
Richard Scheringer, the KPD

and the Politics of Class and

Nation in Germany,

1922–1969

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Abstract

This article examines the life and times of Richard Scheringer, an army officer and supporter of Adolf Hitler who became famous during the early 1930s for his high-profile conversion to communism. Known in the closing years of the Weimar Republic as a point-man for Communist efforts to win support from the radical right, Scheringer survived the Third Reich to become a leading figure in the postwar Communist Party. His well-documented but little-studied career, bridging critical caesurae of modern Germany history, highlights the unique political constellation of the interwar period, demonstrating fundamental continuities in the relationship of German communism to the nation before and after 1945.

Since the onset of the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the wake of the terror attacks of 9/11, a long-standing but sometimes dormant tendency within the German radical right has again become prominent: a right-wing ‘anti-imperialism’ that declares its solidarity with ‘Third World liberation movements’ and actively seeks alliance with the radical left against alleged US attempts at ‘world domination’.¹ A contemporary update of the neo-Nazi *Querfront* or ‘diagonal’ strategy of bridge-building to the opposite side of the barricades – a strategy that has been around in one form or another since the Weimar Republic – this tendency aims to win

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¹ Thus Michael Koth of the *Kampfbund Deutscher Sozialisten* can praise the ‘heroic’ opposition of ‘socialist Cuba’ against ‘Uncle Sam’; ‘Der Zweifrontenkrieg ist unbedingt zu vermeiden’ (General Guderian) – oder etwa doch nicht...? ‘Der rot-braune Kanal’, accessed at http://www.kds-im-netz.de/sonstiges/kanal/2003/okt_2003.htm, on 31 October 2003.

elements of the ‘anti-globalisation’ left on the basis of a supposedly common anti-Americanism.² Drawing connections with an older, explicitly reactionary strain of anti-Western and antisemitic feeling stretching back to the 1920s and earlier, proponents of the *Querfronttaktik* find inspiration in the writings of Weimarer ‘National Revolutionaries’ such as Ernst Niekisch and Otto Strasser, whose rejection of US (read Jewish/plutocratic, multicultural/racially degenerate) influence and pro-Eastern orientation resonates strongly in a post-Cold War Europe where former Communist apparatchiks and neo-Nazi militants come to feel themselves on the same side of the barricades.³ At the same time, the German left – particularly the so-called ‘68er generation’ – continues to work through the problem of its relationship to the ‘nation’, and in some cases, to find common cause with the radical right.⁴ In a celebrated recent case, the former New Left radical Bernd Rabehl, a one-time comrade of the late student leader Rudi Dutschke and current professor at the Free University in Berlin, asserted – using a highly-loaded term with clear associations to the radical right in the Weimar Republic – that he and Dutschke had actually been ‘national revolutionaries’.⁵ Made in a forum organised

- 2 The name comes from the alliance proposed between the army, trade unions and ‘left wing’ of the NSDAP near the end of the Weimar Republic; see Axel Schildt, ‘Militärische Ratio und Integration der Gewerkschaften. Zur Querfrontkonzeption der Reichswehrführung am Ende der Weimarer Republik’, in Richard Saage, ed., *Solidargemeinschaft und Klassenkampf. Politische Konzeptionen der Sozialdemokratie zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 346–64. Since the late 1970s, the ‘Querfront’ concept is associated especially with links between the radical right and the ecological left. See Hans Coppi, ‘“Aufbruch” im Spannungsfeld von Nationalismus und Kommunismus – eine Zeitschrift für Grenzgänger’, in Susanne Römer and Hans Coppi, eds., *Aufbruch. Dokumentation einer Zeitschrift zwischen den Fronten* (Koblenz: Verlag Dietmar Fölbach, 2001), 50.
- 3 A prominent part of the right-wing effort to co-opt left-wing positions has revolved around environmental issues. See Janet Biehl, ‘“Ecology” and the Modernization of Fascism in the German Ultra-Right’, in Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism. Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995). National Revolutionaries were active in the Green Party until their expulsion in the early-1980s; Cf. Hans-Georg Betz, ‘On the German Question: Left, Right, and the Politics of National Identity’, *Radical America*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1987), 45–6. See also Oliver Geden, ‘Die Ökologische Rechte’, in *Antifa Reader. Antifaschistisches Handbuch und Ratgeber* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1996), 227–34. On connections between other environmental organisations and the radical right see Volkmar Wölk, ‘Neue Trends im ökofaschistischen Netzwerk: Am Beispiel der Anthroposophen, dem Weltbund zum Schutze des Lebens und der ÖDP’, in Hethey and Kratz eds., *In bester Gesellschaft*. One also finds strong strains of mystical, New Age thought in right-wing environmentalism, above all in the work of Rudolf Bahro; see Niedenführ, ‘New Age’.
- 4 The ‘failure’ of veterans of the ‘1968’ generation to embrace German reunification in 1989 has been heavily criticised by leading Social Democrats; see e.g. Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt, *Die Linke und die Einheit* (Berlin, 1991); Tilman Fichter, *Die SPD und die Nation* (Berlin, 1993).
- 5 See Bernd Rabehl, *Rudi Dutschke. Revolutionär im geteilten Deutschland* (Dresden: Edition Antaios, 2002). The ‘national revolutionaries’ were a part of the extreme right in the Weimar Republic that rejected Western ‘materialism’ in favour of an ‘Eastern Orientation’ (toward the USSR), and sought a ‘Third Way’ between communism and capitalism. A prominent proponent of this tendency, the National Socialist Otto Strasser, is considered by National Revolutionaries to be the ‘Trotsky of National Socialism’ for his criticism of Hitler’s ‘betrayal of socialism’; see Janet Biehl, ‘“Ecology” and the Modernization of Fascism in the German Ultra-Right. On Strasserite ideology see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, Universal Library, 1964), 286–90; for recent echoes see the documents in *Gegen Fremdherrschaft und Kapital* and in *Grundsätze unseres Wollens – Die fünffache Revolution*, cited extensively in Jutta Dittfurth,

by a right-wing student fraternity and subsequently printed in the extreme-right *Junge Freiheit*, the statement provoked a wave of outrage, with Dutschke's widow and others stepping in to dispute Rabehl's interpretation.⁶ The controversy illustrates the ongoing force of the politics of memory in Germany, and not only with regard to the student movement of the 1960s; the Rabehl incident also highlights the continued life of the ideological categories established during the Weimar Republic, as well as the continuing fascination with political *Grenzgänger*, or ideological border-crossers.⁷

The prototypical *Grenzgänger*, one whose name crops up in relation to the Rabehl incident – and appears invariably in discussions about the connection between the radical extremes in modern Germany – is Richard Scheringer. First a Nazi, then a Communist, famous in the early 1930s for his efforts to win rank and file Nazis to the Communist party (KPD), later a leading figure in the Communist party's forlorn swim against the anti-Communist tide in postwar West Germany, Scheringer continues to fascinate as a representative, not only of the lability of extremist politics in the Weimar Republic, but of the relationship between the radical left and the 'national problem' in twentieth-century Germany. Thanks to ongoing media coverage (including a documentary film and several television features) Scheringer – who died in 1986 – remained a part of public memory in postwar Germany long after his political heyday. Yet, although the recent republication, with a scholarly introduction, of the Weimar-era journal inspired by his defection to communism suggests that a scholarly re-assessment of 'National Bolshevism' may be in the offing, Scheringer has so far received little scholarly attention.⁸ This omission is surprising, for Scheringer's well-documented career, bridging critical *caesurae* of modern Germany history (1933,

Feuer in die Herzen: Plädoyer für eine Ökologische Linke Opposition (Hamburg: Carleson Verlag, 1992); see also *Wir Selbst. Zeitschrift für nationale Identität und internationale Solidarität*.

6 Gretchen Dutschke, 'Fortschreitender Realitätsverlust. Bernd Rabehl instrumentalisiert seinen Essay über Rudi Dutschke, um den eigenen Nationalismus zu rechtfertigen', *Die Tageszeitung*, 17 December 2002. See the reactions from other former 68ers in *Junge Welt*, 3 February 1999 ('Nationalisten waren wir nie').

7 Recent studies on the 'Conservative Revolutionaries' include Alexander Bahar, *Sozialrevolutionärer Nationalismus zwischen Konservativer Revolution und Sozialismus. Harro Schulze-Boysson und der 'Gegner'-Kreis* (Koblenz: Verlag Dietmar Fölbach, 1992); Birgit Rättsch-Langejürgen, *Das Prinzip Widerstand. Leben und Wirken von Ernst Niekisch* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1997). A growing literature on the relationship between Nazism and Communism focuses primarily on comparing the Hitler and Stalin regimes; see Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Henry Rousso, ed., *Stalinism and Nazism. History and Memory Compared* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999). See also the exchanges in François Furet and Ernst Nolte, *Fascism and Communism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

8 See Römer and Coppi, eds., *Aufbruch*. Classic studies of National Bolshevism in Germany include Otto-Ernst Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von rechts. Die nationalrevolutionären Minderheiten und der Kommunismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960, and his *National-bolschewismus in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Frankfurt/M, Berlin, Wien: Ullstein, 1972). A more recent, excellent study is Louis Dupeux, *Nationalbolschewismus in Deutschland 1919–1933. Kommunistische Strategie und konservative Dynamik* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1985). On the 'Aufbruch-Kreis' see Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von rechts*, 276, 297–301, 311, 379, 381.

1945, 1949, 1968) and encompassing three regimes (the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the Federal Republic), offers exceptionally rich material for the historian of twentieth-century German politics and society.⁹

A brief résumé of Scheringer's career suggests some of the issues involved. An officer attracted by the anti-Versailles propaganda of the Nazis, Scheringer first achieved notoriety with his arrest and trial for National Socialist agitation in the army.¹⁰ Convicted of treason in the celebrated 'Ulm Reichswehr Trial' of November 1930 – a trial that, among other things, allowed Adolf Hitler, testifying for the defence, to achieve a new level of credibility in German politics – Scheringer shocked political observers a few months later by publicly defecting to the Communists. Charging Hitler with betraying the 'German revolution' through his neglect of the 'socialism' in National Socialism, Scheringer tried to tap into a wave of discontent in the Nazi movement exemplified by the revolt of the Nazi paramilitary wing, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), in April 1931.

His efforts on behalf of the KPD to win disaffected National Socialists to communism probed fault lines running through the Nazi movement, but they also reflected the wishful thinking and illusions that dogged Communist policy in the Weimar Republic and that would continue to plague it, with different causes and consequences, in the postwar period. As a point-man for Communist bridge-building to the militarist right, Scheringer came to stand at the center of Nazi versus Communist polemics in the Weimar Republic. But his career was by no means over with the Nazi accession to power in January 1933. Through a combination of luck and accommodation, Scheringer survived the Third Reich to become a leading Communist politician in Bavaria after 1945. In the 1960s he became a key figure in the campaign to overturn the 1956 ban on the Communist Party and a founding member of the successor party to the KPD, the German Communist Party (DKP). Intimately involved in the Communist struggle to overcome the repressive anti-Communism of the Adenauer years, and then to maintain relevance during the growth of the New Left of the 1960s and 1970s, Scheringer persisted in a dogged commitment to radical politics that caused him continued legal trouble in the Federal Republic.

9 The chief fund of sources on Scheringer is the collection of his personal papers at the *Bundesarchiv* in Berlin (the 'Nachlass Scheringer', BArch, NY 4037). Scheringer's Weimar-era activity for the KPD is richly documented in microfilmed records held at the National Archive in Washington, D.C. and the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich (especially roll MA 644), and in the NSDAP Hauptarchiv microfilm collection at the Hoover Institution (especially rolls 17, 56, and 73). Critical also are the records of the secret Communist 'M-Apparat' in the *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin (SAPMO im BArch). Material on the KPD's nationalist agitation after 1945 – including the 1952 Programme for National Reunification on which Scheringer worked – is to be found in the records of the *Bundesministerium des Innern* (B106) and the Communist Party (B 118 and ZSg 1/65) at the *Bundesarchiv in Koblenz* (BAK). Another excellent source, to be approached with care, is Scheringer's 1959 autobiography: Richard Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los. Unter Soldaten, Bauern und Rebellen* (Hamburg, 1959).

10 See Peter Bucher, *Der Reichswehrprozess. Der Hochverrat der Ulmer Reichswehroffiziere 1929/30* (Boppard am Rhein, 1967).

This sustained and fervent militancy has made Scheringer the subject of a persistent fascination which has less to do with the content of his politics than with his unique stature as a figure representing the intersection of complex antinomies. First, as both an 'old Communist' and a legendary 'National Bolshevik', on friendly terms in the postwar period with leading German Communist figures as well as Weimar-era terrorists such as Ernst von Salomon and Klaus Heim, Scheringer became a symbol of the complex relationship between the radical left and radical right in twentieth-century German history. This relationship, remarkable to commentators in the Weimar Republic for its seeming fluidity, remained relevant in a West German state where Cold War anti-communism and theories of 'totalitarianism' continued to emphasise the connections between the radical extremes.¹¹ Second, as a figure whose determined but hopeless struggles against authority brought him into repeated conflict with the law, earning him the respect of foe as well as friend, Scheringer linked the ideological struggles of the Weimar Republic with those of the Bonn Republic, forming a living connection between the era of totalising ideologies and mass movements and the more prosaic politics of the postwar era.

Third, as a partisan of East Germany in a fiercely anti-Communist West, Scheringer occupied an uneasy position between competing claims on national loyalty. A committed defender of the GDR with both political and personal connections to the East German state, Scheringer was also a Bavarian farmer, deeply involved in local politics and the agricultural issues affecting his Ingolstadt region. In his incongruous position as Communist agitator cum homespun south German traditionalist, Scheringer seemed to embody the intersection of irreconcilable German identities. A strong advocate of German reunification, he continued to stand near the centre of debates about the 'national problem' in Germany, embodying the Communist left's difficulty in coming effectively to grips with the issue, one of the strongest lines of continuity between its politics in Weimar and its politics in the Federal Republic. Thus, while by no means 'typical', Scheringer's career offers a unique window into the development of radical politics in twentieth-century Germany, one through which we can examine the troubled history of the German left in its relationship to the rise of fascism and in its painful transition from old to new left and beyond.

From the 'Black Reichswehr' to the 'Ulm Reichswehr trial'

Scheringer's commitment to military service and nationalist politics was intimately bound up with his tendency to clash with the authorities. He was born in Aachen in 1904, the son of a career army officer killed in action in the Great War. Like Leo Schlageter, another young German who would come to occupy a place in Communist propaganda aimed at the radical right, Scheringer's politicisation came

11 Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism. The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 144.

with the French occupation of the Rheinland.¹² In his first activity, directed at the Rhenish separatist movement, Scheringer took part in the bombing of the 'Guttenberg' printing house in March 1922.¹³

Escaping a sentence of ten years' hard labour from the French occupation authorities by fleeing to relatives in Berlin, Scheringer trained with the so-called Black *Reichswehr*, the military force raised in violation of the 100,000-man limit on the German army stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles. During this period, he once again became involved in illegal activity, this time taking part in an early attempt to overthrow the Weimar Republic. The attempted coup, carried out by Black *Reichswehr* troops under the leadership of Major Bruno Ernst Buchrucker, quickly fizzled out: a half-hearted attempt to seize the barracks and armoury in Kustrine was put down without bloodshed, and Buchrucker was arrested and sentenced to ten years in prison.¹⁴ This so-called 'Kustrine putsch' had important consequences: the dissolution of the Black *Reichswehr*, and a hardening of the army leadership's suspicion against 'national revolutionaries', as well as of its commitment to political neutrality.¹⁵ Participation in the Putsch had no ill effect on Scheringer's career, for enlisted men were deemed to have 'only been following orders' and not prosecuted.¹⁶ Instead, Scheringer became an officer candidate in the regular German army, taking up a post in the Fifth Artillery Regiment in Ulm in October of the same year. He received his commission as lieutenant in 1928.

Scheringer began his career as an officer at a time when the political neutrality (*Überparteilichkeit*) of the *Reichswehr* was being eroded under the impact of multiple crises, including the growing parliamentary impasse, the world depression of 1929, and the rising influence of mass anti-democratic parties.¹⁷ Not only did the army leadership – with ultimately disastrous results – take an increasingly active hand in trying to steer Germany out of crisis, but portions of the officer corps fell increasingly

12 Leo Schlageter (1894–1923) a Freikorps leader active in the Baltic, Upper Silesia, and the Ruhr, was arrested by the French occupation authorities for destroying a bridge at Hamborn in March 1923 and executed by firing squad two months later. On the KPD's response see note 47 below.

13 Herbert Holst, 'Richard Scheringer—ein Beitrag zur Biographie', *Diplom-Arbeit*, University of Rostock (26 Jan. 1976), 3–4; Bundesarchiv NY 4037/50. Scheringer was previously imprisoned for two months and fined 5,000 Marks for slander (*Beleidigung*) against the inter-allied Rheinland Commission; *Ibid.*, 1.

14 The plan called for four battalions of the Black *Reichswehr* to march on Berlin, thereby inspiring the scattered elements of the postwar Free Corps to join in a war of national liberation. Pre-empted at the last minute by the government's declaration of a state of emergency, Buchrucker tried to back out of the plan, only to see it carried forward by rebellious officers under the leadership of Captain Walther Stennes. The actual Kustrine attack was Buchrucker's attempt to defuse the situation by leading a sort of 'sham putsch'. See Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), 249–51. On the details of the putsch see James M. Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1977).

15 Francis L. Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik, 1918–1933* (Köln and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1965), 189; Robert G. L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism*, 253.

16 Robert G.L. Waite, *Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany, 1918–1923* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1952), 253.

17 Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 427–8.

under the influence of the radical right.¹⁸ From the end of the 1920s, the Nazis' intention of winning the support of the army for their campaign against the Republic was openly announced in organs like the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the *Deutscher Wehrgeist* (German Military Spirit).¹⁹ In a special army issue the former published a speech by Hitler mocking the army leaders for their 'wonderful un-political attitude' and challenging them to take up their rightful place as defenders of the nation against Bolshevism.²⁰ As the trial of Scheringer would illustrate, such arguments came to find an increasing audience among the younger officers.²¹ The *Reichswehr* at the end of the 1920s exhibited something of a generational split, with older officers who still remembered the days of the *Kaiserreich* largely opposed to the Nazis, and younger officers heavily – though by no means unanimously – in favour.²² In his opposition to the conservative *Bürogenerale* (desk generals), Scheringer was part of a larger trend in the officer corps favouring radical solutions to Germany's problems.

When Scheringer stepped across the line into illegal activity – accompanied by two colleagues of the Ulm garrison, Hans Friedrich Wendt and Hanns Ludin – it was in the hope of preparing the army to become the kernel of a 'people's army of national liberation'.²³ His choice of the Nazis as a 'political partner' was conditioned precisely by what he saw as the needs of this 'people's army'. The national uprising must not be a simple putsch, but an uprising of the entire people. Because it must necessarily include the proletariat, this uprising had to be based on a politics with a *social*, anti-capitalist component. To Scheringer and his friends, it was the NSDAP that most closely embodied their ideal of a truly *social* nationalism that would bring the workers in on the side of the army.²⁴ The 'socialist' planks of the NSDAP's political programme played a roll in these calculations.²⁵ But far more important for Scheringer and his friends was the Nazi paramilitary wing, the SA. Not only did the stormtroopers seem to offer the Nazis a real chance of seizing power in the streets, but they also seemed to represent precisely the intersection of working-class radicalism and nationalist militarism that would be necessary for the coming 'people's war'.²⁶

Scheringer, Wendt and Ludin were arrested on 10 March 1930, and charged with making preparations to commit high treason. Their trial took place before the Federal Court in Leipzig from 23 September to 4 October 1930. The so-called 'Ulm

18 Thilo Vogelsang, *Reichwehr, Staat und NSDAP. Beiträge zur deutschen Geschichte 1930–1932* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1962), 82.

19 Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York: Bantam, 1953), 131; Gordon A. Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 434.

20 Quoted in Bullock, *Hitler*, 131. The speech was given in Munich in May 1929.

21 Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, 434; Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik*, 341.

22 Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik*, 341–3; Vogelsang, *Reichwehr*, 82.

23 This formulation appeared in an anonymous flier entitled 'The spirit of the army is dead!'; Vogelsang, *Reichwehr*, 83.

24 Carsten, *Reichswehr und Politik*, 343.

25 Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 191.

26 Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 192. Two of the three later belonged to the SA themselves; Wendt joined even before the treason trial began. He quit with the outbreak of the Stennes Revolt, which he called the 'revolution of the German working people'; *Vorwärtz* (5 Apr. 1931). Ludin assumed a leadership position in the SA after the Leipzig trial.

Reichswehr trial' was a key event in the National Socialist march toward power in Germany. Coming on the heels of the Nazis' startling gains in the Reichstag elections of 14 September, which made the NSDAP the second largest party in Germany, and, following in the wake of a dramatic increase in the national profile of the NSDAP resulting from the campaign against the Young Plan,²⁷ the trial marked a further increase in Hitler's political visibility and a dramatic increase in his credibility with conservative elites.²⁸ The trial gave Hitler, in the words of his foremost biographer, 'the chance, now with the eyes of the world's press upon him, of underlining his party's commitment to legality'.²⁹ In his testimony, Hitler distanced himself from those Nazis who toyed with the idea of 'revolution', citing the case of the recently excluded Otto Strasser, who had fallen out with Hitler and left the party over the question of 'socialism' in July 1930.³⁰ Threatening, to a courtroom ovation, that 'heads [would] roll' after the NSDAP came to power, Hitler swore that the NSDAP would achieve this power only through legal means.³¹ Hitler took special pains to assuage the fears of the army leadership – raised in part by Hitler's own previous attacks on the political neutrality of the army – about the consequences of a National Socialist accession to power.³² Hitler's overtures to the army played no small role in creating the atmosphere for subsequent negotiations that paved the way for the army's assent to his eventual assumption of power.³³

The Ulm trial extended the arrival of the Nazis on the national stage begun in 1929 and allowed Hitler to express his ideas before a sympathetic audience and gain a great deal of free publicity.³⁴ But the long-term benefit of the trial for Hitler's position vis-à-vis Germany's conservative elites was partially offset in the short term by the trouble it caused with his followers. Already during the campaign for the Reichstag elections of September 1930, the Berlin SA, under Walther Stennes, had gone 'on strike' against

27 The Young Plan, formulated by the US politician and economic advisor Owen Young, set the reparations payments required by the Treaty of Versailles at 121 billion Reichsmarks, to be paid in fifty-nine yearly installments. Reparations were suspended in the treaty of Lausanne in July 1932.

28 Vogelsang, *Reichswehr*, 92.

29 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris* (New York, London: Norton, 1998), 337.

30 Dr. Otto Strasser (1897–1974) had been a member of the so-called 'Nazi left' and co-editor, with his brother Gregor, of the Berlin-based *Kampfverlag*, a left-wing national socialist paper. The last holdout of this 'Nazi left' after its defeat at the Bamberg party congress in 1926, Strasser came into repeated conflict with Hitler over the course of the movement and finally quit the NSDAP altogether in July 1930. Declaring 'the socialists are leaving the NSDAP', Strasser went on to form his own organisation, the Kampfgemeinschaft Revolutionäre Nationalsozialisten (KGRNS). See Patrick Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus von Links. Die 'Kampfgemeinschaft Revolutionärer-Nationalsozialisten' und die 'Schwarze Front' Otto Strassers 1930–1935. Studien zur Zeitgeschichte Herausgegeben vom Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1984); Günther Bartsch, *Zwischen drei Stühlen—eine Biographie* (Koblenz: Verlag Siegfried Bublies, 1990); Kurt Gossweiler, *Die Strasser-Legende* (Berlin: Edition Ost/Neues Berlin, 1994).

31 Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 218.

32 Bullock, *Hitler*, 130–1.

33 *Ibid.*, 134.

34 Joseph Goebbels was delighted with the result of Hitler's appearance at the trial: 'The echo in the press is magnificent'; Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels. Sämtliche Fragmente. Teil I. Aufzeichnungen 1924–1941. Band 1. 27.6.24 – 31.12.1930* (München, New York, London, Paris: K.G. Sauer, 1987), entry for 26 Sept. 1930.

the party, angered by a perceived lack of respect on the part of the ‘civilian’ party *Bonzen* (‘bigwigs’) for the ‘sacrifices’ of the SA.³⁵ Issues of funding and outfitting were in the forefront, but simmering discontent over the NSDAP’s participation in electoral politics also played a major role.³⁶ Hitler’s ‘oath of legality’ (*Legalitätseid*) at the Ulm trial exacerbated the tensions that found expression in a second revolt of the Berlin SA, the so-called ‘Stennes Revolt’ of April 1931. Ironically, however, the negative consequences of Hitler’s testimony at the Ulm trial came out most forcefully in the subsequent actions of defendant Scheringer. Sentenced on 4 October 1930, to 18 months’ imprisonment, Scheringer continued his political deliberations as an inmate at fortress Gollnow in Mecklenburg-Pomerania. Here, in daily contact with Communist and Social Democratic fellow prisoners, Scheringer began seriously to question his commitment to National Socialism.³⁷ Disturbed by Hitler’s statements at the trial, Scheringer sought assurance that the NSDAP was serious about its professed commitment to social revolution. He took the opportunity of a prison furlough to visit Joseph Goebbels in Berlin, travelling from there in the company of Goebbels to see Hitler in Munich.³⁸ Hitler spent most of the audience extolling the virtues of the recently completed Nazi headquarters – the ‘Brown House’ – on the Brienner Strasse, and Scheringer returned to his prison cell fully disillusioned.³⁹ Less than a month later, on 19 March 1931, the Communist deputy Hans Kippenberger read out to the Reichstag a letter announcing Scheringer’s conversion to communism.⁴⁰

‘Soldier in the front of the Fighting Proletariat’: Richard Scheringer and the KPD in the Weimar Republic

The news that the 26-year-old Nazi hero Scheringer had defected to the party of Stalin caused a sensation which was reported extensively in both the domestic and foreign press.⁴¹ For many German political observers, the ‘*Fall Scheringer*’ confirmed prejudices about the fundamental similarities between Nazism and communism.

35 Walther Stennes (1895–1983), former Great War officer and Berlin Police Captain, held the post of Osaf Stellvertreter Ost (deputy to the higher SA leadership – East). See Moreau, *Nationalsozialismus von Links*.

36 On the content of the revolt in the eastern German areas under Stennes’ command see Richard J. Bessel, *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism: The Stormtroopers in Eastern Germany, 1925–1934* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

37 While in prison, Scheringer was exposed to the *Communist Manifesto* and learned Russian with the help of a Communist fellow prisoner, Heinrich Kurella; see Coppi, “‘Aufbruch’”, 30. For an account of this period of Scheringer’s development from a Communist fellow prisoner see Fritz Gäbler, ‘Erinnerungen an meine Festungshaft in Gollnow und meine erste Bekanntschaft mit Richard Scheringer’, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* (1961) Heft I–IV, 621–35.

38 Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 237; Goebbels mentions the trip in his diary, observing of Scheringer: ‘He’s concerned above all with the social question’; Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, entry for 26 Feb. 1931.

39 According to the account in Scheringer’s autobiography, Goebbels assured him that Hitler’s oath of legality had been nothing but a ploy to disguise his true intentions. Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 237.

40 T. Vogelsang, ‘Der Sogenannte “Scheringer Kreis,”’ *Gutachten der Institut für Zeitgeschichte*. Bd. 2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), 469–70.

41 For a detailed discussion of the press coverage see Herbert Holst, ‘Richard Scheringer. Ein Beitrag zur Biographie’, *BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037–50*, 48–59.

The liberal *Vossische Zeitung* took Scheringer's act as a sign of the ease with which young activists were able to cross the barricades.⁴² For another writer the case 'proved better than a thousand arguments that a straight road leads from National Socialism to Communism'.⁴³ The KPD cited Scheringer's defection as a sign of the superiority of the Communist idea, trumpeting the young lieutenant's 'brave deed' on the front page of the *Rote Fahne*.⁴⁴ Nazi leader Joseph Goebbels dealt with this political embarrassment by speculating that Scheringer, whom Hitler had celebrated at the Ulm trial as an 'upright German man', must be suffering from 'prison psychosis'.⁴⁵ But Scheringer's 'road-to-Damascus' experience was less startling than it first appeared, for two reasons.

First, Scheringer's defection was possible only because of the 'nationalist turn' taken by the KPD in the second half of 1930 as a means of dealing with the Nazis. The party had been rather slow to recognise the danger posed by the NSDAP, and indeed, the 'ultra left' strategy adopted in 1928 treated the 'social fascist' SPD as an even bigger threat than the 'national fascist' Nazis. But the growing electoral success of the NSDAP from the end of the 1920s, and the national visibility achieved by the Nazis through the campaign against the Young Plan in 1929, forced the KPD to begin taking the Nazi threat more seriously. Aware of the NSDAP's success in mobilising cross-class support by exploiting opposition to the Treaty of Versailles, the KPD tried to stake out nationalist territory for itself, a manoeuvre it had attempted once before with the 'Schlageter line' of the early 1920s.⁴⁶ The centerpiece of this 'second wave' of KPD nationalism was the 'Programme for the National and Social Liberation of the German People', unveiled during the campaign for the Reichstag elections of September 1930.⁴⁷ Promising to 'tear up' the Treaty of Versailles and to destroy all other obstacles to Germany's national self-determination,⁴⁸ the programme forcefully argued that the KPD, not the NSDAP, was the true representative of

42 Quoted in 'Der Leutnant von Ulm. Richard Scheringer 70 Jahre alt', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 14/15 Sept. 1974.

43 *Augsburger Post*, 21 March 1931.

44 'Das Echo der mutigen Tat Scheringers', *Die Rote Fahne* Nr. 79 (4 Mar. 1931).

45 'Poor kid!', Goebbels wrote in his diary, 'I would have made something out of him' ('Schade um den Jungen! Aus dem hätte ich etwas gemacht'); Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, entry for 22 Mar. 1931.

46 Conan Fischer, *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 112. Karl Radek's so-called 'Schlageter Speech' of June 1923, celebrating the death of a young nationalist militant executed by the French occupation authorities, signalled an early willingness on the part of the KPD to make common cause with nationalist extremists. See Karl Radek, 'Leo Schlageter, der Wanderer ins Nichts', in Karl O. Paetel, *Versuchung oder Chance? Zur Geschichte des Nationalbolschewismus* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt Verlag, 1965). For a detailed treatment of the 'Schlageter line' from a participant see Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism. A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 268–87.

47 The full text of the 'Programmerklärung zur nationalen und sozialen Befreiung des deutschen Volkes' is reprinted in Hermann Weber, ed., *Der deutsche Kommunismus. Dokumente* (Köln and Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1963), 58–65.

48 SAPMO BArch RY 1/ I 2/3/22.

Germany's national interests.⁴⁹ This strategic amendment to the idea of proletarian internationalism – representing nothing less than the adoption of all the main demands of the radical right by the KPD – was followed by the policy of ‘*Völkerevolution*’ (‘People’s Revolution’), a line for which Ernst Thälmann successfully argued at the eleventh plenum of the EKKI in Moscow in March 1931.⁵⁰ The concept of ‘*Völkerevolution*’ was an attempt to extend Communist influence to those groups with which the Nazis were enjoying the greatest electoral success and the Communists the least: rural voters, white-collar employees and civil servants.⁵¹ It had the two-fold aim of winning the middle class for communism while preventing further Nazi inroads into the working class, a KPD concern from the early 1920s.⁵² This attempt to show that the KPD was more ‘national socialist’ than the National Socialists was neither convincing to most nationalists nor acceptable to many Communists;⁵³ but it did provide an ideological justification for Scheringer to jump from one side of the barricades to the other, even if his ‘conversion’ was devalued (at least as an expression of the superiority of the idea of proletarian internationalism) by the fact that it was facilitated by what amounted to the KPD’s capitulation to nationalist chauvinism.⁵⁴

Yet Scheringer’s switch cannot be explained solely by the enticements of the ‘Programme for the National and Social Liberation of the German People’. Even more important than the artificial ‘nationalism’ of Communist propaganda was a fundamental, often overlooked connection between the NSDAP and the KPD: a shared commitment to male toughness, militarism, and the idea of ‘war’. The militant self-image of the KPD, as Eric Weitz has convincingly argued, involved ‘an ethos of tough proletarian masculinity’ intimately linked to ‘a culture of political violence’ fostered in the early Communist struggles against the Republic.⁵⁵ The link between masculinity, political violence and war was expressed, organisationally and at the level of style and symbol, by the marching, uniformed columns of the party’s paramilitary

49 See *Die Rote Fahne* (24 August 1930). The programme was a response both to the startling electoral success of the NSDAP in the 1929 state and local elections, and to the signs of disarray in the Nazi camp signaled by the departure of Otto Strasser in July 1930; see Coppi, “‘Aufbruch’”, 20. The programme is usually attributed to Heinz Neumann, writing at the instigation of Stalin; see T. Vogelsang, “Der Sogenannte ‘Scheringer Kreis’”, *Gutachten des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*. Bd. 2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), 469–70; Fischer, *The German Communists*, 106–7; Adolf Ehrh, *Totale Krise – totale Revolution? Die ‘Schwarze Front’ des Völkischen Nationalismus* (Berlin: Eckart Verlag, 1933), 201; Georg Schwarz, *Völker hört die Signale. KPD bankrott*, (Berlin, 1933), 201; Babette Gross, *Willy Münzenberg, Eine politische Biographie* (Leipzig: Forum Verlag, 1991), 224.

50 James J. Ward, “‘Smash the Fascists . . .’ German Communist Efforts to Counter the Nazis, 1930–31”, *Central European History*, 14 (1) (1981) 30–62, 61.

51 Coppi, “‘Aufbruch’”, 23. The nationalist programme was followed by the publication of a ‘*Bauernhilfsprogramm*’ in early 1931; see T. Vogelsang, ‘Der Sogenannte “Scheringer Kreis”’, *Gutachten der Institut für Zeitgeschichte*. Bd. 2 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), 469–70, 469.

52 Coppi, “‘Aufbruch’”, 21; Fischer, *The German Communists*, 48.

53 For Hermann Remmele’s critique of the KPD’s position on the national question as shallow and unconvincing see SAPMO BArch, RY 1/1/2/1/78, Bl. 120. Protokoll der Sitzung des Zentralkomitees 14.–15.5.1931. See also Schüddekopf, *National-bolschewismus*, 294–5.

54 Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 227.

55 Eric D. Weitz, *Creating German Communism, 1890–1990. From Popular Protests to Socialist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 196.

wing, the *Rotfrontkämpferbund* (RFB), which closely resembled those of the Nazi SA.⁵⁶ Both organisations portrayed an image of masculine prowess and proletarian militancy that spoke at least as loudly as the (often nominal) commitment of their members to the competing ideologies of their respective parties, and which rendered plausible, in the eyes of someone like Scheringer, the idea that the future ‘people’s army’ could be created from members of both.⁵⁷

The KPD’s politics also threatened to overlap with those of the radical right through the party’s commitment to war. The early history of the party was marked by repeated attempts at armed insurrection – in 1919, 1920, 1921, 1923 – and this history gave the party a ‘militaristic legacy’ which heavily influenced its subsequent history.⁵⁸ To be sure, *opposition* to war – especially ‘imperialist war’ (that is, a war of the West against the USSR) – was a key aspect of Communist rhetoric, but the goal of civil war inherited from the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and reinforced by the KPD’s early insurrectionary experiences carried its own inexorable logic. The KPD’s preparation for war had both ‘moral’ and ‘technical’ components. One of the chief tasks of the Rote Frontkämpferbund (RFB) – founded in 1924, banned by the government in 1929 and continued illegally thereafter – was to keep alive both the ‘memory’ and the ‘technical knowledge’ of the Great War as a means of ‘defending against nationalist–military propaganda in favour of a new imperialist war’.⁵⁹ The RFB’s youth wing, the *Roter Jungsturm*, emphasised the importance of the ‘spiritual militarisation of proletarian youth’ as a means of defence ‘against Fascism and the danger of imperialist war’.⁶⁰ Both organisations were charged with keeping alive the memory of ‘the glorious days of the Red soldiers in Russia and the whole world’.⁶¹

Alongside this emphasis on the ‘moral’ elements of proletarian warfare, the KPD emphasised technical know-how, publishing a number of military–political texts that were circulated within the party’s secret *M-Apparat* or ‘military’ bureau.⁶² Among this department’s several tasks were preparations for a military uprising (for which it gathered arms and published a technical journal *Oktober*), the internal policing of the party and defence against espionage (the *M-Apparat* was sometimes known as the ‘German GPU’) and the subversion of both the armed forces of the state (police, army, navy) and ‘enemy’ paramilitary formations including the Social Democratic

56 Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 199.

57 On transfers of membership between Nazi and Communist paramilitaries see Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde. Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im italienischen Squadristum und in der deutschen SA* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2002), 521; Siegfried Bahne, *Die KPD und das Ende von Weimar. Das Scheitern einer Politik 1932–1935* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1976), 16; Ingrid Buchloh, *Die Nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung in Duisberg. Eine Fallstudie* (Duisberg: Duisburger Forschungen, 1980), 35; Fischer, *The German Communists*, 137; and Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von Rechts*, 375.

58 Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, 196.

59 ‘Zusammenfassende Darstellung über die Rote Frontkämpferbund (R.F.B.) und der Rote Jungsturm (R.J.)’, 2. MA 100418, *Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv*.

60 Founded in Jena on 22 Aug. 1924; its name was changed to *Rote Jungfront* in Jan. 1925.

61 *Ibid.*

62 See James J. Ward, ‘Revolution in the Revolution? Ideas of Armed Struggle in the German Communist Movement, 1929–1933’, paper presented at the History Conference of Hudson Valley Colleges and Universities, Bard College, 27 October 1983.

Reichsbanner, the Nationalist *Stahlhelm*, and the Nazi *Sturmabteilung*. The goal of subversion was suggested in the occasional use of the designation ‘AM-Apparat’ (‘anti-military’ *Apparat*) which also reflected, simultaneously, an attempt to disguise the department’s own insurrectionary designs.⁶³

The head of the M-Apparat in the final Weimar years, Hans Kippenberger, was himself a seasoned combat veteran, commander of a machine-gun regiment on the Western Front during the Great War and one of the military leaders of the Communist uprising in Hamburg in 1923.⁶⁴ It was he who managed Scheringer’s conversion to, and subsequent activity for, the KPD. When Kippenberger visited Scheringer in prison it was to emphasise, not the KPD’s opposition to war, but its *fitness* for war.⁶⁵ The KPD would carry out the anti-Versailles war of *national* liberation desired by Scheringer, as *one* front in an internal, anti-capitalist war, a *civil* war of class against class. The letter, written by Scheringer and read out by Kippenberger in the Reichstag, praised the KPD’s support ‘for the militarisation of the entire working people, for a prepared and militant German Red Army’, and quoted Lenin on the necessity of revolutionary war: ‘We are going to become “defenders of the Fatherland” . . . we are going to become the most “warlike” of parties . . .’⁶⁶ The wording of Scheringer’s conversion left no doubt as to what he considered important about the KPD: ‘I reject . . . pacifism and take my place as a soldier in the ranks of the fighting proletariat.’⁶⁷

Scheringer’s ‘conversion’ was thus less a shift from ‘right’ to ‘left’ than a displacement of hope for a ‘people’s war’ against the Versailles powers from one army (the *Reichswehr*) onto another (a German ‘Red Army’ backed by the power of the USSR). As such, the change of heart it represented was fundamentally shallow. Left-wing critics of the KPD’s nationalist turn were quick to note this. For Leon Trotsky, Scheringer was someone who looked ‘favourably upon the cause of the Communist Party as the direct continuation of [the Great War]’, who saw the dead of that war as ‘heroes who have fallen for the freedom of the German people . . .’ Scheringer and his ilk agreed to accept the ‘people’s revolution’. Trotsky continued, but only as a means ‘of mobilising the workers for their “revolutionary war”’. Their whole programme lies in the idea of *revanche* (revenge).⁶⁸ The pacifist and left-wing publisher Carl von Ossietzky similarly mocked the sudden awakening to the military virtues of a party that had only recently heartily criticised the ‘sort of people’ who

63 Viktor Gilenson, “Die Komintern und die “paramilitarischen Formationen” der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands (1926–1932)”, in *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* (5 Jan. 2001), Heft 1, 15.

64 Coppi, “‘Aufbruch,’” 41–42; see also Ward, “‘Smash the Fascists . . .’”, 52.

65 ‘In Namen des Reiches . . .’ IfZ München, 1827/56, 8.

66 IfZ München MA 644, ‘Aus dem Brief des Oberleutnant a.D. Scheringer an den kommunistischen Abgeordneten Kippenberger’.

67 The provisional nature of Scheringer’s conversion was further reinforced in the correspondence reprinted in a Communist-financed pamphlet, *Erwachendes Volk*. To Generalleutnant a.D. Dietrich, Scheringer wrote of his desire for a ‘war of liberation against the West’ to be carried out ‘over the rubble of the Weimar Republic’.

68 Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle against Fascism in Germany* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971).

went into the *Reichswehr*.⁶⁹ This scepticism was shared by many in the KPD, few of whom would go as far as one exasperated (ex)-Communist functionary who proclaimed the Scheringer line ‘fascism’ pure and simple, but many of whom who recognised that as a nationalist and a militarist with ‘social’ aspirations, Scheringer still had more in common with the Nazis than with the Communists, his new vocabulary of ‘proletariat’ and ‘Soviet Union’ notwithstanding.⁷⁰

Scheringer recognised the continued affinity between his ideas and those of the Nazi movement. He still placed great hopes in the stormtroopers of the SA, and one of his first acts as ‘Communist’ was to issue a series of appeals to north German stormtroopers of SA leader Walther Stennes who were uncoupled from the NSDAP by the revolt of April 1931. Stennes, expelled from the party after months of rising tension, charged the Nazi leadership with subverting the ‘revolutionary momentum of the SA’ through its ‘bourgeois-liberal tendencies’, and formed his own group, the *Nationalsozialistische Kampfbewegung Deutschlands* (NSKD).⁷¹ A strong initial resonance was quickly dissipated by a combination of Stennes’ own ineptness and the strong response of the Nazi leadership.⁷² But the revolt nevertheless increased Communist hopes that the ‘proletarian elements’ in the SA would now turn their backs on the Nazis and ‘march to the left’.⁷³ Scheringer and his sponsor Kippenberger saw the revolt as evidence that the Nazi movement was finally coming apart under the strain of reconciling its ‘socialist’ and its ‘nationalist’ elements. Stennes’ ‘objective role’, in Kippenberger’s view, was to prevent the rebellious proletarians in the SA from following Scheringer’s example.⁷⁴ Kippenberger’s deterministic interpretation was reinforced by the way that Stennes played up his ‘socialism’ to the plebian SA rank and file, forming an alliance with the ‘left-wing’ ex-Nazi Otto Strasser and giving his paper a name – *Arbeiter, Bauern, Soldaten* (workers, peasants, soldiers) – that echoed the social makeup of the ‘Red Army’ dreamed of by Scheringer.⁷⁵ Hoping to win over the stormtroopers detached from the Hitler movement by the revolt, Scheringer made a series of appeals to the SA. In a flier distributed on 3 April and printed in the *Rote Fahne* on 5 April, Scheringer criticised Stennes’ failure to ‘break ideologically . . . with Hitler and Goebbels and the counter-revolutionary NSDAP’. Rather than trying to attain ‘a rebirth of national socialism’, Scheringer argued, the rebels should place ‘themselves decisively on the side of the revolutionary war for the

69 Carl von Ossietzky, *Sämtliche Schriften. Band VI. 1931–1933. Texte 969–1082*. Gerhard Kraiker, Gunther Nickel, Renke Siems and Elke Suhr, eds., (Reibeck bei Hamburg: Rohwolt, 1994), 134–5.

70 Hans Pütz, *Dokumente kommunistischer Führungskorruption. Die KPD im Dienste der russischen Aussenpolitik* (Leipzig: Kurt Wildeis, 1931), 30.

71 Letter of Stennes reprinted in *Der Angriff*, No. 69, 2 Apr. 1931.

72 Some 30% of the Berlin SA and 20% of the Berlin Hitler Youth went over to Stennes immediately; HA 56/1368, Landeskriminalpolizeiamt (IA) Berlin, 1 May 1931. ‘Rechtsradikale Bewegung. N.S.D.A.P. 1. Die Stennes-Revolve’.

73 HA 73/1551, ‘Ost Express’, *Pravda* Nr. 80 (7 Apr. 1931), quoted in ‘Gründe und Auswirkungen des Zwistes Hitler-Stennes’.

74 *Welt am Abend*, No. 82 (9 Apr. 1931), BArch, 26073.

75 HA 56/1368. The first issue of this bi-weekly news-sheet appeared on 9 April in an edition of 20–30,000 copies. *Landeskriminalpolizeiamt*.

social and national liberation of the working people . . .’ But despite the lip service paid to the need for the rebels to go beyond ‘the pseudo–socialist phrases’ of the Nazis, ideology really had little to do with the matter.⁷⁶ The problem had rather to do with choosing the correct army for which to fight, the army that was serious about combining a class war with a war against the Western powers.⁷⁷

In the event, Scheringer’s appeals had little effect on the course of events – rather than following Scheringer to the KPD, most of Stennes’ rebels quickly returned to Hitler.⁷⁸ But the KPD’s attempt to use Scheringer’s example to subvert the Nazis – the so-called ‘*Scheringer-Kurs*’ – was only just beginning.⁷⁹ Scheringer’s imprisonment (prolonged by a new sentence, in April 1932, of two and a half years for Communist activity in prison) provided a propaganda focus for the KPD, which formed a ‘Scheringer Committee’ of ‘non-party’ signatories to agitate for his release.⁸⁰ More importantly, Scheringer’s defection became a staple of Communist efforts to spread discontent in the SA. The anti-Nazi department of the *M-Apparat* published countless small newspapers and leaflets aimed at dissatisfied stormtroopers. Papers such as *Der rote Angriff* (‘The Red Attack’) contrasted the hypocrisy and corruption of Nazi leaders with the honesty and ‘heroism’ of Scheringer, calling on Nazis who were serious about the ‘revolution’ to follow Scheringer’s example and make the jump to the KPD. *Der rote Angriff* used visual imagery as well as words, illustrating its points with crude drawings. On the cover, uniformed stormtroopers, hard-jawed and masculine, looked warily but respectfully at a heavily-muscled and determined worker, who called out to them: ‘*Her zu Uns!*’ (‘Here to us!’). Manliness, heroism, comradeship – the ‘virtues’ of the trenches of the Great War – these, the cover illustration suggested, were the *real* connections between left and right.⁸¹

76 IfZ Munchen MA 644, ‘*An die SA. Berlins. Brief des Leutnants a.D. Scheringer*’.

77 The SA, to be sure, stood *against* the concept of class war, but as the rhetoric of the Stennes Revolt clearly demonstrates, it simultaneously appealed to and exploited the class resentments of its rank and file members; on the ambiguities of SA radicalism see Conan Fischer, *Stormtroopers. A Social, Economic and Ideological Analysis, 1929–35* (London and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 213.

78 The quick response of the NSDAP party organisation was a major factor in the failure of the revolt. Herman Göring was appointed *Politischer Kommissar Oberost* to oversee the expulsions of Stennes’ supporters, and the party’s *Uschla* system (Investigation and Conciliation Committees) was brought into play to give legal backing to the measures; *Politischer Kommissar Oberost*. ‘Anordnung III’ (17 Apr. 1931) HA 17/325.

79 The official ‘*Scheringer Kurs*’ was ended in late 1932 as a consequence of the dispute between Heinz Neumann and Ernst Thälmann; Schüddekopf, *National-bolshevismus . . .*, 306–7.

80 Coppi, ‘“Aufbruch”’, 31. Among the signatories to the Scheringer campaign were Georg Ledebour, Ernst Toller, Kurt Hiller, Veit Valentin, the renegade Nazi Otto Strasser, and Scheringer’s former commander in the Free Corps, Major Buchrucker. All of them belonged either to no party or two small splinter groups; no Communists, Nazis or Social Democrats were represented; see Deak, *Weimar Germany’s Left-wing Intellectuals*, 194.

81 Published by the KPD in the working-class Prenzlauer Berg district of Berlin, the paper echoed in its title, none too subtly, the name of the Nazi party organ in Berlin, ‘*Der Angriff*’. ‘*Der Rote Angriff*’ portrayed the defection of Scheringer ‘an act of great political significance’, calling on ‘SA proletarians and workers of the NSDAP’ to abandon their ‘traitorous leaders and, with the revolutionary workers under the leadership of the K.P.D.’, to ‘fight for the social liberation of all workers (Werkstätigen) from the capitalist exploiters . . .’; IfZ MA 644, ‘*Der Rote Angriff, auf dem Prenzlauer Berg. Kampforgan gegen den Faschismus. Herausgegeben von K.P.D. Nord-Ost*’.

The connection was taken a step further in the creation of fake ‘SA Opposition’ papers which, unlike the openly-Communist *Roter Angriff*, pretended to be the work of the stormtroopers themselves.⁸² These *Zersetzungsschriften* (‘subversion sheets’) skilfully combined the charges made by the Stennes opposition with the Communist critique of Nazism’s contradictions, depicting Scheringer as the one militant who had found the answer to the questions about National Socialism’s revolutionary credibility being posed by Nazis themselves.⁸³ The blurring of militant identities attempted through this fake press was taken to its logical conclusion in efforts at infiltration and organisational fusion. The *Rotfrontkämpferbund* and the *Kampfbund gegen den Faschismus* (the latter created in 1930) were intended not only to fight against, but to ‘debate’ with stormtroopers, providing, where possible, an organisational space for the integration of vacillating Nazis into the Communist sphere of influence.⁸⁴ Local intelligence for the ‘*Zersetzungsschriften*’ was gathered in part by Communist spies, who in some cases distributed their own handiwork in SA uniform.⁸⁵ The chimerical attempt to forge a united front with Nazi proletarians ‘from below’ – a tactic first used by the KPD against its left-wing Social Democratic rivals – reached its ultimate expression in the creation of so-called ‘*Scheringer Staffeln*’ from units of the banned *Rotfrontkämpferbund*, whose members sported Soviet armbands with their SA uniforms.⁸⁶

Alongside the effort to win over proletarian and ‘working’ elements in the NSDAP and SA, the ‘*Scheringer-Kurs*’ attempted to extend the reach of the KPD into the ranks of the militarist bourgeoisie, both as a means of weakening the forces arrayed against it, and of winning over technical experts for the future ‘Red Army’. The centerpiece of this effort was a magazine launched by Hans Kippenberger in the summer of 1931. Entitled ‘*Aufbruch. Kampfblatt im Sinne des Leutnant a.D. Scheringer*’, it sought to capitalise on Scheringer’s defection to attract militants of the nationalist right to the Communist cause.⁸⁷ *Aufbruch* was aimed in the first instance against

82 Coppi, “‘Aufbruch’”, 24.

83 These papers include *Das Sprachrohr* (Berlin), *Die Sturmflagge* (Hamburg), *Der Sturmbanner* (Franconia), *Der Freiheitskämpfer* (Frankfurt am Main), and *Der Front Appell* (Munich).

84 The RFB was intended to be a ‘Zwischenorganisation’ between left and right; SAPMO BArch, I 2/705/6, ‘*Entwurf des Programms der militärpolitischen Kurse*’.

85 According to a local SA official in Frankfurt am Main, the *Freiheitskämpfer* was distributed in the SA barracks by uniformed SA men, one of whom was later seen entering a Communist printing house; *NSDAP Hauptarchiv* 17/325, Stabsleiter der SA Gruppe Nord-west to Oberste SA Führung (16 Jun. 1931).

86 A police agent’s report on the KPD’s attempt to establish a *Schutzstaffel Scheringer* in Berlin just two weeks before the Nazi seizure of power illustrates well the dubious nature of the undertaking. *Schutzstaffel* members were to appear at meetings throughout Berlin wearing SA uniforms with a Soviet armband replacing the swastika. Franz Lange of the *Bundesleitung* was to speak at the founding meeting scheduled for 18 January – disaffected stormtroopers were to be found to appear at the founding meeting ‘if possible’; see ‘Bericht über die Sitzung der Nazibearbeiter im Bereich des UB. 5’ (17 Jan. 1933); IfZ München, MA 644, frame 867 110. ‘*Scheringer Staffeln*’ existed also in Hannover, Hamburg and Cologne, composed largely or completely of RFB men; see Christian Striefler, *Kampf um die macht. Kommunisten und Nationalsozialisten am Ende der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1993), 140–41.

87 See the excellent discussions in Coppi, “‘Aufbruch’”, and Schüddekopf, *National-bolschewismus*, 298–302.

the NSDAP, and a number of high-profile National Socialist defectors and fellow-travellers regularly contributed articles emphasising the gap between the NSDAP's anti-capitalist promises and its actual behaviour.⁸⁸ Despite the participation of authentic *Grenzgänger*, *Aufbruch* was by no means an independent voice of the National Bolshevik tendency in Germany – it was firmly integrated into the KPD's propaganda apparatus, its ideological content overseen by Theo Bottländer, the head of 'Ressort C' (fascist organisations) in the party's *M-Apparat*. The publication of *Aufbruch* was linked to the creation of discussion circles known as *Aufbruch-Arbeiterkreise* (AAKs) created to facilitate contact with likely recruits, above all 'proletarianised' former officers and members of the right-wing 'intelligentsia' known to be disappointed with Hitler.⁸⁹ The Nazi stormtroopers who figured so prominently in the KPD's strategy of *Zersetzung* received special attention in the pages of *Aufbruch*. Numerous appeals urged the stormtroopers to follow Scheringer's path to the KPD, and every small sign of their disaffection was reported and exaggerated.⁹⁰ *Aufbruch* published internal Nazi memoranda dealing with problems in the SA – gained through the intelligence contacts within the Nazi organisations – and took every opportunity to emphasise the growing signs of 'Zersetzung' in the NSDAP.

Just as Scheringer's overtures to the SA turned on his status as a warrior, so too the magazine founded on his appeal assumed that both communism and radical nationalism had a common interest in issues of military preparedness. *Aufbruch* was steeped in war, combining articles on revolutionary politics with articles on military tactics and technique in such a way as to suggest that there was no fundamental contradiction between the two. And although it made no mention of the illegal interchange between the German and Soviet armies in the wake of the treaty of Rapallo, the magazine clearly sought to capitalise on the intense interest in the Red Army on the part of military observers in Germany.⁹¹ The particular milieu to which *Aufbruch* sought to appeal was symbolised by the participation of Beppo Römer, a radical nationalist and *Freikorps* leader active in the ethnic border struggles of the early postwar period,⁹² who had afterwards moved to the left, eventually joining the Communist party in April, 1932.⁹³ Römer's accession to the editorship of *Aufbruch* in May 1932 brought a dramatic increase in public interest, with Römer's speaking engagements in Munich and elsewhere drawing large crowds. Yet Römer's popularity – and Scheringer's – had less to do with their Communist message than with the aura of adventure and romance attached to warriors who had served in the postwar struggles for Germany. It also reflected a respect for militancy at a time when

88 These included the writer Bodo Uhse of the Schleswig-Holstein *Landvolkbewegung*; Wilhelm Korn, former leader of the NSDAP leadership school; former acting *Gauführer* of the NSDAP for Berlin-Brandenburg, Rudolf Rehm, and the former *Gaupropagandaleiter* Lorf; Coppi, "'Aufbruch'", 24.

89 Coppi, "'Aufbruch'", 40.

90 'Her zu uns!', *Aufbruch*, 2 (Sept. 1932), No. 7, 1–2; one article hailing the growing unrest in the SA cited as evidence the false 'SA opposition' papers appearing all over Germany; Dr. Falkenstein, "Sturmzeichen in der SA!", *Aufbruch*, 2 (Oct./Nov. 1932), No. 8, 4–7.

91 Coppi, "'Aufbruch'", 37–38.

92 Peter Steinbach, 'Vorwort', in Römer and Coppi, eds., *Aufbruch*, 8.

93 Susanne Römer, "'Aufbruch' – fast 70 Jahre danach', in Römer and Coppi, eds., *Aufbruch*, 12.

militancy was increasingly seen to be an end in itself. By the end of 1932, *Aufbruch* had a nation-wide distribution facilitated by discussion circles in some thirty-two cities and a circulation of 100,000.⁹⁴

The modest success of *Aufbruch* notwithstanding, the *Scheringer-Kurs* failed to achieve its aims; it neither provoked a mass defection from the SA nor succeeded in building a significant bridge between the militarist bourgeoisie and the KPD.⁹⁵ The KPD's nationalist rhetoric was less convincing to potential converts from the right than the Nazis' social revolutionary rhetoric was to those from the left, and Communist success in infiltrating and building cells within the Nazi mass organisations was minimal to non-existent.⁹⁶ The illusion, shared by Scheringer and others, that the SA was a 'valuable force', a hopeful symbol for Germany's future – an illusion possible in the first place only for those blinded by militarist fantasies and willing to ignore the fundamental chauvinism and racism of the Nazis – was brutally shattered in January 1933, when the stormtroopers, unleashed by Hitler's victory, turned their fury not on the capitalists, but on the organisations of the working class.

Scheringer's role in the KPD's campaign against the Nazis is nevertheless highly significant, for it suggests some of the cultural content of interwar fascism that supplied potential meeting ground between the radical extremes. The modest success of *Aufbruch*, and the celebrity of Scheringer himself, was less a demonstration of the popularity of communism than evidence of the extent to which militarism provided a common ground between the revolutionary contenders of 'right' and 'left' in the Weimar Republic. As an imprisoned political 'martyr' exemplifying the 'virtue' of comradely self-sacrifice, Scheringer embodied the 'spirit of the trenches' that supplied much of the mythic source material for fascism in Germany and elsewhere. His political martyrdom was only an extension and a reconfiguration of the ideal of martyrdom derived from the war-experience, and as such, his campaign to win over Nazi activists to communism was symptomatic of the infusion of military values into civilian politics that characterised Germany and much of Europe in the interwar period.⁹⁷ When Scheringer quoted Lenin on the necessity of revolutionary war, he was merely putting a Bolshevik stamp on the same 'nationalisation of the masses' long

94 Coppi, "Aufbruch", 46–7.

95 In the second half of 1931, for example, only 454 National Socialists – 0.3% of all new recruits – went to the KPD; see Klaus-Michael Mallmann, *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik. Sozialgeschichte einer revolutionären Bewegung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1996), 120. See also Conan J. Fischer, 'Class Enemies or Class Brothers? Communist-Nazi Relations in Germany 1929–33', *European History Quarterly* 15 (1985), 259–79.

96 This more often resulted in Communist defections to the Nazis than the other way around. The police president in Hannover noted: 'The KPD is attempting by all possible means to penetrate the National Socialist organisations, especially the SA . . . The party has shown success, however, in only a few individual cases, because the vast majority of people entrusted with this task take the ideals of the (*Wehrverbände*) as their own and refuse any further activity for the KPD'; 'Bericht des Hannoverschen Polizeipräsidenten an den Regierungspräsidenten über den Stand der kommunistischen Bewegung'. 7 June 1933, in Klaus Mlynek, ed., *Gestapo Hannover meldet . . . Polizei- und Regierungsberichte für das mittlere und südliche Niedersachsen zwischen 1933 und 1937* (Hildesheim, 1986), 47.

97 George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: H. Fertig, 1975).

dreamed of by national revolutionaries. It is a painful irony that after January 1933, Scheringer's goal of a total revolutionary war by a people in arms would be realised in its darkest possible permutation by the Nazis, and that Scheringer himself would be among the combatants.

Between resistance and accommodation: Richard Scheringer in the Third Reich

Like many other 'Old Communists' in the postwar period, Richard Scheringer would come to serve as a symbol of Communist resistance to the Nazis during the Third Reich. The fact that he had at first supported Hitler only added to, rather than detracted from, the perceived force of his conviction in supporting the KPD; and the danger of his high-profile conversion to communism – in a period when Germany was on the verge of transition to a state in which Communists were routinely murdered – only increased the affective value of his resistance.⁹⁸

Yet Scheringer's 'resistance' in the Third Reich involved more grey than black and white. In February 1933, as Communists were being driven into informal concentration camps and savagely beaten and tortured by the stormtroopers of the SA, Scheringer was temporarily out of their reach, in prison for treason after the sentence of April 1932. Scheringer was released from prison in September, 1933, through the intercession of his friend and co-defendant in the Ulm Reichswehr trial, Hanns Ludin.⁹⁹ After a brief stay with his mother in Münchmünster, Scheringer took over the family's *Dürrnhof* farm in Kösching by Ingolstadt in April 1934.¹⁰⁰

Scheringer's survival under the Nazis as an apolitical 'farmer' faced two main hurdles: his position toward the Nazi regime, and his relationship toward his former political associates. Scheringer's friend Ludin had taken up a high post in the SA, and although Scheringer refused repeated appeals to join him, he did continue to hope that the stormtroopers would recognise their 'true interests' and make an anti-capitalist 'second revolution'. This hope – shared by portions of the KPD's illegal apparatus as well as by the clandestine remnants of the National Bolshevik groups under Niekisch and Strasser – was largely dashed by the blood purge of 30 June 1934.¹⁰¹ Scheringer was approached at the *Dürrnhof* by members of the Niekisch

98 The DKP said of Scheringer's conversion: 'This completely unusual step helped at that time, as also today, above all young people, to take up their place on the right side of the barricades in the struggle for peace and social progress'; DKP, letter to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 Sept. 1974. Nachlass Scheringer BArch, NY 4037-51.

99 Herbert Holst, 'Richard Scheringer. Ein Beitrag zur Biographie', BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-50, 84-85. Ludin's intervention succeeded with the support of General von Reichenau; see Monika Schattenhofer, 'Nazi, Kommunist und Erdhofbauer. Reichswehroffizier a.D. Richard Scheringer', Bayerischer Rundfunk, Sendung von 26.6.1994. IfZ München, Ms 200/239, 17.

100 Monika Schattenhofer, 'Nazi, Kommunist und Erdhofbauer. Reichswehroffizier a.D. Richard Scheringer', Bayerischer Rundfunk, Sendung von 26.6.1994. IfZ München, Ms 200/239.

101 The Black Front tried unsuccessfully to arrange Scheringer's escape to Prague; see the trial records of Herbert Blank and Walter Schreck (8J306/35 and 2H 30/35) in the microfilm collection *Widerstand als 'Hochverrat' 1933-1945* (München and New York: K.G. Sauer, 1994).

and Strasser organisations, but nothing came of this.¹⁰² The illegal AM-Apparat remained active in Bavaria after the seizure of power, as did surviving portions of the *Aufbruch Arbeitskreise*, but Scheringer appears to have had no contact with them.¹⁰³ He nevertheless became involved with local underground KPD circles in Ingolstadt, holding meetings in his home and, in at least one instance, arranging the escape abroad of an opponent of the Nazis.¹⁰⁴ Scheringer's continued low level activity for the KPD escaped the notice of the authorities, but despite the protection of his friend Ludin, which lasted throughout the war, Scheringer's Weimar-era reputation and his reserved attitude toward the Hitler regime got him into some potentially serious scrapes with the law.¹⁰⁵

Yet Scheringer's attitude toward the Nazi regime was more complex than it might first appear. There is evidence to suggest that the Nazis' determination to wage a war of revenge against the allied powers held a strong attraction for him. Scheringer hailed the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 23 August 1939 and enlisted with the Wehrmacht promptly with the outbreak of war a week later.¹⁰⁶ He served in the artillery under Ludin's command in the French campaign of 1940 and commanded his own battery in the invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. After an extended period of home leave to tend the harvest, he returned voluntarily to the front in late 1944. Scheringer would later cast his military service in the Third Reich in terms of 'resistance', explaining his initial enthusiasm as a hope that war would 'set things rolling' against the Nazis.¹⁰⁷ His voluntary return to the front in 1944 was, he said, done in the hope of agitating among his fellow officers.¹⁰⁸ But there is little doubt that the commitment to militarism and military values that had informed his political activity in the Weimar Republic remained strong during the Third Reich, as did the notions of comradeship and 'manly struggle' that he prized among the stormtroopers of the SA. Scheringer later admitted as much, citing the

102 Scheringer was called to testify when Niekisch was put on trial in 1938–9. Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 354–7. See also the 'Eidesstattliche Erklärung' by former *Widerstand*-group member Joseph Drexel in Hugo Erlich, *Der Fall Scheringer* (München: Franz Verlag, 1948), 14–16.

103 Hartmut Mehringer, 'Die KPD in Bayern 1919–1945. Vorgeschichte, Verfolgung und Widerstand,' in Martin Broszat and Hartmut Mehringer eds., *Bayern in der NS-Zeit. V. Die Parteien KPD, SPD, BVP in Verfolgung und Widerstand* (München and Wien: R. Oldenbourg, 1983), 1–286, 110–123. Holst, 'Richard Scheringer . . .', 92.

104 With KPD activist Georg Fischer, the Communist activist Georg Fischer testifies that he and Scheringer helped anti-fascist activist Sepp Zäuner avoid a second internment in Dachau by escaping across the border to Switzerland; see Fischer, 'Eidesstattliche Erklärung', (26 Aug. 1947), IfZ München, Fa 314.

105 In March 1934 he was jailed for ten days, beaten and threatened with execution by SA men over an incident in which he failed to join fellow filmgoers in singing the 'Horst Wessel Song'; Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 312–17. He was imprisoned again in Landsberg/Lech in the wake of the Night of Long Knives in June of the same year.

106 Holst, 'Richard Scheringer . . .', 94.

107 Scheringer to Plaum, 23 August 1947, in Erlich, *Der Fall Scheringer*, 9.

108 Georg Fischer, Scheringer's Communist comrade from Ingolstadt, testifies that he and Scheringer discussed continuing their resistance from within the army if it came to war; Fischer, 'Eidesstattliche Erklärung'.

influence of the military tradition of his family, as well as the continuing influence of what he called the 'Männerbundromantik' of the interwar years.¹⁰⁹

It is far from clear, moreover, that Scheringer rejected all the guiding assumptions of the Nazi regime. The question of antisemitism is notably missing in his postwar writings, but the 'Jewish problem' was not absent from the *Zersetzungs*-propaganda of the KPD aimed at the Nazis in the Weimar Republic,¹¹⁰ or from the appeals of Scheringer himself, who on at least one occasion couched his rhetoric in terms of the fight against 'Jewish capitalism'.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Scheringer's best friend Ludin – who visited the *Dürrnhof* on numerous occasions during the war and sought refuge with Scheringer immediately afterwards – was heavily implicated, as German ambassador to the puppet Tiso regime in Slovakia, in the deportation and murder of Slovakian Jews.¹¹² This is not to make Scheringer culpable for crimes in which he was not involved, but rather to suggest some of the complexities of 'resistance'. If Scheringer's potentially dangerous notoriety, counterbalanced by the protection of Ludin, made him far from typical, he was, in a larger sense, indeed typical, for he resisted where and how he felt he could afford to do so. If anything, Scheringer's behaviour in the Third Reich illustrates the point made by Martin Broszat: that under National Socialism 'the coexistence of nonconformity and conformity were the rule'.¹¹³

109 'Leaving aside the fact', he noted, 'that I was at the time still very closely bound up with my background in an officer's family, and still very far from being a Communist – to say nothing of our schizophrenic condition of our consciousness as front-line soldiers – I understood the idea of comradeship in this sense: duty is duty . . .'; Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 479.

110 The above-mentioned *Freiheitskämpfer*, for example, tried to turn the stormtroopers' antisemitism against the party by printing bizarre rumours about the NSDAP's involvement with 'the Jews'. The authors wondered whether 'the Jews' had used their 'financial control' over the movement to dampen its revolutionary spirit, and alleged that 'the Jews' had so little to fear from the NSDAP that Jewish merchants even benefited from the movement by selling Hitler postcards (!); *Der Freiheitskämpfer*, June 1931, HA 17/325.

111 'Scheringer an die Scheringer-SA', *Neue Zeitung*, 14 April 1931, in Schattenhofer, 'Nazi, Kommunist und Erdhofbauer', Bayerischer Rundfunk, Sendung von 26.6.1994. IfZ München, Ms 200/239.

112 Portions of Ludin's correspondence pertaining to the Final Solution in Slovakia appear in the records of the Adolf Eichmann trial. Addressing the fallout from a pastoral letter from the Slovakian Church alerting the faithful to the murderous realities of Jewish deportation, Ludin wrote reassuringly to the Foreign Office in Berlin that 'the antisemitism of the Slovakian people, founded in experience [sic], as well as the antisemitic propaganda being carried out by us, has created an atmosphere that appears to be no longer favorable for such [interventions]'. Ludin ordered the propaganda office to ignore the pastoral letter, and to continue with its antisemitic propaganda; Hanns Ludin to *Auswärtige Amt* Berlin (13 Apr. 1943), *Institute für Zeitgeschichte*, Eich 1016.

113 Martin Broszat, 'Resistenz und Widerstand', in Martin Broszat, Elke Frölich and Anton Grossman, eds., *Bayern in der NS-Zeit, Volume Four, Herrschaft und Gesellschaft im Konflikt* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1981), 607–9.

**From ‘workers, peasants, soldiers’ to ‘workers, peasants, citizens’:
Richard Scheringer and the KPD 1945–1969**

For Scheringer, as for the Communist Party, the end of the war offered an opportunity for a fresh start. Despite its near-destruction under the Nazis,¹¹⁴ the KPD bounced back quickly, riding a postwar ‘anti-fascist surge’ to become once again a mass movement in the early postwar period.¹¹⁵ Scheringer, who had never actually belonged to the KPD in the Weimar Republic, joined on 1 November 1945. Placing himself at the forefront of Communist politics in Southern Germany, he worked to ensure the supply of food and necessities, participated as one of a handful of Communists in the committee for the creation of a new Bavarian constitution (*Verfassungsausschuss der Verfassungsgebenden Landesversammlung*), and accepted the post of state secretary for agriculture in Bavaria.¹¹⁶ But the renewed opportunity to pursue politics was to prove a mixed blessing. It was relatively easy to fend off criticisms of his Nazi past – many one-time fellow travellers were busy painting themselves as ‘resistors’ after 1945 and Scheringer had resisted more than many; much more complicated were the problems facing Communist activists in a context of division, occupation, and growing Cold War polarisation.¹¹⁷ As a sort of ‘celebrity militant’ for the KPD in the Weimar Republic – relatively isolated from the flow of events by his imprisonment – Scheringer had been able to pursue a largely privileged and independent course. As a party member in the postwar period, he would have to take public responsibility for the tortured twists of the party line in conditions that – after the brief postwar anti-fascist ‘honeymoon period’ – quickly went from bad to worse for the KPD.

114 Some 10,000 Communists activists were murdered by the Nazis, Richard Loss, ‘The Communist Party of Germany (KPD), 1956–1968’, *Survey. A Journal of Soviet and East European Studies* XIV (1973), Nr. 4 (89), 66–85, 72; another 10,000 fled abroad, Patrick Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 24; All told, anywhere from one-third to half of the KPD’s 350,000 members suffered persecution of some kind; Beatrix Herlemann, ‘Communist Resistance between Comintern Directives and Nazi Terror’, in David E. Barclay and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Between Reform and Revolution. German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 1998), 357–71, 359. On the KPD’s losses during the Third Reich see also H. Mehringer, ‘Die KPD in Bayern 1919–1945. Vorgeschichte, Verfolgung, und Widerstand’, in Martin Broszat and Hartmut Mehringer, eds., *Bayern in der NS-Zeit. V. Die Parteien KPD, SPD, BVP in Verfolgung und Widerstand* (München and Wien: R. Oldenbourg, 1983), 1–286. Communist losses came not just at the hands of the Nazis, but of the Soviet NKVD as well; see Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, ch. 8. Scheringer’s mentor Kippenberger was one victim of the Stalinist purges.

115 Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 13. In August 1945, the KPD had 150,000 members; in October, 250,000, and by April 1946, 624,000; Müller, ‘Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands . . .’, 448.

116 Holst, ‘Richard Scheringer . . .’, 102.

117 Scheringer’s tenure as state secretary ended abruptly when the US occupation authorities found his name on the Nazi party rolls in Berlin (Scheringer, *Das Grosse Los*, 498). In a pamphlet subsequently published by the KPD to clear his name, Scheringer claimed that his name was entered on the NSDAP’s rolls without his consent during his imprisonment in fortress Gollnow (a not-implausible explanation), and argued that his role as figurehead for the KPD’s campaign of subversion against the Nazis had actually been a form of ‘resistance’ that had born fruit in the increasing disorganisation of the NSDAP in 1932. His infatuation with the stormtroopers of the SA – and the KPD’s role in subverting Weimar democracy through its ‘social fascism’ strategy – received no mention, Scheringer to Plum 23 August 1947, in Erlich, *Der Fall Scheringer*, 9.

Scheringer's transformation into a 'Communist' in Weimar was fuelled, as we have seen, by a commitment to the 'nation', to 'war', and to 'militancy' as an end in itself. Each of these concepts would live on in his postwar relationship with the party, but in ways reflecting the transformed circumstances. The campaign to stake out the terrain of the 'nation' in which Scheringer had played such a key role was, first of all, by no means an aberration of the interwar period. On the contrary, the KPD returned to the politics of nationalism with a vengeance after 1945. On the surface, the postwar nationalist discourse was a response to a new and unique circumstance – the division of Germany – but its deep causes expressed a strong continuity with the Weimar years. In the first instance, the new nationalist course was an attempt to address a perennial problem for the KPD – a level of support incommensurate with its claim to a leading role in German politics. After the failure of attempts in the immediate postwar period to position itself as 'first among equals' in an 'anti-fascist bloc' of parties, the KPD turned to a more forceful policy, browbeating the rival Social Democrats into a merger in the Soviet Occupation Zone in April 1946 and continuing for decades thereafter to harrow the SPD in the West with calls for 'unity of action' ('*Aktionseinheit*') under Communist leadership.¹¹⁸ The lack of support that was both cause and consequence of this behaviour – made manifest in a dramatic decline in membership and electoral representation from the end of the 1940s – brought about a renewed attempt to make up on the right what was lost on the left.¹¹⁹ Once again, just as it had done in Weimar, the KPD tried to sell itself as 'more nationalist than the nationalists'.¹²⁰

A second cause of the return to nationalism was the KPD's need to conform to the power-political goals of its eastern sponsors, now consisting not only of the USSR, but of the 'Socialist Unity Party' ruling from April 1946 in the Soviet Occupation Zone and – from October 1949 – over the newly-created German Democratic Republic. In the circumstances of national division and growing Cold War polarisation, 'nationalism' became not just a demagogic tool for winning support, but a weapon that the KPD could employ on behalf of its sponsors against the West German government and its US allies.

Here Scheringer found a bridge with the politics of his youth, for 'resistance against foreign powers' was once again the order of the day. Just how little Scheringer had to alter his politics to fit into the postwar KPD comes out strikingly in the campaign waged by the main vehicle of the KPD's postwar nationalist course, the 'National Front'. Launched in March 1949, the initiative aimed at solidifying party control in the East by providing an 'organisational collection point for all citizens of the DDR

118 Hilmar Hartig, 'Die Entwicklung des Kommunismus in der Bundesrepublik', in Wolfgang Schneider and Jürgen Domes, eds., *Kommunismus international, 1950-1965. Probleme einer gespaltenen Welt* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1965), 91.

119 By 1950, the combined effects of purges and resignations had cost the KPD half its officials and a third of its membership, Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 201.

120 *Ibid.*

who [did] not belong to the SED;¹²¹ bolstering Communist support by providing a place for the ‘coming together of all national-minded forces’; and undermining the West German-US alliance by defying the ‘imperialist occupation powers in the Federal Republic and West Berlin’.¹²² The appeal to nationalist chauvinism was far from subtle: the National Front’s founding document called upon ‘all Germans to secure, through national self-help (“nationale Selbsthilfe”) the right of our people to self-determination, self-rule and self-preservation’. Wilhelm Pieck, at the first ‘National Congress’ in 1950, called for ‘national resistance’ (‘nationalen Widerstand’) against the politics of the West German government, making explicit the link between the ‘National Front’ campaign of the postwar period and the ‘nationalist’ line of the Weimar Years.¹²³ For Scheringer, the new party line could hardly have been more familiar; when he campaigned for public office in 1954 as a ‘brave fighter for the national interests of the German people’ he was pursuing a goal that had motivated him, whether as a ‘Nationalist’ or a ‘Communist’, from 1922 onward.¹²⁴

Yet the nationalist line pursued so ardently by Scheringer and the KPD after 1945 was fundamentally flawed, for as partisans of a foreign power that had occupied half of Germany and instituted what most Germans saw an ‘enemy state’ on German soil, Communists were highly implausible mouthpieces for West German patriotism. There is evidence that Scheringer himself recognised this – as late as 1948 he was publicly refusing to identify himself with Soviet ‘power politics’, portraying the Oder-Neisse border as at odds with ‘the needs of the German people’ and denying that the KPD had any intention of trying to reduce Germans to living under ‘Russian conditions’.¹²⁵ Yet Scheringer ultimately had little choice but to put his stamp on the division and loss of territory, a fact illustrating the intractable nature of the ‘national problem’ facing the KPD after 1945.¹²⁶ The party’s highly instrumental and one-sided ‘patriotism’ meant, in practice, either support for the GDR, backed by the power of the Soviet Union – vilified in the popular imagination as the ‘jail keeper of German prisoners of war’ – or a future, reunified Germany, achieved at the expense of the ruling system in the West.¹²⁷

In this context, the party’s ‘nationalism’ backfired, giving the West German government an excuse for a crackdown and fueling popular anti-communism. Public

121 Wolfgang Felsen (SED, Leiter der Kaderabteilung im Büro des Präsidiums des nationalrates), on 1 December 1953; Archiv Friedshof, 14 April 1955, *Tagebericht* Nr. II-585/55, ‘Die Nationale Front’; BA Koblenz (hereafter BAK), B106 I/82.

122 ‘Dritter Deutscher Volkskongress’; Archiv Friedshof, 14 April 1955, *Tagebericht* Nr. II-585/55, “Die Nationale Front;” BAK, B106 I/82, 8.

123 Archiv Friedshof, 14 April 1955, *Tagebericht* Nr. II-585/55, ‘Die Nationale Front’; BAK, B106 I/82, 5.

124 ‘Every vote for Richard Scheringer’, the material for the Bavarian state elections of November 1954 continues, ‘will be a blow against . . . the submission of West Germany to the boot of American occupation’; *Bayerisches Volks-Echo*, Wahl-Ausgabe (undated); BArch Nachlass Scheringer, NY 4037-132.

125 ‘Richard Scheringer gegen den Krieg’, *Donau Kurier* (20 September 1948); BArch Nachlass Scheringer, NY 4037-51.

126 Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 125–6.

127 Weitz, ‘The Ever-Present Other’, 228.

resentment about events such as the suppression of the East German uprisings of June 1953 and the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 frequently bubbled over in Communist forums. Typical were meetings such as the one attended by Scheringer in early 1954 in which the presiding speaker was asked to explain the 'concentration camps in the Eastern zone' amid shouts of 'Communists out!' and 'we shit on the Soviet Union'.¹²⁸ Scheringer was frustrated by such attitudes, which he blamed on the 'anti-Communist propaganda' of the CSU and SPD. He hoped that the SED's 'new course' aimed at improving living standards in the GDR would overcome all criticism by turning the East German state into 'a showplace of socialism'.¹²⁹

But if these hopes were unrealistic, they illustrate something more than that wishful thinking continued to dog German Communists after 1945 – they show that for both Scheringer and the KPD nationalist and socialist ideas were far more intimately linked after 1945 than they had ever been in the Weimar Republic. Once established, the GDR became the site both of a displaced nationalism and a utopian socialist dream of Germany's future. Ironically, this attachment to East Germany guaranteed the isolation of the KPD in West Germany, insuring that Communist efforts would come to nought and bringing the weight of the Adenauer administration's repressive apparatus down on the KPD. Not only did the KPD's fifth column status sap its social support, sending the party into permanent decline by the beginning of the 1950s, but the party's 1952 'Programme for the National Reunification of Germany' – which called for 'revolutionary struggle' to 'overthrow' Adenauer's 'regime of national betrayal' – supplied the rhetorical 'smoking gun' for the government's proscription of the KPD in August 1956.¹³⁰ Scheringer was sentenced to prison for his work on the programme and later, with other Communists, stripped of all his remaining elected offices.¹³¹

128 'Bericht über den Wahlkampf und die dabei gesammelten Erfahrungen', 4; BArch Nachlass Scheringer, NY 4037-132.

129 'Bericht über den Wahlkampf...', 16-17; BArch Nachlass Scheringer, NY 4037-132. The 'New Course' was announced on 11 June 1953. It offered a relaxation of forced industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation but failed to reduce the increased work quotas that were a cause of the uprising of 17 June.

130 The KPD's early electoral performance was quite respectable – in Bavaria, for example, the KPD won seats in every city parliament in the elections of May 1946 and became the third largest party in the founding state parliament (after the CSU and the SPD) in the June elections. But by the early 1950s the party was in terminal decline, winning only 1.9% of the vote in the Federal elections of 1953; Karl-Ulrich Gelberg, 'Vom Kriegsende bis zum Ausgang der Ära Goppel (1945-1978)', in Alois Schmidt, ed., *Handbuch der Bayerischen Geschichte. Viertes Band. Das Neue Bayern. Von 1800 bis zur Gegenwart* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2003), 782.

131 Scheringer was a member of the municipal assembly in Kösching as well as the district assembly in Ingolstadt. Arrested and released in May 1954 in connection with his work on the national reunification programme, he was sentenced in July 1956 to two years' imprisonment for 'preparation to commit high treason'. He was unable to serve the sentence due to heart trouble and it was reduced to probation in March 1958. Scheringer was arrested again in May 1961, and sentenced to a year in prison. Other leading Communists also paid heavily for their continued activities. The former Communist Landtag deputy in North-Rhein Westphalia, Karl Schabrod, was sentenced to nine months in prison in 1958 merely for declaring his candidacy for new elections, and again in 1961 to two years for the same reason; 'Von der KPD zur DKP...', 17-8; BArch Nachlass Scheringer, 4037-133. All told, some 125,000 individual Communists were investigated by the Federal government

If Scheringer's nationalism had ample opportunity for expression in the postwar KPD, was there room for Scheringer the soldier? Like the concept of the 'nation', the concept of 'war' played a major role for Scheringer and the KPD after 1945 but, whereas in the Weimar Republic Scheringer's politics had been fuelled by a desire for a 'people's war' of national revenge and vague notions of 'dictatorship', now the goal was not war but 'peace'.¹³² To be sure, the Communist party had cast its politics in terms of 'peace' even when it prepared for war. Yet for Scheringer the shift in paradigm was striking. In his 1959 autobiography, *Das Grosse Los*, Scheringer expressed regret at having served in the military under Hitler, and though – as a critical reviewer pointed out – he had initially welcomed the war, there seems little doubt at the sincerity of his later convictions; after all, he had seen the horrors of war first-hand and appears to have felt that he and his comrades-in-arms had been badly used.¹³³

Yet Scheringer's position was emblematic of the KPD as a whole, for in his 'peace activism' after 1945 personal conviction and the needs of propaganda were inseparable. Indeed, Scheringer's shift symbolised the psychological complexity of the KPD's position after 1945, for it represented the dovetailing of a sincere desire to avoid another 'hot' war with the propaganda needs of the 'Cold' one. When Scheringer used his putative moral authority as a combat veteran to speak out against the dangers of war, it was nearly always in the context of an attack on the 'warmongering' of the West German government and the US 'imperialists'. Whether questioning the right of Konrad Adenauer as a non-veteran to make decisions regarding war and peace,¹³⁴ challenging NATO's requisitioning of German farmland for the construction of airfields,¹³⁵ or supporting the rights of a persecuted young Communist in the *Bundeswehr*,¹³⁶ Scheringer's peace politics, like those of the KPD as a whole, never strayed far from the requirements of propaganda. This was not surprising, nor was the result in every case negative; but the one-sided nature of the KPD's anti-militarism – which ignored preparations for war on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain even as it railed against those in the West – tended, like the party's nationalism, to reinforce the appearance of duplicity and bad faith.¹³⁷

The corollary to the KPD's pacifist strategy – an emphasis on popular participation and civic engagement – faced similar difficulties. From early in the postwar period, the

between 1951 and 1968, a third of them in the period before the ban, Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 282.

132 Interview with Richard Scheringer from 6 January 1974 in Michael Nerlich, 'Richard Scheringer', Seminararbeit, 1974; BArch Nachlass Scheringer, NY 4037-50.

133 *Die Zeit*, 4 December 1959.

134 'Adenauer was never a soldier', Scheringer is quoted as saying at a meeting in November 1956, and therefore could not 'bear the weight of a decision of war'; BArch Nachlass Scheringer, NY 4037-51.

135 Described in Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 148.

136 The soldier, Anselm Conrad, was disciplined by the army for taking part in a demonstration organised by the Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes at the former Dachau concentration camp; 'Offener Brief von Richard Scheringer an den Soldaten Anselm Conrad', BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-141.

137 Patrick Major cites the 'path-breaking role' played by the KPD in the opposition to the stationing of atomic artillery on West German soil; Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 11, 147.

party had tried to reinvent itself as part of a broadly-based parliamentary movement, and even when the electoral decline and exigencies of the Cold War forced it into unwanted isolation, it continued to emphasise its democratic intentions.¹³⁸ For Scheringer, who had once fought to build a Red Army of 'workers, peasants, and soldiers', the change, again, was particularly striking – he now campaigned for public office on behalf of 'workers, peasants, and citizens'.¹³⁹ To be sure, the old militance of the Weimar years still lived on in the violence with which Scheringer and other Communists denounced the West German government and its US helpers, but in a society of growing democratic stability and economic prosperity there was no longer a place for the 'politics of revolutionary crisis' that the KPD had pursued in the Weimar Republic. Like its other postwar strategies, the KPD's turn from 'insurgency' to 'citizenship' lacked credibility: the anti-democratic actions of the party's Eastern sponsors – the Berlin Wall for example – spoke louder than the party's democratic words.¹⁴⁰

The problematic nature of the KPD's 'democratic citizenship' strategy was thrown into sharp relief by the campaign begun in the mid-1960s to overturn the KPD-Verbot of 1956. The centerpiece of the campaign, the *Initiativsausschuss für die Wiedezulassung der KPD* ('Initiative Committee to 're-allow' the KPD'), was founded on 14 March 1967 by Scheringer and four others. Its task, Scheringer argued, was not just to overturn the KPD-Verbot or to win amnesty for prosecuted Communists, but to safeguard 'freedom of opinion . . . for all citizens of the Federal Republic guaranteed in the Basic Law . . .'¹⁴¹ Scheringer and others pursued this theme in countless forums, sparing no effort in attempting to forge alliances with church, student, and citizens' groups.¹⁴² The *Initiativsausschuss* tried especially to link up with the New Left of the 1960s, casting itself as an important constituent of the so-called 'extra-parliamentary opposition' and assuming a significant role in the agitation against the Vietnam war and in the campaign against the Springer press monopoly.¹⁴³ Scheringer

138 Müller, 'Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands . . .', 440.

139 'Wer ist dieser Mann?', BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-132.

140 The frequency with which Communist functionaries faced questions about the Berlin Wall was shown when Scheringer's colleague on the *Initiativsausschuss*, Manfred Kapluck, got a laugh at a public meeting with the comment: 'Somebody forgot to ask about the wall'. He went on to justify it as a measure of self-defence for the GDR; 'Wir Freunde von Max Reimann', *Christ und Welt* (nd); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-134.

141 *Initiativsausschuss für die Wiedezulassung der KPD*, 'Aufhebung des KPD-Verbots höchst aktuell' (4 Dec. 1967); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-133.

142 Bundesminister des Innern, 'Erfahrungen aus der Beobachtung und Abwehr linksradikaler Tendenzen im Jahre 1967' (July 1968); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-133. See also Stephen L. Fischer, *The Minor Parties of the Federal Republic of Germany. Toward a Comparative Theory of Minor Parties* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 126.

143 *Initiativsausschuss für die Wiedezulassung der KPD*, 'Presse-notiz' (12 Apr. 1968). After the attempted assassination of student leader Rudi Dutschke in April, 1968, the *Initiativsausschuss* sent letters of support to Dutschke and his wife; 'Lieber Genosse Dutschke' (12 April 1968), and 'Liebe Frau Dutschke' (12 April 1968); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-133. The party trumpeted the attempted murder as further evidence of the repressive climate in the Federal Republic; 'Presse-Erklärung zum Attentat auf Rudi Dutschke' (12 April 1968); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-133.

spoke out in speech after speech against what he called the ‘hysterical KP-*Verbot*’, which he argued was ‘unworthy of a democratic state’.¹⁴⁴

But here again the appearance of hypocrisy was not far away. The appeal to democratic values was, to be sure, heartfelt in at least two senses: Communists believed they were fighting for a freer and more just society, and those who had spent time in Nazi concentration camps – like some of Scheringer’s colleagues in the *Initiativsausschuss* – asked, with every justification, how a state with former Nazis in positions of influence could imprison or deny work to Communists simply for their political views.¹⁴⁵ But in the end the KPD’s commitment to ‘democracy’ failed the same test of credibility as its commitment to patriotism and pacifism. Few could take seriously a party that demanded democratic rights for itself even as it supported regimes widely known to deny them to others. This contradiction was painfully reinforced toward the end of 1968 when Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces moved in Czechoslovakia to crush the democratic experiment of the ‘Prague Spring’. In the same document in which it justified the invasion as necessary to ‘secure socialism’ in Czechoslovakia, the *Initiativsausschuss* issued a call to ‘all democrats’ to demand ‘freedom for the KPD’.¹⁴⁶

In the event, a new party – the German Communist Party (DKP) – was founded on 26 September 1968. The government declined to intervene.¹⁴⁷ But the victory for Communists was partial at best, for the founding of the new party failed to validate Communist claims or to make communism a vital force in West Germany. One might argue that, in highlighting the inconsistencies and excesses in the government’s treatment of political dissent and in winning sympathy from diverse social groups for a relaxation of the ban, the campaign waged by Scheringer and the *Initiativsausschuss* to restore the rights of the KPD made a modest contribution to the democratisation of West German society in the 1960s, but it is probably more accurate to say that Communists were the beneficiaries of the broader democratising change in West German political culture which took place alongside and mostly in spite of them. In their relations with other social groups, the New Left in particular, the KPD and DKP were the suitors rather than the objects of affection, and the support they received was more *against* government repression than it was *for* communism. In the end, the government’s judgment on the new Communist party might well serve as the epitaph for Scheringer’s postwar political activity: the DKP, the government concluded in April 1969, was a ‘fringe phenomenon (“Randerscheinung”) of German democracy’ that need no longer be feared’.¹⁴⁸

144 *Fränkische Landeszeitung* (8 July 1967). *Fürther Nachrichten* (13 July 1967); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-134.

145 Karl Schabrod to Dr. Posser (8 July 1968); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-133.

146 *Initiativsausschuss für die Wiederzulassung der KPD, ‘Jetzt erst recht: KPD wiederzulassen!’* (20 Sept. 1968); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-133.

147 Despite pressure from conservative parties, it was deemed wiser to let the DKP ‘die a natural death at the polls’, Gordon Smith, *Democracy in West Germany. Parties and Politics in the Federal Republic* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 203.

148 BAK B 106/78976, ‘Mitteilungen an die Presse’ (23 April 1969).

Conclusion

Richard Scheringer continued his political activity for the DKP, running for office repeatedly in the 1970s and 1980s, working to forge ties between East and West Germany, and acting as a party expert on agricultural issues.¹⁴⁹ This part of his career lies outside the scope of this essay, and not only for reasons of space – nothing fundamentally new or significant was achieved by the DKP which, even more than the KPD, was little more than the ‘West German branch’ of the SED.¹⁵⁰ The DKP did achieve some support among students in the early 1970s, but was for the most part rejected as ‘reformist and counter-revolutionary’ by the heavily Maoist-oriented New Left.¹⁵¹ Its electoral performance, after an initial flourish, was abysmal.¹⁵² Scheringer’s seemingly hopeless electoral campaigns continued to elicit press coverage, sometimes respectful, often dismissive (the ‘Red Parade-Pony of the DKP’ was one colourful appellation).¹⁵³ But far more, Scheringer’s past as a *Grenzgänger* of the by-gone Weimar days – symbolic of a life of contradictions – continued to fascinate.¹⁵⁴ A popular politician in his home town and region, known for his plain speech, humour, and generosity, a critic of ‘Party Chinese’ (party jargon), Scheringer was hardly the stereotype of the robotic Communist apparatchik.¹⁵⁵ Yet, he bent himself into the contortions demanded of the party line, staying true to the bitter end. Although he would admit, when pressed, that ‘everything [was] not perfect in the GDR’, Scheringer never gave up his faith in the East German Communist experiment,

149 Scheringer served in this role from early in the postwar period, helping found a working group on rural political economy, the ‘Gesamtdeutschen Arbeitskreis für Land- und Fortswirtschaft’ (GALF) in late 1949, producing a pamphlet, ‘Wer melkt wen? Die Bauern und Industriellgesellschaft’, in 1964, and material on agricultural issues for the Communist electoral umbrella organisation Aktion Demokratischer Fortschritt from the late-1960s; Richard Scheringer, ‘Die Bewältigung des Wissenschaftlich-Technischen Revolution in der Landwirtschaft als Problem Gesellschaftlicher Veränderung’, BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-63.

150 The DKP was a ‘convenient whipping-boy for the sins of the GDR, but scarcely a real threat’; Smith, *Democracy in West Germany*, 212.

151 Major, *The Death of the KPD*, 8, 95.

152 By 1970 the DKP had 30,000 members (86% of whom had formerly belonged to the KPD) spread over thirteen state and precinct groups, 240 regional and district groups, 1,200 local party groups, and 240 factory cells; BAK 106/78976, ‘Unterrichtung des Innenausschusses des Deutschen Bundestages über Beobachtungsergebnisse des Bundesamts für Verfassungsschutz am 4.3.1971’. The DKP polled .5% in the Bundestag elections of 1972, Henry Ashby Turner, *Germany from Partition to Reunification* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 167.

153 ‘Aktuelles Porträt. R. Scheringer’, Bayern Kurier (12 Oct. 1974).

154 Scheringer’s life was the subject of numerous television and radio features, both documentary and dramatic, including Wolfgang Venohr’s film ‘Richard Scheringer’ and the dramatisation ‘Der Fall der Ulmer Reichswehroffiziere’ (both shown on West German television in 1967), and the DEFA film ‘Der Leutnant von Ulm’, directed by Karl Gass (DDR) and Ferry Stützing (BRD), shown on East German television in 1979. See the review of the latter in *Berliner Zeitung*, ‘Stationen eines bewegten Lebens. “Der Leutnant von Ulm” von Karl Gass’ (28 November 1979); BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-51.

155 Something of Scheringer’s sense of humour comes out in the incident in which he campaigned for office with an ass bearing a sign reading ‘I vote CSU’. The ass was confiscated by the police; ‘Die “Dynastie” vom Dürrnhof’, *Pravda*, Nr. 233 (21 Aug. 1974), 4; BArch Nachlass Scheringer NY 4037-51.

or in the USSR.¹⁵⁶ If he had survived only a few years longer – he died in 1986 at the age of 82 – Scheringer would have lived to see another great caesura of modern German history, the fall of the wall and reunification. That he might well have been disappointed by this victory of German nationalism only highlights the contradictions of his political career. In his commitment to the GDR, Scheringer was typical of many ‘old Communists’ who had struggled against the Nazis – to them, the East German state was a bastion against war and fascism, a guarantee that it would never return.¹⁵⁷ As someone capable of fierce political attachments – first to the NSDAP, then to the KPD and later the DKP – Richard Scheringer was a man of ‘Weltanschauung’ (‘ideological world view’). Whether as the ‘Lieutenant from Ulm’, the ‘Landsknecht who became a Communist’,¹⁵⁸ or the ‘prototype of the misled . . . idealist’, Scheringer continued – and continues – to be seen as something more than just a unique ‘human interest story’. He was, and is, a representative of the competing forces that shaped Germany’s history in the twentieth century.¹⁵⁹

156 ‘KPD möchte aus dem U-Boot der Illegalität’, *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, No. 158 (11 Jul. 1967).

157 James J. Ward, ‘Remember when it was the “Anti-Fascist Defense Wall”? The Uses of History in the Battle for Public Memory and Public Space’, in Ernst Schürer and Manfred Erwin Keune, eds., *The Berlin Wall: Representations and Perspectives* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 11–24.

158 The *Die Welt*, 3 Dec. 1959.

159 ‘Aktuelles Porträt. R. Scheringer’, *Bayern Kurier*, 12 October 1974. The most recent treatment is the Bavarian Radio feature by Monika Schattenhofer: ‘Nazi, Kommunist und Erdhofbauer . . .’, broadcast on 26 June 1994.