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0521025419 - Heinrich Brüning and the Dissolution of the Weimar Republic

William L. Patch

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Introduction

Brüning and the Prussian Tradition

Heinrich Brüning has long been praised by some as the “last democratic chancellor” of the Weimar Republic and attacked by others as the trail-blazer of dictatorship. In the seminal work on his chancellorship, Karl Dietrich Bracher depicted him as the largely unwitting agent of reactionaries around President Hindenburg who sought to abolish democracy by toppling the last majority coalition of the Weimar Republic in March 1930. Brüning was an “apolitical” technocrat, Bracher argued, obsessed with diplomacy and the details of ever more complex emergency decrees designed to cope with the Great Depression, and his aloof style of government contributed much to the growth of the Communist and Nazi parties. By the time that Hindenburg dismissed him in May 1932, Brüning’s style of government had undermined democratic institutions so much that military dictatorship offered the only remaining alternative to a Nazi seizure of power.¹ Several historians defended Brüning by arguing that the Reichstag had succumbed to paralysis long before his appointment, that he distributed the unavoidable hardships of the Great Depression as fairly as possible and intended to restore parliamentary democracy when the economic crisis passed. Brüning had good reason, they maintained, to focus on diplomatic efforts to abolish war reparations as the prerequisite for economic recovery, and he was near success when Hindenburg foolishly dismissed him.² Keynesian economic historians soon developed a second line of criticism, however, that depicted Brüning as the stubborn adherent of an obsolete orthodoxy who inflicted needless hardship on the German people by ignoring all arguments in favor of deficit spending for public

1 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik. Eine Studie zum Problem des Machtverfalls in der Demokratie*, 5th ed. (1955; Villingen, Schwarzwald, 1971). For a summary in English, see Bracher, *The German Dictatorship* (New York, 1970), chapters 1 and 4.

2 Werner Conze, “Die Krise des Parteienstaates in Deutschland 1929/30,” *Historische Zeitschrift*, 178 (1954): 47–83; Conze’s review of Bracher in *Historische Zeitschrift*, 183 (1957): 378–82; Waldemar Besson, *Württemberg und die deutsche Staatskrise 1928–1933* (Stuttgart, 1959), esp. pp. 358–70; Wolfgang Helbig, *Die Reparationen in der Ära Brüning. Zur Bedeutung des Young-Plans für die deutsche Politik 1930 bis 1932* (Berlin, 1962); Werner Conze, “Die politischen Entscheidungen in Deutschland, 1929–1933,” in Werner Conze and Hans Raupach, eds., *Die Staats- und Wirtschaftskrise des Deutschen Reichs 1929–1933* (Stuttgart, 1967), pp. 211–39.

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works.³ The debate has proved very difficult to resolve, in part because Brüning burned his personal papers before fleeing Germany in 1934. This book will seek nevertheless to demonstrate with the help of newly available sources that Brüning did intend to restore parliamentary democracy with relatively minor reforms when the economic crisis passed, and that his fall, not his appointment to office, marked the crucial turning point in the dissolution of the Weimar Republic.

Brüning himself did little to enlighten the historians. He published one article in a German magazine in 1947 on the causes of his fall but retreated from the limelight when other witnesses contradicted his assertion that President Hindenburg had suffered “a mental collapse lasting ten days” in September 1931 and a steady loss of intellectual capacity thereafter.⁴ Brüning had written detailed memoirs of his chancellorship in 1934/5 but now decided not to publish them until they “serve a purpose for our fatherland and the public seems receptive,” conditions that he never saw fulfilled.⁵ His critics and defenders alike were non-plused when his memoirs finally appeared a few months after his death in 1970. Brüning portrayed himself as a staunch conservative in the spirit of Bismarck, indeed to the right of the Iron Chancellor, since he condemned Bismarck’s introduction of equal suffrage in national elections as premature. The Weimar constitution had broken with German traditions by imposing a democracy based on foreign models. At critical junctures throughout his tenure, Brüning recalled, he had struggled to secure approval for a constitutional amendment to replace the elected President with a hereditary monarch. He supposedly discussed this plan with Hitler in October 1930 and then employed secret intermediaries to forge an alliance with the second most powerful Nazi leader, Gregor Strasser. He thought of making way for a Nazi chancellor at some point in 1932 in a coalition government dedicated to restoring monarchy, and he even revealed this plan in November 1931 to the Social Democrats Rudolf Hilferding, Carl Severing, and Otto Braun. They “intimated” (*liessen durchblicken*) that they could accept a restoration if Brüning concluded that this was the only way to prevent a Hitler dictatorship. The plan was thwarted by Hindenburg’s legitimist devotion to the

3 See Gerhard Kroll, *Von der Weltwirtschaftskrise zur Staatskonjunktur* (Berlin, 1959), and Horst Sanmann, “Daten und Alternativen der deutschen Wirtschafts- und Finanzpolitik in der Ära Brüning,” *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftspolitik*, 10 (1965): 100–40.

4 Heinrich Brüning, “Ein Brief,” *Deutsche Rundschau*, 70, #7 (1947): 1–22, reprinted in *Heinrich Brüning. Reden und Aufsätze eines deutschen Staatsmanns*, ed. Wilhelm Vernekohl (Münster, 1968) (hereafter cited as Brüning, *Reden*); original letter to Rudolf Pechel, written in English on 20 April 1947 (quotation on pp. 4–5), Nachlass (NL) Pechel/51. Contrast Otto Meissner, *Staatssekretär unter Ebert – Hindenburg – Hitler* (Hamburg, 1950), pp. 213–14, and Hans-Otto Meissner, *Junge Jahre im Reichspräsidentenpalais. Erinnerungen an Ebert und Hindenburg 1919–1934* (Munich, 1988), pp. 274–79.

5 Brüning to Helene Weber, 27 October 1947, in Claire Nix, ed., *Heinrich Brüning. Briefe 1946–1960* (Stuttgart, 1974) (hereafter cited as “Briefe, II”), p. 102; Rudolf Morsey, *Zur Entstehung, Authentizität und Kritik von Brünings “Memoiren 1918–1934”* (Opladen, 1975), pp. 10–12, 29–32; Frank Müller, *Die “Brüning Papers.” Der letzte Zentrumskanzler im Spiegel seiner Selbstzeugnisse* (Frankfurt a.M., 1993), pp. 123–70.

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hopelessly unpopular ex-kaiser and by hypocrites on the right who placed partisan advantage above monarchist principle.⁶

The publication of these memoirs damaged Brüning's reputation badly. Werner Conze still defended him as one who sought to preserve the substance of democracy by creating a British-style monarchy, but if the memoirist's description of his goals is accurate, then he should doubtless be considered either reactionary or terribly naive.⁷ Careful readers soon questioned Brüning's vague account of a plan for restoration, however. The memoirist never identifies the potential monarch, glossing over the fact that the ex-kaiser and his oldest son could not agree on who should claim the throne. His assertion that he had initiated Hilferding, Severing, and Braun into this plan was indignantly denied by everyone who knew them. The memoirist also loses the reader's confidence with faulty chronology, a refusal to acknowledge any mistakes, and efforts to deny his colleagues any credit for his achievements. The few surviving associates of Chancellor Brüning agreed that he had pursued far more constructive goals and displayed a more appealing personality than the petulant and self-righteous memoirist. Rudolf Morsey soon concluded in a thoughtful study that the memoirs were seriously distorted by the trauma of dismissal, that Brüning had grossly exaggerated his enthusiasm for Bismarck and the Hohenzollern dynasty ever since June 1932 to prove that there was no foundation for the reproach of hostility toward the right that had persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss him.⁸ Andreas Rödder has recently strengthened Morsey's case, moreover, by demonstrating several noteworthy contradictions between Brüning's memoirs and the contemporary documentary sources with regard to the chancellor's goals in both foreign policy and domestic politics.⁹ If Morsey and Rödder are correct, then historians obviously should not rely on the memoirist's testimony about his long-term goals without corroborating evidence.

Yet many historians continue to cite the memoirs uncritically to establish that

6 Heinrich Brüning, *Memoiren 1918–1934* (Stuttgart, 1970), pp. 54–56, 145–47, 191–95, 209–10, 378, 453–54, 461–62, 512–13, 520–21 (quotation on p. 462).

7 Contrast Conze, "Die Reichsverfassungsreform als Ziel der Politik Brünings," *Der Staat*, 11 (1972): 209–17; with Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Brünings unpolitische Politik und die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 19 (1971): 113–23, and Hans Mommsen, "Betrachtungen zu den Memoiren Heinrich Brünings," *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands*, 22 (1973): 270–80.

8 See Friedrich Freiherr Hiller von Gaertringen, "Zur Beurteilung des 'Monarchismus' in der Weimarer Republik," in Gotthard Jasper, ed., *Tradition und Reform in der deutschen Politik. Gedenkschrift für Waldemar Besson* (Frankfurt a.M., 1976), pp. 138, 170–76; Ernest Hamburger, "Betrachtungen über Heinrich Brünings Memoiren," *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung*, 8, #15 (1972): 18–39; Arnold Brecht, "Gedanken über Brünings Memoiren," *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 12 (1971): 607–40; Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, "The End of the Weimar Republic," *Foreign Affairs*, 50 (January 1972): 368–71; Tilman Koops, "Heinrich Brünings 'Politische Erfahrungen.' (Zum ersten Teil der Memoiren)," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 24 (1973): 197–221; Morsey, *Zur Entstehung*, pp. 50–53; and Müller, *Brüning Papers*, pp. 72–73.

9 Andreas Rödder, "Dichtung und Wahrheit. Der Quellenwert von Heinrich Brünings Memoiren und seine Kanzlerschaft," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 265 (1997): 77–116.

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Chancellor Brüning aimed at the restoration of monarchy, linking him with blatant reactionaries such as Franz von Papen. This premise colors some of the most recent textbooks on German history for undergraduates and has led to highly questionable deductions even in otherwise carefully researched monographs.¹⁰ Most influential among scholars, however, has been the more subtle line of criticism based on the memoirs advanced by Hans Mommsen. He discounts the story about a restoration of monarchy but nevertheless finds in the memoirs “an unexpectedly frank depiction of the chancellor’s motives and long-term goals,” which were to divide and cripple the socialist labor movement while seeking constitutional amendments that would permanently liberate the executive power from any meaningful parliamentary control.¹¹ Mommsen has ample evidence for his incisive analysis of the practices of the Brüning cabinet, under which decision-making power was concentrated in the hands of an ever smaller circle of the chancellor’s closest advisers. To reconstruct Brüning’s goals, however, he relies almost entirely on the memoirs, attaching great weight in particular to Brüning’s recollection that he had hoped to make “the position of the head of state stronger than in the Bismarckian constitution.” Noting other statements in the memoirs that Brüning had formulated a bold plan for public works but delayed implementation until reparations were abolished, Mommsen argues that he deliberately prolonged a devastating rate of unemployment because it crippled laborite opposition to his antidemocratic political reforms. Thus Brüning sought to “instrumentalize” the Great Depression instead of overcoming it. One should note, however, that the passage in the memoirs about the position of the head of state is vague and confusing; Brüning also declares that no amendment of the Weimar constitution was needed to achieve this goal, and his language obscures the distinction between remembered wishes and actual events.¹²

10 See, for example, Holger Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil? Modern Germany 1648–Present* (Lexington, Mass., 1994), pp. 256–61; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York, 1989), pp. 258–63; Dietrich Orlow, *A History of Modern Germany 1871 to Present*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1991), pp. 175–85; Dietrich Orlow, *Weimar Prussia 1925–1933: The Illusion of Strength* (Pittsburgh, 1991), p. 164; Reinhard Neebe, *Grossindustrie, Staat und NSDAP 1930–1933. Paul Silberberg und der Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie in der Krise der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen, 1981), pp. 58–59, 78–80; and Michael Grübler, *Die Spitzenverbände der Wirtschaft und das erste Kabinett Brüning* (Düsseldorf, 1982), pp. 219–25. For perhaps the best treatment of the Brüning cabinet in a general history, see Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar 1918–1933. Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (Munich, 1993), chaps. 13–15.

11 Mommsen, “Betrachtungen,” pp. 271–74.

12 See Hans Mommsen, “Heinrich Brünings Politik als Reichskanzler. Das Scheitern eines politischen Alleinganges,” in Karl Holl, ed., *Wirtschaftskrise und liberale Demokratie* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 16–45 (quotation on p. 33, taken from Brüning, *Memoiren*, pp. 371–73); “Die Stellung der Beamtenschaft in Reich, Ländern und Gemeinden in der Ära Brüning,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 21 (1973): 151–65; and “Staat und Bürokratie in der Ära Brüning,” in Jasper, ed., *Tradition und Reform*, pp. 82–121. The first and third articles are now available in English translation in Hans Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz: Essays in German History* (Cambridge, 1991); see also Mommsen’s textbook account, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* (Chapel Hill and London, 1996), chaps. 8–11.

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Brüning's memoirs cannot simply be dismissed. At times his memory was remarkably accurate, and the fragmentary documentary record of his chancellorship cannot be shaped into a coherent narrative without careful consideration of his recollections. Only since 1992, however, have historians gained the opportunity to study the full range of those recollections in Brüning's voluminous correspondence from the years after 1934 housed in the Harvard University Archive, along with a photocopy of the first draft of his memoirs, typescripts of a dozen lectures on the true meaning of democracy, and a few other miscellaneous items. Historians have long felt stymied by the unscholarly editions of Brüning's memoirs and the two published volumes of his later correspondence, which omit most discussions of the Weimar years for inclusion in a third volume that never appeared. But the 7,000 letters by Brüning now accessible at Harvard make it possible to trace in detail the evolution of his recollections.¹³ When writing letters Brüning often recalled specific events of his chancellorship in a way that is far more consistent than the memoirs with the other sources, doubtless because he was not engaged in a narrative thrusting toward the conclusion that Hindenburg had no reason to dismiss him. Nobody has written a scholarly biography of Brüning,¹⁴ although Morsey has published a series of valuable articles on his career before and after the chancellorship, so the time has come to test the full range of Brüning's recollections against the other sources for German politics in the years 1930–2.

The best research into those other sources in the German archives has recently been summarized by Gerhard Schulz in a monumental political history of what he labels the "Brüning era." Schulz lacked access to the Brüning Papers, however, and made little effort to reconstruct the chancellor's background and world-view.¹⁵ I have been able to consult a few sources in Germany, moreover, not utilized by Schulz. In the national archive in Koblenz, the voluminous correspondence from 1919 to 1921 between Brüning's "neo-conservative" friends Martin Spahn and Eduard Stadtler sheds new light on the obscure first phase of his political career,¹⁶ and the partial collection of the personal papers of Brüning's interior minister, Joseph Wirth, supports his recollections in some key respects. The Wirth Papers include few documents written during Brüning's

13 See Rudolf Morsey, "Zur Problematik einer zeitgeschichtlichen Briefedition," *Historische Zeitschrift*, 221 (1975): 69–95, and Müller, *Brüning Papers*, pp. 22–30. The Brüning Papers found in the Harvard University Archive will hereafter be cited as HUG FP.

14 Much can be learned though from the two short biographies published by admirers during his chancellorship: Rüdiger Robert Beer, *Heinrich Brüning* (Berlin, 1931), and Alphons Nobel, *Brüning* (Leipzig, 1932). Beer's work appeared in four editions in 1931, and the third and fourth include some additions based on Brüning's comments on the first edition. Eilert Lohe relied heavily on Beer and Nobel in *Heinrich Brüning. Offizier – Staatsmann – Gelehrter* (Göttingen, 1969).

15 See *Von Brüning zu Hitler. Der Wandel des politischen Systems in Deutschland 1930–1933* (Berlin and New York, 1992), vol. 3 of *Zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur. Verfassungspolitik und Reichsreform in der Weimarer Republik*; and my review in *Central European History*, 26 (1993): 131–35.

16 In the Bundesarchiv Koblenz (German National Archive, Koblenz, hereafter cited as BAK), NL Martin Spahn/3; see also the correspondence with Adam Stegerwald in vol. 19 and the letters from Brüning himself (which are utilized by Schulz) in vol. 22.

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chancellorship but at least one important attempt to write memoirs.¹⁷ In the reorganized Potsdam branch of the national archive, moreover, historians now gain unrestricted access to the files of the Reich interior ministry and the office of the Reich President, which contain some previously neglected material on the presidential elections of 1932 and government surveillance of the Nazi Party.¹⁸ My first book on the Christian trade unions, which employed Brüning from 1920 to 1929, also uncovered evidence on his early career and ties with trade unionists that has been neglected by historians of the Brüning cabinet. The press of the Christian unions is a valuable source for Brüning's early editorials and later speeches as a politician; I have also studied those speeches in the published transcript of the proceedings of the Reichstag and the Cologne organ of the Center Party, which reported in the greatest depth on the activities of Chancellor Brüning.¹⁹

How should one read Brüning's memoirs? As Morsey and Rödder argue, the assertion that he sought as chancellor to restore a monarchy is almost undoubtedly quite misleading. The minutes of Brüning's cabinet meetings contain no hint of any such plan, and in public the chancellor declared emphatically and repeatedly that the Weimar constitution was not to blame for any of Germany's problems. The most valuable confidential record of the thought processes of Brüning's inner circle, the voluminous daily diary of the state secretary of finance, Hans Schäffer, also contains no discussion about a restoration until the subject was raised by Brüning's successors. In June 1932 Brüning expressed contempt for their political judgment by telling Schäffer that General Kurt von Schleicher planned to make Crown Prince Wilhelm the next head of state. When Schäffer's friends in the entourage of Chancellor Franz von Papen later expressed the hope that Brüning might be persuaded to accept a restoration, Schäffer responded that Brüning had firmly rejected any such idea in conversations with him both before and after his fall from power.²⁰

17 In his Swiss exile Wirth often began to write memoirs but broke off after a few pages. Fortunately for the historian, his fellow exile Wilhelm Hoegner induced him in August 1942 to answer a detailed list of questions about his political career: see NL Wirth/18, "Gespräche zweier deutschen Politiker am Vierwaldstättersee," especially Part III, "Ereignisse und Gestalten, 1918–1933."

18 Bundesarchiv, Abteilungen Potsdam (the Potsdam branch of the German National Archive, hereafter cited as BAP), "Akten der Präsidialkanzlei" (R601) and "Reichsministerium des Innern" (R15.01).

19 Brüning contributed numerous editorials in 1922–24 to the daily newspaper for the Christian unions that he founded, *Der Deutsche*, which is available in the archive of today's *Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* in Düsseldorf. For his ties with it, with the leaders of the Christian unions, and with the editors of the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, see William Patch, *Christian Trade Unions in the Weimar Republic, 1918–1933: The Failure of "Corporate Pluralism"* (New Haven and London, 1985); Nobel, *Brüning*, pp. 27–43; and Josef Hofmann, *Journalist in Republik, Diktatur und Besatzungszeit. Erinnerungen 1916–1947*, ed. Rudolf Morsey (Mainz, 1977), pp. 60–67.

20 See the transcription of Schäffer's shorthand diary in the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich (hereafter cited as IfZ), conversation with Brüning, 7 June 1932, and with Erwin Planck, 28 October 1932, NL Schäffer/21/567 and 23/945. For Brüning's indignant public commentary on the Papen cabinet's lack of respect for the Weimar constitution, see the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, 22 July 1932, #199, 31 July #208, 24 October #293, and 5 November 1932, #305.

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Of course, Brüning might not have opened his heart to Schäffer, who never gained his complete confidence. Schäffer himself judged that there were only three people of whom that could be said, the conservative politician Gottfried Treviranus, Brüning's chief of staff Hermann Pünder, and Rudolf Hilferding.²¹ The last two of these three at least were also ignorant of any plans for a restoration that the chancellor might have had. Hilferding's friend and party colleague, Hans Staudinger, later recalled attending tea at Hilferding's on a day when his host was deeply upset by a conversation that he had just had with Chancellor Brüning:

He [Hilferding] reported that Brüning had spoken with him about his political program and sought his reaction to a new political idea. Shortly before his death, Stresemann had spoken with Brüning in the Reichstag about the question of the reelection of old Hindenburg and suggested the idea of naming a regent [*Reichsverweser*] to take his place; he (Stresemann) had suggested Crown Prince Wilhelm. Hilferding answered Brüning that it was easy to imagine Stresemann saying such a thing, because he never paid enough attention to the echo and the possible consequences of the things he said. But Hilferding was astounded to hear Brüning repeat it. That would mean leaving the foundation of democracy, indeed, the resurrection of monarchy. He told Brüning: "Just don't say anything more about it." [*"Schweigen Sie nur darüber!"*]

That was the last Staudinger heard of the idea. He noted on the basis of his own dealings with the chancellor that although Brüning obviously admired the British constitutional monarchy, he believed sincerely in "democratic ideals" and knew very well as an expert on foreign policy that "a democratic republic was the only form of state that could be trusted in the western world of democracies."²² Schäffer also recalled vividly in later years an encounter in Paris in 1940 with the exiled Hilferding, who was shocked because Treviranus had just told him that Brüning had discussed a restoration with Hindenburg in the winter of 1931/2. Hilferding felt "disappointed on a personal level" that Brüning had deceived him about his goals. Schäffer replied shrewdly that such talk was probably just a gambit to overcome Hindenburg's reluctance to campaign for reelection.²³

Hermann Pünder, the state secretary in the Reich chancellery, had been friendly with Brüning for years, was a Center Party colleague, and conferred at length with the chancellor almost every day. He later declared that he and Brüning had "often discussed the ideal of a parliamentary monarchy down through the years, which was a favorite concept of us both. Since it was then (1931/2) at least a decade too late to implement such plans, however, these ideals

21 Schäffer to Hans Luther, 28 September 1961, NL Schäffer/44/39–42; compare NL Wirth/18, "Ereignisse und Gestalten von 1918–1933," question #22, pp. 4–6.

22 Hans Staudinger, *Wirtschaftspolitik im Weimarer Staat. Lebenserinnerungen eines politischen Beamten im Reich und in Preussen, 1889 bis 1934*, ed. Hagen Schulze (Bonn, 1982), pp. 91, 108–09.

23 Schäffer to Werner Conze, 12 September 1964, NL Schäffer/45/56–57.

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of ours did not find their way into any sort of formal proposals.” Pünder was an eloquent defender of the Weimar constitution while in office, and his diary from 1929 to 1932 contains no discussion of a restoration. When King Alfonso XIII of Spain abdicated in April 1931, Pünder recorded the following observation: “A heavy blow for the idea of monarchy. Alfonso was a modern man. He never believed that the Spanish monarchy would last long.” Thus Brüning’s chief of staff did consider monarchy anachronistic by 1931.²⁴

Treviranus stands therefore as the only knowledgeable witness who later corroborated the story that Brüning sought from the fall of 1931 to restore a monarchy. This fact is highly suggestive, because Treviranus stayed in such close touch with Brüning in exile that the two men forged a single memory of these events. Indeed, Treviranus served as a conduit in the 1950s and ’60s through which Brüning sought to disseminate his version of history to sympathetic scholars in Germany.²⁵ Only after Hitler became chancellor, as we shall see in Chapter 6, is there any documentary evidence that Brüning and Treviranus sought to promote a restoration as the only alternative to a one-party dictatorship. Just after he began to write his memoirs in England, moreover, Brüning visited Winston Churchill in September 1934 and was fascinated to learn that his host explained the Nazi seizure of power as the result of the Allies’ mistaken decision in 1918 to topple the Hohenzollern and Habsburg dynasties. Churchill had recently begun to propagate the view that the constitutional monarchy was the best form of government to save Europe from the twin threats of communism and fascism. Brüning found Churchill’s company exhilarating and sought him out repeatedly thereafter. Treviranus also took part in these conversations, and it seems most likely that both expatriates reshaped their memories as they sought to persuade Tory friends that they had always shared Churchill’s outlook. The first published version of Brüning’s story about a restoration, in John Wheeler-Bennett’s biography of Hindenburg, was also based on discussions with Brüning and Treviranus in 1934. That book obviously reflects hindsight when it declares that Brüning had arrived at the following conclusion in the fall of 1931: “Long hours of contemplation had convinced him that one course, and one course only, could prevent Hitler from ultimately obtaining supreme power – the restoration of the monarchy.”²⁶ In fact Brüning pursued the unheroic policy during his last months

24 Pünder to Wilhelm Vernekehl, 2 April 1962, in Brüning, *Reden*, p. 329; Pünder’s speech of 23 November 1929 on the Weimar constitution, BAK NL Pünder/3/113–15; Hermann Pünder, *Politik in der Reichskanzlei. Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1929–1932*, ed. Thilo Vogelsang (Stuttgart, 1961), p. 95.

25 See the three folders of correspondence with Treviranus in HUG FP 93.10/Box 34, especially the report by Treviranus on 21 November 1963 (folder 2) about his efforts to influence the historians Repgen, Josef Becker, Morsey, and Conze; and Gottfried Treviranus, *Das Ende von Weimar. Heinrich Brüning und seine Zeit* (Düsseldorf and Vienna, 1968), pp. 166, 295–96.

26 See William Patch, “Heinrich Brüning’s Recollections of Monarchism: The Birth of a Red Herring,” *Journal of Modern History* (forthcoming June 1998); Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, *Wooden Titan: Hindenburg in Twenty Years of German History 1914–1934* (New York, 1936), p. 352; Wheeler-Bennett, *Knaves, Fools and Heroes: In Europe between the Wars* (New York, 1975), pp. 54–57; Gottfried Treviranus, *Für Deutschland im Exil* (Düsseldorf, 1973), pp. 34–38, 51–56; and

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in office of waiting for diplomatic successes and the gradual recovery of the world economy to bring the German electorate back to its senses.

If we discount Brüning's later story about a restoration, then the related story that he forged an alliance with the "Strasser wing" of the Nazi Party in the fall of 1931 loses credibility as well. Brüning remembered these matters more clearly when he was not writing memoirs. He became furious, for example, when Hjalmar Schacht and Count Schwerin von Krosigk sought at Nuremberg to justify their roles in the Third Reich by testifying that even the distinguished statesman Brüning had wanted Hitler to succeed him as chancellor. Brüning denied indignantly that he had ever told anyone as chancellor that the Nazis should enter the Reich government; all his efforts had aimed at excluding them from any such role. The most he had ever considered was to admit them as junior partners into the Prussian state government after the democratic parties lost their majority there in April 1932.²⁷ All the other sources support this recollection, not the account in the memoirs. In August 1932, however, Brüning did become so angry with the arbitrary conduct of Chancellor Papen that he advocated making Hitler chancellor in a cabinet bound to a parliamentary coalition between the Nazi and Center parties. He did form an alliance with Gregor Strasser at that juncture, and the memoirs obviously project some of these later discussions back onto the events of his chancellorship.

Brüning's memoirs sometimes echo phrases employed by neo-conservative foes of the Weimar constitution in the 1920s, but we now have access to more detailed accounts of his attitude toward that constitution in the typescripts of his public lectures delivered in the United States from 1937 to 1943. These were thoughtful efforts to explain the collapse of so many democracies in the Great Depression and the preconditions for a revival of democracy in Germany.²⁸ The lecturer spoke often of the need to secure legitimate "authority" and "stability" for democratic government, but he always assumed that Germany's constitution should be based on the formal responsibility of cabinets to a parliament elected by universal and equal suffrage. His major criticism of the work of the National Assembly in Weimar was that it had undermined parliamentary democracy by

Brüning's memorandum of 17 September 1934 and Brüning to Churchill, 28 August 1937, in Claire Nix, ed., *Heinrich Brüning. Briefe und Gespräche 1934–1945* (Stuttgart, 1974) (hereafter cited as "Briefe, I"), pp. 29–31, 147–49.

- 27 See Brüning to Hans von Raumer, 1 May 1947, HUG FP 93.10/Box 26/Hans von Raumer; Brüning to Theodore Draper, 11 July 1947, HUG FP 93.10/Box 7/Theodore Draper; Brüning's affidavit of 15 December 1947, in Müller, *Brüning Papers*, pp. 200–01; and Brüning to Dr. Leutze, 6 December 1956, in Udo Kissenkoetter, *Gregor Strasser und die NSDAP* (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 204–05.
- 28 HUG FP 93.45/Lectures in America: "Some Reflections on the Decay of European Democracy," lecture series delivered at Queen's College, Princeton, early in 1937; "The Essence of Democracy," three lectures delivered at Dartmouth College, 16–19 March 1937; "The Changing Background of Democracy," three Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia, January 1939; "Democratic Reorientation," Brookings Institute lecture of 6 March 1941; "Some Thoughts on the Spiritual Background of the Present Crisis," lecture at the University of Iowa School of Religion in 1941; untitled Detroit lecture of 7 December 1941; untitled Boston University lecture of 1 November 1943. Brief excerpts are published in Müller, *Brüning Papers*, pp. 203–12.

introducing redundant guarantees of popular sovereignty borrowed from the United States and Switzerland, a powerful presidency and the popular referendum. Thus his arguments anticipated the conclusions of the founders of the Federal Republic of Germany. The provisions of the Weimar constitution were nevertheless sufficiently flexible, Brüning argued, that a truly “healthy democracy” could be created within its framework. Any effort to amend the constitution in the years 1930–2 would have provoked explosive controversy and failed to win the necessary two-thirds majority in the Reichstag. Brüning praised the Weimar Republic warmly, moreover, for stimulating patriotism among the working class, for exemplary regulation of church–state relations, and for state labor arbitration and other social experiments that represented the most successful attempt ever to translate the ideals of Catholic social theory into practice.²⁹ These lectures strongly suggest that Brüning was a monarchist by sentiment but a “republican from reason,” a *Vernunftrepublikaner* who went through a learning process in the early 1920s similar to that experienced by Friedrich Meinecke and Gustav Stresemann.

Brüning’s memories of the Weimar Republic experienced further distortion at the end of the Second World War. After the saturation bombing of German cities, revelations about the Holocaust, and the harsh decisions of the Potsdam Conference, he became extremely pessimistic about historical trends. Only in 1947 did Brüning decide that Bismarck’s conservative critics were right to oppose his introduction of universal suffrage, and the opening section of the published memoirs, the section closest in tone to the neo-conservatives, was not written until then.³⁰ The opportunity to visit Germany again upset his mental equilibrium further, as Brüning plunged into investigations of who had persuaded Hindenburg to dismiss him. His opinion of the obvious suspects in the presidential entourage kept fluctuating, and he developed several implausible conspiracy theories.³¹

With regard to economic policy, Brüning’s memoirs undermined any defense of his actions based on the argument that he could not have been expected to understand the novel ideas of John Maynard Keynes. In the 1950s and ’60s the view spread among economic historians that the Brüning cabinet could have lowered the unemployment rate substantially through deficit spending on public

29 See p. 6 of Lecture #1, “Some Reflections on the Decay of European Democracy,” and the entire Detroit lecture of 7 December 1941. These passages are ignored in Frank Müller’s excerpts and contradict his conclusion (*Brüning Papers*, pp. 76–80) that Brüning advocated an “authoritarian democracy” closer in spirit to Franz von Papen than to the Weimar constitution.

30 See Brüning to Fritz Kern, 4 February 1947, and Brüning to Rudolf Pechel, 9 February 1947, in *Briefe*, II:70–74; Brüning, *Memoiren*, pp. 52–56; and Müller, *Brüning Papers*, pp. 134–36. The first draft of the memoirs from 1934/5 in HUG FP 93.4 opens with a brief account of Brüning’s relationship with President Hindenburg (compare pp. 107, 116, and 145 of the published *Memoiren*) and then on p. 3 takes up basically the same narrative of events from 1929 begun on p. 145 of the published version.

31 See Gerhard Schulz, “Die Suche nach dem Schuldigen. Heinrich Brüning und seine Demission als Reichskanzler,” in Karl Dietrich Bracher et al., eds., *Staat und Parteien. Festschrift für Rudolf Morsey zum 65. Geburtstag* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 669–87, and Müller, *Brüning Papers*, pp. 84–111.