

V. Machteliten und Machtübertragung: Die Rolle von Industrie und Agrariern in der deutschen Staatskrise 1930–1933

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‘Alliance of Elites’ as a Cause of Weimar’s Collapse and Hitler’s Triumph?

One of the most persistent themes in the many attempts to explain Germany’s descent into barbarism earlier in this century has been that of a hegemonic continuity of allied, reactionary elites. According to that interpretation, an alliance of agrarians and spokesmen of heavy industry exercised a dominant and negative influence over German politics from the late 1870s down to 1933, in some versions even longer. In seeking to maintain their privileged socio-economic position, those groups allegedly joined together to thwart the development of democracy in Germany and, as a consequence, contributed decisively to the disaster of the Third Reich¹.

Although considerable doubt has been cast upon the cohesion and dominance of this alleged alliance of elites in studies of the latter stages of the Empire, no systematic attempt has been made to examine the viability of the continuity thesis for the Weimar republic. It is undeniable that most of the spokesmen of both agriculture and industry during the republican period were not enthusiastic advocates of democracy and thus represented, in a general sense, a potential liability for the republic. Although the hoary myth of massive big business subsidization of the NSDAP can no longer be taken seriously, it is also incontestable that industrialists as well as agrarians contributed in a variety of ways indirectly, and sometimes inadvertently, to the weakness of the first German attempt to institute democracy. But if, as repeatedly alleged, those two groups in alliance played a direct and deliberate role in the destruction of the Weimar republic and in the rise of Hitler, that should be discernable, after more than a half century of intensive research, in the major political junctures of the years

¹ One of the most outspoken proponents of this view has been *Fritz Fischer*. See his book *Bündnis der Eliten. Zur Kontinuität der Machtstrukturen in Deutschland 1871–1945* (Düsseldorf 1979) and his article *Zum Problem der Kontinuität in der deutschen Geschichte von Bismarck zu Hitler*, in: *Studia Historica Slavo-Germanica I* (1972) 115–127.

1930–33. It therefore seems in order to scrutinize four of those junctures with an eye to establishing the role or non-role of an agrarian-industrial alliance: the collapse of the great coalition that ended parliamentary rule; the appointment as chancellor of Heinrich Brüning and the shift to rule by presidential emergency powers; Brüning's fall; the fall of Schleicher and the appointment of Adolf Hitler as chancellor.

In March 1930 opposition on the part of spokesmen of both industry and agriculture clearly contributed to the fall of the great coalition cabinet headed by Social Democrat Hermann Müller. As is well known, industrial spokesmen in the DVP figured prominently in the crisis through their opposition to increased employers' contributions to the deficit-plagued unemployment insurance fund. Whether they or the trade-union spokesmen in the SPD, who resisted any curtailment of entitlement benefits for the unemployed and therefore favored higher contributions, bear the greater share of responsibility for the final breakup of the coalition remains debatable. Whatever the degree of culpability, the role of industrial interests in escalating the crisis has long been recognized. Less noticed has been the role agrarian interests played in paving the way for the fatal crisis of the great coalition. By contributing to Hindenburg's decision to deny to the Müller cabinet use of his presidential emergency powers under Article 48 agrarian spokesmen helped to weaken the cabinet and make it vulnerable to foes of the great coalition within the parties that had to that point supported the cabinet.

The precise extent of agrarian influence over the Reich president cannot be determined because of the paucity of documentation about his decision-making. There can be no doubt, however, about Hindenburg's pronounced solicitude for the interests of agriculture. He could, therefore, have hardly failed to notice when, despite concessions to agrarian interests by the Social Democrats at the time new tariff schedules were enacted in late March 1930, former Food Minister Martin Schiele of the Reichs-Landbund pronounced the great coalition's trade policies unacceptable and placed the blame for this on the SPD². Hindenburg was exposed to the same message from General Kurt von Schleicher, who included among his arguments for terminating the great coalition the accusation that the program of the Green Front of agrarian interests could not be implemented with the SPD in the government³. To reinforce that message, Schleicher forwarded to the president's office correspondence depicting the plight of eastern agriculture⁴.

² See the remarks of Schiele, then still a DNVP deputy, to the Reichstag on March 25, 1930: *Verhandlungen des Reichstags, Stenographische Berichte*, 427, S.4644f. Also *Heinrich August Winkler, Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik. Der Schein der Normalität* (Berlin, Bonn 1985) 758f.

³ See the Vortragsnotiz prepared by Hauptmann Ferdinand Noeldechen for Schleicher in March 1933 in: *Thilo Vogelsang, Reichswehr, Staat und NSDAP* (Stuttgart 1962) 414–415; im folgenden zitiert: *Volgelsang, Reichswehr, Staat und NSDAP*.

⁴ See the letter by Generalmajor a.D. von Thier to Schleicher, March 13, 1930, forwarded by Schleicher to Staatssekretär Meißner with letter of March 18, in: *Politik und Wirtschaft in der Krise. Quellen zur Ära Brüning*. Eingeleitet von *Gerhard Schulz*. Bearbeitet von *Ilse Maurer* und *Udo Wengst* unter Mitwirkung von *Jürgen Heideking*, 2 Bde. (Düsseldorf 1980) Bd.1, 92–94.

While both industrial and agrarian interest contributed to the collapse of the great coalition, no evidence has been found to indicate that they did so through conscious collusion. Far from conspiring with one another, these two conservative groups were in March 1930 arrayed antagonistically against one another on an issue that had historically obstructed their efforts at political collaboration: trade policy⁵. Experiencing acutely the deleterious effects of the precipitous decline in world food prices, Germany's agrarians demanded ever higher protective tariffs on foodstuffs in hopes of sheltering the domestic market from the competition of foreign imports. The country's industrialists, who were beginning to suffer from the contraction of their markets as a result of the worsening world economic crisis, resisted such protectionist efforts in fear of retaliation against their manufacturing exports by countries whose foodstuffs would be excluded from Germany. Thus, insofar as agrarian and industrial interests played parts in the collapse of the great coalition, their roles were quite distinct and separate, both in terms of the two groups' aims and in terms of how they affected the final crisis of the Müller cabinet. It is true that in pursuit of divergent economic interests, important elements of each group came to oppose the continuing participation of the SPD in the government. They acted, however, not as allies but rather as two estranged groups whose policies were marked, at best, by a partial parallelism.

The selection and installation of Heinrich Brüning as chancellor in the wake of the great coalition's collapse came about through the efforts of the military camarilla around President Hindenburg, not as a result of influence on the part of agrarians or industrialists, either separately or in alliance. Similarly, the decision to rely on Article 48 for legislative purposes was reached independently of those interest groups, having been made by the inner circle of the cabinet in consultation with the president and his behind-the-scenes advisers. Indeed, that step would have been unnecessary if the principal spokesmen of agriculture and industry in the DNVP had been successful in their efforts to swing that party behind the Brüning cabinet in the summer of 1930, thereby providing the chancellor with a parliamentary majority. When their efforts failed, most of those interest-group spokesmen in the DNVP seceded from the party⁶.

In industrial quarters, Brüning's invocation of Article 48 to enact fiscal legislation initially caused considerable apprehension. That step aroused fears that such defiance of the parliament might lead foreign creditors to sense an incipient constitutional crisis and, as a consequence, move them to cut off the flow of loans from abroad on which much of German industry was heavily dependent. When those fears proved groundless, such reservations about reliance on presidential emergency powers subsided, and spokesmen of industry began to applaud Brüning's use of Article 48 – but only then, considerably after the decision had been made.⁷

With regard to Brüning's fall in May 1932 a stronger case can be made for influence on events by agrarians and industrialists. As is well known, the Brüning cabinet's plans

⁵ See *Dieter Gessner*, *Agrarverbände in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf 1976); im folgenden zitiert: *Gessner*, *Agrarverbände*.

⁶ See *Henry A. Turner*, *Die Großunternehmer und der Aufstieg Hitlers* (Berlin 1985) 131–135; im folgenden zitiert: *Turner*, *Großunternehmer*. *Gessner*, *Agrarverbände* 219–234.

⁷ *Turner*, *Großunternehmer* 133–136.

for an agrarian reform that would break up some of the bankrupt East-Elbian latifundia for settlement purposes called down upon the chancellor the wrath of much of the conservative rural establishment. The resultant barrage of indignant letters of protest, many from prominent Junker landholders, that deluged President Hindenburg can hardly have left him unaffected, given his personal identification with the agrarian aristocracy. Those protests in all likelihood outweighed in his mind the continuing, if dwindling, support for Brüning by moderate agrarian interests⁸. As for industry, since the autumn of 1931 the spokesmen of the Ruhr – though not the leadership of the industrial Reichsverband – had become increasingly disillusioned with Brüning. In their opinion the chancellor had failed to adopt a sound economic response to the depression because of an unwillingness to offend the Social Democrats, on whom he had come to rely in order to fend off the formation of a hostile parliamentary majority⁹.

Since some of the industrial leadership remained loyal to Brüning, opposition to the chancellor from that side was less vocal and conspicuous than was that from the side of agriculture. With rare exceptions, Brüning's critics in industry avoided making their views public lest they arouse the wrath of an incumbent chancellor at a time of mounting dependence by industry on governmental favors¹⁰. In any case, even the most prominent of industrialists lacked the kind of privileged access to the president's ear that Junker agrarians enjoyed. Still, by the spring of 1932 prominent spokesmen of both agriculture and industry had in effect withdrawn their support from Brüning, if for different reasons, with divergent timing, and to varying degrees.

This configuration doubtless made it easier for Hindenburg to dismiss the chancellor, but it cannot be demonstrated to have been the cause of that decision. The president appears to have been motivated in part by personal considerations, such as annoyance at finding himself reelected as the candidate of the left after a campaign directed by Brüning. He seems also to have been influenced to a degree impossible to measure by the intrigues of Schleicher, who had been one of those who arranged for Brüning's appointment two years earlier but who now turned against the chancellor for reasons that had nothing to do with the interests of agriculture and industry.

While opposition to Brüning was present in May 1932 among both agrarians and industrialists, if not so outspokenly from the side of the latter, it would again be misleading to speak of an alliance, or even cooperation, between the two camps at the time of the chancellor's fall. Quite to the contrary, their relations were by then rapidly deteriorating as a consequence of deepening differences over trade policy. Indeed, the Brüning cabinet's receptivity to agrarian appeals for higher tariffs on foodstuffs was an additional factor in the growing coolness toward it on the part of industrialists¹¹. Thus, while important parts of both agriculture and much of industry stood opposed to

⁸ Dieter Gessner, *Agrardepression und Präsidialregierungen in Deutschland 1930–1933* (Düsseldorf 1977); im folgenden zitiert: *Gessner, Agrardepression*.

⁹ Turner, *Großunternehmer* 207–217.

¹⁰ Ebd. 220f.

¹¹ Tilman P. Koops, *Zielkonflikte der Agrar- und Wirtschaftspolitik in der Ära Brüning*, in: *Hans Mommsen et al., Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung* (Düsseldorf 1974) 852–868; im folgenden zitiert: *Mommsen, Industrielles System*. Michael Grübler, *Die Spitzenverbände der Wirtschaft und das erste Kabinett Brüning* (Düsseldorf 1982) 250–300.

Brüning, those two camps were incapable of concerted action because of the mounting tensions between them over trade policy.

An alleged alliance of agrarian and industrial elites has often been invoked to explain the momentous events that resulted in Schleicher's fall and Hitler's appointment as chancellor at the end of January 1933. Clearly, many of the spokesmen of German agriculture favored both those developments and did their utmost to bring them about¹². Schleicher's cabinet became anathema for them as a consequence of its rejection of their demands for still greater protectionist measures for agricultural products and its revival of the project to break up large bankrupt estates in the East for settlement by small farmers. Junker agrarians also resented Schleicher's toleration of a parliamentary inquiry into allegations of misuse by estate owners of the Osthilfe funds appropriated to rescue the faltering agricultural enterprises in the East. In contrast to Schleicher's unpopularity in agrarian circles, Hitler enjoyed widespread support among Protestant farmers and within the largest agricultural trade association, the Reichs-Landbund, whose ranks the Nazis had extensively infiltrated by early 1933. In view of Hindenburg's concern for the welfare of the agricultural sector and his accessibility for its spokesmen, it seems unlikely that he failed to notice the clamor from that side against Schleicher and for Hitler.

One incontestable fact about the decisive juncture of January 1933 stands out: despite what journalists and leftist politicians said at the time and what numerous historians have written since then, no alliance between agriculture and industry existed¹³. An effort had been made the previous November to convey the impression of such an alliance by means of a Nazi-inspired petition that called upon Hindenburg to appoint Hitler chancellor and vest him with presidential emergency powers. But while some prominent spokesmen of agriculture appeared among the signatories, those from the business community were, with few exceptions, obscure and marginal figures; the major industrialists withheld their support. Like the so-called Harzburg Front of a year earlier, the petition to Hindenburg represented, among other things, an attempt to conceal the differences between agriculture and industry. Far from collaborating in January 1933, those two interest groups stood at loggerheads as seldom before because of deepening differences over the divisive issue of national trade policy. In December their relations had sunk to an all-time low point as a consequence of a flagrant breach of accepted lobbying practices by the Reichs-Landbund, which in public launched personal attacks on major industrial spokesmen who opposed more restrictive measures against agricultural imports of a sort certain to provoke retaliation abroad against German industrial exports.

While most of agriculture's spokesmen stood vehemently opposed to Schleicher in late January 1933, the attitude of an influential part of industry toward his cabinet

¹² See *Gessner*, Agrardepression 186–94; *Friedrich Martin Fiederlein*, *Der deutsche Osten und die Regierungen Brüning, Papen, Schleicher* (Diss. Universität Würzburg 1966) 434–54; *Vogelsang*, *Reichswehr, Staat und NSDAP* 358 ff.

¹³ On the following, see *Turner*, *Großunternehmer* 366 ff.

had undergone a significant turnabout by then¹⁴. Initially, the new chancellor had awakened grave apprehensions with his publicly stated scorn for economic orthodoxy and his apparent support of large-scale government-sponsored public-works projects of the sort rejected by industry as financially irresponsible and economically counter-productive. His cabinet's repeal of pro-business measures which Papen had enacted further heightened those apprehensions. Schleicher's negotiations with trade unionists and Gregor Strasser, purportedly the leader of the Nazi Party's left wing, raised the specter of a return to parliamentary government with an anti-capitalist bias. But by mid-January 1933 that project had come to naught, as had most of the new chancellor's proposed departures from his predecessor's policies.

In his deeds, as opposed to his words, Schleicher behaved as chancellor increasingly like industry's favorite, Papen. Particularly heartening from the industrial point of view was his emphatic repulse of agrarian demands for greater protectionism in trade policy, an issue on which Papen had temporized. As a result, by late January the leadership of the two premier associations of the business community, the industrial Reichsverband and the Industrie- und Handelstag, had come to favor retention of the Schleicher cabinet. That seemed preferable to still another change of government that might necessitate yet another national election and thus perpetuate the political uncertainties of the previous year, which had contributed, in the judgment of the business community, to a pervasive lack of confidence in the economy that inhibited recovery from the depression.

This support for Schleicher was by no means unanimous in the politically divided business community of January 1933. A small minority of the major industrialists favored giving the chancellorship to Hitler, some in the expectation that, once in office, he would quickly fail, thereby dispelling Nazism's hold over millions of voters. Most industrialists, however, still feared that, despite Hitler's repeated assurances to the contrary, the Nazis would, if they got the chance, seek to make good on the anti-capitalist planks in their program and otherwise disregard sound economic principles. Some industrialists were prepared to see the NSDAP, as the largest party, brought into the government, but only under a conservative chancellor, such as Papen. A formidable obstacle stood in the way of such plans to surround the Nazis with conservatives, however, since under the circumstances an indispensable participant would have to be Alfred Hugenberg, the leader of the DNVP, who had espoused the most extreme trade-policy demands of the agrarians.

The extent to which the divided industrial camp exerted influence over the events that brought down Schleicher and installed Hitler in the chancellorship remains uncertain, once again in large part because of the enigmatic Hindenburg's decisive role. But the industrialists seem, on the whole, to have been less active politically during January 1933 than were the agrarians. Moreover, the last documented communication to the Reich president on the part of the major business associations, which was submitted jointly by spokesmen of the industrial Reichsverband and the Industrie- und

¹⁴ See ebd., and *Reinhard Neebe, Großindustrie, Staat und NSDAP 1930–1933* (Göttingen 1981) 140ff.

Handelstag on January 28, amounted to a warning against the appointment of Hitler¹⁵. There is no documentary evidence, on the other hand, of industrial intervention with the president on behalf of Hitler's candidacy, either directly or indirectly, during the behind-the-scenes negotiations with Hindenburg's confidants during January.

The exact extent to which the president's decisions were shaped by either agrarian or industrial appeals will in all probability never be established. Numerous other influences were in play, including the Osthilfe scandal and the impenetrable role of Oskar von Hindenburg. The outcome was ultimately determined in the mind of an elderly man who was not given to articulating his motivations and who left no record of his reasoning in this crucial instance. Conceivably, efforts to influence Hindenburg's decisions from any side may have weighed little against his reluctance to violate the constitution. Schleicher, who only two months earlier had brought the reluctant president to drop Papen on the grounds that the latter's plan to dissolve the Reichstag and ignore the constitutional provision for new elections within sixty days, now entangled himself in a blatant contradiction by proposing to do essentially the same thing. Under the circumstances, a Hitler chancellorship based on the prospect of a parliamentary majority held out what could appear from the president's perspective as the only way to avoid a breach of the constitution.

To summarize, in only two of the four cases reviewed here – the breakup of the great coalition and the fall of Brüning – did agrarian and industrial interests both contribute to the outcome. At those junctures elements of the two brought their political weight to bear in parallel fashion, but in neither instance can it be contended that they acted as allies.

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Whereas most references to the 'alliance of elites' during Weimar have focused on the final phase of the republic, when none existed, there has been curiously little attention to a period when, if ever during the republican era, a case can be made for close and sustained collaboration between agrarian and industrial elites: the years 1924–30¹⁶. During that time repeated compromises enabled those two groups to exert considerable influence over the politics of the young republic. This was most evident in the behavior of the DNVP, the major rightist political party that sought to reconcile

¹⁵ Ludwig Kastl (RDI) and Eduard Hamm (DIHT) to Staatssekretär Meissner, January 28, 1933, followed by letter from Kastl to Meissner later the same day in which Kastl stated that Gustav Krupp von Bohlen und Halbach, Chairman of the Reichsverband, had fully endorsed the views expressed in the first letter: Akten der Reichskanzlei Weimarer Republik. Das Kabinett von Schleicher, 3. Dezember 1932 bis 30. Januar 1933, bearbeitet von *Anton Golecki* (Boppard 1986) 313. This correspondence should be read in conjunction with Kastl's letter to Krupp von Bohlen of January 26, in which Kastl warned against a Hitler-Papen-Schacht cabinet backed by the NSDAP and DNVP; see *Turner*, *Großunternehmer* 381–384.

¹⁶ See *Michael Stürmer*, *Koalition und Opposition in der Weimarer Republik 1924–1928* (Düsseldorf 1967).

the differences between agriculture and industry within its own ranks¹⁷. In 1924 the conservative spokesmen of those two groups in the DNVP joined together to defy the party leadership by voting for the Dawes Plan legislation because of the economic benefits they expected for both their constituencies from the foreign loans that depended upon passage of that legislation. At the beginning of 1925 the same two groups joined forces to bring the DNVP into the government of a republic whose legitimacy the party had refused to recognize. Once again, the motivation was pursuit of economic interest, this time in the form of influence over trade policy. Later in 1925 those groups resisted the DNVP's exit from the government over the Locarno treaties because of the loss of influence over economic policy that step would entail. And it was those groups that supported the rightist party's reentry into the government in 1927, even at the political price of an explicit recognition by the monarchist DNVP of the republican constitution's legitimacy.

During this middle period of the republic, relations between the elites of agriculture and industry assumed a quasi-institutional form in the Esplanade circle, the full history of which remains to be written¹⁸. At regular intervals, leading industrialists and agrarian spokesmen met at the Hotel Esplanade in Berlin to resolve differences and map common strategies. It was within that forum that industry agreed to finance the effort to rescue the faltering agriculture of eastern Germany as well as to provide other forms of material aid. Responding to the centripetal, integrative allures of parliamentary politics, which held out the prospect of material gains through compromise and mutual support, the two groups worked together to moderate their inherent differences over trade policy.

During this middle period of Weimar a combination of pragmatic pursuit of interest and governmental conservatism bought the largest party of the right, the DNVP, to participate constructively in the republican regime. Some highly conservative, even reactionary, men found themselves, not altogether comfortably, making use of the instruments of parliamentary democracy for their own ends. This significantly broadened the basis for practical politics, which now extended to include a reluctant but compliant DNVP. Even after that party was excluded from the government in 1928, collaboration between agriculture and industry continued during the great coalition, particularly in the sphere of trade policy, where the agrarians now found unexpected support from an SPD belatedly sensitive to the interests of the rural population¹⁹. Whatever one may think of the economic effects of the legislation that resulted, it is difficult not to conclude that the often reviled 'alliance of elites' served as a stabilizing

¹⁷ See *Manfred Dörr*, *Die Deutschnationale Volkspartei 1925 bis 1928* (Diss. Universität Marburg 1964).

¹⁸ There is much documentation on the origins and activities of the Esplanadekreis in the papers of Paul Reusch, one of the organizers, which are now in the possession of the Haniel Archiv of Duisburg. See *Gessner*, *Agrarverbände* 72 ff.

¹⁹ *Dieter Gessner*, *Industrie und Landwirtschaft 1928–1930*, in: *Mommson*, *Industrielles System* 762–78. This article effectively refutes the contention that cooperation between agriculture and industry ended in 1928: *Arno Panzer*, *Das Ringen um die deutsche Agrarpolitik von der Währungsstabilisierung bis zur Agrardebatte im Dezember 1928* (Kiel 1970).

force during the middle years of the republic, even if it was an unintentional by-product of those elites' pursuit of self-interest.

This collaboration did not, of course, continue into the new decade. The reasons for this remain to be fully charted, but a few stand out. Most conspicuously, the agrarian crisis that began during the second half of the twenties intensified demands for protection of German agriculture from foreign competition²⁰. By the early thirties those demands had exceeded the toleration level of an industrial sector increasingly dependent upon exports as a result of the collapse of domestic demand under the impact of the world economic crisis. With the constraints imposed by compromise removed, the discipline of the stabilization period collapsed within the agrarian sector, despite the shaky facade of the 'green front'. Agricultural organizations now strove to outbid each other in raising their demands for protectionist projects. Whereas Germany's industrialists had been able to negotiate with a more or less unified agrarian camp during the years of stabilization, they now faced a bewildering array of mutually antagonistic organizations, each claiming to speak for agriculture but none capable of entering into viable agreements. In addition, the industrialists' political position deteriorated rapidly as the liberal parties upon which they had mainly relied for access to parliamentary give-and-take, melted away under the impact of the depression²¹.

Another major factor in the breakup of the agrarian camp into competing components was the outbreak of radical nationalism that began with the election of Alfred Hugenberg as chairman of the DNVP in late 1928. Vehemently opposed to the pragmatic pursuit of material interest within the framework of the republic, Hugenberg carried with him some of the spokesmen of agriculture of Protestant northern Germany²². But many others defected to special-interest parties, the most significant of which was the Christlich-Nationale Bauern- und Landvolkpartei²³. Soon disillusioned by the impotence of these splinter parties, Protestant farmers eventually flocked in droves to the ultimate beneficiary of this process of disintegration, the NSDAP. By the last years of Weimar, Hitler's party had captured so many rural voters and so thoroughly infiltrated the Reichs-Landbund that it was able to manipulate the institutional voices of German agriculture like a ventriloquist²⁴.

The breakup of the 'alliance of elites' that had operated during the middle years of

²⁰ See *Dieter Gessner*, *The Dilemma of German Agriculture during the Weimar Republic*, in: *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany*, hrsg. v. *Richard Bessel* und *E. J. Feuchtwanger* (London 1981) 134–154.

²¹ See *Larry Eugene Jones*, *German Liberalism and the Dissolution of the Weimar Party System, 1918–1933* (Chapel Hill 1988).

²² See *Dieter Gessner*, "Grüne Front" oder "Harzburger Front", in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 29 (1981) 110–123.

²³ See *Larry Eugene Jones*, *Crisis and Realignment: Splinter Parties in the Late Weimar Republic, 1928–1933*, in: *Peasants and Lords in Modern Germany*, hrsg. v. *Robert G. Moeller* (Boston 1986) 198–232; *Arno Panzer*, *Politische Ansätze der deutschen Bauernbewegung bis 1933*, in: *Europäische Bauernparteien im 20. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. v. *Heinz Gollwitzer* (Stuttgart, New York 1977) 533–538.

²⁴ *Horst Gies*, *NSDAP und landwirtschaftliche Organisationen in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik*, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 15 (1967) 341–376.

Weimar, when the pursuit of material interests led conservative spokesmen of agriculture and industry inadvertently to buttress the parliamentary system, can thus be characterized as a contributing factor in the destabilization of the republic. Moreover, whereas in most versions the behavior of those two groups has been attributed solely to forces and traditions intrinsic to Germany, the circumstances that contributed to the breakdown of their cooperation arose at least in part from causes of international scope. This was the case with the agrarian crisis, the sources of which lay in considerable measure in the general disruption of agricultural markets in the wake of the First World War. Similarly, the world economic crisis arose from causes beyond the control of Germany. Finally, radical nationalism of the sorts promoted by Hugenberg and Hitler fed on the fervent indignation of many Germans at the treatment accorded their country by the victors of the First World War. Under less adverse international circumstances, the important components of conservative Germany for whom the leaders of agriculture and industry spoke during Weimar might conceivably have continued to accommodate themselves to the practices of parliamentary government, just as comparable groups had in other countries undergoing democratization. It was Germany's misfortune that the crucial phase of democratic development during which conservative elites have to be coopted into institutions of self-rule through pursuit of their material interests coincided with a time when that country was beset by vexing, divisive external problems.

If one takes into consideration the role of agrarian and industrial elites not just during the final years of Weimar but also during its period of stabilization, the role of their relationship in the republic's downfall appears less a matter of sinister machinations on the part of a successful reactionary conspiracy than the failure of a promising pattern of pragmatic interest-group reconciliation within the framework of parliamentary democracy. In any case, it should not be forgotten that those elites, whose national status had originated in the Empire, found themselves increasingly emarginated by the anti-elitist politics of mass mobilization that marked the final and fatal crisis of Weimar.