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# An Ideological War of 'Blood and Soil' and Its Effect on the Agricultural Propaganda and Policy of the Nazi Party, 1929-1939

## **Abstract**

*“One then builds a whole system of thought on such a brief, crisply formulated idea. The idea does not remain limited to this single statement; rather it is applied to every aspect of daily life and becomes the guide for all human activity. It becomes a worldview.”* Dr. Joseph Goebbels spoke those words on January 9, 1928 to an audience of party members at the “Hochschule fuer Politik,” a series of talks that investigated the role of propaganda in the National Socialist movement. A few months prior to this event, voters had elected a farmer, Werner Willikens, in the South Hanover-Brunswick district of the Reichstag over a railroad worker. Seemingly, this election was unrelated to Goebbels’s speech on the purpose of propaganda; however, Willikens’s election to the Reichstag reflected Goebbels’s call for diversified propaganda that would highlight “every aspect of daily life.”

## **Keywords**

propaganda, Nazi movement, agriculture

# **An Ideological War of ‘Blood and Soil’ and Its Effect on the Agricultural Propaganda and Policy of the Nazi Party, 1929-1939**

*Keith Swaney*

## **What is Propaganda?**

*One then builds a whole system of thought on such a brief, crisply formulated idea. The idea does not remain limited to this single statement; rather it is applied to every aspect of daily life and becomes the guide for all human activity. It becomes a worldview.<sup>1</sup>*

Dr. Joseph Goebbels spoke those words on January 9, 1928 to an audience of party members at the “Hochschule fuer Politik,” a series of talks that investigated the role of propaganda in the National Socialist movement. A few months prior to this event, voters had elected a farmer, Werner Willikens, in the South Hanover-Brunswick district of the Reichstag over a railroad worker.<sup>2</sup> Seemingly, this election was unrelated to Goebbels’s speech on the purpose of propaganda; however, Willikens’s election to the Reichstag reflected Goebbels’s call for diversified propaganda that would highlight “every aspect of daily life.”

How did this propaganda campaign drive the Nazi movement throughout the late-1920s? Propaganda, first of all, became the core of the Nazi campaign. The “worldview” about which Goebbels spoke explains why the National Socialists started to target German peasants with propaganda by early 1928. Naturally, propaganda—speeches, film, visual art, and even legislative proposals—remained linked to the party’s attack on the inability of the Weimar government to battle the Great Depression. According to a police report written in April 1930, Germans in the Mosel Valley

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from Joseph Goebbels, “Knowledge and Propaganda,” as cited in *Signale der neuen Zeit. 25 ausgewaehlte Reden von Dr. Joseph Goebbels*. 1932. German Propaganda Archive Project, Calvin College. 20 October 2003 <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb54.htm>.>

<sup>2</sup> John Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany, 1928-1945* (London: Sage, 1976), 3.

encountered the Nazis' propaganda techniques first hand. The writer observed, "They [the National Socialists] first test the mood of the population and then shape their propaganda meetings accordingly. Their tactics are basically the same everywhere: opposition to taxes and higher salaries for government officials. But the National Socialist idea has taken root in the minds of many. . . ."<sup>3</sup> Even though the Nazis continued to bash verbally the Weimar leaders, the party needed a group of people, namely the peasantry, who would be living, breathing specimens of the Nazi ideology.

During the "Hochschule fuer Politik," Goebbels noted that propaganda becomes effective when a "brief, crisply formulated idea" evolves into a "worldview." Furthermore, as he commented later in the address, "as propaganda draws an ever-growing following to the idea, the idea broadens, becomes more flexible. It no longer stays in a few heads, but wants to include everything."<sup>4</sup> In 1928, the Nazis not only re-examined their propaganda objectives to broaden their electoral appeal, but realized that the nation had changed as well. The election of Farmer Willikens proved to the Nazis that only a diversified propaganda campaign, tailored to the different strata of German society, would be effective.

As a result, the Nazis continued to attack the economically impotent Weimar government. However, economic promises could not possibly hope to drive the entire movement forward, and thus propaganda became the tool by which the Nazis could instill new ideas into the people. Consequently, the National Socialist movement reached out to the grassroots of German society, especially the peasantry, during the late 1920s. In

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<sup>3</sup> "Police report from Mosel Valley" of April 1930, in *Inside Hitler's Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Benjamin Sax (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1992), 101.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Goebbels, "Knowledge and Propaganda." German Propaganda Archive Project, Calvin College. 20 October 2003 <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb54.html>>

Lower Bavaria, for instance, Gregor Strasser emerged as one of the influential leaders whose ideas helped to pique farmers' interest in Nazi politics. According to a report published in the *Straubinger Beobachter* on September 3, 1932, Strasser announced the party's commitment to the German farmer: "The first priority [of the NSDAP<sup>5</sup> is] to revive the productive capacity of the German people to feed itself. . . ."<sup>6</sup> A month later Strasser provided the ideological context for the National Socialist policy: "the problem of the German peasant is fundamentally a problem of finding a new conception of [the] state."<sup>7</sup> Strasser not only explained that the peasants would feed the soldiers, industrial laborers, and white-collar workers of the economy; he recognized their importance to a "new conception of the state." The peasant became the key to the Nazi ideological puzzle. As a result, he became the foundation on which the Nazis built their "worldview." From the propaganda program of 1930 to the policy measures instituted during the years of the Third Reich, the Nazi regime ideologically revered the peasant and glorified his role in German society. The Nazis developed an agricultural policy based on the peasant as the core of their "worldview," known as "Blood and Soil."

### **Nazi Agrarian Theory: Background to the Propaganda Campaign**

As Adolf Hitler sat in his Landsberg prison cell and dictated *Mein Kampf* in 1924, he iterated similar ideas regarding the mission of propaganda. "The function of propaganda," Hitler stated, "does not lie in the scientific training of the individual, but in calling the masses' attention to certain facts, processes, necessities. . . ."<sup>8</sup> Crucial to Hitler's definition of propaganda was his reference to the "masses"—the Germans who

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<sup>5</sup> The Nazi party.

<sup>6</sup> Gregor Strasser, as cited in Kim Holmes, *The NSDAP and the Crisis of Agrarian Conservatism in Lower Bavaria: National Socialism and the Peasants' Road to Modernity* (New York: Garland, 1991), 100.

<sup>7</sup> Holmes, *The NSDAP and the Crisis of Agrarian Conservatism in Lower Bavaria*, 99.

<sup>8</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 179.

would build a new “worldview” for the Nazis by their adherence to certain principles. However, racial theory also shaped Hitler’s conception of propaganda; that is, propaganda was intended only for the racially pure German. Only this type of individual would understand the party’s “worldview” depicted in propaganda sources, for only he or she possessed the ability to carry out Hitler’s dream of a noble, vibrant *Volksgemeinschaft* (“national community”) based on racial homogeneity.

Hitler spoke of “true idealism” in *Mein Kampf*—the “subordination of the interests and life of the individual to the community . . . to the ultimate will of Nature.”<sup>9</sup> Pertinent to Hitler’s vision of the German community was the hierarchical system on which it would be based. In other words, German citizens were meant to serve the state and ultimately nature by producing strong, healthy children who would ensure the future of the racially superior “national community.” Hitler similarly reasoned:

A philosophy of life which endeavors to reject the democratic mass idea and give this earth to the best people—that is, the highest humanity—must logically obey the same aristocratic principle within this people and make sure that the leadership and the highest influence in this people fall to the best minds.<sup>10</sup>

This Darwinian notion of a “selected race” permeated Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. For both Hitler and the Nazi party, this “selected race” was an elite aristocracy—a noble group composed of the “best people” selected by nature to be the representatives of the German *Volk*.

According to the “worldview” envisioned by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, one of the earliest sources of Nazi propaganda, the peasants were the group of noble Germans who would build the new Reich. Ostensibly, the peasants would feed the physical needs of all

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<sup>9</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 299.

<sup>10</sup> Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, in *Inside Hitler’s Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Benjamin Sax, 256.

Germans by their work as farmers. Yet, on a figurative level, Hitler held that the peasantry fostered not only the physical needs of the *Volk*, but their spiritual ones as well. To Hitler, the plough became the means by which the farmers would give the nation its daily bread.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the plow as an economic symbol, it would come to represent the biological significance of the peasantry as well.<sup>12</sup> Hitler stated in *Mein Kampf*, “For a time a people and a state walk on this path, they will concentrate their attention to augmenting the racial, valuable core of the people and their fertility.”<sup>13</sup> Consequently, Hitler wanted to revert back to a traditional, pre-modern state where the toil of peasants enabled people to earn their daily bread without the fears created by modernity, including poverty, disease, and racial miscegenation. In the pre-modern, romantic German past, liberalism exerted no influence on the *Volk*. Rather, according to Hitler’s *Weltanschauung*, people lived in tight-knit families that exhibited proper gender roles both economically and socially. Women, for example, concentrated on the family sphere and took pride in their roles as mothers and wives. Unlike the post-World War I era and the liberal tenets that motivated women to pursue new endeavors, the traditional, agrarian world depicted life in its purest form for Hitler and the Nazi party. Thus, by ascribing certain moral characteristics to the peasantry, Hitler hoped to portray two contrasting worlds: one was a place in which the content, noble peasant toiled for the German race; conversely, the ideas of liberalism, Communism, and modernism influenced the degeneracy of the other one.

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<sup>11</sup> Gustavo Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants: Agrarian Policy of the Third Reich, 1930-1939* (New York: Berg, 1990), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Mai, *Rasse und Raum*, 39.

<sup>13</sup> Adolf Hitler, as cited in Uwe Mai, *Rasse und Raum: Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS Staat* (Muenchen: Ferdinand Schoeningh, 2002), 38. From this point forward, the English translations of German texts are my own. In German the cited text reads: „Denn hat erst ein Volk und ein Staat diesen Weg einmal beschritten, dann wird sich von selbst das Augenmerk darauf richten, gerade den rassisch wertvollen Kern des Volkes und gerade seine Fruchtbarkeit zu steigern.“

Alfred Rosenberg, a major Nazi philosopher who, like Hitler, argued for a racial definition of the peasantry, claimed that a “struggle between race and race” characterized the essence of the peasant’s life. According to the NSDAP, this biological war undermined the class warfare that Karl Marx had claimed was the basis of society.<sup>14</sup> Rosenberg held that the German peasantry was not an international class, fighting against the evils of a modern, capitalist economy, but rather a people who existed *within* and *for* Germany. To the Nazis, the Weimar economy represented the inefficacy of the international, modern economy as a whole. The party, especially under the leadership of Minister of Agriculture Richard Walther Darré, championed a society in which the peasant fought to uphold the sanctity of the German race against the evils of liberalism and modernity: “Whoever wants to urge liberal methods, sins against the spirit of the German peasantry and therefore against the German people.”<sup>15</sup> Whether a farmer lived in the middle regions of Germany or in Lower Bavaria, this spirit of anti-liberalism, reflected in NSDAP propaganda, was intended to unify the peasantry in a war for racial survival.

“There is no doubt, that we [the German people] owe to liberalism the solution of individualism that has produced a relationship-less society,” Darré wrote in *Ziel und Weg der nationalsozialistischen Agrarpolitik*. In the same piece he built an argument against economic individualism:

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, as cited in Mathias Eidenbenz, *Blut und Boden: Zu Funktion und Genese der Metaphern des Agrarismus und Biologismus in der nationalsozialistischen Bauernpropaganda R.W. Darrés* (New York: Lang, 1993), 5. The German text reads: „Geschichte und Zukunftsaufgabe bedeuten nicht mehr Kampf von Klasse gegen Klasse, sondern Kampf zwischen Rasse und Rasse.“

<sup>15</sup> Speech given by Darré in defense of the Reichsnaehrstandsgesetzes on September 19, 1933, in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie und Agrarpolitik im Staat Hitlers*, ed. Gustavo Corni (Idstein, Germany: Schulz-Kirchner, 1994), 86. The German text reads: „Wer . . . liberalistischen Methoden draengen will, versuedigt sich damit am Geist deutschen Bauertums und damit am deutschen Volk.“

Strong countries attempted to restrict the economic egoism of the individual . . . this means that one attempts to mobilize the economic egoism of the individual in the interests of the national economy of the people. Here we have the key to understanding the things of a national economy, which exists in most large states of the world.”<sup>16</sup>

Darré insisted that only a national economy would rid the German people of the evil of “economic egoism” and thus resurrect the nation. The international economy supported by the Weimar Republic, according to Darré, caused the Great Depression and would lead to more financial instability in the future. The Nazi party needed two things to occur in order to convince peasants that they were the solution to rebuilding the nation and the German race: first of all, it needed to construct a propaganda program based on concrete objectives; secondly, the party needed to *prove* that destructive forces had infiltrated the nation.

The NSDAP used an incident in the town of Wohrdener, Germany to drive its propaganda campaign forward. During the month of March 1929, Communists and Nazi party members clashed in the town; a brawl ensued, leaving two Nazis dead. Behind a campaign which claimed that international Marxism had permeated the entire country, National Socialists were able to convert this village, as well as other peasants who started to believe that the Nazis spoke the truth. As John Farquharson appropriately noted, “A factor here was the close-knit rural society, which induced pressure from existing peasant members on others in the parish still outside, which in some cases amounted to the threat

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Walther Darré, *Ziel und Weg der Nationalsozialistischen Agrarpolitik* (Muenchen: Zentral Verlag der NSDAP, 1934), 7 and 11. The first text reads in German: „Es ist kein Zweifel, dass wir dem Liberalismus die Loesung des Individuums von beziehungslos gewordenen Bindungen verdanken.“ The second excerpt, in which Darré discussed the nature of a national economy, reads: „Zwar versuchten starke Laender den wirtschaftlichen Egoismus des Einzelnen dadurch einzuengen, dass man sich zu einer Art von nationalem Wirtschaftsgebilde entschloss, d.h., dass man den Wirtschaftsegoismus des Einzelnen im Interesse der nationalen Wirtschaft des Volkes zu mobilisieren versuchte. Hier haben wir den Schluessel zum Verstaendnis der Dinge, die bei den meisten grossen Staaten der Welt zwangslaeufig eine Art nationaler Wirtschaft ins Leben gerufen haben.“

of a boycott if they did not join in.<sup>17</sup> Of course, many of the Nazi warnings against Marxism consisted of pure emotion over reason. One NSDAP account later claimed, “the movement would never have conquered the people . . . if its propaganda speeches had been based upon reason only.”<sup>18</sup> Did the peasants across Germany completely understand the Nazi doctrine? No. As Farquharson argued, even the Bavarian peasantry joined the NSDAP in groups, rather as individuals. This trend, however, was significant because it suggests that the Nazis induced group conformity within the peasantry. As Goebbels stated in 1928, propaganda is a “means to an end” that should depict the Nazi party as a “movement that can conquer the broad masses.”<sup>19</sup> To increase communal and regional support for their programs, therefore, the Nazis used various incidents, such as the one in Wohrdener, to attack the status quo and thus drive their propaganda campaign forward. The next step in the Nazi movement to mobilize the peasantry was the formation of distinct, yet ideologically-inspired agricultural programs.

### **The 1930 Program**

1930 was a pivotal year for the Nazi propaganda machine. First of all, the NSDAP published “The Official Party Manifesto on the Position of the NSDAP with Regard to the Farming Population and Agriculture.” This document officially labeled the peasant as the guardian of the nation’s rural health, the source of its youth, and the “backbone of its military potential.” In addition, it ascribed a number of powers to the state regarding agricultural administration. Under the manifesto, the state would control agricultural credit as well as the number of small and medium-sized farms across

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<sup>17</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> NSDAP party member, as cited in Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Goebbels, “Knowledge and Propaganda.” German Propaganda Archive Project, Calvin College. 20 October 2003 <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb54.htm>.>

Germany.<sup>20</sup> According to the Nazi party's agrarian spokesman, the aforementioned Werner Willikens, the program would decrease the number of agricultural products imported into Germany, facilitate industrial growth, and give farmers more purchasing power. In addition, the plan would help remedy the shortcomings of the current government—high taxes, high fertilizer prices, and a lack of protection against the foreign market.<sup>21</sup>

Enter Richard Walther Darré, Nazi expert on animal husbandry and Minister of Agriculture from 1933 to 1942. Darré had fought on the Western Front during the First World War and earned a degree in agronomy at the University of Halle in the early 1920s. At the end of the decade, he produced a series of publications on livestock selection that applied to racial theory. Evidently, this individual attracted the attention of Adolf Hitler, for Darré also believed that the German peasantry should pursue selective breeding.<sup>22</sup> Even though he would not become Agricultural Minister until the Nazis seized political power, Darré's work prior to 1933 was extremely important, as it established how the party would formulate agrarian legislation when it came to power. In a speech delivered in June of 1930 he announced:

In such a state [as Germany] the German farmer is the cornerstone of the state's policy. That should not only mean that agricultural romanticism should be promoted, but rather that the laws of blood and soil must find their point of reference as a top priority.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Clifford Lovin, "R. Walther Darré, Nazi Agricultural Policy, and Preparation for War," *Occasional Papers in German Studies* No. 7 (Dec., 1995): 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Speech of Darré's delivered on June 22, 1930 to the "Nordic Ring," in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 68-69. For this excerpt the German text reads: „In einem solchen Staat ist der deutsche Bauer wieder der Eckstein des Staatsgedankens. Das soll nun nicht heissen, dass bauerliche Romantik getrieben werden soll, sondern dass die Gesetze von Blut und Boden in erster Linie in diesem Staate ihre Beruecksichtigung finden muessen.“

In August of that year, Darré laid out two memorandums before the Nazi leadership. The first suggested that the NSDAP bring all food-producers under its control, isolate urban areas, and economically destroy the Republic. Despite the concrete plans laid out in this memorandum, the party considered Darré's ideas too radical; his plan involved illegal methods of obtaining power. Moreover, the NSDAP only had twelve seats in the Reichstag when Darré composed this document. More important for the Nazi propaganda movement, however, was Darré's second proposal. In it he suggested that the Nazis needed a structure to oversee agriculture and the agrarian propaganda campaign. Darré once commented, "There must be no farm or holding, no co-operative or rural industry, no local farmers union . . . where our [party members] have not so worked that we cannot immediately paralyze the structure."<sup>24</sup> According to Darré, the apparatus would consist of regional and local leaders under the supervision of the Agricultural Minister. Even though "reliable farmers" would be taken on as "honorary advisers" at the village level, Darré constructed the system so that advisers in the village community did not need to be professional farmers, but efficient technicians of propaganda; they would carry Darré's philosophy of "Blood and Soil"—and with it a revolution in ideas to "paralyze the structure" of society in Weimar Germany—directly to the local peasantry.<sup>25</sup>

All of these radical promises could not take root at the local level unless the party addressed how each proposal would work. In the area around Northeim, Germany, for instance, a large number of conservative voters supported the "Guelphs," the *Deutsch-Hannoverische Partei*, during the later years of the Republic. This party supported the

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<sup>24</sup> Darré, as cited in Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 13.

“peasantry, shopkeepers, and artisans—particularly in the oldest Guelph lands” and advocated states’ rights and even separatism. However, by early 1930 the party’s influence had waned, and the Nazi propaganda machine accelerated its efforts to mobilize the people of the town. By supporting a platform that attacked the SPD<sup>26</sup> as Marxists, the Nazis, both in Northeim and throughout Germany, recruited local support and new party members.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the SPD, which believed a class struggle was inherent to Germany’s past and present, the emerging Nazis theorized that a racial struggle, which required the solidarity of the peasantry, had engulfed the nation.

With the propaganda machine in place, the NSDAP could begin to showcase the nationalist, revolutionary nature of its program. In Northeim, the movement attracted farmers and other citizens by promoting recreational and social programs, including sporting events, free “cultural movies,” and vocational training courses for the large number of unemployed persons.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the Nazis established agricultural training courses in German villages to preach “Blood and Soil” to the peasantry. In an article entitled “Coming Tasks of Rural Propaganda,” Gustav Straebe described the nature of this training:

The farmers’ educational courses also gave rhetorically gifted party members, and not only those from rural areas, but also those from cities who wanted to learn more, fundamental knowledge on overcoming liberalism, and therefore the proletariat. It gives him the resources he can use in future public meetings to build the worldview of National Socialism brick by brick.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*

<sup>27</sup> For information regarding the propaganda machine and *Gau* leadership in Northeim, see William S. Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1922-1945* (London: Franklin Watts, 1984), 33.

<sup>28</sup> Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power*, 72.

<sup>29</sup> Gustav Straebe, “Naechste Aufgaben der laendlichen Propaganda.” German Propaganda Archive Project, Calvin College. 20 October 2003 <[www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wilweg01.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/wilweg01.htm)>

Staebe's work was important on two levels. First of all, it reestablished how propaganda should transmit a "worldview" to its audience: specifically, as a mason builds a wall, "brick by brick." Secondly, it utilized technical terms. The text referred to Marxist doctrine and included words such as "liberalism," the "proletariat," and "worldview." During this early stage of agrarian propaganda, the Nazis used these terms to show that the party's struggle was between "us" and "them," as they needed to promote conformity within the peasantry.

Uwe Mai has argued that 1930 provided the basis for a "biologicalization" of the NSDAP's agrarian program.<sup>30</sup> Darré's "Blood and Soil" theory, in other words, focused on the peasant's duty to the German race. A *Protokoll* from the Reich cabinet meeting of September 26, 1933 discussed how the Nazi leadership conceived the biological function of the peasant: "In all states of the world, the peasantry is the nation's source of blood. The existence of a people rises and falls with the stability of the peasantry."<sup>31</sup> The author of the *Protokoll* remarked that the peasantry ensures the survival of a nation by producing food. This is true in an economic sense. However, the Nazis took this philosophy one step further and claimed that the peasant was involved in a biological war to "feed" the pure, mighty German race. As a result, the Nazi propaganda movement disseminated sources that glorified the peasantry on a higher level than mere food producers. Behind "future [economic] rewards and answers to the profound identity crisis into which they had been plunged for some time by the inexorable process of mechanization and

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<sup>30</sup> Mai, *Rasse und Raum*, 40. Mai argued, „. . . gab 1930 der Partei die entscheidenden Impulse fuer eine „Biologisierung ihres Agrarprogramms.“

<sup>31</sup> From the minutes of the Reich cabinet meeting on September 26, 1933, in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 103. The German text reads: „In allen Staaten der Welt sei das Bauernvolk die Blutquelle der Nation. Die Existenz eines Volkes stehe und falle mit der Stabilisierung des Bauerntums.“ Later on in the report, the author notes, „Er [der Bauer] muesse deshalb dem Kampf des Wirtschaftslebens entruueckt werden.“ In other words, this passage stated that the peasant must bear the struggle of the German economic life.

industrialization,” the party praised German peasants to highlight their worth to the Nazi “worldview.”<sup>32</sup> Ideologically, they became the keys to national revitalization.

Between 1930 and 1932, the NSDAP swept up increasing support in the rural areas of Germany. During the last years of the Weimar Republic, peasants experienced falling prices for their agricultural products, low protective tariffs when selling their goods in the international market, and constant bickering and division within the agrarian communities across Germany.<sup>33</sup> Darré’s “Blood and Soil” ideology, whether or not the peasants grasped the essence of it—most probably did not—accomplished its task, especially during these financially challenging years. “Blood and Soil” rejuvenated a lost sense of pride within the German peasantry. In the *Voelkische Beobachter*, a NSDAP-backed newspaper, a writer claimed:

On the 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 will be made and history was made. On the other hand, the debased city-dweller, weak, effeminate and cowardly.<sup>34</sup>

The author of this passage was consistent; he ascribed all of the positive qualities of German-ness to the peasantry: males were “robust” specimens, while females were “faithful companions” and “proud mothers.” According to the author’s logic, “Blood and Soil” was a philosophy that reinforced both history and traditional gender roles.

Historically, the Nazis claimed, it had always existed within peasant families. At the family level, men and women possessed equal, yet different roles in terms of their value

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<sup>32</sup> From the minutes of the Reich cabinet meeting on September 26, 1933, in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 103.

<sup>33</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 25-26.

<sup>34</sup> Article in the *Voelkische Beobachter* from January 9, 1932, as cited in Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 28.

to this ideology. As Jill Stephenson argued in *Women in Nazi Germany*, the functional differences between both sexes stemmed from their “contrasting natures and their complementary functions. In essence, this affirmed the traditional division of labor, with men dominating the public sphere and women controlling the private sphere. . . .”<sup>35</sup> Men were supposed to be healthy, strong specimens who fought the “eternal struggle with . . . the land”; conversely, women protected the health of the German race because they fought the “eternal struggle with nature.” They would accomplish this mission by remaining loyal and subordinate to their husbands and raising their children to be obedient servants of the state.

One could say that the Nazis envisioned the woman as the spiritual head of the family, while the man was the economic head. Maternal strength, although not conceptualized in similar terms to the physical strength of men, would lead to a new “worldview” envisioned by Dr. Walther Gross in a speech to German women: “Let us then together follow the path to a new worldview. Let us go the path of blood and race . . . to build a state. . . . German women today have the good fortune to see a strong and loyal woman at their head.”<sup>36</sup> In addition to a plethora of propaganda speeches addressed to the German peasantry, the NSDAP propaganda machine utilized art as well. Fitting with Joseph Goebbels’s belief that propaganda should convey a “worldview,” art would specifically target the peasantry by illustrating the harmony and order of agrarian life. In 1932 an officer of the German government noted, “In the German art rages a struggle about death and life, nothing different than the field of politics. And besides the

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<sup>35</sup> Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany* (London: Pearson, 2001), 19.

<sup>36</sup> Walter Gross, “National Socialist Racial Policy: A Speech to German Women.” German Propaganda Archive Project, Calvin College. 4 April 2003 <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/gross.htm>>

struggle for power the struggle about art should be led by the same sense of seriousness and determination.”<sup>37</sup>

### The Nazi “Worldview” in Painting

For the Nazi propaganda campaign, art would convey highly technical ideology to the peasantry by illustrating ordinary people doing ordinary tasks. Thus, it would simplify the Nazi doctrine and make it practical. Moreover, art would depict the noble qualities of the peasantry about which Darré spoke and wrote. By showing the peasant in romanticized, agrarian settings, the NSDAP used art to depict what author J.G. Fichte had noted about the “genuine German” as early as 1808: “The genuine German is loyal, modest, pious, and hard working, the courageous defender of the fatherland.”<sup>38</sup> In a painting entitled “Harvest,” for instance, the artist captured a group of farmers cutting and binding wheat from the fields. Despite their intense labor in the foreground of the image, however, the beautiful scenery of the “Fatherland” dominates most of the painting. Stately mountains guard the river valley; in addition, the viewer sees lush, healthy land that produces a rich harvest. The Nazis used propaganda like this image to educate the peasants ideologically about their proper place in the world. Even though their labor was vital to the survival of the German people, as the party contended, nature was still superior to them. According to “Blood and Soil,” the peasants were the noble figures who would safeguard the strong, healthy *Volk*—in the painting their vibrancy was

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<sup>37</sup> Words of Reich minister Paul Schultze-Naunburg, as cited in Harald Olbrich, *Geschichte der deutschen Kunst, 1918-1945* (Leipzig: E.A. Seeman Verlag, 1990), 302. The German text reads: „Denn in der deutschen Kunst tobt ein Kampf um Tod und Leben, nicht anders auf dem Feld der Politik. Und neben dem Kampf um die Macht muss der Kampf um die Kunst mit demselben Ernst und derselben Entschlossenheit gefuehrt werden.“

<sup>38</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*. <<http://www.thorstenspahr.de/p10.html>> The original German text states: „Der echte Deutsche ist treu, bescheiden, fromm und fleissig, der mutige Verteidiger des Vaterlands. . . .“

connected to the health and vibrancy of nature—even as they remained the inferior servants of nature.<sup>39</sup>

Based on the fear that liberalism and Marxism threatened the concept of “Blood and Soil,” Hitler advocated artwork that condemned modernity as a disease. Art, according to Hitler, needed to compel Germans to look for their roots in the golden age of the past.<sup>40</sup> Painting that supported the National Socialist “worldview” was integral to the propaganda movement, for it could teach people better than any leaflet or book. In a painting by Oskar Martin-Amorbach also entitled “Harvest,” the artist depicted a family—a father, mother, grandfather, and two children—to show that the true German family was orderly and behaved according to certain gender roles. Each person carries a sickle in the painting except the small child who stays close to his mother’s side. It appears as if this family is an infantry unit: its members march in a line to maintain cohesion. The father is at the head of the column, while the mother, the nurturer of the children according to the Nazi doctrine, holds the young boy’s hand. The image not only portrayed the hierarchy and order within the farming family, but the hierarchy in nature as well. Again, the subject of the work was the farm family; however, the artist, by portraying the power of nature in the background of the painting, showed the hierarchy of the natural world.<sup>41</sup>

National Socialist art reinforced what Darré said about the racial differences between Germans and Slavs: the “deep-rooted peasant nature” of Germans distinguished them from Slavs.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, according to Kim Holmes, the peasants flocked to the

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<sup>39</sup> For the image of Fluegel’s “Harvest,” see the appendix, image no. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Grosshans, *Hitler and the Artists* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983), 23.

<sup>41</sup> For an image of Amorbach’s “Harvest,” see the appendix, image no. 2.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Walther Darré, as cited in Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 22.

NSDAP program that promised a “new social order” for the peasantry, “one which simultaneously stressed hope for the future and respect for the past.” She maintained that the core of Nazi agrarian policy was not in its philosophical content, but “in its message that the Nazis would create a moral system which would reconcile the cultural and economic lives of the peasantry. . . .”<sup>43</sup> When the Nazis finally seized political power in 1933, this agrarian ideology, centered on a racial “worldview,” became legal reality.

Although the Nazis encouraged a traditionalist interpretation of history, as Holmes argued, they destroyed much of the old order throughout Germany. After the Nazis gained political power, they abruptly transformed the entire system of agrarian organization: Darré debilitated the historic, often quarrelsome agrarian unions by replacing them with one “comprehensive corporation.”<sup>44</sup> By 1932, these regional organizations, which had stirred up dissent in rural communities during the latter years of the Republic, had virtually disappeared.<sup>45</sup> In order to coordinate the remaining unions under Nazi leadership, Darré told his regional directors to get on the local governing committees by election or by “some other way.” Consequently, the SA stepped up its efforts to institute Darré’s agricultural system. In Schleswig-Holstein, for example, the SA physically attacked members of a farm union who opposed a Reich election manifesto. The police justified their response by claiming that the union had abused state funds.<sup>46</sup>

### **The *Erbhofgesetz*: “Blood and Soil” in Action**

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<sup>43</sup> Kim Holmes, “The Foresaken Past: Agrarian Conservatism and National Socialism in Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (Oct., 1982): 681.

<sup>44</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 44.

<sup>45</sup> Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 32.

<sup>46</sup> Material on the Coordination of the NSDAP Agricultural Administration taken from Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 45.

On October 1, 1933 Darré celebrated an easy political victory by holding an *Erntedanktag* (harvest festival of thanksgiving) in Bueckeberg, Germany. Over 500,000 people attended this event and listened to Darré's words:

The German Harvest Thanksgiving Day represents the gratitude for the rich harvest of heaven and earth. It is the day of the German farmer. All groups, all classes, young and old, of the German people greet the German farmer on October 1, 1933, who was called and led by National Socialism to new freedom and new service.<sup>47</sup>

Darré may have been correct in saying that National Socialism led the farmer to a “new service” and a new function in German society. However, during the Reich years, Darré hardly deviated from this ideological, “Blood and Soil” course. His policies never provided the peasantry with “new [economic] freedom.”

One of his first legislative moves was the Law of Hereditary Entailment (*Erbhofgesetz*). By reverting back to the agrarian program of March 1930 that stated, “German soil will not be allowed to be the object of financial speculation,” this law intended to preserve the peasantry under old German inheritance customs. Moreover, the act stipulated that no land could be sold, ensuring that it would always remain in the same family. As J.E. Farquharson argued, the peasant family had gained both security of tenure and guaranteed prices for agricultural products; additionally, the peasant family had become a privileged class, sheltered from a fluctuating world market.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, “Blood and Soil” continued to shape Nazi agricultural programs. As a result of this legislation, the family unit became the building block for future agrarian measures, as the Nazis maintained that the family, held together by distinct gender roles and a respect for order and discipline, was at the heart of the nation's revival.

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<sup>47</sup> Darré's *Erntedanktag* speech (October 1, 1933), as cited in Lovin, “R. Walther Darré, Nazi Agricultural Policy, and Preparation for War,” 7.

<sup>48</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 114.

Furthermore, the *Erbhofgesetz* defined the peasant based on Darré's "Blood and Soil" philosophy. "We need the peasant as the source of blood of the German people and we need him as the breadwinner of the German people," Darré remarked in a political speech.<sup>49</sup> What the *Erhobgesetz* established, however, was a distinction between the peasant, the noble representative of the German people, and the independent farmer. In an essay entitled "Das Ziel" (the goal), Darré described both groups of people: the *Bauer* (the noble peasant) and the *Landwirt* (the independent farmer). He stated:

The difference lies in the fact that the *Bauer* is a term based on family law, while the *Landwirt* . . . is an economic term. That means: the peasantry safeguards the law of the family. . . . With the *Bauer* the earth is never merchandise, as it is only a part . . . of the family. The *Bauer* thinks in terms of 'we' regarding the family. The *Landwirt* thinks in terms of 'I' . . . .<sup>50</sup>

The *Erbhofgesetz* provided for the formation of hereditary farms consisting up to 125 hectares. According to the law, "the property owners of the *Erbhof* are called *Bauer*."<sup>51</sup> In addition, the word *Bauer*, meaning "farmer" in the German language, would now refer exclusively to the *hereditary* farmers. As a result of this act, Darré's "Blood and Soil" ideology became inextricably linked to the family. Moreover, the hereditary farmers became the cultural and racial defenders of German civilization, because one had to be racially pure and bound to the land to receive this distinction. The *Bauer* could focus his

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<sup>49</sup> Speech given by Darré regarding the *Reichsnaehrstandsgesetzes* (September 19, 1933), in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 86. The German text reads: „Wir brauchen den Bauern als Blutsquell des deutschen Volkes und wir brauchen ihn als den Ernaehrer des deutschen Volkes.“

<sup>50</sup> Darré's „Das Ziel,“ published in the magazine *Deutsche Agrarpolitik*, 1932/33, No. 1, in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 76-77. The German text for this passage reads: „Der Unterschied liegt kurz gesagt darin, dass der Bauer ein familienrechtlicher Begriff ist, waehrend der Landwirt, wie schon sein Name sagt, ein wirtschaftlicher Begriff ist. Das heisst: Bauerntum bedeutet die familienrechtliche Sicherung . . . . Beim Bauern wird der Boden daher nie zur Ware, denn dieser ist ja nur ein Teil, sozusagen der ernaehrende Teil, eines Familiengedankens. . . . Der Bauer denkt daher weltanschaulich im „Wir“ des Familiengedankens. Der Landwirt denkt im „Ich“ des bestmoeglichsten Reingewinnes.“

<sup>51</sup> The Preamble of the *Erbhofgesetz*, as cited in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 105.

attention on the family and, as Darré envisioned, serve the German *Volk* without fearing the influences of market fluctuations or foreclosure.<sup>52</sup>

Aside from the honors that the Nazi regime bestowed on the *Bauern*, the *Erbhofgesetz* limited their individuality. Because they sat at the top of the social ladder, the Nazis expected these individuals to behave as model Germans. “It is necessary that he [the *Bauer*] feel conscious of the solidarity between the city and the country,” a government official wrote, “he . . . is to work for the benefit of the community.”<sup>53</sup> As Thomas Phelps pointed out, a *Bauer* could lose his right to farm-management for not abiding by the “Peasant Code of Honor.” One individual who lived in the village of Bamberg, Bavaria, for instance, lost his noble status due to public drunkenness. In another case near Dortmund, a peasant lost his *Bauer* title for not properly providing for his aged mother.<sup>54</sup> All of these cases demonstrated how the Nazis conceptualized the *Bauern*—peasants, unlike the *Landwirten*, who had both economic and ideological duties to the German state.

Robert Brady, author of *The Spirit and Structure of German Fascism*, once wrote:

This program [the *Erbhofgesetz*] is destined to achieve three effects: *fixity of occupation* will be the product of bringing the peasants to the soil in a rigid and permanent relationship. *Fixity of status* is to be brought about by fitting the peasantry into a rigid social-economic class hierarchy. . . . *Fixity of residence* will ensure from the fixity of occupation and status. . . .<sup>55</sup>

By bestowing the title of *Bauer* on these peasants, the Nazi state created an interesting paradox. Even though the regime elevated the *Bauern* to a noble status, their adherence

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<sup>52</sup> Lovin, “R. Walther Darré, Nazi Agricultural Policy, and Preparation for War,” 8.

<sup>53</sup> Lichtenberger, as cited in Thomas Phelps, *The German Peasant Family, 1925-1939: The Problems of the Republic and the Impact of National Socialism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1997), 127.

<sup>54</sup> Information regarding the poor behavior of the peasantry taken from Phelps, *The German Peasant Family*, 129-30.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Brady, as cited in Phelps, *The German Peasant Family*, 128.

to the law made them “virtual serfs,” as the state confined them and their families to the land.<sup>56</sup> The law restricted *Bauern* and made it impossible for them to modernize their farms and purchase new equipment, seeds, and fertilizer to increase production.

According to Darré, the *Landwirt* was the independent farmer who was concerned with modernity and self-sufficiency. *Bauern*, on the contrary, reflected higher ideals and were not supposed to worry about profit.

The *Erbhofgesetz* caused other problems for the peasants as a result of the Nazi “Blood and Soil” doctrine. The law, as Clifford Lovin contended, legalized the inferior status of women. The *Erbhofgesetz* made it virtually impossible for them to own farms, as it created an order of inheritance that catered to males and suppressed females.<sup>57</sup>

According to the legislation:

The following order determines the order of farm inheritance: (1) the sons of the original owner; in the condition of a deceased son his sons follow; (2) the father of the owner; (3) the brothers of the owner; in the condition of a deceased brother his sons follow; (4) the daughters of the owner. . . .; (5) the sisters of the owner. . . .; (6) the female dependents of the owner and such descendants. . . .<sup>58</sup>

Wives of hereditary farmers were last in this inheritance order. In addition to her work as wife and mother, necessity compelled the peasant woman to cook, clean the house, make clothes, milk the cows, feed the pigs, and clean the stable. The Nazis wished to reverse this trend and therefore instructed women to be the spiritual nurturers of the household,

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<sup>56</sup> Phelps, *The German Peasant Family*, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Lovin, “R. Walther Darré, Nazi Agricultural Policy, and Preparation for War,” 9.

<sup>58</sup> The *Erbhofgesetz*, in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 107. The German text that describes the order of inheritance is as follows: „Zum Anerben sind in folgender Ordnung berufen: (1) die Soehne des Erblassers; an die Stelle eines verstorbenen Sohnes treten dessen Soehne und Sohnessoehne; (2) der Vater des Erblassers; (3) die Brueder des Erblassers; an die Stelle eines verstorbenen Bruders treten dessen Soehne und Sohnessoehne; (4) die Toechter des Erblassers. . . .; (5) die Schwestern des Erblassers. . . .(6) die weiblichen Abkoemmlinge des Erblassers und die Nachkommen von solchen. . . .“

even though their daily work on the farm, according to a study published in 1933, restricted them to only five and a half hours of sleep each day.<sup>59</sup>

The NSDAP realized this trend and thus crafted the *Erbhofgesetz* to isolate *Bauern* families from the stresses of a modern, capitalist economy from which they should not be harmed. According to the *Voelkischer Beobachter*, “It is easy to see the consequences for the health of women and their offspring. A woman who has to perform hard physical work from her fifteenth year is old and exhausted by the time she is forty.”<sup>60</sup> Additionally, Darré demanded that the peasant wife be freed from all things economic and concentrate solely on her biological duties. In an essay entitled *Die Frau im Reichsnaehrstand*, he wrote, “Aid must be provided to the female workforce on the farm so that they can be freed from the curse of liberalism . . . and a lust for economic profit.”<sup>61</sup> These excerpts relate that the Nazi movement expressed deep concern regarding the role of the peasant woman on the *Erbhof*. By listing women at the end of the inheritance order—the peasant wife was *dead last*, following male and female family members—Darré wanted women to get back to their natural roles as wives and mothers. In turn, this would hopefully increase the German birthrate and, as he rationalized, protect the racial purity of all *Bauern*.

However, the birthrate actually declined in large peasant families because of the *Erbhofgesetz*. First of all, the law established an immutable pattern of inheritance. Many siblings who received no inheritance from the law moved to the cities to find better jobs. Consequently, this migration decreased the number of people working on the land and the

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<sup>59</sup> Information regarding the life of a farm wife on an *Erbhof* taken from Lovin, “R. Walther Darré, Nazi Agricultural Policy, and Preparation for War,” 9.

<sup>60</sup> *Voelkischer Beobachter*, 13/14 May 1934, in Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Germany*, 152.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Walther Darré, “Die Frau im Reichsnaehrstand,” in *Um Blut und Boden: Reden und Aufsätze* (Muenchen: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1940), 144.

number of marriages that could occur. As Thomas Phelps argued, peasant parents also tended to have fewer children as a result of the *Erbhofgesetz*, for they did not want to create hostilities between siblings or burden the heir with too many responsibilities that stemmed from the law.<sup>62</sup>

Another reason for the decline in birthrate resulted from the time at which peasants married. Before the *Erbhofgesetz*, children gained their inheritance while both parents were alive. When the parents retired they would divide up the farm among the siblings. Therefore, the children would have some inheritance with which they could start their own families. After the passage of the *Erbhofgesetz*, however, parents would retire later or not at all, as the legislation stipulated that they could not divide up their property. Darré and the NSDAP held that the farm was a fixed entity to be preserved by a single individual from generation to generation. Peasant children, after the emergence of the *Erbhofgesetz*, generally waited until they could acquire enough capital to get married and start a family. A case study from southwestern Germany illustrated the peasants' attitude towards marriage. Between 1935 and 1936, peasant males in this region placed 224 advertisements for wives in local newspapers. Seventy-one percent of all requests, however, were left unanswered.<sup>63</sup> Without the inheritance from their parents' farms, peasants—those who actually wanted to get married—had no choice but to wait and save money. The ideological principles behind the *Erbhofgesetz*, although meant for the improvement of the German peasants, detrimentally altered their way of life.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Phelps, *The German Peasant Family*, 102.

<sup>63</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 190.

<sup>64</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 103.

In *Ziel und Weg der nationalsozialistischen Agrarpolitik*, Darré had claimed, “It seems paradoxical; therefore I must say that the peasantry is the basis for an organic exchange of goods. The peasantry . . . is called to protect the national identity. . . .”<sup>65</sup> According to this revolutionary scheme implemented by Darré, the peasants became the defenders of Germany against the influences of liberalism. The “organic” economy about which Darré wrote was based on domestic production: if the domestic sector could increase production, the regime would have less need to import foreign goods. Moreover, the Nazis contended that the peasants would be isolated from the insecurity of the international market. Just as Darré intended to isolate the esteemed *Bauern* by limiting their mobility on the land, he planned to isolate them from the evils of market capitalism. Therefore, in November of 1934 Darré launched the *Erzeugungsschlacht*, the so-called “Battle for Production.”

### **An Ideological “Battle for Production”**

Despite Darré’s obsession with the ideological implications of the *Erzeugungsschlacht*, he needed a plan that could free the German peasants from the “iron laws of economics” that had brought them virtually to extinction.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, Darré developed a system known as the *Marktordnung*—market regulations established to oversee the distribution and production of agricultural goods. Under himself, Darré established the *Reichstellen* offices to regulate foodstuffs imported into Germany. Additionally, the *Reichstellen* were to buy up excess quotas of agricultural products at

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<sup>65</sup> Darré, *Ziel und Weg der nationalsozialistischen Politik*, 18. The German text reads: „So paradox es klingt, so muss ich doch sagen, dass das Bauerntum auf der Grundlage dieses Weges der Wegbereiter eines organischen Gueteraustausches wird. Das Bauerntum . . . berufen ist, unter voller Wahrung seiner nationalen Eigenarten und nationalen Selbstbehauptung. . . .“

<sup>66</sup> Darré, as cited in Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 89.

current world prices and then add tariffs to bring them up to domestic prices.<sup>67</sup> Darré, in an address to the NSDAP party congress, claimed:

The market regulation has a dual function. In times of overproduction or oversupply due to high importation, it serves to ensure that the peasants receive just prices [for their products]. In times of scarce production or unsatisfactory supply, the regulation secures a stable price for the consumer. With the regulation of the market, we mastered the problem of sales for the peasants . . . so that agriculture can be healthy. . . .<sup>68</sup>

Ostensibly, the *Marktordnung* was an economic program with defined objectives. Darré established a system of price regulations that he hoped would protect the peasant against the market. However, as Daniela Meunkel argued, “The installation of the *Marktordnung* was substantiated, like all agrarian-political measures of the Nazi period, by ideologically tinted statements.”<sup>69</sup> In comparison to other agricultural policies, the Nazi “worldview” determined why Darré established the *Marktordnung* to oversee the “Battle for Production.” If the peasants felt safeguarded from economic fears, Darré reasoned, they would be ready to fight this impending battle.

The Nazi propaganda machine championed the *Erzeugungsschlacht* throughout Germany. Not only did the Nazis use public speeches to advocate this policy, they utilized other means of propaganda to drive this ideology into the heads of the peasants. In several towns, for instance, loudspeakers played a recorded conversation between two peasants, one against the production drive, and the other convinced of Germany’s need to

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<sup>67</sup> Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants*, 93.

<sup>68</sup> Darré’s speech to the *Parteikongress der NSDAP* on September 12, 1935, in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Corni, 135. The German text reads: „Die Marktordnung hat ein doppeltes Gesicht. In Zeiten der Ueberproduktion oder bei Uebersorgung durch ueberfluessige Einfuhr bietet sie den Schutz des gerechten Preises gegenueber den Bauern. In Zeiten der Unterproduktion oder bei nicht genuegenden Zufuehren sichert sie den Preis fuer den Konsumenten. Mit der Marktordnung meisterten wir das Absatzproblem fuer den Bauern . . . so dass die Landwirtschaft gesunden konnte. . . .“

<sup>69</sup> Daniela Meunkel, *Bauern und Nationalsozialismus: Der Landkreis Celle im Dritten Reich* (Bielefeld, Germany: Verlag fuer Regionalgeschichte, 1991), 65. The German reads: „Begrundet wurde die Einfuehrung der Marktordnung, wie alle agrarpolitischen Massnahmen der NS-Zeit, mit ideologisch gefaerbten Aussagen.“

increase its agricultural output.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, propaganda leaders continued to stress the idea of a national, coordinated production drive that would revive the national economy. In the June 22, 1934 issue of the *Cellesche Zeitung*, for example, an author demanded an “end to the peasant migration. It is the sabotage of the workers’ struggles.”<sup>71</sup> Daniela Meunkel contended in *Bauern und Nationalsozialismus: Der Landkreis Celle im Dritten Reich* that the rural migration to the cities endangered the Reich’s agricultural objectives.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, as peasants migrated from the *Erbhof* and left their “noble positions” on the land, their actions jeopardized the Nazi ideological stance. “The Germans named those people ‘Bauern,’” Darré noted in *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der nordischen Rasse*, “who had an organic ownership of the land integrated with family unity.”<sup>73</sup> Darré, by stressing the peasant’s “organic” importance, believed that the peasant was intrinsically tied to the earth. To him, the land would never let the noble peasant and his family down, for unlike the insecurity of the world market, influenced by greed, corruption, and severe price fluctuations, the land would ensure both economic and spiritual well-being.

Consequently, the Nazis accelerated their efforts to promote the agrarian life and the *Erzeugungsschlacht* through propaganda. In Thuringia, one story related that a *Bauer* gave an ornate spade to the heir of his farm, symbolizing the hard-working nature of the German people. When he presented it, he told the heir, “May it [the spade] never rust

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<sup>70</sup> Story cited in Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 165.

<sup>71</sup> June 22, 1934 issue of the *Cellesche Zeitung*, as cited in Meunkel, *Bauern und Nationalsozialismus*, 86. The German text for this passage reads: „Schluss mit der Landflucht. Sie ist die Sabotage der Arbeitsschlacht.“

<sup>72</sup> Meunkel, *Bauern und Nationalsozialismus*, 86.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Walther Darré, *Das Bauerntum als Lebensquell der nordischen Rasse* (Muenchen: J.F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1937), 112. The German text for this citation is as follows: „Zusammenfassend duerfen wir sagen: Den Vorstand oder das Haupt einer mit dem Bodenbesitz organisch verkneupften Familieneinheit nannte der Germane einen Bauern.“

and you never rest until you give the farm to your heir.” Next, the father presented his son with soil, water, and the key to the house to show his son what he had inherited. The Nazi propaganda leaders in the town then thanked the old peasant for his dutiful service and reminded the son of his responsibilities. Following this procedure, the peasants lit a hearth-fire next to the housewife to symbolize her new familial responsibilities as a wife and mother, the guiding light of the *Erbhof*.<sup>74</sup> This type of story, however romanticized it may appear, shows how the Nazi propaganda machine targeted local communities ideologically after the start of the *Erzeugungsschlacht*.

At a meeting of the Nazi Agrarian Office in February 1935, Darré continued to stress the importance of ideological indoctrination when promoting the *Erzeugungsschlacht*. In the villages across Germany, the propaganda machine continued to preach both the values of hard work and *voelkisch* duty to the state. More importantly, the Nazis hoped to encourage a feeling of peasant consciousness by inducing conformity within the local peasant communities. Nazi officials held mandatory “work evenings,” for instance, to lecture entire villages of women about their “biological-racial” duties to their husbands and families.<sup>75</sup> In addition, the Nazi authorities employed coercion to promote conformity. In the village of Coppenbruegge in Lower Saxony, a peasant tried to withdraw from a cattle cooperative because of his discontent with agricultural prices. The Nazi officials told him that if he withdrew, authorities would take appropriate measures against him.<sup>76</sup> Whether the prices were unfair or not, the Nazi leadership would not tolerate insubordination to the community, for the core of the NSDAP agrarian ideology was based on peasant solidarity. First of all, Darré needed to maximize

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<sup>74</sup> Story cited in Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 207.

<sup>75</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 210.

<sup>76</sup> Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 211.

agricultural output to carry out the *Erzeugungsschlacht*, the “Battle for Production” that Germany would fight against the modern world market. Furthermore, the peasants could not hope to wage this war, or any other Nazi racial war for that matter, without solidarity. Even though economic goals drove the *Erzeugungsschlacht*, the Nazis, particularly Darré, stressed its ideological importance in order to produce a cohesive peasantry.

### Conclusion

To evaluate the effectiveness of Nazi agricultural policy on the basis of propaganda is sheer folly. Programs such as the *Erbhofgesetz* and *Erzeugungsschlacht* completely failed. The Third Reich faced large-scale peasant migrations, and the Reich Agricultural Office, headed by Richard Walther Darré, was so fixed on the “Blood and Soil” concept that it could not better the peasant’s economic lifestyle. As Thomas Phelps noted in his study of the German peasant family, Darré’s agrarian policy ironically *hurt* the family in some respects. Many peasant families, for example, lived in “primitive” conditions. A house with enough heat and electricity to service the family was quite rare. During the Reich years, the cost of household expenses and overall living increased and forced peasants into greater debt than they previously were. Incidentally, the largest price increase was in seeds, which surpassed even the Republic prices during 1934 and 1935.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the economic goals that each agricultural policy promoted, Darré and his agrarian cadre crafted policy based on ideological statements. To Darré, the peasants were the individuals who would put the Nazi “worldview” into effect. In retrospect, it would be very easy to discuss the economic implications of the Reich’s agricultural legislation. One could analyze the advantages and disadvantages of a given law and

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<sup>77</sup> Phelps, *The German Peasant Family*, 130, 223.

interpret it based solely on the market trends of the 1930s. However, the legislation requires a deeper, more penetrating analysis predicated on “Blood and Soil.” For example, why did the Nazis institute the *Erbhofgesetz* and thus alter the pattern of inheritance throughout the peasant community? Why try to alienate a segment of German farmers as a result? Moreover, why put the peasant’s own wife last in the inheritance order?

The answers to these questions stem from the ideological principles of the NSDAP. Peasant families prior to the Nazis, for instance, divided up the farm among the children. Consequently, each child had capital with which to start a family and an agricultural life of his or her own. With the emergence of the *Erbhofgesetz*, on the contrary, the Nazis transformed ideological tenets into real legislation. They changed the meaning of an ordinary term, *Bauer*, meaning “farmer” in German, and used it to glorify the peasantry. According to Darré, “The existence of a people rises and falls with the stability of the peasantry.”<sup>78</sup> *Stability* was the key term to the overall picture, for the Nazis believed that the peasant was the life source of the entire German nation. Without the peasant, their entire “worldview” would lack substance.

The NSDAP disseminated a broad spectrum of propaganda during the late Weimar period and the years of the Third Reich. Whether the propaganda consisted of speeches, artwork, or ideologically-inspired legislation, it exhibited the principles stated by Joseph Goebbels in “Knowledge and Propaganda.” According to Goebbels, propaganda should “put in words everything [individuals] have been searching for.” It

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<sup>78</sup> From the minutes of the NSDAP cabinet meeting of September 26, 1933, in *Blut und Boden: Rassenideologie*, ed. Gustavo Corni, 103.

should give “form” to what people want.<sup>79</sup> Agrarian propaganda was no different. Darré and the Nazi propaganda machine used these sources to portray a revolutionary “worldview” of which the peasant was the center. By honoring the peasant as the true representative of the German *Volk*, the Nazis gave him a reason to be proud of his occupation and its ideological value to the nation. When the Nazis seized power, they finally had the opportunity to put their “worldview,” namely the concept of “Blood and Soil,” into practice. Joseph Goebbels ended his 1928 address by emphasizing the necessity of propaganda: “That is our [the Nazis] task on this planet: to create the foundation on which our people can live. When we do that, this nation will create works of culture that will endure for eons in world history!”<sup>80</sup> On the eve of the Second World War, German peasants would have disagreed with Goebbels’s claim that the Nazi party “create[d] the foundation” on which people could live, for agrarian policy was one-sided: the Nazis built it on superficial promises that could not be transformed into reality. In 1933 it gave the peasants hope. By 1939 it became the bane of their existence.

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<sup>79</sup> Joseph Goebbels, “Knowledge and Propaganda.” German Propaganda Archive Project, Calvin College. 20 October 2003 <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb54.html>.>

<sup>80</sup> Goebbels, “Knowledge and Propaganda.” German Propaganda Archive Project, Calvin College. 20 October 2003 <<http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/goeb54.htm>.>