Otto Strasser, The Nazi Party, And The Politics Of Opposition

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ABSTRACT

What do we know about Otto Strasser? He and his brother Gregor were highly influential in the early years of the Nazi party; therefore, what should we consider when looking back? To fully understand the individual, we must investigate and analyze: Strasser's post-Nazi Party life, his post-Nazi political aspirations, and the apparent whitewashing of his past as a Nazi. The latter of which most individuals gleaned solely from the fact that he, himself, an ardent National Socialist, was, nonetheless, an opponent of Adolf Hitler. By analyzing Strasser's assertions in his numerous books, articles, and chapters, and comparing them with the voluminous historical record, the project outlined below calls to attention Strasser's attempts to transform his brand of Nazism into an acceptable political ideology.

At first, during his post-Nazi life, Strasser moved around Europe, dodging Nazi assassins everywhere he went. Eventually, Strasser arrived in North America, more precisely, Canada. He spent roughly 12 years there before the West German state reversed the ban on his citizenship instated by Hitler. Strasser entered West Germany under state supervision in 1953, with particular caveats regarding his entitlement to a pension. In his time away from the Nazis, Strasser wrote about his earlier association with the Party, often perfidiously. He authored numerous books describing his relationship with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, painting himself as an aberration of Nazism and whitewashing his past by utilizing his position as an opponent of the Hitler regime. Seeking to dissimulate his past and remove from his background what was commonly deemed offensive about the Nazis, Strasser gave his opinion to everyone and anyone who would listen, even going as far as to provide a—somewhat informed—perspective on Hitler's next moves and actions during the war. Strasser was not precisely a full-fledged Nazi, but he had more in common with *Der Führer* than he was willing to admit. However, his break with Hitler gave him a modicum of acceptance and even legitimacy in the West. Because of his detachment from Hitler, Strasser received attention and legitimacy far beyond what a card-carrying Nazi could expect from the Allies during the war years.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE .............................................................................................................................. 1

CHAPTER ONE: WORLD WAR ONE AND THE GERMAN REVOLUTION .................. 7

CHAPTER TWO: OTTO STRASSER, NATIONAL SOCIALIST ................................. 20

CHAPTER THREE: THE HARDSHIPS OF BEING HITLER’S NEMESIS .......... 46

CHAPTER FOUR: A “GOOD” NAZI ................................................................................. 74

CHAPTER FIVE: AN END TO STRASSER’S USEFULNESS .................................. 85

EPILOGUE ............................................................................................................................. 96

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................................. 101
PROLOGUE

While Hitler was in jail for his participation in the now-infamous "Beer Hall Putsch" in November of 1923, two Bavarian brothers, Gregor, and Otto Strasser, along with an enthusiastic and educated Nazi upstart named Joseph Goebbels, helped to expand the Party's membership numbers—particularly the membership of those Germans who resided in northern Germany. When Hitler emerged from prison in December 1924, he sought to consolidate the now-fractious Nazi movement under his sole vision and leadership. In his absence of nine months, a meager punishment considering the original sentence was five years for his participation in the Putsch, the NSDAP split into factions.

Hitler aimed to subdue or destroy these factions along with their respective leaders. This research thesis deals with the more worker-oriented Strasserite, "socialist" or "left" wing faction of the NSDAP and the reflections, life, mid-war, and post-war political goals, and the tenuous social acceptance of one of its leaders, members, and long-living Nazi opponents to Hitler, Otto Strasser. Unlike his brother Gregor, Otto escaped the "Night of the Long Knives" when members of the SS, on the orders of Adolf Hitler, murdered anyone who represented a threat to the Hitlerite hold on the Party and, ultimately, Hitler's vision of National Socialism. Leaving the Nazi party to form another, the Combat League of Revolutionary National Socialists (Kämpfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten), later known as the Black Front (Schwarze Front), in 1930; Strasser escaped sharing his brother’s fate.
Otto Strasser got lucky and would continue to remain so in many ways. At first, during his post-Nazi life, Strasser moved around Europe, dodging Nazi assassins everywhere he went. Eventually, Strasser arrived in North America, more precisely, Canada. He spent roughly 12 years there before the West German state reversed the ban on his citizenship instated by Hitler. Strasser entered West Germany under state supervision in 1953, with particular caveats regarding his entitlement to a pension. In his time away from the Nazis, Strasser wrote about his earlier association with the Party, often perfidiously. He authored numerous books describing his relationship with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, painting himself as an aberration of Nazism and whitewashing his past by utilizing his position as an opponent of the Hitler regime. Seeking to dissimulate his past and remove from his background what was commonly deemed offensive about the Nazis, Strasser gave his opinion to everyone and anyone who would listen, even going as far as to provide a—somewhat informed—perspective on Hitler's next moves and actions during the war. Strasser was not precisely a full-fledged Nazi, but he had more in common with Der Führer than he was willing to admit. However, his break with Hitler gave him a modicum of acceptance and even legitimacy in the West. Because of his detachment from Hitler, Otto received attention and legitimacy far beyond what a card-carrying Nazi could expect from the Allies during the war years.

Since his death, the post-1930 life of Otto Strasser has attracted little academic attention. Aside from brief self-published biographies from amateur historians in the U.K., and Paradise, Nova Scotia, in the English-speaking world, only Neo-Nazis seem to take an interest in Strasser. He remains an idol to those on the fringes of political acceptability, if
not to those well into the realm of National Socialist nonsense. Praising Adolf Hitler can be easily construed as profoundly racist and egregiously atrocious. However, praising Strasser is perhaps less distasteful, as he was never involved in the Holocaust and was, indeed, a public enemy in the eyes of the Nazi party and a personal nemesis of Adolf Hitler. To many would-be Nazis who fear for their public image, Strasser's anti-Hitlerian record leaves him open to praise as they seek a less shame-ridden figurehead for their racist overtures. This objective was made easier because Strasser left the Party three years before the *Machtergreifung* and would, therefore, have no hand in the atrocities committed by the administration therein.

Douglas Reed is one such admirer and early biographer of Strasser. While Reed was not a fully-fledged Nazi supporter, a cursory search through his opinions is all one needs before agreeing with those his colleagues who, in his time, deemed him a "virulent antisemite," with opinions “not so very unlike Nazi hobby-horses.”¹ Moving even further into the twentieth and even into the twenty-first century, we find another Nazis-like character named Troy Southgate, a Strasser admirer and self-proclaimed "National Anarchist" and "Nazi-Bolshevik" who seeks to elevate Strasser's image not only to that of a revolutionary but to that of an icon — a "model," as it were, of a "genuine" form of National *Socialism*, with the emphasis on "socialism." Considering Otto Strasser's political goals, his attempt to portray himself as a "good Nazi," and the fact that he remains an icon to Neo-National Socialists, historians must investigate how he attempted to make strange

bedfellows with the Allies. In addition, the research must analyze how this influenced and continues to influence, Neo-Nazis hoping to resurrect a more worker-oriented, and therefore, more socialistic National Socialism.

Moving quickly through Strasser's background as a World War One soldier on the Western Front, a member of the Freikorps, and a nascent National Socialist, Chapter One will focus on Strasser's early life and entry into the Nazi Party. Starting with his early background and moving swiftly to his assignment during the First World War and his later writings concerning the era, this first chapter will keep Strasser's ever-evolving political awakening at the center. This chapter aims to illustrate Strasser's political ideas as he served in the Great War and his political life following the war; the pace of the chapter will be quick and concise. Chapter Two will center on Strasser's time with the Nazi Party. Focusing on his introduction to Adolf Hitler and Strasser's split with the Party, it will examine Strasser's life as an activist for the National Socialist cause, which ended with the Strasser/Hitler split in 1930. This chapter will explain the reasons for Strasser's split from the Party and his political differences with Adolf Hitler.

Chapter Three deals with Strasser's post-Nazi life through the beginning of the war and the formation of Strasser's new "Black Front" party. Focusing mainly on Strasser’s attempts to form a formidable rival to Nazism and Hitler's attempts to assassinate him, this chapter will provide the fodder Strasser used to distance himself from the Nazi leader and movement. This section will move chronologically from Strasser's time in Germany, Vienna, and Prague, to his arrest in France as a suspected Nazi fifth columnist by French police in Paris in May 1940, to his joining in with French refugees as France fell to the
Nazis, and to his escape to Bermuda, in 1940. Finally, after less than a year's stay in Bermuda, Strasser settled in Canada.

Here, in Chapter Four, the research will begin to analyze Strasser's attempts to rehabilitate his image as an aberration from Hitler's version of Nazism and as a "good" former Nazi who peddled a "pure" and "decent" political ideology. In 1940 and 1941, under the pretense of opposition to Hitler, Strasser began to publish a flurry of monographs, articles, and letters to anyone who would have him. Continuing to explore Strasser’s anti-Hitlerian overtures to the Allies, this chapter will also analyze Strasser's "Free Germany Movement." Using Strasser's books and numerous articles published during the war, this chapter will show Strasser's attempts to refurbish his image and set himself up as an alternative leader of a post-Hitler Europe. The paper will then turn to Strasser's political ambitions in Chapter Five, where the research will briefly explore the war's end, Strasser's attempts (while in Canada) to form a post-war Strasserite Nazi party in West Germany, his return to Germany in 1953, his Party's failure to ignite any excitement in a war-weary post-Nazi Germany, and the end of his life.

The Epilogue will briefly discuss the difficulty in finding academic sources for this project and the wide variety of avowedly racist sources that are available and easily attainable. This chapter's main point is that if legitimate scholars do not maintain the historical record, politically motivated individuals will change it—a solemn possibility that portends disastrous consequences. The goal of this chapter is to highlight the ease with which nefarious characters influence the stories of the past. The difficulty in executing this paper highlights the pitfalls of accepting the perspectives of distasteful and treacherous
political figures founded exclusively on their theoretical opposition to one's enemies. While the Allies seemingly did not fall for the ruse presented by Strasser, that does not mean figures in the future will not be fooled by politically motivated nefarious individuals. This concept leads us to the final objective of this project, which is show that the historical record, if not maintained and corrected by the forces of legitimate academia, will be left open to interpretation and expropriation by extremists for nefarious ends.

There has been little to no academic work on Strasser, outside of the above. He is forgotten by academics, and often only comes up as a footnote to his brother’s life or achievements. However, in the circles that revere Strasser, he is celebrated and researched fervently. Troy Southgate has named his publishing house after Strasser’s Black Front when he began publishing a biography about Otto Strasser. An American Neo-Nazi, and former community outreach director for the American National Socialist Movement, 32-year-old Matthew Heimbach was ousted from his position at the NSM because of his “Strasserist positions.” In Europe, dating back to the 1970s, the Strasserist Black Front flag and its symbols have been used by neo-Nazis as a substitute for the Swastika, which is banned in some countries, most notably Germany. Strasserism, without academic attention, offers would-be Fascists historians the option to pontificate on a holocaust-free interpretation of Nazism.

2 Dutton, Kynan (unknown). “Matthew Warren Heimbach; as per the authority of chief of staff Bert Colucci and Commander Jeff Schoep of the National Socialist Movement we expel (sic) you from our ranks and our organization. The NSM this so directly due to your open allegiance to Straussersis(sic) and Communism in general. The National Socialist Movement is a firm adversary of all forms of communism, including Strausssism (sic). As of today’s date, December 2, 2018, you are no longer in NSM probationary members or supporter,” December 2, 2018, 05:14 PM. Tweet.
CHAPTER ONE: WORLD WAR ONE AND THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

1.1 Background

Otto Johann Maximilian Strasser was born in Bad Windsheim, Bavaria, on September 10, 1897. He was one of four boys born to the family of Peter Strasser, a Catholic Bavarian judicial officer in Geisenfeld, Upper Bavaria, and his wife, Pauline Strobel. Gregor, the eldest, was murdered on Hitler’s orders, while the youngest, Anton, died on the Eastern Front in 1943. The middle two, Paul and Otto, would survive Hitler and his wars. Like many in his age group, Otto Strasser nationally and enthusiastically joined the military in August 1914 to fight in World War One. Strasser claims he was the youngest volunteer to serve in the First World War in the Bavarian Army, earning the title of lieutenant and two war wounds.3 According to German journalist and Strasser’s unofficial biographer Günter Bartsch, this claim is accurate.4 Serving first in the 20th Reserve Regiment of the 6th Bavarian Army5 and then in the First Bavarian Artillery, Otto Strasser served throughout the war, and for doing so, the Bavarian Army decorated him with the Iron Cross First Class for his bravery. According to Strasser, and confirmed by his biographer Bartsch, he was also nominated for the Bavarian Army’s most prestigious and ennobling military order, the Military Order of Max Joseph (Max-Josef-Orden).6 The

3 Otto Strasser, Germany Tomorrow (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), 11-12.
6 Otto Strasser and Michael Stern, 6.
war’s end and the ensuing collapse of the Bavarian Monarchy ensured that he never received this prestigious award.7

Recalled in *Flight from Terror* (1943), Strasser’s autobiographical book focusing on his escape from Hitler’s fortress Europe, his war years ended on the third floor of Garnison Hospital in Munich - a hospital “reserved for the leg-wound cases from the Western Front.”8 Highlighting the internal issues caused by the war and the blockade - as seen from the perspective of a German soldier wounded at the front Strasser states:

> It was little more than a butcher shop - a dark, dirty, overcrowded waystation for the broken, flesh-torn soldiers of the German Fatherland. In this hospital, we knew only suffering. Even the food supplied to rebuild the weakened bodies of the wounded was awful beyond description. Coffee made from acorns - which we called ‘swine coffee’: butter made from carrots – which we called *Helden-Butter* or ‘hero butter,’ because only heroes could eat it; small chunks of tough black bread, made from potatoes; and meat twice a week, served with ‘barbed wire’ soup [...] Garnison Hospital, a place of misery, filth and lean, desperate want. Everywhere in the third-floor ward – as in all wards – there was pain; each of us tortured by a wound eating away at the flesh of his body [...] and today there had come another wound, a deeper, more deadly one that ate away at the spirit. For today we had heard that the war was over.9

The German nation was in dire straits at the end of the First World War. As is evident above, the British Naval blockade and mass inflation had taken their toll on both home and military fronts. The Kaiser was gone, and the man who would lead after the Kaiser, the Chancellor – Prince Max von Baden – handed over the German Parliament to Friedrich Ebert, leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. From civilians to soldiers, Germans were hungry, tired, and confused. Some more radical individuals fought

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7 Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*.  
8 Strasser and Stern, *Flight from Terror*, 1.  
9 Strasser and Stern, 1-3.
each other on the streets as demobilized soldiers returned to a chaotic and economically upside-down Germany. By the terms of the 1918 Armistice, all German troops we ordered to be demilitarized as soon as possible. Nonetheless, many of these soldiers formed so-called ‘free-corps’ (Freikorps) paramilitary groups which fought against other soldiers and civilians who joined Soviet-backed Communist forces in their fight to transform Germany into a dictatorship of the proletariat.

While in the Munich hospital, Strasser witnessed the beginning of the German Revolution in Bavaria, when Communists fought for - and repeatedly seized – power in Munich from early November 1918 to May 1919. According to Strasser’s account in Flight from Terror, a distant rumbling sound and someone singing the “Internationale,” the marching song of the Communists, bolted him upright and awake. He says the other soldiers were also startled awake, staring at one another with the knowledge that “in the dead world of Germany outside, some group had had the spirit to rise and act.”10 “What’s happening?” Strasser claims he asked his nurse. “Don’t you know, Herr Lieutenant? It’s the Communist revolution!” she replied. The sight and sounds of marching Communists, along with the fear of his nurse, drove Strasser to contemplate his war efforts: “I had fought and suffered for an ideal, for a Fatherland that was mine, and in which I believed. That song I heard through the window was the chant of something alien. I hated one as violently as I loved the other.”11 Strasser escaped the hospital, limping out onto the street and stowing himself on a small truck “filled with calves for the market.”12

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10 Strasser and Stern, 3.
11 Strasser and Stern, 4.
12 Strasser and Stern 6-8.
have threatened the driver into giving him a ride to Ulm – a town about 157 kilometers North-West of Munich on the road to Stuttgart – where he met an “effeminate,” soft-handed, and “roly-poly,” Captain Ernst Röhm (von Epp’s chief of staff), and joined Franz Ritter von Epp’s Freikorps. 13

According to Strasser, his first political conviction was a "hatred of Communism," even though, by this point, according to him, he had already converted to Socialism. Strasser says he converted to Socialism in 1918, while tasked to bolster sagging morale. According to him, he "lectured a group of soldiers on their duty to the Fatherland… [when] afterward one of them said,” "Fatherland means the land that owns my father. My father owns no land, and [neither do I] … we defend the land of the rich who own it and … us."15

In a Maclean’s Magazine article dated April 1952, Otto maintained that at this moment, he realized "Germany should build a society that would give everybody a stake in the nation, an economic system in which all could participate as co-owners," and he joined the Social Democrats. 16 According to Günther, Strasser’s idealism, camaraderie, and his open displeasure with the class barriers in the Wilhelmine Army caused his superiors and his subordinates to dub him the “Red lieutenant.”17 Therefore, it is no wonder he chose to join the SPD since he hated Communism. Although Strasser would leave that Party in 1920, a

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13 Strasser and Stern, 7-8.
15 Sclanders.
16 Sclanders.
17 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 16.
more distribution of wealth would remain at the center of his political ideals for the rest of his years.18

1.2 A Turning Point

After the Bavarian Soviet Republic’s demise, the Freikorps supported the new Bavarian government who put the Communists on trial. At this trial, Otto Strasser claims to have watched “a young corporal, perhaps twenty-five or thirty years old,” play a vehement, venomously shrewd star witness to the prosecution.19 Strasser states, “he was more a prosecutor than a witness; and even Captain Röhm ... several times had to caution him that this was a witness stand, not a soap box.” 20 Questioning the young man’s reasonings, Strasser states:

I gathered from his vehement testimony that throughout the entire period leading up to the abortive Red putsch, he had remained [in his barracks]. Since his entire regiment had taken the Red oath as a matter of course, it is inconceivable that this young Corporal did not do likewise. He was either a turncoat who now pointed the finger of guilt at his ex-comrades in arms [to] save his [...] skin [...], or he was a spy who had joined the Reds at the bidding of Captain Röhm. [Regardless] the job he performed as a witness was the very lowest on the moral scale.

The rhetorically gifted young man in question was Adolf Hitler. While historians must be wary of autobiographical accounts concerning an author’s enemies, the breadth of research undertaken on the subject of Nazism and Adolf Hitler as a person has made corroborating Strasser’s stories easier. Though one cannot substantiate Strasser’s latter claim that a young

18 Sclanders, “Last Survivor.”
19 Strasser and Stern, 11.
20 Strasser and Stern, 12.
Hitler was under the direct control of Captain Röhm, his earlier claim that Hitler was a “turncoat who now pointed the finger of guilt at his ex-comrades” to save himself seems to be true. That is, Strasser’s account of the situation, according to new research, is reasonably truthful.

According to renowned historian Sir Ian Kershaw, in his biography of Adolf Hitler, *Hitler: Hubris: 1889-1936*, “on 14 April, the day after the communist *Räterrepublik* [the Red Republic, or Soviet State] [was] proclaimed, the Munich Soldiers’ Councils approve fresh elections of all barrack representatives,” ensuring that the garrisons stood loyally behind the new regime.21 Kershaw continues, “In the elections the following day, Hitler was chosen as deputy battalion representative.” 22 According to Kershaw, the strong likelihood is “that he had held this position since 15 February.”23 Therefore, while Hitler states, according to Kershaw, that his first political duties took place as a witness for the prosecution during the trial of the Red Putschists, in reality, they took place “in the service of the revolutionary regime run by the SPD and USPD.”24 Was Hitler a Red putschist himself, or was he just caught up in the maelstrom of the moment? As the historian Kershaw points out:

How to interpret this evidence is, nevertheless, [unclear]. Since the Munich garrison had firmly backed the revolution since November and again in April supported the radical move to the *Räterrepublik*, the obvious implication must be that Hitler, [to] have been elected as a Soldiers’ representative, voiced in these months, the views of the socialist governments he later denounced with every fiber of his body as ‘criminal.’25

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22 Kershaw, 118.
23 Kershaw.
24 Kershaw.
25 Kershaw.
This leaves little wonder why Hitler “wished to say little of his actions at this time.”

While Strasser seems to have been correct in his assumptions about Hitler during the Red Putsch in Munich, one must not take all his words at face value. Although he became Hitler’s nemesis in 1930, he was, after all, a comrade of Hitler’s beginning in 1925. Hitler was now (at the time when Strasser published *Flight from Terror*) at war with the world, and it would be advantageous for Strasser to conceal or disguise his past. Nevertheless, in the same chapter of *Flight from Terror* where he addresses Hitler’s testimony, describing the future Führer as holding an “insane hatred of Communism” and an “exaggerated vanity,” he also describes being taken with Hitler’s speaking abilities:

I can see him still in his bedraggled, field-grey army-issued overcoat, with its ill-fitting lumpiness and its exaggerative legs that reached to his ankles. The figure he cut was ludicrous – but no one laughed. In the spell his oratory created, that odd little bedraggled form faded into the background; there was only the sweeping power of the shouted words that rolled out to engulf us all. I stayed at the trials far longer than I had intended, held there by an eloquence I hadn’t expected to find [...] still the power and force of the little man remained with me, even during the painful ride.

The eloquent and powerful force he referred to was Hitler’s prosecutorial testimony against his ex-comrades – the same testimony he earlier labeled as “the lowest on the moral scale.” Later in the same chapter, he opines respectfully about the working-class origins and the good-hearted attempts to save Germany by Friedrich Ebert, saying:

Ebert, an ex-saddler from Heidelberg [...] defined himself in a speech as a ‘son of the working class, grown up in the world of socialistic ideas.’ As president, he promised to be ‘the authorized representative of the entire German people, not as leader of a single party.’ He worked hard, and under the most trying conditions, and he did try to be loyal to both the interests of

26 Kershaw.
his country and the working class. But his education was poor – though he rose to the highest position of [the] state in spite of that handicap – he was subjected to much political abuse. In any event, he did his best to guide the nation through six trying years – until his death in February 1925. I was satisfied for the time being [...] lulled into a false sense of security for the nation itself through the simple and uneventful life in the hospital.\textsuperscript{28}

While it is well within reason for a historian to analyze critically every assertion by someone like Strasser, his attempt to be truthful does lend itself to his credibility. His honesty about being taken with Hitler’s speech, while also recognizing the insidiousness of the individual, and his seeming respect for Friedrich Ebert, adds nuance to his (Strasser’s) character, and, perhaps, that was his goal. One must always be skeptical.

After the trial, Strasser received a ride back to Garnison Hospital, where he stayed until he was released, and then returned to finish his last year of studies at the Oberreal-Schule, or High School, while he recovered further. He then attended the University of Berlin\textsuperscript{29} before he graduated in 1921 with a doctorate from Wurzburg, a short time for a doctoral student by any measure.\textsuperscript{30} There are conflicting accounts about what it was in. His dissertation subject and later job in the Ministry of Food leads one to believe it was economics; however, in many sources, it is listed as law. The government of Bavaria lists it as Economics. Strasser claims his “extracurricular activities were many” and that he founded the “National Union of Students,” an organization he claims to have kept “within the ranks of the Social Democratic Party.”\textsuperscript{31} In his book \textit{Hitler and I}, Strasser claims to

\textsuperscript{28} Strasser and Stern, 13-14.
\textsuperscript{29} Strasser and Stern, 18.
\textsuperscript{31} Strasser and Stern, 18-19.
have also co-founded the “June Club” with Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, an author best known for his controversial contribution to Nazism through his 1923 book *The Third Reich (Das Dritte Reich).* Günter Bartsch corroborates this claim. In keeping with the Social Democratic Party, Strasser claimed to have participated in putting down the Kapp Putsch and praised Ebert’s call from Dresden for a general strike as “the best blow against the military clique.”

Not only that, but Strasser also claims to have also helped broker agreements during the Ruhr Uprising, saying, “President Ebert urged all loyal home-guard [Freikorps] units to organize and suppress” the Communists. Strasser continues, “I called a meeting, and we decided to meet President Ebert’s request under certain conditions,” which included the purging of monarchist elements from the Army, as they had been unwilling to shoot upon the putschists, and the “socialization of heavy industry.” Seeming to hold Ebert in high regard, Strasser claims that it was his “honor to deliver these demands to Ebert himself.” However, the demands of what is historically known as the “Bielefeld Agreement,” or as Strasser calls it, “the Betrayal of Bielefeld,” were repudiated by Ebert. Recalled in more

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33 Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*, 35.
34 Strasser and Stern, 22.
35 Strasser and Stern.
36 According to historian David Childs, in *Germany in the Twentieth Century* (1991), a sequel to the Kapp Putsch was the crushing of the so-called Red Ruhr Uprising which grew out of resistance - in favor of the general strike - to the Kapp Putsch in the Ruhr. During the general strike, thousands of workers had armed themselves and taken over large areas. In certain instances, they showed themselves to be more than a match for armed police. After the collapse of the Putsch, they were reluctant to surrender their weapons so soon after the loyalty of the Armed Forces had proved to be weak. The Socialists demanded guarantees against further insurrections and an introduction to the many social changes that the SPD leaders had promised since the end of the war. On 24 March 1920, an agreement was reached between representatives of the government, representatives of local authorities, the socialists, two communists (though they did not sign), the trade unions, and
detail in Strasser’s book, *Hitler and I*, the now-former Social Democrat, Strasser, explains the situation of Bielefeld:

The Socialists, of whom I was one, declared themselves ready to lay down their arms, subject to terms […], and they signed the Bielefeld Agreement with Minister Herr Severing. The Communists, however, did not lay down their arms and carried on a bloodthirsty struggle. In order to suppress them, the Weimar Government did not hesitate to use the [leaderless] and defeated troops [of the Kapp Putsch]. As soon as the Communists were crushed, the [...] Government repudiated its promises to the Socialists […] As a consequence of this shocking state of affairs […] I left the Socialist Party.37

This so-called “betrayal” caused Otto Strasser and many others to leave the Social Democratic Party. According to Strasser, “Let it be said here that the Betrayal of Bielefeld had much to do with making the people ripe for Hitler and his NSDAP.”38 Strasser asserts, “It seemed that only to the Nazi Party could a person with progressive or socialistic thoughts” now turn.39 To Otto Strasser, “there was no other choice … In disgust, I left the

the wide spectrum of political parties including the Center party, the Democratic Party, and the Social Democrats. Under the agreement, the workers agreed to handover their weapons and return to work, while the government promised to disarm and punish those who had taken part in the Putsch. That is, to disband all anti-Republican organizations; to purge the administration of counterrevolutionary elements; to enact the immediate socialization of industries, especially coal and potash; to call for the formation of local militias from loyal Republican circles of the population; to enact an extension of social welfare legislation and financial help from the state for the dependence of killed or wounded; to offer no discrimination against the workers who had taken part in the struggles or against members of the police and finally to keep the Army out of the Ruhr. The whole agreement was dead on arrival. Ebert rejected the agreement, saying the minister who signed it had no authority to do so. The Freikorps and the Army were called into the demilitarized zone, breaching a stipulation of the Treaty of Versailles, wherein they brutally suppressed the remaining, mainly Communist, strikers. Some strikers handed in their weapons, most of the Communists did not. On 26 March, the Weimar coalition was reshuffled to bring in the participation of the aforementioned parties (barring the Communists), but nothing was done to realize the promises given to the Ruhr workers.

38 Strasser and Stern, *Flight from Terror*, 22.
39 Strasser and Stern.
Social Democratic Party,” along with many other voters.\textsuperscript{40} According to historian Detlev Peukert:

Although the Bielefeld Agreement of 24 March succeeded in combining the dissolution of the ‘Red Army’ with a policy programme \textit{[sic]} that met unions’ demands […], there followed a campaign of terror […] which alienated large sections of the working class from Social Democracy and the Republic.\textsuperscript{41}

Which is to say, Otto was not incorrect. While not “all progressive or socialistic” Germans chose the Nazi Party at this time, according to Mary Fulbrook, in the Summer 1920 elections that followed the Spring suppression of the Ruhr Uprising there was a significant swing from the SPD to the parties of the extreme Left and Right.\textsuperscript{42} The SPD’s vote share fell to 21.7 percent from 37.9, while the KPD (which had not contested in 1919) won a 2 percent gain, and on the right, parties like the DVP (\textit{Deutsche Volkspartei}) and DNVP (\textit{Deutschnationale Volkspartei}) gained 5 to 10 percent.\textsuperscript{43}

One has to imagine that Strasser included this fact because it is essential to the development of German history and because he wanted his audience to understand why he joined the Nazi Party since he was an avowed anti-Nazi in 1940, the time in which he published this book. Strasser wanted his readers to view Ebert’s SPD as the only alternative to Hitler’s early NSDAP and vice-versa. The reasoning, at least in most of Strasser’s writings, was a way to show his readers how he felt and lead his readers into his introduction to Adolf Hitler. Not the same young Corporal Hitler he had watched give

\textsuperscript{40} Strasser and Stern.  
\textsuperscript{43} Fulbrook.
testimony reminiscent of a “soap box” speech, but one who found himself at the head of an early Nazi Party.

However, regarding his views on Ebert and the SPD, Strasser is less straightforward. Was Otto Strasser looking back fondly on Eber’s tenure, suggesting that he had “tried his best,” or was he still “disgusted” with the Social Democratic Party? It is hard to tell. While it is obvious that he was most definitely once a member of the SPD, it seems his musings - while detailing his time in Garnison Hospital - on the late Friedrich Ebert were sugar-coated. His “Betrayal of Bielefeld” was the Ebert coalition's betrayal of state-loyal workers. Strasser would denounce the SPD because, in the words of Günter Bartsch, “The de-facto annulment of the Bielefeld Agreement seemed to him to be the final betrayal of a nationally oriented socialism [...] In his opinion, Social Democracy was no longer an option.”\(^\text{44}\) Still, Strasser needed a political outlet. The Strassers were a family engaged heavily in their civic duties. While he was active in school and veteran’s associations, joining his friend, Moeller van den Bruck, in the June Club, an organization dedicated to organizing students against the hated Treaty of Versailles, Strasser was, according to his own account without a party.

Pondering his place in politics, he visited his parents. While doing so, he received an invitation from his older brother, Gregor, to attend a luncheon at Gregor’s house with General Ludendorff and Corporal Hitler. “Come and have lunch with us tomorrow and meet General Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler ... I insist on your coming, it’s very important.”\(^\text{45}\)

\(^{44}\) Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 27 “Die de facto-Annulierung des Bielefelder Abkommens dünkt ihm als endgültiger Verrat an einem national gesinnten Sozialismus [...] Die Sozialdemokratie kommt seines Erachtens nicht mehr in Frage.”

\(^{45}\) Strasser, Hitler and I.
These are the words that Otto Strasser claims his brother Gregor said to him over the phone while Otto was at his parents’ home in Deggendorf, Bavaria, on holiday. His acceptance to participate in this luncheon would bring Strasser face-to-face with Adolf Hitler for the first time. Strasser said it was “a turning point” in his life, affecting his “whole future.”

46 Otto Strasser, Hitler and I, 3.
CHAPTER TWO: OTTO STRASSER, NATIONAL SOCIALIST

Focusing on Otto Strasser's time with the Nazi Party, from his introduction to Adolf Hitler to his entrance into the Party, and finally his split with the Party, the current chapter will center on Strasser's life as a political activist for the National Socialist cause, and the reason for the Strasser-Hitler split in 1930.

2.1 The First Part Serves to Qualify the Second

In 1920, Gregor Strasser summoned his brother Otto to a luncheon at his house above the chemist shop he owned in Landshut, Lower Bavaria, to meet General Ludendorff and Corporal Adolf Hitler. Not too long before this, Otto had left the Social Democratic Party. He was without a political party and sought a new outlet for his political energies. Strasser states, “My brother’s invitation came to me at a crucial moment [...] I was still searching my way.” In addition to being politically charged, the luncheon was sure to be interesting. As Strasser points out, “what young German officer would not have leapt at the chance” to meet General Ludendorff? 47 On Strasser’s arrival, he noticed that the General and the Corporal were already present. Once he entered, his brother quickly introduced him to General Erich Ludendorff and Corporal Adolf Hitler. Strasser states, “I was at first impressed with Ludendorff. He had heavy features and a firm double chin,” despite “his civilian clothes, he looked every inch of General. One sensed his willpower immediately.” 48 However, according to Otto Strasser, Corporal Adolf Hitler “seemed to be

47 Strasser, Hitler and I, 3.
48 Strasser, 5.
trying to occupy as small a place upon his chair as possible. He appeared to be trying to shelter under the redoubtable General’s wing.” According to Otto, the face of Adolf Hitler known to history had not yet blossomed - he was still merely an argumentative, angry, opinionated, stubborn, and profoundly obsequious sidekick of General Ludendorff’s.

After talking to the General about his military record, Otto was asked about his participation in the Kapp Putsch by Hitler. He claims Hitler said, “Herr Strasser, I do not understand how” a loyal ex-officer like you acted as “a Red leader during the Kapp Putsch in March?” To which Strasser claims he replied, “My ‘Reds,’ Herr Hitler, acted in support of the legal Government of the country. They were not rebels [...] but patriots, who were trying to check the rebellious followers of a few reactionary generals.” This quip worked Hitler up, to which Strasser claims Hitler said, “No [...] The Kapp Putsch was necessary, though it was ineffectively carried out. The ‘Versailles Government’ must be overthrown!” Contemplating Ludendorff’s participation in the Putsch, Strasser states that he found himself “in a difficult position” because had he been alone with Hitler, Strasser would have replied “vehemently”; however, Ludendorff was present and “Ludendorff’s role during the famous Putsch had not been at all clear [...] was [Ludendorff] a chance spectator or a secret accomplice?” Strasser claims to have never found out. Ian Kershaw asserts that Ludendorff participated marginally in the Kapp Putsch. As Kershaw states,

49 Strasser.
50 Strasser, 7-13.
51 Strasser, 8-9.
52 Strasser.
Ludendorff’s völkisch nationalism and advocacy for the ‘stab-in-the-back’ myth “had taken him effortlessly into the slipstream of” Pan-Germanism and garnered him “fringe participation in the Kapp Putsch.” Nevertheless, Strasser says that Ludendorff agreed that the Putsch was “senseless,” to which Hitler became more subservient and docile in his agreement.

Watching Gregor, Hitler, and Ludendorff talk, according to Otto Strasser and Günther Bartsch, Otto interrupted when the NSDAP was mentioned, “Excuse me, what do you mean ‘NSDAP’?” to which Gregor replied, “The National Socialist German Worker’s Party!” Otto replied, “National Socialist? That is interesting, a party once called itself that in old Austria and Czechoslovakia.” According to Strasser, Hitler said nothing of this until Strasser asked to see the Party Programme. Hitler abruptly replied, “The program doesn’t matter to me, it’s all about power [...] power is the only prerequisite.”

Attempting to expose the roots of Hitler and Strasser’s differences, Strasser claims that he appealed to Hitler about the need for Germany’s Socialism to be national to “establish a new order in Germany and not set out on a new policy of conquests.” Strasser claims Gregor replied, “Yes, from the right we shall take nationalism which has so disastrously allied itself with capitalism, and from the left, we shall take Socialism,” after divorcing it from its internationalist tendencies. Thus, Gregor said, “We shall form the

54 Strasser, Hitler and I, 9.
55 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 32.
56 Bartsch.
57 Bartsch.
58 Strasser, Hitler and I, 10.
59 Strasser.
National Socialism which will be the motive force of a new Germany and a new Europe.”

Strasser then claims that he questioned Hitler’s grammar and use of the word ‘Socialism,’ saying, “the emphasis in this amalgamation must be on the Socialism. Don’t you call your movement ‘Nationalsozialist’ in a single word, Herr Hitler? German grammar tells us that in compound words of this kind, the first part serves to qualify the second, which is the essential part.” He then alleges to have made a few examples of this German grammatical machination before “maliciously” insulting the intelligence of Hitler’s “Baltic advisor, Herr Rosenberg,” by insinuating that Rosenberg did not understand the nuance.

According to Strasser, Hitler suddenly lost his patience and struck a table furiously, exclaiming, “Enough hair-splitting,” before going into a long antisemitic rant. While plausible and believable based on shared knowledge regarding these historical individuals, one has to remain skeptical of Strasser’s claims, especially ones like this, which are far more detailed and almost stage-like in delivering their characters’ lines.

Can one be confident that any of these exchanges actually took place? According to Günter Bartsch, no one can be sure, as Strasser is the only one to corroborate these exchanges given that the other Party is deceased. However, this exchange is somewhat believable if, by chance, it is not an outright fabrication. Some anecdotal aspects one finds agreeable are likely based on their knowledge of these historical figures; Hitler was vehemently racist and a petty tyrant, the Strassers were “socialists,” etc. However, upon

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60 Strasser.
61 Strasser.
62 Strasser.
63 Strasser, 10-11.
64 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 41.
further investigation, Strasser’s accounts are debatable on at least one front. According to historians, Rudolf Heß brought Hitler to Ludendorff’s attention in May of 1921, the Spring after this supposed meeting between the General, Strasser, and Hitler.\textsuperscript{65} Therefore, this had to have happened after that, which would make sense as Strasser was already attending University. Regardless, in another later account of the meeting, Strasser recalls being driven there by a chauffeured vehicle; the driver was none other than Heinrich Himmler. Why would Strasser omit such a crucial element of his first encounter with Himmler in his first book and include it in the second? Perhaps, hindsight indeed provides clarity, or it was an attempt to increase his credibility by showcasing that he “knew everyone” in the movement.

In Strasser’s 1940 \textit{Hitler and I} and his 1943 \textit{Flight from Terror}, he details his first meeting with Adolf Hitler and Erich Ludendorff. In the 1940 book, Strasser claims to have been called by his brother to attend a luncheon the following day, where then Strasser says, “It is about sixty miles from Deggendorf to Landshut, in Lower Bavaria, where Gregor was living with his young wife. I took an early train and walked from the station under a clear autumn sky.” However, in the 1943 book, Strasser claims that Gregor offered to send a car for him before he and Gregor hung up. According to this retelling, the chauffeur of the vehicle was (as mentioned above) Gregor’s secretary, Heinrich Himmler. Which story is more plausible is reasonably easy to tell. Strasser’s motive for lying is not so easy. Ironically, this story is not found in any of Strasser’s other writings and is also absent from Günter Bartsch’s works on Strasser; therefore, his account of being chauffeured by

\begin{footnotesize}
\end{footnotesize}
Heinrich Himmler seems to be a fabrication, but why? One could argue that at the time he was drafting this book (1943), he was 13 years out from his break with Hitler, Hitler was waging war all over Europe, and Strasser was attempting to paint himself as a person who knew every Nazi and was at almost every event. He wanted to add gravitas and urgency to his claims and stories.

Perhaps Himmler chauffeured for Gregor Strasser after rejoining the Nazi Party in August 1925, when he joined the staff of the Strasser brothers, but certainly not before, which leaves one to wonder why Strasser included it at all, if not to attempt to add gravitas to his statements and story. True, Himmler’s early years in the Party found him as a secretary to Otto and Gregor Strasser, but only after the summer of 1924; this Strasser anecdote had to come from before the abortive Putsch. While Himmler did join Röhm’s nationalist corps, “the Imperial War Flag Union” (Bund Reichskriegsflagge), he did not apply to join the NSDAP until August 1923, only three months before the Beer Hall Putsch, where he was present as a flag bearer. Regardless, he was not a secretary to the Strassers at this time. Unless Röhm was at the luncheon, of whom there is no mention, Strasser’s account is not credible. An interesting shame is Strasser’s lack of credibility; however, when it comes to twisting facts, it is not profoundly confusing for a politically-motivated former Nazi to fabricate facts to paint himself as an all-knowing figure in the realm of National Socialism. Even so, one must comb through Strasser’s report as he was personally

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connected with individuals deeply inspirational to the Nazi movement – like the originator of the term “Third Reich” (Das Dritte Reich) – and was a pre-1933 Nazi.

The “Third Reich” has become synonymous with Nazi Germany, with the era often referred to as the “Third Reich” in many books, non-fiction and academic; however, that term was, like many Nazi ideas and images, not original to their movement. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, an early proponent of German “national socialism,” was, as Strasser claims, his friend. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck is, of course, the author of Das Dritte Reich (The Third Reich), a book and term that the Nazis would adopt and co-opt so aggressively that one cannot help but think of Nazism whenever someone mentions the phrase. Moeller van den Bruck was born in 1876 in the Rhineland, the son of a middle-class architect and Prussian official whose family lineage stretched back to Saxony. Van den Bruck had no formal education, as he was expelled from his Dusseldorf Gymnasium for his indifference to his studies. Nevertheless, the young Moeller visited several centers of intellect in Germany, where he undertook his literary work and attended lectures.

According to an article from 1941 in The American Political Science Review, van den Bruck engaged with others his age, “all the while finding himself increasingly at odds with the ‘Prussianized’ German state and its policies.” However, after leaving Germany in 1902, Moeller “glorified those Prussian ways which had driven him from Germany” in his 1916 book Der Preussische Stil, predating Oswald Spengler’s Preussentum und

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69 Krebs.
Sozialismus by four years.\textsuperscript{70} According to the article, it was shortly after this, between 1917 and 1922, that Moeller became politically active.\textsuperscript{71} It is during this time he would have likely met Strasser. Moeller was increasingly busy, and during this phase of his life, van den Bruck contributed several articles to the magazine \textit{Die Deutsche Rundschau}; wrote an appeal to President Wilson warning against a peace dictated by France; debated at gatherings of young intellectuals; and helped organize Strasser’s aforementioned “June Club” in 1919.\textsuperscript{72} Finally, in 1923, Moeller published his most famous work, \textit{Das Dritte Reich}, his final political statement as he would kill himself just two years later – “on the day he realized that Hitler had betrayed his ideas,” according to Otto Strasser. \textsuperscript{73} As Otto Strasser tells it, Moeller van den Bruck was his close friend and a person whom he admired. If one can believe his account in \textit{Hitler and I}, Strasser claims to have founded the June Club with van den Bruck, claiming that van den Bruck proclaimed to him, “We have lost the war, but we shall win the Revolution.”\textsuperscript{74} 

In understanding Strasser’s political point of view, one must understand his views of Moeller van den Bruck. Like van den Bruck, Strasser strove to find a mix between “the best elements of Right and Left.”\textsuperscript{75} As stated previously, Strasser had been a member of the SPD. While an ardent nationalist, he was also labor-oriented regarding his political opinions on social and civil affairs. He was also more “internationalist” in his view of Germany’s future. Van den Bruck published \textit{Das Dritte Reich} in 1923; even still, his “Third

\textsuperscript{70} Krebs.\textsuperscript{71} Krebs.\textsuperscript{72} Krebs.\textsuperscript{73} Strasser, \textit{Hitler and I}, 14.\textsuperscript{74} Strasser.\textsuperscript{75} Strasser, 23.
Reich” term and the idea therein had already found their way into the common vernacular in his works and lectures. According to Strasser, the phrase was so well known to Germans that Hitler, in 1920, used to say about van den Bruck’s “Third Reich” that “the first reich was Bismarck, the second that of the Versailles Republic and the third is myself,” to which Strasser claims he would state, “No, Moeller van den Bruck said the First Reich was Charlemagne’s Christian and federal Holy Roman Empire, the second was that of Wilhelm and Bismarck, and the third must again be federal, Christian and European.”

In Otto’s opinion, Hitler’s world view (Weltanshauung) stood in opposition to van den Brucks’s given that Hitler followed after Spengler, who “deified Prussianism.” Otto states, “Spengler’s great aim was to put Socialism in the service of Prussianism, this is what Hitler did [...] Moeller van den Bruck summarized his views in the following phrase: ‘We were Teutons, we are Germans, we shall be Europeans.’ But Hitler never understood him.”

According to journalist Francesco Giubilei, Moeller van den Bruck became linked to National Socialism via a “common rejection of liberalism and Western democracy.” However, Giubilei states, “the thinkers who remained loyal to [Moeller’s ideas] [within] Nazism were marginalized, forced to leave, or even killed by Nazis,” an experience to which Strasser can attest. According to Giubilei, Moeller knew every nation was different, and while he was in favor of a form of Pan-Europeanism, he believed that “becoming a liberal nation meant, in Moeller’s opinion, losing one’s own cultural identity in favor of

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76 Strasser, 26.
77 Strasser, 25.
78 Strasser.
80 Giubilei and Stone.
globalization” which leads to dividing communities and the creation of social tension.\textsuperscript{81} Moeller wanted a nation-first socialism that was deeply European without homogenization between cultures and nations.\textsuperscript{82} Like Moeller, Otto Strasser wanted a National Socialism more “European” in its orientation but uniquely German- something not wholly aligned with Western capitalism but more socialistic, but certainly not Communist. Hitler wanted something only German, purely Prussian in its militarism, and against both sides of the capitalist/communist political coin; a German third way. Still, Strasser would continue to visit his brother in Landshut, bringing him closer to Hitler and the NSDAP.

2.2 At The Party’s Lowest Ebb

According to Ian Kershaw, at about 8:30 pm, on the evening of November 8, 1923, while Bavarian State Commissioner Gustav Ritter von Kahr was giving an oration, Hitler’s SA troops encircled the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich as Hitler pushed his way forward into the hall.\textsuperscript{83} While his men mounted a machine gun at the entrance, Hitler jumped on a table, shot his pistol, and announced that the national revolution had begun, the building was occupied by 600 heavily armed men, and if there was trouble he would “bring the machine gun into the gallery.”\textsuperscript{84} According to William Shirer, Hitler then claimed that the Bavarian and Reich governments were “removed and a provisional national government formed [...] The Army and the police are marching on the city under the banner of the Swastika.”\textsuperscript{85} The

\textsuperscript{81} Giubilei and Stone.
\textsuperscript{82} Giubilei and Stone.
\textsuperscript{83} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: 1889-1936}, 206.
\textsuperscript{84} Kershaw.
\textsuperscript{85} William L. Shirer, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany} (New York: Gallery, 1960), 68.
last two statements were a pure bluff, but no one could tell in all the confusion. Hitler’s gun was undoubtedly genuine, and after a while, he was in the next room trying his fate at forming a new government from the barrel of it.

Hitler wanted to march on the Government after a night of political bargaining, most of which involved threats. Hearing reports of outside difficulties from the putschists, Hitler resolved to go and help them. Upon Hitler leaving the Bräukeller, the military leaders with whom he had been bargaining reneged on their agreement and sought to quell the Putsch. The Police and Reichswehr met Hitler and his fellow insurgents in a narrow street near the Odeonsplatz in Munich. In this little street was a conflagration in which the police and Reichswehr shot and killed some Nazis while others, like Adolf Hitler, lived and made it to safety. Anecdotally, according to Shirer, Ludendorff is said to have soldierly walked unharmed through the hail of gunfire, directly into the Odeonsplatz. According to Strasser, the day following the disastrous Putsch, Gregor and Otto’s brother-in-law, police officer Georg Hofler, arrived at Gregor’s house to arrest him sometime around lunch. Gregor was arrested for his participation in the Putsch, Otto was not involved and therefore not arrested.

In Otto Strasser’s second autobiographical book published in 1943, he clarifies that the Beer Hall Putsch inspired him to join the Nazi Party. Of the incident, he says, “The effect of the Munich putsch on my mind was exactly the reverse of what ordinarily might

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86 Kershaw, Hitler: 1889-1936, 208.
87 Kershaw.
88 Shirer, The Third Reich, 70-71.
89 Strasser, Hitler and I, 43.
be expected. Instead of alienating me entirely from National Socialism, it [drew] me closer to the Party."90 Otto continues, “I had always felt that this Party’s principles were closest to my own personal [sic] beliefs concerning the economic rehabilitation of Germany [...] It was merely my distrust of Hitler’s leadership that had kept me from joining before.”91 The story is similar to how Strasser describes it in Hitler and I (1940); however, in the original story, Strasser maintains that he joined the Party after Hitler’s release from Landsberg Prison and only after being asked for help in organizing by his brother, Gregor, not immediately following the Putsch. Strasser states:

Hitler, released from prison, resumed his leadership of the movement in South Germany. The North, however, was partly closed to him, [because] he was banned from speaking in any of the Prussian provinces. He [knew] of Gregor’s organizing ability, his popularity with the workers, and his fundamental honesty. He asked him to take charge of the National Socialist Movement in North Germany, with complete freedom. Once more, my brother asked me to help him. In these circumstances, I consented, and in the Spring of 1925, I became a member of the Party.92

Admitting that he had done work for the Party during Hitler’s incarceration, Strasser states, “During Hitler’s imprisonment, I had contributed to the Völkischer Beobachter, under the [historical] pseudonym Ulrich von Hutten,”93 named after a 16th century outspoken critic of the Catholic Church, satirist, poet, follower of Martin Luther, and leader of the Imperial Knights of the Holy Roman Empire. In naming himself as such, Strasser was connecting himself to a nationalist past, and in writing as he did, Strasser claims to have “laid the

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90 Strasser and Stern, Flight from Terror, 55-57.
91 Strasser and Stern.
92 Strasser, Hitler and I, 73.
93 Strasser.
groundwork for our National Socialism,” placing, for the first time, Strasserism in opposition to Hitlerism. According to Strasser, from day one of his entrance into the Party, he was already writing in opposition to Hitler’s vision of National Socialism. In Otto’s mind, he and Gregor were the real National Socialists; Hitler was simply an opportunist. But so was Otto. In the story above, told two different ways, Otto Strasser wants to convince his audience that he joined the Nazi Party during its “lowest ebb, at a time when it was scarcely a political party anymore” because he wanted his audience to sympathize with him and his decision to join his brother in the service of Hitler’s NSDAP. He used a grand opportunity to tell his version of the story.

2.3 A National-Socialist Joins the NSDAP

According to Günter Bartsch, the same year Moeller van den Bruck killed himself because he “would rather die than make a pact with Hitler,” Otto Strasser joined the NSDAP in 1925. Before officially joining the Party, however, as mentioned above, Otto Strasser got his hands dirty by helping his brother publish and edit under the nationalistic pseudonym of “Ulrich von Hutten.” After the failed Putsch, the state released Gregor Strasser within weeks because he was elected to serve in the Reichstag. Those who supported the cause elected him to the Reichstag as a member of the North German National Socialist Freedom Party - a pseudonym for the North German NSDAP, which the

94 Strasser.
95 Strasser and Stern, Flight from Terror, 57.
96 Strasser and Stern.
97 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 41.
Weimar Government had banned following the Putsch.\textsuperscript{98} Then, he asked his brother, Otto, to help him recreate the Nazi program because, as Gregor said, “We now have the opportunity to give the NSDAP a [new] program. A party without a program is a body without a spine. Join us, Otto.”\textsuperscript{99} So, Otto joined the NSDAP in the Spring of 1925, receiving membership number 23918\textsuperscript{100} and establishing a publishing house, the \textit{Kämpfer Verlag}, with his brother.\textsuperscript{101}

The Strasser brothers wanted to shift the focus of the NSDAP from antisemitism to Socialism; however, each of their relationships with Hitler differed. Gregor viewed Hitler as a superior whom he found fascinating.\textsuperscript{102} On the other hand, Otto joined the Party as a critic of Hitler, determined to set the NSDAP on a different course. Otto saw his brother as the rightful leader, whom he supported and for whom he wrote speeches and articles for the \textit{Kämpfer Verlag}.\textsuperscript{103} Otto began immediately to publish many National Socialist publications. From this perspective, one could argue that Otto joined the Nazi Party for the wrong reasons. Either way, the brothers agreed to orient the Northern faction of the NSDAP towards economic issues and away from the vulgarly antisemitic variation in Munich.\textsuperscript{104} That is not to say that the Strasserite wing was without its antisemitism; it employed the old tropes of the “greedy Jewish financier” and the malevolent Judeo-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{98} Bartsch, 43.
\item \textsuperscript{99} Bartsch.
\item \textsuperscript{101} Bartsch, \textit{Otto Strasser}.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Bartsch, 44.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Bartsch, 45.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Bartsch.
\end{itemize}
Bolshevik; they just did not regard it as a central focus of their ideology. Regardless, according to Strasser, Hitler “heartily congratulated Gregor on learning that” Otto had been “won over” to the NSDAP, even if he possibly viewed it as a necessary evil. Strasser claims Hitler said, “Whatever he does, he’ll do well. Two men like you cannot fail.” Again, while plausible, one must be wary of accepting Otto Strasser’s biased and possibly fabricated retelling of his former boss-turned-nemesis’ spoken words.

The Strasser brothers’ first assignment was to arrange the Nazi party in the North of Germany more efficiently. According to Strasser, and as is known to history, the Party was scattered and had to be regrouped. Their first task was to set up an “intelligent press, adapted to their mentality” and ideas. Therefore, they founded the bi-weekly review of the NS-Briefe (Nationalsozialistische-Briefe) to push their socialistic perspective of National Socialism. Their next step was to “work out an economic, political, and cultural programme[sic]” as opposed to, in the field of economics, both Marxism and capitalism. Beginning to show his politics in the NSDAP, Strasser states that he and his brother “foresaw a new equilibrium” based on state feudalism. The state was to be the sole owner of the land, which it would lease to private citizens. In this endeavor, Strasser hoped they could “combat proletarianization.” Revealing the roots of Strasser’s differences

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106 Strasser, Hitler and I, 74.
107 Strasser.
108 Strasser.
109 Strasser.
110 Strasser.
with Hitler, he explains that in the political field, he and his brother “rejected the totalitarian idea in favor of federalism.”

Further revealing his differences with Hitler, Strasser states, “In the field of foreign politics, we naturally demanded equality between the nations and the cessation of the ostracism of Germany that still prevailed. We had no territorial demands.” Furthermore, Strasser said they would have only held “honest” plebiscites in the so-called “disputed areas.” One has to imagine that he is talking about areas like the Sudetenland, parts of Poland and the Franco-German border regions. Around this time, Strasser gave up a minor position at the Ministry of Foods and devoted his time to the Nazi Party.

As detailed in Manvell and Fraenkel’s *Doctor Goebbels: His Life and Death*, in looking for an editorial assistant at the *Kämpfer Verlag* for the NS-Briefe, the Strasser brothers became acquainted with Joseph Goebbels. According to the authors after first hearing of Goebbels from Karl Kaufmann, a Gauleiter for the Nazi Party in the Rhine-Ruhr District, the Strasser brothers wondered if he might make a suitable choice for the position of assistant editor at the NS-Briefe. According to Otto Strasser, he was surprised at the weakness of Goebbels’ physical appearance; he felt that any political opponent could’ve just pushed him over with one hand. However, Strasser was impressed with the young man’s presence, piercing eyes, and voice. During the meeting, Goebbels complained about

111 Strasser.
112 Strasser.
113 Strasser.
116 Manvell and Fraenkel.
117 Manvell and Fraenkel.
the *Völkische Freiheitspartei*, saying, “The leaders know nothing about the people; they are afraid of Socialism, but I am convinced that only a kind of Socialism and nationalism can save Germany.”\textsuperscript{118} According to William Shirer in the classic *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Goebbels was attracted to the Strasser brothers' radicalism and agreed that the Party needed a proletarian foundation. \textsuperscript{119} Shirer states, "The diary of Goebbels is full of expressions of sympathy for Communism at this time."\textsuperscript{120} According to Shirer, Goebbels wrote on 23 October 1925, a “final analysis” that “it would be better for [Weimar Germany] to end our existence under Bolshevism than to endure slavery under capitalism.”\textsuperscript{121} Around this time, Goebbels also published an open letter to a Communist leader stating, "Nazism and Communism are really the same thing [...] you and I are fighting one another, but we are not really enemies."\textsuperscript{122} All of which falls in line with what Goebbels is said to have remarked to Otto Strasser:

> I don’t mind admitting that it was your brother Gregor who helped me to understand these ideas. He is a genuine socialist, and it is his synthesis of socialist ideas and nationalist emotions that must be observed without any equivocation by us National Socialists.\textsuperscript{123}

According to Manvell and Fraenkel, Otto noted that Goebbels used the term “us” as if he were already a party member. Nevertheless, after the meeting, at a salary of 200 marks per

\textsuperscript{118} Manvell and Fraenkel.
\textsuperscript{119} Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, 126.
\textsuperscript{120} Shirer.
\textsuperscript{121} Shirer.
\textsuperscript{122} Shirer.
\textsuperscript{123} Manvell and Fraenkel, *Doctor Goebbels*. 

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month, the fervently socialistic Goebbels was hired for secretarial work and as an assistant editor at the Kämpfer Verlag in Berlin.

The Strassers were incredibly successful in expanding the Nazi Party in Northern Germany. According to British historian Peter Stachura, the brothers proved to be tireless recruiters for the Nazi movement, contriving to bring members of their own family, including their father, into the party. They were siphoning members from the populist, nationalist völkisch parties and increasing the NSDAP’s political significance. As the Nazi Party took up more of their time, Gregor and Otto’s success came at the expense of their former jobs. As mentioned above, Otto quit his job with the Ministry of Food. According to author James Pool in *Who Financed Hitler: The Secret Funding of Hitler’s Rise to Power 1919-1933*, early in 1925, Gregor gave up his pharmacist’s practice in Landshut and devoted himself to building the Nazi movement in northern Germany and the industrialized Rhineland. With the help of Otto, whom Pool described as “a talented journalist,” Gregor rapidly achieved success. According to the eminent historian Richard Evans in *The Coming of the Third Reich*, by the end of 1925, promoting the “socialist” aspects of Nazism to win over the industrial working class in areas like the Ruhr, the Strassers’ “tireless recruitment drive had increased the number of branches nearly fourfold.” While Hitler should have heralded this as good news, he viewed the increased popularity of the “socialist”

124 Strasser, *Hitler and I*, 77.
125 Manvell and Fraenkel, *Doctor Goebbels*.
128 Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 203.
Strasser brothers as a threat to his hold on power. The Strassers were indeed inclined to take the “socialist” part of the party program rather seriously, advocating for the nationalization of heavy industry and extensive landholdings. \(^{129}\) For strategic and ideological reasons, Hitler was against this; “He did not want to damage his chances for an alliance with the ruling elite.”\(^{130}\) The fact that he considered such an alliance should explain why the socialist, Otto Strasser, opposed a bourgeois-friendly Hitler.

On 22 November 1925, Gregor Strasser called a meeting, in Hanover, of the Party District Leaders (Gauleiters) of Northern Germany. Like most Northern Party leaders, Strasser was “restive under the control of Munich” and opposed Hitler on numerous questions. \(^{131}\) According to historian Jackson Spielvogel, their opposition to Hitler’s Munich variation came on a few fronts, objections to the control and domination of the Party by the leaders of the Southern faction of the NSDAP, especially the unsavory Julius Streicher and his friend Hermann Esser; opposition to participation in election campaigns, favoring instead the use of strikes by the urban masses - another reflection of its socialistic tendencies; and finally, support for the socialist demand of expropriating the property of former royalty.\(^{132}\) Feelings against Hitler were running high and finally ossified around whether the Government should confiscate the vast estates of the former German Royal houses.\(^{133}\) The northern leaders wanted Hitler to side with the Social Democrats in the Reichstag and stand behind the decision to seize the property of the princes. Hitler was

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\(^{129}\) Pool, *Who Financed Hitler*.

\(^{130}\) Pool.

\(^{131}\) Pool.


\(^{133}\) Pool, *Who Financed Hitler*.
furious; this would alienate the wealthy elites and remove from Hitler any opportunity to use them to fund his movement. More importantly, Hitler quickly recognized the growing influence of the Strasser brothers was a threat to his control of the NSDAP. Therefore, on 14 February 1926, he called a meeting between all Party leaders, Northern and Southern, in the Bavarian town of Bamberg.\footnote{Evans, \textit{The Coming of the Third Reich}, 205.}

Although Otto Strasser asserts that the meeting in Bamberg, Franconia took place on a weekday and, therefore, none of the Northern German or Rhineland leaders - except for Gregor and his assistant Joseph Goebbels - could attend,\footnote{Strasser, \textit{Hitler and I}, 81.} according to James Pool, this assertion is false.\footnote{Pool, \textit{Who Financed Hitler}, 103.} According to any modern calendar, the day fell on a Sunday, and everyone who was anyone in the North German faction was there, including the recalcitrant Northern leaders.\footnote{Pool.} According to Richard Evans, Hitler spoke for two hours, rejecting the socialistic views of the Northern faction and reasserting his belief in the “centrality of the conquest of living space.”\footnote{Evans, \textit{The Coming of the Third Reich}, 205.} Whereas Strasser, Goebbels, and the Northern faction urged the Nazis to join the campaign to wrest from the German princes their vast estates, Hitler rejected such a campaign as an attack on private property.\footnote{Evans.} Consequently, Gregor capitulated and completely dropped his proposals. In return, Hitler mollified the North Germans by removing Hermann Esser, a close friend of Julius Streicher, from his post in Munich; the Northern faction despised both Streicher and Esser.\footnote{Evans.} This capitulation on the
side of Gregor did not deter Otto; in fact, he continued to publish a flurry of diatribes against capitalism and the capitalistic tendencies of the NSDAP and to agitate publicly for reform of the party program; despite the formal injunctions against questioning the ‘immutable’ Twenty-Five Points.\footnote{Steinback, “Thinking Beyond The Führer: The Ideological and Structural Evolution of National Socialism, 1919-1934,” 98.} Using his \textit{Kämpfer Verlag}, Strasser could print and distribute his opinions at a moment’s notice. His ability to do this would bring him into direct conflict with Adolf Hitler.

According to Günter Bartsch, on 22 May 1926, a general meeting of members of the NSDAP took place in Munich.\footnote{Bartsch, \textit{Otto Strasser}, 59.} Hitler wanted to anchor his victory in Bamberg; therefore, he pushed through three specific decisions which affected the Northern faction. First, Hitler announced that he alone had the power to appoint \textit{Gauleiter}.\footnote{Bartsch.} He also forbade meetings between the district leaders not convened by him. This decision gave Hitler complete control over what variation of Nazism prevailed among the districts, who controlled the sections, and the interpretation of Nazism that came to dominate the whole NSDAP. Next, he announced his ability to ban individual members and entire local groups.\footnote{Bartsch.} One can imagine that this was to rid the Party of the factions that plagued it, and step towards the future move of banning the Strasserite wing of the NSDAP.\footnote{Bartsch, 60.} Finally, Hitler announced that the NSDAP’s party program was an unchangeable and unshakeable “dogma.”\footnote{Bartsch, 59.} A direct slight at the Strasserite variation of National Socialism, this ordeal...
was one of Hitler’s early efforts to consolidate the Party under his sole leadership. He wanted an end to political discussions - and thereby factionalism – as he feared the NSDAP would lose its fighting spirit; he also wanted to consolidate the power over the party into his hands alone.147

As a first move against Otto and his socialist leanings, in June 1926, Hitler ousted a close friend of Otto’s, Ernst Schlange, from the position of Berlin Gauleiter.148 In October 1926, the sycophantically Hitlerian Goebbels was appointed the new Gauleiter of Berlin.149 Hitler later approached Gregor with an offer to move to Munich and take a higher position in the Party.150 Gregor demurred, preferring the independence of organizing and working at the publishing house with his brother. By remaining independent, Gregor hoped to form a man-to-man relationship with Hitler as equals to steer him toward the socialistic side of Nazism.151 However, Gregor caved, and Hitler made him Reich Organization Leader of the NSDAP in Munich on 2 January 1928.152 According to Günter Bartsch, with Hitler’s acquisition of Gregor’s services, the North German triumvirate of the Strasser brothers and Goebbels dwindled to just Otto.153 Hitler ratcheted tensions between him and Otto Strasser in 1928 by purging Strasser’s remaining Gauleiter comrades.154 To add insult to injury, Gregor was in Munich working for Hitler just as the brothers’ old assistant editor,
Joseph Goebbels, was vying for control of the Nazi press with his weekly paper, *Der Angriff.* The brothers were separated, but Otto still had his publishing house and still produced the daily *NS-Briefe,* which, for the time being, outsold Goebbels’ weekly paper. However, the breaking point was nearing, Strasser was boxed in, and he was soon to exit the Nazi Party.

### 2.4 Strasser’s Exit from the NSDAP and the Dawning of the Black Front

As previously mentioned, one must be wary of Strasser’s stories. To recall the Hitler-Strasser split story in his way would increase the size of this chapter exponentially; therefore, in the name of brevity, and due to not being able to confirm many of Strasser’s claims, the paper will now move quickly through his split with the Nazi cause. The relevant – and possibly fabricated - dialogues and the reason for their existence will be covered in chapter four.

Hitler and Otto Strasser came to ideological blows - if one believes Strasser - from day one of their introduction. However, one can attribute the Strasser-Hitler split of 1930 to two main factors. The first issue was a matter of ideology. As established, when considering the Strasserite faction, one must remember that Otto was the more radical of the two brothers. During the so-called “lean years” of the Nazi Party, he deeply opposed Hitler cozying up to wealthy industrialists and societal elites. Even so, this issue was

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155 Manvell and Fraenkel, 127-29.
156 In both of Strasser’s Hitler-based books *Hitler and I* and *Flight from Terror,* and in any interview concerning his introduction to Adolf Hitler, Strasser maintains they were ideologically opposed to each other from the very beginning.
exacerbated chiefly by Strasser’s willingness, nay ability, to promote and publish his diatribes against Hitler’s variation of Nazism. The second issue was a matter of personalities. Although Strasser’s publishing house was - at the time - the most popular in the Party, he was running out of friendly comrades in positions of power within the NSDAP; even his brother was in line with Hitler. By 1930, it was only logical for Strasser to become a sycophant to Hitler or leave. It was also during this time that Goebbels began to maneuver for control of the Nazi press, attempting to oust Strasser, his former comrade, as the official mouthpiece of the Nazi Party.\textsuperscript{157} This tension came to a crescendo in 1930 when Strasser, using his publishing house, openly admonished Hitler.

In full support of a trade union strike in Saxony in April 1930, Otto Strasser accused Hitler of working with the “reactionary forces of big business” by not supporting the unions.\textsuperscript{158} The radical socialist line Strasser was peddling had become an embarrassing thorn in Hitler’s side. The simmering dispute concerning the place of socialism in National Socialism was now in the open. According to James Pool, even the industrialists who were always sympathetic to the Nazi cause were now in fear of the party’s “socialism,” making it clear to Hitler that, unless he immediately repudiated the stand taken by Strasser, there would be no more subsidies.\textsuperscript{159} Hitler ordered that no party member could participate in the strike, yet he could still not silence Strasser’s pen.\textsuperscript{160} Strasser had his publishing house, and there was not much Hitler could do but ban the papers from the party. Even still,

\textsuperscript{157} Manvell and Fraenkel, \textit{Doctor Goebbels}, 128-29.  
\textsuperscript{158} Pool, \textit{Who Financed Hitler}, 167.  
\textsuperscript{159} Pool, 168.  
\textsuperscript{160} Pool.
Strasser could print and distribute the articles. Hitler had to make a move to kill or co-opt the *Verlag.*

In May, Hitler made an abrupt and surprise visit to Berlin to meet with Strasser regarding his desire to purchase the *Kämpfer Verlag*, the only organ of socialistic descent left within the Party. 161 Strasser declined, and there was a lengthy argument between the two, wherein, according to Strasser, Hitler extolled the virtues of wealthy industrialists like Krupp before they parted ways. 162 According to Ian Kershaw, Strasser accused Hitler of trying to destroy the *KV* because he wanted to “strangle a social revolution through a strategy of legality and collaboration with the bourgeoisie right.” 163 Hitler “angrily” denounced Strasser’s “Socialism as nothing but Marxism.” Afterward, Hitler said Strasser was “an intellectual white Jew, totally incapable of organization, a Marxist of the purest ilk.” 164 Despite Hitler’s repudiation of the Saxony strike and a lack of socialistic principles, the Nazi representation in Saxony rose, making it the second-largest political party in the region. 165 At the same time, Strasser publicized the details of their tense meeting in May, which left Hitler little choice but to act.

According to both Strasser and historian James Ward, 166 from the beginning of June, Hitler banned Strasser’s benefactors and supporters from the Party. 167 Later, in a

161 Strasser, *Hitler and I,* 92.
162 Strasser, 103.
164 Kershaw.
166 Strasser, 105.
Berlin meeting called by Goebbels and Strasser, 168 Goebbels expelled numerous socialist members who supported a Strasserite (Schapke) who had been banned from the Party. 169 On 1 July, Gregor resigned from his position at the *Kämpfer Verlag*, disassociating himself from his brother’s position. 170 Days later, after all the turmoil and banning of his fellow socialists, finally, despite Goebbels’ earlier insistences to Hitler that Strasser be banned from the Party, Otto Strasser left the Nazi Party of his own volition to form the Fighting Community of Revolutionary National Socialists (*Kämpfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten*), 171 later known as the Black Front, with the proclamation: “Socialists leave the Nazi Party.” 172

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168 On page 106 of *Hitler and I*, Strasser claims that he asked Goebbels to call a meeting of the Berlin Party Official and he did, however, Strasser maintains that he was not allowed to attend because he did not belong to the “same political district.”
169 Strasser, 106.
CHAPTER THREE: THE HARDSHIPS OF BEING HITLER’S NEMESIS

The present chapter deals with Strasser’s post-Nazi life up to World War Two. Focusing on his immediate post-Nazi life following the Nazi rise to power and Hitler's attempts to assassinate him, this chapter will analyze the circumstances that later became fodder for Strasser to distance himself from the Nazi leader and movement. Then, the paper will analyze Strasser's arrest as a suspected Nazi fifth columnist by French police in Paris in May 1940, his joining in with French refugees as France fell to the Nazis, and his escape to Bermuda via Portugal on an American ship in September of 1940. Finally, after looking at Strasser’s six-month stay in Bermuda, the chapter will cover his settlement in Canada in 1941.

3.1 A National-Socialist Leaves the Nazi Party

In early July of 1930, Otto Strasser left the National Socialist German Worker’s Party; immediately afterward, in the fashion of the Munich Post, Strasser publicized the headline, “Socialists Leave the Nazi Party.”173 Like the Post, Strasser was being flashy and loud about his assertions of the “socialists” leaving. Strasser’s papers and any publications from the publishing house were thereafter banned from the Party. Strasser became a pariah in Nazi circles, often referred to as a Bolshevik or as being under the pay of Moscow. According to Strasser, Hitler even authored an article stating that Strasser was a “rootless scribbler and a parlor Bolshevik.”174 At the same time, Goebbels asserted that Moscow was

173 Strasser, Hitler and I, 108.
174 Strasser.
paying Strasser. 175 According to Strasser, when returning to a train station outside Brandenburg shortly after his exit from the Party, he was attacked by a group of SA soldiers “dressed as hooligans.”176 He drew his revolver, and the men scattered, but not before injuring his disabled veteran friend, Brehm.

Although Strasser admitted that his brother’s position in the Nazi Party had kept him in the NSDAP, brotherly love did not keep Gregor from denouncing his brother early after the latter’s departure. According to Günter Bartsch, shortly after the split, Gregor signed a declaration from the “National Socialist Reichstag Faction,” which branded the Kämpfer Verlag a hostile and anti-party organism. 177 In the Völkischer Beobachter (People’s Observer), Gregor also personally renounced his brother, saying he was “a desk person, alien to life” or, rather, a dreaming shut-in.178 Finally, Gregor accused Otto of promoting a "sterile" and, ultimately, “criminal” ideology.179

It was also around this time, when Gregor Strasser stepped down from his position at the publishing house, that Gregor agreed, along with another investor, to sell their shares of the Kämpfer Verlag to Hitler, thereby attempting to squeeze Otto Strasser out of his ability to promote and widely distribute his opinion.180 Even with the Kämpfer Verlag now in the hands of Hitler’s NSDAP, Otto Strasser did not give up. Hitler was not yet the leader of Germany and, therefore, had to use the lengthy and drawn-out court process that would ensue if he were to try and oust Otto from his position, given that Strasser still held a one-

175 Strasser.
176 Strasser, 109.
177 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 92.
178 Bartsch.
179 Bartsch.
180 Strasser and Stern, Flight from Terror, 103-04.
third interest in the publishing house.\textsuperscript{181} Therefore, Otto’s next political journey began again with a publishing house. This time, he had experience from the previous five years of working with the NSDAP which he now attempted to put to use.

3.2 Heil Deutschland: The Black Front

First, Strasser founded the Fighting Community of Revolutionary National Socialists (\textit{Kämpfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer Nationalsozialisten}) from all of the disparate \textit{völkisch}, nationalist, and worker-oriented groups which surrounded Nazism and even more radical Nazis like Walter Stennes, an important S.A. leader who had threatened to lead his S.A. regiment against the NSDAP in a bid for parliamentary nominations.\textsuperscript{182} This amalgamation did not last long, and, like the Black Front, which followed it, it was not very popular. Ian Kershaw has stated that the Strasser-Hitler split showed “above all, the strength of Hitler’s position.”\textsuperscript{183} The lack of support also showed that Strasser “had not been a popular member of the party, and his influence was less extensive” than he had believed and later propagated.\textsuperscript{184} According to Kershaw, once outside the NSDAP, he lost almost all significance, “No major leader followed him; there were no repercussions; the rebellion fizzled out overnight.”\textsuperscript{185} In fact, according to Jackson Spielvogel, Strasser’s departure ended most of the leftist radicalism of the NSDAP.\textsuperscript{186} As historian Joachim Fest

\textsuperscript{181} Strasser and Stern.
\textsuperscript{183} Kershaw, \textit{Hitler: 1889-1936}, 328.
\textsuperscript{184} Kershaw.
\textsuperscript{185} Kershaw.
\textsuperscript{186} Spielvogel, \textit{Hitler and Nazi Germany}, 53.
points out, this is true, as hardly anyone followed Strasser. Fest states, “It turned out that
the party had virtually no socialist members” and very few who cared about the theoretical
aspects of politics. Even though Hitler banned his followers from reading anything
published by the Kämpfer Verlag, “the subjects belabored by these publications soon
ceased to attract attention anyhow.” It is hard to decode why, but one could argue that
Strasser’s brand of Nazism was not popular. To many Nazis he was some sort of
Communist, to the Communists he was a former Nazi, and to undecided Germans, he
reeked of the political fights that plagued the republic; all of this made his political message
untouchable by a broad base of individuals.

Nevertheless, Strasser plugged away and founded his party with those who either
followed him or joined him as nationalists who despised Hitler. Strasser said he meant for
the Front to be a “School of officers and noncommissioned officers of the German
Revolution.” The emblem became a communistic hammer and sword upon a shield or
“tiepin,” as Strasser called it. Their greeting became “Heil Deutschland” instead of “Heil
Hitler.” According to Günter Bartsch, the logic behind their flag was as follows:

The red flag means blood without spirit. The black, red and gold flag
of the Republic [was] a beautiful mistake. The black, white and red flag of
the Bismarck Empire fluttered over an unrestrained lust for power. Now
only the black banner of departure [will fly over Germany].

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187 Fest, 471.
188 Fest.
189 Strasser, Hitler and I, 112.
190 Strasser.
191 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 165.
Otto believed that most of the German population was already potentially behind the Front, even the majority of the working class, although they were unaware of it. In the Black Front, Strasser saw the future of the so-called “people’s community,” which will break down the barrier between left and right. According to Bartsch, their symbol was the black flag of the conservative and peasant revolution, a flag of distress, humiliation, and ultimate struggle, the banner of the restlessness of thoughts about Germany’s fate and how to turn it around.\footnote{Bartsch.}

The Black Front was not an organization that one could join and leave, but rather an umbrella organization of organizations, movements, and individuals with similar socialistic and nationalistic aims. \footnote{Bartsch, 173.} Strasser described the Black Front as a kind of “Freemasonry,” due to the fact that Freemasonry is organized into smaller units. \footnote{Bartsch.} Regardless, its structure comprised collective leadership and a loose advisory staff.\footnote{Bartsch.} One of Strasser’s associates, Richard Schapke, characterized the Front more accurately as anti-parliamentarian, anti-capitalist and anti-clerical. He branded it as a militant and revolutionary idea.\footnote{Bartsch. 173-74.} In practice, it turned out to be a kind of federation. Despite Strasser’s personal beliefs regarding Jews, antisemitism receded into the background to the same extent that the conflict with Hitler became its focus.\footnote{Bartsch, 160.} That is not to say that the Black Front was not antisemitic - it was. Even if Strasser did business with Jews and showed no
deep racial bias towards them in person, the Black Front had its own German-only rules.\textsuperscript{198} Strasser openly espoused the belief that Jews were “fundamentally different” from Germans and Europeans; an entire section of his 1940 political appeal-turned-book, \textit{Germany Tomorrow}, espouses this belief.\textsuperscript{199}

Although they had very little success in recruiting or growing numbers, after Hitler came to power, the Nazi government viewed the Black Front for what it was, a national opposition group, albeit a tiny group in comparison to the NSDAP. However, all opposition was a unique challenge for the new regime, which pretended to have carried out a “national revolution.” Many of these Black Frontmen were former Nazis or those on the right who were anti-Hitler, and while their numbers were minuscule compared to those in the NSDAP, they still amounted to a sizable opposition which did not look good to the Nazis. Therefore, the Nazis swiftly moved against the Black Front. The authorities took more severe action against the Black Front than against the KPD, banning the Party before the KPD in February 1933.\textsuperscript{200}

Refusing to be intimidated, the Front held one public (non-secret) event after another. The final event was on, fatefully, 27 February 1933 in Berlin. At the meeting, Otto Strasser stepped up to the podium, but numerous SA men shouted him down, drowning out his voice with screams of hate and rage.\textsuperscript{201} Finally, a train of police officers divided the speaking hall into two sections; a fight broke out. The police escorted out the group of

\textsuperscript{198} Bartsch.
\textsuperscript{199} Strasser, \textit{Germany}, 73-79.
\textsuperscript{200} Bartsch, \textit{Otto Strasser}, 182.
\textsuperscript{201} Bartsch, 182-83.
unruly SA men, and Strasser finally spoke. Later that night, Otto Strasser got word that the Reichstag had been set ablaze. Knowing he and his movement were part of a national opposition to the NSDAP, he realized his life was in danger. Strasser believed that Hitler’s “pitiless persecution” would come swiftly.

3.3 Nemesis: Strasser on the Run

Strasser’s assumption was correct; the next day, the Gestapo seized the premises of his former headquarters, taking two individuals, according to Strasser, to the concentration camp in Oranienburg. As a new wave of arrests raged nationwide, the Black Front went underground and became a secret society. In the meantime, Hitler sent police and Brownshirts to arrest many of Strasser’s known comrades. Otto was spared only because he remained on the move. According to Strasser, hundreds of arrests began among the Black Front members in the Berlin area in the following weeks. Similar arrests also took place in other provinces.

As recounted in Hitler and I, Otto Strasser went into hiding at his new headquarters in Thuringia under a false name. According to Strasser, he packed the same night as the Reichstag Fire and set off toward Thuringia, where he worked for two months. Then, according to his account, one morning, the telephone rang with a call from a member of the Black Front who had succeeded in “worming” his way into the Gestapo. The double

202 Bartsch, 183.
203 Strasser, Hitler and I, 133.
204 Strasser, Hitler and I, 134.
205 Strasser.
206 Bartsch, Otto Strasser.
207 Strasser, Hitler and I, 134.
agent warned Strasser that the SS had tortured one of his men into talking, and the Gestapo knew he was in Thuringia. Despite Munich being the home-field of Nazism, Otto resolved to return to Bavaria, where Hitler’s control remained tenuous. Along the way, a Berlin police motor car tailed and rode beside them.\textsuperscript{208} Otto’s double agent later informed him that the Gestapo agents were wary of his propensity to carry a pistol and hoped to wait till night to “dazzle” him and take him alive.\textsuperscript{209} Regardless, after eluding his pursuers, Strasser left Bavaria and went to Northwestern Germany, where he stayed until mid-April when he returned to Bavaria. While lodging in Chiemsee, he called a meeting of the Southern German Black Front leaders for May 5.\textsuperscript{210} According to Strasser, a young student suggested arranging the meeting in her hut six thousand feet up into the mountains.\textsuperscript{211} Strasser would once again come face-to-face with danger.

According to Strasser, during a meeting with all of the leaders from Bavaria and Württemberg and an Austrian representative, they were approached by members of the SS.\textsuperscript{212} In the Bavarian dialect, the Black Guards asked for their identification papers. Strasser asserts that he was the only one present able to speak the Bavarian dialect, so he answered, “Where do you expect us to keep our papers? Do you take [yours with you when you’re in a bathing suit]?”\textsuperscript{213} One of the guards, according to Strasser, seemed as if he was going to attack him when the other restrained him and asked what they were doing there. Strasser responded loudly, “What does one do in a mountain hut? You better ask the two

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{208} Strasser. \\
\textsuperscript{209} Strasser, 136. \\
\textsuperscript{210} Strasser, 137. \\
\textsuperscript{211} Strasser. \\
\textsuperscript{212} Strasser. \\
\textsuperscript{213} Strasser, 138.
\end{flushleft}
ladies.”214 After speaking with the ladies, the officers “went away in the direction of the Austrian frontier.”215 While standing and planning their next move, Strasser said that he and his cohort continued to hear the blowing of police whistles, and just then, a thunderstorm broke out, which provided them a chance to escape without looking conspicuous.216 After hiking six hours down in the pouring rain, they returned to Chiemsee. Otto realized the Nazis had found him again, and it was time to flee. So, to disguise his appearance, he colored his hair, dawnd a pair of spectacles, and bought a false mustache.217

As Strasser claimed, on 9 May 1933, as he was preparing to leave, a driver arrived and handed his hostess a letter. It was from Gregor. According to Otto, he recognized the handwriting right away and took heed of the warning it imparted:

I dined last night with Minister Frick; he told me that Goering was sending two death squads to [...] kill you. I have come to Munich by aeroplane [sic], and I appeal to you to fly to Austria in the car that I am sending to you. Gregor.

Strasser hurried to the driver and asked, “Can you take me to Munich to the gentleman who gave you this letter?” The driver replied in the affirmative, and Strasser, an hour later, had his last conversation, face-to-face or otherwise, with his older brother. According to Strasser, Gregor understood his untenable position (or lack thereof) in the Reich and that Hitler’s men would too hunt him, but, despite Otto’s insistence, Gregor resolved to stay in Germany, where he would be murdered in 1934.

214 Strasser.
215 Strasser.
216 Strasser, 139.
217 Strasser.
Bartsch’s research tells this story slightly differently; however, a few facts will be clarified in the name of brevity. According to Bartsch, Gregor’s conversation with Frick happened over the telephone, and the letter to Otto was longer; however, if one were to paraphrase it, and change Gregor’s conversation with Frick to a telephone conversation from Munich as opposed to a face-to-face in Berlin, then Otto Strasser’s retelling is not wholly inaccurate, albeit a tad concise for such a meaningful moment. Either way, Otto went to his cousin’s house in Vienna, Austria, where he believed, the Nazis would not dare cross an international border to touch him.

**Austria**

In Austria, Strasser pretended to be an engineer; however, his job consisted of setting up other so-called “combat groups” under the umbrella of the Black Front and smuggling “illegal literature” into Germany in as large a quantity as possible.\(^{218}\) Otto began to publish his *Der Schwarze Sender* en masse. According to Strasser, his group had long ago formed a printing works from where he could print and run a “clandestine organization” that would carry his works over the frontier to Germany.\(^{219}\) He got to work straight away and started to print pamphlets immediately. One pamphlet of particular interest is one of his first, written in March 1933, entitled “Wie lange noch Hitler?”\(^{220}\) In this pamphlet, Strasser questions how Hitler came to power, how long he will last, and the origins of

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\(^{218}\) Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*, 192.  
\(^{219}\) Strasser, 141.  
\(^{220}\) Found in the Appendix of Günter Bartsch’s *Otto Strasser: Der linke Nationalsozialist*, 339-42.
National Socialism. He also challenges Hitler’s view of the sanctity of private property and alludes that a revolution is still forthcoming. He declares that Hitler’s movement was only lip service, claiming that the leadership and the movement knew nothing and had repeatedly fallen victim to “liberal reactionary infiltration.”\footnote{Bartsch, 341: „aber ihre unzureichende Erkenntnis läßt sie immer wieder jener liberalreaktionären Überfremdung anheimfallen.“} He calls attention to Hitler’s indebtedness to the wealthy capitalists and doubts that Hitler will divorce himself from the “reactionary” capitalists. He asserted that Hitler and the affluent industrialists wrap themselves in the façade of nationalism to distract from their capitalistic tendencies and intentions.

The pamphlet was distributed within the German and Austrian NSDAP. As the Nazis discovered Black Front members in their ranks, they broke up divisions to root out the dissidents.\footnote{Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 192.} According to Günter Bartsch, in the beginning, the Viennese group only had eight members until it began to work itself into the federal government; however, that ended abruptly when Austrian Nazis in the federal government blamed the group for a bombing in Vienna.\footnote{Bartsch.} Bartsch said the Austrian NSDAP members carried out the bombing and blamed the Black Front. Consequentially, the offices of the Black Front were raided and their files taken; 17 members were arrested, handed over to the judiciary, and charged with conspiracy and weapons possession.\footnote{Bartsch.} However, Otto had no idea this had happened. Like other moments of his life, Otto’s account of the following differs from what historians like Patrick Moreau or Günter Bartsch have portrayed. To remain within the realm of
history, the research will attempt only to consult Strasser when his account compliments what experts have confirmed.

Otto was in Lower Austria in a secret meeting with Dr. Edgar Jung, a confidante, and advisor of former Chancellor von Papen, who had invited Strasser to inform him of the discord within the Nazi regime. They disagreed on numerous points but agreed that Hitler must go. In “high spirits,” Strasser returned to his hide-out to discover that the apartment was locked and police had taken his caretakers. Strasser wandered the streets on his feet until the morning when he read that there was an arrest warrant for him and that the Black Front was guilty of a bombing. His next move was to escape to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he set up another headquarters, including two employees and an office. Strasser knew the Czechs would be unwilling to help the Nazis in their quest to capture him.

**Czechoslovakia**

Otto arrived, made his presence known to the police, and settled into a quiet existence, albeit remaining politically active. In November 1933, only five months after Strasser arrived in Prague, Hitler made another move against him. Although he was a Strasser enthusiast and well-known antisemite, this episode is detailed most concisely in Douglas Reed’s *The Prisoner of Ottawa*. According to Reed, Strasser was startled awake

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225 Bartsch.
226 Bartsch, 193.
227 Bartsch, 194.
during a nap by his “corpulent landlady,” who told him there were police outside. Behind her came the police, who barged in with their revolvers leveled. They asked Strasser questions in “harsh and voluble Czech” before Otto asked them to speak German, wherein they asked if he were “Herr Müller,” one of the aliases he used in Vienna. He said no and produced a quality-made counterfeit passport bearing a swastika and another name, one unknown to his pursuers. The police left, murmuring. Having previously informed the Prague police of his new assumed name and real identity, Strasser went to the police precinct to ask some questions. The police told him that they had not visited when Strasser pieced together that the men he spoke to were not police but SS men in stolen Czech police uniforms. The officers who spoke Czech were Sudeten Germans, which explains why they did not immediately recognize Strasser. They had not considered the possibility that Strasser would obtain a new passport.

In February 1934, Strasser announced in various newspapers the founding of the “Action Committee of the German Revolution,” which he viewed as the seed of a government in exile. In contrast to the mainstream nationalist sentiment in Germany at the time, the committee did not mention the annulment of any post-WW1 treaties. Interestingly, however, the proclamation did announce the equality of Jewish people and a recognition that Zionism should be treated with respect and support. It was also during

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229 Reed.
230 Reed.
231 Reed, 139.
232 Bartsch, 194.
233 Bartsch, 195.
this time that Strasser, came into contact with numerous Jewish refugees. After several discussions, he concluded that the Jewish question in Germany could not and should not be solved by “Hitler’s barbarism.”\footnote{Bartsch.} Strasser now professed that he believed that Jews, even Jews with a Jewish national consciousness, were a respectable national minority in Germany who, like other foreign nationals, ought to be protected under the law.\footnote{Bartsch.} This sentiment is undoubtedly a reflection of his friendship with a former Nazi, Rudolf Formis. Formis was a German radio engineer, and pioneer of the German amateur radio movement. After the Nazis came to power, he became a member of the S.A. on March 7, 1933. However, he later came in a conflict with the Nazis when it was discovered that his grandmother was Jewish. He would dedicate the rest of his life to transmitting anti-Nazi radio broadcast for Strasser’s Black Front organization in Czechoslovakia.

In Prague, Otto Strasser could publish a monthly bulletin to various Black Front sub-groups in Germany and abroad and read his speeches on pirate radio. The monthly publication was called the “German Revolution,” whose motto remained, “The Hitler system must die so that Germany may live!”\footnote{Bartsch, 210.} For Strasser, National Socialism, as he knew it, was dead, and this was only further proven on the Night of the Long Knives, or as Strasser called it, “Saint Bartholomew’s Night,” on June 30, 1934. Strasser’s political and social opinions began to take more nuance than they had in the past, albeit gradually. While in Prague, Otto worked with Rudolf Formis, a talented radio engineer and former member of the NSDAP who was run out of the Party because of his Jewish heritage. Strasser later
described Formis as “a man whose loyalty to the cause [could not] be questioned.”

Formis was a talented radio engineer, formerly in charge of the Stuttgart radio station; he was discharged after it was assumed he was technically sabotaging the broadcast of Hitler’s speeches; he was not, but Formis told people that he did, as no definitive proof could ever be presented. Later, according to David Vaughn in *Radio Prague International*, it was found to be a technical error, and not Formis’ doing, despite his insistence otherwise.

Nonetheless, Strasser chose Formis to take charge of the Prague office. While working in the offices, Formis built a secret radio transmitter from individual parts that he secretly fetched himself. He built it into a mattress in a hotel room, using the room as a broadcasting station. According to Bartsch, the Black Front had the most modern far-reaching technology at its disposal for a movement of its size at the time. The shows began at 7 PM and ended at 3 AM; Strasser spoke for fifteen minutes, and then Formis commented on the daily news. The shortwave broadcasts reached tens of thousands in Germany. Otto Strasser suspected that Reinhardt Heydrich would soon strike and told Formis he should have a guard posted. Formis denied the request.

Between 30 June and 2 July, in the Summer of 1934, the Nazis murdered all those Hitler perceived as a “lingering challenge” to the Nazi political order, including Strasser’s much beloved older brother, Gregor. Strasser was incensed. In the wake of the murders,

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240 Bartsch.
241 Bartsch.
Strasser ramped up his attacks against Hitler and his government using his radio program. In a step towards making moves against Nazi foes outside of the Reich, in the Fall of 1934, SD boss Reinhard Heydrich gave the order to destroy the underground transmitter. According to Peter Longerich in *Heinrich Himmler: A Life*, SS Squad leader Alfred Naujocks drove to the hotel in Czechoslovakia with Edith Kersbach (a Berlin gym teacher), camouflaged as a skier couple. They met Formis and made a positive impression, gaining his trust while taking several pictures together, mainly with Formis and Kersbach pictured together. While there, they made an impression of the key to the hotel room and returned to Berlin to make a copy. According to *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand*, when the agents returned in January 1935 to kidnap Formis and take the radio transmitter, they were met with gunfire from Formis, who died in the ensuing firefight. The SD agents had to leave quickly without the transmitter. Although Otto claims to have been charged with two years of hard labor for the crime of running an illegal radio transmitter, Edvard Beneš never signed the sentence, and therefore, he never served it.

The following week, the exiled German communist newspaper, the “Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung,” based in Prague, published a report on the event replete with pictures of the crime scene. It ended with the words, “What does this all mean? That murder, as the political weapon of a bankrupt clique, is to become a permanent institution. The isolated

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244 Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*.
246 Strasser and Stern, *Flight from Terror*.
247 David Vaughn, “Rudolf Formis.”
incidents of today and yesterday will be repeated on a large scale: in war!”\textsuperscript{248} The agents never recovered the transmitter; it is now a museum piece at the National Technical Museum in Prague. The death of Formis, a close personal friend and an invaluable helper, was a critical hit to Strasser and his movement. He had to, again, start all over with the knowledge that the Gestapo was closing in.

Sometime in 1935, after the announcement of the racial laws in Nuremberg, which barred Jewish students from studying at German universities,\textsuperscript{249} a (son of two Germans who were both naturalized American citizens) Jewish-German student named Helmut Hirsch moved to Prague, where he enrolled as an architecture student at the German Institute of Technology.\textsuperscript{250} His family joined him the following year, but by then, he had already made the acquaintance of the leader of the Black Front, Otto Strasser. Strasser and others worked to convince Hirsch to take part in a concerted anti-Nazi action. They told him that, as a Jew, such a plot would inspire other Jews in Germany.\textsuperscript{251} Hirsch agreed to take part, and the plot was revealed to him. The plot was to venture back into Germany and set up two bombs in Nuremberg, one in the Nazi party headquarters and another at the offices of the Nazi press.

Hirsch applied for a visa to re-enter Germany, stating that he would visit his sick mother. However, his entire family was already living in Czechoslovakia, a fact assuredly

\textsuperscript{248} Vaughn.

\textsuperscript{249} United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “1935 Nuremberg Racial Laws,” \textit{United States Holocaust Memorial Museum}.


\textsuperscript{251} Green.
known to the German authorities.\textsuperscript{252} When Hirsch arrived in Germany, in December 1936, instead of heading to Nuremberg to carry out the plot, he went to Stuttgart to meet an old friend whom he hoped would talk him out of this daring stunt. Hirsch’s friend failed to show. Early the following day, Gestapo agents arrested Hirsch.\textsuperscript{253} He was charged with conspiracy to commit treason and possessing explosives, even though he had never picked them up.\textsuperscript{254} His trial was held in front of biased Judges\textsuperscript{255} and cameras in the so-called Nazi “People’s Court” in March 1937. Hirsch openly admitted his involvement in the plot. Although his public defender argued that he should be acquitted, as he never acquired the explosives and had not begun to act, he was found guilty and sentenced to death. Despite campaigning with human rights organizations and the U.S. declaring Hirsch’s U.S. citizenship in April, he was executed by decapitation on 4 June 1937. A story ran in the \textit{New York Times} announcing Hirsch’s death wherein the paper stated that,

\begin{quote}
The official red placards appearing on the Berlin billboards this morning stating that Hirsch had entered German territory in the interest ‘of treasonable elements abroad’ with the intention of committing crimes... the ‘treasonable elements abroad’ are believed to be Otto Strasser and his group in Prague. They are former National Socialists who hold that the Hitler movement has become the tool of big capital, and [so] they organized the Black Front.\textsuperscript{256}
\end{quote}

According to an article in the \textit{Jewish Telegraphic Agency}, dated 9 June 1937, Strasser claimed, in a Prague interview, that Hirsch was framed and denied him or Hirsch having

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{252} Green.  \\
\textsuperscript{253} Green.  \\
\textsuperscript{254} Green.  \\
\textsuperscript{256} “Germans Execute Hirsch.”
\end{flushleft}
any involvement in the plot. He claimed the trunk containing the explosives was “foisted upon” Hirsch to “obtain evidence.”

Hirsch’s story is similar to that of Formis. Like Formis, Strasser praised the young man and lamented his passing. In one of his books, while discussing Hirsch’s fate and that of the show trial, Strasser states, “The whole thing was a farce from beginning to end – for everyone but the prisoner. For Helmut Hirsch, it was the grimmest sort of tragedy. He was sentenced to death under the headman’s axe.” However, regardless of the lives lost along the way, one thing remained at the center of Strasser’s endeavors, his need to incite the destruction of Hitler’s power, if not the leader himself. As seen above, whether or not Strasser’s denial was earnest, he utilized people, countries, and movements that opposed his enemies. He stayed in countries prioritizing their sovereignty over the ruthless persecution of the Nazis’ political foes. He utilized individuals who, by the very nature of their heritage, opposed the Nazi cause. This utilization of the opposition became Strasser’s modus operandi in the following years. While his urgent message penetrated Germany, it did not amount enough to foment any significant resistance.

Strasser believed he could see Hitler’s aim for war. In January 1937, he proclaimed, “The Hitler system brings war, [and] war brings the division of Germany - unless the socialist revolution prevents this!” The impending war that Strasser forecasted was not something most Germans wanted; however, the Black Front was widely detested in Hitler’s

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258 Strasser and Stern, *Flight from Terror*.
259 Found in the Appendix of Günter Bartsch’s *Otto Strasser: Der linke Nationalsozialist*, 339-42.
party circles as “German Bolshevism,” which they believed was secretly connected with Russian Bolshevism. While this is not true, the argument had an effect. Although Otto Strasser considered Bolshevism and fascism two sides of the same coin meant to divide and control, this did not help his cause in Germany. In August 1938, the German embassy in Prague planned to kidnap Strasser in the car of its military attaché and take him back to Germany. While the plan was unsuccessful, the Munich Agreement proved to Strasser that Prague was no longer a safe harbor for him or his movement.

While visiting family in Switzerland in early August 1938, Otto was approached by an “incognito” German general, part of the military opposition to Hitler’s war plans. The general is reported to have asked Strasser, “Will Prague fight if the Germans invade the Sudetenland?” Otto considered his answer and then replied that the Czech would fight. The President of Czechoslovakia was determined to resist, but the Munich Agreement was signed on September 30, 1939, and it paralyzed the country’s ability to defend itself. According to Günter Bartsch, the general who visited Strasser was General Kurt Freiherr von Hammerstein-Equord, a well-known opponent of Hitler. In addition to being a fervently anti-Hitler General, he was the highest ranking officer in the Reichswehr (Germany’s military during the Weimar period), and is also reported to have tried to lure Hitler to his assassination numerous times during the early Polish campaign in

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260 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 212.
261 Bartsch, 213.
262 Bartsch.
263 Bartsch.
September 1939; this latter claim could not be corroborated. However, it is known that he participated in the early planning phases of the 20 July 1944 plot against Hitler.265

With the announcement of the Munich agreement, Strasser knew it was time to leave Czechoslovakia and close the Prague headquarters; he needed to abscond once more. With few countries left to run to, Strasser knew France would be the last place to work with Hitler’s Germany. He found a pilot willing to fly him from Prague to Paris. Once again, Strasser escaped his captors, fleeing over the heads of the Nazi-German Reich as it breached the borders of Czechoslovakia266 — Hitler’s first unwilling victim, but certainly not his last. How Strasser funded all of his moves during this time is mostly unknown or undocumented, one assumes he had friends and family helping him along the way.

From France to Canada and Everything in Between

Strasser set up his new headquarters in Paris, while another was established in Copenhagen under the direction of Silesian leader Richard Schapke, who immediately began work for the Black Front.267 Strasser was only in Paris for three months when the German foreign minister, von Ribbentrop, arrived in December 1938 to sign a treaty of eternal friendship with the country, which Hitler was to break two years later. He requested the arrest of Strasser, and the French government complied, under the suspicion that he might be planning an assassination attempt on von Ribbentrop. Two days later, a police commissioner suggested that Strasser leave immediately. He agreed and went to

265 Kirsch.
266 Bartsch, 214.
267 Bartsch.
Switzerland, where he was able to meet briefly with his wife and family. Two more assassination attempts took place, but vigilante police foiled them.²⁶⁸ Tired of playing cat and mouse with Strasser, Hitler, one more time, attempted to silence him by offering – through a third party – up to 400,000 Swiss francs if Strasser agreed to quit writing against the Third Reich. Strasser declined.²⁶⁹ Gregor’s blood was on Hitler’s hands, and Strasser would rather fight to the death than be bought. Nearly half a million francs is an insulting price for the life of one’s brother.

In May 1939, Strasser, as Chairman of the Black Front, sent an open letter informing all representatives around the world that he believed the prognosis to be war, that Hitler would wage a defensive battle in the West and an aggressive war in the East; it was determined to be a certainty that Germany would attack Poland.²⁷⁰ Strasser saw the situation as desperate, but things would only get worse. At midnight, on November 8, 1939, on the anniversary of the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, all German broadcasters reported that the Munich Bürgerbräukeller had been blown up with dynamite; Hitler escaped unharmed.²⁷¹ Finally, it was said that the Munich assassination attempt was carried out by Georg Elser “on behalf of Otto Strasser and the British intelligence service.”²⁷² This rumor was even reproduced on the front page of *The Waterbury Democrat*, a small town newspaper in Connecticut on 22 November 1939.²⁷³ Immediately following the bombing,
according to Goebbels, Hitler thought it was a hoax.274 The official story was as told above; in the service of Otto Strasser and the British Secret Service, Elser had attempted to assassinate Hitler and high-ranking members of the NSDAP. However, this was not true.

According to Ian Kershaw, Elser was reported to have been a loner. Those who knew him - and there were not many - thought well of him.275 He had little education, did not read books, and scarcely bothered with newspapers. Kershaw asserts that after the Munich agreement, Elser became convinced that Germany would “make for the demands of other countries,” and “prompted by no one,” he began to obsess upon ways to improve the condition of the workers and prevent another war.276 He concluded that eliminating the regime’s leadership was the only option, which meant Hitler, Göring, and Goebbels. In the Autumn of 1938, he decided to undertake this endeavor.

Following this assassination attempt, Hitler finally branded Strasser as public enemy number one in 1939. Hitler demanded his extradition from Switzerland. The Nazis intended to have a show trial. The Nazi government placed a one million RM bounty on Strasser.277 In an article from the Manchester Guardian from November 1939 entitled “Extradition of Dr. Strasser Demanded by Germans,” Strasser stated that “Germany is ready for an anti-Hitler revolution.”278 The article goes on to state that, “Strasser, who is now in Paris, reveals that he was given only four hours to leave Switzerland after the

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275 Kershaw, *Hitler- Nemesis*.
276 Kershaw *Hitler- Nemesis*, 272.
277 On pages 230-31, in *Flight from Terror* Strasser uses American Dollars, and states the sum at half a million.
Munich bomb explosion 10 days ago because the Germans were demanding his extradition, describing him as a ‘instigator of the crime.’” Continuing, the article reports that five thousand arrests were made following the Elser bombing in Munich.279 The number seems to be confirmed in an article entitled “5,000 ARRESTS AT MUNICH,” in The Times dated 19 November 1939, stating that the reported number comes from “various neutral countries.”280

Strasser, seeing the Swiss government in a difficult position, hid to avoid being arrested and extradited. According to Strasser, he left his family in Switzerland and boarded a plane back to France. It is known that Strasser’s connection to ministers in the French government allowed him to remain undetected and that he spoke to them about a future Germany, but exactly who helped him is not known at this time. According to Bartsch, as early as 1940, Strasser explained that the subsequent treaty should not be like Versailles as that would just create another Hitler.281 Strasser’s astounding ability to escape death and meet with influential figures is what would cause one to assume he was a liar, but these are the parts of his life that are not fabricated, at least not from what can be documented. During this period of his life, he published Hitler and I, arguably a more concise retelling concerning this era of his life. In Flight from Terror, once in France, Strasser ponders his safety, stating, “Didn’t the Maginot Line and the whole French Army stand between Hitler and me?”282

279 “Extradition of Dr. Strasser Demanded by Germans.”
280 “5,000 Arrests at Munich,” The Times, November 20, 1939, Monday edition.
281 Bartsch, Otto Strasser, 224.
282 Strasser and Stern, Flight from Terror, 231.
According to Strasser, in May 1940, the French government seized him as a suspected fifth columnist and detained him in a concentration camp with thousands of other people, of whom, according to Strasser, 95% were Jews.\textsuperscript{283} According to Günter Bartsch, Strasser was interned with German Freedom Party member and former Prussian Finance Minister Otto Klepper, who was living in exile at the time of the German invasion of France.\textsuperscript{284} Strasser was released in the closing days of May 1940. On the morning of June 10, Strasser claims he heard rumors about the advancing German Army and an Italian declaration of war on France.\textsuperscript{285} He visited a contact who told Strasser to escape Paris as quickly as possible and handed him two passports — one for Strasser and one for a friend Strasser claims he was with named “Hans.”\textsuperscript{286}

Strasser boarded a train with Hans to Switzerland, but the Swiss border was closed. From there, they headed to an address on the Atlantic coast, a place they had contacts and knew they could find refuge. However, it was at the other end of France. The next morning, Strasser and his companion “started off early by overland taxi” — a larger taxi with room to sleep.\textsuperscript{287} According to Strasser, as they got closer to the front of the war, they noticed a “monstrous wave of fugitives.”\textsuperscript{288} These were war refugees from France, Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The streets and roads became impossible to control with the war and the refugees. The police took the path of least resistance and sent all vehicles, bicycles, and all those on foot southwards.

\textsuperscript{283} Strasser and Stern.
\textsuperscript{284} Bartsch, \textit{Otto Strasser}, 217.
\textsuperscript{285} Strasser and Stern, 233.
\textsuperscript{286} Strasser and Stern, 234.
\textsuperscript{287} Strasser and Stern, 236.
\textsuperscript{288} Strasser and Stern.
After arriving on the other side of France and splitting from their taxi driver, Strasser found himself in La Rochelle, where he asked the town command whether France had been lost to the Germans. They replied in the affirmative. Strasser states that they told him if he could get a car, they would provide him with gas to continue his escape. They told him to go to Bordeaux or Bayonne and England. Stating, “England is our last hope, for all of us! Godspeed.” Strasser almost made it off the continent to England by ship; however, during his trip, all ships were called back to port according to Article XI of the German-French Armistice Agreement of 1940.

After a couple of days, Strasser found himself near the border with Spain, in the French town of Tarbes. In any event, Strasser claims that on the morning of June 27, he read the full armistice, which he says hit him “like a blow to the face.” He notes that in Article XIX, the Germans stipulate the turning over of all criminal refugees from French soil to Germany. He claims he had an “incomplete passport,” and according to the Armistice, the French authorities were also obliged to force all travelers and refugees to report to the police. Strasser realized it was only a matter of time; he was among those most wanted by the Germans. They made their way to Toulouse, but after having no luck escaping from there, they attempted to flee through Vichy. While walking late at night,

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289 Strasser and Stern, 237.
290 Strasser and Stern.
291 Nazi Germany, “ARMISTICE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GERMAN HIGH COMMAND OF THE ARMED FORCES AND FRENCH PLENIPOTENCIARIES, JUNE 22, 1940” (Yale Law School: The Avalon Project), Article XI.
292 Strasser and Stern, Flight from Terror, 243.
293 Nazi Germany, “ARMISTICE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GERMAN HIGH COMMAND OF THE ARMED FORCES AND FRENCH PLENIPOTENCIARIES, JUNE 22, 1940.”
Strasser claims to have met a man from a Portuguese consulate who had turned him down for a visa. Strasser repeated his story to the man, who gave Strasser a tip about obtaining a tourist visa from a consulate representing the Netherlands the following day. The next morning, “together with dozens of Jewish immigrants who had followed the same tip,” Strasser obtained a tourist’s visa for “the Dutch island of Curacao.” After some trouble receiving the necessary stamps, as Strasser states, “There is no collapse of a state so complete that Saint Bureaucratius does not survive it,” Strasser was finally on board a ship that was officially headed to Bermuda, despite his visa for Curacao.

Strasser arrived in early October in the port town of St. George’s. While there, according to Bartsch, Strasser made the acquaintance of H.G. Wells, who insisted only on knowing all about the sex life of Hitler — Strasser knew nothing about it. Wells would go on to write a very unflattering article about Strasser entitled “Otto Strasser: An Ally We Don’t Want,” wherein he stated that Strasser made numerous antisemitic statements, each of which ended with “Heil Hitler.” According to historian Robert Keyserlingk, Strasser granted interviews to all and announced the formation of a worldwide front of anti-Nazi Germans, of which his Black Front would be apart. The front was called “The Free Germany Movement.” With the news of Göring’s failure in the Battle for Britain, Strasser, feeling like the next war’s peace treaty might be harsher than the first, resolved to establish

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294 Strasser and Stern, *Flight from Terror*, 245.
295 Strasser and Stern, 246.
296 Bartsch, *Otto Strasser*.
this new movement; however, according to Canadian amateur historian Millard H. Wright, the Bermudian government found its obligation to keep an eye on Herr Strasser was too much of a burden, so Britain was forced to find a new destination that would accept him. That place was Canada.\textsuperscript{299} In April 1941, after six months in Bermuda, Strasser was dispatched by ship to Saint John, New Brunswick.\textsuperscript{300} This was Strasser’s last international step in his flight from Hitler’s henchmen. He could now rest, but Strasser would choose to remain vocal, and while the Allies were happy to oblige at first, this eventually became tiresome as it was obvious what Strasser was doing.

\textsuperscript{300} Wright.
CHAPTER FOUR: A “GOOD” NAZI

In every really great world-shaking movement, propaganda will first have to spread the idea of this movement.
-Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf

This chapter will analyze Strasser's attempts to rehabilitate his image as an aberration of Hitler's version of Nazism and as a "good" Nazi who peddled a "pure" and "decent" form of National Socialism. Beginning in France in 1940, Strasser began to publish a flurry of monographs, articles, and letters to anyone who pay heed. Using Strasser's books and numerous articles published during the war and his "Free Germany Movement,” this chapter will examine Strasser's attempts to refurbish his image and set himself up as an alternative, or future, leader of a Hitler-free Europe. The paper will then turn to Strasser's further political ambitions in the final chapter.

4.1 Strasser’s Books

The facts and embellishments are two very noticeable details in the difference between Strasser's two early books on the subject of his fight with and flight from Hitler. In Strasser’s earlier book, Hitler and I, he gives a more straightforward story. While in the later Flight from Terror, he embellishes, not necessarily on the basic facts but on the moments, the persons, the emotions, the dialogue, and even the places. To be sure, it is imaginable that some of these pieces of memory are fuzzy or that these moments could be forever etched into his memory, but the detail with which Strasser paints these long lines

301 Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, English Language (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 583.
of dialogue lead one to believe that they are, at the very least, vastly paraphrased if not mostly fabricated. As shown above, facts have been omitted from the earlier variation only to be included in the latter. One such instance, as detailed in Chapter One, is Strasser’s introduction to Heinrich Himmler. Why would Strasser add that demonstrably false factoid into his second book? As is well known, lying is often a way to attract attention, either by being caught or by making grandiose claims in an attempt to garner admiration, respect, and condolences or to add gravitas to one’s story – it is also a way to sell books. Strasser had plenty to brag about, so why would he lie about this era about small things or omit others? Perhaps, he thought no one would notice. Regardless, it seems he felt no need to correct himself as there is no record of him doing so, and most historians who quote him deem him an unreliable source. In any case, many of the events and facts in Strasser’s books are accurate, including those relating to individuals he worked with or those who died.

An interesting fact concerning those in Strasser’s life who died as a direct result of his movement, Strasser makes no mention of Helmut Hirsch in Hitler and I; however, he devotes a considerable section to him in Flight from Terror. Why is this? The postscript section of Hitler and I is dated June 1, 1940 - Hirsch was executed in 1937 - the event had long passed. Why did Strasser fail to mention it? Perhaps, he did not want to alarm the French authorities. As is known to history, aside from the Germans, Europeans lacked the stomach for war before Germany’s invasion of France. It stands to reason why Strasser would want to avoid advertising that he supports and planned efforts to kill foreign leaders from the soil of other countries. However, that is negated by the fact that France had already
declared war on Germany in response to the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939. His desire to kill Hitler would be an applauded effort by this point. Perhaps, one should consider Strasser’s intended audience.

While in France before the German invasion of that country, Strasser’s intended audience was predominantly the English and the French. Besides opining over the French countryside and its beauty, in Chapter 12 of *Hitler and I*, Strasser spends considerable time complementing the military prowess of the French. He also warns of the “terrible threat to the west represented by the Russo-Prussian combination” that can only be compared to the early invasions of “the Mongols and the Turks.”

From this, one can only deduce that he is speaking to Europeans and resurrecting the specter of charges long passed. To be sure, Strasser’s goal was also to engage with the United States, but the US was not yet involved in the war as lend-lease would not come to pass until March of 1941. In the chapter, Strasser chastised Hitler’s lack of foresight and explained that it was often better to avoid giving him disagreeable news when he worked for him.

Therefore, Strasser deduced that Hitler did not know what he was facing with England and France. He asserted that France and England were well prepared to fight the German onslaught and that the German generals realized it but were reticent to express this fact to Hitler. This could be honest, and this could be opportunism. Strasser was an enemy of Adolf Hitler, but he also aimed for power. Strasser’s ultimate goal remained political power in Germany and, using Charles de

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302 Strasser, *Hitler and I*, 200.
303 Strasser, 203.
Gaulle’s template of “Free France,” Otto Strasser set out on his own “Free Germany” endeavor.

Laying the groundwork for this endeavor, in 1940, Strasser wrote Germany Tomorrow, wherein he detailed his desired plans for a future Germany. Historian Paul Gottfried says this marks a shift in his “basic philosophical outlook.” According to Gottfried, this work “must be seen in the context of the German resistance to Hitler in which Strasser played an active role even in exile.” Gottfried asserts that the book's underlying assumption is the “reality of a successful revolt against Nazism with the Black Front at its head.” Strasser, self-indulgently engaging his passion for wishful thinking, imposed a second idea upon his readers: a new Germany led by the Black Front. Gottfried summarizes that were Strasser’s efforts to be successful, “the Black Front, after giving the Nazis their desserts, would make peace with all of Germany’s neighbors, compensate the Poles and the Czechs, work for a reestablished the League of Nations, which would be given an army to ensure the maintenance of international peace,” an idea very similar to what is now known as the United Nations.

4.2 Strasser’s Political Pamphlets

After spending ten years publishing and distributing numerous pamphlets and leaflets against Hitler throughout Europe, upon arriving in Canada, Strasser wasted no time


\[305\] Gottfried.

\[306\] Gottfried.

\[307\] Gottfried.
returning to work against Hitler. In 1941 he published a pamphlet entitled “Free Germany Against Hitler,” in which he described the goals of the movement. These included “War on Nazism and punishment to all those guilty of its horrors; war on communism and every dictatorship; economic democracy and social cooperation; democratic self-government and the federalization of Germany;” the formation of a “European Federation;” cooperation with all democracies in the world, and a “Return to God.”

Further on, the pamphlet reveals the means by which Strasser’s movement aimed to accomplish these goals. The circular states that to achieve their purpose, the Free-German Movement prescribed itself this program of work:

Unified propaganda, using all modern means, in the Reich, and especially in the army and the party; propaganda among German nationals and descendants abroad, especially in North and South America; systematic work among Germans who are prisoners of war, to win them from Nazism; organization and utilization of immigrants from Germany; guidance and organization of passive resistance in Germany itself; preparation of active measures in the Reich for the proper hour; later formation of an armed troop (‘Liberty Corps’) available for policing of German territories that may be occupied or rebellious.

Furthermore, the pamphlet also states that the movement “Rejects all cooperation with the communists, consciously and uncompromisingly.” While Strasser avoided open-use of the term “Jew,” he was a proponent of the Judeo-Bolshevik myth that Jews are deeply intertwined in international finance and instead used dog-whistle terms like “international finance” to denote to Jews. He was, for all intents and purposes, a fervent anti-semite, albeit

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309 Strasser, *Free Germany*.
310 Strasser, *Free Germany*. 

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not to the murderous degree that Hitler was. While Strasser knew, according to knowledge telegraphed in the pamphlet (murder, mass robbery, and more), that Hitler and the Nazi government were going to face war crimes trials, he was showing his support for that trial. In addition, Strasser calls for a war on Bolshevism, stating, “There can be no joint action and no compromise with Communism, just as there could be no joint action and no compromise with Fascism and Nazism.” This indicates that he, like many, knew there would be an upcoming face-off between the Capitalist West and the Communist East. He was placing his bet on the West; however, one cannot state for sure if that was due to his residence, or rather captivity, in Canada, although it seems relatively evident given his position regarding Bolshevism before the Hitler split. Finally, Strasser makes two intertwining points. The first is economic security. In asking for economic security, he states, “The movement sees the necessary solution for the future in the union of economic security and personal liberty […] by replacing the principle of force with the principle of cooperation and by broadening political democracy [to a] social democracy.” This plea for democracy goes directly in hand with the subsequent demands for a federalized Germany stating, “only a European federation makes possible that universal disarmament, which is necessary; it is the sheerest guarantee of economic recovery and political peace.” These, while admirable ideas, could be taken as disingenuous overtures to the Allies to elevate one’s self to a position of power via their distaste for an enemy with whom they share little ideological difference. Strasser is not Adolf Hitler, but the two once agreed

311 Strasser, Free Germany, 5.
312 Strasser, Free Germany.
313 Strasser, Free Germany.
on many things, i.e., that Germany was destined for greatness and to be the ruling culture over the rest of Europe.

Considering further Strasser’s distaste for Communism, one must understand the year and the atmosphere under which the document was produced. Granted, this pamphlet dates from early 1941, but Strasser was as weary of Stalin as he was of Hitler. According to Strasser, Bolshevism is the “tactical ally” of Nazism. Strasser reasoned that because many of the anti-war protestors in Europe and abroad were Communists, many Communists must support the Hitler government, which would seem illogical if not for the Stalin-Hitler pact. To be sure, this pamphlet predates the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Therefore, Stalin and Hitler were still allies and were still brutally occupying Poland. Strasser’s point is not hard to follow. He wanted to make an allegiance with the West, and he saw the Communists as allies of Hitler, which, Stalin was at the time. Again, Strasser was utilizing the position of opposition to increase his success. While Strasserism has historically been seen as a sanitized version of Nazism, this pamphlet revolves around the tenants of anti-Hitlerism, anti-Bolshevism, a “democratic front” against Hitler’s Germany, and surprisingly Christianity, which seems out-of-place in what was supposed to be a secular movement. Strasser was an opportunist above all. To be sure, Strasser’s attempts to warn of the danger Hitler presents were genuine; after all, he did lose his brother and Hitler did try for global domination. However, time and time again, Strasser appeared to be attempting to align himself as a future leader of a Hitler-Free Germany, and his opposition to Hitler gave him a level of legitimacy not afforded to many former Nazis at the time.
4.3 Strasser’s Interviews

Strasser was given time to air his opinion on most matters concerning the war and Nazism. Even when giving his opinion on the issues not directly concerning his aims for Germany, Strasser would be sure to include a section about his plans. In a May 1941 edition of the *Pahiatua Herald*, a New Zealand newspaper, Strasser gave his opinion concerning Rudolf Heß’s flight out of Germany.\(^{314}\) It was a pointed response outweighed by Strasser’s so-called “four-point plan for defeating Germany,” wherein he detailed his “Free-German Movement” pamphlet more concisely starting with, “firstly, anti-Hitler propaganda among German prisoners of war; secondly, organized propaganda directed to [Germans] in the United States and South America; thirdly, the creation of an independent Free German Legion modeled on de Gaulle’s Free French Plan,” with Strasser undoubtedly in-charge.\(^{315}\) Finally, and more importantly, he states that there should be the creation of an “authoritative German National Council of leaders in exile,” that is, himself in particular.\(^{316}\)

Without hardly addressing the question of Heß’s ill-fated flight, Strasser shows his eagerness to broadcast his point of view, which is to be expected from someone who focused so heavily on the use of propaganda as a tool to win a war. It was evident from this that Strasser’s audience remained the Allies and anyone with enough power or pull to bring him toward the reins of power in Germany. Strasser hoped that by utilizing his opposition to Hitler, his brother’s death the undeniable evidence of Hitler’s hate, he would be able to

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\(^{315}\) Press.

\(^{316}\) Press.
maneuver himself into a position of power once Hitler’s empire had collapsed and Germany was in the rubble.

Strasser’s opposition to Hitler provided him legitimacy and even acceptance. An example of Strasser’s acceptance in the West is apparent in a news article from the Detroit Evening Times in November of 1941. In the article, covering a speech Strasser gave at Assumption College in Windsor, Canada, Strasser asserts that only 10 percent of the population of Germany at that time supported Hitler, a statement which was obviously untrue. In the speech, Strasser states that the Nazis are “continually impressing 56,000,000 innocent Germans that the democracies are their enemies, determined to destroy them. [The Germans] want nothing more than peace.” Strasser was a former Nazi and Hitler’s public enemy number one. His opposition to Hitler gave him an air of legitimacy and the ability to broadcast his point of view on college campuses, newspaper interviews, books, and even in self-authored magazine articles. While it is obvious no one actually considered Strasser a “German leader” per se, his actions prove that he believed he could maneuver himself into that position.

4.4 Strasser’s Articles

Shortly after arriving in Canada, Strasser authored an article entitled “What Hitler Told Me About Peace” for *Liberty Magazine*, a now out-of-print American magazine, describing Hitler’s understanding of peace. In the article, Strasser explains that Hitler saw the Versailles Treaty as too “lenient” and asserts that he once expressed his design to impose a peace that would “crush the enemy.” He then states that Hitler angrily remarked that Germans “don’t need peace in Europe; what we need is German domination over Europe. That is the true road to peace!” Strasser then asserts that he believes a negotiated peace with Germany to be folly. Strasser states, “Always when he [Hitler] is in difficulties he adopts the tones of peace. Always when he wants to win time, he proposes a peace pact.” While this fact is demonstrably true and known to history, what Strasser says next illuminates his aims,

Hitler would like time to completely digest the conquered territories—Poland, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg, and France; to organize their resources according to a unified plan; and then, with his fighting power materially increased, to take up once more the battle against England and America.

Strasser’s aim is apparent; it was to see a continued fight against Hitler’s Germany by utilizing all resources provided to him by the allies, and their citizens, as an oppositional player against the Nazi German state. He wanted to see Hitler crushed, and being an authority on the matters of Germany, the Nazis, and Hitler, he wanted to use his opposition to the Hitler regime to position himself as the future leader of Germany. The Allies knew this, and they used Strasser as well. As Strasser stated above, propaganda is an essential

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tool of war, and he provided a free service to the Allies in many ways. He would gladly speak out against Hitler, and the British would gladly publish it. Americans would also gladly publish it, in an attempt to break the America-First isolation so prevalent at the time. Eventually, this game of political warfare wore its usefulness.
CHAPTER FIVE: AN END TO STRASSER’S USEFULNESS

5.1 The Illusion of Cooperation and the Politics of Opposition

In order to understand why the allies would use Strasser, one must understand the position of the British at the beginning of the war in 1939. At the outbreak of war in September 1939, Britain and France were both equally unprepared for war. To make up for their lack of military might, the British optimistically devised a plan for how to defeat Hitler by non-military means. According to historian Robert Keyserlingk, while Churchill gave the impression in his memoirs that from the beginning of the war, long before the Americans were involved, the British were in favor of defeating Hitler by a military means however, this is not so. According to Keyserlingk, both Churchill and Chamberlain “chose a strategy of political warfare to undermine the Nazi regime.” They believed that the regime represented a “façade behind which factions conflicted, which represented potential allies of the British in the “war against Hitler and his gangster regime.” The British planned on utilizing the “divisions among the Nazis, and between the Nazis and the discontented masses of the German and occupied people.” The aim of the strategy, according to Keyserlingk, was to break down “the enemy’s unity and will to resist, but as important, to move the occupied peoples and ‘good’ Germans from apathy to action.”

As Keyserlingk states, “this strategy was a product of both practical necessity and a great deal of wishful thinking based upon fear of repeating World War I experiences.”

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320 Keyserlingk.
321 Keyserlingk 72-73.
322 Keyserlingk 73.
Faced with their military weakness, yet unwilling to admit that defeating Hitler was not possible, the British worked to build up the image of a Europe “filled with secret allies in the war — the patriotic Germans and occupied peoples” who stood against Hitler.\textsuperscript{323} According to Keyserlingk, Churchill’s political warfare, as a 1941 plan described it, was “to arouse disorder on the continent so that the Nazi regime would collapse before any real military offensive took place.”\textsuperscript{324} The early wartime strategies of the British depended on anti-Nazis everywhere, including “good” Germans. However, to the British, it was not clear which groups could organize and trigger a German revolt against Hitler. At some point, somehow, it was decided within the British political warfare machine that Otto Strasser might offer some assistance.\textsuperscript{325} Further examination of this is needed, as the British government has released conflicted accounts.

While Strasser’s anti-liberal, anti-parliamentarian and fascist corporatist roots were well-known to the British, the principle of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” outweighed any reservations they may have had. This made sense, as Strasser seemed to be violently anti-Nazi with control over a vast underground network of disillusion Germans which could, theoretically, be used to encourage the “hoped-for German revolt.”\textsuperscript{326} Strasser was aware of this and used the specter of Prussian Militarism as well as his protracted fight against Hitler as sound credentials.

\textsuperscript{323} Keyserlingk.
\textsuperscript{324} Keyserlingk.
\textsuperscript{325} Keyserlingk 75.
\textsuperscript{326} Keyserlingk.
As shown above, Strasser came with a vast program of propaganda concerning his own struggle against Hitler, with whom the Allies now struggled. Strasser had an “inside knowledge” that the British could hope to exploit. While, he was a former Nazi, he was not still a Nazi. Strasser’s own activities in the early Nazi Party were overlooked, as he had split with the party in 1930 and “struggled against Hitler since then.” Therefore, he appeared, to the British in particular, to be well equipped to aid in the fight against the Nazis through international propaganda and by inciting propaganda in Germany to trigger a revolt. However, Strasser’s political ambitions and overall aims were not overlooked. As a foreign official put it in 1941, “We are, and have been using for this purpose (propaganda to Germany) several Germans with whose ultimate aims I totally disagree, but who are thought [to be] useful.” The British believed that Strasser’s “socialist” perspective would appeal to non-Prussian, “non-elite members of German society” to turn against their rulers. Strasser’s propaganda fit well within the scheme of British thinking, as it also confirmed long-held anti-Prussian biases leftover from the First World War.

Once Strasser arrived in Canada, he was welcomed by the press. According to Keyserlingk, he was even in talks about making a film with Warner Brothers and Errol Flynn, the latter with whom he also co-wrote an anti-Hitler leaflet. The Canadian Press praised Strasser as “the well-known German politician who would aid the British through his underground organization and his new FGM to bring Hitler down by October 1941.”

327 Keyserlingk.
328 Keyserlingk.
329 Keyserlingk.
330 Keyserlingk.
331 Keyserlingk, 76.
332 Keyserlingk, 77.
Whether or not the British government helped Strasser escape Europe cannot be stated confidently. However, it is known that with the help of the British Secret Service, he was brought to Montreal under the alias “Oswald Bostock” and settled in the suburb of Westmont, under the protection of Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Strasser began to produce a vast surge of articles concerning Nazism. As also shown above, he even commented on current events tangentially related to Nazism. Strasser was able to sell his article to leading North American and British newspapers including the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *New Statesman*, and in the above *Liberty Magazine*. As highlighted in a *New York Times* article from the Toronto press, titled “Strasser is in Canada: Predicts Defeat of Nazism and is Working for it,” Strasser proclaimed that he was on the North American continent to “do all in his power for the overthrow of Nazism.”

According to the article, his mission in Canada was to establish the “nucleus” of the “Free German legion” which he hopes to tie-in with revolutionaries in South America, the United States and even Germany and the occupied countries. At the time of the article, Strasser was approaching the Canadian Government for an official sanction; it seems no such sanction ever came.

The British gradually lost faith in their plan to use Strasser to split Hitler from the rest of Germany. His efforts in every respect besides propaganda were meaningless, and while it is clear they had no objections to using anti-Nazis for anti-war propaganda, the

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333 Keyserlingk, 78.
335 Toronto Press, “Strasser Is in Canada.”
336 Keyserlingk, 81.
British stated that it wanted to make no attempt to “promote the formation of Free German movements in this country or elsewhere.”337 In addition to that, the Russians did not appreciate Strasser’s anti-Bolshevism, which became a significant issue after Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, and the Americans were not convinced of his usefulness as an ally. As William Donovan, head of the American Office of Strategic Services, never put much stock in Strasser, but believed he had the ear of a vast network of recalcitrant Germans in waiting. He told President Roosevelt that Strasser was “by no means so much an anti-Nazi as anti-Hitler [...] at heart he subscribes to principles of” Nazism.338

Even if Strasser claimed in a press conference in Montreal that, “the Free German Movement adheres the declaration of Washington to defeat Hitlerism,”339 the OSS took Strasser’s boasts of a large network in Germany and abroad seriously. The Allies had not forgotten Strasser’s earlier ravings in a New York Times article from 25 November 1939, that Hitler did not comprehend the “strength of our revolutionary organization or of the hate which the early genuine Nazis bear for him.”340 In addition to all the above, Strasser, according to Keyserlingk, was also condemned by many other Germans as a revolutionary and ‘near’ Nazi.341 To be clear, from the above statement, they would be correct. Strasser, as the OSS stated, was less anti-Nazi and more anti-Hitler. The Allies could see through

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337 Keyserlingk, 82.
338 Keyserlingk.
341 Keyserlingk, “Political Warfare Illusions: Otto Strasser and Britain’s World War Two Strategy of National Revolts Against Hitler,” 82.
Strasser’s game. His success as an opponent of Hitler had come to an end. In 1942, around the time HG Wells printed his attack against Strasser, tensions in Canada regarding his presence rose to a fever pitch. In May, Strasser was accused by the Canadians of still being “as much a Nazi as he always was.”342 His plans to come back to Germany the triumphant hero and new potential leader would not come to pass.

According to Keyserlingk, Strasser’s “much-vaunted Black Front” emerged as “little more than a small circle of personal friend” who had either fled to South America or New York from Nazi Germany, and according to Keyserlingk, there were none in Germany who remained in contact with Strasser.343 The American “wing” was apparently made up of “One Jewish ex-Black Front member and his two female cousins.” 344 The South American wing was made up of “three old friends from Germany” named “sub-leaders.” Strasser did not personally know his “representative” in Central America. 345 As the organizations of Strasser turned out to be fairly worthless, the Canadian government asked Strasser to stop all public activity. Strasser protested, as it was his only means of monetary support. In early 1943, after Strasser ignored an informal ban from the Canadian government on publishing political articles, the government began to more closely monitor his mail. By monitoring Strasser’s communications, the Canadians were able to see that he had been writing his friends castigating the “weakness” of Western democracies and touting the “necessities” of a new European order.346 There was a little else left for the

342 Keyserlingk, 83.
343 Keyserlingk, 84.
344 Keyserlingk, 84-85.
345 Keyserlingk, 85.
346 Keyserlingk, 86.
Canadian government to do but to silence him officially. With his income cut off, Strasser took refuge in mid-1943 on a friend’s farm, in Paradise, Nova Scotia, where he subsisted on a meagre income sent to him by his brother Paul, Father Bernhard Strasser, a Priest living in Minnesota.

As of a November 1948 article in the New York Times, it was understood that Strasser was backing extreme right-wing parties aimed at “Germany’s reorganization.” By 1949, Strasser was on his fifth effort to re-enter Germany. His political alliances back home had somehow strengthened, and at the same time his diplomatic relations with the winning nations of World War Two weakened. While Strasser was being denied entrance to Germany on the grounds that the allied nations did not want him there for fear he would ignite another conflagration, he had supporters in his home country. An article in the Manchester Guardian took note of the “Friends of Strasser,” which the article described as a “society to secure the return of Strasser to Germany, and the subsequent foundation of a far-flung political party.”347 They demanded the return to Germany of her eastern territories annexed by Poland and Russia. The “Friends of Strasser” state that they stand for a European Federation of nations in which Germany, with her frontiers back to those of 1938, will be an equal member.348 The group stated that, until Strasser was returned to Germany, they would take no part in elections nor constitute a political party; they had forty-nine members as of April 25, 1950.349 The article goes on to state that the movement was

348 “Parties Bicker at Bonn Over Today’s Election” Politicians Compete for Presidency.”
splintering into the “Deutsche Reichspartei.” A Party that would officially form four months after the September article, and was notoriously a political harbor for old Nazis, eventually morphed into the Holocaust denying, explicitly neo-Nazi, Socialist Reich Party in 1952. There is no mention in the historical record whether or not Strasser worked within the circle of neo-Nazis (former Nazis) that surrounded former state secretary to Joseph Goebbels, Werner Naumann, who was a well-known neo-Nazi in West Germany.

Strasser tried repeatedly to return home until finally, in 1952, he was granted his citizenship by a Cologne District Court. However, Bonn officials appealed it. On June 8, 1953, the West German Government in Bonn appealed Strasser’s citizenship, after a Cologne court had ruled in favor of Strasser’s reinstatement of citizenship. However, in November 1954, the Supreme West German Administrative Court, which sat in Berlin, ruled in favor of Strasser’s appeal to regain his citizenship. The court ruled that it had to be returned under the West German law “requiring such action in the case of anyone deprived of their citizenship by the Nazis.” Strasser wasted no time, even his arrival back was a political publicity stunt.

On March 18, 1955, almost 20 years since his flight from Adolf Hitler, Otto Strasser arrived in Frankfurt Germany. He stepped off the plane in a black beret and black coat and talked freely to more than fifty members of the press. Not one to shy away from being transparent in his intentions, Strasser announced that he would attempt to reunify Germany

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352 “Strasser Wins Rights.”
under an economic system of “coownership, with the state, employers, and workers participating equally. Taxes would be eliminated under the system.”

According to an article in *Stars and Stripes*, the government’s long objections to his return were based on fears that he would revive a form of Nazism. When pressed, he said he had his political platform “in his pocket” and in an answer to another question he said, “that racial problems were included in his program.” He went on to state that he believed that West Germany was an American colony and East Germany a Russian one. After his arrival, Strasser went on tour around West Germany, giving speeches and trying to form a political movement on the ground in Germany for the first time in more than 20 years. Despite rabble rousing, the party Strasser formed failed to ignite excitement and he disbanded it in 1956. In that same year the party disbanded, Strasser admitted in a *New York Times* article that his party’s new program was “that of National Socialism before Hitler perverted it.”

At the announcement of his party, in Miltenberg, Germany, according to the same *New York Times* article,

> Blood flowed and chairs splintered in the upstairs banquet room of a resort Hotel in this ancient Bavarian town as socialist hecklers attempted to break up the inaugural meeting of the German Social Union. Hundreds of anti-Strasser Germans, many of them members of left-wing socialist youth groups brought 50 miles up the Main river from Frankfurt by bus, sit outside the hotel shouting insults at the former Nazi leader who broke with Hitler. Inside 400 persons heard Dr. Strasser call for a ‘new order’ in Germany and the creation of a ‘middle-class international’ in Europe. The [attendees] knew Germany would be organized as a corporate state on the pattern develop by Mussolini.

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354 Mahoney.
355 Mahoney.”
356 Mahoney.”
358 Olsen, “Strasser Brings Party Into Open.”
According to the article, a fight broke out in the crowd made of “mostly middle-class men of middle age.” This violence and Strasser’s rhetoric obviously did not bode well for him and his movement. His party was disbanded the same year, and Strasser further backed away from the spotlight before settling into relative obscurity. In the years that followed, Strasser wrote about numerous topics. From Fascism as a concept, to his own life, Strasser never stopped talking and writing. In 1968, after more than 38 years of trying to distance himself from his former boss, Adolf Hitler, Strasser authored a book which either signaled his embrace of his former boss or, perhaps, the hope to eclipse him. The book was entitled *Mein Kampf*, and much like the earlier book with which it shares its name, it was a political biography of one man and his warped perspective on the world. The book is in two parts. The first part deals with Strasser’s personal history, and the rest with his political history and ambitions. However, unlike his former boss, Strasser’s story has received little-to-no academic attention and verification.

Strasser’s story is one of failure, and opportunism. He failed in his time with the Nazi party. When he left, he failed to turn members of the Nazi party against his former boss. Once on his own, he then failed to form a formidable movement against the NSDAP. Later, he failed to ignite a revolution in Germany during the war, and then he failed to prop himself into power following Hitler’s demise. The one thing he proved to be good at was staying alive. In every other respect, Otto Strasser was a complete failure in all the political

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359 Olsen, “Strasser Brings Party Into Open.”
endeavors he attempted. The only success that Strasser ever found has come after his death, within the fringes of the modern right wing. Neo-Nazis the world over utilize Strasser’s ideals and Strasserism to promote what they view is a “clean” version of Nazism, free from the guilt and horrors of the Holocaust.
EPILOGUE

While researching Otto Strasser, one is bound to encounter a handful of sources concerning Strasser, and Strasserism, written by known antisemites, neo-Strasserites, and Nationalists who, while they may dislike Adolf Hitler, espouse a sincere belief in the bulk of the original Nazi party program and a love of Otto Strasser and his politics. Douglas Reed was a contemporary of Otto Strasser in age and his unofficial biographer. Troy Southgate is a "National Anarchist/National Bolshevist" who has increasingly become the modern biographer of Otto Strasser and a modern arbiter of Strasser's Black Front's political point of view.

While Southgate does not espouse an explicitly racist message, he traffics in Nazi-adjacent imagery and talking points. One only needs to reach the table of contents of his book, Tradition and Revolution, with chapters entitled “Revolution and Reaction, Blood and Soil: Revolutionary Nationalists as the Vanguard of Ecological Sanity,”\(^\text{361}\) to see what kind of rhetoric and vitriol he endorses. In the same book, he also mentions that he does not believe in human rights, not “anyone, man or beast, has a specific ‘right’ to life.”\(^\text{362}\) He then follows that up with some warped amalgamation of materialist Marxist theory mixed with fervent chauvinism. Further exposing his kinship to, at the very least, Fascism, he praises Oswald Mosley saying, “I am opposed to all totalitarian doctrines, being a fascist or communist. But whilst Mosley himself was a thoroughly dislikable character [...] to a


\(^{362}\) Southgate, 271.
certain extent, I have respect for what he tried to achieve.”  

He goes on to expose his views on diversity and race by stating, “

Let’s face it, the main towns and cities of modern-day England have become multiracial hellholes and despite the flag-waving that accompanies any major football tournament, it’s quite ridiculous to cling to the belief that we can somehow restore our nationhood by repatriating all immigrants and their descendants.364

Not a subtle point he is making. Aside from producing racist and mildly eco-fascist diatribes, he also runs a publishing house named The Black Front Press, undoubtedly an homage to Strasser. From what can be deduced, the press began due to Southgate’s inability to find a publisher to print and distribute his work on Strasser and numerous other distasteful characters. However, Southgate is not alone in his admiration of Strasser, nor is he the first. Before Troy was born, Douglas Reed attempted to take up the Strasserite cause from England.

Douglas Reed was a British journalist, novelist, and political author. He was also an admirer of Otto Strasser’s and ardently against Hitler. Reed wrote two books concerning Strasser. The first, written in 1940, is entitled Nemesis? The Story of Otto Strasser and the Black Front. 365 The book tells the story of Strasser’s struggles up until the book's publication. The second, The Prisoner of Ottawa, written in 1953, is a similar biography of Strasser, albeit this time more grandiose in the descriptions of Otto’s political points of view.366 The second book works as a quasi “recommendation letter” from Reed to Strasser, also known for his hatred of Hitler.

363 Southgate, 273.
364 Southgate.
In the book, Reed painted Strasser as the “sole apparent candidate of importance.”\(^{367}\) In the opinion of Reed, Strasser’s “return to Germany would be a serious setback for Communism,” and he accused the political leaders of the West of preventing it.\(^{368}\) Later, Reed asserted that Strasser was also detrimental to Prussian Militarism, a known target of the Allies. In this book, Reed seemed to be falling over himself to endorse Strasser and plead his case. Reed even asserted that Strasser was a “Prisoner in Canada,” representing the only figure who could fix the German crisis.\(^{369}\) In between these moments of endorsement for Strasser are oddly racist moments. One which stands glaringly is that he once refers to Hitler as a “racial mongrel” from the “Bohemian Borderlands,” oddly asserting that Bohemians are somehow lesser Europeans.\(^{370}\) By his death in 1976, Reed had, by and large, been forgotten except for the various discouraging remarks he made about Jews. Hence, when his obituary ran in *The Times* in the same year, he was remembered mainly as a virulent antisemite.\(^{371}\) In a book review for *The Advertiser*, a South Australian newspaper, the paper says that in the book Reed suggests, “that the allied governments, the Russians, Germans, Jews and the press, for their own various reasons, have all conspired against” Strasser. In the review they point out that Strasser is seen as a “fall” guy. That is, Strasser is claimed to have denied a request to take the Free Germany Movement to Moscow, and this denial is said to have “made him unpopular to the Kremlin” and in turn, he was dropped by the Allies “to keep the Russians sweet.” The review points

\(^{367}\) Reed. 11.  
\(^{368}\) Reed, 17.  
\(^{369}\) Reed, 18.  
\(^{370}\) Reed, 78.  
\(^{371}\) Billig, “Methodology and Scholarship in Understanding Ideological Explanation.”

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out that Strasser’s views make him anathema to the Russians, but that there was no valid reason to keep him from Germany when “prominent Nazis” were “already back in office in Bonn.” This was during Strasser’s appeal to have his citizenship reinstated, and it should be noted that it was already decided that his citizenship should be reinstated in 1952, however, Bonn had appealed that ruling. Nonetheless, the article finished with the disheartening claim that “nobody interested in international affairs should miss this book.”

Perhaps, no student of history with a firm grasp of the context should miss Reed’s book; however, without context, Reed’s book could be viewed as a piece of history, which it could only be considered in theory. Yes, it deals with historical events, sometimes better than other sources, but around these facts are grossly antisemitic claims of Judeo-domination and other well-known antisemitic tropes.

While attempting to research Strasser, one will quickly realize that the story has yet to be fully verified. Many aspects of his life are based solely on his testimony in his books and other writings. As mentioned above, Strasser is often referred to by most historians who quote his accounts as “unreliable,” and one should only imagine those sycophantic to him would be biased. As historians work to reassemble a picture of the past, authors like Reed and Southgate, who create conjecture and rumor, distort the image. As seen above, sometimes their accounts are more concise and, therefore, more readily quotable or usable to a historian, even if these are not ideal sources. Granted, while working in Nazi history, one is bound to work with the personal diaries and testimonies of liars, but more historical work must be done on characters like Strasser, whose story remains unclear in many aspects due to lies and fabrications.
In most cases, scholarly academic studies outweigh the nefarious misinformation, and one is often able to differentiate fact from fiction. However, in the case of Strasser, more work has been done in the realm of glorification than actual academic work. There is no doubt that Strasser survived an adventurous and dangerous escape from Hitler’s Europe, and that should be acknowledged. Still, one should also not forget that Strasser was a critical functionary in the ascent of Hitler and his movement. Historians must wrestle the facts from myth and rumor. If more historians do not rescue the truth of Strasser’s stories from the clutches of those with dubious motives to push, the biographies of people like Otto Strasser will be used for nefarious ends.


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