RICE UNIVERSITY

OTHMAR SPANN AND THE POLITICS OF "TOTALITY": Corporatism in Theory and Practice

by

John J. Haag

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John Haaq

ABSTRACT

The Austrian economist and sociologist Othmar Spann (1878-1950) was the most important corporative theorist in Central Europe during the years between 1918 and 1938. After delivering an extremely popular series of lectures at the University of Vienna in 1920, later published under the title Der wahre Staat (The True State), he became a major spokesman for the anti-Marxist, anti-democratic "conservative revolution" which fired the imagination of German-speaking intellectuals. By the mid-1920's, he had gathered an ardent following among young nationalist (völkisch) and conservative Catholic thinkers who regarded Spann as an intellectual standard-bearer of the Right.

Spann's "universalistic" philosophy drew much of its inspiration from Plato, medieval Realism and mysticism, and, above all, from the idealistic writings of the German Romanticists. As a panacea for the chaos racking the continent between the wars, he urged the German people to reestablish the hierarchically organized society medieval Europe had known. In his organic corporative state "the best" rather than the vulgar multitude would rule. All members of this society would be represented in an occupational parliament which would ensure maximum stability for the broad masses of producers and political power for a handful of planners, thinkers, and philosophers who would guide the "true state."

A dramatic lecture style and a colorful personality enabled Spann to transform his students into a devoted circle (Kreis) of adherents who saw him as the prophet of a new social and spiritual gospel which would regenerate the entire German people. His enthusiastic disciples attempted to disseminate his ideas among the intellectual, political, and industrial elite dominating Austria, Germany, and the Sudetenland. Financed by German business magnates, they were able to gain positions of influence within many conservative organizations throughout Central Europe such as the Austrian Heimwehr, a coalition of anti-socialist private armies. In Germany after 1930 the circle appealed to Catholics, industrialists, and National Socialists to consider the merits of an authoritarian corporative order. In the Sudetenland they organized an elitist association of young men known as the Kameradschaftsbund which propagated universalistic theories. All of these groups regarded Spann as their ideological mentor.

Personal jealousy and philosophical differences with those in power destroyed the influence of the Viennese professor and his students by 1936. The Austrian government mistrusted Spann and his followers because of their admiration for Nazi Germany, while the National Socialists themselves disliked the circle's "intellectual opportunism", adherence to "political Catholicism", and rejection of Aryan racial theories. In 1938 the SS arrested the professor and several of his close collaborators, ending their ascendancy in the Rightist camp.
Stripped of its Romanticist and metaphysical verbiage, Spann's social and political theory revealed itself to be little more than an elitist variant of Pan-German nationalism which could not be translated into political reality in any form. The concept of a Ständestaat governed by a "spiritually superior" elite was a static idea which could not withstand the Nazi movement's revolutionary dynamism. In an age of mass upheavals fueled by fear and hatred, Spann signed his political death warrant by asserting that only a caste of mystically elected intellectuals could be entrusted with the rule of a modern industrial society.
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PREFACE

This is a study of a man, his ideology, and the circle of intellectuals who attempted to implement his ideas in the realm of political action. Viewed simply as a narrative, it is a story of political naïveté and utter disaster. As an inquiry into the history of the German mind, it is hoped that this dissertation will add some more details to the still incomplete picture of the profound differences which existed, or were believed to exist, between "Western" and "German" thought in the years between the two World Wars. A fascinating figure in a purely human and biographical sense, Othmar Spann was also a major representative of the philosophy that the German people had somehow achieved an unprecedented degree of profundity in understanding both individual and social destiny. His mystical faith in the eventual creation of a harmonious social order—a balanced, moral hierarchy expressed as an archetypical "true state"—is clearly indicative of the continuing power of neo-Romanticist ideas in German intellectual life well into the fourth decade of the twentieth century.

To complete this work, the author traveled to a large number of libraries and research institutes in the United States and Europe. I would like to extend my thanks to the officials of these many institutions. In the United States, the staffs of the following libraries must be singled out for
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In Europe, officials in the following libraries kindly aided with the author's research: the Styrian Provincial and University Libraries, in Graz; the National and University Libraries, in Vienna; the Institute for Contemporary History Library and Archive, in Vienna; the Institute for Contemporary History, the Sudeten German Archive (Collegium Carolinum), and the Bavarian State and University Libraries, all in Munich; the Institute for Foreign Relations, in Stuttgart; the Herder Institute, in Marburg/Lahn; the German Federal Archives and Municipal Library, in Koblenz; the Royal Library, in Brussels; the Library of the Catholic University of Louvain; and, last but not least, the National and University Library, in Prague.

A number of individuals in Austria and Germany helped to further my research often making it quite pleasant. They include the Moosbrugger family, of Graz; the Engelhart family of Graz and Plattsburgh, New York; Dr. Anton Porhansl, of the Austrian-American Educational Commission (Fulbright Commission); Dr. Wolfgang Kohte and Dr. Heinz Boberach, of
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assisted him both financially and emotionally.

During my years of graduate study several teachers have imparted
many rich historical and human insights. Scholars I have been privileged
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Without constant support from the world of family and friends, my
studies would have never commenced, let alone come to fruition. The
gratitude due my parents is boundless. Without my loving wife's unique
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only a void where there is now, it is hoped, at least a modest degree of
accomplishment.

John J. Haag
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On February 19, 1933, a small man rose to address the assembled guests in the Aula of the University of Berlin. The audience included hundreds of students, a large delegation of notables, and the recently appointed German chancellor, Adolf Hitler. The subject, "The German State," was a timely one. ¹ Germany in the early months of 1933 was the scene of gravely important events. Many individuals desperately sought an explanation for the chaos around them; a famous scholar could perhaps provide perspective for a war-torn generation. Some of his listeners had heard his powerful speeches, and more than a few had at least a passing knowledge of his writings. Now they waited for him to explain the significance of Hitler's assumption of power in Germany from the grand perspectives of German philosophy and sociology.

Although he was fifty-four years old, the speaker appeared to have the energy and restlessness of a much younger man. His listeners were struck by the orator's eyes--deep set, piercing, and to many, hypnotic. This guest lecturer, Othmar Spann, was more than a well-known (and controversial) professor of sociology and economics at the

University of Vienna. In the ideological and political struggles that had convulsed Austria and Germany since 1918, he had been an intellectual standard-bearer of the Right. To a remarkable degree, his ideas mirrored the discontents and dreams of a generation that had known little but insecurity and upheaval.

Spann addressed himself to his audience's hope for a "new state." He declared that heretofore accepted ideas of state and society had been based on "individualistic" assumptions which inevitably lead first to democracy and ultimately to Marxism. He reserved his sharpest criticism for liberal democracy, which he felt was characterized by "mechanistic equalization and an unnatural formalistic centralism." He stated that a true expression of national political will "from the bottom up" was fundamentally impossible. He insisted that liberal democracies created negative phenomena such as "wild" leadership cliques and political parties which based their appeal on the lowest common denominator. His alternative was to replace the abstract individualism with Gemeinschaft, or organic community. In his concluding remarks, the noted Austrian scholar warned that "between the Scylla of Liberal-Capitalism and the Charybdis of Bolshevism" there

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2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., p. 128.
was no option for the German people other than the corporatively organized \textit{volkisch} state.

The man who tendered these thoughts was born in 1878 in Altmannsdorf, a suburb of Vienna. His father, a descendant of an old Viennese family, was a manufacturer of marbled paper, as well as an inventor. Both parents died before Othmar went to the university. He studied political economy, sociology, and philosophy at the Universities of Vienna, Zurich, Berne, and Tubingen; in 1903 the latter University granted him a doctorate \textit{summa cum laude}. Entitled "Research on the Concept of Society for an Introduction to Sociology," his dissertation was intended as a broadly philosophical study. The young sociologist's work impressed the former Austrian cabinet minister and sociologist Albert Schaffle (1831-1903) so much that he published several of the youthful scholar's articles in his own \textit{Zeitschrift für die gesamte Staatswissenschaft}.  

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4. \textit{Volkisch} is an almost impossible word to translate; it implies a broad \textit{Weltanschauung} based on pre-industrial and hierarchical modes of thought and also has strong "racial" overtones.

5. Interview with Hanna Riehl, Graz, Austria, November 14, 1967.


After receiving his degree, Spann obtained a position under the noted social worker Christian Klumker at the Zentrale für private Fürsorge (Private Welfare Center) in Frankfurt am Main. His papers based on his experiences in Frankfurt soon established him as an authority on the problem of illegitimacy. After his reputation was established, Spann moved back to Vienna to become vice-secretary of the Imperial and Royal Central Statistical Commission in 1908. In 1909 he received an appointment as Privatdozent (academic lecturer) at the German Technological College at Brünn (Brno); he received a professorship in that institution in 1911.

Although the years immediately preceding 1914 were a "golden age of security" for many Europeans, some intellectuals, including the newly-appointed Privatdozent at Brunn, felt a deep spiritual chasm between themselves and society. Since 1815 the rise of powerful nation-states and their rapid industrialization had led to material and ideological transformations which shook European society to its very

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foundations. In the words of Gerhard Masur, "static energies gave way to revolutionary tidal waves which are still surging up in our time."\(^{11}\)

Some thinking men met the challenge of the new times head on by accepting scientific and aggressively secular philosophies that justified a status quo of extreme wealth and poverty on the basis of the "inherent" right of the strong and ambitious to rule over the weak and incompetent. Other intellectuals retreated from the world of brutal nature into the realm of idealism, while still others fused the two in various theories of "race" and "national character."\(^{12}\) Nearly all of them were grappling with the social problems of what has aptly been called a "generation of materialism."\(^{13}\)

Like other intellectuals of his generation, Othmar Spann struggled with the problems created by a materialistic society. As early as 1903 he began to write a history of economic theories from an idealistic philosophical position. By 1905 he was insisting that economic systems


must be seen in relation to the entire growth of social patterns and institutions. Intuition rather than a slavish reliance on statistics would enable social scientists to grasp the very essence of social structure and behavior. The young Austrian scholar was convinced that the social sciences had reached a dead end because of their "mechanistic and mathematical" methodology, which he felt doomed these disciplines to a sterile reliance upon "dead" approaches based on empiricism and materialism. 14

During his years at Brünn Spann developed the idea that social phenomena could be regarded in two fundamentally different ways: "genetically" or "functionally." Those who held the genetic view classified phenomena according to their origin, whereas those influenced by the functional approach did so according to social consequences. 15 These classifications led Spann to make a distinction between "individualistic" and "universalistic" theories of society. The conflict between these two approaches lay at the very core of his sociological theory. In his opinion, human society could only be organized according to a single basic principle: either that of individualism or that of universalism.


In Spann's view, the principle of individualism could never be valid; only as a member of society, he insisted, could the individual become a "real" entity with a personality developed to its utmost limits. For the Austrian sociologist, a society built on the concept of personal autonomy was but "a meaningless pile of sand." In contrast to individualism, universalism recognized society as a totality (Ganzheit) whose parts were not independent but members of a social whole. He asserted that man's potential mind and spirit could be developed only in community with other human beings; in a universalistic society individuals and groups would not be isolated atoms, but would instead be parts of an organic entity.

In the realm of practical politics, however, Spann's organic community splintered into fragments. As a first-hand observer of the struggle between the Austro-German and Czech inhabitants of Brunn, he took up the fundamental ideas of General Friedrich von Bernhardi and Heinrich von Treitschke and adapted them to some of the specific problems facing the Dual Monarchy. Bernhardi, one of the era's leading

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military theorists, professed that the preservation of peace "can and must never be the aim of politics." Military prowess had radically changed the map of Europe in the nineteenth century, and only continual preparedness would ensure the further exploitation of these past gains. War as "a biological necessity, a regulator of the life of mankind which is quite indispensable" became the German general's credo. The key role played by a military caste always prepared for war had been emphasized earlier by the German historian von Treitschke; for him the state's right to make war was above the questioning of mere mortals.

Like Bernhardi and von Treitschke, Spann insisted that war was an indispensable mechanism of international development. From his vantage point in Brünn, the Austrian scholar predicted an inevitable collision between the Slavic and the Germanic worlds. He set forth his theory in a speech on the "sociology and philosophy of war" given before the Association of German-\textit{Völkisch} Academicians in Brünn on November


19Ibid., p. 11.


30, 1912. Austria, he stated, had been a German colonists' state since the days of Charlemagne, and its true historical destiny dictated that the Germans be the pillars of the Austrian state. After 1848, however, the impact of Liberalism and the "pipe-dream of humanity" had made the Austrian empire increasingly unaware of its "true" political dynamism. The lecturer described the Czech claim to partnership in a "German" state as "infamous, treasonous, and anti-Austrian." The Czechs had been allowed to create a "humiliating, disgraceful and mutinous state of affairs." The disastrous effect of their behavior could be halted only if the German-Austrian state acted decisively and pulled the Czech "thorn from its flesh." Austria, the speaker forcefully declared, would either "stand or fall with the Germans."

The Great War tested Spann's theories about military and political conflict. Although the end of one way of life created an almost physical sense of loneliness and anxiety within some artists and

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. 24.
26 Ibid.
intellectuals, the war brought a sense of community sharing and effort to others. As a reserve lieutenant sent to the front soon after the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, Spann experienced a feeling of comradeship with his fellow-countrymen. Shortly after the battles around Lemberg (Lwów) in 1915, however, he was wounded and left the front with a medical discharge. In 1916 the reserve lieutenant became a member of the Scientific Committee for War Economy which had been established by the Ministry of War in Vienna.

During the remainder of the war, Spann wrote little and read voraciously.\(^{28}\) In Vienna he spent much of his time planning for Central Europe's post-war economy. Many political, business, and academic leaders dreamt of a vast and powerful German-Austrian economic and political unit, Mitteleuropa. Like many of his contemporaries, Spann felt that the military alliance between Germany and Austria-Hungary would lead to a lasting political and economic relationship. He expounded these beliefs at a meeting of the influential Verein für Sozialpolitik in Berlin on April 6, 1916, where he told the assembled experts that the Austro-Hungarian economy was fundamentally sound; his prognosis for the future was an optimistic one.\(^{29}\)

\(^{28}\) Spann was a voracious reader during these years, even taking books with him into the kitchen of his crowded apartment. Interview with Raphael Spann, Vienna, May 10, 1968.

With the military and political collapse of Central Europe in 1918, the economist's hopes were destroyed. Chaos, poverty, and misery replaced visions of a stable, prosperous, and well-ordered Mitteleuropa. Starvation lurked in the streets of Vienna. The present was clearly desperate, and the future seemingly hopeless. Stefan Zweig summed up many intellectuals' fellings when he wrote, "an infinity of horror confronts us, endless, pathless, at the end, catastrophe!"  

The death of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the nascence of the Czechoslovak Republic terminated Spann's teaching career at Brün." His hostile attitude toward Czech political ambitions was well known, and an insignificant incident brought about the inevitable--his departure from the German Technological College. So that he could learn about the books his students wished to read, Spann solicited suggestions from the members of his seminar. One student proposed a book by Thomas Masaryk, the newly elected Czech president. The Austrian professor informed his seminar that while Masaryk was a successful politician he was not a scholar, and only scholarly studies would be used in his course. When the Czech population heard about the remark a wave of protest swept Brün and some demonstrators broke the windows of Spann's apartment. He fled the city by a circuitous route.

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31 Letter to the author from Hans Neuwirth, Munich, April 22, 1968.
Spann left Czechoslovakia to begin a new life in Vienna, arriving during the city's trial by revolution and starvation in the spring of 1919. On April 1, 1919, he was awarded the chair of economics and sociology at the University of Vienna which had been vacated by the death of the sociologist Eugen von Philippovich. In his inaugural address, entitled "On the Spirit of Political Economy," he proclaimed his theory of universalism to the academic world. Only two kinds of social science existed, Spann announced; one was individualistic and the other the "true," universalistic social science. The new Viennese professor contended that his social philosophy of universalism would demolish "individualism, atomism, psychologism, Marxism, and other dead sciences." From this point forward Spann was to be the center of numerous academic disputes. During the next two decades he was also to be a force in the major intellectual and political developments which convulsed Germany and Austria.

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32 The address was published as *Vom Geist der Volkswirtschaftslehre. Antrittsrede* (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1919).


CHAPTER II

THE ROMANTICIST LEGACY AND OTHMAR SPANN

Othmar Spann's philosophical system was rooted in the cultural, social and political crises which racked Central and Western Europe throughout the nineteenth century. The French revolution, the shock of industrialization, and the rising political and economic demands of a democratizing society created grave social disorders. As is often the case when societies are in the throes of internal transformation, the past became preferable to the present for some individuals.

The early nineteenth century German Romanticists were among the first to voice the feelings of insecurity which has come to characterize the modern age. The egalitarian ideas ushered into Central Europe via the French revolution threatened traditional hierarchical systems.¹ The Romantics sought to devise a counter-ideology which would successfully compete with the revolutionary triad of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In an attempt to justify the conservative regimes which had offered them security and sustenance, they searched for the eternal principles of authority in art, literature, and politics.² Because the Romantic conservatives experienced the transition from aristocratic absolutism to

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middle-class constitutional rule and the social transformation of a rigid caste structure to a fluid money-oriented class system, they were very aware of the impermanence of social institutions. They expressed a continual concern about social stability because they were uncertain about the ability of Europe's post-revolutionary society to provide physical or psychic security. ³

The Romantics criticized the fundamental spirit of their age because it had allowed the individual to become isolated from his fellow men, from society in general, from nature, and from God. ⁴ They wanted to restore unity to a world characterized by cold and mechanical rationalism in which all the traditional elements of human existence were disintegrating. These conservative intellectuals' prescription for a decaying Europe was an organic society in which each individual would have his place in a hierarchical order. Their basic argument against French revolutionary egalitarianism was the notion of organicism. To the "Jacobin" theory that the state was a rational creation man could consciously use for limited, utilitarian ends, the Romantic intellectuals replied that the state and society were the culmination of untold centuries of mysterious

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growth. They rejected the concept of social contract because they insisted that this principle weakened a society's organic structure. Ultimately, Romantic political theory conceived of a majestic and sovereign God intervening in society through his appointed princes, Europe's traditional and legitimate rulers.  

A systematic theory of a corporative society (Ständestaat) was first developed by the German-Austrian political theorist Adam Heinrich Müller (1779-1829) in his book Elemente der Staatskunst published in 1809. This book, most likely the major work of German Romantic political theory, emphasized the social collectivity over the individual. Like his fellow Romantics, Müller venerated the middle ages because of the high degree of spirituality and social cohesion he felt had existed in the corporative Catholic monarchies during that era. His concept of the state was essentially mystical and totalitarian. For him the state was the union of all individual endeavors fused into a living entity.

5 Hans Reiss, Politische Denken in der deutschen Romantik (Berne: A. Francke, 1966), passim.


In his own words the state was "the whole of physical and spiritual wealth...the total external and internal life of a nation." Only an organic hierarchical state similar to those which had existed in Europe during the middle ages, declared the Romantic political theorist, allowed a people's true talents and potentialities to flourish. The only society based on divinely ordained principles was the corporative state (Ständestaat).

With the industrialization of Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century, the malign spirit of the French Revolution, and with it political Romanticism, faded. The new specter haunting Europe was the "social question," the sprawling slums and the factories which spawned them. Virtually all classes of Europeans, other than the capitalists themselves, opposed in some way the social and economic system of industrial capitalism which altered the entire fabric of the continent. The very word "capitalism" was an implicit critique of the existing social and economic order. Two basically hostile views of the modern industrial economy were developed by Marxian Socialists, Catholic and other

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conservatives. For the Socialists, capitalism was a necessary stage in society's progressive development toward an ultimately classless state, whereas for the conservatives it symbolized the degeneration of human and social relationships.

Conservative Catholic intellectuals viewed the "social question" plaguing Europe essentially as a spiritual problem, rather than, as the Socialists insisted, a desperate question of economic existence, or Magenfrage. Throughout a period of increasing urbanization and industrialization, conservatives maintained that the new economic system was unable to give men a spiritual reason for living. They believed that the process of proletarianization had transformed formerly dignified, pious peasants and artisans into dissolute, anarchistic creatures who no longer feared God, revered church authority, the sanctity of the established social order, and the justness of the social organism. Expelled from historic human groups of family, guild, village, and church, devoid of the old organic order's certitude and security, twisted by the mechanical processes of the capitalistic system, these unfortunate men, women and children had become "a herd, a crowd, a mob."

European civilization faced an impending crisis, the conservatives warned. The closely interwoven relationship between master and

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journeyman which characterized the middle ages had deteriorated into a
cash nexus between employer and worker in the modern capitalistic age.
The workman, who had once occupied a secure station in a hierarchical
society, was now forced to negotiate wage contracts with employers who
controlled their very existence. Left to struggle for wages in an unstruct-
tured, impersonalized society, the worker felt increasing alienation from
the world around him. This very estrangement, warned conservative
intellectuals, threatened European civilization as society rapidly disint-
TEGRATED into opposing social camps.

To halt this social decomposition, corporatist thinkers devised
their own philosophy of human relationships. They viewed the body of
society as a living organism composed of single members or parts.
Just as organs in the human body had specific functions, said corporatist
intellectuals, so different social groups also had certain rights, duties,
privileges, responsibilities, and rewards. Each of the social organism's
different elements had a determined and "proper" place in relation to the
whole.\(^\text{13}\) The system outlined by these conservatives was hierarchical,
for as certain parts of the body were more "valuable" than others, so
some individuals or groups had greater worth to the social totality.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Gottfried Salomon, "Die organische Staats- und Gesellschaftslehre,"
in René Worms, Die Soziologie (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1926), pp. 111-143.

\(^{14}\) Ralph H. Bowen, German Theories of the Corporative State
Because each member of a corporative society would feel secure and content in his "proper" place, stability would replace the chaotic materialism which was destroying European life.

The Viennese stock market crash of 1873 and the ensuing depression in Central Europe seemed to bear out the conservative predictions of impending disaster. Economic individualism, the basis of liberal prosperity and power, was now identified with insecurity and suffering; the classes threatened by economic liberalism increasingly came to believe that large-scale factory production menaced their very existence.

Hostility toward political liberalism merged with various shades of anti-industrialism to form a vague, shapeless longing for a more perfect, secure society. 15 Among the clamoring critics in Austria—socialist, nationalist as well as conservative—one voice was particularly prominent, that of the corporative publicist Baron Karl von Vogelsang (1818-1890). Born in Mecklenburg, Germany, Vogelsang came to Austria in middle life and bought an estate near Vienna. Financial difficulties forced him to liquidate his estate in the 1870's and to earn his living as a journalist. 16 Having been converted to Catholicism earlier, Vogelsang

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became the editor of the Catholic newspaper *Vaterland*. Financial need as well as conviction impelled the Catholic editor to write literally thousands of newspaper and magazine articles whose main thrust was modern society's utter inability to give man security and meaning in his social existence.

Vogelsang's alternative to the liberal system which, he felt, exploited workers, fragmented society into opposing classes, and created the potential for revolution, was a state organized along corporative lines. In this state representation would be occupational and functional rather than political and territorial. Each delegate would represent a particular trade or profession in the economic parliament and thus he would be familiar with his constituents' problems and their aspirations. Representatives and their constituents would share an "inner relationship" which would replace the "superficial" act of voting. 17 The members of this state would not be equal, for corporatism recognized the natural inequalities existing between men and wove them into the fabric of human relationships, creating a more ordered, stable, and just society. As the separate trade and professional guilds were strengthened, the "centralized and bureaucratized state apparatus" with its "Byzantine manner" of government and administration would be inevitably weakened.

17 *Von Klopp, Die sozialen Lehren des Freiherrn Karl von Vogelsang*, pp. 245-248.
Vogelsang insisted that a corporative system of social organization would remedy the evil effects of capitalism, urbanization, industrialization, and secularization; in short, a corporative society would restore the organic relationships that had existed from time immemorial.  

The idealistic tenor of Vogelsang's theories appealed to conservatives who used them as an intellectual focus for their political response to liberalism and socialism. A small circle (Kreis) formed around Vogelsang, drawn together by a shared rejection of what they felt to be the ugliness and injustice of industrial society. The members of the Baron's Kreis included socially-conscious priests, aristocrats, and journalists. Rejecting liberalism because of the unjust, vicious and dangerous society they felt it had created, the Vogelsang circle predicted that one day the poor and oppressed would rise up and destroy the system which tormented and exploited them. The editor's followers both anticipated the destruction of secular, immoral liberalism and, at the same time, feared the carnage such a social upheaval was bound to bring in its wake.

During the last years of the nineteenth century, a number of developments tended to weaken Vogelsang's predictions. Higher wages,

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18 Ibid., p. 248.

universal manhood suffrage, and the nationality conflict were some of the major issues of the day; vague theories about corporative social orders no longer explained the complex nature of a rapidly changing society. Vogelsang's death in 1890 signaled the demise of his circle and the expiration of its elitist attempts to replace capitalistic-individualistic society with a traditional "organic" and hierarchical order. Political gradualism by means of parliamentary action became increasingly acceptable to both Catholics and Socialists; piecemeal amelioration of social injustices, rather than the Utopian ideal of a perfect organic state, took up most of the energies of intellectuals after 1900.²⁰

A new method of perceiving society and of describing the alienation and dislocation of the industrial age came to replace some of the social criticism of conservative corporatism in the last years of the nineteenth century. This new discipline, sociology, was conceived as an intimate union between philosophy and economics.²¹ Instead of merely depicting existing societies, this new discipline often set up models of what an ideal social organism should be. A number of

²⁰ Paul Jostock, Der deutsche Katholizismus und die Überwindung des Kapitalismus (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1932), pp. 138-144.

scholars held that sociology could only operate as a fusion of fact and value judgement. Using this method, the "social question" was not only to be studied as it actually existed, but approaches for its solution were also to be carefully examined and analyzed. Both materialists and idealists began to see sociology as a "scientific" tool for applying their social philosophies.

A milestone in German sociological theory was attained in the book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, a work first published in 1887 by Ferdinand Tönnies (1855-1936). Although Tönnies attempted to present a pure theory of society, he, like so many other German-speaking intellectuals in the late nineteenth century, reacted emotionally to what he felt was the increasing atomization of social relationships in the modern era. For him, the key to explaining many of the social crises of the contemporary age was the antithesis between "society" and "community." For Tönnies, the community (*Gemeinschaft*) with its traditional ties of blood, neighborhood, and friendship was rapidly being replaced by a commercial and contractual society, the *Gesellschaft*, whose single measure of value was money.


Although the first edition of Tonnies' book was virtually ignored, the second edition published in 1912 struck a responsive chord not only among sociologists but also among educated laymen. For many readers, the Gemeinschaft came to represent the security, "warmth," and harmony of interests they associated with the pre-industrial age, while the Gesellschaft became linked with all that was sterile and materialistically "cold" in the modern world. These thinkers began to make a sharp distinction between the uniquely German Gemeinschaft and the mechanistic societies of "the West." Superficial Western civilization, based on individualistic and subjective values since the French Revolution, could only conceive of men as economic "machines" temporarily allied by contractual relationships. On the other hand, Germans, who had always been able to gaze deeply into the essences of existence, possessed a deep and meaningful way of life, a profoundly rich Kultur which expressed itself ideally as a morally binding community.\textsuperscript{25} The diffusion of Tonnies' concepts saw German intellectuals proving to their own satisfaction the inherent superiority of the "German" Gemeinschaft over the "Western" Gesellschaft.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} Mitzman, "Anti-Progress," pp. 65-85.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intellectual irrationalism germinated in German-speaking Europe. The evils of rationalistic liberalism, capitalism, industrialism, then democracy and socialism could be destroyed, conservatives believed, only if a new, specifically Germanic social order was created, first in the world of ideas, and then in the real world. For several decades before 1900, corporatist theorists condemned industrial society and demanded a return to the unified, ordered, and peaceful social system they felt the middle ages had known. These thinkers almost invariably failed to use precise terminology and devise specific political strategies; their prescriptions for social harmony were unsophisticated and Utopian. Corporatist theory was, in fact, a crazy-quilt of emotional yearnings thinly disguised as ideas.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, professional sociologists were pushing the untrained and often emotional advocates of a hierarchial society into the background. Some of these pre-1914 sociologists were, however, social philosophers almost as much as they were unbiased diagnosticians of society. Deeply involved in the problems of their age,

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these men were troubled by the impact of modernization on the traditional culture of Central Europe. A close observation of social problems often awakened within them a nostalgia for the supposed benefits of a traditional organic order.\textsuperscript{29} It was this nostalgia among a considerable number of intellectuals that flourished and became a major theme of German social and political thinking after the collapse of 1918.

The shots fired at Sarajevo destroyed the root-system of the society German and Austrian conservatives had condemned for many decades. Most intellectuals in Central Europe felt exhilarated at the outbreak of war in 1914, believing the struggle presented their nations with the opportunity to return to their "true" cultural traditions, rebuild society on the properly idealistic ideological foundations, and commence a new age. The actual war experience strengthened these beliefs.\textsuperscript{30} Many idealistic young men, whose imaginations kindled by the sacrifice and heroism of war, desired to infuse civilian society with the close comradeship they knew at the front. They saw the "spirit of the front" (Frontgeist) as a social ideal, for it recognized the primacy of the community over the individual. In fact, they declared, the "total mobilization" of national energies and aspirations had produced an almost complete

\textsuperscript{29}Mitzman, "Anti-Progress," pp. 65-85.

rejection of the "always questionable concept of individual freedom." 31
These inspired soldiers hoped that the Frontgeist would be more than
a temporary phenomenon born of war, a mere "field-kitchen socialism." 32
The society so often maligned by Germanic intellectuals became the
"world of yesterday" with the catastrophe of 1918. The old order had
vanished almost without a trace, bringing hunger and fear and, at the
same time, creating a powerful sense of freedom and liberation. Some
prominent conservative intellectuals openly welcomed the end of the old
era, proclaiming that the break with the past offered a new opportunity
to rebuild a society whose moral and social inadequacies had caused its
collapse. 33 The times were now ripe for rebuilding society, for creating
a genuine Volksgemeinschaft, a true people's community.

Other intellectuals were not so optimistic. In Austria, material
distress underscored the necessity of building a new society. Postwar
Vienna was little more than a "huge city of starving and freezing beg-
gars." 34 Not only was the body assailed by hunger, the "German spirit"

31 Ernst Jünger, "Die totale Mobilmachung," in Ernst Jünger (ed.),

32 Günther Lutz, Die Front-Gemeinschaft. Das Gemeinschaftserlebnis
in der deutscher Kriegsliteratur (Greifswald: Hans Adler, 1936), passim.

33 Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Das dritte Reich, ed. Hans Schwarz

34 Julius Braunthal, The Tragedy of Austria (London: Victor Gollancz,
1948), p. 43.
had not been so endangered in centuries. From the West, the Germans were threatened by parliamentary democracy and mass rule; from the East, by revolutionary Bolshevism and social levelling. The central position of the German people between the capitalist world of the West and the socialist world of the East made it imperative that a new Germanic ideology be formulated. Conservatives warned that Central Europe's social order was in dire danger of being annihilated by one or both of these vulgar and fundamentally un-German philosophies. In effect, the eleventh hour of civilization, as Germans knew it, was at hand.

In Vienna a still unknown professor teaching at the University also heard the death knell of a dying civilization, but his impassioned lectures offered hope to a disillusioned generation of war veterans. Recognized in the academic world at large as only a young scholar with a highly desirable chair in sociology and economics, Othmar Spann was known at the University of Vienna chiefly as the creator of inventive words and definitions, and as a teacher who had a "modern," almost informal attitude toward his students. His relative obscurity, however, was soon ended by a highly popular lecture series in 1920 which appeared


36 Georg Jahn, review of Othmar Spann, Fundament der Volkswirtschaftslehre (Jena: Gustav Fischer, 1918), Jahrbücher für Nationalökonomie und Statistik, Vol. CXVII (1921), pp. 73-78.

in book form in 1921 under the title of Der wahre Staat. From this point forward, Spann's was a voice that could not be ignored in the intellectual and political conflicts of Central Europe.

Profoundly influenced by the social, political, and aesthetic philosophy of German Romanticism, Spann drew upon the wealth of conservative thought which had accumulated during the past century to express German feelings of cultural superiority and "sense of mission." He voiced his belief that German preëminence was based upon the power and wisdom of national tradition which was, in turn, derived from the Volk's religious and mystical experiences. Above all, the Austrian neo-Romantic intellectual was convinced that underlying all the seemingly contradictory and confusing events of any historical era there was an inner core of truth which men could, and--if society were to attain justice, order, and beauty--must discover anew every generation. He was persuaded that his own generation was fated to discover these truths anew and place them into the world of human affairs.

Employing what he termed the "universalistic" or "totalistic" method, Professor Spann found that he was able to determine the inner core of truth for his own age. He viewed his universalistic theory of

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society as being more than a mere methodology for the social sciences; it was the key to a profound understanding of the social organism and man's place in it. Underlying his entire system was the universalistic "theory of categories" which he reduced to five major principles: 1) the totality does not exist "as such"; 2) since the totality does not exist "as such," it exists only in its members; 3) the totality is prior to its members, logically if not necessarily in time; 4) the totality is more than the sum of its parts; and, 5) the totality is the true source of its members. 39 For the Austrian sociologist, this scale of hierarchies proved that the totality was superior to its component parts. Applied to human society, the theory of categories allowed the individual to function properly as part of an organized social community, for Spann believed that man could enjoy peace and contentment only as a member of an established order of human relationships.

Spann insisted that corporatism was a thread running throughout human history. Ancient Persia, Sparta, Rome, medieval Europe, and the old "pure" Germanic state had all possessed hierarchical social structures. Belonging to a specific social estate (Stand) had given the members of these societies a profound feeling of security. These great civilizations had been characterized by their harmony and stability. In

39 Spann, Kategorienlehre, pp. 54-77.
modern times, however, the French Revolution had destroyed the social
stability of European civilization. 40 According to the Austrian professor,
the egotistic individualism of 1789 had shattered the harmonious corpora-
tive polity of the middle ages. This "mighty eruption" of social and
intellectual forces had unleashed chaos in modern Europe nurturing the
blight of liberalism, unrestrained capitalism, and mass democracy.

The French Revolution was for the Austrian neo-Romantic thinker
a glorification of an allegedly "free" individual; belief in a completely free
individual had distorted the true relationship between the social totality
and its component members. It was precisely this French Revolutionary
spirit which remained the greatest enemy a healthy and flourishing society
could have. Stressing the unique person's importance, libertarian ideas
disregarded the primacy of the whole society, when, in fact, removed
from the totality of the social organism, the individual could play only a
passive historical role. Throughout history, the Viennese scholar de-
clared, the theory that man was an autonomous social force had caused
only grief and turmoil and the disruption of positive traditional values.
Just a hair's breadth removed from anarchy itself, individualism had
allowed the capricious whims of the masses or the cruelties of tyrants
to convulse the social whole. Such a concept of the human being,

40 Spann, Der wahre Staat, pp. 123-125.
Spann stated, could bring only disaster to the society which espoused it. 41

The only valid alternative to individualism's destructive philosophy and its chaotic systems of government was the corporative state (Ständestaat). This state would be organized according to the principles of organic hierarchies. In such a society, Spann stated, each person would belong to a definite social group which had a distinct and entirely functional role; similar spiritual qualities and attributes would determine an individual's social estate. Spiritual attainments would take precedence over material achievements in determining a person's place in the hierarchy of functions. Those whose "spiritual inferiority" assigned them to a lower rank in the corporate order would be taught to accept their position. The state's educational system would emphasize the benefits both the individual and society would receive from this arrangement; the "spiritually inferior" members would learn that although a society's component parts were unequal, all were nevertheless indispensable for its survival and development. Once the members of the corporate society accepted the concept that some individuals were higher on the spiritual scale than others, the Austrian social theorist believed the disturbing

41 Ibid., pp. 127-129.
search for individual identity in modern, liberal society would cease, and harmony would replace social unrest.\textsuperscript{42}

Spann's organic society was to be constructed with hierarchically arranged social units or \textit{Gemeinschaften}. The members of the corporate order would first be divided according to their spiritual qualities and intellectual abilities into more or less latent communities or \textit{Stände}. The \textit{Stände} would be subdivided into \textit{Vor-Stände} and \textit{Voll-Stände}, a further sifting of individuals according to their professional and mental qualifications. The \textit{Stände} would be vague categories without definite or formal social organization.\textsuperscript{43}

The \textit{Vor-Stand} would consist of three distinct "spiritual" communities in an ascending order. The first and lowest rank would be composed of manual laborers. Somewhat higher on the scale would be those who were engaged in "spiritual" activities, but who made no "truly" original contributions to society such as teachers, professors and performing artists. The third and highest group would include all individuals whose activities and ideas were genuinely original and spiritually creative.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., pp. 195-315.


\textsuperscript{44}Spann, \textit{Der wahre Staat}, pp. 195-315.
The Voll-Stand would further divide members of the community according to their profession. The manual workers would again occupy the fifth and lowest rung of the social ladder. The fourth group would consist of skilled workers involved in such repetitive and uncreative tasks as construction and the decorative arts. Next would come business and industrial managers, or as Spann graciously alluded to them, the economy's "guiding lights." Leaders of public organizations such as presidents, army commanders, and church officials would comprise the second rank. Finally, the first and most important group would rule the "true state" as the spiritually creative wise men of the organic community.

The "true state" as envisioned by Othmar Spann was to be built on the foundations of quality rather than quantity. Fundamentally, he proposed to replace the democratic concept of popular sovereignty with the idea of the "validity of the highest values," a notion finding political expression as the "rule of the best." The best form of government, according to the Austrian sociologist, allowed the "best" individuals to rule. As in Plato's ideal state, class antagonisms were to be eliminated, not by abolishing the differences between men, but by

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., pp. 211-213.
accentuating them. 47 Adherence to an ascetic code of moral behavior was to distinguish the rulers from the ruled. These born leaders, with crystal-clear minds and pure hearts, were to display a wisdom and nobility enabling them to live in the "spiritual" atmosphere of loneliness and supreme responsibility. 48 This sensitive elite would voluntarily subordinate their own needs and ambitions for the whole community. Sensing the needs of the entire collectivity through an acute spiritual awareness, the intellectual rulers would direct the great, relatively inert mass whose main concerns in life were material rather than idealistic. 49

Rulers in the "true state" were not to direct the mundane affairs of everyday life; they would, instead, relegate specific details to the estate leaders. These leaders would possess many of the same qualities the middle ages had required of its lords of the manor who acted as judges, administrators, and military commanders all at the same time. Heroic, decisive personalities would characterize these guild and corporate leaders, for they had to be able to demand unconditional obedience

49 Spann, Der wahre Staat, p. 163.
from the members of their estate at all times. Embodying the talents and ideas of the state, they could speak for the entire nation in all matters of internal and external political policy. Sharing the same general skills as the men they governed, these group commanders would be able to concentrate on the actual problems of masterful, wise, and just rule within each corporative body. This system would allow the cobbler to rule "in the sphere of cobblerish," and, according to the Viennese professor, would institute a "new form of equality—an equality between human beings who really are equal among themselves."  

The Austrian social philosopher felt that the lowest estate, the masses, needed energetic and forceful leadership because of its utter inability to cope with the great spiritual and intellectual issues of the times. He described the great masses of people as being "merely united in the pool of sensual and vital life," expressing their "fabric of urges... in public houses, at vulgar home parties, at popular amusements, in cinemas." He traced this deterioration of the proletariat directly to the nineteenth century liberal-democratic societies which had robbed the worker of his dignity and sense of security. As a member of the

\(^{50}\) Ibid., p. 236.


\(^{52}\) Quoted in ibid., p. 96.
corporate estate of producers in a "true state," the worker would once again be "a king at his turning-lathe."  

53 Restored to the compassionate body of society, no longer would the worker belong to a narrow interest-group: instead, he would function as one of several organic segments of a harmonious social totality. This totality would, however, be flexible enough to allow for individual creativity. For example, the skills of an artisan class would be consciously encouraged. In essence, Spann proposed a return to the traditional pre-industrial values of life and work, thus making possible a restoration of the spirituality he felt had been seized from the masses during the preceding century.  

Another expression of the "true state's" lofty goals was its organized method of political expression. Voting would be essentially a spiritual matter; as expressions of quality, votes would be "weighed" rather than counted. Although they had obtained the right to vote, the European masses were thoroughly incompetent to decide the relative validity of the complex social and intellectual issues of the time; likewise "the people" were incapable of choosing qualified representatives. Majority rule always resulted in the precedence of inferior over superior


values; only the qualitative "weighing" of votes would allow spiritual
values to emerge as the dominant force in society.

Like its citizens, the "true state's" economy would also be
hierarchically organized. Property restrictions would ensure a re-
latively stable society within this future corporate state. Regulation
of property, politically and emotionally manipulated in liberal societies,
would be rationally and legally controlled in an organic order; the
emphasis would always be on use for the entire community. Wealth
would belong to one of three categories. The first classification of
property would include resources in private hands which served a gen-
quine social function. Such private property would be strictly regulated
by the corporative organs most affected by its specific usage. Most
property, however, would not be owned but would only be loaned to
individuals in the community. Property of particular value and
importance to the whole social body, such as heavy machinery, would
be held in the form of a fief (Lehen), that is to say, it would be alloted
in somewhat the same way as feudal tenures were granted during the
middle ages. The individual who received such property would have
full use of it, being aware at the same time that the community which
assigned the fief must receive adequate services in return. The third

56 Spann, Der wahre Staat, pp. 111-112.
kind of wealth was to be directly owned, operated, and controlled by
local and municipal bodies, corporative organs, and the state itself. 58

Just as property regulation was to ensure stability, so social
organization would also limit economic vicissitudes. Spann anticipated
tensions arising from conflicts of interest between the different estates,
and he felt that some discord was essential to keep a society alive and
ready to meet new challenges. He believed, however, that the funda-
mental spiritual ties cementing the corporate body would override conflicts
of interest between the different groups. Specifically he organized the
members of his "True State" into large economic units which would deal
with one another as closed bodies. For example, worker organizations
would bargain with cartel-like employers' groups to reach industry-wide
contracts (Gesamtarbeitsvertrage) benefitting all of society. 59 A great
many potential conflicts could be resolved in a corporative society on the
spiritual level because a spirit of morality derived from the eternal
source of "total spirituality" (das Gesamtgeistige) lay at the heart of
social relationships in a universalistic Ständestaat. Spann believed that
since both the individual and the totality received sustenance from the
same moral source of total spirituality, their interests were harmoniously
fused; threats to the individual member's well-being endangered the

58 Ibid.
59 Spann, Der wahre Staat, pp. 35 and 256.
corporate body's moral integrity as well. In his universalist state, relationships between individuals and the community were grounded in the morality of spiritual essences rather than in "mechanistic" contractual agreements. 60

Not only social relationships would reflect the loftiness of the human spiritual forces, for throughout history, the Austrian sociologist believed, the organic state had been an expression of the Idea of the Good. As an "organism of a higher kind," 61 Spann's "true state" would be morally omnipotent and omnicompetent. As a profoundly rich and mysterious collection of moral relationships, the state would require no external sanctions to justify its majesty, not even that of religion and the church. The highest form of spiritual and intellectual unity was achieved in a "cultural state" (Kulturstaat) in which all national energies were brought together in a single entity. Not only would this future Kulturstaat deal with purely mechanical and administrative matters, it would also foster the growth of intellectual and spiritual ties between its individual members. 62 In essence, the Austrian political philosopher conceived of the state as a political entity eventually transforming itself into a moral and ethical community tying man to the eternal and absolute

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60 Ibid., pp. 46-48.


62 Spann, Der wahre Staat, p. 66.
forces present in the universe. Othmar Spann created his "True State" to replace what he believed to be a rapacious social and economic system predicated solely on ego-tistic principles of personal enrichment. By dominating the German-speaking areas of Central Europe, the capitalistic form of economic individualism had violated a profoundly rich and meaningful network of social relationships. Incalculable damage had been done to the traditional social order of the German people; the destruction of the harmonious balance of their corporative society threatened the viability of their Kultur. The economy of unchecked capitalism had enthroned strife and conflict as the sovereign principle of social interaction. For Spann, the entire system was a "barbarous, brutal, and bloodthirsty" form of economic Machiavellianism. Permanently at the mercy of the winds of change and a violence-prone proletariat ready to strike down their tormentors, capitalism was clearly unacceptable to reasonable and sensitive human beings like himself.

Spann saw suffering from "insecurity, rootlessness, and insignificance" in capitalistic society. While this economic system could produce an almost unlimited amount of goods, it offered no

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66 Spann, *Der wahre Staat*, pp. 69-70 and 127.
security, status, or spiritual goals. Capitalism had effectively cut
the bonds between man's spiritual life and the organization of his
society; by separating human action from its metaphysical wellsprings,
capitalism had "externalized" life. Although he was poorer in the
material sense, as a member of a guild of producers the medieval
journeyman had felt a sense of pride in his work because he had be-
longed to an estate firmly rooted in society. The modern industrial
worker was richer materially, but as a despised proletariat he led an
insecure, uprooted, and spiritually impoverished life. The spiritual
aridity of modern industrial society was one of the truly great outrages
of human history for the Austrian conservative because here was
loneliness in the midst of crowded cities, and unhappiness in the midst
of material affluence. In a society which knew little else but constant
change and social transformation, much if not most wealth was ephemeral.
Because it destroyed the spiritual heart of human existence, capitalism
was a moral malady striking down the rich as well as the poor. 67

The seeds of democracy and Marxism had sprouted side by side
in the soil of capitalism, Spann believed. Both of these systems were
political manifestations of an atomistic spirit which did not allow the
existence of society as a supra-individual and spiritual entity. Both

67 Ibid.
Marxism and democracy erroneously organized society on the atomistic and mechanistic principle of mass involvement in the state's inner workings. Both systems threatened future spiritual development in Europe, and the Austrian corporatist determined that they must be annihilated. 68

Democratic inclusion of the people in the governing process increased instability which was inherent trait of the masses as far as Spann was concerned. This volatility was reflected in the democratic political practice of turning great numbers of officials out of office after elections. 69 Democracy's worst aspect, however, was its employment of the most despicable human instincts as a normal political practice. This system's leadership clique had a vested interest in maintaining an inert and passive citizenry so that it could retain power. The so-called "will of the people" was, in actual fact, the cynical manipulation of mass gullibility. Because democratic society excluded spiritual qualities and prevented the development of an organic consciousness, the sociologist predicted that its citizens were fated never to come of age politically. In a mass society, they could never achieve higher qualitative plane. 70

Democracy was also objectionable because it allowed quantity rather than quality to be the decisive factor in political decisions. Every individual, no matter how profound his mind or soul, possessed

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., pp. 89-94.
the right to cast only one ballot; this system equated a Nietzsche with a shoe-shine boy and sacrificed the truth to the capricious emotions of the mob. It was, in the Austrian professor's opinion, impossible to form a state from the sum-total of separate, individual wills. Pure democracy, according to Spann, had been rejected by great philosophers and poets from Plato to Goethe, and could never be put into political practice.  

The most extreme form of democracy for Professor Spann was Marxism, which he described as the hideous and misshapen child of classical individualistic philosophy. Although Karl Marx had theoretically emphasized the social body rather than the individual, he was, in reality, a loyal member of the individualistic school of social thought. Marxism's basic flaw was its materialistic view of man and society; it only saw man as a creature whose personality was economically determined by his class, a mere homo oeconomicus. Marx's theory of economic determinism and environmental influences completely negated the spiritual forces that Spann had found within each individual and society. Economic determinism's second major flaw, according to the Viennese scholar, was the concept of a classless society which would

\[71\text{Ibid.} \]
eventually replace the organized state. This belief could only lead to the collapse of society and the victory of the forces of anarchy.

Empiricism and relativism, the universalistic philosopher declared, had blinded the father of communism to the reality of eternally valid social and spiritual forces. 72

Othmar Spann believed the dual dangers of capitalism and Marxism could be avoided only if society were reconstructed. His alternative to the destructive capitalistic and communistic systems was a society constructed on corporative principles. This, he believed, was the only viable solution to the age-old problem of man's relationship both to his fellow-men and to the moral community known as the state. He was convinced that his "true state" would merge state and society into one harmonious organic union. As a member of the social totality, each individual would occupy his "proper" place; no matter how little talent or spirituality a person possessed, he could always be fitted into the proper hierarchical rank. The basic principle of this society would not be the freedom of liberalism, but that of pure justice itself. Spann did not conceive of justice as equality; his was the Aristotelian concept of "distributive justice" or "suum cuique" ("to each according to his due."). 73 Because the spirit of universalism


had dominated all great civilizations of the past, the Austrian economist believed that this spirit had to be revived in order to renew the bonds which had once united men to their community. Viewing man as fundamentally a creature of the spirit (Geist), Spann reasoned that all social organization should eventually reflect this spirituality. In the final analysis, his "true state" was a spiritual alternative to the materialism he felt inevitably led to political and social chaos.

Almost without realizing it, Spann had long been exposed to the basic themes of Austrian conservatism. There can be little doubt that his father, a small-scale manufacturer, felt threatened by larger, better organized, and better financed industrial competition. The son could not but respond to some of the vague yet ever-present anti-capitalist sentiment prevailing in almost all sectors of the population. As he grew older, he became more convinced that modern industrial society lacked the vital spark of inspiration and spiritual cohesion which had characterized other materially poorer yet spiritually richer societies. Rejection of the "mechanistic" aspects of the modern industrialized world was at the heart of the message Spann began delivering in the 1920's.

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In Der wahre Staat, published in 1921, the Austrian social philosopher endeavored to ground his ideal society in hard economic fact. The future corporative order's building blocks would consist of workers' trade guilds and employers' cartels. Its parliament would represent economic and social interest groups rather than political parties. United in serving the totality of society, these groups would accurately reflect the whole nation's concerns. Secure in their respective social niches, the citizens of a corporative society would all feel part of a great ethical Gemeinschaft; their feeling of "belonging" would assure social stability.

Spann's book filled a void which had existed in Austrian conservative thought for a number of years. In this work he consciously attempted to infuse conservative social theory with new life by returning to what he believed had been the original source of its strength: the spirit of idealism originating with Platonic philosophy. The Viennese professor believed this idealistic spirit had found its highest practical expression during the European middle ages and had attained its greatest intellectual development in the early nineteenth century, when the Central European Romanticist thinkers formulated a specifically German way of looking at man and his place in the universe.
The philosophy of universalism would aid the German people in their hour of need. Corporatism, Spann felt, would enable the German-speaking people of Central Europe to unite and become a great European nation. Once they had overcome the scourges of democracy, socialism, and Bolshevism, the Germans could take up their traditional role in Central Europe: extending German cultural, political, and economic hegemony. In the balkanized Central Europe which had emerged after 1918, the Austrian professor predicted that only German power could create permanent social and political order. Poland, Bohemia, Hungary and the South Slav region, including even Greece, must be restored to their former status as German fiefs. 75

Der wahre Staat was in many ways a blueprint for a new society which Spann believed was destined to bring a new Western cultural spirit to the East of Europe. Germans should not ask for equality; they should demand a greater share of power and responsibility than the world's other peoples in order to fulfill their cultural mission. 76

In preparation for this role, the idealistic professor felt that the Germans were duty-bound to reconstruct the internal social order.

75 Spann, Der wahre Staat (1921 ed.), pp. 101-102
which had once made them the leading nation in Europe.

It could be argued that Spann's *Der wahre Staat* was one of the last books in a long line of inclusive systems, for "up to about 1920 no sharp division between literature and social science had been drawn, and the intellectual still felt himself as free as Goethe to roam at will throughout the varied domains of human activity." 77 Although the Austrian intellectual addressed himself to specific problems of social dissolution in post-defeat Austria and Germany, the great sweep of his book was very much in the "great inclusive system" tradition. Its author claimed to have found universally valid laws of social behavior, valid at least in the German-speaking world. These laws which allowed an analysis of the problems societies faced served at the same time as a grand blueprint for the reconstruction of Germanic culture on solid and idealistic foundations.

Within a few years after the publication of *Der wahre Staat*, the "builders of great inclusive systems" 78 such as Spann's were to be increasingly on the defensive as conceptions of the intellectual's precise role in European society changed. After Spann's generation it


proved more and more difficult
to maintain that a major writer should concern
himself with the whole range of human problems--
that he should survey with Olympian calm the
social doings of his fellow men and, after a
suitable parade of literary and historical learn-
ing, and a minimum of reflection on his presup-
positions, come to certain majestic conclusions
about what constituted the true, the beautiful,
and the good.

The degree of "Olympian calm" which Othmar Spann surveyed
Europe during the 1920's and 1930's, and the intensity of his desire
selflessly to infuse Austria and Germany with what he defined as
spiritual ideals can, in the final analysis, only be measured by the
man himself. The historian can only attempt to document the impact
of this thinker on his own times, tracing his conscious attempts to
deal with one of the eternal dilemmas of the intellectual desiring to
be a man of affairs: that of the transformation of ideas into historical
deeds. Whether or not Spann abused his position as a major intellectual
figure in Central Europe is a question history has already abundantly
answered.

Ibid., pp. 404-405.
CHAPTER III
PROFESSOR AND PROPHET

When the final shots were fired and the trenches were at last emptied, a new generation, molded by history's first World War, wended its way back to civilian society only to find the secure world Europe had known in 1914 now racked by anarchy, civil disorder, and starvation. During their absence thrones had toppled, entire social systems had been transformed, and old values and beliefs had disappeared. After four years of traumatic blood-letting, these young members of the "front generation" wondered whether their struggle had been in vain and asked themselves if their sacrifices had only led to the disasters now sweeping Central Europe. Where was the new and just social order for which the war had supposedly been fought? In this atmosphere of disappointment, tragedy, and extreme expectation, these uprooted men, whose vague yearnings for "totality" (Ganzheit) had emerged from the crucible of war, grasped for new ideas.1

Battle-scarred veterans returned to the University of Vienna after the war hoping to pick up the threads of civilian life.

Habituated to hatred and violence, these restless ex-soldiers were

characterized by their "readiness for action." They expected to find the same heroic and exhilarating ideals at home as they had known at the front. Ideologies flourished in this prevailing atmosphere of expectation. As a young man only in his early forties and a war veteran himself, Othmar Spann appealed to these students' emotional exuberance. The idea of a "true state" ruled by "naturally superior" leaders was attractive to a generation which had taken on the supreme responsibility of defending the nation. In many ways these ex-soldier students could identify with their professor and his idealistic ideas.

Beginning with his inaugural address at the University of Vienna in May, 1919, Spann's lectures were little short of sensational. Students searching for new ideals packed one of the university's largest lecture halls to hear an intellectual who had mastered the wisdom of the past and yet was also passionately concerned about the problems of the present. His lecture style enraptured his students. Entering the hall with quick, nervous steps, the corporatist philosopher first scanned the hall, a questioning look on his face, before he began to lecture. Then,

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he began to talk. Initially, the words came slowly; the phrases formed themselves only with difficulty. Soon, however, the flow of ideas became smooth, controlled, and coherent. Spann's remarkable eyes, piercing and penetrating, seemed transfigured as if they glowed from an inner spiritual force. His face, crossed with "lines of mimicry," appeared to be that of an artist's because of its sculptured features.⁶ Although his voice was too high in pitch,⁷ the lecturer's vigorous platform style amply compensated for this blemish. More than an academic lecturer, Spann was for many of his students a public personality in the tradition of the Viennese popular stage.⁸ In sum, he fascinated and excited his students not only as a thinker but also as a human being.

The Viennese professor consciously attempted to impress his students with the possibilities of turning ideas into deeds, for he believed that dedicated intellectuals could lead a nation to greatness. He chose to pattern his academic career after that of the German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), a man who in Spann's eyes had successfully implemented his ideas in the world of practical affairs. When the German nation was dissolving all around him, Fichte had created a new national spirit with his Reden an die deutsche Nation, a series of lectures delivered at the University of Berlin in

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⁶ Von Salomon, Fragebogen, p. 92.

⁷ Letter to the author from Maria Hartlieb, Vienna, October 26, 1968.

the winter of 1807-1808. His thinking had, Spann believed, awakened
the dormant national feeling in the educated classes of Germany.
Fichte's spirit had inspired young Germans to agitate vigorously and
aggressively for national unity and strength. 9 Lecturing before a
similarly helpless and humiliated people, the young sociologist felt
that he, like his illustrious predecessor, 10 would also be able to re-
infuse the German intellectual classes with knowledge of their past
achievements so that once again they could rise to spiritual greatness
and lead the civilized world. 11

Spann's ideas, like those of his model - Fichte - were popular
among students whose imaginations were fired by the concept of a new
social order. Students who fancied themselves as members of the
intellectual avant-garde felt that the economic philosopher's corpora-
tive theories would solve the problems plaguing the German people.
Corporatism, they believed, would replace divisive parliamentarianism
imported from the West with a specifically German form of organic
democracy. Bound to the soil and to age-old German cultural
traditions, the new organic community described by the popular
lecturer would replace the anemic formal democracy of the Austrian

9 Friedrich C. Sell, Die Tragodie des deutschen Liberalismus
(Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1953), p. 89.


11 Spann, Vom Wesen des Volkstums, pp. 35-37; Räber, Othmar
Spann's Philosophie des Universalismus, p. 10.
and German republics with a vigorous hierarchical society led by a charismatic leader.  

Students of all political persuasions flocked to the vigorous young professor's lectures on "economics." Catholic students who were members of the "CV" (Cartellverband katholischer Korporationen) came to hear a description of a society in which spiritual forces were sovereign; deeply struck by his fusion of intellect and faith, this group accepted Spann as one of its leaders.  

The Pan-German Deutsche Studentenschaft, an anti-Semitic student association, was also attracted to the economist's corporative system although he himself rarely if ever voiced strong anti-Semitic sentiments.  

The prestigious Deutscher Hochschulring, a nationalistic student organization claiming to represent German and Austrian university groups, invited the Austrian thinker to speak at its meetings as its members regarded Spann, along with Oswald Spengler and Edgar J. Jung, as one of mass democracy's most eloquent critics.  

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14 Robert Körber, Ostmarkischer Freiheitsgeist (Vienna: Selbstverlag, 1927), pp. 144 and 149.

Members of conservative and Pan-German student associations attending the University of Vienna shared the professor's corporative ideas with German-speaking academic communities throughout Central Europe. They concretely expressed their desire for Austro-German unity by exchanging permanent editors and contributors to student publications with their like-minded contemporaries in Germany. A number of these Pan-German magazines and newspapers featured articles about the Austro-German "true state" of the future.\textsuperscript{16}

Nationalistic professors included Der wahre Staat as well as other works by the Viennese economist on their reading lists.\textsuperscript{17} One of the most influential Pan-German professors of the day, the historian Georg von Below, ardently supported his conservative colleague in Austria,\textsuperscript{18} praising him as a truly nationally-minded and patriotic scholar who had almost singlehandedly revived the great social insights of German Romanticism.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{17} Volk in Not! Ein Weck- und Mahnruf der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der völkischen Akademiker-Verbände des deutschen Sprachgebiets (2nd ed., Elberfeld: Bergische Druckerei und Verlagsanstalt, 1925), p. 82.


students and professors believed that the concept of a totalistic German culture developed by the Viennese social philosopher would transcend the political boundaries dividing the great German people.

Corporate universalism's appeal was not limited to student organizations; members of the clergy were also attracted to Othmar Spann's social philosophy. One young cleric popular among student circles at the University of Vienna was the Jesuit preacher Anton Stonner. Employing a universalistic vocabulary in his sermon, this young priest became extremely popular as a student chaplain. Stonner so impressed the father of universalism that the young cleric was invited to sign up for Spann's weekly private seminar, a special privilege accorded only to his most promising students.\textsuperscript{20} The Jesuit attempted to combine the traditional religious conception of the community with elements of radical post-war nationalism. He prophesied that the national spirit of Gemeinschaft would one day restore German glory.\textsuperscript{21} Stonner's vision of a universalistic spiritual rebirth of the German nation found an enthusiastic audience in Viennese conservative circles.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Interview with Raphael Spann, Vienna, May 10, 1968.


Although Othmar Spann received enthusiastic support from many
groups and individuals, almost from the successful commencement of
his teaching career he himself hoped to implement his ideas through a
small, devoted circle of followers. These devoted disciples, possess-
ing the intellectual gifts and moral integrity Spann deemed essential for
a spiritual elite, were selected to disseminate his message of a "true
state" throughout Central Europe. This Kreis (circle of like-minded
individuals) developed from the economist's exclusive private seminar
which was held in his apartment every Sunday morning. To ensure
purity of intellect within the group, the professor demanded long and
difficult assignments from his chosen pupils. The seminar concentrated
on a historical survey of great thinkers which commenced with Plato
and concluded with the Romanticists. During these Sunday morning
meetings, the master transmitted his universalistic concepts to his
disciples. Since his ideas were simply "the truth," they were not
discussed; furthermore, the master did not like to be contradicted.

The members of the Kreis themselves were drawn to the
universalistic system because they felt it was a valid explanation of,
and a workable alternative to, the social chaos surrounding them.

23 Hans Riehl, "Walter Heinrich, sein Leben und sein Werk im
Dienste der Zeit," in Festschrift Walter Heinrich. Ein Beitrag zur
Ganzheitsforschung (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1963),
pp. 2-3.

24 Letter to the author from Josef Dobretsberger, Vienna,
March 12, 1968.
The Austrian philosopher's interpretation of sociology and economics was for them a passionate prophecy which foretold of a spiritual, moral, and social rebirth of all German-speaking people. Many members of the circle were to remain committed to Spann's corporative-spiritualist philosophy throughout their lives.

As recently as 1967, one Kreis member, Jakob Baxa, described himself as a loyal and devoted disciple of his "unforgettable teacher and friend Othmar Spann."^{25} Baxa returned to Vienna in 1919 as a war veteran wishing to resume his studies; immediately the ex-soldier came under the spell of the charismatic founder of universalism. Working with great determination in libraries and archives, he became one of the foremost authorities on the German Romantics' political and social thought. Although his neo-Romanticist teacher had become familiar with Adam Müller's ideas as early as 1907, it was his enthusiastic student Baxa who introduced the economist to the full range of Romanticist social theory.^{26} Seriously wounded in combat, Spann's young student lost his hearing, so he rarely engaged in political controversies and discussions. Totally committed to the idea of universalism as formulated by his magnetic teacher, he was generally

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^{25} Letter to the author from Jakob Baxa, Maria-Enzersdorf bei Wien, July 12, 1967.

regarded by other members of the Vienna Kreis as the group's most assiduous scholar.

Another student who tirelessly disseminated his master's ideas was Hans Riehl (1891-1965), one of Spann's most important and influential collaborators. Scion of a family of lawyers (his grandfather had been a representative at the Frankfurt Assembly of 1848), Riehl chose not to pursue legal studies despite family pressure. He decided instead to study under the dynamic social theorist, whom he had met earlier at Brünn in 1913. After receiving his doctorate in political science in 1923, the young graduate divided his time thereafter between studying medieval Austrian art and architecture and administering several substantial private libraries. After marrying a daughter of Anton Apold, general director of the German-controlled mining and smelting corporation, the Alpine-Montagesellschaft, he was able to establish close contacts with leaders of German and Austrian heavy industry which proved to be valuable to the Spann Kreis. Riehl's public utterances often emphasized the key role business and industrial leaders would be assigned in a universalistic society.


28 Ibid., pp. 249-250.

Wilhelm Andreae (1888-1962), another member of the inner circle of the universalistic Kreis, also had influential business connections. Although he had been trained to direct the family company, a shipping line on the Elbe, Andreae decided to liquidate his commercial undertakings after receiving his doctorate from the University of Breslau in 1921 so as to devote full time to mastering universalistic philosophy. After completing his studies under Spann in Vienna, he taught at the University of Graz from 1926 to 1933, and at the University of Giessen from 1933 to 1942. He distinguished himself as a translator and editor of Plato's writings. In addition he was the author of several academic studies in economic theory. Like Baxa, Andreae was essentially a scholar who rarely engaged in political dialogues. Only his discussions about corporatism's advantages touched upon day-to-day politics.

Spann's best student and closest collaborator in the Kreis was without doubt Walter Heinrich (1902- ). Born in the Bohemian industrial town of Haida, Heinrich witnessed the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the incorporation of a large German minority in the Czechoslovak

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Republic. Because Sudeten-Germans continued to recognize Vienna, rather than Prague or Berlin, as their cultural and intellectual capital, Heinrich began his studies in the old Habsburg city in 1921. Formerly a member of the romantically inclined Sudeten-German youth movement, he soon became active in the conservative and nationalistic Pan-German fraternity, Deutsch-Akademische Gildenschaft (D. H. G. "Freischar," later known as the D. H. G. "Thule"). Shortly after his arrival at the University, Spann noted the young student's abilities and invited him to join his exclusive seminar. An intimate intellectual relationship soon developed between the two men. After the corporative philosopher's death in 1950, Heinrich took up his mantle as the leader of the universalistic school of thought.

An unofficial yet influential member of the circle was the economist's wife, Erika Spann-Rheinsch (1880-1967). A poetess and student of mystical phenomena, her artistic temperament was of decisive importance in the development of her husband's intellectual interests; in the early years of their marriage they collaborated on several artistic enterprises.

By the 1920's her solid reputation as a poetess, as well as her dramatic conversion to Catholicism, made her a public personality in Vienna, where she frequently gave poetry readings to the influential Leo-Gesellschaft.  Her poetry, describing "spiritual adventures among immanent mysteries and presences," found some of its mystical sources in Chinese and Indian philosophy. Frau Spann was at the same time interested in the political developments of her time, and her verse revealed strong patriotic sentiments. Poems like her "Erzengel Deutschlands" prophesied a rebirth of the German spirit, cleansed once and for all of its materialistic weaknesses. Throughout their life together, she maintained a lively interest in her spouse's philosophical endeavors.

Universalism united the Spann Kreis in action as well as in thought. After the publication of Der wahre Staat in 1921, Spann decided to codify and systematize the roots from which his theories drew nourishment. He proposed to issue in one series fundamental writings in the social sciences which characterized "all times and all peoples." He recruited his most brilliant seminar students, as well as authorities in other fields, to edit works which he felt expressed eternally valid social concepts.

37 Jahrbuch der österreichischen Leo-Gesellschaft 1931, p. 244.
The series, entitled Die Herdflamme ("The Hearth Flame") first presented Jakob Baxa' edition of Adam Müller's Elemente der Staatskunst in 1922. Later volumes included selections from Plato, Augustine, and the great German Romanticist and nationalist intellectuals of the early nineteenth century. The purpose of the Herdflamme series was to inform Central Europe's intellectual elite of the metaphysical and organic conceptions of state and society which had distinguished all great social theory throughout history. It was believed that, once disseminated, these eternally valid social principles would give German-speaking peoples a new basis for revitalizing their view of man's social nature.  

Othmar Spann's circle attempted to disseminate its corporative theories through organizations as well as through publications. Beginning in June, 1923, the Viennese student association, Hochschulring Deutscher Art, which was dominated by the universalistic philosopher's disciples, sponsored an annual course in the theory and practice of national politics. The lectures were given in an abandoned and highly picturesque Carthusian monastery located near the Lower Austrian mountain village of Gaming.  


An established institution by the late 1920's, these meetings, called Gaminger Wochen, usually featured Spann and Heinrich as the major speakers. After the addresses, smaller circles were formed to discuss the question of leadership and the diffusion of the Standestaat idea in Austria, Germany, and the Sudetenland. Members of German heavy industry, as well as students, were attracted to the Gaminger Wochen because they believed Spann's elitist conceptions were compatible with their own view of society. A number of industrial leaders offered to subsidize these extended seminars. Judging from their longevity and popularity, these subsidies were accepted.

Spann, a young man in his forties, enjoyed a popularity few professors have known. Always lecturing before a packed hall, his every observation was noted by avid listeners. Students sought the popular teacher even outside the classroom, inviting him to expound his philosophy before their fraternities and organizations. So many were ardent admirers that the professor could select the very best for his Sunday morning seminar. Even after receiving their degrees, these seminar students remained devoted to their master, forming a Kreis around him and disseminating his ideas through journals and meetings. Surrounded by student disciples,

admiring colleagues, and even industrial tycoons, idolized by a circle of his most promising disciples, the philosophical creator of universalism had only to wait for the right moment to establish his "true state."

Popularity, however, did not immunize Othmar Spann from intellectual critics who challenged the universalistic system. Not all students at the University of Vienna had fallen under his magnetic spell. A minority of liberal, radical, and socialist (as well as Jewish) students viewed him as little more than an up-to-date Austrian version of the ultra-nationalistic professor Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896). They felt that the chauvinism inherent in Spann's thinking had been primarily responsible for the great debacle of 1914. Some socialist students carried their opposition into the popular lecturer's classroom scraping and shuffling their feet while he talked. His most determined student critics went so far as to attempt to pelt him with rocks. Some faculty members were likewise at odds with their flamboyant colleague. Two Viennese scholars in particular carried on a running debate with the neo-Romanticist economist


--Hans Kelsen, who defended middle-class parliamentary democracy, and Max Adler, who criticized universalism from a socialistic viewpoint. 46

Critics of Spann's system emphasized that he had ignored much of the sociological and economic knowledge available to scholars. By depending on generalized idealistic concepts dating back to Plato, Aristotle, and the Christian philosophers Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, Spann, they claimed, had ignored the scientific world-view common to all educated Western intellectuals. For him, the only valuable ideas produced in the nineteenth century came from its first third, when the German Romanticists had revived the idealistic philosophy and faith of antiquity and the middle ages. His ideological conservatism had blinded him to the scientific breakthroughs made during the latter part of the nineteenth century. 47

The Viennese professor's contemporaries also attacked his ideal corporative society as being essentially grounded in non-empirical, static concepts strongly buttressed by faith. His use of the ideas of "organism" and "totality" had little to do with scientific, empirical observation of


facts. Rather than developing a useful research tool for the social sciences, the idol of Vienna's students had presented his contemporaries with nothing less than a system of belief, a blueprint for social redemption. 48 Most of the sociologists of the time felt that universalism was a description of an ideal world rather than a method of understanding existing societies. 49 Spann's insistence that all forms of causality were "mechanistic" 50 gave many of his colleagues the impression that this scholar was more of a "semi-religious prophet than a scientific sociologist." 51 His critics viewed him as a man out of place in the sciences, as a metaphysician and poet caught in the web of Romanticist mysticism. 52

Controversy over Spann's universalistic system also raged within Catholic intellectual circles. Even though the 1931 papal encyclical Quadragesimo anno apparently endorsed corporatism, a considerable number of Catholic thinkers questioned the desirability or the feasibility of instituting a corporative social and political system in Austria; some

48 Ibid., p. 96.
49 Ibid., pp. 13 and 83.
52 Herzog, Universalismus und Lohnproblem, p. v.
suggested that a Ständestaat organized along occupational lines would blur the necessary distinction between state and society and that in the ensuing confusion, traditional sovereignties would break down, the final result being anarchy. Some members of the Austrian church, such as Cardinal Piffl, voiced a quiet skepticism of the economist's social theories. The Cardinal feared the "true state" would be used only to deprive workers of their hard-earned social benefits.

Spann's major Catholic critic was the German Jesuit Oswald von Nell-Breuning, the principal spokesman for the German Catholic school of social thought known as Solidarism; supporters of this ideological position tended to think the Ständestaat notion was a Utopian fable. Nell-Breuning believed the modern industrial state was capable of dispensing considerable amounts of social justice, and he chided the Austrian philosopher for viewing society in romantic, rather than realistic, terms. For him, universalism was a false view of man's total nature because it emphasized the dominance of society over the individual.

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53 Raimund Günther, Diktatur oder Untergang (Vienna: Carl Konegen, 1930), pp. 26-34.


was seconded in his criticism of universalism by the Catholic intellectual Eberhard Welty, who felt that Spann had exaggerated the collectivity at the expense of the individual, and by the German thinker Jakob Hommes, who stated that the Austrian professor's system was collectivist, totalitarian, völkisch, and fundamentally anti-Catholic in its implications.

Although Austrian Socialists praised Othmar Spann's textbook on economic theory as late as 1919, the publication of Der wahre Staat in 1921 aroused the bitter hostility of Socialist intellectuals. Although they accepted the economics professor's earlier critiques of capitalism, the Socialists rejected his conviction that the "true", corporative state was the only possible alternative to Bolshevist chaos. They stated that Spann's talk of "spiritual essences" confused the masses' ability to understand the real problems facing them; his scholarly integrity could no longer be believed because he had openly sided with employers at the workers' 

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expense. For the Austrian Socialists, universalistic philosophy's "radical" rhetoric was a barely-disguised defense of the capitalistic status quo. 60

German and Austrian Socialist intellectuals viewed Othmar Spann as either a muddled metaphysician or a symbol of capitalistic despair whose scholarly work revealed a distressing lack of objectivity. They pointed out that books written by Marxists were not to be found in his bibliographies. 61 Because the Viennese professor used "daring new" definitions, analyses, and interpretations to defend the existing social order, he had become the darling of "bourgeois scholarship." Despite the fact that both Rudolf Hilferding and Joseph Schumpeter had been available to write an encyclopedia article on imperialism, these eminent scholars had been passed over; in their stead, the young Ständestaat philosopher had been chosen to write the article. For the Austrian Socialists such incidents clearly demonstrated the near-monopoly of communication which the propertied classes used to support scholars willing to defend their interests. 62

60 "Der Professor aus Wien," Arbeiter-Zeitung, March 15, 1922, pp. 2-3.


Many Socialist intellectuals felt that Spann's ideology was a clear expression of the last stages of a moribund society. The Hungarian-born literary critic Georg Lukács compared the Viennese economist's ideas to an ideological goulash which included everything "good and dear," to quote the philosopher himself, from the Upanishads of India to Neo-Kantianism. 63 Using the terminology of Scholasticism, the conservative intellectual had combined authority based on traditional social hierarchies with the techniques of capitalist efficiency (the "Taylor system"). 64 Lukács found it impossible to take the father of universalism seriously; in his opinion, Spann's extensive borrowing of ideas from the entire history of philosophical thought had no purpose other than to serve as window-dressing for modern capitalism.

Other Socialist scholars felt that Spann lacked an understanding of his own age. For the Marxist social philosopher Ernst Bloch, he had little or no sense of the post-1918 world's revolutionary spirit; the author of Der wahre Staat was an unimpressive reincarnation of the political theologians


64 Ibid., pp. 302-306. Lukács characterizes Spann as an "episodic" reactionary ideologist of the years before 1933 and believes that the static idea of a Standestaat was incompatible with Hitlerite "imperialistic capitalism." Letter to the author from Georg Lukács, Budapest, August 12, 1967.
who had peddled their wares during the Austrian Vormärz era. The popular Viennese lecturer was merely expounding another version of the patriarchal "anti-capitalism" which had flourished in Central Europe since the early nineteenth century. Himself a student of the Utopian spirit, 65 Bloch declared that Spann was living in a muddled world of intellectual and emotional illusions. 66

The Austrian Socialist leader Otto Bauer was also able to detect an overwhelming nostalgia for an idealized past in the neo-Romanticist ideology of universalism. The grave social and economic dislocations that had plagued Austria since 1914, Bauer felt, bestowed an air of apparent stability on Spann's theories. Ruined by war and inflation, the old Austrian professional and bureaucratic elite desperately wanted a society which would give them the stability and security they had enjoyed before the war. This wing-collar proletariat sought to escape Central European chaos through a belief in Spann's "true state." This ideological phenomena, Bauer believed, symbolized better than any other the "flight


of a bourgeois intelligentsia ruined by currency devaluation into a Romanticist ideal." 67

Carl von Ossietzky, a brilliant contributor to the German liberal journal Weltbühne, also observed the revolt of insecure segments of the middle class against postwar industrial civilization. For these uprooted members of society, everything which appeared to grant stability and security became "organic." But what, Ossietzky asked, was uniquely "organic" about a return to medieval guilds and estates? How would an independent butcher in Spann's Ständestaat be a better human being than a wage-earning urban industrial worker? Ossietzky doubted whether this Austrian social philosopher understood any of the problems facing the proletariat. 68

Many Socialists refused to criticize Spann systematically. Ernst von Aster declared that he was embarrassed to read most of the corporatist philosopher's works, much less write a polemic against them. 69 Those who criticized universalistic concepts felt that corporatism was


a conscious attempt on the part of the capitalist class to harness the
class-conscious proletariat to the vague idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft*
and wean them from their Marxist convictions. The hierarchical class
structures central to corporative theories were in the minds of Marxist
intellectuals a return to medieval thinking and a desperate middle-class
attempt to avoid imminent destruction.

Throughout the 1920's Othmar Spann was both a charismatic and
controversial figure at the University of Vienna. His "true state" was
either ardently accepted or passionately rejected in Austrian and German
academic circles. The new social order his disciples glimpsed was
violently repudiated by their Marxist counterparts, intent upon realizing
their own Utopia. Dramatically uttered in a crowded lecture hall, Spann's
words were heard, faintly at first, then with increasing volume outside
university walls. As in the classroom, these words evoked hopes and
hatreds. Afraid and confused, intellectuals from the German-speaking
middle classes grasped desperately for the security they felt a universal-
salistic society might offer—just as the Socialists feared they would.
Corporatism germinated in the lecture hall, but it grew and flourished
in bourgeois homes and apartments. Othmar Spann's disciples carried
his idealistic banner; the wing-collar proletariat left his legacy to the
world.

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70 Josef Hofbauer, "Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront," Der Kampf.
CHAPTER IV
ACADEMICIAN AS POLITICIAN

After the Great War shattered Europe's "golden age of security," the political consequences were immediate. Schemes for new social orders sprang up like mushrooms after a summer rain. These plans promised to eliminate corruption and general weakness, class struggles and civil strife either through a Marxist proletarian dictatorship or by strong, authoritarian conservative leadership. Regardless of their political orientation, European thinkers shared the belief that nineteenth century values were no longer valid in the postwar world. They felt that the survivors must transform the materialistic industrial civilization which had turned upon itself during four cataclysmic years of bloodshed.

War, revolution, and inflation had brought ruin and despair to large segments of the formerly secure middle classes, particularly in Central Europe. Young men from this social background were especially bitter. Alienated from the beliefs of their fathers, they rejected both the monarchical past and the republican present. Feeling out of place in a highly complex, rationalized, and unstable society, they believed in the necessity

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of a "conservative revolution." Dispossessed both materially and spiritually, they desired a new social order, one "unpolluted" by democratic parliamentarianism or Marxian socialism. ³ They sought a "profound" sense of sociality (Bindung), a feeling of wholeness or organic interaction (Ganzheit), and, above all else, a rediscovery of social unity (Einheit). ⁴ These young men's radical and conscious break with generations of historical development has been characterized by the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal as a "conservative revolution of a dimension . . . surpassing anything that European history has seen so far." ⁵

It was only natural that many young intellectuals came to regard Othmar Spann's social philosophy as a real means to radically alter Europe's unsatisfactory state after 1918. During the later 1920's and early 1930's enthusiastic members of the young generation in Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland actively began to disseminate the Viennese social philosopher's ideas. Corporatism was not immediately accepted in older, more wary circles, but throughout the 1920's a growing number

³ Karl Landauer et al., Internationaler Faschismus (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1928), p. 52.


of mature Germans accepted universalistic concepts. During this decade Spann's followers slowly wove a complex and unwieldy web of relationships which enmeshed intellectuals, industrialists, conservative provincial private armies, and Pan-German organizations. The speeches, pamphlets, and books of Spann's young disciples all proclaimed one message to these disparate groups--the German people must renounce alien Western ideas and return to the authentic essence of their being. They must repudiate Western rationalism, science, and industrial technology so as to immerse themselves once again in the wellsprings of traditional beliefs.

In Germany proper several segments of the population shared Spann's apprehension about the disappearance of established values. One particularly important group was the Junker class, which found the Austrian professor's concept of a stable elite thoroughly compatible with their own social thinking. The Junker squirearchy identified with the "true state's" small and self-conscious ruling class, and like this theoretical elite, they


8 Spann, Der wahre Staat, p. 98.
believed that their desires and goals were an integral expression of the
national political will. 9 Hans-Joachim von Rohr-Demmin, a leader of
the Landbund—an agrarian lobby, was particularly impressed with the
economist's corporative system, and his contacts both with the landed
nobility and industrial leadership in the Ruhr provided substantial sub-
sidies for the Spann circle. 10

Specific aspects of the Austrian intellectual's philosophy found
acceptance not only in elite groups but also in mass organizations. The
nationalistic and conservative war veterans' association, the Stahlhelm,
which had over a million members in 1930, 11 also toyed with Ständestaat
concepts. Led by the Reichstag deputy Friedrich Everling, the intellectuals
of the Stahlhelm attempted to formulate a social theory based on Spann's
universalism that would also appeal to their conservative rank and file.
In essence, Everling fused the social theories of Freiherr vom Stein and
Otto von Bismarck together with Spann's universalistic system to create

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9 Wilhelm Longert, "Der ständische Gedanke," Deutsches Adelsblatt,
February 22, 1930, p. 112; "Das Führertum. (Gesellschaft 'Deutscher
Staat.')", ibid., December 1, 1928, p. 779.

10 "Der Spannkreis. Gefahren und Auswirkungen. --Ende Mai 1936--" (secret
Sicherheitsdienst report), p. 20. Hereafter cited as "Der Spannkreis
(1936)."

11 "W. M. Knight-Patterson," pseud., [W. Kulski], Germany from
the ideal of a corporative social pyramid crowned by a monarch in the Prussian tradition.  

Another conservative and chauvinistic German organization which was interested in Spann's political theories was the Fichte Society (Fichte Gesellschaft), founded during World War I to foster national idealism. Like other reactionary groups, the Fichte Society was particularly attracted to the concept of an ideal state in which only leaders suited to rule would be allowed to wield power. In 1924, Karl Bernhard Ritter, a Lutheran pastor and member of the Prussian Landtag who was an active member of the association, invited the Austrian intellectual to speak about the problems of state and nationality at the Society's headquarters in Hamburg. Hoping to bridge the gap between the Protestant and Catholic concepts of the German political and cultural mission in Europe, the conservative association called upon the Viennese professor to act as a spokesman for

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the Austro-Catholic conception of the Reich. His theories were well received by the Fichte Society. \textsuperscript{15}

Spann's corporative notions found a particularly responsive audience among Catholic intellectuals who also hoped to initiate a "conservative revolution," albeit a more religious one. Maria Laach, a Benedictine abbey near Koblenz which was the cultural and intellectual center of Rhenish Catholicism, became a stronghold for corporative ideas. \textsuperscript{16} Universalism, some of the abbey's monks believed, could renew the spiritual intensity Germany had known during the middle ages. \textsuperscript{17}

One of the Viennese scholar's clerical disciples was the Cologne priest Franz Xaver Landmesser, general secretary for the Association of German Catholic Academicians. Believing that Spann's system reinforced the "great totalistic corporative idea and the Corpus Christi dogma," Landmesser disseminated the Ständestaat concept to a small but influential group of teacher, scholars, and free intellectuals who read a publication


\textsuperscript{16} "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 9.

\textsuperscript{17} Leopold Ziegler, "Neues Mittelalter?", \textit{Europäische Revue}, Vol. IV, No. 10 (January, 1929), pp. 548 and 555.
edited by the priest, *Der katholische Gedanke*. During a conference of Catholic sociologists at Maria Laach in 1931, Landmesser stated in Spann's presence that because the universalistic system was "firmly based on Catholic dogma," it was worthy of support.

Despite the spiritual nature of his projected "true state," Spann did not, as might be expected, receive his greatest support from nationalist and religious organizations. The *Ständestaat* concept, in fact, was most enthusiastically received by German manufacturers and industrialists. Although they cared little for political theory, these businessmen endorsed corporatism because they conceived of it as a "politburo of industrialists" which would allow them to have an institutionalized voice in national political and economic life. Some of them were also strongly attracted to the idea of a hierarchical society as the specifically German alternative to Bolshevik chaos.

A second aspect of corporatism which greatly appealed to German industrial magnates was Spann's sympathetic analysis of cartels. For

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the sociologist, these industrial monopolies were in many ways the modern counterparts of medieval guilds. 21 Because of their enormous complexity and size, he felt these business enterprises were less subject than small firms to the "mechanistic" laws of centralization. He believed they carried the seeds of organic growth within them. 22 In Spann's hierarchical society, cartels would be allowed to grow freely and "organically." The small producer would control the small market, and monopolies would dominate the large market.

As an intellectual celebrity of the Right, Spann was frequently invited to speak before employers' associations. As early as 1922 he characterized Marxism as a "sickness of the German national soul" (Volkseele), telling business tycoons that rational arguments alone could not destroy this economic and social philosophy. 24 As he saw it, only faith in a new, better, and "true" social order could revive spiritual values


among the German people. The economist proclaimed that the captains of industry could, and should, awaken the Volk and found a new society based on moral and ethical principles. The Germans had once heard "the footsteps of God resounding through history"; if economic leaders would assume their social responsibilities, the people could once again discover their spiritual heritage, he prophesied, and the völkisch soul would be cleansed of debilitating materialism.

Such theories intrigued German industrial magnates, and they generously contributed to the Austrian philosopher's coffers to aid in the realization of a "true state" in Central Europe. Monetary gifts from the Rhine and Ruhr enabled the Spann Kreis to establish its own publishing house in 1931. Established as an "educational" press, the Erneurungs-Verlag had only a limited advertising revenue, so it depended almost entirely upon an industrial subsidy of some one thousand Reichsmarks a month. A series of pamphlets on corporative theory and practice,


28 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," pp. 6-8.
Bücherei des Ständestaates, as well as an ostensibly scholarly journal, Ständisches Leben (Corporate Life), were first issued in 1931. Spann announced in the first issue that his journal would lead the struggle to free the German people from the chaos of individualism and impending Bolshevism. Published by the Austrian professor and edited by Wilhelm Longert, Ständisches Leben was enthusiastically received by German businessmen. Although Spann cautioned his staff on the Erneuerungs-Verlag not to defend the employers' interests in any direct manner, the various books and articles of his press nevertheless pleased its financial and moral patrons. One industrial leader, Albert Vögler, reportedly prized Ständisches Leben so much that he carried a copy of the magazine wherever he went.

The influence of corporatist theory upon certain ultraconservative organizations as well as important connections with German heavy industry almost guaranteed Spann's eventual involvement with the National Socialists, who looked to the same groups for support. The universalistic

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30 Letter from Othmar Spann, Vienna, June 11, 1931, to Paul Karrenbrock, reproduced in "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 53.

31 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 7.
Kreis and this aggressive political movement shared certain ideological concepts and a common goal of reforming the German state. The official Nazi party program had called for the creation of an organic state as early as 1920. The party's economic theorist, Gottfried Feder, advocated a system of government based on professional rather than political representation. He publicly endorsed the Austrian economist's ideal "true state" in an extended commentary on the party program which was first printed in 1927. Other National Socialists likewise sanctioned Spann's ideas in official party journals in both Austria and Germany. The Nazi publishing house also sold some of the Viennese philosopher's most popular books, including Der wahre Staat. Because of his prestige in

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conservative academic circles and his renown as a Pan-German thinker, the Austrian professor was frequently mentioned as the man most capable of creating what some Nazi intellectuals feared their party most lacked—a clear and comprehensive ideology.  

It was not as a political theorist, however, but rather as a critic of modern culture that the corporatist thinker made his first intimate contacts with Nazi party leaders. In the late 1920's the Hitler movement decided to enlist members of the German intellectual and social elite in several auxiliary organizations. One of the most important of these groups was the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur (Fighting League for German Culture) founded in 1928 by the official Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg. The Kampfbund's executive board boasted an array of prestigious names from the academic world such as the prominent Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölflin. The association's stated purpose was to strike out against the threat of Americanization from the West and "cultural Bolshevism" (Kulturbolschewismus) from the East. Its other function was to do battle with Germany's entrenched intellectual oligarchy.  

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When the Kampfbund was established, Othmar Spann immediately joined the organization, and as a charter member of the executive board, he was invited to give the group's inaugural address on February 23, 1929. Speaking before a capacity crowd at the University of Munich's Auditorium maximum, the Austrian Neo-Romantic drew a vivid picture of the profound cultural crisis which had gripped Europe since the Renaissance. He described the Weimar republic—a "calamitous" liberal state founded on individualistic and mechanistic social principles—as the child of scientific rationalism. During the present-period of confusion and decay, the speaker lamented, ambitious demagogues had seized power, thus helping to destroy Central Europe's traditional society. 40

The Austrian sociologist was not, however, entirely pessimistic about the future because he saw the first rays of hope for a beleaguered German culture. Dissatisfied with scientific explanations of the enigma of human existence, a new generation was now searching for more profound metaphysical and religious interpretations of man's eternal problems. 41


These Germans were coming to realize that eternally valid social philosophies, such as Kant, Fichte, Hegel and the Romantics, had developed, would prevent the cultural collapse of Europe. They were aware, the sociologist stated, that only submission to an "authoritarian form of life" would save them from democracy's anarchy and its inevitable excesses. He prophesied that a handful of leaders imbued with a metaphysical profundity, inner piety, and heroic spirit could steer the German people away from the modern era's "desolate, materialistic style of life."

Waging battle against the alien materialism plaguing the German soul, this intellectual elite would lead the Volk to the gates of paradise with fire and with the sword. 42

Although the professor's speech was well received by the Munich audience, which included members of the Nazi party, its ideological chief—Alfred Rosenberg, and its leader—Adolf Hitler, his ideas were criticized by several liberal democratic newspapers, including the influential Frankfurter Zeitung. This paper berated the University of Munich for allowing its facilities to be used for "National Socialist propaganda," pointing out that politics rather than culture was the motivating force behind the Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur meeting. Addressing an audience whose swastika armbands and wild applause for Hitler denoted

42 Ibid.
its reactionary political sentiments, Othmar Spann had delivered a polemic against democracy rather than a report on the German cultural crisis, the newspaper editorialized. His condemnation of the modern democratic use of posters, billboards, and mass assemblies was actually a more accurate description of Nazi political tactics. Although the featured speaker had implicitly denounced the essence of the National Socialists’ strategy, Hitler was evidently not disturbed because he shook hands with his Austrian countryman, who respectfully returned the demagogue’s deep bows. 43

The liberal German newspaper was also distressed by what it felt were Spann’s anti-Semitic innuendoes. His criticism of German intellectuals for allowing "foreigners" such as Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer to re-introduce Kantian philosophy was interpreted as being directed against the Jews. 44 Basing its account on the Frankfurter Zeitung’s report of the events in Munich, the Viennese Zionist paper Die neue Welt was likewise disturbed by this remark, as well as by the general tenor of the speaker’s ideas. Its account proferred the warm greetings the Austrian professor had exchanged with Hitler as further proof of Spann’s anti-Semitism. 45


44 Ibid.

The philosopher's wife, Erika Spann, took offense at Die neue Welt's report attacking her husband's Munich speech, and the Zionist journal's next issue featured her rejoinder in the form of a letter. Explaining the economist's relationship with Hitler, she stated that the two had never met until by chance they had both been invited to a birthday celebration. When he learned of Spann's presence, she commented, the party leader attempted to leave the festivity, but, having been persuaded to stay, eventually spoke with the Viennese sociologist and promised to attend the Kampfbund lecture. Disputing other details the Zionist newspaper had quoted from the Frankfurter Zeitung, the poetess wrote that she knew of no swastika armbands at the Munich university hall. As for the great burst of applause the account described, it had been for her husband rather than for Hitler. "Obviously" the two men had shaken hands and exchanged bows at the end of a successful speech. Only this meeting, Frau Spann declared, had brought these men in contact; her husband had not even attended another monster rally the Nazis had staged in Munich during his stay.

The sociologist's wife voiced particular resentment about Die neue Welt's accusations of anti-Semitism, which she termed unjust. Her

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husband had discussed the contemporary crisis of culture, not the Jewish domination of philosophy. His mention of the Jews had been praiseworthy rather than derogatory, Frau Spann insisted, as he had pointed out that these scholars had preserved some of the greatest creations of German philosophy. Certain intellectuals, she noted, seemed apprehensive every time Gentiles used the word "Jew." Throughout his successful career, this Viennese academician had not published a single anti-Semitic sentiment; yet without regard for the truth, the "Jewish press" had seen fit to ignore this fact and slander an innocent person. Voicing the hope that her letter would "clear the air," Spann's wife ended her message to the Zionist journal with the scarcely veiled threat that, should her husband continue to be unjustly attacked, his large circle of devoted friends might one day decide to launch a vigorous offensive against such unmerited verbal assaults.  

Although liberal and Zionist newspapers attacked the Viennese intellectual's political activities in Germany and his association with the National Socialists, his closest connections by the early 1930's were, in fact, with the Sudeten-Germans. Spann's interest in the Sudetenland—a vague frontier area dividing Slavs from Teutons—was personally motivated, for he had taught at Brünn before the First World War. After he

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
received his University of Vienna professorship, his contacts with the region continued through the many Sudeten-German students who traditionally came to the Austrian capital for advanced studies. 48

Czech national sentiment had forced the Austro-German intellectual to flee Brün; therefore his attitude toward this Slavic people's political aspirations was not a positive one. His feelings reflected the traditional Sudeten-German prejudice that the average Czech was "a half educated creature, to some extent saved by German influence, who . . . [was] politically intolerable and unreliable, socially never satisfied, and always pushing for his nation." 49 These Slavs could never reach the cultural heights their Teutonic neighbors had scaled, because, according to Spann, their elite class had been "leached" (ausgelaugt) and absorbed by a more spiritual community—the Germans. 50 Only the Germans' temporary weakness in 1918 had enabled this inferior people to establish their own state, and now they were forcing the Sudeten-Germans to suffer "shame and dishonor under . . . [their] bloody lash." 51


Such sentiments were welcomed by German nationalist circles in the Sudetenland. Spann achieved status as a major spokesman for the area soon after he delivered a speech in March, 1920, in Brünn. Entitled *Vom Wesen des Volksstums* ("on the nature of Germandom"), his remarks centered upon the German people's restless metaphysical spirit, which enabled them to peer into the depths of human and divine truth and beauty.  

Printed and widely distributed by the press of the nationalistic organization *Böhmerlandbewegung*, the speech went through two editions within several years. When the economist's book *Der wahre Staat* appeared in 1921, it was also enthusiastically received and highly praised in several Sudeten German journals. As early as 1922, Spann's plea for a corporative reconstruction of society was recommended to school teachers as a valuable political handbook by one of the region's most prestigious educational and cultural journals.

Spann's anti-Czech sentiments were also eagerly seized upon by Sudeten-German students who felt they must prevent the inundation of their homeland by the Slavic sea surging up around it. They were

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52 Spann, *Vom Wesen des Volksstums*, pp. 5 and 29.


especially attracted to the Viennese philosopher's definition of nationality in terms of a "spiritual community" (geistige Gemeinschaft), which they preferred to the conventional concepts of "race", language, or political allegiance. 55 Accepting his view of nationality as a spiritual condition attainable only by a few particularly gifted and educated men, they felt that the ignorant masses could add little to a national group's unique qualities. 56 These young thinkers adopted their teacher's assessment of German superiority over Slavdom, and they began to prepare themselves for their role as bearers of a higher culture and civilization to their "spiritually inferior" Czech neighbors. 57

Pan-German overtones alone did not attract these youth to Spann's elitist system; they were also drawn to his idea of a corporative order, seeing it as a viable alternative to a mechanized, democratized society's unstable values. Viewing the völkisch community as a mystical relationship which engulfed and submerged the individual, they believed the industrial age had emphasized the single being to the detriment of the social totality. Above all, they were disgusted with the modern democratic

55 Spann, Vom Wesen des Volkstums, pp. 5 and 29.
56 Spann, Gesellschaftslehre, pp. 488-491.
57 Spann, Vom Wesen des Volkstums, pp. 36-37.
state's lack of political and moral authority and its cynical reliance on the manipulation of mob passions. Only a small, spiritually superior circle of men, these young conservatives felt, could regenerate the German people and state.

Inclusive social systems emphasizing German superiority and the urgent necessity of cultural renewal enjoyed great popularity among young Central European intellectuals, especially in the Sudetenland. The youth movement (Jugendbewegung) formed a link between the vague idealism of the pre-1914 era and the political ideologies of the post-World War I period. Many of Spann's students had been members of this idealistic wave which swept German-speaking lands after 1900. Forming Bünde or groups of like-minded individuals, these youthful idealists rejected the materialism, ugliness, and pervasive hypocrisy which they felt characterized their elders' bourgeois world. They were persuaded that a corporative society based on elitist leadership could elevate the state above mere individualistic and capitalistic money-grubbing interests. Feeling middle-class values


to be morally fraudulent and intellectually deceitful, and yet unwilling and unable to accept socialism as an alternative, these idealists sought cultural renewal in the ideal völkisch community. 61

Some members of the youth movement were strongly influenced by the symbolic poetry and aesthetic creed of the German poet Stefan George. Rejecting an industrial society lacking heroic values, he longed for an idealized, hierarchical, static society ruled by an elite unencumbered by the pressures of mass society. 62 This male spiritual elite would be recognized "by the light in their eyes." Impregnated with their master's ideas, George's disciples saw themselves as "twentieth century knights ... united by secret codes," whose mission was to rescue the German people from the ugly materialism destroying their national soul. 63 The cult's avowed purpose was to create a perfect world, a "secret Germany" where spiritual forces would reign supreme.

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61 Becker, German Youth, p. 51.


Influenced by George and the youth movement, Spann's students from the Sudetenland believed that a Bund—a male community with shared emotional values—could become the nucleus of a new energetic and heroic society. Dissatisfied with the youth movement's vague Romanticist yearnings, these Sudeten-Germans founded the Arbeitskreis für Gesellschaftswissenschaften (Social Science Study Circle) in 1926. This "study circle" was patterned after medieval knightly orders as well as nationalistic organizations such as the Tugendbund, which had sprung up during the German War of Liberation in 1813. Known as the Kameradschaftsbund or KB (Union of Comrades), this male elitist association's ostensible purpose was to coordinate seminars and meetings held by student groups.

The Kameradschaftsbund combined the characteristics of a conspiratorial group and a Masonic lodge. It was, above all, an elitist

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association which probably never comprised more than 250 members.\textsuperscript{68} Within the KB itself, there was an inner circle of not over fifty men who were carefully selected for leadership roles.\textsuperscript{69} This association was well established by 1930 when it began publishing its own magazine, \textit{Die junge Front}. The KB's policy was to place its members in positions of influence within other existing organizations so as to disseminate universalistic ideas.

By the early 1930's, \textit{Kameradschaftsbund} members held important positions in a considerable number of fraternal, cultural, and political groups in the Sudetenland.\textsuperscript{70} Under the leadership of Heinrich Rutha and Walter Brand, both students of Spann, KB members infiltrated groups such as the \textit{Sudetendeutsche Jungenschaft}, a youth association led by Rutha himself, as well as a number of university "corporations" (\textit{Freischaren}) in Prague and Brünn.\textsuperscript{71} The KB's most important coup was to occupy many


\textsuperscript{71}Letter to the author from Wilhelm Sebekovsky, Essen, May 11, 1968.
positions of leadership within the Deutscher Turnverband. A traditionally important gymnastic federation, the Turnverband was as much a social and political institution as it was a purely athletic one. As director of the gymnastic association's educational program, Brand was able to impress upon Konrad Henlein, a colorless former bank clerk who headed the 200,000 member organization, that the Turnverband was a powerful expression of united Germanism.  

Actively disseminated by the Kameradschaftsbund, Spann's ideology was enthusiastically received in the Sudetenland. This highly industrialized area of Czechoslovakia suffered great social dislocations following the onset of the world economic crisis in 1929. Unemployed workers and an insecure middle class contrasted sharply with the stable social order envisioned by the Austrian philosopher.  

Young intellectuals in particular accepted the corporatist's argument that economics had become too important a part of modern life. The universalistic system, they believed, would halt the frenzied economic growth and the migrations from village to city which were destroying the traditional fabric of German life in Central Europe. These uncertain ethnic Germans anticipated life in an organic community.

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72 Fischer et al., Ihr Kampf, p. 39; "Der Spannkreis (1936), "", p. 13.

73 Letter to the author from Franz Künzel, Kassel, February 17, 1969.
where once again the peasantry would be rooted to the soil and the artisan would be bound to his craft.  

The Kameradschaftsbund also propagated Spann's nationalistic theories with great success in the Sudetenland. His definition of a nationality as a spiritually unique group allowed the KB to justify the existence of the Sudeten Germans as a separate minority within the Czechoslovak republic and at the same time to differentiate them as a culturally related but spiritually distinct group (Stamm) from Germans and Austrians.

This isolated minority's intellectual leaders were impressed by the KB's assertion that the decentralized structure of a "true state" would allow various nationalities to develop their own political and cultural potentialities. Diversity would thus assure harmony between German and Slavic peoples. The Kameradschaftsbund proclaimed that Spann's organic concept of nationalism was the only truly realistic solution to the Sudeten-German problem.

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75 Spann, Gesellschaftslehre, p. 486.

76 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 23.


The Kameradschaftsbund's propagation of corporatist ideas marked a high point in Spann's political significance outside Austria. Already well-known in Central European academic circles, the philosopher was now recognized in the political sphere. He traveled throughout Europe delivering speeches about the "true state". Members of the Kreis likewise voyaged extensively, disseminating corporative ideas in lectures and meetings. The circle used the written as well as the spoken word to explain the hierarchical order of the future; they printed books, magazines, and pamphlets on their own press, the Erneuerungs-Verlag. Spann's universalistic system thus reached numerous conservative Pan-German groups who supported his efforts both morally and monetarily.

Assiduous political activity in Germany and the Sudetenland did not exclude involvement in the economist's Austrian homeland. Spann's corporative system was rooted in the Alpine republic's soil, and his concepts flourished in this fundamentally agrarian country. The Austrians were able to understand the sociologist's hierarchical system because their social relationships remained stratified in their daily lives. The master-servant tie had been the predominant social pattern until only recently, both on the farm and in small shops staffed by artisans. Many Austro-Germans, like Othmar Spann himself, traced their origins back to the

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farming or artisan milieu, and large-scale industrial factory production was alien to them. Their social model was not the sprawling, "atomized" city; it was the patriarchally administered village which was quickly becoming obsolete. Wishing to restore an idealized agrarian society, some Austrians viewed universalism as a vehicle which would return them to the bucolic and secure lives they remembered.

Spann's desire for a stabilized society was most assiduously seized upon in Austria by the private armed groups of conservatives known as Heimwehren. Both conservatives and Socialists had formed para-military groups in 1918 after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Their purpose was to preserve law and order and to maintain the new Austrian state's territorial integrity. After the political situation stabilized around 1920, these armed formations refused to disband. Wedded to inflexible ideological preconceptions, the socialist Schutzbund in Vienna began to think of itself as the proletariat's shield, while conservative provincial Heimwehr units viewed themselves as defenders of the family, national honor, property, religion, and tradition in general. Staffed by shopkeepers, peasants, professional men, and war veterans, these local armed groups had received generous financial backing from industrialists, financiers,

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and politicians as early as 1919, when it appeared that the "Bolshevik peril" in Bavaria and Hungary might sweep across Austria.\textsuperscript{81}

Strong provincial loyalties and adherence to the concept of charismatic leadership (\textit{Führung und Gefolgschaft}) characterized the members of the \textit{Heimwehr}. Their narrow interests and divided loyalties, however, weakened the movement, and by the mid-1920's it had lost much of its original momentum. Encouraged by the young republic's increasing political and economic stability, the \textit{Heimwehr}'s financial backers lost interest in subsidizing an organization which appeared to have outlived its purpose.\textsuperscript{82} A generally complacent attitude replaced the former enthusiasm which the private armies had generated in bourgeois circles. This indifference changed dramatically, however, when the Viennese workers rioted after a jury acquitted the defendants in a political trial. The irate proletariat burned the Palace of Justice in Vienna on July 15, 1927,\textsuperscript{83} and shortly thereafter the socialists called a twenty-four hour strike which paralyzed the country.\textsuperscript{84}


\textsuperscript{84} Edmondson, "The Heimwehr," pp. 66-70.
The conservatives' fear of revolution as well as the grave social disorders in July, 1927, united Heimwehr units throughout the republic in a common determination to halt the "Red menace" which centered in Vienna and a few other industrial centers. The prelate-chancellor Ignaz Seipel not only condemned the socialists as "enemies of Jesus Christ" but also aided in procuring arms for these semi-public armed units.

At the same time Seipel began searching for a leader whose strong personality could weld together the fragmented provincial armies. The priest-politician found a potential leader in the German-born freebooter Waldemar Pabst, whose involvement in the murders of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, as well as in the Kapp putsch, marked him as an experienced political soldier. By 1929 his measures had given the private armies a new-found strength and they held promise of becoming a major political force.

It was during this period, when it seemed that the Heimwehr would gain political ascendancy in Austria, that Spann and his circle made their

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85 Ibid., pp. 75-76.
88 Ibid., p. 72.
first important contacts with the movement. The disparate armed groups had formed the "Austrian Self-Defense Leagues" (österreichische Selbstschutzverbände) in 1928, and Walter Heinrich, who had become closely associated with the Pabst circle, was appointed general secretary for the new group. His mentor Spann had meanwhile developed a working relationship with Walter Pfrimer (1881-1968), leader of the Styrian Heimatschutz, the best-organized of all the private armies. Through these influential contacts the professor and his circle began to proselytize their Ständestaat ideology to the various Heimwehr units.

A considerable number of the rank-and-file of these private armies read, studied, and accepted the basic ideas presented in Spann's Der wahre Staat. This popular book denounced democracy's unjust manipulation of

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89bid., p. 125.


91A series of lectures delivered to Heimwehr audiences in Carinthia in the summer of 1929 by Walter Heinrich and Hans Riehl were said to have aroused considerable interest. See Heimatschutz in Österreich (Vienna: Verlag Zoller, 1934), p. 181.

the masses and capitalism's exploitation of rich and poor alike. It mirrored the unsophisticated sentiments of conservative peasants and small shopkeepers who felt threatened by the vagaries of the capitalist market economy and the regimentation of the socialists. Fearing the "pagan" world of urban capitalism as well as atheistic socialism, these classes swelled Heimwehr ranks. Those members with faith in an ideal society came to believe that Spann's corporative order would guarantee them a secure place in society and protect them from both economic insecurity and Marxist anarchy.

During Johann Schober's chancellorship in 1929, Walter Heinrich and Hans Riehl tirelessly attempted to bring about the political realization of Spann's "true state." Before assuming office, Schober privately assured the inner councils of the Heimwehr that he was quite in sympathy with establishing a corporative fascist regime under strong authoritarian leadership. Under the direction of Heinrich and Riehl, the united Heimwehr's central office in Vienna drafted a provisional constitution which was presented to the Austrian chancellor in the fall of 1929. Both the Heimwehr leaders and the Spann Kreis believed that this document, calling for a "temporary" dictatorship, would herald the beginning of corporative reconstruction. 93

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The bourgeois military organization was disappointed, however, when Schober did not initiate its plans. Political rejection was a serious blow to these loosely allied forces as their vague corporatist programs were eliciting little enthusiasm or financial support by late 1929. 94 Fearing these private armies were running out of ideological steam, the Spann Kreis determined to re-emphasize the fundamental "ideological principles" of the Heimwehr movement. They wrote several pamphlets and numerous newspaper articles defining the policies and intellectual foundations of these armed formations. 95 Popular in nature, their works emphasized the Heimwehr's role as an impregnable bulwark against Marxism.

Bolshevism's aggressive nature, these publications warned their readers,

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would destroy Europe's cultural heritage if its leaders did not remain
eternally on guard.\footnote{Andreae, \textit{Für und wider den Ständestaat}, p. 12.} In Spann's view, Austrians should be particularly
aware of the "Red menace," for they all knew from painful experience
that "at the push of a button in Moscow the Palace of Justice burns."
\footnote{Spann, \textit{Die Irrungen des Marxismus}, p. 45.} Only with a clear and powerful ideology, \textit{Kreis} publications stated, could
the \textit{Heimwehr} crush Marxian Bolshevikism spiritually as well as politically.\footnote{Walter Heinrich, \textit{Grundsätzliche Gedanken über Staat und
Wirtschaft. Ein programmatischer Vortrag über die geistigen
Grundlagen der Heimwehrbewegung} (Vienna: Bundesführung der
Österreichischen Selbstschutzverbände, 1930), p. 5; "Massensturm!
Erste Hilfe für unsere Arbeitslosen!," \textit{Die Heimat! Organ der
Wiener Heimwehr}, January 29, 1930, pp. 1-2.}

Having accepted Spann as their "spiritual leader" (\textit{geistiger Führer}),
the \textit{Heimwehr} publicly announced a new policy in the spring of 1930. More
than eight hundred delegates assembled at a meeting at Korneuburg in Lower
Austria on May 18, 1930, to hear about the group's future political objec-
tives.\footnote{"Der Spann-Kreis (1938)," frame 754812.} The military organization's leaders outlined their goals in an

\footnote{For the official text, as well as a photograph of the "Oath of
Korneuburg," see \textit{Heimatschutz in Österreich}, pp. 47-48.}
oath which Walter Heinrich, in his role as director of the Heimwehr's economic and corporative bureau, played a key role in formulating.\textsuperscript{102}

The Korneuburg Oath, as it came to be known, grandly proclaimed the Heimwehr conference of May, 1930, as a historical turning point. The organization would now direct its energies toward the seizure of power so as to renew Austrian political life from the ground up. Leaders strongly imbued with a heroic martial spirit would henceforth rule the state. Corporative economic bodies would replace the anarchic capitalism which was destroying the country. The new society envisioned in the oath would emphasize religious faith, social stability, and complete obedience to Heimwehr leaders.\textsuperscript{103}

The Heimwehr conference in Korneuburg was in Spann's eyes a decisive triumph for corporative theory and clear evidence of the political influence his Kreis had gained in Austrian nationalist and Pan-German

\textsuperscript{101} Edmondson, "The Heimwehr," pp. 143-144.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., pp. 150-153; "Aufstellung von Ständegruppen," Der Panther, May 24, 1930, p. 8. Heinrich spent four months in Italy in 1929 studying the theory and practice of Fascism. See Giorgio Sansa, "Uno studio sul Fascismo del Segretario delle 'Heimwehren'," La Tribuna (Roma), March 20, 1930, p. 2.

circles. The universalistic school's activities in the Alpine republic were similar to those in Germany and the Sudetenland—he and his disciples disseminated the ideology of a corporatively organized "true state" through speeches, publications, and personal contacts. In this manner conservative, volkisch, and nationalistic German organizations throughout Central Europe were influenced by the Viennese philosopher's vision of a new social order, an organic and harmonious wahrer Staat.

United in a common effort to establish an authentic corporative society, the disparate groups officially endorsing Spann's social theories all shared a general disillusionment with parliamentary democracy. Above all, they blamed "the West" for unleashing ideas that led to the destruction of the traditional social order of the German people. Surrounded by political confusion and intellectual decay, these individuals sought an alternative that was "revolutionary" without, however, being tainted by the spirit of Marxist socialism. Socialism was merely an extension of "indivisualistic and mechanistic" capitalism, and would inevitably result in drab social leveling and destructive nihilism. They believed that a hierarchical society ruled by a young and vital authoritarian elite was the uniquely German alternative to Western parliamentary democracy.
and "Eastern" Marxism. Spann's corporative system seemed to be the ideal solution to the social chaos engulfing German-speaking Europe; above all, it held out hope of being the long sought-for "third way" between individualistic capitalism and a Marxism predicated on class warfare. In offering an ideology that promised to extricate Central Europe from the "appalling situation" into which it had fallen, the Austrian professor became a spokesman for many of the dissatisfied forces which fueled many varieties of Fascism in the years before 1933. His followers' elitist faith in the vision of a "true state" remained pure and constant until a more powerful voice was heard from Germany.


CHAPTER V

ILLUSION AND REALITY

In the early 1930's many German Rightist intellectuals experienced a wave of new hope as the neo-conservative and National Socialist movements became intertwined. The elitist journalist Hans Zehrer\(^1\) expressed this mood when he reminisced:

The last two years of the Weimar Republic represented one of the most fertile phases of our history. Never before had there been so much thinking and planning in Germany. The ice was suddenly broken when the old powers, the ones of the Weimar system, at last started to abdicate. All . . . minds suddenly seemed to communicate in a new way . . . It was like a trance. Everything seemed possible if only tackled in the right way . . . Everything assumed a new meaning. But then it occurred at every discussion that there was a silent guest who mostly was not even visible but who nevertheless dominated the discussion . . . And this silent guest was Adolf Hitler.\(^2\)

The Nazi Führer was no longer a mute visitor after he assumed the German chancellorship on January 30, 1933. Hitler's advent to power united conservatives of many different political hues in a temporary coalition. Rightist circles felt a new sense of vitality within their own ranks. Shortly after the new Nazi-led administration took over the reins

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\(^1\) For Zehrer's ideas, see Struve, "Hans Zehrer as a Neoconservative Elite Theorist," pp. 1035-1057.

\(^2\) Quoted in Von Klemperer, Germany's New Conservatism, p. 199.
of government, Spann, who had on a number of occasions defined the Nazi party as a corporative estate of leaders, immediately left for Berlin to proffer his congratulations to the new elite of the German state. While in the capital, he spoke at many public and private festivities and delivered a speech over the radio urging an Anschluss between Austria and Germany. The high point of his sojourn was an address which the economics professor made in the Aula of the University of Berlin interpreting recent political events from the grand perspective of German idealistic philosophy.

The Austrian social philosopher believed Hitler’s rise to power was the long-expected turning-point in the political development of the German people. For the universalistic school, the Nazi "seizure of power" (Machtergreifung) was a unique historical opportunity to establish an organic state. Professor Spann feared, however, that the Third Reich would be only an intermezzo between the chaos of liberalism and Bolshevik anarchy. He reminded the leaders of the new Germany in an essay published in Ständisches Leben that only a corporatively organized "true state" could solve the "social question" plaguing Central Europe and

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save it from the scourge of Marxian socialism. The new national government must first create a conscious awareness of Germany's spiritual and intellectual heritage within the body of the people. Then the Hitler cabinet must strip parliament of all power in economic affairs and establish a chamber of corporations to regulate future economic questions.\footnote{Walter Heinrich seconded his teacher's efforts to gain official National Socialist approval of the universalistic system by delivering a series of lectures in the Rhineland.}

Spann and his disciples appealed for the new German regime's acceptance, publicly endorsing it in speeches and pamphlets. To demonstrate their solidarity with the Third Reich, Spann, Heinrich, and other members of the Kreis joined the National Socialist party by the summer of 1933.\footnote{The corporatist's son Adalbert, already a member of the University of Vienna's Nazi student organization since 1928, joined the}


\footnote{Letter from Alfred Rosenberg, Berlin, February 24, 1933, to Rudolf Hess, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, \textit{Kanzlei Rosenberg/NS} 8/177/Bd. 1 (1933-1935)/288.}

elite SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler shortly after the party's assumption of power. 9 A considerable number of the economist's student admirers also expressed their allegiance to Nazism, manifesting their sentiments at the end of his ever-popular lectures by exuberantly singing the "Deutschland" and "Horst Wessel" Lieder. 10 The intellectual prestige and organizational experience of the Spann circle enabled it to dominate the ideological training courses sponsored by the secret Austrian NSDAP, which were held in the professor's seminar rooms at the University of Vienna. 11

Spann believed that his "loyalty" to the party and his academic fame would entitle him to a special status in the new government. Seeing himself as the Third Reich's praecceptor Germaniae, he hoped to occupy the chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin where Fichte had stirred Germany's heart and soul over a century before. 12 The Viennese

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9 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 5.

10 Ibid., p. 21; letter to the author from Stefan T. Possony, Stanford, Calif., February 26, 1969.


professor was intent upon teaching only in Berlin, for he had refused earlier offers from the University of Tübingen and the Technological Institute at Charlottenburg.\textsuperscript{13} He felt that he could be of service not only as the German Reich's ideological mentor but also as the author of its projected corporative constitution.\textsuperscript{14} Heinrich suggested to Hermann Göring that the \textit{Ständestaat} philosopher be appointed to a position somewhat analogous to that of Rosenberg, the party ideologist.\textsuperscript{15} Contacts with the Nazi elite, particularly with Göring, made Spann confident that both he and Heinrich would be included in the inner circle of National Socialist intellectuals.\textsuperscript{16}

While the corporatist thinker was lobbying for placement within the new government, he became involved in a joint project with the Nazis and German industrialists. The steel magnate Fritz Thyssen had long dreamed of creating an institute to study and plan for an organic social order; for


\textsuperscript{14} "Einer wird herausgegriffen!", \textit{Das schwarze Korps}, December 22, 1938, p. 14; letter to the author from Heinrich Härtle, Munich, November 24, 1967.

\textsuperscript{15} "Einer wird herausgegriffen!", \textit{Das schwarze Korps}, December 22, 1938, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{16} Ferber, "Othmar Spann und der Nationalsozialismus," p. 549.
the wealthy industrialist, a corporative society was a "necessary form of socialism." After Hitler attained power, Thyssen discussed his idea with the chancellor, who gave his approval for the project. Enlisting the support of several wealthy businessmen, he founded a National Socialist Institute for Corporative Organization (Nationalsozialistisches Institut für Ständewesen) in May, 1933. The industrial tycoon, who was under the influence of Spann's elitist ideas, conceived of the Institute as a training school for talented upper-echelon managers and technocrats. Its graduates were not to be mere specialists skilled in the production and distribution of goods; they were to be dedicated, disciplined political leaders of a future corporative state. Their daily activities during their course of instruction at the Institut für Ständewesen were strictly regimented; from morning calisthenics to communal meals, the emphasis at Thyssen's corporative leadership school was on group life.

The Institut für Ständewesen was ceremoniously dedicated on July 23, 1933, in Düsseldorf with a great number of important Nazi officials

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18 Bracher et al., Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung, p. 644.

and industrial leaders in attendance. As the Institut’s scientific director, Walter Heinrich gave the keynote address. Over a dozen other members of the Spann Kreis were on the school’s permanent staff or were visiting lecturers. Although the Düsseldorf school was officially within the Nazi party’s jurisdictional and disciplinary authority, the preponderance of Spann’s disciples on its faculty made them feel that it was in fact their own “spiritual child.”

In the first months after Hitler’s seizure of power, the philosopher’s adherents did not make any great distinction between National Socialism and corporative universalism. They discerned no real differences between the two movements and the men who led them. In their eyes, Othmar Spann was to the world of intellectual endeavor what Hitler and Mussolini were to the one of political achievement. Ilse Roloff, a member of the Kreis, detected a “genuinely astonishing degree of agreement” between the ideas Hitler expressed in Mein Kampf and the corporatist

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22 Ibid., p. 37.

philosophy espoused by Spann. Hitler the great statesman and Spann the great scholar were both the kind of men who lived what they taught. These two master educators of the German youth were, in the Kreis' opinion, the nation's guarantee of a strong secure future.

Outside the borders of Germany, this spirit of cooperation manifested itself in the Sudetenland, where disciples of the two "master educators" collaborated in the concrete world of political action. Leaders of the Nazi-controlled Volkssport and the Spann-dominated Kameradschaftsbund met in 1932 to work out a united anti-Czech strategy. The KB soon became, however, the single decisive force in the Sudeten German nationalist camp when the Czechoslovak government banned the Nazi party in the fall of 1933. Held together by strong personal ties and a common belief in Spann's elitist philosophy, the

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25 Ibid., p. 616.
Kameradschaftsbund suddenly gained ascendancy over nationalist political circles in the Sudetenland.

The proscription of the Sudeten German Nazi party left a political vacuum in the region which the Austrian corporatist’s adherents quickly filled. Working primarily behind the scenes, the Kameradschaftsbund rallied fragmented völkisch groups, former National Socialists, and Pan-Germans in a new organization, the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront (Sudeten German Home Front). Brand, Rutha, and Henlein, all members of the philosopher's circle, played a major role in rallying nationalistic anti-Marxist forces.²⁸ Determined to keep the Home Front alive, the German government decided in December, 1933, secretly to subsidize Henlein's political endeavors, quite aware that Spann's disciples in the Kameradschaftsbund gave the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront much of its dynamism.²⁹

Whereas Nazi activities were merely an annoyance in Czechoslovakia, in Austria they threatened the very existence of the state. Although a German-speaking people, the Austrians were deeply divided on the

²⁸ Ibid.

question of their nation becoming part of Hitler's Reich. All Socialists and many Catholics saw incorporation of Austria into the Nazi state as the negation of the true German spirit. This view was strongly defended by the diminutive chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss, who, although entirely a man of practical politics, was aware of the need for a positive ideological program to present to his nation. As early as March, 1933, Dollfuss announced plans for the creation of an "authoritarian corporative state." Only vaguely defined, Dollfuss' Ständestaat was an attempt to steal ideological thunder from the radical Austrian Nazis and infuse the nation with the same new spirit which had united and strengthened the Germans under Hitler and the Nazi movement.

Spann had always emphasized the political as well as cultural solidarity among all German-speaking peoples in Central Europe, so despite his affinity for corporatism, he could not subscribe to Dollfuss' separatist program. It seemed absurd to the Viennese professor that a single people should be divided into two separate political entities. He demonstrated his support for the German rather than the Austrian regime when he applied for and received a secret unnumbered membership card

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in the National Socialist party on May 1, 1933, shortly after Dollfuss announced plans for the creation of a "Christian corporative state."\textsuperscript{31}

Both Spann and his Kreis decided almost immediately that the anti-Nazi policies of Dollfuss were harming the cause of Germandom throughout Central Europe. Writing in his own magazine, the prophet of corporatism declared that the Austrian government was guilty of treasonous stupidity. By ignoring the resisting the great events taking place in Germany, the Dollfuss regime had directly or indirectly sold out national interests to Paris, Prague, and Rome.\textsuperscript{32} Writing in \textit{Die junge Front}, the Kameradschaftsbund's magazine, the philosopher's son Raphael echoed his father's criticisms. He described Dollfuss as a "questionable" leader of the Austrian people who could probably not command the support of more than one percent of the country's population.\textsuperscript{33} Raphael Spann voiced fears that the Austrian chancellor, heedless of the danger, might


\textsuperscript{33}Raphael Spann, "Wie lange noch Dollfuss?", \textit{Die junge Front}, Vol. IV, No. 6 (June, 1933), pp. 185-186.
ally himself with both Habsburg reactionaries and socialists. Solidly backed by international capitalism, the world Masonic movement, the Western powers, Bolsheviks, and pro-Habsburg monarchists (!), he would be able to threaten not only Austria but the Third Reich as well.  

With such nefarious un-German forces dictating its every move, the Dollfuss regime stood the possibility of soon becoming little more than a mindless semi-dictatorship bent on destroying all opponents, whether political or ideological.  

In speeches and articles, members of the Spann Kreis publicized what they believed to be the only true alternatives to the Austrian regime of Dollfuss. Their central theme, succinctly expressed by the circle's mentor himself, emphasized that Austria, "a small, historically peculiar creation," was but a mere fragment of the great homogeneous German nation. Its true historical and organic relationship was with Germany. Only through an Anschluss could Austria fulfill its cultural and historical mission in Central Europe. The Austro-German Volk must unite and

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35 Raphael Spann, "Soll Österreich nachhinken?", p. 147.

36 Othmar Spann's review of Papesch, Fesseln um Österreich, p. 518.

instigate a profound political and social reconstruction within their country to prepare the way for eventual union with all German-speaking peoples. As in the Third Reich, Spann's Austrian adherents believed that only an elite could lead the nation toward its rendezvous with its Germanic destiny. The Kreis' publications during this time left little doubt that no organization other than itself had the spiritual credentials essential for undertaking such leadership.

The Spann circle's public endorsement of a Greater German Reich led by Adolf Hitler's regime, as well as their active collaboration with the National Socialist party in Austria and the Sudetenland, concealed from many the fundamental differences between the elitist Kreis and the mass movement led by the rabble-rousing Führer. The "national revolution" of 1933 benefited only the Nazis; their conservative allies soon found themselves excluded from the positions of power which they had helped their vulgar "friends" to achieve. The Rightist intellectuals soon learned that they were little else than the "spiritual victims" of forces they had helped unleash but over which they now had not the slightest control. The intellectuals of the "conservative revolution" helped set the stage for 1933, but when der Tag finally arrived, they were told they could go,

38 Raphael Spann, "Soll Österreich nachhinken?", pp. 148-149.
for they had "done their duty."

After 1933 it was clear that the Third Reich was applying the political maxim of revolutions, using one set of men who could be dropped in favor of another group once power was achieved.

Having destroyed their Marxist enemies, the National Socialists began to scrutinize all organizations, no matter how conservative, in order to detect any threat of opposition. In the case of Spann and his school of thought, their observations quickly disclosed that the intrinsic dissimilarities existing between Nazi and corporatist ideologies were profound and permanent. Careful surveillance of the intellectual and political activities of the universalistic Kreis convinced the technicians of power in the Nazi party that these "eggheads" (Literaten) were at best superfluous, and that they were at least potentially capable of menacing National Socialist ideological supremacy in Germany. Hitler's rise to power signaled an end to the ideological eclecticism upon which the Nazis had relied before "seizing" power. The party went through a thoroughgoing

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process of "debunking ideas" (Ideendämmerung) after 1933; if the "national revolution" was to have any ideology at all, it would come from the new masters of Germany themselves and not from an independent Kreis of intellectuals, for parallel efforts by "sulking clubs" had no place in the process of creating an ideology for the Third Reich.

From the outset, the conflict between National Socialism and Spannian corporatism centered upon the importance of "race" within the German state. The universalistic philosopher believed that although certain people were inferior, it was the level of spirituality rather than hereditary traits that determined their low rank on the human scale. In other words, a deficiency of inner spirit, not a lack of biological attributes, accounted for "lower" ethnic groups. The people of Scandinavia and The Netherlands, for example, had retained "pure Nordic and heroic" racial characteristics, but their utilitarian and mechanistic style of life based on economic individualism had resulted in the general qualitative decline of the societies of these "Aryan" races. Only a profound spiritual transformation, the professor was convinced, could elevate them from their fallen state. Spann's universalistic system

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went beyond classifying various peoples in terms of their spiritual qualities; it "weighed" the individual's attributes as well. The Austrian thinker pointed out that many great men had parents whose intelligence was merely average. A person's unique genius, he felt, could be explained only by the presence of spiritual forces in the universe, not in terms of biologically-grounded racial characteristics.\(^{43}\)

The Nazis, on the other hand, insisted that the entire German Volk shared the same blood and consequently had the same human potential. Their concept of state and nation emphasized the ascendancy of "racially superior" Germans over all other peoples because of clear biological laws. Within the German Volksgemeinschaft, united by the "leadership principle" (Führerprinzip), every German was potentially capable of taking on a leadership role. Opposed to this radically egalitarian notion was the universalistic division of society into an elite caste and spiritually inferior masses. Refuting Spann's hierarchical categorization of the German people, Robert Ley, chief of the totalitarian German Labor Front, stated, "The worker has the same abilities as his employer because both are members of one racial community. What the worker lacks, we [the Nazis] must give him."\(^{44}\) National Socialist propaganda

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never tired of pointing out that Adolf Hitler himself had risen from the 
ranks of the people. 45 The Nazi ruling elite rejected Spann's hierarchical 
ideology because it inevitably would lead to a fragmentation of the national 
will, returning Germany to the situation existing before 1933 when the 
people's total energies had not been harnessed to an overpowering move-
ment. 46

Political activity as well as differences in "racial" theory precipi-
tated conflict between the Spann school and the National Socialists. Although 
members of the professor's Kreis were actively engaged in organizations 
such as the Institut für Ständewesen, the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront, and 
the Austrian Nazi party, all of which were partially funded by the German 
state, Ley and other critics of corporatism remained wary of these intel-
lectuals' eager efforts at "collaboration." The Berlin government was 
ever certain whether these Literaten expended their energies to attain 
party goals or whether in fact the Spann circle directed its efforts toward 
achieving its own separate aims.

45 Heinrich Härle, Vom Ständestaat zur Priesterherrschaft. Eine 
Abrechnung mit Othmar Spann (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, 

46 Robert Ley, "Der Sieg der Vernunft," Der Deutsche, January 
The Nazi party's initial distrust stemmed from a specific incident. In 1931 Pope Pius XI published the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* which supplemented earlier papal decrees on social questions. Spann believed that in this pronouncement endorsing an "organic" society based on vocational rather than political representation the Catholic church actually gave official sanction to his own corporative ideology. It occurred to the philosopher that papal "approval" of his social theories might assist in the propagation of his version of a future *Ständestaat* throughout Central Europe. German-speaking Catholics had been traditionally influenced by universalistic concepts, the Austrian academician thought; so why not unite all Catholics under one intellectual and political banner—his own. Political life in Austria, Germany, and the Sudetenland had been fragmented into a multitude of political factions; if all Catholics combined forces under a single ideological program, they would control the balance of power in these troubled areas. United, they could weld the *Volk* together in a "total Germany" (*Gesamtdeutschland*).

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47 Jostock, *Der deutsche Katholizismus*, p. 201.

Certain Catholic circles were already attracted to Spann's idea of a German Reich. Members of the Catholic youth movement, the Benedictine Order, and a number of Catholic university professors had embraced his concept of an eternal German kingdom which would bring aesthetic as well as political unity to the heart of Europe. The Austrian scholar conceived of a Reich in much the same terms as had the Romantics of the early nineteenth century--it was to be a supranational state including all of Germany's medieval territories. Seeking a perfect realm in Central Europe, a number of conservative Catholic intellectuals enthusiastically received the Neo-Romantic professor's conception of a reborn German Reich which reflected the social unity and spiritual intensity they felt had existed in the Holy Roman Empire of the Christian middle ages.

Spann's influence upon Catholic intellectual and political circles alarmed National Socialist leaders who feared the Austrian corporatist

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would betray both the Volk and fatherland to the powers represented by the Vatican. Some party members were even afraid that their Führer had come under the sway of Catholic ideology. Carl Dyrssen, a writer deeply imbued with the Prussian mystique, expressed this fear when he stated that "both the activities of the practical politician Adolf Hitler in Munich and the teaching of the political philosopher Othmar Spann in Vienna are taking on a noticeably ... Fascist character, and they will end up in the Rome of the Catholic church just as Mussolini did."

Nazi purists believed that Catholic universalism was not truly German, and that Spann's propagation of a universalistic "true spirit" would destroy their unique völkisch state and replace it with a theocracy.

The Austrian corporatist's penchant for Catholic intellectual and political unity did not go unnoticed by his contemporaries. In late 1931 the "Greater German Press Service" (Grossdeutscher Pressedienst) of Berlin released the information that Spann was on the verge of founding a "National Social Catholic Party." The sociologist immediately denied this report in a public statement in which he pointed out that one of his


52 Härtle, Vom Ständestaat zur Priesterherrschaft, pp. 91-95.
former students, a certain Dr. Kunze, had made several misleading remarks about the universalistic school's political ambitions. He flatly stated that Kunze was using his name without authorization to give the new political body ideological prestige.  

Determined to refute those accusing him of political intrigue, Spann instructed his lawyer, Hans Frank, a Nazi residing in Munich, to sue the Greater German Press Service if a retraction of the original news release were not forthcoming. Frank assured the offended professor that the entire affair could be easily settled and indicated that he would probably be able to have a denial of the allegations published in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, the official Nazi paper. At the same time, the Austrian scholar requested his close associate Wilhelm Longert, who edited *Ständisches Leben* in Berlin, to find more definite information about this press agency. Longert's investigations disclosed that the *Grossdeutscher Pressedienst* was a rather shadowy organization which apparently had no responsible publisher. Frank also made

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inquiries about the Pressedienst during a trip to Berlin. After this sojourn the lawyer wrote Spann immediately, advising him to drop his charge forthwith. Frank had discovered that the Greater German Press Service was, in fact, a Nazi propaganda organ. As a loyal party member, he felt he could not act as the Austrian's counsel in the Kunze case. He wrote Spann that the agency had agreed to accept the professor's point-by-point denial of its allegations, which would be published in both the Grossdeutscher Pressedienst and the Völkischer Beobachter. Frank advised his client to accept this proposal, urging him, above all, not to initiate any legal proceedings against the National Socialists.57

After Hitler's accession to power, Nazi displeasure with Spann and his Kreis was openly exhibited. When the economist attended a meeting on corporative reconstruction at the Reich chancellery in 1933, Hitler refused to enter the conference room until the Austrian professor had left.58 The specific reason for the Führer's behavior was never explained, but further official opposition to the Ständestaat ideologist was manifested in the same year when a scheduled speech in Cologne was suddenly


cancelled by order of the local authorities. The major blow against Spann and his circle came in late 1934, when Hitler decided to end all corporative "experiments" and ordered a halt to all programs carried out under this general designation. Ley announced shortly thereafter that a Ständestaat social and political order would doom Germany to the political chaos and impotence it had known during the Weimar republic. He singled out Spann as the most influential propagator of this dangerous theory.

Determined to strike back at their adversaries, the Spann circle launched an attack against certain members of the National Socialist party. Answering Ley's criticism, they questioned his scholarly qualifications and maintained that only a trained intellectual could seriously examine Spann's universalistic system. The corporatist thinker himself censured the deterministic ideologies of the "Gobineau school" in an article published in early 1935 in the Italian Fascist ideological journal

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59 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 17.


Lo Stato. At the same time the racial expert of the Kreis, Otto Brandl, examined Nazi biological theories in a critical light, insisting that "racial breeding" would only lead to the eventual destruction of the spiritual essence of Germandom.

The circle's boldest assault on the philosophical assumptions of National Socialist philosophy was made by Paul Karrenbrock, an important member of the Institut für Ständewesen. In an essay entitled Die Lösung der Judenfrage (The Solution of the Jewish Question), Karrenbrock analyzed what he and the universalistic school felt were the disastrous consequences of radical racist theories as applied in Germany since 1933. In particular, Rosenberg's criteria of birth and heredity rather than achievement and . spiritual worth as national standards were condemned because they excluded talented Jews from national life and virtually ignored the idealistic forces in German political and intellectual life. Written with Othmar Spann's full knowledge and approval, the essay was privately printed and distributed. In keeping with the universalistic school's belief that only a nation's


65 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," pp. 29-30.
elite could effect truly lasting change, three hundred copies were sent to various party, government, industrial, and academic leaders. In a note accompanying the copy sent to Adolf Hitler, Karrenbrock reemphasized the threat which Rosenberg's racial theories posed to the future of the Third Reich. 66

The Karrenbrock essay set off a chain reaction of events, the first of which was its author's arrest in the fall of 1935. Extensive interrogations of the Spannian disciple and the seizure of much of his correspondence convinced the leaders of the SS that the Viennese professor and his students must be thoroughly investigated. 67 Both Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler and his brilliant, ruthless deputy, Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Sicherheitsdienst, had long suspected this version of corporative theory was thoroughly incompatible with the ideals of both the Nazi movement and the German nation and had to be viewed as a real political threat. Their observations led to the inescapable conclusion that universalistic ideology was a potential rallying point for dissatisfied conservatives. The SS chiefs feared that Spann's "true state" might one day emerge as a "counter-Germany"

66Ibid., pp. 35-36.

67Karrenbrock's arrest made possible the secret SD report of May, 1936, that formed the basis for subsequent Nazi actions against the Spann Kreis.
(Gegendeutschland) based on non-racial, universalistic Catholic principles. 68

Nazi "intellectuals," particularly those connected with the inner circles of the SS, were also highly critical of the elitist social theories of the Austrian scholar, holding that they threatened the unity of the new Germany. Virtually ignoring the völkisch forces which permeated the nation, his system tended to make the state the property of a chosen elite rather than the living expression of a true people's community (Volksgemeinschaft) based on blood ties. 69 Spann's occupational estates would destroy the direct relationship the Volk now shared with its Führer, fragmenting the German people into antagonistic vocational cliques and hostile interest groups. The National Socialist leadership corps were convinced that this Neo-Romanticist ideologist's concepts were a "poison" endangering German racial unity and national strength. 70

Karrenbrock's arrest and the censure of universalistic corporatism by the SS threw a pall over all activities in which Spann and his circle were engaged. In June, 1936, the Institut für Ständewesen was officially

68 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 24.


liquidated. The Austrian staff members had already returned home, and their German colleagues likewise scattered to various academic and business centers. Industrial financiers also deserted projects with which the Austrian social theorist and his disciples were involved. Unwilling to associate with these blacklisted Nazi party members, the coal and iron interests which had subsidized Ständisches Leben and the Erneuerungs-Verlag since 1931 terminated their relationship with the Spann Kreis early in 1935, sending their former intellectual mentors a final payment of 4,000 Reichsmarks.

Even after all substantial German industrial subsidies had been withdrawn from corporative projects, Himmler's agents continued to keep a close watch over the Austrian professor and all those who associated with him. When Wilhelm Grau, a staff member of the Reich Institute for the History of the New Germany, paid a casual visit to Spann in Vienna in January, 1937, both the Sicherheitsdienst and the Gestapo recorded the details of this unimportant call. The SS fully informed Walter Frank, the director of the Institute, about Grau's visit with this Austrian persona non

71 Braune Wirtschafts-Post, Vol. IV, No. 50 (June 13, 1936), p. 1613; and Vol. IV, No. 51 (June 20, 1936), p. 1645.

72 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," pp. 8 and 17.
grata. Obviously the Nazi security services did not regard any contact with Spann as a matter to be taken lightly.

SS scrutiny of the shrinking universalistic circle was rigorous and relentless. When a Munich student named Nitsche told the Austrian professor that Himmler had changed his mind about Spann's universalistic theories and his Kreis' political pursuits, the hapless youth was promptly arrested. The SS accused him of "atrociously misusing" the Reichsführer's name, and the Gestapo carefully interrogated Nitsche to ascertain whether the young man was mentally unstable or a genuine "political agitator".

One of Himmler's personal adjutants wrote Spann a letter informing the Viennese philosopher that the SS was investigating all the details of the case. The letter's final paragraph tersely stated that Himmler's "well-known" negative attitude toward Spann and his endeavors had never altered, even to a slight degree. 74

Nazi disfavor affected the Austrian professor's influence outside the Third Reich's frontiers as well as inside the borders of Germany.


74 Copy of letter from SS-Brigadeführer Wolf, Berlin, January 22, 1937, to Othmar Spann. Desider Viktor, of the University of Dayton, who originally received this document from Walter Heinrich, has kindly given the author permission to cite this source.
Spann and his Kreis were soon made to realize that the National Socialist political octopus held sway over vast German-speaking areas of Central Europe. Hitler's agents were everywhere, and the conservative Austrian circle could make no move unnoticed. The Nazis were particularly interested in undermining Spann's influence in the Sudetenland, where his disciples in the Kameradschaftsbund posed a very real threat to the Hitler movement's political domination of the Sudeten German Home Front.

 Particularly after the National Socialist takeover in Germany in 1933, doubts mounted about the degree to which the Kameradschaftsbund accepted both the ideas and leadership of the Third Reich. The Nazi suspicions were not entirely unfounded, for the KB had consciously remained a small exclusive band of intellectuals dedicated to their ideological mentor in Vienna. KB members fundamentally disdained the Nazis who, according to Walter Heinrich, did not have a single eminent mind among their leadership. This elitist organization believed that the Third Reich would flounder without an integrated philosophical system. Walter Brand went so far as to assert that if Hitler did not hand over Germany's ideological leadership to Spann, the Führer would be guilty of treason against the German

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75 "Der Kampf gegen die Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront," Der Sudetendeutsche, Folge 9 (September, 1934), pp. 5-6.

76 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 5.
people. A particularly enthusiastic Kameradschaftsbund member, intent upon saving the German nation from the "non-intellectual" National Socialists, avowed that "Our Führer is Othmar Spann, not Adolf Hitler."

The KB's adherence to its own separate goals was noted by the radicals within the Sudenten-German nationalist movement, and its independent attitudes were criticized by Der Aufbruch, a crypto-Nazi journal. This publication viewed Kameradschaftsbund members as men with an academic penchant who preferred subtle ideological discussions to decisive political action. These indolent intellectuals did not exert any effort to create new organizations; instead, they infiltrated already-existing groups. Rather than assist the Sudenten-German people in their difficult national struggle, these bookish conspirators chose to theorize about the "mission" of a spiritual elite in German Central Europe. The pro-Nazi editors of Der Aufbruch castigated members of the KB for reading Spann's textbook vision of

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77 Ibid., p. 41.
78 Ibid., p. 4; "Der Spann-Kreis (1938), " frames 754805-754806. 
80 "Der Kampf gegen die Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront," pp. 5-6
a perfect social order while others actively engaged in a fierce combat to realize a new people's community.

The Nazis who had formed around the journal Der Aufbruch rebuked the Austrian professor's disciples for their political opportunism, their specific critiques went beyond conditions in the Sudetenland as they represented the universalistic philosophy as a distinct threat to the future of a dynamic Germanic in Central Europe. The publishers of Der Aufbruch dismissed Spann's corporative state as little more than a refurbished version of the Holy Roman Empire. His universalistic "true state" was politically dangerous for the völkisch cause because it provided an intellectual wedge for a Habsburg restoration in the lands of the defunct Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

81 "Intellektueller! Dein politisches Bekenntnis!", Der Aufbruch, Das Blatt der Kommenden, July 1, 1934, p. 8
The father of universalism's idealistic philosophy was in fact imbued through and through with "theocratic notions" which would enable the Catholic church to dominate secular politics.

The Aufbruch circle insisted that the German people must be made to realize that the Ständestaat ideology was but another aspect of the nefarious forces of "political Catholicism" that were always ready to menace the founding of a powerful Pan-German commonwealth in Central Europe.

Members of the Kameradschaftsbund defended themselves the accusations leveled against them by Der Aufbruch in articles of their own. Replying to the public attacks on Spann, Walter Brand wrote that his mentor was not in any way to be seen as a proponent of Roman Catholic political domination of a Germanic Mitteleuropa; the famous author of Der wahre Staat was, in fact, a "brave volkisch fighter and a great philosopher."

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84 "Sudetendeutsche Entscheidungen," p. 4.
Hurling back the charges of having engaged in "indolent scholarly discussions" while others fought and bled for the cause of Sudeten German nationalism, the publicists of the Kameradschaftsbund asserted that, since the group's purpose was moral and educational, it never had any intention of entering into day-to-day political conflicts. These mature and talented men had only sought to unite the Sudeten-German people with a potent ideology. They informed their Nazi enemies that the KB had, in fact, so successfully accomplished its goals of national education that the association had seen fit to voluntarily dissolve itself in 1934.

Nazi-instigated onslaughts did not cease with the "dissolution" of the Kameradschaftsbund. When the Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront, originally organized by KB members in 1933, reemerged in 1935 as the Sudeten German party (Sudetendeutsche Partei; SdP), the Aufbruch circle became convinced that former KB members, led by Brand and Rutha, were once again working in concert in order to maintain their clique's dominance in the new political movement. The Nazi radicals redoubled their efforts to destroy the influence of the universalistic Bund once and for all.

86 "Die Wahrheit über den 'K.-B.' 'Geheimnisse,' die keine sind," Rundschau, Sudetendeutsche Wochenzeitung, March 15, 1936, p. 3.
It was decided in 1936 that Walter Brand, chief spokesman for the KB and a leading member of the secretariat of the Sudeten German party, should be brought before a "court of honor" to answer to charges of involvement in an elitist semi-secret organization (i.e., the Kameradschaftsbund), and of propagating Ständestaat theories, both activities detrimental to the popular German völkisch spirit which the SdP claimed to be a rallying point for all non-Marxist Sudeten Germans.

In an open letter addressed to the "court of honor", Othmar Spann himself entered the controversy threatening to destroy the unity of the Sudeten German party. Insisting that his student's ideological training had prepared him for the high positions he held in the Sudetenland, Spann not only defended Brand but also reminded the party "judges" that his own universalistic ideas had been of critical importance in protecting the Sudeten German workers from the dangerous and un-German bacillus of Marxism. Actively disseminating an intrinsically German system of thought, both he and Brand had been valiant soldiers in the battle against Bolshevism and liberalism.

87 "Der Führer bekannte sich zur Idee, das Volk zum Führer," Rumburger Zeitung, July 12, 1936, p. 3.
After the trial, the National Socialist radicals of the Aufbruch circle and the Spannian corporatists of the Kameradschaftsbund faction worked out a temporary truce. They agreed that Brand should be retained as a member in good standing in the Sudeten German party and that he should also be appointed the organization's roving ambassador in Western Europe; at the same time several Nazis were allowed to become members of the party's secretariat. The compromise pleased the KB to the extent that Brand gained new status, and the Nazis exulted in his removal from the political scene in the Sudetenland. Spann's intervention in the accused's behalf was at least partially responsible for Brand's "reprieve", but the philosopher's defense also convinced members of the Hitler movement in Czechoslovakia that Spann was, in fact, the ideological mentor of a close-knit circle intent upon realizing its own separate goals.

After the Brand affair, the Viennese corporatist and his followers came under increasing surveillance by Himmler's Sicherheitsdienst, whose ever-vigilant agents continued to record their every move.

Although the two conflicting factions within the Sudeten German party were publicly reconciled after the trial, bitter journalistic attacks on Spann did not cease; in fact, they became increasingly

89 "Die Sudetendeutsche Partei in der Krise,"

personal. The Nazi radicals asserted that the Austrian scholar's intellectual qualifications were at best questionable; their researches produced the information that the professor had entered the University of Tübingen with a preliminary degree that did not qualify him for matriculation to an institution of higher learning. Even as a scholar, he inspired more doubt than admiration; most of his contemporaries were not impressed with the quality of his work. His Nazi critics in the Sudetenland also questioned the sincerity of both his nationalism and conservatism, citing persistent rumors that he had belonged to the Socialist party while working in Germany before World War I. Finally, he had shown his true patriotic colors during the war when he requested and received a medical discharge from the army for a mere finger wound. Such an individual, the Nazis insisted, was clearly not capable of leading the German people either intellectually or politically.

The attacks from the Nazi camp became more vehement when the Czech government arrested several members of the Kameradschafts-bund for subversive activities in the fall of 1937. Before these indicted men could be brought to trial, one of their number took his life in jail. Heinz Rutha, a prominent member of the Spann Kreis, was

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generally thought to be a homosexual, and his suicide only confirmed this suspicion for many. The resulting scandal almost destroyed the Sudeten German party and tainted the reputation of the deceased man’s intellectual comrades as well as that of his ideological mentor.

The moribund Kameradschaftsbund was mercilessly extirpated after the Sudetenland was annexed to the Third Reich in the fall of 1938. In a show trial held in 1939, Walter Brand and other Kameradschaftsbund leaders were accused of homosexuality. The Nazi court alleged that the KB was a "homoerotic" association of men which had combined Spann’s elitist notions with sexual perversion. The prosecution maintained that an all-male elite caste threatened Nazism and endangered the family life upon which the new German society was founded. Declared "enemies of the state," the former Kameradschaftsbund elite received long sentences in concentration camps, and all traces of the association were liquidated.

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93 "Staatsfeinde werden ausgemerzt!", Das schwarze Korps, January 18, 1940, p. 4.

The Spann Kreis helplessly watched its influence in Central Europe steadily diminish after Hitler's rise to power; one by one their journals were forced to cease publication, and friendly organizations professing the Standestaat ideology were liquidated or forced to change their intellectual orientation. No longer could the social philosopher and his disciples voyage freely throughout Europe disseminating their ideas, for much of the continent was now dominated by their National Socialist enemies. The German Führer and his lieutenants had dammed up the river of gold flowing from the industrialists in the Rhine and Ruhr so that the circle could undertake no new projects. The Viennese academician was unable to make his voice heard in a Germany where mass political rallies and hypnotic parades drowned out his message of a "true state." Shrinking funds and increasing Nazi hostility forced Spann and his followers to confine their activities to the Austrian hinterland, where they were patiently endured.

The Austrian governments of Schober, Dollfuss, and Schuschnigg tolerated Rightist ideologues of various political persuasions as it was felt that such theoreticians presented no real menace to the conservative republic.

The official attitude before 1933 allowed Spann and his circle to propagate their ideas in the Heimwehr movement; in fact, their involvement with this bourgeois militia was encouraged by prominent politicians, particularly the political prelate and leader of the Christian Social party, Ignaz Seipel. Only when there were hints that theories might hatch political plots did official leniency cease.

This was the case in June, 1930, when the Schober government strongly suspected that the Heimwehr was once again planning a coup d'état; the chancellor reacted vigorously by deporting the organization's military chief, Waldemar Pabst, as an undesirable alien. Pabst's sudden departure ended the "alliance" between the Spann Kreis and the Heimwehr. Despite desperate attempts to receive the association, the circle was unable to prevent the movement's loss of momentum and eventual disintegration into opposing factions. In fact, their attempts to unite the Heimwehr through the adoption of an official ideology actually hastened its demise.


Spann's teaching at the University of Vienna did not disturb the government until the tone of his lectures became pro-Nazi in the spring of 1933. Valiantly struggling to maintain the nation's independence, Chancellor Dollfuss was not sympathetic to the professor's yearning for Austrians to become citizens of Hitler's Third Reich. After enduring several months of violent criticism, the head of government decided to initiate disciplinary procedures against his scholarly adversary in December, 1933. Although it appeared to some that the academic might be dismissed from his position, the case stagnated in bureaucratic channels until May, 1934, when it was officially announced that Spann would be allowed to retain his professorship. Rumor credited the intervention of the Italian ambassador in Vienna as having rescued the Ständestaat philosopher from his political predicament.

After 1935 Othmar Spann disappeared into political limbo. Rejected in Germany, attacked in the Sudetenland, and all but ignored in Austria, he increasingly withdrew from involvement in public life.

98 Cuno Horkenbach (ed.), Das Deutsche Reich von 1918 bis Heute (1933) (Berlin; Presse- und Wirtschafts-Verlag, 1935), p. 630
100 "Der Spannkreis (1936)," p. 24
His attitude toward national independence changed, and he dropped his lifelong Pan-German stance for a guarded pro-Austrian position. In 1937 he assured Chancellor Schuschnigg he was fully convinced that Germany was moving in the wrong direction.\(^{101}\) The political phase of his life ended; Spann now ventured into private activities, dividing the bulk of his time between studies of pure philosophy and religion, and the development of oilfields in the Zistersdorf region.\(^{102}\)

During the last agonizing months of Austrian independence, Spann was convinced that his fellow-countrymen must defend themselves against those "two fools, Adolf and Rosenberg, and their un-German movement which is inimical to religion." He believed that the Nazi movement was doomed to an early political death in Germany. Once Nazism had disappeared, he anticipated the restoration of the Houses of Habsburg and Hohenzollern in Central Europe. Just weeks before the Anschluss he confided to Rudolf Hoyos, a close friend of Schuschnigg, that the only way for Austria to avoid German annexation was to be "spiritually prepared to such an extent that Hitler will lose the desire to swallow us up." As he saw the situation, if Austria could temporarily withstand pressures from the Third Reich, it could reconsolidate under the Habsburg banner and


\(^{102}\) Ibid.
the ancient Holy Roman Empire would once again lay claim to large parts
of Germany itself. 103

When the sound of the Wehrmacht's boots echoed upon Vienna's
pavements on that fateful day in March, 1938, Professor Spann was equal
to the occasion. He "assembled his family about him, drew the cork from
a bottle of champagne, and announced: 'This is the happiest day of my
life!'" 104 Shortly thereafter he sent the leader of the Austrian Nazis,
Arthur Seyss-Inquart, a congratulatory letter. 105 Despite tumultuous
celebration, the intellectual found time to see off a self-exiled Jewish
acquaintance at the railway station. 106 A few days after the Nazis
occupied the Austrian capital, Spann was arrested as an enemy of the
Third Reich. 107

103 Copy of letter from Rudolf Hoyos, Vienna, February 28, 1938,
to Kurt Schuschnigg, enclosed in letter from Reinhard Heydrich, Berlin,
June 1, 1938, to Hermann Göring, International Military Tribunal
Nuremberg, Office of U. S. Chief of Counsel, unpublished document
3580-PS.

104 Von Salomon, Fragebogen, p. 102.

105 "Der Spann-Kreis (1938)," frame 754822.

106 Letter to the author from Franz Goldner, New York, February
6, 1969.

107 Heydrich, Himmler and Hitler were kept informed of the Spann
case after March, 1938; the professor's petulant letters to the Führer
asking for full pension rights, due recognition as a völkisch intellectual
pioneer, and appointment to the chair of pure philosophy at the University
of Berlin are contained in the folder from the Berlin Reichskanzlei, now
kept in the German Federal Archives in Koblenz under the classification
R 43 II/399.
Ever engrossed in philosophical theory, this universalist thinker never understood Hitler's power politics. He had collaborated with the National Socialists because he believed that only through the force of ideas could one achieve power. It was his intent to furnish the Third Reich with its ideology; Germany would become a Spannian "true state", morally and spiritually dominating all Europe. It seemed inconceivable to him that the Nazis could ever rule without a clear philosophy to guide them, and he declared that "They could never govern a country. What's their policy, their scientific doctrine? What is it? It just doesn't exist. The stuff Rosenberg writes, it's . . . it's rubbish!"\textsuperscript{108} The Neo-Romanticist idealist failed to comprehend that it was precisely this lack of a specific body of ideas which catapulted Hitler to power.\textsuperscript{109}

After several months of imprisonment, Spann was released and exiled to his rural estate in the Burgenland where he passed the remainder of his life writing philosophical, religious, and mystical studies. Throughout his career, the father of universalism desired to see the world as it should be, not as it really was. Only here, on the Austrian plain, did Othmar Spann finally witness the triumph of pure philosophy over ugly fact.

\textsuperscript{108}Von Salomon, \textit{Fragebogen}, p. \textsuperscript{99}.

\textsuperscript{109}Von Klemperer, \textit{Germany's New Conservatism}, p. 199.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Othmar Spann's metamorphosis from professor of economics and sociology to spokesman for a conservative intellectual movement was rooted in the chaos which racked Central Europe after 1918. The Great War shattered not only the centuries-old Habsburg monarchy but a familiar and secure way of life as well. War weakened a middle class already caught between the conflicting forces of big business and organized labor. Ruined by inflation and frightened by the threat of annihilation by either capitalists or proletarians, this class yearned for an alternative to the fluid, unstable urban society which they felt menaced their very existence. These discontented Central Europeans were seized by a nostalgia for a traditional, stratified social order. ¹

Theorists of corporative societies found an eager response among the uprooted members of the postwar generation. These thinkers outlined various plans for social orders based on the principles of leadership, faith, and myth. They promised that a Germanic community harnessing the mystical forces of Deutschum, Blut und Boden ("Germandom, blood

and soil") would alleviate the malaise gripping Central Europe. Othmar Spann was only one of many "prophets and preachers"\(^2\) whose vision of a new spiritual community gave an insecure generation a glimmer of hope for the future.

The Austrian Neo-Romantic was himself optimistic that, once the German Volk returned to their pristine origins, they could quickly recover their position of primacy in Europe. Their spiritual superiority was unmatched by that of any other nationality because they had always yearned to understand the universe in cosmic terms.\(^3\) This great nation in the heart of Europe would never accept shallow Western materialism, for it was fundamentally "un-German" and conflicted with their transcendental Weltanschauung.\(^4\) If the innate superiority of the German people was not apparent to Europeans after the war, it was because they had temporarily forgotten the essence of their mystical nature. Once they reestablished their traditional stratified, organic social order, the turmoil and spiritual malaise tormenting them would cease. The German

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\(^2\) Ernst Toller, Briefe aus dem Gefängnis (Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1935), p. 78. Klemens von Klemperer kindly pointed out this reference to the author.

\(^3\) Spann, Tote und lebendige Wissenschaft, pp. 1 and 176; Körber, Ostmärkischer Freiheitsgeist, p. 144.

nation had but to follow the route Spann outlined in Der wahre Staat to recover its moral and ethical primacy on the continent. Spiritually united by his philosophy of mystical totalitarianism, the German Volk would lead Europe to a new kingdom based on "truth" itself.

Spann hoped that his circle of devoted disciples would fulfill his social prophecies. In order to disseminate the professor's universalistic ideology, his small elite was to epitomize all that was spiritually unique within the German people. To achieve a rarified level of perception, these chosen men should ignore everyday distractions. All the paraphernalia of modern life—radio, motion pictures, and especially newspapers—should be avoided, for they drained men of their spiritual energy. His select band of followers would surround themselves only with the "best" people, books, and thoughts. This elect would embody the essence of all spiritual forces, and the spark of their ardor would one day become a world conflagration.  

The Austrian thinker's mystical predilections increased throughout his life. Although he had concentrated on statistical work early in his

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6 In his later years, he always kept copies of the writings of Master Eckhart and St. Theresa of Avila on his desk. Interview with Raphael Spann, Vienna, May 10, 1968.
academic career, the professor turned more and more away from the scientific aspects of sociology in later life. His wife's studies of the spiritual origins of Aryan social structures awakened his interest in the mystical philosophies of ancient India. His fascination with the harmonious and stable Indian caste system led him to direct several seminar studies on the subject at the University of Vienna. Spann supervised the writing of a book on the mystical origins of money in the Aryans' ancient homeland authored by a student who was a member of the Brahman caste. The father of universalism also became absorbed in the society of ancient Egypt after a visit to that country in the 1930's. He was amazed by the extraordinary degree of spirituality which the Egyptians had achieved under the rule of the Pharaohs, and he contrasted the sprawling, industrialized cities of modern Europe with the ancient hierarchically-organized civilization which had experienced no "proletarianization, misery, and dirt." Unable to accept the ugliness and

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7 Interview with Hanna Riehl, Graz, November 14, 1967.

8 Kolnai, *The War Against the West*, pp. 384-386 and 690.


pettiness of the world as it was, this idealist continually retreated back-
wards in time, ever searching for the immutable.

Spann and his circle were convinced that an absolutely just and
perfect society could be created in Central Europe after 1918. Their
profound error was their faith in the ideological tenet that "deeds make
history, but ideas make deeds."¹¹ Buoyed up by boundless "philosoph-
ical self-confidence,"¹² they entered the political arena intent upon
establishing a spiritual and moral German Reich. They soon realized
the importance of political support, and it was at this point that Spann
and his disciples began to confuse ends and means, words and deeds,
facts and illusion, and, worst of all, friends and enemies. Intellectuals
to the core, they joined a front of anti-intellectuals.¹³ Despising "mob
irrationality," they themselves fed the flames of social myth and polit-
ical unreason.¹⁴ Espousing the primacy of spiritual forces in society,
they endorsed a movement based on racial materialism.

¹¹ Othmar Spann, Kämpfende Wissenschaft (Jena: Gustav Fischer,
1934), p. iii; Spann, "Die Bedeutung des ständischen Gedankens für die

¹² Karl Jaspers, The Origin and Goal of History, transi. Michael

¹³ Ernst Robert Curtius, Deutscher Geist in Gefahr (Stuttgart:
Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1932), p. 43.

¹⁴ Spann enthusiastically endorsed the Nazi book-burnings of
May, 1933, as a "triumph of the essence of Germandom." See Spann,
Kämpfende Wissenschaft, p. 126.
This social prophet's political maneuvers were part of a rebellion against reason and freedom that was fatal to himself, his followers, the German people, and to an entire generation of Europeans. Yet, despite the many disasters which befell him, the philosopher never ceased to believe in the power and nobility of his ideas. 15 Throughout his life he remained convinced that his universalistic metaphysics explained man's social and moral nature. Creator of a totalitarian intellectual system which was incapable of explaining man's place in modern society, Othmar Spann, philosopher-king of a poetic "true state," ended his days as a lonely prince in the "kingdom of illusions." 16

15 Up to the time of his death, Spann could not believe that his ideas had been anything other than beneficial in the intellectual and political life of the years 1918-1938. Letter to the author from Klemens von Klemperer, Northampton, Mass., May 10, 1967.

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