

8-20-93
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"The Nationalization of the German Revolution":
The June Club, *Das Gewissen* and the Ring Movement.

This thesis examines the development of the neo-conservative

June Club in Germany. Todd Donald Robert Evanchiew B.A., University of Victoria, 1993

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS and its attempt to develop a coherent in the Department of History

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the development of the neo-conservative June Club in Germany during the period 1919-1928. Based on the group's journal *Das Gewissen* (1919-1928), and its collective publication *Die Neue Front* (1922), it explores the gradual coalescing of the June Club's membership and its attempt to develop a coherent neo-conservative political movement.

While insights are provided into the June Club's sociological background through a study of some of its more noted participants, *Das Gewissen* and *Die Neue Front* are used as a basis for exploring the group's ideas in the areas of domestic policy, foreign policy, the economy and corporatism, culture, as well as the significance of the war and revolution in Germany.

A claim is made that the ideology developed by the June Club played a part in helping to prepare the German populace to later accept the more radical ideas of the Nazis. This thesis reveals the group as an integral piece of the puzzle which makes up the fascinating shift from rational politics in Germany, to the popular longing for national redemption and a great leader figure.

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To Mom, Dad, Jill, Dave and Sara

Chapter One: Introduction

While Germany's failure in the First World War meant an unprecedented political opportunity for some, many found the post-war revolutionary period to be one of frustration in the face of overwhelming turmoil. In fact, many political activists and intellectuals felt they had been unfairly displaced by the chaotic events of the Revolution and the formation of the Weimar Republic. Yet, these same individuals refused to give up participating in the political arena entirely. It was in the early months of 1919, at the Berlin home of the political activist Heinrich von Gleichen, that one group of these individuals began to gather in weekly discussions on how Germany as a whole might best overcome this situation. These attempts to deal with their own political marginalization led ultimately to this group's creation of a formal collective for the development and propagation of the ideas which came out of these meetings. Based on the guidelines laid down by Gleichen and his closest collaborators, Eduard Stadtler and Moeller van den Bruck, the Juni-Klub, or June Club, was formed officially at the start of June 1919.

Chapter One: Introduction

Shortly after the group's formation, their weekly meetings moved to a rented headquarters in a Berlin suburb and began to draw an average of between 120 to 150 regulars, plus special guest speakers. The group's participants were made up of a unique mix of important publishers, editors, journalists, educators, bankers and economists, as well as party leaders from the whole of the political spectrum. All of these representatives shared one common bond. They were frustrated with the status-quo and could foresee

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better things for Germany through the creation of a new political movement. Such a movement would focus on the creation of interlocking "rings" of support which could eventually direct public opinion towards its own unique political platform. Only such a platform, they felt, could save Germany from the chaos which it was experiencing in those June days of 1919.

This study of the June Club will focus on several aspects of the group. First, it will explore the historical background from which the group's ideas sprang. It will argue that their beliefs were the product of a number of historical contingencies unique to Germany itself. The group's novel combination of these beliefs and ideas encouraged them to break through the political frustration which they faced in the Germany of the early 1920's. In effect, they hoped to "nationalize" the German revolution, which had strayed from the course they desired through the domination of socialists and reactionary groups. Second, an attempt will be made to reveal the sociological background of the group through a study of its membership. This section will focus on the participants' personal history, occupation, and political and intellectual activities. An attempt will be made to reveal the multiplicity of contacts among members which became the basis for the so-called Ring Movement. Third, this study will examine the group's weekly journal, *Das Gewissen*, or *The Conscience*, in its most productive period, 1919-1922. The unique slant which the journal put on the events of the post-war period and many of the specialized issues to which each of the writers contributed will be studied. Finally,

the thesis will conclude by examining the group's struggle to adapt to the changing political climate in the period 1923-1928. This will cover the group's creation of a political college, the publication of a collective program in 1923, under the title of Die Neue Front, as well as the continued publication of *Das Gewissen*.

It is not surprising that when disaster came in the form of Germany's loss. While the development of an industrialized society in Germany and the social changes that resulted from it might seem marginal to an examination of the June Club in the 1920's, these events were instrumental in setting the stage for the group's development. Social changes threatened a declining middle-class usually described in its urban form as the *Bürgertum*, or more generally, as the *Mittelstand* or middle-estate. Connected to this rapidly changing social structure was a political phenomenon that would eventually come to bear the brunt of the latent anger which was developing in many segments of this changing societal group. Liberalism was developing in such a way that it came to be associated with all of those things which seemed to mean less control for the individual in one's own life. Ultimately, it came to be characterized by ineffectual parliamentary wrangling and by the uninspired leadership of parties. Many felt there existed a general lack of any unifying elements in society that reflected the sentiments of the *Volk* as a whole.¹ It became fashionable to argue that since Bismarck there had existed no individual who possessed the charisma and will to keep the country together, and that disintegration of the German *Volk* was a disaster only waiting to

happen. *Honoratiorenpolitik*, the politics of notables, had effectively given way to mass political organization in the final decade of the nineteenth century.² Furthermore, new political trends reflected this "modernized" form of society and the *Honoratiorenpolitik* was replaced by elections based on issues. It is not surprising that when disaster came in the form of Germany's losing the First World War, many political ideologues jumped at the chance to declare the end of German society and call for drastic measures to be taken.

One of the effects of this modernization of society was that forms of social organization had to be updated in order for political interest groups to advocate their causes effectively. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the trend away from the *Verein* as a pattern of organization.³ The *Verein*, which means literally 'organization' or 'association,' referred to the public orientation of a political interest group in the tradition of enlightenment liberalism. Membership was open and oriented towards support of specific political parties. These parties usually sought either to maintain past rights and privileges, to hold power within the status quo, or to direct the future of society, according to their particular class oriented economic formula.⁴ However, the newer trend, especially for many on the Right of the political spectrum, was a return to the forms of association that existed before the *Verein* model associated with political liberalism. In effect, this was a return to the old honorific style of organization. Politically active individuals in Germany

at this time reacted against mass interest-group organization. In response, they attempted to move beyond the classic mass organizational style documented by Geoff Eley in his study of the Navy League and the German Right.⁵ This new form of organization looked to the leadership of an intellectual elite to provide an alternative to the current class based requirement.

The June Club was therefore formed to try to break through the domination of Weimar politics by particular classes. Space existed for a new political group that did not base its support on class or party, but rather on their combination of ideas. As might have been expected, the attempts to sway public opinion concentrated on an attack on liberalism. Fritz Stern has explained this attack on two grounds. First, there developed in nineteenth-century Germany a trend towards a certain style of life or cultural stance, which he terms a *Lebensgefühl*.⁶ Stern suggests essentially that the *Lebensgefühl* of many people, including the middle-class *Bürger*, substituted their nation's greatest achievements, its cultural accomplishments, as a justification for their greatest shortcoming, the inability to organize politically.⁷ He argues that Germany missed out on the democratic revolution in the West, as its first experience with such ideas came in the form of a foreign conqueror -- Napoleon Bonaparte. Therefore, an aroused German nationalism was early on less concerned with the social and political ideas of the French Revolution, and instead dwelt on the superiority of the German brand of Idealism and its corollaries, the movements of *Sturm and Drang* and romanticism.⁸ Second, as a result of this

Idealism, there was also the trend towards worship of the individual as a representation of perfectibility. Ideas of equality were lost amongst those of strong personalities who had achieved great heights in culture and politics and these were represented by the likes of Bismarck in his single-handed mastery of the liberals.⁹ By the time society became overwhelmingly secularized in the modern period and through the further influences of Hegel and Nietzsche, this ideal was strongly imbedded in the German people.

The earliest significant changes to German conservative ideology began in the early 1890's with creation of the *Bund der Landwirte*, or Farmers' League. This organization formed as a result of the deflationary crisis that was ongoing in the previous twenty years and in order to combat the tariff policies of Chancellor Caprivi. It has been argued by Hans-Jürgen Puhle that this crisis and the resulting change were a natural symptom of society and the economy adjusting to developing socio-economic and political realities.¹⁰ The Farmers' League was instrumental in starting to bring to the Conservatives something that they had previously lacked. The support of a greater part of the *Mittelstand*, younger political leaders and agitators, as well as a more modern, organized and disciplined party and electoral base, were all changes that slowly began to colour the new conservative ideology.¹¹

However, these earliest changes to German conservatism were not single-handedly orchestrated by the Farmers' League. It was

followed closely by many similar organizations, all plying their own section of society much in the same manner as the League had done. The first to develop were predominantly interest-based like the Farmers' League. Group names such as *Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfenvereine*, or National German Shop Assistants' Association, the Pan-German League and the Navy League, reflect attempts to earn support based on an identifying interest, as opposed to a more general political platform. But it was also not long before such organizations began to contrive more general political platforms and turned towards supplanting the party structure and running parallel to it. Moreover, unlike the Verein model during its formative period, these groups increasingly adhered to more secretive and little understood organizational forms, which would be reflected in groups such as the June Club, the Thule Society, the Germanic Order, the *Reichshammerbund*, the *Dürerbund*, the Germanic Order, the Wednesday Society, and the *Herrenklub*.¹² The outlook and combination of ideas maintained by these associations suggests that one use the title "neo-conservative" in order to comprehend how they related to their antecedents. These groups were "neo-conservative" because they urged the preservation of a "natural" state that was rooted in traditional forms, but was politically and socio-economically radical and would be achieved by revolutionary means if necessary. Finally, this new state was focussed on Germany and would not support the kind of internationalism encouraged by European socialists.

Finding the exact beginning or end to the movement of neo-conservatism is an almost impossible task. However, for the purposes of this thesis, it is possible to present the reader with a variety of ideas that played some role in the entire neo-conservative movement, as well as in the background of *Das Gewissen*, the June Club, and the Ring Movement. The primary influences on this movement were German nationalism; social conservatism and economic corporatism; the youth movement that began in the latter half of the nineteenth century; the "ideas of 1914" and the front mentality which they cultivated; and finally, the experience of the war and revolution for the majority in Germany.

From the formation of the Reich, to war, to revolution, to Republic, one can suggest that the task of organizing the state in such a way that it would promote national unity, or at least limit those who might speak out of line and contravene it, was the ultimate goal of all German nationalists. Beginning with H.J. Grimmelhausen, J.G. Herder, and J.G. Fichte, through to the renewed German nationalism of Bismarck and Wilhelm II, and then the various parties and coalitions that represented the Weimar government, all worked to create the conditions that they thought would make Germany a strong and stable nation. One can place all of the neo-conservatives of the early twentieth century, including the June Club, at the end of this line.

Related to renewed nationalism was the question of economic survival for the majority of Germans in a period of multifaceted

change. In response to the looming power of organized capital and labour, it became necessary for new economic ideals to replace a system that many felt had become stale in its options. The solution for some became a recombining of past options, once promoted by the likes of J.G. Fichte, Adam Müller, and G.W.F. Hegel, into new and exciting possibilities. Later on, these possibilities would take on names like "Social Conservatism" or "Prussian Socialism," but all owed at least some credit to what Ralph Bowen has termed "German Corporatism," or the *ständische Idee*.

In 1896, Werner Sombart first began to question the nature of Germany's economic modernization and the haunting issue of class conflict. Sombart's significance lay in his ability to analyze the situation in Imperial Germany at the turn of the century, and prescribe distinctly German remedies that did not fall into the typical pattern of support for a single party or class. He outlined these solutions in his major work, Socialism and the Social Movement (1896), which was but one of many similar efforts undertaken throughout his life. Sombart's writings suggested that Western and Central Europe were witnessing the decline of the capitalist system and its eventual transition to Socialism.¹³ For Sombart, the Social Democrats (SPD) were not the party that would lead Germans into this stage of economic development. He argued that they had lost track of their ideological principles and become accommodationists, hence supporting the current capitalist system.¹⁴ Only individual nations with a new form of economy, one that was

completely planned at every turn and level, would be successful in the future which he saw creeping towards the depression. He would write in his later life:

The work of deliverance of German Socialism does not extend to any single class or to any particular group of the population, but comprehends all in all their parts. Since peasants, wage-workers, land-owners and employers, merchants and manual labourers, officials and intellectuals, in short, all members of society were equally injured by the economic age, they all now must be delivered from these injuries. German Socialism is no proletarian, *petit bourgeois*, or other kind of part-Socialism, but a popular Socialism. And as it comprehends the entire people, it also includes every branch of culture, not merely the field of economics: it is *totalistic*.¹⁵

Two elements struck Sombart as particularly necessary for future economic success, and these were inextricably linked. First, class-conflict seemed to be an inevitability of social and economic change and as such, had to be dealt with successfully by non-violent means, leaving all parties satisfied.¹⁶ Second, the German people would have to be more nationalistic to survive. However, Sombart felt this would come as an inevitable result of members of the society being satisfied with the economy and their share in it. Throughout his career Sombart fine-tuned several aspects of his theory but the essentials always remained both "national" and "social" in their orientation.

Another significant influence upon the neo-conservatives was the youth movement, which was related to, but went beyond, the basic concept of a renewed German nationalism. For neo-conservatism, the key significance of the *Wandervogel* movement lay in the ideals cultivated within the generation that participated in

it. First, one would have to point to the importance of the movement as a reaction against all of the elements of modern bourgeois society. A release was presented from all of the stresses discussed earlier, such as industrialism, urbanization, the stuffy world of Wilhelmine society and politics in general.¹⁷ Second, the youth movement was also unique in the answers that it provided for these problems. These were idealistic solutions for young and dynamic people. The solutions were sufficiently revolutionary to satisfy the youthful need for action, but traditional enough that the proposed style of life was rooted in the imagined harmony of a bygone age. This spirit also drew inspiration from writings by Wilhelm Riehl, Hermann Löns, Paul de Lagarde and Julius Langbehn, as well as the artistic ideals of Fidus, and even old Germanic folk songs.¹⁸ Young people of the *Wandervogel* were discouraged from bringing politics into the movement in its early stages. The ideal of a unified *Volk*, rooted in its *Heimat*, or natural home, would remain unpolitical almost until the beginning of the First World War.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the dynamic force of the young generation in Germany was soon pulled in all directions by various political associations hoping to benefit from it. It is not surprising that the youth movement could not resist eventual politicization. However, for the purpose of this study, the youth movement's importance lay in the ideals it developed earlier on in its organic stages before the war.

The start of the First World War meant further changes in the German consciousness. In examining this stage, one can see the

spawning of both a series of ideas that resulted in popular approval, often termed the "ideas of 1914," and then a resulting "front mentality" that developed amongst those who served in the conflict.

Any attempts to define the "ideas of 1914" have stemmed from the supposition that popular sentiment in Germany during the couple of decades before the first World War had come to be dominated by a longing for that country's "place in the sun," a place that reflected the political, economic, and cultural achievements of the past century. The German government's focus on imperialism, the development of a large naval fleet and an aggressive *Weltpolitik*, had been in part an attempt to combat the growing strength of the socialist movement.²⁰ This new spirit later fostered the Kaiser's declaration of a *Burgfriede*, or truce of all adversaries on the domestic front.²¹ One can argue that this, in turn, was exploited by politicians who saw the benefits of advocating a *Sammlungspolitik*, or gathering together of all factions in society to support the state, in order to win government backing and bring the people closer together in the face of any future international conflict. This policy became Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg's attempt to steer the "diagonal" path and find a balance between domestic and foreign pressures.²²

Some have also looked at the "ideas of 1914" as they directly affected the German people. Germans looked forward to a quick war that they hoped would act as the key spiritual event crowning their development as a nation. Enthusiasm for the war, it was hoped,

would do for Germany what the revolutions had done for the British and French--define them as a people.

While the significance of the "ideas of 1914" lay largely in the ideal that they provided for a unified German society, the "front mentality" is far more difficult to quantify. Debate still exists between those, like Robert Wohl, who believe the war experience forced the majority of the young men of the front to feel rejected and abandoned by society,²³ and those, like Richard Bessel, who feel that most of the men of the front generation successfully made the transition to civil society. However, he does concede that some may have used the war experience as an excuse to express their political views more radically.²⁴ As Bessel points out, it was often the war-youth generation, or those somewhat too young to fight in the conflict, that most took to heart the concept of the "front mentality." In any case, the ideal concept of the front was passed on into popular mythology. It is notable that after the war and the revolution it was far more likely for groups from both sides of the political spectrum to organize para-military wings of their parties.²⁵ It was also these more radical groups that commonly advocated a rejection of the Republic and the Versailles agreement associated with it. Beyond the experiences of the soldier, one cannot overlook the impact of the war on the consciousness of the German public as a whole. This devastation resulted in the collapse of the home-front support system and then led to eventual revolution. It is significant to note that approximately 2.7 million soldiers

returned from the war permanently disabled.²⁶ Furthermore, the number of post-war widows was estimated at over 500,000 and the number of orphan children at over 1.1 million, all of whom had to be cared for by the new German state.²⁷ This massive economic burden fell on an economy already afflicted with the severe disruption of war, not to mention the further weight which the Versailles agreement would soon add. It is a small wonder that disillusionment had already become the dominant sentiment by the end of the war.

The sheer devastation of the war pulled the German populace directly into revolution as the old order collapsed. After the final German military failures in the spring and summer of 1918, Prince Max von Baden was urged by leaders of the German establishment to become Chancellor in order to start developing a more liberal constitution. However, the last-ditch attempts of his government to negotiate an armistice were interrupted by strikes, by naval mutinies and by uprisings in cities and towns across Germany. The revolutionary government that formed from the movement of revolutionary workers' and soldiers' councils, otherwise known as the *Räte*, eventually coalesced around Friedrich Ebert's SPD. Ebert's revolutionary mandate was not fully utilized since a majority of the government administration was kept for the sake of continuity and stability.²⁸ In the end, the election of the National Assembly in January 1919 led to the creation of the "Weimar Coalition," consisting of the SPD, the Centre Party, and the German Democratic Party (DDP). Their drafting of the equitable

Weimar Constitution left open the possibilities of either a new and successful, liberal society, or the chaos that became the 1920's in Germany. Any hope of success for the new Weimar Germany seems to have been doomed by the fact that arrayed against it from the start were the Independent Socialists (USPD), the national liberal German People's Party (DVP), and the German National People's Party (DNVP), not to mention a plethora of interest groups, political clubs, and veterans' organizations.

It was in this context that the June Club and their political journal, *Das Gewissen*, emerged as advocates of neo-conservatism, and in which they sought safe outlets to test and disseminate their thought. Had the trends and changes of the nineteenth century affected the German people any less drastically, the political outcome of the early twentieth century would surely have been less severe. Had the historical traditions of the German people been any different, with regards to nationalism, economic thought, and youth rebellion, the political response would surely have been less radical. Finally, had the experience of the war and revolution been any less violent on the soldiers and society of Germany, the calls for post-war change might have reflected this. The June Club represents the culmination of many trends and changes in the German nation over the past century, together with the historical traditions of the German people and the experience of war and revolution. The end result of this amalgamation of political, social and cultural factors was a new-formed group in society seeking to fulfil what it perceived to be the needs of the entire

German Volk.

Chapter: Dear The June Club

Certainly the most interesting part of the June Club and *Das Gewissen* is the blend of personalities that gathered together to form this movement. While some political groups contain participants who cling closely together from the beginning of their careers, propelling each other forward with the attitude that the success of their organization means the ultimate success of their private careers, this is surely not the case in this study. On the contrary, what makes this group unique is that it can be viewed as a collection of very experienced partners. Each of them came to the June Club and *Das Gewissen* already possessing some significant qualifications or achievements in their personal careers. They were, in fact, a collection of leaders in their own fields, all used to creating and directing opinion among their peers. One might even suggest that this group was a meeting of great minds attempting to answer the call for strong and unified leadership in a nation obviously lacking the latter, yet also possessed of many able personalities. This chapter will attempt to analyze a number of these personalities. An effort will be made, first, to distinguish the participants in this group from other neo-conservatives of the time, and second, to look at a number of individual members and their accomplishments. Furthermore, the participants will be classified according to their careers and personal characteristics before entry into group. One may well ask whether this or that individual participant fits the sociological mould one might expect. It is hoped that the answers to this question will provide the reader with a greater understanding of

Chapter Two: The June Club

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the June Club and *Das Gewissen*, by illuminating some of the minds behind the ideas that would later affect the whole of German society so significantly.

One can justify this sociological approach with respect to several distinctive features of the club. First, they were different from other neo-conservatives by virtue of the breadth of their discussions. In their meetings, typically held on Wednesday evening at number 22 Motzstrasse in Berlin, it seems that any topic relating to the health of the German nation was open for discussion and planning. This was a neo-conservative group without the singular blinders of race, nationalism, youth, or the war experience affecting their plans too heavily. Nor did the group tie itself in any way to the new Republic. The fate of the Republic was always seen as peripheral to their cause, which suggests that they understood that furthering the greatness of Germany might one day require its sacrifice. Second, the group's uniqueness lay also in the fact that it was not an organization of casual members led by a few great minds. On the contrary, the June Club represented a collection of intellectuals and leaders from all spheres of society. From its core of original thinkers and tireless organizers to the main body of highly esteemed editors, educators, economists and politicians, the group's members can be organized into concentric and interlocking circles of influence. In many ways, the group's composition seems unusual, as extreme nationalists co-operated with radical socialists and those of all other political persuasions. Nevertheless, one bond existed to

cement together this unique collection. All held as paramount their interest in the redemption of Germany and a new German revolution. groups of the Weimar Republic are included here.

The June Club and *Das Gewissen* did not stand alone as representatives of the neo-conservative movement in the post-war period. It was, in fact, but one of a number of groups that historians have lumped together as neo-conservative. However, historians have classified the neo-conservatives in different ways.

Probably the leading experts on neo-conservatism are Armin Mohler, author of *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932*(1950), and Klemens von Klemperer, author of *Germany's New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century*(1957). Both tackled the difficult task of defining the neo-conservative movement with reference to all of its participants. Mohler viewed the task as an inclusive one and used five categories. The first distinct group that he identified was that of the "völkisch" thinkers, who concentrated on concepts of "race" and ideas of Germanic tradition to legitimize their beliefs.²⁹ This group included the likes of Guido von List, Alfred Schuler and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Second were those that Mohler described as "Young Conservatives." In this group he included all of the members of the Ring Movement centred around the June Club and *Das Gewissen*, as well as Oswald Spengler and the young Thomas Mann. The "National Revolutionaries" made up Mohler's third classification. Here he included the mythical "front-generation" of those born between 1890-1905, for whom the idea of

"Germanness" was, as for Ernst Jünger, a religion of nationalism and the war experience.³⁰ Such views meant that the many paramilitary groups of the Weimar Republic are included here. Mohler's fourth classification was part of the youth movement often described as the "*Bündische Jugend*," numbering 50-60,000 by the end of the 1920's, a massive part of organized neo-conservatism.³¹ Finally, Mohler identified the "*Landvolk*" movement, whose focal point lay in Schleswig-Holstein, as to neo-conservative in orientation. He called the "Elders," and suggested that they consisted of men. Klemens von Klemperer's interpretation of the neo-conservative movement differs from Mohler's. He included only those groups that were interested in political thought for altruistic reasons, rather than simply embracing one facet of political theory often related to conservatism, or acting as a particular interest group. Klemperer managed to reduce his categorization to two main groupings by amalgamating Mohler's separate classifications of "*Völkisch*" groups, "National Revolutionaries," "*Bündische Jugend*" and "*Landvolk*." Klemperer never overtly stated his rationale for this decision, yet, based on his treatment of the latter groups, one can surmise that he felt these aspects of neo-conservatism were only peripheral. In the case of the "*völkisch*" group, Klemperer did not agree that the basis of their beliefs was developed enough nor that the individuals were innovative enough to constitute a separate classification. Rather, the beliefs of those concentrated in this area might better be viewed as a hold-over of old-style German Conservatism. With regards to the other three classifications,

Klemperer dealt with each as if they were symptoms or expressions of the neo-conservative movement, not the central manifestation of it. In other words, groups such as the "National Revolutionaries," "*Bündische Jugend*," and "*Landvolk*" were mostly out to promote their own group's interests, which happened to coincide with the spirit of neo-conservatism.³²

In contrast to Mohler, Klemperer argued that the neo-conservative community could be divided into two main groups. The first he termed the "Elders," and suggested that they consisted of men such as Max Weber, Friedrich Meinecke, Friedrich Naumann, Ernst Troeltsch, Walther Rathenau and Thomas Mann. He argued that many of these men were nineteenth-century liberals who had followed their consciences as a guide to politics, often supporting the causes of both the monarchy and the workers, and never fully backing the Weimar Republic.³³ It seemed to Klemperer that the birth of the Republic itself had pushed them into their role as neo-conservatives. The "Elders" responded to the new Republic by taking the path of positive criticism and opposition, while looking to the flourishing Youth Movement for answers to the nation's problems.³⁴ However, relying on the Youth Movement was a less than dependable bet on the part of the "Elders" and as is often the case, this more moderate generation was outdone by the extremism of the younger neo-conservatives.

The "Young Ones", as Klemperer classes them, began as early as 1909 with the magazine, *Die Tat*. This periodical was taken over by the publisher Eugene Diederichs in 1912 and evolved into a focal

point for the development of a renewed conservatism, which was also aimed at the Youth Movement. Where the "Elders" were not successful in attracting the attention of the nation's politically interested youth, Diederichs found a resonance. Based in the respectable university town of Jena, Diederichs published *Die Tat* as an avenue of expression for his personal belief in the blossoming of "New Romanticism," and as a forum where the open debate of social, cultural, and political ideas was encouraged.³⁵ This re-born spirit, he felt, was returning to the German people as a means to combat the ills of the modern age. Diederichs went on to form his "Sera Circle" of authors, artists, and members of the Youth Movement. Among like-minds, Diederichs would lose himself in the festival atmosphere of the circle's meetings. Germanic customs and traditions were revived, feasts were enjoyed, and even dances held, all in the name of reviving the *Geist* of their forbearers.³⁶ Yet, while some felt that Diederichs' mind was uniquely open to a full range of social, cultural, and political views, some questioned his seriousness and argued that he himself was a confused thinker.

It was after the war and revolution in Germany that a group of more sober intellectuals and political activists gathered quietly to discuss their ideas in the home of Heinrich von Gleichen and the neo-conservative June Club was born. The inner core of the June Club, spiritually and organizationally, formed around the relationship of three individuals, Heinrich von Gleichen-Russwurm, Eduard Stadtler, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck. Together, their

individual contacts united a number of already existing groups and influential personalities. It only remained for these three individuals to formalize a unified organization towards which this final group of "Young Ones" might all direct their efforts.

Heinrich von Gleichen, the official head of the June Club, is an extremely difficult personality to understand, as most of his life was spent tirelessly organizing those around him and actually writing very little. Gleichen came from a noble Thuringian family whose claim to fame lay in being descendants of Schiller.³⁷ He showed outstanding promise in his legal studies early on and was soon offered a civil-service career. However, instead of pursuing this career path, Gleichen followed the direction of his political interest and by 1913 had published a dialogue in the magazine "Nord und Süd" regarding the political consciousness of the top-layer of society in the stormy conditions of pre-war German society.³⁸ In 1916, Walther Rathenau offered Gleichen the leadership of the "Association of German Scholars and Artists." Here he made friends with such individuals as Max Liebermann, Friedrich Meinecke, Max Planck, and Ulrich von Wilamowitz. In this group he reconfirmed his main goal, that of motivating those people he felt were the upper strata of society. By October 1918 Gleichen also organized another group to help him pursue a political program more suited to his own beliefs. The "Vereinigung für nationale und soziale Solidarität," or "Solidarians," as they were known, was officially formed into a group that included Moeller van den Bruck and Eduard Stadtler. The group of around twenty members cultivated a

political program that was anti-Bolshevik, anti-liberal, and anti-parliamentarian, all in the hopes of encouraging the realization of a twentieth-century *Volksstaat*.³⁹ Nevertheless, the Solidarians never attracted broad membership or acquired a sound publishing infrastructure.

It is not surprising that Eduard Stadtler and Moeller van den Bruck ended up working together with Gleichen, as each of these individuals answered a need for the latter's fledgling Solidarians. Eduard Stadtler was an Alsatian Catholic who began his political career working as leader of the Centre Party's youth movement. He served in the German Army during the war and ended up in Russia in 1917 after being taken prisoner.⁴⁰ Upon his return to Germany in late 1918 Stadtler began developing his own agitational group known as the "*Antibolschewistische Bewegung*" or Anti-Bolshevik Movement, which would early on change its name to the "League for the Protection of German Culture." Stadtler considered himself an expert on Bolshevism as he had spent some time working in Moscow after the war in the Press Bureau of the German Embassy. Also participating in Stadtler's group were Gleichen, Ernst Troeltsch, Adam Stegerwald, Adolf Grabowski, Graf Bernsdorff, Joachim Tiburtius, and Friedrich Naumann, author of *Mittel-Europa*.⁴¹ Financial backing for the group was generous and involved Naumann, the Deutsche Bank, Hugo Stinnes, and many others from different facets of the German business world.⁴² Stadtler's organizational energies, together with the financial support given to his group, allowed the League to publish massive quantities of educational

booklets, the newsletter "Antibolschewistische Korrespondenz," as well as to organize public rallies. However, the group quickly disintegrated after its financial supporters distanced themselves from the more radical ideas professed by certain Solidarian members.⁴³ It seems that the attempt to promote interest in ideas of a German *Volksstaat* smacked to them of socialism. When the Solidarians were forced to leave the fold, it meant the loss of the League's most creative contributors and the end of the League itself. The result was a vacuum in the political life of the dissatisfied Berlin neo-conservatives.

Against the organizational drive and experience of both Gleichen and Stadtler, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck possessed raw creativity and the respect of the greater part of the German publishing world. Moeller came from Solingen, descended from an established Prussian family. His young life is somewhat obscure but from an early age he seems to have been independently minded, as he was expelled from his *Gymnasium* under unclear circumstances.⁴⁴ Yet, Moeller's removal from school, did not preclude further intellectual development. He spent much of the 1890's fraternizing with various scholars and artists in Leipzig and Berlin and trying his hand at literary criticism. Moeller even became involved in a small Berlin literary circle, known as *die Montagstisch*, which would later include Franz Evers and Theodor Däubler.⁴⁵ The result of this developing interest was Moeller's first published works, collectively known as *Die Moderne Literatur in Gruppen- und Einzeldarstellungen* (1899-1902). In this study of contemporary

writers and artists, he explored the great cultural transition that he believed was occurring. Moeller admired Nietzsche's radical views of cultural expression, the possibilities of the present and future, and the importance of struggle.⁴⁶ However, it was also apparent to him that Nietzschean political thought did not present a clear enough program for Germany. How to solve this nagging lack of an organized program would preoccupy Moeller for almost two decades. outbreak of war in Europe brought an end to Moeller van den Bruck's Travelling and living in the great European centres from 1902-1914, Moeller van den Bruck was determined to avoid his military service, even if it meant leaving his family behind. Nevertheless, his time abroad also gave him a chance to develop further one aspect of his political thought, that is, the importance of individual national characteristics. Moeller poured his efforts into eight volumes of writings that explored the history of the Germans, which he titled Die Deutschen (1904-1910). This was an unusual style of "great-man" history, in which Moeller chose to organize his work by personality types, rather than by chronology.⁴⁷ This series was interrupted by another unusual theoretical work, Die Zeitgenossen (1906). In this work Moeller began developing a theory that would inspire him for the rest of his career, and one that would also find resonance in the thought of Thomas Mann and Oswald Spengler.⁴⁸ He suggested that the various nations of the world could be ordered according to a definable "age." Each age was revealed by a combination of its culture and national characteristics and allowed one to divine its future. Moeller

argued that the future lay not in the hands of the traditionally powerful Western nations, but rather in the potential of the central and eastern states, like Germany and Russia. Yet, leadership in the future was not guaranteed for these "young" nations. They would have to learn to utilize their own national characteristics in order to propel themselves to the forefront of European civilization. The outbreak of war in Europe brought an end to Moeller van den Bruck's leave of absence in Europe and persuaded him to return home. Upon his return, he published his most ambitious and successful work to date, a twenty-three volume collection of Dostoevsky's works in translation and complete with lengthy introductions.⁴⁹ It was an instant hit; sales of the translation would continue for years to come. Moeller's introductions to the Dostoevsky collection clearly revered the latter as an anti-Western prophet of both revolution and conservatism, proving that the two could be made compatible.⁵⁰ The author's success would also bring him into contact with two future members of the June Club, Heinz Brauweiler, his publisher and Hans Schwarz, his editor.

By 1916, Moeller joined the Army and served for a few months on the front. It appears the excitement of the war brought out the latter's inner partisan nature but excess nervousness forced him out of any active combat role. After this time he was assigned to write for the Press and Propaganda Department in Berlin. Moeller would use this opportunity to make valuable contacts, writing for various newspapers and magazines such as *Die Kreuzzeitung*, *Berliner*

Börsenblatt, *Deutsche Rundschau*, and *Preussische Jahrbücher*.⁵¹ In 1916 Moeller also published the first edition of the book that foreshadowed the synthesis and maturity of his political thought.

Der Preussische Stil (1916) is a work that examines many themes--architecture, geography, history, politics--all in an attempt to define the national character of the Prussians. His writing served the greater purpose which Roy Pascal has described as the conscious "creation of myth."⁵² Moeller suggested that the Prussians had been successful because of their conscious dedication to maintaining the traits of the national character, epitomized by a tradition of individuals serving the whole before themselves. Yet, as was often the case with Spengler's myth-creating *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, the integrity of the examples used by Moeller was maintained by ignoring those elements that did not fit his thesis. The book serves as a final example of the author's call for change in Germany. This call would guide the plans of Moeller van den Bruck, first in his early attempts to develop a "Front of the Young," and then in his involvement with the June Club and *Das Gewissen* after June 1919.

Moeller combined with his partners Gleichen and Stadtler to write the official admission guidelines and policy for the new group. This resulted in a short outline known as the "Thirty-three Principles."⁵³ Moeller would write as a spiritual guideline for the group:

The purpose is integration [*Sammlung*]; integration refers to people and to ideas... Membership is a question of trust... Nobody can be admitted for whom even one member harbours well-grounded mistrust... [in order to

avoid the fearful ones, the compromisers and the intellectual racketeers... Those who come from the right and those who come from the left shall meet in the fellowship of a third point of view, which we consider to be that of the future.⁵⁴

Examples of these include *Der Expressionismus* (1914), *Die Meetings of the June Club* took place in a pleasant suburban house (Feisterstange (1924), *Das Wartende Lande* (1931), *Dichtung als* at 22 Motzstrasse in Berlin, which also housed the *Grossdeutsche Deutschen* (1932).⁵⁷

Jugend club, as well as the *Volksdeutsch Klub* of Dr. Karl Christian

Similar status and influence was also achieved by a friend of von Loesch, who often wrote in *Das Gewissen* on the subject of Fechter's, Rudolf Pechel. Whereas Paul Fechter both tended to his foreign Germans under the pseudonym "Sylvanus." Over the front door of the building Hans Schwarz wrote, "In here sits the June member of the June Club, Rudolph Pechel leaned his editorial work Club, which is represented fundamentally by Gleichen, [and] by Moeller..."⁵⁵

In fact, the careers of these two friends ran along From the triumvirate of Gleichen, Stadtler, and Moeller, the parallel paths, but with many differing elements. Pechel achieved rest of the June Club branched out like a Who's Who of influential his doctoral degree just two years after Fechter and in the field citizens in Weimar. Foremost among these were those editors of German philology. He then spent a few years working in both the German newspapers and magazines who found themselves attracted to Goethe and Schiller Archive in Weimar and then in the *Märkisches the ideas of the group. These were men such as Franz Rohr of the Museum in Berlin.* Pechel's publishing career began in 1912 with Catholic periodical *Deutsche Arbeit*, Max Hildebert Boehm, editor of his participation in the *Literarisches Echo*. It was also in these *Die Grenzboten*, and Walter Schotte, who helped Friedrich Naumann pre-war years that he became acquainted with several newspaper with Mitteleuropa and was also the editor of *Preussische Jahrbücher*. A prime example of these editors is the journalist-Landschau. Pechel became famous after taking over as the editor-editor, Paul Fechter. This young intellectual gained his doctorate publisher of this paper. He would hold this position for over in philosophy in 1906 and in the same year was appointed as the twenty years, in which time he used the paper as a means to define cultural-political editor of *Dresdener Neueste Nachrichten*, later his views on the appropriateness of a renewed conservatism in then in the pre-war years with *Vossische Zeitung*.⁵⁶ However, Germany. Pechel began his own publishing house in 1924 and was Fechter's real influence developed in his June Club period in reported to have done so with the secret subsidy of a combination Berlin, where he became director of the feature section of the

Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung and acted as the theatre and art expert. Beyond his work as a journalist and editor, Fechter also developed several extensive literary studies and thematic novels. Examples of these include *Der Expressionismus* (1914), *Die Kletterstange* (1924), *Das Wartende Lande* (1931), *Dichtung als Deutschen* (1932).⁵⁷

Similar status and influence was also achieved by a friend of Fechter's, Rudolf Pechel. Whereas Paul Fechter both tended to his job as an editor and attempted to make his mark as a writer and member of the June Club, Rudolph Pechel teamed his editorial work and June Club participation with a healthy degree of political activism. In fact, the careers of these two friends ran along parallel paths, but with many differing elements. Pechel achieved his doctoral degree just two years after Fechter and in the field of German philology. He then spent a few years working in both the Goethe and Schiller Archive in Weimar and then in the *Märkisches Museum* in Berlin.⁵⁸ Pechel's publishing career began in 1912 with his participation in the *Literarisches Echo*. It was also in these pre-war years that he became acquainted with several newspaper editors and began contributing to the respected paper *Deutsche Rundschau*. Pechel became famous after taking over as the editor-publisher of this paper. He would hold this position for over twenty years, in which time he used the paper as a means to define his views on the appropriateness of a renewed conservatism in Germany. Pechel began his own publishing house in 1924 and was reported to have done so with the secret subsidy of a combination

of German industry and certain government ministries.⁵⁹ He gained this support probably due to the fact that he took a strong and influential stand on German foreign policy in all facets of his work. Added to his work as an editor of *Deutsche Rundschau* and contributing member of the June Club, Pechel also headed up his own organization, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die Interessen der Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschen*, or Society for the Interests of Expatriate and Borderland Germans. Using this group as a platform, he urged the protection of expatriate Germans and their "cultural well-being" as an organizing theme for government foreign policy.

It comes as no surprise that it was Rudolf Pechel who, in the spring of 1922, brought Adolf Hitler to address a June Club meeting and meet afterwards with Moeller van den Bruck. Although the meetings usually found between 120 and 150 in attendance, that evening, reportedly, only about 30 members arrived. Contrary to popular images of Hitler as a hypnotic speaker, reports suggested he was less than impressive.⁶⁰ Hitler's overtures to enlist Moeller's help in the former's cause also met with little more than distrust and disinterest. He is reported to have suggested to Moeller: even at one time considered a Ludendorff protégé.⁶⁴

You have everything I lack. You create the spiritual framework for Germany's reconstruction. I am but a drummer and an assembler. Let us work together.⁶¹

Moeller's repugnance toward Hitler's political style ensured that the majority of the June Club conservatives would never join the National Socialists. After the meeting, Moeller remarked to Pechel: "That fellow will never grasp it."⁶² Heinrich Brüning

suggested that Moeller also threatened his own suicide if Hitler ever got into office. This ironic promise was fulfilled somewhat early, as Moeller committed suicide in 1925, not long after a nervous breakdown and a short period of institutionalization. The final editor of note known to have been a participating member in the June Club, was Georg Bernhard. Elements in his background might suggest he was out of place in a neo-conservative political group. However, as this study of the participants will suggest, it is difficult to typecast the members of the club. Bernhard began to gain the notice of his peers after making the transition from a bank employee and editor of his own financial newspaper to the editor's chair of a major paper of the Ullstein publishing house.⁶³ Bernhard led the *Vossische Zeitung* in tandem with the previous editor-in-chief, Hermann Bachmann, for six years. He had spent his early years as a political supporter of the revisionist wing of the SPD. However, experience changed Bernhard and by the time of his appointment to the *Vossische Zeitung* he had moved distinctly into the camp of the left-liberals. In these years, he vigorously defended the war-aims of the German military and was even at one time considered a Ludendorff protege.⁶⁴ Bernhard's career reached a pinnacle when he spent a full term in the Reichstag in 1919, where he quickly became known as a radical through being an ardent supporter of socialization measures and corporatist economics. Unfortunately, his career was also speckled with conflicts in which anti-semites of both the extreme Left and Right targeted him as a "trouble-making Jew" actively involved with

a variety of Jewish groups.⁶⁵ Bernhard's influential career in Germany did not come to an end until after a major fallout with his patron, Franz Ullstein, in 1929-30. His backing of wild accusations of spying levelled against Ullstein led to the end of Bernhard's publishing career in Germany. With the *Machtergreifung* of the National Socialists, Georg Bernhard emigrated first to Paris and then to New York, where he would work for the American Jewish Congress. circle that would strongly influence the Chancellors

Leading university professors and educators of the 1920's provide another sub-group which can be analyzed as a significant factor in the moulding of public opinion. These individuals participated actively in the June Club and *Das Gewissen*, and they illustrate the varied backgrounds found in the group. For example, a frequent contributor to *Das Gewissen* was the professor of political science and public law, Heinrich Herrfahrdt. He was also the author of a number of political works that looked specifically at the problem of class in society.⁶⁶ However, Herrfahrdt was not nearly as renowned in the field of education as some of the other June Club participants.

The noted theologian, philosopher, and historian, Ernst Troeltsch, was known to have participated in club meetings in the 1920's.⁶⁷ He became recognized through his tenure as the Heidelberg Professor for Systematic Theology and Philosophy, and then as successor to Wilhelm Dilthey as Professor of Philosophy in Berlin. In his important Social Teaching of the Christian Churches and Groups (1912), Troeltsch would build upon Dilthey's idea that

history was best understood in its social context, rather than abstractly. His later life became more politically focussed after a turning point in 1915. In this year he worked with the editor Hans Delbrück and the economist Lujo Brentano to oppose a statement of Pan-German war aims called "Petition of the Intellectuals," which was compiled by a collective of over 1300 academics.⁶⁸ Troeltsch then joined with Delbrück and F. Meinecke to form an advisory circle that would strongly influence the Chancellors Bethmann-Hollweg and Prince Max von Baden. Troeltsch also participated in Walther Rathenau's unsuccessful attempt to organize Germany's moderate liberals into the Democratic People's League.⁶⁹ From 1918-1919 he collaborated successfully with Max Weber, Hugo Preuss, Theodor Heuss, F. Naumann, and F. Meinecke to co-found the German Democratic party (DDP). Troeltsch was active on behalf of his party in the Prussian *Landesversammlung* and the Prussian Ministry of Culture. It was in these later roles that he could promote his anti-Kaiserreich, liberal political views, while at the same time attempting to temper both the rabid German Nationalists and the revolutionary Left.⁷⁰ Although Troeltsch was not really a "young" conservative, he, like many of his peers, did not give up on the idea that they might be able to find a new conservatism by staying abreast of current political thought and attempting to work from within the Republic's system. *Das Gewissen, the respected*

Unlike that of Ernst Troeltsch, the career of Otto Hoetzsch followed a path one might expect as more "typical" of a member of the neo-conservative movement. Hoetzsch was educated at the

University of Berlin and was an active participant in the *völkisch* student movement.⁷¹ He also joined the *Ostmarkverein* and Pan-German League and became part of the latter's national committee. Hoetzsch's studies in eastern European history led him to a professorship, first, at the Royal Academy in Posen and then, from 1913, at the University of Berlin. It was at this time that he became a strong supporter of German imperialism and argued for a pro-Russian orientation for Germany.⁷² Hoetzsch became politically active during the war by commenting on foreign affairs for the conservative newspaper *Kreuzzeitung*. In a November 1918 edition of this paper, Hoetzsch laid down the goals that he felt it would be necessary to achieve in order for conservatism to survive its most recent setbacks.⁷³ He then jumped on the chance to abandon the old Conservative Party and join the new *Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei* (DNVP), with which he worked until falling out with the more radical Alfred Hugenberg in the late 1920's. Hoetzsch represented the DNVP in the Reichstag for nine years from 1921 until 1930, and for some time he chaired its foreign affairs committee and advised German diplomats. He eventually became well-known as a pundit of "enlightened nationalism."⁷⁴ Yet, his political successes waned after leaving the DNVP and Hoetzsch was relieved of his University appointments by the Nazis in 1935.

As a frequent contributor to *Das Gewissen*, the respected Professor of Pedagogy, Ernst Krieck, found an outlet through which he could express his theories on education. In fact, one might argue that the neo-conservative journal was perhaps the only medium

which could possibly have taken seriously Krieck's radical ideas, which he believed encouraged national socialism.⁷⁴ Ernst Krieck began his career as an elementary school teacher. However, Krieck's personal education did not end here, as he continued to develop his thought through self-directed philosophical and literary studies.⁷⁵ This resulted in his first book on cultural philosophy and criticism, Personality and Culture (1910). This work set the tone for his future educational pursuits, as Krieck sought to inculcate a new world-view that regarded culture, nation, and society as an integrated force that drove one's understanding of the world. From this, Krieck hoped to define a national-political conception of the state that balanced a variety of factors such as socialism, liberalism, nationalism, and corporatism.⁷⁶ This thought culminated in two works, The German National Idea (1917) and Philosophy of Education (1922), which resulted in Krieck being awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Heidelberg. The next decade of Krieck's life was spent developing his educational theory in order to achieve his goal of using the public school system to mould the perfect citizen.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, by 1932 Krieck joined the National-Socialists, who awarded him various high-ranking positions in education, but with whom he could not reconcile his views on race.

The last of the important educators was, like Troeltsch and Hoetzsch, a notable historian at the beginning of his career. Martin Spahn was the son of the famous *Zentrum* party politician, Peter Spahn, and it is in this path that the son would initially

follow his father. Martin Spahn made a name for himself by lecturing at the university level by the age of 21 and holding a chair at Strassburg by the age of 26. Many, including Theodor Mommsen and F. Meinecke, argued that Spahn's appointment was a patronage award from the government to the *Zentrum*. They felt that this type of appointment constituted an utter abomination.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Spahn's political involvement with the *Zentrum* party began on the district level as early as 1908. Within a couple of years, he chaired the Alsatian faction of the party and soon became one of their committee members in the Reichstag. It became an early objective of Spahn to prove that Catholic Germans could overcome the everyday prejudice they faced and become an important and integrated part in the new German nation.⁷⁹ It is not surprising that he would also become a role model for other young Catholics, such as Adam Stegerwald and Heinrich Brüning, with whom he had come into contact during his career. Spahn continued his teaching career by working in Köln and then taking over the leadership of a June Club project, the Political College, established in Berlin in 1921. Spahn was a blossoming neo-conservative and pursued new possibilities for himself by transferring to the DNVP, which he represented in the Reichstag until 1933, and for which he formed a Catholic Committee.⁸⁰ His final years were spent working for and supporting the NSDAP up until his death in 1945.

Second only to the editors and educators in the moulding of public opinion in Germany in the 1920's were participants in the

June Club who were noteworthy in the field of economics and banking. Foremost among these was certainly the economic specialist, Wilhelm von Kries, who wrote frequently in *Das Gewissen*. Also, there was the entrepreneurial economist of the German People's Party (DVP), Hermann Schumacher, who looked to big-business to develop a new social conscience oriented towards the whole of society.⁸¹ The banker, liberal economist and sociologist, Franz Oppenheimer, is remembered as being the June Club member who toyed with the idea of developing a "liberal socialism" that avoided the class-oriented internationalist aspect of standard socialism.⁸² However, for the purposes of this study, one other example will better serve to characterize the background of these participants.

Definitely the most famous and knowledgeable representative in the field of economics for the June Club was Wichard von Moellendorff. Moellendorff became a certified mechanical engineer at the *Technische Hochschule Charlottenburg*. With these qualifications, he worked from 1906-1914 for the large German firm AEG (*Allgemeine Electricitätsgesellschaft*). In this firm Moellendorff met Walter Rathenau, his superior on the job, who quickly arranged for the latter to be transferred to the German War Materials Department, where Rathenau had been charged with organizing the German war economy.⁸³ In his service in this department Moellendorff soon developed a distinct sense that the peace-time capitalist economic system actually hindered the nation and should be reformed significantly. Furthermore, he felt that if

the latter were not done Germany might be headed towards economic disaster. His ideas for this reform were outlined in a pamphlet he wrote in 1916, entitled Deutsche Gemeinwirtschaft. It is notable that Moellendorff's pamphlet appeared several months before a more polished, yet very similar work by Rathenau.⁸⁴ The plan outlined by Moellendorff argued that the peace-time economy should follow the lead of its war-time counterpart and pay more attention to efficiency, rather than profit.⁸⁵ The creation of "Economic Groups" consisting of panels of industrial leaders would be necessary to organize a policy of improved efficiency in each specific industry. Moellendorff's raw ideas, as related in this short work, were enough to win him the attention of the politically active Berlin neo-conservatives by the end of the war.

After falling out of favour with the government over his disapproval of the Hindenburg economic program of 1916, Moellendorff's career slowed until he was brought into the *Reichswirtschaftsamt*, or Department of Commerce, by its director, August Müller.⁸⁶ Both Müller and Moellendorff attended the June Club frequently in this period. Amidst the turmoil of revolutionary Germany, Moellendorff developed a second, more detailed plan for the economic renovation of Germany in his memorandum of May 17, 1919. His all-embracing plan called for a drastic leap towards an economy that was part socialist and part corporative, but ahead of its time. First, he urged the creation of a central government organ to deal with the processes of money in the economy.⁸⁷ The gathering of these powers under one body

would ensure that only one economic goal--the general improvement of the German nation--would rank above all else. This was also to include the creation of a publicly-owned bank on behalf of the German nation. Second, an extensive system of semi-public corporations was to be created. These would operate through the divisions of a large economic industries and activities into *Wirtschaftsbunde*, and operation of these would be controlled by committees composed of a mixture of industry leaders, workers, and consumers.⁸⁸ Finally, a billion mark *Reichsfund* was to be created to finance and manage the plan. Yet, regardless of some of the forethought shown by Moellendorff's economic ideas, the plan was unanimously rejected by the German Cabinet in July of 1919, with even Rathenau moving to distance himself from his protege. Wichard von Moellendorff spent the next two decades in Berlin and America quietly collecting data and awaiting the economic collapses he had earlier predicted. It was spent in pursuit of his "Essen Program,"

As occupational representation was comparatively diverse in the June Club, the representation from political parties was similarly far more varied than in other clubs and interest groups of this period. The whole gamut of the political spectrum was often represented in June Club meetings. In addition to the collection of conservatives and liberals already discussed, there were also numerous influential Catholics, German Nationalists, and radical Social Democrats in attendance. Three examples will suffice to illustrate this point. The only Catholic politician to be considered as much of a

mentor to the younger participants as Martin Spahn was the trade unionist Adam Stegerwald. Stegerwald made a name for himself at the turn of the century by developing a Christian wood-workers' trade union in order to offer the Catholic worker an alternative to socialist groups.⁸⁹ This effort was widely praised and expanded into a federal organization known as the *Gesamtverband der Christlichen Gewerkschaften*, which Stegerwald led as chairman until 1929, developing it into a powerful force. Simultaneous with his trade union activities, Stegerwald also pursued a very successful political career. He obtained positions in the War Food Office in 1916, where he collaborated with August Müller, and moved on to the Prussian *Herrenhaus* and then to the Prussian Ministry of Welfare. Stegerwald was in the Prussian National Assembly for a short time before moving to the Reichstag where he stayed until 1933.⁹⁰ He was also deputy chairman of the *Zentrum* party for eight years. Stegerwald's career was spent in pursuit of his "Essen Program," formulated during his June Club years, and then outlined at the federal trade union congress of 1920. He called for the creation of a new, moderate party that would encompass the interests of several different smaller parties. He envisioned an inter-denominational Christian, social, democratic alignment, along the lines of his trade union, but one that was also nationalist in its outlook.⁹¹ Stegerwald's "Essen Program" was never officially accepted, and he soon became one of the government representatives which the June Club and *Das Gewissen* held accountable for Germany's predicament. The contributors to *Das Gewissen* chided him

frequently in their editorial articles. A disciple of Adam Stegerwald, Heinrich Brüning, later notorious as the "Hunger Chancellor," undertook efforts to rule depression-era Germany, which resulted in the triumph of NSDAP radicalism. Brüning was also a June Club member who had a code of conservative, nationalistic, bourgeois values developed through his war experience and early career.⁹² He was quite successful in early life and closely tied his career to that of Stegerwald, although the differences in their political outlook prevented them from following the same path to their objectives. Brüning possessed a Ph.D. in political economy and became in 1919 a financial advisor of the *Zentrum* party and business manager of Stegerwald's Christian trade union. However, in the mid 1920's Brüning pursued an alliance of his party with the DNVP, while Stegerwald found the Nationalists far too chauvinistic and preferred an alliance with the Left if necessary.⁹³ Eventually, Stegerwald's labour leanings led to his unpopularity with much of the *Zentrum* in the late 1920's, while Brüning became the preferred candidate of the party majority.

Representation to the right of the *Zentrum* party existed in the June Club, as German Nationalists such as Hans Grimm, Count Kuno Westarp, and Oskar Hergt also participated avidly. Hans Grimm attained fame not through his early manhood spent as a trader in South Africa, but from his 1200-page novel *Volk ohne Raum*, which reached sales of 500,000 by the Second World War.⁹⁴ Grimm's novel sounded themes that rang true for many Germans and justified their

paranoid suspicions. It suggested that the Germans were a great, racially pure people on a divine mission and that their living space was being restricted in an unhealthy way. It even argued that foreign enemies, especially the British, were collaborating with enemies like the German Social Democrats and Jews.⁹⁵

This sort of extreme nationalism was echoed by the likes of Count Kuno Westarp and Oskar Hergt, both members of the DNVP. The careers of these two moderates run along almost the same path, and in many ways they also parallel that of the DNVP member and educator, Otto Hoetzsch. Both Westarp and Hergt pursued their early careers in the civil service. While the Junker aristocrat Westarp attained legal qualifications that led him to become a local magistrate, police president of Berlin-Schöneberg, and then a senior judicial official, Hergt advanced through the Prussian Ministry of Finance, to *Regierungspräsident* in Silesia, and then Prussian Finance Minister.⁹⁶ Both were also involved with the DNVP when it was founded in late 1918. However, Westarp brought to his new party a decade of Reichstag experience leading the German Conservatives, while Hergt maintained no formal political ties until the DNVP. Both Westarp and Hergt held seats in the Reichstag for the entire decade of the twenties, as did Otto Hoetzsch. Furthermore, Hergt chaired the DNVP's parliamentary group for the first half of the decade and Westarp took over the position for most of the second. It is notable that in the 1920's Westarp was also involved with the running of the conservatives' newspaper *Kreuzzeitung*, the same one which had given Otto Hoetzsch his

start.⁹⁷ The official positions of these two German Nationalists, Westarp and Hergt, were not the only similarities that they shared. Both became known to their party peers as moderates that would not be bullied into taking extreme positions. An example of this was Hergt's refusal to give his assent to General Lüttwitz in the run-up to the Kapp Putsch.⁹⁸ Furthermore, he was criticized by reactionaries early on in his leadership for wanting to broaden the appeal of the DNVP towards the masses. Hergt's refusal to discipline the DNVP members that supported the Dawes Plan allowed it to pass through the Reichstag, much to the chagrin of party reactionaries. Westarp was warned by Alfred Hugenberg because he promoted compromise with advocates of the Republic and within factions of the party.⁹⁹ Westarp's battles with the latter's hard-line stance on a variety of issues were fruitless and they eventually split the party as he had warned they would. In fact, all three of the DNVP June Club participants, Hoetzsch, Westarp, and Hergt, would leave the party in the early 1930's when the Social Darwinist Alfred Hugenberg began to consolidate his control over it. The final group of party representatives to participate in the June Club came from none other than the SPD. However, it must be noted that these SPD members, like Paul Ernst, August Müller, Moellendorf's war-time associate from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, as well as August Winnig and Otto Strasser, were perhaps considered fringe or atypical members of that party. August Winnig

was from a working-class family which prodded him into social democracy from the start of his career. Before the war, Winnig enjoyed two important trade union positions, first, as editor of the union-oriented newspaper *Grundstein*, and second, as deputy chairman of the *Bauarbeitgewerkschaft*, or construction workers' union.¹⁰⁰ Within the SPD, Winnig was a supporter of its nationalist wing and an advocate of co-operation with radicals of other parties.¹⁰¹ He would use these contacts in the early Weimar years to earn himself a plenipotentiary position in the Baltic, the job of *Reichskommissar* for the East, and then as president of East Prussia. Yet, Winnig's developing co-operative, nationalist tendencies would fully manifest themselves later, as he was expelled from the SPD in the early Weimar period, after declaring his support for the Kapp Putsch.¹⁰² Winnig spent the decade of the 1920's publishing various works on neo-conservatism and canvassing workers' groups for their support of his ideas. The later success of the NSDAP initially earned his tacit support, but it was soon withdrawn.

As with August Winnig, whose socialist views were instilled in him by a working-class family tradition, Otto Strasser came from a family in which his father was a revolutionary socialist and author of various political tracts. He spent a brief spell as a textile worker before heading off to war at the age of 16. His military career was successful in that he won the Iron Cross and achieved the rank of Lieutenant, after which time he was known to his peers as the "Red Lieutenant."¹⁰³ In Berlin, in the early 1920's,

Strasser simultaneously pursued his education, worked as a Reichstag stenographer, and joined the SPD. However, his alienation from that party would come early on, after his role in resisting the Kapp Putsch left him demanding the government pursue more rapid socialization measures.¹⁰⁴ The result of Strasser's vocal disapproval regarding the pace of reform was his forced expulsion from the SPD. The group represented an unusually well-qualified. Upon his removal from the party, Strasser claims to have stayed aloof from politics. Nevertheless, he is reputed to have been an avid participant of the June Club and numerous articles appear in *Das Gewissen* under the name Ulrich von Hutten, a pseudonym he would use also in later years in the NSDAP newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*.¹⁰⁵ Strasser claims never to have officially joined the Nazis but rather just to have given them the ideological guidance they needed. The result of this was his development of the NSDAP "Twenty-five Points" into the "Bamberg Programme," which created the divide between Strasserism and Hitlerism. Thus, if one were looking for tangible evidence that the ideology of the neo-conservatives was an influence upon the NSDAP, this is probably the most obvious. In the end, Otto Strasser's long-running debate with Hitler over the primacy of his ideas resulted in the former being expelled from the party in 1930 and losing control of his publishing house, the *Kampfverlag*.¹⁰⁶ Strasser's few remaining years in Germany were spent trying to jump-start a political program he called "Solidarism," which had no relation to Gleichen's platform of Solidarism, and to establish it through his "Black

Front" against Hitler. On February 4, 1933, only a few days after Hitler's achievement of total power through the Enabling Act, the latter forcibly shut down Strasser's newspaper. By the day after the Reichstag fire on February 27 Strasser was an exile on the run.

An examination of the participants in the June Club and *Das Gewissen* reveals a number of outstanding factors about the group. First, leading members of the group represented an unusually well-qualified collection of leaders in a privileged position to disseminate their opinions to others in German society. At the core of the membership one finds truly original thinkers and tireless organizers who could put aside their own personal ambition and work together for what they felt would be the benefit of the whole of society. Around this core one finds editors, educators, economists, and politicians representing a multitude of other groups and parties. Many were radical thinkers and the foremost leaders in their field whose beliefs regarding the salvation of Germany prevented their toeing the line. Time and time again one is struck by the same names and the same publications that fostered the development of like minds. These were the interlocking circles of the Ring Movement, as it was originally envisioned. Yet simply bringing together these personalities would never suffice to redeem Germany in the way that many felt was necessary. That task would require a massive, organized effort that focussed on the coordination of their ideas and took advantage of all the resources available to these individuals.

From the meetings of June Club members who gathered at 22 Motzstrasse in Berlin came a plethora of ideas which were to be diffused to the public. With the literary and journalistic backgrounds possessed by so many of these participants, it is not surprising that the medium of a weekly journal was selected as the primary means of this diffusion. Thus, *Das Gewissen* was made available to a German public during the chaotic events of the post-war revolution. It would, for the decade after 1918, become one of the most famous German papers seeking to interpret the significance of recent events for the German people. The paper was published on a weekly basis by a group calling itself the Ping Publishing House, represented by Eduard Stadler and Werner Wirths. However, subscription terms were set by the publishing house of Dr. R. Hammert for production. Editing of the paper was done by the ever-changing collective of contributors. *Das Gewissen's* circulation reached as high as 30,000 subscribers and just four months after its creation Ernst Troeltsch noted how the paper's writers were already controlling other papers owned by Hugo Stinnes.

Chapter Three: *Das Gewissen*

Das Gewissen sought to define Germany's needs in the post-war period. From formulating the most appropriate form of post-war society, to critiquing the actions of the contemporary government, to arguing the necessities of a modern policy of culture, the writers attempted to steer the revolutionary spirit in a direction they preferred. Foreign policy was also a focal point for the contributors. In the pages of *Das Gewissen* one can follow the gradual development of a position of extreme hatred towards the

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perceived injustice of the Treaty of Versailles and the question of guilt. From this point, it was only a small step to cultivating a more thorough xenophobia. The economic failures of the post-war decade led also to an analysis of the German economy and the government's policies of handling it. Corporatism was often outlined as the necessary solution to these problems. Until its final edition in July of 1928, all the values of the "new German citizen" they hoped to create were instilled through the pages of *Das Gewissen*.

On Wednesday April 9, 1919, the first edition of *Das Gewissen* was published with the alarming headline, "In the Final Hour!" This headline was more than a commentary on the state of the war and revolution in Germany. It was also a way to set the tone for the entire existence of the paper. The call was answered by a quotation from none other than the spiritual icon Goethe--"Which government might be the best? The one that teaches us to govern ourselves." In the article that followed, an appeal was made to the conscience [Gewissen] of every reader in the face of an annihilation of German society.¹⁰⁷ All were asked to put aside their class interests and gather their collective strength in order to build a "new house" for Germans that would be better than the old one. In other words, they should completely reorganize the current national outlook by altering their existing mind-set and governing systems. The article urged as a priority the abandonment of in-fighting to avoid the degree of civil war such as existed in Russia. It continued by reflecting on the danger of the shattered

economy for the existence of future generations. The article played to popular sentiments by delivering a simple message:

A common front of all the genuine friends of the Volk must be created against the lies, poisoning of the masses, against the vulgar self-interest, against special corporate interest in every form. Whether middle-class or worker, all of you, who want to struggle for your real social freedom and right as a people, join together!¹⁰⁸

While this first edition of *Das Gewissen* set a tone for the interpreting the significance of the war and revolution. *Das Gewissen* was instrumental in perpetuating a series of beliefs about same sentiments were echoed in regular advertisements in several what the war experience meant for the majority of Germans. Never later editions.¹⁰⁹ While urging individuals to subscribe to the paper and buy selected pamphlets or books written by group members, the editors of *Das Gewissen* would continue to repeat the four-part formula which was developed in the first edition. This formula rested on two assumptions. First, the writers of *Das Gewissen* worked on the basic assumption that Germany itself was in great peril and somehow faced an even worse fate than it had already experienced. The Spenglerian notion of a declining culture in danger of utter destruction was promoted in every advertisement. Second, it was suggested to the reader that this danger was the result of actions by enemies who were often termed the "unscrupulous," "public defects," or "pests" in society.¹¹⁰ These comprised all those Germans who did not abandon themselves to the service of the whole, such as the members of parties and interest groups that many felt were crippling Germany with their haggling. Only those individuals who had proven their allegiance to the interests of the collective above that of their partisan interests would avoid criticism. The combination of imminent danger and

selfishness meant that the equation could only be balanced in one way. This was through the creation of a "ring movement" of active supporters in order to save Germany. It was the task of the *Das Gewissen* writers to interpret the present situation and then propose the practical solutions, based on this theoretical formula.

Dealing with Germany's present situation meant, above all, interpreting the significance of the war and revolution. *Das Gewissen* was instrumental in perpetuating a series of beliefs about what the war experience meant for the majority of Germans. Never were these beliefs in the war experience so concisely explained as in the writing of the official *Das Gewissen* editor-in-chief, Werner Wirths.¹¹¹ Wirths explained:

The war was our destiny. The Army was a weapon of freedom. We look back in history in which the German, surrounded by more fortunate peoples, arduously toiled from the beginning for the preservation of heirs and species... As it always goes, to be or not to be. Life or death. Volk or Slavery.¹¹²

Thus, history had pre-determined the war as a necessary struggle for the under-privileged and encircled Germans. The suffering and defeat after four years of hardship were hardly mentioned, except in the sense of the good that these years brought to the Volk. In fact, it was not just a brighter side of the defeat that was suggested; the defeat was made into a defining moment for the Volk in which the traitors to Germany revealed their true colours.

August 4, 1914, was the only revolution of the Germans: From parties, classes and occupations, the wonder of need welded the *Gemeinschaft*. The war could be perfection... Against that end we struggled, against the revolt from betrayal, cowardice and boundless stupidity, that gave up one's own Volk and worshipped the word of the enemies.¹¹³

The Ring Movement hoped to align itself against these proven traitors like a bastion of defence. These men felt themselves to be a generation moulded by the ideas of the war experience, regardless of whether this experience was real or imagined. One article aimed at recruiting members into an Association of Front Soldiers built upon this ideal.

We have removed the grey jacket; with that falls our *Gemeinschaft* and unity. But something clings to us and roots deeply and strongly, a common bond that binds us: the same experience, the genuine comradeship often tested and proven in attacks and slaughters, that reciprocity for each other. And this spirit, the front soldier's holiest good, that creates before the enemy a fighting strength and successful unity in the mere mass of men, will accept no petering out.¹¹⁴

Germany, the argument ran, was in danger and compelled to start a war. The unscrupulous enemies surrounded her on all sides, in neighbouring nations, as well as in the parties and interest groups. Only by the welding together of the *Volk* into a *Gemeinschaft*, through the means of the Ring Movement, could Germany be saved.

On the material impact of the war, *Das Gewissen* carried a small number of articles regarding post-war poverty. However, instead of concentrating on the issue of poverty as a result of the war, they often derided the actions and opinions of the proletarian agitators. In a discussion of the 1919 potato famine, agitators who came from the city were blamed for inspiring farmers to fight for the eight-hour day and cash wages typical for city workers.¹¹⁵ The results of this "senseless agitation" were that the farmers were caught unprepared by the early cold and frost, while the

potato crops froze in the ground. The irony of the city-dwelling labour agitators now scouring the countryside in search of potatoes was given as proof of the ill-effects of promoting any special interests. In the same vein, Ulrich von Hutten warned of the danger that might lie in criticizing the minimal existence standards which were set up as a guideline for family support by the government.¹¹⁶ A total itemization of the cost of living in this period led the writer to suggest that these were more than generous and should not be tampered with as a rallying point for proletarian interests. In all cases the moral was the same. The writers of *Das Gewissen* clung to the idea that it was not necessary to mention the root causes of the war and resulting post-war poverty. Unity of the *Volk*, and attention to their newly formulated plan, was all that Germany required in order to take its place in the sun.

If the writers of *Das Gewissen* viewed the war as the forge for a new type of German, they saw the current revolutionary path as quite the opposite. They unanimously agreed first, that the Revolution of 1918 had been a failure, and second, that a different set of goals should have been targeted. The critique of the November Revolution was led by none other than Moeller van den Bruck. In an article entitled "We Want to Win the Revolution" he wrote:

The revolutionaries of 1918 have lost the Revolution of 1918 because they made a liberal revolution out of it. They believed it sufficient to do by imitation what the West had done. But time has moved forward more than a hundred years since 1789. The West lives in this age with its liberalism. It learned to make use of

parliamentarianism in this age and to deceive the people. It calls this democracy. But freedom and equality and fraternity are not political bread by which a people can live. The socialism that has come to us since then demands justice. Each age has its own revolution and each people has its own revolution.¹¹⁷

Moeller argued that the revolutionaries were out of touch with their time for not realizing that any German revolution in the twentieth-century needed to be both "national" and "social" in its general outlook. Furthermore, he felt that each revolution had to be tailor-made to fit the national character of the individual people. This had been shown recently by the success of the Russian Revolution. For Germany, Moeller contended, this meant that the revolution needed to be directed against the primary adversary--the West.

While Moeller's analysis of the 1918 Revolution was the most comprehensive, he was certainly not the first to undertake this task. Several authors propounded the need for the German Revolution to consist of a total spiritual renewal, starting with the nation's leaders and then filtering downwards.

Never has the German Volk had so much need of spiritual leaders than when they managed without as in the last year. But not only has the purely political leadership failed; in deplorable measures, the so-called intellectuals in press and literature have left the "spiritualizing" of our Volk in the lurch.¹¹⁸

From the desired spiritual transformation, the authors of *Das Gewissen* could see hope for the reconstruction of Germany in spiritual and physical terms. Authors like Max Hildebert Boehm also viewed this renewal as an opportunity to recruit members to their Ring Movement.

We require--that it grow from the smallest to the biggest--a community of German men and women, **the Ring of Builders**, which feel consciously that Germany's working re-construction is their destiny and their mission.¹¹⁹

There appears to have been agreement amongst the authors that they were witnessing the end of an epoch. Yet, this epoch straddled two generations of men. The first were those "elders" who were unaware of being the last of an outdated political tradition, the second, the "young ones," were those such as the *Das Gewissen* contributors who could not begin to imagine the future implications of their ideas. These ideas on domestic policy, culture, foreign policy, and the economy would be slowly outlined in the pages of the weekly over the next decade.

Das Gewissen commented on the domestic policies of the German leadership on a number of different levels, from abstract theory to contemporary criticism. With regards to the theory of governing, the contributors tried to place their ideas amongst the current politics of other regimes and then define the key concepts inherent in these plans. The most sweeping view of neo-conservative policy was provided by Eduard Stadtler in April of 1919, in his article, "Neither Lenin nor Wilson."¹²⁰ Stadtler told his readers that the high-minded promises of President Wilson's "just policy" and a "new brotherhood of all men" were nothing more than a sham revealed by the latter's attitude in the peace talks. On the other hand, the course of Leninism ensured that all Germans would become spiritual slaves to Bolshevism: it meant following an outdated form of socialism, based on party politics, based on Marx and Engels, and

based on the needs of the Russian nation.¹²¹ While the West had become the clear antagonist to the German spirit, Russia was simply viewed as misdirected in its mission. In Stadtler's eyes Germany had to find the will to stand alone.

Two months later, Stadtler followed up on this article as if he had been criticized for relying on concepts too vague to define his stance. In short paragraphs, each opening with the question

"What to do?", he wrote: "parties of the middle," such as the

First of all we should declare war on the government as a party-mismanaged government. The people must know that we are being governed into the ground.¹²²

Put together an action program whose highest principle is not thoughtless passivity, but rather programmatic activism. On the grounds of a world-revolutionary reality and on the spiritual basis of an ambitious synthesis, of our national history with the new ideas of the time.¹²³

The dismantling of a private capitalist system will lead to a co-operative economy, which will put to rest the defeat of high capitalism in the world war and to a positive victory of new economic organizational ideas.¹²⁴

National city councils and trade unions, employer and worker in the industrial community, agriculture, ... must meet for a total congress of the creative German national traditions.¹²⁵

Smooth the way for the party-free dictator, a strong-man bound to the program and with a ministry of strong personalities, let him force the amalgamation of the parties on the basis of his program of action.¹²⁶

Thus, the rough program was laid down, most likely in the form which members of the June Club and contributors to *Das Gewissen* had arrived at through their discussions. But with every answer given, there appeared to be two new questions.

One question which surfaced time and time again concerned the

form of domestic political organization which needed to be created in order to save Germany. In *Das Gewissen* this was often suggested as a "middle way," or third point of view between the political polarities; it is this point which requires clarification. The first thing that should be explained is that the "middle way" was not just a reference to the bi-polar division of "left" and "right" in traditional politics. Many members of the group accepted the fact that the so-called "parties of the middle," such as the *Zentrum*, the DDP, and the majority socialists, had not found this conciliatory middle. In fact, as with the other parties of the time, they had quarrelled amongst themselves to the point of obsolescence.¹²⁷ Strangely enough, this fault was often attributed to none other than the German intellectuals. It was agreed that they had failed in the one moment when their countrymen needed them most. They had failed to produce a better alternative to the obsessive party egotism. As Hans Schwarz pointed out, the reins of spiritual leadership lay dragging in the dust.¹²⁸ One finds the members of the group pushing forward their Ring Movement ideal as a way to redeem the German intellectuals.

However, the attempt to find the elusive "middle way" was not just focussed on spiritual leadership. Economic divisions in society presented the same problem.¹²⁹ German society had long been divided by a class system which, at times, seemed immobile. While capital was monopolized by one class in society, labour or white-collar services were performed by another. The crux of the problem, as many saw it, was that efforts to bridge the old party

and class prejudices could never be successful. Attempts to do so were inevitably met with participants bowing to partisanship or group interest, as no higher authority seemed to exist. The solution to this dilemma was put nicely into perspective by Franz Rohr in a *Das Gewissen* article of December 1920.¹³⁰ He argued that one had to think not in terms of "bridging" but of "fusion." Only with a fusion of old forms into the new was there a chance of allegiance to a new authority. However, if this fusion precluded the idea of the existing party or class system being the dominant part of this new authority, then what?

Throughout the pages of *Das Gewissen* the idea of creating the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or community of the *Volk*, was repeated with unwavering urgency. Nevertheless, it is quite impossible to give a short definition of what the term exactly means, as it can be taken on several levels. The *Gemeinschaft*, or community, was often spoken of as a group formed through need, that is, those such as the original Protestants of the Reformation, who sought a relationship with their God which no other people of the times had.¹³¹ A *Gemeinschaft* could be made up of any groups which needed each other for spiritual and material sustenance, whether they were workers, soldiers, artists, the defeated in a war, or even those overcome by their own vices. Members of these *Gemeinschaften*, it was thought, should protect and serve one another based on common need. Thus, a theoretical barrier existed to a common experience between groups, be they real or imagined. In the case of the German *Volk*, it was thought to be its own community shaped by a

unique past: no foreign ways, political, economic, or social, could serve them properly. Many contributors wrote as if the mistakes of the recent past were all the result of the Germans' being out of touch with their national character and subverted by foreign influences. Once the average German had been put in touch with this character, it was felt, he would naturally serve the national collective without also working to hinder members of it. In the end, the idea of a *Volksgemeinschaft* suggested national efficiency to the highest degree, in all facets of life. One author wrote:

From the need for *Gemeinschaft* must come love of *Gemeinschaft*, from the love of *Gemeinschaft* must come action of *Gemeinschaft*. The power of the *Volk* requires a *gemeinschaftliche* middle, that as the heart, would preserve the *Volk's* body permanently and continuously with fresh blood.¹³²

However, an efficient collective of the *Volk*, based on a unique historical experience and national character, was not all that was emphasized.

No other quality of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was emphasized more often than that of youthfulness. Youth became not only the target of the group's ideas; youthfulness was suggested as the spiritual basis for the transformation they hoped to effect. The youth of the times were seen as a gigantic reserve fund of political energy and idealism, which only needed to be given the correct shape for it to be made effective.¹³³ Groups like the June Club attempted to distance themselves from the "Elders," who had only been lucky enough to bring Germany to its present juncture intact, and instead courted the dynamic energies of the young. Yet, it was more than this dynamic energy that made youthful German spirits so valuable

to the group. As one author would explain, their value lay in the prerogative of faith which was so necessary to the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹³⁴ Only will and strong conviction, not the jaded scepticism of their elders, could move the mountains necessary to achieve this task. *Das Gewissen* bolstered these sentiments on behalf of the nation's youth and reprinted a collective appeal which had originally run in the Berlin student newspaper, *Die Warnung*:

We want mankind to serve in the poverty of its present against the spectres of the future. No classes, no parties, no dead theories, no shallow traditions, no egoistic objectives aimed at our duty, but rather only that which discerns on its own the well-being of our Volk with reason and heart.¹³⁵

Thus, *Das Gewissen's* theoretical plan for a domestic policy envisioned a new state that would follow a political path paved by neither Lenin, nor Wilson. Their political plan involved action. They would conduct an active war on the government waged under a strong leadership. They would not suffer under the yoke of capitalism, nor ignore the threat of Bolshevism. A new middle way had to be found, socially, politically and economically, in order to harness the power of youth and create its *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Although the frequency of articles exploring abstract political theory in *Das Gewissen* is certainly one of its most striking characteristics, one cannot ignore the very practical side of the weekly. *Das Gewissen* was a fountain of criticism of the Weimar governments and parties. Furthermore, it harangued any group which it felt was guilty of looking after its own interests

before that of the German nation.

The writers of *Das Gewissen* saved their most venomous criticism for the coalition government that formed in the void left by the war and revolution. At the forefront of this criticism in the early years was Philipp Scheidemann. In an article entitled "Scheidemann's Revolutionary Balance Sheet," M.H. Boehm evaluated the efforts of the first Chancellor.¹³⁶ His conclusion was straightforward. Boehm intimated that it was Scheidemann's duty to consolidate the Revolution of 1918 and bring about some positive results from this rare opportunity. He described the Chancellor's taking credit for revolutionary success on the anniversary of that event as "pitiful." Pointing out the fact that most of the majority socialists had not actually wanted the Revolution, Boehm reminded his readers that Scheidemann had been a counter-revolutionary social reformist during this period.¹³⁷ Any attempt to take credit for a successful revolution was hollow opportunism.

The skilful masking of the truth by Scheidemann, often referred to as "the withered hand," was repeated in the same edition of the paper. In a look at the Parliamentary Investigation Committee that was seeking those responsible for preventing a peace from being concluded earlier during the war, the anonymous author pointed out a similar obfuscation.¹³⁸ He suggested ironically that both the coalition government and Scheidemann would ultimately find themselves at least partly responsible for not having stood up against the war. The same criticism was applied to the government's handling of coup attempts from the Left in Berlin in

1919, and was repeated again in Heinrich von Gleichen's analysis of the *putsch* attempt by Wolfgang Kapp in 1920.¹³⁹ In his view, there occurred in 1920

[a] characterless flight of the Minister and surrendering of the responsible position. Due to the utter lack of diplomacy, a timely prevention of the *putsche* was missed. Afterwards, a treason of the people was perpetrated through the suicidal proclamation of a General Strike. In the end, there came a ridiculous, unfounded victory-crow from our current governors down there in Württemberg.¹⁴⁰

In each case the message to the reader rang out clearly. The current government and its Chancellor were vain, hollow opportunists who ran like cowards from every onslaught by extremists, and then returned to govern with their hands held high as victors. In order to continue clinging to this charade of leadership, the argument ran, they had auctioned off their political principles.

Having criticized the governing parties as their first priority, the writers of *Das Gewissen* were true to their total anti-party philosophy and turned their attention to the others. In these assaults, none were spared. From the extreme right to the extreme left, they shot to the heart of the self-interest which they saw represented in the groups and parties around them. The Left of Germany had been one of their targets since the earliest days of the June Club. However, criticism of the German Right was also common. Of the Right, one headline article read:

One of the great dangers that stands in the way of the recovery of our economic and political life is the endeavour of certain circles of the Right to produce again the pre-revolutionary arrangements... These endeavours are in the highest measure destructive and in

no way conducive to the well-being of the state.¹⁴¹ In other places, members of the Right were described scornfully as being characterized by a "well-known naiveté" and as "no doubt members of a duelling society."¹⁴² Traditional conservative values were mocked and equated with an inability to grasp Germany's current predicament. The middle parties shared the same self-interest, a budget surplus, without considering Germany's own post-

Zentrum, Democratic Party, and Majority Socialists?

These three elements of colour in the Reich have each so helplessly, quarrelled with every force of their incompatible programs, that only their egotism is their coherence.¹⁴³

One of Eduard Stadtler's 1919 reports on the Democratic Conference in Leipzig was completely over-shadowed by his questions regarding the party's role in the renewal of Germany. He scoffed at their claims of having undergone a spiritual re-ordering along "national-social" lines.¹⁴⁴ He needled them for their absolute lack of innovative ideas which, he felt, proved they were mired in their nineteenth-century heritage. In fact, the simple reason that they adhered to the "cancer" of the party formula was enough for him to write them off as insignificant.

One might think that with the number of influential Catholics in the June Club, *Das Gewissen* might have been lighter on the Zentrum. Nevertheless, this was not the case. The editor of *Das Gewissen*, Werner Wirths, led the paper's contributors in a brutal attack on Matthias Erzberger and his stolen idea of "Christian Solidarism." Wirths did so by praising the Essen speech of Adam Stegerwald as the first reverberation of solidarism possessing a

genuine national and social character.¹⁴⁵ Then, Wirths went on to credit Erzberger with having the talent to "scent out" the popular effect of this idea, and to turn a poor forgery into clever "political business." The same also went for the Chancellor in 1921, Josef Wirth. The author felt that the latter deceived the public by proclaiming the allied government's weaknesses and flaunting a budget surplus, without considering Germany's own post-war political position and the massive war debt.¹⁴⁶ As Werner Wirths concluded, all of the party-wrangling that he had witnessed amounted to an attempt to trick the German people into supporting them, and walk into slavery under the Entente. Yet, many of these articles also suggested that the *Volks* could never be so ignorant and that their tolerance of political games was lessening.

The symptom of this lessening tolerance was a Weimar era disease which became known as "election fatigue." In a 1921 article of the same title, a person writing under the name "Hadubert" lamented hearing the buzz of a new election before that of a previous one had even dimmed.¹⁴⁷ He claimed that citizens of every class and party had become tired of the exercise. Yet, none could sacrifice their own interests, and the fear of conspiracies to gain parliamentary control had driven the people into gangs of resistance. What was desired, "Hadubert" postulated:

[were] different starting points for national-political responsibility of the individual, ...to guide the political activity of all corporative-feeling national comrades into new channels.¹⁴⁸

But proposing the problem was only the first step towards solving it. Next, one had to come up with a means to do just that. The

author's suggestion hauntingly foreshadowed the plans of Adolf Hitler less than a decade later, but ended on a far more optimistic note which was typical of this group. *Das Dritte Reich*, bearing the same title...the parliamentarianism, which is the cancer-damage of our time, can only be conquered out of itself, by itself. The organic bonds must be saved under all circumstances and by all means that combine good tradition with a happy future.¹⁴⁹ A close second to this was

In a couple of short lines, the ultimate end to the collective goal of *Das Gewissen's* domestic policy had been revealed. True, they spoke of "good tradition" and a "happy future," but this might have been expected. What was far more revealing was the fact that the author forced himself to look into the future and propose what might need to be done in order to stop the parliamentary fighting. Through this means they hoped to achieve the elusive maximized efficiency of their national energies. Approximately one year later, a similar call would be widely published in a far more cryptic form. Moeller issued same in his dedication to Gleichen:

In 1923, in the midst of his June Club and *Das Gewissen* activities, Moeller van den Bruck published a new book which he dedicated to his friend, Heinrich von Gleichen. The book, *Das Dritte Reich*, or "Germany's Third Empire," was made up of articles which Moeller had been writing for *Das Gewissen* since March of 1920. These articles were meditations on particular types of political personae--Revolutionary, Socialist, Liberal, Democrat, Proletariat, Reactionary, Conservative--each of which he mercilessly ripped apart in the pages of the newspaper. Moeller's plan was very simple. He would root out every German citizen

maintaining destructive prejudices and prove to them that they were the ones destroying Germany's future. In return, Moeller offered an alternative. The final chapter of *Das Dritte Reich*, bearing the same title, elaborated on his hopes for the future. Moeller's plan unfolded concisely. First, he cited unity of the people as the foremost principle above all others.¹⁵⁰ A close second to this was the importance of German nationalism. From these two pillars of belief, the idea of the "Third Empire" was built from the values in which the entire group believed; conservatism of tradition, a community of all Germans, and the courage to overcome their many antitheses, such as the barbarian versus the civilized spirit, minor tribalism, religious division, and westernism versus Germanism.¹⁵¹ The author felt strongly that these divisions would have to be harmonized in order for Germany to attain the potential greatness which he saw in its future. But the most passionate warning that Moeller issued came in his dedication to Gleichen:

Let us be perfectly explicit: the thought of the Third Empire--to which we must cling as our last and highest philosophy--can only bear fruit if it is translated into concrete reality. It must quit the world of dreams and step into the political world. It must be as realist as the problems of our constitutional and national life; it must be as sceptical and pessimistic as the times require.¹⁵²

In his message to Gleichen just a few short years before taking his own life, Moeller had predicted the weakness of his own group and many others.

The final aspect of German domestic policy which was discussed in *Das Gewissen* was the sphere of culture. Needless to say, the contributors to this weekly viewed the issue of culture as

another one in which they could set an example for society and inspire the appropriate behaviour and ideals. The great majority of articles on culture appearing in *Das Gewissen* relied on yet another basic formula. They attempted to provide their readers with inspiring examples of people and sentiments which they could look up to. Profiles were written on people such as Goethe, Ernst Moritz Arndt, Friedrich von Gentz, Dostoevsky, Dante, Prince Louis Ferdinand and Theodor Däubler; even collections of quotations from historical German heroes were published. Other profiles focussed on different geographic places of significance, such as Tilsit, Danzig, Flensburg, or Nystadt. In many cases simple poems expressing noble sentiments were included in the paper. Titled "German Destiny," one such poem was published in a late 1919 edition:

Pain: and this Volk bleeds in the darkness
 Want is the master denying from slaves
 But the Father Song sounds from calibrated moans
 Piercing laughter cries with the play
 Gold is the death idolized by fools Volk to be proud of its
 Regarding the enemies height the blood is aroused
 Act: and the Volk raise itself to brightness
 Hero is the god carried by brothers
 Over the groaning masses triumphs the Ring's prayer.¹⁵³

But while the majority of articles on the subject of culture merely presented examples to be emulated, others did present bolder opinions.

One such article of opinion by L. Hoppe-Lichterfeld made a direct plea to the people of Germany to preserve their moral fibre

from modern cultural "diseases."¹⁵⁴ In "A Call to All," the author pleaded for Germans to take a critical look at the modern media of communication--film, stage, press, and popular literature--in order to see the moral crisis that was taking place. He or she felt this crisis could be seen through a variety of symptoms, mainly, through the "glorification of evil" in the form of "disgrace," "sexual offence," and "crime."¹⁵⁵ A prime example of this was the popular craze of the "terror-film" which the author thought was putting the moral quality of Germans in question with nations abroad. Moreover, it seemed, a host of other dangers were running out of control in society. The author included cabarets and the advertising sections of certain unmentioned newspapers in the list. Regardless of the content of this "trash," the clear message to the reader was that the danger lay in the fact that all of this was being carried out unhindered by the German *Volk*.¹⁵⁶ The author suggested that true strength lay latent in the "decent majority," which were incapacitated by their party and class prejudices.

The same perceived inability of the *Volk* to be proud of its cultural vitality was lamented in 1921 by Martin Spahn, in his look at the fifty-year anniversary of the birth of Germany.¹⁵⁷ Spahn offered this remedy for his fellow citizens who, he felt, had become unappreciative of their history:

We must...track down the inner unity of the state-in-the-becoming of our *Volk* throughout the entire thousand-years which our *Volk* has existed, and again permit the illumination of it in our national consciousness.¹⁵⁸

Spahn's suggested to his readers a far more concise action plan

than that of L. Hoppe-Lichterfeld, who proposed a similar scheme which would include the solicitation of help from parliamentarians and locally organized *Arbeitsgemeinschaften*. Nevertheless, these suggestions were as practical as the group would ever provide on the issues of culture.

While issues of political theory, general German domestic policy, and culture dominated the pages of *Das Gewissen*, the newspaper made a significant contribution to the reader's foreign political outlook. Two main issues became the newspaper's focal point: first, the maliciousness and injustice of the Versailles Peace, and second, the question of Germany's war guilt.

From the very signing of the Peace, the writers of *Das Gewissen* began to condemn it as a treaty orchestrated to enslave Germans for the rest of their existence. Again, Eduard Stadtler led the charge in the summer of 1919:

The basis of German foreign politics must be the fact that the peace that we signed is really intolerable and impossible. The whole German press, from the entire Right to the entire Left, is in complete agreement.¹⁵⁹

A headline article of "Hutten," helped to direct the mounting criticism at the government:

The give-in politics, the protests behind which stands no spirit, no will, no character, brought us to decline, as the government covered itself, as they believed, through the majority decision of the National Assembly, which accepted the peace outline...¹⁶⁰

Finally, the newspaper's expert on the subject of Versailles, Paul Dehn, revealed to the readers of *Das Gewissen* what he felt was the truth about the end of the war:

The Peace of Versailles is not an agreement because

it would not be acceptable on the basis of negotiations. At the same time, the enemy representatives do not condescend and [instead] treat Germany as a criminal, setting firmly their one-sided peace conditions and enforced under threat of wider advances of their troops, the Germans sign a confession. The Versailles Peace is what Clemenceau admitted, only a continuation of war by other means.¹⁶¹

Thus, in three easy steps and in the course of one year, the verdict was brought forth by the jury of the June Club and its contributors--Germany was still at war and should think in such terms. Yet, the simple fact that a handful of writers argued this point did not necessarily make it true. More detailed information on the terms of the agreement would be necessary to make this an irrefutable fact.

In a series of instalments beginning in late October 1919 entitled "From the Peace Treaty," Paul Dehn wrote detailed explanations of the treaty clauses, complete with his own judgements of them. In his first instalment, Dehn documented the way in which Germany's pre-war coal production of 202 Million tons in 1913 was also its yearly consumption.¹⁶² The loss of a massive part of this in annexed territories and coal payments to the victors of the war led him to speculate on the latter's intentions:

...in the winter the German Volk would be without house heating, without light, and without the possibility of cooking, and German industry would discontinue its business while its workers were dismissed by the millions.¹⁶³

One week later, Dehn wrote an exposé on the restrictions put on the defence industry.¹⁶⁴ He looked at the reduction of the Army to 100,000 men, restrictions on officers, foreign service, fortifications and weapons production. With regard to the Navy,

Dehn detailed limitations on ships, men, armaments, munitions, shipbuilding, and especially the U-boat. Two weeks later, he examined Germany's loss of financial sovereignty in Articles 233 to 244 of the treaty.¹⁶⁵ He described to the reader the way in which the enemy would send a "delegation of reparations" to look after its new wealth and interests in Germany. He outlined how they would not stand outside of the government as a friendly advisor, but rather function like a bankruptcy estate receiver in charge of the spoils.¹⁶⁶ Dehn's analysis of the Versailles management of the German protectorates in Articles 119 to 127, was presented in much the same way:

On the 10th of November 1914, Lloyd George declared that England did not demand the German protectorates kneel before it. In reality, England hastened to satisfy its greed through a series of robberies of German protectorates, and pressed the individual colonies to similar action.¹⁶⁷

In any event, the message to the reader was meant to be the same. The German nation was being sold out from under them by the leadership and immediate action was needed.

The central points of the call to action on behalf of *Das Gewissen* were not surprising. Paul Dehn's conclusive warning was issued at the end of his series and as many of the Versailles stipulations began to come into effect:

So long as this peace remains unchanged, it will take that long for the gagged Germany of the War to go away. With neither power nor justice. Germany will be raped, crushed, and squeezed out.¹⁶⁸

"Revisionism" had become enshrined as the catch-word of the group. Anything other than immediate plans for changes to the Treaty of

Versailles was deemed senseless complaining. Eduard Stadtler took hold of this call to action and through his own intellectual gymnastics, turned it directly into a call for a political uprising against the party system:

The indignation against the disgrace of Versailles will become so difficult for all parts of the German Volk... that the inevitability of a national uprising against the alien yoke of slavery must lead to domestic political pressure on behalf of a national longing, which yearns for an attainment of the needs of the Volk, in the struggle against the barren party nature.¹⁶⁹

But probably even more critical to the liberation of the German spirit than the overthrow of an unjust peace was the refutation of Germany's responsibility for the War. This crucial position was staked out by the club's spiritual mentor, Moeller van den Bruck. In the article "Lloyd George," of March 16, 1921, Moeller decried the insaneness of the post-war attitudes towards the question of guilt in the war.¹⁷⁰ The attitudes of everyone with whom Moeller came into contact were the same, from foreigners to his own native Germans. A consensus existed that the war-guilt clause was a formality that meant nothing and would be forgotten by all in due time. Furthermore, many Germans suggested to him that avoiding an uproar over the issue might make the Treaty of Versailles somewhat easier on them. However, the truce that Moeller found so insulting was, in his eyes, broken by a London speech in which Lloyd George began to urge that the issue be brought up for its moral value. The author described Lloyd George's new outlook on the guilt question. "It will rather be given precedence as a vital matter which concerns all. And there

will be nothing spoken of as much in Europe, than of it!"¹⁷¹ In an exultant crowd Moeller responded to the invitation to comment, "They broke the spell which lay over the guilt question!" He continued in a lengthy analysis which questioned the Entente in its cock-sure pronouncement of Germany's guilt. This was enough to provide the crucial spark to Moeller's followers.

Almost exactly one month later the responses began to flow in. The first came from a Dr. Emmy Voigtlander. In this short time, Moeller's fresh look at the problem of guilt had so inspired his readers to look for Germany's innocence, that Voigtlander wrote:

Never will it come out differently, that the will to war was on the side of the Entente, [and] the will to peace on the side of Germany. The question is rather: How was it at all possible that such a twisting of facts, such a reversal of all things and decisions could come into being, which afflicted us with the label of the "trouble-makers?"¹⁷²

Voigtlander went on a limb to come up with her own rationalization for Germany's being accused of guilt in the War. She systematically argued that war was just a distasteful but necessary part of life and as such, not a punishable offence. Furthermore, she argued, the pacifist attitudes that staked such claims were a product of Anglo-Saxon weakness, which was being used by the British to legitimate the subordination of other peoples.¹⁷³ The same idea was recycled by Wilhelm von Kries, who blamed both the British and the French.¹⁷⁴ He suggested that one could find causes and preparation for the First World War as far back as the 1890's, and that war must be at all times a "latent political factor." In other words, any nation that existed without keeping

an eye on its competitors militarily was not a wise nation. He further elaborated that it was neither unrealistic nor criminal, for the powers to use the entire world as their battleground, due to the breadth and depth of their resources.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, the evidence for Germany's criminal guilt in the war was nothing other than circumstantial.

Turning from special issues in foreign policy to the general foreign political outlook of *Das Gewissen*, one finds documented the changing view of Germany's orientation in Europe. This understanding of Germany's foreign political status was revealed in a number of articles appearing in 1919. The most comprehensive analysis came again from Moeller van den Bruck.¹⁷⁶ He viewed Germany's situation as a complex interaction of four distinct fronts, and as in Shakespearean drama, the Germans were being forced to choose one of several poor alternatives. Moeller saw the directions of North and West as being "locked" by the Entente powers. To the South, Germany looked upon an Austrian nation confused by its own political distinction and affinity for "Germandom." This was a fact which had earlier prompted Fritz Ehrenforth to write an exposé questioning the unusual relationship of these two nations.¹⁷⁷ Finally, and this was the biting irony to Moeller, the East consisted of several false "border-states," specifically constructed by the English to frustrate Germany.¹⁷⁸ Behind these border-states lay the unpredictable turmoil of Russia, and here Eduard Stadtler never missed an opportunity to warn *Das Gewissen* readers of its latent danger.¹⁷⁹ While Moeller van den

Bruck felt that Germany's best choice lay in turning its attention to solving the problems of the eastern border-states, the nation was unwittingly being forced into its old antagonism with France. Furthermore, he believed this to be an unfortunate result of the latter's inability to give up on its continental policy. The fact remained that Germany was surrounded and isolated, with its only true friend being the faithful Swiss-Germans.¹⁸⁰

By 1921, the German foreign political orientation had evolved as old and new foes re-aligned themselves in the minds of German citizens. In his New Year analysis of the foreign political situation, the *Das Gewissen* editor, Werner Wirths, shared his belief in Germany's biggest concern:

The power of the East is colossal. Soviet Russia stands foreign-politically in full armament there. It mocks the whole world and will be feared by the whole world.¹⁸¹

And if the new threat in the East was not enough of a problem, Wirths gave his impression of the consistency of Germany's neighbour to the West:

France is really a crazy female. Unfortunately, in full war-like equipage. And is today on our West border, such as on the Rhine, with its face turned towards Europe, at the same time the greatest war-power and the most determined political will-power.¹⁸²

And to the North, Wirths felt, England had been wise to follow Lloyd George's plan to avoid any political positioning for the time being and let the European wounds heal. The situation on Germany's southern border was completely over-shadowed by two factors that the author listed; first, the already discussed squeeze being applied to Germany via the two ambitious powers it saw on its East

and West borders, and second, the weight of its own internal problems--hunger and inflation. While Germany's situation was still relatively good in 1921, Werner Wirths could optimistically view Germany's foreign policy hopes and urge his readers on towards the greatness he saw near:

"Young Germany! You, generation of the War--awake to action! Close the ring! Greatness lies behind you. Greatness awaits you. Germany--not Europe--calls!¹⁸³

By March of 1923 a small symptom of a very large problem began to reveal itself, as the cost of *Das Gewissen* had risen from the 50 pfennigs for the first three years of its existence to 200 Marks per issue. The difficulties of the German economy were due to a multiplicity of factors--inflation, unemployment, the war reparations debt, and the loss of a large portion of Germany's productive abilities. The poor, post-war economy provided the contributors of *Das Gewissen* with a chance to direct the frustration and despair that they witnessed around them against their traditional enemies, the victors of the War who had fleeced them, the ineptness of the German government, and the party system in general.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, in these early years there was also an overall lack of genuine economic analysis. Despairing sentiments such as the following were most common:

Thus far in retrospect; an outlook that should promise a solution cannot be given, so long as the bankruptcy of the economy of a Volk is still full on its course. The people responsible refuse to be held accountable that the bankruptcy is there and the redevelopment of our economy and our reconstruction demands radical measures.¹⁸⁵

One year later, in late 1920, Germany's situation had worsened to

the point that "Hutten" could declare a world economic crisis in effect.¹⁸⁶ Blaming the wrath of French militarism and imperialism, he argued that Europe's economy should be viewed organically. Its recovery was dependent on Germany and the world's economy was dependent on Europe. In an interesting outlook on the global economy, "Hutten" blamed the misery of the world on the victors' desire to punish Germany. However, other writers would not let the German government slip away without its share of the blame.

As Germany's situation began to worsen in the summer of 1921, a rash of articles began to blame the German government for the nation's current fortunes and to suggest means by which the ills of the economy could be remedied. In a revealing analysis, Heinrich von Gleichen's article "Inflation-or-Production Policy" argued that the only real remedy for the German situation lay in the previously ignored advice of the Swedish national economist, Gustav Cassel.¹⁸⁷ Cassel had argued that the heart of Germany's problems lay in a disparity between lack of capital in real savings and an abundance of legitimized means of payment. The international loans which Germany took had not worked to improve their situation, as they did not have the available savings to back them, and instead they actually increased inflation.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, a disparity also existed between government taxation measures and the public's ability to pay these taxes. The same went for the pricing policies which artificially kept down prices. All of these measures, Cassel thought, worked together to increase inflation. Gleichen admired his simple solution to the problem:

Only a return to economic production-policy on the grounds of a stabilized value, a return to the present-day economic strengths of the nation in question, can rescue what is still to rescue.¹⁸⁹

The same sentiments were echoed by the economic solution of "Hutten," which was published simultaneously in an all out appeal to public opinion.¹⁹⁰ He suggested that Germany use its unique geographical position and the medium value of its goods to trade to its advantage with the nations to the East and West. To the East, Germany obtained a high value for its goods and would have the advantage in trade if it could find the business possibilities, preferably through mutual exchange. To the West, the author urged a realization that German manufactured goods were coveted on the western market because of their high quality and relative inexpensiveness. Mastering the advantages of Germany's position would have to be done immediately as there was no guarantee how long these perfect conditions might exist.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, the nation's leadership had not yet picked up on the aforementioned ideas. "Hutten" wrote condemningly:

But what the German government is doing is the reverse, because their entire policy of fulfilment amounts to a systematic weakening of German production-power, which will result in the greatest disruption of German value.¹⁹²

A consensus had been reached that Germans were part of a world market. This could easily be witnessed in the variety of needs that made up Germans' very modern lifestyle. As one author put it, the value of the strong German banks, industries, and businesses was being lost.¹⁹³ He suggested that they suffered from the same dilemma as the American boxer Jack Dempsey who was being refused

the opportunity to fight an opponent; both were losing their form and value.

Given that many Germans felt their nation was nearing an economic crisis, it is not surprising that even more radical economic plans might have been suggested. However, it had been one of the group's goals from its earliest inception to develop a new form of socialism, or corporatism, in Germany. In the first editions of *Das Gewissen*, articles began to appear berating the type of socialism which was typical of the day.¹⁹⁴ Claims rang out that the current socialists only valued spiritual development and did so out of egotistical class-oriented motives. Early critics urged that the German people needed to become more "social" for the sake of the Revolution's success and to change their basic concept of property.¹⁹⁵ However, such criticisms were of a very general nature. It would take the leadership of Moeller van den Bruck to define the direction which the group was ultimately to pursue.

In his article "Prussianism and Socialism" of January 1920, Moeller set the future tone of the group's views on socialism. In doing so, he championed the position of Oswald Spengler who had written that a Prussian form of socialism existed as distinct from the western version.¹⁹⁶ To both Spengler and Moeller, the West stood for an "each for themselves" attitude, that saw the world as booty for business and consumption. The Prussian tradition, on the other hand, encouraged the idea that "All were for all," with each citizen being an individual worker committed to the social value of their individual work. Needless to say, Moeller then had to

address the difference between the ideas which he had outlined and those of the contemporary German socialists. To differentiate among these, he argued that the German socialists had mistakenly adopted the international socialism of the West, to his mind a disguised liberalism that aided in the West's triumph over Germany. To describe the distinct Prussian idea of socialism, Moeller wrote in the general sense:

It is their work manner and it is their life-style. It is not in the place, not in Prussia, in the state, and today not, first of all, bound more to the Prussian people. It has come through Germany for a long time through Prussia. It is, as Spengler said, "a feeling of life, an instinct, not a need to be different."¹⁹⁷

When in need of a more technical explanation, Moeller continued with the words of Oswald Spengler to describe the conditions of Prussian socialism. He noted that Spengler saw it as the "impartial state arrangement of wages for each type of work, graded as planned on the condition of the general economic situation."¹⁹⁸ Spengler saw this aspect of Prussian socialism being important because it looked to serve the *Volk* above all. Furthermore, Moeller added to this by recognizing the potential which existed in these ideas and adding an exhortation to action, which he aimed at those who had the energy to change the present situation:

The young generation knows that the roots of German socialism lie deeper. They lie in the future but also with the guilds of the Middle Ages. They lie with Luther, but also with Thomas Münzer and later, with Freiherr von Stein and with Friedrich List...¹⁹⁹

As with many of Moeller's calls to action, his article was followed by a flurry of activity on the part of the *Das Gewissen*

contributors. Those contributors sought to develop further the direction which their leader had defined. The first author to become entranced by the ideal of German socialism was Max Hildebert Boehm. In a series of articles in 1920 he attempted to clarify a number of points around this subject.²⁰⁰ First, Boehm determined the reason for the failure of this system to date. He laid the blame on the shoulders of a number of groups, starting with the misled socialist government, which had provoked the extremism of the Right in Germany. Boehm added to the pile of guilty parties by declaring the Communists fools doomed by their short-sighted concern with only their own part of the organic whole.²⁰¹ Concentrating on the necessity of appreciating the needs of this whole, Boehm expanded on his own idea of "cells" of corporative organization, which he felt would form bonds to encourage co-operation for the renewal of the nation.²⁰² Heinz Brauweiler later added to this idea, by suggesting that a whole new constitutional system also needed to be developed to encourage this co-operation.²⁰³ He argued that the current system was no better than the Absolutism of the 17th and 18th centuries, because no power was in place to check the influence of the government. In a conflict of interest they were both the authority to rule the *Volk* and the representatives of it. Brauweiler urged the creation of a body which could represent the *Volk* and force the government to listen to the needs of the organic whole.²⁰⁴

In this era of *Das Gewissen*, the contributors spent less time defining the finer points of their corporative dream than they did

trying to influence the general direction of economic thought in Germany. The dominant idea seems to have been not determining the correct form and proportions of representation by the various professional groups, but rather constantly reminding the reader that this was the type of organization which they would pursue when given the chance. Furthermore, a chance was never missed to repeat to the reader the fact that current government economic plans were driven by class-based self-interest, as were those of other groups vying for power in Germany. The final words on the subject were perhaps best given by the duo of Gleichen and Moeller. Gleichen concluded:

There are certainly two-worlds [in Germany]: The world of thoughtless egoism that rejects all responsibility, that does not recognize the anchoring of human decision in moral demands, and does not want to recognize it. One calls this lack of principle a betrayal of the community. And there is the world of responsibility, in which the individuals believe that a higher law gives them guidelines for their behaviour, that their conduct remains responsible to the community, and which they have to serve, not just ask of it.²⁰⁵

Moeller, believing in the ultimate correctness of his own vision, added to this:

Where Marxism ends, there begins Socialism.
It is not the task of the third Reich.
It is its basis.²⁰⁶

Moeller's view of economics was certainly very dependent on his own intuition. It was as if the author felt that it was not up to him to work out the glitches in the group's systems, but rather to simply gaze into his crystal ball and decide whether a certain path or direction would be in harmony with the spirit of the German nation. Only time would tell whether Moeller van den Bruck's

confident attitude was justified. ~~To overcome these limitations~~

In summary, the reader can conclude a number of things about the weekly publication of *Das Gewissen*. Its success, evidenced by a circulation of up to 30,000 regular subscribers and a following of many well-respected devotees, provided an effective means by which the members of the June Club and the newspaper contributors could manage two tasks. First, they could rally public opinion against the status quo through their unending criticism of the governing powers and the plethora of parties and interests groups, which they viewed as a divisive force in the nation. Second, they could diffuse their multiplicity of ideas regarding the improvement of the German nation, while still in an unrefined form. One might even argue that *Das Gewissen* was the ultimate medium for such tasks. The scarcity of print space precluded any lengthy explanations of their ideas, and the tradition that almost every article was spent critiquing the current government, parties, and interest groups, meant that very few comprehensive details ever emerged. The contributors merely had to toe the intellectual line, as it was laid out by the inner core of the group's membership. In any event, one is left questioning the ultimate success of these, the group's earliest efforts. The only answer that can be given to this is that while the group's newspaper enjoyed immense popularity, with a large circulation and influential contacts in numerous other popular German papers, it desperately required a means to move beyond the informal organization guidelines which it had set down for itself. Had the group ensured its own failure in

its earliest designs? The attempt to overcome these limitations would be the first test of the crucial adaptability of the June Club, *Das Gewissen*, and the Ring Movement.

Chapter Four: Adaptation and Incline

While the years 1918 to 1921 can be viewed as an attempt by the members of the group to formulate their positions on a very general level, the post-1921 era was one in which these same individuals tried to create a more practical program. Having looked at some of the ideas of the June Club and *Das Gewissen*, one is certainly struck by the way in which these ideas unfolded extremely slowly in their discussions and articles and failed to coalesce in a concise outline. Many persons did work to create a unified group line. However, only the individual who knew the intellectual leadership well and had studied the bulk of articles being printed in *Das Gewissen* would understand the program which was being proposed.

Chapter Four: Adaptation and Decline

had to become more efficient in communicating their message. Yet they were forced to adhere to their basic tenet of refusing to adopt the party structure and, at the same time, develop the means by which they could more easily diffuse their ideas and educate their followers. They would do so by expanding their efforts in two new directions which will be explored here. The first was the creation of a "political college." Through this, they hoped to inculcate in the German leaders of tomorrow an outlook which reflected their own ideas. Second, the contributors of *Das Gewissen* collaborated in the development of a book, Die Neue Front.²⁶⁷ This work would not only act as a programmatic statement of their collective views; it was also an attempt to firmly entrench the group's interpretation of history, politics, and philosophy in the manner in which they felt was appropriate for the

While the years 1919 to 1921 can be viewed as an attempt by the members of the group to formulate their positions on a very general level, the post-1921 era was one in which these same individuals tried to create a more practical program. Having looked at some of the ideas of the June Club and *Das Gewissen*, one is certainly struck by the way in which these ideas unfolded extremely slowly in their discussions and articles and failed to coalesce in a concise outline. Many persons did work to create a unified group line. However, only the individual who knew the intellectual leadership well and had studied the bulk of articles being printed in *Das Gewissen* would understand the program which was being propounded. In the end, the June Club and *Das Gewissen* had to become more efficient in communicating their message. Yet they were forced to adhere to their basic tenet of refusing to adopt the party structure and, at the same time, develop the means by which they could more easily diffuse their ideas and educate their followers. They would do so by expanding their efforts in two new directions which will be explored here. The first was the creation of a "political college." Through this, they hoped to inculcate in the German leaders of tomorrow an outlook which reflected their own ideas. Second, the contributors of *Das Gewissen* collaborated in the development of a book, Die Neue Front.²⁰⁷ This work would not only act as a programmatic statement on their collective views; it was also an attempt to firmly entrench the group's interpretation of history, politics, and philosophy in the manner in which they felt was appropriate for the

German Volk. This most important step would be their attempt to turn the myth creation of the last few years into the historical fact of the present. Finally, the group continued its efforts to produce *Das Gewissen* and keep influencing their readers' opinions on a multitude of political subjects.

The first new direction pursued by members of the June Club and *Das Gewissen* was the founding of their own "political college." There is evidence that the idea for a college was formulated during the group's inception in 1919, but no action was taken to officially start it until November of 1920. A similar but unrelated organization, the "German College for Politics," was one step ahead of the group but followed a more traditional path in politics that was described by the June Club as "erroneous." Furthermore, the first mention of the college in *Das Gewissen* was not until January of 1921, in an article signed by "Chronicler."²⁰⁸ In the article, the author related how the members of his group had, until recently, satisfied themselves with the "multifarious transmissional effects" of their efforts to influence politics. Yet, he or she also revealed a certain frustration or dissatisfaction with these effects:

That, which is in "Gewissen," which is in our other collected writings and individual publications that have gained literary form, that, which has effect as speeches in the city and country, remains, with intention and necessity, a part-achievement in the wide framework of the Ring Movement. All organization retains the characteristic of being provisional. Programmatic restriction became consciously avoided.²⁰⁹

The author was clear to point out that the group did not avoid practical action altogether. He or she reminded the reader that

the group's members had published books in their own fields, had worked in the area of adult education, giving speeches to workers in industrialized regions, and developing contacts with the radical workforce, and had cultivated active partnerships with other newspapers, such as Rudolph Pechel's *Deutsche Rundschau* and Hans Roesler's *Hochschule*.²¹⁰ Referring to the first year's evolution and the goals of the college, the author wrote:

With strict discipline and from the smallest organic beginnings it set out in its lecture-cycle and in its workshops to achieve political reconstruction as we understood it. They have proven themselves a richer community of workers in two years. Repetition in vague Enlightenment business and empty formalism was avoided. *Gemeinschaft* of all collaborators, the tightest contact between factual research, well-grounded teaching and immediate, practical results were striven for.²¹¹

Thus, through the new task which the circle felt itself ready to undertake, it set out to achieve a deeper and broader effect on the political scene in Germany. The Political College was to be guided to avoid the dangers which it saw in the German traditions of "dry academic professionalism." Instead, they hoped to be innovative and of strong, youthful wills, as well as both *gemeinschaftlich* and corporative.

A more complete explanation of the Political College's organizational structure was given two months later in an article published in May of 1921, this time written by Heinrich von Gleichen.²¹² Gleichen's discussion began with an outline of goals similar to those sketched out in the latter article; goals which he said were necessary due to a hereditary German fault--weakness of will. This weakness, he argued, was the root cause of the nation's

dependence on obscure goals and formulas, which were always rationally justified by individuals and small groups. However, Gleichen also felt that history had necessitated change, by forcing three great educational experiences on a single generation.²¹³ The war, collapse, and resulting poverty had been these three learning experiences and the June Club was lucky enough to possess members extremely knowledgeable in a variety of specialized, political and economic fields, who could pass on their learning to the leaders of tomorrow.

The key participant in the organization of the college was also the only educator who can be described as a generalist. The background qualifications of the historian Martin Spahn easily won him the admiration of his collaborators and he was awarded the task of providing students at the Political College with their key lectures. To Spahn fell the duty of inculcating the basic outlook in foreign policy, politically responsible organization, and the economic self-administration of the nation.²¹⁴ He would base these teachings on the group's particular ideal of German state reconstruction, which was to be cultivated through historical teachings and organizational forms. In addition, he had to formulate his educational plan along lines that avoided the problems of the party system. This was possibly the most unique and most difficult innovation of the group. It was also a factor that many saw as the cornerstone of their entire movement, and one that had been held as sacred from their earliest days. Finally, these goals had to be both inspirational to their students and

attainable. With such a broad mandate, Spahn could only hope to organize the fundamental ideas for his students. He would never manage to develop any of these fields in detail. This task fell to his collaborators.

Martin Spahn's colleagues at the Political College formed themselves into six different specialized workshops to instruct the students. The first such workshop was run by Max Hildebert Boehm. It dealt with the problems of nationality and tribalism "in connection with the world political factors of nationalism, irredentism, and federalism."²¹⁵ The second specialized workshop was conducted by Heinrich Herrfahrdt, and dealt mainly with issues which he raised in his book, The Problem of Professional Group Representation from the French Revolution to the Present (1921). This focussed on the political and constitutional consequences of these professional groups. The third workshop was jointly taught by Fritz Wenzel and Fritz Ehrenforth. Their focus was on the notion of developing a population policy and a settlement policy, an area of politics which seems to have been in its infancy. As leaders, Wenzel and Ehrenforth hoped to point out the lack of attention which the young generation had paid to this problem.²¹⁶ The fourth workshop was unique in that it was being developed with the participation of organized trade union circles. In this workshop, they aimed to study the complexities and inadequacies of the party system in Germany, an issue that was of immediate importance to the group. Workshop number five was truly a co-operative effort. The focus on foreign policy was developed

collectively here by Martin Spahn and Karl Hoffman. Furthermore, Moeller van den Bruck participated by teaching about the utilization of the ideas of the World War and the handling of the guilt question.²¹⁷ In addition to Moeller, Eduard Stadtler was also involved with the foreign policy workshop by teaching the correct method for handling the consequences of the Peace of Versailles. Finally, the sixth and final workshop was run by Paul Fechter. Here, students would examine the influence of literature on the formation of public opinion and the morale of the masses.²¹⁸ Particular consideration was given to the impact of newspapers.

Workshops were not the only means by which the students would learn. Experience in practical journalism and public speaking was the last requirement for students in the Political College and in this area they were helped by their teachers' contacts with *Das Gewissen* and other newspapers. Each student was required to fulfil a newspaper duty arranged by the college's Press Liaison.²¹⁹ This duty had to address relevant political issues of the day. In the same vein, the presentation of a lecture that promoted the movement was also required of the student.

In the end, the goal of the Political College was to act as a political academy.²²⁰ Its patrons hoped that the skills and information which they passed on to their students would prepare them for active leadership roles in many fields. Whether it was politics, education, or culture, the goal remained to ensure that tomorrow's leaders were focussed on their task of taking active part in the greater Ring Movement.

Another major development in the strategy of the members of the June Club and *Das Gewissen* was their publication, in 1922, of the collective work *Die Neue Front*. In explaining the need for a collective work by the contributors, the editor of late 1921, Eduard Stadtler, wrote:

It follows from the close-fitting circle. And it follows from those that stand with it in a close or distant relationship, but work in a goal-related cast of mind. The areas [of writing] are different. But they are founded on each other through the new way, as [only] they will look at it. And the people which represent these areas, supplement each other through the same trend and change each other's ideas.²²¹

This much became clear in Stadtler's discussion of the group's turn towards a programmatic statement. They had come to a turning point where the group realized a need to become more pragmatic and more defined. This did not demand establishment of an official program per se; it was more a matter of being decisive, of firmly defining the beliefs which they had been propagating over the last four years. At stake was the creation of an official German history and philosophy that agreed with the group's "spiritual line," as Stadtler called it.²²² The latter felt it probable that several of the contributors might possess different ideas about Germany's purpose and destination. At this time it was not important to resolve slightly differing conceptions of a German utopia. What had always been the focus was the formation of a unified front to allow Germans to maximize their potential and arrive at their collective goal. Thus, each of the contributions that made up the five parts of the book attempted to define this spiritual line.

The opening section of *Die Neue Front* was dedicated to setting

the tone of the work and defining a very general political philosophy on all levels. Martin Spahn's essay "1648 and 1918" achieved this by drawing a vivid comparison between the situation in which Germans found themselves at the end of the Thirty Years' War and at the end of World War One.²²³ In fact, he even went so far as to argue that the Germans of his time were in better shape than their fore-fathers, due to the complexity of their social infrastructure, which could better withstand political collapse. However, Spahn was blunt in arguing that the current situation was worse in many ways, since in the past the generation of elders had graciously stepped aside to let the youth of the country rebuild, or had taken part in this reconstruction. The problem that Spahn saw was that the generation of elders from around the year 1888 had been an uninspired transitional generation, which would not hand over the leadership of the country.²²⁴ When such a transfer of power had taken place in 1648, a great natural upheaval occurred. Beginning with music and continuing into literature, philosophy, history, politics, and economics, the author related a list of German achievements which he felt were the result of a youthful spirit leading the people. Spahn concluded by echoing the central question of his essay:

Today it is important to help the nation to repeat another similar inner renovation. Will we succeed in bringing leadership to the life of the nation, to bring power instead of weakness... then the elevation can follow the breakdown of 1918 in the same manner as it did in the year 1648. The deciding factor will be whether the generation of 1914 does as well in peace as it did in war.²²⁵

The call to his readers was for awareness of their historic

significance and a readiness to undertake their roles.

With these sentiments in mind, the other contributors sought only to formulate the official program for adoption. Moeller van den Bruck and Max Hildebert Boehm complemented Spahn's section on general political philosophy by outlining the twin pillars of neo-conservative and the young revolutionary thought, which they understood as the only reasonable choice for the German psyche. The first such pillar was explained in an essay on liberalism, which would later appear in Moeller's Das Dritte Reich.²²⁶ The underlying point of Moeller's essay was that Germany had been betrayed by the Allied powers in accepting their promises of a peace based on liberal principles. In a spirited barrage, the author condemned the idea of freemasonry, English imperialism and utilitarianism, the Enlightenment tradition of reason, and French rationalism, all of which he saw as manifestations of the same trickery--liberalism.²²⁷ Furthermore, he argued that the idea of liberalism had even been used to subvert the conservatives and socialists in Germany. Moeller explained how concepts of "freedom" and "democracy" in liberalism had been used to trick most of the world into submission:

When two augurs meet each other in the West, then they know what liberalism is: a political trick with which the rising society of the third class learned to cheat the still remaining people on the promises of 1789. But we know what freedom of the Westerners is: a word which has retained enough appeal from the three catch-words of the activists for human rights in order to bring the masses to the safe ballot boxes, instead of onto the dangerous barricades.²²⁸

But Moeller felt Germany's hope resided in its youth. These youth, from across the political spectrum, would not believe in the

liberal promises as easily as their elders, and were also more prone to practicing politics by instinct. This resulted in the meeting of the strange political bedfellows that Moeller's group represented: that the political philosophy of a nation could not

be reduced. If one follows the reasons which have made the young conservative and the young revolutionary so obviously agree in their judgement—which is more than a judgement about the circumstances in which we live, rather a judgement about the principles, points of view and guidelines which led to these circumstances—then one will find...that it is the liberal content in the political views for which they have contempt. That is what they have in common. It is almost the only common thing that exists in Germany. It is the common ground of a new front which is forming behind the parties, and where the forces of the right combine with the forces of the left, as far as they are the forces of youth in Germany.²²⁹

Max Hildebert Boehm continued in his own theoretical vein by adding to the attack on liberalism as an improper choice for the German Volk, as he felt that it had misled contemporary socialists.²³⁰ He did this by concentrating on the second pillar of neo-conservative thought, the importance of corporative bonds to replace the ideas of contemporary socialism. Boehm argued that socialism, in general, was in a very critical phase. It had not had any strong-willed defenders for some time and the most recent advocate of any note, Karl Marx, had actually led people towards another English bourgeois ideal. The reason for this lay in the fact that Germans needed the idea of unrestricted work as a necessary service to society in order to define their individual nature. This work should not be limited by a short work-day or any other stipulations designed to promote a foreign concept of "freedom," as Marx had suggested.²³¹ Boehm felt these types of

socialist pressures only masked a kind of liberalism which helped a single class dictate to the rest of society. Rather than solving the problems of class in society, Marx had inflamed them. The author argued that the political philosophy of a nation could not be reduced to sociological theory. Like concepts such as "love" or "time," this political philosophy was not always logical and often had to be understood intuitively.²³² He suggested that the successful form of socialism for Germany would be based on an appreciation of the nation's corporative bonds. Hope for the future and the freedom to create work and culture on their own soil were utter necessities for any nation. Yet, beyond these stipulations, Boehm felt that it was also necessary for each *Volk* to educate its youth along its own lines, in ways that recognized its own distinct heritage.

The second chapter of Die Neue Front turned its attention from concepts of general political philosophy to an area very central to the group's world-view, a thorough understanding of the relationship of a *Volk's* culture to its political outlook. To outline this relationship, one must begin with the ideas expressed in the selection written by Wilhelm Stapel, "Volk and Volkstum."²³³ Stapel's essay is another attempt at defining the "appropriate" views of the German people by understanding historical ideas. He argued that the fault of past theoreticians had been in their concentration on the belief that various "ideas," rather than the paths of individual nations, made up the discernible historical ages. By contrast, Stapel argued, history is better understood as

the unfolding of an individual Volk's lifecycle, according to the motivation of its own inner desires, which was a manifestation of destiny.²³⁴ In one sense, the author drew a very distinct line between what he saw to be abstract and what he saw to be divine. Historical ideas were abstract and coincidental and thus were not worth studying. On the other hand, he felt, one could use the philosophy of phenomenology to study the nature of being, or how things were mechanically and organically connected.²³⁵ Furthermore, this was all evidenced strongly by the inaccuracy of laws used to describe different aspects of history, such as politics, culture, or economics. They were inaccurate because they failed to take into account the social factors of the nation involved in them.

Yet, one is certainly left asking, how was a proper accounting of these factors not crippling to the study of whole nations as well? Stapel argued that the social factor did not affect the understanding of nations because these were non-annullable bonds.²³⁶ This could not be said of any other bonds of community, be they social, friendly, or religious. All required a positive will on the part of those involved. The familial bond of the nation, on the other hand, required no such consent. Stapel believed this to be proof that it was truly divine. In this sense, he could then suggest that it was from the state of "unreflectiveness" that a Volk produced their "Volkheit," which can only be translated as its "peopleness."²³⁷ With his argument, Stapel provided a very unique service to the followers of his group. He made official the logic necessary to shun traditional interpretations of history based on

"ideas" and the laws which affected them. Stapel validated the textbook rationalization for the intuitive nature of the group's non-traditional German history, politics, and philosophy.

Wilhelm's Stapel's sentiments on the relationship of culture to politics were echoed by Werner Wirths, who wrote on the importance of the experience of the war for "the German people. Wirths pointed out two important things about the war experience. First, Germans had gone to war almost instinctively in 1914 and by creation of a true *Gemeinschaft* shared nothing other than a "holy" experience.²³⁸ This was an example of the Germans showing their "peopleness" in an unreflective moment. Wirths felt that losing the war was nothing of which to be ashamed. The *Volk* had only demonstrated that they were still capable of the fighting spirit which had preserved them in past moments of need. Second, the experience of the war had also proven that Germany was a young, growing nation that could only be defeated if infected by foreign ideas. He wrote of this betrayal:

The Germany of 1914 had the willpower to determine its destiny. The Germanness of 1918 betrayed it. The fighting Germany was invincible until the political Germany had to face the betrayal which the democratic ideology of the West and the marxist ideology of the East prepared, and German socialism followed. Away from the fatherland German farmers and workers fought and they saw no goal and no leadership. The Army (which had the strength to reach the Marne in the fourth year) would surely have held the Maas line through the last, decisive winter. But fatherland and leadership doubted. The old flag came down. And the new flag greeted the West as the winner.²³⁹

Werner Wirths wrote unequivocally that the war was lost not against the armies of the West, but rather against the permeating influence

of western civilization. He thereby determined the true enemy of the *Volk* and re-wrote the official story of the war to suit the needs of his group's followers.

The central chapter of Die Neue Front dealt with the relationship of the economy to Germany's political outlook. This section was anchored by an article entitled "Value," written by Wilhelm von Kries. As with the other sections of the book, Kries' article was entirely dedicated to constructing an official interpretation of the recent history of Germany's economic fortunes. Through a complex marxist-style analysis, the author claimed that Germany's economic failure after the war was a result of the lost world network of relations which it had been developing for years before the war.²⁴⁰ The loss of these relations was directly a result of the Allied powers' deliberate vengefulness and the current government's failure to take action against this. Kries argued that this loss was also the failure of Germans to understand the reality behind the concepts of "value" and "wealth." His analysis was based on the presumption that actual economic value came not from the inherent worth of an object, which could not be naively measured in the man hours needed to produce it. On the contrary, the post-war period in Germany proved that a willingness to work did not necessarily mean the creation of wealth.²⁴¹ Wealth came from exploiting others' needs in a relationship of dependency, through the use of one's superior intellect. It was control of these relations which possessed value and was the skill of which Germans were proving world-wide mastery

of in the pre-war period. Nevertheless, in Kries' view the post-war situation had changed:

The connections with humanity, the connections within the nation are gone. The security of these connections and the possibility to get directly in contact with people in the whole world in order to recommend our products to them--this is all presently impossible. Because of this, we cannot create value nowadays, no matter how much we work. We have renounced the freedom of the will, the exploitation of our intelligence and of our creative strengths; we are no longer equal opponents in world-traffic; we are only objects of exploitation.²⁴²

Kries defined two possible limitations to obtaining control in these relations of dependency. The first such limitation was the utilization of various technologies.²⁴³ In this way, one could use advancements in technology to escape the dependency relation to a dominant controller. An example of this was the use of new technology in order to utilize a material such as potash to create agricultural fertilizers. But the second and more important limitation which Kries outlined was the use of politics and laws to affect the economy.²⁴⁴ Politics could be used not only to limit certain aspects of economic development, such as "protection from monopolies, it could also be used to protect one's own national interests. An example of this would be in the use of mutual political relations to ensure that one's own nation did not become overwhelmingly an economic victim. This is the situation which Kries felt Germany had unwittingly accepted and had led to the weakness of their credit situation. He argued that German credit was dangerously based on an absent value, as this had all been destroyed by the limitations which the Treaty of Versailles placed

on their relations. Furthermore, the greatest crime of all, in his view, was the current government's inability to realize this and then remedy the situation through the re-establishment of these relations and Germany's essential worth.²⁴⁵ One should note that this fact uniquely served the group's political cause by removing blame from the *Volk* and placing it squarely on the shoulders of their oppressors--their government and the West. Again, the author's version of recent history received the group's official stamp of approval. Complementing von Kries' official line on the politics of the German economy were related selections from Franz Rohr and Fritz Weth, which dealt with the need for change in the socialist movement in Germany. Rohr's basic point was that the German working-class needed to develop greater spiritual goals for itself.²⁴⁶ He argued that although the working class was probably the greatest repository for German culture in the entire nation, they were weak in their lack of creativeness and historicity. Rohr suggested the working-class movement had no "fire" in their souls because of their preoccupation with materialism and the lack of a transcendental world-view. In other words, the reason for which they were on earth was none other than to fulfil their own material pleasures. A similar argument was presented by Fritz Weth's article, although his was more traditionally that of *Das Gewissen*. Weth placed the blame on party factionalism and bureaucracy which restricted creative energies.²⁴⁷ He concentrated on the need to bridge the old divisions and lessen the friction that existed

amongst the people, socialists and non-socialists alike. The latter felt the "era of skill" was fast approaching. In this era, skill would be appreciated in any citizen of the nation based on the value it had for the whole and the "oxygen" which it produced for the masses.²⁴⁸

Yet, one must ask, what actually was this greater design which Rohr and Weth hoped to suggest as the official program of their group? In both cases and on a general level, it was the abandonment of the socialist dream as it had been formulated by recent Marxist ideologues. For Franz Rohr, this meant specifically the continuation of the greatness achieved in the Christian-German Middle Ages, which he felt had only been interrupted.²⁴⁹ To create over again this sense of "Germanness" and a renewed rise of the Occident would be the unifying belief and task of the working-class. Fritz Weth's specific plan augmented these goals. He believed that this goal could be achieved through the continued alliance of the radical Right and the radical Left, who had allied after the war in their opposition to the West.²⁵⁰ Furthermore, a concentration on economic issues by all would give Germans a proper sense of community and allow their most talented leaders to rise to the top naturally, as opposed to ruling by guile through party politics. Weth singled out "formal democratic administration" as one of the current aspects of government hindering these creative spirits.²⁵¹ Together, Rohr and Weth played their role in service of Die Neue Front. The authors aided in the creation of a group line on the politics of the economy and confirmed the official

interpretation of the recent history of the economy, as outlined by Wilhelm von Kries. Besides confirming many of the foreign policy views expressed throughout *Das Gewissen*, the fourth chapter of *Die Neue Front* outlined a number of "official" outlooks and goals of the group in this area. The first important development came in a selection entitled "Race," which was written by Paul Ernst in the form of a theatrical dialogue.²⁵² Previously, the meaning and value of the controversial concept of race was almost entirely avoided by the contributors to *Das Gewissen*, as if the group preferred to distance themselves from the racial fanatics of their time. However, in the course of Ernst's dialogue, a delicate appreciation of the group's opinion of the subject was revealed through the fictional discussion of four individuals, a poet, a Baltic baron, a German statesman, and the statesman's wife, which was supposed to have taken place sometime in 1919. The discussion was punctuated by anecdotes which revealed several aspects of race. The first was that one could only ever see the values and possibilities of one's own race. The Baltic baron related a tale of Slavic cruelty and ignorance of the value of heroism, in an example where a young German girl gave her life to prevent the execution of the sick and elderly mother whom she cared for.²⁵³ Yet, when there came an opportunity for the storytellers to condemn other races as inferior, the wise poet character brought up the question of time and circumstance being the actual motivating factor of racial representatives acting dishonourably, and chastised the opposing

view as an uncertain desire to see one's own race as distinguished.²⁵⁴ The wise poet continued to argue that race was also not a condition or state of origin, but an ideal signified by an unwavering feeling of commitment towards one's own race.

Two other tales in the dialogue represented other aspects of the group's opinions on the subject of race. The statesman told his tale of the young Count Arco who assassinated Kurt Eisner after realizing the negative effects which the latter was having on the nation. Count Arco was saved by two German communists who were, in the end, overwhelmed by the nobility of Count Arco's sacrifice and moral independence.²⁵⁵ A member of the Communist Red Guard was also driven to tearing off his own brassard with shame in the face of Arco. The moral here was that the German race was still healthy and not beyond redemption, the only thing lacking was morally independent leadership. However, the poet's surprising reaction to the tale is significant. He argued that Count Arco should have been executed as a murderer, and that any lesser punishment would itself be a crime by a government of Philistines. The poet explained that the German *Volk* was an ideal that had to be upheld at all costs. Murder was against that ideal and Count Arco should have been sacrificed and respected as a martyr to that cause.²⁵⁶

A similar message came from the final tale which was told by the wise poet. He related the story of a poor Jewish merchant's arrival in a friendly Polish town. After being welcomed and charitably supported by the local population, the Jewish merchant eventually gained total economic control of his neighbours and

converted them to his service. During a pogrom in the town, the merchant is helped to escape by the very Pole whom he had reduced to a state of poverty and now employed with a meagre wage. But despite the Pole's efforts to save his exploiter, the Jewish merchant is eventually found and murdered anyway. Surprisingly, the poet's moral message about this story did not relate to the characteristics of individual races. The focus was instead on the divine nature of relationships among different *Völker*. The poet explained God's divine purpose for the relations of people in historical terms:

When the Greek still lived under primitive conditions, the Phoenician salesman came; they were thieves, profiteers and kidnappers. They must have had a destructive effect on the old societal orders and on the spiritual state of the Greeks. But those thugs caused the Greek people to develop to a higher, the highest state. When the Greeks aimed for that, the Greek salesman came to Italy; he had the same impact as the Phoenicians had had in Greece hundreds of years before.²⁵⁷

In other words, the Jews in Germany were there to awaken the German *Volk* from its "dullness." The poet intimated that Germans should, at this juncture in time, promote an inner consciousness of their situation by viewing the Jew in their society as a predator and themselves the potential prey. External political measures might complement this inner consciousness, but it was only the latter which would ensure the survival of the German *Volk* in the face of God's plan.

The second important development in perspectives on foreign policy was outlined in August Winnig's essay, "The New World Situation."²⁵⁸ While the essay was a rather typical survey of the

world order through the lens of the developing world powers, what is different was the very clear statement of Germany's mission in the face of these changes. This mission of the German *Volk* was often spoken of, but very infrequently elaborated upon. Winnig began his explanation with a recent historical perspective and suggested that the world war might have been another symptom of English economic jealousies.²⁵⁹ He argued that Germany's economic success after 1871 presented England with a challenge which it was not prepared to handle. In the face of a threat to their entire economy, Winnig felt that the English had engineered a war of destruction to re-establish their dominant position. However, several symptoms suggested these post-war alliances might be ending and that a new world order was in the making. The first such symptom was the rise of American economic power and America's new willingness to turn its attention from its own hemisphere, and to expand its purview to include Europe and the Far East as well.²⁶⁰ The reason for this change of attitude was the Americans' new interest in competing for markets in which to sell refined goods, an industry which had been greatly developed in that country by the war. The English were quickly losing ground to their friendly competition and would be seeking out new allies as a counter-balance. On the other hand, Winnig also recognized the Soviet Union as another "late bloomer" whose industrial and economic potential was even less appreciated.²⁶¹ All other powers would be forced to operate to their greatest advantage between these poles. With the French now firmly entrenched as the West's dominant

continental power, Germany's future path had already become obvious. Less than three years after having lost a war of conquest, August Winnig wrote of future plans for expansion:

But we believe in the German mission. We believe in a new German future. If we don't build it, our sons will. We cannot say when it will happen. We cannot even see the paths leading to it. But we know the goal. The tracks of the old German colonizers show us the direction.

What I see as the great historical task of Germany and the Germans is the following: to become the colonizer, world-leader and sword-carrier of the peoples and countries between the North Sea and the Pacific Ocean.²⁶²

One must certainly be shocked by the ambitiousness of the group's plan and its willingness to declare it openly, so quickly after Germany's recent loss and the imposition of the "punitive" Treaty of Versailles.

The final chapter of Die Neue Front was a retrospective on the events of the past few years and a discussion of Germany's needs in the future. Perhaps the most profound selections came, as expected, from Eduard Stadtler and Heinrich von Gleichen. Stadtler's essay, "The Nationalization of the German Revolution," looked at the events of the post-war era with special reference to attempts to make Germany's revolution "national" in character.²⁶³ By this, he meant that the actions of his group could be viewed as an attempt to inculcate a popular feeling in which the fortunes of the nation rose and fell as a true collective, not as a deeply divided body. However, Stadtler did note that by the beginning of the revolution this effort had been severely crippled. During this time, "natural" leaders in the German royal families and the

military establishment were discouraged from taking an active role in revolutionary change.²⁶⁴ This was the same dilemma lamented by Heinrich von Gleichen when he wrote that it was necessary for the current German leadership to face up to the terrible spiritual and material state of the nation, symbolized by the Versailles "slavery contract."²⁶⁵ Gleichen argued that this had not been realized by enough of the population. Many tried to avoid the spiritual issue by accumulating goods and making great profits in business, he thought. Nevertheless, the spirit of self-help amongst the Germans was growing slowly out of necessity. Gleichen suggested that ignorance on the part of the German leadership had led to the unique situation of an unofficial state growing within an official one.²⁶⁶ Only success would decide its fate, and those willing to participate should expect hostility and a sacrifice greater than that of the war. If necessary, Gleichen implied that this state must encompass the whole of the German *Volk* and become a "secret empire" independent of the enslaved state.²⁶⁷

Eduard Stadtler's concept of "nationalizing the revolution" rationalized the program for such a "secret empire." The first such step would be in accepting the recent German revolution as a failure and "cowardly national suicide." Second, the *Volk* would have to realize the treachery inherent both in Wilsonian democracy and in Lenin's Bolshevism. Both had proven to be misleading solutions to Germany's problems and both were regarded as unfit for the German people.²⁶⁸ Yet, Stadtler had also realized that one could not build a successful program based on negating the ideas of

others. One had to present one's own alternatives that might have some attraction for elements of the *Volk* which otherwise believed in the political ideas of the East or the West. Negating contemporary socialism was easy enough as Germans already had their own traditional brand of corporative socialism from which to draw inspiration. However, replacing the ideals of democracy proved somewhat more difficult. Stadtler felt that both the galvanizing effect of the war declaration in 1914 and the subsequent disappointment with Wilson's peace betrayal after the war had pointed Germans towards the positive aspects of their own self-affirmation and love of *Gemeinschaft*.²⁶⁹ Rejecting western democracy turned the deeply-rooted mistrust of leaders into an intuitive longing for leadership; it transformed a cult of inadequacy into a cult of expertise, an obsession with the enlightenment into a re-birth of community and irrationalism, the worship of the number into the contempt for mechanism. With this turning away from the values of the East and West, he predicted an end to obsessions with class or party. And looking towards the future, Stadtler wrote in a prophetic tone in the closing lines of

Die Neue Front:

This nationalization of the German revolution has not yet reached its climax. Sometimes it seems that we are abysses away from the goal. Through lack of great leadership, the tension between longing and fulfilment, between becoming and being, is visible. The revolution has not yet found its national hero. The nation has not yet felt anything of the mountain-moving power of a revolutionary-leadership. And in our foreign policy we do not yet see the spark that would be created, that can transform the revolution into a national impulse and the nation into a common revolutionary-glow. The time will come...over the enslavement of the state we proceed to

the revolutionary revolt of the nation.²⁷⁰

The final years of *Das Gewissen* ultimately reflected the changing political situation of the Weimar Republic, as well as factors inherent in the group's makeup and philosophy. When stability of the economy and political situation was precariously maintained by the actions of Gustav Streseman in 1923, the demands of the group began to become somewhat more muted and reasonable. The introduction of the *Rentenmark*, the quelling of uprisings through the use of the "Enabling Laws," and the introduction of the Dawes Plan in 1924 contributed to the temporary stabilization of the German economy and the domestic political situation. Streseman's Locarno Agreements in 1925 and the Treaty of Berlin in 1926 also secured key foreign political objectives. However, this was a period of uncertainty in domestic politics, due to the numerous coalition governments which rose and fell with great frequency. Nevertheless, it was also one of these tenuous coalitions which was a portent of the neo-conservative movement's ultimate success. On April 26, 1925, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg was elected president of Germany; this in turn suggested that republicans might finally comprise a minority in the German Republic. To many historians this signalled that the efforts of the neo-conservative thinkers were starting to come to fruition.²⁷¹ To the German public, however, Hindenburg was not a symbol of the defeat of 1918, since that burden had been effectively shifted onto the "traitorous," early representatives of Weimar. Rather,

Hindenburg was a living symbol of the heroic ideals of the past; just the sort of ideal which many neo-conservatives hoped to cultivate.

The period 1924-1928 represented one of decline in the virility of *Das Gewissen*. Its articles reflected the loss of its spiritual leaders, who one by one fell out of line and left the group and its journal. In this period, one is struck immediately by the more speculative tone of articles published. The issues are less creative in a philosophical and political sense, yet also less concrete in their demands. One is given the sense that the spiritual unity of the group was slowly being sapped by the members' personal migrations. Issues were no longer proudly propounded by group members working to stir up public opinion; nor were those bringing up the problems of Germany supported in the same way that the contributors had once dutifully followed Moeller, Gleichen, and Stadtler. Instead, unsigned articles reviewed old problems and proposed programmatic solutions. Even these tired issues and predictable solutions failed to resonate.

With regards to the members of the June Club and the contributors to *Das Gewissen*, a gradual erosion occurred in which most of them went their separate ways and pursued their own interests. Surely the most devastating blow came in the form of Moeller van den Bruck's withdrawal from the group as a result of his personal differences with Heinrich von Gleichen regarding the effectiveness of the club.²⁷² Moeller was heading towards a nervous breakdown after which he committed suicide in 1925, while Gleichen

moved to lead the new *Herrenklub*, which catered more to the *Junker* and big business. Eduard Stadtler and Heinz Brauweiler eventually became more involved with the *Stahlhelm* and Hans Schwarz founded his own extremist journal, *Der Nahe Osten*.²⁷³ Rudolph Pechel, Wilhelm Stapel, and Ernst Krieck also became more involved with work in various journals, mainly *Deutsches Volkstum*. Those group participants who were also members of the DNVP seem to have become overwhelmed in the battle for control of their party, which occurred simultaneously with the political rise of Alfred Hugenberg. The party eventually split into the "radical nationalists" led by Hugenberg and the more moderate supporters of "governmentalism," which included Count Kuno Westarp and Otto Hoetzsch.²⁷⁴ These splinter groups from the DNVP eventually devolved into the *Konservative Volkspartei*, the *Christlichsozialer Volksdienst*, and the *Deutsches Landvolk*.

Of all the members of the June Club, it seems that a relatively small percentage became closely involved with the NSDAP in the 1930's. Otto Strasser, temporarily allied with his brother Gregor, became discouraged in the struggle for a national socialism independent of Hitler and eventually fled to Canada. Oskar Hergt is on record as having become disillusioned with German politics before withdrawing from the stage completely. The same can be said for Georg Bernhard and Heinrich Brüning, both of whom emigrated to the United States in this period. Only Ernst Krieck, Martin Spahn, Adam Stegerwald, and August Winnig showed any real enthusiasm for the Nazis during the *Machtergreifung*. Stegerwald and Winnig both

distanced themselves from the national socialists almost immediately after their seizure of power and only Ernst Krieck and Martin Spahn stayed with the Nazis until the end of the Second World War.

The final period of the June Club represents a last attempt by the group to increase its influence through more practical measures. Programmatic restrictions that had prevented them from developing a more organized structure were abandoned in favour of the potential effect of their Political College and Die Neue Front. Yet, while the latter caused quite a stir around the time of its creation and aided in the re-writing of recent national history, neither the Political College nor Die Neue Front ever became great institutions of German life and both were soon forgotten. All the while, *Das Gewissen* kept publishing even though lacking the old fire it had once possessed. Probably the most significant factor that contributed to the decline of the June Club was something inherent from its earliest inception. In the same way that the cell of an organism is mysteriously pre-programmed to die right from the time of its birth, so the June Club always harboured the seeds of its own demise. The failure to become more concrete and present the *Volk* with a tangible political platform, rather than bunches of ideas "approved for Germany," allowed the group to become overtaken by political parties such as the Nazis.

Nevertheless, one can also make a strong case that the June Club helped prepare the populace to accept the more radical ideas of the Nazis. Had this type of preparation not occurred, one can

speculate that groups such as the Nazis might never have won a mass base of support. The striking similarity between the plans of the June Club and those ideas which the Nazis propounded is certainly more than coincidental. Thus, an understanding of this influential group of neo-conservative thinkers is key to fully comprehending the psychology of the German *Volk* when it lined up in fervent support of the Nazis. While neo-conservative groups like the June Club worked out the political, social and economics dreams of the German *Volk*, Adolf Hitler presented a bold promise actually to deliver these dreams. In this sense, the June Club, *Das Gewissen* and the entire Ring Movement should be understood as an integral piece of the puzzle which makes up the fascinating shift from rational politics in Germany to the popular longing for national redemption and a great leader figure.

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Title of Thesis:

"The Nationalization of the German Revolution": The June Club, *Das Gewissen*, and the Ring Movement.

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January 31, 1997