



The Conservative Revolution In Weimar Germany

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Abstract

After WWI, a new form of German conservatism arose, frustrated by the immorality of the Enlightened, liberal west. Seeing qualities like democracy, parliamentarianism, and pacifism as unnatural to the true German, the Conservative Revolution aimed to reinvent Germany as a new, conservative state. The neo-conservatives broke with conservative tradition by not advocating for a restoration to the pre-war empire, but instead toward a new, modern form of authoritarianism. The Conservative Revolution drew from radical nationalism of the previous century, including the *Volkisch* tradition, Germanic supremacism, and populist mass tactics. Through their efforts, the Conservative Revolution helped contribute to the decay of German interwar democracy and helped to set the stage for Nazism and popular acceptance of fascism, albeit inadvertently.

Who Were the Neo-Conservatives?

The neo-conservatives were a movement based on a revolutionary form of conservatism with three notable characteristics:

Portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II



1. **Anti-liberalism and hatred of the modern, Enlightened world order**
2. **Nationalistic advocacy for a new Germany and new German-led Europe**
3. **Anti-Capitalism, and a desire to integrate the Left in the new Germany**

While prewar Prussian *Junker* Conservatives were aristocratic and elite, neo-conservatives were middle-class, nationalist, and did not advocate for a Kaiser's restoration. They believed that the world had changed after the war, and that Germany's new form should reflect that.



Map of Germany showing post-Versailles Treaty territorial losses

The Revolution's Goals

The neo-conservatives saw Europe and especially Germany as careening toward an **immoral, Enlightened, liberal future that was uniquely foreign to the German people**. To that end, they sought to re-make Germany as a hierarchical, authoritarian, militaristic world power, and with their massive influence, they would reshape Europe in their image.



Portrait of Arthur Moeller Van Den Bruck, a leader in Neo-Conservative thought

Neo-conservatives were skeptical of capitalism, but still hated the class-based analysis and egalitarianism of Marxism. They sought to re-constitute the Left as a "Socialism of the Blood" based on nationalistic ties.

Types of Neo-Conservatives

Young Conservatives	National Revolutionaries	The Volkischen
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most influential branch• Philosophical reasoning behind revolution: Romanticism, Pessimism, Fatalism• Idealistic, optimistic nationalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Influenced by WWI militarism, front-line soldiers• Utilized of modern technology and methods, like propaganda• Nationalism as means to new society• Connections to mass organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Volkisch</i> ideology: superiority of the Germanic race• Focused on the "true" German people, or <i>Volk</i>, and what is natural to them• Racists, eugenicists, artistic and literary movement, occult• A non-partisan unifying movement

Although different, the branches shared a dedication to revolution, a disdain of the modern world, a strong nationalist sentiment, and firm belief in Germanic supremacy.

Neo-Conservatives and Nationalism

Neo-conservatives drew heavily from the tradition of *Volkisch* radical nationalism established in the late 19th century as a reaction to the modern world. In particular, they were very concerned with the Germanic race, and concepts they believed to be "natural" to Germans, or of German historical invention.

Nationalism radicalized as the German political system under Bismarck became parliamentarian and grew to include diplomacy and other aspects nationalists deemed as "foreign" and "Western."

The Conservative Revolution's nationalist critiques of democracy were mainly conceptual in their origin. They believed that liberalism, democracy, and egalitarianism were **foreign and oppressively imposed upon Germans**. Because they had originated elsewhere, they were better suited for those they had been invented for, and therefore harmful to Germans.

The Fall of Democracy

As the window of opportunity closed to make Germany anew, Conservatives became desperate.

The conservative German National People's Party (DNVP) never had a foothold with the people like the NSDAP did, and initially wanted to utilize them to garner popular support. The DNVP formed a coalition, thinking the NSDAP merely a weak, junior party whom they could later discard. However, Hitler used this coalition to legitimize his party. As the newly bolstered NSDAP rocketed up to prominence, their use for the Conservative party declined. The NSDAP completely obliterated the ailing DNVP just years later.

Although they were not ideological precursors to fascism, the conservatives' consistent political and intellectual resistance to Weimar democracy helped keep it unconsolidated, and fomented anti-democratic views among the middle class, **helping to lay the groundwork for National Socialism**.

Conclusion

The Conservative Revolution was an influential, ideologically based movement that called on historical German philosophical and nationalistic trends even as it called for a revolution. Firmly anti-democratic and anti-liberal, they idealistically believed that they could undo progress and revert Europe back to authoritarian hierarchy.

Both forward and backward looking, the neo-conservatives are important in analyzing Hitler and the National Socialists' rise to power, but also important in analyzing today's political landscape—nationalistic conservatism is re-emerging today, and important to study previous forms to know how best to react today.



Portrait of Ernst Jünger, a Neo-Conservative leader