



Behemoth: The Structure & Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944

Franz Leopold Neumann

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El autor toma de la tradiciÃ³n hebrea el nombre del monstruo Behemoth para designar el nacional-socialismo. Analiza la naturaleza del Estado totalitario, asÃ© como la rebeliÃ³n del Partido, el lÃder carismÃ¡tico y el pueblo racial fuente del carisma: el espacio vital y la doctrina Monroe alemana, y la teorÃa del imperialismo racial.

Behemoth: The Structure & Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944 Details

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Justpassingby says

This book offers an extremely well-informed analysis of the organization of Nazi Germany; it could have appeared in the late 1960s after decades of extensive archive searches, interviews, perhaps some first-hand experience, and bullying at least a dozen starved Ph.D. students. The truly amazing thing is that it was published (in the United States) in 1942.

Neumann is an intelligent Marxist. He subscribes to the viewpoint of historic materialism in the sense that major historic developments are shaped by material (usually economic) circumstances. It would be all too easy to ascribe totalitarianism to a small number of deviant personalities; in fact it would be dead wrong, taking into account that totalitarian dictatorships developed simultaneously in a relatively large number of industrial nations.

He begins by observing that National Socialism is not organized, in the sense that there is no coherent underlying philosophy or plan. Hitler and his immediate circle have often spoken and acted contrary to the ideas and intentions stated in *Mein Kampf*. In fact, practical National Socialism since 1933 has consisted of little more than a sequence of opportunistic responses to the challenges of the moment, an imitation of the forms of rational behaviour without internal consistency or even without meaning. The real explanation, Neumann argues, lies not in published books and articles but in the economics of German industry. The elite of Germany after 1933 is composed of four groups: party, bureaucracy, army and industry. Although outwardly the party appears to control the three others, actual party policy is more often than not dictated by the other three. German industry especially has undergone a major structural change since WWI and under the Weimar republic; competition has been replaced with cartels, trusts and *de facto* monopolies. The Nazi policy, rather than discouraging such collusion (as the Americans did starting with the 1890 Sherman Act), stimulated industrial collaboration. Neuman demonstrates how seemingly illogical German policies since 1933 can always be explained by the interests of major industrial manufacturing cartels. Even the war itself emerges as a necessary consequence of the need to combine industrial expansion with low inflation.

I am not in a position to judge the correctness of this thesis. Perhaps the Marxist perspective has led the author to conveniently ignore important contingencies and specific aspects of early 20th-century German education and consciousness. This does not diminish the interest of the book and the wealth of information and observation it offers.

Katie Brennan says

the first edition was written in 1942 (only later editions expand to '44), and this book is totally amazing for how much franz neumann was able to learn (contemporaneously!) about the nitty-gritty of party politics, state bureaucracy, and economic practices in nazi germany. highlights include the role of magic in european monarchies (takes up about a paragraph in this 500 page book, but totally interesting), the nazi attitudes toward international law, and speculation on the ultimate economic aims of the national socialists. it's dense, but worth it, as it's really stood the test of time.

sologdin says

Corollary to Lemkin's Axis Rule in Occupied Europe. Like Lemkin, Neumann is European attorney in exile in the United States during WW2, writing about German legal developments. Whereas Lemkin focused on the fascist periphery vis-à-vis occupation statutes, Neumann is intent on the imperial center of the Third Reich, which of necessity includes some items regarding periphery. It is overall very well accomplished. Lacks Lemkin's rigor in presentation of actual statutes and decrees (Lemkin achieved this through a separate appendix to his argument, which renders the argument manifestly substantial), though features much legal commentary & constitutional analysis. Draws as much from journalist reports as from published legal texts.

Very much a text of the Frankfurt school. Broken into four parts (not counting lukewarm intro by scholar Peter Hayes, which attempts to throw the Marxist components of the text under the bus, and not counting Neumann's own introduction, which works up a tidy narrative of the ruin of the Weimar Republic): part one is ideological ingredients of the NSDAP; part two concerns "totalitarian monopolistic economy"; part three is a survey of the society that results; part four is an appendix that updates the other parts from 1942 to 1944.

A thick text, I'll simply hit the highlights, as it's packed full of specificities.

Polycracy is the rule, rather than the exception, in the era of interventionist monopoly capitalism, wherein polycracy is "the conjunct body of independent public agencies (social insurance institutions, control boards, publicly owned corporations, and so forth), subject to no parliamentary supervision" (44)--reminds one of the APA in the US, incidentally.

Notes that "the idea of the totalitarian state grew out of the demand that all power be concentrated in the hands of the president" (47). This was intentionally anti-liberal in the NSDAP lawyer's arguments, because "an identity between the ruler and the ruled," i.e., in democratic representation, "undermined the necessary authority of leadership" (48). The totalitarian state was not mere coercive absolutism, but rather "a form of life of the racial Volk" (id.). NSDAP lawyers flipped out over this stuff, but nevertheless totalitarian "glorification of the state was abandoned a short time later" (49). Contrary to post-war critics of totalitarianism (typically from the rightwing end of liberalism), Schmitt theorized Romanic v. Germanic totalitarian doctrine; the former "regimented all spheres of life," whereas the latter "left economic activities unrestricted" (49). The enabling act of 24 March 1933 is the enthronement of this doctrine.

Though the reality is totalitarian, the ideology remained very much party-oriented: the NSDAP wanted "not the establishment of the state's totality, but of the totality of the National Socialist movement" (63). The text has much discussion of parallel state and party organs, ultimately electing the view that the Third Reich is Hobbes' eponymous behemoth, an anarchy, stateless, wherein the party, the army, the bureaucrats, and the cartels had overlapping and conflicting jurisdiction. One such parallel party organization is the SS (i.e., it is a private organization, though its head, Himmler, also has state appointments) (69).

Führerprinzip is introduced with some discussion of Luther and Calvin (no shit), which is generally kickass (85-92). Long sections on race doctrine and the doctrine of greater German empire. We see in the latter the normal attack on liberalism from the right, i.e., a frontal assault on egalitarian doctrine.

Part II: disagrees that the Third Reich is state capitalism or bureaucratic collectivism (221-225). Text really shines in its presentation of the economic organizations, which is quickly bewildering, in its cartels

(horizontal organization), trusts (vertical organizations), groups (am still not sure exactly what a group is), and combines (apparently mega-firms that span many industries, whereas cartels, trusts, and groups are local to the steel industry, or the coal industry, or the salt industry, or whatever). This type of organization is to be considered autonomous to industry, i.e., self-regulation--though of course there is plenty of public regulation, also, typically concerning procurement for the war.

Useful discussion of Germanic law of property & contract (255-261). Cartelization became compulsory by statute in July 1933 (265). So the inference to draw from this is: anti-liberalism (i.e., no competition of capitals under the aegis of antitrust law) but also anti-socialist (i.e., private property is maintained). Much like the economic statutes in Lemkin, the regulation on display here (very detailed minutiae!) involves the fixation of industry at its current state--an attempt to forestall the revolutionization of the means of production, to stay the invisible hand, and so on.

NSDAP “will not nationalize industry because National Socialism believes in a ‘spiritual’ and not a ‘materialistic’ nationalization of economy” (270). This means that Aryanzation and Germanization of capital may involve expropriation, but not socialization, as properties taken from Jewish owners and enemies of the Reich were distributed to monopolists (or to the Party)--not the public or the state.

Despite the self-organization of capitalism in the Third Reich (a process that was proceeding pre-WWI, NB), there is also the command economy which handles: “1) direct economic activities of the state, 2) of the party, 3) the control of prices, 4) of investment and profits, 5) of foreign trade, and 6) of labor” (293). Neumann sets these areas of inquiry up as antitheses to his thesis regarding totalitarian monopoly capitalism, and then produces the synthesis, which involves tracking these command economy elements through four stages (initial power, the Schacht plan, the Four Year Plan, and the war planning). Much very specific analysis of capital accounts, joint stock holdings, and other indicators. As to state activity, it is small compared to the whole. Regarding party activity, it is presented as US gangsterism, wherein the criminal conspiracy attempts to become legitimate through investment of criminal proceeds into real industry (229 ff). Price controls is reeled in by noting that this by no means abolished the market, and acts as a means of destroying small firms to the benefit of the cartels (312 ff). Denies that profit control exists (316), noting that NSDAP likes “productive capital,” as opposed to “predatory” or “parasitical” capital. (“Whenever the outcry against the sovereignty of banking capital is injected into a popular movement, it is the surest sign that fascism is on its way” (322).) As for foreign trade, presents the nifty idea that NSDAP is not autarkic by doctrine, but merely as a preparation for war (329 ff). Great discussion of contract law historically regarding the control of labor (contract challenged as liberal, &c)--which makes for a return to corvee levies and chattel slavery (337 ff). In the end, “the profit motive holds the machinery together” (354).

Ends with the “contribution of the National Socialist party to the success of the war economy is nil. It has not furnished any man of outstanding merit, nor has it contributed any single ideology or organizational idea that was not fully developed under the Weimar Republic” (351).

Part III lays out NSDAP production of a ruling class, ruled classes, and the ultimate result. Contrary to the Lederer thesis that the Third Reich is classless (365), the goal is rather atomization: a social policy that “consists in the acceptance and strengthening of the prevailing class character of German society, in the attempted consolidation of its ruling class, in the atomization of the subordinate strata through the destruction of every autonomous group mediating between them and the state, in the creation of a system of autocratic bureaucracies interfering in all human relations” (366). The four competing groups (army, party, bureaucracy, industry) participate in this process. Clarifies: “Nothing could be more erroneous than to call National Socialism a feudal system, for the essence of feudalism, sociologically speaking, is the directness of human relations expressed without mediation by a market. Bureaucratization of the economy entails the

complete depersonalization of all property relations. Even the traditional market economy leaves a large number of direct human relations in existence" (386). (This all brushes against the grain of Dimitrov and Dutt, incidentally--but that's to be expected, as this is Frankfurt marxism.)

NB: "By the Hereditary Estate Act, in force since 1 October 1933, the peasant (only if racially a pure Aryan, of course) was tied to the land" (394). (Perhaps a bit inconsistent with the commentary on feudalism, *supra*, though!). NB also: "the peasant elite is being created without de-feudalizing or even dividing the entailed Junker estates" (395). Nonetheless, many such estates, referenced as latifundia at times by author, were subject to some sort of sequestration, as described in detail by Lemkin for the occupied territories (396 ff).

Punchline of much of this is that the "various strata are not held together by a common loyalty. To whom could they give it, after all? Not to the state, for it has been abolished ideologically and even to a certain extent in reality" (397). (This thesis builds on the discussion of international law in the Third Reich, which argued against the Third Reich being a state proper (151 ff).) All four of the parallel ruling groups "is sovereign and authoritarian; each is equipped with legislative, administrative, and judicial power" (398).

Regarding the ruled classes, NSDAP objective is to "create a uniformly sado-masochistic character" (402)-- cf. Adorno! Thorough presentation herein of the labor movement from Weimar to the Third Reich, all damned interesting. "Wage differentiation is the very essence of National Socialist wage policy" (433), i.e., performance bonuses and piece work compensation, rather than wages based on incremental time. Extremely strong section on the transformation of the legal system into a system of individualistic arbitrariness (440-58).

Concludes with a discussion of the hobbesian Behemoth. Denies that the Third Reich is a hobbesian Leviathan (459), but is rather "a non-state, a situation characterized by complete lawlessness" (id.). Denies that there is a coherent political ideology, but merely opportunistic pragmatism, cynical and nihilistic (463).

Denies that the Third Reich is a state: "We are not concerned with the sophistry of this new theory of transubstantiation implied by the identification of the Leader and the people" (469). Rather, "advanced National Socialist constitutional theory, although attacked by Carl Shmitt, clearly admits that it is not a state which unifies political power but that there are three (in our view, four) co-existent political powers, the unification of which is not institutionalized but only personalized" (id.).

Part III: updates all sections extremely concretely through 1944 (521-634).

Recommended!
