The Forbidden History of Left-wing Socialist Tendency within Nazism

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Superficially, there are some moderate left-wing analysts claiming that "nazis included socialist as a catchphrase to attract more workers to their political party", unaware of their own lack of understanding to the complicated historical context of the time. Thus, examining these complexities is vital, especially considering the contemporary resurgence of far-right nationalism, de-globalisation attempts and anti-immigration populism. Understanding the nuances of far-right politics and its historical context is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent the rise of similar ideologies nowadays.

Left-wing's Antisemitism

To analyse whether there were left-wing socialist roots within Nazism, it's necessary to start by trying to understand the long history of antisemitism within the left which even still exists during these days. Leila Al-Shami, a Syrian anarchist, critically labelled the contemporary pro-Assad Western left and their anti-imperialist stance as "the anti-imperialism of the idiots." This critique resonates with historical precedents. For instance, around the turn of the 20th century, the concept of "Jewish capital" gained traction within certain left-wing circles, equating capitalism with Jewish influence. This constituted a dangerous blend of anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, and antisemitic conspiracy theories. August Bebel, one of the political leaders of Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) at its good days, described the socialism of those who believed in economic antisemitism within the progressive left of the time as 'the socialism of fools'.

It is crucial to acknowledge that even figures like Mikhail Bakunin, a prominent anarchist philosopher, held views that exhibited similar antisemitic tendencies. Within the letter "Study of the German Jews*", Bakunin wrote as follows:*

> *I know that in speaking out my intimate thoughts on the Jews with such frankness expose myself to immense dangers. Many people share these thoughts, but very few dare to express them publicly, for the Jewish sect, which is much more formidable than that of the Catholic and Protestant Jesuits, today constitutes a veritable power in Europe.*

In response to the letter, Bakunin's friend Alexander Herzen reacted to this racist letter by complaining to Nicholas Ogarev, "why all this talk of race and of Jews?". Bakunin can also be seen equating the capitalist state with central state bank as "parasitic Jewish nation". Thus, it's empirical to say that Bakunin believed that an international Jewish conspiracy played a key role in running the world.

The Kingdom of Shylock, a pamphlet written in 1915 by Australian socialist politician Frank Anstey of the Labor Party, contained antisemitic content, some of which were later deleted in a republication. The original pamphlet's circulation was suppressed because of its antisemitic elements.

Rudolf Jung, one of the most prominent early theoreticians of National Socialism, was well-known among his peers for his 'leftist' commitment to labour activism and far-reaching socio-economic reform, claimed that Judaism and capitalism are identical, by quoting Werner and his work "The Jews and Economic Life". This notion of a 'socialism of fools' was not exclusive to Rudolf Jung. Similar views were espoused by other prominent figures within the early Nazi Party, including Otto Strasser, Gregor Strasser, Joseph Goebbels, and Alfred Krebs.

National Socialist Movement

Nowadays, a lot of left-wing historians, and journalists from mainstream media claimed that "the Nazi regime had little to do with socialism, despite it being prominently included in the name of the National Socialist German Workers". They would, in their unknowingly ignorant way, superficially claim that the National Socialist German Workers' Party wanted to attract more workers to their party base. These narratives are not only superficial but also demonstrate a lack of understanding about the history related to Germany, and the history of anti-capitalist movements within Europe. This attempt to rewrite history through propaganda will ultimately have detrimental consequences for the public. If the public remains unaware of the true nature of the Nazis, they will be unable to effectively oppose them. Understanding the origins of National Socialist ideology requires an examination of the historical context, specifically the divisions within the socialist movement.

Franko Stein, an Austrian and Czech journalist, who was a believer of national syndicalism founded a nationalist and socialist trade union namely National Association of German Workers in Bohemia in 1893. National Association of German Workers was a unionist movement that endorsed the antisemitic political agenda of Austrian politician namely Georg Ritter von Schönerer who stayed against the arrival of Jewish refugees during the Russian Empire's pogroms, since 1881. National Association of German Workers claimed that it's pan-German, anti-Slavic, antisemitic, and anti-Catholic trade unionist movement. Rudolf Jung, one of the earliest theoretician of "national socialism", later in his book "National Socialism: It's Foundations, Development, and Goals", claimed that "Pan-German was originally conceived as a grass-roots movement, inevitably led to the evolution of a unique political and trade unionist tendency".

Similarly, Pierre Biétry, a French syndicalist affiliated with the French Workers' Party (POF), emerged as an early ideological forerunner to national socialism. His advocacy for unionism earned recognition in Le Socialiste, the POF's official publication. Distancing himself from orthodox Marxism—often termed "red socialism"—Biétry pioneered an alternative movement known as "yellow socialism," which represents a more moderate form of socialism compared to Marxism. In 1902, he established the Fédération nationale des jaunes de France, a trade union aligned with his views, followed by the creation of a political counterpart, the National Socialist Party, in 1903. Influenced by the anti-Semitic rhetoric of Édouard Drumont, Biétry incorporated xenophobic themes into his anti-capitalist corporatist agenda.

Second International vs. Third International Nationalist or Internationalist

"National Socialist" movement was not a fringe contrarian group that combined nationalism and socialism. Nationalism was indeed popular among the socialist movement during those days. To understand the context, it's important to analyse the nationalist split and the internationalist split that occurred within the Second International. Second International was generally represented by the social democratic tradition of gradualism. Its key ideas were mainly influenced by classical or orthodox Marxist thinkers such as Karl Kautsky, and Georgi Plekhanov, in contrast to Leninism.

Even though there were infightings based on ideological questions of gradualism and vanguardism, the main split was more influenced by the effects of the World War I. The social democrat camps were split into at least two camps: nationalists (defencist) and internationalists. Julius Martov, a minority internationalist Menshevik can be served as an example of how internationalist social democrats were alienated among the social democrats during the World War I. While most Mensheviks were defencist socialists, Julius Martov considered the war as "imperialist war". Similarly, Leon Trotsky called the Second International a "rigid shell" from which socialism must be liberated. Lenin denounced the Second International as a "stinking corpse" and, called for the formation of a Third International at a Bolshevik conference in Berne in early 1915. This historical record demonstrates the presence of nationalist tendencies within the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) during the early 20th century. This is evidenced by the 1915 split of the "International Socialists of Germany" from the SPD, indicating a divergence on internationalist principles. Furthermore, prominent figures like Otto Strasser, who later joined the anti-capitalist and nationalist German Völkisch Freedom Party, were initially members of the SPD.

This highlights the existence of antisemitic leanings within certain sectors of the party, as exemplified by individuals like Julius Schreck, a founding member of the Sturmabteilung (SA) and the first leader of the Schutzstaffel (SS) who also served as a member of the Bavarian Red Army of Bavarian Soviet Republic in late April 1919. Besides, the Sturmabteilung (SA) was at that time known to be socialist leaned. This historical context demonstrates that nationalistic socialism was not a marginal or novel phenomenon within the broader socialist movement.

The Original Nazism (Strasserism) & Economic Antisemitism

Scott Sehon published an article via Jacobin Magazine asserting that Nazism was not a form of socialism. While acknowledging the initial socialist leanings within the Nazi Party, exemplified by figures like Gregor Strasser,Scott Sehon's article, responded to Senator Rand Paul's 2019 book "The Case Against Socialism," which mistakenly labelled Hitler a socialist. He also ultimately presented a misleading claim "Nazism was not a form of socialism" by downplaying Strasser's left-wing Nazi fraction and their social-democratic economic antisemitism. This omission appears to be driven by a focus on the suppression of Strasser's faction by Hitler during the Night of the Long Knives.

"Resolution from a National Socialist Conference 1920" stated that "the German National Socialist Party declared to commit itself to the class standpoint of productive labour and therefore, it was a class party". Also, "Guiding Principles of the National Socialist Party" cleared stated that they advocate unconditionally for all largescale capitalist enterprises which constitute private monopolies to be transferred into the possession of the state, province (Völkisch self-governing bodies) or municipality. Rudolf Jung, one of the most prominent early theoreticians of National Socialism called the program "a socialist one" in his book "National Socialism". So, it's factually wrong, and morally corrupted to exclude the ideology Strasser's faction within Nazi party while discussing the ideology of Nazi party.

Gregor Strasser, a left-wing fraction leader within Nazi party, once said the following which was quoted by Troy Southgate in his book "Tradition & Revolution".

> *The Capitalist system with its exploitation of those who are economically weak, with its robbery of the workers labor power, with its unethical way of appraising human beings*

by the number of things and the amount of money he possesses, instead of by their internal value and their achievements, must be replaced by a new and just economic system, in a word by German Socialism.

Gregor Strasser also wrote the following in his text "Thoughts about the Tasks of the Future":

We have to learn that in the economy of a people it is not profit, not gain, which are important – but only satisfying the needs of the members of this people! This and nothing else are the task of a "national economics!" We have to learn that the ideas "world trade" "balance of trade" – "export surplus" are ideas of a declining epoch which have in the end reduced themselves ad absurdum, because they violate the eternal law of organic life and were born out of speculation, not out of necessity, not out of the soil! We have to learn that it is a betrayal when speculative production, with all its means of touting and advertising, creates an artificial need, a betrayal of human labor, of human life!

Gregor Strasser also wrote the following in his text "Motherhood and Warriorhood":

We are socialists. We are enemies, deadly enemies, of today's capitalist economic system with its exploitation of the economically weak, its unfair wage system, its immoral way of judging the worth of human beings in terms of their wealth and their money, instead of their responsibility and performance, and we are determined to destroy this system whatever happens! We have never left any doubts about the fact that our national socialism puts an end to the privileges of wealth, and that the emancipation of the worker involves participation in profits, property, and management. We must learn that work means more than possessions! Performance is more than dividends! It is the most wretched legacy of this capitalist system that the criterion for everything's value is money, wealth, possessions!

Besides, Gregor Strasser also wrote the following in his text "The Slave-Market of Capitalism":

"Long live freedom! Long live Germany! Long live the accomplishments of the Revolution! Are you familiar with these cries, German worker?" Down with the slavery of capitalism! Down with bloodsucking international world finance! Down with their leaders, their spokesmen, their henchmen: nationally-poisonous Judaism!

For a national socialist like Gregor Strasser, he identified himself as a socialist, deadly enemy of capitalist system that exploits the economically weak with the unfair wage system, who would fight for the emancipation of the workers. However, for them, capitalism is inherently linked with either Judaism or Jewishness or Jews. They're the nationalist fraction of the left that suffered economic antisemitism at the time.

Following Stalinist USSR model, they also aimed to establish socialism in one country. Gregor Strasser can be seen writing the following in his text "The Slave-Market of Capitalism":

The common front of productive national Labor as the community of all productive German folk-comrades, united in the coming, salvation-bringing National Socialist state.

Otto Strasser, one of the most prominent early left-wing theoreticians of National Socialism, can be seen differentiating the different type of socialism in his text "On the Nature of Capitalism" which was first published July 1927.

> *There are few terms in which this deterioration of value, this variegation of perception, is quite so evident as with the terms 'capitalism' and 'socialism', which are intended to designate two mutually hostile systems. What isn't called 'socialist' these days? First and foremost, there are the Marxists of both persuasions, Social-Democrats and Social-Dictators (known as 'Communists'). Alongside these, there is also 'Front-Socialism', 'Young-Socialism', and above all there is our 'National Socialism'!*

He then later continued explaining how he understood capitalism. Some of the worth reading sentences can be as follow:

> *Thus far I have become acquainted with two very good definitions of the capitalist economic system from the theoreticians of National Socialism, which, in spite of their brevity, give expression to the essence of capitalism; these are Dr. Rosikat's formulation: "Capitalism is the rule of property over labour," and Gregor Strasser's formula: "Capitalism is the organization of scarcity in order to achieve the greatest possible profit." It is therefore capitalist to the highest degree to demand surplus labour for the purpose of increasing production and reducing production costs. Capitalism, however, imposes long working hours without consideration for the national welfare and public health of the Volk, exclusively in the interest of increased profits. The hunger for money is thus the motor of the capitalist system. Money is the great ruler, money is the measure of all things, the possession of money or valuables the measure of every man! – And this leads me to the 'soul of capitalism', to the fundamental source of its being! Everyone who appraises the value of his fellow human beings according to their ownership of money or valuables – he is a capitalist and is our enemy!*

Otto Strasser considered capitalists as the first and foremost enemy of the Nazi party. Similarly, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, who was a Nazi party propaganda minister, once wrote the following in his text "Capitalism" which was first published 15 July, 1929.

> *The socialist worldview begins with the Volk and then moves on to things. Things are subordinated to the Volk; the socialist places the Volk above everything, and things are only a means to an end. If in economic struggles it places itself on the side of those who are hostile to the Volk – no matter how nationalist they might purport to be – then it is capitalist. If, on the other hand, it serves justice and that which is synonymous with it, state necessity, then it is socialist. We are socialists who want money to serve the Volk, we therefore rebel against this state of affairs, priming the will to break an intolerable system so that, from the ruins of the democratic money-province, there shall someday arise the socialist German national state.*

Dr. Albert Krebs, former leader of the NSDAP's Hamburg branch, intensified the party's left-wing socialist stance. In his 1930 publication, "Against Capitalism," aimed at a left-wing audience, he urged his supporters to join the fight against capitalism.

> *You, dear friend from the Left, curse capitalism and understand it as that mysterious power which deprives you of your just wages, which allows you to live in dark holes and lets your children gradually grow into withered and weary creatures from youth. We National Socialists regard all property as hereditary fiefs of the nation, which the respective owner has to administer out of a sense of responsibility towards the community.*

Thus, empirical evidence suggests that the early Nazi Party, along with its nationalist leanings, exhibited anti-capitalist tendencies. While their economic policies were influenced by antisemitism, the party initially espoused a form of socialism, albeit one characterized by a nationalistic focus.

Forgotten History of Collaboration between Nazis and Marxist-Leninists

The common assertion that Nazis murdered communists the first during World War II oversimplifies the complex historical reality. Ideological conflicts were rampant among various political factions, including within communist and Nazi ranks. Stalinist regimes in the USSR brutally suppressed left-wing opposition, including fellow communists like Leon Trotsky. Similarly, Hitler purged his own party, eliminating rival factions like the Strasserites during the Night of the Long Knives. Consequently, the assertion that Nazis and communists were inherently and exclusively adversarial may represent an oversimplified and inaccurate interpretation of historical events.

Historically, the Communist Party of Germany considered the left-wing elements of Nazi party, led by Otto Strasser as their comrades. The "Open Letter" of Scheringer and numerous bulletins used the terms such as "Comrade S.A". In short, Communist Party of Germany literally called those from Sturmabteilung, the original paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party as "Comrades".

Communist Party of Germany under the Third International (Communist International) led by Stalin collaborated with Nazi (National Socialist German Workers') Party of Germany against the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). In the 1931 Landtag Referendum in Prussia, the Communist Party endorsed, at Stalin's behest, a Nazi referendum to overthrow the SPD government.

In 1923, the leader of the KPD in Berlin, Ruth Fischer, had given a speech to Nazi college students and attempted to appeal to them with abhorrent antisemitism, declaring that,

> "Those who call for a struggle against Jewish capital are already class fighters… You are against Jewish capital and want to fight the speculators. Very good. Throw down the Jewish capitalists, hang them from the lamppost, stomp on them."

In November 1932, an unusual alliance emerged as members of the Communist Party and the Nazi Party united to support a strike by Berlin transport workers, actively collecting funds for the striking workers.

According to Gilles Vergnon's text "The KPD and Nazism 1930–1933", Otto Strasser commented on the adhesion to the KDP of Scherigner and Stenbock-Fermor by saying

> *"We're delighted that, through these adhesions of national-socialists to the KPD, the progress of de-Marxifying this party will be able to go ahead. We know that German blood is thicker and stronger than the spirit of Marxism".*

Also, in the same report, Gilles Vergnon reported that

> *the militants of the KDP were often unable to stand up in discussion with their contacts in the SA or with workers influenced by Nazism, with whom, as Simone Weil has stressed, "they could not identify the point of disagreement".*

The observation offered by Simone Weil that Communist Party cadres and militants in Germany struggled to identify significant points of disagreement with Nazi supporters reveals intriguing parallels between Nazi ideology and the authoritarian tendencies of Stalinism and other left-wing authoritarian movements.

Also, in the same report, Gilles Vergnon reported that

> *the police sources show that the Berlin S.A., which at one moment was in rebellion against the national leadership of the N.S.D.A.P., was already hesitating to join the Strasser-ians suspected of Communism.*

According to "Alarm", the liaison bullet of R.F.B (Roter Frontkämpferbund Alliance of Red Front-Fighters) for November 1931 declared:

> *One can belong to the Reichsbanner, to the S.P.D., to the Zentrun (German Centre Party) and even to the N.S.D.A.P and at the same time be a member of the Kampfbund. In Hitler's party, there are many honest revolutionary elements, who fight against Hitler's fascist course and have anti-capitalist idea.*

Despite accusing the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of "social fascism," communists from KDP did not necessarily perceive the Strasserites within the Nazi party as enemies. They recognized the Strasserites as revolutionary elements, albeit with anti-capitalist tendencies, downplaying their economic antisemitism and nationalist leanings.

Hitlerite Tendency

The Nazi Party contained internal factions, such as Rudolf Jung's group and the Strasserites, that held left-wing socialist, anti-capitalist, and economic antisemitism. While Hitler's faction differed significantly, it's a misrepresentation to categorize Hitlerite Nazism as simply capitalist or socialist.

Hitlerite Nazism held fringe and pseudoscience racial theories which had the roots in a French academic named Georges Vacher de Lapouge. Georges Vacher de Lapouge was a lecturer of Anthropology and a theoretician of eugenics and (pseudo)scientific racism. Here, it's important to note that Georges Vacher de Lapouge was an influential socialist thinker who co-founded French Workers' Party along with Jules Guesde, and Paul Lafargue (son-in-law of Karl Marx). Later, his theories of eugenics and (pseudo)scientific racism played a vital role to Hitlerite tendency within the Nazi party.

However, Hitler was more of a pragmatic and charismatic person than a dogmatic ideologist. So were his followers. In Otto Strasser "Hitler and I", the followings were written:

> *"Apropos of Mein Kampf, I remember an amusing incident which I shall relate here, though it is anticipating my story by several years. It took place at the Nazi Party Congress at Nurnberg in 1927. I had been a member of the Party for two-and-a-half years and presented the annual report. In the course of it I quoted a few phrases from Mein Kampf, and this caused a certain sensation. That evening, at dinner with several colleagues Feder Kaufmann Koch and others, they asked me if I had really read the book, with which not one of them seemed to be familiar I admitted having quoted some significant passages from it without bothering my head about the context. This caused general amusement, and it was agreed that the first person who joined us who had read Mein Kampf should pay the bill for us all. Gregor answer when he arrived was a resounding no. Goebbels shook his head guiltily, Goering burst into loud laughter and Count Reventlow excused himself on the ground that he had no time. No body had read Mein Kampf, so everybody had to pay his own bill."*

Otto Strasser, a prominent figure within the early Nazi Party, claimed that many of the party's leaders, including those at the highest levels, had not actually read Adolf Hitler's book, Mein Kampf. This suggests that a significant portion of Nazi supporters may have been more drawn to the ideology of the Strasserites faction, which differed from Hitler's more extreme and ultimately dominant vision.

In a letter written on 6 September 1921 to the leader of the Hanover district group of the NSDAP, it was written as follows:

> *What we need is to attract powerful masses, preferably from the extreme left and extreme right wing.*

According to a monologue on 30 November 1941, Hitler was reportedly saying that "his party at the time consisted of ninety per cent of people from the left".

The following quote of Hitler can be found in the book "A Concise History of Nazi Germany" by Joseph W. Bendersky.

> *Nazism rejected the Marxist concept of class conflict, and it praised both German capitalists and German workers as essential to the community. In the community, social classes would continue to exist, but there would be no class conflict between them.*

Here, it can be confirmed that Nazism has the economic policy of national class collaboration just like in Italy's state corporatism.

Summing up

It is factually correct to acknowledge that early Nazi ideology, before Hitler's consolidation of power, included significant socialist elements. Unlike the Hitlerite faction, which embraced pseudoscientific racial theories, the Strasserites faction within the Nazi party were anti-capitalist pan-German nationalists who primarily suffered from economic antisemitism. Both the Hitlerite and Strasserites factions, despite their differences, originated from the national syndicalist movement. Thus, combating fascism and Nazism effectively requires a strong ideological counterforce.

Since historically, all forms of fascism have rejected liberal principles like democracy, open migration, individualism, limited government, and civil rights, a key strategy could involve championing these liberal values. A more radical approach might involve advocating for international solidarity beyond the identity politics in the light of social justice, stateless solutions to intersectional oppressions, acknowledging the uniqueness of the individuals, the recognition of class struggle as a driving force of the history and defending universal human rights along with the civil liberties of every human being.

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