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The Anatomy of a Volkspartei: The Sociography of the Membership of the NSDAP in Stadt- and Landkreis Wetzlar, 1925-1935

*Jürgen W. Falter and Detlef Mühlberger**

Abstract: The analysis of the sociography of the NSDAP membership presented here is based on a complete set of data provided by a register of new members joining the party in Wetzlar town and county between 1930 and 1933, along with branch census returns drawn up in 1934 and 1935 relating to 46 of the 62 branches and cells established by the NSDAP in the region by 1933. These data permit not only a very detailed, comprehensive examination of the social contours of the membership mobilized by the NSDAP in a predominantly Protestant, rural and small-town milieu, but also throw light on the question as to which occupational groupings were involved in the relatively high membership turn-over which the party suffered from in its so-called *Kampfzeit*, an aspect of the Nazi Party about which we know little that is specific to date. The data show that the NSDAP mobilized a following in the Wetzlar region which transcended class divides, making the party a *Volkspartei* in social terms. In Wetzlar town and county the Nazi Party secured a membership whose occupational and class profile was astonishingly variable from branch to branch. The almost totally male, and predominantly young, membership was subjected to a high rate of membership turn-over in the early 1930s, in which the volatility among the working-class members drawn to the party before 1933 is particularly striking.

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In the last two decades considerable progress has been made in our understanding of the social structure of the NSDAP before 1933 on the basis of *empirical* evidence subjected to quantitative analysis using Computer technology. The orthodox view which predominated since the 1930s, which characterised the Nazi Party as being primarily, if not exclusively, a *Mittelstandsbewegung*, was initially reinforced in a series of pioneering studies produced by Michael Kater in the 1970s and early 1980s.¹ Since then a number of historians and social scientists also engaged in establishing the social characteristics of the supporters of Nazism began to challenge the validity of the orthodox view of the social base of Nazism. They demonstrated that the Nazi Party, both in terms of the social background of its membership² and of its electorate,³ transcended the class division of Weimar society by drawing

¹ Michael Kater, a staunch advocate of the orthodox view of the Nazi Party's social Base, has argued in all of his seminal work on the Sociology of Nazism published since the early 1970s, that the NSDAP was primarily a Mittelstand phenomenon - See especially the following: „Zur Soziographie der frühen NSDAP, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 19 (1971), 124-59; „Sozialer Wandel in der NSDAP im Zuge der nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung“, in Wolfgang Schieder (ed.), *Faschismus als soziale Bewegung. Deutschland und Italien im Vergleich* (Hamburg, 1976), 25-68; „Methodologische Überlegungen über Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer Analyse der sozialen Zusammensetzung der NSDAP von 1925 bis 1945“, in Reinhard Mann (ed.), *Die Nationalsozialisten. Analysen faschistischer Bewegungen* (Stuttgart, 1980), 155-85. The extensive data Kater has produced over the years, however, underlines the markedly heterogeneous nature of the social base of Nazism, as is clear from the various tables in Michael H. Kater, *The Nazi Party. A Social Profile of Members and Leaders, 1919-1945* (Oxford, 1983), esp. Tables 2-7, 242-253. In comparison with his earlier work, Kater has now adopted a significantly different view as regards the social composition of the membership and electorate of the NSDAP. For Kater's current approach see Jürgen W. Falter and Michael H. Kater, „Wähler und Mitglieder der NSDAP. Neue Forschungsergebnisse zur Soziographie des Nationalsozialismus 1925 bis 1933“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 19 (1993), 172-3.

² An attack on the orthodox *Mittelstandsbewegung* thesis was launched in the mid-1970s by J. Paul Madden, „The Social Composition of the Nazi Party, 1919-1930“ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1976); *idem*, „The Social Class Origins of Nazi Party Members as determined by Occupations, 1919-1933“, *Social Science Quarterly*, 68 (1987), 263-80. See also Detlef Mühlberger, „The Sociology of the NSDAP: The Question of Working-Class Membership“, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15 (1980), 493-511; *idem*, *Hitler's Followers. Studies in the Sociology of the Nazi Movement* (London/New York, 1991); Jürgen W. Falter, „Radicalization of the Middle Classes or Mobilization of the Unpolitical? The Theories of Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix on the Electoral Support of the NSDAP in the Light of Recent Research“, *Social Science Information*, 2 (1981), 389-430; *idem*, „The First German Volkspartei: The Social Foundations of the NSDAP“, in Karl Rohe (ed.), *Elections, Parties and Political Traditions. Social Foundations of German Parties and Party Systems, 1867-1987* (New York/Oxford/Munich, 1990), 53-81; William Brustein and Jürgen W. Falter, „Who joined the Nazi Party? Assessing theories of the social origins of Nazism“, *Zeitgeschichte*, 22 (1995), 83-108; William Brustein, *The Logic of Evil. The Social Origins of the Nazi Party, 1925-1933* (New Haven/London, 1996).

³ The major works are, in chronological order, Chose by Richard F. Hamilton, *Who voted for Hitler?* (Princeton, N.J., 1982); Thomas Childers, *The Nazi Voter. The Social Foundations of Fascism in Germany 1919-1933* (Chapel Hill/London, 1983); Dirk Hänisch,

support from all occupational groups and social classes. Almost unanimously their analyses reached the conclusion that the NSDAP was indeed in regard to its social roots a *Volkspartei*, as the Nazis themselves claimed it to be.⁴ The survival of two detailed sets of membership data on the Nazi Party in Wetzlar town and county permits the reconstruction of the sociography of the membership of the party between 1925/1930-1933 in some detail. This case study not only allows to test the validity of the *Volkspartei* thesis, but also to throw light on some additional aspects of the social characteristics of the Nazi membership in this part of Germany.

The first data Set on which this study is based is drawn from a virtually complete record of those many tens of thousands who joined the Nazi Party in *Gau* Hesse-Nassau-South⁵ between September 1929 and May 1933 in the form of lists of *Neuaufnahmen* regularly submitted by *Gau* officials to the *Kassenverwaltung* of the NSDAP in Munich.⁶ The use of this data Set does create a problem which has a bearing on the absolute precision of the results presented here. In the case of several villages and small towns of which there

Sozialstrukturelle Bestimmungsgründe des Wahlverhaltens in der Weimarer Republik. Eine Aggregatdatenanalyse der Ergebnisse der Reichstagswahlen 1924-1933 (Duisburg, 1983). The most comprehensive study is by Jürgen W. Falter, *Hitlers Wähler* (Munich, 1991).

⁴ For a review of the debate on the social profile of the membership and electorate of the Nazi Party see Peter Manstein, *Die Mitglieder und Wähler der NSDAP 1919-1933. Untersuchungen zu ihrer schichtmäßigen Zusammensetzung* (Frankfurt a.M./Bern/New York/Paris, 3rd. ed. 1990).

⁵ Part of this material was used in the chapter on the social background of the membership of the NSDAP in *Gau* Hesse-Nassau between 1929 and 1931 in Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers*, 84-123.

⁶ The *Neuaufnahmen* lists relating to Wetzlar town and county are part of a complete record of individuals joining the Nazi Party in *Gau* Hesse-Nassau as from September 1929 to May 1933 and are to be found in the Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Wiesbaden (hereafter *HHSStAW*), Abt. 483/10605-10607, 10610-10613 and 10640. The membership recruited in the following 62 branches or cells (*Stützpunkte*) in place by 1934 was extracted from this source: Allendorf, Altenkirchen, Aßlar-Klein Altenstädten, Berghausen, Bermoll, Bieber, Biskirchen, Bissenberg, Blasbach, Bonbaden, Brandoberndorf, Braunfels, Burgsolms, Daubhausen-Greifenthal, Dorlar, Dornholzhausen, Dutenhofen, Ebersgöns, Ehringshausen, Erda, Feilingshausen, Frankenbach, Garbenheim, Groß Altenstädten, Groß Rechtenbach, Hermannstein, Hochelheim, Hörsheim, Hohensolms, Holzhausen, Katzenfurt, Kinzenbach, Kraftsolms, Kröffelbach, Krofdorf, Krumbach, Laufdorf, Launsbach, Leun, Lützellinden, Mudersbach, Münchholzhausen, Hauborn, Naunheim, Niederbiel, Niederkleen, Niederquembach, Niederwetz, Oberbiel, Oberkleen, Oberndorf, Oberquembach, Oberwetz, Odenhausen, Rodheim, Schwalbach, Stockhausen, Tiefenbach, Vollnkirchen, Werdorf, Wetzlar and Wissmar. With the exception of seven pages missing from a list sent to Munich on 1 August 1932 [see *HHSStAW*, Abt. 483/106071], the data appear to be complete. The entries until November 1932, with the exception of a small list recording individuals joining in Frankfurt-am-Main in November 1929 which includes the date of birth of new members, only provide details on which branch individuals joined, their name, occupation and place of residence, or if the latter is the same as the branch, a street or house number. The lists compiled after 18 November 1932 are much more detailed and provide the name, place of residence, address, date of birth, place of birth, and branch joined of each recorded new member of the party.

were more than one bearing the same name in Hesse-Nassau, it is not always made clear in the *Neuaufnahmen* as to which county the town or village listed refers to.⁷ The second source, censuses undertaken by the Nazis in 1934 and 1935, though incomplete, does cover the bulk of the branches and a sizeable proportion of the Nazi membership in Wetzlar town and county.⁸ Taken together the material permits not only an evaluation of the occupational and social background of the membership of a complete set of Nazi branches concentrated in one county, but also allows an insight into the pattern and tempo of Nazi recruitment in the area over time. Important also, given that one can compare the membership enrolled in the *Neuaufnahmen* lists with the membership of the majority of the branches situated in the region recorded in the census returns of 1934 and 1935, the data allow an examination of the question as to which occupational and social types were involved in the

⁷ This is a problem before the data becomes more detailed as from late 1932. For example, it is difficult to determine whether the few entries relating to Allendorf in the *Neuaufnahmen* before 1932 refer to individuals joining the Nazi party in the village of that name in county Wetzlar, or to Allendorf in the Dillkreis, or Oberlahnkreis or Unterlahnkreis. The Wetzlar county branches at Altenkirchen, Berghausen, Dornholzhausen, Ehringshausen, Holzhausen, Oberndorf and Schwalbach presented similar problems in that these placenames are also found in other Hesse-Nassau counties. Fortunately comparatively few members were enrolled in these places before 1933 anyway, and for all but Allendorf, Berghausen and Holzhausen, census returns could be used to act as a Cross-check for accuracy. Moreover, the habit of the individuals in the *Gauleitung* responsible for compiling the *Neuaufnahmen* lists to Cluster returns from the Same parts of *Gau* Hesse-Nassau also allows reasonable assumptions to be made as to which county such branches were situated in. But given the problem outlined above, the Chance of error in the placement of a handful of individuals cannot be ruled out. The statistical effect, however, of such error would be highly marginal.

⁸ The first census returns for Nazi branches or cells situated in Wetzlar town and county, lists which were dated March or April 1934 [a few are undated, but clearly stem from this period], recorded members and party leaders separately. Though these lists cover all but two of the branches and cells established by the NSDAP by 1934, not all of the lists record the occupation of the members or leaders noted. In the 1934 census returns occupational details are given (in a few cases, identified in the following list by an asterisk, only the occupations of party *functionaries* are provided) for the following branches and cells (*Stützpunkte*): Altenkirchen, Bernoll, *Biskirchen, Bissenberg, Blasbach, Bonbaden, Burgsolms, Daubhausen-Greifenthal, *Dornholzhausen, Ebersgöns, Ehringshausen, Erda, Fellingshausen, Frankenbach, Groß Altenstädten, Groß Rechtenbach, Hochelheim, Hömsheim, Hohensolms, Katzenfurt, Kinzenbach, Kröffelbach, Krofdorf, Laufdorf, Launsbach, Leun, Lützellinden, Münchholzhausen, Nauborn, Naunheim, Niederbiel, Niederkleen, Niederquembach, Niederwetz, Oberbiel, Oberkleen, Oberndorf, Oberquembach, Oberwetz, Odenhausen, Rodheim (the First page giving details an the Frst 34 members of the total membership of 73 are missing), Schwalbach, Tiefenbach, Werdorf, Wetzlar and Wissmar; the lists are all in *HHSStAW*, Abt. 483/4513a. Additional information an Hohensolms is provided in a list dated 17 May 1932, in *HHSStAW*, Abt. 483/4513e. New or additional information an Niederquembach, Oberbiel, Oberkleen, Oberndorf, Oberquembach, Oberwetz and Odenhausen, based an a census dated 15 May 1935, is to be found in *HHSStAW*, Abt. 483/10389.

membership fluctuations which affected the Nazi Party in the years prior to the Nazi seizure of power, an aspect of the development of the NSDAP about which we know very little that is specific as yet.⁹

I

Until the administrative reform of the Prussian *Landkreise* initiated on 1 August 1932 transferred Kreis Wetzlar to *Regierungsbezirk* Wiesbaden in the province of Hesse-Nassau on 1 November 1932, the county had represented an enclave of the *Regierungsbezirk* Koblenz, part of the Rheinprovinz.¹⁰ The reform also provided the opportunity for some boundary adjustments to county Wetzlar, with the absorption of the area around Brandobberndorf from county Usingen in the south, and the inclusion of part of the county Biedenkopf in the north (see Map 11).

For the occasions of *Reichstag* and *Landtag* elections, however, Wetzlar town and county belonged to electoral district 19 (Province Hesse-Nassau) throughout the Weimar period. The Wetzlar area was also always part of the operational zone of *Gau* Hesse-Nassau-South of the Nazi Party, which was centered on Frankfurt-am-Main.

The inhabitants of Wetzlar town and county were relatively homogeneous in their religious affiliation during the Weimar period, with 94,4 per Cent belonging to the Protestant faith according to the 1933 census.¹² It was only in Wetzlar town itself that Catholics formed a more visible presence, accounting for 15,2 per Cent of the population.¹³ It was an area of small-town and village communities. The census returns of June 1933 record that out of a total population of 86065 in the Wetzlar region, 17392 (i.e. 20,2 per cent) were residing in Wetzlar town, its only sizeable urban centre.¹⁴ In view of this fact it comes as no surprise that the economic activity and social structure of the

⁹ For a review of the question of the turn-over rate among the Nazi membership before 1935 see Manstein, *Mitglieder und Wähler*, 147-152.

¹⁰ Cf. Ulrich Mayer, *Das Eindringen des Nationalsozialismus in die Stadt Wetzlar* (Wetzlar, 1970), 12.

¹¹ Based partly on a map of Kreis Wetzlar in *Dienststellen-Verzeichnis der NSDAP Gau Hessen-Nassau*. Im Auftrage des Gauleiter Pg. Sprenger. Bearbeitet vom Gauorganisationsleiter Pg. Mehnert (Munich/Berlin, 1934). This lists all of the Nazi branches and cells in the *Gau* alphabetically by county; pages are not numbered. Also used was the map in Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 103.

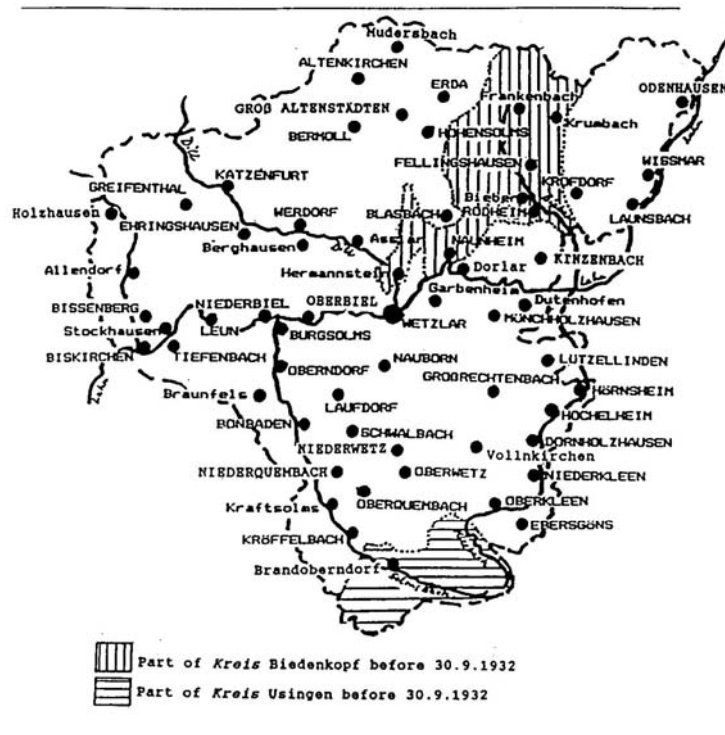
¹² Data taken from Statistik des Deutschen Reichs (hereafter *StDR*), Band 451, part 3 (Berlin, 1935), 54.

¹³ Protestants accounted for 82,3 per cent in 1933; percentages taken from *StDR*, 451, part 3 (Berlin, 1935), 54.

¹⁴ Aside from *Stadtkreis* Wetzlar, only three of the 89 *Gemeinden* in the county had populations of over 2,000 by the time of the 1933 census, namely ABlar-Klein Altenstädten [3,337], Krofdorf-Gleiberg [2,502] and Rodheim a.d.Bieber [2,479]. Data taken from *StDR*, 456, part 25 (Berlin, 1936), 55.

working population of this relatively major urban centre in the area was to come extent conditioned by its role as the chief administrative, educational, banking and commercial centre of the county.¹⁵

Map Nazi Party branches and cells established in Wetzlar Town and County by 1934



Note: Nazi Party branches on which there is only *Neuaufnahmen* data are in lower case. Nazi party branches on which there is *Neuaufnahmen* and 1934/35 census data are in upper case.

It was only in Wetzlar town itself that the tertiary sector was an important employer, with civil servants, white-collar employees and members of the free professions, occupational groups largely lacking in Wetzlar county, forming a significant section of the working population (see Tables 1¹⁶ and 2¹⁷).

¹⁵ The following is based on Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 13-14.

¹⁶ Percentages relating to Wetzlar town and county are calculated on the basis of data in *StDR*, 456, part 25, (Berlin, 1936), 44-5; for *Regierungsbezirk* Wiesbaden and Province Hesse-

Table 1: The working population in Wetzlar town and county according to the economic sector in 1933 (by %)

	Agriculture & Forestry	Industry & Crafts	Trade & Transport	Other
Wetzlar Town	4.8	56.5	19.8	18.9
Wetzlar County	55.9	32.9	6.5	4.7
Wetzlar Town & County	47.7	36.7	8.6	7.0
Reg. Bez. Wiesbaden	28.8	32.9	23.3	14.9
Provinz Hesse-Nassau	37.2	30.8	18.9	13.0
Land Prussia	28.4	39.9	18.9	12.8
Germany	28.9	40.4	18.5	12.2

Additionally of great importance, however, was the fact that the town was also the centre of both heavy and light industry. The Wetzlar area, and the valleys of the Lahn and Dill in general had been, due to the proximity of iron-ore and chalk in the region, the centre of an important iron industry for centuries. In the 1920s heavy industry dominated the north-western parts of Wetzlar town in which the Röchling-Buderus iron and steel works, a modern integrated concern created after the First World War, was situated. The firm controlled both the iron-ore mining, ore-smelting and finishing processes, and was a major employer in the Wetzlar region, drawing its workforce from both the town and the surrounding villages.¹⁸ Significant also as an employer in the Wetzlar area was the optical and precision engineering industry centered on Wetzlar town in the shape of the large Leitz concern and the much smaller Hensoldt factory, the former with a workforce of 1,995 in 1930, the latter employing 227 in the same year.¹⁹ This rector of Wetzlar's economy fared much better than that of heavy industry during the World Economic Depression, especially the Leitz concern, which weathered the recession remarkably well on the back of the Leica, the first small all-metal camera which had revolutionized photography after 1925, the production and export

Nassau *ibid.*, 2-3, 44--5; for *Land Prussia StDR*, 454, Part 1 (Berlin, 1936), 2-3; percentages for Germany are taken from Dieter Petzina, Werner Abelshäuser, Anselm Faust, *Sozialgeschichtliches Arbeitsbuch III. Materialien zur Statistik des Deutschen Reiches 1914-1945* (Munich, 1978), 55.

¹⁷ Percentages relating to Wetzlar town and county are calculated on the basis of data in *StDR*, 456, part 25, (Berlin, 1936), 41, 44-5; for *Regierungsbezirk Wiesbaden* and Province Hesse-Nassau *ibid.*, 42-5; for *Land Prussia StDR*, 454, Part 1 (Berlin, 1936), 3; for Germany *StDR*, 453, Part 2 (Berlin, 1936), 34.

¹⁸ The firm employed some 6,628 people [5,960 blue-collar workers and 668 white-collar employees] in 1929 before the onset of the World Economic Depression drastically reduced the workforce to 2,905 [2,383 blue-collar workers and 522 White-collar employees] by 1932; figures taken from Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 17.

¹⁹ Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 25.

Table 2: The social structure of the working population of Wetzlar Town and County in 1933 (by %)

	Self-employed	Members Total	Assisting Family		Civil Employees		White-collar workers		Blue-collar workers		Domestic workers	
			Total	male	Total	male	Total	male	Total	male	Total	male
Wetzlar Town	14.2	15.3	5.5	1.5	5.9	7.2	21.8	21.1	46.3	54.8	6.3	0.05
Wetzlar County	18.5		34.1		1.8		4.2		39.9		1.4	
Wetzlar Town/County	17.8		29.4		2.5		2.5		41.1		2.2	
Reg.-Bez. Wiesbaden	17.2		16.9		4.6		16.2		40.7		4.3	
Provinz Hesse-Nassau	17.5		21.4		6.5	6.6	12.9	12.9	39.8	51.0	3.7	0.05
Land Prussia	15.4		15.7		5.2	6.4	13.0	12.1	47.4	56.9	3.9	0.04
Germany	16.4		16.4		5.6	6.5	12.5	11.8	46.3	55.0	3.8	0.03

Note: The 1933 census only provides data which permits a separation of the male and female workforce for communities with a population of 10,000 and over, and for administrative units at *Provinz* level or above.

demand of which boomed from the late 1920s.²⁰ The combination of heavy industry on the one hand, and of the light, precision industry on the other, made Wetzlar town an important industrial and manufacturing centre, with the secondary sector employing the majority of the working population, with blue-collar workers representing a significant social grouping among the working population in the early 1930s.

While the various industrial concerns situated in Wetzlar town drew a considerable proportion of their workforce from the surrounding villages,²¹ the presence of iron-ore mines and the existence of numerous branches of the metal-finishing industry, as well as quarries and cement Works scattered throughout the county, along with the concentration of the tobacco industry in the Krofdorf-Wissmar-Launsbach area,²² made the secondary sector an important employer in Wetzlar county, with blue-collar workers forming a sizeable section of the county's workforce (see Tables 1 and 2). The primary sector, however, dominated the economy of Wetzlar county, based predominantly on owner-occupiers²³ of small- and medium-sized farm units typical of *Regierungsbezirk* Wiesbaden in the mid-1920s.²⁴ Agriculture, of significance in most parts of the county, was particularly important in the southern half in the villages below a line drawn from Laufdorf to Großrechtenbach, an area in which the majority of the population depended on the primary sector for their livelihood.²⁵ In the county as a whole independent farmers and their family dependants made up the largest social grouping.

With its predominantly Protestant population, overwhelmingly resident in small towns and villages and strongly *Mittelstand* in social terms, the Wetzlar region contained a socio-religious mix theoretically conducive to the growth

²⁰ Ibid., 24-5. Cf. Alexander Berg, *Ernst Leitz. Optische Werke 1849-1949* (Frankfurt a./M., 1949), 84.

²¹ Some figures cited by Mayer indicate a strong commuter element within the Wetzlar workforce. A significant section of the workers in the Röchling-Buderus concern were resident in the county [specifically, 70 per cent of the workforce of the „Sophienhütte“ lived in the villages surrounding Wetzlar]; about 25 per cent of the Leitz workforce came from outside of Wetzlar; Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 18 and 21.

²² Ibid., 16-18, 35.

²³ According to the 1925 census, 91,1 per cent of the 10,156 farms in the county were owner-occupied; data from *Statistisches Jahrbuch für den Freistaat Preußen* (hereafter *StJFP*), vol. 26 (Berlin, 1930), 391.

²⁴ Only 0,6 per cent of the 101,979 farms in the region were over 100 hectares in size (but these alone accounted for 47,5 per cent of the farmland). Small farms of under 10 hectares accounted 96,8 per cent of the total units in the region, involving 41,5 per cent of the farmland; percentages calculated on basis of data in *StJFP*, 26, 123.

²⁵ Only in Bonbaden, Kraftsolms, and Niederquembach did the percentage of the population dependent on agriculture for their livelihood fall below 50. In the villages of Oberwetz and Vollkirchen more than 75 per cent of the population was dependent on agriculture; details in *StDR*, 456, Part 25, 55.

and success of Nazism.²⁶ In comparison with similarly structured towns the Nazi Party was under-represented in electoral terms in Wetzlar Town until the end of the Weimar Republic. In the county too the Nazi Party had difficulties at first until it secured markedly above average electoral returns as that from July 1932. An overview of the development pattern of the membership of the NSDAP in the Wetzlar region, and especially in Wetzlar town itself, indicates that though the party could trace its existence in the area back to the early 1920s, it had a relatively tough time securing considerable membership support. It was Hitler's acquisition of the chancellorship at the end of January 1933 which radically transformed the fortunes of the party in terms of membership recruitment.

In the immediate post-war years the Wetzlar area was subjected to its share of radical Fight-wing agitation by various fringe forces, both of a political and paramilitary variety. This rightist extremism connected with the strong anti-Semitic tradition of a region which had formed part of the operational sphere of Otto Böckel's Anti-Semitic People's Party in the decades before the First World War.²⁷ Although it is highly unlikely that Wetzlar town or county had a branch of the NSDAP before the Munich putsch of November 1923,²⁸ it is certain that there were individuals scattered around Wetzlar who were corresponding members of the Munich branch. Some contact obviously existed among these early *völkisch*-Nazi elements, for one of them, in a letter to Munich, announced that a small SA unit had been formed in Wetzlar in June 1923,²⁹ suggesting that, despite the hart imposed an the NSDAP by the Prussian authorities in November 1922, limited organizational activity was beginning to take place in the months preceding the Munich putsch. It is probable that these same early supporters of the Nazi Party in Wetzlar were instrumental in keeping Nazism alive following the collapse of the Hitler

²⁶ Expectation of a sizeable Nazi presence in the area would be especially strong if one subscribes to the view found in many accounts of the history of the Nazi Party that it organized much support before 1933 in rural and small-town Protestant regions of Germany. Cf. Lipset's well-known characterization of the „ideal-typical Nazi voter in 1932“ as being „a middle-class self-employed Protestant who lived either on a farm or in a small community“; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (London, 1960), 149. According to Jürgen Falter, Thomas Lindenberger, Siegfried Schumann, *Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1986), 200, the NSDAP secured by far its best electoral returns in Protestant agrarian regions which had a limited working class presence.

²⁷ See Eberhart Schön, *Die Entstehung des Nationalsozialismus in Hessen* (Meisenheim am Glan, 1972), 8-26.

²⁸ Wetzlar is not mentioned in an alphabetical list of Nazi branches in existence by 1923. The list, which covers the letters M to Z, is undated, but was probably put together some time in 1923; it is to be found in NSDAP *Hauptarchiv - Hoover Institution Microfilm Collection* (hereafter HA), Reel 10, Folder 304.

²⁹ „F. Wilberg an das SA-Oberkommando München“, Wetzlar, 13 June 1923: HA, 16/297. The formation of an SA-group in Wetzlar in 1923 was noted by the local authorities; cf. Wolf Arno Kropat, „Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung am 30. Januar 1933 in Wiesbaden und Nassau“, *Nassauische Annalen*, 94 (1983), 247.

putsch and the subsequent disintegration of the NSDAP. The *Völkisch*-Social-Block, an electoral alliance formed by *völkisch* and Nazi elements to contest the May 1924 election, was able to form a branch in Wetzlar, while its successor organization, the National Socialist Freedom Party, established branches in both Wetzlar and Braunfels in September 1924.³⁰ However, neither organizationally nor electorally did right-wing radicalism make much of an impression on the Wetzlar region before the early 1930s. Yet the fact should not be ignored that in the wake of the re-formation of the NSDAP in February 1925, new centres of Nazi activity evolved in the county in the Small towns of Braunfels, Ehringshausen and Leun. Just these relatively early strongholds of Nazism in the county gave impetus to the limited Nazi activity in the Wetzlar region that existed from the mid-1920s rather than that generated by the comparatively small branch which struggled on in Wetzlar town itself, and numbered perhaps 60 members by 1928.³¹ Police reports monitoring the activities of the Nazi Party in the Wetzlar region in the run-up to the 1928 *Reichstag* election indicate that it was unable to attract much attention from the populace.³² The first signs of greater political activism, and the start of organizational expansion reflecting some growth in support for Nazism in the Wetzlar area, only began to be noted in the local press from 1930 onwards.³³ In a report from the political police in February 1931, which monitored Nazi activity in the county, the lack of votes cast for the NSDAP as late as November 1929, when communal elections had taken place, was sharply contrasted with the party's ability to secure around 5,600 votes by the time of the *Reichstag* election of September 1930. This success triggered off increasing propaganda activity in the months following, which the police authorities implicitly linked with significant organizational expansion in the county.³⁴ Beyond the Wetzlar branch, the membership of which was given as 75 by February 1931, the police pointed to the existence of a number of relatively sizeable branches in the county in the small towns and villages of Ehringshausen, Laufdorf, Niederwetz, Oberwetz and Schwalbach, with smaller branches at Aßlar, Braunfels, Großrechtenbach and Leun by early 1931. In the course of the next twelve months further branches and cells (*Stützpunkte*) were established at Allendorf, Biskirchen, Bissenberg, Ebersgöns, Greifenthal,

³⁰ Schön, *Nationalsozialismus in Hessen*, 56 and 67

³¹ Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 32.

³² Schön, *Nationalsozialismus in Hessen*, 88. Cf. Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 32-3.

³³ Reports on the meetings organized by the Nazi Party in Wetzlar in the run-up to the September 1930 *Reichstag* election are given in Mayer, who also provides a detailed list of the public meetings and rallies organized by the NSDAP from the end of 1930 to the March 1933 *Reichstag* election; Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 36-9, 44-8.

³⁴ See police report on the development of the NSDAP in the *Regierungsbezirk Koblenz*, dated 14 February 1931, reprinted in Franz Josef Heyen, *Nationalsozialismus im Alltag. Quellen zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus vornehmlich im Raum Mainz-Koblenz-Trier* (Boppard, 1967), 56-7.

Holzdorf, Krofdorf, Kröffelbach, Odenhausen and Werdorf.³⁵ The process leading to the creation of an increasingly dense network of Nazi branches and cells was well on its way by the end of 1931, a development which made the NSDAP present in all parts of the Wetzlar region by 1933 (see Map), even if the majority of the branches were rather small in terms of membership. The activism generated by the party in the region is probably the main reason which misled police observers to write accounts in which the growth-rate and size of some of the branches established by 1931 was grossly exaggerated. Thus the Wetzlar branch was considered by the police to have had some 180 members by the end of October 1931, and was credited with attracting 100 new members between February and October 1931, when in reality it managed to enroll less than half that number (see Table 3).

Similarly, by mid-February 1931, according to police reports, the branch at Schwalbach was deemed to have a membership of between 90 and 100, and that at Oberwetz between 130 to 140, a membership strength which seems to bear little relationship to reality, judging from the picture which emerges from the total recruitment figures for these branches for 1930 to 1933 provided by the *Neuaufnahmen*, which numbered 16 and 29 new members respectively.

The fact is that in terms of its membership recruitment the performance of the NSDAP in Wetzlar town and county was sluggish throughout the period running up to Hitler's acquisition of the chancellorship.³⁶ What ultimately dramatically altered the party's recruitment performance in the Wetzlar region, and these factors played a similar role in boosting the flow of Support to the NSDAP in Germany as a whole, was the combination of the Nazi participation in, and Hitler's leadership of, the so-called „National Government“, the electoral performance of the NSDAP in the *Reichstag* elections of March 1933, and the announcement of an end to further NSDAP membership enrolment in 1933, a bar which came into effect on 1 May. Combined these factors triggered off the explosive phase of membership growth of the Nazi Party in Wetzlar town and county in April-May 1933 (See Table 3). Just under two-thirds of the total membership recruited in the region in the period stretching from January 1930 to May 1933 was given the entry date of 1 May 1933 alone. The surge in the number of people wanting to join the Nazi Party by that date was so great that the *Gau* administration was unable to process all May applications quickly

³⁵ Police reports dated 22 April, 12 August, and 31 October 1931, and 2 February 1932; Heyen, *Nationalsozialismus im Alltag*, 57-61.

³⁶ The recruitment pattern of the NSDAP in the Wetzlar region was, however, broadly in line with the general pattern of membership growth in *Gau* Hesse-Nassau-South, which recruited 5,855 members in 1930, 10,623 in 1931 and 11,603 in 1932; totals based on *Neuaufnahmen* lists, *HHStAW*, Abt. 483/10605-10607. The growth rate of the membership at the national level shows a similar pattern. Cf. Jürgen W. Falter, „Die ‚Märzgefallenen‘ von 1933. Neue Forschungsergebnisse zum sozialen Wandel innerhalb der NSDAP-Mitgliedschaft während der Machtergreifungsphase“, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 4 (1998), 595-616, here 600-604.

enough, with very large batches of membership applications being sent off to Munich at regular intervals throughout May 1933.³⁷

Table 3: The recruitment pattern of the membership of the NSDAP in Wetzlar Town and County, January 1930 to May 1933 [based on the *Neuaufnahmen* lists]

Wetzlar Town (N: 843)

	1930			1931			1932			1933		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
January	0.0	0.0	0.0	19	22.9	2.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
February	1.0	2.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.0	23.9	2.5	8.0	1.3	0.9
March	3.0	6.1	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.0	20.4	2.1	3.0	0.5	0.3
April	1.0	2.0	0.1	3.0	3.6	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.0	1.6	1.2
May	2.0	4.1	0.2	13.0	15.7	1.5	18	20.4	2.1	602.0	96.6	71.4
June	2.0	4.1	0.2	6.0	7.2	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0			
July	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0			
August	3.0	6.1	0.3	2.0	2.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0			
September	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	4.8	0.5	22.0	25.0	2.6			
October	27.0	55.1	3.2	16.0	19.3	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0			
November	4.0	8.2	0.5	6.0	7.2	0.7	9.0	0.2	1.1			
December	6.0	12.2	0.7	14.0	16.9	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0			
TOTAL	49.0	99.9	5.6	83.0	100.0	9.7	88.0	99.9	10.4	623.0	100.0	73.8

Wetzlar County (N: 2,777)

	1930			1931			1932			1933		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
January	0.0	0.0	0.0	46.0	14.2	1.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	0.2	0.1
February	1.0	0.6	0.03	12.0	3.7	0.4	74.0	19.1	2.7	32.0	1.7	1.1
March	20.0	13.1	0.7	25.0	7.7	0.9	42.0	10.8	1.5	67.0	3.5	2.4
April	13.0	8.5	0.5	4.0	1.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	133.0	6.9	4.8
May	4.0	2.6	0.1	45.0	13.9	1.6	93.0	24.0	3.3	1679.0	87.7	60.5
June	3.0	2.0	0.1	22.0	6.8	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0			
July	10.0	6.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0			
August	25.0	16.4	0.9	17.0	5.3	0.6	15.0	3.9	0.5			
September	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.0	6.8	0.8	113.0	29.2	4.1			
October	30.0	19.7	1.1	21.0	6.5	0.7	7.0	1.8	0.2			
November	28.0	18.4	1.0	46.0	14.2	1.7	43.0	11.1	1.5			
December	18.0	11.8	0.6	63.0	19.5	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0			
TOTAL	152	99.7	5.4	323	99.8	11.6	387	99.9	13.8	1915	100	68.9

³⁷ A considerable number of applications sent by *Gau* Hesse-Nassau-South to Munich in May 1933 were only returned to Frankfurt in the spring of 1934. For example, in the *Neuaufnahmen* lists for Tate May 1933 (in *HHSStAW*, Abt. 483/10613), batch number 4775, which was sent to Munich on 30 May 1933, was eventually returned to the *Gauleitung* on 24 April 1934.

Wetzlar Town & County (N:3,620)

	1930			1931			1932			1933		
	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III	I	II	III
January	0.0	0.0	0.0	65.0	16.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	0.1	0.1
February	2.0	1.0	0.05	12.0	2.9	0.3	95.0	20.0	2.6	40.0	1.6	1.1
March	23.0	11.4	0.6	25.0	6.1	0.7	60.0	12.6	1.7	70.0	2.7	1.9
April	14.0	7.0	0.4	7.0	1.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	143.0	5.6	4.0
May	6.0	3.0	0.2	58.0	14.3	1.6	111.0	23.4	3.1	2281.0	89.9	63.0
June	5.0	2.5	0.1	28.0	6.9	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0			
July	10.0	5.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0			
August	28.0	13.9	0.8	19.0	4.7	0.5	15.0	3.1	0.4			
September	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.0	6.4	0.7	135.0	28.4	3.7			
October	57.0	28.3	1.6	37.0	9.1	1.0	7.0	1.5	0.2			
November	32.0	15.9	0.9	52.0	12.8	1.4	52.0	10.9	1.4			
December	24.0	11.9	0.7	77.0	19.0	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0			
TOTAL	201.0	99.9	5.6	406.0	99.9	11.1	475	99.9	13.1	2538	99.9	70.1

Notes: I Number of recruits per month.

II Number of recruits per month expressed as a percentage for the year.

III Number of recruits per month expressed as a percentage for January 1930 to May 1933.

The explosive growth of the Nazi Party's membership in Wetzlar town and county in the period between Hitler's appointment as chancellor and the suspension of membership recruitment on 1 May 1933 is in line with that of the party in Northeim, William Sheridan Allen's „Thalburg“, and that of other localities and regions of Germany. Approximately 1,6 million new members were enrolled in this three month period by the NSDAP in Germany as a whole.³⁸

Little is known about the size of the membership gathered by the NSDAP in the Wetzlar region before 1930,³⁹ from which point onwards the *Neuaufnahmen* data do provide a precise source of information on Nazi recruitment in town and county. An examination of the membership recruitment pattern of the NSDAP in the Wetzlar region in the early 1930s Shows that as late as March 1933 the Nazis were still comparatively thin on the ground, especially in Wetzlar town itself. This is not to overlook the fact that from 1930 onwards the NSDAP did make, in comparison with its development in the Tate 1920s, significant progress in the region (See Table 3). Starting from a relatively modest number of new members mobilized in 1930, the party was able to double its recruitment in 1931 in comparison with that achieved in

³⁸ On 30 January 1933 the NSDAP had a membership of approximately 850 000, which grew to just under 2,5 million by the time of the recruitment ban in force from 1 May. See *Partei-Statistik. Stand 1. Januar 1935. Band 1 Parteimitglieder*. Herausgeber: Der Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP (Munich, n.d.), 12-17; also Falter, „Die ‚Märzgefallenen‘ von 1933“, 601-605.

³⁹ Mayer suggests that the Wetzlar branch probably had around 60 members by 1928; Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 32.

1930, after which, similar to the Situation in Germany as a whole, the intake of new members levelled off. Looking at the recruitment pattern in these years there is a Suggestion that the party's activity in the run-up to the September 1930 *Reichstag* election, and the electoral breakthrough achieved by the Nazis in that election, resulted in a surge of membership applications, noticeably so in the case of Wetzlar town. But surprisingly the intense propaganda efforts surrounding the two presidential, the two *Reichstag* and the Prussian *Landtag*, elections of 1932 do not seem to have had any discernable accelerating effect on Nazi recruitment, since the total of new members enrolled in 1932 in comparison with 1931 was virtually identical in Wetzlar town, and only marginally ahead in the case of Wetzlar county.⁴⁰ Thus despite the increase in the Nazi Party's public meetings in Wetzlar from 11 in 1931 to 24 in 1932, only five more members were recruited in 1932 in comparison with the total enrolled in 1931.⁴¹ Nor did Nazi events which drew very large crowds, such as the public meeting held in August 1931 at which Prince August William of Prussia was the „star“ attraction, or the parade by the SA in Wetzlar in July 1932, when General von Westrem was the main speaker at an event which attracted around 1,300 participants, appear to have had any immediate impact on the party's recruitment in Wetzlar. However, it is unlikely that the Cluster pattern in which the *Neuaufnahmen* were being dispatched by the *Gau* administration in 1932 was the consequence of any sudden surges in Nazi support occasioned by any specific event. It is very probable that the intense pressures imposed on the party by the series of concentrated propaganda campaigns generated by the numerous elections of 1932, which undoubtedly held up the more routine aspects of party administration, determined the dispatch pattern.

The intensity of the activity of the NSDAP in the Wetzlar region in the early 1930s had a much more noticeable impact on increasing the electoral strength of the party than in boosting its membership.⁴² Whereas the party's ability to attract new members tailed off in 1932, the number of votes gathered by the

⁴⁰ The Wetzlar pattern was very much in line with the recruitment pattern for the NSDAP at the national level. On the latter see Falter, „Die 'Märzgefallenen' von 1933“, 600-604.

⁴¹ On the relationship between party propaganda activity and electoral behaviour and performance see Dieter Ohr, „War die NSDAP-Propaganda nur bei (nationalistischen) Wählern erfolgreich? Eine Aggregatdatenanalyse zur Wirkung der nationalsozialistischen Versammlungspropaganda“, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 46 (1994); *idem*, „Political Meetings of the National Socialists and the Increase of the NSDAP Vote. Analysing Conditions of Propaganda Effects with Aggregate Data“, *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 22 (1997), Heft 1, 29-58; *idem*, *Nationalsozialistische Propaganda und Weimarer Wahlen. Empirische Analysen zur Wirkung von NSDAP-Versammlungen* (Opladen, 1997).

⁴² Mayer provides a list of all Nazi public meetings (details provided are the dates, speakers, themes and nature of the events) held in Wetzlar between January 1930 and March 1933; Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 44-8.

NSDAP in Wetzlar town and county continued to increase quite dramatically, especially in the county (see Table 4⁴³).

Table 4: The electoral performance of the NSDAP in Wetzlar Town and County in the Reichstag elections from 1924 to 1933 (by %)

	4.5. 1924 ^a	7.12. 1924 ^b	20.5. 1928	14.9. 1930	31.7. 1932	6.11. 1932	5.3. 1933
Wetzlar							
Town	6.1	2.4	1.3	13.7	32.7	28.9	37.4
County	5.6	3.7	1.1	15.7	52.0	51.5	58.7
Town & County	5.7	3.4	1.1	15.2	47.3	46.7	54.0
Hesse-Nassau	5.6	2.5	3.6	20.8	43.6	41.2	49.4
Germany	6.5	3.0	2.6	18.3	37.3	33.1	43.9

Notes: ^aVölkischsozialer Block (VSB)

^bNationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung (NSFB)

The rising level of electoral support for the NSDAP in the Wetzlar region is clearly linked with the onset of the world economic crisis in 1929, a connection strongly underlined in the leader of the *Wetzlarer Anzeiger*⁴⁴ analysing the NSDAP's breakthrough in September 1930 and in a report by the *Regierungspräsident*⁴⁵ evaluating the reasons for the comparatively rapid growth of Nazism in 1931. Although the Nazis were broadly peddling the same message in the latter half of the 1920s as they did in the early 1930s, a strong response to their overtures only materialized when economic and social stress

⁴³ Percentages of the vote secured by the VSB and NSFB in Wetzlar Town and County in the 1924 elections are calculated on basis of data in *StDR*, 315, *Die Wahlen zum Reichstag am 4. Mai 1924 und am 7. Dezember 1924* (Berlin, 1925), part II, 6 and 44, and part IV, 4 and 42; the Reichstag election results secured by the NSDAP in the period 1928 to 1933 are taken from Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 105-106. Percentages for the NSDAP vote in electoral district Hesse-Nassau and in Germany are taken from Jürgen Falter, Thomas Lindenberger, Siegfried Schumann, *Wahlen und Abstimmungen in der Weimarer Republik* (München, 1986), 69-75.

⁴⁴ The paper viewed the Nazi breakthrough in the Wetzlar region as the consequence of „the general dissatisfaction with economic developments“, as well as „strong resentment against the ... unproductive nature of parliamentary work in the last few years“. *Wetzlarer Anzeiger*, no. 215, 15 September 1930, quoted by Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 72.

⁴⁵ In his report on the development of Nazism in 1931 in the *Regierungsbezirk Koblenz*, the *Regierungspräsident* suggested that „the intense economic plight“ of artisans, tradesmen and farmers was the main factor which had led to the growth in Nazi support in the Koblenz region; see report dated 31 October 1931, reprinted in Heyen, *Nationalsozialismus im Alltag*, 59.

began to radicalize society.⁴⁶ Clear is that in the run-up to the *Reichstag* election of May 1928, a period in which the impending economic crisis was still largely invisible, the population had virtually ignored the relatively few Nazi meetings organized in the Wetzlar region.⁴⁷ Even in late 1929, a time when a general economic depression was manifesting itself in Germany, and at a time when the NSDAP's participation in the anti-Young Plan campaign had given to it a higher public profile, the Nazis in the Wetzlar region viewed their situation as being too weak to run under their own ticket in the November communal elections.⁴⁸ The lack of response to Nazism by the population in the region is clearly demonstrated by the party's miserable performance in May 1928, when it fell well short of the average polled by the NSDAP in Hesse-Nassau, and failed even to reach the very modest 2,6 per cent polled by the NSDAP at the national level. The comparative under-representation of the NSDAP in the Wetzlar region was still in evidence at the *Reichstag* election of 1930. Thereafter, however, the electoral behaviour of the population resident in Wetzlar town and county diverged sharply, with a consistent marked under-representation of the NSDAP in the town, always well below the support secured at the provincial and national levels and in towns similar in size and comparable in their confessional and socio-economic structure, and a constant absolute majority secured by the party in the county, always well above the percentages polled at provincial and national levels, as well as in similarly structured regions, in all the elections upto 1933 (see Table 4).⁴⁹

There are a number of factors which help to explain this divergence of response to Nazism between town and county at the time of the 1932 elections. Clearly the heavy dependence on the primary sector as an employer in the county and the lengthy and very deep recession which this sector suffered in the course of the agrarian crisis in the late 1920s, ultimately benefitted the Nazi Party. Signs of the pressure under which the farming population was placed can be seen from 1929 onwards in the increasing frequency of reports and announcements in the *Wetzlarer Anzeiger* regarding forced sales of farm equipment and of farm animals, especially in the villages in the northern and south-eastern parts of the county.⁵⁰ The disenchantment of large sections of the farming community with the centre-right DVP and right-wing DNVP, which had a combined vote of 39,4 per cent in the *Reichstag* election of December

⁴⁶ Unemployment, which affected virtually all branches of economic activity in the Wetzlar region, was the chief cause of growing social distress in the early 1930s. The number of unemployed in Wetzlar town and County rose from 3,704 on 15 May 1930, to 5,309 a year later, and to 7,284 by 15 May 1932; figures taken from Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 27.

⁴⁷ According to a police report of 17 April 1928 the election meetings in Wetzlar County were „... generally very badly attended“; quoted by Schön, *Nationalsozialismus in Hessen*, 88.

⁴⁸ Cf. Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 70.

⁴⁹ See data in Falter, Lindenberger, Schumann, *Wahlen und Abstimmungen*, 178 and 200.

⁵⁰ Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 59.

1924,⁵¹ is shown in the way their electoral fortunes collapsed in 1928 with the founding of the Christian-National Peasants and Agricultural Party. This new party, closely associated with the *Landbund* and supported predominantly by peasant proprietors owning small- and medium-sized farms, became the dominant *Mittelstand* party in the county in the *Reichstag* election of May 1928, in which it secured 31,5 per cent of the vote. The emergence of the Christian-National Peasants and Agricultural Party reduced the combined DVP and DNVP vote to 15 per cent, a development which fundamentally altered the electoral geometry of the county.⁵² In the elections of the early 1930s the further radicalisation of the peasantry in county Wetzlar as their economic problems became ever more acute, allied to a vigorous Nazi propaganda assault on the Christian-National Peasants and Agricultural Party, which paid rapid dividends for the NSDAP, which enjoyed enormous electoral support by the time of the 1932 elections. By mid-1932 the Nazis had successfully subverted the *Landbund* movement in county Wetzlar. By the time of the presidential elections in the spring of 1932 the head of the county *Landbund* organization and one of the committee members of the Christian-National Peasants and Agricultural Party had left the party, soon to be active on behalf of the NSDAP. When the party dissolved itself in Wetzlar county in early July 1932 the leader of what was left of the county organization suggested that the membership should vote for either the DNVP or NSDAP in the coming election.⁵³ The surge in Nazi electoral support in the elections of 1932 decimated not only the Christian-National Peasants and Agricultural Party, but also reduced the support enjoyed by other *Mittelstand* parties to virtual insignificance.⁵⁴ These parties paid the price for their inability to identify with the social and economic interests of a farming community which, with some hesitancy at first, switched its political allegiance to Nazism as the Nazis cobbled together an agrarian program which promised salvation to a peasantry faced with social decline and

⁵¹ The DVP polled 20,9 per cent and the DNVP 18,5 per cent of the vote in Wetzlar town and county in the *Reichstag* election of December 1924; percentages calculated on the basis of data in *StDR*, 315, *Die Wahlen zum Reichstag am 4. Mai 1924 und am 7. Dezember 1924* (Berlin, 1925), part IV, 42.

⁵² Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 68.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 60. For an interesting case study illustrating how the Nazis destroyed their rural political rivals and mobilized support from Protestant farming communities in Hesse, see Wolfgang Egerer, „Die Entwicklung des Nationalsozialismus im Kreis Friedberg und seine Beziehungen zu den bäuerlichen Organisationen“, in Eike Hennig (ed.), *Hessen unterm Hakenkreuz. Studien zur Durchsetzung der NSDAP in Hessen* (Frankfurt a.M., 2nd. ed. 1984), 199-222. Friedberg county is adjacent to county Wetzlar. Cf. Schön, *Nationalsozialismus in Hessen*, 144-54.

⁵⁴ In the 1928 *Reichstag* election the combined vote of the bourgeois parties (DDP, DVP, Economy Party, Christian-National Peasant and Agricultural Party, DNVP) in county Wetzlar stood at 51,1 per Cent. By the time of the *Reichstag* election of July 1932 these parties (along with the CSVD founded in 1928) polled a mere 10,4 per cent. Percentages calculated on basis of data in Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 105.

economic ruination as the agrarian depression deepened further in the early 1930s.⁵⁵

In Wetzlar town the Nazi Party was unable to make the dramatic electoral gains (see Table 4) which it recorded in the county even during the period of growing economic gloom in the early 1930s, which affected town and county in roughly equal measure. Lay-offs and shorttime working were a feature of the majority of industrial enterprises in both town and county from the late 1920s.⁵⁶ The only concern in Wetzlar town which survived the recession in a comparatively healthy state was the Leitz company which, on the basis of the success of the Leica camera, continued to expand its number of employees from 1927 until the end of 1930. In the following two years even this relatively successful firm was forced to reduce the number of employees by some 10 per cent, before considerable numbers were taken on again from 1933 onwards.⁵⁷ The fact that the head of the firm, Dr. Ernst Leitz, a leading industrialist and notable in the town, was a well-known democrat and supporter of the *Reichsbanner*, is the major reason advanced by Mayer in his explanation of why political extremism did not make much headway in Wetzlar town before 1933.⁵⁸ The head of the rival, and much smaller, optical firm of Moritz Hensoldt & Sons, Dr. Karl Hensoldt, who was the first prominent Wetzlar industrialist to openly support the Nazi Party in 1930, lacked the prestige and political influence of Ernst Leitz before 1933, though within his own small workforce his political line did have some imitators.⁵⁹ Important also in conditioning the muted response of the citizens of Wetzlar to Nazism is the fact that the town's most widely read newspaper, the *Wetzlarer Anzeiger*, though conservative and national in its tone, did not countenance the methods of

⁵⁵ See the „Official Party Statement on its Attitude toward the Farmers and Agriculture“, which appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on 6 March 1930 - reprinted in Barbara Miller Lane & Leila J. Rupp, *Nazi Ideology before 1933* (Manchester, 1978), 118-23. Cf. John E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika. The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany 1928-45* (London, 1976), 13-15.

⁵⁶ Unemployment in town and county increased from 2,100 in mid-November 1929 to 7,284 by mid-May 1932: figures taken from Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 27. By the time of the 1933 census the unemployment level in Wetzlar town still stood at 16,5 per cent, slightly above the county level of 13,6 per cent; percentages calculated from data in *StDR*, 456, Part 25, 44.

⁵⁷ The Leitz workforce rose from 1,468 in 1927 to 1,995 by 1930, then declined to 1,756 by 1932, to rise again in subsequent years to reach 2,553 by 1935; figures cited in Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 25. The firm had manufactured its 10,000th Leica by 1928, its 50,000th by 1931 and its 125,000th by 1933; *ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁹ According to Mayer, Hensoldt publicly supported the Nazi Party from 1930 onwards. The Hensoldt factory was one of the first to see the formation of an NSBO cell, to which all of the employees belonged even before the *Gleichschaltung* of 1933; Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 26.

political agitation developed by the NSDAP.⁶⁰ The negative attitude of the sole local daily to its antics probably did cost the Nazi Party electoral and membership support, but is most likely a minor factor among those involved in explaining why Nazism was not more strongly supported in the town before the spring of 1933.

II

The *Neuaufnahmen* and census data relating to Wetzlar town and county allow an analysis of the gender, age, occupation and social class of the Nazi membership mobilized in the area. Comparisons between these two sets of data also permit an insight into the question as to which social types were involved in the membership turn-over of the pre-1933 Nazi Party,

According to the *Neuaufnahmen* the NSDAP recruited 3,620 individuals resident in Wetzlar town and county in the period January 1930 to May 1933, two-thirds of whom were made up of the so-called *Märzgefallenen* and *Maiveilchen*⁶¹ who rushed to join the party between March and the beginning of May 1933 (see Table 3). A handful of Chose who joined the NSDAP before Hitler's acquisition of the chancellorship at the end of January 1933, some 2,4 per Cent, joined as individual members of the *Gau*, which were recorded separately as *Gaueinzelmitglieder* in the *Neuaufnahmen* rather than as members attached to a Nazi branch in their locality. Such a form of membership was especially a feature in Braunfels, which accounted for almost two-thirds of the individual *Gau* members registered in the county, with Wetzlar providing the bulk of the rest. Judging from the occupational titles given by *Gaueinzelmitglieder* in both Braunfels and Wetzlar, these individuals do not appear to have had any obvious reasons for not joining their local Nazi branch. Only a few local notables, people prominent in the professions, industry or commerce, who might have had some professional or social reason for wishing not to be identified locally as members of the Nazi Party, were among them.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ibid., 39-44. The problem with using the „influence factor“ of the *Wetzlarer Anzeiger* as one reason to explain, as Mayer does, the relatively weak support marshalled by the Nazis in Wetzlar before 1933, is that the newspaper was also the only daily in county Wetzlar as well, an area in which the Nazis performed very strongly in the elections of the early 1930s. On the question of the relationship between the character of newspaper coverage and Nazi electoral performance see Hamilton, *Who voted for Hitler?*, and *idem*, „Braunschweig 1932: Further Evidence on the Support for National Socialism“, *Central European History*, 17, 1 (March 1984), 3-33.

⁶¹ The social characteristics of individuals attracted to the Nazi Party during the *Machtergreifung* have been analyzed in detail by Falter, „Die ‘Märzgefallenen’ von 1933“.

⁶² Karl Hensoldt was among Chose who opted for *Gaueinzelmitglied* status when he eventually joined the NSDAP in December 1931 even though his association with the Nazi Party was well-known in Wetzlar. The entry of Hensoldt is recorded in the List sent to the *Kassenverwaltung* in Munich by the *Gauleitung* dated 31 December 1931: the list is in

Looking at the recruits mobilized in the Wetzlar area as a whole more closely, two well-known characteristics of the Nazi Party are encountered. Firstly, and this concerns the Nazi Party as a whole, males represented the overwhelming majority of the membership recruited in the region.⁶³ Secondly, the age profile of those recruited in the early 1930s was dominated by the younger age cohorts.⁶⁴

In both Wetzlar town and county female party members were generally an extreme rarity. In the county only six branches were able to attract women supporters, and these accounted for a mere 2 per cent of all the members who joined the party in the time span January 1930 to 30 January 1933. These-quarter of these women recruits, moreover, were resident in the small town of Braunfels, where local factors must have determined the unusual pattern of relatively high female recruitment within a small-town milieu.⁶⁵ The stampede into the party in Wetzlar county which took place between February and May 1933 involved only a further 27 females, or 1,4 per cent of the new members enrolled in this short time span. Braunfels again provided almost 50 per cent of these, the rest being scattered in nine localities. Given these statistics it comes as no surprise that in virtually all parts of county Wetzlar the NSDAP was an almost exclusively male phenomenon. In Wetzlar town, however, women were slightly less dramatically underrepresented within the membership of the

HHStAW, Abt, 483/10606, Cf. Hensoldt's entry in „Cell 2“, Wetzlar NSDAP (not dated, but probably compiled in early 1934), *HHStMW*, Abt, 483/4513a.

⁶³ This feature emerges clearly in the Nazi Party's own membership census undertaken in 1934 according to which women only accounted for 7,8 per cent of those recruited before 30 January 1933, and a mere 4,4 per cent of those recruited subsequently; see *Partei-Statistik. Stand 1. Januar 1935, Band 1 Parteimitglieder*, Herausgeber: Der Reichsorganisationsleiter der NSDAP (München, n.d.), 16, Cf. Michael H. Kater, „Frauen in der NS-Bewegung“, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 31, 2 (1983), 202-241, here especially 204-206; Falter, „Die „Märzgefallenen“ von 1933“, 606-607.

⁶⁴ Some 42,2 per cent of those who joined the NSDAP before 30 January 1933 were 30 years or under; see *Partei-Statistik, Band 1*, 162. On the youthfulness of the pre-1933 Nazi Party see Kater, *Nazi Party*, 139-44. Cf. J. Paul Madden, „Generational Aspects of German National Socialism, 1919-1933“, *Social Science Quarterly*, 63, 3 (1982), 445-461; also Falter and Kater, „Wähler und Mitglieder der NSDAP“, 172-3; and, using the most extensive data set at the Reich level evaluated so far, Jürgen W. Falter, „The Young membership of the NSDAP Between 1925 and 1933: A Demographic and Social Profile“, in Conan Fischer (ed.), *The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany* (Providence/Oxford, 1996), 79-98.

⁶⁵ In Braunfels women were comparatively more highly represented among Nazi membership than in any other part of the Wetzlar region. In Braunfels women provided 13,3 per cent of Nazi membership recruited between February 1930 and 30 January 1933, and 11,2 per cent of those who joined the party in early 1933. Such a comparatively strong presence of female support within the Nazi Party is unusual, suggesting that exceptional local factors were at play in Braunfels. Before May 1933 the Nazis were generally unable to recruit female party supporters in communities with a population of under 2,000, and made few converts among women in smalltowns with a population of under 15,000. On the relationship between community size and female membership in the NSDAP see Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers*, 44, 121, 140 and 148.

NSDAP. Here they accounted for 7,3 per cent of those entering the party between January 1930 and the end of January 1933, a percentage which dropped sharply to 2,9 in the period February to May 1933. Overall women provided a mere 3 per cent of the total Nazi membership recruited in Wetzlar town and county in the period January 1930 to 30 January 1933, and only 1,7 per Cent of the many individuals who jumped onto the Nazi bandwagon in 1933. These percentages are much lower than those for female membership of the NSDAP in *Gau* Hesse-Nassau as a whole. According to the *Partei-Statistik* women provided 6,2 per cent of the *Gau* membership of the party in the period 15 September 1930 to 30 January 1933, and 3,6 per cent of the new intake recruited in the months following Hitler's elevation to the chancellorship in 1933.⁶⁶

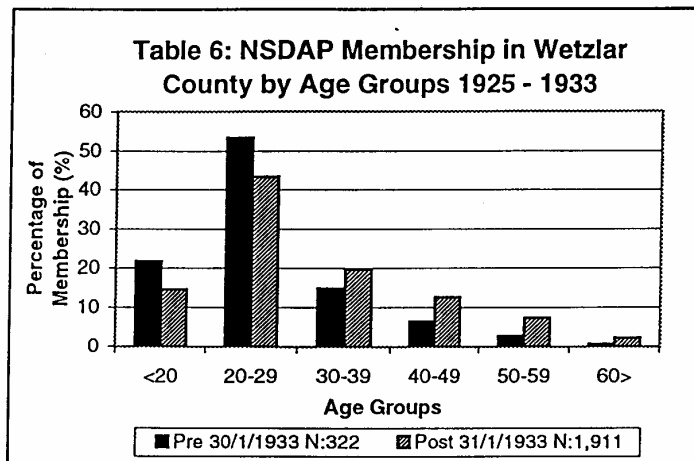
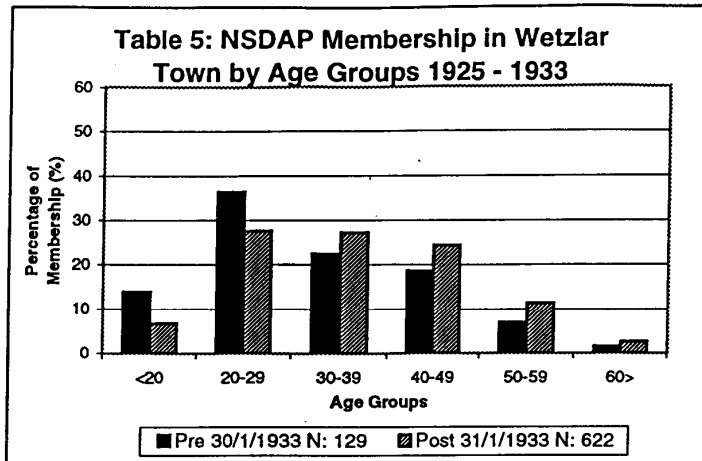
A striking feature of the membership of the Nazi Party in the Wetzlar region is its youthfulness (see Tables 5 and 6). In both town and county the 18 to under-30 age cohort provided the absolute majority of Nazi Party members between 1925 and May 1933.⁶⁷ The attractiveness of Nazism to those between 18 and under 30 years of age is particularly marked in the case of Wetzlar county, in which this age group accounted for 75,1 per Cent of members before 30 January 1933, and for 58 per cent of the many who rushed into the party between the beginning of February and May 1933. These percentages are significantly higher than those relating to Wetzlar town, where the under-30 age group accounted for 50,1 per cent of the intake before 30 January 1933 and 34,1 per cent thereafter, percentages more in line with the party's membership at the *Gau* and national level.⁶⁸ As far as the limited female recruitment by the Nazi Party in town and county Wetzlar is concerned, the 18 to 29 age cohort

⁶⁶ Percentages calculated on the basis of data in *Partei-Statistik*, 26 and 30. At the national level the percentage of women among the new recruits in 1933 also declined marginally, though not as drastically as in the Wetzlar region - see Falter, "Die 'Märzgefallenen' von 1933", 606-607.

⁶⁷ The age of members is not recorded in the *Neuaufnahmen* before 1933. The data for the pre-30 January 1933 period evaluated in Tables 5 and 6 are derived from census returns for 42 of the 46 *Ortsgruppen* or *Stützpunkte* in the Wetzlar region (these are identified in note 8) in which the occupation and date of birth are provided in data produced in 1934/35. The age of birth of members is not given in the census returns for Erda, Launsbach, Leun and Lützellinden. It should be noted therefore that the data presented in Tables 6 and 9 are incomplete and one is therefore not comparing like with like in Tables 5 to 10 in that the pre-30 January 1933 data is based on incomplete census data, whereas for the post-*Machtergreifung* period from 30 January 1933 to May 1933 the *Neuaufnahmen* provide a virtually complete record since the date of birth of recruited Nazi members is generally recorded in all but a few instances. Tables 5 and 6 are based on all members on whom there is data, whereas members whose social background is unclear are excluded in the data presented in Tables 7 to 10.

⁶⁸ In *Gau* Hessen-Nassau the age group 18 to 30 accounted for 46,4 per Cent of members before 30 January 1933, and for 37,6 per Cent after the *Machtergreifung*. The respective percentages for the Nazi Party as a whole were 42,2 and 35,4. Percentages calculated on the basis of data in *Partei-Statistik*, 162, 173, and 177.

also provided the majority, namely 55,7 per cent.⁶⁹ Many an answer has been provided to the question as to why the younger generation was particularly prominent among the Nazi membership, ranging from the demographic aspect relating to the size of the 18 to 29 age cohort in German society during the late Weimar period, to economic factors and to the attraction to youth of the radicalism of the party.⁷⁰



⁶⁹ The pattern in the Wetzlar region seems to be different to that in other parts of Germany where women were generally older than males in the membership of the NSDAP. On this point see Kater, *Nazi Party*, 150-1.

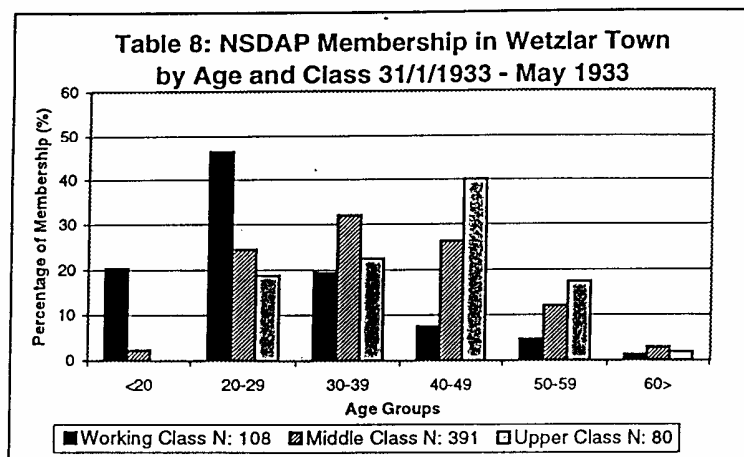
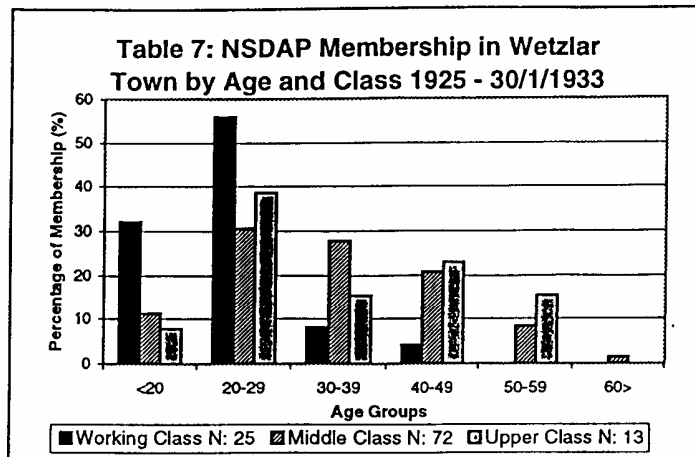
⁷⁰ For a brief overview see Kater, *Nazi Party*, 141-4.

It would seem that one of the main messages peddled by the Nazis, that their party was the only hope for a German recovery, was always more likely to appeal to the less politically aware younger elements of German society than rational politics once the socio-economic crisis of the early 1930s radicalized large sections of German society. As a crisis party par excellence the NSDAP increased its support in the early 1930s in the Wetzlar region as elsewhere in Germany, and rapidly secured more and more support because the social stress and widespread misery from which all social and age groupings were suffering to varying degrees in the early 1930s alienated a large section of society from moderate politics.

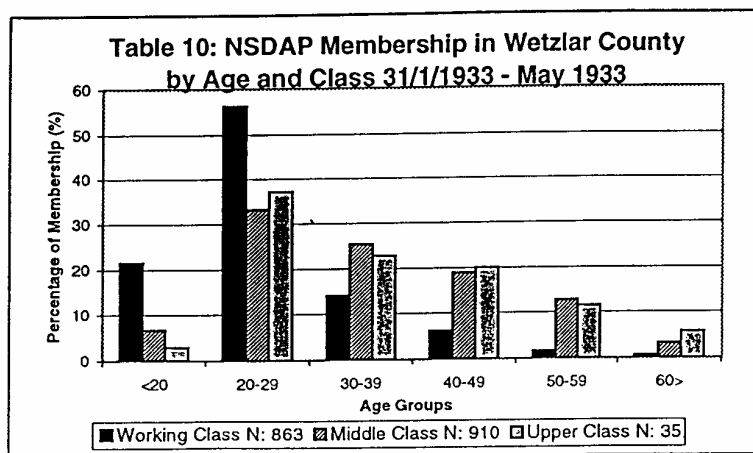
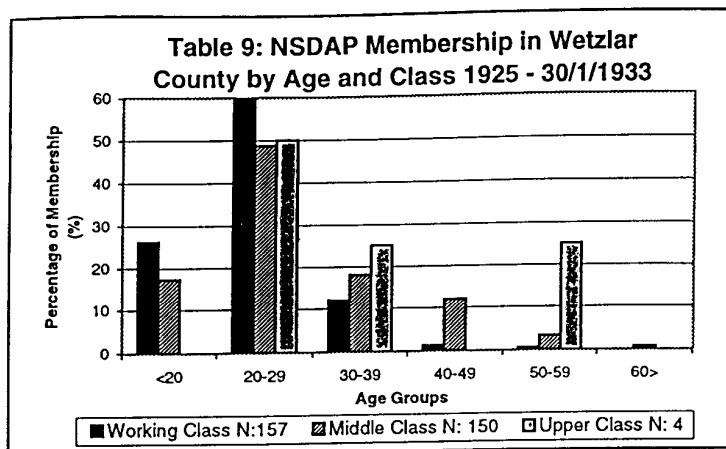
Taking both age and class factors into consideration, it is evident that in Wetzlar town and county the attractiveness of Nazi membership was much greater among workers under the age of 30 than the same age cohort in the middle and upper classes, both in the pre-30 January 1933 period and during the *Machtergreifung* phase (see Tables 7-10). Workers over the age of thirty were a comparative rarity among the Nazi membership of the Wetzlar region before February 1933, with only 12 per cent drawn from the over-30s in Wetzlar town, and 14 per cent in Wetzlar county. The percentages increased to 33,3 and 22,1 respectively thereafter as skilled and craft workers in especially the 30 to 49 age cohort joined in some numbers in early 1933. But members aged over 30 from any class were not that common before 1933, though more visible among some occupational sub-groups. Thus in Wetzlar town the lower- and middle-grade white-collar employees, lower- and middle-grade civil servants, along with merchants, alone accounted for 56,2 per cent of those aged over 30 before 30 January 1933. In Wetzlar county, as one might expect, farmers were by far the most numerous within the older age cohorts, accounting for 30 per cent of those aged thirty and over. Unskilled and semi-skilled workers, skilled and craft workers, lower- and middle-grade white-collar employees and lower- and middle-grade civil servants accounted for a further 33,7 per cent. It was only during the *Machtergreifung* phase that the older age-cohorts overcame their reluctance to join the party. The aggressiveness which accompanied Nazi propaganda activity, and the style and nature of the party, often the object of censure by the proprietor of the local *Wetzlarer Anzeiger*,⁷¹ is probably one important factor which explains why older people, irrespective of their class, thought twice before joining the Nazi Party in town and county. It is likely that Hitler's acquisition of the chancellorship at last legitimized the NSDAP as an acceptable party to the older elements within the population. Certainly the strong surge of support from the over-30s drawn from the *Mittelstand* and upper class in Wetzlar town and county is most marked in the February to May period. Before 1933 few elite elements from the academic professions were visible in the party. The same is true of merchants and master

⁷¹ Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*. 39-43.

craftsmen, who were also a comparative rarity among the party membership in the Wetzlar region before Hitler became chancellor. These types made up for lost time in the spring of 1933, and were strongly represented among the *Märzgefallenen* and *Maiveilchen*.⁷² Not surprisingly, given the constraints on their joining of radical parties before 1933, civil servants, primarily in the 30 to 59 age group, especially teachers and policemen, formed a major component of the Nazi recruits who entered the party between February and May 1933.



⁷² A similar pattern to that prevailing in Wetzlar is discernable at the national level - see Falter, „Die „Märzgefallenen“ von 1933“, 615; also *Partei-Statistik*, 70-1.



In social terms there are marked differences between Nazi Party members resident in Wetzlar town and county. *Mittelstand* elements dominated the Nazi Party's recruitment pattern in Wetzlar town between January 1930 and May 1933 in all but 1931 (See Table 11). By the time of the 1934 census this social stratum provided two-thirds of the Nazi membership. The surge of the Wetzlar petite bourgeoisie into the NSDAP is especially noticeable in the Spring of 1933, when civil servants and white-collar employees flooded into the party. The constantly expanding *Mittelstand* support enjoyed by the Wetzlar NSDAP between September 1930 and May 1933 progressively marginalized the working-class component drawn to Nazism in the town. In Wetzlar, unlike Wetzlar county, the NSDAP was a pre-eminently middle-class affair. The

dominance of white-collar types among Wetzlar's Nazis is underlined even more in the Nazi Party's census undertaken in 1934, which recorded permanent or long-term membership. Workers were few and far between in virtually all of the seven cells into which the Wetzlar Nazi Party was divided organizationally by the time of the census. In cell 4 (*Frequency* at census point: 81), which covered part of Wetzlar's commercial area to the north of the City centre and included county council offices along with a few Small industrial units such as the Hensoldt factory,⁷³ workers were virtually invisible, accounting for only 3,6 per Cent of the membership, as against 86,3 per Cent drawn from the *Mittelstand*. The marginality of the working-class component in the cell's membership is underlined by the fact that there were more women (and these numbered only 4) than workers (a mere 3) among its ranks! In Gell 2, an area covering the eastern part of the *Altstadt* and the adjoining eastern fringe of the town in which white-collar workers and civil servants lived in some numbers,⁷⁴ the working-class component was, at 6,8 per cent, also extremely low. Only in cell 6 (*Frequency*: 40), which covered the Spilburg suburb to the south-east of the town, did workers form, at 40 per Cent, a significant element among the Nazi membership in the town.⁷⁵ In Wetzlar-Niedergirmes, a predominantly working-class suburb lying to the north of the town adjacent to the Röchling-Buderus works, the Nazis managed to recruit only a quarter of their members (*Frequency*: 113) from the working class.⁷⁶ Before January 1933 shopkeepers, master craftsmen, merchants, and white-collar types such as Shop assistants, bookkeepers, technicians and office personnel, formed the bulk of the Nazi Party in Wetzlar. These elements continued to dominate the party after January 1933, but were then joined by large numbers of civil servants and municipal employees, especially teachers, policemen, taxation officials and those employed in the judiciary.

Although academic professionals resident in Wetzlar were recruited into the party in some number in 1931, the town's *Oberschicht* hesitated joining the Nazi Party before Hitler's elevation to the chancellorship, after which

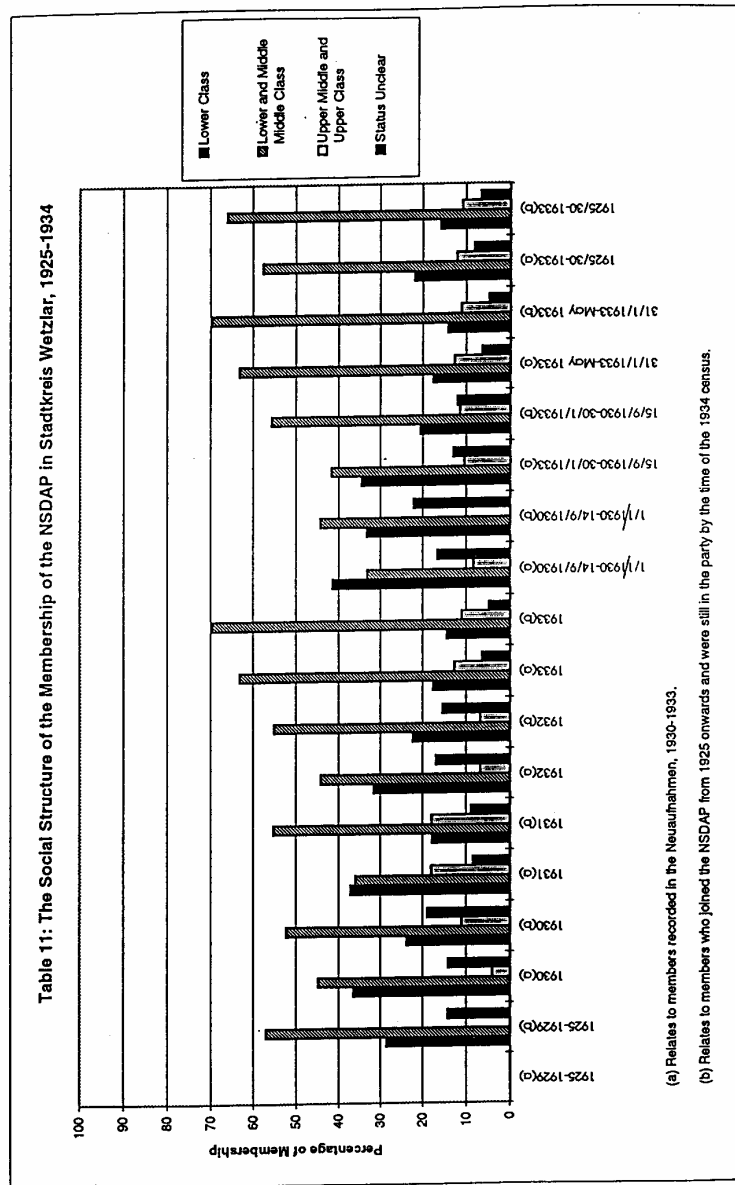
⁷³ Judging from the addresses given by the members listed in the Wetzlar party cells, it seems that the latter were based on the electoral districts of the town, the socio-economic characteristics of which are outlined in Mayer's study. Cell 4 covered electoral district 5, the *Landratsamt*: cf. Mayer, *Nationalsozialismus in Stadt Wetzlar*, 86-7; also Map of Wetzlar electoral districts, 104.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-5 and 104. Cell 2 covered electoral district 2, *Gymnasium*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 88 and 104. Cell 6 was based an electoral district 8, *Spilburg*, which centred an the Büblingshausen housing estate developed after the First World War. The population resident in the estate was isolated from the town in terms of Wetzlar's associational life.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 87-8. Wetzlar-Niedergirmes covered the two electoral districts of Schule-Niedergirmes and Buderus-Schlafhaus, the latter being an exclusively working-class district, while the former, centred an Niedergirmes village, had a mixed population of farmers and workers, the bulk of the latter being employed in the nearby Röchling and Buderus concerns.

architects, doctors, dentists, lawyers, pharmacists and factory owners figured prominently among the town's notables who entered the party by May 1933.



As to the comparatively few women who joined the party in the town in the early 1930s, it is difficult to reach any precise conclusions as to their occupational and class background. The majority of women recorded as joining the Wetzlar Nazi Party declared themselves to be „housewives“ or „without occupation“. Only a few listed occupations and these almost invariably suggest white-collar employment.

In contrast to Wetzlar town, the working class provided a marginal absolute majority of the membership recruited in Wetzlar county between 1930 and January 1933, where after its share of the membership fell slightly as *Mittelstand* elements rushed to join the party in some numbers (for the following See Table 12). In just over one-third of the 61 branches and cells established by the Nazis by May 1933, the working class formed the absolute majority of the membership. Neither community size nor the extent of the population's dependence on agriculture appear to have been critical indicators to the size of working-class support mobilized by the NSDAP in Wetzlar county. Thus small villages with populations below 500, such as Bermoll, Bissenberg, Daubhausen-Greifenthal, Ebersgöns and Stockhausen all attracted very strong working-class support, whereas in Kröffelbach, Krumbach and Oberquembach support from this social group was significantly lower. Remarkable was the Situation in Niederquembach, where not one worker could be mobilized to join the party before 1935. In some large villages or small towns with a population of over 1,500, workers were well-represented in such places as Aßlar-Klein Altenstädten, Dutenhofen, Rodheim and Wissmar, whereas in Braunfels, Naubom, and Naunheim *Mittelständler* dominated Nazi membership. In the 19 Nazi branches in the county in which over half of the total population depended on agriculture for its livelihood, the extent of working-class membership support for the NSDAP ranged from 12,1 per cent in Hocheilheim to 74,9 per cent in Ebersgöns.⁷⁷ In the 18 Nazi branches in county Wetzlar in which less than a quarter of the total population depended on the primary sector for its livelihood, the percentage of workers active in the party ranged from 31,9 per cent in Braunfels to 61,9 per cent in Bissenberg.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Namely the branches (with percentage of working-class membership given in brackets) at Altenkirchen (49,9), Bermoll (60), Brandoberndorf (38,3), Dornholzhausen (44), Ebersgöns (74,9), Groß Altenstädten (42,9), Groß Rechtenbach (43,5), Hocheilheim (12,1), Hörsheim (24), Hohensolms (44,7), Kröffelbach (34,5), Laufdorf (66,6), Niederkleen (45), Niederwetz (47,6), Oberkleen (53,3), Oberquernhach (37,5), Oberwetz (44,8), Schwalbach (43,7), and Vollnkirchen (45). Percentage of the total population dependent on agriculture in the above communities taken from *StDR*, 456, Part 25, 55.

⁷⁸ Namely the branches (with percentage of working-class membership given in brackets) at Aßlar-Kleinaltenstädten (48,6), Biskirchen (47), Bissenberg (61,9), Braunfels (31,9), Burgsolms (45,4), Ehringshausen (46,9), Fellingshausen (57,9), Garbenheim (57,1), Hermannstein (48,4), Katzenfurt (61,5), Krofdorf (43,2), Launsbach (58,3), Naunheim (33,3), Oberbiel (40), Oberndorf (39,4), Rodheim (52,1), Stockhausen (58,3), and Werdorf (39,2). Percentage of the total population dependent on agriculture in the above communities taken from *StDR*, 456, Part 25, 55.

Table 13: Turn-over rate among the NSDAP's membership recruited in Weizlar town, 1930-1933

Class	Occupational Subgroup	(1)			(2)			(3)			(4)		
		a.	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.
		N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%
LOWER CLASS	1. Agricultural workers	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	100	1	0	100
	2. Un- & semi-skilled workers	1	0	100	8	2	75	7	2	71.4	15	4	73.3
	3. Skilled & craft workers	16	5	68.8	22	6	72.7	18	5	72.2	52	16	69.2
	4. Apprentices	1	0	100	1	0	100	2	0	100	4	0	100
	5. Domestic workers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal		18	5	72.2	31	8	74.2	28	7	75	72	20	72.2
Lower- & Middle- MIDDLE CLASS	6. Master craftsmen	1	0	100	2	2	0	5	2	60	7	4	42.9
	7. Non-acad. professionals	2	0	100	4	2	50	2	1	50	7	3	57.2
	8. Non-university students	2	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	100
	9. White-collar employees	7	4	42.9	8	3	62.5	13	7	46.2	27	14	48.2
	10. Lower civil servants	3	0	100	1	1	0	6	3	50	9	4	55.6
	11. Manual public workers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	12. Soldiers/NCOs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	13. Merchants	7	1	85.7	15	9	40	12	8	33.3	34	18	47.1
	14. Farmers	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
	15. Assisting family members	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal		22	5	77.3	30	17	43.3	39	22	43.7	87	44	49.4

Table 13: Turn-over rate among the NSDAP's membership recruited in Weizlar town, 1930-1933 (continued)

Class	Occupational Subgroup	(16)			(2)			(3)			(4)		
		a	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.
		N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%
Upper	16. Managers	0	0	0	1	0	100	0	0	0	1	0	100
MIDDLE	17. Higher civil servants	1	0	100	0	0	0	1	0	100	2	0	100
&	18. Officers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
UPPER	19. University students	0	0	0	3	0	100	0	0	0	3	0	100
CLASS	20. Academic professionals	1	0	100	9	7	22.2	2	0	100	11	7	36.4
	11. Entrepreneurs	0	0	0	2	1	50	3	2	33.3	5	3	40
Subtotal		2	0	100	15	8	46.7	6	2	66.6	22	10	54.6
STATUS	22. School children	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
UNCLEAR	23. Pensioners/Retired	3	2	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
	12. Wives/Widows	1	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	100
	13. Illegible/no data	3	0	100	6	2	66.7	15	9	40	24	11	54.2
Subtotal		7	2	71.4	7	3	57.2	15	9	40	27	13	51.9
TOTALS		49	12	75.5	83	36	56.6	88	40	54.6	208	87	58.2

Notes: a. Relates to *Neuaufnahmen*.
b. Relates to Census returns of 1934.
c. Percentage loss by 1934.

Table 14: Turn-over rate among the NSDAP's membership recruited in 41 branches in Wetzlar county, 1930-1933

Class	Occupational Subgroup	(1)			(2)			(3)			(4)		
		1930	1931	1932	1930	1931	1932	1930	1931	1932	1930	1931	1932
		a. N:	b. N:	c. %	a. N:	b. N:	c. %	a. N:	b. N:	c. %	a. N:	b. N:	c. %
LOWER CLASS	1. Agricultural workers	0	0	0	3	2	33.3	4	0	100	7	2	71.4
	2. Un- & semi-skilled workers	5	4	20	14	4	71.4	21	9	57.1	35	14	60
	3. Skilled & craft workers	39	21	46.1	79	30	62	85	42	50.6	180	81	55.0
	4. Apprentices	1	0	100	0	0	0	3	0	100	5	0	100
	5. Domestic workers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal		45	25	44.4	97	36	62.9	113	51	54.9	227	95	58.1
LOWER- & MIDDLE CLASS	6. Master craftsmen	0	0	0	5	1	80	6	4	33.3	11	5	54.5
	7. Non-acad. professionals	0	0	0	3	1	66.6	4	2	50	7	3	57.2
	8. Non-university students	0	0	0	3	2	33.3	0	0	0	3	2	33.3
	9. White-collar employees	7	3	57.1	16	9	43.7	11	4	63.6	32	16	50
	10. Lower civil servants	1	0	100	0	0	0	6	6	0	6	6	0
	11. Blue-collar public workers	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
	12. Soldiers/NCOs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	13. Merchants	9	7	22.2	15	4	73.3	14	6	57.1	33	14	57.6
	14. Farmers	23	13	43.5	35	23	34.8	38	19	50	81	45	44.4
	15. Assisting family members	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal		40	23	42.5	77	40	48	80	42	47.5	174	92	47.1

Table 14: Turn-over rate among the NSDAP's membership recruited in 41 branches in Werzlar county, 1930-1933 (continued)

Class	Occupational Subgroup	(16)			(2)			(3)			(4)		
		a	1930		1931			1932			15.9. 30.1. 1930 - 1933		
		N:	N:	%	a.	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.	a.	b.	c.
					N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%	N:	N:	%
Upper	16. Managers	0	0	0	1	0	100	0	0	0	1	0	100
MIDDLE	17. Higher civil servants	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
&	18. Officers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
UPPER	19. University students	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	100	2	0	100
CLASS	20. Academic professionals	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	4	4	0
	11. Entrepreneurs	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Subtotal		1	1	0	3	2	33.3	4	2	50	7	4	42.8
STATUS	22. School children	0	0	0	1	0	100	3	0	100	4	0	100
UNCLEAR	23. Pensioners/Retired	2	1	50	0	0	0	2	2	0	3	2	33.3
	12. Wives/Widows	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	13. Illegible/no data	5	0	100	5	1	80	10	4	60	17	5	70.6
Subtotal		7	1	85.7	6	1	83.3	15	6	60	24	7	70.8
TOTALS		93	50	46.2	183	79	56.8	212	101	52.3	432	198	54.2

Notes: a. Relates to *Neuaufnahmen*.
b. Relates to Census returns of 1934.
c. Percentage loss by 1934.

A similarly variable picture emerges when one looks at the extent to which farmers were prepared to join the Nazi Party. Among the villages in which the majority of the population depended on agriculture for a living, farmers provided 50 and 69,7 per cent of Nazi membership in Vollnkirchen and Hochelheim respectively, whereas in Laufdorf and Ebersgöns the respective percentages were as low as 11,1 and 16,6. Similar marked variations can be detected when one looks at other occupational groups, such as white-collar workers and merchants. The infinite variety in the social configuration of Nazi Party branches in a region in which such factors as religion, economic structure and community size were broadly comparable is difficult to explain. One suspects such factors as the social background of the first Nazis active in the localities, the attitude of local notables to the party, the type of propaganda pushed out by the branch leadership, and the relationship between the party and the Protestant clergy, are probably among the critical local influences at play. Clear is that in social terms men from all walks of life, especially from among the skilled and craft workers, white-collar employees, merchants and farmers were drawn to the party in some numbers.

As to the comparatively few women who joined the party in the county in the early 1930s, it is difficult to reach any conclusions as to their occupational and class background. The majority of the handful of women recorded as joining the NSDAP before 30 January 1933 either gave „housewife“ or „widow“ as their occupation at the time of entry into the party or provide no clue as to their occupational status at all. The same applies to the period after 30 January 1933. The few that offer any indication as to their occupational status fall into the domestic workers and commercial white-collar employees categories, along with a scattering of teachers who joined after January 1933.

There is agreement among historians that the Nazi Party was subjected to significant membership fluctuations during its so-called *Kampfzeit*, but uncertainty as to the extent of the turn-over.⁷⁹ A comparison of the *Neuaufnahmen* from January 1930 to 30 January 1933 with the 1934 census returns for Wetzlar town⁸⁰ (see Table 13) and for 41 branches in Wetzlar county,⁸¹ (see Table 14) suggests that the party suffered from a very high

⁷⁹ Gerhard Schulz has calculated that the Nazi Party lost over 40 per cent of the membership it enrolled between 1925 and late 1934 - Gerhard Schulz, *Aufstieg des Nationalsozialismus. Krise und Revolution in Deutschland* (Frankfurt/M., 1975), note 74, 859. In his review of the question of membership turn-over Manstein argues that this percentage is too high and that values between a minimum of 23 per cent and a maximum of around 37 per cent are nearer the mark; cf. Manstein, *Mitglieder und Wähler*, 147-152.

⁸⁰ The data for Wetzlar town is virtually complete. Only the census data for Cell VII, the small village of Steindorf to the west of the town, is not included in the calculations since the occupational data of its 28 members as of March 1934 (four of whom had joined before 30 January 1933), is not given.

⁸¹ The data in Table 14 relate to 41 of the 45 branches in Wetzlar county for which there are both *Neuaufnahmen* and census data (see note 8). The census returns for Biskirchen and Dornholzhausen (which relate only to party functionaries), Erda (the census return omits

membership turn-over in the early 1930s. In both town and county just over half of the membership mobilised between the time of the Nazi Party's electoral breakthrough in September 1930 and Hitler's acquisition of the chancellorship at the end of January 1933 are not to be found in the local census returns of early 1934. A straightforward comparison produces this extraordinarily high membership turn-over in the Wetzlar region, well above the highest figures advanced for the national level in the existing literature. There are two problems, however, which restrict the utility of the party's membership fluctuations calculated in Tables 13 and 14. One problem is that the data sets only allow comparing those who joined the party in Wetzlar town and county from 1930 onwards with those members who remained *resident* in the area through to 1934. The absence of a locally recruited member in the census data of 1934 does not automatically mean that he or she had *left* the party by the time of the census. We do not know how many members had moved outside of Wetzlar town and county rather than leaving the party altogether. The census returns do show that a relatively small number of members who had left the NSDAP by the time Hitler became chancellor did re-join it subsequently. Nazi members recorded in the 1934 census who do not figure in the *Neuaufnahmen*, but had presumably joined the party outside of Wetzlar town and county and then moved into the area by 1934, were relatively few in number. The indications suggest that the geographic mobility factor had only a limited impact on the turn-over rate of the membership in the case of the Wetzlar region. The second problem is that in three-quarters of the branch census returns only the party membership is listed, local functionaries being returned on separate lists, virtually all of which are missing. This feature of the data undoubtedly had an effect on the measurement of the turn-over rate of the membership recruited in the Wetzlar region before February 1933 in that functionaries tended to be drawn from the earlier recruits to the party, were presumably more committed to Nazism and less likely to leave the party than rank-and-file members. Their omission from many of the 1934 branch census lists therefore does impact on the values to be found in Tables 13 and 14, undoubtedly inflating the membership turn-over. Though the extent to which the two factors indicated above skewed the calculations in Tables 13 and 14 cannot be measured accurately, it would seem that the actual turn-over rate among the NSDAP membership in Wetzlar town and county was slightly lower than the data in Tables 13 and 14 suggest. The available data do suggest, however, that in both Wetzlar town and county the party suffered from a turn-over rate between September 1930 and January 1933 which was somewhat

the date of entry of the membership) and Rodheim (incomplete data, given that the first sheet of the census return is missing) were not used. Left aside also are the comparatively few Nazi members recorded in the census returns who had joined the party outside of Wetzlar town and county, but were resident in the region by the time the census was taken.

higher than the maximum suggested in the literature for the NSDAP as a whole.⁸²

A closer examination of the membership pattern of individual branches and *Stützpunkte* on which there is detailed information throws up turn-over rates which are extremely variable. In some of the villages in which the Nazi Party had a *Stützpunkt* or a small branch by the time of the 1934 census, the loss of rank-and-file members recruited before 30 January 1933 was often total. The isolation of the few individuals mobilised by the NSDAP in small villages in which it did not have any organizational presence until 1933 probably accounts for the 100 per cent loss of small groups of individuals recorded as joining the party in the *Neuaufnahmen* lists in places such as Altenkirchen, Bissenberg, Dornholzhausen, Fellingshausen, Lützellinden, Münchholzhausen and Niederkleen. Before the NSDAP established an organization in these communities, the persons recruited in these villages in the early 1930s were usually attached to nearby Nazi branches, which could be some distance from where they lived. There would have been no „party life“ or real sense of „belonging“ among these elements until the party managed to establish a *Stützpunkt* in their place of residence, and this occurred more often than not only as late as the Spring of 1933. One can, however, find a few examples of stable membership patterns even among small Nazi groups, such as in Oberquembach, where seven of the eight members enrolled before 30 January 1933 were still in the party by March 1934. In Odenhausen not one of the eight members recruited in 1931 and 1932 had left the party by March 1934. The dynamic of group cohesion and the qualities of an available leader capable of generating sufficient enthusiasm for the „cause“ among tiny memberships, may well explain the durability of those Nazi grouplets. Among the larger Nazi branches, a similar variable pattern can be discerned. In Ebergöns and Hohensolms the party managed to recruit an identical number of supporters before Hitler's acquisition of the chancellorship, namely seventeen. Of those 61,6 per Cent do not appear in the party census of 1934 relating to Ebergöns, in contrast to the loss of only 29,4 per Cent in the case of Hohensolms. In Laufdorf only one member out of twenty-one of its pre-January 1933 membership (that is a loss of only 4,8 per Cent) does not appear in the 1934 census, whereas in Großrechtenbach the figures are seventeen out of twenty-four (a loss of 70,8 per Cent). In a number of branches in the county the membership recruited in 1930 proved to be remarkably durable compared to those who entered the party in 1931 or 1932. Perhaps somewhat unexpected is the fact that in Wetzlar county the party's membership loss by 1934 of the 1930 intake was lower than that for the 1931 and 1932 cohorts (See Table 14,

⁸² The turn-over rate between 1925 and 1933 of about 40 per cent calculated by Schulz is still generally accepted as valid. Manstein proposes a turn-over rate for the Nazi Party's membership of 32,5 per cent maximum for the period 14 September 1930 to 30 January 1933 - Manstein, *Mitglieder und Wähler*, 149.

columns 1 to 3).⁸³ The comparatively large Ehringshausen branch lost only 31,6 per Cent of its 1930 intake by 1934, as against the loss of 70 and 47 per Cent of those enrolled in 1931 and 1932 respectively. In Großrechtenbach 54,5 per Cent of the 1930 intake cannot be found in the 1934 branch census returns, as against the loss of 87,5 per Cent of those recruited between January 1931 and January 1933.

Our knowledge of how far specific occupational and class groupings were involved in the membership turn-over of the pre-1933 Nazi party is still very limited.⁸⁴ In Wetzlar town and county occupation and class did have a significant bearing on the extent to which members stayed in the party in the early 1930s.⁸⁵ Working-class elements who joined the party, especially in Wetzlar town, were much more likely to leave it than individuals drawn from the *Mittelstand*. Of the occupational sub-groups which generated the bulk of the NSDAP's membership, the un- and semi-skilled, as well as skilled and craft workers categories, were affected by a very high drop-out rate in the case of Wetzlar town, well ahead of the turn-over seen among white-collar employees and merchants, the strongest recruiting sub-groups within the *Mittelstand* (see Table 13). In comparison with Wetzlar town, the exit rate of blue-collar members in Wetzlar county was much less pronounced, though consistently higher than that for the middle-class recruits. In the Wetzlar region support derived by the NSDAP from the working-class was clearly much more volatile than that derived from the middle class. The evidence advanced here cannot determine whether or not this also applies to the party at the national level, but it would be surprising if this feature is not confirmed by additional studies covering the membership of the NSDAP as a whole.⁸⁶

III

⁸³ Madden's data covering the NSDAP at the national level in the 1925 to 1929 period Shows a clear, consistent trend not reflected in the Wetzlar data relating to the 1930s: the earlier the party entry, the higher the percentage loss by 1930. Thus whereas 60,8 per Cent of those recruited in 1925, and 48,6 per Cent who joined in 1927, had left the party by 1930, the percentage loss fell to only 7,7 per Cent of those recruited in 1929; Madden, „Social Composition of the Nazi Party, 1919-1930“, 229, also Table 54, 266-8.

⁸⁴ Cf. Manstein, *Mitglieder und Wähler*, 152.

⁸⁵ According to Madden „the occupations of party members did not play a significant role in proclivity to leave the party“ in the period 1925 to 1930 as a whole, though „Nazis from laborer classifications were somewhat more likely to drop out of the movement than members of other occupational groups“; Madden, „Social Composition of the Nazi Party, 1919-1930“, 265. For a contrary view, relating to the recruitment pattern in *Gaue* Württemberg-Hohenzollern and Hesse-Nassau-South for the period 1928 to 1930, See Mühlberger, *Hitler's Followers*, 82-3 and 121-3.

⁸⁶ The first results of the Brustein-Falter data set point in the same direction. This aspect is to be investigated more fully in work currently planned by Jürgen Falter.

The Nazi Party did not make much of an impression on the Wetzlar region before the end of 1930. This is surprising, given that Wetzlar town and county met all the well-known religious and socio-economic pre-conditions theoretically conducive to Nazi growth. Despite the predominance of the Protestant faith among the population, despite the rural, small-town character of the area, despite the fact that the party had an organizational history in Wetzlar town which stretched back to the early 1920s, and despite the establishment of a number of active Nazi centres in the county following the re-formation of the NSDAP in 1925, the party was of little consequence in the region before late 1930. The performance of the NSDAP in Wetzlar town and county suggests that there was not an inevitably strong, positive correlation between Protestantism and Nazism, not even by the time of the September 1930 *Reichstag* election in which the party polled a lower percentage in Wetzlar town and county than it achieved in the most Catholic county of *Gau* Hesse-Nassau, the Rheingaukreis.⁸⁷ In Wetzlar town the Nazi Party never really made much headway before 1933, in contrast to the rapid expansion of its membership and electorate in the course of 1931 and 1932 in Wetzlar county. The stark contrast in the electoral performance of the NSDAP in Wetzlar town and county was accompanied by an equally striking difference in the social types gravitating to the party in the early 1930s. Whereas in Wetzlar town the *Mittelstand* dominated membership recruitment to May 1933, working-class supporters formed the majority of its membership in the county. Within the county, however, the occupational and class profile was infinitely variable from locality to locality. The Wetzlar data suggest that the Nazi Party suffered from a very high turn-over rate before 1933 which was even greater than that recorded for the party as a whole. Workers who joined the NSDAP in the region before 1933 appear to have left it again in greater numbers than those recruited from the middle class. As far as the gender aspect and age profile of the party in the Wetzlar region is concerned, however, it conforms strongly to the national pattern. Overall, in terms of the social background of its membership, it was a predominantly young, male *Volkspartei* before the Nazi *Machtergreifung*.

⁸⁷ In the Rheingaukreis, which had a broadly similar socio-economic structure to *Kreis* Wetzlar, the Nazis secured 18,1 per cent of the vote in September 1930; electoral percentage calculated on basis of data in *StDR*, 382, 11 (Berlin, 1932), 43. According to the 1925 census, Catholics accounted for 87,5 per cent of the population; figure taken from *StDR*, 451, 111 (Berlin, 1930), 54.