March 21st and May 1st, 1933:

Nazi Germany and the Nature of Fascism

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A Graduating Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements, in the

Honours Program

For the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts

In the

Department

Of

History

The University of Victoria

March 31st, 2022

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Introduction:

Fascism is a heavily debated and often elusive concept. The term is thrown around in contemporary political discourse, often being used as a label for one's political enemies. This suggests lack of clarity about what it signifies. In one sense this lack of clarity is understandable. There is no singular text to which one can refer as the authority on fascist ideology, as there is, for instance, with Marxism and *The Communist Manifesto.* While one can identify early or proto-fascist thinkers like George Sorel and Charles Maurras, there is no definitive originator or shaper of the concept, again unlike the case of Marxism or even liberalism as formulated by John Locke.[1] Fascism has thus inevitably been subjected to many different interpretations. Even identifying fascist countries has been a matter of dispute. Most agree that Mussolini's Italy and Nazi Germany were fascist.[2] However, what about Francoist Spain? Portugal under Salazar? The numerous military dictatorships in South America throughout the twentieth century? These questions have generated much debate, making it difficult to come to a single understanding of fascism and what qualifies a regime as fascist.

Although providing a comprehensive and definitive picture of fascism is beyond the scope of this project, the aim here is to explore developments in the *Gleichschaltung* of Germany during the spring of 1933, in light of key elements that historians have identified as fascist. At the beginning of March 1933, the Nazi grip on Germany was tenuous, evidenced by the March 5th election in which they failed to win a majority. However, only two months later, support for Hitler's regime had increased dramatically. In the secondary literature, March 21st, the Day of Potsdam, and May 1st, the National Day of Labour, are key turning points in this period. The purpose of this thesis is thus to analyze these two events using components identified as fascist as

[1] Conan Fischer, *The Rise of the Nazis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 43.
[2] However, as will be explored shortly, some even question the Third Reich's fascistic credentials.

a lens. To what extent can fascist categories illuminate aspects of these developments that we might otherwise miss?

To put its conclusions upfront, this thesis argues that four components of fascism highlighted in the critical literature, namely, national rebirth, people's community, revolution, and spectacle, are particularly helpful for understanding the transformation of German society through the events of March 21st and May 1st. A fifth, violence, is not directly relevant for these events but was contextually so important both before and after each that it too deserves consideration. The Day of Potsdam and the Day of Labour instantiated national rebirth and achievement of a people's community, respectively. On these grounds they arguably appealed to many Germans. Their impact was also inseparable from massive displays of spectacle which aimed to inspire awe and overwhelm participants and viewers in service of a political message. Additionally, national rebirth and people's community were given revolutionary significance. Here violence also played a key role, both from above and below. Altogether this brief period saw a fundamental shift, even transformation, in popular sentiments in tandem with the Nazi seizure of power.

The first section of the thesis will provide an overview of components of fascist ideology and touch on elements of fascist praxis by surveying the relevant secondary literature for notable recurring themes. The next section will explain the events of March 21st and May 1st, demonstrating their importance for the coordination of German society. Analysis will follow the Day of Potsdam and National Day of Labour in terms of components noted above. Finally, the fourth section will re-examine these concepts and assess their usefulness for understanding the transformation that occurred in Germany in spring 1933. It will consider them in dialogue with each other and suggest where they need qualifying.

Before proceeding, several issues need to be addressed. The first concerns the argument that Nazism is distinct from fascism in its obsession with racism and anti-Semitism. Zeev Sternhell maintains that racism and anti-Semitism are the defining features of Nazism, contrasting this with Italian fascism where Jews were accepted before 1938.[3] While Sternhell's argument is important, there are several counterpoints. First, there is general agreement that, at the very least, fascism did not assume racial equality. Even Sternhell acknowledges that while fascism did not necessarily involve racism, the two are hardly at odds, as evidenced by Italy's implementation of Nazi-style racial laws in 1938.[4] Moreover, other scholars like Carlos Martins and Toni Morant argue that racism is a core fascistic element.[5] Finally, as Ian Kershaw points out, other profound similarities exist between Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany.[6] Due to these factors, this thesis works from the assumption that it is reasonable to treat Nazism as a variant of fascism and examine Nazi Germany as a fascist regime.[7]

Another element to keep in mind is that even if racism is understood as the Third Reich's defining feature, one can reasonably argue that it did not convince many Germans to fall in line with the regime, at least during this period. For instance, the most prominent display of anti-Semitism in the first year of the Third Reich, the April 1st boycott, famously fell flat. Germans largely ignored the Nazi Brownshirt intimidators waiting outside Jewish-owned stores, resulting in the boycott being cancelled after a day.[8] Therefore, while those who converted to National

[3] Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 4-5.
[4] Ibid; these were put in place to be in closer accordance with the Third Reich.
[5] Carlos Manuel Martins, *From Hitler to Codreanu: The Ideology of Fascist Leaders*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & amp; Francis Group, 2021), 21; Toni Morant, "The German Fascists: Nazi Political Culture" in *Reactionary Nationalists, Fascists and Dictatorships in the Twentieth Century: Against Democracy* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 149.
[6] Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship; Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: E. Arnold, 1985), 85.
[7] Thus, the terms Nazism, National Socialism, and German fascism will be used interchangeably throughout.
[8] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889 - 1936: Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), 416.

Socialism likely endorsed anti-Semitism to some degree, there is little evidence that Jew-hatred *on its own* won over substantial numbers of Germans during the period of analysis. Hence, even if racism were not an undisputed element of fascism, this would not present a real obstacle to this thesis.

Section 1: The Ideology and Praxis of Fascism

The literature on fascism is extensive and anything but consensual. Therefore, it is necessary to search for broad overarching themes by which to create categories of analysis. In doing so, several non-mutually exclusive recurring elements emerge. First, fascism has a core set of "antis" or negations. Some scholars, like Stanley Payne, place equal emphasis on fascism's anti-liberal, anti-Marxist, and anti-conservative tendencies.[9] Others argue particular "antis" to be more important than others. For instance, Ernst Nolte emphasizes fascism's anti-Marxism.[10] Hermann Beck highlights fascism's anti-conservative nature, describing how the Nazis aimed to break down traditional class structures, much to the dismay of the conservative elite.[11] Mark Neocleous asserts fascism's anti-democratic tendencies are crucial, emphasizing how fascist movements reject 1789--the French revolution--and its democratic connotations.[12] Finally, Zeev Sternhell drives home fascism's anti-liberal characteristics, arguing that it rejects the Enlightenment and its values.[13]

While these antis are crucial components of fascism, the secondary literature also highlights many positive elements, meaning values for which fascism stood. For instance, Martins

[9] Stanley G. Payne, *Fascism Comparison and Definition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 7.
[10] Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New American Library, 1965), 20-21.
[11] Hermann Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis in 1933: The Machtergreifung in a New Light* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 5.
[12] Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Open University Press, 1997), 1.
[13] Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolutio*n, 3.

argues that fascism touts the value of "absolute violence in the political realm."[14] Mann expands on this notion, arguing that paramilitarism and violence represent the key organizational feature of fascism.[15] Eksteins also highlights the importance of violence, quoting an Italian fascist writer, who, when describing Italy's invasion of Abyssinia, wrote, "war is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the pauses, the scents and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony."[16] Mussolini himself exalted violence, talking about how the "anti-pacifist spirit is carried by fascism even into the life of the individual."[17] In short, violence, specifically the belief that *violence is an inherent good*, is a core element of fascism.

The secondary literature also highlights the importance of World War One. Some, like Kallis, argue fascism itself was a short-term phenomenon that developed out of anger over the result of the war.[18] Morgan and Paxton expand on this idea, asserting that due to intense "humiliation" from the war's outcome, fascism arose out of the bitterness and victimhood complex widespread in countries like Italy and Germany.[19] Others, like Payne, argue that fascism, like communism, emerged out of a post-war crisis of liberalism.[20] On a somewhat different note, Lacqueur posits that the end of the conflict led to tensions between pre-war social structures and emerging post-war institutions.[21] Thus, fascism developed in this context as a movement against pre-war elitist structures.[22]

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[14] Martins, *From Hitler to Codreanu: The Ideology of Fascist Leaders*, 35.
[15] Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 16.
[16] Modris Eksteins, "Spring Without End," in *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Lester & Orpen Dennys Ltd, 1989), 302.
[17] Benito Mussolini, "The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism," *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism* (The Hogwarth Press, 1933), 12.
[18] Aristotle A. Kallis, "The 'Regime-Model' of Fascism: A Typology," *European History Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2000), 79.
[19] Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2007), 126; Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Penguin Book, 2005), 218.
[20]. Payne, *Fascism Comparison and Definition*, 3.
[21] Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1979), 4.
[22] Ibid.

Focus on World War One and the past more broadly can be tied to another element of fascism, the goal of national rebirth. Roger Griffin explains this concept succinctly, asserting that palingenetic ultranationalism is a core component of fascism.[23] In other words, he argues that fascism is a backwards and forward-looking phenomenon, which appeals to a nation's history, but reinterprets that history in a modern context, thereby creating a new vision for a nation's future.[24] Neocleous agrees with this assertion, arguing that fascism makes a firm commitment to modernity *and* a mythicized past.[25] Eatwell makes similar statements, contending that while fascism looks to the past, its desire to create a "holistic nation that transcend(s) divisions" suggests a forward-looking nature.[26]

Closely tied to this notion of national rebirth is the concept of a people's community, a "classless" society in which "the people" are "equal." Morgan argues that the Nazis aimed to create a society where "the people," regardless of their income, occupation, or educational background, could be seen as equal contributors to the nation.[27] Orlow also presents a people's community as a key fascistic concept, asserting that fascism wants different classes to maintain their identities but also "work harmoniously together to advance the national good."[28] Eley expands on how this process functions in practice, arguing that the Nazis' Strength through Joy (KDF) vacation program allowed Germans across class lines to feel unified by participating in communal excursions.[29] Of course, this people's community comes with significant caveats. As Toni Morant highlights, who was allowed in the Nazi people's community, the Volksgemeinschaft, was

[23] Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 6; Palingenetic means rebirth or recreation.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Neocleous, *Fascism*, 60.
[26] Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Vintage, 1996), 13.
[27] Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*, 140.
[28] Dietrich Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 7.
[29] Geoff Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany 1930-1945* (London: Routledge, 2013), 72.

determined by characteristics like race.[30] Moreover, as argued by Passmore, fascism emphasizes traditional European gender roles, implying an inherent inequality between men and women.[31] Yet, despite these caveats, the overall idea of a people's community predicated on creating a national sense of belonging regardless of class must be seen as a core element of fascism.

Fascism is also revolutionary, meaning that it aims to fundamentally change the societies in which it emerges. For instance, Martins argues that fascism holds a "deep desire to transform society and carry out profound changes concerning societal norms, values, and beliefs."[32] Elaborating on this notion, Sternhell posits that fascism embraces the market-based values of liberalism and violent revolution of Marxism but rejects their core philosophical principles.[33] In other words, he argues that fascism wants to benefit from the structures and so-called progress of modern society but ignore its values. Orlow focuses on how fascism aims to change societal values, asserting that key figures, like Sturmabteilung (SA) leader Ernst Röhm, wanted to replace "the democratic ideas of 1789" with "the powers of soul and blood."[34] Morgan agrees with this general notion, describing how the Nazi revolution was "spiritual" in nature, but argues that creating a people's community was its goal.[35] James Gregor presents a similar vision of fascist revolution, emphasizing how it "commit(s) the totality of human and natural resources" to creating "a historic community."[36] Finally, Eksteins suggests that German fascism was a "headlong thrust into a new world," aiming to fundamentally transform the German people and create a new type of "man."[37]

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[30] Morant, "The German Fascists: Nazi Political Culture," 149.
[31] Kevin Passmore, Fascism: A Very Short Introduction (Oxford University Press, 2002), 31.
[32] Martins, *From Hitler to Codreanu: The Ideology of Fascist Leaders*, 30.
[33] Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, 7.
[34] Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe*, 144.
[35] Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*, 128-129.
[36] A. James. Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1969), xii.
[37] Eksteins, "Spring Without End," 303.

In summary, while exactly what the revolution entails is unclear, the secondary literature is clear that fascism *is* revolutionary.

While much of what has been focused on so far has been ideological, fascism also has a core set of practices. Among these, fascist regimes notably saw massive displays of spectacle. Morant highlights the Nuremberg Rallies as celebrations designed to display the importance of the "Volk" and the "nation.[38] Eley notes the spectacle of the KDF vacation programs, commenting on how they helped encapsulate the notion of a reborn nation by creating a cause and effect relationship between German's wellbeing and Nazi programs.[39] Fascist Italy was also known for its massive celebrations that conveyed a sense of spectacle, with Berezin describing Mussolini's regime as a "Festival State" that used celebrations to accomplish its political goals.[40] In short, spectacles and celebrations, both big and small, characterize fascist politics.

Section 2: Two Crucial Dates

Before considering elements of fascism that offer a lens to analyze March 21st and May 1st, 1933, it is necessary to provide some context and give a general explanation of the events themselves. Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany on January 30th, 1933. The reaction from ardent believers and Nazi sympathizers was one of almost indescribable joy. In his diary, fifteen-year-old Nazi Franz Schall wrote, "A fresh wind will soon be blowing across Germany… Germany will now meet a man (Hitler) who will forge a nation out of its anguish and disgrace, a

[38] Morant, "The German Fascists: Nazi Political Culture," 150.
[39] Eley, *Nazism as Fascism: Violence, Ideology, and the Ground of Consent in Germany 1930-1945*, 72; Eley also comments on how the KDF programs functioned to demonstrate the "supremacy" of the Aryan race. However, as this thesis is not focused on race, elaborating further would be irrelevant.
[40] Mabel Berezin, "The Festival State: Celebration and Commemoration in Fascist Italy," *Journal of Modern European History* 4, no. 1 (2006), 61.

nation that will finally defy the world."[41] A nationalist school teacher from Hamburg, Luise Solmitz, also wrote, after seeing a torchlight parade, that she was "drunk with enthusiasm."[42] Perhaps most interestingly, in an interview with Theodore Abel about a year later, a Nazi sympathetic farmer remarked about January 30th that "the workman in the office or behind the plow, the one behind an anvil and in the mines, the government employee, the farmer, the artisan, all had their faith in Germany restored."[43]

However, support for the Nazis was hardly as universal as the farmer suggested. For instance, despite rampant political violence and voter intimidation, the Nazis only won 43.9 percent of the vote in the election about a month later on March 5th.[44] Moreover, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) won 18.3 percent of the vote and 119 seats in the Reichstag, only losing one seat from the previous election.[45] The Communist Party (KPD) also garnered almost five million votes, despite violent persecution of its leadership and membership.[46] Indeed, only with the help of the German National People's Party (DNVP), which won eight percent of the vote, were the Nazis able to reach over fifty percent in the Reichstag. All these results indicate that a significant segment of German society was still not on board with National Socialism. When given the opportunity, many still chose a non-Nazi option. Therefore, steps would need to be taken in the months to come to eliminate the other parties and institutions to which Germans had longstanding commitments, as well as convince the 48 percent who did not vote for the Nazis or Nazi adjacent parties of the merits of National Socialism.

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[41] Franz Schall, *Hitler Youth Schall. The Diaries of a Young Nazi*, trans by Rachel Hildebrand, (New Books in German, 2016), 18.
[42] Luise Solmitz: Diary Entry January 30th, 1933, in *Nazism, 1919-1945: A Documentary Reader Volume 1: The Rise to Power 1919-1934*, ed. Jeremy Noakes and Geoffery Pridham (University of Exeter Press, 1998), 130.
[43] Theodore Abel, *The Hitler Movement* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 300-301.
[44] Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis in 1933; The Machtergreifung in a New Light*, 125.
[45] Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889 - 1936: Hubris*, 416.
[46] William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1960), 199.

Peter Fritsche's book, *Hitler's First 100 Days*, provides a framework to understand this process by addressing the two events under examination as exercises in trying to reach the unconvinced. The Day of Potsdam on March 21st celebrated the re-opening of the Reichstag after it caught fire on February 27th.[47] The main ceremony took place in the Garrison Church in Potsdam.[48] Hitler and propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels purposefully staged everything to display respect for Germany's past. Potsdam was the centre of the old kingdom of Prussia, and the Garrison Church was the resting place of Frederick the Great.[49] It was also the site of President Paul von Hindenburg's pilgrimage during the Austro-Prussian war.[50] Furthermore, March 21st was the date of the initial opening of the Reichstag in 1871.[51] In short, the Day of Potsdam was a propaganda event designed to demonstrate Hitler's respect for German history and tradition, as well as to quell fears of Nazi excesses. Moreover, Goebbels' decision to broadcast the ceremony over the radio was a conscious attempt to communicate this nationalistic respect to everyday Germans, thereby demonstrating National Socialism's legitimacy and working to win Germans' allegiance.[52]

The day began with a religious service that Hitler did not attend: he and Goebbels went instead to pay respects to the graves of Nazi martyrs.[53] He did, however, attend the noon ceremony that signified the official re-opening of the Reichstag. At this function, Hindenburg and Hitler met on the steps of the church and shook hands.[54] They then walked in and Hindenburg gave a brief

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[47] Peter Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 195-196.
[48] Joachim Fest, *Hitler* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 404.
[49]Robert Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 153.
[50] Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 197.
[51] Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis*, 153.
[52] Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998), 146.
[53] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 197.
[54] Fest, *Hitler*, 404.

speech, proclaiming that the "old spirit of this celebrated shrine" would "lift us up from selfishness and party strife and bring us together in national self-consciousness."[55] Hitler responded with his own speech, asserting that, despite the upheaval of the last month, Hindenburg had allowed for the "marriage between the symbols of the old glory and young strength."[56] He then famously turned and shook Hindenburg's hand, bowing deeply while doing so.[57] The president proceeded to lay a wreath at the tomb of Frederick the Great. All this was done while Hitler was wearing normal, civilian clothes, rather than the Nazi brownshirt uniform, whereas Hindenburg was wearing his Prussian field marshal uniform.[58]

By all accounts, the event was a success. Across Germany, workday routines were interrupted, classes cancelled, and businesses closed so people could dedicate all their attention to the ceremony.[59] During the ceremony itself, Goebbels noted that Hindenburg was deeply moved, even having tears in his eyes at some points, an observation corroborated by the French ambassador to Germany André François-Poncet.[60] The ambassador, hardly a Nazi supporter, later wrote in his memoirs that despite Hitler possessing far more real political power than Hindenburg, he seemed "timid," "modest," and "respectful" during the ceremony.[61] At the time, Poncet wrote in his diary, "how could (the conservative elites) fail to dismiss the apprehension with which they had begun to view the excesses and abuses of (Hitler's) party?"[62] Conservative Vice-Chancellor Franz von Papen seemingly agreed, writing in his memoirs that anyone on March 21st was justified in

[55] Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany,* 197.
[56] Adolf Hitler, "Speech at the Garrison Church, March 21st, 1933" in *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations Volume One: The Years 1932-1934,* eds. by Max Domarus, (Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1990), 272.
[57] Kershaw, *Hitler: 1889 - 1936: Hubris*, 465.
[58] Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 276.
[59] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 197.
[60] Fest, *Hitler,* 405.
[61] André François-Poncet and Jean-Paul Bled, *Souvenirs D'une Ambassade à Berlin: Septembre 1931-Octobre 1938* (Paris: Perrin, 2018), 62.
[62] Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany,* 198.

believing Hitler would maintain the "foundation of the country's life and morals."[63] While writing to justify his role in Hitler's appointment after the horrors of the Second World War, von Papen's recollection is consistent with the contemporary observations of Goebbels and Poncet.

Accounts from the time indicate that Potsdam also resonated with everyday Germans. Erich Ebermayer, a member of the German Democratic Party, listened to the ceremony with his family on the radio. Despite recognizing its staged nature, Ebermayer wrote that the two months in government had turned Hitler into a "real statesman."[64] He then described its emotional impact, writing, "father is deeply impressed… mother has tears in her eyes. I silently leave the room... I must be alone."[65] Non-Nazi newspaper Kölnische Zeitung also wrote that "never before have we had representation in which pure national idealism was so plainly evident."[66] Finally, a Great War veteran remarked that "after eighteen years of darkness," this event had made Germany "light and beautiful" again.[67]

Only two days later, the Reichstag assembled in the Kroll Opera House with the Enabling Act on the agenda, a piece of legislation that, if passed, would allow Hitler to rule without Hindenburg or the Reichstag. A two-thirds majority was needed for its approval. As the KPD leadership had been arrested soon after the March 5th election, and the party kept from attending the March 23rd session, this threshold was easier to reach.[68] The SPD still spoke out against it, with their leader Otto Wells proclaiming that "no Enabling Act gives you (Hitler) the power to destroy ideas that are eternal and indestructible."[69] However, this opposition proved futile: the law passed

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[63] Franz von Papen, *Von Papen: Memoirs,* trans by Brian Connell, (London: A. Deutsch, 1952), 273-274.
[64] Erich Ebermayer, "Diary Entry March 21st,1933," in *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Roderick Stackelberg and Sally Anne Winkle (London: Routledge, 2004), 140.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 198.
[67] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 197.
[68] Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, London: Penguin 2005, 337.
[69] Otto Wells, "Opposition to the Enabling Act," (March 23rd, 1933).

with 444 voting in favour and ninety-four voting against, easily clearing the required threshold.[70] In summary, the Day of Potsdam was a key event in the coordination of German society. It helped win over everyday Germans and lulled anxious conservatives into believing that the Nazis would respect tradition. It therefore helped prepare the ground for the passage of the Enabling Act two days later, a measure which gave Hitler absolute political power to pave a new path for Germany.

Fritzsche identifies May 1st as another day crucial in the coordination of German society. For years, Weimar politicians had discussed creating a holiday to celebrate German workers, with no results.[71] The Nazi regime, wanting to appear more effective and attentive to its citizens, quickly set out to make May 1st, the National Labour Day, a paid holiday for German workers.[72] However, a more political goal was also in play. Just like the Day of Potsdam, May 1st was a propaganda event designed to convince Germans, particularly workers, Marxists, and other leftists, to fall in line with the regime, creating a sense of trust before Nazi grip over the institutions of German society was tightened. As Goebbels wrote in his diary on April 17th, "On 1 May we shall arrange May Day as a grandiose demonstration of the German people's will. On 2 May the trade union offices will be occupied. Once… in our hands, the other parties and organizations will not be able to hold out for much longer."[73]

May 1st saw celebrations throughout Germany, the most famous of which occurred in Berlin. In the capital, the morning began with a youth rally in the Lustgarten, with speeches from Goebbels, Hindenburg, and Hitler.[74] Around mid-day, Hitler met with a delegation of workers from all over Germany and introduced them to Hindenburg.[75] Then, in the evening, a massive rally

[70] Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 353.
[71] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 199-200.
[72] Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History*, 280.
[73] Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 357.
[74] Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis*, 170.
[75] Thomas Childers, *The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 259.

occurred at the Tempelhof airfield, which contained an airshow, the unveiling of a new zeppelin, and a fireworks display, culminating in a speech from the chancellor.[76] As this was broadcast over the radio, German life came to a stop and was followed by two minutes of silence.[77] Celebrations also took place in other major German cities. For example, left-wing Frankfurt journalist Lili Hahn observed bands marching throughout the city, parades, and a ceremony in a park. In the latter case, she noted the "electrified and fervent" singing of the national anthem.[78] Such events were not just confined to the big cities. For instance, Northeim, a small village in central Germany, saw a flag raising, a church service, a parade, the aforementioned broadcast of Hitler's speech, and a concert.[79]

According to most accounts, May 1st was successful at reaching the unconvinced. Fritzsche notes the economic context; as workers felt abandoned by the Weimar government due to its handling of the Great Depression, the National Day of Labour was significant in making them feel heard and appreciated.[80] Furthermore, he cites the *Berliner Morgenpost* asserting that the celebration at Tempelhof was "the largest demonstration of all time."[81] Statistics from the Berlin Transport Company back up this claim, since they reveal that 3.6 million Berliners, out of a city of four million, used public transit on May 1st, many presumably getting to and from the celebration.[82] Moreover, Willy Cohn, a Jewish academic living in Breslau, observed that much had been accomplished regarding the "overcoming of class hatred."[83] Hahn made similar remarks,

[76] Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, 227-228.
[77] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 201.
[78] Lili Hahn, *White Flags of Surrender* (Washington: Luce, 1974), 16.
[79] William Sheridan Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power the Experience of a Single German Town 1930-1935* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 203.
[80] Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis*, 222-223.
[81] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 204.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Willy Cohn, *No Justice in Germany: The Breslau Diaries, 1933-1941*, trans by Kenneth Kronenberg, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 7-8.

asserting that due to this newfound unification between classes, "(Frankfurters) were ready to follow their Führer blindly."[84]

As previously noted, May 1st was followed by the Nazi occupation of trade unions the next day. Major union officials like Paul Theodor and Peter Grassmann were arrested and imprisoned, and by May 10th, all worker's organizations were merged into the German Labour Front, headed by Robert Ley.[85] Despite these measures seemingly contradicting the entire point of May 1st, Hitler felt confident that the workers were on his side. This confidence was made abundantly clear when, in a speech given at the opening of the German Labour Front on May 10th, he proclaimed, "I shall never in my life have any greater pride than when, at the end of my days, I am able to say: I have gained the German worker for the German Reich."[86]

Evidence for this statement, or at least evidence that the tide had turned regarding the Nazi's grip over German society, can be seen in the weeks following May 1st. Cohn remarked on May 4th that he now felt like a "guest" in his own country due to everyone else's apparent newfound commitment to the regime.[87] Another Jewish academic, Víctor Klemperer, noted after May 1st that many of his previously skeptical non-Jewish friends were now declaring their "commitment to National Socialism."[88] On May 10th, a mass book burning occurred at the Bebelplatz in Berlin, in which thousands of students, a percentage of whom were presumably not Nazis, gleefully participated in the destruction of books of an "un-German spirit."[89] Finally, whereas before May

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[84] Hahn, *White Flags of Surrender,* 16.
[85] Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History,* 280.
[86] Adolf Hitler, "Speech at the Opening of the German Labour Front, May 10th, 1933" in *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations Volume One: The Years 1932-1934,* eds. by Max Domarus, (Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1990), 322.
[87] Cohn, *No Justice in Germany: The Breslau Diaries, 1933-1941, 8.*
[88] Victor Klemperer, *I Will Bear Witness: A Diary of the Nazi Years 1933-1941*, trans by Martin Chalmers, (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 6.
[89] Louis P. Lochner, "The Book Burning: Report," Head of the Berlin Bureau of the Associated Press, (May 10, 1933).

1st, Lili Hahn and her colleagues viewed the Nazis as "comical figures," this shifted soon afterwards.[90] For instance, on June 29th, after she mocked the Nazi salute, her boss reprimanded her, asserting that "there is nothing to laugh about. You should take everything that has to do with the Nazis in dead earnest."[91] This newfound fear indicates that, while both Hahn and her boss still held few Nazi sympathies, the tide had shifted enough so that one of them was encouraging self-censorship.

It is true that these examples are anecdotal and difficult to directly link to May 1st. It is also difficult to say if these commitments to Nazism were genuine or motivated by fear and expediency. Both Fest and Evans point out that most unions required workers to participate in the May 1st celebrations to be paid, thereby calling into question the genuineness of their conversions.[92] Nonetheless, the fact that unions were enacting such requirements and that such professions of belief were occurring at all indicates that German society had transformed into something very different than the one that failed to give the Nazis a majority on March 5th.

None of this is meant to suggest an all-encompassing devotion to National Socialism. Indeed, the presence of unconvinced observers like Hahn indicates that Nazi efforts to win over Germans were not universally successful. The same is indicated by the account from Peter Gay, then a young Jewish boy living in Berlin. In his memoir, Gay writes that throughout 1933 his school was oddly apolitical, with the new regime having little impact on his daily lessons.[93] Willy Schumann, then a five-year-old from a conservative family, suggests a similar experience in his memoir.[94] While these nuances are important, the general shift in German society across the period

[90] Hahn, *White Flags of Surrender*, 16.
[91] Hahn, *White Flags of Surrender*, 20.
[92] Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 357; Fest, *Hitler*, 413.
[93] Peter Gay, *My German Question: Growing up in Nazi Berlin* (Yale University Press, 1998), 63.
[94] Willy Schumann, *Being Present: Growing up in Hitler's Germany* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1993), 10.

of March 21st through May 1st remains. Indeed, while personally unconvinced, Hahn's observations of changes throughout this period indicate that overall, German society was dramatically altered. Moreover, Gay's and Schumann's memories of their schooling experience are juxtaposed with their observations of massive changes in many other aspects of society.[95]

Section 3: Fascism and the Coordination of German Society

Now that the core elements of fascism have been explored and some crucial dates in the coordination of German society established, one can now ask how fascism can serve as an analytical tool to understand the transformation of Germany during this period. In other words, in light of the elements of fascism established above, what is revealed about these specific German developments that one might otherwise miss? As indicated in the introduction, five components of fascism appear most immediately relevant: national rebirth, people's community, revolution, spectacle and additionally, violence. These elements will now be explored in more detail.

The last of these is a helpful place to begin insofar as it was crucial contextually. After the election of March 5th, Germany experienced a wave of violence. Even as the election made it clear that most Germans still did not support National Socialism, it emboldened Nazi activists to attack political opponents and seize power at various levels across the country. As a preliminary step to winning the population over, the movement displaced or eliminated opposition and asserted control over institutions to which many Germans had longstanding commitments. For instance, the Nazis occupied the Bavarian state parliament on March 8th, the Dachau concentration camp was opened for political prisoners on March 22nd, and the KPD was banned on March 28th.[96]

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[95] Schumann, *Being Present: Growing up in Hitler's Germany*, 6; Gay, *My German Question: Growing up in Nazi Berlin*, 57-58.

[96] Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 336; Milan Hauner, *Hitler: A Chronology of His Life and Time*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 91-92.

Furthermore, although the Enabling Act was formally passed through legal means, violent intimidation was widespread in the days and hours leading up to its enactment. KPD representatives were prevented from attending and an SPD deputy entering the Kroll Opera house on March 23rd recalled hearing angry voices chanting, "we want the Enabling Act!" [97] Sturmabteilung (SA) men also called him a "Center Pig" and "Marxist Sow."[98] The later seizure of trade unions on May 2nd was also violent, as officials were arrested, imprisoned, and often beaten. In one particularly horrific instance, SA men killed four trade union officials in Duisburg.[99]

The secondary literature suggests that violence functioned to coordinate German society politically and institutionally. It gives little attention to how Germans themselves reacted. Some primary sources indicate that violence was actually counterproductive in terms of reaching the unconvinced. For instance, Madeline Kent was an English woman living in Dresden, married to a Social Democrat. Both she and her husband had little sympathy for National Socialism. Indeed, when the results were clear on March 5th, she watched in horror as traffic was stopped by stormtroopers marching down the street in victory, intimidating and beating up anyone who challenged this display.[100] A day later, the local police force, in coordination with the SA, searched Kent's home.[101] She was disgusted by this blatant political persecution, cementing her and her husband's dislike of the Nazis.[102]

However, contrary to the secondary literature and Kent's account, other first-hand accounts reveal that violence actually *convinced* some Germans to declare their loyalty to the new regime, albeit under duress.[103] Sebastian Haffner, then a young man from a liberal, upper class family

[97] Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History,* 276.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich,* 358.
[100] Madeleine Kent, *I Married a German* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939), 166.
[101] Kent, *I Married a German,* 169.
[102] Kent, *I Married a German,* 171.
[103] Ibid.

living in Berlin, asserted that March 1933 saw the violent elimination of most non-Nazi political institutions, leaving millions of Germans without representation.[104] He argued that eliminating other avenues for political participation made many suffer "nervous breakdown(s)" and fall in line with the Nazis.[105] While Haffner's assertion is perhaps hyperbolic, the threat of violence likely played a role in swaying thousands, if not millions, toward acceptance of National Socialism. Indeed, as Christian Democrat Matthias Joseph Mehs wrote in his diary on May 1st, as he observed thousands participating in the festivities, "I knew how it was done with so much unwillingness by many people… and how they acted out of fear and were virtually coerced."[106] Moreover, then five-year old Willy Schumann remembered an "overwhelming sense of crisis" in his household as his father, a Great War Veteran, reacted to the Nazi's March 5th victory and reports of widespread violence.[107] A member of the Deutsche Volkspartei until then, Schumann's father joined the Nazi Party later that month.[108] While factors like anger towards the Treaty of Versailles and the overall outcome of World War One played a role in his conversion, at least according to Schumann, his father only used them as justification *after* his initial fear of violence, indicating that this fear was the primary motivation.[109]

As demonstrated in the previous section, many Germans *genuinely* came to support the Nazis. Therefore, factors other than fear of violence must be considered. The secondary literature argues that the Day of Potsdam was designed to demonstrate Hitler's respect for the conservative elite. While true, re-examining the day with categories of fascism in mind offers a more nuanced

[104] Sebastian Haffner, *Defying Hitler: A Memoir*, trans by Oliver Pretzel (London: Phoenix, 2011), 133.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Alf Lüdtke and Michael Wildt, "Self-Reassurance in Troubled Times: German Diaries during the Upheavals of 1933", in *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship: Collusion and Evasio*n, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 67.
[107] Schumann, *Being Present: Growing up in Hitler's Germany*, 6.
[108] Schumann, *Being Present: Growing up in Hitler's Germany*, 8.
[109] Ibid.

reading, one that looked to the past but also the future. For instance, Hitler spoke of the "marriage… between the symbols of the greatness of the olden days and the vigour of youth."[110] He also drew upon German history, asserting that while Bismarck's unification of Germany seemed to signify "an end to the long period of internal war between the German tribes," the result of World War One destroyed this stability and unification.[111] However, he then juxtaposed this history with an appeal to the future, asserting that with the people's "will," the Nazis would "restore the unity of spirit and will to the German nation."[112]

Several firsthand accounts provide insight into how these promises connected with Germans and in some cases, helped convince them of the broader "merits" of National Socialism. Elisabeth Gebensleben, a Protestant living in Braunschweig, had long been anti-republican, expressing anger towards Weimar due to the Treaty of Versailles. She attended a DNVP meeting on the eve of the March 1932 election but by January 30th, 1933, she was a full-blown Nazi, "we(eping) for joy" upon hearing the news of Hitler's appointment as chancellor.[113] While anti-Semitism and anger towards World War One contributed to her conversion, the Nazi promise of national rebirth further entrenched her support, as exemplified by her reaction to the Day of Potsdam. In a letter to her daughter on March 22nd, Gebensleben wrote how moving it was to see "the field marshal from the World War and the ordinary front soldier now both the leaders of their people."[114] She also wrote that this government's job would be to reconstruct the German nation, praising the ceremony for conveying a forward-looking mentality.[115]

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[110] Peter Longerich, *Hitler: A Biography,* trans by Jeremy Noakes and Lesley Sharpe (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2019), 296.
[111] Hitler, "Speech at the Garrison Church, March 21st, 1933," 272.
[112] Hitler, "Speech at the Garrison Church, March 21st, 1933," 272-273.
[113] Hedda Kalshoven, *Between Two Homelands: Letters Across the Borders of Nazi Germany* (University of Illinois Press, 2014), xii.
[114] Elisabeth Gebensleben, "To her Daughter Irmgard Brester, March 22nd, 1933" in *Between Two Homelands: Letters across the Borders of Nazi Germany*, ed. Hedda Kalshoven (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 72.
[115] Ibid.

Gebensleben was not the only person caught up in this sentiment of national rebirth. For instance, a previously noted quote from a veteran, who after the ceremony, asserted that "after eighteen years of darkness," Germany was "once again light and beautiful" indicates that he too shared this feeling.[116] Perhaps mostly interestingly, twelve-year-old Hoimar von Ditfurth recalled that, despite his conservative father initially negatively colouring his opinion, Hitler's promise to "free" the German people and create a "national revolution" convinced the young boy that he was a man worth following.[117] In other words, despite having negative preconceptions, Ditfurth was made a Nazi through Hitler's promise for something better, an assurance that the German nation would be reborn.

In his speech to the Reichstag on March 23rd, Hitler stated that "we want to build a true community from all the German tribes, classes, occupations, and former classes."[118] In other words, Hitler wanted to create a society where people from all classes could be seen as contributors to the nation, a people's community. The May 1st celebrations were the first major opportunity to put this concept into practice. For instance, Childers argues that by introducing a delegation of workers to Hindenburg, Hitler intended to display that all workers were unified, regardless if one was a coal miner or the Reich President.[119] Moreover, in his speech in the evening, Hitler proclaimed that "the millions of people divided into professions, separated into artificial classes… must find a way to come back together!"[120] The two minutes of silence that followed encapsulated

[116] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 197; it is unclear if this veteran had previous Nazi sympathies.
[117] Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis,* 153.
[118] Adolf Hitler, "The Führer Makes History 1933," (1933).
[119] Childers, *The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 259.
[120] Adolf Hitler, "Speech at Tempelhof Airfield, May 1st, 1933" in *Hitler: Speeches and Proclamations Volume One: The Years 1932-1934,* eds. by Max Domarus, (Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1990), 311.

this idea. To quote Goebbels, it was a "powerful moment of community" that connected "all classes and estates."[121]

Evidence from diaries and memoirs suggests some truth to Goebbels' claim. Gebensleben wrote, after observing the festivities, that Hitler's "singular achievement" was bringing "together a people that had been so divided and miserable!"[122] Jewish academic Willy Cohn's previously noted statement that "class hatred" had been overcome also fits with this notion of a people's community.[123] Lili Hahn's observations also can be interpreted through this lens, as she noted Germans from all walks of life engaging in the festivities, asserting that as they "had jobs again, could live, and make plans for the future," they were now ready to "follow their Führer blindly."[124] In short, the primary evidence indicates that a people's community appealed to Germans, and thus when displayed through events like the May Day celebrations, helped bring many in line with the new regime.

March 21st and May 1st also represent significant propaganda displays and *spectacles*. While the ceremony at the Garrison Church was the main event on Potsdam Day, the day began with a religious service. As previously noted, workdays were interrupted and classes cancelled so all Germans could experience the festivities. In the evening, torchlight parades occurred in cities throughout the country. Various other celebrations also occurred in local jurisdictions; most notably, Berlin saw a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger*.[125] Primary accounts indicate the efficacy of these celebrations in reaching Germans. Gebensleben refers not just to the ceremony in the church but also the broader celebrations of the day, claiming that "such

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[121] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 197.
[122] Elisabeth Gebensleben, "To her Daughter Irmgard Brester: May 4th, 1933." in *Between Two Homelands: Letters across the Borders of Nazi Germany*, ed. Hedda Kalshoven (University of Illinois Press, 2014), 79.
[123] Cohn, *No Justice in Germany: The Breslau Diaries, 1933-1941*, 7-8.
[124] Hahn, *White Flags of Surrender,* 16.
[125] Fest, *Hitler*, 406.

a day of national celebration no doubt occurs very rarely in the history of a people" and noting the "shouts of unrestrained joy" echoing throughout the city.[126] On March 22nd, *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, a non-Nazi conservative newspaper, also wrote that "nationalist enthusiasm swept over Germany yesterday…and broke open doors which until now had been defiantly closed to it."[127]

On May 1st, the Nazis once again infiltrated German's lives through celebratory spectacles. This could be seen in the small central German town of Wolfenbuttel. Plans for workers began at 7:45 AM, as they met in their places of work. Until 2:00 PM, the local Nazi Party had every minute planned ahead of time.[128] Workers then gathered around radios to listen to the celebrations at Tempelhof.[129] This example is but one instance of a process that occurred throughout Germany, as similar events took place in Frankfurt, Breslau, Halle, Stuttgart, Munich, Hamburg, Dresden, and many other cities.[130] Accounts from the time indicate that these celebrations were popular, as Luise Solmitz remarked that they had given the "ancient and joyful May Day festival…back to the German people."[131]

The role of immense spectacles in reaching the unconvinced can be seen in the months following May 1st. For instance, a 24-year-old journalist with no Nazi sympathies, Martha Dodd, went on vacation to Germany in the summer of 1933, encountering radical believers wherever she went. In a moment on which she later looked back in embarrassment, Dodd got caught up in the fervour and excitement of these displays, "heil(ing) as vigorously as any Nazi."[132] Thus, by

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[126] Gebensleben, "To her Daughter Irmgard Brester,: March 22nd, 1933," 71.
[127] Fest, *Hitler*, 405.
[128] Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis*, 172.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Lüdtke and Wildt, "Self-Reassurance in Troubled Times: German Diaries during the Upheavals of 1933, 67.
[132] Dodd, "Hitler needs a Woman," 47.

showing the power of immense Nazi demonstrations, Dodd's account gives credence to the notion that March 21st and May 1st also functioned to win over Germans through the awe they inspired.

Given all the aforementioned evidence, how can one understand the nature of this newfound support for the Nazis? For some, it was no doubt rooted in expediency. Indeed, Fritzsche notes that after April 20th, when it was announced that membership in other parties would be banned on May 1st, 1.3 million people joined the Nazi Party.[133] However, primary accounts indicate that the Nazi hold over many Germans was more profound than one rooted in convenience, or even mere agreement. For instance, in a letter written on April 8th, Swiss journalist, photographer, and communist Annemarie Schwarzenbach, who was in Germany for March 21st, wrote that "a whole people…(was) declaring its adherence to (Nazism)" despite such an embrace being "cultural suicide."[134] Looking back on the events of 1933, Friedrich Kellner, a Social Democrat, made similar comments, writing that "what our ancestors had fought to achieve over centuries was forfeited in 1933 by inane carelessness (and) incomprehensible gullibility."[135] Despite some differences in their political leanings, both Schwarzenbach and Kellner observed a core altering of Germans and German identity, as they believed people had abandoned their longstanding cultural and intellectual traditions in favour of Nazism. Thus, their observations align with Eksteins' understanding of fascist revolution, which entailed a fundamental transformation of people themselves. In short, many Germans had seemingly been transformed from non-Nazis into Nazis.

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[133] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 184.
[134] Annemarie Schwarzenbach, "Why Could the Nazis Come: Letter to Klaus Mann," April 8th, 1933, in *Travels in the Reich, 1933-1945: Foreign Authors Report from Germany*, ed. Oliver Lubrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 38.
[135] Friedrich Kellner, *My Opposition: The Diary of Friedrich Kellner -- A German Against the Third Reich*, translated by Robert Scott Kellner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 45.

Evidence of this transformation can be seen in events immediately following May 1st. Indeed, it is one thing to agree with a government's denunciation of certain ideas but it is another thing to raid the offices and workplaces of those propagating such ideas, as happened when students, in coordination with the SA, plundered Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Research on May 6th.[136] One of them converted to National Socialism just days earlier, proclaiming that a "new page" had been turned in his "own history."[137] Nationalistic sentiments were also common in other countries but deliberately destroying literature of an "un-German spirit," as occurred on May 10th, suggests radical devotion to "the nation."[138] Again, the account of Martha Dodd suggests something similar, as she noted the crowds of fervent believers and their "intoxicating" nature.[139] All these examples indicate that rather than passive endorsement, many Germans were devoted to the principles of National Socialism, suggesting a core transformation of who they were only months previously.

Section 4: A Useful Analytical Tool?

As explored in section two, most attribute the success of the Day of Potsdam to Nazi ability to ease the concerns of anxious conservatives. Moreover, the National Day of Labour is traditionally understood as a celebration meant to appeal to workers. While both are true, by considering the five aforementioned components of fascism, section three presented another lens through which to understand the Nazification of German society. However, it is worth reflecting on whether this lens is *the best way* to understand this transformation. Indeed, violence cannot be

[136] "German Students and Nazi SA Plunder the Library of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, Director of the Institute for Sexual Research in Berlin," Photograph, Berlin, from The United States Holocaust Museum, *Archive,* May 6th, 1933.
[137] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 208.
[138] Lochner, "The Book Burning: Report."
[139] Martha Dodd, "Hitler needs a Woman," July-August 1933, in *Travels in the Reich, 1933-1945: Foreign Authors Report from Germany*, ed. Oliver Lubrich (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 47.

ignored or discounted, but its relevance needs qualification. By contrast, national rebirth, people's community, revolution, and spectacle are central elements for understanding the two events under examination and the processes of this period more broadly. Through the spectacles of mass engagement of the Day of Potsdam and the National Day of Labour, the Nazis staged national rebirth and people's community, ideas themselves that were revolutionary, while simultaneously revolutionizing Germans by transforming them into Nazis

Violence was contextual rather than a direct component of the events of analysis, neither of which featured violence nor celebrated it as an inherent good. Tactical considerations also played a key role. Hitler's initial cabinet only had three Nazis, Wilhelm Frick, Hermann Goering, and Hitler himself, with the remaining eight seats belonging to conservatives.[140] On the one hand, this imposed certain constraints, particularly as the conservative elite expected the Nazis to fail. In the famous words of Vice-Chancellor von Papen, "within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far into a corner that he'll squeak."[141] On the other hand, to accomplish anything, the Nazis needed to exploit their capacity for violence to crush the left and seize trade unions. In addition, accounts from people like Haffner, Mehs, and Schumann indicate that many converted to National Socialism due to fear without necessarily grasping the broader ethos of violence that characterized German Fascism. Indeed, Schumann's recollection of an "overwhelming sense of crisis" suggests little motivation beyond fear and panic.[142]

The events of March through May 1933 did not, however, occur in a vacuum. By this point, Hitler had been preaching political violence for over a decade.[143] Moreover, particularly in the four

[140] Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany,* 184.
[141] Fischer, *Nazi Germany: A New History,* 268.
[142] Schumann, *Being Present: Growing up in Hitler's Germany*, 6.
[143] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2000), 24-25.

years before the Nazi's rise to power, SA violence was widespread on German streets.[144] Also, while March 21st and May 1st were not violent, they were both followed by events that either gave the Nazis legal power to do violence as they saw fit, as was the case with the Enabling Act, or that were explicitly violent, as was the seizure of trade unions. In short, to argue that Nazi violence simply materialized during this period for practical reasons would be incorrect. It existed in the context of a longer commitment that pointed to the ideological priority of active struggle and combat to attain political goals. Nonetheless, actions can and often do have more than one motivation, and thus, the instrumentality of Nazi violence must be considered along with its intrinsic value to the movement.

As previously noted, Roger Griffin argues that fascism is a backwards and forward-looking phenomenon, looking to a nation's history but reinterpreting that history in a modern context and creating a new vision for the nation's future.[145] Neocleous and Eatwell make similar assertions. This description of national rebirth fits very closely with the messages staged by the Day of Potsdam. The setting, paired with Hitler's deference and supposed respect for Hindenburg, demonstrated a nationalistic reverence for Germany's history. This respect was then reinterpreted through an appeal to the future, as demonstrated by Hitler's promises to "restore the unity of spirit and will to the German nation" and "(marry)… the symbols of the greatness of the olden days and the vigour of youth."[146] Previously mentioned accounts from people like Gebensleben and Ditfurth suggest that this message was powerful and widely popular amongst Germans, as a promise for a new vision clearly appealed to many amidst the chaos of Weimar. Worth highlighting again is Gebensleben's anger towards Weimar, juxtaposed with her praise of the Potsdam ceremony for

[144] Kershaw, *Hitler*, 53.
[145] Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, 6.
[146] Hitler, "Speech at the Garrison Church, March 21st, 1933," 272-273; Longerich, *Hitler: A Biography*, 296.

displaying "the field marshal" (the old) and the "ordinary front soldier" (the new) as leaders of Germany.[147]

There is also noteworthy intersection between May 1st and historical understandings of the people's community, as in Morgan's assertion that the Nazis aimed to create a society where "the people," regardless of class, could be seen as equal contributors to the nation.[148] Hitler's introduction of a delegation of workers to Hindenburg was clearly an attempt to convey this notion by making Germans of all classes appear unified.[149] Furthermore, Orlow's argument that fascism wanted different classes to "work harmoniously together to advance the national good" was also on display.[150] Indeed, both Cohn and Gebensleben's observations that class hatred had seemingly been overcome, while hyperbolic, line up with the concept of some sort of class-unity.[151] In short, March 21st and May 1st instantiated the ideas of national rebirth and people's community, speaking to many Germans in the process.

Both national rebirth and people's community need to be understood in the context of spectacle. Put differently, the celebrations on March 21st and May 1st were not just powerful because of the messages they conveyed but also because of the awe they inspired. For example, on March 21st, Erich Ebermayer commented on the message, but also asserted that the staging of the ceremony was "remarkable."[152] Hoimar von Ditfurth also remarked on the *tone* as well as the content of Hitler's proclamations.[153] On May 1st, the conservative magazine, *Die Woche*, proclaimed that the "disorderly masses" had finally coalesced into a "coherent

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[147] Gebensleben, "To her Daughter Irmgard Brester, March 22nd, 1933," 72.
[148] Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945,* 140.
[149] Childers, *The Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany, 259.*
[150] Dietrich Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 7.
[151] Gebensleben, "To her Daughter Irmgard Brester, May 4th, 1933, 79"; Cohn, *No Justice in Germany: The Breslau Diaries, 1933-1941,* 7-8.
[152] Ebermayer "Diary Entry March 21st, 1933," 140.
[153] Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis,* 153.

Volksgemeinschaft," thus noticing the spectacle of the "masses" and the ideological connotations of the "Volksgemeinschaft."[154] Lili Hahn, while noting the supposed breakdown of class structures, also commented on the marching bands and "police horses pranc(ing) along rhythmically."[155] In sum, the pageantry and spectacle of March 21st and May 1st need to be considered in conjunction with the messages conveyed, as this combination played a role in German conversions to National Socialism.

Finally, revolution is a useful concept for understanding the shift in German society during this period and one through which national rebirth and people's community can be reinterpreted. An appeal to the past *and* the future had revolutionary potential insofar as it indicated the creation of a new form of society, one never previously achieved.[156] A revolution of this kind appealed to Germans who desperately wanted to escape from the despair and weakness of Weimar, as illustrated by the Great War veteran who claimed that "after eighteen years of darkness," March 21st had made Germany "light and beautiful" again.[157] Moreover, Ditfurth asserted that Hitler's promise to "free" the German people and create a "national revolution" was the part of the Potsdam Day speech that resonated most strongly.[158] Breaking down class-barriers to create a Volksgemeinschaft also had revolutionary significance. Pre-Nazi Germany was highly divided socially. Everything from religion, to educational background, to class, determined one's social positioning.[159] Thus, Elisabeth Gebensleben's reference to Hitler's "singular achievement" in

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[154] Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis,* 224-225.
[155] Hahn, *White Flags of Surrender,* 16.
[156] This notion is supported by Morgan and Gregor. For more see Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945,* 128-129 and Gregor, *The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism*, xii.
[157] Fritzsche, *Hitler's First Hundred Days: When Germans Embraced the Third Reich*, 197.
[158] Gellately, *Hitler's True Believers: How Ordinary People Became Nazis,* 153.
[159] Adam J. Tooze, *Statistics and the German State, 1900-1945: The Making of Modern Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007), 41.

bringing Germans together, or remarks from Willy Cohn that class hatred had been overcome, suggest appreciation for a revolutionary shift in German society.[160]

Intrinsic to the Nazi revolution was violence. Hitler appealed to the SS and the SA in a speech on March 10th to stop the "revolution from below," since he deemed unrestrained lawlessness and violence was no longer useful. But it did not end, and it was paralleled by purposeful, state-directed violence.[161] This included the opening of Dachau concentration and the seizure of trade unions. Goebbels' statement on April 17th that trade union offices would be occupied on May 2nd indicates the strategic use of violence to attain political ends.[162] In other words, after the displays designed to show respect for Germans' wants and desires, the Nazis then used violence to do what they wanted, enacting a revolution from above and below. Indeed, regarding violence in the form of local activism, it likely exceeded general planning. It is not clear that Hitler could, for instance, have reeled in the violent displays Madeline Kent observed in Dresden, as revolutionary fervour was seemingly not easy to tame.[163] It is also not clear to what extent the mass conversions to National Socialism that Haffner observed were a result of the Nazi's directed actions or of unleashed violent fervour the Nazis could no longer control.[164] In any case, violence, from above and below, provided an essential foil for the events of March 21st and May 1st.

Finally, as suggested in the previous section, revolution provides a framework to comprehend the fundamental transformation of Germans themselves. At the opening of the Propaganda Ministry on March 15th, just days before the Day of Potsdam, Goebbels asserted:

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[160] Gebensleben, "To her Daughter Irmgard Brester: May 4th, 1933, 79"; Cohn, *No Justice in Germany: The Breslau Diaries, 1933-1941*, 7-8.
[161] Hauner, *Hitler: A Chronology of His Life and Time*, 91.
[162] Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 357.
[163] Kent, *I Married a German*, 166.
[164] Haffner, *Defying Hitler: A Memoir*, 133.

It is not enough for people to be more or less reconciled to our regime, to be persuaded to adopt a neutral attitude towards us; rather we want to work on people until they have capitulated to us, until they grasp ideologically that what is happening in Germany today not only *must* be accepted but also *can* be accepted.[165]

This quote indicates the active goal to transform German society fundamentally by turning Germans into Nazis. Indeed, all the aforementioned examples and primary accounts of radicalism, from the book burnings to the persecution of academics perceived to be "un-German," indicate that some form of social revolution was in train. The growing outrage of the neighbours of Matthias Joseph Mehs at his refusal to buy or fly a swastika flag further illustrates this shift in social expectations. One neighbour eventually insisted that he "absolutely had to buy a swastika flag" to show support for "national feeling."[166] Thus, even within the confines of the domestic sphere, Mehs could not escape the revolution in social values when his neighbours had become strong enthusiasts for the new regime.

Conclusion:

Reference to key components of fascism sheds light on the transformation of German society on March 21st and May 1st, 1933. Violence leading up to and following those dates, in part directly unleashed and in part grassroots, was crucial for the political coordination of Germany. The threat of violence also carried considerable weight in persuading some to choose allegiance to the National Socialist project. National rebirth and people's community accurately encapsulate two key messages conveyed on and through the Day of Potsdam and National Day of Labour, messages that clearly appealed to many Germans. The spectacle of the dates in question is

[165] Joseph Goebbels, "Speech to the Press on the Establishment of a Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda" (March 15, 1933).
[166] Lüdtke and Wildt, "Self-Reassurance in Troubled Times: German Diaries during the Upheavals of 1933, 70.

important to consider as well, as the celebrations won over Germans through the awe they inspired *and* their ability to represent certain ideas and values. Finally, revolution also captures what occurred, since national rebirth and people's community were revolutionary ideas, violence was used to further the revolution from above and below, and many Germans became convinced believers. All five components of analysis need to be understood in relation to each other. The intersectionality, indeed synergy, of violence, national rebirth, people's community, revolution, and spectacle deserve particular emphasis. Together they represented both essential features of National Socialism as German fascism and a powerful instrument of political persuasion.

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