



Young *Naturfreunde* in the Upper Bavarian district meet at the Rohrauerhaus, 1924. Courtesy of the Naturfreunde Deutschlands, Bezirk München.

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The Tourist Association “Friends of Nature” and Working-Class Hiking in Interwar Germany, 1919-1935¹

For years, historians have tended to cast Social Democratic cultural efforts during the Weimar Republic as insufficiently progressive, too “bourgeois” in outlook and everyday practice, and therefore ineffective in building a solid ground of working-class support for Germany’s fledgling democracy. A general consensus has evolved, according to which the weaknesses of the moderate workers’ cultural movement contributed to the Social Democrats’ failure to hinder the Nazis’ accession to power.² This essay revisits socialist cultural mobilization in a less judgmental and less teleological way. My analysis avoids the common tendency among scholars of Weimar to begin with liberal democracy’s failure and work backward in a quest to uncover the causes of that failure. Rather I focus here on one

¹ This essay is adapted from John A. Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940*, © 2007 Board of Trustees of Leland Stanford Jr. University, reprinted by permission of the publisher. Please note that the author has not incorporated post-2006 publications on the TVDN and welcomes any additional insights from their authors at johnw@bradley.edu.

² See, for example, Josef Mooser, *Arbeiterleben in Deutschland, 1900-1970* (Frankfurt, 1984); David Barclay and Eric Weitz, eds., *Between Reform and Revolution: German Socialism and Communism from 1840 to 1990* (New York, 1998); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford, 2002). A more positive view can be found in K. H. Pohl, *Die Münchener Arbeiterbewegung* (Munich, 1992); Hans-Werner Frohn, *Arbeiterbewegungskulturen in Köln, 1890 bis 1933* (Essen, 1997).

organization within the vast network of socialist cultural organizations, the Tourist Association “Friends of Nature” (*Touristenverein “die Naturfreunde”*—TVDN).

The *Naturfreunde* movement promoted a proletarian “turn to nature” through hiking, with the goal of improving the working class’s physical, mental, and political strength. This project has to be seen within the ambiguous context of postwar malaise, competition for mass support, and myriad projects of national healing that characterized everyday popular culture in Weimar. Looking at socialist cultural efforts in this way allows us both to address the old question of success vs. failure and to ask entirely new kinds of questions. How did the socialist subculture address the everyday problems and desires of Weimar’s industrial workers? What relationships between moderate Marxism, the working class, and nature did the *Naturfreunde* create? To what extent was the socialist turn to nature progressive for its time?

I stress from the outset that the *Naturfreunde* movement for the most part conformed to a capitalist system that forced workers to rely on their bodily health as the prerequisite of their economic survival. Nevertheless, they cannot be justifiably accused of political apathy or “embourgeoisement.”³ TVDN leaders hoped to help German workers democratize the political and economic system from below. They are a classic example of the general effort by the socialist Workers’ Cultural Movement to transform the skilled German workers into “New Human Beings,” who would lead the nation toward a better future characterized by genuine popular participation and social equality.⁴

The most original contribution of the *Naturfreunde* was the notion of “social hiking.” This kind of hiking took groups of workers through their regional homeland, exposing them to the environment of the countryside and the industrial town, as well as to the social conditions of rural and urban workers. Social hiking was intended to reveal how working people lived and how capitalism was preventing them from developing “an active mind in a strong, beautiful body.”⁵ By combining experiences of the rural landscape with a strong commitment to social justice, the Weimar

³ Since 1984 several German studies of the *Naturfreunde* have appeared. These are primarily organizational histories, and analyses of ideology and practice are few. Those that address ideology generally make the misleading argument that the TVDN was fundamentally “bourgeois” and thus a failure. Williams, *Turning*, 283-84.

⁴ On the *Arbeiterkulturbewegung*, see Rob Burns and Wilfried van der Will, *Arbeiterkulturbewegung in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt, 1982); Friedhelm Boll, ed., *Arbeiterkultur im europäischen Vergleich* (Munich, 1986) and *Arbeiterkulturen zwischen Alltag und Politik* (Vienna, 1986); W. L. Guttsmann, *Workers’ Culture in Weimar Germany* (New York, 1990); Peter Lösche, ed., *Solidargemeinschaft und Milieu: Sozialistische Kultur- und Freizeitorganisationen in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin, 1990-1993, 4 vols.).

⁵ Theodor Waechter, “Soziales Wandern,” *Aufstieg* (1929): 1.

Naturfreunde thus attempted to use leisure as a tool to raise working-class consciousness and strengthen the proletarian collective.

Organization and Ideology

The *Touristenverein "Die Naturfreunde"* was founded in 1895 by a small group of Social Democratic artisans in Vienna. From the beginning the *Naturfreunde* saw capitalism as the enemy, arguing that capitalists alienated workers from nature by claiming the natural landscape as private property. The *Naturfreunde* wanted to give workers access to the natural landscape, a goal that was reflected in their official slogan. In opposition to the powerful bourgeois Alpine Association, whose motto was "*Berg heil*" ("Hail the mountain"), they adopted the populist motto "*Berg frei*" ("the mountain is free," i.e. accessible to workers). By 1905 the movement had spread to Germany, where it attracted some 12,000 mostly skilled male workers and an indeterminate number of their family members.⁶

Soon after the Weimar Republic was founded, the national TVDN organizational network became fully autonomous from the movement's international leaders in Vienna. In 1923 a German leadership committee took up residence at its office in Nuremberg. It presided over a federal structure in which eighteen district branches and hundreds of local groups maintained a high degree of independence. The membership of the TVDN expanded significantly in early Weimar, from 20,753 people in 1919 to 116,124 in 1923. More non-proletarian members joined, most notably employees, civil servants, educators, and artists.⁷

The TVDN invested time, energy, and money establishing collectively-owned property in the form of *Naturfreunde* houses. These served members as overnight hostels and as sites of meetings and celebrations. The number of such German houses rose rapidly, from forty in 1922 to 160 in 1926 and 230 by the end of 1931.⁸ Building projects were financed through members' contributions, lotteries,

⁶ Workers' wives and children were categorized as *Anschlußmitglieder* and were not counted in the TVDN's official statistics. See Williams, *Turning*, 76-77. On the Alpenverein, see Helmut Zebhauser, *Alpinismus im Hitlerstaat* (Munich, 1998); Anneliese Gidl, *Alpenverein: Die Städter entdecken die Alpen. Der Deutsche und Österreichische Alpenverein von der Gründung bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Vienna, 2007).

⁷ The most politically radical districts were Brandenburg and Thüringen, and there were also communist-led local groups in Berlin, Württemberg, and the Rhineland. Viola Denecke, "Der Touristenverein 'Die Naturfreunde'" in Franz Walter, et al, *Sozialistische Gesundheits- und Lebensreformverbände* (Bonn, 1991), 242-43, 273-75, 285.

⁸ Historische Kommission zu Berlin (hereafter HKB), NB457: TVDN Reichsleitung to Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschafts-Bund (July 19, 1926); Wulf Erdmann and Klaus-Peter Lorenz, "Baumeister der neuen Zeit: Das

and subsidies or loans from local governments; and municipal governments sometimes donated building sites or materials. The SPD and trade unions often lent their support by petitioning authorities and publicly singing the praises of local TVDN groups at their groundbreaking ceremonies. Of course, the *Naturfreunde* had to compete for state funding with myriad other organizations. One way they tried to solve this problem was by joining its staunchest competitor for funding, the National Federation of Youth Hostels, in 1926. In return, *Naturfreunde* houses opened their doors to all adolescents, bringing many of them into contact with socialist hikers for the first time.⁹

The *Naturfreunde* were obliged to formulate their overtures to the state in language that was as politically neutral as possible. This was not all that difficult, for they shared the Weimar state's interest in social reform in general and the welfare of young people in particular. The local group in Neustadt, for instance, used typical "youth cultivation" rhetoric, arguing that working youths needed a *Naturfreunde* house "to steel the body for new work, to prevent sickness, and to encourage serious weeknight activities for body and mind without the pressure to drink and smoke." Particularly during the winter, the lack of such meeting places was "driving youths into the arms of pulp literature and all the other enervating, de-moralizing winter activities, including the immoderate enjoyment of alcohol and tobacco."¹⁰

Such appeals were sometimes couched in terms of the good of the nation. The same Neustadt group reminded the Palatinate state government in 1923 that the working populace was suffering from the French occupation of the Rhineland. Due to the policy of passive resistance, there were many unemployed workers who would be helped by participating in the building project. "This house will be one day be a monument that bears witness to the fact that in a time of hardship, there were men and women here who gave their all for the good of the people and the Fatherland."¹¹ In no sector of Weimar political culture (except for the far left) was this brand of defensive nationalism unusual at the time. Its use, and the use of youth cultivation rhetoric, shows the cleverness of the *Naturfreunde* in using politically consensual language in their appeals to the authorities.

In spite of the political divide between Social Democrats and Communists that weakened the Weimar labor movement, the membership of the *Naturfreunde* was politically varied. Leaders merely

Naturfreundehäuserwerk entsteht" in "Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit": *Die Naturfreunde*, ed. Jochen Zimmer, et al (Cologne, 1984), 141-83.

⁹ HKB, NB457: "Grundsteinlegung des Naturfreunde-Ferienheimes und der Jugendherberge Am Üdersee"; Anon., *Das Naturfreundehaus auf dem Rohrberg bei Weissenburg in Bayern* (Nuremberg, 1925): 7-8.

¹⁰ Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv München (hereafter BayHStAM), MK13977: TVDN Ortsgruppe Neustadt to Stadtverwaltung Neustadt (November 12, 1922). On youth cultivation, see Williams, *Turning*.

¹¹ BayHStAM, MK13977: TVDN Ortsgruppe Neustadt to Regierung der Pfalz (July 24, 1923).

expected that a member would belong to one or the other Marxist party, and a significant minority of functionaries and members belonged to the Communist or Independent Socialist parties.¹² The few available memoirs claim that the rank and file members, be they socialists or communists, generally got along well in the local organizations. This reflected the lack of a strict segregation between communists and socialists in everyday life; they lived often side-by-side and interacted peaceably within working-class neighborhoods.¹³

Nevertheless, finding political consensus was difficult. Ideological divisions over practical and doctrinal issues increased among the leaders and functionaries, if not in the rank and file. In 1923-1924 and again in 1930-1932, the national leaders in Nuremberg, all Social Democrats, chose to expel thousands of communist-affiliated members as punishment for their attempts to push the movement in a more radical direction. During the first open controversy in 1923-1925, the membership fell from its all-time high of over 116,000 members to 83,853 by the end of 1924. By 1926, less than one-half of the membership of 1923 remained. After 1926 the numbers stabilized, and the TVDN began a phase of slow but steady growth, reaching about 61,000 by 1929. By the late twenties, the TVDN was a skilled workers' and lower middle-class movement that was mostly committed to moderate socialism. It might well have eventually regained its 1923 levels if the Depression, and another surge of political polarization, had not put an end to the positive trend. Membership began to fall again, albeit more gradually. There were 59,126 *Naturfreunde* in 1930, and 58,134 in 1931. Still, even as late as 1931 there remained over 800 local groups in Germany.¹⁴

Political disagreements were not the only source of trouble for the *Naturfreunde*. Two broad trends threatened to deprive the movement of support from industrial workers and the lower middle class. One was the rationalization of industrial labor, which was evidently both exhausting and dispiriting for many factory workers.¹⁵ An even more significant challenge was the expansion of the mass media and mass sports in the 1920s, which offered workers more ways to spend their leisure time than they had ever had before. The *Naturfreunde* thus had to work harder to convince workers that getting up early to go hiking was both a fun and meaningful way to spend one's precious free time.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Denecke, "Touristenverein," 276-77; Klaus-Michael Mallmann, *Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik* (Darmstadt, 1996).

¹⁴ Denecke, "Touristenverein," 257, 273-75. No 1932 figures are available.

¹⁵ Herbert Winkler, *Die Monotonie der Arbeit* (Leipzig, 1922); Alf Lüdtk, "'Deutsche Qualitätsarbeit,' 'Spielereien' am Arbeitsplatz und 'Fliehen' aus der Fabrik: Industrielle Arbeitsprozesse und Arbeiterverhalten in den 1920er Jahren" in Boll, *Arbeiterkultur*, 155-97.

To popularize and lend meaning to their movement, *Naturfreunde* leaders and spokespersons constructed in their public discourse official narratives of progress through “turning to nature.” Although they sought consensus surrounding such narratives, this was a tall order, as we will see. Nonetheless, there was a basic pattern that any narrative of turning to nature followed. It began with a detailed diagnosis of a particular social crisis (or crises). The next step involved advocating and describing an ideal method of turning to nature. The narrative concluded with a vision of improvement for the individual, for the entire membership of the TVDN, and ultimately for the entire nation.

It was easiest for Weimar *Naturfreunde* leaders to find a consensus regarding the problems that workers were facing. The first problem that they pinpointed and continually stressed was the exclusion of the working class from access to rural nature. Indeed, since its beginning the movement had represented such access as a basic human right and had attacked the capitalist system of private property for hoarding the rural landscape. Karl Renner, one of TVDN’s founders in Vienna, voiced this critique already in 1896 as follows:

Not a single piece of the earth belongs to us. The house in which we live, the workshop in which we toil, the fields through which we hike—everything belongs to others. The tree under which we rest, the caves in which we seek shelter from the storm, the forest whose clean air strengthens our lungs—all of nature experiences us as strangers. We are strangers on this earth, for we have no part of it! They have left only the street to us! . . . They have divided the earth . . . among themselves and have granted us only the dust of the street.¹⁶

This lament, and the desire to appropriate the natural world, paralleled the labor movement’s more general and ongoing attempt to gain access to Germany’s classical cultural traditions, as represented by the works of Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, and others. It also paralleled the Marxist goal of appropriating the means of industrial production for the good of workers.

Another problem that the Weimar *Naturfreunde* commonly stressed in their narratives was the rationalization of industrial production. This streamlining of work processes and regimentation of the work force commenced in some industries during the period of relative stabilization in the mid 1920s. Social Democratic and union leaders generally supported it as necessary, if not progressive.¹⁷ Yet the TVDN took a starkly negative view of the process, not only as a cause of structural unemployment, but even more so as a threat to the worker’s body and psyche. As rationalized work processes took

¹⁶ Karl Renner, “Der Arbeiter als Naturfreund und Tourist,” *Der Naturfreund* (1926, orig. 1896): 3-4.

¹⁷ Hans-Albert Wulf, “*Maschinenstürmer sind wir keine*”: *Technischer Fortschritt und sozialdemokratische Arbeiterbewegung* (Frankfurt, 1987).

away the individual's humanity, he sank "into night and horror." The worker was becoming a docile, easily exploitable part of the machine who just happened to be made of flesh, blood, and mind.¹⁸ These experiences, wrote the TVDN essayist Adolf Lau, "wear down any upwards-striving powers in the human being," turning the worker into "a docile beast of burden who knows no real cultural needs and thus has no part in the lively workings of nature." The only experience of nature left to the worker, Lau concluded, was the purely biological growth and decline of the physical body.¹⁹ Such arguments were an innovative extension of the Marxist critique of alienation: the modern worker was not only alienated from the work process, but from nature itself.

A third problem that the *Naturfreunde* diagnosed was the threat of urban life to workers' physical and mental health and, ultimately, to political health as well. The city was a "stony desert" in which "millions were striving for air and light." It distracted and weakened the working class with "its modern non-culture (*Unkultur*), its poisonous enjoyment spots, its slick streets and people, its noise and unnatural smells of factory smoke and perfume, its breeding-grounds of terrible 'culture'-sickness."²⁰ And like most others on the left, the *Naturfreunde* were suspicious of the new and increasingly popular mass media, movies in particular. The cinema, they announced, was a capitalist enterprise bent on exploiting the "taste of the uneducated masses," who "willingly let themselves be betrayed and deluded."²¹

There is reason to doubt that this forceful rhetoric against mass urban culture had a great influence on the rank-and-file. Working people partook of many different kinds of leisure pursuits and forms of sociability including, but not limited to, organized movements like the *Naturfreunde*. Indeed, the attack on mass media simply reflected the obvious availability of the many new ways for workers to spend their leisure hours, most of which were insufficiently political from the perspective of TVDN leaders. The need to win workers' support in the face of such competition made developing the second step in the narrative of progress—the formulation of methods of turning to nature—difficult for *Naturfreunde* leaders. For there was disagreement over how to make organizational practice appealing and popular; and that, it soon became clear, was fundamentally an issue of politics.

¹⁸ Fritz Endres, "Die ideellen und kulturellen Werte der Naturfreunde Bewegung," *Nordbayerischer Wanderer* (1930): 20; Karl Eckerlin, "Warum Arbeitersport- und Wanderbewegung?," *Aufstieg* (December, 1929): 1-2; Gustav Riemann, "Der Kampf um unsere Freiheit," *Nord- und Ostdeutscher Wanderer* (1930): 51.

¹⁹ Adolf Lau, "Naturfreundschaft als Faktor des kulturellen Aufstieges," *Der Naturfreund* (1926): 210.

²⁰ Anon., "Aufwärts!," *Rheinisches Land* (1927): 149; Theo Müller, "Neue Kultur—Naturfreundschaft," *Rheinisches Land* (1926): 129.

²¹ Richard Kunze, "Kinokultur und richtiges Wandern," *Der Wanderfreund* (1920): 66.

All *Naturfreunde* leaders could agree on the need to restore and maintain physical and mental health. They agreed that hiking was a great way to improve circulation, to provide relief from the crowded atmosphere of the working-class apartment, and to refresh the mind through exposure to a diversity of sensory impressions.²² The most controversial question was: how could hiking be used to raise the political consciousness of the rank and file and thus help them gain access to nature, resist rationalization, and avoid the ills of mass urban culture?

The Bavarian *Naturfreund* Walter Trojan described the difficulty of appropriating hiking for political purposes in a 1925 essay. The war with its ten million dead and ten million wounded signaled a negative turning point in world history, Trojan wrote. Would a generation come that had the energy and ability to construct a new world? Socialists had to look at present conditions clearly and pragmatically; they had to drop their utopian promise that one day “a magnificent empire of peace, freedom and fraternity and socialism” would come. Many workers were reluctant to fight capitalism directly, Trojan argued, because of their lack of freedom and their obligations to family. And workers longed for enjoyment in everyday life, because they understood that at the end of the path of life stood death. The working mass did not understand why not only work, but free time, had to involve struggle. Should their little bit of leisure also be a struggle?²³

A dominant *Naturfreunde* narrative of turning to nature through hiking developed rhetorically within this difficult context in the course of the 1920s. According to this narrative, which had become dominant by the mid-1920s in the published discourse of the *Naturfreunde*, work itself could provide no joy to the worker. Thus emotional experience had to be sought during one’s free time, and only free time could save one from slavery to the machine.²⁴ Sport alone was not the solution, since the entire human being, not just the body, needed relief and redemption in order to become politically strong. Hiking in a group of one’s peers was the best way to restore health, to offer the worker a diversity of sensory experiences and mental stimulation, and to strengthen the solidarity and political determination of the collective.

The emphasis on emotion was strong in this narrative, but it coexisted with a stress on progress through reason. Workers needed knowledge about the natural world, since only those who were

²² Anon., “Des Wanderns Einfluss auf die Nerven,” *TVDN, Gau Mittelrhein-Main* (December, 1921).

²³ Walter Trojan, “Das Erlebnis des Zeitgeschehens,” *Nordbayerischer Wanderer* (1925): 82.

²⁴ Gustav Riemann, “Der Kampf um unsere Freiheit,” *Nord- und Ostdeutscher Wanderer* (1930): 51.

attuned to science could take up the class struggle successfully.²⁵ Hiking, then, was a form of self-education in the “book of nature, whose pages are turned by the feet.”²⁶ In this way, political consciousness could be raised. “Our first duty is to give to the mass of the proletariat knowledge of nature,” announced the national leaders in Nuremberg. “But we will not stop at natural knowledge and hiking; both are useless if they fail to lead to the socialist deed.” This deed, according to these leaders, was exemplified by the building of *Naturfreunde* houses, which were symbolic utopian acts of collective solidarity.²⁷

These national leaders in Nuremberg spoke for the moderate Social Democratic majority in the TVDN. For the radical Communist and Independent Socialist minority, however, their narrative did not go far enough. The political divisions that emerged within the *Naturfreunde* movement resulted above all from the radicals’ formulation of their own alternative narrative of turning to nature, at the end of which lay not peaceful democratization through reform, but violent revolution.

This radical alternative narrative took shape as the moderate TVDN leadership began to clamp down on the Communist minority. At the 1923 national conference in Leipzig, a majority of *Naturfreunde* delegates agreed on the programmatic separation of political work and leisure activities, thereby sidestepping the strategic question of how to combine leisure and politics. Responding to the criticisms of the left-wing minority that such a separation would lessen the movement’s political strength, Carl Schreck formulated a more specific resolution that the movement would be solely concerned with “the cultural value of hiking and the processes of nature.”²⁸ A special conference adopted Schreck’s resolution in October 1924, simultaneously granting the national leadership committee the right to expel individual members as well as entire local groups. The leaders in Nuremberg first exercised that right against the entire Brandenburg district, where local groups had been joining the revolutionary communist sports movement. They also expelled local groups in Solingen, Remscheid, and Cologne for the same reason.²⁹

²⁵ Bruno Krause, “Wissenschaft und Klassenkampf,” *Die Naturfreunde: Mitteilungsblatt für den Gau Rheinland* (November, 1924): 1.

²⁶ Fritz Endres, “Vom Sinne des Wanderns,” “*Berg frei*”: *Mitteilungsblatt des TVDN, Gau Pfalz* (1922).

²⁷ Bundesarchiv Berlin, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR (hereafter SAPMO-BArch), RY22/V SUF/419: Reichsleitung to TVDN, Gau Brandenburg (July 15, 1924).

²⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 250.

²⁹ SAPMO-BArch, RY22/V SUF/419: Reichsleitung to Gau Brandenburg; Augustin Upmann and Uwe Rennspiess, “Organisationsgeschichte der deutschen Naturfreunde Bewegung bis 1933” in Zimmer, et al, *Zeit*, 81-82; Denecke, “Touristenverein,” 251. Solely from the standpoint of organizational unity, these expulsions were justified, as the KPD was conspiring to destabilize the TVDN by creating communist factions at the local and district levels. Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereinafter BArch), R58/782: “Diskussionsgrundlage für die Regelung der Frage des Arbeiter-Wanderer-Bundes und des TVDN” in “Auszug aus Informationsblatt der KJD, Bezirk

In a special issue of their district journal entitled “Against the Current,” the Brandenburg leaders presented their response to the moderates. It is here that we find the radical narrative, which was rationalistic, militant, and masculinist. The radicals rejected the notion of a “third column” according to which the workers’ cultural movement should leave economic and political issues to the parties and unions. For them there was no such thing as politically neutral cultural forms. They also rejected the moderates’ emphasis on emotion, which they saw as emptily sentimental “gushing about nature” (*Naturschwärmerei*). “The path of the proletariat in the homeland of Romanticism lead not ‘back to nature,’ but over barricades and mountains of corpses. They are hard, stony, and shadowless.” Given this emphasis on militarism, what really counted for the radicals was “the task of building, through systematic physical cultivation (*Körperpflege*), a healthy, naturally-developed troop of fighters to achieve and sustain a proletarian people’s state.”³⁰

Radicals in the *Naturfreunde* were thus representing themselves by 1924 as forward-looking, energetic class warriors, in contrast to the allegedly weak moderate majority. However, their actual narrative of improvement through hiking was strikingly similar to that of the moderates, and it was thus somewhat at odds with the hyper-rationalist and militarist verbiage. This hiking narrative began with a worker’s encounter with the local natural setting of his homeland, an encounter that was simultaneously emotional and rational: “Hiking in the region of the *Heimat* reveals an unknown world to the proletarian who is eager to learn. He sees nature at work in all its restless, intermeshed, and interdependent processes; and he is seized by a great love of nature that allows him to understand it.” The narrative then moved to the healing power of nature and its ability to show the hiker how unnatural capitalism was: “[Nature] heals the worker’s body and mind, [and he] comes to recognize the processes at work in human society and the unnatural state of affairs in the capitalist system.” This experience of a nature that was running according to natural laws of justice would then spark the worker’s political anger and his will to fight: “He feels himself strong, in complete possession of his powers, and he dares to reproach society for its lack of morality, culture, and authenticity. But the worker does not restrict himself merely to criticism. He takes up the fight alongside his comrades to establish proletarian cultural values.”³¹

Nordbayern Nr. 5 vom 25.7.24,” attached to Preussischer Minister des Innern to Polizeipräsidenten Abteilung XA (October 16, 1934).

³⁰ SAPMO-BArch, RY22/V SUF/420: Herrmann Leupold, “Die Kultur des Proletariats und die Aufgaben der Naturfreunde Bewegung,” *Gegen den Strom* (1924): 6-7, and Emil Jensen, “Die proletarische Kulturbewegung” in *ibid.*, 9.

³¹ Jensen, “Kulturbewegung,” 10.

The joining of reason, emotion, and political militancy in this rhetoric of the early 1920s reflected the aim of creating an actively fighting working class, an aim held by the radical left throughout the Weimar years. Yet this version of the narrative was still based on a holistic notion held in common with moderate *Naturfreunde*, the belief that hiking would advance the working class not only physically and mentally, but also politically. That view remained consensual throughout the history of the Weimar *Naturfreunde*. Soon an innovative notion of “social hiking” took shape as the organization tried anew to find a way to combine politics, leisure, and nature in everyday practice.

“Social Hiking” and Representations of Nature

Even though the radicals’ demand to combine leisure and politics met with failure in the short term, their critique ultimately forced the *Naturfreunde* to recognize the need to develop a more overtly political method of turning to nature. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the *Naturfreunde* developed a consensual narrative of turning to nature politically through a new kind of “social hiking” (*soziales Wandern*). This was their most innovative and daring contribution to Weimar Social Democracy and to German culture in general.

In the process of developing the concept of social hiking, they deployed the word “social” in two senses. First, they spoke of *collective solidarity* among workers, which they believed could be created through the group nature experience. Divisions of gender and generation could be transcended, leading to mutual respect and the sense of class commitment that was necessary for the development of new leaders.³² Social hiking was also an opportunity to learn collectively about nature. As Mathilde Hürtgen of the Rhineland *Naturfreunde* wrote, hikers should teach themselves about “historical, regional, literary history; the study of plants, animals, geography; and human cultures and traditions.” The many possibilities of collective self-education, she asserted, made social hiking superior to all other kinds of proletarian sport.³³

Second, “social” stood in this narrative for political socialism, which would grow within the individual out the experience both of nature and of one’s fellow workers. Getting to know workers in other locales and professions, in other words, was a way to raise socialist consciousness. Hikers needed to study the living, working, and health conditions of other workers, their places of work and leisure, and their political attitudes and mentalities.³⁴ Above all, social hikers had to learn about the economic

³² Willy Buckpesch, “Der Wert des Jugendwanderns,” *Luginsland* (1927): 56-57.

³³ Mathilde Hürtgen, “Sollen wir Sport oder Kultur pflegen?,” *Rheinisches Land* (1926): 151.

³⁴ Werner Mohr, “Soziales Wandern,” *Der Naturfreund* (1930): 218.

backwardness and systematic inequality that were preventing Germany's progress toward social justice. As the Rhineland *Naturfreund* essayist Theo Müller wrote, "A short trip in which we observe the activity of the farmer, the poor forestry worker, and the craftsman can teach us more than any heavy tome."³⁵

Although this "social hiking" narrative of turning to nature became the dominant one in the TVDN after 1925, controversy persisted between moderates and radicals over the political efficacy of hiking in this way. In fact, whether a given local *Naturfreunde* group paid any attention to social inequalities during a hike depended on the group's political stance. Groups under a moderate leadership often found it easy to focus on everyday work processes in lieu of a critique of capitalist exploitation. For instance, in an exhibition entitled "*Heimat* and Hiking" held in Munich in 1928, the exhibit on social hiking contained an original weaver's room and pictures of other workplaces, as well as various examples of regional handicrafts. The presentation was picturesque, with no critical discussion of Bavarian workers' economic situation.³⁶ By contrast, more radical groups emphasized critical sociological understanding as a precondition for true social hiking. At the 1925 conference of the Württemberg district, debate raged over whether groups should read and talk about sociology alongside natural science during its meetings and hikes. Radical delegates argued that only Marxist sociology could show workers the way to liberation. Social hiking without this knowledge was not truly social. Yet this was a minority view at the conference. One of the visiting national leaders, Xaver Steinberger, spoke against the teaching of sociology, using the tried and true moderate argument that the *Naturfreunde* should avoid all overt (that is, radical) political activity. A vote followed, and the sociology resolution failed.³⁷

What did social hiking look like in practice? The frequency of TVDN hikes is impressive. In the Baden district, for instance, a total of 10,554 hikes with 115,279 participants took place between 1928 and 1931. 28 percent were hikes of just a few hours; 57 percent took an entire day; and 15 percent were hikes of several days' duration.³⁸ Anywhere from 7 to 70 men, women, adolescents, and children typically participated in a *Naturfreunde* hike. What of the solidarity-building and socialist elements of social hiking? Viola Denecke has argued that the kind of hiking in which cities were visited and political discussion took place never became popular in the TVDN.³⁹ But in truth, there is

³⁵ Theo Müller, "Ein 'Berg frei' dem neuen Jahr!," *Die Naturfreunde: Mitteilungsblatt für den Gau Rheinland* (January, 1925): 1-2.

³⁶ BayHStAM, MK13977: "Heimat und Wandern," *Fränkische Tagespost* (December 21, 1928).

³⁷ K.M., "Die Gaukonferenz in Stuttgart," *Aufstieg* (March, 1925): 1-3.

³⁸ Heinrich Coblenz, *Geschichte der badischen Naturfreunde* (Karlsruhe, 1947), 26-27.

³⁹ Denecke, "Touristenverein," 258.

simply not enough surviving evidence to be sure of this. Judging by the hiking announcements listed in district journals, groups on day hikes nearly always chose to leave the town and head for the countryside, which might imply an escapist attempt to leave the city and its problems behind. Yet longer journeys of a week or more often took hikers directly through towns and cities. Sometimes they even visited factories.⁴⁰

The extent of political discussion during *Naturfreunde* activities is also impossible to gauge. Each local group held talks and discussions, but not much of this appears to have dealt directly with socialist theory or political events. In the discussion evenings and public exhibitions of the Baden district, for instance, the focus was on the natural phenomena, geography, history, and folk traditions of southwestern Germany.⁴¹ There is other evidence that everyday discussions dealt mainly with natural phenomena and culture. Former *Naturfreund* Georg Graser described such occasions in another memoir:

[I remember] the weekend hiking trips and the meadows surrounding the houses where motley groups of cheerful young people would camp, interspersed with young-at-heart adult leaders, all of whom used the informal *Du* in speaking to each other. I remember the “workers’ academies,” where the teacher—often an older, well-known man of science—would sit naked but for a loincloth under a tree. In the grass around him would lay a crowd of tanned, naked young boys and girls. Everyone had the right to interrupt the teacher, to question and to correct him.⁴²

Even if this text does not indicate overtly political consciousness-raising, it does show that social hiking was taking place in the broader sense of building an egalitarian sense of community. Moreover, less formal discussions of politics may have taken place during hikes. According to the memoirs of former member Fritz Bohne, the *Naturfreunde* in their everyday activities studied botany, cooked, sang, and “did silly things together,” but there was also a great deal of political discussion.⁴³

Although we cannot draw any definite conclusions about political discussion in everyday TVDN practice, it seems clear that the *Naturfreunde* concept of nature itself was both democratic and socialist. The organization was obliged to appeal to workers by developing nature concepts and narratives of progress that meshed well with industrial workers’ everyday experiences. We have

⁴⁰ Eco-Archiv im Archiv der Sozialen Demokratie der Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung (hereafter Eco-Archiv), Ortsgruppe Kuchen, *Wanderberichtsbuch*: “Tageswanderung am 4. März 1928.”

⁴¹ Coblenz, *Geschichte*, 100-108.

⁴² Georg Glaser, *Geheimnis und Gewalt* (Stuttgart, 1953), quoted in Jochen Zimmer, “Vom Walzen zum sozialen Wandern” in *Studien zur Arbeiterkultur*, ed. Albrecht Lehmann (Münster, 1984), 161.

⁴³ Interview with Franz Bohne, reprinted in Zimmer, et al, *Zeit*, 282.

already seen that a vision of the rural landscape as a site of physical, mental, and emotional recovery emerged as an alternative to everyday living and working conditions in the industrial city. What else can be said about the *Naturfreunde* movement's representation of nature?

First, the movement fashioned a new socialist version of the *Heimat* concept. Often in Weimar Germany, the rhetoric of *Heimat* or “homeland” was shot through with nostalgia for pre-industrial social hierarchies.⁴⁴ But the *Naturfreunde* clearly distanced themselves from this conservative *Heimat* ideal, developing an alternative concept that represented the natural landscape of Germany as both rural and industrial and as a site of potential social equality. Journal frontispieces depict a landscape in which industry is embedded harmoniously in the rural landscape. This is the homeland behind the social hiking idea, in which city and country, industry and agriculture are all integral parts of the modern democratic nation. No part can exist without the others, and there is a strong ideal of equality between different ways of working and living.

This representation of the *Heimat* landscape as the unifying symbol of a socially diverse nation is also found in a 1931 speech on social hiking by one Dr. Schomburg. Addressing a meeting of *Naturfreunde* youths in northern Germany, Schomburg warned his audience not to seek only the sublime and the beautiful during a hike. Instead, the social hiker had to experience all the variety of the landscape, even that which seemed ugly. Thus *Naturfreunde* needed to hike not only in the agrarian countryside, but also through industrial towns. Nor should they hike only in the friendly seasons; they had also to face the storms of winter. Schomburg, in other words, was saying that there was much more to hiking than physical and aesthetic enjoyment—it was also about embracing all aspects of nature and the nation. And his ideal of social hiking transcended even nationalism. “We must expose the people to the diversity of life, not stopping at the political borders of the nation . . . Whoever wants to learn to hike in a truly social way must also hike at least once into foreign lands.” This would save the hiker from arrogance, for only in this way could people recognize that every nation, including Germany, had both good and bad qualities.⁴⁵ This version of *Heimat* demonstrates that the concept could merge with both the liberal-republican ideal of the nation and with the progressive internationalist tradition of socialism.

A second typical feature in *Naturfreunde* representations of nature was a strong current of rationalism. According to the “social hiking” narrative of progress, hiking would give workers a

⁴⁴ This rhetoric characterized the Weimar bourgeois conservationist movement, for example. Williams, *Turning*, 219-56.

⁴⁵ Prof. Dr. Schomburg, “Soziales Wandern,” *Der Naturfreund aus Gau Nordmark* (1932): 3-7.

chance to learn about the laws of nature firsthand. Such knowledge would show them that capitalist society was fundamentally at odds with natural evolution, which the *Naturfreunde* saw as an inevitable progression toward a more just human society. The authors who wrote along these lines saw humanity's evolution not primarily as a process of violent struggle, but as an orderly, egalitarian process of cooperation and symbiosis.⁴⁶ The following passage in a 1930 essay by Ludwig Ziegler constructs a parallel between nature and an ideal socialist community:

The simple observation that there is a uniform cell structure common to all plants and animals reminds of the equality that we are striving for in society. The study of plant and animal life reveals to us the existence of mutual aid among the organisms, the kind that we desire for our highly developed human race. Concepts like the division of labor, love, freedom, and joy—they can be comprehended in the processes that take place every day along the path of the proletarian hiker.⁴⁷

In his “hiking diary” another member drew similar political analogies to natural processes: “‘Mountains are kings, and wind and weather are the forces that wear them down into the valley of democracy.’ I read that somewhere once. So that would be progress? Culture? Leveling. Equalization.”⁴⁸ It should be noted that such gradualism was not to the liking of the radical minority of *Naturfreunde*, who tended to see human evolution as a struggle between the classes. Bourgeois society, wrote one, was “condemned to death by nature, which only knows eternal advancement . . . The dispossessed are in league with nature, and the possessing class is doomed.”⁴⁹

It seems unlikely, however, that ordinary members of the TVDN perceived nature in the same rationalist and scientific way as the spokespersons quoted above. There is very little we can say about the rank and file members' attitudes toward the landscape; the only remaining evidence exists in the form of a tiny number of hand-written hiking journals. One report from a local group in 1927, for example, describes six men and one woman taking the train to a nearby town, then hiking further.

After climbing a small hill we stood before the cliff wall. Beneath us was an old mill with a half-decayed water wheel covered in moss. Above us on the edge of the cliff, knotty linden trees rustled in the wind. We walked a little further and we stood before a waterfall that must present a wonderful spectacle when there is a lot of water.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ In this they were probably influenced by Peter Kropotkin's writings on symbiosis.

⁴⁷ TVDN München, *Festschrift zum 25jährigen Bestehen* (Munich, 1930), 39.

⁴⁸ Lutz Lersé, “Aus meinem Wanderbuch,” *Der Naturfreund* (1922): 82.

⁴⁹ M. Frenzel, “Natur und Mensch,” *Der Wanderfreund* (1920): 26.

⁵⁰ Eco-Archiv: Eugen Bielforth, report of a hike on October 16, 1927 in Ortsgruppe Kuchen, *Wanderberichtsbuch*.

This matter-of-fact language is typical of such reports, in which the authors generally use prosaic words or the term “romantic” when describing the landscape. A further bit of evidence comes from the few surviving photographic collections produced by *Naturfreunde* local groups.⁵¹ Without exception they show people contemplating a strictly rural landscape, with no sign of towns or factories. Often people look out over a rural landscape with their backs turned to the camera, echoing the classically Romantic landscape tradition of Caspar David Friedrich and others.

What this scanty evidence does suggest is that rank and file *Naturfreunde* did not view nature in a very rationalistic way. Indeed, some of the leading members who published their thoughts in TVDN journals seemed to realize this. They combined their interest in natural laws with a strongly emotional emphasis on reverence and happiness. For Walter Trojan, “Reason and emotion go hand-in-hand in the hiker, and this combination alone makes the full human being.”⁵² And Adolf Lau of the Rhineland *Naturfreunde* offered an optimistic vision of the future in which approaching nature in both a rational and an emotional way would make nature “the wellspring (*Born*) of new life energy.” “Every person will stand close to every other,” Lau predicted with striking optimism, “and all these individuals’ unique *internal* experiences of nature will unite, giving life to a higher community. This will be made possible by a friendship between human beings and nature that encompasses the entire world.”⁵³ This is an extraordinary statement of solidarity among people and with nature. It demonstrates that reason and emotion, the ideal of a democratic human community across national boundaries, and proto-environmentalist thinking could be joined together in a socialist concept of nature.

Indeed—and this is a third significant feature of TVDN concepts of nature—the Weimar *Naturfreunde* were unique in the entire Marxist labor movement in struggling against environmental destruction. At the forefront of the movement’s conservationist efforts were the relatively moderate leaders. The handful of more radical figures who had anything to say about nature protection argued that only the revolutionary destruction of capitalism itself would end the overexploitation of nature. This attitude was analogous to the dominant radical view of women’s rights and human rights, and it meant putting off efforts at practical change until after the revolution. Any such efforts at the present time would be a “useless waste of proletarian energies.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Magistrat der Stadt Mörfelden-Walldorf, ed., “Der Konrad, der hat die Mandoline gespielt und ich die Gitarre”: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Ausstellung zur Naturfreundebewegung der Weimarer Republik am Beispiel der Ortsgruppe Mörfelden (Mörfelden-Walldorf, 1992), 104-105; Wulf Erdmann and Klaus-Peter Lorenz, *Die grüne Lust der roten Touristen* (Hamburg, 1985).

⁵² Trojan, “Erlebnis,” 82.

⁵³ Lau, “Naturfreundschaft,” 212.

⁵⁴ For instance, Meyer, “Für den Naturschutz!,” *Der Wanderfreund* (1922): 77.

Historian Ulrich Linse has criticized the *Naturfreunde* for allowing “bourgeois values” to enter the movement in the form of conservationism.⁵⁵ At first glance, the history of German conservationism would seem to justify such criticism. The conservation movement had originated as an elitist, conservative project of the educated bourgeoisie at the end of the nineteenth century. At its heart lay antipathy to socialism and disdain for the “masses.” And yet, Linse ignores the potential of the conservationist idea itself to capture the imagination of German industrial workers, some of whom were already protesting pollution and landscape destruction in the late nineteenth century. Thus it is not surprising to find the *Naturfreunde* leadership already in 1911 adding “the cultivation of *Heimat* and nature preservation” to the organization’s national statutes.⁵⁶ This version of conservationism was not “bourgeois”; rather it was an adaptation of the *Naturschutz* idea to an oppositional protest movement. Moreover, conservationist ideology had much in common with the *Naturfreunde* goal of helping the common people recover from urban and industrial life. There was nothing uniquely conservative, bourgeois, or German about this. The demand for workers’ access to nature has characterized many conservationist initiatives elsewhere in the modern age.⁵⁷

Because conservationism was not inherently conservative, then, the *Naturfreunde* were able to incorporate it into their project of creating a socialist future. They asserted that nature conservation was a practical way to counter the harmful consequences of capitalist greed. As one essayist put it, most human beings were driven by “the fanatical desire for property,” so they looked at the landscape through the eyes of the “would-be owner.” This attitude was devastating for nature, for plants and animals were helpless against the invasion of the “vastly more powerful human species.” Conservationists in the *Naturfreunde* had to take up the struggle against this “mental condition” by popularizing a sense of community between human beings and nature.⁵⁸ This ethos of nature protection was communicated to *Naturfreunde* members in a number of ways. For instance, it was prominent in the movement’s rules of correct hiking:

Spare and safeguard nature! . . . Do not yell or make loud noise when moving through nature, especially in the woods. At resting spots, do not litter and do not break bottles

⁵⁵ Ulrich Linse, “Die ‘freie Natur’ als Heimat: Naturaneignung und Naturschutz in der älteren Naturfreunde Bewegung” in *Hundert Jahre Kampf um die freie Natur: Eine illustrierte Geschichte der Naturfreunde*, ed. Jochen Zimmer and Wulf Erdmann (Cologne, 1991), 68-70.

⁵⁶ Staatsarchiv Leipzig (hereafter STAL), PPL-V, Nr. 708: “Satzungen des Gesamtvereins, beschlossen auf der 7. Hauptversammlung zu München, Pfingsten 1913.” On proto-environmentalist attitudes and protest in the working class, see Williams, *Turning*, 67-69.

⁵⁷ Peter Coates, *Nature: Western Attitudes Since Ancient Times* (Berkeley, 1998), 161-62; Peter Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900* (Brighton, 1988).

⁵⁸ Anon., “Der Sinn des Naturschutzes,” *Rheinisches Land* (1926): 154.

and glasses. Anyone who likes to explore caves should avoid damaging their most beautiful ornaments, the stalactites and stalagmites. We ask all those who share our opinion in this matter to join us in the battle against false attitudes toward nature, and to help us fight hiking abuses (*Wanderunsitten*).⁵⁹

Naturfreunde essayists also called for laws to protect relatively undisturbed natural areas, and they voiced their support for activist conservation leagues like the Nature Park Association (*Verein Naturschutzpark*). The TVDN also undertook efforts to promote conservation in the general public through local exhibits and the distribution of flyers.⁶⁰

More daringly, the *Naturfreunde* sometimes participated in local protests aimed at preserving recreation areas near the cities. Local groups in the Rhineland, for example, protested against the regulation of the lower Rhenish waterways, which obliterated many of the lakes close to industrial centers. Young people seem to have been particularly active in this regard, on occasion even taking on the military. The *Naturfreundejugend* in Dresden held an “anti-war hike” in 1930 that culminated in their brief occupation of an army exercise field. Their purpose was to call attention to the destruction of nature by the military.⁶¹

Division and Destruction, 1929-1933

The *Touristenverein* “*Die Naturfreunde*” offered one of those alternative pathways that make Weimar culture in hindsight so interesting, a popular project that *might* have succeeded—if only it had had more time and a more stable economic and political context. Organized socialist hiking in the Weimar Republic was grounded in firm commitments to human rights, equality, and reverence for the natural world. At their best, the Weimar *Naturfreunde* showed that reason and emotion, the ideal of a democratic human community across national boundaries, and proto-environmentalist thought could indeed join together in a liberal-republican conception of nature.

But the period of relative political stability in the *Naturfreunde* was as brief as the time of stability enjoyed by the Weimar Republic itself. The years 1925-1928 were not adequate for the

⁵⁹ SAPMO-BArch, RY 18/II 142/1: TVDN, “Schutz und Schonung der Natur” (c. 1921).

⁶⁰ Markwart, “Der werdende Naturschutzpark in der Lüneburger Heide,” *Der Naturfreund aus dem Gau Nordmark* (October, 1924); Anon., “Zwei deutsche Naturschutzparke,” *Nordbayerischer Wanderer* (1925): 135; Die Gauleitung, “Unsere Arbeit im Jahre 1926/27,” *Nordbayerischer Wanderer* (1928): 50; Hans Peter Schmitz, “Naturschutz--Landschaftsschutz--Umweltschutz:” in Zimmer, et al, *Zeit*, 184-204; Jochen Zimmer, “Kleine Chronik ‘Naturschutz und Naturfreunde’” in Zimmer and Erdmann, *Kampf*, 78-81.

⁶¹ “Um den Schutz der Natur,” *Rheinisches Land* (1926): 137-39; Jochen Zimmer, “‘Grüne Inseln im Klassenkampf?’” in Zimmer and Erdmann, *Kampf*, 46.

TVDN to put down its roots firmly in popular culture. Unfortunately for the movement, there was a resurgence in 1928 of political struggle between the moderate majority and the radical minority within the TVDN. Following Stalin's accession to power in the USSR in 1928, the German Communist Party underwent a phase of radicalization that put an end to any chance of cooperation with the Social Democrats. The KPD more and more stridently criticized the SPD, and communist *Naturfreunde* worked to draw other members away from "social fascism," their new term for Social Democracy. In 1929 a number of local groups in Saxony, Thuringia, Württemberg, Saarland, and the Rhineland joined a newly created communist sporting federation, the Fighting League for Red Sport Unity (*Kampfgemeinschaft für rote Sporteinheit*). On the national level, an Oppositional *Naturfreunde* Committee was formed.⁶²

The Social Democratic leaders of the TVDN realized that not only the movement's political solidarity, but also its property in the form of *Naturfreunde* houses, were under threat. The national leadership committee in Nuremberg presented an ultimatum to the radical groups: either refrain from all "party-political activity" (such as membership in the Fighting League) or face expulsion. By the national conference in Dresden of August 1930, the TVDN had expelled several local groups. At that meeting, a majority of delegates supported the leadership's policy of expulsion; and the leaders at Nuremberg passed a resolution giving themselves authority to expel local groups without the official consent of the broader organization. This put a de facto end to the federalist division of powers among the eighteen *Naturfreunde* districts; henceforth crucial powers would be in the hands of a small number of anti-communist leaders in Nuremberg. These leaders demonstrated a high degree of political hypocrisy at the conference. Xaver Steinberger announced that there was room for different political viewpoints in the organization—as long as everyone refrained from agitation in support of specific parties. Yet he went on to call on the delegates to support the SPD in the upcoming national election to held on September 14, 1930, earning mockery from the opposition.⁶³

There followed many more purges of local groups from the TVDN—no fewer than 213 by 1932. The minority communist factions schemed to draw local groups into the KPD fold, with the "hiking section" of the *Fighting League for Red Sport Unity* developing strategies to that effect. Communists,

⁶² Upmann and Rennspiess, "Organisationsgeschichte," 85; Peter Friedemann, "Die Krise der Arbeitersportbewegung am Ende der Weimarer Republik" in Boll, *Arbeiterkultur*, 229-40.

⁶³ While the moderate leaders in the Nuremberg central committee have been justly criticized for their behavior at the Dresden conference, the radical minority at this meeting also contributed to the polarization by, for example, demanding that leading *Naturfreunde* functionaries leave the Christian church. "Die III. Reichsversammlung der Naturfreunde Deutschlands," *Der Naturfreund* (1930): 228-29; Eco-Archiv: TVDN Ortsgruppe Weissenburg, "Rundschreiben des TVDN Reichsleitung für Deutschland" (April 5, 1933), 3-4; Denecke, "Touristenverein," 244, 254-55.

they wrote, should send representatives to meet with local groups during their discussion evenings. They should attempt to take over the discussion, making sure that current politics as well as advancements in the Soviet Union took up time. Should this tactic fail, they would smuggle in new members to undermine Social Democratic influence.⁶⁴ The national leaders in Nuremberg responded with their own “defensive measures,” demanding that all new members undergo a background investigation to see whether they might be KPD spies.⁶⁵

Yet the situation was more complex than it appears, suggesting that the political divisions of late Weimar were forced on the rank and file from above. Despite polarization at the upper echelons of leadership, the tradition of solidarity that came from communal hikes and house construction continued to stabilize the movement in the early thirties. Communist and socialist *Naturfreunde* continued in several places to cooperate unofficially. People of differing political views could still make a local group function from day to day. Also, many groups were critical of both the moderate leaders and the radicals, committing themselves only tentatively to one side or the other. The local group in Leipzig, for instance, criticized the polarizers for losing sight of “the democratic rights of the membership,” and they called for a renewed commitment to political neutrality as the basis for reunification.⁶⁶

It seems possible that the “social hiking” consensus might have held the movement together if not for this power struggle between socialist and communist functionaries. However, in what might have been an unconscious attempt to quell emotions during this time of political strife, the spokespersons for *Naturfreunde* hiking undertook a rhetorical shift that may have further weakened the movement. This involved moving away from the aforementioned synthesis of rationalism and emotionalism that had become so integral to the “social hiking” idea. By 1929 *Naturfreunde* writers were representing social hiking as a strictly “no nonsense” practice and rejecting the reverent Romantic approach to nature as outdated, reactionary, and “bourgeois.” As one wrote, “The remnants of Romantic hiking in our ranks must be overcome, because unworldly Romanticism does not suit us, and it hinders us in our battle to conquer the world . . . The socialist is not only for a planned economy, he is also for planned hiking.”⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BArch), R58/782: “Rundschreiben Nr. 4 der Wandersparte der Roten Sporteinheit,” quoted in TVDN Reichsleitung, “Anhang zum Rundschreiben an alle Ortsgruppen vom 3.2.1933: Abwehr kommunistischer Wühlarbeit,” 3-4.

⁶⁵ TVDN Reichsleitung, “Anhang,” 7.

⁶⁶ “An alle Naturfreunde Württembergs!,” *Arbeiter-Wanderer: Organ der oppositionellen Naturfreunde, Gau Württemberg* (1931); Upmann and Rennspiess, “Organisationsgeschichte,” 77-88; SAPMO-BArch, SgY 2/V DF VIII/70: TVDN, Ortsgruppe Leipzig, “Für die Einheit” (c. 1930).

⁶⁷ Stechert, “Was ist soziales Wandern?,” *Jugend und Arbeitersport* (1932): 22-23.

Of course it is impossible to prove that the draining away of emotionality from hiking discourse reduced the attraction of the *Naturfreunde* for Germany's workers. But judging by the rare bits of evidence of working-class attitudes to nature, which were often infused with emotion and (sometimes Christian or pantheistic) reverence, we can reasonably infer that jettisoning Romanticism in favor of rationalism was a mistake. Here are just some examples from surveys of working-class young people:

How beautiful, when you see God's world waking up. Then you realize how small and insignificant we are in the face of nature.⁶⁸

My mother and grandmother still believe in God and go to church. That's not for me. If I want to pray, I can do it when I take a hike. There I see nature, and that is my God.⁶⁹

Religion is a far-reaching idea. Many people think that it is pious to go continually to church . . . I find that repulsive; for I and my colleagues have discovered that of 50 people who go to church, only five are truly pious. The rest go only to be admired in their new clothes or to have a rendezvous. My religion is nature with its many wonders. Here I feel divinity, here God's omnipotence reveals itself, here one sees that there must be a higher power.⁷⁰

In short, political division and, probably, the denigration of emotionality severely damaged the popularity of the *Naturfreunde*. The economic crisis that began in 1929 further contributed to the stagnation of the TVDN's membership and caused great financial difficulties for the movement. Many local groups could no longer pay their dues to the national organization, as even better off workers were falling onto hard times.⁷¹ Things grew worse as the Depression wore on. By 1932, one local group had only two employed members left, for instance; and there was a drastic decline in the numbers of young workers in the movement.⁷²

TVDN property also came under threat during these years of economic crisis. Local groups were often heavily in debt because of their building projects. Before the Depression, these debts had been met in part by fees charged to non-members to stay overnight in the houses. But such visitors

⁶⁸ Quoted in Robert Dinse, *Das Freizeitleben der Grossstadtjugend* (Eberswalde, 1932), 96.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Carl Stockhaus, *Die Arbeiterjugend zwischen 14 und 18 Jahren* (Wittenberg, 1926), 65.

⁷⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, 66.

⁷¹ Denecke, "Touristenverein," 281.

⁷² STAL, Polizeipräsidium Leipzig V, Nr. 4404: testimony of former member Arno Fleischmann given to Polizeipräsidium Leipzig, Abteilung IV (May 17, 1935); E. D., "Gau-Konferenz 1932," *Der Naturfreund aus Gau Nordmark* (July, 1932): 1-2.

declined rapidly in number after 1929, and groups began requesting help from the national leaders to save their houses from being reclaimed by creditors.⁷³

Moreover, as the Nazis' political fortunes improved in the crisis situation of late Weimar, the network of *Naturfreunde* houses became one of their targets. In 1931 the leader of the Frankfurt local group received the following letter from an anonymous Nazi:

I warn you, honorable Herr Comrade, that we are going to spoil the attempts by you pack of proletarians to contaminate the Taunus region with your so-called *Naturfreunde* houses . . . You dirty pack of proles belong in the factory, in prison, or at the pig-trough, but not in God's free nature. Germany awake, awake, awake!⁷⁴

Thugs undertook to vandalize some of the houses as well. For instance, in April 1932 they laid waste to one house near the northern town of Maschen and smeared it with swastikas. These attacks increased in frequency after the *Naturfreunde* entered the SPD's anti-Nazi propaganda federation, the Iron Front, in early 1932.⁷⁵

On January 30, 1933 President Paul von Hindenburg named Adolf Hitler chancellor of Germany. The Nazis used the Reichstag fire to convince Hindenburg to pass a "Decree for the Protection of Nation and State" on February 28. Using these and other police decrees, the new regime began to clamp down on the Marxist labor movement between March and May. Underestimating the Nazis' totalitarian determination to take complete control of the state and civil society, the TVDN national leaders in Nuremberg, Xaver Steinberger and Leonhard Burger, did everything they could to save the organization. This included attempts to downplay the movement's Marxist tradition and to appease the Nazis through "self-synchronization" (*Selbstgleichschaltung*). On March 16, Burger and Steinberger sent a memorandum to all local groups advising them not to do anything that might raise the suspicion of illegal activity. The TVDN had nothing to hide, they wrote, since it had always worked legally in the service of the nation. Therefore groups must obey all state laws and decrees and must take all possible steps against attempts of the now illegal Communist Party to invade the organization.⁷⁶

⁷³ TVDN Reichsleitung, "Anhang," 8; BArch, R58/782: Polizeipräsident in Frankfurt to Gestapoamt (August 30, 1933).

⁷⁴ Reprinted in Anon., "Die Nazis als Arbeiterfreunde," *Der Naturfreund* (1931): 73.

⁷⁵ "Das Naturfreundehaus in Maschen durch Nazis demoliert!," *Der Naturfreund aus Gau Nordmark* (May, 1932): 7-8.

⁷⁶ BArch, R58/782: TVDN, Reichsleitung für Deutschland to alle Ortsgruppenleitungen und Bezirksleitungen im TVDN Reichsgruppe Deutschland (March 16, 1933).

The Nazis struck first against the Baden district. In late March the police banned the TVDN there, confiscating all houses and the furniture, books, and other objects within. The National Federation of Youth Hostels now turned against the TVDN and asked the police (without success) to confiscate the *Naturfreunde* houses for the Federation's use.⁷⁷ The SA and the police began to take possession of houses elsewhere, prompting Steinberger and Burger to complain on March 24 to Nazi Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick. They assured Frick that the TVDN had never had anything to do with political parties and that for years they had worked against Communist attempts at subversion. They reaffirmed the movement's promise to work positively toward the new regime's goal of a national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), although they made no mention of "race" in this communiqué. On April 5 the national leaders sent a memorandum to district leaders announcing state bans on the TVDN in Baden, Bavaria, Thuringia, and Braunschweig. They demanded that such bans be unconditionally followed and reiterated the warning not to cooperate in any way with Communists.⁷⁸

During the spring of 1933, the Nazis exploited this kind of acquiescent behavior, which was all too common throughout the Social Democratic union and cultural movement leadership. They soothed the fears of labor movement leaders before striking against them. The regime finally dropped its facade in early May, first allowing the unions to celebrate May Day peacefully before turning on them with unexpected violence on May 2. In the face of this clampdown, Steinberger and Burger tried again to convince the Nazis of their will to "synchronize" the organization. On May 9 they sent Frick a long memorandum entitled "The Significance of the *Naturfreunde* Movement and the *Naturfreunde* Houses for People, State, and Nation." It was an essential characteristic of Germans, they wrote, to love nature, the *Heimat*, and hiking. The TVDN had made access to nature possible for all "estates" (*Stände*) and had improved the nation's health during the period of rapid industrialization. They had also fought for nature conservation, participated in youth welfare efforts, and promoted a spirit of camaraderie among Germany's "working peoples." They had fought an ongoing battle against Communists, who "wanted to use the organization for their own dark purposes." The movement's greatest achievement, the building of the houses, had been made possible by the workers' "boundless idealism and willingness to sacrifice." The movement as a whole had prepared Germany's working class for service to the national community:

Straightforward and unspoilt are those German laborers who gained internal values through hiking. They will easily find their way into the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the national state. The *Naturfreunde* movement, anchored in the working German people,

⁷⁷ Coblenz, *Geschichte*, 136.

⁷⁸ BAArch, R58/782: TVDN Reichsleitung to Preussisches Ministerium des Innern in Berlin (March 24, 1933); eco-Archiv, TVDN, Ortsgruppe Weissenburg in Bayern: Rundschreiben of Reichsleitung (April 5, 1933).

is prepared to devote its energies to the service of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* and to work for the new formation of the German state and national life. We await our incorporation into the developing German *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁷⁹

This kind of attempt to survive within a criminal system is never a pretty sight for historians, who wish there had been more resistance and search for the motives behind the toadying. Ulrich Linse has interpreted the May 9 memorandum as the result of bourgeois *Heimat* and conservationist ideology that had infiltrated the worldview of the national leaders. He maintains that the *Naturfreunde* leaders agreed in principle with the Nazis and genuinely wanted to participate, pointing to the disturbing fact that both Steinberger and Burger after 1933 found a personal niche for themselves within the Nazified *Heimat* and hiking movement.⁸⁰

Linse's causal argument is, however, unconvincing. He neglects Steinberger's and Burger's attempt to establish their anticommunist credentials, which plays at least as large a role in the document as the language of conservation and *Heimat*. And as I have shown in this essay, the *Naturfreunde* developed a discourse of *Heimat* that, while patriotic, had none of the nationalist chauvinism of many bourgeois conservationists and *Heimat* celebrants. The memorandum simply jettisoned this democratic *Heimat* rhetoric, selecting the more folkish rhetoric of the bourgeois movement. Does that mean that the authors of the *Denkschrift* suddenly subscribed in principle to the conservative tenets of bourgeois conservationism? It seems more likely that they made a pragmatic rhetorical move, something that could not have been very difficult given their knowledge of the various rhetorics of *Heimat*. Supporting this thesis is the fact that one of the key points of agreement between late Weimar bourgeois conservationism and Nazism, namely racist nationalism, is nowhere to be found in the May 9 memorandum. Moreover, if we look to the rhetoric found in the national leaders' official journal just days before Hitler became chancellor, we find that it was defiantly antifascist:

The German spring of the year 1933 lies far ahead of us in the fog. Brown storm clouds obscure its entry path and keep the sunshine of spring from reaching us. The wheel of time is being inexorably turned backward, the natural process of development [*natürliche Gang der Entwicklung*] is being brought to a standstill and prevented. But let the storm blow, for the victorious young energy of natural development cannot be destroyed.⁸¹

⁷⁹ BArch, R58/782: TVDN, Reichsleitung für Deutschland, "Denkschrift: Die Bedeutung der Naturfreunde-Bewegung und der Naturfreunde-Häuser für Volk, Staat, und Nation," 7.

⁸⁰ Linse, "Freie Natur," 69-70.

⁸¹ A.C. Gé., "Frühling ohne Hoffnung?" *Der Wanderer* (March 1933), 18-19.

Certainly the TVDN leadership's appeals to the Nazis were a betrayal of the Social Democratic emphasis on justice and democracy. But Linse's claim that the leaders were genuinely pro-Nazi in May 1933 is empirically insupportable. In my view, Steinberger and Burger were not expressing genuine support for Nazism; rather, they were opportunistically manipulating language in hopes of surviving the new regime. Given the basic simplemindedness of Nazi ideology, rhetorical tweaking cannot have been too difficult. The authors used the language of patriotism at every opportunity, especially the noun *Volk* and the adjective *deutsch*. They claimed that the *Naturfreunde* taught workers obedience to the state and love for the Fatherland. Instead of the word *worker*, they used the apolitical terms *working folk* and, better yet, *national comrade*. They demonized communism and silenced the movement's support for Social Democracy. Obviously the authors were walking a tightrope, telling the Nazis what they believed they wanted to hear while emphasizing the worth of their own tradition and experience.

It seems clear that the *Naturfreunde* leadership did not fulfill a sinister protofascist bourgeois tradition. Instead, they betrayed a progressive socialist one. We should, however, pause before condemning historical figures who were trapped, without the benefit of hindsight, in a terrifying political situation. Considering their position as Social Democratic functionaries in the days following the violent destruction of the labor movement, fear and desperation no doubt had much to do with Steinberger's and Burger's actions. Some light is shed by a comparison with another *Naturfreunde* leader's attempt to appeal to the Nazis on the local level. In late May the head of the Leipzig chapter, Werner Mohr, complained by letter to the police about their ban on the group and confiscation of its property. The Leipzig group had been neither Marxist, nor Communist, nor Social Democratic, he wrote. They had until recently been associated with the international leadership committee in Vienna, but only because they had always considered Austria to belong to the German nation. Mohr concluded his appeal by expressing the local group's desire to work for the new regime.⁸² The police were not convinced and remained suspicious of Mohr. Perhaps they were aware that Mohr was a member of the SPD, and that in 1930 he had written an article advising the *Naturfreunde* to learn from Marx, who had drawn "some of his best conclusions about society" during his long Sunday walks.⁸³

None of this is meant to excuse leaders' betrayals of Social Democratic principles during the Nazi takeover but simply to speculate why the betrayal occurred. What the sources do make clear is the leaders' desire to save the *Naturfreunde* organization and its property. In the May 9 memorandum, Steinberger and Burger gave extensive details about the debt still owed for over two hundred houses,

⁸² STAL, PPL-V 4404: Werner Mohr to Polizeipräsidium Leipzig (May 31, 1933).

⁸³ Werner Mohr, "Soziales Wandern," *Der Naturfreund: Mitteilungen des TVDN in Wien* (1930), 217-18.

which amounted to nearly two million marks. It lay in the interest of many thousands of creditors and thus of the national economy, they wrote, “that normal activity in the houses resumes as soon as possible so that we can pay our debts.” The *Naturfreunde* houses were ready to serve the new regime’s “high ideal” of strengthening the German nation, but only if they were managed by an idealistic hiking movement like the TVDN. Without the *Naturfreunde* running them, the houses, would be “like an organism without blood and energy.” Thus, the incorporation of the movement lay in the national interest.⁸⁴

These naive appeals fell on deaf ears. The Nazis’ aim at this point was to take over civil society by destroying all competition, and their most potentially powerful competitors were the Christian churches and the Marxist labor movement. They had no intention of allowing Socialists to play any important role in the new system. For state and national governments, the police, and the Gestapo, the *Naturfreunde* remained an untrustworthy, conspiratorial movement of international Marxism.⁸⁵ This suspicion abounded in internal state discussions of the movement in the spring and summer of 1933. For example, in late April the local TVDN group in Essen changed its name to The Association for Nature and *Heimat* Cultivation of Greater Essen. Yet the state prime minister in Düsseldorf refused to accept the group’s repudiation of Marxism. Just because they had changed on the surface, he wrote to the Prussian Cultural Minister, did not mean that they would stop “thinking and acting in a Marxist way.”⁸⁶

It is interesting to compare such suspicions with the regime’s treatment of the national leaders Xaver Steinberger and Leonhard Burger. Apparently the memorandum of May 9 convinced its readers of the leaders’ anticommunist and patriotic credentials, so both were able to find a niche in the “synchronized” hiking movement. Xaver Steinberger took up a leading position in a *Heimat* celebration club in Nuremberg and managed to bring five Franconian *Naturfreunde* houses into its possession.⁸⁷ Leonhard Burger pursued a new career in the National Federation for *Heimat* Hiking and Mountain Climbing, a long-established bourgeois organization that maintained a measure of relative independence by quickly synchronizing itself following Hitler’s accession to power. In the fall of that year, Burger gained permission from the Bavarian political police—apparently “due to his activity as a

⁸⁴ “Denkschrift,” 6-8.

⁸⁵ BayHStAM, MA 107384: Bayerischer Minister des Innern to Bayerische Staatskanzlei (June 17, 1933); BArch, R58/782: Staatspolizeistelle für die Regierungs-Bezirk Münster to Geheime Staatspolizeiamt in Berlin (July 28, 1933).

⁸⁶ BArch, R58/782: Der Regierungspräsident in Düsseldorf to Preussischen Minister für Wissenschaft, Kunst, und Volksbildung in Berlin (August 14, 1933).

⁸⁷ Steinberger was reestablished as postwar chairman of the TVDN, but he was tried and convicted for embezzling organizational funds in 1954. Christiane Dulk and Jochen Zimmer, “Die Auflösung des Touristenvereins ‘Die Naturfreunde’ nach dem März 1933” in Zimmer et. al. *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit* 116.

front soldier”—to found an official national journal for the federation.⁸⁸ Burger published and edited *Deutsches Wandern* for several years. His writings during the Third Reich were essentially repetitions of the May 9 memorandum, to the effect that through hiking “we come to the sources of national power and national life, find our way back to the historical energies and fates of our People and our *Heimat*, and feel ourselves to be part of the national whole, which we must subordinate ourselves to and serve.”⁸⁹ Burger and other writers repeated such clichés ad nauseam in *Deutsches Wandern* for the next ten years.

Thus the national leaders managed to benefit from their activities following the Nazi takeover, even if they did not succeed in saving the TVDN as a whole. But what of the thousands of *Naturfreunde* at the district and local levels? The few surviving sources suggest that the situation was complex and varied from place to place. The state expropriated all *Naturfreunde* houses in the course of 1933 and 1934. Some of them were sold to individuals, although most were transferred to the National Federation of Youth Hostels, which itself came increasingly under the control of the Hitler Youth. Many members moved into bourgeois clubs like the German-Austrian Alpine Association and local or regional *Heimat* groups. Many apparently also managed to preserve their sense of comradeship, even taking informal hikes in small groups.⁹⁰

The Nazi state’s attempts throughout the 1930s to stamp out the remnants of the *Naturfreunde* are well documented. The regime remained suspicious of former *Naturfreunde* and put them under surveillance in some places. In the Bavarian town of Holzkirchen, for example, the police spied on former members based on the suspicion that they were continuing to meet illegally.⁹¹ Even the organizations of the National Federation for German *Heimat* Hiking and Mountain Climbing were subject to surveillance if their members included former *Naturfreunde*. The police in Hamburg reported on a meeting in late May 1935 of the North German Hiking League, noting that the meeting place was a former *Naturfreunde* house and the hosts a former TVDN local group now called the Hamburg Hiking League. Some seven hundred people attended. During a speech in which the speaker talked about the close relationship between the German people and Adolf Hitler, plainclothes police observers noted that some groups “were whispering and laughing among themselves.” When the

⁸⁸ Hasso Spode, “Der deutsche Arbeiter reist’: Massentourismus im Dritten Reich,” in Gerhard Huck, ed., *Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit* (Wuppertal, 1980), 296; *Festschrift zum Ersten Großdeutschen Wandertage* (Berlin, 1940), 1; “Zulassung der Zeitschrift ‘Deutsches Wandern’ durch die Politische Polizei Bayerns,” reprinted in *Deutsches Wandern* (December, 1933): 3.

⁸⁹ Leonhard Burger and Fritz Stremel, “Dem ‘deutschen Wandern’ auf dem Weg,” *Deutsches Wandern* (December 1933), 2.

⁹⁰ Erdmann, “Wandern,” 25-27; Magistrat der Stadt Mörfelden-Walldorf, *Konrad*, 107.

⁹¹ Staatsarchiv München, LRA 150944, folder 19: file entitled “Auflösung der Holzkirchener Naturfreunde.”

speaker ended with a “threefold hiking greeting to the Führer” and a singing of the German anthem, a large number of attendees failed to raise their arm and to sing. Some did not even stand up—nor did the band play along. The Hamburg police concluded that the majority in this organization were “Marxist elements” who opposed the state, even if their leader “may well be a National Socialist.” They had opportunities to associate publicly, and they were hard to observe because they knew each other and were suspicious of newcomers. Therefore, they should be prevented from associating.⁹²

The report, though written from the police’s point of view, hints that the authorities had reason to doubt the commitment of former proletarian hikers to the Third Reich. Although we cannot determine the extent of opposition by former *Naturfreunde* and thus should not overstate it, a number of local groups clearly found ways to defy the regime. The Aschaffenburg *Naturfreunde* burned down their house rather than turn it over to the Nazis. They then rented a substitute hut and hiked there regularly until 1943. District leaders in Swabia advised people not to join bourgeois hiking groups, to work further illegally, and to maintain personal contacts with and between local groups. In the Mittelrhein/Main district, former Social Democratic and Communist members continued to meet illegally. And in Saxony, former members of the left-wing TVDN opposition were active in the Communist resistance.⁹³ These examples of defiance fortified the TVDN when they refounded their movement after the Second World War.

Conclusion

The decline of the *Naturfreunde* movement was due not to any inherent ideological weaknesses, but to the larger conditions of political polarization and economic collapse that weakened the Weimar Republic itself. Thus the problems of late Weimar can be seen in microcosm in the fate of the popular cultural movement that was the *Naturfreunde*. Culture and politics were intertwined then—perhaps they always are. But the history of the Friends of Nature also has something to tell us the complex relationship between culture and nature in the modern age. This movement was a left-wing example of a broader popular tendency, in Germany and elsewhere, to seek answers to the problems of modern life in a “turn to nature.” Proponents of such a turn to nature were deeply disturbed the consequences of capitalist industrialization and urbanization. Historians have long interpreted this critical stance as simply anti-modern; and in the German case, they have often accused nature movements before 1933

⁹² BArch, R58/782: Leiter der Staatspolizeistelle Harburg-Wilhelmsburg to Geheime Staatspolizeistelle in Berlin (June 3, 1935).

⁹³ Dulk and Zimmer, “Auflösung,” 114.

of setting the cultural stage for the “romantic” and anti-modern nature worship that *allegedly* characterized Nazism.⁹⁴

In fact, those cultural activists who focused on nature in the Weimar Republic were for the most part thoroughly modern and sometimes strikingly progressive for their time. The *Naturfreunde* movement’s offer of improved health, intertwined as it was with their socialist critique of capitalism, held great potential to attract those workers who desired the solace that contact with rural nature and with their fellow workers undeniably offered. Moreover, the determined efforts by *Naturfreunde* leaders and publicists to instill an ethic of stewardship in the working class, as well as the organization’s occasional public demonstrations in favor of nature conservation, are early examples of popular environmentalism in Germany. In this the *Naturfreunde* were swimming against the main current of Marxism, an ideology that shared with capitalism a technocratic, utilitarian notion of progress through the exploitation of nature.⁹⁵ The *Naturfreunde* saw in nature not only a realm of working-class liberation and health, but also something that had intrinsic value and beauty.

In this they conflicted directly with the Nazi leadership’s social darwinist instrumentalization of nature, which transformed the natural world into the alleged source of “natural laws” that justified their brutal social policies.⁹⁶ The Nazis quickly banned the *Naturfreunde* as a threat to the nation and did their best to track down and punish the surviving remnants of local groups throughout the 1930s. Nevertheless, through the Nazi “Strength Through Joy” initiative, they offered organized hikes in an attempt to negotiate the consent of industrial workers to their rule. This was itself an ironic measure of the popularity of proletarian hiking by the 1930s.⁹⁷

Ultimately the socialist hiking movement fell victim to the same crises that destroyed the Weimar Republic—the Great Depression, the polarization of political culture, and the rise to power of the National Socialists. Yet given more time and a more stable political and economic situation, the interwar *Naturfreunde* might have succeeded in using workers’ desires for a more healthy and natural life in order to strengthen the popular commitment to republican democracy.

⁹⁴ Countless works of history have cast nature movements before 1933 as proto-fascist. For a critique of this historiography, see Williams, *Turning*, passim.

⁹⁵ Coates, *Nature*, 149-51.

⁹⁶ See Williams, *Turning*, passim.

⁹⁷ On the hiking component of the Nazi *Kraft durch Freude* organization, see Williams, *Turning*, 94-104.

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