

OTTO STRASSER AND SOCIAL-NATIONALISM

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THE ORIGINS OF STRASSERISM

To understand Strasserism and Social-Nationalism as a whole, we must examine the roots of the movement. To understand the roots of the movement, we must take a look at the main ideologue and figure head of the movement - Otto Strasser. It must be briefly noted that many involved in the tradition of National Socialism seem to confuse the Strasser brothers involved with the NSDAP. It must also be clarified that most of Strasserist theory comes from Otto Strasser, the man who was chased into exile by the Gestapo; and although his brother Gregor was a treasured and valuable character in the history of the NSDAP, his inability to see that Hitler could not be influenced led to his ultimate demise in *The Night of the Long Knives*.

Otto Johann Maximilian Strasser was born on September 10th, 1897 in the town of Windsheim, Bavaria. Otto Strasser and his older brother Gregor were born into a bourgeois family and were both raised Catholic. When he was 17 years old, on August 2 1914, Otto had joined the Bavarian Army as a volunteer. He was not politically active prior to this point. It is worthwhile to note, however, that Otto's father Peter, was involved in Revolutionary Christian Socialism, a Socialism opposed to Marxism that never gained much traction in Germany. During his service on the front lines in The Great War, Otto had risen through the ranks to Lieutenant and was wounded twice. For his service to his country in the First World War, Otto was awarded an Iron Cross of the first and second class as well as a Medal of Merit.

When the Great War had ended, Otto returned to Germany in the year 1919. Not yet ready to give up on military service, he joined the German *Freikorps*. Through involvement with the *Freikorps*, Otto was there personally to help put down the revolt that resulted in the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Otto saw Eisner, the leader of the Bavarian Soviet Republic, as a direct threat to his German fatherland and a puppet of Bolshevism. At the same time, Otto had begun to sense a problem growing from within his own fatherland, yet had not managed to put his finger on precisely what was wrong. It is around this time that Otto had joined the SPD, the German Social-Democrat party looking for answers. He became very active in the SPD, and had personally helped put down the *Kapp-Putsch*. It was later that year when he had participated in putting down a worker's uprising in the Ruhr that he realized that the SPD was too much of a reformist (and not revolutionary enough) party for him, and no amount of change could have come from the SPD.

At this time the disillusioned Strasser had joined a radically left wing splinter faction of the SPD, the Independent Social Democrat Party, also referred to as the USPD. It is here that we begin to see the first real roots of Strasserism and Social-Nationalism. Throughout his activities with this party he had the opportunity of meeting radical Communists such as Grigory Zinoviev and at the same time he had started to study the work of Conservatives such as Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and Oswald Spengler. This led him to attend many young nationalist and conservative revolutionary meetings. It is needless to say that Otto's meetings and studies in this time period had a profound impact on his own ideology.

Elsewhere in Germany, 1925, other activities involving the NSDAP had been heating up. Adolf Hitler, who had been sentenced to prison for his involvement in the Beer Hall Putsch, was just getting out of jail and looking to take control of his party again. While Hitler had been in jail, the National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP) did not cease its activity. Around this time Otto's older brother, Gregor, who had been a member of the party for some time now, had taken over the reins of the northern faction of the party and was successful in recruiting a great deal of Northern German workers over from the *KPD* as well as many unaffiliated German workers who were experiencing the tough times of the Weimar Republic. During this time Gregor had been preaching for a more radically socialist movement and many of Gregor's followers had considered Gottfried Feder's *25 Points* to be outdated. This would lead to conflict with a Hitlerite faction that would form in the south of Germany; however that will be touched on later. It is in this year of 1925 that Gregor had invited Otto to join the party, seeing in his brother's ideas something that could restore Germany and bring the masses of Germans up from the abyss of the Treaty of Versailles. Otto enthusiastically accepted his invite. It was agreed that Otto would be the main ideologue for the party while Gregor would be the organizer. It is noteworthy to mention here, that Otto had not been a complete stranger to Hitler. He had met with him as early as 1920, and had negative impressions of him from his first meeting. Commenting on this meeting, he said of Hitler that "He has no political convictions, only the eloquence of a loud speaker" (Otto Strasser, *Hitler and I*, Page 25).

It is then, no surprise, as to why Otto had joined enthusiastically when he realized the influence of Hitler in the party was diminishing. It is this time when Otto had written his *14 Theses* which came to be the official program of the Northern Faction of the NSDAP and was to replace Feder's *25 Points*. This was the first defiance the Northern Faction had shown to Hitler and it is

again worthwhile to note that the majority of the NSDAP in the north did not see Hitler as the leader of the party, but instead pledged allegiance to simply the National Socialist idea.

Together, Otto and Gregor founded the publication the *Kampfverlag* (“Fighting Publications”), out of which they issued several journals - all espousing a radical socialist program which had defied Hitler’s newly found alliance with the industrialists and aristocracy of Germany. In many of the journals and papers issued from the *Kampfverlag* the Strassers advocated and organized support for strikes. Later during this period in time when Ernst Rohm advocated for a *second revolution*, the Krupp Corporation had referred to those inspired by the Strassers’ ideals of Social-Nationalism as “National-Bolsheviks” (obviously to mock Niekisch’s movement which was developing around the same time).

It is important not to lose sight of our topic here however, which is Otto Strasser. It is inevitable following the Northern Faction’s submission to the south, the result of the many people who switched sides at the last minute such as Heinrich Himmler and Joseph Goebbels, that Otto would come into direct conflict with Hitler. In 1930, the trade unions of Saxony declared a full scale industrial strike. Otto came out in full support of the strike in his paper the *Arbeitsplatt* (“Work Platform”) and rallied a sufficient number of Northern S.A. men to defend the strikers from strike breakers. The party leader in Saxony, Martin Mutschmann, was an unabashed supporter of Hitler and ordered Strasser to cease support for the strikes in his paper and to withdraw all S.A. men from the lines. Otto Strasser and the S.A. men who remained loyal to him defied Mutschmann and so defied Hitler himself. In reaction to Strasser’s defiance, Hitler had ordered the *Kampfverlag* shut down and the complete liquidation of all papers published out of it. Strasser refused the ultimatum and as of July 4th, 1930, he ceased to belong to the National Socialist Party. He had immediately set up a new organization called the Combat League of Revolutionary National Socialists, otherwise known as The Black Front. This new organization made it clear that it would never forsake either its nationalist *or* anti-capitalist principles.

Otto had urged men like his brother Gregor and Rohm to join him, but both saw the ground that Hitler’s party was gaining and thought they could influence him. Although it is notable that many S.A. men who remained loyal to Strasser had joined up with him. Among unique features in the newly formed Black Front was the fact that Strasser and his men replaced the party salute of “Heil Hitler!” with “Heil Deutschland!” and had vowed absolute allegiance to the National Socialist idea rather than a supposedly infallible “Führer”. The party could not gain enough traction in Germany to compete with the NSDAP, and ultimately with Hitler’s consolidation of power The Black Front was banned. Known members were jailed and Otto Strasser was marked as a wanted man. Otto Strasser spent 12 years in exile in which he wrote his two most well-known works, *Hitler and I* and *Germany Tomorrow*, which contain the bulk of Strasserist ideology. Let us examine those works and Strasserist ideology here.

STRASSERIST AND SOCIAL-NATIONALIST THEORY

In the following sections we will examine the crux of the issue in this paper; that is, the political theories and ideas that Otto Strasser had for Germany.

1. Social (Economic) Justice

Let us begin with one of the main distinctions of Strasserism from Hitlerian tendencies within National Socialism, which is the concept of private property. It is the belief of those in the Strasserite tradition, that private property - that is, property owned by one individual (or many through stock trading) with the owner's unchallenged right to do with this property as he wills - is not compatible with the ideology of nationalism, as Strasserists see the nation as an organism in itself and it is a crime against natural law that one part of the organism should exercise its functions as to damage the organism as a whole. Therefore, those who call themselves Social-Nationalists claim that the nation, and therefore the people as a whole, has the superior claim to property, specifically in the means of production. Today we are witnessing the final stages of the capitalist system, the system in which the idea of "property makes free" has caused a traitorous bourgeoisie to transplant offshore thousands of jobs with the sole reason being for profit, thus leaving thousands of workers at home unemployed and either homeless or collecting benefits from the welfare state to provide for themselves. To usurp the nation and its people out of their economic future and social prosperity is high treason that stems from the right of individuals to do as they will with exclusively owned means of production.

Furthermore, in the Strasserist view it is not enough to restrict the flow of capital from the nation. Strasserists wish to create a true *Volksgemeinschaft* ("People's Community"), and it is thus necessary that the capital be in the hands of the people themselves. Therefore, the socialization of private enterprise is necessary, a most bold demand that many nationalists will shy away from; but nevertheless will otherwise fail at creating a true community of the people. This socialization will be nothing like Marxist collectivism, as Strasser made it quite clear that this type of economy is modeled after the traditional European guild system. Marxism, he claimed, will fail because of its liberal origins and its lack of roots in anything traditional. Otto made it quite clear that he intended to give the German workers a say in their enterprise.

Let us view some quotes from both Gregor and Otto to reinforce this position:

Whoever recognizes the truth of the saying 'Property makes free', whoever affirms the necessity for a sustaining stratum in any satisfactory social order must look forward to the new order which will aim at the deproletarianization of the people, and at our liberation from the social and economic monopolies under whose harrow no sort of freedom is possible. (Otto Strasser, Germany Tomorrow, Page 65)

We have to learn that work is more than possession, that achievement is more than dividends. The most deplorable legacy of the capitalist economic system is that it has taught us to judge all things by the standards of money, ownership, possession. The decay of a people is a necessary outcome of applying such a standard of value, for selection by ownership is the mortal foe of the race, of blood, and of life. We have no shadow of doubt that under National Socialism this privilege of ownership will be annulled, and that the liberation of the German worker will go so far as to include a share in profit, a share in ownership, and a share in management. (Gregor Strasser, Germany Tomorrow, Page 245, Appendixes)

1. DISTINCTION FROM CAPITALISM

- a. There is no private property in the means of production. They can neither be bought nor sold, so that even though there may be persons who possess large quantities of commodities or money (wealth in this sense being both possible and permissible) nothing like 'capitalism' can come into existence.*
- b. The staff of workers and the State are equally privileged partners with the manager, who is not a capitalist but merely a fief-holder.*
- c. The need for economic and systematic production is enforced upon the manager because his partners out-number him.*
- d. Every German citizen is one of the joint possessors of the entire German economy. (Otto Strasser, Germany Tomorrow, Page 164)*

Otto Strasser also makes it clear as to how this differs economically from Marxism:

- a. The personal initiative of the responsible managers is preserved, but it is incorporated into the needs of the community.*
- b. Within the systematically planned management of the whole national economy by the State (organically safeguarded by the equal third of influence which the State has in every industrial enterprise) the wholesome rivalry of the individual enterprises is maintained.*
- c. The treatment of State and economic enterprise, that is to say of official and industrial manager, on an equal footing is avoided; so is the arbitrary power of the State which deprives the worker of his rights.*
- d. Everyone engaged in an enterprise is, in virtue of his being part-possessor as a citizen, one of the immediate and influential possessors of his enterprise, his workshop, and can exert this possessive right in full measure on the supervisory council of the concern. (Otto Strasser, Germany Tomorrow, page 165)*

Strasser gave details as to how this “factory fellowship,” as he called it, would work. He stated that managerial workers have a right to 49% of the profit, while workers, in addition to their wages, engage in a 10% profit sharing. This model will not only ensure a future of economic justice for the people but will also increase productivity. As can be observed, in a purely capitalist enterprise, a worker’s wages and employment in general is never assured. There are multiple factors which will decide if a worker gets a raise or not, and a general increase in productivity is not the sole or most important factor. A large factor that goes into the thought of raising a worker’s wages is the condition of the market at the time, a market that the worker himself has no control over and a market in which the capitalist alone has a say in through his privilege of ownership. In the model of socialization and profit sharing, the worker now throws off his role as the object of the economy and now becomes its subject; the harder he works, the more money the enterprise as a whole makes and so he is guaranteed a share in those profits.

Naturally, as a socialist, Strasser had advocated for both universal healthcare and education. He states that there must be no artificially created handicaps in life, especially those which arise from social class. He writes as a firm conservative, and although he thoroughly repudiated the idea of innate human equality all throughout his writings, he was always a supporter of the idea that equality of opportunity is absolutely necessary.

Perhaps one of Strasser's most revolutionary and important Socialist plans for Germany was his plan for a complete "life insurance." This term "life insurance" is not to be confused with the privatized concept of payments to family members in case of the death of a supporter, but rather this insurance is meant to guarantee a man's life by the very virtue of being part of the German community. This means that, in times of unemployment, a man is guaranteed a job through employment by the state. A man's health and education is insured, as stated before by taxed subsidized State healthcare and education. In this insurance scheme for which Strasser also used the term "National Insurance," a man is guaranteed his post in life no matter what ills may befall him. In Strasser's own words:

In contrast with, the existing methods, the whole complicated system of insurance and support would be replaced under socialism by a unified life insurance. Every citizen would thereby be insured in a way that would guarantee him a sufficiency whatever happened, and no matter whether he (or she) was temporarily or permanently unfitted.
(Otto Strasser, *Germany Tomorrow*, Page 175)

He stated that this simple, albeit very necessary form of insurance on one's life, is accomplishable by the merging all the existing private (therefore capitalist) insurance companies into a national insurance agency under direction of the Reichsbank. Furthermore, the Reichsbank was to be the new nationalized banking system of Germany and was to be established in order to eliminate usury and professional loan sharking which are all too common practices within a privately controlled (therefore capitalist) banking system.

In addition to socialism, Strasser advocated for a strong autarkic economy. Dependence on foreign trade, he argued, specifically American finance capital, was the road to the enslavement of a nation.

2. Structure of Government and the Estates System

Like most nationalists, Otto Strasser held a special contempt for the party system. However, Strasser considered himself a democratic man to the very end. In a world where our bourgeois media has made a party system almost synonymous with the term "democracy" it is hard to picture a democratic system operating under any other mode other than the corrupt party system. It is however important to dispel here the myths which have been forced upon people by the controlled media and realize that America is *not* the democratic paradise it claims itself to be. It is merely a system in which you are given choice A or choice B, whereas both are controlled and lobbied by corporate and banking interests, interests which run counter to those of the nation as a whole and most usually run counter to the well-being of humanity as a whole.

Realizing this, to be a Strasserist requires that one calls for the destruction of political parties which seek only to fracture the people among a countless myriad of different petty interests. How is this done? Is there to be a one monopoly party such as the one practiced under the Hitler system, or perhaps such as the North Korean party dictatorship? No, the liberation of the people only comes about with the abolishment the party system in general, and Strasserists object to a one party monopoly as much as a multi-party system that keeps the people fractured and splintered. So how does a state with *no* party work? The answer is simple. A revert back to the

traditional system of estates. Strasserism repudiates the pseudo-democratic notion of innate human equality at every step and realizes that since no two humans are equal in ability they must differ in what they can do for the community as a whole.

Strasserists therefore seek to establish a new estates system, a new democratic system, based on the skills and experience of the members in question. In the Strasserist system there will be five major circles and vocational councils to govern the life of citizens all operating on the basis of one person, one vote. The five major councils are as follows: The Worker's Council, The Peasant's Council, The Council of Liberal Professions, The Council of Industry and Trade, and The Council for State employee and Officials.

When writing about this, Strasser went on to elaborate that each council is to be made up of specifically twenty-five members and all are elected for three years.

This is not the furthest extent of government, however. Any logical person reading this naturally asks questions such as: what about a president (or general leader)? Was Strasser to be a "Führer" much like his Hitlerian counterpart? The answer to this question is no as well. Strasserists demand the election of a president for lifetime. This president is to be the supreme representative of state power. Once elected this president would be held accountable to the vocational councils and the estates (which we will later elaborate upon), but Strasserism repudiates the American and liberal idea that it is necessary to switch presidents every four or so years to give the illusion of freedom and democracy.

Directly under the president is an institution which Otto Strasser called "The Great Council." The Great Council was to consist of all the presidents from the German provinces as well as five ministers of the state and the presidium of The Reich Chamber of Estates. The Reich Chamber of Estates would constitute ten members, all elected and then nominated for their post, one of which will oversee the Chamber as the presidium. These three bodies, the President for a lifetime, The Great Council, and lastly the late mentioned Chamber of Estates all equally have a share in national political decisions. Therefore a law will have to have the approval of two out of three of said bodies before it is able to come into effect.

It is worthwhile to note that *none* of these officials were to be privileged above the folk in general; they were to share with the masses both economic hardship as well as prosperity.

3. Federalism

Otto Strasser had made it clear that he wished to keep Germany a federal Germany. He, by no means, supported the current division of provinces that Germany was held under though. He was of the opinion that, despite his respect for Prussian ideals, Germany's current federal division was a result of Prussian hegemony over the rest of Germany. As Strasser states in *Germany Tomorrow*:

I have, indeed, too much respect for the Prussian spirit, and am too keenly aware of the important part it has played in German history, to be moved by any anti-Prussian resentment such as I might be supposed to have imbibed in my Bavarian homeland. But

*my knowledge of the German character and of German history have convinced me that the Prussian particularist solution was no more than an arbitrary expedient which did not cease to be an arbitrary expedient because it was advocated and adopted by Frederick the Great and then by Bismarck. My general understanding of historical interlacements convinces me, indeed, that in the epoch of the (liberal) national State there was no other way by which the Reich could be established than by the hegemony of Prussia. But the same understanding now informs me that the time is ripe for a revival of the old (conservative) idea of the Reich, an idea whose mystical interconnexion with the rebirth of the West is overwhelmingly confirmed by the history of the last thousand years. (Otto Strasser, *Germany Tomorrow*, Page 185)*

Due to the cultural and religious diversity of the Germans, Strasser stated that this new federal Germany must not be and cannot be ruled from one central spot. He proposed that the new federal Germany indeed must be unified, but a degree of autonomy must be practiced by each federal subdivision. Otto was never clear on how he planned to divide up the provinces, only that the divisions should clearly be respective of tribal, cultural, and geographic entities. In addition, each province was meant to have its own president who, as stated before, will serve on The Great Council.

4. Anti-Semitism

For many nationalists, the question of anti-Semitism is an important one primarily because Adolf Hitler, who is constantly equated as the prime inspiration for modern day nationalism by our liberal and bourgeois media, was known for his steadfast anti-Semitism. When thinking of Hitler's socialist counterpart however, the question that springs to mind is thus: Did Otto Strasser endorse any sort of anti-Semitism? This is quite a difficult question to answer accurately as Otto Strasser's opinions on Germany's Jewish minority varied throughout his ideological career. In the beginning of his career, Otto had taken an anti-Semitic stance comparable to that of Hitler's own stance. In the *14 Theses* as well as other essays Strasser was publishing out of his papers, Otto made it clear that his National Socialist movement fought against "Jewish decay" and the rule of "Jewish Roman Law".

Much later in time, however, particularly after his break with the Hitler Faction, Strasser attacked Hitler for what he called "His ruthless and inhuman anti-Semitic campaign." Otto Strasser actually dedicated an entire chapter in his work *Germany Tomorrow* to the Jewish problem. In it he claims that while Jews are indeed foreign to Europe, they are endowed with the same rights as the Germans. Thus Strasser goes on to elaborate on his solution for "The Jewish Problem."

Unlike with Hitler's regime, Otto Strasser supported the right for German Jews to do one of the following: 1) They may stay within the greater nation of Germans but be marked as foreigners and thus only enjoy the rights of such. 2) They may be deemed national minorities and given their own autonomous states within a federal Germany where they will be able to exercise a degree of autonomy over their own people. 3.) They may repudiate both their Jewish religion and identity and assimilate into the German nation. Otto Strasser made it clear it should be up to each individual Jew what he or she wishes to do.

Let us note here that Otto Strasser at this time supported the movement known as “Zionism” as a movement dedicated to the national and ethnic conscious of the Jewish people as National Socialism was for his own German people. However, due to Strasser’s anti-imperialist stance it is likely that were Strasser around today he would be a most ardent champion of anti-Zionism. Otto’s stance on imperialism is best defined by the quote “For us, National Socialism has always been an anti-imperialist movement and the spirit of which was to be limited to conserve and ensure the life and development of the German nation without any tendency to dominate other peoples and other countries.”

5. Strasser: Clericalist or Secularist?

It has been mentioned previously in this essay that both Otto and his brother Gregor were born into Catholic families. This, however, says very little about Otto’s religious views later in his life, as we can observe the profound religious shift of the Catholic born Hitler whose later religious views reflected an almost deification of the concept of Social Darwinism. Was the same to be true of Otto Strasser? Did he reject Catholicism in favor of Darwinism, or perhaps support a German Pagan revival?

The truth of the matter is that Otto Strasser remained a Catholic until his dying breath. From Strasser’s writings, it is more likely for us to believe that Strasser had remained such a steadfast Catholic because he equated Christianity with Western civilization. This is not an altogether inaccurate viewpoint either, considering that Western civilization has been vastly Christian for the past thousand years.

Even if the reader is not a Christian, that should not dissuade him or her from realizing the value of Strasser’s ideas. Although a firm Catholic, Otto Strasser had supported a secular state all throughout his political career. He wrote in *Germany Tomorrow* that he held a respect for all truly German religions (although at one time scorning Alfred Rosenberg for his Paganism in *Hitler and I*). He spoke of the separation of church and state in his book *Germany Tomorrow*:

A separation of the main Church in a country from the State would likewise be beneficial to other religious communities, and would favour the growth of all genuine religious movements, with whose internal affairs the State should never interfere. (Otto Strasser, *Germany Tomorrow*, Page 206)

6. A United Europe

This idea is short and simple and therefore not much need be said about it. Otto Strasser imagined a European state, a united European state where each European nation would maintain its own identity, custom, and laws, but this European state would be bound and unified by the European ideal and to prevent future conflicts between them. Each European nation is to enter into this union on its own accord. This union is to be given a unified military force, much like NATO, though of course, differing in form. Strasser made it clear that Russia and the USA are to have no part in this union, as they are not part of Europe. To end this essay, as well as demonstrate Strasser’s want to preserve the diversity of Europeans within this United States of Europe, let us conclude with an inspiring and hopeful quote from Strasser:

She [Europe] is full of inner vitality which has its source in her national and cultural differences – and this is something which Mr. Dulles and other apostles of a so-called ‘integration Policy For Europe’ have failed to take into account. It is that blessed individuality of each nation of our Continent – it is those rich shades and degrees of difference between us; whether they be cultural, economic, military or political – which go to make up the foundation of Europe’s greatness – which give shape and colour to the culture, to the soul of Europe!! We Europeans are sick unto death of hearing this idiotic demagoguery about how ‘necessary’ it is for Europe to ‘unite’!! We are Spaniards and Italians; Frenchmen, Germans and Poles. We are Swiss, Danes and Swedes – we are Dutchmen, Greeks, Bulgars, and Liechtensteiners – and only therefore and in so far as we ‘Europeans.’ The moment in which Europe allows herself to be forced, for practical considerations, into one great hodgepodge unit (‘Your production would be so much cheaper,’ we are told by the Baruchs, the Dulles and the Monets – while they figure gleefully how much more interest their ‘United Europe’ could pay to the World Bank) – will be the moment in which Europe relinquishes her meaning and her mission; just as England would sacrifice her meaning and her mission if she gave up the commonwealth. (Otto Strasser, “The Role of Europe”)

With Nationalism again growing in Europe, let us hope that they remember the call of Otto Strasser and do not get foolishly led into anymore brother wars nor get tricked into capitalist financial enslavement either by manufacturing capital or finance capital.

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