

---

THE MARBURG STUDENTENKORPS: AN ALTERNATIVE  
VIEW OF THE "PREHISTORY" OF NAZISM

Rudy Koshar

University of Michigan

November, 1978

---

CRSO Working Paper No. 184

Copies available through:  
Center for Research on  
Social Organization  
University of Michigan  
330 Packard Street  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109

The Marburg Studentenkorps:  
An Alternative View of the "Prehistory" of Nazism

Rudy Koshar  
November 16, 1978

The tragedy of Mechterstedt in March of 1920 was a touchstone for the stability of the Weimar Republic. Mobilized by the government to defend the Republic against Communist actions in the wake of the Kapp Putsch, a temporary volunteer military unit (Zeitfreiwilligenverband) made up chiefly of fraternity students from Marburg an der Lahn shot and killed 15 captured workers in an "escape attempt" near the Thuringian village of Mechterstedt. Although evidence left little doubt about their guilt, the members of the Studentenkorps (or "Stuko," as contemporaries often referred to it) involved in the slayings were exonerated for their actions first by a military court and then an assize court. Although university students participated in similar kinds of military actions in the Ruhr, the Baltic, Magdeburg, Würzburg and Munich, the Thuringian incident gained particular notoriety because of its gruesome outcome. It exacerbated an already violent struggle over the existence and form of the new state and contributed to a shift in the constellation of power that benefited the Republic's growing number of opponents.<sup>1</sup> In this sense, those fraternity students' actions constituted an important chapter in the "prehistory" of Nazism, and both the mobilization of the Studentenkorps and its conflict-ridden aftermath deserve special attention. That is the task of this paper. But first it would be worthwhile to review some previous interpretations of paramilitary organizations and conflict in the Weimar Republic.

Numerous historians have attempted to explain the confusing array of paramilitary organizations that emerged in Germany in the first years after World War I. Generally, scholars have rejected Robert Waite's excessively psychological interpretation which emphasized the effects of military defeat on "the German mind" to explain the formation of special volunteer military units (Freikorps).<sup>2</sup> Instead, they have devoted considerable time to studying changes in the relationship between state and society in 1919 and 1920 and linking those changes with the mobilization of paramilitary organizations.<sup>3</sup> This perspective divides the problem into two broad stages which can be simplified in the following manner: First, the Weimar state's attempt to stabilize itself and re-establish "law and order" after January of 1919 determined the appearance of paramilitary units whose job was to defend the Republic against Bolshevism. Secondly, the leaders of those new organizations attempted to exploit events to shore up their own power position in the new order of things. Although considerable disagreement and confusion existed over the the methods whereby the latter task could be accomplished, it is generally agreed that the outcome of both stages was the ill-conceived Kapp Putsch in March of 1920. This interpretation offers the considerable advantage of placing the emergence of paramilitary organizations in the context of broader political conflicts. However, historians employing this approach have not gone beyond the older theoretical traditions which psychologize specific groups' participation in paramilitary organizations. For instance, Hagen Schulze's detailed study of the Freikorps emphasizes the deep psychological

ramifications of the war experience on young officers who were attracted to the Freikorps.<sup>4</sup> Könnemann and Krusch's study of working class resistance to the Kapp Putsch identifies the "dissatisfaction" of demobilized war veterans and their resultant susceptibility to "mass psychological" appeals to explain the formation of paramilitary battalions.<sup>5</sup> Although examples could be multiplied, the main point should be clear enough; historians have continued to place the major emphasis on the dislocating effects of military defeat to analyze paramilitary collective action in the early Weimar Republic.

Because fraternity students participated extensively in the Nazi student Bund after 1926, their prior experience in paramilitary organizations is of particular interest. But the reasons given for their involvement in the Studentenkorps and other similar organizations also rest on essentially psychological categories. Michael Kater notes the bruised sensibilities of student veterans after World War I who longed for the untranslatable Volksgemeinschaft of the trenches and were willing to fight in the Freikorps to promote that ideal.<sup>6</sup> Michael Steinberg describes some important features of student organizational life and political conflict, but underlying his analysis were the usual references to "student disillusion" and middle class youths' "anxieties."<sup>7</sup> Finally, Anselm Faust's otherwise outstanding study of the Nazi student Bund rests on the argument that idealistic students' desire to renew the Volksgemeinschaft discovered during the war was the "motive power" (Antrieb) for students' actions in the postwar years.<sup>8</sup> Despite the substantial contributions these studies have made, their authors continue to focus on the collective trauma of the war and its aftermath as a springboard for their analyses.

The dissatisfaction and trauma arising from Germans' war experiences cannot be ignored. The military defeat was a historical fact of far-reaching importance for an entire generation. However, it was also a diffuse and indirect factor with regard to specific actions and their outcomes. Thus it is necessary to identify other intervening variables whose impact was more immediate in their particular historical context. In the following discussion, I hope to demonstrate that the mobilization of the Studentenkorps and the conflicts surrounding its actions can be explained through an analysis of students' stated interests, organizational life and concrete power position in 1920.<sup>9</sup> In addition, although the problem of Marburg fraternity students' subsequent participation in the Nazi party cannot be explicitly addressed here, I will identify some of the major features that would later facilitate Nazi mobilization as they appeared in Stuko's short history.

Because of the substantial social freedom (Burschenfreiheit) guaranteed students by the German university system and the absence of university-sponsored extracurricular programs, student organizational life prospered. In Marburg, where the university gained a reputation as a Sommeruniversität due to its scenic, small-town and medieval setting, student organizations were particularly important. Atop the network of student organizations were perched the major fraternities (Corps, Landsmannschaften, Burschenschaften and Turnerschaften) who

dominated students' political and social concerns at the university. They were the most inclusive of student organizations with their private houses, ritualized practices and stringent codes of conduct which often included duelling but always demanded consuming large amounts of beer. They were elitist, nationalist, conservative and, with varying degrees of explicitness, anti-semitic in thought and action. Moreover, they were the principle organized student participants in university festivals and processions, and their vividly-colored caps and sashes often gave them the appearance of being students' quasi-official representatives in the university. Arranged below these imposing organizations were a series of professional, scholarly, religious and athletic organizations that varied in size, inclusiveness and the degree to which they imitated the forms and practices of the older fraternities.<sup>10</sup> Roughly 415 out of every 1,000 students who attended the university in Marburg in the summer semester of 1914 belonged to one kind of student organization or another, a proportion that was probably slightly higher than that for students in the Reich as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Undoubtedly, however, students were the most highly organized single social group in Marburg.<sup>12</sup>

The majority of Marburg's student population had gone to war in 1914. Almost 1500, or 68.8 per cent of the total enrolled students, participated in World War I in the winter semester of 1915/1916. On the basis of my estimates, a good deal more than half of these were fraternity members. Blank pages fill the folders containing fraternity membership lists from the years of the war. In some cases, entire

houses were vacated, leaving behind only housemasters and three or four fraternity officers. A number of houses were converted for use as military hospitals. For the most part, fraternity business was completely postponed or severely curtailed. Even the popular duels were discontinued, at least in the early days of the war. The "shocking fact" of this extensive participation in the war effort was that approximately 580 students from Marburg fell in battle.<sup>13</sup>

Students returned to Marburg to find that the local Rathaus had been occupied by the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in the night spanning the 10th and 11th of November, 1918. A machine gun stood in the fountain overlooking the marketplace, and a small red flag fluttered from the Rathaus steeple. Consisting of members from a number of different groups, the Council was wholly dedicated to "prohibiting bloodshed" and preserving "peace and order" in spite of its ostensibly threatening paraphernalia.<sup>14</sup> Large-scale structural changes were not to be considered. Still, the distribution of power in Marburg and the Reich had been temporarily altered, and students must have found the contrast with the Wilhelmine period alarming enough.

The initial thrust of Social Democrats' policies vis à vis students was to promote democratization at the university while simultaneously encouraging students' participation in the political life of the new Republic. Already on November 9, 1918 the Prussian government issued a decree which stated: "Since the political order of our time should be based on the reasonable cooperation of all Germans, opportunities for students' participation in public life

should also be opened."<sup>15</sup> Some of the main features of this approach included liberalizing guidelines for student organizations, granting twenty-year-olds the vote and establishing student self-government on the basis of proportional representation. However, the rush of events after January of 1919 imparted a new urgency to Social Democrats' actions. Relying on both new paramilitary and "self-defense" units and an array of pre-existing political and social organizations to stabilize the state and rejecting more radical impulses from the Left to restructure German society, Social Democratic leaders turned to the Right. Students were among the main groups to whom the appeal to defend the Republic was directed; Prussian Minister of Culture Haenisch and Reich Army Minister Noske offered to suspend university classes in return for students' participation in temporary volunteer military service in February of 1919.<sup>16</sup>

Students in Marburg had already voiced their willingness to take part in paramilitary actions. The enthusiasm with which students anticipated the task could be seen in fraternity newsletters, posters and in public discussions. However, it is important to note that this was not just an emotional outpouring of nationalism. Rather, it was a combination of emotion and calculating, interest-oriented action that ran throughout students' responses. This was apparent in the proclamations that originated in two student assemblies in 1919. In January of 1919 Marburg's student government, dominated by fraternity representatives, resolved to offer assistance to the new state in the struggle for Ruhe und Ordnung if the government also added assurances

that classes would be closed until February of 1920 and state examination dates would be postponed; otherwise, the students noted, volunteers for paramilitary service would be disadvantaged in comparison with those who chose not to perform their "patriotic" duty. The validity of this claim was recognized in official circles when, one month later, the call to arms was linked to a suspension of classes. Later that summer, another student assembly reiterated the stance by offering to fight against "Bolshevism and anarchy" if "all German universities [would] be closed immediately and the assurance of renewed study [could] be guaranteed."<sup>17</sup> Thus, the wave of nationalism which both the Republic's opponents and allies sought to exploit in 1919 and 1920 was hardly independent of specific groups' concrete interests--not even those of students, the most patriotic of any group in German society.

Although the reasons for the success of students' mobilization in this period must await a fuller discussion until later, it should be noted that other general features of student organizational life, more or less unconnected either to students' patriotic leanings or their concrete interests, were finally more important in facilitating such actions. This was particularly true of the fraternities who commanded considerable resources in 1919 and 1920. Table 1 indicates that the proportion of active fraternity members in the total population increased in the summer semester of 1919 and winter semester of 1919/20, the period before the Kapp Putsch. It is true that the total number of active fraternity members declined; but their rising share of the total population meant that they were at least remaining stable in comparison to the student population as a whole during a time in which inflation and military demobilization caused tremendous difficulties.

Table 1  
Organized Students in Marburg, 1914-1923<sup>18</sup>

Semester*	Total Active Fraternity Members		Members/1,000 Enrolled Students		Total Fraternity Members		Members/1,000 Enrolled Students		Total Members in "Other" Student Organizations	
	Members	Enrolled Students	Members/1,000 Enrolled Students	Enrolled Students	Members	Enrolled Students	Members/1,000 Enrolled Students	Enrolled Students	Members	Enrolled Students
SS 1914	982	398.5	1024	415.6	120	48.7				
SS 1919	960	244.6	1279	325.9	109	27.7				
WS 1919/20	827	248.0	1259	377.5	114	34.1				
SS 1920	802	253.6	1231	389.3	121	38.2				
WS 1920/21	621	264.5	1064	453.2	111	47.2				
SS 1921	610	245.2	1061	426.5	107	43.0				
WS 1921/22	527	234.2	916	407.1	104	46.2				
SS 1922	588	245.6	990	413.5	103	43.0				
WS 1922/23	502	241.4	831	399.5	89	42.7				
SS 1923	568	241.2	896	380.4	83	35.2				

\*SS= Summer semester  
WS= Winter semester

This is part of the reason for Marburg's color-carrying fraternities' abilities to rebuff the Workers' and Soldiers' Council's demands to forego wearing the bright caps and sashes that had become symbolic of reaction and the old regime and to continue staging duels in the face of the Council's opposition to such traditional practices.<sup>19</sup> Above all, the increasing proportion of fraternity membership showed that the fraternities were in the best position to weather the economic storms of early Weimar and to organize an effective response to the call to arms before the march to Thuringia.

Of course, none of this guaranteed that such a response could be organized. Indeed, conflict and competition between fraternities and non-fraternity organizations and among the various fraternities themselves were constants of student organizational life in Marburg.

This hindered students' ability to act collectively and reinforced the far-reaching demarcation between different organized groups within the student population we have already mentioned. Although students shared a concern for organizing their responses to the new state, the conflict over means appeared in the earliest days of the Republic. For example, the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in Marburg had provided one seat for a student representative and students were to decide how their participation on the Council was to be structured. Some fraternities, including Wingolf, called for a Student's Committee (Studentenausschuss) that would function as the liaison between the Council and students and be elected on the basis of universal suffrage. Although the spokesmen of color-carrying fraternities were willing to accept the idea of a Committee, they preferred that it be organized according to traditional corporate guidelines that ensured their own majority. While there is no detailed account of the shape of events in the last two months of 1918, Wingolf's semester report indicated the outcome of the dispute. The Council intervened to organize the

the new Ausschuss with one member of Wingolf, one Corps student, one "free student," one member of the independent "Academic Association" and two women students as its representatives. Once constituted, the Ausschuss participated in peace-keeping missions, night patrols and housing referral services for returning war veterans.<sup>20</sup> Students had achieved a modicum of cooperation then, but only as a result of the Council's intervention. That is particularly significant because it was once again outside intervention--this time in the form of the agents of the state--which prompted the quick and decisive formation of the Studentenkorps.

On March 13, 1920, the Ehrhardt Brigade, whose dissolution appeared imminent as a result of the reduction in size of the army and Freikorps formations stipulated in the Versailles Treaty, marched into Berlin and sent the uncertain officials of the new Republic packing to Dresden. Wolfgang Kapp, a bureaucrat and former member of a number of nationalist organizations, assumed the role of Reichskanzler. Momentarily, it appeared that the counterrevolution was victorious. However, both the tactical planning and political support for such a venture were lacking, and it became clear that Kapp was incapable of carrying out his ill-timed task. More important was the fact that German workers throughout the Reich staged a comprehensive general strike that crippled the Kapp regime's chances for survival. The strike was particularly effective in Berlin where residents were left without water, lights, gas, transportation and garbage removal services. By March 17, Kapp had resigned.<sup>21</sup>

Leftist mobilization against the Kapp Putsch could not be simply halted after the removal of the anti-Republican regime. Workers' participation in the general strike had been transformed in some cases into an attempt to influence the shape of the Republic once again. According to Arthur Rosenberg, Germany fell into five separate political regions during the Kapp days. First, in the lands east of the Elbe, Kapp's supporters generally retained the upper hand. Secondly, in Baden, Württemberg and Hesse and up around the North Sea, the supporters of the Republic held sway. Successful workers' strikes and Communist agitation characterized the third region in the Rhineland and Westfalia. Meanwhile, Bavarians upheld their position as perpetual exceptions while the fifth region, the areas generally described as Mitteldeutschland, were crisscrossed with conflicts between pro-Kapp putschists, defenders of the Republic and Communist revolutionaries. Where the situation was unclear, Social Democrats in Berlin decided to call again upon right-wing volunteer military troops to repress the Left.<sup>22</sup>

Marburg's students were quickly drawn into the contested fifth region. Numerous calls for participation in military battalions appeared in the local newspapers. One of them, issued in Marburg on March 19 and signed by the District Commanding Officer, read:

"The Fatherland is in serious danger. In Thuringia, chaos reigns. Armed, marauding bands march through the countryside. Immediate help is therefore needed! The troops in Marburg including any volunteers will soon be transported [to Thuringia]. All authorities and all political parties that

defend the Constitution are called upon to join in securing peace and order. Anyone who can handle a weapon and who is willing to put aside petty strife, has a duty to serve the Fatherland. In the hour of need we must look above our narrow concerns and see the whole picture; [we must] put aside our personal interests and strive for common goals.<sup>23</sup>

An extra edition of the local newspaper published on the same day reported an immediate response. "As a consequence of today's announcement," the article read, "numerous volunteers, most of them students, reported to the local battalion. They are being readied for service."<sup>24</sup> Within 24 hours of the call to arms, more than 800 students had turned out to go to Thuringia.<sup>25</sup>

Why was the mobilization so rapid? For one thing, the nucleus of the Studentenkorps had existed for quite some time. One account reported that the company originated during the autumn of 1919. Another reporter mentioned that some of Stuko's members had participated in the Korporationsausschuss, an ad hoc fraternity coordinating committee set up in the early postwar days under the command of an officer from the local Jägerbattalion that also undertook street patrols in Marburg. Although there is no direct evidence of their membership in Stuko, a number of fraternity members from Marburg had already fought in Freikorps units in Magdeburg and the Baltic in 1919. Above all, the students who turned out to volunteer for the Studentenkorps were chiefly demobilized army veterans.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the speed with which the Studentenkorps was assembled can be explained either by students' ongoing affiliation with the corps or by others' familiarity with its form in terms of prior military experience or participation in paramilitary-like patrols in Marburg in the early postwar days.



The internal structure of the Studentenkorps revealed even more about its nature. Its companies were divided according to each members' organizational affiliation. The first company consisted solely of members from the Corps and included 40 students from Teutonia, 50 from Hasso-Nassovia and 40 more from other Corps. The second company was made up of members from the Burschenschaften whose largest single representative was Arminia with 60 members. A third company included the Landsmannschaften, a fourth the Turnerschäften, a fifth Wingolf and the catholic fraternities and so on. "Non-incorporated" students were hustled into the sixth company and a few days after the initial mobilization, yet another company made up of "republican elements" without fraternity connections was mobilized in the form of the Volkskompanie.<sup>27</sup> The concise structure and clear demarcation of student organizations from each other reflected the strong and direct foundations the Studentenkorps possessed in local organizational life. Of course, that fact would also enhance the possibility that pre-existing divisions and conflicts within organizational life would be transferred into the Studentenkorps.

The unit's politics were hardly ambiguous. Von Selchow, the commander of Stuko, had said: "If I can rid our country of Bolshevism by shooting 100 Spartacists, then I will have them shot."<sup>28</sup> Even though the Studentenkorps was mobilized to stabilize the state, it did not tolerate "republican elements" within its ranks. When a "People's Company" (Volkskompanie) that appealed to both workers and students was organized in Marburg after Stuko's departure and attached to the students

company, the latter's members reacted with bitterness. The new addition was led by Dr. Hermelink, a Marburg theology professor and a member of the left-liberal DDP. Although the Marburg county council doubted that many workers participated in the new corps, it is clear that its sentiments were "republican." Its members posted placards and banners reading "Hoch lebe die Republik" on troop transport trains. The leaders of the Studentenkorps charged that such outright support for the Republic disqualified the new company for action in the field; in the eyes of the commander of the second volunteer company, the People's Company was "militarily unuseable."<sup>29</sup> Thus the strongest supporters of the Republic in the paramilitary unit that left for Thuringia was ostracized for allegiances.

Personal accounts of Stuko's actions reflect the dialectic of high tension and ennui that resulted in the shooting of 15 unarmed workers in Thuringia. After days of inaction, a company of 60 students was ordered to seize "Spartacists" who had been denounced by informants in the village of Bad Thal. The students possessed a list of 40 persons who were alleged to have demanded the disarming of a middle class self-defense organization in favor of building a workers' defense unit (Arbeit-erwehr). When it was found that the attempt had failed and that weapons seized for the undertaking had been returned, the students still chose 15 prisoners who were to be transported to Sattelstedt. On the morning of March 25, however, on a stretch of road less than 3 kilometers long, all 15 of the prisoners were shot in an "escape attempt."<sup>30</sup> The alignment of forces and the configuration of conflict that occurred in the aftermath of the slayings will tell us a lot about the significance of what happened on that short stretch of road.

Marburg was tense in the days immediately preceding the Kapp Putsch notwithstanding local newspapers' excessively sanguine appraisal of the calmness with which Marburgers reacted to political turmoil. "Democrats and workers" in Marburg had already publicly criticized the fraternities' "doubtful" support of the Weimar Republic, and that attitude was only strengthened when Ludendorff voiced his nationwide appeal to students to join the forces defending the Kapp Putsch. Sympathizers of the Republic from Marburg's working classes, white collar workers and civil servants had staged a protest strike and demonstration against the Kapp undertaking on 16 March. The demonstration brought out 300 to 400 participants who demanded that the fraternities be disarmed. Rumors spread that some of the demonstrators would storm the fraternity houses. The situation quieted somewhat when Stuko left for Thuringia, but when news of the shootings reached Marburg, matters became tense again.<sup>31</sup>

Although evidence is spotty for a detailed accounting of the pattern of conflict in Marburg in the next months, there is enough to provide an adequate picture of events. It is clear that Marburg's working classes were in the forefront of the opposition. In early April, trade union officials met to discuss recent events. They drafted a resolution in which they called for the ruthless removal of all "traitors and reactionaries" in the Reich administration and army who participated in or tolerated the Putsch. They urged the national leadership of the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund to use all its power to work in the same direction. In addition, they called upon the government to disband all student volunteer units immediately.<sup>32</sup> Similar resolutions from throughout the Reich reached Berlin. Only one was finally met: on 14 April the Prussian government forbade students' further participation in volunteer units.<sup>33</sup>

More radical voices were also heard. The Kreisrat reported that a USPD assembly on April 8 featured a detailed discussion of the Thuringian events. A speaker from Frankfurt saw the incident as a significant spark in the class struggle and predicted that Germans would soon have to decide whether they would turn to the left or the right for the resolution of conflict. Moreover, Communist "agitators" from the Ruhr area and student radicals from an unidentified socialist student group were also reported to have been lurking in Marburg.<sup>34</sup>

Later that month, concrete charges formulated by "local trade union organizations along with thousands of members from the parties of the working people against students and professors" appeared in a local newspaper. The charges addressed the issues of students' actions before the Kapp Putsch and in Thuringia. According to the report, fraternities had stored weapons in their houses, attempted to get local printing shops to print pro-Kapp notices and had utilized university classes to read the notices to other students. Lists of local DDP, SPD and USPD figures had been compiled, the charges continued, that would be used to round up potential opponents of the Kapp regime. Jews had been refused entry into the Studentenkorps and supporters of the Republic in the Volkskompagnie had been forced to remove their pro-Weimar placards from troop transport trains. Fraternity students were charged with murder in the case of the Thuringian shootings and with returning to Marburg in a "provocative manner" afterwards. Finally, unnamed university professors were criticized for polemicizing against the Republic and acting in a "counterrevolutionary way."<sup>35</sup>

The charges were serious enough, but the mere fact that working class organizations stood behind the catalogue of accusations was even more upsetting to some members of the local populace. Local elites in city government, the press and at the university had taken great pride in pointing out the relative lack of conflict in Marburg during the tumult of the first years of the Republic and the class conflict that now appeared to be mounting was considered catastrophic. Significantly, it was Dr. Hermelink, the leader of the Volkskompagnie, who felt obliged to address the charges and try to muffle antagonisms. Hermelink did not explicitly refute the charges; instead he counseled reason, understanding and an end to the regrettable conflict that had developed between workers and fraternity students. Behind the "glittering facades" of the fraternity houses, Hermelink wrote, students were having their own problems. A reconciliation between students and workers was imperative. In the months to come, Hermelink was to reiterate his call for cooperation in a series of speeches and lectures.<sup>36</sup> But it was finally not the counsel of reason that settled the issue.

Students' defenders gained a significant victory in the conflict by mid-June. A Military Court convened in Marburg on June 15 found all 14 defendants in the case not guilty. The court ruled that the students had acted as soldiers and that, because of the defendants' considerable military experience, their actions could hardly have been unprovoked. The numerous rumors and accusations that had surrounded the affair, the court claimed, had been aired and found to be false.<sup>37</sup>

The protests against the verdict and its political implications were weak and ineffective in Marburg. For one thing, working class organizations were now severely split. Reichstag elections in early June had left the Social Democrats with only 7.9 per cent of the total vote compared to 21.5 per cent in the Republic's first Reichstag elections in January of 1919. On the other hand, the Independent Social Democrats had increased their share of the total vote to 10.9 per cent, a jump of 8.3 per cent. The tiny Communist party had managed 0.4 per cent of the vote.<sup>38</sup> Thus, what protests were heard were only loosely coordinated. Communists met on July 5 to protest Noske's policy of relying on Freikorps units and criticized the outcome of the trial against Stuko. Social Democrats issued a demand on July 7 that the District Military Officer responsible for the initial mobilization be removed by the Reich government. In addition, they formulated a clearly defensive statement in which they demanded that the state take special care to provide "guarantees for the life and security of [Marburg's] working classes and the Republic."<sup>39</sup> Subsequent events would show that this defensive posture was not only a reflection of workers' internal disunity but also a response to the increasing solidarity of students' sponsors and allies.

The verdict prompted a more vigorous defense of Stuko's actions on the part of both students and their supporters. Dr. Hermelink had taken his appeal for reason before the assembled members of the theology faculty, members of student government and participants of the Studentenkorps on July 7. A day later a letter from "from the students' side" appeared in a local newspaper and scoffed at Social Democrats' concerns for their members' safety. In the days of the Kapp Putsch, the writer complained, it was students' lives that were in danger.<sup>40</sup> Even the Rektor of the University publicly defended Marburg's

Studentenkorps. Noting that the verdict had still not quieted critics' voices, the Rektor issued a statement in which he defended students' actions as militarily necessary and thanked them for their defense of the fatherland: "We are indebted to our students for their response to the government's call in its time of need."<sup>41</sup>

Even before the trial, the Thuringian incident had caused an uproar. The liberal and left-wing press had singled out Marburg's students as symbols of what could be expected from Germany's reactionary academic community. The issue was debated in the Reichstag as Communists and Social Democrats levelled vociferous criticisms both at Marburg's students and students throughout the Reich. The high point in the national debate came when the Minister of Culture Konrad Haenisch attacked the Studentenkorps in an interview with the 8-Uhr Abendblatt in Berlin. He called the action a "cowardly assassination" of workers by the "Marburg rogues."<sup>42</sup>

Haenisch managed to unite representatives from a number of student groups with his attack. A Freistudent and a Jewish student in Marburg called for a general student assembly in which Haenisch's "treason" was characterized as a criticism of all students, not just those who were fraternity members. Instead of defending students against attacks from outside, the assembly maintained, the Culture Minister had insulted all German university students. The assembly's declaration was widely circulated among student governments throughout the Reich and printed in countless student organizations' magazines and newsletters.<sup>43</sup>

Although the reaction to Haenisch's remarks appeared to have included an array of student groups, it was still the fraternities that were in the forefront of collective action in the aftermath of the Culture Minister's interview. When left wing organizations that one fraternity observer described as "Communists" met on Marburg's market square to protest students' criticism of Haenisch, they were confronted by members of several fraternities. While the one group of demonstrators sang the International the other countered with Deutschland über Alles. A fight ensued and both sides sustained injuries. A member of the Corps Teutonia was reported to have been stabbed. Although connections to this violence are unclear, we also know that members of the fraternity alumni associations who were in town for the annual Stiftungsfest supported the fraternities in a joint protest declaration against Haenisch. Later that evening, Hasso-Nassovia planned a parade and beer party as part of its Stiftungsfest. When police "asked" the fraternity to abstain from the use of music, lights and flags, they were simply refused. Alarmed by the rumors that "Spartacists" had converged on Marburg to break up the fraternity's beer party, more than 100 students from other fraternities joined the parade; they sang patriotic songs, drank beer and sent out calls to yet other "enemy" fraternities to join them. No signs of challenges from left-wing groups were mentioned. In the words of one gushing fraternity reporter, it was "a powerful display of solidarity of Marburg's students."<sup>44</sup>

The events of the following months proved that the fraternities could continue to count on the support of important allies to back up their show of force. At a torch light parade in August given by students for the outgoing university Rektor Dr. Busch, fraternity spokesmen used the occasion to refer to the Rektor's past support for the students who had fought in Thuringia. Dr. Busch responded by thanking the fraternities for their service to the fatherland. Some months later, the incoming Rektor Dr. Hoffmann continued a similar line. Hoffmann praised students' patriotism and, typically, regretted the "alienation" that had now developed between workers and students in the new Republic. Of course, the most publicized support students received came from an assize court's ruling in Kassel in December, 1920 in which the military court's verdict of the Studentenkorps members' actions was upheld.<sup>45</sup>

Now even Haenisch, the most vociferous critic of students' actions among high placed Reich officials, chose to backtrack. In a highly publicized speech in Münster, the Culture Minister attempted to strike a note of reconciliation that was extended to all university students. When a national conference of student government representatives in Göttingen persisted in its criticisms of Haenisch's past attacks on Marburg's students, the Minister offered a full apology. "I take [my] statements back" he said bluntly. The apology appeared soon afterwards in countless fraternity newsletters and general student publications.<sup>46</sup> Although some newspapers and Social Democratic and Communist Reichstag delegates reiterated their criticisms after the Kassel verdict, Haenisch's retreat appeared to have sealed the issue.

The Studentenkorps did not merely fade away in either concrete or symbolic terms. Although students' participation in volunteer military units was forbidden, evidence indicates that the Studentenkorps continued to lead a hazy existence as a "loose committee of fraternities" that carried on chiefly athletic activities until at least late 1928. One of its leaders retained contacts to other right-wing groups and Bünde such as the Jungdeutscher Orden, the Deutschnationaler Jugendbund and Stahlhelm. Moreover, right-wing students throughout Germany recognized the entire incident as a symbol for war veterans' unselfish patriotism in service to an ungrateful and weak-willed government.<sup>47</sup> Most important, however, was the fact that Stuko's actions and their results directly affected the interplay of state and society during the Weimar Republic and, therefore, the subsequent success of the Nazi party. To explain its contribution in this regard, we must summarize the rise and fall of the Studentenkorps within the context of Nazism's "prehistory."

When Social Democrats attempted to mobilize German society to re-establish order, university students were drawn into temporary volunteer military service. After the Kapp Putsch the government assured students that such service would not endanger the latter's professional interests and that the survival of the country depended on their actions. Because of the stable membership of Marburg's fraternities and the considerable military experience fraternity students had acquired either in military service or in temporary volunteer units, the mobilization of the Studentenkorps was rapid.

However, the context in which the mobilization took place and the actions of Stuko's members brought students into conflict with the working classes and their pro-Republican allies. In Marburg, workers had already threatened the fraternities; but the bloody execution in Thuringia only exacerbated antagonisms. The conflict became a permanent feature of the following years and the Nazi party was one of numerous organizations whose appeal rested in part on the promise to eradicate conflict and restore the order the Social Democrats had been unable to achieve.

An alternative solution might have been found in pro-Republican authorities' purposive intervention in the universities and student fraternities. However, the particular constellation of power in Germany in 1920 and thereafter would not have allowed such action without a far-reaching transformation of society--a solution the Social Democrats rejected from the start. Thus, a pattern of repression that worked to the advantage of the Right in general was maintained.

The Thuringian incident reflected this pattern and strengthened it. In an act that was simultaneously brutal and highly symbolic, fraternity students shot workers who had already given up their arms and abandoned a project to build a workers' defense unit. In the aftermath, students were confronted with a series of repressive actions. The government banned university students' further participation in volunteer military units while trade unions, Social Democrats, Communists and other supporters of the Republic kept up an uneven but insistent barrage of criticisms in the press, parliament and streets.

Furthermore, Konrad Haenisch brought down the full weight of a Reich ministry upon students with his verbal attacks. However, the potential effects of such actions were blunted. University officials, alumni associations and, most obviously, the courts sheltered university students and thereby lowered repression. Because of the fact that the fraternities made up the chief organized force among university students and were also the main powerholders in student governments until the early 1930s, they benefited most directly. However, other organizations outside the traditional fraternity structures also took advantage of the situation. For members of the Nazi student Bund, the lower level of repression at the universities meant greater chances to organize and mobilize. That freedom was utilized to such a degree that Nazi students exercised unprecedented influence in student governments throughout the Reich by the summer of 1931, well before scheming conservatives' invitation to Hitler in 1933. It is hardly coincidental that the Nazi party established this early stronghold within one of the most highly organized and simultaneously least repressed sectors of German society.

Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the following secondary sources for the description of the incident and the events that followed: Hans Peter Bleuel and Ernst Klinnert, Deutsche Studenten auf dem Weg ins Dritte Reich (Gütersloh: Sigbert Mohn, 1967), pp. 72-78; Thomas Nipperdey, "Die deutsche Studentenschaft in den ersten Jahren der Weimarer Republik," in Adolf Grimme, ed., Kulturverwaltung der Zwanziger Jahre (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1961), pp. 19-48; Georg Heer, Marburger Studentenleben 1927-1927 (Marburg/Lahn: Elwert, 1927), pp. 176-188; Erwin Könnemann and Hans-Joachim Krusch, Aktionseinheit contra Kapp-Putsch (East Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1972), pp. 413-415.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Waite, Vanguard of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement in Postwar Germany 1918-1923 (New York: Norton, 1952), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> A good example is Johannes Erger, Der Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Innenpolitik 1919/20 (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> Hagen Schulze, Freikorps und Republik 1918-1920 (Boppard am Rhein: Harald Boldt Verlag, 1969), pp. 54-69.

<sup>5</sup> Könnemann and Krusch, Aktionseinheit, p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Michael H. Kater, Studentenschaft und Rechtsradikalismus in Deutschland. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Studie zur Bildungskrise in der Weimarer Republik (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe, 1975), p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Steinberg, Sabers and Brown Shirts. The German Students' Path to National Socialism 1918-1935 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), pp. 48-51.

<sup>8</sup> Anselm Faust, Der Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund. Studenten und Nationalsozialismus in der Weimarer Republik (Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1975), pp. 19-21.

<sup>9</sup> The general theoretical background for this paper is informed by the perspective developed in Charles Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978). See also Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly and Richard Tilly, The Rebellious Century 1830-1930 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>10</sup> Ermenhild Neusüss-Hunkel, Parteien und Wahlen in Marburg nach 1945 (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1973), pp. 17-18; Konrad H. Jarausch, "Liberal Education as Political Socialization: The Case of Students in Imperial Germany," Paper delivered at the Social Science History Association Conference, Ann Arbor, MI., 1977, pp. 12-13.

<sup>11</sup> All data for membership in student organizations in Marburg can be found in Staatsarchiv Marburg (hereafter, StAM), 305a, Acc. 1954/16; for data on national fraternity organizations, see Steinberg, Sabers and Brown Shirts, pp. 36-47.

<sup>12</sup> For data pertaining to the membership of other organizations in Marburg see Oberhessische Zeitung (hereafter, OZ), July 29, 1927, passim; complete data will be found in my Ph.D. dissertation, "What Mobilization Required. Organizational Life and the Nazi Party in Marburg an der Lahn, 1918-1935," Diss. University of Michigan, forthcoming.

<sup>13</sup> Heer, Studentenleben, pp. 176-177; Walter Kürschner, Geschichte der Stadt Marburg (Marburg: Elwert, 1934), p. 292; StAM, 305a, Acc. 1954/16.

<sup>14</sup> Kürschner, Geschichte, p. 292.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted from Jürgen Schwarz, Studenten in der Weimarer Republik. Die deutsche Studentenschaft in der Zeit von 1918 bis 1923 und ihre Stellung zur Politik (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1971), p. 109.

<sup>16</sup> Steinberg, Sabers and Brownshirts, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> For the January 1919 assembly, refer to Resolution of the Marburg Deutsche Studentenschaft, Jan. 11, 1919, StAM, Acc. 1950/9, 584; for the later assembly, see Wingolfs-Blätter (hereafter, WB), July 12, 1919, 48, pp. 396-397.

<sup>18</sup> See note 11.

<sup>19</sup> WB, Jan. 18, 1918, 5/6, p. 108; Georg Heer, Die Marburger Burschenschaft Arminia (Marburg: privately printed, 1951), p. 123.

<sup>20</sup> WB, Jan. 18, 1918, 5/6, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> See Erger, Der Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch, passim.

<sup>22</sup>Arthur Rosenberg, Geschichte der Weimarer Republik (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1961), pp. 89-99.

<sup>23</sup>OZ, March 19, 1920, 66.

<sup>24</sup>OZ, March 19, 1920, extra edition.

<sup>25</sup>Deutsche Corpszeitung (hereafter, DCZ), May 5, 1920, pp. 40-42; Karl Schaumlöffel, Das Studentenkörps Marburg in Thüringen. Ein Kriegstagebuch in Frieden verfasst und zusammengestellt vom Stabsfeldwebel des Studentenkörps (Marburg: Elwert, 1920), pp. 5-6.

<sup>26</sup>ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Schaumlöffel, Studentenkörps, pp. 5-6.

<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Könnemann and Krusch, Aktionseinheit, p. 414.

<sup>29</sup>Schaumlöffel, Studentenkörps, pp. 30-32; Hessische Landeszeitung (hereafter, HLZ), April 30, 1920, 100; Report of the Kreisrat to Oberpräsident on April 9, 1920, StAM, 165 Kassel, Abt. I/1230, Bd. 1.

<sup>30</sup>Bleuel and Klinnert, Deutsche Studenten, pp. 72-78; Könnemann and Krusch, Aktionseinheit, pp. 413-415.

<sup>31</sup>Report of the Kreisrat to Oberpräsident, April 9, 1920, StAM, 165 Kassel, Abt. I/1230, Bd. 1; OZ, March 15, 1920, 63.

<sup>32</sup>HLZ, April 4, 1920.

<sup>33</sup>Schwarz, Studenten, pp. 230-231.

<sup>34</sup>StAM, 165 Kassel, Abt. I/1230, Bd. 1.

<sup>35</sup>HLZ, April 30, 1920; StAM, 180 LA Marburg/2368.

<sup>36</sup>HLZ, May 12, 1920, 110; StAM, 180 LA Marburg/2368.

<sup>37</sup>See OZ, June 15, 1920, 136 and June 19, 1920, 140; see also Bleuel and Klinnert, Deutsche Studenten, pp. 72-78.

<sup>38</sup>Neusüss-Hunkel, Parteien und Wahlen, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup>For the Communists' meeting, see OZ, July 6, 1920; for the Social Democrats' meeting see OZ, July 8, 1920, 156.

<sup>40</sup>OZ, July 8, 1920, 156.

<sup>41</sup>See DCZ, July 5, 1920, p. 125.

<sup>42</sup>For the national response, see Heinrich Hannover and Elizabeth Hannover-Drück, Politische Justiz, 1918-1933 (Frankfurt, 1966), p. ; Haenisch's remarks were also printed in OZ, July 19, 1920, 165.

<sup>43</sup>Bleuel und Klinnert, Deutsche Studenten, pp. 75-76.

<sup>44</sup>For the declaration, see OZ, July 19, 1920, 165; for the violence surrounding the demonstration and Hasso-Nassovia's subsequent parade, see DCZ, October 5, 1920, 7, pp. 137-138.

<sup>45</sup>For the torch light procession see OZ, August 6, 1920, 181; for Hoffmann's remarks, OZ, Jan. 13, 1921, 10.

<sup>46</sup>Bleuel and Klinnert, Deutsche Studenten, pp. 76-78.

<sup>47</sup>For Stuko's later form see StAM 165 Kassel, Abt. I/3940, Bd. 1; Bleuel and Klinnert, Deutsche Studenten, discuss the symbolic use of the incident, p. 78.



WORKING PAPERS OF THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Center for Research on Social Organization is a facility of the Department of Sociology, University of Michigan. Its primary mission is to support the research of faculty and students in the department's Social Organization graduate program. CRSO Working Papers report current research and reflection by affiliates of the Center; many of them are published later elsewhere after revision. Working Papers which are still in print are available from the Center for a minimum fee of 50 cents, with higher prices (at a rate of roughly one cent per page) for papers longer than 50 pages. The Center will photocopy other papers at cost (approximately five cents per page). Recent Working Papers include:

- 174 "The Web of Collective Action in Eighteenth-Century Cities," by Charles Tilly, March 1978, 29 pages.
- 175 "On Measuring a Norm: Should the Punishment Fit the Crime?" by V. Lee Hamilton and Steve Rytina, May 1978, 64 pages.
- 176 "Perspectives on Policing in Nineteenth-Century America," by Robert Liebman and Michael Polen, April 1978, 28 pages.
- 177 "Language as Social Strategy: The Negotiation of Sex-Linked Barriers for Becoming a Medical Student," by Judith Hammond, May 1978, 29 pages, reprints unavailable.
- 178 "Collective Violence in European Perspective," by Charles Tilly, July 1978, 69 pages.
- 179 "Two Reports on Sociology and History," by Charles Tilly, July 1978, 24 pages.
- 180 "Organizations, Social Structure, and Historical Change: Towards an Historical Sociology of Organizations," by Andrew G. Walder, September 1978, 66 pages.
- 181 "The Routinization of Protest in Nineteenth-Century France," by Charles Tilly, October 1978, 18 pages.
- 182 "The Attribution of Responsibility in a Wife Abuse Context," by Debra Kalmuss, October 1978, 22 pages.
- 183 "Interactive, Direct-Entry Approaches to Contentious Gathering Event Files," by R.A. Schweitzer and Steven C. Simmons, October 1978, 141 pages.

Request copies of these papers, the list of all available Working Papers and other reprints, or further information about Center activities from: Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan, 330 Packard Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.