use of fertilisers 1926–1938 (net contents in thousands of tonnes)

Fertiliser	1926/27	1934/35	1937/38
Nitrates	340	426	632
Limes	1,200 ¹	1,446	2,010
Phosphates	421	561	690
Potassiums	618	818	1,156

1. Gross volume.

Source: *Statistische Jahrbücher des Deutschen Reiches*.

to RM9.8 billion in 1939, an increase of 26 per cent and a considerably higher proportional increase than the general growth in capital in agriculture for the same period (+7.9 per cent). For a further comparison of the rate of growth of capital in equipment and machinery, it should be remembered that the maximum rise was in the period 1900–13 (+31.7 per cent), whereas for the years from 1923 to 1932 the same indicator rose by 21.9 per cent.⁹⁶

The use of chemical fertilisers also spread considerably in the 1930s (Table 8.10). This shows that progress had been made in production, but not enough to make inroads into the food deficit, given the simultaneous general increase in consumption which the regime neither wished nor knew how to control.

It was only in 1935 that the expenditure for the purchase of fertilisers, again according to the data collected by Hoffmann, began to go beyond the previous maximum level (at constant prices) reached in 1928. It then continued to rise at a good rate until it peaked at RM1.472 million in 1938, a 79.8 per cent increase for the years during the Third Reich.⁹⁷

To conclude, during the seven years of National Socialist agrarian policy that we have examined, the battle for production did not even reduce the food balance deficit enough to satisfy the growing demands of the consumers and to permit a re-allocation of available resources.⁹⁸ Although modernisation and the process of intensifying production continued, they did so at a slower rate than in the past and with fluctuations and weaknesses. In a radio speech of 12 December 1938, replacing the traditional speech of the *Reichsbauerntag*, which had been cancelled for the aforementioned political and health reasons, Darré presented a highly significant list of aims to be achieved: (1) an improvement in upkeep of land; (2) an increase in vegetable production; (3) a consolidation of feeding-stuffs production; (4) better upkeep of pastures; (5) a change to

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Table 8.11. Values of agricultural output after deduction of seeds and feeding-stuffs 1928–1938 (RM million at 1913 prices)

Year	Value	Year	Value
1928	10.975	1936	11.882
1933	12.006	1937	12.334
1934	12.330	1938	12.712
1935	11.878		

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 310.

Table 8.12. Yields of main crops 1929–1938 (quintals per hectare)

Crop	1929/33	1937/38	Difference: 1929/33–1937/38 (%)
Rye	17.4	18.4	+5.7
Winter wheat	21.6	25.2	+16.7
Summer wheat	21.4	24.0	+12.1
Winter barley	23.9	26.7	+11.7
Spring barley	19.4	21.9	+12.9
Oats	19.5	22.2	+13.8
Peas	15.6	17.2	+10.3
Beans	17.6	19.8	+12.5
Potatoes	156.1	183.7	+17.7
Oil-seed rape	13.0	18.3	+40.8
Beet	283.1	327.3	+15.6
Clover	52.2	55.0	+5.4
Lupins	63.5	69.7	+9.8

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 320.

indoor rearing; (6) the co-operative use of machinery; and (7) improved living conditions for wage earners.⁹⁹ The key sectors of cereals and edible fats still depended to a large extent on imports, demonstrating the general failure of the *Erzeugungsschlacht*.

The contradiction between the triumphantly optimistic bulletins, which Darré and the other RNS leaders distributed not only to the population but also in circles close to the Führer,¹⁰⁰ and the gloomy situation of the real production difficulties was resolved only with the outbreak of war. If H. von der Ropp's threatening article of December 1934 is anything to go by, these disappointing results had repercussions for the whole of Darré's agrarian policy: 'Output will be the key test for Darré. Depending on the results of the

output campaign, we shall be able to judge if it was right to have given the peasants the privileged position they enjoy in Hitler's state.'¹⁰¹

With the outbreak of war, the military extension of the economic territory of the Third Reich completely changed the terms of the problem by shifting most of the action of the 'battle for production' abroad. But earlier there had been those, well placed in the top decision-making levels of the economic and financial world, who had already clearly indicated the way out of the impasse. An editorial of the *Deutsche Führerbriefe*, dated 27 March 1934 and significantly entitled with a question-mark *Landwirtschaftliche Autarkie?*, began by refuting the wisdom of seeking self-sufficiency in food at all costs. For although feasible, it would end up doing enormous damage to the international interests of the German economy. The problem of self-sufficiency in food should – according to the writer of the article – be part of the context of a *Großraumwirtschaft*, centred round Germany.¹⁰² And in fact, with the passing years, it became increasingly clear that this was the direction that was being taken in order to escape from the dilemma of otherwise unavoidable, and definitely undesirable, structural reforms.

Notes

1. W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, pp. 526ff.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 526, 468.

3. K. Meyer, 'Grundsätze und Ziele nationalsozialistischen Agrarpolitik', in K. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1939, p. 211.

4. F. Tyszka, 'Deutsche Selbstversorgung mit Nahrungsmitteln', *Wirtschaftsdienst*, no. 47, 23 November 1934.

5. A. Hanau and R. Plate, *Die deutsche landwirtschaftliche Preis- und Marktpolitik im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1974, p. 80.

6. Cf. O. Leibrock, 'Warum Schutz der deutschen Nahrungsfreiheit?', *Ruhr und Rhein*, no. 48, 1 December 1933: to become the leader of a politico-economic continental block, Germany first had to achieve self-sufficiency in food.

7. Cf. T. Mason, 'Il nazional-socialismo e l'eredità del 1918', *Storia contemporanea*, vol. 4, 1973, pp. 3–25.

8. Feder, *Das Programm der NSDAP*, Munich, 1938, p. 6.

9. Quoted in H. E. Volkmann, 'Das außenwirtschaftliche Programm der NSDAP 1930–1933', *AfS*, vol. 17, 1977, p. 254.

10. Cf. Darré's explicit references to the international block, which was supposed to have starved Germany out and laid her flat in the previous world conflict, in two speeches given at Kiel and Wilhelmshaven to German Navy officers in

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December 1933: quoted in H. Gies, 'Aufgaben und Probleme der nationalsozialistischen Ernährungswirtschaft 1933-1939', *I'SWG*, vol. 66, 1979, p. 468.

11. Of the many people involved in the debate, see in particular for the 'optimists': Graf von Roedern, 'Nahrungsfreiheit durch Hebung der bäuerlichen Produktion', *JNS*, vol. 145, 1937, pp. 513ff.; T. Wessels, 'Die Selbstversorgung Deutschlands mit Agrarprodukten', Dissertation, Bonn, 1938. More sceptical views were expressed by E. von Borsig, 'Reagrarisierung Deutschlands? Eine Untersuchung über ihre Möglichkeit und Grenzen', Dissertation, Stuttgart, 1934; P. Klauke, 'Die deutsche Fett-, Getreide- und Futtermittelpolitik seit 1933', Dissertation, Cologne, 1937; and K. T. Weinbrenner, 'Voraussetzungen, Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der landwirtschaftlichen Selbstversorgung Deutschlands', Dissertation, Gießen, 1938.

12. Cf. F. von Papen's line of reasoning in an article entitled 'Gedanken zur Erzeugungsschlacht', *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 21 December 1935. Propaganda which aimed only at increasing production without considering whether the farms had a 'healthy economic base' was detrimental. It was vital that every productive unit had a diversified and balanced structure, able to produce a wide range of products. Significant too was the defensive position adopted by K. Meyer, 'Die Erzeugungsschlacht als Ausdruck deutschen Leistungswillens', *Odal*, vol. 4, 1935/36, pp. 692ff. According to Meyer, those who accused the current National Socialist policy of concentrating too much on ideological aspects and neglecting economics had not understood that the new regime had introduced a completely new vision of economics. The very concept of 'performance' ceased to have cold and mechanistic overtones.

13. Cf. her recent book, *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party*, Abbotsbrook, 1985 (for criticism see the ample review by G. Corni in *Neue Politische Literatur*, no. 3, 1986, pp. 501ff.).

14. Darré, *Aufbruch des Bauerntums*, Berlin, 1942, p. 359.

15. H. Backe, 'Volk und Wirtschaft im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland', Berlin, n.d., p. 45. In the same speech, Backe rebutted the widespread opinion that the policy begun by Darré proposed only to defend and consolidate the peasantry. He reiterated that its main priority was the general interest of the German people. Cf. an article by Backe, 'Eigennutz, Zwang oder Leistungswille?', *Odal*, vol. 5, 1936/37, pp. 158ff.

16. And therefore he agreed with Puhle (in *Politische Agrarbewegungen in Kapitalistischen Industriegesellschaften*, Göttingen, 1975, p. 101) that 'the attempt to achieve autarky inevitably clashed with the structural reorganisation of agriculture'.

17. Cf., for example, L. Pesl, 'Faschistische Agrarpolitik', *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*, vol. 1, 1934, pp. 653ff.

18. See the countless requests for help for exceptional cases in BA, R 2, vol. 18018. On 18 June Darré was forced to ask Hitler to convene an urgent meeting to discuss the difficult food situation. The meeting, however, was called off by the Minister himself; his reasons for doing so are not clear from the proceedings: BA, R 43 II, vol. 193.

19. C. Lovin, 'Die Erzeugungsschlacht 1934-1936', *ZAGAS*, vol. 22, 1974, p. 214. All the same the Ministry of Finance put forward many objections to Darré's requests to set aside extra funds for the propaganda campaign. The Ministry gave in only when the amount was lowered considerably. See the correspondence, November-December 1934, in BA, R 2, vol. 18018.

20. Cf. a survey of the measures taken until then in W. Meinberg, 'Steigerung der landwirtschaftlichen Erzeugung', *VJP*, vol. 1, 1937. For detailed criticism, see Gies, 'Aufgaben und Probleme', pp. 474ff.

21. Incidentally, the Minister seized the occasion offered him by the battle for production to propose abolishing the last remaining powers that the *Länder* had over agrarian policy. But his proposal to centralise policy completely met with

government opposition and was rejected. See Darré to Hitler, 16 April 1935, in BA, N1 Darré II, vol. AD 24.

22. Significant criticism came from a Fascist economist, anxious to show that the Italian system was better: 'Hitler's political power engaged in the battle for production with only one weapon: political propaganda.' F. Di Fenizio, *Politica agraria tedesca*, Milan, 1937, p. 159.

23. On the subject of Schacht and his policies see E. N. Peterson, *Hjalmar Schacht*, Boston, 1954; D. Petzina, *Autarkiepolitik im Dritten Reich*, Stuttgart, 1968; W. A. Boelcke, *Die deutsche Wirtschaft 1930-1945*, Düsseldorf, 1983; H. Müller, *Die Zentralbank, eine Nebenregierung*, Opladen, 1973; and his autobiography, H. Schacht, *75 Jahre meines Lebens*, Bad Wörishofen, 1953.

24. The difference between the two personalities clearly emerges in their view of each other. Looking back, Schacht judged Darré more of a philosopher than a practical administrator (Schacht, *75 Jahre*, p. 114), whereas on several occasions Darré branded the Minister his 'mortal enemy' in so far as he was the worst kind of narrow-minded liberal: cf. SA Goslar, N1 Darré, vol. 146.

25. For criticism of the exorbitant cost of the RNS, see the correspondence, March-May 1935, in DZAP, 36.01, vol. 2272 and that of the following summer in BA, R 2, vol. 18295. In his struggle against the RNS, Schacht found an ally in the Minister of Finances, Schwerin von Krosigk. Not surprisingly, he was another member of conservative circles and he fiercely opposed increases in the obligatory contributions for the RNS, which Darré asked for every year with the excuse that his organisation had an increasing number of duties to fulfil. Backed by the Chancellery, Schwerin objected that inefficiency could not be rewarded. Darré was thus forced to cut down his demands greatly: BA, R 43 II, vol. 203 and R 2, vol. 18294.

26. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum*, p. 286.

27. These figures unequivocally called Darré's bluff. Faced for a second year with fears of huge increases in butchered pigs, he defended himself by saying that the situation was completely under control. He had no intention of following the example of those who, in 1914, had panicked because of a shortage of feeding-stuffs and had drastically cut the pig herd with very dramatic consequences. See his article, 'Der Schweinemord von 1914 diente als Warnung', *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 November 1935. See also the anxious observations of a contemporary commentator, P. Klauke, 'Die deutsche Fettpolitik', p. 57 and the harsh protests by the Price Commissioner, Goerdeler, who directly informed the Führer about the very tense situation on the livestock market. This forced Darré to make a flurried defence: BA, N1 Darré II, vol. 24.

28. *Wirtschaft und Statistik*, Berlin, 1935, pp. 166, 502.

29. The crisis, which was also reported in the foreign press (see the articles in the *Economist* and *The Times*, 5 and 9 October respectively), was anxiously followed by Hitler who was concerned to avoid any further lowering of morale in the population. Cf. the proceedings, also from the provincial administration, in BA, R 16 I, vols 2067 and 2063, R 43 II, vol. 783, as well as in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vols 3328 and 7496. In an article published by *Der Angriff*, 4 October 1935, the Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels, gave indications to party offices on minimising and explaining with temporary, natural factors the reasons for the tense market situation.

30. The economic difficulties and hardships, especially for farmers, emerge in provincial RNS reports: DZAP, 36.03, vol. 58.

31. Cf. the note from the Chancellery, 14 August 1934, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 199.

32. The first clashes between Darré and the Gauleiters took place on 14 July 1934. At the end of August the following year, it was Backe's turn to be called to account for himself, first to the Treuhänder der Arbeit and then two days later to the Gauleiters. Provincial party leaders pointed out that the spread of ill-feeling among the population created a potential breeding-ground for 'communist propa-

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ganda': BA, R 43 II, vol. 317. See also Bormann's circular to all Gauleiters on 8 January 1936, inviting them not to send complaints by letter or telegram, given that they might be intercepted and used by foreign provokers: BA, NS 22, vol. 850.

33. The article mentioned appeared in *VB*, 21 November 1935. Schacht's hostility to any form of coercive or planned economy emerges clearly in a letter to Reusch, 2 January 1933: GHH-HA, vol. 400101290/33a. But once in government office he changed his rigid doctrinaire stance, as we shall see in the case of his trade policy.

34. K. H. Minuth (ed.), *Die Regierung Hitler*, Boppard, 1983, p. 130.

35. Darré to the Ministry of Finance and the Reichsbank, 26 July, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 199.

36. See the severe request (after nine warning letters in the same tone) from the board of the Reichsbank to Darré, 12 May, asking him to spare currency or at least deal only with countries with whom there existed clearing agreements: BA, R 2, vol. 18039.

37. This emerged from a memo sent by Darré to Hitler, on 6 May 1935. Hitler seemingly expressed worries of a strategic nature during the next meeting on 18 October: BA, NI Darré II, vol. 24. From an undated note from Willuhn, an official at the Chancellery, it appears that both Hitler and the other ministers were against keeping huge reserves of cereals: resources should be concentrated on the priority of relaunching industry: BA, R 43 II, vol. 331.

38. But see the earlier long letter sent by Darré to the Führer, 28 February, complaining about Schacht's obstructionism: BA, NI Darré II, vol. 24.

39. See the Ministry of Agriculture communication to the Chancellery, 10 October, in AA-Archiv, Sonderref. Wirtsch., vol. Getreide 7.

40. Cf. A. Schweitzer, *Big Business in the Third Reich*, Bloomington, 1964, p. 243.

41. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 253. See Goerdeler's detailed report sent to the Chancellery, 27 October 1935. He stressed the harmful effects of too much state intervention in agriculture, effects which would lead to a worsening of the food deficit. The Commissioner dramatically predicted that, if large imports were not authorised immediately, 'from January it would be barely possible to survive': BA, R 43 II, vol. 318a.

42. Darré to Schacht, 23 August 1935, in AA-Archiv, Sonderref. Wirtsch., vol. Getreide 8.

43. Cf. D. E. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War*, Princeton, 1980, p. 152. From then on Schacht asked Hitler to exonerate him from attending meetings in which Darré would also be present. The letter, 3 April 1936, is in BA, NS 10, vol. 32. The debate in government circles must have been leaked on several occasions, as is clear from a number of well-informed articles such as those in the Dutch daily *De Telegraaf*, on 11 November 1934 and 4 May 1936.

44. Cf. the letter of 28 February 1935, the memo of 6 May in BA, NI Darré II, vol. 24, and the letters to Lammers of 8 October and 27 December 1934 (R 43 II, vol. 193), aimed at rejecting criticism or at least reassuring the ruling bodies of the regime.

45. But confidential internal documents reveal that there was widespread concern over the difficult food situation and the possibility of price increases which would be unbearable for most consumers: cf. the RNS circular to all LBFs, 23 August 1934, and a Ministry of Agriculture internal report, 4 September 1935, in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2063 and R 43 II, vol. 318a respectively. But in an article published in the *Deutscher Nachrichtenbüro*, 11 August 1934, the Ministerial Director, Moritz, also frankly acknowledged the dangers of the shortfall in the cereal harvest (approximately -21 per cent) and its possible repercussions.

46. 'Die Frage: Fett oder Arbeit?', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 6 December 1935.

47. Petzina, *Autarkiepolitik*, p. 46. In an interview on the main lines of the

regime's agrarian policy, published in *VB*, 23 January 1936, Darré firmly pointed out that, to achieve the principal aim of guaranteeing adequate consumption levels for the population, huge amounts of currency were required.

48. A. Barkai, *Das Wirtschaftssystem des Nationalsozialismus*, Cologne, 1977, p. 120.

49. Cf. Schweitzer, *Big Business*, p. 253.

50. Cf. Petzina, *Autarkiepolitik*, pp. 48ff.; A. Simpson 'The Struggle for Control of the German Economy', *JMH*, vol. 31, 1959, pp. 37-45.

51. A. Hitler, 'Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan', introduced by W. Treue, in *VfZG*, vol. 3, 1955, p. 206.

52. The appointment of Göring as head of the Four-Year Plan was made official on 18 October. As early as 1 November Darré wrote to him, enthusiastically offering his assistance and at the same time proclaiming that this change meant the end of the 'mortal' struggle with Schacht who had threatened to destroy all his work: SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 146. But on 5 September the Minister had already written to Hitler asking for a more austere economic policy, run along military lines (BA, NS 10, vol. 103). The Reichsbauernführer publicly announced his unconditional support for the new course in an inaugural speech for the *Grüne Woche* (the annual RNS fair) in Berlin on 29 January 1936. Darré claimed that the RNS would give its full backing to the battle for the Four-Year Plan. Schacht, on the other hand, was to stay in the posts held up till then for another two years, but he increasingly tended to distinguish between his own position and the economic policy that was actually adopted. Thus in a speech given in January 1937, he stated that 'If we are told that the important thing is to produce and not whether we produce in an economic way, then I will reply that to produce in an uneconomic way is simply a waste of the resources of the German people': quoted in Boelcke, *Deutsche Wirtschaft*, p. 173.

53. Hitler, 'Denkschrift', p. 207.

54. K. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung*, p. 521.

55. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum*, pp. 524f. It should be borne in mind that raw materials from agriculture, which are important from the quantitative point of view, could not be included.

56. In a speech given at the Goslar *Reichsbauernntag*, Göring had denounced peasants who were in the habit of feeding their pigs cereals intended for planning quotas. This was one of the negative consequences of the shortage of feeding-stuffs. According to Göring, this practice could be avoided only through the adoption of external solutions, such as putting domestic swill to better use or the production of low-cost fish-flour. The speech is in the *Nationale Wirtschaft*, 5 February 1937. In fact, in the previous year from the same tribune Göring had branded peasants who squandered wheat destined for the Plan as 'traitors': BA, R 43 II, vol. 223. Backe's report of 1 April 1936, sent to the Führer's Chancellery, was along similar lines (BA, R 43 II, vol. 200). From local RNS office reports, it emerges that the ban, which went against deep-rooted habits, created a good deal of ill-feeling: cf. the report for Mecklenburg, in *DZAP*, 36.03, vol. 60.

57. Producer prices on the main world markets (RM per kg):

Year	Butter		Lard		Pig Meat	
	Berlin	Copenhagen	Berlin	New York	Berlin	Warsaw
1929	343.7	340.7	151.5	110.3	158.3	104.1
1933	217.8	107.6	148.1	44.3	75.6	51.8
1936	254.0	114.8	185.1	61.5	97.0	41.9

Source: K. Brandt, *The German Fat Plan and Its Economic Setting*, Stanford, 1938, p. 179.

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58. See the correspondence between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance during the summer of 1934 concerning subsidies for exceptional measures for the slaughtering of livestock to take the weight off the feeding-stuffs crisis, which had already been heightened by a long drought: BA, R 2, vol. 18111. For this purpose, a law was even issued on 9 August, setting aside RM47 million to buy up animals: Tornow, *Chronik der Agrarpolitik und Agrarwirtschaft der Deutschen Reiches*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1982, pp. 52f. Cf. the worried report from the cereals Hauptvereinigung, 7 July 1936, urgently asking for currency to buy the necessary feeding-stuffs to supply the continually growing pig herd: BA, R 14, vol. 370.

59. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung*, p. 783.

60. Cf. the statistical appendix in D. Grupe, 'Die Nahrungsmittelversorgung Deutschlands seit 1925', Dissertation, Göttingen, 1956.

61. 'Strukturwandlungen in der Futtermittelversorgung', *Deutsche Führerbriefe*, 16 October 1934.

62. Cf., among others, H. Ilchmann, *Die Wiedererringung der deutschen Nahrungsfreiheit im Vollzug des Vierjahresplanes*, Berlin, 1939; L. Manns, 'Deutschlands Selbstversorgung mit Speisefetten', Dissertation, Cologne 1937. Many interesting but 'fanciful' projects for feeding-stuffs autarkies are to be found in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 4295.

63. In *Nationale Wirtschaft*, no. 1, 5 January 1938.

64. E. Woermann, 'Die Forderung der landwirtschaftlichen Erzeugung' in Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung*, p. 540.

65. Hanau and Plate, *Die deutsche Preispolitik*, p. 88. L. B. Bacon and F. C. Schloemer, *World Trade in Agricultural Products*, Rome, 1940, p. 326, have pointed out that, compared to another large fat-importer like Great Britain, Germany actually managed to cut its percentage imports without affecting consumption levels.

66. W. Voigtmann, 'Die Versorgung der deutschen Futtermittelwirtschaft mit Ölzufuhren, Ölsaaten und Ölkuchen', Dissertation, Dresden, 1936, p. 52.

67. For example, the producer price of colza was artificially kept up at RM30-2 per quintal, whereas oil and linen rose steadily from RM12 to RM32 from 1932 to 1939. Hanau and Plate, *Die deutsche Preispolitik*, p. 92.

68. See the lengthy correspondence with the Ministry of Finance, in BA, R 2, vols 18160, 18319 and 18060.

69. In a letter to the Führer's Chancellery of 1 April 1936, Backe rejected this line of reasoning which led to pessimism about the chances of achieving autarky. He stressed the importance of stepping up production: BA, R 43 II, vol. 200. Even a careful observer of agricultural affairs like H. Richarz was in favour of rationalising available agricultural land: cf. his articles, 'Leistungssteigerung der Landwirtschaft' and 'Die Sorgen der Landwirtschaft', *Deutscher Volkswirt*, no. 10, 14 December 1937, and no. 12, 17 December 1938.

70. See, in particular, Manns, 'Deutschlands Selbstversorgung'; Voigtmann, 'Versorgung'.

71. Hanau and Plate, *Die deutsche Preispolitik*, p. 88.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 76. Hanau and Plate set the figures for milk higher at 24.2 and 25.4 million tonnes.

73. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum*, pp. 303, 308.

74. Cf. O. Neber, 'Wie verträgt sich die Mechanisierung der Landwirtschaft mit der heutigen Bauernpolitik', Dissertation, Heidelberg, 1937, p. 21; Ilchmann, *Die Wiedererringung*, p. 22. As far as butter was concerned, increased production did not make inroads into the deficit, nor did it reduce market tension as is clear from the article, 'Zur Lage am Buttermarkt', *Deutsche Führerbriefe*, 4 October 1935.

75. Ilchmann, *Die Wiedererringung*, p. 14; Hanau and Plate, *Die deutsche Preispolitik*, pp. 38ff.

76. Cf. the proceedings in BA, R 14, vol. 370, and Darré's diary entries of 4 and

9 February 1937, SA Goslar. The theory of a plot seems to have been well founded, given that Moritz came to the fore again during the war as one of Backe's chief assistants in managing the exploitation of resources from occupied Slav countries.

77. Cf. the reconstruction of events by E. A. Goeggel, 'Untersuchungen zur Verbrauchslenkung auf dem Gebiete der Ernährungswirtschaft', Dissertation, Munich, 1938.

78. Cf. the detailed complaints by Riecke and Linkelman on behalf of the Verband deutscher Landeskulturgenossenschaften, 7 March 1934, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 207.

79. Ministry of Agriculture for Prussia to the Führer's Chancellery, 14 July 1933: BA, R 43 II, vol. 204. An article in the *NS Landpost*, 8 March 1935, revealed that the National Socialist government intended to sow or improve the yield in as many as 9 million hectares, through massive reclamation schemes.

80. The bill, presented in a cabinet meeting of August 1935, included provisions for all kinds of hydraulic and land-reclamation work to be carried out by private companies with large funds from the Ministry. For reasons which are not very clear, the Ministry of Finance opposed the bill so fiercely that the law was never passed: cf. BA, R 43 II, vol. 201.

81. On this subject, see the urgent requests from the Ministry of Agriculture that there be no skimping on the financial contributions for such important projects. These requests generally fell on deaf ears: BA, R 43 II, vols 204, 207 and 208.

82. Cf. F. Sohn, 'Deutschland: Allgemeiner agrarpolitischer Bericht', *Berichte über Landwirtschaft*, vol. 22, 1938, p. 84.

83. Cf. H. Katthage, 'Die Bedeutung der ländlichen Siedlung für die Industrie landwirtschaftlicher Maschinen', Dissertation, Cologne, 1934, pp. 21ff.

84. In 1935 the director of the Berlin Landmaschinen-Institut, Denecke, stressed that the battle for production would open up new markets for agricultural machinery, especially at home where sales had been limited until then: 'Erzeugungsschlacht und Industrie', *Ruhr und Rhein*, no. 14, 5 April 1935. See also the optimistic reports by the Verband deutscher Landmaschinen-Industrie, summer 1933, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 10590.

85. On the origins and early development of the RKTIL, see the memos in DZAP, 61 Re 1, vol. 28, and in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 10612 respectively. On the strategies and proposals of the more 'dynamic section' of industry, advocating a modernisation of the sector based on agreements with union representatives, see D. Abraham, *The Collapse of the Weimar Republic: Political Economy and Crisis*, 2nd edn, New York, 1986 (pp. 204ff. of the 1st edn, Princeton, 1981).

86. Cf. FAH, E IV, vol. 23/496, 497, 507, 508, 509, and GHH-HA, vols 400101290/40 and 40010124/3a.

87. L. Ries made a highly significant report to a conference organised by the RKTIL in September 1933. It basically aimed at confuting the fears prevalent among the 'romantic' extollers of the *Bauerntum*: FAH, E IV, vol. 23/497.

88. See Wilmowsky's reflections with hindsight in a long letter of 29 December 1937, in FAH E IV, vol. 23/511.

89. Wilmowsky to Krupp, 23 October 1933, *ibid.*, vol. 23/507.

90. Krupp to Darré, 5 February 1934, *ibid.*, vol. 23/220.

91. Wilmowsky to Reusch, 3 September 1940, in GHH-HA, vol. 400101290/40. But see also the disappointing and disappointed account given by Darré in his speech to the annual assembly of the association of agricultural co-operatives in Koblenz: published in the *NS Landpost*, 7 June 1938.

92. Cf. F. v. Zellermann, 'Landmaschinen gegen Landflucht', Dissertation, Berlin, 1939, pp. 61f.

93. Neber, 'Wie verträgt'. In this detailed study, Neber called for low-cost machinery to be produced for small farmers. He described these machines as *Bauernmaschinen*. Up until 1935 the price index for agricultural machinery, if 100 in

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1925, was way above the indices for agricultural prices and finished industrial products: 107 as opposed to 97 and 84 respectively. Cf. E. Eggers, 'Kritische Betrachtungen über die Preisindexzahlen für landwirtschaftlichen Maschinen', Dissertation, Berlin, 1935, p. 5. But the producers' association rejected this assessment, pointing out that the increase in prices corresponded to considerable improvements in performance: report dated 31 August 1933, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 10590.

94. Cf. the well-argued criticism by O. H. Weichelt, 'Landmaschinenindustrie und Erzeugungsschlacht', *Deutsche Volkswirt*, no. 33, 1935. The president of the Verband of producers was more optimistic in his assessment made at the assembly in February 1934, in BA, R 2, vol. 18331.

95. For the period before 1918, see the figures recorded in *Produktivkräfte in Deutschland 1870-1918*, Berlin, 1985, p. 179.

96. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum*, p. 320.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

98. At this point we come to the still unresolved question of whether German re-armament was so obviously downright harmful to the production of consumer goods from the outset. I shall not dwell on the matter here, but see the following: F. Blauch, 'Wirtschaft und Rüstung in Deutschland', in W. Benz and H. Graml (eds.), *Sommer 1939: Die Großmächte und der europäische Krieg*, Stuttgart, 1979, pp. 33-61; T. Mason, 'Zur Funktion des Angriffskrieges 1939', in G. Ziebura (ed.), *Grundfragen der deutschen Außenpolitik seit 1871*, Darmstadt, 1975, pp. 376ff.; and H. E. Volkmann, 'Politik, Wirtschaft und Aufrüstung unter dem Nationalsozialismus', in M. Funke (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, Krongberg/Ts., 1978, pp. 269ff.

99. Darré, *Aufbruch*, pp. 95ff.

100. Cf., for example, Darré's letter to Hitler, 30 December 1935, in BA, NI Darré II, vol. 24, or the Minister's speech at the inauguration of the fourth RNS fair in Munich, published in *Odal*, vol. 6, 1937, no. 1, pp. 2ff.

101. 'Mehr erzeugen', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 21 December 1934.

102. In DZAP, 25.01, vol. 2065.

Extending the Living-Space: The Myth of the Balkans

I have already mentioned the fact that the National Socialist regime had a very useful way of taking the pressure off peasant production: the network of trade relations with the Balkan countries which were exporters of food and agricultural raw materials. This network strengthened and grew to such an extent that it gave rise to an actual economic and political *Großraum*. I shall not go into the evolution of German foreign policy before and after Hitler's rise to power, nor shall I try to examine the historiographical controversies on the subject.¹ I shall simply mention the fact that, since its constitution in 1870, the Reich had always shown great interest in its eastern and south-eastern borders. Lacking in natural geographic barriers, the new state had to reckon with both the positive and the negative aspects of its strategic position at the centre of the continent. The theoretical possibility existed of creating a sphere of influence in the south-east. This introduces the concept of *Mittel-europa*, which is difficult to describe in political terms as it had an infinite number of definitions: they ranged from that of F. Naumann, who wrote a highly successful book bearing the same title, to those of the theoreticians of military and imperialistic expansion, magisterially analysed by F. Fischer in his studies on the genesis of the First World War.² In any case, both before and after the war, an idea that made considerable headway among both intellectuals and industrial circles was that, given its great economic and political potential, Germany was destined to become the fulcrum of a vast geo-political system that would include the Danube-Balkan region.³

This idea received further impetus from the outcome of the war, despite the fact that considerable restrictions had been placed on Germany's international role. The activism of German diplomacy and industrial and business pressure groups did not cease because of the obstacles placed in their way by the Treaty of Versailles, which had also set limits to German trade policy. However, in the 1920s, foreign policy concerning the Balkans was also hampered by the tenacious resistance of agrarian pressure groups towards forms of

co-operation which would lead to the importing of low-cost agricultural foodstuffs to the detriment of domestic agriculture. Consequently, under the Republic, trade policy proceeded by fits and starts, and continually changed, depending on who could bring more pressure to bear at decision-making levels: those interests which looked to international markets (but at the same time were anxious to keep consumer prices down) or the farmers, who stubbornly clung to a position of intransigent protectionism.⁴

Without going into the historiographic debate over the differences between Hitler's foreign policy (based on racist and ideological terms hinging on the concept of *Lebensraum*) and that of his predecessors,⁵ we should bear in mind, however, that the Balkan area was utterly insignificant in Hitler's planetary *Weltanschauung*. This may be the reason for the Führer's total lack of interest in establishing a *political* presence in the area. Fundamentally, he was interested only in establishing a German economic and trading presence.⁶ This was so much so, in fact, that in the 1930s he was anxious to avoid upsetting the good relations with Fascist Italy, which was also very keen to establish a hegemony in the Balkans. It should be said, however, that as early as Stresemann, German foreign policy aimed at 'resolving political issues by economic means', and National Socialist policy also followed this approach.⁷

The advocates of a greater German presence in the Balkans were of very varied political colours and often proposed different options. In fact, after an initial, partly underground, debate in 1933, a 'free-marketeer' option was shelved. This had been supported by groups linked to business interests in the large ports of Hamburg and Bremen, which were in favour of maintaining the traditional trade system based on the clause of the most favoured nation.⁸ On the other side, among the most fervent supporters of 'autarky', was Ferdinand Fried, a close collaborator of Darré.⁹ But he too was fully aware that German economic closure in the name of an unlikely situation of absolute self-sufficiency was merely wishful thinking. Using the concept of 'autarky' as 'a code to mask nationalistic forms of political and commercial interventionism',¹⁰ along with many contemporary authors, Fried suggested that the aim should indeed be for a closed economic space, but on a supra-national scale in which there would be a kind of harmonious division of labour between the periphery (meaning, above all, the Balkan states), supplying raw materials, and the industrial centre, that is Germany. The ultimate aim was to form a suitably solid bloc under German leadership to oppose the *Weltreiche*: the existing large blocs (France, Great Britain and the United States).

Along with Fried, other advocates of this policy – but with a good deal of difference in emphasis – included the group from the magazine *Die Tat*,¹¹ exponents of big capital like Max Hahn, general secretary of the *Mitteleuropäischer Wirtschaftstag*,¹² his chairman Wilmowsky,¹³ RDI president Carl Duisberg,¹⁴ the Minister of Economics, Kurt Schmitt,¹⁵ who had taken over from Hugenberg, and Schmitt's successor, Schacht. The various positions of these figures will be illustrated below. The doyen of German agronomists, Max Sering, also expressed a very favourable opinion on the close relations between the German economy and those of the Balkan countries with agricultural surpluses.¹⁶ Even top officials in the Foreign Ministry were generally favourable, in their usual cautious way, towards a more aggressive policy than that of Stresemann in the 1920s. A significant memo, drafted by State Secretary von Bülow and presented by von Neurath to his government colleagues in March–April 1933, proposed moving the bulk of Germany's trade policy, with parallel political aims and renewed vigour, towards those areas – the Balkans and the Baltic – in which Germany had traditionally played an important role.¹⁷ Finally, *Reichswehr* strategic planning bodies also took great interest in the Balkans and the potential for economic and commercial penetration in the area.¹⁸

Even Darré, whom a recent biography has presented as a 'pacific man' concerned only to defend German farmers' interest,¹⁹ openly advocated extending German 'living-space'. This aim was barely disguised in the slogan of a 'Green International' on which RNS propaganda insisted so much: a kind of 'Peasants' Europe' dominated by Germany and organised along the lines of the German para-corporative model. This proposal was clearly empty show aimed at impressing the outside world and – above all, I would say – placating possible ill-feeling among German farmers, by seeking to convince them that as they were protected by the *Marktordnung* they had common interests and the same destiny as farmers in the Balkans and eastern Europe.²⁰ It should be stressed that, in a speech given to the commission for NSDAP economic policy in January 1939, Darré too maintained that Germany had the historic right to assume the role of the 'spiritual guide' of the central European *Großraum*, and he called for a further strengthening of trade relations on the basis of the complementary nature of the German and Balkan economies.²¹

The common ground shared by these wide-ranging opinions and forces was the awareness and belief that the free-market era had definitively come to an end, and that a new phase of international

economic relations, based on the great blocs, had begun. In short, in the phase of transition from the *Weltwirtschaft* to the *Großraumwirtschaft*, it was Germany's natural destiny to look towards the Slav-Balkan area which, although politically and economically weak, had considerable potential.²²

This position, or at least its main points, was also shared by Hjalmar Schacht, the 'saviour of the mark'. In the summer of 1934 he was called upon to take charge of German economic policy, replacing the seriously ill Schmitt, in the twofold role of Minister and chairman of the Reichsbank. In drawing up the regime's trade policy, he paid careful attention to the general situation: there had been a world-wide fall in trade flows after 1929, aggravated in the German case by a disturbing currency weakness. Schacht's objective was to avoid the devaluation of the mark,²³ and to preserve the international role that the German economy had won for itself in the decades before the depression, especially in the industrial sectors, whose main raw materials consisted mostly of imports. Like the leading groups in German industry, Schacht considered the development of an open and enterprising trade policy to be indispensable. He therefore rejected the arguments of the 'autarky fanatics'²⁴ as incompatible with the basic interests of the German economy.

Furthermore, Schacht also believed that a strengthening of the domestic market was of fundamental importance, so he did not approve of 'free-market' solutions either. Because the policy forced on Germany by the victorious powers in 1918 had kept it on the defensive, Schacht was obliged to introduce bilateral forms of trade. This meant concentrating on trade relations with those countries with which there existed strong two-way exchanges or at least the potential for them, as well as creating artificial systems of payment which would allow cuts in the outlay of currency without reducing trade flows.

Clearing agreements and the various accounting and bureaucratic mechanisms for bilateral exchanges, which allowed goods to be exchanged without an actual outlay in currency, were certainly not invented by Schacht or Germany. Originally proposed by the heads of the Austrian National Bank during a banking conference held in Prague in 1931,²⁵ these forms of agreement, intended to be an antidote to the dangerous monetary instability in the south-eastern area, spread rapidly among countries which had currency problems. In public, Schacht often defined his policy as a necessary evil: in his opinion these were 'barbarian', 'dreadful' or even 'undeutsch' measures, imposed by outside circumstances. He de-

plored the size of the bureaucratic machinery set up to implement currency controls, and reiterated that these were only emergency, provisional solutions.²⁶ The Minister never revealed, however, what he considered the best solutions would be once the emergency was over, and on at least one public occasion he claimed that his 'New Plan' should not be seen as a temporary or makeshift solution: it was a 'piece of a long-term economic policy'.²⁷

This is not the place to describe the whole of Schacht's contribution or his political role, separating it from his actual ideas. Suffice it to say that his trade policy fitted in perfectly with the practical aims and interests of the Hitler regime. It kept the door open for many other ways of increasing trade, thus catering to the business interests. At the same time it allowed a central European bloc to be created, based on the future vital strategic needs of the Third Reich.

But before Hitler's rise to power, a position even more in favour of the regionalisation of German trade policy had been adopted by Hans Ernst Posse, a top civil servant in the Ministry of Economics in the 1920s and a leading figure in the negotiations which led to the bilateral treaties with Romania and Hungary signed in 1931–2.²⁸ In July 1933 Posse was appointed State Secretary for the same Ministry.²⁹ He thus represented a link in the chain from Stresemann's foreign policy to the decidedly more autarkic and aggressive economic policy implemented after 1936. Posse, who has not received sufficient attention in studies up to now, must be considered a figure of great importance.³⁰

Before a detailed examination of developments in German trade policy is undertaken, it is worth taking a look at the crisis in the Balkan economies and their place in an international context. The economic structure in the Balkan states provided the opportunity to implement the theories and ideas underlying the German economic and political *Großraum*. From an economic and social point of view, south-east Europe had always been underdeveloped, and this was partly due to the persistence of a solid feudal heritage. Moreover, it had suffered the consequences of a traumatic event: the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian empire which had put an end to deeply rooted bonds and the complementary nature of the various economies. The ways in which the double monarchy had been dissolved had, in fact, left very bitter nationalistic resentment in its wake. This was especially true of the two countries, Hungary and Bulgaria, who had lost the war and were therefore in favour of a radical 'revision' of the international boundaries decided by the victorious powers in 1918–19. Countries that were quite advanced

from the industrial point of view, such as Austria and Czechoslovakia, ended up being separated economically from countries that were mainly agricultural and whose surpluses could in no way find outlets in the former countries, both for structural reasons (the shrinking of the domestic market) and because of autarkic-protectionist policies in the economic sphere.³¹

Consequently, the serious structural problems in Balkan agriculture, based on a cereal monoculture which was no longer competitive, could not be remedied through an *internal* solution despite the passionate efforts in those years by Balkan intellectuals and politicians, such as the Hungarian Elemer Hantos.³² Each country went its own way in pursuing the objective of strengthening its productive set-up, and there was no united front to tackle the serious economic crises of the 1920s and 1930s. Thus in the so-called 'successor states' to the Austro-Hungarian empire (including Poland), under the pressure of the world economic crisis of 1929, import-export movements, which had already been falling off in the previous years, plummeted: imports went from \$1 billion in gold in 1928 to \$281 million in 1935, and exports from \$1.043 billion to \$280 million. Compared to the pre-war years, in the 1930s the trade volume of these countries dropped by approximately 16 per cent.³³

In addition to ardent nationalistic protectionism, a further cause of the lack of unity was the awkward presence of the great European powers, which as early as the nineteenth century had had expansionist designs (at least from the financial and commercial point of view) on this very politically weak area. In the years immediately after the war, France mainly used the arm of financial penetration. It also aimed at preserving the status quo, which was favourable to France, by creating the alliance known as the 'Little Entente'. Centred round Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, the alliance's principal objective was to prevent any German attempts to seek 'revenge'. From the early 1920s onwards – as we shall see later – the Third Reich again turned its attention to this area, which had great potential for new commercial and political outlets. Mention must also be made of the diplomatic activism of Fascist Italy, which considered itself *the* legitimate power in the area whose duty was to control the Adriatic and Aegean, and lastly the British presence, although this was on a much more modest scale, given the different priorities of British foreign policy.³⁴

But coming back to the structural set-up of the Balkan economy, there was another element whose substantially negative consequences were to have a lasting effect: the agricultural reforms

implemented in the early 1920s. These reforms had multifarious common aims: on one hand, the desire to put an end to the almost feudal oppression by large landowners (which generally belonged to other nationalities, than that dominant in each country) and to satisfy the perennial demands for land by the peasant masses, and on the other hand, a desire to prevent the possible spread of the nearby Bolshevik model, which had already been experimented with briefly in post-war Hungary. The parties which came to power after 1919, fully aware that they had to reckon with a predominantly peasant population, resorted to a kind of policy, described by Urwin as 'peasantism',³⁵ which used such tools as demagoguery and nationalism to win consensus.

In the event, the reforms did lead to the break-up of the large estates, which were divided into many small holdings destined to be owned by peasants. Historians are unanimous in pointing out, however, that these forms of legislation were not well-enough prepared, nor were they accompanied by back-up measures, especially as regards credit facilities favouring the new landowners. Thus – according to Lampe and Jackson³⁶ – it is not so much the breaking-up of land ownership *per se* that should be seen as harmful, as was the case in Japan at the time, but the fact that (1) the new owners were not given economic assistance by the state, and this led to many getting into debt very quickly, and (2) the implementation of the reforms was carried out very slowly, which meant that for a long time new owners were very insecure about their own fate, and this undoubtedly had negative consequences for their commitment in terms of production. Combined with the structural weaknesses in the Balkan peasant economy – of which more later – these serious limits to the reforms had very harmful consequences.

Overall, it can be said that the millions of peasants who received their longed-for parcel of land were then left to their own devices without any help whatsoever from the state.³⁷ This meant that they were particularly badly hit by every new economic crisis. To give but one example: from 1926 to 1938 of the 450,000 new holdings created in Hungary by the reform, as many as 67,000 ended up being auctioned. Problems associated with the great surplus of rural labour and the generally very low technological and productive levels were in no way rectified by the reforms in the early post-war period, and the basic situation of Balkan agriculture remained essentially unchanged.

An important factor to bear in mind is the expansion of agriculture in social and demographic terms. In the 1930s the vast majority of the active Balkan population still lived and worked in the

Table 9.1. Percentage of employees in agriculture

			%		%
Hungary	Men	1890	53.6	1930	55.0
	Women	1890	37.9	1930	47.4
Bulgaria	Men	1910	72.4	1934	70.7
	Women	1910	94.8	1934	91.1
Romania	Men	1913	71.0	1930	68.8
	Women	1910	90.5	1934	87.5

Source: B. R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics 1750–1970*, London, 1978, p. 89.

country, and in much higher proportions than in other European countries. Despite the efforts of the Balkan governments to start a process of industrialisation, the proportion of those involved in agriculture, which was by far the highest in Europe, showed no sign of decreasing (Table 9.1).

Moreover, from the productive point of view, because of the break-up of land ownership, peasant holdings were almost entirely lacking in machinery: in Bulgaria, after intense efforts by the state, the number of tractors only rose from 24 in 1920 to 1,503 ten years later.³⁸ The land was worked by hand and almost exclusively by members of peasant families, given the absence of employees. The consequence of this structural weakness in the peasant economy was that productivity fluctuated greatly and was fully exposed to erratic weather conditions. To take two examples from the 1930s, the unitary yield of maize in Romania fluctuated from 13 to 8 quintals per hectare and in Bulgaria from 14 to 7 quintals.³⁹ Compared to the pre-war years, output was the same, if not lower, ten years later. It should be borne in mind, however, that the reliability of these statistics, like the others presented here (Table 9.2), is questionable, and that they should accordingly be used only for reference purposes.

If the average index is 100 for the years 1931–5 for agricultural output per unit of land and per capita worker on a European scale, the indices for the Balkans fluctuated from 87 to 69 for productivity per unit and were as low as 75 to 43 for productivity per capita.⁴⁰

On top of this precarious state of difficult structural conditions came the international crisis in agriculture of the late 1920s. It had particularly negative repercussions in this area which, because of a weak domestic market, inevitably had to turn to international markets. Apart from one or two special cases, such as Romanian oil, almost

Table 9.2. Wheat yields and livestock in a number of European countries (quintals per hectare; head of livestock per 100 hectares)

	Wheat yields (average: 1930-34)	Livestock (1934)	
		Cattle	Pigs
Holland	28.8	102	86
Germany	21.5	65	81
Hungary	13.0	23	40
Romania	8.9	25	17
Yugoslavia	10.0	28	22
Bulgaria	11.6	32	20

Source: H. Raupach, 'Struktuelle Auswirkungen der Weltwirtschaftskrise in Ost-Europa', *VZG*, vol. 26, 1976, p. 42.

all of the exports from these countries were food and agricultural products, especially cereals. The international crisis caused a considerable fall in trade both in absolute quantity and in value. But whereas the large exporting countries overseas managed to hold on to their share of the market, the Balkan countries' trade completely collapsed.⁴¹ According to Berend and Ranki:

the agricultural crisis in the countries in east-central Europe made itself felt in three ways: 1) the loss of income caused by the fall in prices for agricultural products; 2) a gap opened up between agricultural and industrial prices which upset relations between the two sectors causing considerable social tension; 3) with the shrinkage of external markets the balance of payments and the balance of trade became dangerously unstable.⁴²

The combined effect of the fall in prices and in the size of exports led to a collapse in the value of food and agricultural exports. Starting with an index of 100 in 1929, by 1934 it was 42 for Romania, 50 for Yugoslavia, 41 for Bulgaria and as low as 39 for Hungary.⁴³ This not only suddenly cut the incomes of millions of peasant families, it also reduced the possibility of importing tools or industrial goods indispensable for the modernisation of their productive structures. Government measures in the form of moratoriums for debts, or the granting of compensation and the creation of special credit institutions to finance agriculture, were not enough, given the financial weakness of these states. The measures ended up disappointing all concerned without getting to the root of the crisis. The public bodies (Prizad in Yugoslavia, Futura in Hungary, etc.) created with the purpose of artificially increasing farmers' incomes by making up the difference between domestic

prices and world prices, could operate only for a short time, the indispensable cash outlay being far too high for their modest coffers.⁴⁴ Attempts were also made to diversify production putting an end to the cereal monoculture, which was no longer profitable, and increasing those crops which were in greater demand on world markets.⁴⁵ As we shall see later, it was above all German pressure that led to a vigorous relaunching in the Balkans of the production of oil seed and fibre plants for industrial working.

The economic crisis of 1929 led to intense diplomatic moves in an attempt to find a solution to the Balkan problem, which threatened seriously to undermine the international political and economic equilibrium, given the deep indebtedness of the countries involved.⁴⁶ But efforts made by the League of Nations to find a satisfactory solution did not produce concrete results. Various political conflicts, mainly between 'revisionist' countries and those satisfied with the status quo, whose main patrons were Italy and France respectively, were interwoven with economic and trade conflicts. The indebted countries were all producers of agricultural surpluses which were extremely difficult to place on an international market increasingly characterised by reciprocal protectionism: Czech industry was a threat to the interests of German industry, and many other examples of this kind could be cited to illustrate the complexity of the problem. But here I shall outline only those cases which contribute to an understanding of German policy and the reasons for its success.

The League of Nations organised numerous political and technical meetings and conferences in an attempt to reach international agreements favouring the selling-off of the Balkan agricultural surplus by means of unilateral preferential tariffs. But the most active single country in the area was definitely France. Anxious that Germany should not be allowed to create room to make independent moves either on the delicate Austrian question or among the 'revisionist' countries (Hungary and Bulgaria), various French governments aimed, above all, at supporting international agreements excluding the Reich and favouring France's main allies in the area, Romania and Czechoslovakia. Moreover, being the principal creditor, France had considerable financial interests in the Balkans area. It did not, however, show as much interest as far as trade was concerned. The plans put forward in turn by Briand, François-Poncet and Tardieu in 1930-2 met with opposition not only from Germany, which felt left out of these proposals for a new overall economic and political set-up, but also from Italy, which looked to the south-eastern area with great interest.⁴⁷

The Balkan countries, however, were divided and distrustful of each other – as is clear from the failure of a series of technical conferences organised in 1930–2 with the aim of bringing into being an ‘agrarian bloc’ better able to defend their own interests.⁴⁸ An additional factor was that unlike Germany, neither France nor Italy, which in theory could have created a satisfactory equilibrium in the area, was able to absorb the huge agricultural surpluses in this area, one of the main causes of the crisis. Finally, the economic crisis forced all of these countries to decree moratoriums or to suspend unilateral payments of debts with their principal trading partners, and this made a return to normal trade flows very difficult, and the transition to bilateralism almost inevitable.⁴⁹ Wendt is right, therefore, when he points out that ‘there can be no doubt that financial creditors in Western European capitals must share the blame [in Hitler’s inarrestible rise] because of their persistent commercial disinterest in south-east Europe’.⁵⁰

The country which showed the greatest lack of interest was definitely Great Britain. Although they attributed a good deal of strategic importance to the Balkans, British governments continued to act on the assumption of their own objective weakness in the area, so much so that after the Ottawa agreements of August 1932 Britain chose to strengthen its trade links with Commonwealth countries. So until the *Anschluss* with Austria, Britain adopted only a passive policy and kept a low profile in the area.⁵¹ In fact, it had a twofold strategy: it supported France but, at the same time, to avoid negative political repercussions, it was careful not to hinder the spread of German economic interests (‘economic appeasement’). In the event, this policy turned out to be a failure and contributed in its own way to the formation, on the eve of war, of a *Großraum* controlled by the Third Reich.⁵²

Finally, a word about Italian policy, whose effectiveness was limited both by the fact that Italy was also a producer of agricultural surplus and engaged in the *battaglia del grano* and by the presence of strong nationalist complications – above all, the question of the Dalmatian coast. With inferior economic and political means, Mussolini had to steer a course that prevented either Germany or France from gaining too much ground. Initially, Italy’s main tactic was to form a three-sided alliance with Austria and Hungary to give stability to the area. This was actually achieved with the drawing-up of a trilateral agreement in Rome on 17 March 1934, which led to an intensification of trade between the countries involved. This alliance, which certainly did not lack occasions for disputes with Hitler’s Germany, spurred Italy on to take more

interest in the Balkans area, and in particular, relations with Yugoslavia improved greatly. Despite the significant increase in trade with these countries during the 1930s, however, Fascist Italy never came to play a truly important role in the area and its policy was never more than a 'defensive cover'.⁵³

Compared to the uncertain, wary action of the other great powers, Germany seems to stand out for its incisive trade policy in the Balkans. Despite this, it cannot really be said that the Third Reich had one single foreign policy whose sole purpose was to create a central European *Großraum*. On the contrary, the simultaneous presence of various organisations, ministries and interest groups did not always produce positive results.⁵⁴ The political subjects involved had different, and at times divergent, aims. The diplomatic corps moved prudently and basically stuck to the foreign policy of the Reich from the previous decades. National Socialist theoreticians, like Werner Daitz, on the other hand, proposed a different, ideological approach based on the concept of a *Großraum*. Paying little heed to customary diplomatic caution, they reasoned along the lines of creating an 'informal empire' controlled by the Third Reich.⁵⁵

A different approach again was adopted by powerful interest groups, like MWT or the chemical giant IG Farben, whose moves were based on considerations of an economic nature.⁵⁶ They wished to create a German monopoly in these countries by controlling their industrial take-off. On the other hand, the NSDAP's Außenpolitischer Amt (APA), headed by Alfred Rosenberg, aimed to penetrate the Balkan countries to encourage radical parties and undermine their governments.⁵⁷ German foreign policy in the area was highly personal, in the sense that it was often individual leading figures of the regime who proposed their own policies: Göring's strategy was very different from that of von Neurath or Krupp, to name but two.⁵⁸

But the important fact remains that this 'polycracy', which reflected the great German interest in the Balkans, ultimately produced good results, although not quite as good as expected.⁵⁹ One assumption of German policy was that changes would be made in the German agricultural situation in such a way that the importation of large amounts of agricultural raw materials and foodstuffs would be as painless as possible for domestic production. This was one of the tasks of the *Marktordnung*, described in Chapter 5. Karl Ritter, the head of the trade department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was fully aware of this, as is clear from a dispatch he sent to the German Embassy in Rome on 12 March 1934:

The positive policy for the organisation of agricultural production and the domestic agricultural markets has meant that, unlike in the past, Germany can now meet more fully the demands and needs of neighbouring countries exporting agricultural foodstuffs. The reason for this lies in the fact that, given the more solid organisation of production and of its possible internal shortfalls, regulated foreign imports will have fewer negative consequences for German agriculture, especially as far as prices are concerned.⁶⁰

Moreover, as Schröder has rightly pointed out,⁶¹ the capacity of political agitation by agrarian interest groups was seriously reduced by their integration in the RNS. This does not mean, however, that Darré's Ministry did not react to the turnabout in trade policy at the end of 1933. It actually fought for a long time to slow down co-operation, and for reductions in import quotas, and advised caution and prudence.⁶²

One factor, last in chronological terms but important in contributing to the ultimate removal of all obstacles after 1936, was full employment. This, along with improvements in domestic economic circumstances, increased the food deficit, making huge imports indispensable. Moreover, as the race to war accelerated, so too did the need to accumulate strategic stocks. Archive documents clearly show a growing trend of German demand at the end of the 1930s,⁶³ and a parallel strengthening of links with the Balkan countries which had been abandoned by France and Britain and were left at the mercy of a great power offering both a huge market and secure, albeit uncomfortable, political protection.

In March 1939 came the climax of the German policy to extend the economic living-space before the war, with the signing of a trade agreement with Romania (it was no accident that it had been negotiated directly from the offices of the Four-Year Plan): it laid down the guidelines for the considerable subordination of the Romanian economy to German interests.

It had been Schacht, in fact, who had paved the way to this success. The mainstay of Schacht's trade policy was the so-called 'New Plan', introduced with a law of 4 September 1934.⁶⁴ It made provisions for setting up a centrally run network of checkpoints to regulate import flows. The objective was to avoid too many goods being imported from countries which had a trade deficit with Germany. The 'New Plan' proposed selecting trading partners to avoid increases in, or even to reduce, bilateral deficits and at the same time to improve the distribution of German trade flows from a strategic point of view. Schacht introduced measures, already in force for some years in other countries, which allowed for an

exchange of goods without an effective outlay of currency, but through clearing accounts managed by the respective central banks. In various forms, these clearing agreements spread so quickly that by 1935 75–80 per cent of German exports by volume were made according to this formula.

In this way, Schacht's policy fitted in perfectly with the basic interests of the regime. This was so much so that his successors, Göring and Funk, did nothing but follow along similar lines. The 'New Plan' led to a progressive tightening of the close trade and political links with those Balkan countries (Hungary, Yugoslavia, Rumania and Bulgaria) which were to supply mineral raw materials and food and agricultural products for the growing consumer demands of German industry. Schacht initiated a process which shifted German trade flows away from traditional partners like the United States. Before the depression it had been the principal customer, contributing 14.6 per cent to Germany's imports and buying 7.4 per cent of its exports (in 1929). Ten years later, these figures had fallen to 4.1 per cent and 2.4 per cent respectively. Similarly, there had been a sharp drop in trade with northern and western European countries (France and Britain occupying the first places): the percentage of their products exchanged with Germany fell from 27 per cent and 45 per cent of imports and exports (in 1932) to 23 per cent and 35 per cent seven years later. German trade flows definitely shifted towards the Balkans and Latin America in this period. Whereas the former accounted for 1.08 per cent of German imports in 1932, and received a similar figure of Third Reich exports, by the eve of the war the figures were up to 12 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. Imports from and exports to Latin American countries rose from 8 per cent and 3 per cent to 13 per cent and 10 per cent respectively.

To illustrate further the significance of this shift (which, however, still left Germany partially dependent on trade relations with other western and Scandinavian countries), it should be remembered that the total of German imports and exports from and to Western Europe from 1932 to 1936 fell by an overall value of RM3,234.4 million to RM2,703.8 million, whereas the corresponding imports from the Balkans and Latin America, taken together, rose from RM947.3 million to as much as RM2,281.7 million in the same period.⁶⁵

This trend becomes particularly significant if we consider that, because of the prevalent 'autarkisation' of the international economic system, quantitative levels of trade had fallen everywhere: by the eve of the war, a value index of 100 for 1928 was only 32.7 for

Table 9.3. German share of imports and exports in the Balkans 1929 and 1938 (%)

	1929		1938	
	Imports	Exports	Imports	Exports
Bulgaria	22.2	29.9	52.0	58.9
Greece	9.4	23.1	28.8	38.5
Yugoslavia	15.6	8.5	32.6	35.9
Romania	24.1	27.6	36.6	26.5
Hungary	20.0	11.7	30.1	27.4

Source: L. Zumpe, *Wirtschaft und Staat in Deutschland 1933 bis 1945*, Berlin-Vaduz, 1980, p. 173.

German imports and 46.1 for German exports. When considered from the point of view of the gross national income, if imports and exports made up the high figure of 34.8 per cent (16.2 per cent exports + 18.6 per cent imports) in 1928, then by 1938 this percentage had drastically fallen to 14.2 per cent, with a considerable reduction in the international role of the German economy.⁶⁶

Seen from the point of view of the Balkan countries, the growth of the economic and political influence of the Third Reich appears even more significant. Although drawing on an established tradition of a commercial presence going back to the end of the previous century, Germany's influence grew enormously – as can be seen from Table 9.3 – until it took on the proportions of near total monopoly.

A large part of import–export movements consisted of agricultural products. In absolute values, the proportion of these products imported from Balkan countries (including Turkey) rose from 7.1 per cent in 1928 to 31.2 per cent in 1939 – although in absolute terms the value of agricultural imports dropped by 61.6 per cent in the same period. Thus with a policy which certainly did not lack hesitations and fluctuations, although it did have a rigorous internal logic,⁶⁷ the heads of German foreign policy made a number of agreements and trade treaties based on clearing arrangements, aimed at using the food and agricultural production, as well as other raw materials available in these countries, to supply the German market. At the same time, these countries were to be brought under Germany's wing, thus removing them from the French sphere of influence and creating – at least in the long run – good markets for a number of basic German industrial products, particularly in the chemical and steel sectors. But let us now

Table 9.4. German trade with Hungary 1925-1933 (RM million)

Year	Exports plus imports
1925	179.60
1929	236.09
1933	72.30

Source: K. Andresen, *Die deutsch-ungarischen Wirtschaftsbeziehung und das Problem ihrer engeren Gestaltung*, Rostock, 1935, p. 95.

examine in detail how trade relations developed between the Third Reich and the Balkan countries.

Hungary

Of all the Danube-Balkan countries in the sights of the Third Reich's trade policy, from the political point of view, Hungary potentially had most in common with Hitler's Germany. It too had lost the war and its territory had been reduced as a consequence. It was governed by a right-wing dictatorship, led by the openly pro-Fascist Admiral Horthy. But there were a number of obstacles to creating concrete economic agreements reflecting the political affinities between the two countries: on one hand, the rapid process of industrialisation, begun in the 1930s to avoid the loss of the imperial economic heritage, meant that Hungary was no longer exclusively an agricultural country wishing to offload its surplus; and on the other hand, Hungary was the object of special attention in Mussolini's foreign policy. These factors, and the general economic crisis, meant that when Hitler took power trade between Germany and Hungary was at minimal levels (Table 9.4).

Not even a trade agreement of 18 July 1931, creating a system of preferential tariffs for Hungarian agricultural products, in keeping with the League of Nations recommendations, contributed to changing this negative trend, partly because of the long-lasting protectionist agricultural policies of the presidential governments after 1930.⁶⁸ The political turning point came, however, with the complete agreement of opinion between the Führer and Gyula Gömbös who, after becoming Hungarian Prime Minister in autumn 1932, abandoned the moderate and pro-French policies of his predecessors.⁶⁹ Appealing to old friendships and ideological bonds, in April 1933 Gömbös asked Hitler to make specific pledges to relaunch German imports of Hungarian agricultural products.

He was given an affirmative answer and, significantly, Hitler made reference to political and not economic reasons for doing so.⁷⁰

Hugenberg, on the other hand, moved according to economic dictates which also took into account agrarian pressure groups' refusal to deal abroad. Despite appeals from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,⁷¹ he imposed a severe protectionist block on Hungarian demands, virtually freezing trade between the two countries for several months.⁷² A second meeting between Hitler and Gömbös, held without the usual protocol in July 1933, provided the occasion for the long-awaited turning point. Talks to draft a new trade agreement were quickly set in motion.⁷³ At the same time, through the mediation of the MWT, talks were begun with IG Farben for the purchase of oil seeds and fibre plants through a clearing system.⁷⁴ As is clear from a note of 14 July by Clodius, a head of the department of trade in the Foreign Ministry, the policy pursued by German diplomats in the talks was to balance out the relative sacrifices for German agriculture (being more psychological in nature, given the strong obstacles to such a large opening to agricultural imports) with adequate political advantages: the winning of a reliable ally.⁷⁵ It even seems that the two government leaders hinted at the idea of creating a tariff union between the two countries.⁷⁶

Despite these good beginnings, available archive documents show that the Ministry of Agriculture, although now firmly in the hands of the National Socialists, still had misgivings, and this opposition could be completely and gradually won over only through the concerted efforts of the other ministries and pressure groups.⁷⁷ Thus although IG Farben had already signed on 11 October a clearing agreement to the tune of RM3.5 million for the importation of linseed at a price 45 per cent higher than world prices, diplomatic negotiations moved forward much more slowly.⁷⁸ By threatening to strengthen trade relations with Italy, the Hungarian negotiators managed to obtain very favourable conditions for their agricultural exports.⁷⁹

The new treaty, signed on 21 February 1934, was greeted with satisfaction by both parties and was considered an excellent basis for a considerable increase in trade,⁸⁰ even if an official RNS statement warned the Hungarians that the German government would never sacrifice the interests of its own farmers to obtain a favourable trade agreement.⁸¹ The agreement also allowed for possible changes in Hungarian agricultural production to meet German needs, especially in the sphere of oil-seed crops. The convergence of economic and political factors meant that the last

Table 9.5. Index of the value of German trade with Hungary 1935 and 1937

Year	Index (1933 = 100)	
	Imports	Exports
1935	247	148
1937	323	204

Source: I. Berend and G. Ranki, 'Ungarn und die "Lebensraum"-Politik des deutschen Faschismus', in *Ungarn im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Berlin, 1978, p. 16.

obstacles placed by Darré's Ministry were removed. It should be pointed out, however, that German diplomacy always took farmers' interests into account. A typical example is provided by the Hungarian plan, presented in the summer 1934, to build a 'pure lard' factory, which was to work exclusively for the German market. Opposed by the Ministry of Agriculture because of the costly long-term commitments demanded by the Hungarians, the project was shelved. The reason given by Karl Ritter was that Darré should be suitably rewarded for the willingness to co-operate that he had shown up until then.⁸²

In the following years, despite an improvement in trade relations with Italy, sanctioned by the aforementioned trilateral agreements – a defeat which greatly rankled with German diplomats⁸³ – trade between Hungary and Germany grew steadily (Table 9.5). The Rome agreement between Mussolini, Dollfuß and Hungary, in fact, did not produce – according to German observers – the desired effect.⁸⁴ The clearing balance, however, continued to stay in the red, given that the Hungarians were not very willing to import the equivalent quantity of industrial goods, despite repeated solicitations from the Germans.⁸⁵

But these figures are only one side of the coin. In fact, relations between the two countries were still troubled by a number of problems besides that of the clearing balance. The Ministry of Agriculture continued to put forward objections and to veto, even if the tone was more remissive and the issues at stake were usually details.⁸⁶ The Hungarians were often reluctant to meet German requests fully, preferring to sell their surplus to countries which paid in valuable hard currency.⁸⁷ The private initiatives to increase linseed and soya crops for exportation to Germany, in order to make up the serious deficit in edible oils and fats, did not produce satisfactory results. The cause seems to have been Hungarian farmers' unwillingness to grow these crops despite the high prices

offered: 26 pengös per quintal compared to a world price of 7 pengös in 1935. This price difference was made up mainly by German industry led by IG Farben, whose interest in the deal was such that it was never abandoned despite the difficulties involved.⁸⁸

These setbacks led Schacht to ask formally for a revision and reduction of the privileges granted to Hungary. In his opinion they were too heavy a burden to bear for the desired results. In answer to his requests, the heads of German diplomacy reiterated that (1) such privileged conditions had been formally established by Hitler in his meetings with Gömbös, and (2) any reduction of such privileges would probably thwart the primary political purpose of German policy concerning the Magyar republic: to halt Italy's economic and diplomatic drive into the Danube area.⁸⁹ Accordingly, Schacht's proposal was rejected.

Relations between the two countries were further shaken by Göring, who in autumn 1936 began his own personal diplomatic campaign in Hungary, based on an exchange of agricultural foodstuffs for arms.⁹⁰ Germany was permanently in need of the former since it had fully entered the pre-war climate of accumulating stocks.⁹¹ In 1938-9 we witness German diplomatic pressure to reach long-term agreements that would allow trade to be planned, realising the full potential of the complementary nature of the two economies. Hungary was explicitly asked to halt its incipient industrialisation and to direct its farmers to produce oil-seed and industrial fibre plants and cut down on cereals.⁹² Until the outbreak of war, the Hungarian government responded cautiously to such pressure, and was decidedly hostile when a new proposal to create a tariff union was aired.⁹³ But yet again the figures on the size of trade flows clearly show how Hungarian caution was overtaken by events: Germany completely dominated the situation, given that its trade accounted for 48.4 per cent of Hungary's exports and 50.4 per cent of its imports.⁹⁴

Yugoslavia

From the chronological point of view, developments in trade relations with Yugoslavia were rather similar to those with Hungary: the talks begun at the request of Yugoslavia to revise the existing trade treaty going back to October 1927, based on the clause of the most favoured nation, ran into deadlock almost immediately because of the rigid protectionism imposed by Hugenberg. Stojadinovich's government replied with a thorough-

going tariff war, fought through reciprocal increases in protective duties.⁹⁵

But the initial conditions were rather different from those of the Hungarian case: politically Yugoslavia, born out of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian empire, was one of the strongholds of the 'Little Entente' patronised by France, and it had no affinities with Nazi Germany, nor did it share the ideology of the Hitler regime. Economically, the country had plenty of potential. This was partly because of its considerable reserves of raw materials such as bauxite and chromium, but also because of the tense situation with Italy over the Dalmatian question,⁹⁶ leaving it little choice as far as the export of its excess agricultural products was concerned.

Germany was thus very interested in this important market. None the less many months passed after Hugenberg's dismissal before things began to change in the relations between the two countries. Yugoslavia attached a great deal of importance to the question of egg exports. But the heads of German trade policy opted initially (April 1933) to maintain good relations with Holland and Denmark (in the same period new trade agreements were being discussed with these countries).⁹⁷ And in June 1933 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, placing the accent on the internal problems of German agriculture, completely refused Yugoslavian requests for preferential treatment for eggs, poultry, fruit, fish and maize.⁹⁸ After a provisional four-month agreement signed on 29 July, based on the clause of the most favoured nation,⁹⁹ there was considerable pressure from authoritative lobbies worried about the stalemate in German policy in the Balkans.¹⁰⁰ This led to a meeting between Hitler and the Yugoslav ambassador in Berlin, Balugdzich, which set in motion intense negotiations, giving rise to a wide-ranging trade agreement.¹⁰¹

The Germans went to the negotiations 'in the dark' – as Ritter wrote in his instructions to the delegation – given that the Yugoslavian requests were not known. The political objective, however, was clear: to introduce a disruptive element into the economic and trade hold of the Little Entente.¹⁰² These negotiations again saw the Ministry of Agriculture in the role of the recalcitrant party, concerned to concede as little as possible to the aforementioned political priorities,¹⁰³ and here too – as in the Hungarian case – German diplomacy was at pains to take its objections into account, making it clear to the Yugoslavs that the interests of German agriculture could not be harmed.¹⁰⁴ The situation was further complicated by the fact that, unlike the Hungarian requests being discussed at the same time, the Yugoslavian requests concentrated on only a few

agricultural products (eggs, fruit, vegetables and livestock), thus reducing the possibilities of distributing equally the subsequent burden over many sections of German agriculture.¹⁰⁵

The treaty was signed on 1 May 1934. Based on clearing agreements, it made provisions for wide concessions to Yugoslavian agricultural exports, leaving possible preferential treatment for German industrial products fairly much in the background. The official statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was positive: 'The German concessions are sufficient to make the German market, in the long term, indispensable for Yugoslavian exports.' The regulations introduced by Darré for the domestic market were supposed to guarantee that such concessions would have little effect on German producers.¹⁰⁶ From the exports point of view, the German negotiators' expectations turned out to be unfounded. Germany soon found itself deeply in debt in the trade balance, given the low capacity (and will) of the Yugoslavian domestic market to absorb industrial exports. This imbalance greatly disturbed both the Yugoslavian government and the heads of German economic policy.¹⁰⁷ The latter, in fact, embarked on non-stop negotiations to force an increase of industrial imports on the Yugoslavs in order to restore the clearing balance.¹⁰⁸

In March 1935, the two government commissions, set up to discuss periodically the state of trade relations and to find possible remedies to problems, met in Zagreb. This meeting led to a concrete Yugoslavian commitment to draw up a number of contracts to supply imports to state, civil and military bodies, for a sum of RM10 million. On this occasion the Reichsgruppe Industrie, which until then had been rather dissatisfied with developments in German-Yugoslavian trade,¹⁰⁹ expressed its approval.¹¹⁰ In exchange, the quotas of Yugoslavian agricultural products were considerably raised, thus fully meeting the requests of the Germans.

In those months, thanks also to the sanctions which the Yugoslav government were forced to impose on Italy because of the invasion of Abyssinia, Germany got the upper hand on its rivals and assumed the stable role as Yugoslavia's main trading partner.¹¹¹ Yugoslavian exports to the German market, which two years previously had been only 13.9 per cent, rose to 26.7 per cent in 1936, whereas Germany's share of Yugoslavia's total imports went from 13.9 per cent to 23.7 per cent. Despite some persistent quibbling, from then on relations between the two countries were good, with repeated declarations of mutual friendship.¹¹²

As in the Hungarian case, official diplomatic activity was accompanied, at times with conflicting results, by initiatives from

companies and private 'mediators'. Thus the experimental introduction of linseed and soya crops was promoted in spring 1935 by IG Farben and the Verband deutscher Ölmühlenindustrien, by means of a company with capital from both countries.¹¹³ Just as Werner Daitz had been very active in the Hungarian case as a political mediator, so too Erich Koch, Gauleiter for Eastern Prussia, promoted a number of large-scale clearing deals. But these were looked on with a fair degree of scepticism by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Economics, and ultimately were partially blocked.¹¹⁴

At the end of 1936, when the German diplomatic authorities began to press for considerable increases in cereal imports to cover increases in domestic requirements,¹¹⁵ the Yugoslavs replied so reluctantly that the heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had to remind them brusquely that up until then the Germans had always fully met Yugoslav requests, even when they had no great need to: now it was the counter-party's turn to fulfil its obligations.¹¹⁶ This pressure produced the desired result.

In German diplomatic strategy, along with a concern for trade, a great deal of importance was attached to political considerations. But moves were made cautiously in this area to avoid provoking cries of alarm in the country concerned and to ensure that the internal position of trusty allies, such as Prime Minister Stojadinovich, were not jeopardised.¹¹⁷ This is why the *Anschluß* with Austria, presented as a springboard for further infiltration into the south-eastern area, was met with mistrust and concern in Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, inducing the respective governments to be more careful in making bilateral agreements with Germany, and especially as far as military supplies were concerned. In August 1938, however, the Yugoslav government was persuaded to draw up a pacification treaty with Hungary, and this further strengthened Germany's hegemony in the Balkans.¹¹⁸

Romania

The Romanian case, although essentially similar to those of the other countries considered up to now, had one very special feature: along with agricultural products, it had an even more important raw material, sought after by all industrial European countries, including Germany – oil. This strategic resource was obviously doled out in small doses by the Romanian government to get the maximum political and foreign currency benefits possible. More-

over, because of this very important raw material, Romania, with all its endemic political instability and financial precariousness, was more closely controlled by France and Britain than were the other Balkan states.¹¹⁹

The possibilities of German commercial penetration were thus greatly reduced, even if the Third Reich also showed greater interest in this country. Moreover, it should be remembered that Romania was an integral part of the Little *Entente*, controlled by France. But even more than in the other cases, the German capacity to satisfy to the full Romania's need to sell off its large agricultural surplus – it was opposed only by a weak Anglo-French import policy – meant that, after many years' preparation, Hitler's Germany eventually managed to draw up the aforementioned trade agreement, signed in March 1939. This is the most significant example of the subordination, based on 'non-development', of a Balkan country to German strategic needs.

But let us take a brief look at how trade relations developed between the two countries in the preceding phase. With a trade agreement signed in June 1931, the German government gave concrete proof of its desire (in its own interests) to meet the urgent Romanian need to solve its serious agricultural crisis. In fact, Germany offered very attractive preferential tariffs for Romania's cereal exports.¹²⁰ For a long time this formed the basis of relations between the two countries, even if they were later to be troubled by customs disputes.¹²¹ These were due, on one hand, to the agrarian protectionism of the last presidential cabinets of the Weimar Republic and Hugenberg's spell in the Ministry of Agriculture, and on the other hand, to Romania's reluctance to be bound by clearing agreements when oil provided it with the possibility of bargaining from a position of strength.¹²²

Once again it was primarily private initiatives, taken by IG Farben and mediated by the Romanian ambassador in Berlin, Comnen,¹²³ this time concerning clearing agreements for the production of soya, that led to renewed trade between the two countries. And this was at a time when, partly because of different political allegiances, trade was very slack. At this stage, the official position of German diplomacy was actually in favour of private agreements, provided there was no direct government involvement,¹²⁴ although some discreet support was given to the deals embarked on by IG Farben and MWT. Thanks to the very high prices they offered, IG Farben's experiment with soya crops produced good results, in fact better than in other Balkan countries. In 1935 there were fewer than 25,000 hectares sown with the crop, but three years later this figure

had risen to 63,000 hectares, with a fivefold increase in output: from 10,000 tonnes to 52,000 tonnes, 80 per cent of it being exported to Germany.¹²⁵ By 1938 the experiment involved more than 35,000 Romanian farmers, organised in co-operatives controlled by companies with capital from both countries which monopolised purchases. Apart from these positive results, in 1933-4 there was a situation of complete stalemate with bleak short-term prospects – as emerges from a discouraging note by von Bülow in August 1934.¹²⁶ Subversive moves of a clearly politico-ideological nature by Rosenberg's APA certainly did not help matters.¹²⁷ In fact, they led to a severe admonition from Hitler, who reiterated that Third Reich trade policy must not be undermined by political manoeuvrings.¹²⁸ Finally, a trade agreement signed on 5 June 1934 was of little economic importance, in that it concerned exchanges of goods worth only RM5 million.

Once more it was a top-level meeting, this time between Schacht and the Romanian Prime Minister, Manoilescu-Strunga, in December 1934, which broke the deadlock. Regular negotiations were set up with bilateral commissions, and this led to the drafting of the trade agreement of 23 March 1935. Based on the definition of a number of import quotas, this agreement largely met Romanian requests, which German diplomacy had managed to have accepted even by the recalcitrant Ministry of Agriculture.¹²⁹ One of the many changes of government saw in July 1936 the removal from the scene of Titulescu, a declared enemy of Germany. In addition, a serious overproduction crisis in the summer of 1935 forced Romania to become more flexible and receptive.¹³⁰ From this time on, trade continually improved between the two countries, even if diplomatic papers reveal the persistence of one or two points of contention: insistent Romanian requests that oil imports should be paid for in currency and not through clearing channels,¹³¹ and a monetary policy which, overvaluing the exchange rate of the mark, harmed exports of German industrial products.

In the ultimate analysis, these disputes arose from the Romanian government's reluctance to give in completely to the German economic hold, despite its attractiveness.¹³² In Romanian political circles, however, the awareness gradually began to dawn that only Germany, with its enormous economic potential, could help the country to set in motion a process of industrialisation.¹³³ This conviction was strengthened by the disappointing results from negotiations with Britain. Confronted with a record grain harvest in 1938, the government had unsuccessfully appealed to Britain to buy up its enormous surplus. German diplomacy was much more

skilful and, after agreeing with Italy to avoid the artificial intensification of competition,¹³⁴ the Third Reich purchased an enormous quota of almost a million tonnes of wheat, which in fact it desperately needed.¹³⁵

A further turning point in the relations between the two countries came with the appointment of Helmuth Wohltat, former president of the Reichstelle für Öle und Fette, who moved to the Ministry of Economics in 1934, as head of special projects for the Four-Year Plan. Starting from the assumption, already stated years earlier by Clodius, that 'in Europe there are probably very few countries whose economies complement each other so well as those of Romania and Germany',¹³⁶ Wohltat set up negotiations from the end of 1937, which firmly aimed at reaching a long-term agreement to realise such potential. Large German investments were to be made to convert Romanian agriculture, mainly a cereal monoculture, to produce industrial plants and oil seeds, indispensable for German requirements.¹³⁷ In exchange, Germany was willing to meet Romanian requirements for arms and war materials (this meant large orders for the national steel industry).

This strategy, already attempted in the Hungarian and Yugoslavian cases, was finally implemented in Romania thanks to the combination of several favourable conditions: Romanian disappointment with its western allies, the pro-German feelings of the King, and Göring's pressure to go beyond traditionally cautious diplomatic channels. It should be pointed out, however, that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was slightly sceptical about Wohltat's enthusiastic predictions, stressing, both before and after the signing of the agreement, that there were a number of weak points, especially the costly burden of inflated prices for Romanian agricultural products.¹³⁸ Based on the main points decided in a meeting between Wohltat and Gafencu, held at the end of February, the German-Romanian agreement of 23 March 1939 made provisions for, among other things, the diversification of agricultural production to suit German needs, the realisation of German-financed pluriennial plans for the exploitation of mineral and forest resources, the creation of an oil industry based on capital from both nations, German investments to finance Romanian industrialisation¹³⁹ and huge supplies of arms.¹⁴⁰ An additional agreement, signed on 20 July of the same year, included a plan for the purchase of large quantities of agricultural products (cereals, livestock and oil seed) at guaranteed prices, above world levels.¹⁴¹ Rapidly moving towards war, the Third Reich thus obtained a secure supply of indispensable raw materials and food stocks.

Bulgaria

Leaving aside the Greek and Turkish cases, given the small flow of trade with Germany (concentrated on only very few products, such as tobacco and dried fruit), this rapid round-up of the National Socialist regime's trade policies with Balkan countries producing agriculture surpluses is concluded by examining the Bulgarian case, which is above all characterised by a long-standing tradition of close political and commercial links with the Reich.¹⁴² Even before the first World War, Germany was Bulgaria's main trading partner, and it firmly held on to this position in the 1920s. Thus in the Bulgarian case, the National Socialist policy did not have to fight off fierce competition from Britain, France, Italy or other European countries – as had happened especially as far as Yugoslavia and Romania were concerned. In 1933 Germany already accounted for 38.2 per cent of Bulgarian exports (Italy was a very distant second with 7.5 per cent) and 36 per cent of its imports (Italy had 9.1 per cent). This was partly due to the agreement based on clearing arrangements signed in July 1932. It is highly significant that in subsequent years there was no need to renew legislative measures for trade.

But in the case of Bulgaria too Hugenberg's protectionist policy was the cause of a souring in relations between the two countries. Again, the centre of attention was egg exports, penalised by very high tariffs. Under incessant pressure from the Bulgarians, German diplomacy managed – but it was already December 1933 – to squeeze a fairer treatment for Bulgarian eggs out of Darré's Ministry.¹⁴³ The year ended with a vehement protest from the APA of the NSDAP, demanding that the trade agreement in force be condemned for not taking into account the interests of German exporters. This request was forcefully rejected by the Ministry of Economics, which feared that relations between the two countries would be seriously damaged as a consequence.¹⁴⁴

From 1934 onwards we witness a definite improvement in trade: Bulgaria was willing to meet German requests to set up an experimental production of oil-seed and industrial plants.¹⁴⁵ Having resisted the objections put forward by the Ministry of Agriculture, thanks to agreement among the other main ministries, IG Farben was able to implement its plans with fairly good results.¹⁴⁶ Farmers sowed more of these crops, but of course this led to an increase in the financial burden of making up the difference with world prices.

Available archive papers show how Bulgarian–German relations from 1934 onwards were not troubled by the same recurrent

tensions and conflicts, both internal and bilateral, which were a feature of Germany's relations with other Balkan countries. Similar problems – German indebtedness in the clearing arrangements, the reticence of the Ministry of Agriculture, the cautious policies of the Balkan governments – were also to be found in the Bulgarian case, but in much less serious, or in muted, forms.¹⁴⁷ Bulgarian nationalists' distrust of German 'colonisation' also emerges in diplomatic sources on several occasions, but these clouds did not overshadow the development of healthy trade relations.¹⁴⁸

From 1938 onwards the arms factor came into play – as had also happened in the other Balkan countries – thanks primarily to Göring's 'personal' foreign policy. After an initial refusal,¹⁴⁹ in May 1938 the Bulgarian government signed the first of a number of clearing deals for the purchase of arms and other military supplies, destined to modernise its armed forces.¹⁵⁰ A report from the head of the diplomatic delegation in Sofia, dated 31 January 1939, accurately summarises the excellent state of trade relations. According to Rümelin, Germany's dominion was so great that the rival nations had abandoned the field, leaving Germany with an unchallenged monopoly. In the same document, the diplomat pointed out that the deficit which still existed in the clearing balance was in no way a cause for concern, given that moves for state commissions for German industry were well under way.¹⁵¹

In conclusion, then, at the outbreak of war the Third Reich had firmly established itself as the principal trading partner for the Danube–Balkan countries, forcing a kind of dependence on them which had important political, strategic, economic and commercial consequences. At the same time, although Germany had increased its imports from these countries, in 1939 it imported only 14 per cent of its requirements from the four states examined here. Over 50 per cent of its exports continued to flow towards advanced industrial countries, thus proving that Germany still had close links with them, despite all the talk of autarky. In fact, especially from 1938–9 on, a certain disappointment began to be felt among the heads of German economic policy as far as the results of the economic drive into the Balkans were concerned. And given the ambitious nature of the projects for a *Großraumwirtschaft*, this disappointment was all the more bitter.

In a memo of January 1939 examining the crisis in food supplies, even Darré had to admit that the contribution from the production of oil-seed and oil plants set up in the Balkans to cater for the

serious domestic shortfall would only be of any consequence in a few years' time. In this way, he demolished much widespread and unrealistic optimism.¹⁵² Although 30 per cent of German food imports did come from Balkan countries (compared to just 10 per cent in 1932), it cannot be said that this was an economically closed area – this was only the intention. But neither do these considerations lead me to agree with Alan S. Milward who, in a recent 'revisionist' interpretation, overturns the traditional view of non-military German imperialism by claiming that it was above all the Balkan countries which benefited from these bilateral trade relations.¹⁵³ Although this may be true from a purely financial point of view (Germany did pay relatively high prices for its imports), the Third Reich's relations with the south-eastern area must be seen in the overall context, taking into account, therefore, the linkages or politico-strategic conditions involved, which in fact were to the detriment of the political independence of these countries. But on the other hand, the Balkan 'myth' was never more than such, for not even the war could make it a complete reality.

Notes

1. Given that the literature on the subject is very extensive indeed, I suggest referring to some recent historiographic essays which summarise the debate up till now: J. Hiden and J. Farquharson, *Explaining Hitler's Germany*, London, 1983, pp. 110–29; I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 2nd edn, London, 1989, pp. 107–31; and K. Hildebrand, *Il Terzo Reich*, Rome–Bari, 1983, pp. 214–29 (original edn, Munich, 1979).

2. Cf. J. Droz, *L'Europe centrale: Evolution historique de l'idée 'Mitteleuropa'*, Paris, 1960; and F. Fischer, *Assalto al potere mondiale*, Turin, 1965 (original edn, Düsseldorf, 1961).

3. See also R. Frommelt, *Panuropa oder Mitteleuropa*, Stuttgart, 1977.

4. On the debate on protectionism in the last years of the republic, see, among others, D. Gessner, *Agrardepression und Präsidialregierungen in Deutschland*, Düsseldorf, 1977; D. Stegmann, 'Deutsche Zoll- und Handelspolitik 1924/25–1929 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung agrarischer und industrieller Interessen' and "'Mitteleuropa" 1925–1934: Zum Problem der Kontinuität deutscher Außenpolitik von Stresemann bis Hitler', in D. Stegmann, B. J. Wendt and P. C. Witt, *Industrielle Gesellschaft und politisches System*, Bonn–Bad Godesberg, 1978, pp. 203ff.

5. On the origins of National Socialist imperialism, see the study by W. Smith, *The Ideological Origins of Nazi Imperialism*, New York, 1985.

6. Cf. R. Zitelmann, *Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs*, Leamington Spa, 1987, pp. 215ff., which includes many quotations.

7. M. L. Recker, 'Großbritannien, Deutschland und die südosteuropäischen Staaten 1919–1939', in M. L. Recker (ed.), *Von der Konkurrenz zur Rivalität*, Stuttgart, 1986, p. 67.

8. Cf. E. Teichert, *Autarkie und Großraumwirtschaft in Deutschland 1930-1939*, Munich-Vienna, 1984, pp. 232ff. Cf. also W. Grävell, 'Gestaltung und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten der deutschen Außenhandelsbilanz', *Ruhr und Rhein*, no. 17, 5 April 1935, and G. Schlotterer, 'Der Weg des deutschen Außenhandels', *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft*, no. 1, 1934, along with the official statements of the DIHT: 'Gedanken der Wirtschaft zur Handelspolitik', *Berliner Börsen Zeitung*, 4 November 1933, and the letter to the Chancellery of 1 February 1933 in K. H. Minuth (ed.), *Regierung Hitler*, Boppard, 1983, p. 17. As late as 1939, in the midst of re-armament and the Four-Year Plan, Grävell insisted on Germany's need to export: 'Störungen im Außenhandel', *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft*, no. 1, 1939.

9. See his booklet, *Die Zukunft des Außenhandels*, Jena, 1934.

10. Teichert, *Autarkie*, p. 263.

11. Cf. J. Petzold, *Wegbereiter des deutschen Faschismus*, Cologne-Berlin, 1978, pp. 274ff.; H. Lebovics, *Social Conservatism and the Middle Class in Germany 1914-1933*, Princeton, 1969, pp. 193ff.

12. See Hahn's articles, 'Einheitlichkeit in der Wirtschaftspolitik' and 'Donau und Donauraum', both in *Ruhr und Rhein*, 6 January and 24 March 1933.

13. Chaired by Wilmowsky, the MWT - as we shall see below - played a decisive role in realising the hegemonic and expansionistic goals of the German economy.

14. Cf. the speech given in Munich, 24 March 1931. Extracts are included in W. Schumert et al. (eds.), *Weltherrschaft im Visier*, Berlin, 1975, pp. 219f., as well as the booklet *Die Zukunft der deutschen Handelspolitik*, Berlin, 1931.

15. See his book, *Die Wirtschaft im Neuen Reich*, Berlin, 1934.

16. Cf. M. Sering, 'Die agrarischen Grundlagen der Sozialverfassung' in *Probleme des deutschen Wirtschaftslebens: Festschrift Schacht*, pp. 856ff.

17. The memo is published and analysed by G. Wollstein, 'Eine Denkschrift des Staatssekretärs Bernard von Bülow vom März 1933', *MGM*, no. 1, 1973, pp. 77-94.

18. Cf. A. Kube, *Pour le mérite und Hakenkreuz: Hermann Göring im Dritten Reich*, Munich, 1986, p. 31.

19. A. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party*, Abbotsbrook, 1985.

20. Among the most active propagandists for this 'peasant idea of Europe' was a top official in the RNS, Erich Winter, head of the C Section of Darré's Stabsamt: see, among others, his articles in the *Berliner Börsen Zeitung* of 8 December 1933, 12 January and 20 March 1934. But cf. also H. Tiesenbauer, 'Das mitteleuropäische Agrarproblem und die neue deutsche Bauernpolitik', *Der Ring*, 24 November 1933.

21. Quoted in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 27 January 1939. See the entries in his 'purged' diary, 21 and 30 September 1937, SA Goslar. To get over his most serious problem, i.e. the shortage of manpower, Darré openly opted for an imperialistic drive east and south-east to give breathing space to German farmers. These declarations are in stark contrast with his self-defence at his trial, which loses credibility as a consequence: *DZAP*, 99 US 7, vol. 165, pp. 90ff., 103ff.

22. This was particularly true of Backe. For his economic ideas, see the collection of articles and speeches, *Das Ende des Liberalismus in der Wirtschaft*, Berlin, 1938, and *Die Nahrungsfreiheit Europas: Großraum oder Weltwirtschaft?*, Berlin, 1942.

23. Cf. H. James, *The German Slump*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 388ff.

24. See the speech given in Munich, 7 December 1935, entitled 'Deutschland und die Weltwirtschaft', p. 18 of the printed version: 'Germany is a typical country of high-quality production. As such it must support the idea of the *Weltwirtschaft* and refuse the notion of autarky which can only lead to poverty, above all for Germany. It is obvious that Germany must create a solid domestic market and defend it, but to achieve this aim a sound foreign trade policy is required.' Cf. also Schacht, 'Außenhandelsfragen', a speech given in Weimar, 29 October 1934, pp. 23ff.

25. I. Berend and G. Ranki, *Lo sviluppo economico nell'Europa centro-orientale nel*

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XIX e nel XX secolo, Bologna, 1978, p. 312 (original edn, New York, 1974).

26. Cf. the Board of the Reichsbank (ed.), *Schacht in seinen Äußerungen*, Berlin, 1937, pp. 11 and (for the last quote) 102, and *Deutschland und die Weltwirtschaft*, pp. 27ff. of the printed version.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

28. H. E. Posse, *Der gegenwärtige Stand der deutschen Handelspolitik*, Münster, 1930.

29. According to W. A. Boelcke, *Die deutsche Wirtschaft 1930-1945*, Düsseldorf, 1983, p. 87, Hitler seriously considered appointing Posse Minister of Economics.

30. For a brief profile of this important figure see Teichert, *Autarkie*, pp. 105ff. From a number of attacks made by the press near the RLB, it would seem that as early as the end of 1932 he advocated a trade policy of co-operation with the international market. Cf. DZAP, 61 Re 1 Pressearchiv, vol. 352.

31. Austria, for example, very successfully pursued a policy of controlling agricultural imports. In fact, its imports in this field fell from a value of over a million schillings in 1925 to 404,000 in 1929. The same trend was also to be found in Czechoslovakia. Cf. E. Zaleski, *Les courants commerciaux dans l'Europe danubienne au cours de la première moitié du XXe siècle*, Paris, 1952, pp. 110f. For the more general economic problems of the successor states see A. Teichova, *An Economic Background to Munich*, Cambridge, 1971.

32. A Hungarian Jew, Hantos, after holding a number of government posts in the 1920s, in the 1930s became an adviser to the League of Nations and a successful publicist. He espoused the cause of an inter-Balkan economic federation, convinced that 'within the large closed economic areas the agrarian problem could be solved independently from the rest of the world': *Das mitteleuropäische Agrarproblem und seine Lösung*, Berlin, 1931, p. 25. His approach, although it did not exclude agreements with Germany, was not in German interests and he soon became a *bête noire* for them. Cf. also his book, *L'Europe centrale: Une nouvelle organisation économique*, Paris, 1932.

33. F. Hertz, *The Economic Problems of the Danube States: A Study in Economic Nationalism*, London, 1947, p. 80. According to figures from League of Nation experts, the introduction of protectionist barriers was a factor that further aggravated the subsequent agricultural crisis: *Société des Nations. Comité Economique: La crise agricole*, Geneva, 1931, pp. 20ff.

34. Cf. D. E. Kaiser, *Economic Diplomacy and the Origins of the Second World War*, Princeton, 1980; N. La Marca, *Italia e Balcani tra le due guerre*, Rome, 1979.

35. D. Urwin, *From Ploughshare to Ballotbox: The Politics of Agrarian Defence in Europe*, Oslo, 1980, p. 250.

36. J. R. Lampe and M. R. Jackson, *Balkan Economic History 1550-1950*, Bloomington, 1982, pp. 351ff, 443ff.; Urwin, *From Ploughshare*, pp. 69ff.

37. In general, see S. Zagoroff et al., *The Agricultural Economy of the Danubian Countries 1935-1945*, Stanford, 1955, pp. 294ff.; P. R. Berger, *Der Donauraum im wirtschaftlichen Umbruch nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, 2 vols, Vienna, 1982, vol. I, pp. 53f.

38. Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*, p. 363.

39. D. Warriner, *The Economics of Peasant Farming*, London, 1964, p. 47 (original edn, 1939).

40. D. Warriner, pp. 89f.

41. See the comments and statistics in L. B. Bacon and F. C. Schloemer, *World Trade in Agricultural Products*, Rome, 1940, p. 900. On the agrarian crisis, see also R. Schönfeld, 'Die Balkanländer in der Weltwirtschaftskrise', *VSWG*, vol. 62, 1975, pp. 179-213.

42. Berend and Ranki, *Lo sviluppo economico*, pp. 289f.

43. For Yugoslavia, see N. Vučo, 'La crise agricole en Yougoslavie 1930-1934', *SHOec*, vol. 7, 1972, pp. 159ff.; for Bulgaria, A. Piperow, 'Bulgariens Agrarkrise

und Agrarverschuldung', Dissertation, Berlin, 1938; and for Hungary, F. Hertz, *The Economic Problems of the Danube States*, London, 1947, p. 129.

44. Lampe and Jackson, *Balkan Economic History*, p. 439.

45. Berend and Ranki, *Lo sviluppo economico*, p. 294. The suggestions made by the League of Nations experts were also in this direction: see *Crise agricole*, p. 137.

46. In 1930 Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Romania totalled a foreign debt of \$3.455 million, the equivalent of almost half their national income: Berend and Ranki, *Lo sviluppo economico*, p. 300.

47. Cf. H. Sundhausen, 'Die Weltwirtschaftskrise im Donau-Balkan-Raum und ihre Bedeutung für den Wandel der deutschen Außenpolitik', in W. Benz and H. Graml (eds.), *Aspekte deutscher Außenpolitik im 20. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart, 1976, pp. 121ff.

48. For these initiatives, see J. Kuehl, *Föderationspläne im Donaauraum und Ostmitteleuropa*, Munich, 1958. Apart from a few insignificant technical agreements, the only concrete result was the Balkan pact between Yugoslavia, Romania, Greece and Turkey. Yet again the 'revisionist' countries were absent. There is a great deal of documentation on the subject in AA-Archiv, Abt. IIb, vol. Rohstoffe Ungarn. Getreide.

49. Cf. P. Friedman, 'The Welfare Costs of Bilateralism: German-Hungarian Trade 1933-1938', *Explorations in Economic History*, vol. 13, 1976, pp. 113ff.

50. B. J. Wendt, 'England und der deutsche "Drang nach Südosten"', in I. Geiss and B. J. Wendt (eds.), *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Düsseldorf, 1973, p. 489.

51. In 1938 England's trade with the Balkan countries was only 1.3 per cent of its imports and 2 per cent of its exports, a much lower percentage than for Germany or Italy.

52. Cf. Recker, 'Großbritannien'; G. Juhasz, 'Zur britischen Politik gegenüber Rumänien, Ungarn, Jugoslawien und der Tschechoslowakei', in H. J. Schröder (ed.), *Südosteuropa im Spannungsfeld der Grossmächte*, Wiesbaden, 1985; and B. J. Wendt, *Economic Appeasement*, Hamburg, 1971.

53. See J. Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini: Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom 1933-1936*, Tübingen, 1973, and 'Italien und Südosteuropa' in J. Becker and K. Hildebrandt (eds.), *Internationale Beziehungen in der Weltwirtschaftskrise*, Munich, 1980, pp. 393ff.; T. Rafalski, *Italienischer Faschismus in der Weltwirtschaftskrise*, Opladen, 1984, pp. 175-286; and I. Csöppus, 'The Rome Pact and Hungarian Agricultural Exports to Italy (1920-1944)', *JEEH*, vol. 11, 1982, pp. 403ff.

54. On this subject, see the essays in the first part of M. Funke (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, Düsseldorf, 1978, pp. 17-114, which provides a representative sample of existing interpretations.

55. Cf. W. Daitz, 'Kontinentaleuropäische Großraumwirtschaft und der Ostseeraum', *Der deutsche Volkswirt*, no. 15, 1934, as well as his speech published by Schumann et al., *Weltherrschaft im Visier*, pp. 242ff.

56. See the studies by W. Schumann, 'Aspekte und Hintergründe der Handels- und Wirtschaftspolitik Hitlerdeutschlands gegenüber Jugoslawien', *Bulletin des Arbeitskreises zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, vol. 3, 1973, and H. Radant, 'Die IG Farbenindustrie AG und Südosteuropa bis 1938', *JWG*, vol. 3, 1966, pp. 146-95. The archives of the chemical monopoly kept in Potsdam cannot currently be consulted by non-GDR historians.

57. R. Bollmus, *Das Amt Rosenberg und seine Gegner*, Stuttgart, 1970.

58. See the recent study by S. Martens, *Hermann Göring: 'Erster Paladin des Führers' und 'Zweiter Mann im Reich'*, Paderborn, 1985.

59. Cf. the perceptive study by A. Kube, 'Außenpolitik und "Großraumwirtschaft": Die deutsche Politik zur wirtschaftlichen Integration Südosteuropas', in H. Berding (ed.), *Wirtschaftliche und politische Integration in Europa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, 1984, pp. 185ff.; J. Radkau, 'Entscheidungsprozesse und

Entscheidungsdefizite in der deutschen Außenwirtschaftspolitik 1933–1940', GG, vol. 2, 1976, pp. 33–65. Cf. the recent study by W. S. Grenzebach, *Germany's Informal Empire in East-Central Europe*, Stuttgart, 1988 (concentrated on the cases of Yugoslavia and Romania).

60. DZAP, 09.11, vol. 43012. See also a speech by Darré summarised in *Der deutsche Volkswirt*, no. 29, 20 April 1934; the article by top Ministry official Walter, 'Die Bedeutung der neuen Agrarpolitik für die deutsche Handelspolitik', *NS Landpost*, 4 May 1934; and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs circular, 18 June 1934, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. III, pp. 26ff.

61. H. J. Schröder, 'Deutsche Südosteuropapolitik 1929–1936', GG, vol. 2, 1976, p. 31.

62. Cf. Ministry of Agriculture to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 September 1935, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Jugoslaw. 3. Darré felt that the granting of excess prices for Balkan exports was not at all justified by the relatively insignificant political gains. On the other hand, he was forced to acknowledge the need to find some form of regular flow of agricultural products into the country.

63. For example, see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs circular to all embassies concerned, 3 September 1937, urgently asking them to identify potential sources for supplies of foodstuffs: AA-Archiv, Gesand. Sofia, vol. Aussenhandel 3.

64. The law was published in Rgbl. I, p. 816, and is commented upon by Tornow, *Kritik*, pp. 179ff.

65. L. Zumpe, *Wirtschaft und Staat in Deutschland*, Berlin–Vaduz, 1980, pp. 168f.; and V. Hentschel, 'Osservazioni sulle dimensioni del commercio estero tedesco' in P. Hertner and G. Mori (eds.), *La transizione dall'economia di guerra all'economia di pace in Italia e Germania*, Bologna, 1982, pp. 603–63.

66. R. Erbe, *Die nationalsozialistische Wirtschaftspolitik 1933–1939 im Lichte der modernen Theorie*, Zurich, 1958, p. 82.

67. It is above all the East German historians who maintain that there was a continuous long-term German trade policy which reflected the interests of the power block which supported the regime. But the existing archive documents – as we shall see below – go to show that this interpretation is far from satisfactory.

68. The widespread discontent in Hungarian agrarian circles when faced with German incomprehension emerges, among other places, in the reports sent by Wiehl, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, on 30 October 1933 (DZAP, 09.11, vol. 42998) and by the German ambassador in Budapest on 16 April 1933 (*ibid.*, vol. 43010).

69. On the other hand, the Hungarians continued to keep the Italian alternative open, as is shown by Gömbös' visit to Rome: cf. the report by the German ambassador in Rome, 25 November 1933, in DZAP 09.11, vol. 43012.

70. The exchange of letters between the two heads of government in April 1933, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. I, pp. 324f. See the essay by I. Berend and G. Ranki, 'German–Hungarian relations following Hitler's rise to power', *Acta Historica*, vol. 8, 1961, pp. 313–346.

71. Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ministry of Agriculture, 17 May 1933, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. I, pp. 450f. Cf. the protocol of the cabinet meeting of 7 April, *ibid.*, pp. 258f.

72. German ambassador to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 May 1933, in AA-Archiv, Ges. Budapest, vol. Handelsvertrag 4.

73. Cf. DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41284.

74. AA-Archiv, Ges. Budapest, vol. Ölsaatenanbau, 1.

75. AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Ungarn, 3.

76. Benzler (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to Ritter, 27 September 1933, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. II, pp. 845f.

77. Cf. the protocol of the Handelspolitisches Ausschuß meeting, 18 August, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41284.

78. *Ibid.*

79. Cf. note dated 22 January 1934, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Ritter, vol. Ungarn 3, as well as the despatch of 7 February from the German ambassador, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41285.

80. But in a circular dated 2 March 1934, the RDI called for prudence and pointed out that, given the low trade flows in the previous years, it would be unreasonable to expect a sudden change: *ibid.*

81. The statement, dated 20 February, is in AA-Archiv, Ges. Budapest, vol. Präferenzverhandlungen.

82. Proceedings in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41285, and in AA-Archiv, Ges. Budapest, vol. Regierungsaussch. 1.

83. Cf. Csöppus, 'Rome Pact' pp. 403ff.; Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini*, pp. 320ff.

84. Report by the ambassador, von Schnurre, 13 January 1935, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Ungarn 1.

85. Ritter to the ambassador in Budapest, 13 March 1935: *ibid.* But even the Hungarians complained about this outstanding credit, which rose to RM25 million in 1935 and to RM49 million in 1939. Cf. Schnurre's note to Clodius, 5 May 1936, about a conversation he had had with the chairman of the national bank, Imredy: AA-Archiv, Ges. Budapest, vol. Regierungsaussch. 1.

86. The debate on the quotas of carp, cattle and eggs is reflected in the archive documents, respectively: DZAP, 09.11, vols 41286, 47921 and 41290.

87. German ambassador to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 April 1935, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41290.

88. There is a great deal of archive material on this subject: see DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41290, AA-Archiv, Ges. Budapest, vols Ölsaatenanbau 1 and 2, and Handakten Ritter, vol. Ungarn 3.

89. Ritter's note, 15 July 1935, in DGFP, vol. IV, p. 451, and the note by Clodius, 25 September 1935, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Ungarn 3.

90. Correspondence between Göring and the new Prime Minister, Darany, autumn 1936, in ADAP, ser. C, vol IV/1, pp. 98ff., 137.

91. Significant documents on the German drive are in AA-Archiv, Handelspolitische Abteilung (hereafter Hapolabt.) IVa, vol. Rohstoffe/Getreide and in Ges. Budapest, vol. Entwicklung d. Warenverkehrs. Darré was explicit on this subject during an interview with a Budapest daily, published 11 June 1937: cf. DZAP, 61 Re 1 Pressearchiv, vol. 83.

92. Clodius openly wrote: 'Especially as far as the Hungarian case is concerned, it is of great importance to create a secure market in Germany on which to place its agricultural products at a good price' (note of 28 April 1939 in AA-Archiv Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Ungarn, Wirtschaft 1,1). See also Wiehl's note, 30 November 1938, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. V, p. 287.

93. Report by Clodius on the statement by von Nickl, Hungarian ambassador, on 16 December 1938, in AA-Archiv, Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Ungarn, Handel 11, 1.

94. Cf. J. Tihany, 'Deutsch-ungarische Außenhandelsbeziehungen im Dienste der faschistischen Aggressionspolitik' *JWG*, vol. 1, 1972, p. 68. See also the evaluation by Berend and Ranki, 'Lebensraum Politik', pp. 14, 22.

95. Ritter's note, 5 April 1933, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Ritter, vol. Jugosl. 2.

96. Cf. A. Mitrovic, 'Alternativen der jugoslawischen Außenpolitik', in Schröder (ed.), *Südosteuropa*.

97. Ministry of Foreign Affairs circular to the Balkan ambassador, 19 April 1933: AA-Archiv, Ges. Budapest, vol. Agrarkontingentierung.

98. In DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41140.

99. *Ibid.*, vol. 41141.

100. Cf. letter from the Reichsverband des deutschen Groß- und Überseehandels to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economics, 22 June 1933, in BA, R II, vol. 305, as well as statements in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41146.

101. Von Neurath's note, 9 March 1934, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. II, pp. 562f.
102. Dated 12 March in AA-Archiv, Handakten Ritter, vol. Jugosl. 2.
103. Cf. Darré's remonstrations as late as 28 September 1935, quoted in Schröder, 'Südosteuropa als Informal Empire Deutschlands: Das Beispiel Jugoslawiens', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, vol. 23, 1975, p. 90.
104. Declaration by Sarnow (Ministry of Economics) to the Yugoslav press in mid-March: in AA-Archiv, Handakten Ritter, vol. Jugosl. 2.
105. Sarnow to Koehler, 7 April 1934, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41142.
106. In a despatch sent to the German ambassador in Belgrade, 21 June 1934, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, Jugosl. 2.
107. For the former, see Hess (ambassador) to Sarnow, 2 November 1934, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Jugosl. 3; for the latter, Schröder, 'Südosteuropa als Informal Empire', pp. 80f.
108. Cf. the protocol of the first meeting of the government commissions, held in Munich at the end of February 1935, in AA-Archiv Handakten Wiehl, vol. Jugosl. 3. Six months later the ambassador, Hess, commented that great advances had been made in this field: despatch of 29 August 1935, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Jugsl. 3.
109. Cf. the various papers in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 40727. From them it emerges that, along with the objective obstacles that Yugoslav bureaucracy placed in the way, many firms were not dynamic enough in cultivating this promising market – at least according to German diplomacy.
110. Circular, 18 April 1936, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41147/1.
111. See the satisfied report by the German ambassador, 4 March 1936, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 40727. But even in October 1937, at a meeting of government commissions in Dubrovnik, the gap in the trade balance continued to be at the centre of attention. According to the Germans, the gap was due to the protectionist policies of the Yugoslavs. See the AA-Archiv, Ministry of Economics circular, 4 October 1937, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. VI/2, pp. 1148f.
112. A public declaration made by Stojadinovich, 27 October 1936, in AA-Archiv, Hapolabt, IVa, vol. Jugo. Handel 13/1.
113. AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Jugosl. 3. See also Schumann, 'Aspekte und Hintergründe'.
114. Ritter to the German ambassador, 14 December 1936, and Schacht to Göring, 20 January 1934, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. VI/I, pp. 180, 218, 320, 488. Koch intended to finance the extreme right-wing movement whose task was to destabilise the Yugoslavian institutional set-up.
115. Ritter to the German ambassador, 29 December 1936, in AA-Archiv Handakten Clodius, vol. Jugosl. 3.
116. Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ambassador von Heeren, 6 March 1937, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Jugosl. 3.
117. Report by Clodius, 7 January 1938, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. V, pp. 183ff.
118. Cf. G. L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, Chicago–London 1980, vol. I, pp. 218f.; Kube, *Pour la mérite*, p. 261ff.
119. Cf. P. Marguerat, *L'Allemagne et le petrole roumaine*, Leida, 1977; W. S. Grenzebach, 'German Economic Policy in Rumania 1933–1939' in Schröder (ed.), *Südosteuropa*. Cf. also the recent study on the previous Republican phase by H. Torch, *Wirtschaft und Politik auf den Balkan*, Berne–Frankfurt, 1984.
120. Cf. H. Sundhaussen, 'Politisches und wirtschaftliches Kalkül in den Auseinandersetzungen über die deutsch-rumänischen Präferenzvereinbarungen', *Revue d'Etudes Sud-Est Européennes*, vol. 14, 1976, pp. 405ff.
121. Cf. the proceedings of the Handelspolitischer Ausschuß at 13 April, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41140.
122. Von Bülow gives a very significant account of Hitler's meeting with the Romanian ambassador on 8 June 1933, from which emerged (1) Hugenberg's

opposition and (2) the pressure applied by Krupp, IG Farben and others to open the way to increased trade between the two countries: AA-Archiv, Abt. II, vol. Ruman. Handel 13/11. Cf. also Ritter to Keppler, 13 July, *ibid.*

123. Cf. AA-Archiv, Abt. II, vol. Öle und Fett. The agreement signed in August made provisions for the purchase of cereal amounting to RM17 million by IG Farben, part of which was to be sold to third countries. In exchange, the company obtained commissions for RM13.6 million in chemical and pharmaceutical products: AA-Archiv, Abt. II, vol. Handel 13/11.

124. Note by Wiehl, 7 December, in AA-Archiv, Abt. II, vol. Öle und Fette.

125. Cf. 'Soja-Anbau in Rumänien', *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 March 1939.

126. In AA-Archiv, Abt. II, vol. Handel 13/1.

127. Clodius to the Ministry of Economics, 8 October 1934, in AA-Archiv, Sonderref. Wirtschaft, vol. Handel 11.

128. Memo by Ritter, 3 November 1934, in DGFP, ser. C, vol. III, p. 565.

129. German ambassador to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 March 1935, in AA-Archiv, Handelspol. Abt. IVa, vol. Rum. Handel 13/12.

130. Report from the German embassy, 26 May 1933, *ibid.*

131. Minutes of the HPA meeting, 25 May 1936, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Wiehl, vol. Protokolle.

132. See the report by the German embassy, 23 March 1937, claiming that Turkish sources had revealed that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tatarescu, had expressed the desire to freeze relations between the two countries: AA-Archiv, Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Rum. Handel 11.

133. German ambassador to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 November 1937, in AA-Archiv, Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Handel 13A.

134. *Ibid.*, Getreide 1.

135. German ambassador to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 15 October 1938, in ADAP, ser. D, vol. V. pp. 266ff. See the letter from Clodius to the ambassador, 11 March 1937, urging him to buy cereals wherever possible: AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Rum 1.

136. Article in *Breslauer Neueste Nachrichten*, 22 June 1936.

137. Cf. Wohltat's report to Göring, 13 December 1937, in ADAP, ser. C, vol. V, pp. 174ff.

138. Note from Clodius, 15 February 1939, in ADAP, ser. D, vol. V, pp. 327f. Cabinet meeting, 10 March, in which Clodius was very sceptical: in AA-Archiv, Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Rum. Sojabohnen, as well as another note by Clodius, 12 April, in Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Rum. Handel 11. The Ministry of Agriculture also protested on 24 December 1938, but in the end it gave way before superior political needs: Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Handel 13A.

139. From a report by Wohltat to Göring, 30 April 1939: 'Germany must bear in mind that if Romania is to support its excess population and raise living standards, then it must become industrialised to a certain extent.' AA-Archiv, Handakten Wiehl, vol. Rum. Handel 11.

140. Report by Wohltat, 27 February, *ibid.*

141. *Ibid.*

142. Cf. E. Igerz, 'Die Deutsch-bulgarischen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen', Dissertation, Graz, 1941.

143. See the extensive correspondence on the subject in AA-Archiv, vol. Bulg. Handel 13/4.

144. Ministry of Economics to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 October 1933, in AA-Archiv, Ges. Sofia, vol. Aussenhandel 2.

145. HPA meeting, 15 September 1934, in DZAP, 09.11, vol. 41286.

146. See the optimistic report on the trial first year sent by Hahn to the Ministry of Finances, 18 May 1935, in BA, R 2, vol. 18319. But see also IG Farben to Ministry of Agriculture, 27 June 1935, *ibid.* The archive contains an extensive

correspondence which clearly reveals the favourable opinion of the various ministries.

147. Cf. Ministry of Agriculture, 13 May 1936, in AA-Archiv, Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Handel 13-1/1. As far as imbalances in the clearing agreement are concerned, cf. the report by the ambassador, Rümelin, 10 February 1937. He surmised that they had hurried to increase imports from Bulgaria without paying enough heed to the interests of German exporters: AA-Archiv, Ges. Sofia, vol. Aussenhandel 3.

148. The German ambassador's call to proceed cautiously, 7 October 1937, in AA-Archiv, Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Bulg. Handel 11/1.

149. Note from Clodius, 29 June 1937, in AA-Archiv, Handakten Clodius, vol. Bulg. 1. The Bulgarians refused an exchange of cereals for arms on the basis of a clearing agreement.

150. Secret protocol, 12 May 1938, for the supply of war material amounting to RM20 million, to be partially covered by the export of mineral products: DZAP, 09.11, vol. 68971/16.

151. AA-Archiv, Hapolabt. IVa, vol. Bulg. Handel 11/1.

152. In BA, R 43 II, vol. 213.

153. On the question of how much Germany stood to gain out of this 'informal imperialism', see Milward and the critical reply by Wendt in G. Hirschfeld and L. Kettenacker (eds.), *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität*, Stuttgart, 1981, pp. 377-428. For a recent general and balanced survey on the whole Balkan question in the inter-war years, cf. A. Teichova, *Kleinstaaten im Spannungsfeld der Großmächte*, Munich, 1988.

The Exodus of the Rural Population and the Shortage of Agricultural Labour

From the authoritative tribune of the sixth *Reichsbauerntag*, held in Goslar on 27 November 1938, the Minister of Agriculture and Reichsbauernführer, R. Walther Darré, spoke on the increasingly delicate theme of the growing shortage of farm labour, and the terms he used deserve mention. In his opinion, the flood of the rural population away from the land could not be stemmed with economic measures, but only through the ‘undevising will’ of the NSDAP to tackle the problem from a *weltanschaulich*–racial point of view.

He then went on to describe what he meant, praising the example of extreme right-wing youth movements like the *Artamanen*, which had tackled the problem with the heart and not with reason. Darré was thus hoping for a return, in grand style, to the *Landdienst*, that is temporary voluntary service especially for young people.¹

In examining this problem, which had not only been beleaguering German agriculture, the head of National Socialist agrarian policy continued to use these irrational terms despite the evident failure of the ‘service’ to which he clung like a lifeline – as we shall see in the present chapter. This ideological ‘blindness’ was symptomatic of the National Socialist leaders’ inability to get to the heart of the profound contradictions which they themselves had created by accelerating the rate of industrial production.

The problem, in fact, went a long way back. Ever since the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, when the balance of power between agriculture and industry was definitively reversed in favour of the latter, one of the crucial factors had been the exodus of the rural population and the consequent lack of agricultural labour. The flight from the land, which more or less went in an east–west direction, had reached vertiginous levels, and the industrial and urban centres, especially the capital Berlin, grew by the thousands of workers.

The eastern provinces, which consisted mainly of large estates practising extensive agriculture, underwent a haemorrhage of man-

power that marked it indelibly, furthering its economic and social backwardness compared to those regions more directly involved in the processes of industrialisation and modernisation. The different, but closely related, phenomena of the exodus from the land and of the declining labour force also continued in the period between the wars. From 1840 to 1919 – to give some examples – through immigration the population of Berlin grew by 948,500 and the Rhineland–Westphalia industrial area also saw a net increase of 751,500. In the short period from 1910 to 1924, immigration to the Berlin area grew at an even greater rate (+371,300 immigrants) as did that to Rhineland–Westphalia (+103,000).²

At the same time, although at a decreasing rate, the eastern provinces continued to lose their population: 739,300 inhabitants emigrated from East Prussia between 1840 and 1919, and 111,600 between 1910 and 1925. In this second phase, Western Prussia–Posen lost 12.8 per cent of its population compared to the 1919 census, Silesia 4.5 per cent, Eastern Prussia 8 per cent, and Pomerania 8 per cent; obviously these figures take into account the changes in borders with the cession of land to Poland and Czechoslovakia.³

From the point of view of employment, the exodus from the land caused a sharp fall in the number of wage earners, from 3.72 million in 1895 to 2.61 million in 1925, and a considerable increase in the number of family members involved in farming to make up for the loss in wage earners. Family helpers rose from 1.9 million to 4.8 million (+180 per cent) between the two censuses.⁴

A detailed comparison of the various categories of farm size defined by the censuses allows a more accurate picture of these trends. From 1907 to 1925 we witness a growing concentration of manpower in larger farms: on estates of 100–200 hectares, the average number of staff rose from 28.6 to 32.1, and on those of over 200 hectares from 71.3 to 78.2. On smaller farms, whose overall number was growing, the number of permanent or seasonal workers fell sharply: for holdings of up to 2 hectares it fell from 416,683 to 207,014, at a time when the number of productive units increased from 3,525,335 to 4,602,032. Similarly, for the 2–5 hectare category, the number of non-family workers dropped by 60.4 per cent, while the number of farms rose by 0.7 per cent.⁵

Thus we observe that the large landowners, mainly grouped in the eastern provinces, managed to maintain a high level of wage earners. But this was due to an unscrupulous policy of taking on seasonal workers from the nearby Slav states. Whereas, on one hand, the Junkers continued to set themselves up as the standard-

bearers of German nationalism,⁶ on the other, economic demands forced them to make use of the seasonal immigration of Poles, Czechs and Russians, who were less militant in political or union activities and had much less bargaining power.⁷ Governments during Imperial times had openly supported the interests of large-estate owners in this sense, so much so that at the outbreak of the First World War there were 430,000 officially registered seasonal immigrants.⁸ During the Weimar Republic, however, efforts were made to regulate the number of seasonal immigrant workers in quotas. But this made no real difference: in 1926 there were 136,836 foreign seasonal workers, but by 1930, at a time when domestic unemployment was rising, there were 142,721.⁹ The Republican authorities, in fact, had to put up with widespread forms of clandestine immigration. This is further proof of the strong influence that the large eastern landowners had in political and bureaucratic circles.

The debate over the causes of rural depopulation in the east saw a clear-cut division of opinion: many authoritative experts like Max Weber and Franz Oppenheimer considered the problem to be strictly linked to the unfair distribution of land; others stressed the role of large-scale structural causes.¹⁰ The former, who may be described as 'reformists', proposed relaunching internal settlement to consolidate the German cultural and demographic fabric in the eastern provinces. They basically agreed with the propaganda of conservative and large-landowner circles who insisted on the theme of an anti-Slav 'wall', of which the Junkers should be the proud standard-bearers.

With the steady shift of the weight of the German economy towards industry and the services sector, the 1933 census registered a further decrease in the absolute number of both permanent and seasonal wage earners in agriculture: from 3,292,707 in 1925 to 2,859,888, a 13 per cent drop which was more than the overall decrease in the total number of people engaged in agricultural activities (-4.3 per cent). This drop was felt in all size categories except that of 50-100 hectares, where the number of wage earners actually rose from 194,492 to 325,910. Again, the small farms were most affected by the exodus from the country (Table 10.1).¹¹ But it must be added that the 1933 census figures do not reveal the full extent of the phenomenon, since during the depression many returned to the land, perhaps to parents' or relatives' farms where they could be sure of being fed. According to a survey carried out by the Bureau International du Travail in Geneva, the causes of migration in Saxony and Pomerania in this period can be summar-

The Exodus of the Rural Population

Table 10.1. Permanent and seasonal wage earners per farm 1907 and 1933

Farm size (ha)	1907	1933	Change (%)
2-5	0.40	0.19	-210
6-20	1.19	0.62	-191
21-50	3.94	2.48	-159
51-100	9.60	5.83	-165
101-200	25.68	12.81	-200
More than 200	66.90	39.59	-169

Source: E. Eichweber, 'Zur Frage der Reagrarisierung Deutschlands', Dissertation, Cologne, 1937, p. 12.

ised in five points: real wages were lower in agriculture than in industry; social, health and unemployment welfare was poorer; there was less possibility of upward social mobility; employment legislation was worse in agriculture than in industry; and lastly, working and living conditions were harsher in the country.¹²

This tendency greatly increased the workload for members of farmers' families, who accounted for over half of the people employed in farms of up to 50 hectares (a maximum of 94 per cent for farms of 2-5 hectares), and only 42 per cent and 8 per cent respectively for farms of 50-100 and over 100 hectares.¹³ The 1933 census also reveals that over 2.7 million of the 4.4 million women employed in agriculture were actually members of farmers' families. They were concentrated in the small to medium farms, whereas the number of women employed by the large estates amounted to only a few thousand.¹⁴

A local study concerning East Prussia substantially confirms this trend: the decrease in wage earners affected almost all size categories, but particularly the smaller farms (the fall in waged labour compared to 1907 was 7.9 per cent in holdings of 5-10 hectares, 4.6 per cent in farms of 10-20 hectares and 1.8 per cent in the 50-100 hectare category). Slight increases were found in the 20-50 hectare category (+5.2 per cent) and in that of over 100 hectares (+11.6 per cent).¹⁵

At the time of the *Machtergreifung* there were at least five million unemployed in Germany, among them one and a half million young people under 25 years of age. Agriculture also suffered from severe underemployment: in the winter of 1932/33 there were more than 326,000 unemployed in the sector.¹⁶ Presidential government measures tended to move in the direction of a block on seasonal immigration and the creation of new job opportunities in both the

public and the private sectors. As far as immigration was concerned, on 23 December 1932 the President of the Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung stopped the entry of new seasonal workers and limited existing contracts until 30 April of the following year.¹⁷ The authorities were confident that the block would not have negative consequences for production since they believed that there would be a return *en masse* to agricultural work. As the Minister of Labour wrote in a circular of 24 March 1933: 'As far as we can see, requirements for agricultural labour will be abundantly covered even in the future.'¹⁸ Not the most accurate of forecasts!

Among the more positive measures taken were the numerous programmes for public works, which included operations in the forestry and agricultural sectors. An example of this was the project devised by the Prussian Minister for Agriculture at the end of January 1933, which made provisions for financial contributions to housing for land workers. At the onset of winter, which would inevitably slow down work both on farms and on the state-financed schemes for infrastructure, a proposal came from many quarters to reduce the working day in agriculture to avoid unnecessary burdens on farmers' slim financial resources.¹⁹ At the same time there was concern that public works in other sectors would harm the already difficult employment situation in agriculture.²⁰

The Hugenberg-Rohr Ministry, already preoccupied with the debt-relief question and problems related to the deficit in edible fats, paid little attention to the problem of the agricultural workforce. This was partly due to a belief that the reduced rate of economic growth would favour a gradual settling-down of the labour market. Two proposals were discussed, however, and partly translated into measures. Prior to the formation of the Hitler cabinet, a proposal to create special funds to construct or renovate rural dwellings in order to encourage land workers to settle was approved in a cabinet meeting of 16 February. But this was only after it had been blocked for a long time because of budget restrictions. In the end, it was integrated into the second law for the reduction of unemployment, issued on 21 September of the same year. This law made provisions for grants at low interest rates for improvements to rural buildings, and exemption from property tax for those who built new buildings.²¹ But the promises made by von Rohr, in a radio speech in early March and then in an article in *Der Reichslandbund*, to issue a detailed law granting state contributions to farm workers' wages, were never fulfilled. However, a wide-ranging programme for land-reclamation and improvement schemes, destined to create new jobs, was eventually presented in

May of the same year.²²

In any event, Rohr sent a gloating report to Vice-Chancellor von Papen illustrating the most significant achievements up till then: he stressed that in May considerable reductions had been made to unemployment in agriculture.²³ In fact, the measures taken by the new government to combat the economic crisis had quickly reduced the enormous unemployment rate. In agriculture they even reversed the situation: from an excess supply to an inability to fill all the jobs. At the beginning of winter 1933/34, the Ministry of Labour was thus able to give a positive account of the campaign to eliminate unemployment, which had dropped by 34 per cent compared to the same month in the previous year and by as much as 312 per cent compared to when it was at its height.²⁴ This reversal is all the more significant given that foreign seasonal workers from countries more badly hit by the crisis increased (by approximately 165,000). Thus, despite the obstructionist policies of the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF), it seems clear that, for both international and internal reasons, it was impossible to stem this immigrant flow completely.²⁵

In spite of the victory over unemployment, structural problems persisted. Farmers were not able to bear the burden of paying workers during the winter when their productivity fell drastically. The National Socialist regime could combat this sharp drop in seasonal employment only by making appeals such as that of the Bavarian Ministerpräsident Ludwig Siebert.²⁶

The concern to create employment for the industrial unemployed not only in agriculture in the narrowest sense, but also in infrastructure work, lasted into the early months of 1934. First the Prussian Ministry for Agriculture and then Ministerpräsident Göring drew up proposals to meet this need. The Prussian proposal was definitely more ambitious: land-improvement schemes with an enormous budget (RM450 million, half of it provided by the Reich), to create work for more than 300,000 people over several months. But lack of funds meant that this project was never implemented.²⁷

The so-called 'Berlin Plan', which Göring had described in a speech of 30 April 1934, was more modest: the intention was to decongest the great urban conurbations, reversing the phenomenon of the flight from the land and thus taking a certain number of city workers (not very many in this case: 2,000) into farm and forestry schemes.²⁸ This aim had deep political and ideological implications: to combat the discontent and frustration of the proletariat, by providing them with a 'productive pastime' in the form of horti-

cultural and garden interests. These formed the basis of the *Kleinsiedlung* phenomenon – the setting aside of small garden plots on the outskirts of industrial cities – to which the regime was to dedicate a lot of energy in the late 1930s.²⁹

The project presented by Göring and discussed by the central commission for the struggle against unemployment was judged politically dangerous, in that it would have mixed the urban proletariat (often with Marxist leanings) with farm workers, thus risking ideological contagion. In addition, given the state of unemployment in country areas, it did not seem the right moment to send industrial workers there.³⁰ Eventually the scheme was implemented and, although it lasted only a year, it did take the weight off the labour market in the capital by 12,000 workers, who were sent to work in the surrounding countryside.³¹

In its incessant propaganda from 1930 to the rise to power, the National Socialist Party paid very little attention to the problems of land workers and the landless. Usually it made only vague promises and expressed hopes about the possibility of improving their social position by acquiring holdings. The propaganda campaign led by Darré and his Agrarpolitischer Apparat promised salvation and mobilisation along nationalistic-racial lines, without, however, going into the details of what kind of measures would actually be taken.³² The problem of land workers and attempts to improve their social position, considered by many as the only real antidote to the exodus from rural areas, was never really brought out into the open because of the hedging round the land ownership question that we saw in Chapter 5. It cannot be said, therefore, that when Darré took over the management of German agrarian policy a clear programme had been drafted to solve the labour shortage in agriculture.

Let us consider, however, the few legislative measures that were implemented from the beginning of the Four-Year Plan. Firstly, to prevent workers from leaving the agricultural sector, an attempt was made to block intersectorial movements of the labour force. A law of 15 May 1934 prohibited all industrial firms from giving work to people who had been engaged in agricultural activity in the three previous years, and forced them to dismiss immediately all workers who were in this category.³³ A subsequent decree of 30 December strictly controlled seasonal immigration. And finally a law of 26 February 1935 authorised the President of the Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung to bring back to agriculture all workers who had left, and had thus disobeyed the aforementioned law of 15 May 1934.³⁴ The basic tool used to enforce these measures was the

obligatory Labour Book (*Arbeitsbuch*), which was supposed to make it possible to check all the movements of each worker.³⁵

A second kind of measure was concerned with improving the working, and more particularly the living conditions of land workers. To achieve this an RNS decree of 1 September 1934 provided for the setting-up of a special commission 'for the land worker question'. This was entrusted to Helmut Reinke, a deputy and former head of an RNS section. He was to look after working relations and attempt to improve the climate between employers and employees, or, in the corporative language of the time, between *Betriebsführer* and *Gefolgschaft*. Earlier, on 20 January, work trustees (*Treuhänder der Arbeit*) had been appointed with the task of defending the interests of workers on farms with a staff of more than twenty.

It was the Ministry of Labour which tackled the housing situation with a decree of 22 November 1935, which granted loans at the low rate of 3 per cent for land workers wishing to build themselves a house. Another decree issued on the same day created a 'loyalty bonus': all *Heuerlinge* (married harvest workers) who had signed a contract for at least five years were to receive a free sum of RM1,500.³⁶

A third kind of measure in National Socialist policy was concerned with voluntary forms of work aimed, above all, at bringing young city dwellers into contact with life and work in the country. The idea of voluntary service (*Dienst*) in the country had strong roots in *völkisch* circles and was part of a more general reassessment of the virtues of the country compared to the city. Among the advocates of a militant anti-urbanism,³⁷ which had taken on widespread concrete forms in temporary voluntary work, were the *Wandervögel*, active during the Wilhelmine period, and the *Artamanen*, which existed between the wars. Inspired by a deeply anti-Slav sentiment, which led them to oppose the growing presence of foreign seasonal workers on the big eastern estates, and romantic myths about country life (with health and racial overtones), thousands of *Wandervögel* and *Artamanen* rushed off to the eastern provinces, during the busy seasons on farms, to offer their services free to the nation.³⁸ Although it seems an exaggeration to claim – as Schlicker does³⁹ – that the *Artamanen* issued directly from the eastern estate owners, there can be no doubt that this phenomenon served as an important model for the various forms of work service which Darré gradually introduced as a substitute for a structural solution to the manpower shortage in agriculture. It is certainly no accident that when the Bund der Artamanen decided to break up in

September 1934, its last remaining members joined the RNS.

In February 1933 the first *Landhilfe* was set up for unemployed young people of 16 to 21 years of age. Farmers who had more than 80 hectares could make six-monthly contracts (which could be renewed only twice) with young volunteers, who were given a modest wage and board and lodgings. In exchange they had to work, but at the same time they also received a rudimentary professional training. The *Landhilfe*, to which the Hitler-Jugend dedicated a good deal of energy, was dissolved by a decree of April 1936, and contracts still running were incorporated into the *Arbeitsdienst*, whose purpose was to contribute to the building of infrastructures like canals and roads.

The compulsory *Landjahr* was first introduced in East Prussia in April 1934: all children of fourteen years of age were employed for nine months on a farm, as a form of instruction in farm work and physical education, as well as giving them the opportunity to come into direct contact with *Bauerntum* values. The *Landdienst*, set up by the Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung on 28 May 1935, was of much more modest dimensions. It initially involved groups working on large estates, but in the following year the system was also extended to smaller holdings. This form of voluntary work, introduced to control organised groups of youngsters more closely, was the nearest to the *Artamanen* ideas, especially since it was limited almost exclusively to the eastern provinces.

Among the other forms of the surreptitious use of labour (but less important in terms of sheer numbers) were those involving women, who, given the general shortage of labour, had much greater workloads, domestic or otherwise, than men.⁴⁰ The *Frauen-dienst*, set up on 1 January 1934, included work and education camps as well as *Mädelschulungslager* (education-work camps for girls) set up halfway through the same year. The very few instances of temporary voluntary service schemes for women can be explained by the regime's lack of interest in providing work for women, despite the undeniable economic need for it.⁴¹

Even the *Pflichtjahr*, a year's farm work for women, introduced in 1938, was implemented only with countless exceptions and reserves, which in fact rendered it fairly ineffective.⁴² The *studentische Erntehilfe* involved students working temporarily (8–10 weeks) during the summer holidays for farmers particularly in need.⁴³ A lack of documentary sources means that it is not easy to gauge the extent of all of these voluntary and semi-compulsory forms of work on farms. In her fundamental study on the subject, Frieda Wunderlich sets the figure for the *Landhilfe*, which was by far the

most important measure, at a maximum of 160,000–165,000 people employed between December 1933 and April 1934. By 1937/38 the figures had dropped dramatically to 30,000–40,000.⁴⁴ The *Landjahr* employed 31,000 boys and girls in 1936, and only 28,000 the following year. The *Landdienst* figures were more variable, but they never exceeded 26,000, almost half of whom were girls.⁴⁵

The substantial failure of these surreptitious methods of recruiting labour was due to numerous factors, but the most important seems to have been the lack of real job prospects for the young volunteers. As the regime's propaganda constantly emphasised,⁴⁶ the *Landdienst* and similar organisations were preparation for turning young volunteers into future settlers and soldiers. But – as we have seen – the very *Neubildung des deutschen Bauertums* policy, promoted by Darré, actually thwarted this aim. Thus the incentive to join work groups or, above all, to find a steady job in agriculture was minimal. Furthermore, it was no easy matter finding farmers willing to take on volunteers, either individually or in groups, since time was lost in teaching them the rudiments of farm work without any guarantee that they would stay on. Lastly, idealistic appeals to the healthy life, or a return to the deeper values of German culture and a commitment to fight off the Slav threat, were no match for the higher wages, better living and working conditions and brighter prospects of social improvement than other jobs offered. Because of this, in the *Landhilfe* – according to the figures supplied by Stierling, who probably tended to minimise its failure – a large number of participants gave up after a few days; of the rest only 80–90 per cent completed the full term of the voluntary work, and of them on average only 10–15 per cent chose to continue working in the agricultural sector.⁴⁷ Many farmers were very critical of the moral qualities of the volunteers, whom they considered to be 'city scum'.⁴⁸

Among National Socialist policy makers there was a fundamental difference of opinion about the concept of voluntary 'service': those who stressed the educational–ideological aspects disagreed with those who advocated giving priority to economic–productive considerations. Thus when a step-up in the work rate was called for, it was opposed by men like the head of the *Arbeitsdienst*, Konstantin Hierl, who wished to give suitable space to educational, athletic and general ideological activities.

But the laws intended to restrict or freeze the movements of labour were also widely disregarded, as State Secretary Backe had to acknowledge in a very worried circular letter sent to other central and local government offices.⁴⁹ The attraction of higher

Table 10.2. Net incomes in agriculture 1932–1938 (RM million)

Year	Independent farmers	Wage earners	Wages (%)
1932/33	300	1,332	444.0
1933/34	1,368	1,376	100.5
1934/35	2,235	1,443	64.5
1935/36	2,159	1,576	72.9
1937/38	2,268	1,738	76.6

Source: F. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor in Germany*, Princeton, 1955, p. 195.

wages and better working conditions was stronger than the threats of administrative or pecuniary penalties. The figures speak for themselves. If the index for 1925 was 100, in 1939 the average real wage for industry rose to 107 and as high as 129.8 in the services sector, whereas in agriculture it dropped to 91.5.⁵⁰ Within the agricultural sector, the drop in income was even more marked for the poorest category: farm servants.⁵¹

The very fragmented nature of wage levels in the numerous different specialisations in work on the farm,⁵² as well as the varying degrees of payment in kind, means that it is very difficult to follow the evolution of wages in German agriculture in the 1920s and 1930s. The available figures, which for the reasons given above should be taken with a fair degree of circumspection, seem to indicate a certain recovery in the absolute values of wages compared to the depression years. But they never reached the highest levels of the previous decade. Compared to farmers' profits, it can be seen that the percentage incidence of wages, greatly reduced by the economic recovery and the advent of full employment, remained steady with a slight tendency to increase towards the end of the 1930s (Table 10.2). These figures allow us to consider how important wages became in farmers' accounts. It also explains farmers' hostility and the consequent caution shown by the RNS as far as proposed wage increases were concerned.

Wages were partly held down by the attitude of the heads of the RNS and the Ministry, who advocated 'demonetarising' wages, which would at the same time drastically reduce them. Speaking at the opening session of the Reichsbauernrat, held on 26 November 1936, the head of the first section of the RNS, Haidn, peremptorily stated that wages, being a hateful heritage from Marxist economics, should be abolished as soon as possible.⁵³ Both at a theoretical level⁵⁴ and in administrative practice, a purely monetary and 'materialistic' vision of the relations between employers and em-

ployees was rejected. Calls were made for forms of co-partnership or payment in kind, which should above all emphasise the common interests of the two social subjects⁵⁵ and secondly foreshadow a qualitative change (no further details were given) involving the raising of wage earners to the rank of owner. The so-called 'ruralist' exponents started from the assumption that farm wages could in no way be comparable to those of industry without endangering profitability. According to Darré, what really counted was not the size of the wage packet but the extent of 'a man's overall fulfilment in life'.⁵⁶ Moreover, the coercive measures taken until then had created widespread ill-feeling. For this reason, the regime primarily proposed a systematic educational-propaganda activity to instil in young farm workers an awareness of the indispensable role they were being asked to play. Women peasants, in particular, were said to bear a great responsibility. In addition to their tasks as *Hausfrauen* and workers, it was their duty to educate their children to stay and work in the country.⁵⁷

Priority was given to a form of propaganda full of military overtones (agriculture was a 'front' and anyone leaving it would be branded as a 'deserter'). Second place was given to the commitment to use old forms of co-partnership, the *Deputatarbeit* and the *Heuerlingswesen*,⁵⁸ which were considered the first steps to be taken in the raising of the land worker to the rank of owner. In Darré's view, this was 'the only way out' of the problem.⁵⁹ Commissioner Reinke's position was slightly different. He maintained that, given the special conditions of agricultural work, it was senseless to fix pre-established wage tariffs according to egalitarian criteria. He proposed a flexible system of remuneration (according to both the degree of specialisation and the season) aimed at rewarding individual performances.⁶⁰ It should not be forgotten that wage increases would have considerably damaged farmers, whose incomes were already rather precarious. As far as the heads of the National Socialist agrarian policy were concerned, the proposal to abolish money wages was thus a possible way to avoid losing the support of farmers, especially those in the livestock sector which had greater need of specialised workers, and at the same time it aimed at not leaving production levels neglected.

Although some contemporary commentators, like Bindseil,⁶¹ gave a realistic account of the excessive slowness of the settlement plans aimed at giving land workers the opportunity to acquire a holding, to my mind most studies of the time were influenced by an anti-capitalist prejudice, which led to a loss of analytical clarity. An example is provided by the report sent to Darré at the end of

1937 by the Hanover LBF, von Rheden-Rheden. In apocalyptic tones, he criticised the capitalist 'plague' which in the name of the free-market concept of 'performance' (*Leistung*) wrenched away the best forces from the land. The (miraculous) solution put forward by this top functionary consisted in obligatory agricultural service for all those citizens exempt from conscription.⁶²

The weaknesses in this approach were immediately grasped by the Cologne Gauleiter, Grohé, who rejected Rheden's anti-urban ideas as foolish, and put forward a number of detailed proposals based on the massive use of foreign immigrants and on mechanisation. Significantly, Grohé also criticised the RNS for having neglected its own political duties in order to dedicate itself completely to administrative activity. This was not the case with the DAF which, in his opinion, was much more than simply a union.⁶³

And it was, in fact, the continuous friction with the DAF which underlay the policy of Darré's apparatus concerning farm workers. This friction centred both on the division of areas of competence between the two organisations – as we saw in Chapter 4 – and on their respective political projects: the DAF aimed at improving the material and living conditions of farm workers with special emphasis on wage increases, and openly criticised the RNS approach, which dwelt, above all, on educational aspects and forms of co-partnership.⁶⁴ R. Berndt observes, however, that from 1938 the DAF's commitment to a concrete social policy began to bear fruit at a politico-legislative level.⁶⁵

The oft-repeated commitment of representative organisations in industry to respect the existing laws did not produce any tangible result,⁶⁶ especially considering that industrial interests in this respect were diametrically opposed to those of agriculture.⁶⁷

Table 10.3, showing supply and demand for the agricultural workforce on 31 October each year for the industrial region of Silesia, clearly indicates how the problem grew worse as the mobilisation of the industrial sector for re-armament intensified.

By 1938 the initial situation of abundant unemployment (for every job there were 16 male and as many as 28 female workers available) had turned into an alarming state of shortage: 17 jobs for every male and 8 for every female on the labour market. According to cautious general estimates by the heads of the National Socialist agrarian policy, in 1938 there was a shortage of over 10 per cent of the indispensable labour, that is more than 250,000 workers.⁶⁸ Two regional examples are enough to show how the forms of voluntary or obligatory service implemented by the party or armed forces were absolutely incapable of meeting the growing requirements for

Table 10.3. Demand for and supply of the agricultural workforce in Silesia 1933-1938

Year	Men		Women	
	Supply	Demand	Supply	Demand
1933	9,706	607	27,774	976
1934	7,470	691	5,134	1,621
1935	5,813	1,150	3,033	2,060
1936	1,466	441	2,331	2,389
1937	441	2,522	1,146	3,061
1938	228	3,866	556	4,385

Source: F. Zellermann, 'Landmaschinen gegen Landflucht', Dissertation, Berlin, 1939, p. 21.

labour. In Thuringia in 1939, faced with a shortage of more than 22,000 employees, the state could find only 13,789 substitutes, who were either voluntary or conscripted. The difference was even more striking in Baden, a year earlier: a 'gap' of more than 55,000 workers could be filled only very partially by 6,200 workers recruited in various ways by the state and the party, plus another 10,532 extra workers for the harvest.⁶⁹

The much-flaunted policy in favour of co-partnership also produced very disappointing results, according to the official figures: in 1939 only 17,176 farms contributed plots of land for *Hewerlinge*, and the total land involved was only 47,666 hectares.⁷⁰

This dramatic situation was also described in the many reports by the Ministry of Labour's *Treuhänder der Arbeit*⁷¹ and the Ministry of Propaganda.⁷² Darré too showed he was aware of the situation. Among many statements, he mentioned it during an important radio speech broadcast on 12 December 1937, when he declared that the shortage of manpower was a new factor further hindering the battle for production.⁷³ The Minister seemed even more worried in a private letter sent to Göring ten days earlier: 'if things do not change very quickly, eastern Germany will be almost depopulated in a few years'. He then added an even more alarming prognosis: if the problem were not solved, 'the next war would be lost even before the first shot was fired'.⁷⁴ Schacht had spoken out earlier: in October 1936 he pointed out the serious nature of the problem which, in his opinion, endangered the whole German economy.⁷⁵

Such important fears, expressed in the highest offices, should have led Hitler's government to tackle the problem much more resolutely than in the past. But in fact they just muddled on, even in

the face of more desperate or threatening appeals. At this point I should like to cite a few of these. For example, on 13 March 1937 Darré and Ley signed a joint appeal to all volunteers. A year later the *Stellvertreter des Führers*, Hess, called on all party members, pointing out that it was their patriotic duty to participate in the work of the imminent cereal harvest. In a speech of 24 March 1937, the head of the National Socialist Four-Year Plan, Göring, warned: 'In future I will treat the flight from the land as an abdication from the responsibility that everyone has towards the whole economy.'⁷⁶ And lastly, at the inauguration of the *Reichsbauerntag* in November 1938, after having exalted the heroic spirit of self-denial of women in the countryside, Darré made a desperate appeal to farmers' daughters 'not to abandon the flag' and not 'to leave their mothers in desperate straits', but resolutely to struggle on, especially in these difficult times, and stay in the countryside to fulfil their patriotic duty.⁷⁷

At the same time the columns of the *Arbeitsdienst* were co-opted into helping with the harvest,⁷⁸ and the measures concerning temporary service became more severe. A decree issued by Göring on 15 February 1938 established that any women applying for jobs in the textile, clothing or tobacco sectors, as well as office staff in both private and public sectors, had to prove that they had done at least a year's voluntary service in the country or in domestic work. By the end of the same year a second decree had extended this preliminary requirement to all types of employment.⁷⁹ Similarly, measures were taken to encourage land workers to stay in the country. A decree by the head of the Four-Year Plan in 10 March 1937 set aside RM44 million to facilitate the construction of rural buildings with loans at low interest rates.⁸⁰ The grants awarded could cover up to 72 per cent of the total cost (up to 85 per cent for the *Heuerlinge*). Given an initial estimated shortage of 350,000 country dwellings, in two years the grants awarded led to the construction of 6,000 dwellings; work had begun on another 10,000 and a further 13,000 had been planned and were going through the necessary bureaucratic channels.⁸¹ But as F. Wunderlich has rightly pointed out, to a large extent these generous opportunities, offered by the state to farm workers to build a decent dwelling, could not be taken up because of the latter's weak financial position: few had the necessary capital to make such an investment.⁸²

A year later Göring issued a decree making provisions for loyalty bonuses (RM400 for each employee who had worked in agriculture for at least five years, to be doubled every subsequent

five years), and interest-free loans in the case of marriages and the related purchase of furniture.⁸³ But in fact, as early as April 1935, the Reichsanstalt für Arbeitsvermittlung had already decided to give grants of RM1,800 in six annual instalments to help farm workers set up home.⁸⁴

As far as prohibitions were concerned, the head of the Four-Year Plan issued a decree on 22 December 1936 which allowed labour exchanges in the hotter sectors (the steel and construction industries as well as agriculture) to prevent job changing by employees.⁸⁵ Nothing concrete was done, however, on the crucial issue of wage imbalances. In April 1938 Backe formally asked for a general increase of 20 per cent to reduce the gap with wages paid in other productive sectors.⁸⁶ But during a cabinet meeting of 5 May 1938, Göring brusquely invited those present to leave aside the problem of wages which, for the moment, could not possibly be solved.⁸⁷

Nor were any concrete moves made concerning the problem of improving the social status of land workers, although all agreed, at least in theory, on its importance. In fact, with the passing years land workers' chances of acquiring settlement holdings gradually diminished: in 1934 the proportion of land workers among the new settlers was 29 per cent, but by 1938 it had fallen to 16 per cent, thus further limiting the possibilities of social improvement.⁸⁸ Resentment was still felt among agriculture policy makers towards industry and Hitler's economic policy, which was accused of unilaterally favouring industry. Thus, for example, at the beginning of 1935, in a detailed report on the situation in agriculture in Bavaria, Franz Ritter von Epp called for an end to the vicious circle of the inexorable growth of industry at the expense of agriculture.⁸⁹ And one of the most authoritative 'brains' of the RNS Hermann Reischle, even proposed an obligatory contribution to be paid by all industrial workers in the form of the earnings of an hour's overtime a day, which would go towards funding the 'loyalty bonuses' for rural workers. Although the proposal was rejected out of hand as not even worth discussing,⁹⁰ it is significant that the heads of agricultural policy, in an attempt to solve the serious labour shortage, should have asked for such unrealistic sacrifices from the leading sector of the German economy.⁹¹

In an attempt to make up the shortfalls in agricultural output, the regime even had to forgo one of the cornerstones of its ideology: nationalism. From 1 April 1935, the borders were opened up again for the immigration of foreign land workers, and bilateral agreements were reached with countries like Italy and Poland, to allow for the emigration of their citizens.⁹² Despite the considerable

Table 10.4. Foreign workers in agriculture 1933–1939

Year (1 April–31 March)	No. of workers
1933/34	44,645
1934/35	51,662
1935/36	53,043
1936/37	64,321
1937/38	120,009
1938/39	188,545

Source: Calculated from *Statistische Jahrbücher*, 1934–9

difficulties involved and the opposition of Darré on ideological grounds,⁹³ this flow of legal and clandestine labour grew yearly, despite the delicate currency situation (Table 10.4).

Of course these figures do not take into account the phenomenon of clandestine immigration, which must have involved a large number of workers.⁹⁴ In the harsh competition between the main economic sectors, bonuses and incentives were used to tempt available workers away from rival sectors. Naturally, the weakest sector, agriculture, lost out. As can be seen from this book, agriculture had a secondary, 'residual' role as far as the heads of German economic policy were concerned. Although, to a certain extent, the complaints of its leaders were justified, the RNS did very little in the way of implementing reforms which could have attenuated the serious contradictions hindering the modernisation of agriculture. It is symptomatic that, after years in which the phenomenon of the exodus of rural labour had become obvious, a party leader complained that those who were attracted to the city and industrial jobs were 'spineless men, unaware of the importance of agriculture, who did not recognise the meaning of *Blut und Boden*'. He then repeated the worn-out message that action had to be taken in the field of education.⁹⁵

Returning briefly to the subject of mechanisation, which received fuller treatment in Chapter 8, on the failure of the battle for production, from the wealth of contemporary literature it can be deduced that there was a good deal of distrust of the use of machines, which were considered alien to the peasant way of thinking, dehumanising and typical of the capitalist mode of running agriculture, and therefore 'un-German'. Many commentators dwelt on the purely functional nature of agricultural machinery and on its usefulness in helping with farm work, and thus on its positive

effects on the health of farmers' families. These comments were clearly intended to refute widespread 'romantic' notions which were hostile to the use of machinery in agriculture. To emphasise the usefulness of machinery, Neber coined the expression *Bauernmaschinen*, that is machines which, in all aspects, were on 'a peasant scale'.⁹⁶

Confronted with the increasing gravity of the problem, even Darré gradually had to yield: in an article published in May 1937, he cautiously admitted that 'a greater mechanisation of our agriculture might be the only effective medium-term solution in combatting the shortage of farm workers'.⁹⁷

To sum up, the agricultural policy clearly failed to halt the

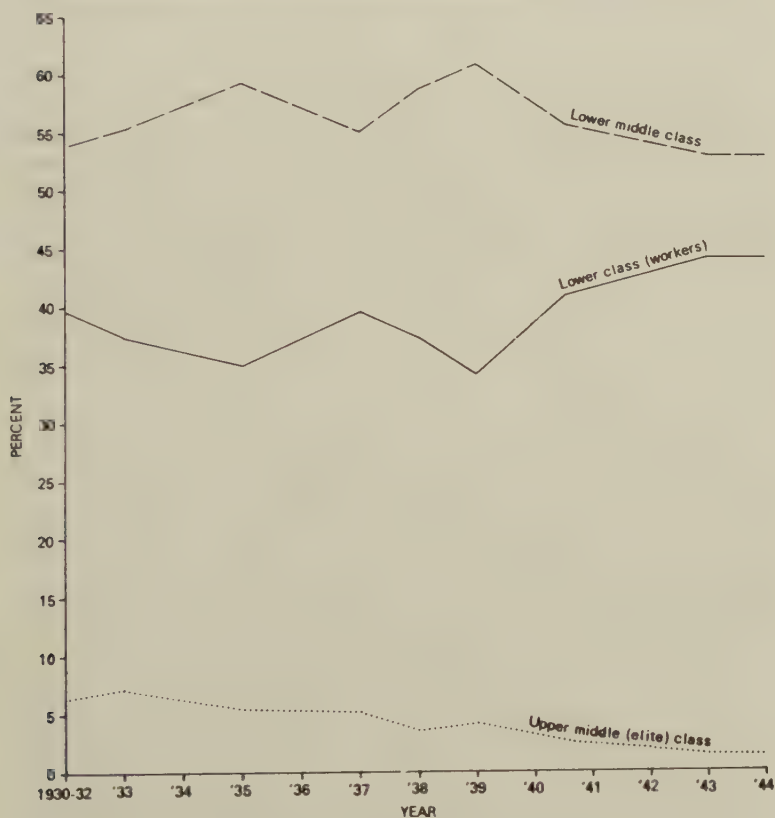


Figure 10.1 Nazi newcomers in the country, 1930-1944

Source: Michael Kater, *The Nazi Party: A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945*, London, 1983, Appendix V.

Table 10.5. Number of staff per farm size 1933 and 1939

Farm size (ha)	Staff per 100 ha		Difference (%)
	1933	1939	
0.5-2	60.8	42.2	- 30.3%
3-5	64.8	47.8	- 26.2
6-20	40.4	35.0	- 13.3
21-100	20.9	18.7	- 10.5
More than 100	13.1	13.1	0
Reich	31.3	26.8	- 14.3

Source: M. Jatzlauk, 'Untersuchungen zur sozialökonomischen Struktur der deutschen Landwirtschaft zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen', Dissertation, Rostock, 1983, pp. 70f.

phenomenon of migration to the urban centres, especially if we consider the figures from the various censuses. The proportion of the population living in the countryside fell from 22.8 per cent in 1925 to 18 per cent in 1939, and similarly, the percentage of people working in agriculture fell from 26.7 per cent to 18.2 per cent. Within the sector the proportion of wage earners continued to fall: from 26.7 per cent in 1925 to 23.6 per cent in the last census before the war, with a greater decrease for women (-15.1 per cent in 1939 compared to six years earlier). At the same time there was an increase in the proportion of family co-workers, whose main job was not in agriculture. This primarily harmed women, whose workload increased considerably, with predictable consequences for their procreative function, which the regime considered to be of such importance. The total number of women working in agriculture increased from 4.65 million - according to the 1933 census - to as many as 5.94 million six years later.⁹⁸ Whereas from 1933 to 1939 the use of labour from outside the family decreased by 16.8 per cent, the proportion of family helpers rose by 5.5 per cent. During the 1930s there was thus a strengthening of the prevalently familiar productive unit in German agriculture.

A survey of the staff per unit of land shows above all a general decline between 1933 and 1939, but with a higher percentage for smaller farms unable to compete in procuring the little labour available (Table 10.5). If we bear in mind the meagre means that these farms had for acquiring machines as substitutes, the very negative consequences that the agricultural economic policy had for small farmers and peasants become obvious.

Finally, some figures which illustrate how the young labour force in agriculture was gradually depleted: in the years between

the two censuses, the number of young people (i.e. born between 1894 and 1919) employed in agriculture dropped in absolute terms from 2.64 million to 1.82 million, that is from 27.07 per cent to 20.2 per cent of the total population employed in agriculture.⁹⁹

The 'accusations' made, mainly by the heads of agrarian policy and contemporary commentators, against the industrial sector for indiscriminately luring farm workers away from the land must be set beside the weak will to tackle seriously the structural causes underlying the terrible living conditions and wages which agricultural workers had to bear. In this sense, the regime's decision to limit as far as possible the outlay of resources for agriculture (such as contributions and subsidies) meant that, to save on labour costs, farmers had to rely on insufficient support from the various forms of more or less voluntary *Dienst*, which the state promoted through ideological means.

One consequence of the failure to realise the interclassist ideals so prominent in RNS propaganda is reflected in the number of enrolments of farmers and farm workers in the NSDAP (Figure 10.1): the two graphs complement each other perfectly, given that when the percentage membership of farmers (in the words of Kater: 'lower middle class') rose the percentage of land workers joining the party fell, and vice versa.

Notes

1. Darré, *Aufbruch des Bauerntums*, Berlin, 1942, pp. 119f.
2. H. Haack, 'Wanderungsbewegung im Deutschen Reich während der Zeit der Weimarer Republik', in *Fremdarbeiterpolitik des Imperialismus*, vol. 11, Rostok, 1981, pp. 33f.
3. D. Keese, 'Die volkswirtschaftlichen Gesamtgrößen für das Deutsche Reich in den Jahren 1925–1936', in W. Conze and H. Raupach (eds.), *Die Staats- und Wirtschaftskrise des Deutschen Reiches 1929–1933*, Stuttgart, 1967, p. 15.
4. D. Petzina, 'Grundzüge der wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert', *Deutsche Geschichte seit dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, vol. 2, Stuttgart, 1973, p. 777.
5. *Statistisches Jahrbuch des Deutschen Reiches*, 1933, pp. 58f.
6. Cf. H. Rosenberg, 'Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse', in H. Rosenberg (ed.), *Probleme der deutschen Sozialgeschichte*, Frankfurt, 1969.
7. Cf. J. A. Perkins, 'The German Agricultural Workers 1815–1914', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 11, 1984, pp. 3–27.
8. J. Tessarz, 'Die Rolle der ausländischen landwirtschaftlichen Arbeiter in der Agrar- und Ostexpansionspolitik des deutschen Imperialismus', Dissertation, Halle, 1962, p. 116.
9. Cf. J. A. Perkins, 'The Agricultural Revolution in Germany 1850–1914', *JEEH*, vol. 10, 1981, p. 100.

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10. See the survey of various positions in the debate in P. Quante, *Die Flucht aus der Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1933.

11. Klemm, 'Ursachen und Verlauf der Krise der Landwirtschaft', Habilitation, Berlin, 1965, pp. 45ff.

12. Bureau International du Travail, *L'exode rurale en Allemagne*, Geneva, 1933, pp. 53f.

13. K. Ehrfeld, 'Untersuchungen über den Stand des landwirtschaftlichen Maschinenwesens', Dissertation, Heidelberg, 1936, p. 49.

14. M. D. Brand et al., *Die Frau in der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1939, p. xxiii (introduction by M. Sering).

15. O. Brock, 'Landwirtschaftlicher Arbeitseinsatz und Landflucht in Ostpreussen', *BüL*, vol. 27, 1942, p. 219. In a comparison of costs, Brock notes that the burden of wages was much heavier for smaller farms than for the estates. Similar reflections on the unequal distribution of the total wages for various kinds of farm in Saxony are to be found in H. Bindseil, 'Die Landarbeiterfrage unter dem Gesichtspunkt des landwirtschaftlichen Arbeitseinsatzes in Sachsen (Freistaat)', Dissertation, Leipzig, 1937.

16. R. Jäckel, 'Die faschistische Politik gegenüber der werktätigen Landbevölkerung in Deutschland', Dissertation, Berlin, 1979, p. 12.

17. DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 241.

18. *Ibid.*

19. See the proposal by v.d. Goltz, the Pomeranian Treuhänder der Arbeit, passed on by Göring to the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture, 19 October 1933. After a wide-ranging debate between the various decision-making bodies, it was decided to leave it up to provincial offices to decide whether or not to introduce experimental forms of work involving fewer hours: DZAM, Rep. 87B, vols. 43 and 46.

20. Cf. correspondence in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 46.

21. Rgbl., 1933, I, pp. 651-3. The preparatory cabinet-level discussions are in BA, R 43 I, vol. 1459.

22. The programme made provisions for funds of RM750 million in four years for works to be organised by the *Arbeitsdienst*: BA, R 2, vol. 18240.

23. BA, R 43, vol. 23.

24. Memo presented at the end of October 1933 in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 43.

25. See the severe warnings from the Ministry of Labour to the DAF to change their attitude, 20 December 1933 and 16 March 1934, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 241.

26. The appeal is published in *VB*, 4 August 1933. A circular from the Reichsbauernführer's Verwaltungsamt was similar in tone: BA, R I, vol. 2063.

27. See the letter from the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Finances, 28 March 1934, in BA, R 2, vol. 18241.

28. The documents for this project are in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 46.

29. The subject of the small settlement plots in industrial areas is not part of the present study. It was, however, of great importance both from the point of view of social control and for food supplies, since the more than seven million suburban gardens included in the statistics for 1939 undoubtedly provided a considerable quantity of foodstuffs for family consumption and the market.

30. Cf. the minutes from the cabinet meeting of 31 May 1934, in DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 43.

31. Cf. L. Zumpe, 'Die Entwicklung der Arbeitslosigkeit in Berlin 1932 bis 1935', *JWG Sonderheft 1986*, pp. 194ff.

32. Cf. K. Hildebrandt, *Nationalsozialismus und Landarbeiterschaft*, Munich, 1930, as well as the articles in *NS Landpost*, 13 September and 3 December 1931.

33. Rgbl., 1934, I, 381, with the relative decrees of 17 May and 30 August 1934.

34. Rgbl., 1935, I, p. 310.

35. The Labour Book was introduced with a law of 26 February 1935.
36. On the legislation, see W. Tornow, *Chronik der Agrarpolitik und Agrarwirtschaft des Deutschen Reiches*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1972, pp. 66ff.; G. Stierling, *Die Landflucht und der Einsatz von Stadtjugend in der Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1937, pp. 86ff.
37. On anti-urban movements and ideologies, see K. Bergmann, *Agrarromantik und Großstadtfeindschaft*, Meisenheim a.G., 1970; A. Lees, 'Critics of Urban Society in Germany 1854-1914', *JHI*, vol. 40, 1979.
38. On the *Artamanen* movement, see the fundamental study by M. H. Kater, 'Die Artamanen: Völkische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik', *HZ*, vol. 23, 1971. Hagiographic and uncritical is the recent book by P. Schmitz, *Die Artamanen: Landarbeit und Siedlung bündischer Jugend in Deutschland*, Bad Neustadt, 1985.
39. Cf. W. Schlicker, 'Die Artamanen: Eine Frühform des Arbeitsdienstes und Kaderzelle des Faschismus auf dem Lande', in *ZfG*, vol. 18, 1970, pp. 73f.
40. According to an RKTU survey, women's working hours were 10 per cent more than men's, with the same physical demands: H. Sudau, *Untersuchung über die Arbeitswirtschaft bäuerlicher Betriebe*, Berlin, 1938. See also the essay by M. D. Brand, 'Die Frau in der Landwirtschaft Süddeutschlands', in Brand et al., *Die Frau*.
41. Cf. T. Mason, 'Zur Lage der Frauen in Deutschland 1930 bis 1940', in *Gesellschaft: Beiträge zur Marxschen Theorie*, vol. 6, Frankfurt, 1976, pp. 169ff.
42. Cf. S. Jacobeit, 'Zum Alltag der Bäuerinnen in Klein- und Mittelbetrieben während der Zeit des deutschen Faschismus', *JWG*, 1982, pp. 7-29; J. Stephenson, 'Women's Labor Service in Nazi Germany', *CEH*, vol. 15, 1982, pp. 241-65; and D. Winkler, *Frauarbeit im 'Dritten Reich'*, Hamburg, 1977, pp. 52ff. More recently see C. Lovin, 'Farm Women in the Third Reich', *Agricultural History*, vol. 60, 1986, pp. 105-23. On the failure of the decrees intended to reinforce women's labour, see the report by the Reichsamt für Agrarpolitik of 8 July 1938. It conceded that, despite all the incentives offered to young women, they preferred to look for work in the cities: BA, NS 22, vol. 851.
43. On the various forms of voluntary work, see Stierling, *Landflucht, passim*; F. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor in Germany*, Princeton, 1955 pp. 248ff., 326ff.
44. Stierling was one of the heads of the Hitler Jugend, responsible for finding voluntary workers. Although he supplied different figures, he still had to admit that after the first two years the scheme was smaller and there had been a drastic fall in the numbers of participants in the various forms of voluntary work.
45. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor*, p. 321.
46. Cf. for example the highly rhetorical articles published in *Das deutsche Willen*, 5 December 1933 and 30 January 1934. From a different perspective, a more favourable judgment on the *Landdienst* is to be found in G. Rempel, *Hitler's Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS*, Chapel Hill-London, 1989, pp. 107-40. The author stresses above all the close relationships between *Landdienst*, Hitler Jugend and the SS. The latter saw the voluntary forms of land work as an important recruitment source for the new élite.
47. Stierling, *Landflucht*, p. 74f. According to a *Berliner Tageblatt* survey, the percentage of young people who had decided to take up work definitively as agricultural workers was as low as 2-3 per cent of volunteers, or 5 per cent in a few exceptional cases: 'Jugend auf dem Weg zum Land', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 4 October 1936.
48. Cf. the Pomeranian police report of May 1935, quoted in R. Thévoz et al. (eds.) *Pommern 1934/35*, Cologne-Berlin, 1974, vol. 2, p. 168.
49. Letter of 27 February, in BA, R 46 II, vol. 313. See the letter from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Prussian Ministry of Agriculture of 24 May 1935, describing how firms avoided the restrictive measures: DZAM, Rep. 87B, vol. 270.
50. Jatzlauk, 'Untersuchungen', p. 100.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
52. The tables in summary form, published in Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor*, pp.

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Region	Net wages per hour for semi-skilled workers (RM)	
	Building workers	Farm workers
Westphalia	50-72	36-40
Württemberg	50-74	33-6
Silesia	50-70	34
Saxony	55-73	35
Hesse	53-75	35-49.5
Schleswig	67-91	40-3

Source: Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor*, p. 238.

245f., are particularly significant.

53. BA, R 43 II, vol. 202a.

54. In addition to Bindseil, 'Landarbeiterfrage', and Brock, 'Landwirtschaftlicher Arbeitseinsatz', see F. V. Zellermann, 'Landmaschinen gegen Landflucht', Dissertation, Berlin, 1939, and A. Schönberg, 'Die Arbeitsverfassung', in K. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1939.

55. 'Farmers must consider their employees as assistants bound to them by fate and therefore must offer them the chance of developing an independent personality': Middelman, 'Vom Landarbeiter zum Bauern', *LB Schleswig-Holstein*, 22 February 1936.

56. 'Leistungen verlangen Anerkennung und Förderung', *WPD*, 11 December 1937.

57. See the appeal, 'Die Frau im Kampf gegen die Landflucht' *VB*, 17 May 1935.

58. The *Heuerling* system, which was typical of north-west Germany, consisted in giving wage earners a plot of land of their own. It was considered an excellent solution, equally far from Marxist and liberal notions. The best way of responding to the 'deutsches Fühlen und Denken', it would provide the wage earner with the opportunity of learning how to run a holding.

59. A speech given by the Minister at Sarnow, 26 October 1936, and quoted in the *Berliner Tageblatt* the following day.

60. Cf. his article in the *Wochenblatt LBF Kurmark*, 9 February 1935. But Reinke was in complete agreement with those who gave priority to education: cf. his article, 'Der Arbeitseinsatz in der Landwirtschaft', *VB*, 15 January 1936.

61. Bindseil, 'Landarbeiterfrage', pp. 80f.

62. Rheden to Darré, 10 November 1937, in BA, NS 22, vol. 851.

63. Grohé to Darré, 24 November 1937, *ibid.*

64. For an idea of the fundamental conflict between these two organisations at regional level, see F. Wiesemann, 'Arbeitskonflikte in der Landwirtschaft während der NS-Zeit in Bayern', *VZG*, vol. 25, 977, pp. 573-90.

65. R. Berndt (ed.), *Lage und Kampf des Landarbeiter im ostelbischen Preußen*, Berlin-Vaduz, 1985, p. LXXI.

66. See the mild recommendations in an RDI circular of 5 March 1934. A year later another circular, using almost exactly the same words, also attempted to encourage moves to implement existing legislation: GHH-HA, vol. 400101220, and FAH, IV E, vol. 217, respectively. In some local situations, industrialists under pressure from both the RNS and the DAF made more concrete concessions. For example, in Thuringia workers were given the chance to go to the country to help with urgent farm work without losing their wage, job or insurance contributions: BA, R 16 I, vol. 2060. See also a similar example in Magdeburg in summer 1937, cited in Berndt, *Lage und Kampf*, pp. 234f.

67. One authoritative economic review took up a clear position on this issue: *Der deutsche Unternehmer*, 15 June 1935.

68. The figure is given by Backe in a report to the Chancellery on 6 April 1938, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 213.
69. Schönberg, 'Die Arbeitsverfassung', in Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung*, p. 1324.
70. *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1939/40, p. 108.
71. See, for example, T. Mason, *Arbeiterklasse und Volksgemeinschaft*, Opladen, 1975, pp. 284f., 306, 318ff., 336ff., 349, 366ff., 615ff., 618f.
72. Cf. the reports for the first half of 1935 in BA, R 16 I, vol. 2031.
73. Darré, *Aufbruch*, pp. 95f.
74. Darré to Göring, 2 December 1937, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 213.
75. Mason, *Arbeiterklasse*, pp. 198ff. On the other hand, the problem of the shortage of rural manpower was one of the main sources of anxiety for farmers and further contributed to jill-feeling. Police and social democratic emigration sources agree on several points: cf. police reports for Lower Saxony in K. Mlynek (ed.), *Gestapo Hannover meldet*, Hildesheim, 1986, pp. 454, 496, 487 and *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands 1934-1940*, Frankfurt, 1980, vol. 3, pp. 387ff., vol. 4, pp. 1486ff.
76. In DZAP, 61 Re 1, vol. 83; NS 22, vol. 851; and DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 387, respectively. But see also the earlier appeal, signed by Darré and published by all press organs on 14 March 1935 (DZAP, 25.01, vol. 2124), or the appeal by the Bavarian Ministerpräsident, Siebert, on 20 May 1936, in DZAP, 61 Re 1, vol. 4072.
77. Cf. Darré, *Aufbruch*, pp. 116ff.
78. Göring's decree of 24 October 1936, in DZAP, 25.01, vol. 2125.
79. Winkler, *Frauernarbeit*, p. 58.
80. DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 387.
81. Figures supplied by Siemer, in K. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung*, pp. 356f. According to other contemporary sources, however, the number of new dwellings was in the order of 50,000 in 1939: P. Petersen, *Der Bauer und die sozialen Fragen der Zeit*, Berlin, 1940, p. 75.
82. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor*, p. 282.
83. Decree of 7 July 1933, in BA, R 2, vol. 18249.
84. Cf. the statement published by the *Berliner Tageblatt*, 12 April 1935.
85. Mason, *Arbeiterklasse*, pp. 230f.
86. BA, R 43 II, vol. 213.
87. BA, R 2, vol. 18732.
88. Wunderlich, *Farm and Labor*, p. 183.
89. Report, 27 February 1939, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 195.
90. Letter of 11 May 1938 and related correspondence, in BA, R 2, vol. 18197.
91. In some cases, such as Thuringia (see note 66), more realistic, concrete measures were adopted.
92. According to a Treuhänder der Arbeit report of 10 August 1938, by employing Polish workers many farmers were able to avoid employing German workers: cf. Mason, *Arbeiterklasse*, pp. 660f. B. Mantelli (Turin) and J. Lehmann (Rostock) are currently working on the subject of Italian immigrants.
93. A. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party*, Abbotsbrook, 1985, p. 120.
94. Cf. J. Lehmann, 'Ausländerberbeschäftigung: Ja und Nein?' in *Fremdarbeiterpolitik des Imperialismus*, vol. 11, pp. 39-45. See the same author's still unpublished Habilitation thesis: 'Ausländerbeschäftigung und Fremdarbeiterpolitik des faschistischen deutschen Imperialismus 1933 bis 1939', Dissertation B, Rostock, 1985.
95. Hessian Gauleiter, Sprenger, to Hess, 27 February 1939, BA, R 43 II, vol. 195.
96. O. Neber, 'Wie verträgt sich die Mechanisierung der Landwirtschaft mit der heutigen Bauernpolitik?', Dissertation, Heidelberg, 1937. See also Eichweber, 'Zur Frage der Reagrarisierung', pp. 25ff., and Zellermann, 'Landmaschinen', pp. 50f.

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97. 'Technik und Landwirtschaft', *ZdR*, 27 April 1937.

98. W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 210.

99. R. Melzer, 'Studien zur Agrarpolitik der faschistischen deutschen Imperialisten', Dissertation, Rostock, 1966, p. 21.

The Four-Year Plan and the Failure of the 'Peasant Utopia'

Introduced in late autumn 1936, the Four-Year Plan was an important turning point in the history of the Third Reich. In the specific case of agrarian policy, it led to two important developments: firstly, as the goal of making war became increasingly clear, the regime applied greater pressure on farmers to step up production; and secondly, the advent of new forms of decision making, subordinate to the *Generalbevollmächtigter* of the Four-Year Plan, further contributed to Darré's political decline.¹ The combined effect of these two phenomena marked the end of the political project, cherished by Darré and many others in the RNS, for a return to a central political, economic and cultural role for the *Bauerntum*.

It is not easy to ascertain exactly when the Reichsbauernführer, who had been the unchallenged leader of an organisation counting millions of members, began to lose power. In fact, Darré's political death was long and slow, but the appointment of Herbert Backe as head of the agriculture section of the Four-Year Plan must certainly have been a decisive factor. From that moment on, Darré's deputy and trusty *alter ego*² effectively became a second Minister with wide powers of intervention, given that he already held top positions both in the Ministry and in the RNS. This meant that a considerable part of legislation concerning increases in agricultural production now passed through the decision-making centres of the Four-Year Plan, and not the Ministry.

In her recent book,³ A. Bramwell claims that Darré's political defeat was basically due to the fact that he was not a true National Socialist and that there were radical differences of ideological approach between him and Backe. In actual fact, the explanation for the conflicts in which Darré and the RNS became embroiled and the periodic criticisms made against them would seem to me to lie in the polycentric, and at times chaotic, nature of the policy-making processes in the regime.⁴ Thus Darré was criticised, for example, by the Gauleiters or by Ley – as we saw in the previous chapters – because of his political decisions or because of conflicting

interests, and not because, as a non-National Socialist, he was considered as a kind of 'alien body' within the regime. Moreover, to contrast Darré with Backe by describing the former as 'an archetypical National Socialist' – as A. Bramwell has done⁵ – would require a precise definition of such an archetype. In light of the literature on the subject, this would appear to be an extremely arduous task given that so many deep differences have been found among leading exponents of the regime. On comparing the ideologico-political writings of Darré and Backe, the impression one gets is more of a difference of emphasis than of radical divergences. Whereas Darré was greatly interested in selecting a new peasant 'nobility', able to take up again the central role that the peasants had once had in German history,⁶ Backe placed the accent more on economic matters. Assuming that the world market would one day no longer be the natural outlet for economic activity, he postulated the absolute need to create a regional economic system, a *Großraumwirtschaft*, based on German needs.⁷

Given the nature of the decision-making processes in the Third Reich, the differences in personality between the two men should also be borne in mind. Darré, who was proud, upright and anything but servile, never became part of the select circle of advisers-cum-courtesans whom Hitler liked to have round him, and who had plenty of opportunities to influence decisions. Neither did Darré wish or know how to get on with influential lobbies. Even his friendship with Himmler, based on a common interest in the racial question, turned out to be superficial and short-lived, given that they fell out over their first difference of opinion.⁸ Isolated within the National Socialist leadership, the Reichsbauernführer was considered an abstract theoretician obsessed by his pet ideas on *Blut und Boden*.⁹ As Göring was later to declare in the war trials, 'Darré was too much of a mystic, and his ideas were not practical enough. But Backe was practical.'¹⁰ Backe's reputation, then, as we have just seen, was that of a very reliable technician who had trained in economics, and he was exactly the kind of person needed to increase domestic agricultural output, by keeping clear of all kinds of 'corporative' fetters.

Eventually Darré's political star waned even further because of the essentially disappointing outcome of the 'battle for production', which he had set in motion in 1934. These results were seen as the natural consequence of Darré's too 'sectoral' and over-protective attitude towards the peasant masses whom he had brought together in the RNS.¹¹

Backe's appointment, in October 1936, to the managerial com-

mittee of the Four-Year Plan, announced a month earlier during the party's annual congress in Nuremberg, came as a surprise to Darré. He had just enthusiastically welcomed Hitler's decision to create an almost military leadership apparatus for the economy, (rightly) considering it a decisive break with the free-market system personified by Schacht.¹² Darré had actually proposed Meinberg, his ambitious but innocuous RNS deputy, for the appointment, and so he reacted angrily to the choice of Backe, whose technical and political capabilities he knew too well. But Darré's objections¹³ were to no avail, as were his subsequent frequent complaints that he did not have enough executive power, whereas his own State Secretary, on the basis of his position in the Four-Year Plan, assumed the right to act independently.¹⁴ There was a highly significant exchange of letters between Darré and Göring in the second half of October 1936. Göring replied to the Minister, who had offered the full collaboration of the RNS for the newly created machinery for the Four-Year Plan, by lavishing praise on Backe for his organisational and technical capabilities. As to the offer of collaboration, he replied in evasive tones, expressing rather unflattering opinions, however, about Meinberg and Reischle, another of the Reichsbauernführer's assistants.¹⁵ The political explanation demanded by the Minister was never given, partly because Göring cleverly exploited the vague nature of the areas of competence of his office to extend them further.¹⁶ For his part, Hitler showed no interest whatsoever in settling this kind of controversy. From that moment on, therefore, there were two independent policies and decisional centres, which, when not in open conflict, followed independent lines.¹⁷ Even Darré's resignation, which had been made to force the issue, was not accepted. According to the heads of the Third Reich, it was not the right moment for the Führer to admit publicly to a lack of confidence in his Minister. It might have raised doubts among public opinion as to the validity of the *Führerprinzip* – the basis of the National Socialist hierarchy.¹⁸ Moreover, I would think another fairly plausible reason for rejecting Darré's resignation was that he still had a considerable following among the peasants. His sudden disappearance from the political scene might have been seen as another blow against agriculture, a sector which was already showing signs of crisis and disaffection – as we shall see in the following pages. Darré only finally resigned in May 1942, officially for health reasons. But, by then, the affair was only of secondary importance to events on the war front. By way of an epigraph for Darré's definitive disappearance from politics, we can quote the sneering diary entry made by

Goebbels, who had never been a friend: 'Darré has so exhausted the catchphrase *Blut und Boden* that not even a dog would give credit to it today.'¹⁹

The outcome of the embarrassing stalemate was that Darré's powers became increasingly circumscribed, being limited to a formality for the outside world. He must have got very little satisfaction, therefore, when the law abolishing *Fideikomnisse* was finally promulgated in July 1938. And in fact this belated victory for Darré's anti-Junker ideology did not reflect – as we have seen – a great loss in the Junkers' economic and social position before 1945. In any case, he was kept in the dark about all the most important questions, such as plans concerning the war and the occupation of Slav territories, whereas Backe had actually risen to power thanks to his special knowledge of Russian agriculture and the projects he had drafted to exploit fully its potential, which had been considerably overestimated.²⁰ It was thus Backe who had full powers to direct the policy of brutally exploiting the food and agricultural resources in occupied territories and the ambitious Germanisation plans, involving massive movements of people.²¹

A significant example of the leadership's complete loss of confidence in Darré is provided by the cancellation of the traditional harvest festival in November 1938, apparently on grounds of a serious outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. On 15 November Darré – who was very aware of the importance of symbolic gestures – warmly invited Hitler to give some kind of concrete acknowledgement of farmers' efforts in the battle for production. The Minister's request was ignored, and the harvest festival was never held again, even though the foot-and-mouth epidemic had ended.²² The many increasingly harsh memos that Darré sent to Hitler, criticising the whole economic policy of the regime for favouring industry, ended up collecting dust: perhaps it could be argued that at this point Darré was already preparing 'to call himself out', using the same arguments that he often repeated in 1945 when he continually passed the buck.²³

Backe's approach fitted in very well both with the SS ideas for the creation of a *Herrenvolk* to dominate the whole continent, and with the views expressed by Hitler in a memo for the setting-up of the Four-Year Plan. The Führer began by describing the priority need to leave behind economic logic based on calculations of profitability and compatibility, so as to arrive at the triumph of voluntarism: the will was to ensure an increase in the arms build-up and freedom from the limits imposed by the shortage of raw materials. As far as food requirements were concerned, Hitler

firmly rejected the idea that domestic production could be increased enough to meet needs. The only solution was to extend the living-space. He thus referred back directly to the theories expressed in *Mein Kampf*.²⁴ A year later, during a military summit well known above all for the protocol made by Colonel Hoßbach, considered a decisive source about the German preparation for war, Hitler stressed one more time: 'As regards victualling the problem of self-sufficiency cannot be solved.' He argued that the improvement in standards of living would lead to a remarkable increase in food needs. He thought it would be impossible to enlarge home production enough to face such a big change. So Hitler believed the country was already on the brink of a food catastrophe and required large food imports.²⁵ Hitler's firm stance, whose main target was Schacht and the advocates of keeping the German economy within a capitalist logic, ended up destroying Darré's utopia of reaching a considerable degree of autarky, and thus devalued the peasants' contribution to the German productive effort.²⁶ In April 1939, in an interview with a journalist of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Darré reiterated the fundamental difference between the *Blut und Boden* ideology (which he considered an indispensable element in the regime's agrarian policy) and the *Wirtschaftsexpansionismus*, with which he could not possibly identify.²⁷

The Führer's memo for the Four-Year Plan can thus be seen as the moment when Darré's policies were authoritatively shelved for good.²⁸ But pending military expansion abroad and to make it possible, more than ever before the regime's agrarian policy had to place the accent on stepping up output. Symptomatic of this change was the shift of emphasis in propaganda to imperative militaristic tones, which stressed the peasants' duties towards the German people. According to one economic journal, a change had to be made from the traditional *Agrarpolitik*, primarily concerned with protecting producers' interests and well-being (*Wohlbefinden*), to a policy whose main purpose was to maximise output, the *Ernährungspolitik*.²⁹ At the same time of the powerful appeal for greater efforts in stepping up production, made from the *Reichsbauerntag* tribune in Goslar in November 1937, Göring had (threateningly) reminded farmers that they were in no position to complain, given the difference between their guaranteed incomes and the economic precariousness of industrial workers.³⁰ An authoritative comment from the new Price Commissioner, Wagner, was along similar lines: this was no time for farmers' to harp on with their usual complaints. They were called upon to fulfil their duty towards the nation and to leave aside their sectoral claims and the question

of profitability.³¹ Backe himself publicly admitted that the limits had been reached in the traditional system of farm profitability: from now on, claimed the head of the agriculture section of the Four-Year Plan, every indispensable increase in output would mean sacrifices by producers.³² There was also a clear change in tone concerning the control and (indirect) influence over consumption to help alleviate the serious food deficit.³³

Right from the start, the notion of idealistic sacrifice was an intrinsic part of the *Blut und Boden* ideology, which rejected all forms of economic logic. Shortly after being appointed Minister, Darré declared: 'A farmer must always consider his activity as a duty towards his family and his people, and never simply an economic venture from which he can earn money.'³⁴ Furthermore, the choice of the name of the corporation, the Reichsnährstand, placed the accent on 'food' rather than – let us say – 'farmers'. But after 1936/37 the insistence on this theme suggests that there was to be a real turn of the screw. With the beginning of the Four-Year Plan the intrinsic ambivalence, present from the outset in the organisation of German agriculture, definitively disappeared: the mixture of self-management and authoritarianism was now clearly replaced by state dirigisme which increasingly responded to the growing military needs. But this dirigisme could not completely ignore the effective productive capacity and the consensus of the rural population.

An initial series of measures, which were intended to highlight as much as possible agriculture's subordination to military requirement, concerned the rationalisation of land distribution: the *Umlegung* of 26 June 1936 gave to the state, in this case the Ministry of Agriculture, the power to exchange or expropriate property to bring together in the most rational way possible scattered or disparate productive units, a phenomenon typically found in central and western Germany. It is estimated that the overall land subject to such mergers came to as much as 6 million hectares.³⁵ The measure provided the opportunity for a radical reorganisation of the German countryside.³⁶ A second legislative provision, which was even more radical, made it obligatory for all farmers to plan their output according to state directives and bearing in mind the overall interests of the nation. In the event of non-fulfilment, the state could intervene with the forms of management run by commissioners or even force the cession of the farm to a more willing and receptive farmer.³⁷ But Darré made it clear that this extreme punitive measure was to be used only as a psychological deterrent and should never actually be applied.³⁸

Lastly, a decree of January 1937 brought back an old Bundesrat measure which had been issued as far back as March 1918. This measure required that all sales of land over 2 hectares be subject to the prior consent of the Ministry of Agriculture, which in the new version would first seek the advice of local RNS offices. The state authorities could thus prevent transactions possibly harmful to the common interest.³⁹ This was obviously a legislative package of considerable importance which directly affected the notion of private property and forcefully imposed priorities in the overall national interest. But partly because of the subsequent outbreak of world war, these programmes, whose implementation would have been a long-term business, ended up being shelved. According to official statistics, in the years 1937–8 the *Umlegung* involved only 563 farms and a total of 230,392 hectares. The effective increase in farmland was only 15,328 hectares, whereas 7,056 hectares were made available for settlements.⁴⁰ It is more difficult to calculate the effect in terms of output. The RNS heads themselves admitted that at this rate it would take 60–70 years to reach their goal.⁴¹ The figures relative to the enactment of this law also reveal that some of the land previously cultivated had been used to build up a road network with military purposes in mind.

But the serious imbalances in agriculture could simply not be 'resolved' through punitive measures or dirigisme, which risked further stirring up ill-feeling among the rural population, resentful of the pressure from the *Marktordnung* and other restrictive measures on freedom of enterprise, as well as the shortage of manpower and modern machines. Therefore more concrete material incentives had also to be used. After a series of top-level and interministerial meetings, held in the early months of 1937, to examine the food situation and to propose possible improvements, Göring took this delicate matter in hand. In a much-publicised radio speech of 24 March,⁴² he announced a number of measures concerning production. Firstly, it was decided to set aside funds (RM200 million for the first instalment) for land-reclamation and improvement works; secondly, the price of fertilisers was considerably lowered (–30 per cent for nitrates and –25 per cent for potassiums, the former being backdated to 1 January),⁴³ and the cost of their rail transport was also reduced. The aim of these measures was to cut the overall expenditure on production and to increase farmers' net incomes. Likewise Göring announced an increase in producer prices for rye (by RM20 per tonne), and for potatoes and potato flakes for feeding-stuffs (by 17–20 pfennigs per kilo of starch).

These proposals stemmed from a report presented by Professor Ernst Woermann, Director of the Institute of Agronomy at the University of Halle, and later adviser to the MWT in the war years. Drafted in 1937, the report emphasised the priority need to close the deficit in the animal feed sector, sending more noble cereals, such as rye, for human consumption.⁴⁴ Similarly, other contributions to the debate which took place in the last years of the pre-war period pointed out that it was essential to reduce the pig herd, which, given the lack of feeding-stuffs, took up potential food for human consumption.⁴⁵

The head of the Four-Year Plan also announced vague low-rate credit facilities and a rural housing plan to induce land workers to stay in the country, and to stop the flood of young workers into industry. Finally, the state set up a systematic farm census, by means of the so-called *Hofkarte*, which was to be filled in by the RNS, and was to give a clear picture of each agricultural productive unit.

Almost a year later, the Price Commissioner, Wagner, issued a decree reducing by 20–30 per cent the price of the main agricultural machines, and halving retail profit margins, in an attempt further to mechanise the sector. The decree offered particularly favourable terms for the purchase of small machines. It also made provisions for severe sanctions which could even mean the temporary or permanent closure of firms which had ignored the new price lists. To grasp the relative ineffectiveness of this decree, it should be remembered that it was only a special temporary measure, given that the reductions applied for only six months.⁴⁶ In addition to a number of administrative measures intended to improve the practical working of the *Marktordnung*,⁴⁷ a national output competition, organised by the RNS, was launched in grand style. Darré also set up a group of honorary agronomy advisers, whose task was to check productivity on all peasant holdings and to advise and encourage farmers to introduce improvements where necessary. In an increasingly obsessive race to maximise output, the standard to be reached was set by the best farms in each district.⁴⁸ The position of tenant farmers was also improved. Their lease could be extended indefinitely, if the administrative bodies considered it in the interests of productivity.⁴⁹

Given the structural imbalances between agriculture and industry, however, it soon became clear that the margins for cutting production costs were very limited. The figures for investments (fertilisers and machinery) certainly show a considerable effort to step up production, and its absolute value did increase, but viewed

from the standpoint of the needs and hopes of the National Socialist leadership, these improvements were nowhere near enough (Table 11.1). Significantly, investments in agriculture fluctuated, whereas those in industrial sectors rose steadily and rapidly (Table 11.2).

In terms of net content, the use of fertilisers also increased yearly, but the price reductions made in 1938 did not bring immediate benefits. With the approach of war, basic chemical products went to military production, causing a complete collapse in the use of chemical fertilisers (Table 11.3).⁵⁰

Capital in agriculture grew in absolute terms (at constant 1913 prices) from RM50.33 billion in 1933 to RM54.34 billion in 1939. But in relative terms it decreased, although not greatly, compared to the overall capital in the economy: it fell from 19.57 per cent in the first year of the regime to 18.05 per cent in 1939.⁵¹ A clear indication of the inadequacy of the National Socialist regime's measures to encourage modernisation comes from the figures for productivity per unit of land (Table 11.4). These figures show a discontinuous trend, with slight improvement in productivity for certain cereals (wheat and barley) and for beet, but only towards the end of the decade. The figures show that, compared to 1928, there was no steady rise in productivity in the main agricultural sectors despite the – at least apparently – profuse commitment of the regime. This far from brilliant trend is confirmed by other official data, comparing productivity over a longer period (Table 11.5).

The crucial problem of this latter phase of National Socialist agrarian policy in the pre-war years, however, was prices. As we shall see more clearly in the following pages, there was a widespread opinion among experts (but not only those on the side of farmers) that the consumer price trend continued to harm agriculture, especially as far as production costs were concerned. Cries of alarm went up after surveys carried out by authoritative bodies like the Statistisches Reichsamt and the Institut für Konjunkturforschung⁵² were given wide coverage by the press. The much-feared price scissors which increasingly cut farmers' profits had not been closed. On the contrary, they tended to open up even further, and this was mainly because of the gap between agriculture, where prices were strictly controlled, and industry, where they still followed the rules of the market. The largely propaganda use of this information took on an aspect all of its own, irrespective of the available statistics, which lead me to deduce that the scissors did not actually open up further but, if anything, would seem to have tended to close slowly. We can only surmise, however, given the

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Table 11.1. Agricultural output and investments 1928–1938 (RM million at 1913 prices)

Year	Net output	Investments		
		Fertilisers	Machinery	Rents
1928	10,975	947	756	919
1933	12,006	813	785	943
1934	12,330	923	866	946
1935	11,878	1,108	876	949
1936	11,882	1,066	886	952
1937	12,334	1,300	909	956
1938	12,712	1,472	988	961

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 320.

Table 11.2. Investments 1928–1939 (RM million at 1913 prices)

Year	Agriculture	Industry	
		Producer goods	Consumer goods
1928	920	1,717	898
1934	-470	700	360
1935	140	1,221	415
1936	1,610	1,637	522
1937	1,500	2,208	635
1938	1,390	2,952	739
1939	800	3,596	836

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 320.

Table 11.3. Use of fertilisers in net contents and their cost 1927–1939

Year	Fertilisers			Cost
	Potassiums	Phosphates	Nitrates	
1927	705	512	391	676
1933	719	462	383	545
1934	820	545	427	601
1935	949	636	491	700
1936	1,156	606	570	674
1937	1,256	690	634	697
1938	1,256	762	718	774
1939	1,216	454	704	645

Source: A. Hanau and R. Plate, *Die deutsche landwirtschaftliche Preis- und Marktpolitik im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1974, p. 21.

Table 11.4. Productivity index for main crops 1933–1939

Year	Productivity index per hectare (1928 = 100)				
	Wheat	Rye	Barley	Potatoes	Beet
1933	134.1	97.6	104.3	96.3	67.0
1934	127.2	96.9	107.3	95.9	78.4
1935	126.6	98.3	105.7	97.2	82.2
1937	118.0	89.7	112.8	101.3	100.2
1938	121.2	92.0	107.7	101.5	110.6
1939	121.8	91.1	109.8	99.5	110.8

Source: W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum der deutschen Wirtschaft seit der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 247.

Table 11.5. Yields of main crops 1910 and 1939 (quintals per hectare)

Crop	Yield	
	1910	1939
Rye	19.0	19.2
Wheat	17.0	22.7
Barley	18.0	21.7
Potatoes	132.0	128.7
Beet	281.0	329.4

Source: *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1939, p. 101.

extremely aggregate nature of the data and the difficulties involved in accounting for all the factors (interests, etc.) which affected production costs.

But on examining the general index for agriculture producer prices (Table 11.6), we note: firstly, that the slight recovery in the early 1930s did not bring prices anything like near the average 1924–9 price levels; and secondly, that a gap existed between the livestock sector and the arable sector (a gap which was to grow considerably compared to the Republican years).

Table 11.7 concerns the question of the price scissors. By comparing the price indices for agricultural products, this time per farm year, with business costs and the costs of the indispensable means of production, it can be deduced that, although there was no dramatic re-opening of the scissors, they definitely persisted. In other words, the slight but constant increase in farmers' incomes was not enough to close the gap and improve their overall economic situation.

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Table 11.6. Price index at constant prices 1929–1938

Year	Price index (1913 = 100)			
	General	Crops	Meat	Meat derivatives
1929	130.7	127.5	128.4	137.9
1933	83.3	96.8	64.1	96.7
1934	88.8	105.7	70.6	101.1
1935	96.5	114.7	80.0	105.5
1936	101.2	116.8	84.6	111.2
1937	101.5	119.7	83.6	124.4
1938	104.2	123.8	84.8	114.7

Source: M. Steiner, *Die Agrarpolitik in der Schweiz und in Deutschland von 1933 bis 1939*, Breitenbach, 1953, pp. 78, 91.

Table 11.7. Prices and business costs 1927–1938

Year	Index of prices and business costs (1909–13 = 100)		
	Agricultural products	Running costs	Means of production
1927/28	130	144	—
1933/34	84	117	112
1934/35	94	117	111
1935/36	102	121	111
1936/37	101	124	112
1937/38	102	129	113

Source: M. Steiner, *Die Agrarpolitik in der Schweiz und in Deutschland von 1933 bis 1939*, Breitenbach, 1953, p. 82.

The dramatic situation of the crisis years had undoubtedly come to an end, but it cannot be said that farmers now enjoyed exorbitantly good levels of income, especially compared to other strata of society. Other figures, comparing agricultural price trends at the various stages of production and marketing, show that, compared to 1928, at the outbreak of war differences between prices at the various stages had been greatly reduced thanks to the *Marktordnung* policy. Thus even the proposal put forward by many in the last, most heated phase of the debate, to which we will now dedicate our attention, had little chance of being accepted. It was no longer possible to pass the relentless price rises on to retail traders whose margins had already been largely eaten way.

Faced with the gravity of the situation and growing discontent, even the RNS had to abandon its optimistic façade and admit that

there was an urgent need for drastic action. Backe, in particular, took it for granted that a reduction in production costs was out of the question, given the absence of price regulations in the industrial sector. He argued that only a massive increase in prices would induce farmers to step up output significantly. Together with other writers of memos and proposals at that time, he stressed the particular need to help the livestock and dairy sectors which, until then, had been clearly handicapped by price trends. Large increases in butter and milk prices were therefore demanded.⁵³

The proposals put forward by the heads of National Socialist agrarian policy met with strong resistance. A long memo by an unknown author, dated 24 February 1939, whose purpose was to confute the arguments of the head of the sector in the Four-Year Plan, rejected his pessimistic prognosis, referring to the more recent reports by the *Regierungspräsidenten* which were more optimistic in outlook. According to the writer, 'the question of farm wages was the only problem which could become dangerous for agriculture'. In his opinion, the problems of the sector would be solved not through price increases but through a rationalisation of production costs and of the use of what little manpower was available. The writer of the report then went on to ask for concrete measures: a further reduction in the cost of machinery; a cut in the heavy taxes paid to the bureaucratic-corporative monster – the RNS; the introduction of lower tax rates for small incomes; and improvements to the road network to be carried out on behalf of the state by the offices of the Four-Year Plan.⁵⁴

The hardest opposition to the demands made by the sector came from those leaders, like Hess, who realised just how delicate the question of price increases was in view of mobilisation for war, and from Hitler himself, anxious to avoid any further spread of ill-feeling among the population. In a detailed report, dated 21 May, the *Führer's Stellvertreter* strongly rejected price increases, considering them inopportune: according to him, the whole party was decidedly hostile. Such increases might, in fact, lead to a considerable loss of confidence in the regime. Hess reiterated the need to cut retail profit margins and tax burdens as far as possible. He also suggested off-loading part of the cost on to industry.⁵⁵ As for Hitler, as early as 1934 he had already brusquely refused Darré's requests for better treatment for farmers' through price increases for bread: increases were completely out of the question.⁵⁶

Furthermore, in the countryside, the peasants, disappointed by the great hopes raised through years of demagogic promises, were in an extremely black mood, as is shown by the clear drop in the

number of peasants joining the NSDAP. In 1933 they accounted for 13.2 per cent of new members, but by 1937 this share had fallen to 8 per cent.⁵⁷ Despite the difficulties involved in assessing the degree of consensus, given the biased nature of the sources, many scattered elements do seem to back Kershaw's conclusions in his study on Bavaria: 'there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the initial high hopes of the regime among the peasantry were already giving way to a more pessimistic evaluation of the likely benefits for farmers in the Third Reich'.⁵⁸

The counterproposals put forward by Wagner during an interministerial meeting held on 5 May 1938 simply suggested yet another reduction in retail profit margins.⁵⁹ A week of talks brought the two positions no closer together – as is shown by the minutes of the interministerial meeting held on 19 May, in which the main leaders did not change their respective positions.⁶⁰ The participants indulged in playing ball with the responsibility before turning to the highest authorities: Hitler and Göring.⁶¹

In a counter-memo, presented on 6 August, Backe reiterated the need to increase producer prices for milk, butter and meat, sharing out the main burden equally between traders and consumers. Backe went on to accuse the Ministry of Finance of short-sightedness for having continued to keep the price of linen (a raw material of strategic importance) artificially high, which caused a loss of interest among farmers and a consequent net reduction in land sown with this crop.⁶² The pressure from RNS leaders showed no sign of abating: directly addressing the Führer in May of the same year, Darré asked for special action to be taken by the state in the form of subsidised prices of a total cost of RM700–800 million, as the only way to remedy the crisis in German agriculture. But Hitler's answer – as is clear from the laconic note from the Chancellery – was negative: 'As a matter of principle, he is opposed to any form of price rise.'⁶³ A few months later the Minister tried again: in September he wrote to Hitler, pointing out that the situation concerning butter and other fat supplies was so delicate that there were fears that the strategic reserves would soon run out and that it would be impossible to supply the population adequately.⁶⁴

The only result of this contorted top-level political clash was the decision taken by Göring in mid-August to increase producer prices by 2 pfennigs a litre for milk not destined for human consumption (the so-called *Werkmilch*). This increase was not borne by the consumers but was financed by diverting taxes on fats, and by contributions from the oil and margarine processing industries.⁶⁵

But this measure was obviously utterly inadequate given the

gravity of the situation. In fact, less than a month later – in the report cited above – Darré pointed out that he had been forced to reduce butter quotas on the market, substituting them with imported margarine, to avoid reducing the already low reserves even further.⁶⁶ In January 1939 both Darré and Backe in two separate memos once more drew attention to what had openly been described as the ‘crisis of the specialised farm worker’. They made severe criticisms of industry (and indirectly of the economic policy of the regime), whose wages were so high that they were the cause of even the most willing and healthiest worker’s leaving the land. Backe also mentioned revising the whole system of fixed prices, which had turned out to be too rigid and, in the last analysis, ineffective. On this theme, I believe it is highly significant that the market economy’s continuing influence on the system of fixed prices was recognised, and that the price factor still eluded all forms of compulsory organisation. Darré’s memo, however, hinged round a harsh criticism of the regime’s pro-industry economic policy. Again he asked for some form of rationalisation of the market in industry too, as a remedy for the radical difference in wages and prices in the two sectors, for this was the primary cause – according to the Minister – of the current crisis in the peasant economy.⁶⁷ In addition to currency for the importation of necessary fats, Darré and Backe also asked for substantial price increases, to be borne by the whole community. To remedy the shortage in manpower, Darré asked for a sweeping return to settlement and rural housing programmes, whereas his State Secretary and rival pushed for loyalty bonuses to be paid by the state to reduce the gap with industrial wages.

Proof of just how varied the positions were within the various bodies at the head of the Third Reich in assessing the state of agriculture and its future potential comes from the clear differences in approach to the Ten-Year Plan for the battle for production. Entitled *Der deutsche Ernährungshaushalt und die wehrwirtschaftliche Unabhängigmachung*, the plan was drawn up at the end of 1936 by the A2 section of the RNS Stabsamt, and contrasts with the typewritten memo produced by Dr Hans Weiss of the Institut für wehrwirtschaftliche Forschung in April 1937. Although the RNS technicians in charge of planning acknowledged that very little had been done so far – this was implicit in the proposal – to maximise production with a view to achieving autarky, they took it for granted that this goal would be reached.⁶⁸ The military plan, however, began from the assumption that over and above the efforts made, or that could be made, it would never be possible to

eliminate the German food deficit, or at least to produce enough to guarantee the minimum requirements in the event of war. Weiss therefore suggested opting for reductions, or changes in habits, in individual consumption so that surrogate products (obviously of lower quality) could be introduced to fill the existing gaps. He also wrote off what had been done up till then in the battle for production, describing it as a palliative that was completely inadequate given the size of the problem.⁶⁹ Another memo drawn up by the RBF Stabsamt in February 1938, entitled *Wie kann die Lücke in der deutschen Speisefettversorgung geschlossen werden*, was relatively optimistic. Leaving aside the crucial problem of the shortage of feeding-stuffs, the report stressed the possibilities of obtaining considerable increases in production through improvements in the selection of cattle. The opinion expressed on the pig and oil-seed plants sectors was also optimistic: production could be greatly extended.⁷⁰

But ten months later, when the war was already under way, Darré sent a long letter to the Führer with the same complaints, criticisms and demands that are to be found in the documents already considered. This is clear proof that nothing concrete had been done to meet the urgent demands of German agriculture. After having pointed out that 'since taking power, all the work of the agrarian policy has been carried out with a view to the preparations for the possibility of war', Darré made a list of the main points of tension – oils, butter, pigs – and he also stressed the great difficulties in supplying chemical fertilisers, fuel and machinery, due to military priorities. Only a turnabout in domestic economic policy that accorded agriculture its rightful importance would put an end to the current crisis. If this did not happen, then the fragile equilibrium on which agriculture rested would collapse: it was impossible to ask farmers to produce record harvests every year in all sectors – and this was the condition underlying the precarious equilibrium.⁷¹ By then the National Socialist leadership was fully committed to war, and this drastically changed the terms of the problem: the plans for the indiscriminate exploitation of the economies and agriculture of the occupied countries could now become reality.⁷² This new situation led to the definitive decline of Darré, who was substituted by the strategic experts of the 'New European Order': Himmler with his myth of the chosen race of peasant-warriors (*Wehrbauern*), who were to give new life to the feudal system that existed in the glorious era of medieval eastern settlement, and Backe with his entourage from the Four-Year Plan, committed to exploiting to the full the occupied territories. But in

my opinion it is a mistake to contrast the pacific and national policy, supposed to be specific to Darré's *Weltanschauung*, with a 'racist' and 'imperialist' political project, personified by Himmler and Backe.⁷³ To give the lie to this idea, one has only to cite the projects drawn up by the W section of the RNS (and therefore under the control of the Ministry) for an 'Institute for East Germany', whose task was to work out the ideological basis for the new peasant nobility that would rule over Slav Europe once hostilities ended.⁷⁴

German agriculture would lose much of its importance within this new context, in which the whole economy of the 'European Fortress' was to be placed at the disposal of the *Herrenvolk* to satisfy its needs in the best way possible. I need only mention in passing that these calculations turned out to be pitifully wrong: in overall terms the territories occupied by the German armed forces were deficient in food, thus the rations that were available for the *Herrenvolk* soon dwindled until they were totally insufficient.⁷⁵

But the war only brought to an extreme conclusion an existing tendency with which the regime's agrarian policy basically complied: the ineluctable decline of agriculture's role in the German economy. The figures for the distribution of the national income clearly reflect this tendency. In 1927 agriculture accounted for 12.2 per cent of the gross national income, but by the outbreak of war this share had dropped to 9.8 per cent. There was something of a recovery until 1935 compared to the rock-bottom level of 1930 (9.8 per cent), which was then reached again in 1939 because of the rapid growth of industry and the services sector.⁷⁶ These developments are also reflected in another factor: the value of agricultural output in total production. On the eve of the depression it was 16.67 per cent, then it rose to 22.8 per cent (in 1933) before inexorably falling to a minimum of 15.09 per cent in 1938.⁷⁷ Similarly, the incidence of agriculture in employment fell both in absolute terms and in percentage values. In 1925 over 9.7 million were employed in agriculture, and in 1933 9.34 million, but by the last pre-war census there were only 8.98 million. The percentage share fell from 30.5 per cent to 28.9 per cent to 25.9 per cent.⁷⁸ Thus we find a clear difference between these figures and the respective shares of the gross national product and production values: agriculture became a sector whose economic value was increasingly low compared to the number of people employed in it. Mention should also be made of another interesting phenomenon: the gap between the income of the sector and output levels. From 1937/38 a gap opened up to the disadvantage of the former. This

meant that agriculture's economic role was undervalued in terms of its productive capacity and in terms of the 'well-being' of those employed in the sector.⁷⁹

At least during the few years of peace that Hitler's regime allowed itself, all this data confirms how agriculture continued to decline in economic importance. The myth of re-ruralisation, flaunted above all to win consensus, eventually succumbed to the force of the structural evolution of the German economy and society.

In demographic terms too the long-term trend of a growing concentration in the cities and a relative depopulation of the country areas steadily continued: the percentage of inhabitants in rural communes (i.e. those with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants) fell from 35.6 per cent in 1925 to 32.9 per cent in 1933 and to 30.1 per cent in 1939. The inexorable 'evolution of things' – so to speak – was accompanied and encouraged by the lack of reforms within agriculture itself. From this point of view, I feel it is wrong to claim that the natural tendency towards the growth of industry and the services sector ultimately prevailed under National Socialism *despite* the policies of Darré and the RNS. In fact, I would say that their policies actually encouraged the overall tendency. The criticisms made of industry by leading agrarian policy makers, who turned out to be so ineffective, only partially concealed the deep contradictions in their own policies.

As we have clearly seen in the previous chapters, from the point of view of the top decision-makers in the regime, from Hitler down, the problems of agriculture were of secondary importance. The leaders' aim was simply to hold on to consensus, especially through ideological and formal incentives: the insistence on the *Blut und Boden* ideology, the festivals, a return to folk traditions, and fairly acceptable guaranteed price levels. And neither should it be forgotten that Hitler's party took out a 'debt' at the time of the massive electoral support it received from the rural population in the two-year period 1930–2. The demands for greater productivity were basically along similar lines: direct state pressure was applied only in the last period before the war, and even then in such a way as to avoid widespread bitter reaction. Furthermore, in this latter phase, efforts were made to offer some economic incentive, albeit modest, in exchange. Whenever the repeated protests of RNS leaders actually attacked the root of the problem of the discrepancies between the state-run agricultural sector and industry, which continued to thrive thanks to favourable market circumstances, they were not even considered worthy of further discussion. The very lax implementation of the *Erbhof* law also provides a classic

example of the caution with which the National Socialists moved.

This latter example introduces the subject of the approach to policy by agricultural leaders themselves: Darré and the machinery of the 'Food Corporation', whose political aims did not fully coincide with those of Hitler and the heads of the Third Reich. The agrarian question, whose residual importance consisted only in holding on to consensus, was very low in their list of priorities. Darré and his assistants, on the other hand, wished to legitimise and consolidate their own area of power within a polycracy sustained by the harsh laws of competition between rival lobbies. To this end, they pursued a policy which was careful not to upset the delicate balances (or imbalances) within agriculture, and they were even willing (see the aforementioned cases of the *Erbhofgesetz* and the toning down of 'internal settlement') to forgo the main principles of their ruralist ideology when it contrasted with the prevalent opinion in country areas. Of course, it should be remembered that Darré had only a relatively short period of time in which to work, and that the RNS's political project had a very high dose of ideology in the early stages.

Thus the National Socialists' attempt to create a new ruling class in rural areas was far from being a social revolution.⁸⁰ The complexity of the factors involved could give life only to a cautious, wavering policy that was full of contradictions. By way of a conclusion, I should like to summarise these contradictions here:

- (1) On one hand, for racial and general ideological purposes, the peasant *Hof* was exalted and crystallised in a form which, by means of the *Erbhof* law, effectively excluded the market economy; but on the other hand, there was an awareness of the need to improve peasant producers' chances of obtaining credit facilities, technology and, above all, land.
- (2) An attempt was made to consolidate settlement, especially to help wage earners and disinherited farmers' children. This included the introduction of a radical project to break up the East Elbian *Großgrundbesitzertum*. At the same time, however, for general political reasons, the large estates had to be left almost intact in the hands of their historical owners.
- (3) The *Marktordnung*, as a means of regulating market flows, was supposed to have brought about a harmonious equilibrium between producers and consumers. Price trends, however, clearly show that producers were basically dissatisfied and that consumers did not benefit from more favourable prices as propagandists so insistently claimed.

- (4) For racial reasons the central role of the family was emphasised, but at the same time productive demands and the land-flight of the workforce created intolerably heavy workloads, especially for women.
- (5) Although the state did not intervene far enough to bring about its goals, namely to order and regulate the economy in the sector, its considerable interference did manage to create a good deal of ill-feeling and discontent among farmers. The spurious organisation of the RNS, half corporation, half executive body of the will of the state, was symptomatic of this mixture, which with the advent of war soon turned into rigid state dirigisme.

Enveloped in an inflexible ruralist ideology and caught between corporative protectionism and the need for a considerable step-up in production, the Third Reich agrarian policy brought to an end the utopian dream of an *Agrarstaat* and paved the way to the triumph of high-technology urban industrial society. After 1945 German farmers and their representatives were able to struggle only for a few marginal improvements to their now permanently subordinate social and economic position. Paradoxically, what rose out of the ashes of the *Blut und Boden* ideology, defeated by the logic of a sudden arms build-up and an expansionist war, was a fully fledged industrial society.

Notes

1. Recently a number of well-documented biographies of Göring have been published which dedicate considerable space to the Four-Year Plan: S. Martens, *Hermann Göring: 'Erster Paladin des Führers' und 'Zweiter Mann im Reich'*, Paderborn, 1985; A. Kube, *Pour le mérite und Hakenkreuz: Hermann Göring im Dritten Reich*, Munich, 1986; and R. J. Overy, *Goering: The Iron Man*, London, 1984.

2. But see the first important signs of disagreement in his diary, 2 March 1936: SA Goslar, Darré's Diaries.

3. A. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party*, Abbotsbrook, 1985.

4. Cf. the review by G. Corni, *NPL*, vol. 31, 1986, pp. 501ff, and similar criticism by H. Gies, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, vol. 22, no. 186, pp. 224ff.

5. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, p. 127.

6. Even in the midst of war, the Minister, by then powerless, broke a lance in defence of more 'organic' forms of production which were more in keeping with the peasant tradition and less dependent on the laws of the market: cf. correspondence

with Backe, May 1941, in BA, NI Darré II, vol. AD 20.

7. See, for example, the economic writings of Backe published in *Das Ende des Liberalismus in der Wirtschaft*, Berlin, 1938, and *Die Nahrungsfreiheit Europas: Großraum oder Weltwirtschaft?*, Berlin, 1942. Like Darré and many other leading National Socialists, Backe was not born in Germany (but in Batum, Armenia, 1896). After studying geography and economics at Göttingen, he became an assistant in the geography institute of the Hanover Polytechnic. He had a good deal of practical experience of farming and was a tenant of state property. He joined the party in 1925 – much earlier than Darré – and initially fell in with the wing led by the Straßer brothers. He drew attention to himself for his theories on the need for economic and cultural expansion towards the east. After Hugenberg had been disposed of, Darré initially appointed him commissioner for 'special purposes', until the end of September 1933 when he took over from Rohr as State Secretary.

8. On relations between Darré and the SS, see in particular Kater, *Das 'Ahnenerbe' der SS 1935–1945*, Stuttgart, 1974, pp. 28ff.

9. In later years it was Backe himself who described this basic weakness of the former Minister, when he declared in a programme speech held in Hanover in June 1942: 'future tasks cannot be carried out through vague romanticism, but through an ideal realism. It does not matter who does things, but it is vital that something is done.' Quoted by Joachim Lehmann, 'Faschistische Agrarpolitik in zweiten Weltkrieg: Zur Konzeption von Herbert Backe', *ZfG*, vol. 27, 1980, p. 950.

10. Declaration made in 1946 in view of the inquiry for Darré's trial, in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 546, p. 118.

11. The extremely difficult situation for cereal growers in winter 1936/37: proceedings in BA, R 14, vol. 370. A confidential RNS document, drawn up in 1935 and dealing with military mobilisation, acknowledged that it was impossible to create reserves because of the 'tense food situation': DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 387, pp. 134ff.

12. Cf. above p. 163.

13. Cf. the diary entry, 11 October: SA Goslar, Darré's Diaries.

14. See, in particular, Darré's harsh letter to Backe and other RNS leaders, calling for a clear and final definition of their respective responsibilities, dated 4 February 1937, in SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 137, and Darré's memo to Kerri, Minister of Religious Affairs, 25 August 1941: BA, NI Darré, vol. 137.

15. The letters, from February 1937, are to be found in SA Goslar, NI Darré, vol. 137.

16. Cf. Kube, *Pour le mérite*, pp. 156ff.

17. Cf. the declarations and evidence used by the defence in Darré's trial: in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 546, pp. 31ff.

18. Cf. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, p. 111, note 58.

19. Diary entry, 20 May 1942, quoted in K. Bludau, *Nationalsozialismus und Genossenschaften*, Hanover, 1968, p. 80.

20. On Backe's geo-political theories and their implementation during the war, cf. Lehmann, 'Faschistische Agrarpolitik', pp. 948ff.

21. Cf. Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, pp. 151ff.; R. L. Koehl, *RKFVDV: German Resettlement Policy*, Harvard, 1957.

22. Cf. the proceedings in DZAP, 06.01, vol. 315/1.

23. See, for example, the memo sent by Darré to the Chancellery, 2 December 1941, in BA, NI Darré II, vol. AD 27.

24. 'Denkschrift zum Vierjahresplan', p. 206. In general on Hitler's ideas concerning the lack of domestic resources, cf. L. Herbst, *Der totale Krieg und die Ordnung der Wirtschaft*, Stuttgart, 1982, pp. 85ff.

25. Cited in B. J. Wendt, *Großdeutschland, Außenpolitik und Kriegsvorbereitung des Hitler-Regimes*, Munich, 1988, pp. 193f.

26. Cf. Lovin, 'Die Erzeugungsschlacht 1934–1936', *ZAGAS*, vol. 22, 1974, pp. 219ff.

27. Darré to Motz, 18 April 1939, in BA, N1 Darré II, vol. AD 25.
28. On this subject it is worthwhile examining an article by H. Reischle, one of Darré's closest assistants. In the article, published in the theoretical organ of the RNS, Reischle claimed that the difference between the new phase of agrarian policy, which he described as the 'battle for food', and the previous battle for production lay in the fact that now the agricultural productive drive received support from all the other sectors of the economy. He did stress, however, that before 1936 Darré had already laid the basis and guidelines to be followed in later stages. 'Ziel, Weg und Einsatz', *Odal*, vol. 5, 1936/7, pp. 866ff.
29. 'Die Lage: Ernährungspolitik statt Agrarpolitik', *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft*, no. 10, 1937. Similar in tone were Darré, 'Die ernährungspolitische Lage', *VJP*, vol. 1, 1937; Backe, *Volk und Wirtschaft im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, Berlin, n.d., p. 45; and Backe, 'Eigennutz, Zwang oder Leitungswille?', *Odal*, September 1936, pp. 158ff.
30. Quoted in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 387, pp. 100ff.
31. J. Wagner, 'Preispolitik und Landwirtschaft', *VJP*, vol. 1, 1937, no. 4.
32. Backe, 'Die agrarpolitische Lage', *Deutsche Volkswirtschaft*, no. 1, 1938, pp. 31ff.
33. Backe, 'Verbrauchslenkung', *VJP*, vol. 1, 1937, no. 4. On this problem see D. Petzina, *Autarkiepolitik im Dritten Reich*, Stuttgart, 1968, pp. 175ff.
34. Press conference, 19 September 1933, announcing the institutional law for the RNS, in Darré, *Um Blut und Boden*, Munich, 1940, p. 359.
35. It was estimated that land subject to incorporation was as much as 6 million hectares: F. Sohn, 'Deutschland: Allgemeiner agrarpolitischer Bericht', *BüL*, vol. 21, 1937, pp. 277f.
36. W. Tornow, *Chronik der Agrarpolitik und Agrarwirtschaft der Deutschen Reiches*, Hamburg-Berlin, 1972, pp. 114f.
37. The law, proposed as early as June 1936, was only finally issued after widespread hostility, on 23 March 1937 (BA, R 2, vol. 18018). The decree of December 1937 was along similar lines. It included the threat of implementing the *Abmeierung*, i.e. expropriation for *Erbbauern*.
38. Letter of 16 July 1937, in BA, R 2, vol. 18018. In fact, however, there is some evidence that in one or two cases the law was actually applied: J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany*, London-Beverly Hills, 1976, p. 172.
39. Tornow, *Chronik*, pp. 115f. A bill dealing with this matter, proposed by Darré in September 1933, had roused a great deal of debate. The various ministries objected to the excessive discretionary powers given to the Ministry of Agriculture, and it created perplexity over the damage that would presumably be done to creditors. Proceedings in BA, R 53, vol. 38. The final text came only after a good deal of backtracking, and in fact the state's powers of intervention were diluted considerably: BA, R 53, vol. 28 and R 2, vol. 18153.
40. Cf. *Statistisches Jahrbuch*, 1939/40, p. 91.
41. Cf. W. Willikens, 'Die Ergebnisse des Landeskulturwerkes', *VJP*, vol. 4, 1939, no. 12.
42. Meetings of 28 September 1936 in Munich, and of 11 February 1937 and 18 March 1937 in Berlin (BA, NS 10, vol. 54, and R 2, vol. 18019, respectively). Göring's radio speech was broadcast on 24 March (transcription in DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 387).
43. In June 1936 the Ministry of Agriculture had already signed an agreement with the association of industrialists in the sector. Prices were to be fixed automatically according to the previous year's trend in consumption – the greater the consumption, the lower the prices: Sohn, 'Agrarpolitischer Bericht', p. 278.
44. The Woermann report is in BA, R 43 II, vol. 355.
45. E. Woermann, *Denkschrift über die Ernährungslage*, n.d. (almost certainly 1937), in BA, R 43 II, vol. 863b.

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46. Decree of 10 February 1938, valid for five months, in BA, R 2, vol. 18249.
47. With the decrees of 26 June 1937 and 29 July 1938 administrative procedures were rationalised in the cereals, feeding-stuffs and dairy sectors to improve the distribution of products. Obligatory stockpiling of cereals was introduced with the decree of 22 July 1937. Cf. Tornow, *Chronik*, pp. 131f.
48. Cf. H. Gies, 'Aufgaben und Probleme der nationalsozialistischen Ernährungswirtschaft', *VSWG*, vol. 66, 1979, pp. 474ff.
49. Law of 30 September 1937 in F. Sohn, 'Deutschland: Allgemeiner agrarpolitischer Bericht', *BüL*, vol. 22, 1938, pp. 290ff.
50. A. Hanau and R. Plate, *Die deutsche landwirtschaftliche Preis- und Marktpolitik im zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart, 1974, p. 21. After 1936 the price index rose above 120 (1913 = 100), fifteen points higher than agricultural products: K. D. Hoeft, *Zur Agrarpolitik des deutschen Imperialismus von 1933 bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin, 1960, p. 46.
51. W. G. Hoffmann, *Das Wachstum des deutschen Wirtschaft seit des Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin, 1965, p. 254.
52. The Institut für Konjunkturforschung report, drafted at the beginning of 1938, was entitled 'Zur Frage der Preiserhöhung für landwirtschaftliche Erzeugnisse' (in BA, R 2, vol. 31090). Cf. also 'Die Betriebsausgaben der deutschen Landwirtschaft seit 1924/5', *VfS*, 1936, III. Press comments on the problem of the scissors can be found in, among others, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, 8 August 1936. An editorial in a pro-industry paper observed that the scissors were closing and that farmers were once more becoming good clients for industry: 'Agrarschere und Industrieertrag', *Ruhr und Rhein*, no. 7, 1937.
53. Memo by Backe, 27 February 1938, in BA, R 2, vol. 18732. The aforementioned report by the Institut für Konjunkturforschung, presented to the appropriate ministries in the same period, was along similar lines. A long memo, presented by Darré's office, concerning the problem of how to increase livestock production given the shortage of feeding-stuffs, also suggested drastic price measures. The figures show that even during the Third Reich the cereals sector did not lose its privileged position. Price index for agricultural products 1938/39:

Cereals	Potatoes	Veal	Price index (1928 = 100)	
			Pork	Butter
90	86	78	69	74

Source: Steiner, *Die Agrarpolitik in der Schweiz und Deutschland*, Breitenbach, 1953, p. 95.

Given that the livestock sector began from lower levels, it did make relative progress. According to other statistics (L. B. Bacon and F. C. Schloemer, *World Trade in Agricultural Products*, Rome, 1940, p. 655), with an index of 100 for 1913 by 1938 the overall index for farm produce had risen to 105.9. But whereas for vegetables it was 115.9, for cattle it was only 88.6.

54. BA, R 2, vol. 18732.

55. *Ibid.*

56. The correspondence, from July 1934, is in BA, R 43 II, vol. 193. On the National Socialist leadership's concern over the domestic front and its desire to avoid the 'knife in the back' of 1918, cf. an interesting essay: T. Mason, 'Il nazional-socialismo e l'eredità del 1918', *Storia contemporanea*, vol. 4, 1973.

57. Cf. M. H. Kater, *The Nazi Party*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 87ff.

58. I. Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich*, 2nd edn,

Hitler and the Peasants

Oxford, 1984, p. 45. A far more positive judgement on the modern character of the National Socialist agricultural policy is to be found in J. Jucovy, 'The Bavarian Peasantry under National Socialist Rule 1933-1945', Ph.D. Dissertation, New York, 1985.

59. Minutes from the meeting and the subsequent agreements in BA, R 2, vol. 31090. Woermann was also in favour of acting on prices, which more than any other measure would induce farmers to step up production (R 2, vol. 18732). Cf. the criticism of the Ministry of Finance in a letter to Göring of 19 July 1938, and Darré to Göring, 14 May 1938, on the obstructionist tactics of Hess and Wagner (NS 10, vol. 35). The Hauptvereinigung of the dairy industry reacted to this proposal by sending a letter on 16 May, protesting that the distribution sector had already been squeezed hard enough and margins could not be cut further: BA, R 2, vol. 31090.

60. BA, R 2, vol. 18732.

61. Darré's letter to Göring of 14 May is revealing on the subject of how decision making in the Third Reich often came to a standstill because of crossed vetos: BA, NS 10, vol. 35.

62. BA, R 2, vol. 18072.

63. BA, R 43 II, vol. 194.

64. Darré to Hitler, 27 September 1938, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 200.

65. Ministry of Finance internal note, 23 August, in R 2, vol. 18072.

66. Darré to Hitler, 27 September, in BA, R 43 II, vol. 200.

67. See the memos by Backe (NS 10, vol. 103) and Darré, both dated 20 January 1939, in R 2, vol. 18732. On 20 February the Minister also sent a note to Göring, who agreed to reconsider proposing price increases for butter and meat to Hitler: DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 393.

68. DZAP, 36.03, vol. 240.

69. BA, R 16, vol. 1299.

70. *Ibid.*

71. DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 388, pp. 64-104. In keeping with an initial criteria based on distribution, only 3.1 per cent of investments for the Four-Year Plan were for agriculture. But this percentage was gradually raised to 16 per cent, given the dramatic food situation. Petzina, *Autarkiepolitik*, pp. 83ff.

72. For agrarian policy during the war, cf. J. Lehmann, 'Faschistische Agrarpolitik' and 'Agrarpolitik und Landwirtschaft in Deutschland 1939 bis 1945', in B. Martin and A. Milward (eds.), *Agriculture and Food Supply in the Second World War*, Ostfildern, 1985, pp. 29-49; cf. also K. Brandt, *The Management of Agriculture and Food in the German-Occupied Areas*, Stanford, 1954.

73. This contrast runs right through Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, which uncritically accepts the self-defence constructed by Darré and his assistants after 1945. See, for example, the testimony of J. Groenwald, LBF for Weser-Ems and witness for the defence: DZAP, 99 US 7, vol. 546, pp. 63f.

74. BA, NI Darré II, vol. AD 14.

75. Cf. Chapter 1 of the recent study by J. E. Farquharson, *Western Allies and Food Management in Germany*, London, 1986.

76. Steiner, *Agrarpolitik*, p. 148.; F. Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Hamburg, 1979, pp. 101ff. With an index of 100 for 1925, by 1938 the national income had risen to 144, whereas for agriculture it had fallen to 97. The indices for industry and the services sector were 164 and 136 respectively.

77. Hoffmann, *Wachstum*, p. 455.

78. D. Petzina, W. Abelhauser and A. Faust, *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch*, Munich, 1978, vol. III, pp. 55, 57.

79. Hamann, in K. Meyer (ed.), *Gefüge und Ordnung der deutschen Landwirtschaft*, Berlin, 1939, pp. 175f., speaks of an 'undervaluing of farmers' work'.

80. I. Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*, 2nd edn, London, 1988, p. 144.

Conclusion: A Comparison with the Agrarian Policy of Fascist Italy

To conclude this study I shall briefly examine, at least in general terms, the problems involved in comparing the agrarian policy implemented by the Third Reich up to the outbreak of war with that of the Fascist regime in Italy. Only very sporadically has the general theoretical debate on 'Fascism' touched on concrete comparisons between various sectors of the economy, thus leaving aside abstract discussions or questions of principle as to whether or not, between the wars, Fascism existed as an international phenomenon present throughout Europe. Even specific comparisons have largely dealt with problems such as the roles and personalities of the two dictators, the form of the party in the regime, foreign policy, and the general ideological premises. There have been almost no comparative studies, however, on socio-economic aspects and the respective economic policies.

As far as the specific subject of agrarian policy is concerned, most experts have tackled the problem by dealing only with national history, thus excluding a priori the possibility of finding international parallels. Other studies have considered the common features in agrarian policies in industrial countries faced with the economic and specifically agrarian crisis that took place on a world-wide scale between the two wars. From this point of view what has been studied is the whole range of interventionist and control-type policies for marketing and production, introduced by all the large industrial countries to defend agriculture. It goes without saying that in these kinds of approach, the problematics of Fascism are of only background interest.

In these brief concluding comments I certainly do not intend to give a definitive answer to the question of whether or not we can talk about a common Fascist agrarian policy. I simply wish to present some interesting data and make some introductory observations on this subject: the implicit aim will thus be to trace a route, often indicated but seldom taken, in the field of historical comparison.

Conclusion

We may begin with a number of considerations concerning the structure of the agricultural sectors in Germany and Italy on the eve of the period examined in this study. From a summary analysis of the statistical data, it is clear that there were a number of deep differences concerning the importance of agriculture in the economic and social systems of the two countries. In the period between the wars, despite the fact that more than 30 per cent of the German population was still engaged in agriculture, there can be no doubt that, from the economic and employment point of view, it was less important in Germany than in Italy. This difference leads to the conclusion that, whereas in Italy agriculture was still by far the dominant sector between the wars, in Germany its importance was marginal to the workings of an industrial economy that for some time had dominated at a European level. One need only bear in mind that in 1925 German agriculture employed 30 per cent of the workforce to produce just 16 per cent of the national product, whereas in Italy the share of the national product was 25 per cent right up to the outbreak of war.¹ Since the turn of the century German agriculture had been relegated to a secondary economic role (subsequently accentuated by the disappointments of the First World War) and all the internal weaknesses of the sector had been exposed when it could not meet domestic requirements. In Italy, on the other hand, agriculture was still by far the most important sector, despite the fact that some areas were undergoing rapid industrialisation. The transition from a predominantly rural economy (and therefore society) to an industrial one took place very quickly in Germany: more or less in the last 30 years of the nineteenth century. And this speed of change had a number of repercussions – as we shall see later – on National Socialist ideology and agrarian policy.

To bring the Italian economy and society up to date, it became imperative for the Fascist regime to modernise agriculture at great speed, whereas Germany felt this pressure less, given that agriculture was more or less of marginal importance to the economy. This first structural difference between the two countries appears so profound that it almost excludes attempts at a comparison from the outset.

As regards the domestic situation of agriculture in the two countries, there were a number of further differences, at least in broad outline (given the difficulties involved in comparing the statistical data). In Germany there was a steady growth in the number of small farmers whose position in the sector improved both qualitatively and quantitatively: it was, in fact, owner-

occupiers, directly farming small to medium-sized units, who dominated the overall scene, although the large-estate owners still had an important position, mainly in the eastern regions. In Italy the internal structure of agriculture was much more fragmented: the proportion of owner-occupiers was certainly much smaller than in Germany, and a distinguishing feature was the pressure on land from families belonging to the 'rural proletariat'. This pressure was so great that agriculture was described by some as the 'sponge-sector',² which soaked up nine and a half million families who had no alternative income. Finally, the role of the southern *latifondisti*, who were mostly absentee landlords fairly disinterested in modernising their huge estates, was completely different from that of the Junkers, who had led the way in the capitalist development of agriculture during the nineteenth century.

But let us now consider a second set of factors concerning the political sphere. In Italy, following a deep political and social crisis, one of whose epicentres was agriculture, the Fascists, while still only a marginal party, rose to power very quickly. The Great War and its social repercussions had triggered off a huge peasant movement, which took at least two different forms: on one hand, the landless pushed to acquire holdings in all Italian regions,³ and on the other, there was growing social conflict in the Po Valley plain between farm workers, organised in socialist leagues, and the large capitalist landowners.

In fact, it was in this area, where big farmers were much more integrated into the capitalist market, that the Fascist Party, made up of students, peasants and members of the urban middle classes, became – as is known – the strong arm of the landowners, engaged in the crucial struggle against unionised farm workers.⁴ Given the very varied and incoherent nature of the Partito Nazionale Fascista in this early stage, it would be a mistake to generalise and claim that Fascism was a politico-military tool in the hands of the Po Valley landowners, who, despite their own efforts, had not been able to organise their political presence well enough until then.⁵ On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the alliance between the landowners and the *fasci* was an important component in the social bloc which opened the way to success for Mussolini's young, dynamic party. Another component in this social bloc in favour of an authoritarian way out of the serious post-war crisis, was made up of the southern *latifondisti*, whose economic interests were very different from those of their Po Valley counterparts.⁶ Whatever the case may be, it may be said that the rise to power of Mussolini's party in 1922 was basically due to the desire of the ruling circles in

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liberal Italy, including both industrialists and agriculturists, to end the post-war crisis. The old ruling class was convinced that, when all had been set right, it would not be difficult to get rid of Mussolini in due time. As is known, this did not prove so easy. But unlike the National Socialists, and despite the much longer period of time available to him, Mussolini had to reckon with the pre-Fascist ruling class right up to the end.

The situation in Germany was very different. The old Third Internationalist theories that Hitler's NSDAP was merely the strong arm of the traditional ruling groups has long been disproved. Certainly, especially in the last phase of the Republican crisis, Hitler received the firm (and some would say decisive) support of influential industrial, agrarian and financial circles. But it would be wrong to over-emphasise this aspect. On the contrary, it must be pointed out that during free elections almost a third of the German people voted for Hitler's party. Mussolini started off from a position of weakness within the ruling élite and did not have a base of mass support, whereas the huge mass following which Hitler had managed to win over, above all during the years of the great depression, was of crucial importance.

This radical difference is clearly reflected in the agrarian policies of the respective regimes: the Italian one had to 'report back' to the ruling circles which had supported it in its rise to power, whereas the German policy also had to meet demands coming from lower down in rural society.

The ideological aspects must also be taken into account. At first sight both regimes shared a 'ruralist' ideology, which exalted the health of the rural world from various points of view, and called for it to be strengthened in the face of encroaching industrialisation and urbanisation. This ruralist ideology strongly influenced agrarian policy. But on examining the inherent components and models, we soon see that there are deep differences. In Germany, following the very rapid and deep transformations caused by the process of industrial growth in the late nineteenth century, a reaction had been building up in large sections of society, especially among the middle classes. They looked on these transformations negatively and longed to stop, or even turn back, 'the clock of history'. The *Blut und Boden* ideology, the basis at least from the programmatic point of view of the Third Reich's agrarian policy, grew out of this extreme anti-industrial reaction. Behind Darré's ruralism, and its prevalently racial basis, was the complete conviction that the peasants could once more play the important role that they had in the past. It assessed the contribution of various social groups not on

the basis of economic values but on the grounds of their respective 'racial quality'.

In Italy, however, the anti-industrial and ruralist tendency never took on similar proportions.⁷ On the contrary, especially around the turn of the century, a productivist ideology, advocating modernisation, had taken root among the middle classes. And Mussolini's anti-urbanism had no racial overtones. He considered ruralism to be a kind of myth of a golden age, to be set beside other unattainable goals. Politically, he wished to strengthen the peasant element by incorporating it into Italian society, from which it had always been excluded, to make it the stabilising force in providing consensus for the regime. Mussolini was less concerned with the idea that, from the demographic point of view, country dwellers were more prolific, and therefore should be strengthened as they had a considerable role to play in a state aiming to become a great power through the sheer number of its population. I believe that interest in this demographic aspect, although fairly important, soon faded – as is demonstrated by the little interest shown by the regime in implementing its own laws to prevent the flight of country dwellers towards the cities.⁸ In Mussolini's ideology there was a significant emphasis on modernisation, and this comes through in his early programmes for agrarian democracy: 'The land to those who work it and make it bear fruit.'⁹ This aspect becomes even more important when we consider that a large number of technocrats, economists, agronomists and leading Italian intellectuals were called in to help with projects for the transformation of Italian agriculture. Mention need only be made of Arrigo Serpieri, a Professor of Agronomy, who on several occasions was given important government appointments, and who long enjoyed the Duce's support. A comparison with what was going on in Germany at the same time is particularly instructive: the National Socialists received no support from technocrats in the sector (cf. the case of Max Sering), nor did they appoint members of academic groups to important positions.

From the aspects dealt with so far, and from specific differences, the highly differentiated characters of the respective agrarian policies emerge: in Germany – as we have seen in this book – an agrarian policy was implemented according to precise ideological premises, especially that of strengthening the *Bauerntum* and freeing it from the logic of the capitalist market, both at home and abroad. At the same time, however, the National Socialist agrarian policy became increasingly marginal compared to other priorities, such as accelerated re-armament. The tensions and contradictions which

could have seriously undermined the rural population's electoral support for the regime were avoided or attenuated due to the – in my opinion – decisive reliance on food resources available elsewhere and in particular in the Danube–Balkan area. Thanks to a dense network of trade and political relations based on the complementary nature of the economies, the regime managed to import low-cost foodstuffs to meet the growing demands of consumption levels at home, thus maintaining 'intact' the protected sphere of the *Bauerntum*.

The Fascist regime's agrarian policy took a different course: it was definitely more inclined to encourage modernisation, even if there is no real confirmation of it from the results. I do not wish to enter into the details of the debate on the more or less modern nature of the Fascist regime and its policy,¹⁰ especially since recent studies have led to the facile contrast between the two extreme theories being outmoded.¹¹ I would, however, like to point out that in some important areas the regime's agrarian policies did have a certain leitmotif of modernisation and rationalisation. I am referring above all to the land-reclamation schemes, which made provisions for deep transformations in Italian agriculture, not only in terms of land ownership but also in productive and social terms. As is known, the dream of Italian technocracy gathered round the idea of 'complete reclamation' and in a couple of phases (1928–9 and 1934–5) they also seemed to win the favour of the Duce. The resources invested in land-reclamation schemes were quite considerable when viewed from the point of view of the structural weaknesses of the Italian economy. But the concrete results never came anywhere near the extravagant promises. A decisive influence in slowing down the reclamation schemes was the opposition of *latifondisti* who – despite Serpieri's efforts to stress the inviolability of their rights – feared that any state intervention would undermine their hegemony.¹²

This should not lead us to undervalue the importance of the project, especially since recent studies have emphasised the considerable interest in the subject shown by important industrial groups, primarily electric companies. They saw scope in these schemes for building up a complete agro-industrial cycle, based on modern infrastructure.¹³ The resistance from the ruling classes meant that the plans for complete reclamation largely stayed on the drawing board, and where they were implemented – as in the case of the Pontine Marshes – they were distorted for propaganda and publicity purposes.¹⁴

Another important episode, in which the agrarian policy showed

clear signs of being well disposed to the idea of modernisation, was the *battaglia del grano*.¹⁵ Begun in the summer of 1925 to combat a serious grain shortage, it gave discreet results from the quantitative point of view. The shortage was almost completely made up, thus taking the weight off the Italian balance of payments, and the incentives to increase cereal output encouraged modernisation in the most advanced area of Italian agriculture: the Po Valley. But the *battaglia del grano* also had negative consequences, for it increased the gap between advanced and backward regions. Thus in the Po Valley provinces in 1938, we find 42 per cent of the country's superphosphates, 62 per cent of its tractors and 66.6 per cent of the total grain-silo volume.¹⁶ Furthermore, in a closed economy the concentration on cereal production caused a serious crisis in specialised sectors, primarily in the south, which had been used to making big profits by exporting products like oil, fruit, vegetables, nuts and grapes.¹⁷ Finally, the *battaglia del grano* had a negative impact on consumption in that it contributed to a shortage of proteins and vitamins, providing only starches. On this subject, it should be remembered that the regime, aware of the limited resources available for its ambitious projects, pursued a policy of holding down mass consumption.

A significant example of the difference in respective agrarian policies was the total lack of measures to strengthen the peasantry in Italy: for example, legislation to improve conditions of tenure (along the lines of the *Erbhof*). As is known, many Fascists considered *mezzadria* (métayage) to be the best way of running a farm. Here too we can see just how far the Fascist regime was dependent on the conditions and interests of the agrarian block that brought it to power. But in Germany the difficult conditions, impeding the full implementation of Darré's ideology, arose more from the fact that precedence was given to industry and re-armament.

As far as the two regimes' intervention and market-control policies are concerned, it must be said that they were not all specific to Fascism. Faced with a serious agricultural crisis in the 1920s, almost all industrialised western countries attempted to regulate their domestic markets in some way or other, so that they could control the prices and flows of foodstuffs and protect domestic production from international competition.¹⁸

To sum up the conclusions of this very brief comparison, in Germany, despite mounting pressure on output, the internal imbalances in agriculture could not be altered without incurring a negative reaction from a large slice of the population whose consensus was important for Hitler. But in Italy modernisation could take

place only on a reduced scale, and with the risk of further opening the gap between rich and poor farmers, and this was due to the fact that Mussolini was never strong enough to clash with the interests of the social block which had helped him rise to power. Thus in answer to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter, an initial survey confirms that the features peculiar to each nation (political, economic and structural) mean that there are little grounds for referring to a common agrarian policy specific to Fascism.¹⁹

Notes

1. For the figures for Italy, cf. the statistical appendices in C. Daneo, *Breve storia dell'agricoltura italiana*, Milan, 1980; P. Ercolani, 'Documentazione statistica di base', in G. Fuà (ed.), *Lo sviluppo economico in Italia*, Milan, 1972, vol. II, pp. 410ff.

2. E. Fano, 'Problemi e vicende dell'agricoltura italiana fra le due guerre', *Quaderni storici*, vol. 29/30, 1975, p. 470.

3. Cf. the thorough contemporary study by G. Lorenzoni, *Inchiesta sulla piccola proprietà coltivatrice formatasi nel dopoguerra: Relazione finale*, Rome, 1938.

4. Cf. P. Corner, *Il fascismo a Ferrara 1919-1925*, Bari, 1974; A. Cardoza, *Agrarian Elites and the Origins of Italian Fascism: The Province of Bologna*, Princeton, 1982.

5. Cf. M. Malatesta, 'La grande depressione e l'organizzazione degli interessi economici: il caso degli agrari padani', *Passato e presente*, vol. 8, 1985.

6. F. De Felice, 'Fascismo e Mezzogiorno', *Annali dell'Istituto A. Cervi*, vol. I, 1979, pp. 33-347; P. Bevilacqua, *Le campagne del Mezzogiorno fra fascismo e dopoguerra: Il caso della Calabria*, Turin, 1980.

7. Cf. some points dealt with in S. Lanaro, *Nazione e lavoro: Saggio sulla cultura borghese in Italia*, Venice, 1979.

8. A. Treves, *Le migrazioni interne nell'Italia fascista*, Turin, 1976.

9. Passage quoted in R. De Felice, *Mussolini il fascista*, vol. I, *La conquista del potere 1921-1925*, Turin, 1966, p. 75.

10. For the background to the terms of the debate, cf. E. Fano, 'La "Restaurazione antifascista liberista": Ristagno a sviluppo economico durante il fascismo', and R. Sarti, 'La modernizzazione fascista in Italia: conservatrice o rivoluzionaria?', both in A. Acquarone and D. Vernassa (eds.), *Il regime fascista*, Bologna, 1974, pp. 260ff.

11. Cf. the recent definition by T. Mason, 'Moderno, modernità, modernizzazione: un montaggio', *Movimento operaio e socialista*, vol. 10, 1987, pp. 45-62.

12. Cf. the studies by R. Cerri, 'Note sulla bonifica integrale del fascismo', *Italia contemporanea*, vol. 137, 1979; M. Stampacchia, 'Sull'assalto al latifondo siciliano nel 1939-1944', *Rivista di storia contemporanea*, vol. 6, 1978, pp. 586ff.

13. G. Barone, 'Capitale finanziario e bonifica integrale nel Mezzogiorno fra le due guerre', *Italia contemporanea*, vol. 137, 1979, pp. 63ff., and the recent monograph by the same author, *Mezzogiorno e modernizzazione: Elettività, irrigazione e bonifiche*, Turin, 1986.

14. R. Mariani, *Fascismo e 'città nuove'*, Milan, 1976. For a grass-roots study of the conditions of settlers, see O. Gaspari, *L'emigrazione veneta nell'agro pontino durante il periodo fascista*, Brescia, 1986.

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15. A. Staderini, 'La politica cerealicola del regime: l'impostazione della battaglia del grano', *Storia contemporanea*, vol. 9, 1976; G. Tattara, 'Cerealicoltura e politica agraria durante il fascismo', in G. Toniolo (ed.), *L'economia italiana 1961-1940*, Bari-Rome, 1978, pp. 373ff.

16. See the studies in D. Preti et al., *Le campagne emiliane durante il periodo fascista*, Bologna, 1982.

17. For an introduction to the background of the problem, cf. D. Preti, 'Per una storia agraria e del malessere agrario nell'Italia fascista', in Preti et al., *Le campagne emiliane*, pp. 51ff.

18. Cf. H. J. Puhle, 'Aspekte der Agrarpolitik im "Organisierten Kapitalismus"', in H. U. Wehler (ed.), *Sozialgeschichte heute*, Göttingen, 1974, pp. 543ff.; M. Tracy, *Agriculture in Western Europe: Crisis and Adaption*, London, 1964.

19. For a more detailed comparative analysis accompanied by statistical data, see G. Corni, 'Die Agrarpolitik des Faschismus: ein Vergleich zwischen Deutschland und Italien', *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. 17, 1988, pp. 391-423.

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