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Abstract: *»Mehrebenenverwaltung im Nationalsozialismus: Eine Neubewertung der politischen Struktur des NS-Staats«.* To explain the fatal efficiency and relative stability of the Nazi dictatorship, it is necessary to analyze how governmental institutions and society at various levels of the political system interacted. Contrary to the expectation that polycratic structures hampered administrative efficiency and tended to undermine well-established political structures it turns out that new models of governance evolved from the chaotic competition and short-lived cooperation of traditional administrations, party structures and newly created special institutions. While key players on the national level claimed to control lines of command from top to bottom the adaptability of the whole system to new challenges depended to a large extent on complex and often improvised arrangements of multi-level governance. During the war these arrangements served to integrate and to mobilize all political, administrative, military, economic and social forces whose resources were essential to sustain the war effort of the Nazi leadership.

Keywords: Mobilization, Gau, decentralization, Reich Defense Commissioners, polycracy, multi-level governance, Nazi Germany.

1.   Introduction

> The months of air war have doubled and trebled the powers accumulated [at] the
> regional level. Decisions can no longer be centrally made and enacted. The
> decentralization of [political action] and even of policymaking is vital
> in order to cope with the terrific problems created by bombing.
> (Neumann 1944, 537)

Franz Neumann's description of the disorder caused by Allied bombing contradicts our traditional view of the Nazi state as a tightly controlled and highly centralized totalitarian system. Neumann, a German sociologist and US émigré who wrote the book Behemoth in exile, describes how the Nazi state underwent a process of increasingly greater decentralization in the latter years of the war.

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He concludes that regional leaders, acting with a great deal of autonomy, were successful in many respects in dealing with the effects of the Allied bombing campaigns (Neumann 1944, 537).

In a similar vein, Peter Hüttenberger discusses in his 1969 study the increased powers enjoyed by the *Gauleiter* in the latter stages of the war (Hüttenberger 1969). Until the 1990s, the prevailing view was that mid-level authorities in the Nazi state were in constant conflict with each other, until complete chaos broke out in the final stage of the war. Thus Hans Mommsen argued government action collapsed into a "chain of ad hoc decisions shaped by personal bias," and the state degenerated into "an amorphous ensemble of different fiefdoms, held together solely by loyalty to the Führer and parallel administrative structures." In this way, the regime was "well on its way to collapsing into disparate regional authorities headed by jealous and mistrustful leaders who used violence as their primary tools of control" (Mommsen 2000, 237). From this perspective, it is perhaps surprising that the Nazi state persevered for as long as it did, collapsing only in the face of overwhelming Allied strength (Ruck 2011, 77-9).

This paper analyzes Nazi Germany from a novel perspective, drawing on the theoretical model of "multi-level governance" as an interpretive tool. In particular, the paper addresses the following questions: (1) What arrangements developed between actors and organs at various levels of the political system? (2) Were the horizontal and vertical structures of Nazi Germany's multi-level governance system circumvented by instances of "scale jumping"? (3) What effects did these phenomena have on the overall system? In answering these questions, I seek to determine whether the multi-level governance model, which is primarily used to analyze international policy coordination (Hooghe and Marks 2010, 17-31), is useful for understanding the functional mechanisms of the Nazi state.

As Neumann described, in the second half of the war, as the pressures on the home front grew considerably more intense, the individual administrative regions within Nazi Germany, known as *Gaue*, gained increasing powers. Thus, in our application of the multi-level governance approach, we must take temporal factors into account, for they are crucial to understanding how the relationship between various levels of the Nazi regime changed over time (Nolzen 2012, 243). Spatial factors are another important consideration, for *Raum* in the sense of "space" or "territory" was a key concept for the National Socialists. Indeed, overturning the post-WWI political order and establishing German hegemony over continental Europe through force of arms were goals that Germany's political leadership had been single-mindedly pursuing since 1933. German plans for the integration of the conquered Eastern territories were based on the ideas formulated for the political and spatial restructuring of areas that already belonged to Germany. However, even prior to the outbreak of war, the Reich's *Raumplaner*, or "spatial planners," came into conflict with military

officials (Leendertz 2008, 110), who primarily viewed geographic space as a potential venue for armed conflict (Nolzen 2012, 247-52).

Smaller regions and districts within the Nazi state were not only relevant as the recipients of policies formulated from above. The Nazis regularly invoked the notion of *Heimat*, or homeland, to build legitimacy for their rule and mobilize the civilian population. In doing so, they leveraged stereotypical portrayals of German identity that were popular among the nationalistic right. In this way, the small-scale, local levels of the state became important epicenters for "grassroot" displays of loyalty to the Nazi movement and the dissemination of propaganda. This active support from below was crucial for the implementation of political objectives decided at a central level (Steber 2010, 418). Accordingly, the exercise of power in Nazi Germany was subject to an ongoing process of reconciliation between actors who occupied different levels of the system, and who were regularly animated by divergent interests.

Over the past two decades the relationship between German society and its political leadership during the Nazi era has undergone a significant reassessment. Prior to the 1980s, the dominant view was that the German populace primarily "reacted" to the impositions of the regime, whether through resistance, acquiescence, or approval (Broszat and Fröhlich 1978, 11-73). However, recent research has explored the reciprocal relationships that existed between the apparatus of Nazi rule and society, investigating how interactions between "top down" and "bottom up" processes shaped the overall system. This method of investigation exhibits strong similarities to the multi-level governance model, as both approaches analyze how societal and para-governmental actors participated in the political system.

The first part of this paper examines the early years of the Nazi regime and seeks to identify the structural factors that subsequently contributed to decentralization. The second part of the paper examines how the Four Year Plan, Aryanization, and cultural propaganda influenced the shifting power relationships in the Nazi regime's multi-level political system. The third part of the paper looks at the various models of governance, described as *Neue Staatlichkeit* (Hachtmann 2007, 56-79), that were particularly important for governing the new territories added to the Reich after 1938. In the final section I draw on the multi-level governance model as a tool for explaining the complex interactions that took place at various levels of the political system and the resilience of the regime in the second half of the war.

2.   Hierarchical Confusion in Nazi Germany

The term *Gleichschaltung*, which eventually came to refer to the Nazification of all aspects of society, was originally used in 1933 to refer to the consolidation of the regime's control over Germany's federal states, or *Länder*. In this

way, *Gleichschaltung* initially referred to the destruction of the country's traditionally strong federal system which had been adopted during German unification in 1871. During the Weimar Republic, the powers of Germany's states had in fact been on the decline, particularly following Erzberger's financial reforms of 1919-20, the central government's interventions against the governments of Thuringia and Saxony in 1923, the practice of governing without parliamentary support, and the *Preußenschlag* of July 20, 1932. Nevertheless, as the Nazis came to power in 1933, Germany's federal system of government remained relatively decentralized, as the Weimar constitution guaranteed the states various rights and powers.

The National Socialists exploited Germany's federal structure in order to gain power in 1933. Following the "Second *Gleichschaltung* Act" of April 7, 1933, it became clear that Adolf Hitler's new regime sought to establish a highly centralized state. Immediately after the *Reichstag* elections on March 5, 1933, Germany's state governments were replaced by "commissionary representatives" from the NSDAP and SA. The Second *Gleichschaltung* Act then dictated the installation of Reich Governors (*Reichsstatthalter*), who were invested with broad authority to supervise the work of the state governments (Ruck 2011, 86). The Reich Governors, who were appointed by the Reich President based on Hitler's recommendation, were authorized to assume chairmanship of state cabinet meetings, without actually belonging to the state government. In the Prussian provinces, the newly installed *Oberpräsidenten* were invested with the same authority, and like the Reich Governors, were selected almost without exception from the ranks of the National Socialist *Gauleiter*.

With the replacement of Germany's state governments with Nazi loyalists and the subsequent installation of the Reich Governors, the Nazi leadership had launched a successful two-pronged attack against the intermediate level of the political system. Then, on January 30, 1934, the final remnants of German federalism were swept away with the adoption of the Act on the Reconstruction of the Reich. Article 2 clearly states: "(1) The sovereignty rights of the states are transferred to the Reich. (2) The state governments are subordinate to the Reich government." With the stroke of a pen the Reich Governors were subsumed under the authority of the Reich Interior Minister. While the state governments remained in place, they were transformed into mere administrative agents of the central government. In this way, even before key areas of government, such as the police and the judiciary, were fully centralized, a new political system was established that allowed Reich Ministers to ensure that Berlin's policy decisions were enacted down to the regional level (Minuth 1983, 1105).

Given this expansion of the Reich Ministers' authority, what was the future role of the Reich Governors? Were they to merely communicate to the state governments the directives issued by the Reich Ministers, as foreseen under paragraph 3 of the Reich Governor Act of January 30, 1935? Or were they

instead to assume leadership of their respective states, as provided for under paragraph 4? If the former mode of governance had been implemented, there would have been a continuous and direct chain of authority, with decisions made by the central government filtering down to the regional level through the Reich Governors. Yet the precise authorities invested in the Reich Governors were unclear. As Adolf Wagner, the Bavarian Interior Minister and *Gauleiter* of Munich-Upper Bavaria, critically noted in June 1934, it would have been more logical to eliminate the Reich Governors, State Minister Presidents, and State Ministers and replace them with local offices that represented the central ministries in Berlin (Minuth 1983, 1346).

Ultimately, only Jakob Sprenger in Hesse, Martin Mutschmann in Saxony and Karl Kaufmann in Hamburg availed themselves of paragraph 4 (Hütten-berger 1969, 91). The *Gauleiter* in Saxony and Hamburg invoked paragraph 4 in an effort to enhance their authority. Paragraph 4 enabled Mutschmann to prevail in the power struggle against his rival Manfred von Killinger, who had been appointed Saxon Minister President in 1933. Karl Kaufmann, for his part, laid the foundation for the establishment of the "*Reichgau*" of Hamburg (Lohalm 2005, 138). In some cases, there was a mismatch between a *Gauleiter*'s governmental duties and his territorial authority. For example, Alfred Meyer, the *Gauleiter* of Westphalia-North, was named the head of the district of Lippe in 1936, and was appointed *Oberpräsident* of Westphalia two years later. This led to overlapping and unclear territorial authority, in contrast to the intentions of the Reich Governor Act of 1935, as the *Gau* of Westphalia-South remained independent until 1945.

For various reasons the Reich Interior Ministry's reorganization of the country's multi-level political system ran into difficulties in the mid-1930s. On the one hand, there was an inherent contradiction in Hitler's assertion that Reich Governors should act as "public authorities who advance the National Socialist cause," yet not as "administrative authorities" (Mommsen 2000, 230). Underlying this statement was the assumption that the inspirational leadership of the Nazi regime was superior to administrative procedure, and that high-ranking party officials were not fulfilling their political role if they became immersed in bureaucratic detail.[1] Indeed, Hitler hoped to counteract the ossifying effects of established administrative routine with flexible leadership structures. His aim was to keep the political system flexible and dynamic, thus maximizing the regime's ability to mobilize the populace (John 2007, 47-8). It was for this reason that the paragraph 4 of the Reich Governor Act referred to powers that "could" be invoked on an optional basis (Ruck 2011, 87-8).

On the other hand, the Reich Governors had a privileged role within the regime, as they were personally appointed by Hitler. Their status would have

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[1] Martin Bormann: Rundschreiben 121/42, Führerhauptquartier 7.8.1942 (BArchB, NS 18/5, p. 2).

been crucially undermined if they had been made subordinate to the bureaucratic apparatus. As regional representatives of the party, they viewed their standing as equal to that of the Reich Ministers, despite their duty to obey the orders issued by the latter (Minuth 1983, 1228). In a letter of June 23, 1934, to Wilhelm Frick, Adolf Wagner described how the new political arrangements could lead to confused lines of authority:

> According to current law, the Reich Governors are subordinate to you [*viz.* Frick] in your position as Reich Interior Minister. Adolf Hitler is the Reich Governor of Prussia. He has delegated his rights to the Prussian Minister President. However, you are also a Prussian Interior Minister. As Reich Interior Minister, Adolf Hitler and the Prussian Minister President are thus your subordinates. As you are also the Prussian Interior Minister, you are in turn subordinate to the Prussian Minister President and yourself as Reich Minister. I am not a jurist and also not a historian, but I believe this constellation is a rare thing indeed. (Minuth 1983, 1347)

The confusion between the various levels of authority, which Wagner described as an "untenable set of arrangements, at the highest level of the Reich," generated a host of insoluble political conflicts.

By contrast, the German Municipalities Act of January 30, 1935 eschewed the establishment of unclear lines of authority (Gruner 2011, 178-80). The political structures of local government were defined in great detail by the Act, including the specific authority of the mayor and council members. The German Municipalities Act also provided for local government to be supervised by the Reich Interior Ministry, dictating that an "NSDAP representative" – typically the Nazi party's *Kreisleiter* (County Leader) – was to be involved in local deliberations and decision-making (Hirsch, Majer and Meinck 1997, 165-9). The measure, which was designed "to complete the organizational rebirth of the Reich," referred to the simultaneous efforts being made by the Reich Interior Minister to regulate responsibilities of the states and *Gaue*. In real terms, however, there was a yawning gap between the clear reorganization of political authority undertaken at the local level, and the blurry demarcation of authority prevailing at higher levels of the political system.

Thus, while the National Socialists destroyed German federalism within two years of taking power, the replacement system they instituted was a confused patchwork of overlapping jurisdictions. On the one hand, the Act on the Reconstruction of the Reich, the absorption of almost all Prussian ministries by their national counterparts, as well as the subordination of key institutions, such as the judiciary and the police, to the central government created an extremely centralized order. On the other hand, this new order coexisted with state ministers, state chancelleries, and Reich Governors whose authorities remained poorly defined, despite the calls made by prominent individuals, such as Adolf Wagner, for a more clearly defined political structure. Although the *Gleichschaltung* Acts ostensibly provided for a clear assignment of responsibilities, they actually enabled regional party leaders to consolidate and expand their

authority, even if they did not make use of paragraph 4 of the Reich Governors Act (Ruck 2011, 96-7).

Accordingly, we should not take the complaints made by the *Gauleiter* concerning the difficult position occupied the Reich Governors at face value. When Fritz Sauckel, the *Gauleiter* of Thuringia, wrote in a memorandum at the end of January 1936, "the position of the Reich Governors [was] actually more threadbare than that of the State Ministers" (Hüttenberger 1969, 114), he had already made considerable headway in expanding his power base, successfully subsuming various governmental functions under the authority of the Reich Governor's Office (John 2002, 43-4).

It was during this time that local leaders in Saxony developed plans for a "Gau government." To some extent, these plans corresponded with the efforts of the Reich Interior Ministry to create intermediate levels of the bureaucracy resembling Prussia's District Presidents (*Regierungspräsidenten*) in order to consolidate intermediate-level administrative functions (Ruck 2011, 92). These efforts sought to counteract the growing power of the Reich Ministries in Berlin, who began to intervene directly in the affairs of their state-level counterparts, thus sidestepping the Reich Governors, who were the intended supervisors of state-level activities (Schrulle 2008, 178-9). In 1935, the Reich Interior Minister's attempt to depose the presiding Minister Presidents in order to appoint Reich Governors in their stead was successful in Saxony and Hesse, but failed in Württemberg, Baden, and Thuringia. Sensing a unique window of opportunity, the *Gauleiter* of Saxony, Martin Mutschmann, expanded the powers of the Saxon State Chancellery, turning it into a control center with power over a range of party and state functions (Wagner 2004, 365-75; Schaarschmidt 2007, 131-2). In this way, as demonstrated by the events in Saxony, the initial reorganization measures undertaken by the Reich Interior Ministry, and its subsequent efforts to rectify unclear lines of authority, furnished the Reich Governors with opportunities to consolidate and expand their powers at the intermediate level of government within the otherwise highly centralized regime.

3.   The Limits of Centralization

As there was no unified organizational framework in the middle of the 1930s to guide the development of power structures in Germany's states and *Gaue*, the freedom of action enjoyed by Reich Governors and regional officials and their ability to engage in scale jumping depended heavily on individual initiative, interpersonal relationships, and the specifics of existing organizational arrangements at the local level. Germany's Reich Governors were similar to the Prussian *Oberpräsidenten* in that both held a governmental as well as a party office. As *Gauleiter*, they were personally appointed by Hitler, and were part of the highest leadership circle within the Nazi regime. Accordingly, the preamble

to the Act on the Reconstruction of the Reich states explicitly that "matters that fall under the purview of the Reich Governors in their function as *Gauleiter* are not to be subject to decision by the Reich Interior Minister; rather, they are to be judged by the responsible NSDAP authorities."[2] In this way, the Reich Governors were partially subordinate to the Reich Interior Ministry, yet they were also placed on equal footing with the Reich Ministers and *Reichsleiter* (heads of central party offices). The joint conferences held for the *Gauleiter* and *Reichsleiter* – the last of which took place in Hitler's bunker in February 1945 – were a testament to the stature of the Reich Governors (Moll 2001, 215-73).

Yet despite their standing within the regime, their ability to influence policy as regional party leaders was initially quite limited. This was because they were a part of a highly regimented, vertical power structure that encompassed all *Gau* offices, regional party chapters, and related associations (Hüttenberger 1969, 120-3). Yet perhaps an even larger problem was that all party budgets were centrally supervised by Reich Treasurer Franz Xaver Schwarz (Hirsch, Majer and Meinck 1997, 286). When Martin Mutschmann, the *Gauleiter* of Saxony, threatened in September 1935 to resign from office if he was not given sole responsibility for his *Gau*'s finances, he quickly learned that the Reich Treasurer was not to be meddled with. Schwarz categorically rejected Mutschmann's ultimatum. In a letter to Rudolf Hess, Schwarz asked him to

> inform party member ["Pg."] Mutschmann that his behavior is inappropriate [...] that he should refrain in the future from intervening in my affairs. As a *Gauleiter*, Mutschmann should practice far greater restraint when criticizing the policies of the *Reichleitung* [central party leadership].

He also added:

> If Mutschmann believes that he has created the financial basis for his *Gau* by virtue of his good name, then this is an expression of arrogance. He did not receive the money as Mr. Mutschmann, but rather as the *Gauleiter* of the NSDAP *Gau* of Saxony. (Schaarschmidt 2004, 154)

Mutschmann's battering ram strategy was thus a failure. Other *Reich* Governors took a quieter approach, establishing hidden accounts and slush funds that gave them substantial leeway for their own financial decision-making (Hüttenberger 1969, 130). In this context, the dispossession of Jewish firms proved to be particularly profitable, not least because it was legitimated by the National Socialist policy of Aryanization. In a very early example of dispossession, the *Gauleiter* of Thuringia, Franz Sauckel, managed to bring the Simson armaments works in Suhl under his control just two years after the Nazis came to power. The Jewish owners of the Simson works – which became a major site of armaments production during the war – were not just driven into financial ruin during a lengthy trial; they were ultimately forced to flee the country. The

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2 Begründung zum Gesetz über den Neuaufbau des Reiches, 28.1.1934.

Wilhelm Gustloff foundation, based on the Simson works, was controlled by Sauckel and included various other companies by the end of the war (John 2002, 42; Bartuschka 2011).

From the early 1930s onward, the radicalization of Nazi policy toward the Jews was often driven by initiatives taken at the lower and intermediate levels of the party. This was evident in the wake of the boycott of Jewish businesses in April 1933. Anti-Jewish activities proliferated at the local level, reaching a crescendo in the middle of 1935 (Ahlheim 2011, 283-99). As a consequence, while the process of Aryanization was still in a nascent phase at the national level, it was already complete in many cities and districts, such as in the free state of Schaumburg (Werner 2010, 521-83). One can hardly speak of a centrally directed policy when one considers how initiatives at various levels of the political system reinforced one another in a reciprocal fashion. While the Reich leadership clearly set the tone with its anti-Semitic measures in 1933, local party activists seized the initiative with various concrete measures against the Jewish populace. This, in turn, placed the national leadership under pressure to adopt even more radical measures, such as the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 (Wild 2007, 281-2).

As the Aryanization wave of the second half of the 1930s rose in intensity, a number of *Gauleiter*, following Sauckel's example, sought to ensure that their regional party organizations would profit from the dispossession of the Jews. The party officials in the *Gaue* of Munich-Upper Bavaria and Middle Franconia proved to be particularly covetous of Jewish property (Drecoll 2009, 54). Julius Streicher and Adolf Wagner were among the oldest Nazi party loyalists. In a departure from the policy that was implemented in other non-Prussian states, none of the four Bavarian *Gauleiter* had been appointed to the position of Reich Governor; instead, Hitler selected the *Freikorps* commander Franz Xaver von Epp. Epp's position remained weak, however, as he was marginalized by the four Bavarian *Gauleiter*, who based their authority on a combination of party and state offices. Adolf Wagner, who was appointed Interior Minister of Bavaria in 1933, also held the post of Bavarian Cultural Minister from 1936 onward. As the head of the *Gau* of Munich-Upper Bavaria – a traditional stronghold of the Nazi party – he also enjoyed excellent ties to influential personalities in central party and state offices (Drecoll 2009, 52-3). Wagner and his Bavarian colleagues were thus accustomed to circumventing traditional lines of authority by scale jumping when pursuing their interests.

Immediately after the pogroms of November 1938, Wagner created a company under his management that served as a hive-off vehicle for confiscated Jewish property. As he subsequently came into conflict with officials who asserted that the Reich had the exclusive right to take control of Jewish property, he changed course in September 1939, tasking an "Aryanization office" with expropriating the Jews. However, this office was directly subordinate to him as the Bavarian Interior Minister. In its first year of operation, the Aryaniza-

tion office in Munich generated over 700,000 Reichmarks (Drecoll 2009, 69-73). Wagner's counterpart in Franconia, Julius Streicher, believed the confiscation of wealth through Aryanization should be used to finance the party organization at the *Gau* level, and he acted accordingly. However, in the wave of expropriation that swept Germany after November 9, 1938, Streicher and his allies were somewhat overzealous in their efforts to personally enrich themselves. This motivated Steicher's competitors at the regional level to lodge complaints with high-ranking party officials (Drecoll 2009, 81-3). Thus, while Streicher undermined his political standing, other *Gauleiter*, including Sauckel and Wagner, managed to amass considerable funds on accounts they controlled.

In the second half of the 1930s there were two additional fields of political activity that offered opportunities for advancement: cultural policy and rearmament policy. From 1933 onward a variety of institutions intervened in cultural life at the regional level, including the Reich Education Ministry, the Reich Propaganda Ministry, and the Reich Chamber of Culture, among other cultural associations closely linked to the Nazi party. This provided local political officials with a range of options for expanding their influence (Schaarschmidt 2004, 38-47, 66-71). Involvement in cultural affairs was enticing for good reason: on the one hand, it allowed party functionaries at the regional and local level to publically portray themselves as a "men of the people." On the other hand, it was a useful vehicle for rallying support among local members of the public who were otherwise lukewarm to the Nazi cause (Steber 2007, 142-3). Lower level officials' cultural activities were welcomed by the party leadership, as long as the celebration of regional difference did not undermine the effort to establish a unified, pan-German cultural front (Dahm 1995, 221-65).

In the Bavarian region of Swabia, where a cultural association close to the party had existed since 1933, the *Gauleiter* Karl Wahl propagated a National Socialist vision for society that was tailored to a Swabian audience. Wahl invoked traditional aspects of Swabian culture and fused them with the more palatable aspects of National Socialism, thus creating a form of pro-Nazi propaganda that was less divisive, but which ultimately stood for the same social and political goals (Steber 2010, 406-7, 418). Wahl's activities aimed at attracting prominent individuals at the local and regional levels to the Nazi cause in order to demonstrate the party's cultural superiority (Steber 2010, 373).

The Saxon *Gauleiter* Martin Mutschmann was another party official who instrumentalized local culture and regional traditions in order to serve the ends of the Nazi leadership. The Nazi cultural propaganda in Saxony experienced a massive proliferation from 1936 onward, and soon enveloped nearly all cultural associations. Founded as a cultural association, the *Heimatwerk Sachsen* was under the full control of Mutschmann. He successfully harnessed the *Gau* party organization, the regional offices of the NSDAP, and affiliated associations for his propaganda efforts. By fending off central intrusions into regional cultural

affairs Mutschmann used the organization to enhance his sphere of influence (Schaarschmidt 2004, 99-274).

The head office of the *Heimatwerk* was installed in the Saxon State Chancellery, demonstrating to which extent state and party functions commingled. Although the Nazi party was supposed to take the lead in politics the State Chancellery even guided the propaganda issued by regional party offices (Schaarschmidt 2004, 163-6). However, Wahl, Mutschmann, and other *Gauleiter* had limited control over the individual members of their cultural organizations. The *Heimatwerk* in Saxony was ultimately so bloated from assuming new responsibilities and absorbing new associations that its original political purpose was significantly diluted. In the end, the *Heimatwerk* created new avenues for dialectic social processes to take place at the regional level (Schaarschmidt 2004, 272-4).

Aside from the domain of cultural policy, regional party leaders viewed the Four Year Plan (1936-1940) as an excellent opportunity for consolidating and expanding their position in Nazi Germany's multi-level political system. It was no coincidence that Mutschmann subsequently declared the *Heimatwerk* in Saxony to be the state's contribution to the Four Year Plan (Schaarschmidt 2004, 175). In the autumn of 1936, Hermann Göring, who was the Plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan, called upon the *Gauleiter* to mobilize their party organizations for the purpose of rearmament (Der Vierjahresplan 1937/1, 35; see also Gruner 2011, 183). Following this call, a number of *Gauleiter* contacted the central office of the Four Year Plan to offer their support at the regional level.

Fritz Sauckel, the *Gauleiter* of Thuringia, even went so far as to recommend the establishment of a regional branch of the Four Year Plan, including twelve specialized departments. Sauckel's plan was symptomatic of the blurred line between state and party functions that occurred across all domains of politics and administration. The new institution was designed as a main office of the NSDAP at the *Gau* level (*NSDAP-Gauhauptamt*) with administrative functions. It was necessary to assure "the closest possible collaboration between the state, private sector, and party offices" (John 2002, 46). For Sauckel, this had the welcome effect of enabling him to exert influence over the administrative district of Erfurt, which was part of the *Gau* Thuringia but belonged constitutionally to Prussia. However, the overarching concern was to create a regional framework for coordinating the interests of government, business, and social actors, in order to realize the goals of the Four Year Plan. The Swabian Regional Office for the Four Year Plan (*Schwäbische Landesstelle Vierjahresplan*), which was established by the *Gauleiter* Karl Wahl, served similar objectives, although it was to be subordinate to a new central office for the Four Year Plan housed within the Bavarian Ministry of Economics (Gotto 2006, 158).

Göring was late to realize the forces he had unleashed at the regional level with his call to mobilize led to a counterproductive dissipation of energy. In a

decree sent to the *Gauleiter*, Reich Governors, state governments, and *Oberpräsidenten* dated February 15, 1937, he warned that the "formation of new offices [...] was generally more damaging than beneficial [...] as this often leads to frictions with the existing authorities," thus reducing the "punch" of the Four Year Plan (Hartmannsgruber 2005, 115-7). This decree effectively put the brakes on regional party leaders' efforts to create a second channel of influence alongside provincial and state-level administrative structures, which were intermeshed in a highly top-down hierarchy of control. Göring's directive did not address what was to be done with the newly created organizational structures, yet it was abundantly clear that regional branch offices were made redundant when the central administrators of the Four Year Plan in Berlin refused to cooperate with them.

A look at personnel policy during this period underscores the increasing freedom of action that the *Gauleiter* enjoyed at the regional level from the mid-1930s onward. Hitler's "Directive on the Appointment and Dismissal of Public Servants at the State Level" of February 1, 1935 stipulated that appointments were to be made by the Prussian Minister President within Prussia and by the Reich Interior Minister in the other states. However, this directive allowed these powers to be delegated to the *Oberpräsidenten* and Reich Governors, provided the Interior Minister gave his approval.[3] This led to a situation in which the *Gauleiter* were increasingly able to hire and fire at will, without any real oversight by the party organization, as Wilhelm Frick complained to Rudolph Hess in 1937 (Ruck 2011, 95). Frick warned that if the "*Gauleiter* are able to conduct their own personnel policy, then it will not be possible to achieve national unity in Germany's civil service; rather, we will have public servants loyal to their *Gau*, and a new form of regional factionalism will take root" (Schrulle 2008, 76).

Frick's complaints ignored that the Reich Interior Ministry was at least partially responsible for the institutional conflict that had resulted from its effort to implement reforms, which, rather than enhance cohesion toward a common aim, had in practice augmented the freedom of action enjoyed by the Reich Governors and *Oberpräsidenten*. Although the *Gauleiter* were not deliberately engaging in a "new form of particularism" (Schrulle 2008, 75; Ruck 2011, 103-4), as Frick wrote, they did view themselves as "Viceroys of the Reich" (Noakes 2003, 118-52), responsible for mobilizing their states and provinces to further the ends of the Nazi regime. Indeed, the activities of the *Gauleiter* in numerous domains – including their implementation of radical anti-Jewish measures, their effort to conjoin the ideals of "blood and soil" with local tradition in order to create effective regional propaganda for the regime, and their support for the Four Year Plan through the mobilization of social and material

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[3]   Reichsgesetzblatt 1935 I, 2.2.1935, 73.

resources – ultimately represented an effort to coordinate the central and middle levels of the Nazi regime. Yet there was no unified model for how this was to occur on a case-by-case basis.

4.   New Models of Governance in the Multi-Level National Socialist System

The differences between Germany's states, provinces, and *Gaue* increased even further as the regime began conquering new territory (Krüger 1941, 143). Two factors were decisive in this regard: first, the establishment of the so-called *Reichsgaue* in newly annexed regions; and second, the differences between the *Gauleiter* who were appointed Reich Defense Commissioners in 1939 and those who were subordinate to them. Calls for the creation of *Reichsgaue* were made as early as 1938 by the *Gauleiter* of Hamburg, Karl Kaufmann. He was one of the *Gauleiter* who, in 1935, had taken advantage of the Second Reich Governor Act to assume control of the government of his state. In 1938, the Hamburg Senate was replaced by an administrative body under Kaufmann's direct control. This administrative body viewed itself both as a mid-level organization within the Reich bureaucracy, as well as the legitimate representative of Hamburg. Like the Saxon *Gauleiter*, Kaufmann aimed at preventing central authorities from directly intervening in the affairs of individual departments of government at the state level; by bundling competencies, the Reich Governor was to be the representative to whom central authorities were required to turn when they sought to influence middle levels of government. However, in this attempt to control the impact of central authorities on Hamburg, Kaufmann was ultimately unsuccessful, both before and after the outbreak of the war (Lohalm 2005, 125-36; Ruck 2011, 91-2).

The Reich Governors who oversaw post-*Anschluss* Austria and the areas of the Czech Republic and Poland that were annexed in 1938 and 1939 found themselves in a somewhat more favorable position. The Reich Interior Ministry spearheaded the passage of the *Ostmarkgesetz* and *Sudetengaugesetz* in April 1939, which gave the new Reich Governors authority not only over the regional departments of government in their *Gau*, but also over the lower-level offices of special administrative authorities (*Sonderverwaltungen*). However, this authority did not extend to the local offices of the Reich's judicial, financial, transportation, postal, or police authorities (Gebel 1999, 104-8).

The *Reichsgaue* were conceived as "autonomous regional entities" (*Selbstverwaltungskörperschaften*),[4] thus engendering hopes among the new Reich Governors that they would enjoy considerable freedom of action. How-

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[4]   Reichsgesetzblatt 1939 I 74, 778 and 781.

ever, by investing itself with comprehensive authority over the Reich Governors, the Reich Interior Ministry aimed at making regional departments of government amenable to its centralized administrative control. In this way, the Reich Interior Ministry was pursuing the same goal in 1938 that it had in the mid-1930s (Gebel 1999, 98-9). In September 1938, State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart complained that unclear organizational structures at the middle level of government were leading the Reich Governors to increasingly employ "the resources of party" in their effort to influence local administration. "As a result of this regrettable development," Stuckart wrote, "ever greater frictions have arisen between the Reich Governors and the local heads of special administrative authorities" (Gebel 1999, 104).

This calculated ploy of the Reich Interior Ministry – that is, to expand the competencies of the *Reichsgau*, in order to increase its own authority – became even more apparent during the war. In 1941, appealing to Hitler's decree of August 28, 1939 for the "Simplification of the Administration,"[5] Stuckart now argued in a publication, on the occasion of Himmler's 40th birthday, for the "far-reaching deconcentration and decentralization" of the bureaucracy. Stuckart asserted that responsibilities should be delegated to the greatest extent possible to the middle and lower levels of government in order to reduce the burdens placed on central administrative authorities. According to Stuckart, in order to mobilize all available resources, "flexible self-government, secured through a dedicated budget, is needed at the level of the *Reichsgau* in the areas of economics, social affairs, transportation, and culture" as a complement to a strong central authority (Stuckart 1941, 13). However, this reform proposal should not be viewed solely as a wartime "concession." Rather, Stuckart appears to have been considering how the future European order would be organized under German leadership, for he notes the German Reich was "too expansive, its population too large, and its economy too diverse" to be effectively managed by a centralized authority (Stuckart 1941, 4-5). For Stuckart, strong central authority and self-government at the *Gau* level was "not contradictory":

> Finding an organic synthesis between these two crucially important elements [...] is one of the most important tasks that will be undertaken as part of the political and administrative reorganization Reich. (Stuckart 1941, 5)

He further added:

> All activities of a productive nature that do not fall legally under the purview of the Reich (i.e. the public sector of the Reich Governor and the special administrative authorities) or the self-governance of the professional classes [...] should be subject in a unified fashion to self-government at the *Gau* level. (Stuckart 1941, 16)

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5 Reichsgesetzblatt 1939 I 153, 1535-1537.

Michael Ruck's notion "totalitarian subsidiarity principle" which he used in another context appears to be an exact description of Nazi governance, as outlined by Stuckart (Ruck 2011, 80).

The ways in which the new *Reichsgaue* developed during the war largely depended on the relationship between the Reich Governors and HSSPF (Higher SS and Police Leaders). This relationship was most important in the Sudetenland and the Polish territories annexed in 1939, where the installation of German administrative structures went hand in hand with comprehensive ethnic cleansing and resettlement policies. In each individual *Reichgau*, the *Gauleiter* and Reich Governors cultivated divergent relationships with Heinrich Himmler, who was Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of German Nationhood, and with the HSSPF. The Sudetenland was in a difficult situation structurally, as it was overseen by three HSSPF – in Nuremberg, Dresden, and Breslau (Gebel 1999, 114-5). By contrast, other *Gauleiter*, such as Arthur Greiser in Warthegau had an exceedingly cooperative relationship with the police and SS. As Himmler's regional deputy for the Strengthening of German Nationhood Greiser was responsible for the issue of settlement policy, policy that was implemented on a practical level by the HSSPF. There were close linkages at all levels of government between the newly installed government bureaucracy in Warthegau and the *Sicherheitsdienst* (the intelligence apparatus of the SS) (Pohl 2007, 402). However, in the *Reichsgaue* of Danzig-West Prussia and Upper Silesia, cooperation was less evident, as officials held divergent views on ethnic policy (Podranski 2008, 112-8). In any event, all of the newly created *Reichsgaue* were similar in that functions of the state and party were increasingly commingled. Furthermore, the *Reichsgaue* gained a great deal of control over the central authorities' regional departments, even more than in Austria and the Sudetenland (Pohl 2007, 398-401).

By contrast, the competencies exercised by the original 32 *Gaue* did not expand significantly during the first years of war. In June of 1939, numerous *Gauleiter* were appointed as Evacuation Commissioners (*Freimachungskommissare*), in order to manage the evacuation of civilians from border regions in Western Germany (Klee 1999, 252). This appointment involved managing the coordination between the areas to be evacuated and the areas receiving displaced persons (Fleischhauer 2010, 104-6). However, the importance of the Evacuation Commissioners increased dramatically from April 1942 onward, as the Allied bombing of German cities increased in intensity. A similar dynamic emerged with the *Gauleiter* who were appointed as *Gau* Housing Commissioners (*Gauwohnungskommissare*) following Robert Ley's takeover of the office of Reich Commissioner for social housing. While Ley's ambitious residential housing development plans were put on hold after the invasion of the USSR in June 1941, the regional *Gau* Housing Commissioners had to deal with the ever growing demand for temporary housing for bombed-out civilians (Harlander 1995, 271).

A key change that promoted differences between the individual *Gaue* was the appointment of 15 Reich Governors and *Oberpräsidenten* as Reich Defense Commissioners in 1939. Their key responsibility was "to bring civil defense measures in accordance with the needs of the German army."[6] Similar to the Reich Governors in the *Reichsgaue*, they were responsible for the "management of all branches of the civilian bureaucracy" (with the exception of the Reich transportation, finance, and postal ministries). In this way, they were subordinate to the Reich Ministries, and subject to oversight by the Reich Interior Minister. While this appointment paid heed to the fact that the Reich Governors in the original *Gaue* were of elementary importance for coordinating activities between the central and regional levels of government, it also created a new level of governing authority. As most of the Military Districts (*Wehrkreise*) were larger than the *Gaue*, many *Gauleiter* were automatically subordinate to the Reich Defense Commissioners. For example, the boundaries of Military District IX were such that eight other *Gauleiter*, including Jakob Sprenger and Adolf Wagner who themselves were Reich Defense Commissioners of Military Districts XII and VII/XIII, were subject to the authority of Fritz Sauckel (Fleischhauer 2010, 138-9).

While the appointment of individual *Gauleiter* as Reich Defense Commissioners had limited practical significance in the early years of the war (Hüttenberger 1969, 155), the Reich Defense Committees that supported their work proved to be an important forum for the coordination of measures critical to the war effort. According to a directive issued by the Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich on September 22, 1939, the committees had the function of "advising the Reich Defense Commissioner and supporting him to ensure coordinated management of the civil defense of the Reich within the Military District."[7] The Reich Defense Committees were composed of the Reich Governors, *Gauleiter*, and *Oberpräsidenten* of the individual Military Districts, in addition to District Presidents, Minister Presidents, State Ministers, Higher SS and Police Leaders, Presidents of the Regional Employment Offices, Trustees of Labor (*Reichstreuhänder der Arbeit*), and any additional persons appointed by the Reich Defense Commissioners. In this way, a new consultative organ with governance functions was installed alongside the existing, hierarchically organized administrative structures. This organ brought together the most important regional officials within the *Gau*. However, not all of the Reich Defense Commissioners made equal use of the regional Committees in performing their work (Brinkhus 2010, 16-7, 145-6).

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[6] Reichsgesetzblatt 1939 I 158, 1565 et seq.
[7] Reichsgesetzblatt 1942 I 190, 1937.

5.   Total War and Improvised Decentralization

With the outbreak of the war and the mobilization of the population in support of the war effort, the authority of the *Gauleiter* increased significantly. However, the decentralization sought by the Reich Interior Ministry did not get underway until the second half of the war. A decisive step was the November 1942 reform of the Military Districts undertaken to make their borders contiguous with the borders of the *Gaue*.[8] This reform was accompanied by the naming of all *Gauleiter* as Reich Defense Commissioners. As a consequence of the reform, the *Gaue* became the most important spatial units within the Reich. It was no coincidence that this decision was made at a time when the political leadership began to realize that the mere continuation of the war would necessitate the mobilization of all available human and material resources. The responsibility for this total mobilization fell predominantly on the shoulders of the Reich Defense Commissioners, who were already struggling with the aerial bombardment of German cities.

At the same time, from early 1942 onward Albert Speer sought to unite at the regional level all authorities involved in armaments production, and to obligate them to cooperate with his ministry. The party leadership made a deliberate decision to keep the regional organs of the Armaments Ministry separate from the responsibilities exercised by the Reich Governors. Speer created regional armament commissions (*Rüstungskommissionen*), which were responsible for coordinating all actors involved in armaments production at the regional level. The commissions were composed of armaments inspectors, the Armament Ministry's commissioners for the military district, the heads of the armaments committees and rings, the director of the state employment offices, the *Gau* economic advisors, the president of the *Gau* chambers of commerce, and the *Gau*-level heads of the German Labor Front (Werner 2013, 219-20). A territorial reform of the armament commissions to make them contiguous with the *Gaue* did not take place until August 1944. As part of this reform, armament subcommittees were created in the *Gaue* that did not yet have an armaments committee.[9]

The armaments committees were established to coordinate weapons production activities. Yet they were also a management tool, designed to enable top-down control of armaments issues. The importance of this control function was particularly evident in Speer's conflicts with the Reich Defense Commissioners. Common flash points included the shutting down of existing production facilities, as well as centralized intervention to reassign workers. When dis-

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[8]   Reichsgesetzblatt 1942 I 117, 649-56.
[9]   NSDAP Partei-Kanzlei: Rundschreiben 173/44. Betr.: Verstärkter Einsatz der Gauleiter für die Rüstung und Kriegsproduktion, 1.8.1944 (BArchB, NS 6/347, 38-42).

putes arose, the armaments committees served as a forum for reconciling differences between regional interests, and demands formulated at the central level (Werner 2013, 221-5; Ruck 2011, 100). While the *Gauleiter* could sometimes influence committee decisions thanks to the close ties they enjoyed to their *Gau* Economic Advisors (*Gauwirtschaftsberater*), in general "mid-level organs of government were required to simply accept" centralized control by the Ministry of Armaments, as Party Secretary Martin Bormann wrote in August 1944.[10]

This assertion of central government primacy was necessary, for in their function as Reich Defense Commissioners, the *Gauleiter* were invested with greatly expanded authority over the armaments economy. For example, immediately following his appointment as General Plenipotentiary for the Employment of Labor in March 1942, Fritz Sauckel appointed his fellow *Gauleiter* as regional representatives (Nolzen 2008, 184-5). *Gauleiter* authority underwent an additional expansion in August 1944, when Joseph Goebbels was named Reich Plenipotentiary for Total War. In this position he granted the *Gauleiter* wide-ranging powers for mobilizing the home front (Ruck 2011, 102).

At one of the last *Gauleiter* and *Reichsleiter* Conferences, held on August 3, 1944 at the Royal Palace in Posen, Goebbels invoked the revolutionary spirit of the years prior to 1933 and called upon the *Gauleiter* to recruit one million men so that 100 new army divisions could be formed. This manpower was to be obtained by streamlining the bureaucracy while also reducing the personnel involved in armaments production (Heiber 1991, 360-404). While Wilhelm Stuckart complained in 1938 that lack of proper authority was forcing the Reich Governors to leverage their positions as party officials to influence the workings of government, by 1944 mass mobilization by party officials invested with new, wide-ranging powers was now seen as the only means of avoiding defeat in the war. In this way, the Nazi leadership hoped that the improvisational and leadership talents of the *Gauleiter* could be harnessed to restore flagging moral on the home front and free up new resources, thus enabling a continuation of the war (Heiber 1991, 387, 400).

While Goebbels' demand for *Gauleiter*-led intervention into the labor force led to inescapable conflict with the Ministry of Armaments and the *Wehrmacht* leadership (Werner 2013, 230-1; Fleischhauer 2010, 290-1), much of the *Gauleiter*s' influence resulted from the successful coordination of regional actors. Following the devastating aerial bombardment of Rostock in April 1942, the *Gauleiter* of Mecklenburg, Friedrich Hildebrandt, formed a special commission that served as a model for other cities and regions threatened by air attack (Buddrus 2009, 378). The special commissions at the *Gau* level, known as *Gaueinsatzstäbe*, played an instrumental role in dealing with the effects of

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[10] Ibid, 39.

Allied bombing and stabilizing the home front. Shoring up the home front was of elementary importance for the Nazi leadership, for after Stalingrad, there were tremendous fears that military setbacks would erode support for the war and force premature armistice, much like the "stab in the back" that allegedly caused Germany to lose the First World War.

Similar to the Reich Defense Committees and Armaments Commissions established by Albert Speer, the *Gaueinsatzstäbe* created forums for the informal coordination of state and party officials, municipal representatives, military leaders, and important companies. They complied with the expectation that improvised pragmatic solutions were essential for coming to grips with the increasingly dire exigencies of war. While the overarching aim of the reforms undertaken in the latter years of the war was to strengthen executive authority, the establishment of various bodies for coordination at the regional level ultimately reflected the desire to couple centralized control with dynamic and vigorous collaboration at the mid-level rungs of government, as Stuckart had called for in 1941 (Stuckart 1941, 17). In the end, it was irrelevant whether the *Gauleiter*, mayors or other government officials were in charge of running the *Gaueinsatzstäbe* (Brinkhus 2010, 155-6).

Following the shock of the devastating firebombing of Hamburg in July 1943, Kaufmann established a special form of cooperation between the party, municipal bureaucracy, and economic enterprises in his *Reichsgau*. The city was subdivided into 18 sectors, and the companies located in each sector were made collectively responsible for managing reconstruction and caring for bombed-out workers (Lohalm 2005, 151-2). This pragmatic solution was a necessary stopgap measure, as normal government mechanisms had collapsed in the chaos of the bombing and its aftermath. However the Hamburg model ran contrary to the desires of Albert Speer, who sought to exercise direct control over industry through the Armaments Commissions, yet as an *ad hoc* form of governance it successfully harnessed all resources in the city, enabling armaments production to make a dramatic recovery within just a few months.

Concomitant with their "horizontal" mobilization efforts, the *Gauleiter* in areas of West Germany that were particularly threatened by aerial bombardment sought to obtain direct access to Hitler – thus circumventing the normal power hierarchy, in an example of "scale jumping" – in order to impress upon him the need to construct more bomb shelters and evacuate civilians deemed unnecessary for the war economy (Brinkhus 2010, 156-7). As supply bottlenecks for consumer goods became increasingly dire over the course of the war, municipal authorities availed themselves of existing "vertical networks" – while simultaneously circumventing official channels – in order to obtain scarce goods directly from producers and assuage discontent on the home front (Gotto 2006, 334-5). "The personalized and feudalistic administrative structure of the Nazi state didn't just give rise to polycratic structures," Bernhard Gotto writes in his work on the municipal bureaucracy of Augsburg. "In the regional

environment of an organizational culture dependent on cooperation, they served in an equal measure as a sort of dialectic antidote to administrative conflicts" (Gotto 2006, 342-3).

The structures of power at the regional level underwent considerable change in the final two years of the war. This change, fueled in part by the two-pronged goal of encouraging greater decentralization and streamlined bureaucratic structures, led the middle level of governance to gradually take on a significantly different status within the overall system of the Nazi state. The moratorium Hitler imposed on all structural reforms until the end of the war did little to slow this regional transformation. As early as 1941, the *Gauleiter* of Hamburg, Karl Kaufmann, was calling for the *Reichsgau* model which became predominant in the annexed territories to be adopted in the pre-1939 *Gaue* (Lohalm 2005, 136). In 1942, the *Gauleiter* of Saxony, Martin Mutschmann, complained to the head of the Reich Chancellery, Hans Heinrich Lammers, that the Reich Ministries were acting to expand the powers of the District Presidencies (*Regierungspräsidien*) in order to enhance centralized control (Wagner 2002, 54). Mutschmann was not alone in this view. Indeed, in subsequent months, numerous *Gauleiter* sought to curb or otherwise employ the administration of the District Presidents (Heiber 1992). The situation in the Prussian provinces was particularly demonstrative of the latter case (Brinkhus 2010, 153; Schrulle 2008, 200), following Hitler's approval for the creation of the *Reichsgau* of Danzig-West Prussia "as a test case" (Heiber 1992).

Parallel to these developments, throughout 1943 all states and *Gaue*, with the exception of Prussia and Bavaria, witnessed a movement toward the creation of "unitary authorities" (*Einheitsbehörden*), in which formerly separate departments of the bureaucracy were merged, a solution that had been favored by the Reich Interior Ministry even prior to the war. However, the upper leadership in Berlin had very little control over how these unitary authorities were structured. Some of them were created by combining the State Chancellery Offices or the State Ministries with specialized departments. In other cases, they were formed by consolidating all ministerial employees under the oversight of the Minister President (Heiber 1992). In Hamburg, the *Gauleiter* Karl Kaufmann established in August 1943 seven general commissioners for the various branches of the bureaucracy. These commissioners were recruited from among the ranks of the city's most important political leaders. Thus, the mayor of Hamburg, Carl Vincent Krogmann, was put in charge of the bureaucracy; the Higher SS and Police Leader Georg-Henning Graf von Bassewitz-Behr headed the security apparatus, and the *Gau* Economics Advisor Otto Wolff was made responsible for the economy (Lohalm 2005, 137). Kaufmann summarized his successes in February 1944: "In Hamburg, the functions of *Gauleiter*, mayor, director of the state bureaucracy, Reich Defense Commissioner, and *Gau* Housing Commissioner are united in one hand – in the hand of the *Gauleiter*" (Lohalm 2005, 138).

The protests lodged by the Reich Interior Ministry against the solution that was adopted in Hamburg had no practical impact. Similarly, the disapproval voiced by Hitler concerning the unauthorized formation of a unitary authority in Saxony fell on deaf ears (Heiber 1992). Like in Hamburg, all authority in Saxony was consolidated in the hand of the *Gauleiter* Martin Mutschmann. However, in contrast to Kaufmann, Mutschmann appointed subaltern ministerial officials who were personally dependent on him to head up the individual departments of the unitary authority.[11] When the Reich Interior Minister called for a well qualified public servant to be installed as head of the unitary authority, and also insisted that the State Ministries and State Chancellery be dissolved, his demands went unheeded (Heiber 1992).

As had been called for by Wilhelm Stuckart in 1941, "de-concentration and de-centralization" took place on a large scale during the final two years of the war in both the old and newly occupied territories of the Reich (Stuckart 1941, 5). The Reich Governors and *Oberpräsidenten* were the authorities responsible for assuring all regions' resources were mobilized to the greatest extent possible for the war effort, as Stuckart had envisioned (Stuckart 1941, 5, 13). While the expanded powers of the *Gauleiter* led to counterproductive frictions with Himmler and other central authorities such as the Armaments Ministry, this did have positive effects for the maintenance of the regime, as the *Gauleiter* used their expanded authority to assuage the suffering of the civilian population and keep armaments production at the highest possible level. The fact that the *Gaue* functioned as "autonomous regional entities" (*Selbstverwaltungskörperschaften*) on behalf of the Reich (Stuckart 1941, 8) saved Nazi Germany's multi-level governance system from complete collapse in the final phase of the war, when continuous communication between the system's different levels was no longer possible.

6.   The Fatal Consequences of Multi-Level Governance in Nazi Germany

To understand the structure and function of the Nazi state, it is necessary to consider how institutions and actors at various levels of the political system interacted. Yet these interactions cannot be understood simply by examining organizational charts. Rather, it is crucial to examine institutional dynamics at the micro-level, to illuminate interactions between individual actors and the outcomes they generated. Although Germany's political leaders sought to usher in an increasingly centralized system of government after its first constitutional

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[11] See Udo von Woyrsch (HSSPF Elbe) to Heinrich Himmler, 24.9.1943 (BArchB, NS 19/51, 3 et seq.).

reforms in 1933, they had no choice but to adopt a functional equivalent to the existing federal system. The practical challenges associated with effective centralized administration of the vast and diverse territory of the Reich were simply too large. Yet there was no overarching plan for how the Reich was to be ruled; rather, there was a gamut of different concepts and approaches, none of which achieved preeminence.

In real-world practice, this led to a situation in which the old federal structures continued to exist, but were imbued with new responsibilities. At the same time, newly created regional institutions and actors, such as the Reich Governors, strove to consolidate as much influence as possible, and the road to greater influence was for regional actors to position themselves as both loyal and indispensable. This interaction generated a new multi-level system that was even more disparate in its structure than the federal system that existed prior to 1918 or during the Weimar Republic.

Far from being a well-ordered state with clear hierarchies and lines of authority, the Nazi system was more akin to an untended garden in which new growth had run rampant. However, if one does not judge the system according to its adoption of clear hierarchies, but rather according to its ability to cope with the demands of total war, then the flexible structures that took hold at the regional level are cast in a new light, as their usefulness becomes apparent (Ruck 2011, 78). In the speech he gave to the *Gauleiter* and the *Reichsleiter* in Posen on August 3, 1944, Goebbels intentionally spoke of the need for a government structure with a singular purpose – namely, to ensure "in a short period of time, and in improvised fashion, an extraordinarily effective mode of leadership and mobilization for war [without the need for] a large bureaucratic apparatus" (Heiber 1991, 387). This vision had already been achieved to a large extent at the regional level by August of 1944.

A key element of the "improvisation" invoked by Goebbels was the need to rapidly integrate and coordinate various political and social actors in cooperative structures that would be temporary in nature. This form of governance allowed all available human resources at the regional level to be mobilized for the war effort, regardless of whether the individuals to be mobilized were party officials, military officers, municipal bureaucrats, or local business leaders. In this way, the dysfunctional aspects of the polycratic system could be ameliorated (Nolzen 2012, 260). In any event, this situation-specific, pragmatic pooling of various actors and interests was no less a fundamental feature of Nazi governance than the continuous emergence of new power structures at the national and regional levels (Hachtmann 2011, 29-73). Thus, even while the NSDAP maintained its claim to absolute authority until the spring of 1945, diverse forms of governance within the individual *Gaue* and the practice of "scale jumping" must be recognized as integral components of National Socialist rule, particularly in the latter half of the war.

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