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Origin and ideology of the Freikorps movement-
Predecessor and forerunner of the SA?

2nd. Essay

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1. Introduction

The picture of the German Freikorps movement during the Weimar Republic is not very clear one. Even nowadays it is surrounded by several mysteries and uncertainties. Where lay the origins of this strange movement, which should shape the first German democracy in such a destructive way? Did they have any kind of ideology, and if they had one, on what kind of ideology they were based. Or were they nothing more than gangs of “[...] psychopathic killers with a primitive and brutal set of half-baked ideas”¹ who believed in the ‘stab in the back myth’ and the betray of the army by the politicians. Is it possible to say that the Freikorps movement was the predecessor of the SA and the forerunner of the Nazi movement; Hitler as the heir to the Freikorps heritage? These questions I will try to answer in this essay.

According to the limited size of this essay it was unfortunately necessary to mix up the ideology and the history of the Freikorps movement in the second part of this essay. Please see also the additional informations given in the footnotes.

2. Origins of the Freikorps movement

Most of the members of the Freikorps belonged to the generation, which was born in the 1890’s. In order to understand the origin of the Freikorps movement and their spirit it is necessary to take a look on two important occurrences in German history by which the members of the Freikorps were influenced. The first factor was the German pre-war Youth movement and the second one was the First World War² and especially the experimental raising of the so-called ‘Storm’ (‘Sturm’) or ‘Shock’ (‘Stoss’) battalions.³ With their raising Ludendorff employed entirely new tactics for the battle, that were “later to be crucial for the character and development of the Freikorps.”⁴

¹ Jones, Nigel H.: Hitler’s Heralds. The story of the Freikorps 1918-1923. London 1987. p. 105.

² Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: Vanguards of Nazism. The Free Corps Movement in postwar Germany. 1918-1923. Cambridge/Mass. 1952. p. 17.

³ Cf., Jones, Nigel H.: Hitler’s Heralds. p. 7.

⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

2.1 The German pre-war Youth movement – the ‘Wandervögel’

This new movement arose in the end of the Nineteenth Century and reached its climax in the decade leading up to the outbreak of World War One. It was no single German Youth Movement, there were dozen of separate groups which display a bewildering complexity and range of programs, but this Youth movement was dominated by the ‘Wandervögel’⁵ and their admiration of Friedrich Nietzsche and his nihilism.⁶

Characteristic for the Youth Movement was a revolt against the industrialisation, the huge population influx from the country to the town, the rapid mechanisation of everyday life, the teeming, anonymous antlike spawl of the great cities, the transformation of the traditional German family structure, the psychological aspects of adolescence, the peculiar nature of the German educational system and the social changes and results such as the rise of Trade Unions and Socialism.⁷

They started to wage “[...] relentless fight against the school, the home and the church [...] tearing the youth away from the old ties and replacing them with the free colony of Youth spirit.”⁸ Their highest value was “Vitality”; they were seeking a rejuvenation of Germany’s national life, because they were bored constricted by the rigid structures of the Wilhemine Empire. The world of their parents was too ‘Cold’, ‘Static’, ‘Sterile’ and ‘Soulless’ for them. The movement sought for “a change of blood, an insurrection of the sons against the fathers, a substitution of the old by the young.”⁹

“The Youth Movement was above all else the revolt of discontented bourgeois youth against a liberal bourgeois society and all its works.”¹⁰

According to Waite was the “eagerness to submit a leader and the lust for action – action simple for the sake of action itself”¹¹ significant for this Youth movement.

But the pre-war Youth Movement had two different sides. The first side can be characterised by the high idealism, hopeful optimism and gentle good will. It was a recollection of nature and romanticism.¹² The other side of the emphasise of the mystic fellowship of the Volk as

⁵ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p 17-18.

⁶ Cf., Schulze, Hagen: *Freikorps und Republik. 1918-1920*. Boppard am Rhein. p. 59.

⁷ Cf., Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 106.

Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 18.

⁸ Quoted in: Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 108.

⁹ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁰ Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹² Cf., Rombach, Heinrich (ed.): *Wörterbuch der Pädagogik*. Bd.2. *Geographieunterricht bis politische Bildung*. Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1977. p. 112.

opposed to the rights of the individual. “This emphasis on folkish corporatism inevitably led to an attack on the democratic process which were struggling for expression in pre-war Germany.”¹³ “The concept of corprative spirit and the Führer principle”¹⁴ was born.

They “were only to eager to throw themselves at the feet of a Führer and to obey the mysterious dark forces of ‘Ur-deutsch’ – the ancient Germanic ‘Geist’ (spirit) they imagined emanating from the glades and serried ranks of forest trees where they assembled to sing, drink and absorb the legacy of their ancestral spirits.”¹⁵

But unfortunately “[...] it was not the gentle aspect of the movement which appled and conditioned the ‘Freikorpskämpfer’ in the impressionable days of this youth.”¹⁶ Especially the members of this pre-war Youth Movement fought enthusiastically in the First World War,¹⁷ “[...] eager to submit themselves to the demands of the War God and to sacrifice themselves on the altar of the new Germany.”¹⁸

2.2 The raising of the ‘Storm’ or ‘Shock’ battalions

After the breakdown of the Schlieffen Plan at the Marne the OHL¹⁹ was forced to change the tactics of the German army on the western front. The mobile warfare collapsed and the war of attrition had begun.

In order to end the war of attrition the OHL began in 1915 to experiment on the tactical level with compact, well-armed, highly mobile units in a desperate attempt to break through the trenches.²⁰ These ‘Storm’ or ‘Shock’ battalions were the spearhead of the attacks of the general infantry. According to their task “only the youngest, fittest and most intelligent men were selected and trained in these crack formations.”²¹

Concessions of all sorts were made to the ‘Storm’ or ‘Shock’ troopers and they were encouraged to look upon themselves as an elite troop. They were given the best food, the best

¹³ Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 21.

¹⁴ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁵ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 108.

¹⁶ Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 21.

¹⁷ E.g. the battle of Langemarck (10.11.1914) where thousands of members of the pre-war Youth Movement died as volunteers in a useless assault singing the German national anthem.

¹⁸ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 109.

¹⁹ Oberste Heeres Leitung = OHL

²⁰ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 23.

²¹ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 7.

equipment and were allowed to wear pistols, which was previously issued only the officers. They also had their billets far behind the lines and were transported in trucks to the trenches and then returned to the safety of the rear.²²

But the most important difference between these elite troops and the regular German army was their relationship to their officers. In contrast to the traditional “discipline to the death” (Kadavergehorsam) was in the ‘Storm’ or ‘Shock’ battalions a strict discipline connected with an almost friendly type of loyalty between the rank and file soldiers and their officers and commanders.²³ They often used the familiar “du” in addressing their officers, a degree of familiarity unheard of in the old imperial army.²⁴ This led also to a new form of leadership. The Storm Troop leader “[...] stood with his men. To them he was not their commanding officer; he was their leader! And they were his Comrades! They trust him blindly and would have followed him into hell itself if it were necessary.”²⁵

This close relationship to their leaders and the other privileges heighten the sense of the members of ‘Storm’ or ‘Shock’ battalions of being a chosen order destined to conquer and rule.²⁶ Their shared sufferings and the shedding of blood in battle led “[...] into a spiritual, almost mystical state of mind compounded of profound contempt for the civilian world and bourgeois life. At the same time there was the joy of battle, an excitement that was more than mere blood-lust.”²⁷

“The peculiarly close relationship between the officers and men which shall we find to be an essential characteristic of the Freikorps, was fostered by these combat units.”²⁸

“The men of the squads owed a special loyalty to their commanders and this, along with the unique camaraderie born of belonging to a selected elite, was to carry them through into peacetime and render them immune to the germs of mutiny and revolution.”²⁹

²² Cf., Wait, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 24-25.

²³ Cf., Venner, Dominique: *Söldner ohne Sold. die deutschen Freikorps 1918-1923*. Kiel 1984. p. 46.

²⁴ Cf., Wait, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 26-27.

²⁵ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁶ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler's Heralds*. p. 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²⁸ Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p 26.

²⁹ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler's Heralds*. p. 8.

3. The contradiction in the ideology of the Freikorps movement

“Out of the fiery maelstrom a new man had arisen, invincible, clean, ready to built a new world; but even readier to destroy the corrupt remains of the old.”³⁰

“Men who had lived daily with the expectation of violent and agonising extinction could care nothing for peace, security, good manners or the rule of law. It was this reckless, nihilist spirit, this devil-may-care, live and die for today attitude that constituted the characteristic mentality of both the stormtroopers and the Freikorps. Brutal, ugly, uncouth but elemental. It was a world away from the civilised comfort of the bourgeois world that called into being – and then found its spirit, once raised, so very hard to lay down.”³¹

It is not so easy to describe the ideology of the Freikorps Movement. But it seems to questionable that the Freikorps Movement had its origins and political fundamental basis in the pre-war Youth Movement and the raising of the ‘Storm’ or ‘Shock’ troopers and their elite-awareness.

It is even harder to describe their ideology when you remember that there were two totally different types of Freikorps. The majority of the Freikorps were the more or less rightwing Freikorps. But there was a small minority of democratic and republican Freikorps such as the ‘Republican Guard’ (Republikanische Schutztruppe) or the ‘Security Forces’ (Sicherheitswehren). But these Freikorps were too small and often politically unreliable and so they played a subordinate role in the struggle during the first years of the Weimar Republic.³² Because of their subordinate role in these days I will confine me to write the essential things about the rightwing Freikorps ideology. And even this right-wing Freikorps movement was a not homogeneous. Their ideology, their composition and their personnel³³ changed after short periods and differed from Freikorps to Freikorps.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

³¹ Ibid., p. 9-10.

³² Cf., Gordon, Harold J.: The Reichswehr and the German Republik 1919-1926. London 1972. p. 15-22.

³³ There is high discrepancy between the numeral of the personnel. The highest estimate was more than one million, Noske was talking about 400.000, the OHL mentioned 250.000 members of the Freikorps movement. Ernst von Salomon has difficulty making up his mind. In one place he says between 50.000 and 70.000; in another place he mentioned roughly 150.000 members.

Cf., Venner, Dominique: Söldner ohne Sold. p. 74.

Cf., Schulze, Hagen: Freikorps und Republik. p. 36-37.

Cf., Wait, Robert G.L.: Vanguard of Nazism. p. 39.

³⁴ Cf., Schulze, Hagen: Freikorps und Republik. p. 34.

According to their origins in the pre-war Youth movement with its establishment of the concept of ‘corprative spirit’ and the ‘Führer principle’, their sense of mission and their elite awareness were these young soldiers extremely susceptible to the ‘myth of the stab in the back’. The time after the Armistice Germany was “flooded with hundreds of capable, arrogant young commanders who found an excellent outlet for their talents in the Freikorps movement.”³⁵ this front line generation shut their eyes to the real reason for the collapse. They felt

“[...] that the people left behind them had been ‘unworthy’ of their suffering and sacrifices.[...] Purged by the flames of the front, by virtue of its struggle and sacrifice against it believed it had earned the right to dictate the terms of Germany’s new life. Small wonder that the members of this elite, returning the trenches, felt disappointed and embittered that their mission of renewal had been arrogated by the less than heroic figures of Ebert, Scheidemann and Erzberger.[...]”³⁶

3.1 The first phase – a helper in the hour of need

And just in this time the new Republic was in great danger. The Government and the new ‘democratic’ military leaders were alike helpless against leftist insurgents³⁷ so long as there were no reliable troops at their disposal.³⁸ In early January 1919 the new Minister of Defence, Gustav Noske, gave the authorisation to a movement which was already sweeping over the country: The Freikorps movement. But he did not organise a new army; he just collected the Freikorps.³⁹ But the crucial thing is, that “he set about organising (and using) the forces of the counter-revolution.”⁴⁰

And these formations should shape the next years of German history. They fought in the Baltic against the Bolsheviks; crushed leftist rebellions in Germany like the Red Armies of the Ruhr or the soviet republic in Bavaria or at eastern frontier of Germany. Later on they found another, but this time, illegal sphere of activity: The struggle in the Ruhr district against the Allies and in Silesia against the polish population.⁴¹

³⁵ Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 27.

³⁶ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 110-111.

³⁷ E.g. the rebellion of the People’s Naval Division or the so-called Spartacus Rising

³⁸ Cf., Gordon, Harold J.: *The Reichswehr and the German Republic*. p. 15.

³⁹ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 33.

⁴⁰ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 55.

⁴¹ For a short chronology of the Freikorps movement between 1918 and 1923 see:

Thomas, Robert: *Bibliographie zur Geschichte der deutschen Freikorps 1918-1923*. Berlin 1997. p. 34-38.

Now it was the time for the Freikorps movement, they had an official task. Herman Göring once characterised the member of the Freikorps as “fighters who could not become de-brutalised.”⁴² They had no place in a civilian world, but these men formed the leadership as well as the fighting muscle of the Freikorps.⁴³ But the new Republic and their military leader had no scruple to use the Freikorps, because these were the only instruments to re-establish the authority of the government in whole Germany.⁴⁴ They were “[...] indisputably the most powerful political/military force in the nation”⁴⁵ and they made a clear distinction between the ‘Government of shame’ (Schandregierung) and their “Fatherland” which they were trying to save from threat of bolshevism.⁴⁶

As already mentioned there was no continuous common ideology or point of view according to politics in the early days of the Freikorps movement. Gordon describes the majority of the leader of the Freikorps as monarchists.⁴⁷ For him carried only certain number of Freikorps a “racist and ultranationalist idea which characterised the later movement, but these Freikorps appear to have been in the minority in 1919.”⁴⁸ Maybe General Maercker⁴⁹ is an example for one of these Freikorps leaders Gordon is referring to:

He “eschewed highly politically motivated officers (i.e. blatant anti-parliamentary reactionaries) [...] order and discipline were his watchwords, not for him the brutal neo-anarchic ‘free-booting’ spirit so manifest on other more notorious examples of the Freikorps genre.”⁵⁰

But this point of view seems not to be accepted by the majority of the other authors. For them the Freikorps movement can be characterised by “[...] two negative strands (which) were paranoid hostility to the political left and anti-semitism.”⁵¹

“Many of these volunteers allowed their nationalist and anti-Republican sentiments free rein, especially after the government accepted the Versailles Treaty.”⁵²

⁴² Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 29.

⁴³ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 111.

⁴⁴ Cf., Schulze, Hagen: *Freikorps und Republik*. p. 33.

⁴⁵ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 152.

⁴⁶ Cf., Schüdekopf, Otto-Ernst: *Heer und Republik. Quellen zur Politik der Reichswehrführung, 1918 bis 1923*. Hannover/Frankfurt am Main. 1955. p. 47.

⁴⁷ Cf., Gordon, Harold F.: *The Reichswehr and the German Republic*. p. 25.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁹ He founded the first Freikorps on the 6th of December 1918 – the ‘Freiwillige Landesjägerkorps’.

⁵⁰ Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 50.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵² Gordon, Harold J.: *The Reichswehr and the German Republic*. p. 53.

They saw the in the new Republic a feeble government of pacifists which had betrayed the army.⁵³ The Freikorps faced the Weimar Republic with an attitude between mild contempt and deep detestation.⁵⁴

The feelings of the Freikorps members towards the Weimar Republic can be characterised in one sentence: “For the amount of 50 Marks I will overthrow every meaning government – it is cheaper by subscription.”⁵⁵

And although the Freikorps movement remained essentially a bourgeois movement⁵⁶, their members “[...] dedicated themselves to the task of destroying the very society which had given them birth.”⁵⁷ The hatred Weimar Republic was **the** symbol for the liberal bourgeois society the Freikorps were fighting against. Fighting against the corrosive ideals of the liberal western world with the spirit of the pre-war Youth movement.⁵⁸

Later on Ernst Jünger⁵⁹ realised their fault. “We thought that we would save the citizen, but we saved the bourgeois”.⁶⁰

There was also a big contrast in the ideology of the Freikorps movement. They had at least some sympathies towards communism. They did not fought against the communists because they hated communists but primarily because they liked fighting and the revolutionary attempted putsches gave them the excuse to fight. The link between these two doctrines was the fact, that the communism extremism demanded action and was also trying to crush the moderate Weimar Republic with its liberalism, parlamentarism and the smug complacency of the bourgeois mentality.⁶¹ According to this expression of the ‘Bolshevists of the right’ “Rechtsbolschewismus” applied to the Freikorps movement.⁶²

⁵³ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 41.

⁵⁴ Schulze, Hagen: *Freikorps und Republik*. p. 204.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁶ For detailed description of the social basis of the Freikorps movement see:

Schulze, Hagen: *Freikorps und Republik*. p. 47-54.

⁵⁷ Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 54.

⁵⁸ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 54-56.

⁵⁹ Jünger popularised in this context the term of the „New Nationalism“, which deals about „[...] the fact that it will have absolute nothing either to do with monarchy, or conservatism, or bürgerlich reaction, or with the patriotism of the Wilhelmian period.“

Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 275-276.

⁶⁰ Quoted in: Schulze, Hagen: *Freikorps und Republik*. p. 58.

⁶¹ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 270-271.

⁶² Cf., Venner, Dominique: *Söldner ohne Sold*. p. 194.

3.2 The second phase – the attempted disbandment of the Freikorps

The government and the OHL believed a long time that the Freikorps movement was a help in a time of serious difficulties and that the movement could be abolished at any time they wished. But they had to realise that Freikorps movement followed its own laws.⁶³ After several attempted coups carried out the Freikorps or political groups with them connected (e.g. the Kapp-Lüttwitz-Putsch) the government released the demobilisation order for some Freikorps, other less radicals Freikorps were allowed to join the Provisional Reichswehr.⁶⁴

“The thorniest problem was that of disarming and disbanding those Freikorps which were determined to maintain their existence with or without the consent of their superiors.”⁶⁵ They simply refused their demobilisation or formed open, legal, semi-legal organisations such as the ‘Stahlhelm’ or the ‘Jungdeutscher Orden’ or even secret, illegal, underground or outright groups like the ‘Thule Society’ and the Ehrhardt and Rossbach Freikorps with their myriad offshoots and successor organisations.⁶⁶ In order to survive they retired to the right-wing strongholds of East Prussia and Bavaria, where they “[...] continued to dream of a new authoritarian and anti-democratic state”⁶⁷ and knitted the “[...] two strands of nihilism and reaction together in a rope strong enough to strangle the hated Republic.”⁶⁸

“But if these mass and overt nationalist organisations presented a long-term threat to the Republic, a far more insidious danger was posed by the underground groups formed by ex-Freikorps members who adopted an extreme policy of violent opposition to Weimar.”⁶⁹

3.3 The third phase – Politics of murder

But whatever their form or name was, the nationalist societies had a common purpose: the overthrow of the Weimar Republic and the dissemination of militant, racist nationalism and

⁶³ Cf., Schulze, Hagen: Freikorps und Republik. p. 33.

⁶⁴ For an overview which Freikorps were allowed to join the Provisional Reichswehr see: Gordon, Harold J.: the Reichswehr and the German Republic. p. 436-438.
Jones, Nigel H.: Hitler’s Heralds. p. 249-264.

⁶⁵ Gordon, Harold J.: The Reichswehr and the German Republic. p. 79.

⁶⁶ Cf., Jones, Nigel H.: Hitler’s Heralds. p. 188-189.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 191.

the preservation of the Freikorps spirit.⁷⁰ “A connection between nationalism and socialism was wished in an vague and indistinct way.”⁷¹

The spiritual aims of the ‘Organisation Consul’ or ‘O.C.’, which was founded by ex-members of one of the extremist and militant Freikorps – the Ehrhardt brigade, showed the increasing influence of racist ideas on the radical right. They adopted the politics of terror, assassination and murder of its enemies, in order to reach their aims of

“cultivation and dissemination of nationalist thinking; warfare against all anti-nationalists and internationalists, warfare against Jewry, Social Democracy and Left-radicalism; fomenting of internal unrest in order to attain the overthrow of the un-German Weimar Republic.”⁷²

And so the ‘O.C.’ started an unparalleled assassination campaign against the well-known representatives of the Weimar Republic. They killed e.g. Walther Rathenau, Matthias Erzberger, Hugo Haase, Karl Gareis and carried out an acid attack on Philip Scheidemann.⁷³ Rightist killers assassinated all in all 354 persons between 1919 and 1922.⁷⁴

The extremists of the Right needed new tactics. As one of them said at the time:

“Nothing lasting can be achieved by a handful of conspirators using dagger, poison and pistol. What is needed is hundred thousand, fanatical fighters for our view of live. The work must be done, not in secret but in overwhelming mass demonstrations and the conquest of the streets.”⁷⁵

His name was Adolf Hitler.

⁷⁰ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 202.

⁷¹ Schulze, Hagen: *Freikorps und Republik*. p. 60.

⁷² Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler's Heralds*. p. 193-194.

⁷³ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 212-227.

⁷⁴ Cf., Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler's Heralds*. p. 209.

⁷⁵ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 210.

4. The Freikorps movement as predecessor of the SA and forerunner of the Nazi movement?

Many Freikorps moved to Munich where they attached themselves to the one movement that “[...] seemed to represent the last, best, chance of overthrowing Weimar and its shameful subservience to Versailles: the Nazi Party.”⁷⁶ “[...] The men of the Freikorps at once recognised Adolf Hitler as their long awaited Leader and became ardent Nazis.”⁷⁷ And their influx led Hitler to adopt an increasingly aggressive and provocative policy.⁷⁸

Many of the former well-known Freikorps leader joined the Nazi movement and reached high positions in the SA, SS, party or the administration⁷⁹ - if they were not killed in the “Night of the long Knives” in June 1934.⁸⁰

Richard Bessel confirms in his book about the Storm Troopers in Eastern Germany that most of the leadership of the SA had their political roots in the former Freikorps movement:⁸¹

“Thus many of the SA leaders had spent much of their lives in uniform; unwilling to integrate themselves into normal civilian life, they sought to remain ‘soldiers’ in a succession of right-wing paramilitary groups during the 1920s and finally found a home in the SA.”⁸²

The special position of the Freikorps after Hitler’s seize of power can be demonstrated by the fact that Freikorps handed over their battlescarred flags to an honour guard of SA and SS troops and were preserved in the Hall of Honour of the Brown House “or all eternity”.⁸³ And to all former members of the Freikorps a special certificate were handed over for their heroic

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 222.

⁷⁷ Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 276-277.

⁷⁸ Cf., Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 222.

⁷⁹ Cf., Thomas, Robert: *Bibliographie zur Geschichte der deutschen Freikorps 1918-1923*. p. 46-51.

Cf., Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 266-272-

Cf., Venner, Dominique: *Söldner ohne Sold*. p. 292-308.

⁸⁰ In this night the majority of the SA leadership and former Freikorps members were killed. Ernst Röhm and the Strasser brothers were one of the most prominent victims of this bloodshed. Both wanted a second revolution-not only the nationalist revolution they wanted also the socialist revolution.

„Such was the Führer’s thanks to the men of the Freikorps, on whose he had ridden to power, but who found himself unable to tolerate their wild indiscipline, and their failure to recognise him as the sole indisputable embodied spirit of the national revolution.“

Jones, Nigel H.: *Hitler’s Heralds*. p. 208.

⁸¹ Cf., Bessel, Richard: *Political Violence and the Rise of Nazism. The Storm troopers in Eastern Germany 1925-1932*. New Haven/London 1984. p. 41-42.

⁸² Ibid., p. 42.

⁸³ Cf., Waite, Robert G.L.: *Vanguards of Nazism*. p. 196-197.

fight against the Weimar Republic.⁸⁴ Hitler was in “[...] many ways the chief heir to the Freikorps heritage [...]”⁸⁵

It seems to beyond doubt for all authors that the Freikorps movement was in a direct or at least indirect way the predecessor of the SA and forerunner of the Nazi-movement. The members of the Freikorps sought their salvation in a dictatorship, the dictatorship of National Socialism.⁸⁶ The members of the Freikorps were: “[...] the natural representatives of a time of social chaos, confusion, revolution and reaction.

As such they were the natural humus for the growth of Hitlerism.”⁸⁷

5. Conclusion

The Freikorps movement and their ideology in the Weimar Republic is a phenomena. Based on the German pre-war Youth movement with its emphasis on folkish corporatism, the concept of corporatice spirit and the Führer principle mixed up with the elite awareness of the ‘Storm’ or ‘Shock’ battalions led to this strange ideology. They hated the Weimar Republic and wanted to save their beloved fatherland from the threat of bolshevism, but with their brutal suppression of the entire left-wing uprising they helped to preserve the liberal bourgeois society they were fighting against.

With their short liaison with the communism, which led to the expression ‘Bolsheviks of the right’ for the Freikorps movement, they committed themselves to ‘Nationalism’ and ‘Socialism’. And in Hitler’s NSDAP they thought that the ‘National Socialism’ will fulfil their ideology.

According to this Freikorps movement devoted itself to the new party and helped to built up and radicalise it. Because of this is justified to say that the Freikorps movement was the predecessor of the SA and forerunner of the Nazi movement. Later on the former members of the Freikorps realised that Hitler was not willingly to carry out the second ‘Socialist’ revolution and many of them had to pay for their enthusiasm for the new party with their lives in the ‘Night of the long Knives’ in 1934.

⁸⁴ Cf., Thoms, Robert: Bibliographie zur Geschichte der deutschen Freikorps 1918-1923. Appendix.

⁸⁵ Jones, Nigel H.: Hitler’s Heralds. p. 106.

⁸⁶ Cf., Schüddekopf, Otto-Ernst: Das Heer und die Republik. p. 45.

⁸⁷ Jones, Nigel H.: Hitler’s Heralds. p 247.

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