



Volume 6. Weimar Germany, 1918/19–1933

Albert Krebs on Young NSDAP Activists (Retrospective Account, 1959)

Even contemporaries perceived the NSDAP as a particularly youthful political party, and were thoroughly justified in doing so. In 1930, 36.8% of party members and 26.2% of party leaders were thirty years old or younger. Still more apparent was the extraordinary youthfulness of the SA. Between 1929 and 1933, almost 78% of all SA storm troopers (i.e., brownshirts) were under thirty. To penetrate society more thoroughly and, not least, to capture the attention of youth, diverse National Socialist organizations cropped up in the second half of the 1920s. In 1926, the National Socialist German Students' League (NSDStB) was founded for students; and in July of that year, the "Greater German Youth Movement" was officially recognized as an NSDAP youth organization under the name "Hitler Youth. League of German Worker Youth." Additionally, Adrian von Renteln founded the NS Pupils' League in 1929; it conceived of itself as an elite organization and was active in high schools and trade schools.

[. . .]

Characteristic of this period was the steady disappearance of all leaders and subordinate leaders (with the exception of a few parliamentary deputies) whose views and methods of struggle were still rooted in prewar days. Their places were taken by the young men of what was known as the front generation of 25–35 years old.

The importance of this changing of the guard can hardly be overemphasized. The openness of the feeling and judgement of these young men, their unweakened power of faith, their sheer physical energy and pugnacity lent the Party an impetus which the bourgeois parties above all could not match. Only rarely can the attack of youth be parried with the wire entanglement of grey-haired experience or the barbed-wire barricades of bitter skepticism. For the youth of the twenties these were nothing but a new provocation to their defiance and revolutionary enthusiasm. The quickest to feel it were those racist groups and parties whose leadership represented conservative, or rather reactionary, views taken over from the past. Within only two short years they no longer had any political role whatsoever, even though such of them as the 'German Racialist League of Defense and Defiance' had at one time several hundred thousand followers. Even in Hamburg, where the development of the NSDAP progressed rather slowly, the Racialist Freedom Party was already after one year in total disintegration. 'Without young people', one of their representatives confessed to me, 'nothing can be organized, not even the distribution of leaflets'.

[. . .]

Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945*, Vol. 1, *The Rise to Power 1919-1934*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, p. 50.

Source of original German text: Albert Krebs, *Tendenzen und Gestalten der NSDAP: Erinnerungen an die Frühzeit der Partei*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH, 1959, pp. 42-43.