

**German Youth  
1900 – 1933  
From Emancipation to Radicalization**

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## Abstract

*This thesis provides a survey of the German youth movement from 1900 to 1933. The purpose of the research is to identify how youth was conceptualized, organized, and consolidated within the Weimar Republic (1918 – 1933). I present the argument that the German youth movement evolved in five distinct phases: Emancipation (1900 – 1917), Transformation (1918 – 1919), Politicization (1920 – 1924), Polarization (1925 – 1928), and Radicalization (1929 – 1933). Furthermore, I argue that the youth movement was divided between bourgeois and working-class elements that significantly influenced the later organization of youth in Weimar. The division became increasingly polarized until the NSDAP's rise to power in 1933 led to a forced consolidation of the youth movement, which ended the diverse youth organization that characterized the Weimar period.*

## Abbreviations

**BJ** – Bismarck Jugend (Bismarck Youth)

**DF** - Deutsche Freischar (German Boy Scouts)

**DNVP** - Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party)

**DVP** - Deutsche Volkspartei (German People's Party)

**FDJ** – Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth)

**FSJ** – Freie Sozialistische Jugend (Free Socialist Youth)

**HDJ** – Hindenburg Jugend (Hindenburg Youth)

**JAH** – Jungsturm Adolf Hitler (Young Stormtroopers, Adolf Hitler)

**JDB** – Jung Deutsche Bund (Young German League)

**KJVD** - Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands (Young Communist League of Germany)

**KPD** - Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)

**NSDAP** - Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)

**RDPG** - Reichsverband der Deutschnationalen Parteijugendgruppen (Association of the German National Party's Youth Group)

**RFB** - Roter Frontkämpferbund (Alliance of Red Front-Fighters)

**RJ** - Rote Jungfront (Red Young Front)

**RJB** – Reichsjugendbewegung (German Youth Movement)

**SA** – Sturmabteilung (Stormtroopers/Brown Shirts)

**SAJ** - Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend (Socialist Workers' Youth)

**SPD** - Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)

**VAJV** - Verband der Arbeiterjugendvereine Deutschlands (Association of German Working Youth)

**USPD** - Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)

**Wandervogel** – Wandering Birds

## *Introduction*

The Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany era have been the subject of intense academic study since the end of the Second World War. The role of German youth within the Nazi State, in organizations such as the *Hitlerjugend* or *Sturmabteilung*, has also been extensively examined and debated. However, the exact ideological origins of these organizations within the Weimar Republic, and other youth organizations more generally, have been the subject of less interest. The study of the German youth movement has largely been eclipsed by, or understood only in relation to, the rise of Nazism and the collapse of the Weimar Republic. Yet, the German youth movement was an important social phenomenon in its own right. The aim here is to explore the origins, development, politicization and eventual radicalization of the German youth movement in the Weimar Republic.

It is important to define the term youth and how it will be used throughout the thesis. Youth is a relatively new cognitive designation emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has signified different realities to different societies, but some common generalities can be made about it. Youth has traditionally signified the period between an individual's adolescence and adulthood and thus signifies a specific and identifiable period of time in an individual's lifetime. The characteristics of this period, however, differ vastly according to each specific society. A common feature is usually a relationship between youth and age group. This thesis will use the term to signify German individuals between the ages of 14 and 20. The choice is connected to how the term was used in the Weimar Republic. The age category is expanded slightly, however,

as I argue the related age groups faced similar social situations and shared similar ideological beliefs. Youth, then, is not meant to signify a specific age but a shared reality.

This thesis traces the development of the German youth movement from its independent formation in the Wilhelmine era to its radicalization in the final years of the Weimar Republic. It argues that the German youth movement began during the Wilhelmine era as a result of rapid industrialization and urbanization that led to the social emancipation of bourgeois and working-class youth. However, differing socio-economic realities faced by bourgeois and working-class youth led to their separate ideological development before 1919. With World War I, the nature of the German youth movement changed, resulting in mass politicization and incorporation by political parties of both bourgeois and working-class youth by 1924. Politicization slowed with the onset of the Weimar 'Golden Age' as moderate political youth disengaged from the parliamentary system and anti-Republican youth increasingly engaged with radical parties such as the NSDAP and KPD. The onset of the Great Depression in 1929 led to a new phase of politicization that was more radical and foreshadowed the forced consolidation of the German youth movement under the NSDAP as *Hitlerjugend*.

My thesis has been organized into five sections. Each section is divided according to chronology and theme. These sections suggest an argument about the character and development of the German youth movement at the time. The first section is entitled "*Emancipation*" and focuses on the period 1900-1917. It explains the emergence of youth in Wilhelmine Germany as a social concept and the creation of the Free German Youth movement. The second section is entitled "*Transformation*" and focuses on the period 1918-1919. It explores the effects of the First World War on the Free German Youth

movement and the eventual decline of the movement's influence. The third section is entitled, "*Politicization*," and focuses on the period 1920-1924 to examine the efforts of Weimar political parties to attract the support of German youth as well as the establishment of various new political youth organizations. The fourth section, "*Polarization*," focuses on the period 1925-1928. It aims to understand the increasing political polarization of German youth into radical leftist and radical rightist youth organizations. The fifth section, "*Radicalization*," focuses on the period 1929 – 1933 and investigates the growing tensions between radical leftist and radical rightist youth organizations and the subsequent domination of the National Socialist youth movement.

***Part One: Emancipation (1900-1917)***

It is impossible to explore the eventual politicization of German youth in the Weimar Republic without understanding their social emancipation and social recognition during the Wilhelmine era. I propose that we understand emancipation as the process whereby youth come to differentiate themselves from other social categories by measures of ideological, economic, political, or social activism. It is during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm II (1888-1918) that youth first began to view themselves as socially and ideologically distinct within German society.<sup>1</sup> The differentiation was fostered by rapid social change as a result of a population boom facilitated by increasing industrialization and newfound national wealth. Increasingly, young people began actively pursuing an agenda of independent organization whereby their specific organizational and ideological goals could be achieved.

Rapid industrialization and increased urbanization were crucial preconditions for the social emancipation of youth in the Wilhelmine era. Yet, the process of youth emancipation differed in detail and outcome according to the corresponding class. Most importantly, the emancipation of bourgeois youth must not be confused with the emancipation of working-class youth, since before 1919 these were largely separate social developments. Furthermore, the separate development of bourgeois and working-class youth emancipation had significant effects on youth organization within the Weimar Republic. As historian Peter D. Stachura posits, “The emancipatory aspirations of bourgeois youth and proletarian youth were essentially different: while the former sought

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<sup>1</sup> Peter D. Stachura, *The German Youth Movement 1900 – 1945* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), 13.



freedom through the socialization process... the latter was concerned with... liberation from the economic exploitation.”<sup>2</sup>

The trends of increased industrialization and urbanization were facilitated by an increase in the German population in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Between 1871 and 1910 the German population increased by 58%.<sup>3</sup> Population growth was especially pronounced in provinces like Prussia (62%) and Bavaria (41%).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the growth rate corresponded with an increase in urban populations, such as in Berlin, which had 966,859 residents in 1875 and 2,071,257 residents in 1910.<sup>5</sup> German nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased to become the highest in Europe by 1910 and second highest globally behind the United States (US).<sup>6</sup> The increase in national wealth led to the expansion in the influence of the German bourgeoisie. By 1907 the bourgeoisie constituted a minor percentage of the total population, but owned around half of the national wealth.<sup>7</sup> Thus, although the bourgeoisie did not constitute a majority of the population, they held a significant amount of the nation’s wealth. Most important, however, is the specific socio-economic reality created by these economic conditions that would significantly affect the development of the bourgeois youth.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>3</sup> “Population Growth 1890 – 1914.” German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=631](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=631) (March 3, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> “Population Redistribution 1871 – 1910.” German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=632](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=632) (March 3, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> “Population Growth in Large Cities 1875 – 1910,” German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghidc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=644](http://germanhistorydocs.ghidc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=644) (March 3, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> “Occupational Breakdown of Germany’s Population 1882 – 1907,” German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=633](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=633) (March 3, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Economic prosperity fostered an entirely new and unique environment for the development of bourgeois youth. Bourgeois youth, unlike working-class youth, did not have to concern themselves with economic survival and could focus instead on outdoor activity, leisure, and ideological concerns, resulting largely from a general sense of restlessness within the bourgeoisie class. Ideological concerns also developed in reaction to the rapid social change experienced as a result of industrialization. Bourgeois youth specifically feared the erosion of German culture as a consequence of increasing economic internationalism.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, bourgeois youth increasingly began to incorporate nationalist and racial ideas. The popularity of the new *völkisch* ideology continued to grow among bourgeois youth, who in turn began to seek outlets for their expression and rebellion.

The first significant organization among bourgeois youth was the *Wandervogel*, whose first official branch established on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1901 in Steglitz (Greater Berlin).<sup>9</sup> Karl Fischer, a previous student at the Steglitz *Gymnasium*, led the first *Wandervogel* group.<sup>10</sup> The first *Wandervogel* group had no political affiliation and was a grouping of bourgeois, mostly Protestant boys under the age of 18.<sup>11</sup> Initially, the purpose of the group was to create a forum that allowed local youth to gather and experience nature under the supervision of the local school board.<sup>12</sup> Group activities consisted mostly of local hiking, traditional folk singing and prolonged outdoor regional

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<sup>8</sup> Walter Z. Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 20.

<sup>11</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*, 26.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

excursions. By 1903, the *Wandervogel* had grown from a local grouping of 100 boys to include 250 members in 5 nationwide branches.<sup>13</sup>

Between 1904 and 1910 secessions and divisions challenged the unity of the *Wandervogel* movement. In 1904, the first division occurred as a result of disagreements over the authority of Fischer's leadership. The *Steglitzer Wandervogel*, led by Siegfried Copalle, emerged in 1904 as an alternative for those youth who opposed Fischer's authoritarian leadership style.<sup>14</sup> Fischer's group was renamed the *Alt-Wandervogel*.<sup>15</sup> Thereafter, a fierce debate occurred among *Wandervogel* youth on the issue of adult supervision. Members who felt the influence of adult supervision was too great seceded in 1910 to form the *Jung Wandervogel* under the leadership of Wilhelm Jansen.<sup>16</sup> In 1911, the more nationalist elements of the *Wandervogel* seceded to form the *Verband Deutscher Wandervogel*.<sup>17</sup> Yet, despite the tendency of the *Wandervogel* toward sectarianism on organizational issues, a common bourgeois *völkisch* ideology prevailed among all subsequent formations.<sup>18</sup>

Proponents of the independent youth movement gathered in 1913 at Hoher Meissner in Hesse in order to discuss the formation of an organized and unified movement.<sup>19</sup> The meeting was attended by German, Austrian, and even Swiss youth – highlighting the emerging phenomenon of youth organization throughout the greater Germanic areas at the time. The meeting resulted in the creation of the *Freie Deutsche*

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*, 22.

<sup>15</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 38.

*Jugend* (FDJ) and the proclamation of the ‘Meissner Formula.’<sup>20</sup> The formula stated, “[FDJ], on their own initiative, under their own responsibility... are determined to independently shape their own lives.”<sup>21</sup> The declaration was a daring and unprecedented display of independence by German youth and the articulation of their social emancipation.

The creation of the *Wandervogel* allowed for the eventual formation of the FDJ to a significant degree. As a result, there were various ideological continuities between the two organizations. First, there was significant overlap between the membership of the FDJ and *Wandervogel*. Second, the FDJ was an identifiably nationalist movement that, despite their initial inclusion, excluded Austrian and Swiss counterparts. To be clear, the FDJ voiced support for a supranational organization of German youth, but did not see itself as the catalyst for such a movement. Finally, there was reluctance in both organizations to engage with any specific political movement as outlined in the Meissner Formula. Consequently, the *Wandervogel* and FDJ existed to some degree in congruence, despite not being officially aligned.

*Völkisch* ideology, which developed first within the *Wandervogel*, significantly influenced the practice and character of the FDJ. More specifically, the FDJ adopted conservative positions on questions of religion, gender, and sexuality. First, the FDJ was a predominantly Protestant movement: Catholic and Jewish youth were significantly underrepresented in the membership based on societal reasons outside the organization.<sup>22</sup> The Catholic Church discouraged youth from joining the FDJ since it saw the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.32.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*, 74.

organization as an affront to Church authority.<sup>23</sup> Jewish youth, however, were excluded from the FDJ on the basis of racial ideology. In 1913, the Fulda Report, issued by Friedrich Wilhelm Fulda, publicly argued against the inclusion of Jews in the FDJ.<sup>24</sup> Second, the FDJ was an almost entirely male dominated organization that generally excluded female involvement in activities.<sup>25</sup> Finally, homosexuality was condemned by the FDJ in 1912, yet many homosexuals remained part of the FDJ and were especially common within *Wandervogel* groups.<sup>26</sup> In sum, despite officially being a non-political entity, the FDJ represented a distinctly *völkisch* conservative ideology.

Working-class youth did not constitute a significant percentage of the overall FDJ membership. Instead, working-class youth tended to identify with socialist organizations or organized independently in unions or apprentices' associations. Furthermore, working-class youth were the largest youth demographic, corresponding to the increasing size of the German working-class from 34.8% of the total German labour force in 1882, to 42.2% by 1907.<sup>27</sup> The working-class was also surprisingly young, as by 1900 over 1 million members of the workers were between the ages of 14 and 18.<sup>28</sup> The social emancipation of working-class youth was related to their specific economic concerns as opposed to the ideological considerations that influenced the bourgeois youth. Furthermore, working-class youth did not oppose parental authority to the degree

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>24</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>27</sup> "Occupational Breakdown of Germany's Population 1882 – 1907," German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=633](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=633) (March 3, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 97.

outlined in the Meissner Formula.<sup>29</sup> Instead, working-class youth generally formed close associations with workers of all ages, genders or backgrounds.

The Wilhelmine regime was reluctant to recognize the organizational emergence of both bourgeois and working-class youth. Moreover, the eventual response by the Wilhelmine State illustrates a deep and fundamental misunderstanding of the youth movement more generally. The first official response came in 1907 in the form of the Reich Law of Association, which prohibited German youth forming or joining political organizations.<sup>30</sup> Thereafter, the state formed the *Jung Deutsche Bund* (JDB) in 1911 in an attempt to curtail the growing membership of the FDJ.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the JDB did not become a significant factor among early youth organizations and its development was ultimately undermined by the outbreak of World War I. Organized youth activity was severely limited by the Wilhelmine State throughout the war, as authorities feared their activities might act to undermine the German war effort. In sum, the Wilhelmine state pursued a characteristically oppressive agenda in regards to early youth emancipation.

German youth generally greeted the outbreak of World War I with much enthusiasm, as did the majority of the German population. In fact, the war provided an opportunity for many young males to enlist and pursue the sort of heroic action enshrined by the romantic bourgeois youth ideology. Yet, this romantic notion was quickly shattered by the realities of war. In October 1914 the first major loss of young German life occurred in the Battle of Langemarck, which later became a symbol of martyrdom in youth culture and German discourse more generally.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 100.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

The Wilhelmine era ended with the defeat of Germany in World War I at the hands of the Entente. However, the immense social change that occurred before 1914 as a result of rapid industrialization and increased urbanization could not be reversed or undone. Specifically, the social emancipation of bourgeois and working-class youth and their ongoing organization continued into the Weimar era.

***Part Two: Transformation (1918-1919)***

The Weimar Republic was proclaimed amidst significant social turmoil and economic uncertainty. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1918, German sailors stationed in Kiel mutinied and triggered the onset of revolution throughout Germany.<sup>33</sup> Governmental authority weakened in the following weeks, with much political violence resulting in the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November and the signing of the armistice on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November.<sup>34</sup> The *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), under the leadership of Philipp Scheidemann, proclaimed the German Republic in the Berlin *Reichstag* on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1919.<sup>35</sup> A provisional government emerged, with members of the SPD and the *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (USPD).<sup>36</sup>

The combination of political and economic turmoil created tension within the already fragile FDJ. The membership and organized activity of the FDJ stagnated during the harsh conditions of the First World War. However, by 1918 FDJ leadership began to reorganize in anticipation of the end of the war. FDJ representatives met in Naumberg in March of 1918 in an attempt to reunify and re-energize the movement. At Naumberg, members reaffirmed their non-political and independent status, as well as their commitment to a nationalist identity.<sup>37</sup> Subsequent meetings, in Jena in 1919 and Hofgeismar in 1920, articulated similar commitments.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 37.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 41.



The principles reaffirmed at Naumberg did not translate into meaningful action. Instead, the FDJ began to decline in influence as youth became increasingly divided along political and ideological lines. FDJ activity continued until 1923 but with little effect on German youth. I would argue that the decline in influence was mostly due to the generational divide among FDJ leadership and the failure of the organization to adapt to post-war social conditions. The generational divide existed among FDJ members who had been conscripted between 1914 and 1917 and the home-front bourgeois youth who inherited the FDJ organizational structure by 1918. Generational differences were highlighted by the returning pre-war youth who continued to support the positions articulated in the Meissner Formula, whereas post-war youth generally found these positions irrelevant. In 1923, the remaining members of the FDJ met at Hoher Meissner to mark the ten-year anniversary of the organization.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the meeting only served to highlight the dysfunction that came to characterize the FDJ.

Early members of the FDJ returned in 1919 to an unfamiliar homeland. They entered the war as young adults and returned to the Weimar Republic as hardened men. Many had been wounded, and some were completely unable to re-enter civilian life. Faced with an unfamiliar environment, many simply remained in military-like organizations, such as the right-wing paramilitary *Freikorps*. As Kurt Tucholsky, a German-Jewish journalist, reflecting on the nationalism and militarism of 1914, later posited in 1924, “The wave of drunkenness which overtook the country ten years ago has left behind many hung-over people who know no other cure for their hangover than to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

become drunk again.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, many early members of the FDJ who returned home in 1919 brought with them the trauma of the front.

Some members of the FDJ returned home to become pacifists and educators. They continued to propagate the early ideology of the FDJ, but with little success. The most significant activism influenced the emerging liberal education system in the Weimar Republic. For example, Gustav Wyneken, a previous leader of the *Wandervogel*, was instrumental in the implementation of educational reform in the postwar system. Wyneken supported the “*Appeal to Male and Female Pupils in Secondary Schools*” directive by the then Education Minister Konrad Haenisch on November 27<sup>th</sup> 1918.<sup>41</sup> The directive aimed to create student representative bodies in all secondary schools, in an attempt to create a more effective space for dialogue between youth and educators, mirroring the democratization of Germany more generally. The directive was hugely unpopular with bourgeois youth who viewed it as obtrusive and an affront to the authoritarianism they were accustomed to.<sup>42</sup> In fact, many opted instead to support right-wing student organizations such as the German National Youth League.<sup>43</sup>

Working-class youth remained largely outside the larger youth movement before 1919. Many working-class youth enlisted with the military or spent their time in the munitions factories on the home front during the war.<sup>44</sup> As a result, the involvement of working-class youth in any organizational structures declined as a whole. However, by

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<sup>40</sup> Kurt Tucholsky “The Spirit of 1914,” *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 112.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Donson, “The Teenagers’ Revolution: Schülerräte in the Democratization and Right-Wing Radicalization of Germany, 1918 – 1923,” *Central European History* 44, no.3 (September 2011): 420.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Mark Roseman, *Generations In Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770 – 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 104.

the end of 1919, working-class youth were the first to organize *en masse* behind the SPD, USPD or KPD. Furthermore, within the working-class, there existed a larger sense of class unity that would come to define the early character of the working-class youth organizations of the Weimar Republic. In fact, as the FDJ declined in influence and bourgeois youth splintered into various right-wing organizations, the working-class youth began to unify, largely behind the SPD.

Felix Gilbert, a Weimar youth, recalled, “the critical difference was whether one had grown up before 1914 or after. We felt strongly that the postwar generation was something new.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, by 1919 it was clear that a new generation of German youth had emerged. The romantic ideology of the *Wandervogel* lost influence in the turmoil that characterized the early years of the Weimar Republic. German youth were increasingly searching for organizational outlets to express their frustration and disappointment with the outcome of World War I.

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<sup>45</sup> Gilbert, Felix. “The Weimar Generation.” German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=3850](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3850) (March 3, 2017).

### ***Part Three: Politicization (1920-1924)***

Between 1920 and 1924, the Weimar Republic continued to face existential crises. In March of 1920, a temporary *coup d'état*, the so-called *Kapp Putsch*, displaced the federal government in favor of a right-wing authoritarian regime.<sup>46</sup> A general strike ensued against the newly installed government, which ultimately led to the failure of the coup.<sup>47</sup> More generally, labour strikes continued to be a prominent feature of the Republic. Furthermore, in 1923 French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr, an important industrial region, as a result of German defaults on reparation payments stipulated by the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>48</sup> The occupation resulted in hyperinflation and high unemployment.<sup>49</sup> Urban centers, such as Berlin, were thrown into economic disarray and social disorder. Political parties increasingly began to work through the new democratic system to appeal to the public with their proposed solutions to the recent crises. Moreover, as the German population was the youngest in Europe, political parties increasingly began to incorporate and appeal to the youth demographic. Between 1920 and 1924, every major German federal political party established a youth affiliate or began a close association with an already existing youth group.

The political Left in the Weimar Republic ranged from moderate Socialism to Communism. Youth organization occurred within every major leftist political party, attracting support mainly from the working-class. Between 1920 and 1924, all left-wing political parties began an organized effort to accommodate and integrate the specific concerns of working-class youth.

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<sup>46</sup> Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 91.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 92.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

The *Freie Sozialistische Jugend* (FSJ) was founded on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1918 as the first large-scale socialist youth organization to be established in the chaos of the early post-war era.<sup>50</sup> The FSJ was initially an independent organization of socialist youth, but was increasingly brought under the influence of the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD).<sup>51</sup> Alfred Kurella, a German Communist who had been a part of the youth movement in the Wilhelmine era, founded the FSJ. Kurella visited Moscow in 1919 as a representative of the KPD, and met with Vladimir Lenin in order to discuss the advancement of Communism in Germany.<sup>52</sup> Thereafter, Kurella began to reorganize the FSJ along the guidelines established by the Soviet *Komsomol* – the Soviet State sponsored youth group. The FSJ was renamed the *Kommunistischer Jugendverband Deutschlands* (KJVD) in 1920.<sup>53</sup>

The KJVD became an immensely active political organization between 1918 and 1924. Most importantly, the KJVD supported the efforts of the working-class in the Ruhr during the French occupation in 1923.<sup>54</sup> The KJVD was critical in the propaganda distribution efforts of the KPD in industrial centers and the effort to increase membership. Youth increasingly became symbolically associated in KPD literature with the building of a future Communist utopia. KJVD literature tended to emphasize Germanic identity within a Communist utopia, whereas the KPD emphasized a truly Soviet internationalist model.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, in 1922, the KPD brought the KJVD under

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<sup>50</sup> Barbara Köster, “Die Junge Garde des Proletariats: Untersuchungen zum Kommunistischen Jugendverband Deutschlands in der Weimarer Republik,” (PhD thesis, Universität Beilefeld, 2005), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 104.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

closer control and co-ordination in order to align their literature with that of the Party.<sup>56</sup> The KJVD was temporarily banned in 1923 as a result of their role in the agitation efforts in the Ruhr.<sup>57</sup>

Socialist youth far outnumbered their Communist counterparts in the period between 1920 and 1924. Moreover, socialist ideology was not viewed as a threat to the Republic and thus they were able to enjoy relative stability – unlike the KJVD, which was routinely banned and monitored by the state. The *Verband der Arbeiterjugendvereine Deutschlands* (VAJV) was formed at the end of 1919 by young Social Democrats, and by 1922 had over 70,000 members who actively participated in public demonstrations in urban centers such as Berlin and Munich (see Table 1).<sup>58</sup> The more extreme *Sozialistischen Proletarierjugend* (SPJ), an affiliate of the USPD, rivaled the early membership of the VAJV.<sup>59</sup> However, the SPJ suffered under the political instability of the USPD, which resulted in a split in October of 1920.<sup>60</sup> In 1922, with the merger of the SPD and USPD, the VAJV and SPJ merged to form the *Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend* (SAJ).<sup>61</sup> The founding of the SAJ occurred in Nuremberg, which became an important historical city for most political parties in the Weimar Republic.

By 1924, the SAJ was led by Max Westphal with a membership of over 100,000 Socialist youth.<sup>62</sup> SAJ membership consisted largely of youth who supported reform through the Republican system. It was the largest pro-Republican youth affiliate in the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Timothy S. Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazi and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009) 103.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 115.

period between 1920 and 1924. The SAJ participated in the *Reichsjugendtag* on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August 1923 in Nuremberg in a show of unity for the Republican government.<sup>63</sup> A half million Socialist youth participated in the event, which included a political rally by SPD Party leadership. The SAJ reaffirmed its commitment to the Republican government after the assassination of Walter Rathenau, stating, “at the grave of Walter Rathenau we renew our unreserved support for the German democratic Republic. We shall be prepared at every hour and in all places to defend its well-being and existence.”<sup>64</sup>

The SAJ chairman, Max Westphal, played a central role in establishing the early relationship between the SAJ and SPD. Westphal understood specific working-class youth issues, as he himself had been apart of the early working-class youth movement. His leadership style emphasized the individual character of the SAJ as an entity distinct from the SPD. The period between 1920 and 1924 was characterized by a harmonious and supportive relationship between the SAJ and SPD.

The political Right of the Weimar Republic ranged from monarchism to National Socialism. Youth political organization occurred within every major rightist political party. The political Right attracted its support from youth in the upper and middle classes. Between 1920 and 1924, the major right-wing political parties of the Weimar Republic began efforts to win over the bourgeois youth.<sup>65</sup> However, little ideological unity existed between early right-wing youth groups. No single right-wing youth affiliate was able to dominate the political Right in the early Weimar Republic. Essentially, the early right-wing did not have a youth organization comparable in scale to the SAJ.

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<sup>63</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 104.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

The development of right-wing youth organizations was connected to the decline of the FDJ. The FDJ was a distinctly nationalist movement of bourgeois youth. However, the movement refrained from significant political involvement before World War I. By 1917, the FDJ had notably fractured into an openly *völkisch* sect and a vehemently independent apolitical sect. In 1919, the *völkisch* element completely abandoned the FDJ and began its own organization, the *Jungdeutsche Bund*, under the leadership of Frank Glatzel.<sup>66</sup> Glatzel issued the *Lauenstein Declaration* in August of 1919. It stated the position of the JDB as a nationalist youth movement with the goal of creating a homogenous *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>67</sup> Glatzel, however, became increasingly associated with the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (DNVP) and by 1921 had essentially forsaken his work with the JDB.<sup>68</sup>

The DNVP created their youth affiliate, the *Reichsverband der Deutschnationalen Parteijugendgruppen* (RDPG) in 1922.<sup>69</sup> Wilhelm Klube led the effort, which was notably delayed in comparison to other political parties. Shortly after the founding of the RDPG, the organization was renamed the *Bismarckjugend* (BJ).<sup>70</sup> The renaming occurred in an attempt to attract the more conservative and traditionalist elements among the German youth. The renaming also speaks to the tendency of right-wing organizations to subscribe to the *Führerprinzip*, or the rallying of support around a singular leader or cult of personality.<sup>71</sup> Other right-wing youth organizations would follow suit, such as the

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Gerwarth, *The Bismarck Myth: Weimar Germany and the Legacy of the Iron Chancellor* (Oxford: Calrendon Press, 2005), 106.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 108.



*Hitlerjugend* in 1926 and the *Hindenburgjugend* in 1929. Yet the group's membership of 40,000 in 1923 indicates the limited appeal of the group at the time (see Table 1).<sup>72</sup>

The BJ supported monarchism and the return of Kaiser Wilhelm II. The BJ was also a vehemently anti-Marxist organization and on many occasions between 1922 and 1924, clashed with members of the KJVD. Yet, the BJ was unable to attract significant support among German bourgeois youth. Furthermore, their appeal was limited largely to Protestant areas in northern and eastern Germany.<sup>73</sup> The largest branch of the BJ was located in Berlin where 80% of its 6000 members were from the working-class.<sup>74</sup> Such an example appears to be an anomaly within the larger trend of appeal to bourgeois and Protestant youth. The DNVP and the BJ represented the old Imperial order, which was largely unappealing to bourgeois and working-class German youth.

The right-wing *Deutsche Volkspartei* (DVP) founded its own youth affiliate, the *Reichsjugendbewegung* (RJB), at the end of 1919.<sup>75</sup> The RJB mimicked the exact policies of the DVP without any significant contribution or impact. The RJB was renamed the *Hindenburgjugend* (HBJ) in 1929, in an attempt to capitalize on President Hindenburg's popularity.<sup>76</sup> However, the membership of the HBJ never surpassed 30,000 (see Table 1).<sup>77</sup> In fact, it was the smallest youth affiliate of any major political party in the Weimar era.

The *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) attracted youth through the establishment of their unofficial affiliate, the *Jungsturm Adolf Hitler* (JAH),

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 109.

<sup>76</sup> Peter D. Stachura, *Nazi Youth in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Clio Books, 1975), 5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

in 1922, led by Gustav Adolf Lenk.<sup>78</sup> Lenk was an avid follower of the NSDAP since 1920 and began an independent effort to establish a youth-wing for the Party. By 1922, Lenk gained the approval of Adolf Hitler and his efforts were legitimized.<sup>79</sup> The JAH, however, remained a mostly small collection of radical nationalist bourgeois youth. Moreover, the JAH was banned in 1923, along with the NSDAP, after the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 8 November 1923 in Munich.<sup>80</sup> Lenk continued to organize right-wing youth in Bavaria illegally until the ban was lifted in 1925.<sup>81</sup>

Between 1919 and 1924 there was a large-scale effort by parliamentary parties to politicize German youth. The FDJ emerged from WWI as a damaged and largely ideologically irrelevant organization. Consequently, German youth began to organize in the Wilhelmine era and aligned themselves with various Weimar political parties. In turn, political parties increased their efforts to engage youth, as their support within the parliamentary system was paramount. Left-wing political parties tended to attract the support of working-class youth who had organized independently from the FDJ in unions before 1914. Right-wing political parties tended to attract the support of bourgeois youth who had been organized previously in the FDJ as a result of the similar ideological themes of nationalism and militarism. Radical elements existed on both sides of the ideological spectrum, but moderate pro-Republican organizations, such as the SAJ, remained most popular between 1919 and 1924.

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

***Part Four: Polarization (1925-1928)***

The period between 1925 and 1928 is characterized by significant social stability within the Weimar Republic. The Ruhr Crisis and subsequent hyperinflation ended with the implementation of the Dawes Plan in 1924.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, Germany regained international confidence with the signing of the Locarno Treaty in 1925 and admission to the League of Nations in 1926.<sup>83</sup> Domestically, cultural expression was flourishing in urban centers such as Berlin through the new media of cinema and modernist art.<sup>84</sup> The response of German youth to the so-called ‘Golden Age’ was divided. Involvement in the independent youth movement, known now as the *Bündische Jugend*, rose slightly as semblances of normality returned to Germany.<sup>85</sup> However, the most significant development was the increasing tendency of German youth to engage in radical rightist and radical leftist organizations, as well as the increasing importance of youth in paramilitary action.

The *Bündische Jugend* became a more visible element in the youth movement between 1925 and 1928. The *Bündische Jugend* was essentially a loose association of groups such as the *Wandervogel*, Scouts, and other outdoor youth organizations. In 1926, factions of northern *Wandervogel* groups united with the Scouting Association, *Grossdeutscher Pfadfinderbund* to form the *Deutsche Freischar* (DF).<sup>86</sup> The DF was a sort of rejuvenated incarnation of the early FDJ, but it would not significantly impact the political landscape of the Weimar Republic. Instead, the DF acted as an ideological

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<sup>82</sup> Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 82.

<sup>83</sup> David Redles and Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany* (New York: Pearson, 2005) 188.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 176.

<sup>85</sup> Laqueur, *Young Germany*, 133.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 165.

escape for the youth who had resisted politicization between 1920 and 1924. By the end of 1927, the DF was comprised of only 12,000 members.<sup>87</sup>

Political organization amongst pro-Republican youth affiliates began to stagnate and decline by 1925. The SAJ, which had enjoyed an autonomous and dynamic relationship with the SPD, came under the leadership of Karl Bröger, replacing the popular Max Westphal.<sup>88</sup> Bröger brought the SAJ closer to the leadership of the SPD. The SAJ no longer maintained a significant independent mandate or agenda. Furthermore, to many SAJ members, the SPD began to resemble the bourgeois political elite to which they were ideologically opposed. Consequently, SAJ membership began to decline, as many socialist youth were disillusioned by bourgeois politics and leadership infighting. SAJ membership declined from 105,000 in 1925 to 55,000 in 1927 (see Table 1).<sup>89</sup> The immense decline illustrates the frustration felt amongst many socialist youth.

The failure of the SAJ to maintain an active dialogue with socialist youth directly benefited the KJVD. First, direct ideological opposition to the KJVD decreased as a result of the declining SAJ membership. Furthermore, many SAJ members simply decided to join the KJVD after 1926.<sup>90</sup> The KJVD seized on the opportunity by directing propaganda toward moderate socialist youth, claiming that the SPD and SAJ had essentially become capitalist organizations corrupted by fascism. By 1924, the KPD had set up the *Jungspartakusbund*, which incorporated children under the ages of 14 in an

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Köster, "Die Junge Garde des Proletariats," 167.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 120.

attempt to curtail the development of moderate socialism.<sup>91</sup> At its height, the JSB had 65,000 young Communist members.<sup>92</sup>

The element of militarism became more apparent within the KJVD during this period. The KPD established their paramilitary organization the *Roter Frontkämpferbund* (RFB) in April of 1924, and a youth section of the RFB was founded in 1925 and called the *Rote Jungfront* (RJ) for members aged 16 to 24.<sup>93</sup> The initial purpose of the RFB and RJ was to protect Party officials and meetings. However, the RFB and RJ increasingly became involved in street violence with rival parties and paramilitary organizations such as the NSDAP *Sturmabteilung* (SA). By 1926, the RFB membership had reached almost 70,000 although it is estimated that only 50% were also members of the KPD or KJVD.<sup>94</sup> The RFB and RJ offered young Communists the opportunity to engage with their ideological concerns and provided a pragmatic anti-Republican program that had significant appeal.

Political organization of right-wing youth between 1925 and 1928 remained decentralized in comparison with organization among the left-wing youth. The *Bismarckjugend* (BJ) remained the most visible and populous right-wing youth organization at 48,000 members in 1928, but with little political significance (see Table 1).<sup>95</sup> Instead, the BJ focused its effort on mass pageantry and involvement in annual nationalist rallies at Colberg, Nuremberg, and Munich.<sup>96</sup> The largest gathering occurred in 1928 when the DNVP and the BJ met in Schleswig to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> James M. Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics in Weimar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 185.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>95</sup> Gerwarth, *The Bismarck*, 102.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 104.

Bismarck's death.<sup>97</sup> The mass rally was organized by the DNVP and aimed to showcase to some degree their youth support base in anticipation of the May 1928 election.<sup>98</sup> In fact, the BJ was enlisted by the DNVP during this period to increase their share in the vote, but the effort ultimately failed as the DNVP lost 30 seats.<sup>99</sup> Thereafter, an effort was made by DNVP and BJ leadership to increase youth mobilization, which resulted in a meeting at Friedrichsruh in October of 1928. The chairman of the BJ, Otto Sievking, proclaimed at the meeting, "that there is still a German youth which knows how to act on behalf of the Kaiser... we are prepared to fight for the idea of monarchism and for a Volksgemeinschaft in agreement with our völkisch and conservative world view."<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, any such efforts yielded minimal results as the BJ declined greatly in significance after 1928.

Youth organization under the NSDAP halted after the failed Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. Hitler was convicted of high treason and sentenced to five years imprisonment in Landsberg prison outside of Munich.<sup>101</sup> He was released in December of 1924 and dedicated himself to winning power through the Weimar parliamentary system.<sup>102</sup> The change in tactic essentially forced Hitler to pay closer attention to the youth demographic as a potential voting bloc and reservoir for paramilitary organization. As a result, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1926, the NSDAP founded the *Hitler Jugend Bund der deutschen Arbeiterjugend* (HJ).<sup>103</sup> The HJ was ostensibly the amalgamation of early organizational

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>101</sup> Stachura, *Nazi Youth In The Weimar Republic*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>103</sup> Peter D. Stachura, "The Ideology of the Hitler Youth in the Kampfzeit," *Journal of Contemporary History* 8, no.3 (March 1973): 158.

structures created by Gustav Adolf Lenk and the *Grossdeutsche Jugendbewegung* that developed independently in Saxony. Kurt Gruber was made the first chairman of the HJ in July of 1926.<sup>104</sup>

Between 1926 and 1929 the HJ focused on increasing membership and creating a more efficient organizational structure. The effort to expand membership yielded modest results as by 1929 the organization had almost 25,000 members (see Table 1).<sup>105</sup> However, the bureaucratization of the HJ between 1926 and 1929 was significantly more successful and arguably more important. By the end of 1927, the HJ had an organizational presence across much of the country.<sup>106</sup> Such organization meant that the HJ was well prepared for the rapid growth it experienced after 1929. Moreover, the organizational structure closely resembled that of the NSDAP and allowed for a significant amount of autonomy for National Socialist youth. Gruber established the *Deutsches Jungvolk* (DJV) in 1928 in order to allow boys under 14 to align with the NSDAP – comparable to the KPD’s *Jungspartakusbund* organization.<sup>107</sup>

Right-wing militarism also became a more pronounced feature of the German youth movement in this period. The NSDAP paramilitary organization, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), was founded in 1921 as a security measure for Party officials and meetings.<sup>108</sup> The *Jungbund SA* was founded the following year in order to include boys between the ages 14 and 18 in the paramilitary organization.<sup>109</sup> The makeup of both

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 157.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>106</sup> Stachura, *Nazi Youth in the Weimar Republic*, 233.

<sup>107</sup> Hermann Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis in 1933* (New York: Berghan Books, 2008), 72.

<sup>108</sup> Diehl, *Paramilitary Politics*, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 288.

organizations was predominantly of bourgeois boys under 25 years of age.<sup>110</sup> Many initial members of the SA had been part of the *Freikorps* in Bavaria and consequently added to the organization's generally violent character.<sup>111</sup> Interestingly, the SA membership was the most diverse in terms of class background as its revolutionary message appealed to both bourgeois and working-class youth.

The period between 1925 and 1928 is notable for the intense polarization of youth. Between 1919 and 1923, the moderate political parties enjoyed large-scale success in their efforts to politicize the German youth. However, after 1923, parties such as the SPD, and their youth affiliate the SAJ, struggled to maintain the support of young Germans. Instead, many German youth returned to the original Messiner principles and decided to join scouting or religious organizations without direct political affiliation. Consequently, the remaining political youth demographic increasingly began to be involved with radical parties such as the KPD or NSDAP.

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<sup>110</sup> Andrew Donson, "Why Did German Youth Become Fascists?" *Social History* 31, no. 3 (April 2006): 337.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 338.



***Part Five: Radicalization (1929-1933)***

The final years of the Weimar Republic were characterized by violence, social radicalism and political change. The Weimar ‘Golden Age’ ended abruptly in October of 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression. By 1932, German youth had almost completely abandoned the Republic, as is evidenced by the decline in involvement with pro-Republican youth organizations such as the SAJ, which corresponded with the increasing influence of the NSDAP, and to a lesser extent KPD, in the *Reichstag*.<sup>112</sup> By 1932, the NSDAP was the largest Party in the *Reichstag* with 37% of the total vote.<sup>113</sup> Political extremism translated into social radicalism, especially prevalent among youth, and an increase in violence between members of the NSDAP and KPD. President Paul von Hindenburg ultimately made Hitler Chancellor on the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1933, effectively ending Weimar democracy.<sup>114</sup>

The period between 1929 and 1933 was dominated by the gradual growth of the HJ and the violent confrontation between National Socialist and Communist youth, precluding the forced consolidation of the youth movement under the NSDAP in 1933. Involvement in independent youth organizations, such as the *Bündische Jugend*, continued to decline as the political and social situation worsened. Furthermore, youth involvement in moderate political organizations, such as the SAJ and BJ, continued to decline as general support for the Republic weakened in the shadow of economic and political turmoil. Instead, German youth continued to engage with radical youth organizations such as the KJVD and HJ. By 1933, the KJVD was outlawed as the

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<sup>112</sup> Eve Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists? The German Communists and Political Violence 1929 – 1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6.

<sup>113</sup> Redles and Spielvogel, *Hitler and Nazi Germany*, 65.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, 67.

NSDAP gained victory in the parliamentary system and subsequently began efforts to consolidate, often violently, the German youth movement.

At the beginning of 1929 the KJVD enjoyed a modest membership of 21,470 (see Table 1).<sup>115</sup> However, by late 1932, membership had increased to 58,000 [see Table 1].<sup>116</sup> The growth is due to the worsening of economic conditions after 1929; by 1932 over 70% of KJVD members were unemployed.<sup>117</sup> The increase in membership led to a flourishing of KJVD culture by 1932 comparable to early FDJ activity. For example, by 1930 the KJVD membership enjoyed local hiking excursions, lake day-trips, and on occasion exchanges with Soviet counterparts.<sup>118</sup> KJVD members also often held ad-hoc theatre performances in Berlin, in areas such as train stations or vocational schools, as a means of agitation and spreading revolutionary sentiment.<sup>119</sup> These so-called agitprop performances increased with the onset of the Great Depression and often depicted Marxism as the solution, the NSDAP as the enemy, and the working-class as the victims of western capitalist exploitation.<sup>120</sup> Structurally, the KJVD became more autocratic after 1931 with the further empowerment of the Central Committee.<sup>121</sup> The change was ostensibly organized by the KPD, which by this time had significantly cut funding for KJVD activities. The KJVD continued to publish its periodical, *Die Junge Garde*,

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<sup>115</sup> Köster, “Die Junge Garde des Proletariats:,” 329.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Bodek, *Proletarian Performance in Weimar Berlin: Agitprop, Chorus, and Brecht* (Columbia: Camden House, 1997), 21.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>121</sup> Köster, “Die Junge Garde des Proletariats:,” 50.

although with great difficulty, as it was routinely and critically inspected by KPD officials to ensure political conformity.<sup>122</sup>

KJVD development was largely overshadowed by the increasing tendency of Communist youth toward paramilitary violence. Paramilitary violence became the predominant feature of the Communist youth activity after the Berlin May Day riots in 1929. The riots, which resulted in the death of 32 and arrest of over 800, led to the banning of the paramilitary RFB and RJ by the Prussian government.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the May Day riots were largely blamed on the KPD and KJVD in the Berlin press and heightened public fear of a Communist takeover.<sup>124</sup> As a result, the KPD and KJVD were left without the legal ability to organize paramilitary action against the NSDAP, SA and HJ. However, many KJVD members continued to engage in violence with SA and HJ members, particularly in street fights, which became common after 1929.<sup>125</sup>

The HJ experienced gradual growth between 1929 and 1933. In 1931, the HJ was placed under the leadership of Baldur von Schirach who was made *Reichsjugendführer* by Hitler.<sup>126</sup> Schirach pursued an aggressive agenda of militarization and worked to increase the membership of the organization with significant success. In 1930, membership was 25,000, which was lower than that of the KJVD (see Table 1).<sup>127</sup> By 1932, membership doubled to almost 50,000, while KJVD membership remained at

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>125</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, *Youth and the Welfare State in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 194.

<sup>126</sup> Daniel Horn, "The National Socialist Schulerbund and the Hitler Youth, 1929 – 1933," *Central European History* 11, no.4 (1978): 360.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 358.

around 58,000 (see Table 1).<sup>128</sup> The increase in membership between 1931-1932 is due in part to the popularity of Schirach, as he had been a prominent figure in right-wing youth organizations, like the Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, since 1927.<sup>129</sup> The increase in HJ membership also corresponded loosely to the increase in membership of the SA.<sup>130</sup> The SA was also tasked with an oversight role of the HJ. It is not surprising, then, that by 1933 the HJ closely resembled a young paramilitary unit.

Paramilitary violence became a prominent feature of the HJ by 1930 as it had become a feature of the KJVD after the May Day riots. HJ members were active participants in street fights and violent activism in areas like Berlin. The violence was personified in January 1932 with the murder of Herbert Norkus, a HJ member, by a group of Communist youth in Berlin.<sup>131</sup> Norkus became a hero within the HJ and resulted in his portrayal as a martyr in NSDAP propaganda.<sup>132</sup> By 1932, the HJ was the one of the most prominent youth organizations in the Weimar Republic. Membership increased gradually and was not limited to the expected bourgeois demographics. The appeal of the HJ across the class spectrum is not coincidental. In fact, *Volksgemeinschaft* ideology ignored class considerations in favor of racial and merit based recognition, which affected the demographics of the HJ by 1932. The appeal was also due in part to a conscious effort made by the NSDAP between 1929 and 1933 to tailor propaganda toward middle-class and Communist youth.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Stachura, *Nazi Youth In The Weimar Republic*, 186.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 1932, Joseph Goebbels delivered a speech entitled, “Make Way For Young Germany.”<sup>133</sup> The speech was delivered on election day and aimed to portray the NSDAP as the Party of all German youth and of the German future. Goebbels proclaimed; “A young generation of fighting activists... have torn down the old barriers. They are men who are not first of all... middle-class or proletarian, but rather their first loyalty is to their land, their people, their nation.”<sup>134</sup> Throughout the speech, Goebbels reiterated the theme of a classless German *Volksgemeinschaft*. Furthermore, the speech is littered with symbolic language that related specifically to youth. For example, Goebbels incorporated imagery of a popular movement restrained by rigid tradition that directly related to how the German youth movement saw itself. In sum, the speech delivered by Goebbels in July 1932 indicates the efforts made by the NSDAP to appeal to German youth of all class backgrounds.

NSDAP propaganda between 1929 and 1933 included material that was tailored specifically to address Communist youth. The purpose of such propaganda was to appeal to the social radicalism of Communist youth and attempt to convert them to National Socialism. For example, a pamphlet authored in 1931 was aimed directly at members of the KPD and KJVD. The pamphlet sarcastically asked, “How are things in Russia, the much-praised Soviet paradise? What is the social condition of workers in this land ruled absolutely by communism?”<sup>135</sup> The pamphlet concluded by appealing to the German working-class to devote their energy to the National Socialist cause. A later election

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<sup>133</sup> Joseph Goebbels, “Make Way For Young Germany,” Calvin College German Propaganda Archive, <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/goeb61.htm> (March 10, 2017).

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> “Bolshevist Swindle (1931).” Calvin College German Propaganda Archive. <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/schwindel-des-bolschewismus.htm> (March 3, 2017).

pamphlet published in 1932 echoed similar themes asking, “You trust Russia... Do you believe that Russia will help? Would it not be better to help ourselves? For the German proletariat to help itself?”<sup>136</sup> The impact of these propaganda attempts is difficult to gauge, but reflects the cross class approach of the HJ before 1933.

Similar attempts at ideological conversion were made by the KJVD, although with less success. Ernst Thälmann, leader of the KPD, stated at a meeting to the KJVD in 1932, “We must not allow this young generation to fall under the demagogy of National Socialism! We must recognize... National Socialism has succeeded in catching a certain part of this youth. We Communists must manage to win these youth masses for ourselves, for Communism!”<sup>137</sup> However, despite the pointed rhetoric, the KJVD did not engage in any serious action to appeal to the base of the HJ. The reason for this is likely the financial issues faced by the KJVD by 1932.<sup>138</sup>

The KPD and KJVD were outlawed by the NSDAP in 1933 shortly after their ascension to power.<sup>139</sup> The exact reason for the failure of the KJVD has been debated without definitive conclusion. However, it is likely that the KJVD failed because the pro-Soviet stance essentially divided the political Left and allowed the NSDAP to present youth with an organized, effective and revolutionary alternative. Unfortunately many members of the KPD and KJVD were the first victims of the Nazi ad-hoc executions and later the concentration camp system. Minor resistance among Communist youth continued into the Nazi era, but with little effect on the political landscape.

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<sup>136</sup> “A Nazi Election Flyer (1932),” Calvin College German Propaganda Archive, <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/liste8.htm> (March 18, 2017).

<sup>137</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 176.

<sup>138</sup> Köster, “Die Junge Garde des Proletariats:,” 68.

<sup>139</sup> Horn, “The National Socialist Schulerbund and the Hitler Youth,” 357.

After 1933 the direction and purpose of the HJ entered a new and unprecedented phase. As historian Peter Stachura argued, “[HJ] was no longer simply the youth auxiliary of a political party, but... the youth organization of the Third Reich... [Their] long term work now had to be in a sense constructive, rather than destructive as it had been during the Weimar era.”<sup>140</sup> Indeed, the role of the HJ shifted significantly after 1933, as it became the organization through which the NSDAP began extensive indoctrination and militarization. In 1933 the NSDAP began to eliminate the various remaining left-wing and moderate youth organizations.<sup>141</sup> By 1935, the NSDAP began to consolidate the remaining non-political youth organizations into the HJ. On December 1<sup>st</sup> of 1936 the Law on the Hitler Youth was issued, which stated, “All of the German youth in the Reich is organized within the Hitler Youth.”<sup>142</sup> As a result of the law membership of the HJ increased to over 5,000,000, which was the single largest youth organization in German history.

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<sup>140</sup> Stachura, *The German Youth Movement*, 116.

<sup>141</sup> Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists*, 134.

<sup>142</sup> “Law on the Hitler Youth.” German History in Documents and Images. [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1564](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1564) (March 3, 2017).

## *Conclusion*

The German youth movement cannot be understood as a singular development. Instead, it should be understood as the collective desire of many different youth, from many class backgrounds, to exert their agency and satisfy their particular ideological goals, mirroring the political divisiveness and diversity that characterized the Weimar Republic. By 1933, however, the movement was completely neutralized through the enforced, large-scale consolidation into the *Hitlerjugend*.

My thesis endeavors to explore the nature of the German youth movement from 1900 to 1933. The purpose is to answer the question: how does the *Wandervogel* turn into the *Hitlerjugend*? To address this question in any meaningful way, however, contextualization was critical. Through my research, I discovered that the German youth movement began in the Wilhelmine era as a mainly independent bourgeois movement through organizations such as the *Wandervogel* and *Freie Deutsche Jugend*. The direction of the movement was drastically altered by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. By the end of the war, the independent youth movement had essentially ceased to exist. German youth began to engage with political parties *en masse* after 1919 and political association was largely dictated by socio-economic realities that created a divide between bourgeois and working-class youth. The divide continued to exist into the Weimar 'Golden Age' and increased with the onset of the Great Depression. After 1929, youth organization became increasingly radicalized as political violence and social radicalism became common. By 1933, however, youth organization came under the control of the NSDAP, which ruthlessly eliminated opposition and consolidated support within the HJ.



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## Tables

Table One: Youth Organization Membership Table														
	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933
BJ	-	-	-	6,000	-	-	-	-	42,000	-	-	-	-	-
HJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13,000	13,806	28,743	48,000	55,365
SAJ						100,000	105,000	55,000	-	-	-	-	50,000	
FSJ	35,000	22,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
KJVD	-	-	27,800	-	29,000	70,000	-	-	-	21,470	19,000	-	58,000	-
VAJV	-	53,000	-	-	85,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
HDJ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	27,000	-	30,000	-	-	-	-

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