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Richard Walther Darré, National Socialism, and Bauernpolitik

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RICHARD WALTHER DARRÉ, NATIONAL SOCIALISM, AND BAUERNPOLITIK

An Abstract of a Thesis

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Andrew P. Harnois

University of Northern Iowa

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ABSTRACT

Richard Walther Darré joined the National Socialist German Workers Party in 1930 at the behest of Adolf Hitler and was Germany's Reichsminister of Agriculture from 1933 to 1942. Darré was recruited by Hitler because of his Blood and Soil ideology. This ideology was peasant-centric and argued that the German peasant embodied the ideal racial form and pushed for a rebirth of German agriculture.

This thesis examines the career of Richard Walther Darré and focuses on two questions: first, what role did Darré's Blood and Soil ideology play in his rise and removal from power; and, second, does Darré's fall from power inform us about any policies Hitler and NSDAP might have had about official's removal from power?

I argue that Darré's Blood and Soil ideology was responsible for both his rise and fall from power. Darré was unable to navigate the political landscape that was the Third Reich, and his devotion to his Blood and Soil ideology made it impossible for him to properly administer German agriculture and peasant policy. 1938 marked a turning point in Darré's career. He split with his closest ally, Heinrich Himmler, and set himself on the path to imminent demise. Despite Hitler's push for conquest, Darré focused inward on improving the existing peasantry within Germany through methods such as biodynamic agriculture or through improved prices for agricultural goods to entice peasants from leaving the countryside. Darré refused to change his policies as the

political and social landscape radically changed with World War II. Because of this he was eventually fully removed from power in 1942.

In regard to personnel policy, I argue that all personnel decisions centered around maintaining the party's power. I examine party publications as well as Darré and six other officials' removals to draw this conclusion. Betrayal, scandal, and incompetence were all leveraged by Hitler to preserve the party's image during the Third Reich.

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INTRODUCTION

Richard Walther Darré created the “Blood and Soil” ideology for the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP). In its simplest form, the Blood and Soil ideology argued that settled races were superior to nomadic races; the ideology was peasant-centric, populist, and anti-urban. Darré applied this ideology to the German peasantry and argued that through its racial purity and lack of spatial movement the German peasantry embodied the ideal racial form. This ideology helped fuel Darré’s rise from obscurity in 1930 to the leadership of agriculture for both the party and state in 1933. When Darré joined the NSDAP, it did not have a peasant program and was desperate to diversify to garner more support.¹ Darré was an experienced farmhand and agricultural advisor who had been removed from his position as a Prussian agricultural advisor in 1929. In 1928 and 1929, Darré wrote two books: *Bauerntum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* and *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden*.² In these two books, Darré outlined his ideology on settled persons, nomads, and the German nobility, which would come to be known as Blood and Soil.

¹ The peasantry refers, for the most part, to farmers and farmhands on small and medium sized farms. It does not include the large estate farms that were found in Prussia.

² Richard Walther Darré, *Bauerntum Als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* (Munich: Lehmann, 1929); Richard Walther Darré, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich: Lehmann, 1930).

The Blood and Soil ideology made Darré and, in turn, the NSDAP, popular with the peasantry, a relatively large yet neglected social group.³ Darré rode this wave of popularity to his promotion as Reichsminister of Agriculture in 1933. Shortly thereafter, Darré became the Reich Peasant Leader and penned two hallmark pieces of legislation to aid him in his quest to rebuild the German peasantry: The Hereditary Farm Law and The Reich Food Estate Law. At the same time, Darré worked with Heinrich Himmler to strengthen German racial stock within the Schutzstaffel (SS) through selective marriage measures. Darré believed that by selectively breeding humans, as animals, traits could be strengthened or eliminated over generations.

Darré had a strong start to his career in 1933 with a good harvest. In 1934 and 1935, however, saddled with poor harvests, peasant flight to urban jobs, and low food prices, Darré's weaknesses as an agricultural administrator became apparent, and in 1936 Herbert Backe became the head of the agricultural sector in the newly created Office of the Four Year Plan. Herbert Backe was Darré's deputy in multiple organizations and was more technically minded than Darré. Backe and Darré coexisted for six years in this situation. In the SS, Himmler and Darré's working relationship would only last until 1938 when a disagreement in peasant policy led to Darré's resignation from the Race and Settlement Office (RuSHA). From 1938 to 1942, Darré slowly lost influence and

³ In 1933, agricultural laborers made up approximately 29% of the German population. Found in J Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin USA, 2008), 167.

power as Herbert Backe's grew. In 1942, Darré was removed from his positions as Reichsminister, Reichsleiter, and Reich Peasant Leader.⁴ From 1942 to 1945, Darré lived largely in obscurity and did not hold any official administrative positions. At the end of the war, Darré turned himself in to the Americans and stood trial from 1947 to 1949. For his role in the NSDAP and Hitler's government Darré was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, but he was released in 1950. Darré died three years later, in 1953, from liver cancer.

The career of Richard Walther Darré raises some important questions about the NSDAP's handling of the Blood and Soil ideology, about Darré himself as a National Socialist and high-ranking official, and how the NSDAP dealt with removing high-ranking officials from power. More specifically, while the Blood and Soil ideology was integral to the NSDAP's rise to power, did the ideology maintain its importance by the late 1930s and as World War II unfolded? Second, while the Blood and Soil ideology fueled Darré's rise to power, to what extent did it lead to his eventual loss of power in the government and party? Third, how did Darré's removal from power in 1942 compare to other officials' removal from power and, more specifically, did the NSDAP have any real personnel policy that was applied in Darré's case? The goal of this thesis is to examine

⁴ Reichsleiter was the second highest ranking position in the NSDAP, only subordinate to the Führer, Adolf Hitler. Darré became a Reichsleiter in 1936 when his department in the NSDAP was promoted to a Reichsamt.

these questions and, in particular, to examine Darré's career after 1938, in which the existing historiography on Darré is deficient.

Much of the historiography on Darré focuses on the first half of his career from 1930 to 1936, and it is generally in agreement on the main points. During this period, Darré was recruited to National Socialism because of the NSDAP's need for a peasant program and because of Darré's Blood and Soil ideology.⁵ Thereafter, he consolidated his power and his ideology was massively popular with the peasantry. Third, Darré had an impact on Heinrich Himmler's peasant ideology, and they shared a friendship dating back to the 1920s.⁶ Fourth, Darré was a champion of Gleichschaltung, and cemented his position atop agriculture almost immediately after becoming Reichsminister.⁷ Finally,

⁵ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party* (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: Kensal Press, 1985), 77; E. M. Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 29; Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 170; Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 421; J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: the NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-45* (London: Sage Publications, 1976), 17.

⁶ Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 228; Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 30; Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 171; Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 152-153; Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 90.

⁷ Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party 1933-1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 58; Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 170; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 421; Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 45; Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 83-89.

Gleichschaltung literally translates to coordination or synchronization. It referred to the coordination of all aspects of German government and life under the guise of National Socialism.

the agricultural sector in Germany faced a number of problems from 1933 to 1936, and Darré and the Reich Food Estate were partially to blame for the agricultural failures.⁸

While there is general agreement on Darré's career to 1936, there is a major disagreement on the latter half of his career, specifically, on why and how he was removed from power in 1942. For example, according to Dietrich Orlow, "As late as May 1942, the [Party Chancellery] and SS celebrated a joint victory: the de facto dismissal of Walther Darré..." Thus, Orlow claims that Martin Bormann (Party) and Heinrich Himmler (SS) cooperated in removing Darré from power simply so that they could replace him with Herbert Backe.⁹ Lizzie Collingham states that Hitler replaced Darré with Backe to "revitalize the war effort."¹⁰ Adam Tooze argues that Darré was removed from power in 1942 because of a disastrous ration cut.¹¹ J. E. Farquharson believes that Darré was removed from power due to his implied unwillingness to exploit people that the NSDAP found to be racially inferior, while his replacements, Himmler and Backe, were 'in no way opposed to exploitation of "inferior" peoples.'¹² Farquharson also believes that Darré's falling out with Himmler played a critical role in his undoing.¹³ There is also the

⁸ Jonathan Harwood, "The Fate of Peasant-Friendly Plant Breeding in Nazi Germany," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 40, no. 4 (2010): 575-576; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 576-580; Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 28-29; Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 192-195; Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 168-171; Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, 546-548.

⁹ Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party 1933-1945*, 391.

¹⁰ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 370.

¹¹ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 543.

¹² Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 248.

¹³ Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 248.

opinion shared by Evans, Tooze, and Bramwell that Darré lasted as long as 1942 because of “Hitler’s notorious reluctance to be seen to discard Ministers.”¹⁴ Finally, Anna Bramwell makes the argument that Darré was removed from power because he was too headstrong and devoted to his own ideas.¹⁵ This makes sense, and is part of the argument that I will make, but one area where my analysis will differ from Bramwell’s is in how she views Darré’s personality and his ideology. In sum, there is significant divergence in the existing historiography on the reasons for Darré’s dismissal in 1942. The goal of this thesis, especially, is to bring greater clarity to this issue.

In regard to the NSDAP’s personnel decisions, the historiography is fairly barren. There were very few Reichsministers, and even fewer Reichsleiters, who were removed from power. Each one of their cases seems to be unique, but there are two similarities that can be drawn. As stated earlier, Hitler did not want to be seen as a leader who discarded ministers.¹⁶ Also, Ian Kershaw argues that Hitler had to “save face as usual” when removing high-ranking officials from power.¹⁷ Aside from these thoughts, there is little specific information in the secondary literature in regard to how the NSDAP went

¹⁴ Quote found in Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 83; Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 542; Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 40-42, 60.

¹⁵ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 179.

¹⁶ See footnote 14.

¹⁷ Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936-45: Nemesis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 599.

This specific case is in reference to Wilhelm Frick who was the Reichsminister of the Interior from 1933 until he was removed in 1942 and was then made the Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia.

about removing high-ranking officials from power. Through Darré's case I hope to shed further light on this issue.

The aforementioned secondary sources will provide much useful information for this thesis; however, there are also important primary sources that I will utilize to especially understand Darré's career after 1936. First, there are Darré's own writings. Darré wrote often and authored a number of articles, books, speeches, and laws. His two books will provide the basis of what Darré believed and what exactly his Blood and Soil ideology entailed.¹⁸ Both of his hallmark laws give insight into how Darré attempted to take his ideology and put it into practice.¹⁹ There are also multiple speeches, articles, and other writings that I will use to get a picture of Darré's opinions and ideas at specific points in time.²⁰

¹⁸ Darré, *Bauerntum Als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse*; Darré, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden*.

¹⁹ The complete Hereditary Farm Law including changes can be found at: Richard Walther Darré, "Reichserbhofgesetz," *Verfassungen*, accessed August 25, 2017, <http://www.verfassungen.de/de/de33-45/reichserbhof33.htm>; The complete Reich Food Estate Law including changes can be found at: Richard Walther Darré, "Gesetz über den vorläufigen Aufbau des Reichsnährstandes und Maßnahmen zur Markt- und Preisregelung für landwirtschaftliche Erzeugnisse," *Verfassungen*, accessed August 25, 2017, <http://www.verfassungen.de/de/de33-45/reichsnaehrstand33-2.htm>.

²⁰ Richard Walther Darré, *Neuordnung unseres Denkens* (Goslar: Verlag Blut und Boden, 1940); Richard Walther Darré, *Vom Lebensgesetz Zweier Staatsgedanken* (Goslar: Verlag Blut und Boden, 1940); Richard Walther Darré, *Um Blut und Boden* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf, GmbH, 1941); Richard Walther Darré, *Blut und Boden ein Grundgedanke des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1936); Oskar Just and Willrich Wolfgang, *Nordisches Blutserbe im Süddeutschen Bauerntum* (Munich: Verlag F. Bruckman, 1938).

Diaries will be another important source of information on Darré. Joseph Goebbels mentions Darré multiple times, including the day Hitler dismissed him.²¹ Goebbels also provides insight into the political lives of most other high-ranking officials, and I will use his diary to better understand the NSDAP's personnel decisions. Helmuth Groscurth sheds some light into Hermann Göring's disdain of Darré.²² Alfred Rosenberg recalls Darré reflecting on his quarrels with Himmler.²³ Finally, Ulrich von Hassel provides critical insight into Darré's relationship with the peasantry in 1939.²⁴

I will also utilize a pair of memoirs written well after the end of National Socialism. Hjalmar Schacht, a man with whom Darré quarreled during the better years of both of their careers, explains what he believes Darré's failures were. Schacht also describes the process by which Hitler removed him (Schacht) from power.²⁵ And Albert Speer provides a top National Socialist's opinion on Darré and his ideology.²⁶

Some of Hitler's personal beliefs from the mid-1920s from *Mein Kampf* will be of use on the topic of personnel decisions. In a chapter on propaganda and organization,

²¹ Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924-1945* (Munich: Piper, 1999).

²² Helmuth Groscurth, *Tagebücher eines Abwehroffiziers 1938-1940* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970).

²³ Alfred Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the Onset of the Holocaust*, trans. Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

²⁴ Ulrich von Hassel, *The Von Hassell Diaries 1938-1944*, trans. Allen Welsh Dulles (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947).

²⁵ Hjalmar Schacht, *My First Seventy-Six Years*, trans. Diana Pyke (London: Allan Wingate, 1955).

²⁶ Albert Speer, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976).

Hitler explained, on a very basic level, what the personnel policy of the NSDAP should be, especially once it was in power.²⁷ There are also a pair of collections of Hitler's transcribed war-time monologues that provide insight into Hitler's personal thoughts on others in the party.²⁸

Lastly, the case record of the Ministries Trial by the American Military Tribunal at Nuremberg provides unique insight into Darré's opinions after the war, and it also houses some documentary evidence that is not easily accessible elsewhere.²⁹ Unfortunately, a number of personal documents belonging to Darré and his successor, Herbert Backe, are inaccessible because of the protected nature of the archives in which they are housed.

This thesis consists of three chapters. In chapter one, I explain Darré's ideology and the evolution of his career from 1930 to 1938. This includes the development of his ideology before joining the party and how he attempted to practically apply his ideology through legislation. I explain how he became a Reichsminister, Reichsleiter, and the

²⁷ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 584.

²⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Table Talk 1941-1944*, trans. H R Trevor-Roper (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953); Adolf Hitler, *Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier 1941/1942* (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1965).

²⁹ *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 12, "The Ministries Case" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952); *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, "The Ministries Case" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952); *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 14, "The Ministries Case" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952).

head of the RuSHA. I also explore a number of problems that he faced from 1936 to 1938. This provides the groundwork for the essential second chapter in which I explain Darré's undoing.

In chapter two, I lay out my own research on Darré's demise, and how it was rooted in his peasant ideology, Blood and Soil. I argue that there were a number of ancillary factors connected to this demise, but Blood and Soil was deeply implicated in all of them: Darré's loss of influence in peasant matters, Landflucht³⁰, the decline in Darré's popularity with the peasantry, and Darré's deteriorating relationships with other high-ranking government and NSDAP officials. The accumulating effect of these factors, inflected as they were with Darré's insistence on sticking to Blood and Soil and underpinned by his administrative incompetence, led to Darré's increasing marginalization after he left the RuSHA in 1938, and it culminated in his eventual total loss of power in 1942. Lastly, I discuss Darré's life after 1942 until his death in 1953.

In chapter three, I explain how the fundamental principle of NSDAP personnel policy was to protect the party image at all costs. To explain this policy, I use two main methods of research. First, I use statements about personnel policy made in *Mein Kampf* and the *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP*. Second, I examine six separate officials to explain how there were three main reasons that the NSDAP used to remove officials from power: treason and betrayal, scandal and the preservation of party image, and

³⁰ Landflucht literally translates to land flight. It refers to agricultural workers leaving farms and moving to the cities for better wages.

ineffectiveness and incompetence. Lastly, I explain how Darré's case fits into this personnel policy.

CHAPTER 1

Richard Walther Darré was one of several foreign-born Germans who found a place in the NSDAP. Darré was born on July 14, 1895 in Buenos Aires, Argentina to an ethnic German family. He attended a German school in Belgrano until he was ten, but then moved to Germany to continue his education in Heidelberg and later in Godesberg. From 1911 to 1913, Darré studied as an exchange student at King's College in Wimbledon, England, but by April 1914 Darré began studying agriculture at the Colonial School in Witzenhausen with hopes of returning to Argentina as a farmer. However, this would never transpire; three months later he left school to join the German military.¹

Darré's military career lasted the duration of the First World War and was served entirely on the Western Front. Darré served in thirty separate battles at the front and achieved the rank of Second Lieutenant and earned the Iron Cross Second Class. After World War I, Darré resumed his studies at the Colonial School in Witzenhausen with a new desire to pursue a career in agronomy within the Reich.² In 1920 Darré completed his studies in Witzenhausen, and in 1922 began studying agronomy at the University in Halle. During his tenure at Halle he had a practicum in animal research, and after he

¹ Hermann Reischle, *Reichsbauernführer Darré* (Berlin: Verlag und Vertriebsgesellschaft, 1935), 16.

² Reischle, *Reichsbauernführer Darré*, 27.

finished his studies at Halle in 1925 he began unpaid work for the horse-breeding firm Trakhener Stud in 1926.

Darré became an active writer following his time at Halle publishing fourteen articles on plant and animal breeding from 1925 to 1927. In 1926, Darré released one of his most famous articles “Das Schwein als Kriterium für nordische Völker und Semiten” in which he first laid forth his theory on settled races and nomads which would later be the basis of his Blood and Soil ideology. In the article, Darré explained that to properly rear domestic pigs, a person had to be rooted to one area because the domestic pig is not capable of living a highly mobile, or nomadic, lifestyle.³ Darré argued that Jews’ aversion to pork stemmed from the fact that they were nomadic and for this reason were incapable of rearing pigs.⁴ Therefore, Darré’s main argument was, “The domestic pig gives us clear evidence that Nordic peoples were settled races and that Jews’ rejection of that same animal proves their nomadism just as clearly.”⁵

In 1928 Darré became an expert agricultural advisor for the East Prussian Ministry of Agriculture. During his tenure in this position Darré gained an understanding of how the German agricultural bureaucracy worked. In the same year Darré began work on his masterpiece, *Bauerntum als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse*, that would be released in December 1928. In *Bauerntum* Darré expanded and elaborated on his

³ Richard Walther Darré, *Das Schwein als Kriterium für nordische Völker und Semiten* (Munich: Lehmann, 1933), 8-9.

⁴ Darré, *Das Schwein*, 8.

⁵ Darré, *Das Schwein*, 15.

ideas regarding settled races and nomads that he had begun in “Das Schwein”. Darré argued that Germans are a settled race by nature whose culture has been developed by its peasantry and their connection and influence on the land where they have been settled. The settled race’s antithesis is a nomadic race whose culture is entirely “subordinate to their environment because of their parasitic nature.”⁶ Aside from Jews, Darré also named Muslims and the Chinese as examples of nomadic races.⁷ Darré believed that a settled race’s blood was pure because its kinsmen would only mate with their kinsmen, thereby preserving their cultural and racial integrity; in contrast, Darré believed that nomadic races spread their influence through blood by mating with settled races that they would encounter during their travels, thereby tainting the purity of the offspring’s blood.⁸ This ideology that placed settled races and, specifically, the peasantry at the center of cultural and racial life was Blood and Soil.

In 1929 Darré lost his position with the East Prussian Ministry of Agriculture due to arguments over seed quality with ministry officials in Berlin.⁹ Around this same time Darré began working on his second book, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden*, which was published in 1930. In *Neuadel* Darré explained how Germany could create a new peasant-based nobility using his Blood and Soil ideology. Darré believed that the old

⁶ Richard Walther Darré, *Das Bauerntum Als Lebensquell der Nordischen Rasse* (Munich: Lehmann, 1929), 47.

⁷ Darré, *Bauerntum*, 17.

⁸ Darré, *Bauerntum*, 17.

⁹ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party* (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: Kensal Press, 1985), 30-31.

nobility had been tainted by Christianity and Greco-Roman culture and had become nothing more than a name poisoned by foreign influences where one's blood no longer mattered.¹⁰ Darré argued that any Syrian could have a German noble title, and as long as others accepted him, he would be part of the German nobility.¹¹ Because of this, a new nobility was necessary, one that was title-less and contained solely German blood.¹² Darré believed that the new nobility would have to be composed of people who could sustain and continuously renew the German blood line.¹³ Darré also invoked the Indo-Germans who, according to him, viewed anybody who owned their own house as nobility.¹⁴ This was too broad a definition in 1930 though and Darré believed it should be narrowed to only include landholders.¹⁵ These two conditions -those of German blood and landholders- were the criteria of Darré's Blood and Soil ideology and, therefore, the peasantry ought to be the source of Germany's new nobility.¹⁶

Darré the National Socialist

Darré was unknown before *Bauerntum*.¹⁷ After its publication he started to become known in völkisch and racist circles, which led to Darré's involvement with

¹⁰ Richard Walther Darré, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (Munich: Lehmann, 1930), 23-25.

¹¹ Richard Walther Darré, *Um Blut und Boden: Reden und Aufsätze* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf, 1941), 41.

¹² Darré, *Um Blut und Boden*, 52-54.

¹³ Darré, *Neuadel*, 40.

¹⁴ Darré uses the term *Indogermanen* as a blanket term to describe early Germanic people.

¹⁵ Darré, *Neuadel*, 41.

¹⁶ Darré, *Neuadel*, 41-42.

¹⁷ Darré, *Schwein*, Publisher's Notes 1.

the NSDAP and eventual recruitment in June 1930.¹⁸ Hitler was particularly interested in Darré's peasant ideology and, according to Darré's first biographer, Hermann Reischle, Hitler was willing to offer Darré a position within the NSDAP that allowed him free reign in peasant policy.¹⁹

In 1930 Darré also joined the Schutzstaffel (SS). Darré and Himmler had developed a relationship in the 1920s due to their mutual membership in the Artaman League and Himmler's interest in Darré's early Blood and Soil ideas.²⁰ Darré had taught Himmler that the peasantry was the only reliable source for pure German blood and it was therefore necessary for the state to protect and nurture the peasantry.²¹ When Darré joined the NSDAP he and Himmler naturally gravitated toward each other.²² In 1932, Himmler made Darré the head of the newly created SS Race and Settlement Office (RuSHA).²³ The purpose of this office was initially to oversee racial matters within the SS, specifically issuing marriage licenses to SS-men allowing them to marry pure blooded women and investigating the racial background of SS-enrollees, and was eventually

¹⁸ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 75-77.

¹⁹ Reischle, *Reichsbauernführer Darré*, 48.

²⁰ Michael Kater, *Weimar: From Enlightenment to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 182-183.

The Artaman League was an interwar völkisch-agrarian group that was eventually absorbed by the NSDAP.

²¹ Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head: The Story of Hitler's SS*, trans. Richard Barry (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), 53-54.

²² Kater, *Weimar*, 182-183.

²³ Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head*, 59.

supposed to turn into an office which helped place SS-men on vacant agricultural landholdings.

Germany's agricultural community was quite large, accounting for approximately 29% of the German population, and faced issues such as poor harvests and an over-reliance on imports to meet food needs.²⁴ Despite this they were largely ignored on the political stage.²⁵ Darré and the NSDAP capitalized on this by creating a strong Agricultural Administration within the NSDAP that was stocked with field specialists who injected its influence into the smaller agricultural organizations throughout Germany.²⁶ While addressing the peasantry at this time Darré's speeches had a couple main themes: the peasantry formed the basis of the German race and the peasantry was going to be an integral part of the NSDAP's new world order.²⁷ During this period, Darré was extremely effective at rabble-rousing while strengthening his personal power base, much as Hitler had done in the years prior.

²⁴ J Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin USA, 2008), 167.

J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: the NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-45* (London: Sage Publications, 1976), 178-179.

In 1927 Germany was only 68% self-sufficient in regard to food in comparison to 80% in 1933. This figure was especially staggering in certain areas such as Bread Grain at only 79% in 1927 compared to 99% in 1933.

²⁵ Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 127.

²⁶ Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler*, 127.

²⁷ Darré, *Um Blut und Boden*, 27, 52, 59, 210.

The Machtergreifung refers to when Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933.

This success in penetrating the agricultural sector translated into votes for the NSDAP and to a growth in control of the Reichstag. In the 1930 Reichstag election, the NSDAP went from being the ninth largest party in the Reichstag to the second. Darré earned himself one of the NSDAP's 107 seats. In 1932, the NSDAP became the largest party in the Reichstag with 230 of the 608 total seats. Despite these successes, the NSDAP did not yet hold a majority of the seats in the Reichstag and were therefore unable to unilaterally pursue its political agenda on a national scale. However, on January 30, 1933 President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor and the NSDAP earned its first Cabinet seats.²⁸ This would soon allow the NSDAP and Darré to truly pursue their goals. The NSDAP's good fortune would continue when the Reichstag burned on the night of February 27/28, giving Hitler the chance to convince Hindenburg to pass the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspended some of the liberties afforded to German citizens in the German Constitution.²⁹ The NSDAP used this power to arrest multiple communists, including all the Communist delegates in the Reichstag.

On March 5, 1933 new Reichstag elections were held and the NSDAP received forty-four percent of the vote. With this new power, and with the silencing of the

²⁸ The NSDAP members who received cabinet seats on January 30, 1933 were Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, and Wilhelm Frick.

²⁹ Article 48 allowed the President to enact laws without using the Reichstag in emergency situations.

"The Reich Constitution of August 11th 1919," PSM-Datenbank Zum Unterrichtsvorbereitung Im Fach Geschichte, accessed September 20, 2018, http://www.zum.de/psm/weimar/weimar_vve.php#Third Chapter.

Communists who had twelve percent of the seats in the Reichstag, the NSDAP was able to easily pass the Enabling Act of 1933. This law allowed Hitler and his cabinet to enact laws with no involvement of the Reichstag, effectively ending the democratic process in Germany. Hitler was almost the supreme ruler of Germany; the only man who stood in his way was the aging President Paul von Hindenburg. The issue for Hitler was that Hindenburg had the complete support of the German military and was beloved by the population. Therefore, overthrowing the President was not an option; instead, Hitler simply had to wait for the aging and ailing Hindenburg to die.

Hitler and the NSDAP's successes did not immediately translate to success for Darré. When Hitler became Chancellor, Alfred Hugenberg was appointed as the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Economics. In May 1933 Darré was given the new title of Reich Peasant Leader, but that position was at the time relegated to a special title within the NSDAP. Then a smear campaign by the NSDAP and Hugenberg's vocal belief that the German economy could be saved through colonization led to his forced resignation on June 29, 1933.³⁰

Darré the Minister 1933-1935

Five months after Hitler became Chancellor, Darré was appointed Minister of Agriculture. Darré acted quickly to impose Gleichschaltung and restructure the politics of the Ministry of Agriculture to fall in line with his Blood and Soil ideology. Shortly after

³⁰ Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 431.

assuming office, on September 13, 1933 the Reich Food Estate (RNS) was established as the authority to manage the agricultural supply chain, and Darré, as Reich Peasant Leader, became its head. The RNS was an autonomous organization that was not part of the NSDAP nor part of the German government. The role of the RNS was to “regulate the production, distribution, as well as the prices and price margins of agricultural produce when it appears desirable, having taken into consideration the interests of the economy and of the common good.”³¹ Therefore, the purpose of the RNS was to create a planned agricultural economy that was isolated, and therefore protected, from the world market. The RNS’s role, consistent with the Blood and Soil ideology, was to create economic protections and plans that would help protect and nurture the peasant class.

In 1934 the Market Order of the RNS was issued. Darré’s biographer, Hermann Reischle, states that the Market Order’s intent “was to destroy agrarian capitalism,” and according to Gustav Corni, the goals of the Market Order were to create governmental:

- Oversight of Demand and Production,
- Alignment of production to demand and the adjustment of consumption with production capacity,
- Control of production at the demand sites,
- Elimination of disturbances in the market, especially through import control and stockpiling,
- Maintenance of median pricing for all vital foodstuffs.³²

³¹ Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism, 1919-1945: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 318.

³²Reischle, *Reichsbauernführer Darré*, 59-60; Gustavo Corni and Horst Gies, *Brot, Butter, Kanonen: Die Ernährungswirtschaft in Deutschland Unter der Diktatur Hitlers* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), 254.

In short, the Market Order took the issues with which the RNS was already dealing and created specific goals in hopes of spearheading these issues to promote, and eventually achieve, agricultural autarky. In fall 1934 Darré and his deputy, Herbert Backe, laid forth another plan to help achieve autarky called the Battle for Production. They believed that to achieve autarky the German peasant needed to become more technologically advanced. Peasants in 1930s Germany were still operating like peasants in the 19th century, with many still tending their fields completely by hand because they were unable to afford powered equipment.³³ The goal of the Battle for Production was to increase German efficiency and self-sufficiency through farmer education and by subsidizing modern farm equipment.³⁴

On September 29th, 1933 Darré signed the Reich Hereditary Farm Law. The Reich Hereditary Farm Law created legal protections for farmers and a class system within the agricultural community. The law stated that:

- Agricultural and forestry holdings in the size of at least 7.5 hectares and not exceeding 125 hectares are Hereditary Farms if they belong to someone capable of farming.
- The owner of the Hereditary Farm is a Hereditary Farmer.
- Hereditary Farmers can only be one who is a German citizen, German or like-blood and respectable.
- The family farm will not be divided when inherited
- The rights of the co-heirs are limited to the assets of the farmer. Those descendants who are not receiving the Hereditary Farm shall receive training and equipment corresponding to what the Hereditary Farm can offer; in case of emergency, home refuge is guaranteed.

³³ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 107.

³⁴ Jonathan Harwood, "The Fate of Peasant-Friendly Plant Breeding in Nazi Germany," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 40, no. 4 (2010): 574.

- The Impartible Inheritance cannot be excluded or limited by legal will.
- The family farm is in principle inalienable and unsellable.³⁵

This law created one inheritance law for Germany which put an end to the multiple inheritance traditions left over from the highly fragmented Holy Roman Empire. It also created debt protections for farmers making it impossible for a debt collector to seize a farmer's land as payment for a loan. The law also divided farmers into two classes: Hereditary Farmers (*Bauern*) and standard Farmers (*Landwirte*).³⁶ The Hereditary Farm was Darré's ideal because it embodied Blood and Soil. Only farmers with pure blood could become Hereditary Farmers, and their farms were what Darré considered an ideal size for a peasant. They were legally bound to the land, so their blood, and culture, would forcibly remain pure and they would spiritually create a connection with the soil through generations because they could not legally sell their farm. Anyone who did not fit this mold, such as Prussian estate farmers or families with small farms, would be considered standard farmers. Standard Farmers either did not have large enough plots to really be considered peasants, or their landholdings were so large that they were more than likely members of the Prussian nobility and therefore tainted stock per Darré's argument in *Neuadel*. The Hereditary farm was Darré's attempt at forcibly creating his peasant nobility envisioned in *Neuadel*.

³⁵ Excerpt of the Reichserbhofgesetz found in Darre, *Bauerntum*, 466.

³⁶ Bauer is the German word for peasant, and a Hereditary Farmer would be a true peasant in the Blood and Soil ideology.

Darré also furthered his racial work within the SS. In 1934 Darré was promoted to the highest rank in the SS at the time, Obergruppenführer, and in 1935 Darré joined the Lebensborn program, a subdivision of the RuSHA, which at that time was a family planning service for the wives of SS men. The program also helped unmarried women who were deemed racially valuable and assisted them in either raising their children or placing their children for adoption. By the time the SS Seniority List was released in January 1936, Darré had reached his maximum position within the SS. Darré had achieved the rank of Obergruppenführer and had received the Honor Ring and Honor Dagger, personal gifts from Himmler that were only given to certain SS officers.³⁷

The special position that farmers held during this period was shown in an annual propaganda event created in 1933 called the Reich Harvest Festival. Many of the NSDAP's elite attended, and Hitler and Darré, among others, would address the peasantry directly. This festival was the largest event on the NSDAP's calendar edging out even the Nuremberg Party Rallies.³⁸ In its inaugural year, the Reich Harvest Festival had an attendance of 500,000, and by 1937 was attended by 1.2 million.³⁹

³⁷ *Dienstaltersliste der Schutzstaffel der NSDAP*, Edition from December 1937 (Berlin: SS-Personalkanzlei, 1937), 8.

³⁸ Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 434.

³⁹ Wolfgang Benz, *A Concise History of the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 82.

Competition and Conflict 1935-1938

Darré's inabilities as a politician and administrator became clear as his time in office went on, and Joseph Goebbels' diary is a strong source for this claim. Goebbels was privately very critical of Darré and his criticism grew over the years. For example, early in Darré's career as a minister, in January 1934, Goebbels wrote that "Darré makes up nonsense about nonsense. What an Idiot!"⁴⁰ In August 1935 Goebbels wrote, "I spoke with Darré about inflation. He believes that Goerdeler is his enemy. How naive!"⁴¹ Later that month Goebbels wrote, "Darré needs to focus on food or Goerdeler will be coming after him," and, "Spoke with the Führer about overpricing. Goerdeler should be utilized because Darré still hasn't figured it out."⁴² In November 1935 Goebbels wrote that at a meeting of Party officials there were many complaints about Darré and the RNS.⁴³ In February 1938 Goebbels stated, "Labor shortages are becoming critical. Radical measures are being considered. Darré isn't doing enough, he is too busy organizing."⁴⁴ Goebbels opinion of Darré was clearly negative, but there is a key change that is noticeable as time goes on. The first few times that Goebbels mentions Darré in 1932 and 1933 his opinion is neutral, simply mentioning that he had spoken with Darré

⁴⁰ Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924-1945* (Munich: Piper Verlag GmbH, 1999), 841.

⁴¹ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 875.

Carl Friedrich von Goerdeler was the Reich Price Commissioner from 1934 to 1936. Executed in 1945 for being a part of the 20 July Plot.

⁴² Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 877, 880.

⁴³ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 911.

⁴⁴ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 1205

on the phone or mentioning him in the lists of who would be given cabinet positions should Hitler be made Chancellor.⁴⁵ By 1934, however, almost every single time Goebbels mentions Darré it is a complaint or negative comment. Furthermore, Goebbels comments beginning in 1935 show an increasing urgency to have other officials deal with Darré's shortcomings. Goebbels was not alone in his criticism; there were many others who also argued that Darré was not performing to expectation; the following section will deal with this issue, and some of the problems Darré faced from 1935 to 1938.

In 1933 Germany had a strong harvest with above average yields in several key crops, such as wheat, rye, barley, oats, and sugar beets. In 1934 this high quickly came to an end, however, with large drops in the yields of grains (20% drop in wheat and oat yield).⁴⁶ In 1935 these yields continued to drop, which caused Darré's first tangible opposition within the party and government. The Minister of Economics, Hjalmar Schacht, was in control of Germany's foreign currency, which in the winter of 1935/1936 was being funneled into heavy industry to fuel German rearmament. For fear of having a grain deficit during the winter Darré requested foreign currency for the import of grain to cover the expected deficits; Schacht refused Darré's request. Darré was therefore forced to request Hitler's aid in securing the foreign currency. Hitler appointed Hermann

⁴⁵ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 617, 631, 818.

⁴⁶ Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 178.

Göring to take charge of the foreign currency situation. Paul Körner explained the situation during his post-war trial in Nuremberg:⁴⁷

As far as I was concerned, the entire economic sphere came into being for the first time when Göring, in the conflict between Schacht and Darré, was appointed to procure for Darré the necessary foreign exchange to cover the expenses of the quantities of grain that had to be purchased abroad. This conflict was the first precursor, which ultimately led to the creation of the Four Year Plan. At that time, in the preceding years of 1934 and 1935, Germany had had actually two very bad harvests, and did not have sufficient quantities of bread grain available to feed the population. The shortage amounted to approximately 2 million tons, as compared to a yearly consumption figure for the old Reich of approximately 12 million tons of bread grain. The question was either to import the short quantity in grain or introduce rationing in peacetime. Hitler and Darré were against any rationing and Darré asked that Schacht furnish the necessary foreign exchange in order to be able to purchase the necessary bread grain abroad. Schacht refused and stated that he had no foreign exchange available which might permit him to make that available to Darré for these purposes.⁴⁸

The foreign currency was finally allocated, but the situation stressed the symbiotic relationship between Schacht and Darré, the ministers of Economy and Agriculture, whose governmental roles were often intertwined. Unfortunately for Darré and Germany, this trend of poor yields would continue for the majority of harvests until

⁴⁷ Paul Körner was an SS-Obergruppenführer and was Göring's right-hand man in the Office of the Four Year Plan.

⁴⁸ *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 12, "The Ministries Case" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 568. The severity of the poor harvests was due to a number of ancillary factors: Darré's inability to technologically advance German agriculture to a point where yields were more consistent, Darré's inability to convince other politicians of the needs of German agriculture which led to a lack of funding for critical foodstuffs, and poor weather.

1938, when they finally rebounded to 1933 levels after four consecutive downward trending harvests.⁴⁹

According to Paul Körner, the row between Darré and Schacht had far reaching consequences for both men. The main consequence was the creation of the Office of the Four Year Plan in 1936. This was an economic organization whose purpose was to have Germany war-ready by 1940. Hermann Göring was placed in charge of this organization and was made the plenipotentiary of the German economy. Göring's new place as plenipotentiary made Darré subordinate to him which was a blow to Darré's authority. To make matters worse, Darré's deputy, Herbert Backe, was made the head of the agricultural sector in this new rival organization. This position made Backe a "second Minister of Agriculture"⁵⁰ under the leadership of Göring. Darré was no longer the sole force in agricultural policy, but rather was in constant competition with Backe and the Office of the Four Year Plan.

The German Labor Front (DAF) was another organization that encroached on Darré's authority during this period. The DAF was the party-run organization that replaced all labor unions when Hitler came to power. One of the DAF's major programs was Kraft durch Freude, a program which made vacations, leisure facilities, and automobiles available to the average worker. In 1935 the DAF, led by Robert Ley, began

⁴⁹ Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 178.

⁵⁰ E. M. Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 33.

encroaching on the RNS because Ley wanted agricultural workers, who were administered solely by the RNS, to fall within the sphere of the DAF. The issue was quickly resolved, however, in the Bückeberger Agreement, which allowed the RNS to retain authority over agricultural workers but gave farmers access to DAF programs.⁵¹ This agreement did not last, however, and in 1937 Ley began encroaching on the RNS again. The DAF once again began to seek representation and administration in the agricultural sector where the RNS was supposed to be the sole governing body. Darré brought this issue to Hitler's Secretary, Rudolf Hess, stating that the DAF was attempting to mimic services that the RNS already offered under the guise of the DAF, so much so, that farmers could not understand why they were being administered by two different bodies.⁵² Ley wanted the RNS dissolved entirely and told Darré that the DAF was only intervening in areas where the RNS was not performing.⁵³ Despite continued complaints by Darré, nothing was done to clearly define the boundaries of the DAF and the RNS.

In 1936, the Agra-Political Office of the NSDAP was promoted to a Reichsamt and Darré, therefore, became a full-fledged Reichsleiter.⁵⁴ On paper, this should have been a promotion for Darré, but this move simply gave Darré a new title and stripped the RNS of some of its autonomy. This is shown by one of the new duties of the Reichsamt:

⁵¹ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 109.

⁵² Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 101-102.

⁵³ Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 102-103.

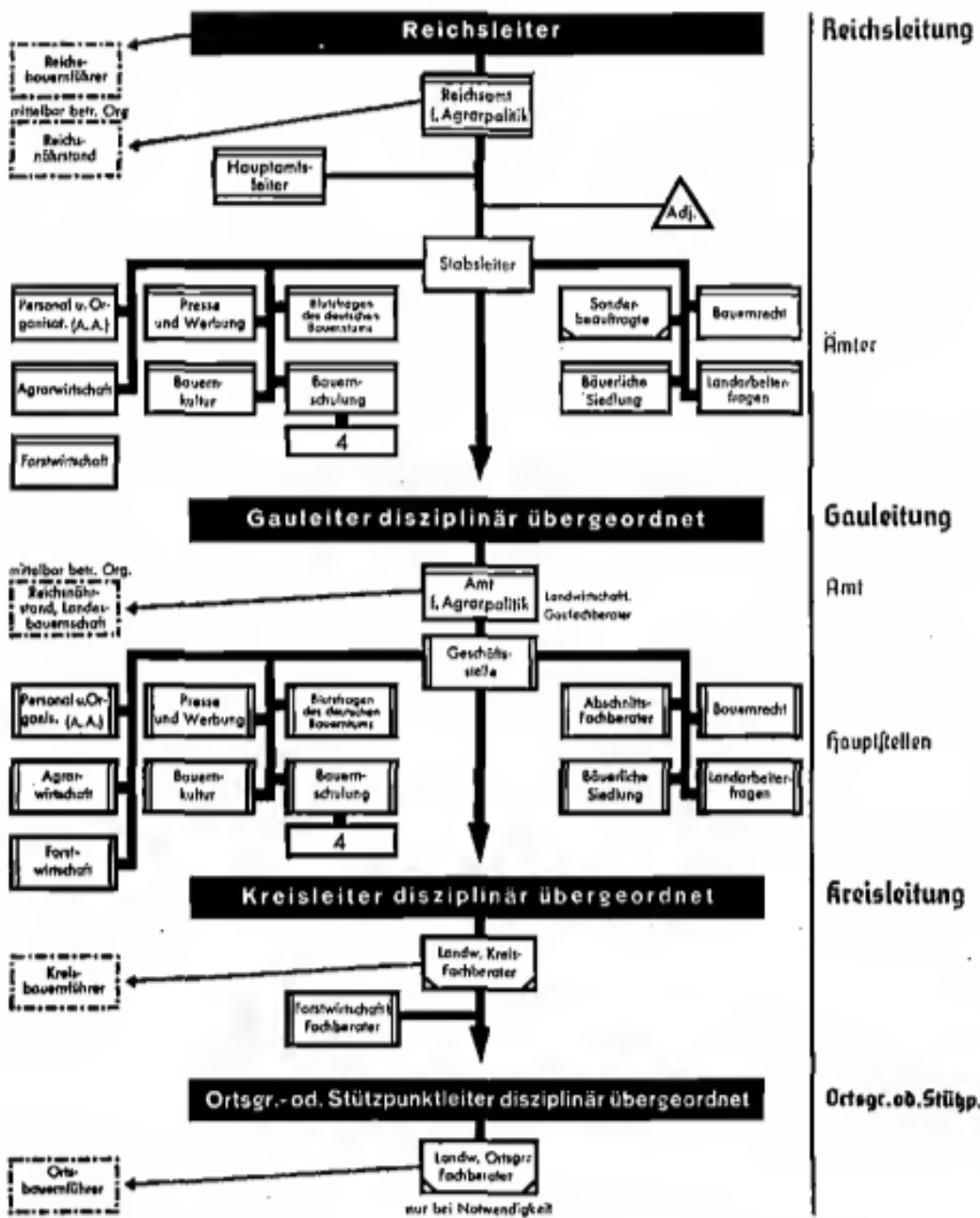
⁵⁴ A Reichsamt was the highest level office in the NSDAP and a Reichsleiter was the person in charge of that office.

indirect supervision of the RNS.⁵⁵ The organizational chart found in Ley's 1937 *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* shows this, as well as how each office/position in the Reichsamt compared to its contemporary within the RNS.⁵⁶ In sum, the RNS became more subordinate to the party, and though Darré was still in charge of the Reichsamt, it allowed the party to have greater influence in RNS matters.

⁵⁵ Robert Ley, *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf, 1937), 316.

⁵⁶ Ley, *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP*, 314.

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The RNS also faced internal issues. In 1936 Darré tore his Achilles tendon and took six months off, leaving his duties in the RNS to a circle of lower officials. This created a power vacuum, and an RNS official named Wilhelm Meinberg attempted to take advantage of the situation.⁵⁷ Meinberg was a rival of Backe but was far less successful. Despite this, he had gained his own group of followers who planned to overthrow Darré as Reich Peasant Leader.⁵⁸ On March 26, 1937 Darré was made privy to what was happening with Meinberg, and on the next day removed Meinberg from his post.⁵⁹ The issue did not end there, however. Meinberg went to Berlin and confronted Walter Granzow and Hermann Göring with the matter.⁶⁰ Granzow's solution was to completely reassign Darré, give Backe the Ministry of Agriculture, and give Meinberg the RNS.⁶¹ The fact that anyone would even consider punishing Darré so heavily for something so minor goes to show how negatively some people within the party viewed him. This problem eventually made its way up to a three-way consultation between Göring, Himmler, and Hitler. The solution was that Darré would retain all of his positions and Meinberg would work for Göring in the Office of the Four Year Plan.⁶² Despite

⁵⁷ Horst Gies, "Konfliktregelung Im Reichsnährstand: Die Westfalen-Streit Und Die Meinberg-Revolt" [Conflict Resolution in the Reich Food Estate: The Westfalian Controversy and the Meinberg Revolt], *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 30, no. 2 (1982): 186.

⁵⁸ Gies, *Konfliktregelung*, 189.

⁵⁹ Gies, *Konfliktregelung*, 190.

⁶⁰ Walter Granzow was a politician for the NSDAP who served as a mid-level political leader in multiple National Socialist Organizations.

⁶¹ Gies, *Konfliktregelung*, 191.

⁶² Gies, *Konfliktregelung* 192.

winning this particular battle, overall, it was a loss for Darré. JE Farquharson argues that, “[Darré’s] prestige suffered a further blow with the row over Meinberg in early 1937, when he stated that only through a ‘superhuman effort’ had he been able to win back the Führer’s confidence.”⁶³

The Hereditary Farm Law became an issue for some regional administrators by 1937 because some Hereditary Farmers took advantage of the increased protection offered to them by the Hereditary Farm Law to the detriment of the country. In East Prussia, for example, the problem was especially apparent through farmers who were incapable of caring for their own farms, but who were unable or unwilling to transfer title to someone else, to farmers who openly refused to increase production because their harvests were large enough for them.⁶⁴ Gauleiter of East Prussia, Erich Koch, believed that there were at least one or two bad Hereditary Farms per village that created a bad example for all other farms in that area. This created headaches for the RNS because they had to focus extra resources on administration and removing inefficient and incompetent Hereditary Farmers from their land.⁶⁵ On top of that, competent farmers who wanted to transfer title of their farm in a non-hereditary manner faced immense difficulty due to the rules of the Hereditary Farm Law. Therefore, on December 23, 1938 the Hereditary Farm Law was reissued so that in cases

⁶³ Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 246.

⁶⁴ Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 136.

⁶⁵ Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 136.

of “special hardships” titles of Hereditary Farms could be transferred non-hereditarily.⁶⁶ It was apparent that creating a new peasant-based nobility was going to be far more difficult than passing a few laws.

Trumping all other issues already mentioned, the greatest of this period was Landflucht. This flight from the land was caused by the unregulated wages of city-workers being higher than the regulated wages of farmers in the countryside.⁶⁷ Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring favored industry and urban workers because they were rearming Germany; therefore, they wanted food prices to remain low to reduce the cost of living in cities. This caused farmers’ wages to decrease because they were unable to charge more for their goods. Prices for agricultural products were set by the RNS and farmers were not allowed to charge differently unless they illegally sold their goods on the black market. Many farmers simply gave up on agriculture and moved to the cities for a higher standard of living. From 1933 to 1938, the number of farm laborers dropped by 21 per cent and white-collar workers increased by 26 percent.⁶⁸ This caused massive agricultural labor shortages because there were fewer farm laborers who were, nevertheless, required to produce an ever-increasing amount of food for the cities.

Adam Tooze described the labor situation as such:

Above all, there was alarm in RNS circles about the way in which farming families were responding to the labour shortage. Farm women were the most

⁶⁶ Daniela Münkel, *Nationalsozialistische Agrarpolitik Und Bauernalltag* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1996), 119.

⁶⁷ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 264.

⁶⁸ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 263.

overworked group in the rural population and reducing the number of children was the most obvious way to cut their work burden. In Niedersachsen, the very heartland of the German peasantry, the number of children per couple had fallen by as much as 33 per cent in a single generation. At the same time the labour shortage was also threatening the efforts of the RNS to raise domestic production. Already in 1937 the harvest had borne all the hallmarks of an emergency 'Aktion'. The regular farm workforce had had to be supported by Labour Front draftees, soldiers, convicts, and schoolchildren.⁶⁹

From 1938 on labor shortages were a constant problem for Darré. In 1938 Darré figured that the undervaluation of agricultural labor was at a staggering minimum of 25 percent, meaning that farmers were only earning 75 percent of what they should.⁷⁰ Farm laborers faced a simple choice, stay in the countryside and earn less than one was worth, or move to the cities and earn more.

Summary

Darré was a massively powerful and popular figure from 1930 to 1935. He launched himself through the party, government, and SS achieving top ranks in each of these groups. His acumen regarding organizing the peasantry was astounding, and he was able to firmly place himself atop this group that encompassed approximately one quarter of the German population by 1933. He attempted to quickly realize his Blood and Soil ideology by top-down control of German agriculture. Despite early success in 1933, Darré faced mostly failures from 1934 to 1938. Darré was charismatic and talented at galvanizing the peasantry, but when it came to actual administration of

⁶⁹ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 264.

⁷⁰ Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 266.

German agriculture Darré showed little shrewdness. Even Darré's greatest successes, the Hereditary Farm Law and Reich Food Estate, became failures. Regardless of Darré's intentions, he could not force Hereditary Farmers to set a good example, he could not force Göring to increase food prices in the city, and he could not stop the ever-increasing encroachments on his autonomy. Despite numerous incursions on Darré and his authority, he was still a Reichsleiter, Minister, the Reich Peasant Leader, SS-Obergruppenführer, and head of the RuSHA. Regardless of his failures and the very real dislike of Darré by many in the party leadership, the only attempts to remove Darré were petty and snubbed by Hitler and Himmler. The appearance of party unity and the appearance of complete control and efficiency were more important to Hitler and Himmler than anything else. At this time Hitler was content leaving Darré in all of his positions while allowing other actors to assert their influence in the agricultural sector.

CHAPTER 2

1938 marked a definitive turning point in Darré's career. Hitler and the NSDAP began to focus considerably more on foreign policy as both Austria and the Sudetenland were annexed by the Reich in March and September respectively. War quickly approached as Germany occupied Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, creating a so-called "protectorate" and establishing a pro-German independent Slovakia. Germany then invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and World War II began. By 1942 it was clear to the NSDAP that Darré's vision of a self-sufficient peasant-centric Germany could not become reality and, eventually, in May 1942 Hitler removed Darré from his positions as Reichsminister and Reichsleiter. Following Darré's removal he lived a relatively quiet life until he surrendered to American forces in mid-April 1945 several weeks before the war's end in Europe.

Darré's loss of power in party and state was preceded by his voluntary resignation from the RuSHA in February 1938. Darré and Himmler had been close friends until at least mid-1937, but Himmler began encroaching on Darré's authority in peasant and settlement matters. Darré had little effect on settlement through the RuSHA and legitimate settlement efforts never really took place until after Darré had already resigned.¹ Peter Longerich described the time after Darré's resignation 'as a

¹ Heinz Höhne, *The Order of the Death's Head: The Story of Hitler's SS*, trans. Richard Barry (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), 176.

chance to shift the emphasis in the expansion of the SS empire from the concept of the “state protection corps” to “Lebensraum policy”.² Darré’s disappointment with Himmler’s encroachment was so great that he actually tried to resign entirely from the SS, though Hitler snubbed this idea.³ Darré’s falling out with Himmler, one of his closest allies, is a main theme of the second half of Darré’s career. This split indicates that the party was moving away from Blood and Soil and was shifting the agricultural ideological sphere into Himmler and Backe’s hands.

This chapter addresses two main questions: How did the status of the Blood and Soil ideology change after 1938, and why was Darré removed from power in 1942? The break between Darré and Himmler, Darré’s loss of popularity with the peasantry, Landflucht, and the war all played critical roles in the decline of Darré and the Blood and Soil ideology. I will rely on diaries, memoirs, and conversations of multiple high-ranking officials to give insight into Darré’s image and that of his ideology. I will also rely on the yearly statistics books released by the German Government to explain quantitatively why and how Darré, agriculture, and the peasantry as agricultural producers failed over time.

² Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 415.

³ *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 14, “The Ministries Case” (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 862.

Darré and Himmler

The deterioration of Darré and Himmler's relationship was extremely damaging for Darré because Himmler had staunchly defended and supported Darré in years past. Darré recalled to Alfred Rosenberg in May 1940 that 'He and H[immler] were both weak at first. They pooled their resources and are now strong. There is nothing but outright power, as well as a forging of internal alliance. . . Now Darré had built up his Race and Settlement Office for Himmler. Then H[immler], always with the Führer as chief of police, no longer needed Darré and "removed" him.'⁴ It appears that although Darré had voluntarily resigned from the RuSHA, he believed that his hand was forced by Himmler's will to throw him aside to strengthen his own political position.

Darré and Himmler's falling out revolved around their contending philosophies regarding the future of the peasantry. One of Darré's main points of contention with Himmler surrounded the Wehrbauer, or a soldier-peasant. Hitler was drawn to the concept of the Wehrbauer, and in July 1941 Hitler spoke of his vision of Wehrbauer colonists:

We'll take the Southern part of the Ukraine, especially the Crimea, and make it an exclusively German colony. There'll be no harm in pushing out the population that's there now. The German colonist will be the [Wehrbauer], and for that I'll take professional soldiers, whatever their line may have been previously. In this way we shall dispose, moreover, of a body of courageous [officers], whenever we need them. In the future we shall have a standing army of a million and a half to two million men. With the discharge of soldiers after twelve years of Service,

⁴ Alfred Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the Onset of the Holocaust*, trans. Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 201.

we shall have thirty to forty thousand men to do what we like with every year. For those of them who are sons of peasants, the Reich will put at their disposal a completely equipped farm. The soil costs us nothing, we have only the house to build. The peasant's son will already have paid for it by his twelve years' Service. During the last two years he will already be equipping himself for agriculture. One single condition will be imposed upon him: that he may not marry a townswoman, but a countrywoman who, as far as possible, will not have begun to live in a town with him. These soldier-peasants will be given arms, so that at the slightest danger they can be at their posts when we summon them. That's how the ancient Austria used to keep its Eastern peoples under control. By the same token, the soldier-peasant will make preschool teacher. The [officer] is an ideal teacher for the little country-boy. In any case, this [officer] will make a better teacher than our present teacher will make an officer! Thus, we shall again find in the countryside the blessing of numerous families. Whereas the present law of rural inheritance dispossesses the younger sons, in the future every peasant's son will be sure of having his patch of ground. And thirty to forty thousand peasants a year — that's enormous!⁵

By 1941, Hitler had decided that the creation of soldiers was of the utmost importance in his future German state, and that the peasantry would be created from these soldiers. Hitler wanted twelve of the most formative years of a peasant's life to be devoted to the military rather than having someone live a peasant's life entirely. Hitler and Himmler's visions for eastern settlement were similar, but what exactly set their vision apart from Darré's?

The greatest difference was that Darré's main focus was reorganization and promotion of the peasantry within the Reich, and resettlement to conquered territories was secondary. For Himmler and Hitler, however, the primary focus was the colonization of conquered territories by armed peasants who would spread SS influence

⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Table Talk 1941-1944*, trans. H R Trevor-Roper (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1953), 16.

into the borderlands. On October 24, 1940 Himmler explained his vision about land acquisition for German resettlement to the civil administration of the newly acquired territory of Posen:

We don't need to buy the land for settlement; settlement land already exists [...]. Polish workers must provide the cheap labour for settlement and for ploughing the fields [...] The Germans will always provide the leadership for everything; the Poles will do the dirty work [...] If there is no more land to be distributed then, as is always the case throughout history, new land will have to be got with the sword.

Himmler also explained that SS-men were already placing money into a compulsory savings account that would be used to fund their colonization of the eastern territories.⁶

In summary, Himmler's idea was that SS-men, regardless of past farming acumen, were to use their savings to move to the borderlands where they would join a hybrid peasant military community. While trying to properly run a farm, they were expected to defend the German borders from any invader or uprising. When these farmers had children, all of the children were to be entitled to land, and if there was no land to give them, they should conquer more land for settlement.

This plan is clearly full of logistical holes. Farming is a science and to expect people to successfully farm foreign soil in varying climates is highly impractical. Land is finite as well, and at some point, there would be no land available for conquest for new peasants. On top of these issues, there was also the fact that Landflucht was still a major

⁶ Longerich, *Himmler*, 443-444.

Quotation from a speech from Himmler to the Reich Governor Posen and his administration on October 24, 1939 found in BAB, NS 2/60.

problem. There was no foreseeable reason why people would want to leave Germany to farm in the newly conquered territories when population and new settlement figures had been steadily dropping since 1933.⁷ The NSDAP's economic vision for the Generalplan Ost further shows how out of touch the vision of the Wehrbauer was from the reality of the past seven years of National Socialist leadership.⁸ The NSDAP envisioned that thirty-five percent of the population that would settle in the conquered Eastern Territories would be involved in agriculture compared to the twenty percent involved in agriculture in the Reich in 1938.⁹

This plan also completely ignored Blood and Soil which had been party policy since 1930 and state policy since 1933. The first major departure from Blood and Soil was that this new policy completely ignored Darré's belief that the German peasantry had to be strengthened from within in order to strengthen German racial stock as a whole. It also ignored Darré's belief that a farm should be impartible and passed down in an organized manner to future generations, so that the peasant and his ancestors could create a spiritual and racial connection with the land. And lastly, this plan ignored the idea that a peasant is supposed to be a farmer first and foremost. The Wehrbauer

⁷ J. E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: the NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-45* (London: Sage Publications, 1976), 154. Additional settlement statistics can be found in the section "Darré and the Peasantry".

⁸ Generalplan Ost is the name for Germany's long term plan in the East that included genocide, ethnic cleansing, and the resettlement of Eastern Europe.

⁹ J Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Penguin USA, 2008), 263.

concept was, therefore, a complete departure from Darré's Blood and Soil ideology and was tangible evidence that the party was abandoning Darré's philosophy in favor of Himmler's.

On October 7, 1939 Heinrich Himmler became the Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Nation instead of Darré. This new title bestowed upon Himmler by Führer Decree¹⁰ made him the authority in all settlement matters in the Reich. Himmler's new responsibilities included:

1. The repatriation of the Reichs- and Volksdeutsche abroad returning home to the Reich,¹¹
2. The elimination of the harmful influence of non-German sections of the population who represented a danger to the Reich and the German people,
3. The creation of new German settlement areas for resettlement, in particular for the Reichs- and Volksdeutsche returning from abroad.¹²

This decree even had a special condition referring to Darré: "The tasks entrusted to the Reichsführer-SS are to be carried out by the Reichsminister for Food and Agriculture in accordance with the general orders of the Reichsführer-SS, as far as the restructuring of the German peasantry is concerned."¹³ Darré had resigned from the RuSHA within the SS in 1938 due to his disagreement with Himmler regarding peasant policy. He now, one

¹⁰ A Führer Decree is a direct order from Hitler that superseded all other laws.

¹¹ In general, Reichsdeutsche refers to Germans living within the Reich and Volksdeutsche refers to ethnic Germans who were not German citizens. In this specific context, Reichsdeutsche refers to Germans living in territories that the Germany military was slated to conquer and Volksdeutsche refers to Germans coming from other areas back to the Reich.

¹² Martin Moll, *Führer-Erlasse 1939-1945* (Hamburg: Nikol, 2011), 101.

¹³ Moll, *Führer-Erlasse*, 101.

year later, found himself once again subordinate to Himmler and also responsible for implementing Himmler's peasant and settlement policies. In November 1939 Darré threatened to resign from his role as Reichsminister due to his dwindling role in the party's agricultural policy and Himmler's selection over Darré as leader in settlement policy. Helmuth von Groscurth recalled in his diary in November 1939 that:

Ever since the Four-Year Plan gained influence over Nazi peasant policy, there have been repeated tensions between Göring and Darré. Added to this was his annoyance at his failure in terms of popular politics. (He had retired from the management of the RuSHA in 1938.) As Reich Minister he had felt responsible for the [Eastern Settlement]. Instead, however, Himmler was appointed Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Nation in October 1939. In autumn of the same year during a disagreement with Hitler about Secretary Backe, whose continued employment in the Ministry was expressly demanded, Darré asked Hitler to bid him farewell, who replied: "Herr Reich Minister, you are under the law of war and when you go, I choose..."¹⁴

It was clear at this point that Darré was no longer in control of his destiny.

Darré and Himmler's disintegrating relationship played a key role in Darré's loss of power. Himmler had long been Darré's strongest asset, and by far the most powerful man with whom Darré had a close relationship. Himmler had even defended Darré from attacks from other party members as noted in the previous chapter. Darré had not only lost his closest and most powerful ally, but this former ally was actively competing against Darré for power with an ideology that differed greatly from Blood and Soil. It should come as no surprise that Darré would eventually lose this battle. Himmler was

¹⁴ Helmuth Groscurth, *Tagebücher eines Abwehroffiziers 1938-1940* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1970), 310.

far too connected, far too powerful, and far more politically apt than Darré. Blood and Soil was losing traction and was beaten by Himmler's expansionist ideology.

Had Darré maintained his relationship with Himmler and allowed Himmler to surpass him in charge of peasant ideology, he likely would have maintained more of his political power. Had Darré given up on Blood and Soil, and instead took his place as an administrator who solely administrated the agricultural sector, he could have coexisted with Himmler despite Himmler's incursions. This was not who Darré was, however. To Darré his Blood and Soil ideology and his vision for the German peasantry were more important than anything else. He had dedicated his entire life since 1928 to bettering the German peasant through internal policy, and he was not going to be complacent when someone tried to replace him.

Losing Himmler as an ally was a massive blow to Darré and was made exponentially worse by the fact that Himmler actively competed against Darré's peasant ideology. Darré was stuck in a losing position, unable to resign from office because Hitler would not allow him and also responsible for enacting someone else's policies that went against his own personal ideology. Darré would be stuck in this position for the next three years as his power dwindled and Himmler's grew.

Darré, the Peasantry, and Landflucht

The leaders of the NSDAP were not the only people who became disillusioned with Darré's ideas and vision for the peasantry, so too did the German peasant.

Agricultural settlement dropped from a record high of 4,931 new farms created in 1934

down to 846 new farms created in 1939.¹⁵ From 1933 to 1938 there were 20,408 new farms created within the Reich, but over that same period the number of farm laborers dropped by 513,000.¹⁶ In 1939 there were 3.85 million farms in Germany and only 730,262 were Hereditary Farms.¹⁷ Overall, the population statistics for the German farmer were not impressive. Settlement slowed by over eighty percent from 1933 to 1938, Germany lost a half million farmers, and only nineteen percent of German farms were the racially elite Hereditary Farms. The peasant situation was dire. The Hereditary Farm Law, while offering some protections, did not solve the problems of the peasantry, but rather created some unique problems of its own.¹⁸ These peasants were not the new nobility in the German Reich, and after years of population decline and an imbalanced planned economy, the peasantry as a whole stagnated economically.

This lack of real growth is evident when comparing the German Gross National Product (GNP) from 1933 to 1938 against the growth in agricultural value during that same period. During this period, the German GNP grew from 58.4 billion Reichsmark in

¹⁵*Statistisches Jahrbuch Für Das Deutsche Reich* (Berlin, 1942: Statistischen Reichsamt), 113, accessed May 10, 2019, https://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN514401303_1941|log3&physid=phys5#navi.

¹⁶ *Statistisches Jahrbuch Für Das Deutsche Reich*, 113. Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 263

¹⁷ *Statistisches Jahrbuch Für Das Deutsche Reich*, 104, 112.

¹⁸ Issues that Hereditary Farmers faced specifically, were applying for and losing Hereditary Farmer status, attempts to sell or parcel land, and removal from land by the RNS. For more information see Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika*, 125-140.

1933 to 100.2 billion Reichsmark in 1938, or a 71.5 percent growth over that period.¹⁹ German agricultural wholesale prices only grew 22 percent.²⁰ Agricultural economic growth lagged heavily behind total economic growth. The growth in food prices looked even less impressive when compared to 1913 prices. On average, the price growth of German agricultural products was only 5.9 percent over 1913 levels. Some agricultural products, such as livestock, had not rebounded to 1913 levels by 1938, sitting only at 88.6 percent of 1913 levels. From 1936 to 1937, the wholesale price of German agricultural goods actually dropped 0.3 percent. In 1938 Herbert Backe and the Office of the Four Year Plan began to have a bigger effect on the German economy, and from 1938 to 1941 the wholesale prices for agricultural products increased 6.5 percent. However, German growth was largely exclusive to factory production, such as consumer goods, where wholesale prices in 1938 were 35.4 percent higher than in 1913.²¹ Not only was wholesale growth greater for finished goods compared to agricultural products, but the ratio of assets to liabilities in these industries was even more lopsided. In 1935 the agricultural sector in Germany had 183 million reichsmarks in assets and 1,113 million reichsmarks in liabilities for a negative balance of -930 million reichsmarks. For finished goods production the total assets were 3,859 million reichsmarks with only 746 million reichsmarks in liabilities for a balance of 3,113 million reichsmarks.

¹⁹ Norbert R ath, *Rezessionen in Historischer Betrachtung*, report (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009), 206.

²⁰ *Statistisches Jahrbuch F ur Das Deutsche Reich*, 358.

²¹ *Statistisches Jahrbuch F ur Das Deutsche Reich*, 358.

These were the conditions that created and sustained the Landflucht problem. In order to rescue German agriculture from this situation, massive amounts of money needed to be funneled into German agriculture. This could occur in the form of increased wholesale food prices, which would come out of the pockets of workers living in the cities. But in a country where war was on the horizon, and where heavy industry needed to run as effectively as possible, this was not going to happen. Therefore, German peasants left their farms to seek a better life in the cities, where economic growth and stability were much greater. The imbalance grew even worse with the approaching war as Germany began funneling billions more into the military sector in order to fuel its war machine.²²

The diary of Ulrich von Hassel²³ provides key understanding to just how much Darré and Blood and Soil's position with the peasantry degraded over time. In February 1939 von Hassel recalled that a lawyer for Allianz told him that, "Out in the country things look most discouraging, particularly because of the labor shortage. A peasant had told him that Darré was seriously beaten up by the peasants at a session of the Bavarian Peasant Council, after he had answered their practical complaints with stupid slogans."²⁴ The German propaganda machine lost its grip on the peasantry. The

²² Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 444.

²³ Ulrich von Hassel was a National Socialist who began to resist the NSDAP after the outbreak of World War II. He was executed in 1944.

²⁴ Ulrich von Hassel, *The Von Hassell Diaries 1938-1944*, trans. Allen Welsh Dulles (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1947), 37.

indefinite cancellation by Hitler of the Reich Harvest Festival in 1938 was surely a major blow for Darré and his image with the peasantry as well. The German peasantry was no longer being targeted en masse by propaganda and, therefore, began to comprehend the reality of its poor situation.

The themes of Darré's speeches also tended away from the Blood and Soil ideology beginning in 1938. Before 1938 the majority of Darré's speeches dealt with Blood and Soil, but after 1938 five of his published speeches were in regard to Blood and Soil (four in 1938 and one in 1939) and eight were in regard to food policy (four in 1938 and four in 1939). After 1939 none of Darré's speeches were published.²⁵ Therefore, Darré attempted to be more practical in his public speaking in 1938 and 1939, but it was to little effect. By September 1939, Darré and German agriculture were in a poor state. With the invasion of Poland and beginning of World War II, Darré regained some stature, but this was inevitably short lived.

I do not believe that Darré's position with the peasantry could have been maintained given the circumstances. In order for Blood and Soil to actually succeed, the full support of the German government was necessary, and this was something that was highly unlikely. The German peasantry could not be put into a position to become the leading social group in a society where industry was favored, and war was on the horizon. Hitler wanted war, and the only role that agriculture played in this scenario was

²⁵ Richard Walther Darré, *Um Blut und Boden* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf, GmbH., 1941), 4-8.

food supply. Darré's internal policy of Blood and Soil could not survive in a country whose leaders drove it completely toward external conquest.

World War II

Germany invaded Poland shortly before harvest time in 1939. For this reason, Darré's first task as war began was to round up enough laborers to secure the Polish harvest. The amount of Polish farmland was no small matter, totaling almost a fifth of Germany's 1937 farmland and consisting of 5000 large farms and hundreds of thousands of small farms.²⁶ On top of this, German officials wanted Germans, not Poles, to secure the harvest.

Immediately behind the advancing army, the entire occupied area (including the present Government General) became dotted with farmers from the Reich, at first widely distant. It was their task to ensure continued cultivation by all available means. More agricultural workers to run the derelict estates and farmsteads were continually being applied for according to the requirements. On the basis of applications and after examination of the applicant's particulars, these agricultural workers were summoned to Berlin and sent on their journey to the areas requesting them. The area south of East Prussia was supplied by the province of East Prussia in the same way as the area now constituting the Danzig-West Prussia Gau was supplied by Danzig, whereas the Warthegau, the district of Kattowitz, and the area now constituting the Government General were directly supplied by the Reich Food Ministry. A great number of farmers, required for running the farms, were also taken from the army and from among the racial Germans on the spot. Almost at the same time, a great number of tractors, tractor implements, steam plow units, threshing implements, steaming apparatus and other appliances were shipped to the East for immediate use.²⁷

²⁶ *Trials of War Criminals Before the Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, "The Ministries Case" (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 152.

²⁷ *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, 152.

Therefore, despite the continued labor shortage that German agriculture had faced for a number of years, the German government shipped off farm laborers to occupied Poland to tend to foreign farms. According to a 1940 article in the *NS-Landpost* by Dr. H. Berger, the success of this mission was due to the “eagerness to work of thousands of German farmers, many of whom had temporarily left their own or leased farms in the Reich.”²⁸

On February 12, 1940 Göring’s Decree Regarding the Public Management of Agricultural and Forestry Holdings stipulated that all agricultural and forest land in the occupied Eastern Territories (excluding the Government General) that was not owned by ethnic Germans was to be put under state control.²⁹ Darré as Minister of Agriculture was now tasked with creating a body to actually enforce the seizure of land from non-Germans.³⁰ The body created was the East German Land Cultivation Company, Inc, otherwise known as Ostland, that not only seized lands from non-Germans, but also tended and cultivated seized farmland. In 1940, Ostland largely continued the work that Darré began in September 1939, maintaining much of the same land and even purchasing the equipment that was originally loaned for use in 1939.³¹ These two events were the majority of Darré’s actual effect on the war.

²⁸ *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, 152.

²⁹ *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, 153.

³⁰ Ingo Loose, *Kredite Für NS-Verbrechen: Die Deutschen Kreditinstitute in Polen Und Die Ausraubung Der Polnischen Und Jüdischen Bevölkerung 1939-1945* (München: Oldenbourg, 2007), 222; Maximilian Becker, *Mitstreiter Im Volkstumskampf: Deutsche Justiz in Den Eingegliederten Ostgebieten 1939-1945* (Oldenbourg: Walter De Gruyter GmbH, 2014), 116; *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, 153.

³¹ *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, 153.

Aside from his role in Poland, Darré had little to no impact on agriculture outside of Germany for the duration of the war. That role fell to his subordinate and eventual successor, Herbert Backe. Rather than Darré, Backe was informed of Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union, and it was Backe who devised Germany's plan to feed itself and deal with the unwanted populations in the Soviet Union.³² Backe's plan was called the Hunger Plan and had two parts. First, all food in the occupied Eastern Territories would be diverted to the German military to free up the German food supply to remain for Germans in the Reich. Second, the plan called for killing off the Jews, Soviet prisoners of war, and the Slavic populations of Eastern Europe by starvation. All in all, the Hunger Plan caused the deaths of millions of Eastern Europeans.³³

Since Darré was not informed of Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union, he believed by late 1940 that the war was practically over, and he began to fully turn his attention back to improving the German peasantry in the Reich.³⁴ Darré believed that German agriculture could be improved through a form of organic agriculture called biodynamic agriculture, based on a German mystical philosophy of self-improvement known as Anthroposophy, created by Rudolf Steiner and grounded in the natural world and spiritualism. Darré believed that biodynamic agriculture could both increase yields

³² Gesine Gerhard, *Nazi Hunger Politics: A History of Food in the Third Reich* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 82.

³³ E. M. Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 5, 317.

³⁴ Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's Green Party* (Abbotsbrook, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire: Kensal Press, 1985), 177.

by improving soil quality and, therefore, growing efficiency (speed of plant growth and amount of quality plants grown), and could free German farmers from the need for synthetic fertilizer.³⁵ From late 1940 to early 1941 Darré sent out a number of questionnaires to a multitude of different party functionaries ranging from Gauleiters to leading SS members, and to Hitler himself to gauge their support for biodynamic agriculture. Hitler did not respond, but twenty-two of the responses to Darré's questionnaire exist, and the results were mixed: seven were supportive, three were unsure, and twelve were unsupportive.

Some of those who supported biodynamic agriculture were Alfred Rosenberg, Hjalmar Schacht, Heinrich Himmler, and Rudolf Hess. Unfortunately for Darré, only Himmler and Hess had any real power in 1940, and because of Darré's falling out with Himmler, it was unlikely that he would be a stalwart for Darré. The real defender of Darré and biodynamic agriculture was Rudolf Hess.³⁶ Hess was Hitler's right-hand man and a devoted National Socialist since 1920. He was the man that transcribed Part I of *Mein Kampf* while Hitler dictated it in Landsberg Prison in 1924. Hess, however, had attempted to broker peace with the British during a doomed solo flight to Scotland in May 1941. Following this attempt, Hitler completely rejected Hess.

³⁵ Peter Staudenmaier, "Organic Farming in Nazi Germany: The Politics of Biodynamic Agriculture, 1933–1945," *Environmental History* 18 (2013), 385, 390.

³⁶ Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party 1933-1945* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 391.

The opponents of biodynamic agriculture consisted of men such as Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Sicherheitsdienst, and the organizer of the death camps, Martin Bormann, the man who replaced Rudolf Hess as Hitler's secretary, and Hermann Göring. Heydrich's disdain was likely the strongest, however. Peter Staudenmaier writes:

Heydrich depicted anthroposophy as a menacing sect unfit for the new Germany, an elite and foreign belief system committed to its own dubious dogma. For Heydrich, anthroposophy, and in turn biodynamic agriculture, was "not a worldview for the whole people, but a special doctrine for a narrow and limited circle of individuals, a doctrine which endangers National Socialism".³⁷

Following Hess' flight, Heydrich issued a declaration called the Action Against Secret Teachings and so-called Secret Sciences. This was a reactionary measure that led to the arrest of occultists and mystics in the Reich, which included practitioners of biodynamic agriculture. There were so many arrests that Darré wrote letters to Heydrich and Himmler telling them to stop arresting farmers.³⁸ The resistance from the most powerful men in the Reich never allowed biodynamic agriculture to take off in Germany as Darré hoped it would.

During the war Darré continued to write and publish articles on German race and the peasantry. In 1940 Darré released a pair of articles regarding his current peasant ideology. In the first, "The Law of Life as seen in the Theories of Two States", Darré argued that both a strong peasantry and a pure blood line were required to create a race that would be great throughout the generations. To make his point, Darré

³⁷ Staudenmaier, *Organic Farming*, 391-392.

³⁸ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 178.

juxtaposed Ancient China and Sparta. In regard to Sparta, Darré argued that while it maintained a pure blood line within the aristocracy, the aristocracy abandoned farming to push for a military based state. Such an aristocracy with no basis in the peasantry would eventually die off from war and conquest, and without the aristocracy supplementing itself with peasants, even the state would eventually die off.³⁹ Darré argued that this was similar to the Prussian system created under Frederick the Great, but the Prussians supplemented their officer corps with middle and lower class individuals, and by 1913 two-thirds of the Prussian officer corps was composed of non-noble citizens.⁴⁰

Opposite the Spartans were the Ancient Chinese who created a stable state based on its peasantry. Because of its familial and honorific system “anyone in China could advance through the political and societal ranks based on ability and willingness.”⁴¹ In Darré’s opinion, China’s method “assured its people eternal life at the cost of being a shaping force in history.”⁴² Sparta, on the other hand, created a race that was great, but died out because it was not “anchored in the Volk.”⁴³ Thus, Darré believed that for the Germans to create both a great state and one that would last for generations, a pure blooded nobility based in the peasantry was necessary.

³⁹ Richard Walther Darré, *Vom Lebensgesetz Zweier Staatsgedanken* (Goslar: Verlag Blut und Boden, 1940), 32.

⁴⁰ Darré, *Vom Lebensgesetz Zweier Staatsgedanken*, 32.

⁴¹ Darré, *Vom Lebensgesetz Zweier Staatsgedanken*, 12.

⁴² Darré, *Vom Lebensgesetz Zweier Staatsgedanken*, 42.

⁴³ Darré, *Vom Lebensgesetz Zweier Staatsgedanken*, 42.

In another article published in 1940 titled “New Order of Thought”, Darré argued that German resettlement in the Eastern Territories lost following World War I was an honorable goal:

It would be ideal if our farms and peasantry could be restored to the soil where they once sat. It would be such a spiritual experience when grandchildren are able to approach the graves of their ancestors and commemorate those who owe their existence to them and who have worked in the fields before them. It would only be then that the idea of [Blood and Soil] would have its actual consecration, when the peasant's plow once again broke the soil around the graves of his ancestors; when the peasant, in memory of his ancestors, could once again work on his farm and return his ancestry to his soil.⁴⁴

Darré believed that life ought to revolve around this pseudo-spiritual idea that land and blood are connected, and that if a family returned to where its ancestors once farmed, a bond between blood and soil would be rekindled.

Despite Darré's attempts, it was clear that by 1941 both Germany and the NSDAP had moved on from Darré and his ideas. Operation Barbarossa began on June 22, 1941, and Germany divided its Eastern Armies into three groups that attacked the Soviet Union in the north, center, and south. Army Group South was dedicated entirely to the capture of Ukraine and Crimea. It is clear that the capture of the agriculturally fertile Ukraine was critical to Hitler, and that he was more interested in advancing Germany through conquest rather than reshaping the existing German state. Herbert Backe had convinced the National Socialist leadership that Ukrainian farmland would

⁴⁴ Richard Walther Darré, *Neuordnung unseres Denkens* (Goslar: Verlag Blut und Boden, 1940), 22.

secure the German military's food supply during World War II.⁴⁵ For this reason, Hitler believed firmly that Ukraine was the solution, and nothing that Darré said about the German peasant would change this. Darré's Blood and Soil ideology was already being abandoned, and biodynamic agriculture was illegal. Any possible value of coupling blood to soil was now completely outweighed by the need to accrue as much food as possible. In Hitler's eyes, Backe was the solution to the food question, not Darré.

By mid-1942 Darré's stock was fairly worthless. As an ideologue whose views centered on the peasantry but who no longer had its support, and as an agrarian who had more failures than successes in recent years, Darré was no longer necessary. Germany was firmly embroiled in a war on multiple fronts, while simultaneously attempting to starve undesirable populations within the territories it had conquered. Darré was simply a liability who was wasting other, more important, diplomats' time by sending them unnecessary memos about biodynamic agriculture.

Finally, in May 1942 Hitler began to permanently remove Darré from office in favor of Herbert Backe. Germany faced grain shortages and poor weather. The fear of having to reduce bread rations in the coming fall was of great concern to Hitler, and this fear galvanized him into action.⁴⁶ On May 16, 1942 Hitler stated via Führer Decree that Darré, "called me regarding his continued health issues to vacate his office as Leiter of the Reichsamt for Agriculture until further notice." Hitler then asked Backe, as the

⁴⁵ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 5.

⁴⁶ Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924-1945* (Munich: Piper Verlag GmbH, 1999), 1794.

leading official in the Reichsamt, to take Darré's place to which he agreed.⁴⁷ Then, on May 20, 1942 Hitler spoke with Goebbels regarding Darré and the food situation.

Goebbels recalled:

The Führer has finally decided to let Darré go. Backe will be his replacement. I urge the Führer not to make a major public action out of it because of the danger that all mistakes in food policy will be blamed on Darré and in turn the NSDAP because Darré is after all a National Socialist Minister. The Führer also agrees and is prepared to publish only that Darré has an illness which prevents him from exercising his office and that he should be represented by Backe. Backe performs in an exemplary way. You can count on him. He is not a pale theorist like Darré, but a true first-class practitioner. I've never thought much of Darré. His theories are pure literature; he does not understand much about practical agricultural life. His slogan of blood and soil has been ridden to death by him and his backers, so that today you couldn't lure a dog out of an oven with it.⁴⁸

On May 23, 1942 Goebbels had the newspapers report that Darré was taking a leave of absence from his position as Reichsminister due to health issues and that Backe would be filling in for Darré.⁴⁹ These of course were lies. Darré was not sick, and he did not vacate his positions willingly, but rather was forced out of his positions by Hitler. Darré lost his positions as Reichsleiter and Reichsminister within a week; he no longer had any power whatsoever, and German agriculture was completely out of his hands.

⁴⁷ Moll, *Führer-Erlasse*, 251.

⁴⁸ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 1794-1795.

⁴⁹ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 1794.

Darré's Life After Power

Following Darré's removal from his positions as Reichsminister and Reichsleiter in May 1942, Germany led an unsuccessful military campaign into southern Russia and northeastern Africa. After key surrenders at El Alamein and Stalingrad the German war machine never regained the traction it had from 1939 to the end 1941. Once the Western Front was reopened on continental Europe following the D-Day invasions in June 1944, Germany's defeat seemed increasingly certain.

Darré lived in relative obscurity from May 1942 to the end of the war in Europe in the spring of 1945. He continued to be involved in government correspondence in 1942 and 1943, and maintained an office in Berlin until 1944.⁵⁰ In March 1943 Darré was exposed alongside multiple other NSDAP members for purchasing food without ration coupons.⁵¹ In 1944, Darré's Berlin house was destroyed by an allied bomb and he, his wife, and daughter moved to a new house outside Berlin.⁵² According to Darré's diary, he ran into Backe in a Berlin air raid shelter in mid-April 1945 and told Backe that his own [Darré's] opposition to the war was justified.⁵³ On April 14, 1945 Darré surrendered to the American forces in Thuringia.

⁵⁰*Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 13, 807, 885, 1002; Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 181.

⁵¹ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 1914.

⁵² Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 181.

⁵³ Bramwell, *Blood and Soil*, 182.

From 1947 to 1949 Darré, among other German officials, was put on trial by the American Military Tribunal in Nuremberg in what came to be known as the Ministries Trial. Defendants in the Ministries Trial faced the following possible charges:

1. Planning, Preparation, Initiation, and Waging of Wars of Aggression and Invasions of Other Countries
2. Common Plan and Conspiracy
3. War Crimes: Murder and Ill-Treatment of Belligerents and Prisoners of War
4. Crimes against Humanity: Atrocities and Offenses Committed against German Nationals on Political, Racial, and Religious Grounds from 1933 to 1939
5. War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: Atrocities and Offenses Committed against Civilian Populations
6. War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity: Plunder and Spoliation
7. War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity: Slave Labor
8. Membership in Criminal Organizations

Darré was charged with counts 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8. After a year-and-a-half of trials for the twenty-one defendants, sentences were passed down on April 13, 1949. Darré was acquitted of counts 1, 2, and 7 but found guilty of counts 5, 6, and 8. Darré was found guilty of count five due to his discriminatory policies toward German Jews in regard to food and land policy⁵⁴ and because of his role in removing the native populations from their land during and after the invasion of Poland.⁵⁵ Darré was found guilty of count six due to the Reich Ministry's role in implementing the Hunger Plan.⁵⁶ Lastly, Darré was

⁵⁴ German Jews received less calories in their ration cards compared to non-Jews, and German Jews received lower rates when they sold land compared to their non-Jewish counterparts.

⁵⁵ *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 14, 554-565.

⁵⁶ *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 14, 697-701.

partially acquitted of count eight due to his attempt to resign from the SS, but was still found guilty due to being a Reichsleiter.⁵⁷ Darré was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for his crimes, crediting time already served; therefore, Darré's sentence ran from 1945 to 1952.

Darré was imprisoned in Landsberg Prison, the same prison that housed Adolf Hitler in 1924 after the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch. Darré was released from prison in August 1950 due to his failing health. He spent his final years in Bad Harzburg near what Darré had dubbed the Reich Peasant City, Goslar, nearly two decades earlier. On September 5, 1953 Darré died in a Munich clinic from liver cancer.

Summary

Three major circumstances made sure that Darré would not survive as a high-ranking German official after 1938. First, the importance of other high-ranking officials to maintaining Darré in power was proven after he lost his two most powerful allies: Heinrich Himmler and Rudolf Hess. Himmler had originally been a proponent of Darré's peasant ideology, Blood and Soil. Himmler also helped launch Darré's political career by making him a leader in the Schutzstaffel in 1932, and defended Darré multiple times when his power was challenged. After 1938, however, Himmler replaced Darré as the leader in peasant policy and pushed for peasant policy based on conquest, rather than Blood and Soil. Rudolf Hess defended Darré later in his career when Darré began trying

⁵⁷ *Nuernberg Military Tribunal*, vol. 14, 861-862.

to infuse Biodynamic Agriculture into Blood and Soil as a means of freeing all German farmers from using synthetic fertilizer in favor of a more natural and spiritual farming method. After Hess was captured by the Allies, Darré was completely vulnerable to all attacks from his detractors, such as Heydrich, Göring, and Bormann.

Landflucht was another massive issue for Darré because he could not promote a peasant ideology with no peasantry to apply it to. Economic favoritism for urban workers and poor leadership on Darré's part helped create the Landflucht problem that continued even after Darré was removed from office in 1942. Blood and Soil was an ideology that could only thrive with the entire power of a government behind it. The mass amount of resources that had to be funneled into the peasantry in order to groom it into the superior state that Darré wanted while still maintaining Germany's industrial capacity made the implementation of Blood and Soil highly unlikely. The entire German agricultural sector was deeply in debt, and in order to bring it out of debt, agricultural wholesale prices would have had to be increased, which would in turn hinder the industrial sector and hurt those living in cities. This was not the route that Hitler and the NSDAP wanted to take and Darré, the peasantry, and Blood and Soil became secondary or worse. By 1939 a large number of peasants had realized that Darré was not going to deliver on the promises of Blood and Soil and they began to reject him as well. With no support from the top or bottom, Darré was destined to fail.

The death knell for Darré was the long war. Darré may have survived as a minister had the war ended in 1940 after the fall of the countries that surrounded

Germany, but after Germany failed to defeat the Soviets in the second half of 1941 and food supplies became an immediate concern, Darré was removed from office. Darré played a role in the war in Poland in 1939 and helped organize the effort to secure the Polish harvest and administer confiscated land in Poland. After this, however, Darré was hardly involved in the war and was replaced by Herbert Backe. The actual plans for agricultural expansion on the Eastern Front were the responsibilities of Herbert Backe, which signaled that Darré was irrelevant regarding both agricultural and peasant matters. The only thing that really held Darré in his position until May 1942 was that he was a National Socialist minister. That his dismissal was coming, however, was signaled as Hitler, Goebbels, and Himmler all expressed concerns prior to May 1942 as to what sort of message removing Darré from office would send to the public.

The existing historiography fails to fully appreciate the role that his Blood and Soil ideology played in his removal. Collingham has argued that Darré was removed from power to “revitalize the war effort,” but this was not fully the case. He had little real power in the war economy because Himmler and Backe already overshadowed him in the agricultural sector from 1939 to 1942.⁵⁸ The removal of Darré in 1942 simply precluded him from bothering other officials regarding Blood and Soil and allowed Backe to have the full use of the official channels that were afforded to Darré as Reichsminister and Reichsleiter. Tooze has argued that Darré was removed from power

⁵⁸ Collingham, *The Taste of War*, 28-29

due to a disastrous ration cut. Instead, it was the fear of having to cut rations that galvanized Hitler into action. Therefore, this fear was a catalyst for removing Darré from office, but not the cause. Farquharson has argued that Darré was removed from power because of his unwillingness to further exploit the unwanted populations in the East after Operation Barbarossa in June 1941. This, however, continued after the invasion of the Soviet Union under the watch of Backe and his Hunger Plan, and there was nothing that Darré could even really do about it had he wanted to. The notion shared by a number of historians (such as Evans, Kershaw, Bramwell, and Tooze) that Hitler did not want to remove Darré from office because of his reluctance to discard ministers is, in my judgement, inaccurate. Darré had been a Reichsminister for almost nine years when he was removed from office, whereas the average tenure for a Reichsminister was less than six years; Darré had also been a Reichsleiter for nine years (three years as a Leiter and six years as a Reichsleiter after his office was promoted in the party hierarchy) and the average tenure was just short of eleven years, though this average is skewed by people who had been Reichsleiters since the 1920s. Therefore, Hitler was not opposed to removing high-ranking officials when necessary. Lastly, Anna Bramwell, has argued that Darré was an honorable and misunderstood man who was mixed in with a group of dishonorable men. According to Bramwell, Darré was not an anti-Semite, his ideas were sound, and his failures were not his fault. In my opinion, Bramwell is off the mark. She does not actually focus on why Darré came to power, remained in power, and was eventually removed from power. Instead, Bramwell devotes much of her book to

arguing that Darré was one of the original green politicians and that he was a trailblazer of his time, neglecting to point out that Darré was a failed administrator, his plans were impractical, and that his personality pushed people away and kept him from further achieving his political goals.

The reality of the matter is that Darré maintained power because Blood and Soil maintained importance until at least 1938/1939. Before the war began and while Germany pursued an internal policy of nation building, Blood and Soil was an attractive idea that appealed to a sizeable minority of the German population. The year before the war began, however, Darré resigned from the RuSHA due to a disagreement in peasant policy with Heinrich Himmler. It was at this point that marginalization efforts against Darré picked up steam. When the war began Darré maintained some importance because his RNS could be mobilized to secure the Polish harvest and improve the German food situation. When the invasion of the Soviet Union began, however, German policy shifted to imperialism, which was not part of Darré's ideology. The shift was then made to completely remove Darré and his ideology because they did not comply with the new direction in which Hitler had decided to lead Germany.

Overall, Blood and Soil failed because of a lack of support on all fronts. It lacked political support from other ministers because of economic favoritism toward urban workers and after 1939 the push towards imperialism, it lacked support from Darré since he was so busy trying to coordinate the agricultural, economic, and social policy for the German agricultural sector, and lastly, it lacked the support of the peasantry,

since they had been marginalized economically and politically since 1936. Blood and Soil was so ambitious that it required support on all of these fronts, and when it did have this support from 1933 to 1935 it was somewhat successful. When it started losing support, however, it was doomed. Something as massive as Blood and Soil simply could not succeed without overwhelming and continued support of the entire German government.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter examines how Hitler went about removing officials from power. I will answer three main questions. Why did the NSDAP remove officials from power? How did the NSDAP go about removing officials from power? And, was there any policy that the NSDAP followed to make these decisions? I will discuss six officials, split into three groups. Gregor Strasser and Ernst Rohm will be in the first group - betrayal or treason. Rudolf Hess and Werner von Blomberg will be in the second group - scandal and party image. Lastly, Hans Kerrl and Wilhelm Frick will be in the third group - ineffectiveness, incompetence, and other reasons for dismissal. In all of these cases, the consolidation of power within a small inner circle of Hitler loyalists was an important result. In each of these groups I will examine why these officials were removed from power and how the NSDAP went about removing them. Afterward, I will examine Darré's place within the context of NSDAP personnel policy.

NSDAP Personnel Policy

Hitler stated in Mein Kampf what he believed the basic premise of NSDAP personnel policy should be:

Hence it is the highest task of the organization to make sure that no inner disunities within the membership of the movement lead to a split and hence a weakening of the movement's work; further, that a spirit of determined attack does not die out, but is continuously renewed and reinforced. The number of members need not grow infinitely; on the contrary: since only a small fraction of mankind is by nature energetic and bold, a movement which endlessly enlarges its organization would inevitably be weakened someday as a result.

Organizations, in other words, membership figures, which grow beyond a certain level gradually lose their fighting power and are no longer capable of supporting or utilizing the propaganda of an idea resolutely and aggressively. ⁵⁹

Therefore, for Hitler, the number one factor in personnel decisions is how they will affect the strength of the party. The party is strongest when it has a few completely dedicated members, and this is the state to which the party returned as time went on. Hitler did not limit enrollment into the party, but rather made it so only a few party members had any real power. This is why officials such as Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Göring would amass titles and responsibilities after 1941.⁶⁰ Hitler tried to centralize the power in the party and the Reich in the hands of his most dedicated officials'. The personnel policy of the NSDAP was to protect the strength of the party at all costs and to consolidate the party's power into a few officials' hands. This idea was further elaborated in Robert Ley's 1937 *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP*, where he wrote that, "expulsion is the highest penalty the party can assign" and "in addition to their membership, [they] also automatically lose their possible leadership positions, workplace in the party and all its organizations, and all honorary posts in the state and

⁵⁹ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 284.

⁶⁰ These men had amassed multiple titles and responsibilities by 1945. Göring's titles were: President of the Reichstag, Minister President of Prussia, Supreme Commander of the Luftwaffe, Reich Plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan, Reichsminister of Aviation, Reichsminister of Forestry. Himmler's titles were: Reichsführer-SS, Chief of the German Police, Reichsminister of the Interior, Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Nation. Alfred Rosenberg's titles were: Reichsleiter of the Foreign Policy Office of the NSDAP, Commissar for the Supervision of Intellectual and Ideological Education of the NSDAP, Reichsminister for the Occupied Eastern Territories.

in the communities,” and “it is generally appropriate that those who have left the movement are also thrown out of their private jobs.”⁶¹ Ley states three main reasons for expulsion: slander, contravening party efforts, and immoral behavior that damages the party.⁶²

Another tool for implementing NSDAP personnel policy were the direct oaths of fealty that Hitler required be sworn to him. Different organizations required different oaths, which carried different obligations and responsibilities. Refusal to take the oath could lead to loss of positions, lack of access to organizations or imprisonment.⁶³

Members of the Wehrmacht were required to state:

I swear this holy oath to God that I should unconditionally obey the leader of the German Reich and the people, Adolf Hitler, the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht, and that I, as a brave soldier, should be ready to commit my life to this oath at any time.⁶⁴

Members of the SS swore to this oath:

I swear to you, Adolf Hitler, as leader and chancellor of the German Reich loyalty and bravery. We vow obedience to you and your chosen leaders until death. So help me God!⁶⁵

⁶¹ Robert Ley, *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher Nachf, 1937), 6.

⁶² Ley, *Organisationsbuch*, 7.

⁶³ “Hitler Oath,” Project Gutenberg, accessed March 7, 2020, http://www.self.gutenberg.org/articles/Hitler_oath.

⁶⁴ “Gesetz über die Vereidigung der Beamten und der Soldaten der Wehrmacht,” *Verfassungen*, accessed March 7, 2020, <http://www.verfassungen.de/de33-45/vereidigung34.htm>.

⁶⁵ “Hitler Oath,” Project Gutenberg, accessed March 7, 2020, http://www.self.gutenberg.org/articles/Hitler_oath.

Lastly, members of the civil service (both party and state) were required to repeat this oath:

I swear: I will be loyal and obedient to the leader of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, observe the laws and conscientiously fulfill my official duties, so God help me.⁶⁶

Therefore, fealty to Adolf Hitler and maintaining the image of the party were two important duties for any civil servant or party official. In the following section I will further describe the party's personnel policy and discuss three main reasons why officials were removed from power.

Betrayal or Treason

Ernst Roehm and Gregor Strasser were two early National Socialists who were critical to the success of the NSDAP leading up to the Machtergreifung. They both also betrayed Adolf Hitler. Betrayal of the Führer carried the penalty of death. Execution was used to remove powerful political opponents from power and to end an immediate threat to the Führer and party's power. Their executions served as an immediate means to an end, a deterrent, and with the proper propaganda would be skewed to make the party look justified in the killings.

Ernst Roehm was the leader of the Sturmabteilung, the NSDAP's paramilitary wing, from 1931 to 1934. Roehm was an officer in the Reichswehr and helped provide the NSDAP with arms during the failed Beer Hall Putsch. While Hitler was in prison

⁶⁶ Ley, *Organisationsbuch*, 16.

Roehm continued his paramilitary activities but quit all political activity from 1925 to 1931 due to disagreements with Hitler regarding the party's paramilitary policies.⁶⁷

Gregor Strasser was one of the leading members of the NSDAP in the 1920s. He was a member of the northern faction of the NSDAP and was the gateway to Goebbels entrance into the party's upper ranks. Strasser and Goebbels helped create the NSDAP's propaganda machine; Strasser was the Reichspropagandaleiter from 1926 to 1929 and Goebbels held the same position from 1929 to 1945.⁶⁸ Strasser was the Gauleiter of Munich and Bayreuth from 1925 to 1929. Strasser and Hitler had repeated tensions, and these tensions worsened exponentially after September 1932.⁶⁹

Both of these men were executed by the NSDAP during the Night of Long Knives on June 30, 1934. Goebbels justified the killings in a July 1, 1934 diary entry, noting that Roehm, Francois-Poncet, Schleicher, and Strasser were conspiring against the Führer, and that the Führer and his supporters decided on June 29th that the rebels would soon act and that they must strike pre-emptively "with blood" to quell the rebellion.⁷⁰ The next day both Roehm and Strasser were arrested and killed. Alfred Rosenberg justified their killings in his diary, arguing that the Führer did not want them to be shot, but they

⁶⁷ Wolfgang Benz, Hermann Graml, and Hermann Weiß, *Enzykloädie Des National Sozialismus* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998), 875.

⁶⁸ Joseph Goebbels, *Tagebücher 1924-1945* (Munich: Piper Verlag GmbH, 1999),

⁶⁹ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 694-696, 730-732, 748.

⁷⁰ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 843.

were both guilty of treason.⁷¹ Viktor Klemperer, a German Jew who kept detailed diaries and often spoke on the political climate in the Reich, wrote in his diary about the killings, stating:

No sympathy at all for the vanquished, only delight, (a) that they are eating one another up, (b) that Hitler is now like a man after his first major heart attack. Admittedly I was depressed when everything remained calm during the days that followed. But then we told ourselves: They cannot survive this blow.⁷²

It was clear that Hitler and the NSDAP knew what they were doing when they executed those who challenged them, and that they certainly could survive it.

Treason was the most serious crime one could commit in the Reich. On July 20, 1944 Claus von Stauffenberg attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler and overthrow the National Socialist government. He failed to kill Hitler and the coup was quickly squashed. In retaliation, 4980 people were executed, including a number of noteworthy officials, such as: Ludwig Beck, Erwin Rommel, Erwin von Witzleben, and Carl Friedrich von Goerdeler.

Treason, betrayal or other challenges to the Führer's power carried the penalty of death. Such deaths accomplished two things: the immediate cessation of the supposed treasonous activities against the Führer and party, and the setting of an example to other people who may attempt to challenge the Führer. Execution was

⁷¹ Alfred Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg and the Onset of the Holocaust*, trans. Jürgen Matthäus and Frank Bajohr (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 39-42.

⁷² Victor Klemperer, *I will bear Witness: a Diary of the Nazi Years 1933-1941*, trans. Martin Chalmers (New York: Modern Library, 1999), 74.

extremely effective when used, and propaganda masterminds such as Joseph Goebbels were geniuses at spinning the story to make the NSDAP appear justified.

Scandal and Party Image

As stated by both Hitler and Robert Ley, maintaining party image was of the utmost importance. Therefore, scandals which could damage the party image or bring unwanted attention to party members and their affairs required immediate action against the guilty person. Scandals could be leveraged against a person in the public eye or in private, and they could be created by the NSDAP or come out through various news outlets. The NSDAP took advantage of scandal to distance itself from an individual, and to separate its ideology and preserve the party's character as much as possible. The individual details of the specific scandal were often kept secret or skewed in order to protect the individual. Because of the way that the NSDAP dealt with scandal it was generally able to maintain the character of an individual and their past accomplishments, while still distancing itself from their scandal. The cases of General Werner von Blomberg and Rudolf Hess are very different but exemplify this approach.

General Werner von Blomberg was the Reichsminister of War in the Hitler cabinet from 1933 to 1938.⁷³ Blomberg largely oversaw the reorganization of the German military from 1935 to 1938 and helped reign in the Army General Staff under the control of Hitler and the Government. In 1938 Blomberg married a much younger

⁷³ The office changed names in 1935, from 1933 to 1935 he was the Reichsminister of Defense.

wife, and multiple high-ranking officials, including Hermann Göring and Adolf Hitler, were present at the wedding.⁷⁴ After the wedding, Göring confronted both Wilhelm von Fritsch and Hitler with a report, stating that Blomberg's new wife had posed for pornographic photos in 1932 and that her mother had a lengthy criminal record. Hitler argued that Blomberg should annul the marriage, Blomberg refused and resigned his post as Reichsminister of War on January 27, 1938.⁷⁵ Shortly after this, General Wilhelm von Fritsch, another army officer and possible replacement for Blomberg, had allegations of homosexuality raised against him, and he also resigned his post on February 4, 1938.⁷⁶ Hitler used these events to completely reorganize and further subjugate the German military. Hitler had the Ministry of War dissolved and replaced by the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht headed by the completely loyal Wilhelm Keitel.⁷⁷

Rudolf Hess was a close associate of Adolf Hitler who flew in the night on May 10, 1941 to Scotland to try and broker peace with the British. Hess secretly planned his flight for five months, and the party leadership did not even learn of his flight until the British press reported his capture.⁷⁸ Rosenberg wrote in his diary that Hess was a man who had been slowly marginalized over the years. This loss of influence, Rosenberg claimed, drove Hess into depression and madness, and this flight to Scotland was simply

⁷⁴ Wilhelm Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel*, trans. David Irving (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 43.

⁷⁵ Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel*, 44-45.

⁷⁶ Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel*, 47-48.

⁷⁷ Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel*, 49-52.

⁷⁸ Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg*, 247.

the peak of Hess' madness.⁷⁹ Joseph Goebbels discussed the political effects of Hess' flight to Scotland in his diary. In his diary entries from the seven days following Hess' flight, Goebbels described the incident as: *a complete mess, terrible, losing dramatic character, and finally fading*.⁸⁰ Goebbels wrote on May 16, 1941:

Extent of atrocity still enormous, substance very low. In the whole presentation no clear tendency. The rumors are killing each other dead. I see it as a great relief for us. Apparently, London does not come up with an obvious twist, simply handing out statements regarding Hess without concern. That would be the only, but also terrible, danger for us. I tremble at the thought that this could happen. But it seems like a guardian angel is standing next to us again.⁸¹

Viktor Klemperer also described this event in his diary:

Hess Affair (Deputy of the Führer, to England in a plane), three days ago on the radio, as we were sitting in the Pschorr, the day before yesterday confused "explanation", now not a word, appears to have caused a great sensation among the whole population. Should one place any hopes in it? In my war diaries I come upon facts that I only allude to, because they seemed to me so incredibly momentous and imprinted on me forever—and today I no longer know what they were about, they were unimportant after all and slipped away. Will it be the same with Hess?⁸²

Though this problem seemingly solved itself with little spin by Goebbels, Hitler still took the opportunity to dissolve Hess' previous post of Deputy-Führer and had it replaced by the Chief of the Party Chancellery.

When scandals arose, the NSDAP protected itself by threatening someone to resign. A scandal could weaken the party and bring into question its integrity and quality

⁷⁹ Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg*, 245-248.

⁸⁰ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 1571-1580.

⁸¹ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 1577.

⁸² Klemperer, *I will bear Witness 1933-1941*, 384.

of its membership; therefore, to maintain maximum power, it was necessary for the NSDAP to remove any officials that were affected by scandal.

Ineffectiveness, Incompetence, and other Reasons

Ministers who were ineffective, incompetent, who outlived their usefulness, or who attempted to do more than their position required were often marginalized or removed from office. As this occurred, the NSDAP consolidated power under fewer officials. Wilhelm Frick and Hans Kerrl were two National Socialist Reichsministers who were removed from office under these circumstances. The NSDAP usually used a process of marginalization, which was a slow process that allowed it to remove someone from office over a longer period of time with little negative effect on party image. These marginalized officials did nothing necessarily wrong, and they were not a threat to the party or Hitler, but their removal was deemed necessary, nonetheless.

Wilhelm Frick was a long time National Socialist who took part in the failed Beer Hall Putsch. Frick was one of the first National Socialists to hold legitimate government positions when he became the Minister of Education and Interior for Thuringia in 1930. When Hitler was appointed Chancellor in 1933, Wilhelm Frick became Reichsminister that year and was the only man besides Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk to be a Reichsminister for the entirety of the Hitler Cabinet. Frick was extremely important to the NSDAP from 1933 to 1936, drafting many of the state's most well-known laws, such as the Nuremberg Race Laws and laws related to rearmament. Much like Darré, Frick's power was usurped by Heinrich Himmler for Himmler's own personal gain.

Unlike Darré, however, Frick was actually replaced in his position as Reichsminister of the Interior by Heinrich Himmler, and Frick was allowed to stay in the cabinet as a Reichsminister Without Portfolio. Frick had unsuccessfully tried multiple times from 1933 to 1938 to limit Himmler and the Schutzstaffel's power. Eventually in 1938 Himmler was named Chief of the German Police which, effectively moved control of the police from the Ministry of the Interior to Himmler's SS. On April 6, 1943 Goebbels wrote in his diary that he had had a conversation with Josef Terboven, and that many of the issues in the Reich were due to issues within the central leadership. Furthermore, Terboven suggested, which Goebbels had long believed, that Himmler should replace Frick as the Reichsminister of the Interior.⁸³ Himmler took Frick's place as Reichsminister of the interior four months later in August 1943. Victor Klemperer viewed Himmler's appointment as Reichsminister of the Interior as a bad omen, "How must matters stand in Germany, if the hangman is made minister of the interior!"⁸⁴ Frick maintained some power, as he was transferred to Prague to become the Protector of Bohemia and Moravia. Frick maintained this position until the city surrendered to the allies in May 1945.

Hanns Kerrl was the Reichsminister for Church Affairs from July 1935 until December 1941. Kerrl was originally made a Reichsminister Without Portfolio in June

⁸³ Goebbels, *Tagebücher*, 1918

⁸⁴ Victor Klemperer, *I will bear Witness: a Diary of the Nazi Years 1942-1945*, trans. Martin Chalmers (New York: Random House, 1999), 256.

1934 but was promoted to Reichsminister of the newly created Church Affairs Office. Kerrl was in an extremely difficult position because it was his job to bring the churches in Germany under the influence of the NSDAP, while several other German officials, such as Rosenberg and Himmler, openly spoke ill of Christianity.⁸⁵ Alfred Rosenberg was especially unfond of Kerrl, and after 1936 wrote often about Kerrl's failures and how, despite his best attempts, he often worked against the Führer's wishes rather than towards them.⁸⁶ Kerrl died in office in December 1941. A man who had accomplished little and left little to no impact on National Socialism was joked about by Hitler and Rosenberg following his death.⁸⁷ Hitler argued, "Kerrl's motives surely were nothing but noble, but the endeavor to unite National Socialism and Christianity was simply a hopeless one."⁸⁸ Kerrl was replaced by another powerless minister who also accomplished little. Kerrl was in the unique position where his entire office was effectively marginalized rather than simply himself.

Neither Frick nor Kerrl had necessarily done anything wrong. Frick was an essential member in the NSDAP's path to legal power and helped implement Gleichschaltung. His issue, however, was that he attempted to maintain control of the police in the Ministry of the Interior and, in turn, limit Himmler's power. He was slowly

⁸⁵ Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg*, 268-269.

⁸⁶ Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg*, 79-81, 111, 117-118, 122-123, 171, 269-270.

⁸⁷ Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg*, 269.

⁸⁸ Rosenberg, *The Political Diary of Alfred Rosenberg*, 269.

marginalized until he lost his position as Reichsminister of the Interior, though he maintained some power in a different form. Kerrl on the other hand embarked on an impossible task, to merge Christianity with National Socialism. In a society where Christianity was openly criticized and occultism was practiced by many prominent party members, this was an impossible feat, and Kerrl was stuck in the middle, incapable of accomplishing anything. He maintained his position, but lost all power.

Darré in the Broader Context of Personnel Matters

Darré did not betray the Reich, and there were no real character issues that the NSDAP could use against him aside from purchasing food without ration coupons. Rather, Darré was marginalized and removed from power because he was ineffective, outlived his usefulness, and attempted to do more than his position required. This process began in 1936 when Backe was made head of agriculture within the Office of the Four Year Plan and became irreversible following Darré's resignation from RuSHA. He faced further marginalization as Backe continued to gain favor and amass power. Darré continued to lose power as Himmler was made the Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Nation in 1939 and, in turn, became the de facto leader in peasant policy. When the war began in 1939 Darré found some favor again, as the RNS was the body deemed responsible for securing and administrating Polish farmland, but this was short lived as Backe became the ruthless administrator who crafted the agricultural policy in Eastern Europe known as the Hunger Plan. Darré found himself continuously more marginalized until 1942, when he was removed from power by Adolf

Hitler. Darré was a longstanding National Socialist minister who played an important role in bringing the NSDAP to power, like his contemporary Wilhelm Frick. Unlike Frick, however, Darré was far more committed to his ideals and policies which led to his complete loss of power, rather than a move to a different position. Darré was not a danger to National Socialism, just a bother to its leadership.

Summary

Treason, betrayal, scandal, the preservation of party image, ineffectiveness, and incompetence were the main reasons that officials were removed from power during the Third Reich. However, as the Eastern and Western fronts continued to converge on Germany from 1944 to 1945, and Germany's fate became more apparent, treason became prominent and execution became more common as the NSDAP tried to maintain control over the state and nation. Before 1944 removals from power were more nuanced as actions were weighed more to decide how the NSDAP would deal with the "guilty" party. These actions could range from execution due to treason or marginalization due to ineffective leadership. It is clear that it had long been Hitler's plan to keep the NSDAP as an exclusive organization, only open to the most dedicated members. Despite membership figures being in the millions in 1945, the real members, Hitler's inner circle, remained small and consistent: Goebbels, Himmler, Speer, Göring, and Rosenberg. These were the men who really held power or influence, and these were the men who helped Hitler run the Reich. Outside of these men, Hitler's larger

circle⁸⁹ did not change much over Hitler's tenure as Führer and Chancellor either. A small and totally dedicated force is what Hitler wanted, and that is largely what he and his personnel policy were able to create.

⁸⁹ Hitler's larger circle included men such as: Frank Xaver Schwarz, Philipp Bouhler, Walter Buch, Wilhelm Grimm, Max Amann, Otto Dietrich, Franz von Epp, Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk, etc.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I investigated how Darré's Blood and Soil ideology fueled both his rise and fall from power between 1930 and 1942. My research, I believe, builds on the existing historiography on National Socialism on two specific points: first, the role that Darré's Blood and Soil ideology played in his demise from 1938 to 1942; and second, the personnel policy of the NSDAP and how Hitler and the NSDAP made decisions regarding the removal of high ranking officials.

The first chapter regarding Darré's rise to power laid the basis for the following two chapters which discussed Darré's removal from power and the personnel policy of the NSDAP. In this first chapter, I explained how Darré's racist and peasant-centric Blood and Soil ideology was attractive to the German peasantry, a large social group that was ignored by other political parties. This popularity helped bring Hitler to power in 1933, and later that same year Darré was awarded with a promotion to Reichsminister. I explained how Darré quickly passed legislation aligned with his Blood and Soil ideology to help nurture, promote, and protect the peasantry. Darré, however, was unable to provide positive results on the agricultural front, and in 1936 his deputy, Herbert Backe, was placed in charge of a rival agricultural organization under Hermann Göring.

The second chapter, I believe, adds significantly to the existing historiography on Darré, which does not properly explain his loss of power, and the role that his Blood and Soil ideology played in his demise. In 1938, when Darré split with Heinrich Himmler, he

irreversibly damaged his political safety net, and faced ever increasing encroachment on his personal power. It was between 1938 and 1942 that the impracticality of Blood and Soil became apparent. A peasant based German state would lead to the stagnation of German industrial society which would directly impact Hitler's ability to prepare for war. It would also require a massive influx of economic and human capital into the countryside to repopulate the agricultural landscape, which had been steadily decreasing in population for most of the decade. The massive effort that it would take to make Blood and Soil a reality is what made it a slogan rather than party policy in the late 1930s. In 1939 Himmler replaced Darré in peasant policy when he became the Reich Commissar for the Strengthening of the German Nation. In 1939, World War II started, and Hitler and the leadership of the NSDAP moved on from internal nation building to conquest. This effectively killed Blood and Soil, a policy that was intrinsically inward facing and focused on bettering the nation through internal rebirth and rejuvenation. Despite Darré's efforts he was removed from power in 1942 so that his former deputy Herbert Backe could have full control of the German agricultural apparatus to pursue a policy of raping the Soviet population of the entirety of its agricultural stores to feed Germany and its people. Afterwards, Darré lived in obscurity until the end of the war when he was arrested by the Allies. Darré stood trial and was found guilty for his crimes.

The second chapter brought clarity to the issue of why Darré was removed from power, and the role that his Blood and Soil ideology played in his removal. There is no consensus in the existing historiography on this point and it is often glossed over as a

minor detail. Darré's Blood and Soil ideology, however, being both the cause for his rise and fall is a major issue, and one that requires closer examination. Although Blood and Soil may never have been a major goal for Hitler, the ideology received significant attention in the early to mid-1930s, so much so that major legislation was passed in order to protect the peasantry and help create the separate social group, Hereditary Farmers. This same ideology that received such great attention during the early years of the Third Reich was abandoned by the NSDAP beginning in 1938. Darré's attempts to continue to push his personal ideology is what led to his split with Heinrich Himmler and his eventual replacement by Himmler as the head of German peasant policy. As Darré continued to push his ideology during the war years he was completely replaced administratively by Backe and was forced into obscurity. This point is critical in understanding Darré and is something that was not yet covered properly in the existing historiography.

The third chapter discussed NSDAP personnel policy and also added significantly to the existing historiography. The questions of why and how the NSDAP removed officials from power during the Third Reich has not been something at the forefront of the historiography of the Third Reich. It has been touched on briefly by some historians but is generally boiled down to Hitler wanting to save face and preserve the leadership of the NSDAP. Hitler did remove ministers and other high ranking officials from power, however, and this chapter explained why and how these removals were carried out.

I divided the reasons for removal into three groups: treason and betrayal, scandal and the preservation of party image, and ineffectiveness and incompetence. Using these groupings, I explained why and how these issues affected the party and also how the NSDAP went about then removing officials from power. I found explanations for the reasons and methods of removals in both *Mein Kampf* and the *Organisationsbuch der NSDAP* and by examining similarities and differences in the removal of multiple officials from power. Darré fell into the last group, ineffectiveness, and my research showed how Darré's career had led to that removal. Darré, despite being effective at first, very quickly displayed his inability to administer German agriculture. As Darré's ideology continued to deviate from the path that Hitler wanted the country to follow and other officials proved themselves more capable of carrying out the duties for which Darré was responsible, Darré was removed from power in 1942. Darré's duties were consolidated under two other existing officials: Herbert Backe and Heinrich Himmler.

This thesis provides critical insight into the career of a major contributor to the NSDAP's ideology and its rise to power. It shows how Darré's contributions both helped him rise to power, but also played a key role in his eventual loss of power. Darré stood at the highest echelon of German political society in the mid-1930s; he was friends with close allies of Hitler such as Rudolf Hess, Heinrich Himmler, and Alfred Rosenberg. As Germany moved towards militarization and further industrialization, however, Darré continued to fight for his own ideology. This was a fruitless endeavor, and as Darré

failed as an administrator, he had little ground to stand on. Darré's continued push for a German peasant based society, rather than an agricultural sector based on conquest led to his replacement in peasant matters by Heinrich Himmler. Darré's failures in agriculture, including his focus on the continued improvement of existing German farming, and his inability to create a policy that Hitler deemed effective for feeding the German military during war, led to his eventual replacement by Herbert Backe as the leader of agricultural policy. Darré's total commitment to Blood and Soil was what cost him his position. Blood and Soil was not important during the war, and Darré's inability to shelve his ideology to face the realities of the total war that Germany had launched in Europe cemented his removal from power. During the war, Darré and his ideology became more of a liability than an advantage, and because of this he lost everything. As Darré lived in obscurity from 1942 to 1945 he witnessed Germany's total destruction. As the Soviet Union poured through the eastern borders of the Reich, Darré watched Germany lose most of its agricultural land, and with it any possibility of Blood and Soil taking hold in the future.

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