

The 'green' origins of Hitler's SA

by Michele Steinberg and Wiesbaden staff

Whether in a meeting-hall or in the street, the right to self-assertion always knows only one way: against great violation to marshal greater violence. Terror can only be broken by terror, never by bashful, tame protests.

—*Ehrenbuch der SA, (Indoctrination Book of Hitler's Stormtroopers), 1934*

Experience shows that nothing is moved peacefully. . . . "The masses" is a fiction! What is not fiction is violence, which at least we can say is noticed. . . . Things have been peaceful for much too long.

—*Tageszeitung* (West Germany's leading counterculture newspaper), September, 1981

Hitler's brownshirts, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), have more in common with today's Greens than mere dedication to violence and terror.

The youth gangs of Weimar Germany of the 1920s and 1930s which became the SA had a "green" program, an anti-capitalist ideology, and hostility to "trade union big-wigs" against whom they waged their campaign of terror.

The Gregor Strasser wing of the Nazi party worked out a strict anti-capitalist program for the SA starting in 1926. Although later amended by Hitler, its essential features remained, and are equivalent in many respects to the Greens' program for an "alternative economy" today.

The goal was a return to an artisan, pre-capitalist economic form, to primitive exchange of agricultural goods and handicrafts.

Most SA-members knew the details of their program no better than today's Greens understand the workings of a nuclear power plant. Then as now, what was essential was the ideology of "comradeship." The National Socialists called theirs a "socialist-idealist world-view," against the "individual-liberal world-view" of the average citizen and the materialism of the Marxists. *I as an individual being am nothing; my Volk is everything!*—

Goebbels's pounding refrain—was the ideology of the SA, the streetfighters, the thugs. For Hitler, Goebbels and the narrow circle of cultists around them, there was the theory of the supermen (*Herrenmenschen*), among which of course they included themselves. Goebbels had the SA in mind when he said: "The essential thing for this revolutionary development is that individualism be smashed and that the *Volk* take the place of the individual man and his idolatry."

The SA shocktroops operated through small gangs of five to ten people that could coalesce into "storms" of 100 or more. The same organization exists among the Greens today, as small squads organized along paramilitary lines battle police.

Although the SA fought bloody battles with the communists, the two groups converged through their radical anti-capitalist ideology, just as the Greens in West Germany today bring together Communists and neo-Nazis. According to an SA document: "The SA-man can, if necessary, understand the militant Red; he recognizes in him the readiness to give his life for an idea; he stands by him since he too comes from the *Volk*; he has sympathy for him because many [SA] comrades originally came from the Commune and had first to be won over to the Führer. Never does the SA-man have the slightest sympathy for anything reactionary."

It is therefore no surprise that the SA and the Communists found themselves *jointly* supporting a strike by Berlin streetcar drivers in November 1932, and carrying out joint "direct actions" (sabotage).

During Hitler's "Night of the Long Knives" on June 30, 1934, the left wing of the Nazi party, including SA leaders Röhm and Strasser, was murdered. The SA decreased in importance after that, giving way to the even more horrible SS and Gestapo. But the years of street terror of the SA had so destroyed the capability of the German people to resist Hitler, that many citizens felt relief when the *Sturmabteilung* passed from the scene.



Bookburning on May 10, 1933.