LISAN BE. ASSEN[*]
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
SRĐAN LJ. ŠLJUKIĆ
Faculty of Philosophy
Novi Sad

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NSDAP AND THE UNDERLYING SOCIAL CONFLICTS

Summary: Multiple causes can be identified which led to the appearance and the success of the NSDAP. Focus of this paper is upon the role that the social conflicts have played in Germany during the first decades of the 20th century. However, it should be acknowledged that other factors, such as the historical development of the nation and economic misfortunes played a significant role as well, therefore these factors are also incorporated. Furthermore, the Treaty of Versailles has created a fertile basis for the emergence of Hitler's party, since it stirred great feelings of hatred among the German people. The most important social conflicts that can be identified in the period are economical and social; there were clashes between the different classes in society. There were also political conflicts between the several political groups in society, with communists on the left and the NSDAP and other right-extremist parties on the right. Some segments of Lewis Coser's theory of social conflict will be used in this paper to explain the nature of the social conflicts and its outcome.

Key words: NSDAP, economic misfortunes, history, political party, social conflicts

Social conflicts have existed among all societies and between societies at particular times in history. Social sciences, including sociology, have made significant effort to understand conflict as a phenomenon. Some conflicts, however, are so peculiar and special in its nature that further light should be shed upon them, perhaps in an attempt to prevent them from happening aga-

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[*] lisanassen@gmail.com

in. This paper aims to answer the questions concerning the emergence of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP). Which social conflicts existing in Germany at the time, led to the possibility of the NSDAP to become the leading party and eventually the only party of Germany? We are all aware where the emergence of the NSDAP eventually led to, but this paper will not focus on the result but on the process leading to it.

The theory of Lewis Coser about social conflicts and the difference between realistic and unrealistic conflicts will be used in order to see the subject from a different angle and perhaps reach new conclusions (Kozer 2007).

It is important to note that the NSDAP did not appear out of nothing and vanished after the Second World War. Right-extremism and nationalism existed for a long time in Germany; it just did not appear so clearly to the surface until after the end of the First World War. It is important to also look at the history of Germany in order to be able to answer the question how the NSDAP could grasp the power. The other factors such as the Treaty of Versailles and the economic depression also played a significant role. Furthermore, there were also clashes between the different political ideologies in society, for example the communist who tried to start a communist revolution in Germany. Although this paper focuses mainly on the social conflicts in the Weimar Republic, it is important to point out that we do not believe social conflicts to be the only cause of the success of the NSDAP.

Historical framework of the nation-state Germany

In order to be able to fully understand the situation of Germany in the decades following The Fist World War it is crucial to incorporate an historical background. Many feelings and ideas existing in those two decades were not as often thought new for Germany. Let us first start with an account of the developments that Germany went through. The starting point of this historical account will be the year 1760. There are several reasons to start the story from there: it was the middle of the Seven years war, which played a crucial role in the surviving of Prussia, not because of its inner strength, but by the death of the Russian empress Elizabeth in 1762 and the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the war; international relations played a decisive role in the unfolding of German history. Other reasons for starting this account from 1760 have nothing to do with war, they are demographic, because of the rapid growth of the German population; cultural, because of a massive increase in German literature; the agricultural revolution, because it determined

human possibilities as surely as industrial take-off shaped what was possible in the century thereafter, and finally because Germany was rapidly becoming more urban. The year 1860 marks the time when the history of the nation and the history of the state came together. This process was not only seen in Germany, but in many other nations as well. Until then the nations were con-federations of loosely organized polities (regions) with a relatively weak central government. Germany had to give up a massive amount of area in order for unity to be achieved. It gave up approximately one fourth of its territory. The composition of religious affiliation also changed due to the changes of territory, a protestant majority emerged. The theologically-framed and religiously inspired nationalism exacerbated religious conflict with Cat-holics and in some cases denied Jews, granted full citizenship in the imperial constitution, the status of fully-authentic Germans. It is clear in this example that anti-Semitism was not something the Nazi's came up with, but it was something which existed for a long time already in the German society. Once political nationhood had been achieved, the divisiveness's of nationalism became clearer. A division between Protestants and Catholics (and both from Jews), liberals among themselves, and the majority of Germans from the socialists emerged. The socialists were portrayed as being anti-national. Many social conflicts existing at the time of the Weimar Republic originate from earlier times, such as the anti-Semitism and the conflict with the com-munists (socialists in earlier times). Prussia developed enormous power with King William and the prime minister of Prussia Otto von Bismarck, who became the first *Reichskanzler* of the German empire, while William became the *Kaiser* of Germany in 1871.

The German army remained effectively insulated from democratic pressure and constitutional control. It had the most efficient, the best equipped and apart from Russia the largest army. The empire however did create a democratic institution, the *Reichstag*. Not democracy but democratic practices followed. The economy after 1871 grow immensely and soon be-came one of the biggest in the world until 1914, and this situation created a deep connection between the first German nation state and the experience of material improvement and peace, cementing the Germans' loyalties and cons-training radicalism. When in 1919 the Weimar Republic was formed, so-called revisionists hoped to restore Germany to its pre-war imperial borders. These revisionist claims enjoyed wide consent among the population in Germany (Smith 2011; Gustav 2002).

After the end of the First World War, the victorious side felt the need to punish Germany. There was a strong cry for justice and reconciliation, which dominated the political agenda. However, reconciliation and justice

stand in conflictual relationship to one another. Demands for justice often involve a backward-looking process of moral accounting that assigns responsibilities for the wrongdoings, whereas reconciliation is a forward looking process aimed at building positive bonds among victims, perpetrators, and their communities, basically creating solidarity. It is very difficult indeed to find the right combination of both justice and reconciliation that will deal in a right manner with the consequences of violence and war. The result is often a perpetuation of grievances and resentments that will serve only too well to pave the road to further mistrust, cruelty, and instability (Lu 2002). The victorious side viewed Germany as the instigator of the conflict, and felt that they should be punished in several ways. The Treaty of Versailles obligation put enormous pressure upon the German society, both in economic and non-economic ways. Germany was forced to concede Eupen-Malmédy to Belgium, the Hulschin district to Czechoslovakia, Posen, West Prussia and Upper Silesia to Poland, and Alsace and Lorraine to France. The German colonies became League of Nation mandates and the city Gdansk, with its large ethnically German population, became a free city. The Treaty demanded demilitarization and occupation of the Rhineland, and special status for the Saarland under French control (*TREATY OF VERSAILLES* 1919b). Probably the most humiliating part of the Treaty was the 'War guilt Clause', which forced Germany to accept complete responsibility for initiating the First World War. The Germans were also forced to pay reparations for the damage caused: the astonishing amount ruined the economy. Furthermore, they were not allowed to have an army exceeding 100 000 men.

The Germans felt as if they were punished in an unfair way. The Treaty was an attempt to create enduring peace, but also a 'peace of justice'; it failed in both attempts. It neither brought peace nor justice, but only paved the way to a second world war. The Treaty of Versailles brought disaster after disaster upon the German society, which led to hostilities and social conflicts. The Treaty of Versailles including its harsh punishments on the German population laid the ground for feelings of hatred, which the NSDAP took advantage of. Because of the Treaty the Germans felt that injustice was done to them. These feelings reduces sensitivity to threats and value trade-off, which leads to an increasing willingness to run risks, and an increasing likelihood of violent behaviour, which can clearly been seen in the Weimar period in Germany (Lu 2002). The Treaty of Versailles thus contributed in a great deal to the existing social conflicts and also created them. The harsh punishments pushed the German economy in a downward spiral, which lead to feelings of hatred towards the allied forces and hatred and hostility within society between the different social groups, each blaming one another. The

NSDAP offered the solution to the economic crisis, by promising to create jobs and get the economy out of its downward spiral, and was therefore able to attract more and more votes during the years, which eventually led to them becoming the largest party in 1932.

Germany before the Weimar Republic did not have much experience with democracy and the Republic showed itself to be unstable in its 14 years of existence; it could not cope effectively with the economic crises of 1929 (*Kwetsbare democratie* 2013).

Many of the NSDAP ideas such as anti-Semitism and nationalism were not new phenomena in Germany, but the genocide was. Contrary to the most theorists and "ordinary" people who see the year 1933 as a rupture in the German history, Walser Smith sees it differently: he states that the breaking point was in 1941 when the Genocide started and not the time frame before when there was simply a continuity of Anti-Semitism and nationalism (Stroo 2012).

The Economic misfortunes of the Weimar Republic and social conflicts

The economy has always been a crucial factor for the stability within society. When an economic crisis occurs, figures show that the stability of the society also finds itself in a crisis and tensions between social groups emerge. It started with the Treaty of Versailles, which demanded great reparations for the damage done in the war. The German nation suffered a great deal from these enormous payments. They were also forced to give up vital industrial territory, which turned out to be a severe blow in the attempts of Germany to rebuild their economy, especially the coal lost from the Saar and Upper Silesia was a vital economic loss (*The Treaty of Versailles* 1919a). The economy in the beginning after the war showed economic growth, due to integrated economic, social and financial policy. Unfortunately, it was very unstable and the attempt was subverted by the non-compliance of businesses and by tax evasion by wealth-holders, which drove the economy into inflation (Balderston 2002). In 1923 the Weimar Republic experienced its first hyperinflation. The United States therefore provided two big loans to Germany in 1924 with the Dawes Plan and in 1929 with the Young Plan. This initially gave a big boost to the German economy. However, it was already noted by some economists of that time, that if the US demanded the short-term credits back the German economy would collapse. This is exactly what happened in 1929, after the Wall Street collapse: the US government demanded that Germany

would start paying back its loans in 90 days. The other world powers were still in devastation and were incapable of lending money to Germany. Many companies in Germany went bankrupt and people got fired by the millions, nearly all the families were affected. Because of the printing of extra money hyperinflation also occurred, and money was starting to become useless (*Weimar Republic and the Great Depression* 2013). The German people were in despair, which led to great opportunities for the NSDAP to gain votes. They benefited from the insecurity and social misery that afflicted broad sections of the German population. Because of the Great Depression the NSDAP was able to become the largest party after the elections in 1932, but it was not able to attain an overall majority (Childers 1990).

A good reflection of the social differences in Germany at the time of the Weimar Republic can be seen when looked at the political parties. There existed around 40 different parties, all with their own ideology. One of the most important differences between the political parties was whether they supported the Republic or not. One of the fiercest opponents of the Republic was the German National People's Party. They were monarchist and conservative, they fought the democratic system; most large landowners were part of the party. The Communist Party of Germany, although with a completely different ideology also fought the Republic, they sought the establishment of a socialist soviet dictatorship like that of the Soviet Union. Their party membership consisted largely out of socialist members of the labour force (*The Weimar Republic (1919 – 1933)* 2013). They started a failed revolution in 1917, in an attempt to seize the power.

A party in favour of the democratic system was the German Democratic Party. Members of this party were mostly the middle class intellectuals and the small traders. The National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, formed in 1919) in the beginning gathered support mostly from the lower middle class around Munich. They tried to stir up the widespread hostility to the Weimar Republic that existed in nationalist circles, by nationalist and anti-Semitic demonstrations and acts of violence. Furthermore, they protested against the Treaty of Versailles. Lots of political parties existed in the Weimar Republic, but the most important ones that show the existing social differences are listed above. They show the clear opposites that existed, ranging from people in favour and people that criticized the new democratic system (*The political parties in Weimar Republic* 2006). There were extremist parties on both sides of the political spectrum: on the left side the communist and on the right side the National Socialists.

The political parties believed the most important social difference was the difference between occupational positions, and the political discourse and

the strategies of the parties were deeply sensitive to occupational status. Although their appeals differed according to a party's social and ideological orientation, their day-to-day campaign literature and activities reveal a striking and suggestive uniformity in the way the parties identified and approached different social and demographic groups. All the political parties focused on the middle-class in an attempt to attract as many votes as possible. They also focused on the specific occupational groups within the middle class, for example the "the white collars". Pamphlets were issued where they explained the party stance on the concerns and problems of the major occupational groups. Each party thus tried to convince its targeted occupational audience that it best understood the special economic needs and social virtues of the occupational position. The leaflets occupied a central position in propaganda; there was an assortment on leaflets for different types, directed mostly to the different occupational groups. Of all political parties, the NSDAP was definitely the most focused on occupational groups, but the other parties also paid much attention to it; they all assumed the centrality of occupation in the formation of social identity. Even the Marxist parties were no less occupationally oriented when addressing middle-class audiences, although they emphasized the need for solidarity among all *Arbeitnehmer*. Campaign literature was also addressed to Protestants, Catholics, women, youth and the elderly, who formed the major demographic components of German society. So the parties of the Weimar Republic also sought to establish their position along the traditional nineteenth-century lines of class or religion. "The bourgeois parties also were attacking the Marxist left and embracing the cause of German nationalism; the intent of most campaign activities directed at the *Mittelstand* or *Burgertum* as a whole was to establish the credentials of the party in question as a defender of middle-class interests and values (Childers 1990).

There was also a conflict going on between the small shop owners and small businesses and the large department stores. Lot of parties warned for the danger that the middlestand will seize to exist, and therefore promised that they would fight for them, especially the NSDAP. Much focus was also directed to German farmers; all the parties actively engaged in recruiting rural support. They did that by focusing on threats to the German peasantry from hostile social and political interests: the Marxists, the bankers, the Jews, and the urban liberals. For the liberals, for example, the language of the profession may have served as a tactical device to mobilize support across a fragmented middle class, by claiming to protect them from socialism; this would then provide liberalism with an attractive political mission. The danger, however, was the idea of seeing the people overwhelmed by the idea of

occupation; the *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (DDP) warned for this in 1930. Between 1920 and 1928 a range of small regionalized or single-issue alternative parties emerged, which were founded in direct opposition to the mainstream liberal and conservative parties, while they also employed the same occupational categories. All of them were anti-Marxist, yet their greatest hostility was towards the large national parties for allegedly failing to protect the interests of the middle class. Almost all of those parties attacked the Weimar party parliamentary system for being dominated by big business and big labor and they advocated the creation of some form of corporatist political and economic order. The NSDAP also clearly had a view on how the economic order should be organized; they wanted a corporatist society as an alternative to Marxism and capitalism, which clearly distinguished them from their bourgeois rivals. They called for national unity that would vanquish class conflict once and for all. It is crucial to keep in mind that support for the NSDAP was not uniformly developed: the Nazi's had a highly unstable coalition of shifting social forces; support for the party was strongest and most durable in the old middle class. In the other social groups significant support for the NSDAP could be mobilized only in periods of severe economic crisis-briefly during the inflation and stabilization crises of 1923-1924 and massively between 1928 and 1933. The people voted for the NSDAP as a protest vote against a system that had produced a seemingly endless stream of economic and political disasters (Childers 1983, 1985, 1990).

Although the main focus was on the occupation stand, the parties also formulated appeals to gender, generation, religion, region, and patriotism and class solidarity. In the end the corporatist language in the programs of the parties became more negative, and increasingly anti-Marxist, anti-liberal and ultimately anti-parliamentarian. It can thus be concluded that all the Weimar parties were convinced that an occupation-specific approach was the best strategy in order to gain votes and to mobilize important groups in the middle class.

The *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* itself was founded in 1919 by Anton Drexler. He was very nationalistic and had anti-Semitic feelings. Adolf Hitler soon became involved in the party and his talent for speaking was soon noticed, which made him the mouthpiece of the movement. He became fascinated by the political orientation of the party, which in 1920 was renamed as the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche arbeiterpartei. In the beginning the party was only one of the right-wing extremist party's. In 1920 Hitler and the party came forward with a 25 points program, listing it most important ideas ranging from unification of Germany, from the expulsion of the Jews, to economic plans. In the beginning years the party stayed at the margins, it was unab-

le to create a big group of followers. In 1923 the party attempts a failed Putsch, known by the name the 'Munich Putsch'. After this Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison; it was a rather mild punishment and he served only one year. However, it gave him crucial time to rethink his strategies in order to attract a larger group of followers. He realized that the best way to do that was through a legal revolution, via the democratic process (*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Fuhrer!* 2008). The people in Germany started to feel desperate and were willing to take drastic decisions to turn the tide. The NSDAP through its ideas was able to attract the people. The personality of Hitler also played a significant role in the success, since he was gifted with the ability to gather a group of people and unite them for a common goal.

Coser's theory and the social conflicts in the Weimar Republic

Lewis Coser is most known for his contribution to the theory of social conflicts. He defined conflict as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals" (Kozer 2007: 14). Coser believed that conflict is part of relationships and society and is not necessarily a sign of instability; he also states that it can be healthy to have conflicts because they ensure innovation (Coser 1957). He also made clear that not all social systems show the same amount of conflict: they vary according to the type of structure, the patterns of social mobility, of ascribing and achieving status and of allocating scarce power and wealth (Kozer 2007).

Coser argued that conflict within a group may help to establish or re-establish unity and cohesion, where it has been threatened by hostile and antagonistic feelings among the members. A distinction is also made between the processes within a system and processes of change of the system; we can talk of a change of system when the major structural relations, its basic institutions and its prevailing value system have drastically changed. He proposed a distinction among social conflicts, dividing them into realistic and non-realistic conflicts. Social conflicts that arise because of specific demands and from estimates of gains, may be called realistic conflicts. Non-realistic conflicts on the other hand do not have rival ends, but there is the need of tension release of one or both of the groups involved. The conflict is an end in itself, and not oriented towards any specific goals. Realistic conflicts cease to exist when the objective is reached, or when the actor can find other ways to achieve his end (Kozer 2007).

It is clear that there were many different social groups and classes in Germany after the end of the First World War. The groups can be divided in different categories such as religious, economic, educational, and political. All these different groups were searching for their place in society in the new political system of the Weimar Republic. This situation perfectly fits into Coser's definition of social conflicts as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, powers and resources. There were many social conflicts and struggles going on between the different groups within society, partly due to the economic miseries the new Republic faced, partly because of the Treaty of Versailles and partly because of the collapse of the world economy.

Coser has made a distinction between two kinds of conflicts, realistic and unrealistic as defined above. Both kinds of conflicts can be noticed within the German society. Let us first have a look at the realistic conflicts existing at the time. The German economy experienced extreme economic inflation and depression; at the height of the economic crises 6 million people were unemployed. These problems were not properly taken care of because the different social groups, the industrialists, the labor union leaders, land owners, and the members of the middle class were all caught up in their particular short term self-interests. Perhaps if there would have been proper cooperation between the social groups instead of social conflicts to maximize individual gains, the crisis could have been faced and the NSDAP would perhaps not have been able to grasp the power (Bookbinder 2011). There were also conflicts going on between the different political parties, who all had a different view on how to solve the crisis, and they all tried to gain as much power as possible.

The social conflicts existing in the Weimar Republic were not all realistic conflicts, also non-realistic conflicts can be discovered, which did not have rival ends, but there was the need of tension release. There was a lot of rage within the society, due to the Treaty of Versailles and the war guilt clause and the economic miseries; therefore, the people needed tension release. That manifested itself in conflicts and clashes between the different political ideologies and the different social classes on the left (communist) and the right (NSDAP) sides of the political spectrum.

The conflicts existing within the German society that eventually led to the Third Reich, can be seen as conflicts that changed the system, from a democracy to an authoritarian fascist regime. Coser argued that social conflicts can establish our re-establish unity. This statement can also be seen in the German society, where the economic and social conflicts eventually united the vast majority of the German people behind Hitler and his party and create unity within Germany.

Conclusion

In order to be able to fully understand the situation of Germany in the decades following the First World War it is crucial to incorporate an historical background. Many feelings and ideas existing in those two decades were not as often thought new for Germany. Anti-Semitism can be traced back in the German history. Furthermore, the divisiveness's of nationalism arose in 1860. Also a division between Protestants and Catholics, and the majority against socialism emerged. It is thus safe to conclude that many social conflicts existing at the time of the Weimar Republic originate from earlier times.

The new democratic system in Germany had a false start due to the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty was aimed to serve justice and reconciliation, but it failed dramatically in the latter, creating a lot of hostility among the Germans. These feelings reduced sensitivity to threats and value trade-off, which leads to an increasing willingness to run risks, and an increasing likelihood of violent behaviour.

The economy of a nation has always been a crucial factor for the stability within society. When an economic crisis occurs, figures show that the stability of the society also finds itself in a crisis and tensions between social groups emerge. In Germany there was a dramatic economic depression due to the Treaty of Versailles and the collapse of the world economy; hyperinflation occurred and enormous numbers of people became unemployed. This led to tensions within society because the different social groups were only looking at their own short-term interests. The German people were in despair, and this situation led to great opportunities for the NSDAP to gain votes; they benefited from the insecurity and social misery that afflicted broad sections of the German population.

A striking similarity between all the political parties was that they all paid much attention to the occupational position of the people in campaigning. The NSDAP was able to appeal a lot of people only partly due to its ideas; the most crucial was the economic and political situation in Germany at the time being. The economy was devastated and the democracy was fragile. Many social conflicts existed among the different social groups, on a number of grounds, such as economic, religious and political. All these factors played a vital role for the NSDAP to grasp the power and to overthrow

the democratic system into a fascist one. The people voted for the NSDAP as a protest vote against a system that had produced a seemingly endless stream of economic and political disasters. As a final remark it is crucial to note that although social conflicts played a significant role in the appearance and the success of the NSDAP it was not the only factor. Other factors, such as historical development and economic misfortunes, also played an important role.

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ПОЈАВА НСРПН И ДРУШТВЕНИ КОНФЛИКТИ

Сажетак: Узроци који су водили до појаве и успеха Национал-социјалистичке радничке партије Немачке (НСРПН) многобројни су. У овом се раду аутори концентришу на улогу коју су друштвени конфликти имали у Немачкој у првим декадама двадесетог века. Међутим, свакако да и други фактори треба да буду узети у обзир, као што су, на пример, историјски развој нације и економска криза. Версајски споразум (1919) створио је плодно тле за појаву Хитлерове партије, пошто је изазвао снажно осећање мржње код Немаца. Најважнији друштвени конфликти који могу бити идентификовани у овом период јесу економски и друштвени; на делу су биле борбе међу различитим друштвеним класама. Постојали суи политички конфликти међу неколико политичких група у друштву, са комунистима на левици и НСРПН на крајњој десници. Неки сегменти Козерове теорије конфликта у овом су раду искоришћени за објашњење природе наведених друштвених конфликата и њихових последица.

Кључне речи: друштвени конфликти, економска криза, историја, НСРПН, политичка партија