Nazis Without Hitler: 
The DNSAP and the First Czechoslovak Republic

The Deutsche Nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei (DNSAP) represents the reconstitution in 1918 within the boundaries of the new Czechoslovak state of the old Austrian Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP). The DAP, a radical, nationalist labor party, had been formed in 1904 as an expression of resistance against the influx of cheap Czech labor into the Bohemian industrial areas of the Habsburg Empire. As such it filled a gap created by the refusal of Austrian Social Democracy, the prime spokesman for the working classes, to abandon its internationalist tenets. As Whiteside has pointed out, the DAP with its anti-Slav, anti-semitic, anti-liberal, and anti-Christian stance anticipated in many ways the later National Socialism of Adolf Hitler. The DNSAP, which continued the ideas and program of its predecessor, could also be seen, in many ways quite legitimately, within the general context of the origins and rise of German National Socialism. Especially during the late twenties the party emerges largely as an across-the border adjunct of the Hitler party. For several reasons, however, it is useful to examine the DNSAP within a somewhat different context. It does predate the Hitler movement; is quite different in composition and approach from the Munich party; and, finally, operates in an extra-German context, i.e., within the postwar Czechoslovak state. It is this last difference which prompts the focus of this paper, for in many respects one can gain insights into the phenomenon of fascism by regarding the DNSAP more as one of many small fascist parties which sprang up in the successor states of East Central Europe in the interwar period, than strictly speaking as merely a peripheral part of the nascent Hitler movement. Indeed, we would advance the thesis that the Czechoslovak context in which the DNSAP operated was of more importance to the

2. This is the point of view taken, for example, by Jaroslav Česar and Bohumil Černý in Politika německých buržoazních stran v Československu v letech 1918-1938, 2 vols. (Práha: Nákl. Českoslavenské akademie věd, 1962), I, 282; also Erik Kühnel-Leddihn, "The Bohemian Background of National Socialism," Journal of the History of Ideas, 9, No. 3 (June 1948).
3. In this regard see Miklós Lackó, "Ostmitteleuropäischer Faschismus" in Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, No. 1 (1973).
development of the party than any influences emanating from across the border in Bavaria—at least until the late twenties and early thirties, when the rise of Hitler's variety of fascism encouraged imitators not only among German minorities but also among other ethnic groups in East Central Europe.

Briefly stated, the Czechoslovak context is important here because it was the imperative of functioning within the context of the new democratic, yet alien, state that both enhanced those characteristics of the DNSAP which can be considered typically fascist and diminished those which point in a direction away from fascism. Yet, at the same time, paradoxically, this very context also put sharp limitations on the evolution of the DNSAP into a full-fledged fascist movement. Thus, in the end, the party seems lodged halfway between being a reform socialist party with radical and racial overtones and becoming a fascist movement of minor format. As such it might be placed under the rubric of "incomplete fascism." One could argue that the DNSAP, as it emerged after 1918, had the potential of becoming a fascist movement in Czechoslovakia similar to and anticipating the later Hitlerian variety, but in fact, given the nature of the party and the circumstances under which it functioned, was by no means foreordained to do so.

From its inception, the party evidenced many characteristics which mark it as fascist, or at least as proto-fascist. It was extremely anti-semitic, anti-Slav and pan-German in its thrust; all betraying the ethnocentrism characteristic of fascism. Its rather primitive level of social analysis led it to see Czechs and Jews together as an enemy hostile to the best interests, and indeed the survival, of Germans in general and German workers in particular. Though most of its membership and a goodly part of its leadership was working-class, the party's rather broad and vague definition of the worker as anyone who did "creative work" enabled it to draw some of its support from petit-bourgeois circles as well—the traditional clientele of fascism. Moreover, the party took a revolutionary stance which was more style than substance: it castigated the capitalistic order and demanded its demise; yet resisted any attempts at violent revolution which might destroy the institution of private property. In taking this position, the DNSAP again was occupying that traditional fascist middle-ground between the twin evils of Mammon and Bolshevism. Finally, though at least one of its leaders, Rudolf Jung, took great pride in being the prime ideologist of National Socialism, mainly by virtue of his book Der Nationale Sozialismus (1920), the DNSAP doctrine tended all too often to be fuzzy, opportunistic, and reducible to a rather crude conspiratorial view of the world and of history. This tendency too falls into a pattern typically ascribed to fascist groupings.

4. Jung's book represents the most complete version of DNSAP ideology. For a more succinct rendition of DNSAP ideas, indicating some of the differences in emphasis among the top leaders, see a series of articles in the party's official newspaper Der Tag.