Leadership Principle of the National Socialist State

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The leadership principle of the National Socialist state was accompanied by the inevitable mysticism surrounding concepts of political absolutism. Particularly, the link between Hitler and the biologically-construed German folk was avowedly intangible. The theory held that this people, possessed of a common blood in themselves and set apart, therefore, from all other peoples, contained a spirit—the *Volksgeist*—which evolved from the peculiar national character of their peculiar status in the family of mankind. From this *Volksgeist* the special laws of the people are secreted, but this subjective material cannot of itself govern; it is similar to the Rousseauistic general will which must be sensed and defined from the invisible haze of popular desire by a man who is inherently qualified to determine the form and direction of the will of millions, a man who is most thoroughly permeated with the inmost and highest desires of his people. This leader, Hitler, yet cited the transitionalistic nature of life of the people under his guidance until such distant time as the new hopes had been realized and a true German Constitution was established. The aim of the people and forces under his command was to be "... the construction of a constitution combining the people's will with authority of real leadership."¹ Again, on another occasion, Hitler declared himself merely commissioned in the task of effecting reforms which would eventually enable the nation to determine the final constitutional form.²

The nearest this trustee elaborated upon the relation between himself, his party and his government was delivered in a speech of 1935. He noted the necessity for party authority in the watch over

²Ibid., p. 425.
the proper development of the growing National Socialist doctrine, and proceeded to compare his idea of authority with that of the military. An army checks the individual to attain the will of all; especially in emergency, a state proclaimed by the leader. Pertinent to this claim the logical question of infallibility was sidestepped with the essentially mystical observation that the subject of the leader's possibility of error was "not under discussion." The order of the political life was one of complete obedience. And "... this need not imply separation between the party and Leader. The Leader is the Party and the Party is the Leader. As I feel myself to be only a part of this party, so the party feels itself to be only a part of me."4

Thus, the Leader, through his personality, demonstrates his independent title to leadership. The unquestioning loyalty of party and people is forthcoming, and it is through his interpretation of the needs of the blood community that that homogeneous group is brought to fuller realization of itself and its needs. Through him the people recognize their duties in the world and history; through the leadership principle, the Fuehrertum, the people are brought to political unity. From this unity, already established by Nature, the leader creates a political consciousness of the dictates of the unity. And from this there arises that totality of power in the state which accrues to the Leader. This results in practical assertions of might such as that which is encountered in the learned journal, the Constitutional Law of the Greater German Reich, written by Max Huber: "The Fuehrer is the bearer of the people's will; he is independent of all groups ... but he is bound by laws which are inherent in the nature of his people... He is... the bearer of the collective will of the people... He transforms the mere feelings of the people into a conscious will... Thus it is possible for him, in the name of the true will of the people... to go against the subjective opinions and convictions of single individuals... He shapes the collective will of the people within himself... In the Fuehrer are manifested the natural laws inherent

2Baynes, op. cit., p. 441.
3Ibid., p. 440.
in the people . . . The Fuehrer principle rests upon unlimited authority."

The Reichstag members were, in Nazi Germany, elected in the one-party system, but it was frankly explained that their approval of bills submitted by the leader was "purely formal." The Reichstag, dissolved at the will of the Fuehrer, reassembled as the result of a plebiscite, not to discuss proposed legislation, but to reassert its confidence in the Leader and his policy, nothing more.

Political irresponsibility was a necessary concomitant with the special nature of the supreme leader of the Nazi state; unlike the ordinary dictator of history in previous centuries who usually rested content with personal power and paid at least verbal homage to a supernatural God and to theological restraints upon his earthly mandate, Hitler was that particular, modern product of the scientific age who sought power not of itself but as a means to the grim effectuation of his distinctive approach to reality, as a means for the realization of the promise of his special key to history. Power, infinitely multiplied by technological advance, was placed behind a remorseless program for the resetting of the social order. Theological restraints and the concept of the Christian God fell before the logic of the new faith. The old morality collapsed as Hitler privately derided the old faith as ridiculous and even a Jewish plot to spread the poison of universalism through St. Paul.

Hitler understood his God as that will which is evident and implicit in the laws of Nature. This essential pantheism was concentrated in Hitler's numerous reiterations upon the Darwinistic theories of natural selection and the survival of the fittest in the eternal struggle of life. The Divinity he claimed to obey was not the Biblical but the natural. In one of many of his specific speeches he states that "Our humility is the unconditional submission before Divine laws of existence as they

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5 Department of State, Division of European Affairs, National Socialism, U. S. Govt., p. 34.
6 Baynes, quoting Deutsches Verfassungsrecht, pp. 146-147.
are known to us... Our worship is exclusively the cultivation of the natural, and for that reason, because natural, therefore God-willed. Our commandment is the courageous fulfillment of the duties arising from those laws."8

This belief in a scientifically-guided morality gave force to the Leader's will in his inflexible adherence to the logical commands of the perceived immutable laws of the Darwinian doctrine in the realm of society and states. The imperatives of the new revelation of nineteenth century research transcended every other consideration. The highest meaning of life, the welfare of the folkic body, subordinated all else. Hitler mentioned in a speech that "the State itself is but one of the forms of the organization of the volkic life; it is set in motion and dominated by the immediate expression of the volkic vital will, the Party, the National Socialist Movement... Party, State, Army, Economics, Administration are all but means to an end, and that end is the safeguarding of the nation. That is a fundamental principle of National Socialist theory."9 As the unique leader and determiner of national decisions, Hitler was verbal in his categorization of interests and behaviour. In tones that are almost similar to passages from the Prince Hitler averred that before the standard of folk interests "considerations of party politics, of religion, of humanity—in a word every other consideration—can have no place whatever."10

Yet, notwithstanding his basic anti-Christianity and subscription to the absolute supremacy of natural law as he interpreted it, Hitler entertained a paradoxical belief—at first mild, then strong—that he was an agent of Divine intervention and special providence in his role as leader of the new order. This curious combination of Scripturally-influenced beliefs in his Prophetic destiny by a supernatural God, and the scientifically-immutable Nature which he often viewed as a God unto itself was evidently the product of Hitler's personality splits rather than any formal National

8Baynes, op. cit., p. 462.
9Ibid., p. 446.
Socialist theory, since the idea of Divine intervention or special designation of a man is clearly outside the typically National Socialist idea of blood ties between folk and leader. As the war progressed Hitler entertained the notion of his Divine stamp more strongly as each threat to his personal safety failed. Alfred Rosenberg wrote that Hitler's belief in his Divinely-entrusted mission to save Germany was noticeable from the beginning of Hitler's career until, towards the end of the war, it assumed positively painful proportions.\textsuperscript{11}

Impelled by such a belief in himself—that of selection by a mystical tie of blood, and by a God above Nature—Hitler manifested the two traits which are always evident in modern times among dictators possessed of comprehensive myths of reality—that of urgency in action and the problem of succession. Who would succeed the first leader was a serious matter to Hitler and he named them soon after accession to power. The myth of the folk, of which he was the sole propounder in his lifetime, needed men as absolute and as awesome before the folk-millions as himself, once he was gone. Hitler thus used his living influence to bind the loyalty of the people upon his successor. Of course he did the selecting; Goering and Hess were named respectively in 1933. Hitler bade all to consider themselves as dutifully bound to blind loyalty to his appointees as they were to him. Of the power of ascertaining the men of worth to lead the people after his death Hitler was not silent. Before a festive crowd Hitler claimed: "I am nothing but a magnet that continually sweeps over the German nation and draws out the steel from among the people . . ."\textsuperscript{12}

But the obvious drawbacks of succession were not lost upon Hitler. With the task of reforming all society set by the dictates of the myth and with the uncertainty that, once he was dead, a successor would indeed execute the necessary requirements of the new faith, Hitler was impelled to accomplish as much as possible in his own lifetime. Drastic

\textsuperscript{12}Speech of Adolph Hitler in Munich on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary, NSDAP, p. 11.
decisions were the result of this certainty in himself and lack of certification of future actions after his death. A letter to Mussolini outlines Hitler's concern with this: "I know as well as you, Duce, how difficult it is to make historic decisions, but I am not certain that after death another will be found with the necessary force of will." And on another occasion, that of an address to his generals about starting the war, Hitler declared that he had to name himself as irreplaceable. "Neither a civil nor a military person could replace me... I am convinced of the powers of my intellect and of decision... The fate of the Third Reich depends only upon me... No one knows how long I shall live, therefore conflict is better now. In the struggle I see the fate of all things. Nobody can avoid a struggle if he does not want to lose out." 

The phenomenon appears here as in all doctrines of the absolute leader, that of a justification of present action in the name of a future good—an eventuality usually beyond the verification of any person living in the time of the present action. Hitler set forth in this pattern to establish and maintain the base of his lifework. The needed human material for the ranks of the elite of the future was to be drawn, in true keeping with the National Socialist creed of folk and honor, from every social and economic class. The natural aristocracy of the people was to be sought out among every corner of the biological organism of the people. Hitler noted, in 1933, the necessity for a special minority, the best of the National Socialists, to find the organic leaders of the future. This selection was to be based upon the theme that leadership was to be given "To those who have a natural right to lead." This obviously precluded considerations of traditional rank and privilege. Indeed the abolition of classes became one of Hitler's logical goals. He underlined the sole glory of unity in common nationality. "Youth is not growing up," Hit-

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15 Baynes, op. cit., p. 481.
ler said, "in the belief that status, classes, professions are of importance; its faith is in a single German nation. In their hearts there is no room for prejudice..." 16

In the new state the poorest peasant child, if discovered to be destined by native talent for higher places, was to be the chief concern of the National Socialists. With leadership drawn from all corners the mass of the German people would feel themselves never in conflict with their leaders, for every man would know that they are people of his own flesh and blood. Hitler, in more private conversations, bitterly castigated the petty princes and monarchs in German history who had divided the land. He even declared himself opposed to class distinctions on ships and trains and once mentioned that army mess tables should be occupied in common by officers and men. 17

The recruitment program for leaders in party and government indicated at least partial application of the socialist portion of Hitler's theory. In the Hitler Youth, observation was made of all physical and mental characteristics of the children, and by the age of eighteen a complete file was had on every member. Those selected for Leadership schools numbered 1000 a year by 1937. These were the most perfect physical and ideological specimens. Social rank and family ties apparently played no part in the selection of candidates. These potential leaders were sent to schools for four years, during which time they underwent the most vigorous training possible for the future elite of the nation.

16 Baynes, op. cit., p. 628.
17 Table-Talk, op. cit., entries of November 11, 1941 and September 23, 1941.