

Module 04: The End of Optimism? The Great Depression in Europe

Evidence 13: "Germany Struggling to Her Feet" by W. Horsfall Carter, 1932

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Questions to Consider

- What does the following assessment by an American observer reveal about the conflicts in German society associated with the growth of unemployment?
- What predictions does Carter make about the conflict between communism and fascism?
- Knowing that Hitler's Nazi Party would, in fact, come to power less than a year later, what does the document below reveal about how observers misjudged the balance of power in Germany during the Depression?

Document

The latest figures show a total of over six million registered unemployed—some 40 per cent of trade union membership. In spite of an admirably administered system of unemployment relief—the *FursorgeStaat*, i.e. State responsibility for social provision, which reaches its highest development in Germany—large numbers of the working-class population have "gone over" from Social Democracy to Communism, and that process continues—must continue—for as long as economic pressure increases. (We should bear in mind, incidentally, that the workers in Germany are capable of not a little intellectual effort, they are trained to the Marxian analysis of the capitalist system which they see being borne out by every successive phase of the world crisis). A Germany whose every contact with the West since 1914 has brought fresh disappointments and tribulation has indeed had every inducement to seek salvation in a dictatorship of the proletariat on the Russian model. The Communist Party is more compact than any other, its organization is so efficient that, whenever in any large urban centre the leaders are under arrest or the party news sheet suppressed, they still have means of communication which have so far escaped the vigilance of the authorities. And they have in their ranks men technically equipped to manage the country's complicated industrial system—which was certainly

not the case in Russia.

No wonder so many of one's German friends foresee the triumph of Communism in Germany—and Herr Hitler representing National Socialism as Europe's only bulwark against Moscow. Nevertheless, I myself do not believe that Communism is to be Germany's fate, first because there is at present no desire on the part of Moscow to precipitate "world revolution" – the collapse of "capitalism" has come about too quickly for Stalin and his friends – and secondly because of the dissensions in the Party. A National Communism has sprung up during the past two years, disposed to cast off the fetters of Russian leadership, but at the same time possessing no real leaders of its own and thus simply bewildering the rank-and-file.

Communism is bound to remain, nevertheless, an ugly groundswell in any future regime. It is certainly strong enough to prevent the Hitler Party as an independent party from capturing power in the way that Fascism seized the machinery of the State in Italy.

Source:

W. Horsfall Carter, "Germany Struggling to Her Feet," *Fortnightly Review* 131 (March 1932): 337-346.