

**Myth and respectability in Swedish and Dutch fascism,  
1931-40**

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April 2018

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

## Abstract

The focus of this thesis is on the process of myth-making (*mythopoeia*) in the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB) and the Swedish National Socialist Workers' Party (NSAP), using a cultural pragmatic approach to analyse the practicalities and implementation of mythopoeia comparatively. A variety of fascist performances, scripted and unscripted, are considered as having mythopoeic potential, and understood as performative in character, i.e. constituting the thing they claimed to represent.

Multiple parts of this mythopoeic process are analysed: the resources, organisation, and technologies required to implement it, and the nature of the process, the events, performances, in other words the actual implementation, and reception by audiences. Secondly, it uses respectability as a means of seeing how in a national context this process was limited, inhibited, or otherwise defined by the standards of the public and media, to which fascists ultimately tried to appeal, thus providing an external perspective on fascist activities to contextualise them.

The thesis is divided into four chapters, which deal with the party apparatus, leader myth, political uniforms, and the role of aesthetics and spectacle respectively. Together these chapters explore the relationship between mythopoeia and respectability as refracted through party organisation and administration, as embodied by the 'charismatic' fascist Leader, in the day-to-day behaviour and appearance of the rank-and-file, and ultimately the holistic experience of fascist aesthetics, i.e. the fully scripted and organised spectacles of party congresses.

Ultimately it is shown that the fascist movements of Sweden and the Netherlands were highly innovative organisations. Mythopoeia had a powerful mobilising capacity, which could make up for the diminutive financial power and low membership figures of fascist parties. Finally it appears that the relationship between myth and respectability was not a straightforward dialectical one, but multivalent, and highly dynamic.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

## Table of contents

Introduction	1
1. The Apparatus: propaganda, organisation, resources	36
2. The Leader: cult, devotion, respectability	70
3. The Uniform: fantasy, violence, discipline	115
4. The Spectacle: aesthetics, morale, immersion	166
Conclusion	227
Bibliography	236

## Introduction

So it has come to this in the civilised world. But do not believe that the degeneration of judgement is limited to the countries in which extreme nationalism has been victorious. Whoever looks around can repeatedly observe how, with developed persons, often youths, a certain indifference has come about to the reality of the figures that have entered their intellectual world. The categories of fiction and history ... are no longer clearly separated. It is no longer of interest if the intellectual material can be verified. The rise of the idea *mythus* is the most important example of this. One accepts an illusion, in which the elements of wish and fantasy are consciously permitted...<sup>1</sup>

—Johan Huizinga, *In the Shadows of Tomorrow* (1935)

## I

Myth occupied a peculiarly prominent place in the politics of interwar Europe. Rather than the post-war settlement leading to the firm establishment of rationalistic and moderate forms of democratic politics, interwar mass politics saw the rise of new political possibilities and profound uncertainties.<sup>2</sup> With new forms of politics on the Left and Right, myths seemed to underpin much of the appeal of emergent mass movements.<sup>3</sup> Myths are here understood as moral narratives that are not strictly fictional, but ahistorical, with strong connotations of the fantastical,<sup>4</sup> or in a simpler sense ‘an image which can inspire men’, with ‘some element of truth in it, but it is twisted into a vision that conforms to the desired ideal’.<sup>5</sup> Myths had been exploited politically before, but in the new era of mass politics brought on by technological modernity, acquired new forms and

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Zoover is het in de beschaafde wereld gekomen. Men meene niet, dat de verworping van het oordeel zich beperkt tot de landen, waar het extreme nationalisme heeft gezegevierd. Wie om zich heen ziet kan herhaaldelijk waarnemen, hoe bij ontwikkelde personen, veelal jongeren, een zekere onverschilligheid voor het waarheidsgehalte van de figuren van hun ideeënwereld is ingetreden. De categorieën fictie en historie ... worden niet duidelijk meer onderscheiden. Het interesseert niet meer, of de geestelijke stof op haar waarheidsgehalte beproefd kan worden. De opgang van het begrip *mythus* is hiervan het belangrijkste voorbeeld. Men aanvaardt een verbeelding, waarin de elementen wensch en fantasie bewust worden toegelaten...’, Johan Huizinga, *In de Schaduwen van Morgen: Een Diagnose van het Geestelijk Lijden van onzen Tijd*, 6th edn (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon N.V., 1936), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Vincent, ‘Political Violence and Mass Society: A European Civil War?’, in *The Oxford Handbook of European History, 1914-1945*, ed. by Nicholas Doumanis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 388.

<sup>3</sup> Myths are a particularly relevant form of symbol in the emergence of mass political movements, as Edelman argued: Murray Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence* (Chicago: Markham, 1971), p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Burke, *History and Social Theory*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture: Intellectual, Cultural and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), p. 93.

significance. Cultural pessimists of the preceding decades, commenting on the explosive growth of print journalism and new technologies of mass production, appeared to be proven right.<sup>6</sup> ‘The masses’ had acquired an ominous significance in European political culture already since the late nineteenth century, but it was the 1920s which really brought their political relevance to the fore.<sup>7</sup> ‘The new politics drew the masses into rituals which connected to myths and symbols, which dramatised politics in spectacular ways.’<sup>8</sup> From the perspective of the new political parties, Left or Right, mythic narratives could turn the inchoate masses into unified communities, create a sense of belonging and re-impose social order on a fractured society, through participation in ritual.<sup>9</sup>

In the early 1930s, a new wave of rightist organisations hit Europe, in the shadow of the established Fascist regime in Italy and the rise of Hitler’s NSDAP in Germany. The small liberal democracies of the continent were no exception. In December 1931, the civil engineer Anton Mussert (1894-1946) founded the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (NSB, National Socialist Movement) in the Netherlands. Mid-January 1933, a young Swedish soldier, Sven Olov Lindholm (1903-1998), broke away from the Swedish National Socialist Party, and founded a new fascist organisation, *Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet* (NSAP, National Socialist Workers’ Party). Sweden and the Netherlands were not strangers to fascists, which had already caused noise in the previous decade, but these movements caused more of a stir in public life than any of their predecessors. Lindholm’s NSAP never managed to enter parliament, failing to collect more than 0.7% of the national vote (1936), but quickly established itself as the largest (with circa 12 000 members) and loudest of Sweden’s fascist groups. Mussert’s NSB on the other hand grew rapidly in its first years (up to about 50 000 members), and attained a highly unexpected 7.94% of the vote in the 1935 provincial elections, breaking the mould for newly formed parties, and focusing Dutch political debate on fascism for most of the 1930s. The NSB lost about half of its voters in the general elections of 1937 however, while the NSAP went into slow decline until it decided to rebrand itself as the *Svensksocialistisk Samling* (SSS, Swedish Socialist Union) in November 1938,

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Mass Media and Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Europe’, in *Fin de Siècle and Its Legacy*, ed. by Mikuláš Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 98–114 (pp. 99–104).

<sup>7</sup> Stefan Jonsson, *Crowds and Democracy: The Idea and Image of the Masses from Revolution to Fascism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 7–17.

<sup>8</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), pp. 2–9.

<sup>9</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, pp. 207–10; Jimmy Vulovic, *Reform eller Revolt: Litterär propaganda i socialdemokratisk, kommunistisk och nationalsocialistisk press* (Halmstad: Ellerströms, 2013), p. 82.

and tried to diversify its appeal, to no avail. The NSAP/SSS dissolved itself in 1950 after more than a decade of further marginalisation. The NSB was dissolved in 1945 with the end of the German Occupation, and Anton Mussert executed the year after for treason. While some have seen these parties as a parenthesis in the political life of stable democratic regimes, they showed that, as the contemporary Dutch historian Johan Huizinga observed, no countries were immune to this new phenomenon in European politics, and the appeal of wilful myth-making was a crucial part of that.

While not unique to fascism, ‘the most self-consciously visual of all political forms’,<sup>10</sup> fascists were the most open in their reliance on myth, and did so most visibly when they came to power in Italy and Germany.<sup>11</sup> Benito Mussolini openly proclaimed the value and use of myth in his own politics.<sup>12</sup> Adolf Hitler, echoing Gustave le Bon, affirmed the ‘feminine’ masses could be easily manipulated through simplistic narratives of good and evil, love and hate.<sup>13</sup> While fascists also offered more or less feasible political programmes to the public and appealed to constituencies’ material interests, they constructed a myth of not just the utopian fascist community, but of themselves. This was a myth that aimed to transcend daily politics, and represented fascism in fantastical terms, as a crusade against evil and chaos. Fascists in the two countries that will be compared in this thesis, the Netherlands, and Sweden, were no exception.

In the absence of international consistency in fascist party programmes and ideological rhetoric, fascism’s mythic constructions arguably formed its principal expression. The fascist myth of fascism functioned as both identity and propaganda, as it mobilised members and attracted followers.<sup>14</sup> Fascist myth was highly performative in character, and expressed aesthetically: mass rallies, visually striking propaganda, fantastical sloganeering, and moving rituals. Fascist performances were a political theatre with a penchant for spectacle, a ‘hothouse fusion of violence, myth, and aesthetics’ - and served to construct a fascism that was dynamic,

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<sup>10</sup> Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilization in Weimar Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 6–10.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Neocleous, *Fascism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf: Eine kritische Edition*, 2 vols (Munich & Berlin: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2016), I, p. 193/507.

<sup>14</sup> For the connection between fascist propaganda, aesthetics, and self-identity, see also: Thomas J. Saunders, ‘A “New Man”: Fascism, Cinema and Image Creation’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 12.2 (1998), 227–46 (pp. 235–36).

disciplined, and impressive.<sup>15</sup> On this plane fascism was not a historically contingent political movement, but a history-making force destined to transform the eternal nation.<sup>16</sup>

Historical literature has dealt extensively with the themes of myth, spectacle, and aesthetics in fascism, and this thesis shares some of that literature's concerns about the function and impact of fascist myths, though it is not interested in analysing or defining fascism through its mythology. The principal queries of the thesis are about the processes at work behind fascist myths, how myths were actually produced in practice, here termed *mythopoeia*, myth-making. While myths have often been explained as a form of propaganda, mythopoeic processes highlight limitations to myth-making, revealing it as a pragmatic project that required resources, technologies, competencies, and money, thus tying what some might dismiss as nebulous fantasy to matters of organisation, finance, and infrastructure. By drawing attention to the connection between fascist myths and their production, other functions of myths within the party are revealed, as the role played by different sections of the party organisations and the cadres are foregrounded. Thus mythopoeia can explain the influences behind the shaping and changing of fascist myth over time, how it repeatedly mobilised fascist activists, and helped maintain party loyalty through long years of struggle. Consequently it also delineates the integral place of the mythopoeic process in the structure of fascist activism, while painting a diachronic picture of fascist myth.

The second concern of this thesis is to ground the analysis of fascist mythopoeia firmly in the context of a cultural-political struggle over the semantic meaning of 'fascism' and 'national socialism'. In the words of David D. Roberts:

The word 'fascism' was new in 1919, and no one knew what it meant; no one knew how whatever it denoted would develop. So even to say that 'they' - The Italians, the Fascists - 'invented' fascism is misleading. It was not something that could be invented. It simply emerged contingently from its

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<sup>15</sup> David E. Apter, 'Politics as Theatre: An Alternative View of the Rationalities of Power', in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 218–56 (p. 223).

<sup>16</sup> Cf.: Paul Betts, 'The New Fascination with Fascism: The Case of Nazi Modernism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37.4 (2002), 541–58 (p. 544).



contingent birth. It was through that contingent process that what came to be called fascism, first just in Italy, but then gradually more widely, came into the world.<sup>17</sup>

The point to emphasise here is that fascism from its inception was very much an empty signifier, and that through the production of myths about fascism, fascists were contributing to a public discourse about the meaning of this new political phenomenon of the interwar period.<sup>18</sup> Thus mythopoeia was a process in argument with liberals, conservatives, and socialists especially, in which fascists actively tried to construct fascism for the public as a transcendently fantastical force. But non-fascist outsiders were not politically blank slates, without any prior notions of their own about fascism, especially not in Sweden and the Netherlands, which in many ways were entangled with Germany,<sup>19</sup> not least culturally and economically.<sup>20</sup> Fascists had to confront competing discourses about fascism's meaning, conflicting ideological hermeneutics that mediated the reception of fascist discourse and performance. The themes of contested interpretations, competing discourses, and challenges to what 'fascism' signified, make this thesis a cultural history about the political struggle for meaning in two different societies, connected by one of the crucial signifiers of interwar European politics.<sup>21</sup> The centrality of myth pushes analysis towards the assignation of meaning through narratives. 'Narrative is an arena in which meaning takes form, in which individuals connect to the public and social world, and in which change therefore becomes possible.'<sup>22</sup> The research into myth is in the area of cultural history – the exploration of the generation of meaning and the structuring of the symbolic order<sup>23</sup> – while the focus on the process

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<sup>17</sup> David D. Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and Its Era, 1919-1945* (New York: Bergahn, 2016), p. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd edn (New York; London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 78–80.

<sup>19</sup> Much as expectations of the NSDAP in Germany were conditioned by prior perceptions of Fascist Italy: Hans Woller, 'Machtpolitisches Kalkül Oder Ideologische Affinität? Zur Frage Des Verhältnisses Zwischen Mussolini Und Hitler Vor 1933', in *Der Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft*, ed. by W. Benz and H. Mommsen (Frankfurt am Main: Geschichte Fischer, 1993), p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> On the transnational reading of national comparative histories, see: Philipp Ther, 'Beyond the Nation: The Relational Basis of a Comparative History of Germany and Europe', *Central European History*, 36.1 (2003), 45–73 (pp. 67–70).

<sup>21</sup> For a definition of culture as a site for the struggle over the terms of (collective) meaning, see: David Chaney, *The Cultural Turn: Scene-Setting Essays on Contemporary Cultural History* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 11–23.

<sup>22</sup> Introduction to: *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, ed. by Victoria E. Bonnell, Lynn Hunt, and Richard Biernacki (London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> 'Central to all forms of cultural history, is the process of symbolic mediation through which human beings make sense of their world.' Anna Green, *Cultural History, Theory and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 9.

of myth-making, mythopoeia, draws attention to the practical and material dimensions of cultural production.

The Netherlands and Sweden provide the comparison to understand the significance of fascist mythopoeia in this context of public discourse about fascism. As two (supposedly) stable liberal democracies, both of which remained neutral during the First World War, they raise interesting questions about the operations of fascist movements and the dissemination of fascist myth within their borders. Swedish and Dutch fascists did not typically have a background of war experience, nor did the national political and legal cultures permit extensive violence, which did so much to shape the experience of Italian *squadristi* and German SA-men. Carrying arms risked an effective ban of the party organisation. Political uniforms were prohibited in 1933 – earlier than most countries<sup>24</sup> – and paramilitaries soon followed. In other words much of the organisational, experiential, and aesthetic structures that shaped fascist myth-making in other countries was missing or limited here. At the same time public discourse about fascism was heavily influenced by the examples of the Italian and German dictatorships, which by the 1930s had a largely negative image in the small democracies, which felt threatened by their German neighbour in particular.

This was unpromising ground for fascist movements, yet nevertheless many movements did emerge throughout the interwar years, persistent in the face of repeated failures to break through. This provides an opportunity to answer questions about how fascist organisations retained a loyal following for decades, and sustained fanatical activism under discouraging conditions. It also elucidates the barely understood connection between fascism's international image as propagated by the fascist regimes and their enemies, and indigenous fascist movements' efforts to construct their own image of fascism, in a trying and ambivalent relationship with their counterparts in other countries. This was an 'era of fascism', in which most of the continent seemed to contemporaries to be turning fascist;<sup>25</sup> the situation of self-defined fascists in these more or less resolutely democratic countries provides a fertile basis from which to study the cultural construction of fascism in Europe. How did established international ideas of fascism put pressure on smaller national movements to conform in their myth-making, while their own liberal democracies forced them to adhere to the norms of political respectability? Did their mythopoeic

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<sup>24</sup> Vincent, p. 394.

<sup>25</sup> Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: Times Mirror, 1965), p. 21.

efforts shape the public perception of fascism at all, and how was it tied to the development of fascist subjectivities? And could Swedish and Dutch fascists really manage and afford the apparatus required to create a convincing mythic construction of fascism for themselves and their constituencies? How did their diminutive size, legal limitations, and international context shape mythopoeic processes?

The comparative method is particularly valuable here, as the two broadly similar democracies help identify the common effects of democratic conditions on fascist movements, while the fascist movements in question were different enough in character, and trajectory, to pinpoint what was unique. Sweden and the Netherlands shared enough characteristics to set them apart from other European states in this regard: neutrality during the First World War, constitutional monarchy, lasting parliamentary democracy during the interwar period, cultural ties to Germany, and so forth. But at the same time the fascist movements in question turned out quite differently, with Dutch fascists managing to acquire a significant following in the 1930s.

While fascism as a regime has been researched a great deal, there is tremendous analytical potential in studying fascist movements under trying and unpromising conditions, even (or especially) if they 'failed'. The Swedish National Socialist Workers' Party and the Dutch National Socialist Movement are – still under-researched – movements which can provide insights into the conditions of success and failure for fascism in Europe, the efficacy and limitations of fascist organisation, and the dynamics of mythopoeia within party culture and public discourse.

## II

The cultural approach to fascism, which analyses fascism 'from the inside out', grappling with the world view it constructed through discourse, performance, and aesthetics, has been gaining ground since the 1960s. George L. Mosse's *Nazi Culture* (1966), presenting a wide-ranging collection of original Nazi texts with commentary, was one early such work, which tried to answer the question of how fascism impinged on the consciousness of its subjects.<sup>26</sup> 'Fascism considered as a cultural movement means seeing fascism as it saw itself, to attempt to understand the movement on its own terms. Only then, when we have grasped fascism from the inside out, can

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<sup>26</sup> Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, p. xix.

we truly judge its appeal and its power'.<sup>27</sup> With the 1970s cultural turn in political history such approaches became more common. Aesthetics and spectacle have occupied a privileged position in the cultural analysis of fascism, often understood as part and parcel of its appeal. Historians such as Ernst Nolte described it as a 'spellbinding of the senses by pageantry and parades';<sup>28</sup> Modris Eksteins saw Nazism as a 'beautiful lie' which through kitsch spectacle and excitement sought to displace ethical considerations.<sup>29</sup> Gerhard Paul's study of Nazi propaganda photography stated Nazism was ideologically void, instead best understood as a movement of propaganda, using aesthetic appeals to the emotions against the dry language and rational discourse of democracy.<sup>30</sup> Works on the Nuremberg *Parteitage*, the spectacular choreography of Albert Speer, or the Nazi *Thingspiel*, have relied on similar narratives of a nihilistic fascism exploiting modern technology to aesthetically manipulate 'the masses';<sup>31</sup> in Sweden Ingemar Karlsson and Arne Ruth described the Third Reich as turning society into a theatre, transforming citizens into a work of art, guising a spiritual vacuum and ethical monstrosity.<sup>32</sup>

By the 1990s George Mosse assessed there had been growing awareness in the historiography of the role of aesthetics in fascism's appeal, but noted there was more work to be done on the function aesthetics played in self-representation and fascist subjectivity.<sup>33</sup> While 1990s historians like Jeffrey T. Schnapp, in *Staging Fascism* (1996), asserted that 'fascism often amounted to little more than a complex of ethical principles, credos, myths, and aversions, held together by opportunism and rhetorical-aesthetic glue', they recognised in the process that the aesthetic-symbolic dimension of fascism played a crucial role in its self-definition.<sup>34</sup> Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi's *Fascist Spectacle* (1997) similarly saw fascist aesthetics as building the Italian regime's

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<sup>27</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999), pp. x–xi.

<sup>28</sup> Nolte, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000), pp. 304–12.

<sup>30</sup> Gerhard Paul, *Aufstand der Bilder: Die NS-Propaganda vor 1933* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz Nachf., 1990), pp. 12–13.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance: Henning Eichberg and Robert A. Jones, 'The Nazi Thingspiel: Theater for the Masses in Fascism and Proletarian Culture', *New German Critique*, 1977, 133–50.

<sup>32</sup> Ingemar Karlsson and Arne Ruth, *Samhället som Teater: Estetik och Politik i Tredje Riket* (Stockholm: Liber, 1983), pp. 16–24.

<sup>33</sup> George L. Mosse, 'Fascist Aesthetics and Society: Some Considerations', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31.2 (1996), 245–52.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *Staging Fascism: 18 BL and the Theater of Masses for Masses* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1996), p. 6.

power and asserting its authority, but at the same time creating its own story and identity.<sup>35</sup> For Mabel Berezin theatre in Mussolini's Italy was a way of forging a fascist community,<sup>36</sup> and went further in *Making the Fascist Self* (1997), reconstructing how the regime used mass rituals to create a fascist identity, with the public spectacles as a point of access for participants into the fascist community, merging the public and private self through emotional force.<sup>37</sup> In 1993, Emilio Gentile's *Il culto del littorio* revived the concept of political religion to underscore the religious-liturgical dimensions of fascist rituals, proposing that they bestowed a religious aura, exciting faith and devotion by imputing divine meaning to political phenomena.<sup>38</sup> While Gentile popularised political religion, religion was really only one of several registers in which fascists performed, while, his critics argue, the distinction between the concept's actual analytical value and enticing metaphorical suggestiveness remains unclear.<sup>39</sup>

Through the foregrounding of ritual, ceremonial, or liturgical elements in fascism, which owed so much to the cultural turn's focus on rituals and symbols, as well as the 'discursive turn' of the 1980s,<sup>40</sup> historians were more prone to take political style and rhetoric seriously, and by extension the myths they conveyed. Alongside the spate of works on the cultural-aesthetic in fascism in the 1990s came Roger Griffin's 1991 *The Nature of Fascism*, which foregrounded the matter of ideology again in the form of myth, in a cultural context. His book argued for a heuristic definition of fascism that would adequately capture what was new and unique about far-right movements, organisations, and regimes of Europe in 1918-1945, and promote a fruitful analysis of fascist ideology in these terms. His minimalist ideal type definition of fascism as 'palingenetic ultra nationalism' – an extreme nationalism driven by the myth of national rebirth – clearly captured the imagination of many scholars in the field, and has within two decades become a standard reference point in the historiography.<sup>41</sup> Griffin argued for the 'primacy of culture' in fascism,

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<sup>35</sup> Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi, *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy* (London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1–4.

<sup>36</sup> Mabel Berezin, 'The Organization of Political Ideology: Culture, State, and Theater in Fascist Italy', *American Sociological Review*, 56.5 (1991), 639–51 (p. 639).

<sup>37</sup> Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 5–7, 19–28.

<sup>38</sup> Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. ix; Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 36–37.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Baumeister, 'Faschismus als "politischer Religion"', in *Der Faschismus in Europa: Wege der Forschung*, ed. by Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2014), pp. 17–33 (pp. 67–69).

<sup>40</sup> Introduction to: Bonnell, Hunt, and Biernacki, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Oxon: Routledge, 1993), pp. 32–55.

reconceptualising ideology through myth (palingenesis), a focus on ‘the underlying ideological matrix of fascist thought, policies and action, not on fascist “doctrine” itself.’<sup>42</sup> The ‘New Consensus’ Griffin asserted seems illusory, and it is questionable to what extent Griffin’s palingenetic orientation has actually led to new research contributions in the field, but his polemic is symptomatic of the entrenchment of cultural approaches to fascism.<sup>43</sup>

The significance of Griffin’s approach to this thesis is limited, but it has placed the role of myth in the centre stage of fascism, and analysing it as more than propaganda. Griffin has proposed that myths could be used to understand fascist mentalities or subjectivities, and by extension their actions, moving beyond instrumental interests or programmatic ideological goals.<sup>44</sup> This has been practised in cultural approaches to fascism before, but without focusing explicitly on myth.<sup>45</sup> However, the insistence on palingenetic myth over any other, no matter how supposedly ‘heuristic’, has proven to be of little help. The same could be said of the academic construction of a ‘generic’ fascism. David D. Roberts is correct when he argues that the use of *a priori* frameworks such as heuristic definitions restrict our understanding of what fascists actually said or thought – myth and activism are far more multivalent and complex than Griffin implies.<sup>46</sup> The use of definitions is unnecessary, if one recognises that fascism, semiotically an empty signifier, was a historically contingent phenomenon which was and always remained a work-in-progress, open to interpretation and revision from all sides. Nietzsche’s dictum, that whatever has a history cannot be defined, applies especially in this instance, where the focus is on tracing how contemporaries constructed fascism (mythopoeia) in the first place.<sup>47</sup>

Some historians have regarded the cultural focus of Griffin as generalising, too synchronic and ahistorical, as well as too idealistic, arguing the primacy of culture lacked any sense of power or connection to real world activism. Michael Mann asked in *Fascists* (2004), ‘[h]ow can a “myth” generate “internal cohesion” or “driving force”? A myth cannot be an agent driving or integrating

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<sup>42</sup> Roger Griffin, ‘The Primacy of Culture: The Current Growth (Or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37.1 (2002), 21–43 (p. 34).

<sup>43</sup> Arnd Bauerkämper, *Der Faschismus in Europa 1918-1945* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2006), p. 35; Baumeister, p. 11; David D. Roberts, ‘Myth, Style, Substance and the Totalitarian Dynamic in Fascist Italy’, *Contemporary European History*, 16.1 (2007), 1–36 (pp. 1–7).

<sup>44</sup> Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> E.g.: H.R. Kedward, *Fascism in Western Europe, 1900-45* (Glasgow: Blackie, 1969), p. 222.

<sup>46</sup> David Roberts, ‘Fascism and the Framework for Interactive Political Innovation during the Era of the Two World Wars’, in *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, ed. by António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 44–47.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Ein Streitschrift* (Leipzig: C.G. Naumann Verlag, 1907), 2:13.

anything, since ideas are not free-floating. Without power organizations, ideas cannot actually *do* anything.<sup>48</sup> But Mann, like other historians, has not been willing to disregard the cultural and mythic elements of fascism altogether in his research, and have acknowledged that fascists' own beliefs need to be taken into account, no matter how irrational.<sup>49</sup> In the more recent historiography, Sven Reichardt has developed a 'praxeological' or cultural-pragmatic analysis of fascism, which focuses on the 'thinking within action', i.e. how cultural-ideological forms are revealed through fascist action and behaviour, rather than analysing ideas about the world. This is a way of not getting at the ideas themselves, but at the significant energy and fanaticism that fascism managed to mobilise, through their ideas.<sup>50</sup> Fascist culture, in the broadest sense of the word, is here tied to social practice, using concepts like Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus* and corporeal repertoire. Repeated actions, habits, and practices had a creative dimension: fascist praxis was in this sense discursive, and generative of meaning, hence an element in the struggle for meaning.<sup>51</sup> In his book *Fascistischer Kampfbünde* (2009), Reichardt shows how violence was used socially to construct a fascist community, and culturally to create symbolic meaning for fascism as a revolutionary, disciplined, anti-bourgeois force.<sup>52</sup> Rejecting an identifiable essence or nature of fascism, Reichardt understands fascists dynamically in their immediate context, through their actions and performances and the meanings they generate. In their immediate context means that, for instance, a ritual is analysed in its practical and material context, foregrounding the mundane aspects of fascist performance.<sup>53</sup>

This approach places political-cultural history within a social and at times micro-historical framework, in a way that is immediately relevant to the present purpose of analysing mythopoeia in the context of discourses about fascism. It brings out the aesthetic-emotional dimensions of fascism, questions of subjectivity and identity, and the mythic, while grounding them in pragmatic everyday concerns of resources, finances, competencies, and political organisation. It also favours

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Mann, pp. 21–22.

<sup>50</sup> Sven Reichardt, 'Faschistische Tatgemeinschaften: Anmerkungen zu einer praxeologischen Analyse', in *Der Faschismus in Europa: Wege der Forschung*, ed. by Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2014), pp. 73–88 (pp. 75–78).

<sup>51</sup> Sven Reichardt, 'Praxeologie und Faschismus. Gewalt und Gemeinschaft als Elemente eines Praxeologischen Faschismusbegriffs', in *Doing Culture: Neue Positionen zum Verhältnis von Kultur und Sozialer Praxis*, ed. by Karl H. Hörning and Julia Reuter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), pp. 129–53.

<sup>52</sup> Sven Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde: Gewalt und Gemeinschaft im Italienischen Squadristum und in der Deutschen SA* (Köln: Böhlau, 2002), pp. 11–19.

<sup>53</sup> Reichardt, 'Faschistische Tatgemeinschaften', pp. 75–77.

the analysis of fascism at the movement stage, instead of the regimes which have typically been privileged by historians. Cultural pragmatism, by placing cultural expression in the realm of day-to-day action, underlines the contingency of fascism: constructed through mythopoeic performances, enacted by the party organisation and the cadres through repeated actions. By bringing in cadres and organisation into myth-making, the aesthetic and spectacular can be analysed in practical terms. Political spectacle, such as mass rallies or carefully choreographed rituals, required the close attentions of the party organisation, the mobilisation of the fascist cadres, financing, use of technologies and competencies, as well as attention to matters of space and *mise-en-scène*. The aesthetics of fascism then can be seen as not just propaganda, or the locus of identity and representation, but the interface of practical organisation and myth. At the same time it shows how fascists in the process practically engaged in a cultural struggle for the meaning of fascism, as the pragmatic requirements of fascist performances link them to political activism. Beyond fascism, this can elucidate the importance of myth in the politics of interwar Europe, how it related to contemporary political organisations and infrastructure, and the viability of extremist activism under democratic conditions. As such it touches on some of the most significant questions of modern mass politics in the first half of the twentieth century, such as the interface of myth, modern technology, and party organisations; the resistance of the democratic public sphere against new political-discursive techniques; and how extremist political actors participated in and exploited public discourse to further their ends.

### III

Having set the historiographical background, it is now possible to turn to the theory and methodology of the thesis. The premise is that there is no need to define or characterise fascism politically, intellectually, socially, or otherwise; instead the background question is what contemporaries understood by fascism, and how those who identified with it (fascists), constructed it. Actions or performances will be privileged in analysing the construction of fascism, while textual discourse will predominantly be analysed insofar as it facilitated performative construction.

From this cultural point of view fascist political performances were not just propagandistic or mobilising, but mythopoeic. By means of understanding this myth-making as both performative



in nature and actively constructing the thing which it signifies, one can also see how this applies not only to organised political events, but also extends to unplanned incidents, behaviour, props, clothes. A spontaneous street fight between a fascist and a communist – what Reichardt termed ‘the everyday symbolic struggles on the street’<sup>54</sup> – could reiterate a narrative of fascism in accordance with its image as disciplined bulwark against Bolshevism. The individual behaviour of a fascist member in a public space fed into public perceptions of what fascism was; the uniform a fascist wore itself contributed to the myth of fascism as a violent or disciplined force. These less organised, unscripted types of representation and behaviour formed a repertoire that was no less performative.<sup>55</sup> However, this repertoire of fascist expression could undermine the myth as well as reiterate it: unscripted performances carried risk, and in the interstices of mis-performance others significations of fascism ‘leaked out’, alternative narratives opened up for consumption by the public.<sup>56</sup> This dynamic points to the open-endedness of reception, and the irregular conveyance of myth: fascist performances had highly variable mythopoeic potential. Focusing on the process of the creation of meaning in mythopoeia, in the context of alternative narratives and discordant hermeneutics, allows for a dynamic analysis of fascist signification.<sup>57</sup>

Discourse did not float freely, but was bounded by human agency. Exclusive focus on myth and political respectability in terms of discourse would be too synchronic; it is through attention to the practical aspects and (historical) contingencies of human social activity in performing, acting, and reacting to discourse that agency is re-inserted. The concept of mythopoeia in particular stresses the active engagement of actors with discourse; even as fascist subjects themselves were produced by the same discourse, they and their opponents engaged in a constant

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<sup>54</sup> Sven Reichardt, ‘Fascist Marches in Italy and Germany: Squadre and SA before the Seizure of Power’, in *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Matthias Reiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 170.

<sup>55</sup> For the performative connotations of the concept of repertoire, see: Eitan Y. Alimi, ‘Repertoires of Contention’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 410–12.

<sup>56</sup> Maiken Umbach, ‘Selfhood, Place, and Ideology in German Photo Albums, 1933–1945’, *Central European History*, 48.3 (2015), 335–65 (p. 365).

<sup>57</sup> Michel Foucault pointed out that ‘what happens in someone’s mind, or in the minds of a series of individuals, actually does belong to history: to say something is an event. The formulation of a ... discourse is not situated above history or off to the side: it’s as much a part of history as a battle or the invention of a steam engine, or an epidemic.’ Interview with Michel Foucault, 1978 w. D. Trombadori, orig. published in *Il Contributo*, 1980, in: Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Power*, ed. by James Faubion, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 2001), III, p. 277.

re-evaluation and re-signification which destabilised meaning and brought about change.<sup>58</sup> Active engagement is emphasised specifically through the contingencies of performance, which accentuates the social dynamics of the production of meaning.<sup>59</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander employs a theory of performance in relation to ritual, which is particularly apt for understanding fascist mythopoeic performances such as rallies or marches. Centring on the pragmatics of social performance, Alexander sees performance as presenting an account to an audience, where '[s]uccessful performance depends on the ability to convince others that one's performance is true, with all the ambiguities that the notion of aesthetic truth implies'.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, the less contrived the performance is perceived to be, the more true seems the account it presents. This depends on practical skills and abilities of the actors, as well as access to the mundane material things that make the performance possible. Elements like *mise-en-scène*, script, props, actors' abilities, and the susceptibility of the audience, all move to produce 'the emotional connection of audience with actor and text and thereby to create the conditions for projecting cultural meaning from performance to audience'.<sup>61</sup> It is a theory which relates the performance to its historical material and social organisation and conditions, bringing out how those affect the communication of and identification with (mythic) narrative. It also leaves space for hermeneutics to intercede in the performance, as part of the social conditions that govern reception, as an antagonistic audience can discern the seams of the performance through their access to alternative discourses.<sup>62</sup>

However, Alexander's theoretical framework is of little use for understanding unscripted modes of mythopoeia, such as the mythopoeic potential that resided in day-to-day behaviour and lifestyle, clothing, composure, etcetera. Instead, a transposition of queer theorist Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity is useful here. The discursive construction of fascism through mythopoeia, and the performativity of mythopoeia itself, points to fascist identity essentially as the enactment of a *fantasy*. Beyond scripted spectacles, mythopoeia continued with and within the individual fascist on the street, when identified as such, in the way they walked, talked,

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<sup>58</sup> 'Introduction', in *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, ed. by Gabrielle M. Spiegel (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 7, 11–14, 22; Green, p. 62.

<sup>59</sup> William H. Sewell, 'The Concept(s) of Culture', in *Practicing History: New Directions in Historical Writing after the Linguistic Turn*, ed. by Gabrielle M. Spiegel (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 83.

<sup>60</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy', in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 29–90 (p. 32).

<sup>61</sup> Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy', p. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy', pp. 68–76.

dressed, or fought. 'Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.' Fascism in this sense has no ontological status apart from the acts that construct and constitute it.<sup>63</sup> Butler's idea of performativity as comprising the entire ontological status of gender can, *mutatis mutandis*, be transposed to the political identity and image of fascism, as a social phenomenon which is not a discreet entity. Such performative, constitutive acts do not just constitute identity, but also constitute it as a compelling illusion, *an object of belief*.<sup>64</sup> This is crucial to fascism's mobilising potential. Moreover, Butler's definition of performativity as being the requirement of a repeated performance to sustain the constitution of the thing itself is particularly useful here. 'This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation.' The identity is then made up through 'the stylised repetition of acts'.<sup>65</sup> Performativity points not only to how mythopoeia constructs 'fascism' outside of organised spectacle or textual discourse, inscribed onto the 'surface' of the fascist body, but also the connection between mythopoeia and fascist identity as the enactment of fantasy. Lastly, this conception allows one to avoid the mistake of assuming that 'fascism' is something that can be properly embodied, that a 'fascist' is someone whose performance has any referent beyond themselves. Properly understood, the performativity of fascism means that whether outsiders perceived self-identified fascists as they represented themselves has nothing to do with the 'truth' of their representation, but the credibility of their performance.<sup>66</sup>

While cultural pragmatic approaches to fascism, if not always explicitly recognised as such, have been relatively common in the past decade, performative analyses of fascism remain scarce; if not so much in studies of Italian and German fascism, certainly among the minor movements.<sup>67</sup> But fascists at the movement 'stage', without the support of the state, or even any big investors, are particularly good subjects for the study of how daily activist behaviour, and the modern political

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<sup>63</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 185.

<sup>64</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), 519–39 (p. 520).

<sup>65</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 191.

<sup>66</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 192–93.

<sup>67</sup> Henning Grunwald is a notable exception, and has used specifically Butler's theory of performativity in his work, see: Henning Grunwald, *Courtroom to Revolutionary Stage: Performance and Ideology in Weimar Political Trials* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

party such as it emerged after the First World War, could make themselves count (or not) in public discourse.

The Swedish NSAP and Dutch NSB have both left ample archival material which details the functioning and development of their respective party apparatuses. These sources of the day-to-day administration of the parties are essential in providing the pragmatic basis for their cultural practices, and give the requisite insight into the resources and organisation at their disposal to perform fascism. Meetings, rallies, marches, and other elements of the fascist repertoire were extensively discussed and analysed by functionaries, in internal correspondence, circulars, minutes, reports, and similar administrative material, which gives a handle on the practical aspects of mythopoeia, the practice and process behind the myths. The NSAP in particular was also extensively monitored by the secret police, so that the police archives provide extensive descriptive material of party activities, the internal mood and plans for the future, as well as volumes of confiscated party material, both published and confidential. Often this internal material gives flashes of insight into the precise intentions behind the parties' outward presentations to the public, and their internal aims. But much of the resulting myth-constructions, the performances on the ground, are supported best by the newspaper material. The weekly party newspapers represent a large bulk of continuous fascist discourse that was constantly involved in the mythopoeic process. This newspaper discourse was itself a performative, discursively constructing fascism, but also supported embodied performativity by guiding readers in their interpretation of the performances, for instance through highly ideological and verbose reports on rallies. Where available, non-fascist newspapers, local and national, are used to provide a contrasting perspective on these events, and show how the mythopoeic endeavour was actually received, and highlight its inevitable flaws and seams. Together these various sources, official and informal, public and confidential, allow us to reconstruct and compare local fascist mythopoeic practices, and their corresponding reception, with reference to the wider European context.

## IV

The discussion above has shown that while the Italian and German regimes still loom large in fascist research, the cultural turn has accentuated the relevance of lesser known, smaller fascist groups in the context of a pan-European set of practices and discourses.<sup>68</sup> Comprehensive histories of generic fascism such as Stanley G. Payne's *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (1995), Philip Morgan's *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (2003), Robert O. Paxton's *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004), or Arnd Bauerkämper's *Der Faschismus in Europa 1918-1945* (2006), deploy narratives which pay attention to the shared practices, symbols, and discourses beyond Italian and German 'role models', and emphasise the unique contributions and variations between nations.<sup>69</sup> However, one obstacle that still stands in the way of is the dearth of actual research done into some of the 'lesser fascisms', particularly in English. In 2015 Roger Griffin still complained that it "stands to reason" that the central plot, the main dish, the top billing in this field are Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany', expressing a legitimate worry that fascism is needlessly characterised as some sort of spurious 'Nazi-Fascism' hybrid.<sup>70</sup>

Some work has been done to rectify this. The volume *Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe* (2014) edited by António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis, has explored how political cultural practices of fascism have been opportunistically borrowed and exploited by more traditional authoritarian regimes in Europe, fruitfully revealing the 'complex transnational dynamic that involved inspiration, political learning, reflexive cross-fertilization and competition which perforated and muddled the boundaries between political categories and constituencies of the inter-war European right', and extending fascism's analytical range.<sup>71</sup> In 2017 Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossoliński-Liebe explored the transnational connections between fascist regimes and movements in *Fascism without Borders*.<sup>72</sup> The turn towards the transnational has had the additional benefit of highlighting the contingency and malleability of fascism's politics and ideology, focusing not on internationally shared characteristics, but how techniques, ideas, and

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<sup>68</sup> Reichardt, 'Faschistische Tatgemeinschaften', pp. 73–74.

<sup>69</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Philip Morgan, *Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* (London: Routledge, 2003); Paxton.

<sup>70</sup> Roger Griffin, 'Decentering Comparative Fascist Studies', *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascism Studies*, 4.2 (2015), 103–18 (pp. 104, 112–13).

<sup>71</sup> Introduction to: *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*, ed. by António Costa Pinto and Aristotle Kallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Arnd Bauerkämper and Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, *Fascism without Borders: Transnational Connections and Cooperation between Movements and Regimes in Europe from 1918 to 1945* (Oxford: Berhahn, 2017).

practices were transferred and exchanged over borders, and adopted, adapted, or rejected as they did so, without needing to refer back to a true original or identify a fascist essence. As Samuel Goodfellow showed in his excellent article on fascist organisations in Alsace, '[f]ascists in different countries shaped the idea of fascism to their own purposes. The process of transnationally interpreting other fascist movements altered the collective meaning of fascism, opening up new ways to organise, implement and understand fascism'.<sup>73</sup> Such an open-ended understanding of fascism is central to research on the Swedish and Dutch fascist parties.



The state of research on Swedish fascism up to this point can be succinctly characterised as dire. The electoral failure of indigenous fascist movements – peaking at 0.7% of the vote in 1936 – in Sweden during a period most notable for the entrenchment of Social Democratic hegemony has given scholars little impetus to look into the Swedish fascists of 1922-1945, which have been commonly regarded as fundamentally alien to Swedish history.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the bulk of scholarship dealing with Swedish fascism has focused specifically on anti-fascist opinion.<sup>75</sup> It was only in 1970 that Eric Wärenstam produced the first historical work on Swedish fascism, *Fascismen och Nazismen i Sverige, 1920-1945* (Fascism and Nazism in Sweden), and since then new works have been few and far between.<sup>76</sup> And while Wärenstam laid the foundations for future scholarship, doing a great deal of impressive original research and source-collecting for the book, it is too short for any in-depth analysis. Wärenstam's description of the developments and failures of the most prominent figures on the fascist scene in Sweden were a crucial start for the historiography, and his plotting of the key developments still shapes how historians view the period today, but his understanding of fascist ideology was at times incoherent and vague, and he did little to elucidate

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<sup>73</sup> Samuel Huston Goodfellow, 'Fascism as a Transnational Movement: The Case of Inter-War Alsace', *Contemporary European History*, 22.1 (2013), 87–106 (p. 88).

<sup>74</sup> Jan Melin, Alf W. Johansson, and Susanna Hedenborg, *Sveriges Historia: Koncentrerad Uppslagsbok: Fakta, Årtal, Kartor, Tabeller* (Stockholm: Rabén Prisma (Tiden Athena), 1997), pp. 227–30.

<sup>75</sup> Louise Drangel, *Den Kämpande Demokratin: En Studie i Antinazistisk Opinionsrörelse 1935-1945* (Stockholm: LiberFörlag, 1976); Jan Peters, *Exilland Schweden: Deutsche und Schwedische Antifaschisten, 1933-1945* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984).

<sup>76</sup> Perhaps the first academic research on Swedish fascism was produced by Kurt Mall in Germany, at the University of Heidelberg. His 1936 doctoral thesis is however not very elaborate, and somewhat marred by ideological biases. Kurt Mall, *Der Nationalsozialismus in Schweden im Spiegel seiner Kampfpresse*, PhD Thesis (Heidelberg, 1936).

the organisation and inner workings of the fascist parties. Wärenstam had no interest in contemporary cultural approaches to fascism, so that his work, while comprehensive, gives no insight into what it meant to be a fascist in interwar Sweden.

The 1990s saw a renewed attempt by Heléne Lööw to write a history of Swedish fascism in her more extensive *Nazismen i Sverige, 1924-1979* (Nazism in Sweden), based on her PhD thesis *Hakkorset och Vasakärven* (The Swastika and the Wasa Sheaf), but as the chronology suggests she considered interwar fascism mostly as the predecessor of neo-fascism, which was attracting attention at the time.<sup>77</sup> Lööw's PhD thesis tackled matters of organisation more thoroughly than did Wärenstam, but her work tends to lump together the multiple fascist parties she studied, and analyses them synchronically. It took until the twenty-first century for a call to be made for more serious academic research into historical Swedish fascism, with a 2002 article by Lena Berggren in the *Journal of Contemporary History*, 'Swedish Fascism – Why Bother?' (also published in *Historisk Tidskrift* as 'Swedish interwar fascism – An uninteresting marginal phenomenon or important research subject?').<sup>78</sup> Berggren, whose previous work focused on the intellectual history of antisemitism in Sweden, rejected the assumption that fascism was alien to Swedish history, and questioned the idea that Swedish fascists were merely emulating the NSDAP. Instead she emphasised how key fascist ideas about race, nation, and society were prevalent in Sweden and did not depend on any German influence, and how Swedish fascists sought to maintain independence from German Nazism. Moreover, Berggren argued that past scholarship has been excessively moralising, keen to denote fascist mavericks as outsiders in a country devoted to benevolent neutrality. With this starting point she hoped that the number of scholars working in the field would increase, and improve on 'the as yet embryonic fascist studies in Sweden'.<sup>79</sup>

As Berggren's angle suggests, she pursued the issue mainly through an intellectual history of fascism, as exemplified by one of her recent articles on Per Engdahl, a figurehead of Swedish fascism until the 1990s.<sup>80</sup> Klas Åmark's comprehensive 2011 work on Sweden's wartime

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<sup>77</sup> Heléne Lööw, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven: En Studie av Nationalsocialismen i Sverige 1924-1950* (Magnus Mölner & Jörgen Weibull, 1990); Heléne Lööw, *Nazismen i Sverige, 1924-1979: Pionjärerna, Partierna, Propagandan* (Stockholm: Ordfront Förlag, 2004).

<sup>78</sup> Lena Berggren, 'Den svenska mellankrigsfascismen - ett ointressant marginalfenomen eller ett viktigt forskningsobjekt?', *Historisk Tidskrift*, 2002, 427–44.

<sup>79</sup> Lena Berggren, 'Swedish Fascism: Why Bother?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 37.3 (2002), 395–417 (p. 398).

<sup>80</sup> Lena Berggren, 'Intellectual Fascism: Per Engdahl and the Formation of "New-Swedish Socialism"', *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascism Studies*, 2014, 69–92.

relationship with Nazi Germany, *Att Bo Granne med Ondskan* (To Be Evil's Neighbour), investigates fascism in Sweden with unprecedented detail, and takes full account both of Lööw's and Berggren's research, but has a rather old-fashioned moralising approach to the subject, and does not seek to understand the indigenous fascists in their own right.<sup>81</sup> Åmark's work is also symptomatic of a much stronger academic interest in Nazi Germany's influence on, and activities in, Sweden, rather than indigenous fascism.<sup>82</sup> Henrik Arnstad's *Älskade Fascism* (Beloved Fascism, 2013) is a work which understands fascism as a European ideology with a global reach, and relies heavily on Roger Griffin's notion of palingenetic ultra-nationalism. While not presenting any original research of its own, it broke the mould as one of the first Swedish books to look at fascism 'from the inside', although Arnstad devotes most of his attention to the neo-fascist *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats).<sup>83</sup> Per Svensson's 2014 *Vasakärven och Järnröret* (The Wasa Sheaf and the Steel Pipe) is another example of this trend, investigating the origins of the Sweden Democrats in the interwar fascist milieu of Lund university, showing how new research is being stimulated by recent political developments in Swedish politics.<sup>84</sup> Such research tends towards a somewhat teleological analysis however, aiming firstly to explain contemporary political developments, and focusing heavily on the transfer of ideology and continuity of personnel over time.

More important to the concerns of this thesis is a 2009 monograph by Henrik Damberg, *Nazismen i Skaraborgs Län, 1930-1945* (Nazism in Skaraborg Province), which provides a brief but detailed analysis of fascist activism in one Swedish province. While Damberg's understanding of fascist ideology and inter-party differences is rather crude, his tracing of developments in party organisation and campaigning tactics adds flesh to the bones of fascism research. His research focuses on various fascist groups, particularly the NSAP/SSS and the SNSP, how they tried to win members and votes in the region, their electoral strategies, and the dissemination of propaganda, especially among school youths. His work also engages with incidents of violence with political

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<sup>81</sup> Klas Åmark, *Att Bo Granne med Ondskan: Sveriges Förhållande till Nazismen, Nazityskland och Förintelsen* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 2011).

<sup>82</sup> See also recent research on German infiltration of Swedish clubs and corporations, e.g.: Birgitta Almgren, 'Svensk-Tyska Föreningar: Mål för Nazistisk Infiltration', *Historisk Tidskrift*, 135.1 (2015), 63–91; Sven Nordlund, "Tyskarna själva gör ju ingen hemlighet av detta." Sverige och Ariseringen av Tyskägda Företag och Dotterbolag', *Historisk Tidskrift*, 125.4 (2005), 609–41.

<sup>83</sup> Arnstad, Henrik, *Älskade Fascism: De svartbruna rörelsernas ideologi och historia*, Norstedts: Stockholm, 2013, esp. pp. 345-99.

<sup>84</sup> Per Svensson, *Vasakärven och Järnröret: Om den Långa Bruna Skuggan från Lund* (Stockholm: Weyler, 2014).



opponents, and fascist terror.<sup>85</sup> While his work is localised in character, the case study sheds some much needed light on how fascist organisation and activism practically worked – it remains to give a more focused picture of the NSAP specifically, and gain an understanding of its operations nationally.

The first scholarly work to be focused on the NSAP specifically came from Viktor Lundberg in 2014, with *En Idé Större än Döden* (An Idea Greater than Death), which successfully employs some of the insights of cultural theory, particularly poststructuralist discourse analysis, in analysing proletarian culture in Lindholm's party. Lundberg has based his analysis on much-needed original research in party and police archives, which have seen little use since the work of Wärenstam and Lööw in the seventies and nineties. While Lundberg's handling of Foucauldian and Althusserian concepts of discourse and ideology are sometimes clumsy, and often obscure the role of individual agency, *En Idé Större än Döden* nevertheless represents a hitherto rare focused, scholarly engagement with Swedish fascism beyond the range of an article.<sup>86</sup> Lundberg's work is one of the first to engage directly with fascist political culture in Sweden; his analysis also covers the role of myth in the NSAP, particularly that of 'workers' Sweden' (*arbetar-Sverige*), but he stays on the discursive level alone, and does not take into account other forms of cultural construction. Ultimately, much room for development remains.

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While Anglophone scholarship on fascism in the Netherlands remains scarce and generally poor in character, riddled with basic factual errors and out of touch with recent research, Dutch studies of fascism are rich in quantity and quality.<sup>87</sup> From its historical origins Dutch fascism spawned a large volume of literature, polemic and academic. The minor fascist groups of the 1920s did not manage to attract much of the attention that was then largely focused on Fascist Italy, but with the rise of the NSB in 1931, public and scholarly attention shifted towards the domestic scene. Of course, the spectacular growth of the NSDAP in neighbouring Germany helped foster a new-found

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<sup>85</sup> Henrik Damberg, *Nazismen i Skaraborgs Län 1930-1945* (Bolum Förlag, 2009), pp. 87–109.

<sup>86</sup> Victor Lundberg, *En Idé Större än Döden: En fascistisk arbetarrörelse i Sverige, 1933-1945* (Stockholm: Gidlunds Förlag, 2014), pp. 35–39.

<sup>87</sup> Erik Hansen, 'Fascism and Nazism in the Netherlands, 1929-39', *European Studies Review*, 3 (1981), 355–85, is one example of English work on the subject, and much better than the average chapters or articles that have appeared on the subject, but is very dated at this point. .

interest in all things called national socialist, and this German connection would prove to be an irrevocable part of the literature on Dutch fascism. For instance P.A. Diepenhorst's *Het Nationaal-Socialisme* (1935) understands National Socialism as an essentially German ideology, and calls the Dutch and German National Socialists 'children of one spirit'.<sup>88</sup>

Interest in the national experience of Nazi occupation after the Second World War was immediate. The collection of material for a special war archive (RIOD, National Institute for War Documentation) started as early as 1944.<sup>89</sup> Directed by Louis de Jong (1914-2005), this collection became the foundation for an innumerable mass of writing on the Netherlands during the Second World War. de Jong's twenty-six volume *History of the Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War* was published 1969-1994 and remains a standard reference work for anyone studying the period. German historians have also contributed important work on this subject, not least Konrad Kwiet's 1968 *Reichskommissariat Niederlande*, a still authoritative analysis of the politics of the Nazification project in the Netherlands.<sup>90</sup> Works focusing on various aspects of the 1940-45 period have been forthcoming constantly since the 1950s, as literature on fascism in the Netherlands has gravitated around the Dutch experience of Nazi occupation.<sup>91</sup> As Dutch historian Jennifer Foray put it: 'To be sure, popular audiences and scholars alike remain highly captivated by – if not wholly obsessed with – the wartime years'.<sup>92</sup>

The foundations for a historiography of Dutch fascism in its own right were laid in the 1960s. G.A. Kooy's 1964 sociological study of the Winterswijk community and its high proportion of fascist voters, *Het Echec van een 'Volkse' Beweging* (The Failure of a 'Volkish' Movement) remains a standard work on the social composition of the NSB.<sup>93</sup> The same year saw the publication of L.M.H. Joosten's *Katholieken en Fascisten in Nederland* (Catholics and Fascists in the Netherlands), perhaps the first serious study of the various minor fascist groups the Netherlands saw in the

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<sup>88</sup> 'In wezen zijn Nederlandsche en Duitse nationaal-socialisten kinderen ééns geestes.' P.A. Diepenhorst, *Het Nationaal-Socialisme* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1935), p. 8.

<sup>89</sup> Annemieke van Bockxmeer, *De Oorlog Verzameld: Het ontstaan van de collectie van het NIOD* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2014), p. 21.

<sup>90</sup> Konrad Kwiet, *Reichskommissariat Niederlande: Versuch und Scheitern Nationalsozialistischer Neuordnung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1968).

<sup>91</sup> E.g.: Werner Warmbrunn, *The Dutch under German Occupation, 1940-1945*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963); Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Nazi Rule and Dutch Collaboration: The Netherlands under German Occupation 1940-1945* (Oxford: Berg, 1988); Jennifer L. Foray, *Visions of Empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>92</sup> Foray, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> G. A. Kooy, *Het Echec van een 'Volkse' Beweging: Nazificatie en Denazificatie in Nederland 1931-1945* (Utrecht: HES, 1982).

1920s.<sup>94</sup> But it is A.A. de Jonge's *Crisis en Critiek der Democratie*, (1968, The Crisis and Criticism of Democracy) which serves as the first comprehensive study of far-right ideological currents in the interwar period. Together with his *Het Nationaal-Socialisme in Nederland* from the same year, the two books give a solid overview of fascist organisations and ideology in the Netherlands.<sup>95</sup>

However, as Konrad Kwiet pointed out in his 1970 article, 'Zur Geschichte der Mussert-Bewegung', there was still need for a proper history of the largest and most notorious of fascist groups in the Netherlands, the NSB, as the literature was only concerned with the movement as a peripheral issue in the wider debate about collaboration.<sup>96</sup>

Since then a great deal of research concerning virtually all imaginable aspects of the NSB has been done, generally in tandem with the social-cultural turn, but initially without any engagement with NSB fascism 'from the inside out'. For a long time more in-depth discussions of fascist ideology or its particular political character remained rare, as they seemed to require some sort of empathetic engagement with the original fascist discourse, an approach indelibly stigmatised by the war experience itself. In 1983 Ronald Havenaar contributed a very brief monograph on NSB ideology, *De NSB tussen Nationalisme en 'Volkse' Solidariteit*, (The NSB between Nationalism and 'Volkish' Solidarity), but after that almost no studies were devoted to this area, nor have did any works try to engage with it from a cultural angle for a long time.<sup>97</sup> Focus shifted instead predominantly to the organisation of the NSB, social composition, the biographies of its members, and their relationship with the German authorities.

It is only in the past decade that Dutch scholars have been keen to abandon a traditional approach to fascist ideology as a set of programmatic ideas and values, and have instead turned to culture to understand the NSB and their kind. Gerard Groeneveld's twin studies of NSB literature and musical culture, published 2001 and 2007 respectively, are good examples of high quality original research that has been done into Dutch fascist culture. Groeneveld's work is interesting for its subject of fascist discourse in published literature, which it analyses specifically with

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<sup>94</sup> L. M. H. Joosten, *Katholieken en Fascisme in Nederland 1920-1940*, 2nd edn (Utrecht: HES, 1982).

<sup>95</sup> A. A. de Jonge, *Crisis en Critiek der Democratie: Anti-Democratische Stromingen en de daarin Levende Denkbeelden over de Staat in Nederland Tussen de Wereldoorlogen* (Utrecht: HES, 1982); A. A. de Jonge, *Het Nationaal-Socialisme in Nederland: Voorgeschiedenis, Ontstaan en Ontwikkeling*, 2nd edn (Den Haag: Kruseman, 1979).

<sup>96</sup> Konrad Kwiet, 'Zur Geschichte Der Mussert-Bewegung', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18.2 (1970), 164–95 (pp. 164–65).

<sup>97</sup> Ronald Havenaar, *De NSB Tussen Nationalisme En 'volkse' Solidariteit: De Vooroorlogse Ideologie van de Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging in Nederland* ('s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1983).

reference to the context of practical production. For instance he has gone to some length to reconstruct the process behind the publication of the Dutch translation of *Mein Kampf* (1939).<sup>98</sup> His work on NSB musical culture stands even closer to the subject of this thesis, connecting NSB music to its organisation, examining the propagandistic aims of song, and the myths which poetic expression invoked, while also considering the reception of fascist music on the streets.<sup>99</sup>

With a more local perspective on the subject, Damsma's and Schumacher's *Hier Woont een NSB'er* (2010, Here Lives an NSB-Member) is a stellar attempt to understand the NSB in Amsterdam as constituting a cultural community, with their own social rituals, pastimes, and conventions, placing emphasis on the day-to-day life of its members.<sup>100</sup> The book also explores NSB relations with outsiders, and goes some way to confront the paradigm of NSB-members as social pariahs.<sup>101</sup> The authors paint a picture of the NSB's community, in which members could socialise with like-minded people, and find support when rejected by other communities (such as the Church). This is in turn used to explain how cadres could be mobilised effectively; Damsma and Schumacher point to the social cohesion and 'cosiness' the party's organisation generated.<sup>102</sup> This analysis is another contribution towards understanding the connection between fascist organisational forms, activism, and culture, though the authors do not explore the significance of myth, while the analysis is strictly limited to the 1940-45 period.

One recent addition to these new approaches to the NSB is René van Heijningen's 2015 *De Muur van Mussert* (Mussert's Wall).<sup>103</sup> The subject of his work is a ceremonial wall-like structure in Lunteren, built by the NSB in 1936, which fell into disuse during the German occupation, but stands to this day. Heijningen places the NSB rallies in the perspective of both 1930s political culture, and in comparison with Nazi Germany's Nuremberg rallies and Thingstätte, inspired by historians of fascism like Roger Griffin (fascism inspiring feelings of mythical rebirth) and Emilio Gentile (political religion, and the focus on the fascist 'symbolic universe'). He gives some good

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<sup>98</sup> Gerard Groeneveld, *Zwaard van de Geest: Het Bruine Boek in Nederland, 1921-1945* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2001), pp. 57–68.

<sup>99</sup> Gerard Groeneveld, *Zo Zong de NSB: Liedcultuur van de NSB 1931-1945* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2007).

<sup>100</sup> Josje Damsma and Erik Schumacher, *Hier Woont een NSB'er: Nationaalsocialisten in Bezet Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), pp. 29–30, 71–72; see also: Josje Damsma and Erik Schumacher, “‘De Strijd om Amsterdam’: Een nieuwe benadering in het onderzoek naar de NSB”, *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 124.3 (2009), 329–48; Josje Damsma, *Nazis in the Netherlands: A Social History of National Socialist Collaborators, 1940-1945*, PhD thesis (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2013).

<sup>101</sup> Damsma and Schumacher, *Hier Woont een NSB'er*, p. 51.

<sup>102</sup> Damsma and Schumacher, *Hier Woont een NSB'er*, pp. 71–72.

<sup>103</sup> René van Heijningen, *De Muur van Mussert* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015).

insights into the political and personal decisions that lurked behind the organisation of the rallies associated with the wall, and many of the practical issues that beset the meetings. The theoretical side of his work is less strong however, using his cultural theoretical concepts more to justify his research rather than harnessing their analytical potential. The reader is given a great deal of insight into how the Lunteren rallies were organised, but analysis of the experience of the rallies does not go much further than noting it was ‘impressive’, generated cohesion, or had a religious atmosphere. In other words, Heijningen’s work does not elaborate sufficiently on the *significance* – in every sense of the word – of the performances he has investigated, for which myth and mythopoeia would be an excellent way forward.

On the whole, work on the cultural dimensions of the NSB in the twenty-first century has been invaluable, and we know a great deal more about NSB subjectivities and myths than two decades ago. We also know thankfully much more about how the NSB’s organisation was implemented in practice, and how it related to party activism, although the picture here remains partial due to the selective or localised nature of research so far. As with the Swedish literature, there is however much more scope for the analysis of fascist myth-making, while the image of fascism, and the cultural production of fascism, has not been explored in performative terms, and tied to a wider political public discourse about fascism.

## V

In the history of fascism in Europe, the Netherlands and Sweden stand out as unlikely breeding grounds for fascist movements. While the intellectual roots of fascism are often traced back to the nineteenth century, particularly Romanticism and *fin de siècle* cultural pessimism, as a movement it is most commonly seen as a product of World War I.<sup>104</sup> In contrast to those countries where fascists gained a mass following – Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania – Sweden and the Netherlands remained neutral during the conflict. Without soldiers united by the experience of combat, and the social dislocation following demilitarisation, nor a context of large-scale leftist rebellion, these democracies lacked some of the strongest drives for the formation of fascist movements.<sup>105</sup> ‘The northwest already had stabilized liberal regimes before 1914. Its governments

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<sup>104</sup> Introduction to: *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives*, ed. by Constantin Iordachi (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1–2.

<sup>105</sup> Reichardt, ‘Faschistische Tatgemeinschaften’, p. 80.

and electorates confronted the economic and military crises with orderly changes of government leaving unchanged the basic constitution of liberal democracy.<sup>106</sup> This seems particularly true of Swedish politics, which is often characterised as quiet and un-dramatic, even compared to neighbouring countries.<sup>107</sup> In the words of the historian Per T. Ohlsson, ‘Swedish politics can be quite boring. That is exactly why it is so exciting’.<sup>108</sup>

But it has become something of a cliché to describe the governments of North-Western Europe as peaceful and stable democracies, even as peace-loving islands, mentally and culturally isolated from the rest of the continent.<sup>109</sup> Sweden and the Netherlands did not escape the socio-economic disruption of the war,<sup>110</sup> and while they did not produce a class of ex-service men that could provide a ready organisational basis for fascism, there were several political groups that could be sympathetic to a new breed of Rightist politics. As the example of the 1918 Finnish Civil War demonstrated, it was perfectly possible for a country with virtually no prior combat experience, and a long tradition of strong civic institutions, to rapidly develop new forms of brutally violent politics.<sup>111</sup>

Both the Netherlands and Sweden suffered economically from the war, especially due to the loss of trade with Germany, and the Netherlands had enormous debts by 1919.<sup>112</sup> Sweden got into conflict with Britain over its exports of iron ore and foodstuffs to Germany; and in 1917 Hjalmar Hammarskjöld’s Conservative government had to introduce rationing to avoid famine.<sup>113</sup> As bread prices on the black market rocketed, riots broke out, which were suppressed by the police and military. The revolutionary atmosphere in neighbouring Russia proved infectious, and a break-away faction from *Socialdemokratiska Arbetarepartiet* (SAP, Social Democratic Workers

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<sup>106</sup> Mann, p. 354.

<sup>107</sup> Stig Hadenius, *Svensk Politik under 1900-talet: Konflikt och Samförstånd*, 4th edn (Stockholm: Tiden Athena, 1996), p. 9; for Hadenius’s work in English, see: Stig Hadenius, *Swedish Politics during the 20th Century: Conflict and Consensus*, 5th edn (Trelleborg: Swedish Institute, 1999).

<sup>108</sup> ‘Svensk politik kan vara ganska tråkig. Just därför är den så spännande.’ Per T. Ohlsson, *Svensk Politik* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2014), p. 7.

<sup>109</sup> Conny Kristel, *De Oorlog van Anderen: Nederlanders en Oorlogsgeweld, 1914-1918* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2016), p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> ‘In fact, it could be argued that the dislocation of economic relationships caused by the war was far more serious than actual physical destruction.’ Derek H. Aldcroft and Steven Morewood, *The European Economy since 1914*, 5th Edition (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 21.

<sup>111</sup> Pertti Haapala and Marko Tikka, ‘Revolution, Civil War, and Terror in Finland in 1918’, in *War in Peace: Paramilitary Violence in Europe after the Great War*, ed. by Robert Gerwarth and John Horne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 73, 84; Juha Siltala, ‘Dissolution and Reintegration in Finland, 1914-1932: How Did a Disarmed Country Become Absorbed into Brutalization?’, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 46.1, 11–33 (pp. 20–21).

<sup>112</sup> Kwiet, ‘Zur Geschichte der Mussert-Bewegung’, p. 167.

<sup>113</sup> Ohlsson, pp. 174–81.

Party), led by Zäta Höglund, made calls for a soviet republic in Sweden. In March 1917 cabinet resigned, and was replaced by a moderate right-wing cabinet under Carl Swartz.<sup>114</sup> At the same time in the Netherlands, the liberal cabinet of P.W.A. Cort van der Linden had created a myriad of crisis committees to arrange rationing, which maintained a semblance of order while criticism of the government grew. At the end of the war the Dutch army, was in a state of unrest to the point of open rebellion, encouraging the government to speed up demobilisation. In light of socialist uprisings in Germany, the Dutch cabinet considered making concessions to the socialists at home.<sup>115</sup> However, this provoked Pieter Troelstra, leader of the *Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiders Partij* (SDAP), to take the opportunity to call for revolution. Mid-November 1918 Troelstra was discussing the formation of workers' and soldiers' soviets to replace government, but found there was insufficient support, and the momentum petered out, an episode pathetically dubbed 'Troelstra's mistake'.<sup>116</sup>

The two countries managed to avoid the extreme ends of disorder and violence at the end of the war, and in both cases Liberal parties managed to push through electoral reforms, which came to characterise the politics of the interwar period. In Sweden, after the 1917 elections saw the loss of further seats for the Right (*Högern*, Conservative party), the King failed to negotiate a coalition government, and was ultimately forced to appoint Liberal leader Nils Edén as PM of a Liberal-Socialist government. In the wake of the Russian Revolution and the revolts in Germany, the Conservatives supported electoral reforms, intimidated by the revolutionary atmosphere.<sup>117</sup> The plan to push through women's suffrage was included in the government's proposal, but was limited to a right to vote in municipal elections. Women were emancipated from male guardianship in 1920, while formal equality was finally assumed in 1921.<sup>118</sup> In the Netherlands universal suffrage and a compulsory vote were introduced in 1918, with proportional representation for the 150 seat lower chamber (States General).<sup>119</sup> As in Sweden, one of the immediate consequences was the decline of the Liberal Party, and the growth of the SDAP into the

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<sup>114</sup> Olle Larsson and Andreas Marklund, *Svensk Historia* (Lund: Historiska Media, 2012), pp. 325–29.

<sup>115</sup> Paul Arblaster, *A History of the Low Countries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 215–16.

<sup>116</sup> Louis de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, 1: Voorspel* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), pp. 45–48.

<sup>117</sup> Nils Stjernquist, *Tvåkammartiden: Sveriges Riksdag 1867-1970* (Lund: Sveriges Riksdag, 1996), pp. 82–91.

<sup>118</sup> Stjernquist, pp. 91–94.

<sup>119</sup> The year before the government had also settled the long-running and contentious school question [schoolstrijd] with the 'pacification of 1917', finally equalising state financial support for public and private (confessional) schools. *Geschiedenis van de Nederlanden*, ed. by J.C.H. Blom and E. Lamberts (Rijswijk: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1993), pp. 334–35.

second largest party in parliament. However, Troelstra's mistake gave the confessional Right an excuse to avoid collaboration with the Left, while the Catholic party had grown to be the largest party in parliament, and the fundament for all interwar governments. The bishops had in any case prohibited cooperating with socialists bar in a situation of 'extreme necessity', which eventually came in 1939.<sup>120</sup>

With the electoral reforms and proportional representation, as well as the socio-economic dislocation of the post-war period and concerns about the growing Left, there was some basis for fascist parties in the 1920s. Even if the two countries in question remained beyond the perimeter of violence that had been generated by the Bolshevik coup and the subsequent fighting in Central and Eastern Europe, they were not unaffected by the fear of contagion. News reports of extreme violence, famine, and chaos, as well as the stories of émigrés, had their impact also in North-Western Europe.<sup>121</sup> This was perhaps most true of Sweden, which was immediately affected by the short but brutal outburst of political violence in the 1918 Finnish Civil War, reifying the Russophobia that had been a cornerstone of nationalist mobilisation for over a century.<sup>122</sup> Swedish volunteers, in the face of a reluctant government, went to Finland to fight on the White side, not least the Swedish Brigade which fought up to Lempäälä, where they met up with German troops that had crossed from Estonia.<sup>123</sup> Swedes also participated in the White Terror during the Finnish conflict.<sup>124</sup> Few, if any, Dutch men managed to find their way into the rightist militaries that roamed Central-Eastern Europe in this period, but many did serve in the civil militias that spawned in response to Troelstra's call for revolution.<sup>125</sup> These paramilitary groups were formed on local initiative in 1918 in the major cities, to defend against 'revolutionary turmoil'. They were soon put under state control, but were distinctly right-wing, and included the Reformed Cornelis van

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<sup>120</sup> Frans Verhagen, *Toen de Katholieken Nederland Veroverden: Charles Ruijs de Beerenbrouck 1873-1936* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2015), p. 212.

<sup>121</sup> Robert Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End, 1917-1923* (London: Penguin, 2017), pp. 96–100.

<sup>122</sup> This is illustrated eloquently by the Rightist propaganda of the 1928 general election, which termed it the 'Cossack election', casting aspersions on the plans of the Social Democrats: Ohlsson, pp. 230–31; Vulovic, p. 9.

<sup>123</sup> At least one fascist leader of the 1930s, Martin Ekström, saw action as a volunteer in this conflict, in Narva, see: Axel Boëthius, *Svenska Brigaden: En Skildring från Finlands Frihetskrig* (Helsingfors: Söderström & Co, 1920), p. v.

<sup>124</sup> The violence was excused by Swedish-Finnish paper Hufvudstadsbladet, criticising Sweden-based papers for their naive criticism of the 'terror': Siltala, pp. 21–25.

<sup>125</sup> Kristel, pp. 251–52, 269.



Geelkerken (1901-76), later co-founder of the NSB.<sup>126</sup> Like van Geelkerken, many militia-men came from an ultra-conservative religious background, and combined nationalist sentiment with a powerful fear of atheist socialism.

The first self-defined fascists in the Netherlands emerged in 1922; a group of Catholic intellectuals around the periodical *Katholieke Staatkunde* (*Catholic Statecraft*) edited by Emile Verviers, which was initially a rather conservative paper in the anti-modernist tradition of Pius X, but which started to take a new political direction after the March on Rome.<sup>127</sup> The group never grew beyond the periodical, not least because it incurred the displeasure of the bishops.<sup>128</sup> In Sweden the first fascist group was a similarly limited affair, in the form of *Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Frihetsförbundet* (SNFF, Swedish National Socialist Freedom League), founded in 1924 by the Furugård brothers, Birger, Sigurd, and Gunnar. Their party was directly inspired by a meeting with Hitler's NSDAP the year before, but in spite of an ambitious party organisation they never managed to grow beyond their home place in Deje, Värmland.<sup>129</sup>

It was in the second half of the 1920s that the first serious and lasting groups were formed. In 1926, after the Swedish Social Democratic government's cuts to military spending the previous year, another fascist group was founded by a handful of soldiers and officers stationed in Stockholm. *Sveriges Fascistiska Kamporganisation* (SFKO, Sweden's Fascist Militant Organisation) was led by the Baltic war volunteer Konrad Hallgren, Sergeant Sven Olov Lindholm, and Lieutenant Sven Hedengren. They were backed by Elof Eriksson, a renegade co-founder of *Bondeförbundet* (Agrarian League), who was fascinated by Fascist Italy, but also had connections with Erich Ludendorff and Julius Streicher.<sup>130</sup> This black-shirted group was predominantly concerned with anti-parliamentary politics and the threat of communism (Hedengren himself monitored communist groups for the army), and attracted some attention in the media on account of potentially illegal arms acquisition and the military training programme through which

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<sup>126</sup> Tessell Pollmann, *Mussert & Co: De NSB-Leider en zijn Vertrouwelingen* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2012), pp. 111–12.

<sup>127</sup> Jonge, *Crisis en Critiek der Democratie*, p. 52.

<sup>128</sup> Joosten, pp. 29–30.

<sup>129</sup> Eric Wärenstam, *Fascismen och Nazismen i Sverige 1920-1940: Studier i den Svenska Nationalsocialismens, Fascismens och Antisemitismens Organisationer, Ideologier och Propaganda under Mellankrigsåren* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1970), pp. 13–15; Bernt Hagtvet, 'On the Fringe: Swedish Fascism 1920-1945', in *Who were the Fascists?*, ed. by Stein U. Larsen (Oslo: Universitetsförlaget, 1980), pp. 719–21; Stein U. Larsen, 'Conservatives and Fascists in the Nordic Countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, 1918-45', in *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. by Martin Blinkhorn (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), pp. 243–44.

<sup>130</sup> Wärenstam, pp. 40–50.

it put its members, led by a high proportion of NCOs. The SFKO may have had as many as 7000 members.<sup>131</sup> The young sergeant Lindholm remained active in the successors of the SFKO, until he broke away from *Svenska Nationalsocialistiska Partiet* (Swedish National Socialist Party, SNSP) in January 1933, and led a break-away group, the NSAP.

In the Netherlands it was the 'Belgian Treaty' (1925-27) which occasioned a nationalist outcry, and created the necessary pressure for far-right organisation, particularly beyond a confessional politics. The treaty allowed Belgian access to the Moerdijk canal via Antwerp, and under the treaty, supported by France, the right to pass through the canal with war ships if necessary. Nationalists decried what they termed a 'Belgian Versailles' impinging on Dutch sovereignty; at their head was a nationalist civil engineer, the young Utrecht Chief of Water Management, Anton Mussert. The treaty was abandoned under the pressure, and momentarily brought Mussert into the political limelight, which would eventually lead him to found his own party, the NSB, in 1931.<sup>132</sup> (The decade did see the rapid emergence and dissolution of a number of other fascist parties: particularly the *Verbond van Actualisten* (*League of Actualists*) in 1923, led by Sinclair de Rochemont, and briefly supported by Verviers's Catholic group, but it disappeared in 1925 when it was cut off from the funds supplied by the millionaire Alfred Haighton.<sup>133</sup> Figures like Sinclair and Haighton would continue to quarrel through a number of other fascist parties throughout the decade, but attracted little attention, and achieved less.)

While Sweden and the Netherlands fared very differently during the interwar period, neither of them possessed stable governments in the 1920s, and both presented a number of political opportunities which could aid the growth of fascism. Between 1918 and 1933 Sweden went through eleven cabinets,<sup>134</sup> while no Dutch cabinet in this period managed to fulfil its four-year term.<sup>135</sup> In 1922 the Swedish Liberal party split over the alcohol Prohibition Referendum,<sup>136</sup> while the Dutch Liberals were equally divided into declining progressive and conservative parties which

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<sup>131</sup> Wärenstam, p. 65.

<sup>132</sup> Ronald Havenaar, *Anton Adriaan Mussert: Verrader voor het Vaderland* (Den Haag: Kruseman, 1984); for a comprehensive history of the treaty, with a summary in English, see: R. L. Schuurmsma, *Het Onaannemelijk Tractaat: Het Verdrag met België van 3 April 1925 in de Nederlandse Publieke Opinie* (Groningen: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1975).

<sup>133</sup> J.L. van der Pauw, *De Actualisten: De Kinderjaren van het Georganiseerde Fascisme in Nederland 1923-1924* (Amsterdam: Sijthoff, 1987), pp. 26-27, 53, 97-99.

<sup>134</sup> Larsson and Marklund, p. 334.

<sup>135</sup> Chris Cook and John Paxton, *European Political Facts of the Twentieth Century*, Fifth (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 153-54.

<sup>136</sup> Larsson and Marklund, p. 335.

had lost their footing after the electoral reforms.<sup>137</sup> Sweden at the time was going through a drawn-out agricultural crisis. Farmers suffered as sugar beet and grain prices declined, while in the north the lumber industry was taken over by big corporations, to the dismay of private owners. With a strong communist presence in northern Sweden, this led to repeated conflicts between employers and workers, with a series of strikes and lockouts culminating in the May 1931 shootings in Ådalen, where soldiers shot five workers to protect strike breakers.<sup>138</sup> The Great Depression hit Sweden in 1930,<sup>139</sup> and unemployment peaked in 1933 at 23%, hitting farmers and industrial workers hardest.<sup>140</sup> Dutch agriculture was also under pressure, and was severely damaged by the drawn-out depression. Unemployment remained high throughout the 1930s, going over 500-600 000 in 1936.<sup>141</sup> Desires for a more authoritative government were fuelled a year before when a Dutch battleship stationed in the East Indies was taken over in February 1933 by Indonesian mutineers, supported by Dutch communists in the Netherlands, and some members of the parliamentary SDAP.<sup>142</sup> (The situation was resolved when the ship was bombed by order of PM Hendrik Colijn, earning him a lasting reputation as a rightist strongman.)<sup>143</sup> Labour unrest came to a head in July 1934 with riots in the Jordaan district of Amsterdam, which saw communists and fascists confront each other on the streets, and brutal police suppression.<sup>144</sup>

The NSB could exploit a niche peculiar to Dutch politics, which was defined by the phenomenon of pillarisation (*verzuiling*), the vertical division of society into rigidly self-contained groups centred on their respective 'pillars'.<sup>145</sup> In the interwar period these were first of all the pillars of Catholicism and Protestantism, and thirdly socialism. While the concept of pillarisation has become increasingly contested in Dutch scholarship in the past decades, and its definition controversial, it remains a good model for explaining and summarising the Dutch socio-political

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<sup>137</sup> Robin te Slaa and Edwin Klijn, *De NSB: Ontstaan en Opkomst van de Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, 1931-1935* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), pp. 66–70.

<sup>138</sup> Ohlsson, pp. 237–42; Francis Sejersted, *The Age of Social Democracy: Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), pp. 156–57.

<sup>139</sup> Peters, p. 1.

<sup>140</sup> Larsen, 'Conservatives and Fascists in the Nordic Countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, 1918-45', p. 589.

<sup>141</sup> Blom and Lamberts, pp. 344–45; Kwiet, 'Zur Geschichte der Mussert-Bewegung', p. 170.

<sup>142</sup> J. C. H. Blom, *De Mouterij op de Zeven Provinciën: Reacties en Gevolgen in Nederland* (Utrecht: HES, 1983).

<sup>143</sup> Verhagen, p. 295.

<sup>144</sup> Slaa and Klijn, pp. 543–47.

<sup>145</sup> Blom and Lamberts, pp. 338–41; Jonge, *Crisis en Critiek der Democratie*, p. 19.

environment of the interbellum.<sup>146</sup> Each pillar had its own party, but also its own trade unions, newspapers, clubs and schools, ensuring the isolation of each pillar from the others, as well as the loyalty of voters to their corresponding party.<sup>147</sup> This was most effective in the case of the *Roomsche Katholieke Staatspartij* (RKSP, Roman Catholic State Party),<sup>148</sup> which throughout the interwar period managed to hold around 30% of the vote. The Protestant vote in turn was divided between the Calvinist *Christelijk-Historische Unie* (CHU, Christian-Historical Union) and the orthodox Calvinist *Anti-Revolutionaire Partij* (ARP, Anti-Revolutionary Party), holding c. 20-25% of the vote between them. Government was thus largely in the hands of the confessional parties, loosely united against the 'pagan' parties. The NSB railed against these divisive social-confessional structures, pleading for an organic national unity, while attracting that remnant of Dutch society which fell outside the pillars.

Only in the Netherlands did fascists grow to be any kind of threat at all, as the NSB enjoyed a rapid rise to prominence with an impressive 7.94% of the vote in the provincial elections of 1935, before losing almost half of those votes in the general elections of 1937. In Sweden the NSAP peaked in 1936 at a dismal 0.7%. On the other hand, while the Swedish cadres were small, there was also widespread sympathy for some of their political goals, and they managed to attract a considerable audience with their street activities.<sup>149</sup> So while opportunities for establishment and growth did exist, democratic parliamentary government was never under serious threat in either of these countries. Only in the Netherlands, from 1933 to 1937, was the NSB a serious concern to the establishment, a contrast with Sweden which did much to shape attitudes to fascism in the 1930s, as well as fascist performative strategies.

In the Netherlands, political uniforms in public were banned in 1933. Paramilitary organisations such as the NSB's *Weerafdeling* (WA, Defence Department) followed in 1936. Parliament enacted legislation banning members of revolutionary organisations from being part of state-organised civil militias, the army, and then the civil service.<sup>150</sup> While Mussert initially

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<sup>146</sup> Janneke Adema, 'Verzuiling als metafoor voor modernisering', in *Moderniteit: Modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914-1940*, ed. by Madelon de Keizer and Sophie Tates (Zutphen: NIOD/Walburg Pers, 2004), p. 265.

<sup>147</sup> For instance the vote of the Anti-Revolutionary Party varied only between 11.6% and 13.7% throughout the interbellum. See Jong: 1969, p. 79.

<sup>148</sup> Officially the RKSP was named the General League of Roman Catholic Caucuses, but Roman Catholic State Party became its formal name in 1926.

<sup>149</sup> Åmark, pp. 288–304.

<sup>150</sup> Slaa and Klijn, chap. 22.

managed to convince the Anti-Revolutionary PM Colijn not to put the NSB on the list, the latter soon changed his mind. In May 1934 Mussert himself was forced out of his job as Chief Engineer, and started to devote all of his time to the party. That same year the Catholic episcopacy issued a pastoral letter warning against the dangers of fascist parties, and the year after threatened to withhold the sacraments from whoever offered significant support to the NSB. The pastoral letter, *Salvation in the Lord*, issued 2 February 1934, speaks volumes on contemporary perceptions of Mussert and the NSB:

it is difficult to discern in how far various fascist or national socialist currents accept the 'total state [...] but sooner or later they will certainly end up under this influence of the deification of the state or nation. The great intellectual currents of global developments usually influence each other in irresistible ways... [...] A certain moderation on the part of the leadership is ... not the slightest security for the future development of a movement. [...] Moreover, it is more than likely that every fascism and national socialism in the Netherlands will in the long run be controlled by a group of people, who largely do not share our world view.<sup>151</sup>

The Swedish NSAP did not enjoy any such notoriety, and during the 1930s Lindholm's party would be repeatedly frustrated by the lack of exposure. Here too political uniforms were banned in 1933, and the party paramilitary, SA, came under repeated police investigation forcing organisational changes, but overall they attracted limited attention from either media or government.

Nor was Swedish society divided in anything like the way the Netherlands was. Virtually all Swedes were gathered under the Lutheran state Church, while politically the socialist party managed to secure an ever larger share of the vote, in compromise with the reactionary Agrarian League. This was the famous *kohandel* (horse trading), which to a large extent defined Swedish politics in the 1930s. The SAP had secured 41.7% of the vote in the 1932 elections after a campaign attacking the structural weaknesses of capitalism, and initiated negotiations with Axel Pehrsson in

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<sup>151</sup> '...moeilijk beslissend uit te maken, in hoever verschillende fascistische of nationaal-socialistische stroomingen te ontzand dezen "totalen staat" aanvaardden. [...] ...vroeg of laat zeer zeker onder den invloed van deze staats- of natievergoding zullen geraken. De groote gedachtenstroomingen toch in het wereldgebeuren beïnvloeden elkaar meestal op onweerstaanbare wijze... [...] Een zekere gematigdheid bij de hoofdleiding is dus niet de minste waarborg voor de toekomstige ontwikkeling eener beweging. [...] Bovendien is het meer dan waarschijnlijk, dat elk fascisme en nationaal-socialisme in Nederland op den duur zal beheerscht worden door een groep personen, die in meerderheid onze wereldbeschouwing niet deelen.' Brochure, Pastoral letter from the Archbishop and the Bishops of the Netherlands to their committed Clergy and Faithful, *Zaligheid in den Heer*, Utrecht, 2 February 1934, National Archive [*Nationaal Archief*], The Hague, 2.19.49: 10.

Bramstorp of the Agrarian League, allowing for more active government intervention in the economy, and definitively undermining right-wing opposition.<sup>152</sup> Whether SAP economic policies and *kohandeln* indeed brought Sweden out of the Depression remains up for debate, but undoubtedly it did wonders for the Social Democrats' reputation and popularity.<sup>153</sup> Under the Minister of Finance's explicitly Keynesian economic programme unemployment was virtually eradicated, the economy prospered once more – not least the metal industry, which benefited from rearmament in Germany – while agriculture experienced the advantages of protectionist policies and mechanisation.<sup>154</sup> Fascism was of minimal concern to Per Albin Hansson, PM for most of this period, unlike for his Dutch counterparts, who presided over parties much more threatened by a new force on the Right.

Doubtless Sweden and the Netherlands were not as severely affected by the explosion of violence, unrest, and political uncertainty generated by the First World War, the Central and East European revolutions, and their aftermath as the countries that experienced these first hand. But this explosion was not neatly contained by national borders, and the new sense of political opportunities these events generated was intrinsically transnational, especially when viewed from a cultural perspective.<sup>155</sup> Democratic norms, and anti- or non-fascist constructions of political respectability prevailed in these two nations during the interwar period, each in their own way, but they were not somehow excluded from new political ideas. While they did not experience the same extent of political street violence that Reichardt argues was central to fascist representation and identity,<sup>156</sup> violence went beyond praxis; Swedish and Dutch fascists ultimately drew on the same performative repertoire as their more successful counterparts elsewhere, but modified their challenge to parliamentary legitimacy to their own contexts. Of course in this they were ultimately unsuccessful, but their participation in the Swedish and Dutch public fora is an important element in the history of fascism's spread and development in Europe. It also gives a much-neglected perspective on the interwar interaction between respectability and democratic norms, and transnational fascist political methods and violence, as it had settled in the second half of the interbellum.

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<sup>152</sup> Bengt Owe Birgersson and others, *Sverige efter 1900: En Modern Politisk Historia* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1981), pp. 125–28.

<sup>153</sup> Larsson and Marklund, p. 341.

<sup>154</sup> Arne Halvarson, *Sveriges Statskick: En Faktasamling* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1986), p. 8.

<sup>155</sup> Vincent, pp. 388–90.

<sup>156</sup> Reichardt, 'Fascist Marches in Italy and Germany'.

It is in this historical context that the mythopoeic processes of the NSB and NSAP will be analysed, with reference to the dictates of respectability peculiar to Sweden's and the Netherlands' socio-political cultures. The first chapter will analyse the party apparatuses, and reconstruct how they waged propaganda, organised their members, and directed mythopoeic performances with the resources at their disposal, in the national context they found themselves. Both parties had derived their party structures from the German NSDAP, but quickly adapted it to their own situations, and very different resources. Party rules and regulations, circulars and directives, organisational correspondence, and other internal documents are central to this chapter. The second chapter will focus on the respective leaders at the head of the parties, Mussert and Lindholm, and the mythopoeia of them as charismatic fascist Leaders. The myths of the Leader are understood principally through their discursive construction in the party organs, and the rituals and cults developed around them. The third chapter will move on to the rank-and-file, taking the political uniform as its subject, and the myth of the movement as an army of political soldiers that it produced. A fascist repertoire of dress, composure, symbols, and acts infused the individual fascist with mythopoeic potential, a repertoire which most directly connected individual fantasy to the wider mythopoeic project. The fourth and final chapter will look at the mythopoeic project in its holistic manifestations, the party conventions. On a regular basis the NSAP and NSB held massive conventions that mobilised a significant percentage of its cadres, meant to be the most impressive and spectacular representation of fascism in its transcendent, ideal form. These resource-intensive pieces of grand political theatre were intended as expressions of the true potential of the fascist party, and hoped to show the movement's capacity to authenticate the myth, for members and outsiders alike.

## 1. The Apparatus: propaganda, organisation, resources

Myths abounded in the discourse of the NSAP and NSB. Putting fantastic self-representations into words was easy enough, but mythopoeia, the actual process of producing myths and communicating them convincingly to a wider audience was a formidable challenge. Reproducing fascist fantasies through discourse and performances that bore the hallmarks of authenticity required not just fascist will, but the means of symbolic production.<sup>157</sup> It required an extensive propaganda apparatus which commanded the numbers, competence, organisation, and finances, to ensure the performative discipline of its members, orchestrate political theatre on a grand scale, and interpose a mythic hermeneutics between audience and performance. Converting the public and mobilising the cadres required practical and material resources. To this, organisation was crucial.

Dutch and Swedish scholarship have hitherto neglected in-depth analysis of the respective party apparatuses of the NSAP and the NSB, of the kind done by Dietrich Orlow for the NSDAP.<sup>158</sup> While the sources are available, the countless forms, regulations, reports, and other administrative documents that filled the party filing cabinets have apparently been dismissed as dull and uninformative. Some historians have simply assumed that the apparatuses were carbon-copies of the NSDAP's (itself hardly a static organisation), without fully exploring the implications if that were indeed the case. For the NSB some of the work has been done, including some impressive studies of regional and local organisations, but never as an end in its own right, and not in any greater detail.<sup>159</sup> For the Swedish NSAP this work has barely been done at all, bar a few bare-bones pages of Heléne Lööv's PhD thesis.<sup>160</sup> The initial histories on Swedish fascism have focused on giving a summary overview of all fascist movements, and focused on matters of ideology, member composition, and voting patterns.<sup>161</sup> More recent work like Victor Lundberg's has dealt with the NSAP organisation specifically, but only narrowly in relation to other questions.<sup>162</sup> But the inner

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<sup>157</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander and Jason L. Mast, 'Introduction: Symbolic Action in Theory and Practice', in *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 1–16 (pp. 5–6).

<sup>158</sup> Dietrich Orlow, *The History of the Nazi Party, 1919-33*, 2 vols (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1971), I.

<sup>159</sup> Damsma and Schumacher, "'De Strijd om Amsterdam': Een nieuwe benadering in het onderzoek naar de NSB"; Damsma and Schumacher, *Hier Woont een NSB'er*.

<sup>160</sup> Lööv, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven*, chap. 4, especially pp. 117-19.

<sup>161</sup> Wärenstam; Lööv, *Hakkorset och Wasakärven*.

<sup>162</sup> Lundberg, *En Idé Större än Döden*.



workings of the party apparatus can be highly informative, and give a direct insight into some of the chief concerns of the party.

This chapter explores the party apparatuses of the NSAP and the NSB, detailing the organisation; outlining the chain of command to see who bore responsibility for the execution and implementation of propaganda; the tools of propaganda available to each party to construct and disseminate their myths; and the role of the rank-and-file, who were the fundament of all mythopoeic efforts in their smallest details. The overall purpose is to give a heuristic overview which can serve as the basis for the analysis of specific mythopoeic performances in the next chapters. Once the division of responsibility and the means of implementation are sketched out, the discussion will go on to describe the organisational structures that were in place in both movements to actually orchestrate their political performances and discourses, and connect them, culminating in the public meeting. The public meeting was at the performative forefront of fascist mythopoeia, as the party newspaper was at its discursive front.

This comparative description naturally relies heavily on the regulations, rules, and directives of the parties, but also entails an analysis of the qualitative differences between the two organisations, and highlights their flaws and the obstacles they faced. Here it will quickly become apparent that while the NSAP and NSB relied on the same organisational model, and closely shared a party structure, in practise they worked remarkably differently, as the workings of the apparatuses were highly contingent on their national context and political fortunes.

## I

The NSB and the NSAP both started out as strictly hierarchical organisations, with a centralised command structure, with more or less dictatorial powers assigned to the *Algemeen Leider* Anton Mussert and *Partiledaren* Sven Olov Lindholm. Whereas the fascist movements of the 1920s in Sweden and the Netherlands tended to be ruled by oligarchical councils,<sup>163</sup> the new movements of the 1930s took a leaf from the book of the later NSDAP.<sup>164</sup> Correspondingly these parties tended to be known to outsiders as the Mussert-Movement or Lindholm-Movement. Power flowed directly from the headquarters in Utrecht and Gothenburg, (later Stockholm), with limited autonomy for local party formations. The pyramidal hierarchy was in both cases based on a flow of responsibility

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<sup>163</sup> E.g.: Pauw, p. 22; Wärenstam, p. 55.

<sup>164</sup> For an account of how the NSDAP power structure was centralised and personalised, see Orlow, I, chap. 3.

from the Leadership, consisting of a Headquarters of Departmental leaders, to the District Leaders, Circle Leaders, Group Leaders, down to Block Leaders. In both cases the District Leaders (*gewestelijk leider* and *distriktsledare*), based on the German *Gauleiter*, were often part of the Leadership (NSB) or closely cooperated with it (NSAP). This structure, as the Swedish police observed, was carefully copied from the NSDAP – the NSAP kept detailed diagrams of the German party structure at their headquarters.<sup>165</sup> The NSB organisation, designed by Mussert, was less elaborate from its inception, and used the 15 member Group as its smallest unit.<sup>166</sup> The most important level for political organisation and collective action in the NSB was the Circle (*kring*, theoretically 1000-4000 members), for which most of the regulatory material was written, while in the NSAP principal organisational action devolved to the Local Group (*ortsgrupp*, 75+), rather than the Circle (*krets*). Thus, the two party organisations were by no means identical, the NSB being a newly formed party for which Mussert developed the organisation throughout 1932, while the NSAP grew out of the previous organisations of the SNSP and SFKO. Comparing the parties' hierarchical organisations, it becomes evident that, in spite of being significantly smaller than the NSB, the NSAP had a more complex, but not more functional, organisation.

At the head of the Swedish NSAP hierarchy stood *partiledningen*, the Party Leadership, a body with significant authority, led by the Party Leader as *primus inter pares*. The body assembled at least once a week.<sup>167</sup> NSAP leadership at times resembled a hybrid between the collegial structure of the 1920s and the *Führerprinzip*.<sup>168</sup> The Leadership, consisting of over a dozen members with ever-shifting roles and responsibilities, changed far too frequently in its precise composition to detail in full, and in most cases there is little biographical information available on the individuals that held office. But a few figures are worth mentioning.

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<sup>165</sup> Memorandum concerning police raid, 22 May 1935, pp. 23-24, Swedish National Archives (*Riksarkivet*): Arninge (SÄPO Archive), dossier 2H1.

<sup>166</sup> Measure of the Administration No 1: Regarding the organisation, Utrecht, 1 February 1932, Amsterdam: NIOD (*Dutch Institute for War Documentation*), Archive 123 (NSB Party Archive), 1.1 (Leadership): dossier 3.

<sup>167</sup> Sven Olov Lindholm, Lindholm interview with Ingemar Carlsson, 1980-81, tape 00258: b, Swedish National Archives: Marieberg, SO Lindholm's Collection, vol. 4.

<sup>168</sup> Booklet, *Tjänsteföreskrifter för NSAP (TF)*, 15 January 1937, p. 1, Arninge: 2B1: folder 1.



Figure 1. The NSAP-members who broke away from SNSP in 1933. Oscar Landahl, sitting in front row, on the far-right; Per Dahlberg, second row, on far-left; Lindholm, second row, third from the right; Gunnar Svalander, back row, third from the left. Photographer unknown. National Archives of Sweden, Marieberg, SO Lindholm's collection, vol. 6. All photographs used with permission from the archive.

The closest person to Lindholm was the Deputy Leader. Initially this position was held by Gunnar Svalander, a key figure in the party 1933-36, who initially held the position of Party Secretary, and later that of the highly influential Party Organiser.<sup>169</sup> Svalander was in the first years crucial in overseeing the organisation and party projects such as the annual conventions. Eventually he rebelled against Lindholm after the electoral disappointment of 1936, and replaced as Deputy by Per Dahlberg.<sup>170</sup> Dahlberg, the glasses-wearing intellectual of the movement, with a degree in political science and economics, was the party's chief ideologist, and always worked closely with the *partiledare*.<sup>171</sup> Perhaps politically the most astute of the chief functionaries, he was considered something of a moderating force in the party, and appears to have been one of the main movers behind the 'New Direction' [*nyorientering*] towards respectability at the end of 1938. He worked as party speaker, wrote numerous articles for the party papers, and held a number of other influential positions in the NSAP throughout the decade, including editor of the weekly party

<sup>169</sup> 'Meddelande från plg', *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten (DSN)*, no 6, 8 February 1934, p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> 'Meddelanden', *DSN*, no 80, 17 October 1936, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> Lindholm interview, 1980-81, 260: a, 1 min.

newspaper, publisher and editor of the monthly theory journal *Nationell Socialism*, leader for the Political Commission (Polkom), Press Chief, Party Organiser, and head of the members' training and education service. He eventually quit in 1940 after being called in for military service. Another ubiquitous figure was Oscar Landahl, a popular party speaker, but most importantly Party Chief of Propaganda in 1933-35. He was also the party's electoral candidate for Gothenburg. As chief of propaganda he was replaced in 1935 by Erik Fahl, another speaker and sometime Political Secretary with growing influence in the party. Eventually he would become permanently employed as organiser of Western Sweden in 1939.<sup>172</sup> Fahl's replacement as propaganda chief was Björn Dahlström, a lawyer by training, and son of the famous socialist writer Kata Dahlström (1858-1923), but already in 1939 replaced by Bertil Siven. Herbert Hultberg was a loyal colleague of Lindholm, who worked as Party Secretary from 1936, and organised the daily business of Headquarters. Bertil Brisman was a political adviser for Lindholm, and Polkom Secretary with a particular interest in cultural politics, was briefly Party Organiser in 1936, and a party speaker.<sup>173</sup>

In the Dutch NSB there was no real alternative to Mussert's increasingly charismatic leadership, who worked closely together with the loyal party co-founder Cornelis Van Geelkerken, who acted as Deputy Leader and General Secretary.<sup>174</sup> Van Geelkerken was also briefly in charge of Department II (Finance), General Leader of Propaganda in 1936, and leader of the evanescent youth movement, the NJS (*Nationale Jeugdstorm*, National Youth Storm).

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<sup>172</sup> 'Erik Fahl fast anställd i Göteborg: Blir talare och organisatör för Västra Landsdelen', *DSN*, no 6, 25 January 1939, p. 1.

<sup>173</sup> Lindholm interview, 1980-81, 260: a, 4 mins.

<sup>174</sup> Pollmann, p. 110.



Van links naar rechts; staande: Mr. H. REYDON (Krispleider Amsterdam), J. F. OVERWIJN (Kr. l. Rotterdam), F. E. FARWERCK (Alg. Prop. Leider), H. VAN DUYL (Kr. l. 't Gooi), K. H. TUSENIUS (Kr. l. IJmuiden), F. W. VAN BILDERBEEK (Chef adm.), J. BODDÉ (Kr. l. Limburg), Mej. C. W. VAN BILDERBEEK (Secr.); zittend: Ir. F. A. SMIT KLEINE (Kr. l. Haarlem), Mr. S. A. VAN LUNTEREN (Hoofdred. V. & V.), C. VAN GELKERKEN (Alg. Secr. - Penningm.), Ir. A. A. MUSSERT (Alg. Leider), J. HOGEWIND (Inspecteur W. A.), T. BAKKER (Kr. l. Groningen), J. W. C. DANNER (Kr. l. 's-Gravenhage)

Figure 2. The NSB General Council, 1934. Names from left to right standing, then sitting fr. F.A. Smit Kleine. *Volk en Vaderland*. All images from VoVa originate from the National Library of the Netherlands, ([www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl)).

Instead of relying extensively on other HQ members, individual Department leaders did not appear to yield much influence outside of their limited spheres. Instead political influence in the party was tied to Mussert's favour, and whoever he had most use for at the time. Count Marchant d'Ansembourg, District Leader for Limburg & North-Brabant, and a key member of the Church Council for Catholics, always wielded a great deal of authority, and was NSB representative in the Dutch Senate from 1935. The Calvinist *bloed en bodem* theorist E.J. Roskam was another member of the Church Council (for the Reformed), and director of the National Press office. J. Hogewind was Commander of the paramilitary WA until its disbandment in 1936, and F.W. van Bilderbeek played an important role as Head of Finance and Administration. Finally there was M.M. Rost van Tonningen, a former League of Nations diplomat from Austria, and personal friend of Heinrich Himmler, who joined the party in 1936 and was immediately assigned as editor of the party's new daily newspaper *Het Nationale Dagblad* (The National Daily). He played an important role as a radical Germanophile ideologist, but largely during the Occupation, and with limited success on account of his tremendous unpopularity in the NSB.<sup>175</sup> These different leadership organisations were also reflective of Mussert's and Lindholm's competencies and responsibilities in the party. While Mussert could invariably be found in his office in Utrecht, centrally located in the Dutch *Randstad* megalopolis, Lindholm was occupied as the chief party speaker for months at a time during his propaganda tours, which took him as far afield as Lapland and Norrbotten.<sup>176</sup> Mussert by

<sup>175</sup> 'Mussert sticht zich een dagblad en benoemt Rost van Tonningen tot hoofdredacteur', *Volk en Vaderland* (VoVa), no 34, 21 August 1936, p. 1.

<sup>176</sup> Sven Olov Lindholm, Private diary, 3 February 1935, Marieberg, SO Lindholm's Collection, vol. 2.

contrast sometimes only spoke at propaganda meetings two or three times per month, in cities no more distant than Hilversum or Dordrecht.<sup>177</sup>

The structures of the organisations did not remain static, and were improved regularly, especially after elections which tended to foreground problems in the apparatus. It was particularly the geographical administration of the party branches which they had inherited from the NSDAP which required adjustment. In 1935, after the Dutch May elections, the leadership structure of the essential Circles were changed in the NSB, with the Circle Leader being integrated into a troika with a Head of Propaganda and a Head of Staff, so that the Circle Leader would no longer be swamped by administrative issues.<sup>178</sup> After the disastrous 1937 elections, the handful of *gewesten* were abolished to instead be replaced by twenty-four *distrikten*, undercutting the power of District Leaders, and allowing more precise management from Headquarters. With roughly two *distrikten* per province, it allowed a closer connection between locality and Headquarters, also addressing complaints about a lack of immediate contact with the centre.<sup>179</sup> Previous District Leaders d'Ansembourg and Plekker were given oversight over the new district system as a whole.<sup>180</sup> The headquarters were constantly expanding: new headquarters were created in Amsterdam, Hilversum (1936) and The Hague (1937), as new functions were created, or the dozen departments redistributed to match up geographically with their responsibilities.<sup>181</sup>

In Sweden, the NSAP reformed the District system several times. *Distriktschefer* (North, East, Southeast, South, and West) were instituted gradually across the country as more branches were established over time and attempts at organising them were made; these were then given a make-over in 1936 when they were re-named *landsinspektörer*,<sup>182</sup> and reduced in number (particularly the party gave up on the North, as the hoped-for growth there was frustrated).<sup>183</sup> They were renamed *ländermän* in 1938,<sup>184</sup> until the system was finally abolished in 1939, to instead focus

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<sup>177</sup> List of meetings, *Vergaderingen*, January-June 1934, pp. 6-14, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 534.

<sup>178</sup> Minutes for meeting 11 July 1935, §1, pp. 23-24, in: Book, meeting minutes *Algemeene Raad*, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

<sup>179</sup> See e.g.: Minutes, Meeting of Disciplinary Council, case HP 85, Comrade T. [name restricted], Doetinchem, Hilversum, 26 May 1936, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1341; Minutes, Meeting of Disciplinary Council, case Dordrecht Circle, 19 May 1937, pp. 1-2, NIOD: 123, 2.56: 2026.

<sup>180</sup> 'Het Hoofdkwartier der Beweging: De mannen om Mussert', *VoVa*, no 31, 30 July 1937, p. 6.

<sup>181</sup> 'Een nieuw hoofdkwartier: Gebouw aan de Maliebaan', *VoVa*, no 7, 15 February 1936, p. 6; 'Het Willem de Zwijgerhuis: Stichting der Haagsche afdeeling van het Hoofdkwartier', *VoVa*, no 41, 8 October 1937, p. 1.

<sup>182</sup> The name was clearly copied from the office introduced into the NSDAP by Gregor Strasser in 1932: Orlow, I, pp. 259-61.

<sup>183</sup> 'Meddelanden', *DSN*, no 86, 7 November 1936, p. 2.

<sup>184</sup> 'Meddelanden', *DSN*, no 19, 9 March 1938, p. 2.

on *kretschefer*, the Circle Leaders, as the nexus of centre and locality.<sup>185</sup> The reasons for these changes will be explored further below. The NSAP's centre of gravity also shifted over time, quite unlike the NSB in Utrecht. Headquarters were initially placed in Gothenburg, where the SNSP from which the party broke away was initially located. But as the party started to expand in Stockholm in 1934-35, the organisation moved eastwards, with more and more of the organisation established in the capital, until Headquarters was moved there in 1937. The Gothenburg branch crumbled only a year later, especially as underperformance in the elections meant it lost much of its funds. While Headquarters remained in Stockholm for the rest of the party's existence, there was a further shift in the organisation to the south, as ground was won in Malmö, where it would eventually hold one of the annual conventions in 1939.

Centrally propaganda was organised by the parties' respective propaganda departments. In the NSAP, *propagandaavdelningen* was headed by the Party Chief of Propaganda, and coordinated by the Party Organiser. The department was subdivided into a Meeting Department, Writing Department, and News Centre.<sup>186</sup> In November 1938, with the appointment of Björn Dahlström, the organisation was expanded to include a functionary for the technical side, and a propaganda council was formed to coordinate propaganda better.<sup>187</sup> The NSB Propaganda Department (Department III) was led by a Propaganda Leader, aided by the Propaganda Council. The department was responsible for five areas: the speakers' service, external propaganda, written propaganda (in conjunction with the Press Department), film and photo propaganda, and the negligible Labour Front.<sup>188</sup> While little archival material remains to elucidate how the internal workings of these departments played out in practice, the resulting decisions were implemented through Circle functionaries. In the Netherlands, Circles maintained their own Propaganda Department with a corresponding Propaganda Leader, immediately subordinate to the Circle Leader, who received circulars with instructions from the central department, and worked together with the Circle Leader to implement the directives.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> 'Partiledaren...', *DSN*, no 41, 14 June 1939, p. 4.

<sup>186</sup> Photo negative, Diagram party hierarchy, Tjänsteföreskrifter för NSAP, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>187</sup> Odd, 'Björn Dalström partipropagandachef: I ett samtal med Den Svenske drar han upp riktlinjerna för den närmaste tidens verksamhet', *DSN*, no 86, 16 November 1938, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>188</sup> Diagram, 'Centrale Propagandadienst', NIOD: 123, 2.01: 394.

<sup>189</sup> Measure of the Administration, no 8: 'Regeling der Propaganda', Utrecht, February 1932, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 3. For an example of such circulars, see: Message no 64, C. van Geelkerken to all Circle Leaders, Utrecht, 27 May 1937, National Archive, The Hague, 2.19.049 (NSB Gewest III): folder 11.

The NSB propaganda functionaries also had, unlike the NSAP, a considerable information-gathering organisation at their disposal. A Documentation Service was founded from the party's inception. Via the Central Bureau of Documentation, the rank-and-file were instructed to send local news reports concerning the party to Utrecht including hostile or friendly statements, evidence of corruption and similar information against opponents, and generally keep it informed of anything relevant to its propaganda efforts.<sup>190</sup> The Bureau in turn compiled and organised the information it received, combined with its own analysis of daily media and current affairs, and provided a digest for the party speakers,<sup>191</sup> as well as a library that could be consulted by propaganda functionaries.<sup>192</sup>

In Sweden directives tended to be issued by District until 1939; District Leaders had more autonomy from the Propaganda Department, and could direct regional propaganda on their own initiative.<sup>193</sup> Correspondence from the NSAP/SSS archive shows that in Sweden local functionaries frequently needed to be privately admonished in writing, so that the formal organisation was supplemented by more personal connections.<sup>194</sup> The difficulty of directing the geographically isolated Swedish groups was circumvented to some extent by the monthly *Porg* (*partiorganisation*) paper, the compulsory and 'confidential organ for the NSAP's functionaries'. In theory a supplement to the *Tjänsteföreskrifter* [TF, Service Regulations] written by Lindholm,<sup>195</sup> in practice it helped the central departments direct functionaries nationally, although as *Porg* itself noted, not all functionaries executed its orders down to the smallest detail,<sup>196</sup> nor, quite bizarrely, did all functionaries subscribe for that matter.<sup>197</sup> In both parties the organisation of propaganda was intended to be dialogic in character. Local functionaries supplied monthly reports, which the central departments used to develop strategy. It is notable that the Dutch reports were universally more elaborate, consisting of several pages with an analysis of the supplied figures, while their

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<sup>190</sup> Circular, District South-South-Holland, Rotterdam, 2 January 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 504; Guideline no 3, for the Documentation Service, 10 August 1933, pp. 1-2, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526.

<sup>191</sup> Report: Documentation, J.C. Scholtz, Amsterdam, 29 September 1933, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 542.

<sup>192</sup> Booklet, Mussert, *Instructie voor de propaganda in den kring*, Utrecht, 1 September 1934, 4A, p. 5, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526.

<sup>193</sup> Circular no 100, Ortsgruppschef Ragnar Lind, Stockholm, 25 April 1938, Arninge: 2A: 2.

<sup>194</sup> E.g. Letter, to Ach Gagner, Ronneby, 15 September 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS Archive, vol. 5, Ronneby (1934-38).

<sup>195</sup> Lindholm diary, 3-15 May 1933.

<sup>196</sup> *Porg*, no 10, October 1935, p. 55, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>197</sup> See the letter of complaint from a District Leader: Dch to Ps, Kalmar, 11 February 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Södra Distriktet (1934-36).



Swedish equivalents typically comprised a single page with only basic distribution figures of propaganda materials and the like.<sup>198</sup>

## II

Next to the party leaders and propaganda departments, the party newspaper was always the most important propaganda organ. In fact, the NSB's *Volk en Vaderland* (VoVa, People and Fatherland) and the NSAP's *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten* (DSN, The Swedish National Socialist) were at the heart of the mythopoeic apparatus of their respective organisations, fulfilling a major mobilising, organising, and propaganda function.<sup>199</sup> VoVa and DSN were not only the face of the movement,<sup>200</sup> but also explicated party ideology, organised the rank-and-file, issued directives, and notified the members of news and changes. They were also the first and foremost propaganda to be distributed on the streets, earning money for the party. The newspapers were the glue that held the entire propaganda effort together, the movements' 'most powerful weapon', serving to make members and sympathisers more militant, and making the indifferent susceptible to the ideas of the party (Mussert),<sup>201</sup> 'the very spine of our freedom struggle' (Lindholm).<sup>202</sup> In theory subscription to the papers was compulsory for all members,<sup>203</sup> though in practice a sizeable minority only bought the paper occasionally.<sup>204</sup> VoVa cost f2/p.a. for members, f3/p.a. to non-members, and 5 cents per individual issue.<sup>205</sup> The intention was to keep the price as low as possible.<sup>206</sup> DSN was sold for 12 kr/p.a., and 15 öre per issue, though some considered this to be too much.<sup>207</sup> One of the reasons for the comparatively high price was the lack of advertisements in the paper, a consequence of Lindholm's distinctly anti-capitalist position and rhetoric, and/or lack of business acumen.<sup>208</sup> Until the party acquired its own printing press in August 1938, DSN was printed by *Simonsons tryckeri* in

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<sup>198</sup> E.g. Monthly report September, Og. 11, Örebro, 1 October 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 5, Örebro (1933-36); Rapport, propaganda for Circle 23, Amsterdam, 15 July 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 549.

<sup>199</sup> For a rather exultant analysis of the significance of DSN, see Mall, pp. 61–69.

<sup>200</sup> Jonge, *Het Nationaal-Socialisme in Nederland*, p. 4; Slaa and Klijn, pp. 183, 521.

<sup>201</sup> Mussert, Order no 2, to Circle Leaders, Utrecht, 30 December 1935, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 39.

<sup>202</sup> Booklet, *Tjänsteföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, p. 27, 2B1: folder 1, Arninge.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 26.

<sup>204</sup> Monthly Report April, Fridlevstad, 5 May 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 6; *Porg*, no 9, September 1935, pp. 53-54, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>205</sup> *VoVa*, no 1, 7 January 1933, p. 1.

<sup>206</sup> Circular, Mussert, Utrecht, 28 December 1932, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 8.

<sup>207</sup> *DSN*, no 1, 25 January 1933, p. 1.

<sup>208</sup> Letter, [illegible name] to *Den Svenske Nationalsocialisten*, Hesselby, 10 February 1937, NSAP/SSS, vol. 2. Contrast this with the NSB's efforts to actively get business on its side: Letter, J. H. [name restricted] to NSB HQ, Enschede, 10 April 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 396.

Gothenburg.<sup>209</sup> In 1980 Lindholm claimed the income generated by DSN was actually sufficient to balance out the costs,<sup>210</sup> but a post-war inquiry into SSS finances shows that at least by 1939 the National Socialist Press joint stock company was under serious strain and making a loss.<sup>211</sup> The stock company was set up in 1937 as a means of financing a printing press and in the hope of turning DSN into a daily, but never succeeded.<sup>212</sup> According to Lindholm's diary, DSN finances were abysmal when it was first published, while 'us "employees" lived at subsistence level'. However, it seems that hard work and donations from members and sympathisers ultimately did bear fruit, and between 1935 and 1938 DSN was published on a bi-weekly basis (Wednesday and Saturday), something VoVa never did.<sup>213</sup> On the other hand NSB-associated publisher Nenasu (Netherlands National Socialist Publisher) actually published a daily newspaper besides VoVa, *Het Nationale Dagblad*, edited by Rost van Tonningen, though this was a consistently loss-making endeavour.<sup>214</sup> VoVa, always dense with advertisements, like all NSB publications, made a reasonable profit – a VoVa Financial Report for the first quarter of 1936 shows it earned Nenasu f1 400.<sup>215</sup> By a rough estimate up to a quarter of VoVa's columns were taken up by advertisements, compared to less than 5% of DSN's. Nenasu was owned by Mussert himself, and evidence suggests he channelled some of the profits into his own pockets.<sup>216</sup> DSN generally sold between 10 and 20 000 of each issue,<sup>217</sup> VoVa around 80 000 on average.

Formally the leaders' ran the papers quite differently, but functionally they served the same purpose. Lindholm was the editor-in-chief of DSN until 1935, (which earned him a prison sentence when one author wrote an illegal article), while Mussert's only legal connection to the paper was as owner of the publishing house. The editorial office of both papers saw a relatively high turnover. Mussert wrote leading articles for the paper on a regular basis, and Lindholm's diary shows he was occupied daily with writing articles for DSN, even when he was on tour.<sup>218</sup> Leading articles from the Leader helped establish a party line, and reinforced loyalty to the Leader

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<sup>209</sup> 'Idag flyttar Den Svenske till Stockholm!', *DSN*, no 55, 30 July 1938, p. 3.

<sup>210</sup> Lindholm Interview, 00259: b.

<sup>211</sup> Report, Sven Hagströms Revisionsbyrå, inquiry into SSS bookkeeping, 5 May 1948, Arninge: P1279: 1.

<sup>212</sup> Secret Memorandum, concerning National Socialism in Sweden, 16 June-15 July 1937, Arninge: 2B: 7, pp. 1-3; Memorandum, Retrospect of the NSAP, 10 March 1938, Arninge: 2B: 9, p. 4.

<sup>213</sup> '...men vi "fast anställda" levde på existensminimum.' Lindholm diary, 19-30 January 1933; 3-5 January 1935.

<sup>214</sup> See for instance the financial reports for 1936-37, in: NIOD: 123, 2.02: 688.

<sup>215</sup> Booklet, *Financiell Verslag*, 31 March 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.02: 688.

<sup>216</sup> Pollmann, pp. 67-70.

<sup>217</sup> Police memorandum, 'Översikt över nationalsocialismen i Sverige', 5 October 1935, p. 59, 2B1: 4, Arninge.

<sup>218</sup> Lindholm diary, 12 July 1938.

through the construction of his charisma. In the case of the NSAP, the DSN editorial office was subordinate to the Party Leadership, but financially run as an independent company, 'in accordance with more business-like methods'.<sup>219</sup> VoVa's and DSN's centralising effects were exploited to mobilise the cadres, especially in the latter case where the paper frequently functioned as a substitute for circulars.<sup>220</sup> Initially VoVa had a similar sort of messaging board function, but around 1935 all internal information was strictly limited to circulars. Before then, reports on meetings, information about upcoming ones, requests for materials and expertise, notifications of promotions and changes in the party, were spread liberally across the pages, providing members with indispensable information about their party, and, unintentionally, outsiders with a window into the party's organisation.<sup>221</sup> The papers also encouraged and exhorted the members to coordinate national campaigns, or attend meetings, rallies, and conventions, so that DSN and VoVa were not just propaganda in their own right, but also a crucial part of the organisational apparatus.<sup>222</sup>

As one of the principal means of disseminating the movements' myths among the public, and supporting the organisation financially, distribution of the newspapers preoccupied the parties constantly. Local branches bought copies of the paper from the publisher, and sold them at a slight profit, to invest in further propaganda and the expansion of the local formation.<sup>223</sup> Apart from subscriptions, copies were distributed via various outlets such as kiosks like *Pressbyrån* in Sweden, or tobacconists like the NSB-supported *De Driehoek* (The Triangle) in the Netherlands.<sup>224</sup> Copies sometimes had to be sold covertly under the counter, especially in Sweden where the NSAP was in regular conflict with LO (*Landsorganisationen*), the Trade Union Confederation.<sup>225</sup> In January 1938 DSN was even blocked altogether, though the ban was lifted by the end of the month.

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<sup>219</sup> 'Partiets tidningar måste i ekonomiskt avseende vara fristående företag, som drivas efter mera affärsmässiga metoder.' Booklet, *Tjänsteföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, pp. 26-27, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>220</sup> E.g. 'Meddelande från P.L.', *DSN*, no 13, 11 Juni 1933, p. 2. See also the letter instructing Bertil Brisman to put the rules for the annual party congress in DSN: Letter, Herbert Hultberg to Bertil Brisman, 8 May 1937, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Herbert Hultberg, Partisekreterare, 1937-38.

<sup>221</sup> E.g. *VoVa*, no 37, 15 April 1934, pp. 7-9.

<sup>222</sup> 'Stor Seger på Söder i Pingst?', *DSN*, no 36, 18 May 1938, p. 1; 'Landdag', *VoVa*, no 39, 28 September 1935, p. 1.

<sup>223</sup> Letter, Dep. 29 Secretary & Cashier, Karl-Axel Söderström, to DSN Financial Department, Karlstad, 17 February 1938, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 2; MS, Stadscolportageleider to Otto van Leersum, 'Schema colportage met VoVa in Amsterdam', 12 July 1934, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 394; Form, 'Weekrapport van den plaatselijken vertegenwoordiger van "Volk en Vaderland"', NIOD: 123, 1.1: 3.

<sup>224</sup> See the correspondence between VoVa and the *Driehoek*, in: NIOD: 173 (Driehoek, Boekhandel en sigarenbedrijf), 27.

<sup>225</sup> Letter, Herbert Widén to Helge Söderström, Stockholm, 1 March 1938, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 2.

Nevertheless it was an encouragement for the NSAP to further develop its distribution apparatus.<sup>226</sup> As was common for newspapers in Sweden at the time, the NSAP relied on the railway network for distribution – the papers would be delivered at a central collection point early in the morning in Gothenburg or Stockholm, from where they would be transported all over the country to the local kiosks, and for delivery at local branches. Little remains in the archive of guidelines developed for the further sale of DSN by party colporteurs, which made up the majority of DSN sales. For VoVa on the other hand continuously updated rules and regulations exist, instructing in painstaking detail how the paper was to be sold and advertised. VoVa representatives were responsible at the Circle level, being a compulsory part of the Circle Propaganda Department, appointed after negotiation with the Circle- and Group leaders.<sup>227</sup> By comparison the organisation for DSN was far more basic – by 1938 it still did not even have a register of subscribers, to the frustration of local branches in particular, who were responsible for collecting subscriptions.<sup>228</sup> At the Section and Block level the corresponding functionaries themselves were responsible for this task.<sup>229</sup> Nationally the DSN editorial office worked together with the Propaganda Department and Political Secretary to coordinate propaganda.<sup>230</sup> Group Propaganda leaders were in charge of colportage more locally, and Block leaders were assigned the responsibility of organising house visits. NSAP house visits appear not to have been standard, but did occur during the electoral campaigns;<sup>231</sup> they were also commonly used in both parties to get rid of old newspaper issues.<sup>232</sup> Colportage was regarded as the duty of any party member, the most basic form of activism which any militant ought to manage. However, unlike the NSB, the NSAP also employed outsiders as colporteurs, including boys as young as twelve, suggesting this universal duty may not have been fulfilled as reliably as desired.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> ‘Bonnie till attack mot Den Svenske: Förbjuder kolportörer och tobaksaffärer försälja vårt kamporgan’, *DSN*, no 1, 5 January 1938, pp. 1, 6; ‘Seger över hela linjen! Bonnie och Källmark slå till reträtt! Bonnie upphäver förbudet mot Den Svenske fr. 1 febr.’, *DSN*, no 5, 19 January 1938, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>227</sup> Measure of the Administration, no 9: ‘Instructie voor de plaatselyke vertegenwoordigers van “Volk en Vaderland”’, Mussert, Utrecht, May 1933, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 3.

<sup>228</sup> Letter, Frans Lindell to DSN, Kalmar, 18 March 1938, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 2.

<sup>229</sup> Booklet, *Tjänsteföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, p. 27, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>231</sup> Instructions regarding colportage, Circle 32, 1 August 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526; ‘Erfarenhetspromemoria’, in: Memorandum concerning police raid, 22 May 1935, p. 48, Arninge: 2H1.

<sup>232</sup> Police memorandum, ‘Översikt över nationalsocialismen i Sverige’, NSAP, 5 October 1935, p. 49, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>233</sup> *DSN*, no 97, 31 December 1938, p. 2.

The VoVa and DSN distributors, colporteurs, were the most visible and regular manifestation of the party to the public. Every day, party members took up posts in public spaces or patrolled neighbourhoods, advertising the paper to passers-by. Colporteurs were the most obvious fascists the public encountered on the streets, and thus functioned as immediate participants in the parties' mythopoeic efforts. They were, in Mussert's words, 'the lancers of the Movement', itself a phrase redolent of myth, of heroic soldiers of war in a tradition going back to early modern times.<sup>234</sup> The fantastic description seemed appropriate, as they were indeed not only the members the public would most commonly encounter, but also those most likely to be involved in violent incidents, especially in the Netherlands. Newspapers regularly carried reports of fights breaking out between colporteurs and Communists, fights which could occasionally escalate into veritable riots.<sup>235</sup> Particularly after the ban on political uniforms, it was precisely the selling of the party newspaper which identified one as a fascist.



Figure 3. Front pages of DSN and VoVa respectively. The front page of DSN changed in 1937, when the *fraktur* header was introduced, and more photographs could be printed as the party acquired its own press.

<sup>234</sup> Mussert, Speech MS, Fifth anniversary gathering, RAI Amsterdam, 12 December 1936, p. 6, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 49.

<sup>235</sup> E.g.: 'Relletjes in west: Communisten contra fascistien', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, no 34750, 6 November 1933, p. 2.

For instance in 1935 a French anarchist attempted to assassinate two NSB members, one identifiable as a VoVa colporteur.<sup>236</sup> Consequently colporteurs often required protection, which, until the ban on paramilitary formations (15 June 1934 in Sweden, in effect 1 August that year; 1936 in the Netherlands), was provided by the paramilitary SA/A-groups in the NSAP and WA in the NSB, magnifying the fascist presence on the streets. The SA and WA were both described as a defence against Marxist violence and terror, but they were also called in by the party to help directly with street propaganda.<sup>237</sup>

With the party newspaper in hand, perhaps flanked by a paramilitary guard, the party member had to performatively enact the fascist myth which the paper constructed discursively. Fascist colporteurs did not just sell a paper, but also their image. In the NSB the emphasis here was, in contrast to a soldier myth, on respectability. The guidelines for colportage emphasised that:

Colportage is not allowed on Sundays and Christian holidays, and never in the immediate vicinity of churches. Everything which is in conflict with good taste, must be avoided, such as provocative behaviour and colportage directly next to rival colporteurs. It must in particular be ensured that the public is not needlessly irritated by pushy or cumbersome behaviour.<sup>238</sup>

House visits in particular required 'trim' or 'decent' (*nette*) people, capable of 'very correct behaviour'.<sup>239</sup> It appears that it took the NSAP rather longer to develop detailed guidelines for colportage, as the first such instructions date from 1938. The 'Instruction for Front Departments' (IF) (the militant part of the party, successor to the SA and A-groups) states that:

The Front Man does not need to be a saint or ascetic, but he may not be pulled along by the indecent swirl of pleasure and entertainment, with which Jewish profiteers want to ruin our

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<sup>236</sup> 'Aanslag op een N.S.B.-colporteur', *De Standaard*, no 19464, 1 October 1935, p. 1.

<sup>237</sup> Gothenburg Detective Police, Report concerning NSAP SA-troops, 1935, pp. 14-15, 31, Marieberg: Eric Wärenstam archive, vol. 35; Booklet, *NSB-126a*, 'Wezen en Doel der Weerafdelingen': sect.: 1, 24, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1005.

<sup>238</sup> 'Op Zon- en Christelijke feestdagen mag niet gecolporteerd worden en nimmer in de onmiddellijke nabijheid van kerken. Alles wat in strijd is met den goeden smaak, moet worden vermeden, zooals uitdagend en provocerend optreden en colportieren vlak naast colportage van tegenstanders. Er moet vooral voor worden gezorgd, dat het publiek niet, door opdringend of hinderlijk optreden, noodeloos wordt geïrriteerd.' Booklet, Alterations to Circle Propaganda Instructions, III: 'Dienst C. – Colportage', p. 4, The Hague: 2.19.049: 2. See the same in: Booklet, Mussert, *Instructie voor de propaganda in den Kring*, Utrecht, 1 September 1934, p. 7, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526.

<sup>239</sup> Circular no 17, Guideline for house visits during the electoral campaign, Amsterdam, 4 January 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 502.

people. [...] Colporteurs must observe such behaviour that he attracts the interest of the public, but *without* in any way whatsoever being 'ostentatious', and provocative even less so.<sup>240</sup>

Notably both parties permitted female members to participate in colportage, one of the few active propaganda duties women were allowed.<sup>241</sup> In the NSAP the emphasis was on a different kind of respectability, and more on that most ubiquitous and comprehensive of fascist ideals, discipline. The militants were 'political soldiers' in the great war for the conquest of Sweden, who would make a good impression through their 'un-criminal discipline', 'which affects Swedish people beneficially, and counteracts the lie that we would be foreign mercenaries of some sort'.<sup>242</sup> The NSAP 'strove to have an *elite* of competent and reliable members, who are not just knowledgeable regarding the ideas but also dedicated to their leader'.<sup>243</sup>

### III

On the foundation of ideologically educated, physically trained, and disciplined cadres, the central administration would construct its myths through spectacular political performances that would pique the interest of the public, win over new members, and of course, voters. There was a veritable 'National Socialist meeting culture' as one Swedish police report put it, and even the young, understaffed NSAP arranged 546 public meetings in 1933 alone.<sup>244</sup> According to *Porg*, '[t]he best propaganda for National Socialism is and remains the public meetings and marches, in which the population itself can see and hear what the National Socialists want, and through which the lies of the Popular Front media will fall to the ground like empty shells'.<sup>245</sup> Given the importance

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<sup>240</sup> 'Frontmannen behöver ej vara något helgon eller asket, men han får ej ryckas med av den osunda nöjesvirvel, varmed judiska profitörer vill fördärva vårt folk. [...] Tidningsförsäljare måste iakttaga ett sådant uppträdande, att han tilldrager sig allmänhetens intresse men *utan* att på något vis vara "uppseendeväckande", än mindre förgelseväckande.' Booklet, *Instruktion för Frontavdelningar (I.F.) inom NSAP*, NSAP Organisationskrift no 2, 1938, pp. 6, 11, Arninge: 2H1.

<sup>241</sup> E.g.: Circular no 40, from the Local Group Administration, 4 January 1935, Arninge: 2B1: 2.

<sup>242</sup> 'obrottslig disciplin', '...som påverkar svenska människor fördelaktigt och vederlägger lögnen om, att vi skulle vara några utländska legoknektar.' Booklet, *Instruktion för Frontavdelningar (I.F.) inom NSAP*, NSAP Organisationskrift no 2, 1938, pp. 5-6, Arninge: 2H1.

<sup>243</sup> 'vi sträva efter att få en *elit* av duktiga pålitliga medlemmar, som ej blott äro kunniga i idéerna utan även hängivna sin ledare.' Extract from: *Porg*, January 1935, p. 2, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>244</sup> Confidential police report, Kort redogörelse över den nationalsocialistiska rörelsens i Sverige utveckling under år 1933, pp. 11, 19, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>245</sup> 'Den bästa propagandan för nationalsocialismen är och förblir alltjämt de offentliga mötena och uppmarscherna, där befolkningen själv kan se och höra vad nationalsocialisterna vilja, och varigenom folkfrontspressens lögnskriverier falla till marken som tomma skal.' Transcript and extract from *Porg*, no 5, November 1937, p. 5, Arninge: 2B: 8.

and frequency of meetings in the fascist mythopoeic repertoire, the party apparatuses naturally developed standardised procedures for their organisation.

The first step for any public meeting was hiring a room, building, or public space, of appropriate size to house the event. Generally this seems to have gone without too much ado, although there were occasions when the responsible organisers failed to arrange a room in time or acquire permission, out of ignorance or miscommunication,<sup>246</sup> or due to the party's reputation.<sup>247</sup> In the NSAP the former appears to have been common enough that *Porg* urged functionaries in 1937 to 'answer letters regarding the organisation of meetings immediately, and not wait until the last minute, or even just ignore them altogether'.<sup>248</sup> Notifying the authorities was of the utmost importance, lest opponents exploit any irregularities as an argument to ban fascist meetings.<sup>249</sup> In Sweden, notification of the meeting had to be sent to the police superintendent [*landsfiskal*] or equivalent authorities, and special permission had to be requested to advertise the meeting, with slightly different procedures for city and countryside. The NSAP's TF helpfully provided letter models for the application. Interestingly the TF's instructions were rather combative compared to those of the NSB, emphasising not just the legal responsibilities of the organiser, but also the limits on municipal and police power to prevent meetings.<sup>250</sup> NSAP meetings were outdoor events far more often than in the Netherlands, as their meetings were more often in the countryside than urban areas, but TF also found outdoor meetings preferable if weather permitted.<sup>251</sup> The NSB placed particular emphasis on the hiring of spaces of an appropriate size, ideally slightly too small for the expected audience to enhance the impression of strong public interest.<sup>252</sup> Notably the division of responsibilities for the organisation of meetings was more formalised in the NSB, being divided up between the Chief of the Meetings Service, Circle Propagandist, and Circle Leader.<sup>253</sup> TF

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<sup>246</sup> E.g. interrogation of Stig Karl Erik Witt, in: Police memorandum, 20 July 1934, Arninge: 2C: 2.

<sup>247</sup> Letter, Dpch. Gunnar Agnér to NSAP A.69, Kristianstad, 9 March 1935, Marieberg, NSAP/SSS, vol. 4, Kristianstad (1935-38).

<sup>248</sup> 'Det är absolut nödvändigt att funktionärerna omgående besvara brev angående mötsverksamheten och inte vänta tills sista minuten eller rent av strunta i det.' Transcript of *Porg*, no 3, May-June 1937, p. 7, Arninge: 2B: 7.

<sup>249</sup> Booklet, v. Kampe, 'Vergaderingen organisatie', 1 August 1934, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 394.

<sup>250</sup> Booklet, *Tjänstföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, p. 29, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>252</sup> Circular, Message no 3, Central Election Bureau to Group Leaders, Amsterdam, 11 January 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 514. Cf.: Turlach O' Broin, 'Mail-Order Demagogues: The NSDAP School for Speakers, 1928-34', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 51.4 (2016), 715-37 (p. 728).

<sup>253</sup> Booklet, *Propaganda-instructie voor den Kring*, Utrecht, 1 September 1934, pp. 9-11, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526.



merely noted that meetings should usually be instigated by the Party Leadership or Circle leaders, but in practice any member could organise a public meeting for the party.<sup>254</sup>

Once the functionary responsible had made the necessary arrangements for the meeting, the cadres were put in charge of advertising for the meeting. Sometimes the help of the paramilitaries was called in; in Sweden the youth group *Nordisk Ungdom* (NU, Nordic Youth) could also lend a helping hand. Meetings were advertised to members in VoVa or DSN; sometimes advertisements were placed in local newspapers.<sup>255</sup> The rank-and-file sold tickets to the meetings where necessary, and leafleted the local area, ideally daily, well before the meeting was due.<sup>256</sup> The leaflets were typically printed on brightly coloured paper – the NSAP invariably favoured bright red (one side usually graced with a large black swastika); the NSB orange, cheap white paper for workers' communities, or yellow in Catholic ones.<sup>257</sup> Lindholm's diary records that he often participated in leafleting for his own meetings, especially when the local party group had neglected to prepare adequately.<sup>258</sup> Leaflets were handed out to passers-by, delivered door-to-door, or pasted on walls and other more or less appropriate surfaces, sometimes by a team overnight.<sup>259</sup> One circular noted the NSB had received a complaint from the Dutch Railway Service that leaflets had been pasted onto trains, and admonished members never to cause offence through the distribution of propaganda.<sup>260</sup> The Swedish police archives by contrast are littered with complaints about and investigations into illegal pasting [*klistring*]. This was a persistent problem throughout the 1930s, but never resolved – invariably the local leaders or the Leader of Propaganda would deny ordering such methods, or any knowledge of who might be responsible.<sup>261</sup> Party leaders did forbid 'irresponsible pasting' as harmful to the movement, but there is no evidence any actual action was ever taken to put a stop to it.<sup>262</sup> In fact, one 1935 letter from Lindholm orders a functionary to withhold information from the police, 'because it's the *police's job* to find out who

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<sup>254</sup> Booklet, *Tjänstföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, p. 28, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>255</sup> E.g. *Vetlanda-Posten*, no 92, 19 November 1935, p. 1.

<sup>256</sup> Circular no 22, 'Kamporder', Stockholm, 16 March 1934; transcript of: Circular no 24, 'Kamporder', Stockholm, 12 February 1934, Arninge: 2B: 1.

<sup>257</sup> Letter, Wessels to General Leader of Propaganda, Utrecht, 15 November 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 400; Circular, to distribution centres, Amsterdam, 29 March 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 502.

<sup>258</sup> Lindholm diary, 21 April 1939.

<sup>259</sup> Memorandum to Police Constable, reg. NSAP meeting, 16 November 1934, Arninge: 2C: 2.

<sup>260</sup> Circular, 'Bericht' no 1/1936, Amsterdam. 8 January 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 516.

<sup>261</sup> E.g.: Memorandum, re. Gösta Hallberg-Cuula and propaganda, November 1934, pp. 1-2, Arninge: 5, vol. 28, f. 2; Report, regarding pasting, 9 July 1937, Arninge: 2C: 8; Memorandum, re. report of pasting, 20 June 1935, Arninge: 2C: 3.

<sup>262</sup> Message from Ragnar Lind, in: Transcript of memorandum, regarding NSAP, 24 March 1938, p. 2 [821], Arninge: 2B: 9.

has been leafleting'.<sup>263</sup> Another popular way of distributing leaflets was from cars – one police report notes an incident where the NSAP had 'incurred general vexation' by driving through Stockholm while throwing leaflets from the car at pedestrians, who had to dodge them to avoid being hit in the face.<sup>264</sup>

Both parties recognised the necessity of an appropriately decorated space; after all:

...a meeting of NSB-members is something different from a meeting of democrats. Our meetings should witness of the new spirit of the Nat. Soc. Movement... the interested or even merely curious visitor, as well as the opponent ... should from the moment of entering the building ... continuously be in contact with that new spirit... To that end each person with a task to fulfil in preparation for, during, or after the meeting, should fulfil it with all the militancy, dedication and care, which characterise a good NSB-member.<sup>265</sup>

The mise-en-scène was far more regulated and uniform in the Netherlands compared to Sweden. NSB instructions directed the Chief of the Meetings Service to decorate the speaker's chair and table on the podium with a red-black cloth. Banners with appropriate slogans were hung up, with a special recommendation for a banner with the Leading Principle at the back of the room. Excessive and brightly coloured decorations were to be avoided at all costs: '[o]ur gatherings are not a carnival. The decorations serve to give expression to a cheerful, but otherwise serious, and more or less rigidly steadfast atmosphere'.<sup>266</sup> The podium was decorated in a way that was simultaneously tasteful, simple, and impressive. In the middle of the background hung a large, vertical NSB flag, ensuring the colours were always facing the right way (black on the left, red on the right). In front of the flag stood an elevated bust or portrait of the Queen, the elevation covered with an orange cloth. On either side of the NSB flag national flags and smaller party flags

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<sup>263</sup> 'ty det är *polisens sak*, att uppsåra vilka som klistrat', [underlined in original], Letter, Lindholm to Lundahl, Ljusdal, 21 August 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1.

<sup>264</sup> Memorandum, to the political department, 4 November 1935, Arninge: 2C: 4.

<sup>265</sup> '...een bijeenkomst van N.S.B.ers iets anders is dan een vergadering van democraten. Onze bijeenkomsten dienen te getuigen van den nieuwen geest der Nat.Soc. Beweging; de belangstellende of slechts nieuwsgierige bezoeker, zoowel als de tegenstander ... dient vanaf het betreden van het gebouw ... voortdurend in aanraking te komen met dien nieuwen geest... Daartoe dient echter een ieder, die in het voorbereiden, dan wel tijdens of na de bijeenkomst een taak ten uitvoer te brengen heeft, deze te vervullen met alle strijdlust, toewijding en zorg, die een goed N.S.B.er kenmerken.' Booklet, *Uitvoeringsbepalingen voor de Propaganda*, VI.1, The Hague, 2.19.049: 2.

<sup>266</sup> 'De versiering dient uitdrukking te geven aan een wel opgewekte, doch overigen ernstige, min of meer stram-vastberaden sfeer.' *Ibid.*, VI.5.

were placed. The rest of the wings were hidden behind black cloths. Against the lectern, decorated with an orange-white-blue or black-red cloth, was a portrait of the *Algemeen Leider*, unless he was the meeting's speaker. Tables for the press were placed to the side of the podium. Party standards with a guard were situated on the sides of the podium foreground. In characteristically sexist fashion, female members were required to check whether decorations were in order.<sup>267</sup> The NSAP's TF simply noted that '[t]he meeting hall should, as well as can be, be decorated with flags, National Socialist motivational slogans, and the like'.<sup>268</sup> The rest seems to have been left to local initiative. Standard bearers, usually members of the SA, were conventional, but otherwise much of the staging was ad hoc.<sup>269</sup> It was especially during the numerous outdoor meetings that things like a podium had to be improvised: in his memoirs, Lindholm mentioned using oil barrels, snow heaps, a road side ditch, soap boxes, and memorably 'a boat in the water off the beach, like Jesus'.<sup>270</sup> The difference of *Inszenierung* between the NSB and NSAP can largely be attributed to the material availability of props and people for setting up the meetings – NSB meetings were typically organised in the vicinity of a party office (*kringhuis*) in urban areas, whereas the NSAP was scattered far and wide across Sweden, and propaganda teams often had to rely on whatever could fit in a car, if one was available at all.

But the most crucial aspect of any meeting was of course the speaker. The remains of the original NSAP/SSS archive contain a particularly large proportion of correspondence about the arrangement of speakers for various meetings across the country, which created a considerable workload for Headquarters. As the southern District Leader put it to the Party Organiser, then Gunnar Svalander, '[t]he external work is after all incredibly important, for without new people there will be stagnation, and to get new people we require speakers, and we do not exactly have an overflow of those'.<sup>271</sup> With meetings as one of the foremost mythopoeic tools, speakers were in very high demand, but acquiring actually competent ones in specific places at specific times placed a great burden on the party apparatus. The relatively few trained and certified speakers had to be notified, travel (usually by train) and accommodation arranged, speeches prepared,

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., VI.4-7.

<sup>268</sup> 'Möteslokalen bör så gott sig göra låter vara dekorerad med fanor, nationalsocialistiska kampparoller o. dyl.' *Tjänstföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, p. 30, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>269</sup> *Porg*, no 11, November 1935, p. 63, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>270</sup> Sven Olov Lindholm, 'Soldatliv och Politik', 2 vols, p. 19, II, Marieberg: SO Lindholm's collection, vol. 4.

<sup>271</sup> 'Det yttre arbetet är ju oerhört viktigt, ty utan nytt folk så bliver det stagnation, för att kunna få nytt folk fordras talare och sådana hava vi ingen uppsjö på precis.' Letter, Dch. Gerhardsson to Po. Gunnar Svalander, 18 June 1935, Kalmar, p. 1, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Southern District (1934-36).

advertisements placed in the papers,<sup>272</sup> and within a limited time frame.<sup>273</sup> In the NSAP arrangements were made via post and only on urgent occasions by telephone, which could make communication slow and inflexible, and prone to mishaps.<sup>274</sup> Costs and reimbursement had to be negotiated, which could particularly be a problem with some of the poorer branches, especially when rooms had to be hired as well.<sup>275</sup> The demand for speakers meant some of the most popular ones had to attend dozens of meetings across the country over the course of a few months – not least the most popular party speaker, Lindholm – something which inevitably led to speakers being overworked and falling ill.<sup>276</sup> *Porg* warned that this undermined the training of new speakers, who were not given due opportunity to practise at meetings, indicating a remarkable inability of the central administration to impose specific speakers on local branches.

It has come to the point where a few of the party's speakers are going to wear themselves out, while new speakers never get the opportunity to properly get started. [...] Is it not still the case in some places, that *if the desired speaker cannot be acquired, you neglect to organise meetings altogether?*<sup>277</sup>

The provision of party speakers was far better regulated in the NSB, through the Central Bureau of Propaganda, which maintained a Speakers' List: a comprehensive database of all certified NSB speakers across the country. The list could be obtained either directly from the Bureau, or from the local Circle Propaganda office (*Kring-Propaganda-kamer*). NSB formations could only hire speakers who appeared on the list, and the speaker's status determined whether they were allowed to answer audience questions after the speech. Rather than arranging reimbursements between the speaker and local formations, speakers could claim standard maximum sums from Department III, by declaring their costs within eight days of the meeting,

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<sup>272</sup> Letter, Kpch. [name illegible] to Ppch., Vittsjö, 20 July 1938, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Skåne (1938).

<sup>273</sup> For an example of such organisation, see e.g.: Letter, Prag. to Helge Burman, Västervik, 14 April 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Helge Burman (1934).

<sup>274</sup> E.g. when the wrong date and place were given to the local party formation: Letter, Lindholm to Prag., Ståholm, 4 September 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Sven Olov Lindholm (1935-38).

<sup>275</sup> Letter, [name illegible] to Erik Fahl, Hässleholm, 8 February 1937, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 4, Hässleholm (1937-38).

<sup>276</sup> Lindholm more than once strained his voice during his extensive propaganda tours, e.g.: Lindholm diary, 12 June 1937.

<sup>277</sup> 'Det har nämligen kommit därhän, att några enstaka av partiets talare hålla på att arbeta ut sig, under det att de nya talarna aldrig ordentligt kunna komma igång. [...] Är det inte fortfarande så på de flesta håll, att *om icke den önskade talaren kan erhållas, så låter man bli att anordna möten?*' Emphasis in original. *Porg*, no 9, September 1935, p. 52, Arninge: 2B: 5.

together with a brief written report. For instance accommodation with breakfast could be reimbursed for up to f3.50.<sup>278</sup> Money for the reimbursements was levied from the local formations, which paid a fixed fee for speakers at all public meetings, depending on their rank, determined by their past experience and the size of the meetings they could speak at. Rank IV speakers cost f6, up to rank I at f12. Circles could also, with special permission, get trainee speakers for f2, from the Regional training schools where available. The hiring costs were paid to the HQ mail account together with the application for the speaker by the Circle Propagandist. This arrangement solved the problem of evenly distributing costs for party formations, which were generally wealthier in the centre and West of the country, where most of the speakers lived, and poorer in the North, East, and South, which would otherwise not be able to afford to reimburse the travel costs.<sup>279</sup> It must also have been an incentive to local formations to hire less experienced speakers to save money, circumventing the NSAP's problem of overworked popular talent, and ensuring the most capable speakers remained available for the largest meetings. Another NSB arrangement which made the organisation of speakers much easier was the Regional Transport Service (*Gewestelijke Vervoerdienst*), which made cars available to speakers when they otherwise would not be able to reach the meeting in time, get a train back home on the same day, or simply be able to save money on transport for the party.<sup>280</sup> Speakers' reports were used to gather information about the quality of the meetings, interest among the public, and competence of the local organisation. The report forms ask whether the speaker was informed in good time of the place and time of the meeting and other specifics, whether the meeting went smoothly without interruptions, the mood of the audience, how full the room was, and so forth.<sup>281</sup>

The structure of the actual meetings was quite similar in both parties. Meeting programmes and reports for both have survived in considerable numbers, allowing for a certain degree of generalisation. Meetings were the principal tool for expanding the party membership – they spread awareness of the movement, and provided information about the movement and its ideology, but they also imposed a mythic image of fascism on the audience. With an audience that

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<sup>278</sup> Alg. Propaganda Leider, 'Instructie voor Sprekers', Hilversum, 1 September 1934, pp. 1-2, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 501.

<sup>279</sup> Circular, Mussert to the Regional Leaders, Propaganda Inspectors, et al, Utrecht, 6 September 1934, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 23. See also: Booklet, *Diensten Afdeling III*, pp. 1.1-5, NIOD: 123, 2.01, 394.

<sup>280</sup> As elaborated in a later version of the arrangements, see: Booklet, 7: *Diensten Afdeling 3*, Utrecht, 25 July 1936, pp. Spr.D.1-8, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 527.

<sup>281</sup> Speakers' reports, 1938, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 550.

ideally consisted of a mixture of both party members and outsiders (ideally 30-40% members in NSB meetings), they served simultaneously to mobilise the own cadres, and acquire new members.<sup>282</sup> Party publications were always sold immediately before and after the meeting, frequently by women members.<sup>283</sup> The opportunity was also used to collect donations, to support the local formation, or to finance an upcoming event or campaign.<sup>284</sup> A successful meeting would yield new members at the end of it, impressed by the character (myth) of the movement. In areas in which the parties did not yet have any formations, public meetings were essential to establish a presence. Meetings were a means of 'conquering new territory'.<sup>285</sup> Hence it was crucial that people who had been attracted to these meetings were given the correct idea of the movement, i.e. one in line with the party's mythic construction. In accordance with the centralised character of the organisation, a general party line was established for how this was meant to be conveyed, so that all meetings would have a similar character – again, more so in the NSB than the NSAP.

In the NSB, two functionaries were in charge of the meeting – first and foremost the local formation leader, and the Chief of the Meetings Service, who divided responsibilities among the available staff. When legal, the WA was used to guard the entrance and technical equipment, the podium, and as a reserve – especially to keep an eye on suspect elements in the audience, such as communists who quite regularly disrupted meetings. At times there was also a police presence. As the audience entered the room, guards and standard bearers were already at their stations – the carrying of political flags in a public meeting was illegal, but holding them *in situ* was not. The meeting was led by the local leader, who opened the meeting with a brief introduction of a few minutes – this was not intended to be a speech in its own right, though that did happen on occasion. Then the main speech would commence, lasting approximately one hour, followed by a brief break during which audience members had the opportunity to buy propaganda material, and apply for membership.<sup>286</sup> Afterwards there could also be an opportunity to answer questions from

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<sup>282</sup> *Instructie voor de propaganda in den Kring*, Utrecht, 1 September 1934, p. 11, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526.

<sup>283</sup> Addition to 'Instructie voor de Propaganda in den Kring', VIII, pp. 8-9, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526.

*Tjänstföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, p. 30, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>284</sup> See e.g.: Letter, Tjf. Ps. to Sten Liljeborg, Hallsberg, 15 April 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 4, Hallsberg (1935).

<sup>285</sup> See for instance one local leader's enthusiastic report of the 'conquest' of Katwijk in the first years: Letter, Haarlem Circle Leader to Mussert, Haarlem, 9 May 1933, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 16. See also the need to start meetings in Zeelandic Flanders: Letter, D. Bruijs to H.J. van Houten, ter Neuze, 25 February 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 395.

<sup>286</sup> Report, W.A. Driessen, Re. Meeting 24 November 1934 at den Burg (Texel), Amsterdam. 26 November 1934, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2003.

the audience, if the speaker had the authority. The end of the meeting was invariably announced with the singing of the *Wilhelmus*; those who did not wish to sing the national anthem were given the opportunity to leave. This ended the meeting without further ado.<sup>287</sup>

NSAP regulations left much more to local initiative. They were held as late in the day as possible, ideally the evening, to ensure the largest possible audience. Sundays were avoided for this reason, though exceptions were permissible, especially in the countryside where meetings were adjusted to the farmers' work schedules. They were typically organised by the local Chief of Propaganda, who like his NSB equivalent divided responsibilities between the staff. Here too the paramilitary was used to guard the meeting, and take note of any known communists in the audience. After paramilitaries were outlawed, protection of the meeting was left to the police authorities. To open the meeting, a procession of standard bearers entered the meeting place to marching music, then took up their stations in front of the podium, followed by music – the reverse procedure would be used to mark the end of the meeting. Apart from the main speaker, someone had to be present to provide an introduction and an afterword. For larger indoor meetings it was also desirable to have multiple speakers if possible. Here too, it was cautioned that the introduction was not to be a speech in its own right, although it was acceptable to have a longer introduction if the speaker was inexperienced. The conclusion was to be limited to purely informative announcements, about membership, papers, contributions, the next meeting, and so forth. Music was a standard part of NSAP meetings, and songs were often sung on several occasions throughout the evening, but only if a positive reception was expected. Members were spread out accordingly in the room to be able to lead songs effectively, as well as any exclamations of approval for the speaker.<sup>288</sup> A typical meeting with one main speaker had three songs scheduled, invariably party songs, often written by Lindholm.<sup>289</sup> Once the meeting was formally concluded, an unscheduled period was left to discuss questions with the audience, sell propaganda material, and recruit new members, provided fights did not break out.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> *Instructie voor de propaganda in den Kring*, Utrecht, 1 September 1934, pp. 9-12, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526

<sup>288</sup> *Tjänsteföreskrifter för NSAP*, 15 January 1937, pp. 27-31, Arninge: 2B1: 1.

<sup>289</sup> E.g.: Transcript of meeting programme, Norrtälje, 20 February 1938, 3pm, Arninge: 2B: 9; Meeting programme, Auditorium, Stockholm, 13 November 1933, 8pm, Arninge: 2C: 1a.

<sup>290</sup> E.g. Lindholm diary, 10 July, 19 July, 7 August, 8 August, 14 August 1933.

## IV

The two organisational structures were self-evidently inspired by the same source – the NSDAP, but when compared notable practical differences emerge. Broadly speaking the NSAP was a weaker organisation relying on autonomous local formations, while the NSB was heavily centralised, and tightly regulated.

The centralised party organisation of the NSB mapped closely to the urban infrastructure of the Dutch *Randstad*, with its headquarters in the capital of Utrecht province, approximately 50-60 km away from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and 's-Gravenhage in Holland, which all had strong concentrations of NSB members,<sup>291</sup> and disproportionate numbers of NSB voters – over 10%.<sup>292</sup> This West-Centre concentration left peripheral NSB Districts isolated, including comparatively large ones like Drenthe or Limburg & North-Brabant. But this was also an opportunity for Mussert to further concentrate the party's financial power in Utrecht, turning it into a monetary redistribution hub for the chief propaganda activity of meeting organisation, and taking national control of speaker access. Through a combination of the dense Dutch railway network and its own transport service, NSB propagandists could be sent all across the country from the *Randstad*, or the cadres could be brought together in one place for a rally.<sup>293</sup> Nevertheless, travel was expensive; for instance in 1936, the Headquarters administration alone incurred costs of f21 515.04 for travel and car maintenance, out of f124 185.68 total.<sup>294</sup> The hierarchical organisation managed to effectively coordinate propaganda efforts at Circle level, no doubt facilitated by the NSB's urban concentrations, meaning Mussert could feasibly orchestrate nation-wide efforts through the District Leaders, as was evident from the electoral campaigns of 1935, 1937, and 1939. As is evident from the surviving rules and regulations for Circle propaganda, the centre closely directed the mythopoeic apparatus in the localities, and had the necessary financial and organisational leverage to ensure their discipline. The Department of Organisation and Personnel deemed it

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<sup>291</sup> Letter, A.S. Plekker to Head Dep. III, Heemstede, 7 Jan 1938, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 1.4: 284, which emphasises that the point of gravity of the party was in North- and South-Holland.

<sup>292</sup> Damsma and Schumacher, *Hier Woont een NSB'er*, p. 15; Jonge, *Het Nationaal-Socialisme in Nederland*, p. 101.

<sup>293</sup> See the report summary of all travel for the 1935 convention: 'Uittreksel uit rapporten van reizen gemaakt ten behoeve der landdagorganisatie', Amsterdam, April 1935, pp. 1-6, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 36. For the convention in The Hague that year, Mussert demanded at least two-thirds of all members be present: Order, Mussert to Circle Leaders, Utrecht, 12 September 1935, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 39.

<sup>294</sup> Appendix to financial report for NSB HQ for 1936, Accountancy Office J. van Beek, Haarlem, 6 April 1937, p. 3 (Lasten), NIOD: 123, 1.1: 69.



desirable to centralise NSB power even further, recommending in the wake of the 1935 elections that the party should aim to ‘completely annul Circle autonomy’, though this was never achieved in practice.<sup>295</sup>

Such control over the minor party branches was unthinkable in the NSAP, which relied heavily on the initiative of District Leaders, especially in Gothenburg and Stockholm, from whom many of the surviving propaganda directives originate, and where much of the membership was concentrated.<sup>296</sup> Beyond the cities, those functionaries did not have much insight even at the Circle level – far too comprehensive an organisational unit for the Swedish countryside – and instead effective organisation devolved to the largely autonomous Local Groups (*ortsgrupp*) or Departments (*avdelning*). These smaller formations of a few dozen or a hundred members were scattered across the country, with little ability to coordinate inter-formational campaigns, and with only limited oversight from the Party Leadership which lacked the necessary control agents. If the surviving correspondence from NSAP Headquarters is representative of party communications, it is glaringly obvious that the party throughout the 1930s did not possess the necessary organisation to exert control at a national level, and would not have been able to expand without significant restructuring. Lindholm himself, in a 1986 letter to Heléne Lööw, described it as a ‘paper tiger’.<sup>297</sup> As the organisation of meetings showed, communication was frequently directly between the Party Leadership in Gothenburg or Stockholm, and *ortsgrupp* or *avdelning* leaders. From time to time formations would go altogether silent, stop paying membership fees, request propaganda material, or send the monthly reports which were one of the few means the centre had to control the periphery.<sup>298</sup> To illustrate, one letter from Party Secretary Hultberg to a Värmland Circle leader mentioned that the Botilsäter formation

seems to be gone altogether. Since the formation was formed we have not heard anything from them. No message, no report: the formation leader does not answer letters. He is a farmer and of

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<sup>295</sup> ‘de autonomie der kringen volledig opheffen’. Report, B.H. Faddegon, ‘Eenige beschouwingen naar aanleiding van de uitslag van de verkiezingen, gehouden voor de Provinciale Staten’, Bussum, 28 April 1935, p. 6, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2003.

<sup>296</sup> Police memorandum, Overview of National Socialism in Sweden, NSAP, 5 May 1935, pp. 15-17, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>297</sup> Letter transcript, Lindholm to Lööw, Rönninge, 20 January 1986, p. 1, Marieberg: SO Lindholm, vol. 5.

<sup>298</sup> E.g.: Letter, Dk to A. Persson, 26 June 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Södra Distriktet (1934); or, Letter to H. Emilsson, 29 June 1937, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Värmland (1936-38).

course that sort has a lot to do at the moment, but do note that the formation was formed already 3.2.37, so one feels he should have had the opportunity to let us hear from him at least once.<sup>299</sup>

The distance from Stockholm to Botilsäter is approximately 370 km, and approximately 70 km from Karlstad, home of the Värmland Circle Leader in question. Such distances, never even remotely an issue in the Netherlands, made controlling local rogue formations very difficult, and checking up on them unfeasibly cumbersome and expensive, even more so in light of the NSAP's poor finances.<sup>300</sup> Conversely, matching the exploits of the NSB to mobilise an absolute majority of the party membership to attend a party convention was inconceivable. Not only were train travel costs for such a large-scale operation excessive, but the Swedish railway network was not nearly as extensive as its Dutch equivalent. Nevertheless, the NSAP did successfully manage to coordinate travel to the annual party convention (*årsting*) by means of busses instead, ensuring that rural members who had never seen Gothenburg or Stockholm before could attend the great event.<sup>301</sup> Not everyone could afford the bus, but some members simply walked the hundreds of miles if necessary. The infrastructural and organisational obstacles the NSAP faced were severe, but not insurmountable.

Comparing Mussert's and Lindholm's respective functions within their parties, it is apparent that it was not only geography which explains the NSAP's deeply flawed centralisation. Lindholm and Mussert fulfilled very different functions within their organisations, which goes some way towards explaining the organisational strength and centralisation of the NSB vis-à-vis the NSAP. The peripatetic Lindholm was frequently occupied with a wide variety of party work, ranging from the editing of DSN, writing articles, organising meetings, giving speeches, writing poetry, but also the most basic tasks normally left to the cadres: advertising meetings, leafleting towns, and recruiting new members. His annual propaganda tours took him away from the headquarters for entire seasons, forcing him to rely on the rest of the Party Leadership. Mussert on

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<sup>299</sup> 'Botilsäter tycks vara alldeles borta. Sedan formationen bildades har vi icke hört något därifrån [*sic*]. Intet meddelande, ingen redovisning: På brev svarar icke formationschefen. Han är lantbrukare och just nu ha ju dessa visserligen mycket att stå i, men det är att lägga märke till att formationen bildades redan den 3.2.37, varför man tycker han haft tillfälle att låta höra av sig åtminstone någon gång.' Letter, Herbert Hultberg to H. Emilsson, 29 June 1937, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Värmland (1936-38).

<sup>300</sup> Lindholm mentioned to his brother that they were used to terrible finances by 1935: Letter, Sven Olov Lindholm to Sigfrid Lindholm, Mjölby, 8 October 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Lindholm (1935-38).

<sup>301</sup> E.g.: Minutes protocol, meeting Fridlevstad, 29 April 1934, and Monthly Report, May, Fridlevstad, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 6.

the other hand was invariably found in Utrecht, behind his desk at the Oude Gracht and later the Maliebaan. Rules and regulations, meeting minutes, circulars, and correspondence show Mussert to have been directly involved in the construction of the basic party organisation in 1932-33, and its expansion for the rest of the decade. Organisation and direction defined Mussert's day-to-day tasks. As noted earlier, Mussert acted as speaker only a handful of times per month at the beginning of the NSB's organisation. At the same time, Lindholm could be speaking at several meetings per day. This was also at least partially due to personal aptitude, a contrast between the civil engineer Mussert, and the health-obsessed military man Lindholm, who confessed to having no real insight or understanding of his party's finances.<sup>302</sup> Nevertheless, Lindholm was always the (more or less) undisputed leader of the NSAP/SSS, and of the surviving rules and regulations like TF, it is evident they were written by Lindholm, as he wrote in his diary. That this was not left to another member of the Leadership, like the Party Organiser, is interesting, and suggests Lindholm tried to retain as much control over the basic party apparatus as possible in his absence, even if perhaps others were more qualified to take charge of party organisation. It also hints a little at Lindholm's 'despotic nature' for which his detractors attacked him.<sup>303</sup> Power was not only much more centralised in the NSB, but also naturally more focused in Mussert's own hands. While Mussert did see internal opposition during the 1930s, especially after the 1937 elections, he retained a far steadier hold on the party leadership, prevented serious break-away movements from forming, and managed to secure his leadership even during the turbulent years of the German Occupation.

Although Mussert had a strong hold over the party administration, and Utrecht could regulate the activities of the localities in considerable detail, this was not without its drawbacks. The expansive party bureaucracy was perceived by some members as stultifying, not least as the still new and inexperienced apparatus did not always work efficiently. In July 1934, van der Goes van Naters – a high-ranking functionary who would rebel against Mussert in 1937 – wrote a litany (co-signed by three other functionaries) to Van Geelkerken to complain about the departments of Organisation (then led by J. Hogewind) and Propaganda (H.J. van Houten). 'Firstly the Dep. Organisation floods the entire N.S.B. with circulars, correcting circulars, additional circulars,

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<sup>302</sup> Lindholm interview, 00259: b.

<sup>303</sup> When the NSAP broke away from the SNSP, the latter attacked Lindholm as despotic, unchivalrous, and lacking in basic organisational ability. SNSP Circular no 6, G. Ringström to all SNSP members, Gothenburg, [1933], Marieberg: Otto Hallberg's archive, vol. 2 (NS parties, 1927-63).

circulars which contradict each other on vital points. And through this paper waterfall, local authorities are confused and halted in their own work...<sup>304</sup> To his mind the fascist battle was supposed to be *against* officialdom and organisational bungling. If anything the propaganda department was even worse:

instead of being a centre of zeal, which pushes and encourages the *entire* Movement, one notices little else from it but bookmarks of different formats and with different imprints: a petite bourgeois patchwork shop goings-on [*klein burgerlyk lapjes winkel gedoe*], which for outsiders is only ridiculous, and distracts the attention of N.S.B.-members away from the greater goal and task, towards rubbish irrelevancies.<sup>305</sup>

The problem of (incompetent) over-administration was reflected time and time again in what was disapprovingly termed the *kankergeest*, the ‘grumbling spirit’.<sup>306</sup> Complaints of grumbling among the rank-and-file were common enough to warrant mention in party rules – for instance one of the official ‘duties of the *Weerman*’ (WA paramilitary member) was ‘silence’ – ‘[n]othing has a more paralysing effect or corrodes the good spirit more than grumbling and gossip...’.<sup>307</sup> A speech model for the member’s oath suggested by the Department of Education compares the NSB to a crusading army, and like such an army ‘[n]either do we ask: “How?” or: “Why?”. We, too, *act*, without asking, without complaint, without grumbling; because we know that the Leader leads us in the battle for a mighty ideal!’<sup>308</sup> Already in a 1934 report to Mussert, John Boddé – inspector of the southern Netherlands – pointed to grumbling as the chief flaw of the Brabant circle. Bergen op Zoom was particularly dysfunctional: ‘Bergen op Zoom and

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<sup>304</sup> ‘1<sup>e</sup> overstroomt de afd. Organisatie de geheele N.S.B. med circulaire, verbeterende circulaire, aanvullende circulaire, circulaire die elkaar op vitale punten tegen spreken. En door deze waterval van papier worden de plaatselyke instanties verward en geremd in hun eigen werk...’, Letter, van der Goes van Naters, J.J.C. Schreuder, E. Horsting, and P.J.S. Visser to Van Geelkerken, Apeldoorn, 4 July 1934, NIOD: 123, 1.6: 341.

<sup>305</sup> ‘institute een centrum van bezieling te zyn, dat de *heele* Beweging voortstuwt en opzweept, merkt men er niet veel anders van dan boekenleggers in verschillend formaat en met verschillende opdruk: een klein burgerlyk lapjes winkel gedoe, dat voor buitenstaanders alleen maar belachelyk is, en de aandacht van de N.S.Bers afleidt van het groote doel en de groote taak naar prutseryge byomstandigheden.’, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>306</sup> As discussed at a HQ meeting in 1936 for instance: Minutes for meeting 19 August 1936, pp. 33-34, in: Book, meeting minutes *Algemeene Raad*, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

<sup>307</sup> ‘Er is niets wat lamlendiger werkt en den goeden geest meer aantast dan gekanker en kletspraatjes...’ Booklet, *NSB-126a*, ‘Plichten van den Weerman’, 36, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1005.

<sup>308</sup> ‘Ook wy vragen niet: “Hoe?” of: “Waarom?”. Ook wy doen, zonder te vragen, zonder te morren, zonder te kankeren; omdat wy weten, dat de Leider ons voorgaat in den stryd voor een machtig idéaal!’ Model-speech for Circle leaders at oath-taking ceremony, Letter, J. Hogewind to G. van Duyl, Utrecht, 9 May 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.04: 719.

grumbling are synonymous.<sup>309</sup> Members were often reluctant to be so closely directed by Utrecht, and there was recurring trouble with internal cliques, which could seriously hamper party activism.<sup>310</sup> A related problem was gossip in the branches, of which there are numerous mentions in the archive. As the head of the organisation department wrote in 1935, '[i]n our Movement there is an enormous gossiping [*geweldige roddelarij*], which I don't have to describe for you'.<sup>311</sup> The whole thing undermined the activism of the branches, as the General Council lamented in 1935, noting a ubiquitous 'laxness' in the Circles.<sup>312</sup> Already in June 1933, one distressed member wrote, in a letter addressed 'to my Leader', to complain that over-organisation had dampened enthusiasm for the Movement.

In the past I once complained about the considerable disorder at Headquarters, though I then added, that I thought it was such a nice place. I enjoyed the enthusiastic stories, about colportage, etc. Every time I had been in Utrecht, I also felt a more enthusiastic NSB-member. There was élan, zeal, though no work got done. Now, work gets done, but there is no enthusiasm, like there used to be. [Now] a visit to Headquarters has the same effect on me as a visit to a tourist bureau. I've received an answer to the questions I asked. [...] Currently we are being 'administered' from Utrecht, while we wish to be led by Utrecht, and spurred on.<sup>313</sup>

In 1936 a letter to the leader of the Department of Training raised concerns that 'the idea – the organism [of National Socialism] – DOES NOT PERISH due to organisation'. After all, it was

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<sup>309</sup> 'Bergen op Zoom en gekanker is synoniem.' Inspection report regarding Brabant, John Boddé, Eindhoven, 14 September 1934, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2000.

<sup>310</sup> Some described this as a historical flaw in the Dutch character, e.g. Letter, W. de Rijke to Mussert, Haarlem, 3 March 1934, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 22.

<sup>311</sup> Letter, Head Dep. I to G.J.K. Baron van Lynden van Horstwaerde, Amsterdam, 25 July 1935, pp. 1-2, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1337.

<sup>312</sup> Minutes for meeting, 28 May 1935, §6, p. 19, in: Book, meeting minutes *Algemeene Raad*, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

<sup>313</sup> 'Vroeger heb ik eens geklaagd over de betrekkelyke wanorde op het Hoofdkwartier, doch ik schreef er dan tevens by, dat ik het er zoo gezellig vond. Ik genoot van de enthousiaste verhalen, over colportage, etc. Telkens, wanneer ik in Utrecht geweest was, gevoelde ik mij tevens enthousiaster N.S.B.er. Er was élan, geestdrift, doch er werd niet gewerkt. Nu, nu wordt er gewerkt, doch er is geen enthousiasme, zooals toen, een bezoek aan het Hoofd-kwartier [*sic*] heeft nu op my den zelfden invloed als een bezoek aan een Bureau voor Vreemdelingenverkeer. Ik heb antwoord gekregen, op de vragen, die ik stelde. [...] Wy worden momenteel van uit Utrecht "beadministreerd", en wy wenschen van uit Utrecht aangevoerd te worden, en aangevuurd.' Letter, T. van de Weide to Mussert, Overveen, 20 June 1933, pp. 1-2, 3, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 16.

argued, 80-90% of people left the movement 'on account of organisation and other reasons – because everyone, once became a member with and through enthusiasm'.<sup>314</sup>

Nothing seems further from the assessments typically heard of the NSAP's unpaid cadres. As one police report put it:

One will not be able to find greater self-sacrifice from the members in any other political party, members who without any compensation whatsoever, dedicate themselves fully to party activity. This can to a large extent be explained by that the party's main cadres are composed of youths, who with glowing enthusiasm use most of their spare time to advance the party.<sup>315</sup>

Indeed Lindholm seems to have been very able to awaken the enthusiasm of Swedish youth. Unlike the NSB's diminutive youth movement, the NSAP's *Nordisk Ungdom* (NU, Nordic Youth), it's 'most important special organisation', amounted to a significant portion of the fascist cadres, and they actively participated in party activities as militants.<sup>316</sup> But youthful enthusiasm combined with considerable *de facto* local autonomy meant that the cadres could also be a real headache to the Party Leadership. In 1935, one local leader complained to the Party Organiser Svalander that:

It is difficult to get 'the boys' to work independently, but they have to if we are going to be able to keep the whole thing going. [...] Whenever I get home from a [propaganda] tour they have only done the things that are absolutely necessary, and they do not understand how to act on their own.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> 'Laat ons hopen, dat de idee – het organisme – NIET ONDERGAAT door de organisatie. [...] Want de 80 of 90% dooie leden – zijn dood gemaakt – door organisatie en op andere wijze – want ieder, werd lid met en door enthousiasme.' Letter, to G. van Duyl, Amsterdam, 9 May 1936, pp. 1, 4, NIOD: 123, 2.04: 719.

<sup>315</sup> 'Man torde icke inom något annat politiskt parti kunna finna en större självuppoftning från medlemmarnas sida att utan någon som helst ersättning helt hängiva sig åt partiets verksamhet. Detta kan till stor del förklaras härmed, att partiets huvudkader utgöres av ungdomar, som med glödande entusiasm använda största delen av sin fritid för partiets framgång.' Police memorandum, 'Översikt över nationalsocialismen i Sverige', 5 October 1935, p. 53, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>316</sup> Police memorandum, 'angående nationalsocialismens utveckling i Sverige', 1924-40, p. 4, Arninge: 2B: 14.

<sup>317</sup> 'det är svårt att få "pojarna" att arbeta självständigt och det måste till för att vi skall kunna hålla det hela igång. [...] Då jag hemkommer från en turné har man endast skött det allra nödvändigaste emedan man ej förstår att handla på egen hand.' Letter, Gerhardsson to Gunnar Svalander, Kalmar, 18 June 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Södra Distriktet (1934-36).

As Henrik Damberg discovered in his research, some local branches consisted exclusively of school boys and girls.<sup>318</sup> Inexperience and incompetence were not the only trouble with young members. Active insubordination was far more common in the NSAP than it was in the Dutch party, and there are instances where local branches actively refused orders from Headquarters. For instance Branch 225 in Arvika in 1937 simply refused to organise a meeting requested by the Chief of Propaganda, Erik Fahl.<sup>319</sup> Several letters from the Leadership complain of a lack of discipline.<sup>320</sup> ‘There are still some formations which think they can act whichever way they like. If they mercifully deign to answer [letters], everything has to be prepared for them like a laid table.’<sup>321</sup> Another common problem was illegal activities such as unlawful leafleting, though NSAP members were also prone to more violent forms of law-breaking. One 1937 police memorandum noted that NU deliberately provoked fights at meetings, to the chagrin of some of the older members present who demanded that the NU be banned from the annual party convention [*årsting*]. Others on the other hand argued the NU should be allowed to participate ‘to make sure something happens’, arguing the party would be noticed and discussed more that way.<sup>322</sup> NU-members were also more likely to flagrantly violate the law against political uniforms,<sup>323</sup> and the NU organ *Makt (Might)* actively encouraged regular violations to undermine the law.<sup>324</sup>

Nevertheless, the NSAP’s at times anarchic militants could be highly effective. This appears from a party analysis of the Gothenburg city elections in 1934, in which the administration noted approvingly that in terms of street propaganda ‘we have been fully able to rival our opponents, and even surpass them’, an impressive feat for such a small and new party. During the electoral campaign the entire city was leafleted, meetings for thousands were held, propaganda cars drove around with slogans, and a thousand balloons with placards were handed out to

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<sup>318</sup> Damberg, p. 21.

<sup>319</sup> Letter, Formation 225 to Ppch. Erik Fahl, Arvika, 18 September 1937, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 4, Arvika (1937).

<sup>320</sup> E.g.: Letter, H. Wennberg to Gunnar Svalander, Lund, 9 January 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Gunnar Svalander; Letter, Helge Burman to Prag, Härnösand, 4 June 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Helge Burman.

<sup>321</sup> Letter to G.V. Jönsson [Southern District Leader], 22 February 1938, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Skåne (1938).

<sup>322</sup> Secret memorandum, regarding National Socialism in Sweden, 16 June-15 August 1937, p. 5, Arninge: 2B: 7.

<sup>323</sup> See for instance: Police memorandum, regarding 4<sup>th</sup> *landsting* in Uppsala, p. 3, Arninge: 2C: 8.

<sup>324</sup> *Makt*, 1936, cited in: Armas Sastamoinen, *Hitlers Svenska Förtrupper* (Stockholm: Federativs, 1947), p. 21.

children (though of doubtful efficacy, on account of the wind).<sup>325</sup> But the unruliness of the cadres showed through. During a speech by the Minister of Finance at a Social Democratic meeting, some members had dropped a large placard attached to ten balloons, decorated with a large swastika and the letters NSAP, from a window in the roof, which slowly descended into the meeting place to the astonishment of onlookers. The party leadership noted that ‘we must remember that our opponents tend to portray and regard us as childish pranksters. It might be unnecessary to pander to this perception’.<sup>326</sup>



The two party organisations and their antithetical problems as portrayed here were reinforced by the political and social contexts in which they emerged. The bureaucratic, ‘stuffy’, NSB organisation, firmly putting the reins in the hands of Mussert and Utrecht, was well-suited to the legally restrictive conservatism of the Netherlands. It would have been unthinkable in the Dutch organisation to let members get away with breaking the law against political uniforms, which did not permit any liberal interpretations of its prohibitions. Throughout the 1930s, Dutch authorities increasingly treated the NSB as a revolutionary organisation; the party leadership was constantly on its guard against anything that could get the movement banned altogether. Nor were violent and independent militants commensurate with the NSB’s attempts to win over parts of the Dutch populace with profoundly conservative notions of law and order, particularly liberal conservatives, Calvinists, and Roman Catholics, who were among the principal targets of party propaganda. These groups were far more likely to be impressed by the myth of an orderly, disciplined, and ultimately respectable army, rather than the fiery enthusiasm of revolutionary youth.

The attitude of the Swedish authorities was far more permissive, perhaps not least because the NSAP never was a serious threat to the established political system in the way the NSB was in the mid-1930s. The law against political uniforms could still permit the wearing of uniform-like dress, and the various successors to the SA could just about pass as civilian formations. At the

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<sup>325</sup> ‘...vi här helt kunna taga upp konkurrensen med motståndarna och även överträffa dem.’ NSAP experience memorandum, Gothenburg elections, October 1934, pp. 141a-43, in: Report concerning NSAP SA-troops, 1935, Marieberg: Eric Wärenstam, vol. 35.

<sup>326</sup> ‘Vi måste nämligen komma ihåg, att vi av motståndarna utmålas och betraktas som barnsliga uppåtsgmakare. Det kan därför vara onödigt att underblåsa denna uppfattning.’ Ibid., p. 143.



same time, Lindholm's focus on workers and farmers, and his unveiled contempt for *borgerligheten* (middle-class establishment), made it much less urgent for the NSAP to construct an image of the party as a respectable force in a bourgeois sense, instead foregrounding the myth of a revolutionary army. While violence was rhetorically condemned by the Party Leadership, it also alluded to the necessity of illegal means of gaining power, possibly not wishing to dampen the useful enthusiasm of its more radical activists.<sup>327</sup> Unlike the NSB, the NSAP did not enjoy nearly the same amount of press coverage, while during the mid-30s it still had to share the spotlight with rival fascist parties, which tended to construct fascism as far more conservative. Consequently the violence of the undisciplined cadres should also be seen in the context of the NSAP's urgent need for the attention of the Swedish press.

In spite of their great differences in practice, the apparatuses underline one fundamental point: adopting the German NSDAP party structure wholesale was inherently problematic and complicated, and required considerable modification to the original design over time. This analysis has shown directly, in the case of Sweden for the first time, that describing its organisation as a German 'carbon-copy' is far too simplistic, and does not actually give any sense of how the party apparatus operated in reality. It has also brought out a number of problems that existed within the NSB apparatus, while in both cases the comparative dimension has foregrounded the cause and nature of the problems and development of their organisations. Particularly the basic issue of geography and public infrastructure stands out – ostensibly similar parties with similar organisations faced completely different situations on account of the very large differences between the Dutch and Swedish landscape and population distribution. As seen, this was largely to the advantage of the NSB, but it also was a cause for completely different styles of administration, which brought its own problems in the Dutch case. The Swedish fascists managed to some extent to overcome many of the obstacles they faced, and in spite of their small size managed to display impressive zeal and activism, something which has hitherto gone unnoticed in the Swedish historiography. As the next chapters will show, while the party apparatus was the fundament for party activity, and by extension the fascist mythopoeic project, the resources behind it did not stand in a deterministic relation to the results.

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<sup>327</sup> Lindholm later claimed the party leadership never seriously considered a violent overthrow of the government: Lindholm interview, 00262: b.

## 2. The Leader: cult, devotion, respectability

The centrality of the figure of the leader to fascism was already well-established by the time the NSB and NSAP were formed. The Dutch and Swedish public were largely familiar with the importance of *il Duce* in Italy or the *Führer* of the NSDAP, and a range of smaller native fascist leaders had cropped up in the previous decade. By 1933, there was little doubt that a single authoritative leader figure was essential to a fascist movement. The 'Leader principle' or *Führerprinzip* has since been firmly integrated into academic discussions of fascism as well, regularly used as an identifying feature of fascism.<sup>328</sup> Particular attention has been paid to the notion of the charismatic leader.<sup>329</sup> Largely based on the examples of Hitler and Mussolini, ideas abound of fascism as a political movement closely connected to a Leader with almost supernatural qualities, charisma as understood by Max Weber.<sup>330</sup>

Neither Lindholm nor Mussert fit such models of fascism very comfortably, but much the same has been said about the reality of Hitler's personality.<sup>331</sup> Ian Kershaw has pointed out that the myth of the heroic Hitler was at crass variance with reality, (as has Richard Bosworth regarding Mussolini),<sup>332</sup> but noted that at the same time the Hitler myth played a crucial integratory function in the Third Reich.<sup>333</sup> Biographical studies of the Swedish and Dutch leaders have been absent or limited. No biography of Lindholm has yet been produced, while the last, and only, full-length scholarly biography of Mussert was published in 1984.<sup>334</sup> In terms of charisma, Lindholm and Mussert have not struck very impressive figures. Scholarship on Swedish fascism has largely ignored Lindholm as a personality,<sup>335</sup> and even a recent article by Victor Lundberg on Lindholm and his ideas makes no real reference to Lindholm as a leader.<sup>336</sup> This is particularly curious in the presence of substantial archival material on and from Lindholm personally. Mussert on the other hand has traditionally been used as a negative example, a tedious technocrat, 'a spiritual and

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<sup>328</sup> Payne, p. 7.

<sup>329</sup> E.g. Roger Eatwell, 'The Concept and Theory of Charismatic Leadership', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7.2 (2006), 141–56.

<sup>330</sup> Martin E. Spencer, 'What Is Charisma?', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 24.3 (1973), 341–54 (pp. 341–45).

<sup>331</sup> J.P. Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (London: Flamingo, 1984), pp. 28–29.

<sup>332</sup> R.J.B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (London: Arnold, 2002), pp. 314–15.

<sup>333</sup> Ian Kershaw, *The 'Hitler Myth': Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), pp. 2–3.

<sup>334</sup> Jan Meyers, *Mussert: Een Politiek Leven* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij De Arbeiderspers, 1984).

<sup>335</sup> Wärenstam, chaps 4–5.

<sup>336</sup> Victor Lundberg, 'Within the Fascist World of Work: Sven Olov Lindholm, Ernst Jünger and the Pursuit of Proletarian Fascism in Sweden, 1933-1945', in *New Political Ideas in the Aftermath of the Great War*, ed. by Salvador Alessandro and Anders G. Kjølsvædt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 199–217.

moral vacuum',<sup>337</sup> thoroughly bourgeois.<sup>338</sup> The short, middle-class, civil engineer married to his aunt, Maria Witlam, was too easy to mock. While recent work by Tessel Pollmann has sought to correct the liberal bourgeois interpretation of Mussert somewhat, there is still little of him as anything like a charismatic Leader.<sup>339</sup> Attempts to understand the cultural construction of Mussert as Leader have also been sparse, including Gerard Groeneveld's brief discussion of NSB literature about Mussert.<sup>340</sup> These images of the leaders of the NSAP and NSB are, as will become apparent, understandable insofar as they reflected the reality of their personalities. Both Lindholm and Mussert were initially reluctant to embrace a leader role in the style of Hitler, and instead focused on developing the myth of the party. As authoritative leaders in parties that wholeheartedly subscribed to hierarchical leadership, they had a crucial role to play at the heart of the organisational apparatus, and consequently in the parties' mythopoeic endeavours.

But they could never remain merely technical leaders. There was a demand from the rank-and-file for something like a charismatic Leader, and if their personalities were not up to scratch, the appropriate Leader could be constructed. Perhaps the historiography has been too focused on the reality of Mussert and Lindholm, and not enough on their myths, which played a very real and effective role in sustaining their respective movements. Charisma then, is not treated as an inherent personal quality – a dubious analytical exercise anyway – but as something artificially constructed around the person, i.e. a myth.<sup>341</sup> The charismatic leaders were created through a mythopoeic process – one to a significant extent driven from below.<sup>342</sup> This process was not simple or flawless, but it was effective. Lindholm and Mussert *became* the party, and to a greater or lesser extent embodied its myth. Mythopoeia could entirely reconstruct them as individuals, at least as far as the faithful were concerned. The mythopoeia of the Leader was directly tied up with the devotion of the membership, and the desire for a leadership cult, and succeeded in creating a lasting charismatic bond.

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<sup>337</sup> Philip Rees, *Biographical Dictionary of the Extreme Right since 1890* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 274.

<sup>338</sup> Havenaar, *Anton Adriaan Mussert: Verrader voor het Vaderland*, pp. 41–44.

<sup>339</sup> Pollmann, chap. 1.

<sup>340</sup> Groeneveld, *Zwaard van de Geest*, pp. 128–31.

<sup>341</sup> Maurizio Bach, 'Mussolini und Hitler als charismatische Führer', in *Der Faschismus in Europa: Wege der Forschung*, ed. by Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2014), pp. 107–21 (p. 109).

<sup>342</sup> Cf. Stein U. Larsen, 'Charisma from below? The Quisling Case in Norway', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7.2 (2006), 235–44.

The popular demand for a charismatic fascist Leader conflicted with the respectability that both leaders at different times sought to exhibit. If fascist members themselves were inspired by external (foreign) sources in their desire for a Leader, non-fascist outsiders too were aware of what models inspired the NSB and NSAP. Neither Swedish nor Dutch mainstream democratic media had a particularly positive view of fascist dictators, so that the myth of the Leader played directly into hostile representations of fascism as tyranny. Alternatively, the impressive propaganda imagery that was promulgated from Italy and Germany to the international press provided a neat measuring stick with which to beat Lindholm and Mussert as inadequate would-be Führers. Members' desires and public opinion were two contradicting driving forces in NSB and NSAP mythopoeia, which was always an on-going process, rather than a synchronic achievement. From 1933 to 1938, the Leaders were in constant flux, buffeted by opinion and political necessity in a dialectical trial and error process of mythopoeic construction.

## I

Sven Olov Lindholm was born on 8 February 1903, in Jönköping, the son of Sigrid Johansson and Knut Axel Lindholm. Lindholm grew up in a semi-rural household, and was raised to love his *hembygd* (cf. *Heimat*), and by extension the fatherland – ‘but it was mostly nature, which was the root of that love’.<sup>343</sup> His merchant father and his friends who frequently visited were typically *nationella*, bourgeois nationalist and conservative supporters of the Right (*Högern*), which was reflected in how Lindholm was raised.<sup>344</sup> This would prove formative, although largely in a negative way, as Lindholm rejected the class elements of the Right. After leaving school at the age of sixteen, Lindholm joined the Royal Artillery Regiment in 1920, going through NCO-training. He remained there until 1927, at which point the regiment was decommissioned, and Lindholm moved to the *Svea* Artillery Regiment in Stockholm.<sup>345</sup> During this period he became a leading propagandist of the SFKO, founded in 1925. In 1929 he attended the NSDAP Nuremberg rally as a guest, and had the opportunity to briefly speak to several of the party leadership, including Hitler. More importantly for his ideological development were his December 1932 conversations with

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<sup>343</sup> Lindholm, ‘Soldatliv och Politik’, I, p. 1.

<sup>344</sup> Lindholm, ‘Soldatliv och Politik’, I, pp. 1–3.

<sup>345</sup> Report [copy in abstract], Gothenburg Detective Police (Criminal Department), 19/3 1935, B.D. nr. 342, Arninge: P1279: Sven Olov Lindholm, 1, p. 1.

Gregor Strasser,<sup>346</sup> whom Lindholm admired throughout his life, and mentioned as a key influence in his memoirs.<sup>347</sup> Overworked, he resigned from military service in 1930 to commit himself fully to the party, which at this point was merged with Birger Furugård's SNSP.<sup>348</sup> Throughout the 1930s Lindholm would continue doing occasional military service, but mostly earned a living with party work. It was also during this period that he met Kersti, whom he married in 1939 after proposing to her at the annual party convention. However, Kersti died from leukaemia in 1941, at the age of 23.<sup>349</sup> During the war Lindholm was promoted to sergeant in the artillery, but was forcibly retired in 1942 after it became public that he was in charge of military defence against a potential Nazi coup. He continued his work as party leader until 1950, when the SSS was disbanded.

Lindholm lived a long life after that, finding work in a typeface factory, Monotype.<sup>350</sup> He remarried to Vera, a German post-war émigré, whose ideology he then shared. However, over time Lindholm's ideology radically changed, and he came to renounce fascism altogether. Eventually Lindholm and Vera divorced in 1960-62 for their political differences.<sup>351</sup> Lindholm spent the remaining decades of his life engaging in anti-nuclear and anti-war activism, and studying the emerging literature on fascism, corresponding with a number of Swedish historians in the 1970s and 80s. He also wrote his memoirs, *Soldatliv och Politik* (Soldier Life and Politics), and edited his diary, both dedicated to his daughter. He died in 1994, at his home in Rönninge.

In his memoirs Lindholm recalled the household literature as being formative for his ideas: Johan Runeberg, Viktor Rydberg, Esaias Tegnér, Verner von Heidenstam, Bertel Gripenberg – Romantic Swedish classics of the nineteenth century, and reputed contemporary nationalist poets.<sup>352</sup> Lindholm was an avid if at times eclectic reader throughout his life, but some themes stand out: military life, Swedish history, Romanticism, and Nordic culture. Viktor Lundberg has

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<sup>346</sup> Lindholm diary, December 1932. Lindholm's visit came right at the moment of Strasser's break with Hitler in a disagreement over political strategy - Strasser was ousted as Organisation Leader before the end of the month, and denounced as a traitor by January: Orlow, I, p. 291ff.

<sup>347</sup> Lindholm, 'Soldatliv och Politik', I, pp. 96-101.

<sup>348</sup> Lindholm, 'Lindholm Interview', 00256: b.

<sup>349</sup> Lindholm, 'Soldatliv och Politik', II, pp. 12-13.

<sup>350</sup> Lindholm, 'Soldatliv och Politik', II, p. 30.

<sup>351</sup> Especially after Vera became involved with Göran Oredsson, leader of the neo-Nazi *Nordiska Rikspartiet* (Nordic National Party) – Vera herself briefly became leader of this successor to the SSS.

<sup>352</sup> Esaias Tegnér (1782-1846) and Viktor Rydberg (1828-1895) were highly regarded as two the greatest Swedish poets of the Nineteenth Century, with patriotic themes strongly focused on the Old Nordic era (Viking era). Verner von Heidenstam (1859-1940) was an important contemporary writer of patriotic poetry in the same tradition. Johan Runeberg (1804-1877) and Bertel Gripenberg (1878-1946) were both Finno-Swedish (*Svekkomen*) writers. The former was renowned for his Finnish epic *The Tales of Ensign Steel*, popular among soldiers; the latter was a nationalist poet who fought in the White Army during the Finnish Civil War, and joined the Lapua movement in the late 1920s.

argued that, quite in line with these interests, Lindholm was heavily influenced by Ernst Jünger as well.<sup>353</sup> However, Lindholm, who otherwise reliably made note of his reading material in his diary and other writings, never mentioned reading any of Jünger's works, so that Lundberg's claim must be regarded with scepticism. Lindholm's lifestyle was shaped in obvious ways by the military, but also by the ideology of Are Waerland, which was reflected in his lifestyle.

Are Waerland (1876-1955) was a Finno-Swedish popular philosopher and dietician, and inventor of the Waerland diet. Throughout the interwar period he wrote on a variety of topics, including the Russian Revolution, idealist and materialist philosophy, Swedish national character, the virtues of the human colon, the dangers of white sugar, and his hobby horse, *kruska* porridge.<sup>354</sup> The degenerate English were described as the most corrupted race due to its supposedly advanced civilisation, while Waerland's hopes were for the Nordic peoples, now under attack but who could still be saved from the diseases of modernity.<sup>355</sup> His ethos is best summed up by his 1938 book, *Död åt det vita sockret – Liv åt de vita folken* (*Death to white sugar – Life for the white peoples*).<sup>356</sup> Lindholm attended at least two of these lectures, and wrote about them in DSN.<sup>357</sup> His short books were written to make philosophy and medical science accessible to the public, and had the grandiose aim of creating a popular movement for a revolution in medicine to save it from its current decline into corruption and elitism.<sup>358</sup> Lindholm wrote in his diary he had become a 'wærländist' in November 1936, but he must have been reading Waerland's works at least as early as 1935 [see chapter 4].<sup>359</sup>

Together with health and military life, Lindholm's ideology was characterised by a corresponding obsession with youth. The idealisation of youth was of course perfectly common among fascists at the time, as well as the Swedish health- and sport movement [*frisksportrörelsen*] in labour ideology, which was peaking at this time.<sup>360</sup> Next to the Swedish landscape, it was youth which most inspired Lindholm to write poetry, and his speeches and articles consistently

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<sup>353</sup> Lundberg, 'Within the Fascist World of Work'.

<sup>354</sup> *Kruska* is made by putting seeded raisins in water, and leaving them overnight for a period of twelve hours. One hour before serving, the water is boiled, and a measure of oat meal added while stirring with a long wooden spoon. After two to three minutes, special wheat germs are added to the mixture until it has a gruel-like consistency. It is then left for half an hour in a warm, sealed box. It is ideally served with a helping of milk. Are Waerland, *Kruskan som kraft- och hälsoföda* (Göteborg: Örnförlaget, 1939).

<sup>355</sup> Are Waerland, *In the Cauldron of Disease* (London: Nutt, 1934), p. 374.

<sup>356</sup> Are Waerland, *Död åt det vita sockret - Liv åt de vita folken* (Stockholm: Reformförlaget, 1938).

<sup>357</sup> Lindholm diary, 19 April and 17 May 1938.

<sup>358</sup> Are Waerland, *Hörnstenen i Hälsans Rike* (Göteborg: Reformförlaget, 1938), chap. 3.

<sup>359</sup> Lindholm diary, 1 November 1936.

<sup>360</sup> Sejersted, p. 125.

emphasised Swedish youth as the key to political success. The documents produced by the organisation of the annual propaganda tours give the most insight into Lindholm's day-to-day life. His diary shows a pattern of rising early, working hard throughout the day and into the night, interspersed with arduous outdoors exercise, and lake-bathing, regularly subjecting the body to cold temperatures. His diet typically consisted of rye bread and raw vegetables, and *kruska* for breakfast, what Waerland termed *lakto-vegetabilisk råkost*. His daily regimen was one he also inflicted on his colleagues during the summer, with a preference for lakeside camping. In his own words: 'Save us, old soldiers, from all desire for comfort, and for all extravagances. In all things we only desire *order*.'<sup>361</sup> His somewhat ascetic lifestyle became almost proverbial within the party. If that was a point of admiration for the cadres, his 'Waerlandism' was not. His rejection of alcohol was not well-received,<sup>362</sup> and one can only imagine how his *kruska* cooking classes were received by party members.<sup>363</sup>



Much less is known about the early life of Anton Mussert, but he could hardly have been more different from Lindholm. He was born 11 May 1894 in Werkendam, in North-Brabant. His father, Joannes Leonardus, was Catholic, but converted to Protestantism when he married Frederika Witlam. Joannes Leonardus was a liberal conservative school teacher who seems to have had a lasting influence on Anton,<sup>364</sup> in spite of his premature death.<sup>365</sup> The historian Jan Meyers argued that this was a fiercely patriotic Orangist household, something which marked Mussert as a conservative bourgeois liberal for life.<sup>366</sup> As such he fell largely outside the confessional pillars of Dutch society, and his Christianity seemed largely negative in character. But as will be shown later, he would come to develop his religion to be more in tune with the serious Christian political culture of the Netherlands. Unlike Lindholm, Mussert had no taste for literature, or music for that matter, and seemed largely culturally illiterate. His main interests were in history, with a similar

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<sup>361</sup> 'Bevare oss, gamla soldater, för all längtan efter bekvämlighet och för alla kinkigheter. Men det är bara *ordning* vi vill ha i allt.', Note from Lindholm, 1935 (Spring), Marieberg: NSAP/SSS Archive, Vol. 1.

<sup>362</sup> Police memorandum, S. Fransson regarding splits in the NSAP, 27 February 1937, p. 1, Arninge: XII 64: 1.

<sup>363</sup> Lindholm diary, 1 November 1936; 9-13 November 1936.

<sup>364</sup> Pollmann, p. 28.

<sup>365</sup> Due to a lung infection, acquired after bathing in a frozen lake mid-winter. Anton's father was, though severe and stately, also prone to occasional recklessness.

<sup>366</sup> Meyers, pp. 15–18.

kind of nineteenth-century national-romantic education as Lindholm, and engineering. His interests in engineering and organisation defined his character for life, and even in prison after the Second World War he would write and propose new ideas on the subject. Generally he appears to have been unsociable; not unpleasant, but humourless and pedantic, and with few friends. He attempted to join the navy, but was rejected as constitutionally inadequate, on account of his diminutive stature. Instead he went to a Technical College to acquire a Master's degree as civil engineer, and he would brandish the title it earned him [*ingenieur, ir.*] for years to come. During the First World War Mussert got some taste of military life, when he managed to join the reserve army.<sup>367</sup> However, he had to go home again for a prolonged illness, during which time he was taken care of by his aunt, Maria Witlam, a 38-year old nurse. In 1917 they married, with royal dispensation for the incestuous union, and much to the dismay of his family, especially Anton's mother who fiercely opposed the marriage to her sister.<sup>368</sup>

After the war he made a career as civil engineer in water management in Utrecht, attaining the prestigious office of Head Engineer at the impressive age of 31 through a mixture of talent and careerist cunning.<sup>369</sup> He spent his spare time reading about history, engineering, and politics, with weekly visits to the Jewish Jitta family to play bridge.<sup>370</sup> A member of the liberal conservative Freedom Union like his father, his work brought him into nationalist politics when the 1925 Belgian Treaty unexpectedly united water management with nationalist controversy. The treaty concerned Belgian access to the Moerdijk canal via Antwerp, and under the treaty, supported by France, the right to pass through the canals with war ships if necessary.<sup>371</sup> Mussert became a leading figure in the national protest against the treaty, which was successfully abandoned under the pressure. Inspired by his political success, Mussert became increasingly interested in politics, leading him to eventually found his own party in 1931, together with his colleague in the treaty protest, Cornelis Van Geelkerken (1901-1976).

In 1934, the law against civil servants in revolutionary organisations forced Mussert into a career of full-time politics, his fame or notoriety growing with the NSB. May 1940 became a turning

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<sup>367</sup> Havenaar, *Anton Adriaan Mussert: Verrader voor het Vaderland*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>368</sup> Meyers, pp. 32–34.

<sup>369</sup> For a critical account of Mussert's career as civil engineer, see 'Mussert als waterstaatsingenieur, 1920-1934', in: Pollmann, pp. 28–50.

<sup>370</sup> Meyers, pp. 36–38.

<sup>371</sup> For further detail and the political background to this treaty, see: Schuurisma; Jonge, *Crisis en Critiek der Democratie*, pp. 279–82.



point as the German Occupation and the establishment of a Reichskommissariat offered the prospect of real political power. But with collaboration –albeit of a very difficult and conflicted sort, with open hostility between the NSB and the SS – Mussert quickly became one of the most hated figures of the Netherlands. After the war he was arrested and put on trial; his time in prison was spent writing letters, proposing new engineering projects, and a justification of his political actions.<sup>372</sup> He was executed on 7 May 1946.<sup>373</sup>

Beyond a short war-time diary and his prison notes, little has been written by Mussert to elucidate his thinking, or the development of his personal ideology. Like Lindholm, Mussert never read *Mein Kampf*, and it seems his conversion to fascism came with reports and propaganda from the rising NSDAP in Germany, and an admiration for Mussolini that was common in the Netherlands of the late twenties and early thirties, as it was elsewhere in Europe.<sup>374</sup> Historians like Ronald Havenaar have denied Mussert had any kind of ideology at all, pointing to the theoretical poverty of his thought, instead seeing him as an organiser above all.<sup>375</sup> There was doubtlessly no originality in Mussert's programmatic statements, and a great deal was copied directly from Germany and Italy, but this must be qualified. Beyond clearly stated ideological positions, Mussert's thoughts were strongly grounded in patriotic histories of the Netherlands and the Dutch Republic. His liberal-romantic patriotism was in many ways conventionally bourgeois, but also made for a consistent and unique fascist ideology.<sup>376</sup> Together with his passion for engineering, it gave Mussert a very distinct ideological profile.

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Lindholm and Mussert were not just the human face of the leadership vis-à-vis the rank-and-file, but the face of the party to the public. As public-facing figures the personalities of the leaders were most immediately on display, rather than by virtue of their office, reflexively bestowing their particular traits on the party. The NSAP's myth of a revolutionary socialist *arbetareparti* owed a lot

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<sup>372</sup> Anton Mussert, *Nagelaten Bekentenissen: Verantwoording en Celbrieven van de NSB-Leider*, ed. by Gerard Groeneveld (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2005).

<sup>373</sup> *Het Proces Mussert* (Amsterdam: Rijkstinstituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, 1987), p. xii.

<sup>374</sup> Arnd Bauerkämper, 'Transnational Fascism: Cross-Border Relations between Regimes and Movements in Europe, 1922-1939', *East Central Europe*, 2010, 214–46 (p. 219).

<sup>375</sup> Havenaar, *De NSB tussen Nationalisme en 'Volkse' Solidariteit*, pp. 15, 86–88, 131.

<sup>376</sup> Nathaniël Kunkeler, 'Narratives of Decline in the Dutch National Socialist Movement, 1931-1945', *The Historical Journal*, 2017, 1–21 (pp. 9–13) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X17000188>>.

to Lindholm himself. The simplicity of his speech, his common habits, as well as his personal background as a low-ranking army officer in the Swedish artillery helped promote the party image.<sup>377</sup> By contrast it was Mussert's background as a leader in the 1925-27 protest against the Belgian Treaty which established his patriotic credentials (his ideas about the treaty and for diplomacy with Belgium were published in the liberal *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, and later as a book),<sup>378</sup> while it was his prestigious job as Head Engineer that gave the NSB such respectable appeal.<sup>379</sup> Lindholm's and Mussert's functions in the party leadership were not entirely separable from themselves as persons. Thus, while the party leaders were themselves situated at various points *within* the apparatus's mythopoeia of the party, there was also an implicit equivalence between them and the party myth as such.

## II

But it was not enough for Lindholm and Mussert to simply function as public leaders in their respective organisations. The formal roles which the parties bestowed on them, and the ultimately rather un-exciting reality of their personalities, were insufficient for *fascist* Leaders. In other words, the party membership, rank-and-file, functionaries, and the leadership, had a pre-established idea of what a leader was meant to be like in such an organisation. Neither of the leaders had read *Mein Kampf*, at least in full,<sup>380</sup> and did not necessarily share the notion of a 'genius' Leader,<sup>381</sup> but they were doubtlessly influenced by the propaganda material and reports coming out of Germany, and to a lesser extent Italy. In the third ever issue of DSN, Per Dahlberg wrote, in a statement of the principles of National Socialism, that 'a leader cannot be conjured forth through advertisement or empty declamations, [rather] he works through *the power of his personality*'.<sup>382</sup> There was an understanding that fascist leaders had to be more than just competent, as implied by the extraordinary authority the party leaders enjoyed. There were other important figures in the NSB

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<sup>377</sup> As noted by one commentator, in: 'S.O. Lindholm nazistledaren', *Göteborgs-Posten*, no 283, 5 December 1933, p. 11.

<sup>378</sup> Anton Mussert, *Richtlijnen voor een Nederlandsch-Belgische Overeenkomst* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1927).

<sup>379</sup> Willem Huberts, *In de Ban van een Beter Verleden: Het Nederlandse fascisme, 1923-1945* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2017), pp. 105–6.

<sup>380</sup> Kwiet, 'Zur Geschichte der Mussert-Bewegung', p. 174; Lindholm interview, 262: a, c. 30 mins. Lindholm did read Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes* in 1935.

<sup>381</sup> Hitler, I, p. 1139 [88] ff.

<sup>382</sup> 'Ty en ledare kan ej framtröjas genom reklam eller tomma deklamationer, han verkar genom *makten av sin personlighet*.' Per Dahlberg, 'Ledning och efterföljelse: Nationalsocialismens grundprinciper', *DSN*, no 3, 15 February 1933, p. 1.

and NSAP which could make claims to leadership on the basis of competence, or who were equally good at commanding a crowd as their superiors. Mussert was a decent speaker, but the Deputy Leader and General Secretary Cornelis Van Geelkerken was generally held to be more engaging, handsome, and taller.<sup>383</sup> Regional leaders could command their own loyalties: southern District Leader d'Ansembourg for instance received requests for signed portraits of him from devoted members.<sup>384</sup> In Sweden, Lindholm had acquired a great deal of experience as speaker – (sadly no recordings of Lindholm's speeches exist)<sup>385</sup> – and propaganda organiser in SFKO and SNSP, but Per Dahlberg rivalled those qualities, while youth leader Arne Clementsson (1915-?) seems to have been an excellent speaker, and even something like a charismatic leader in his own right.<sup>386</sup> Consequently, since neither Lindholm nor Mussert occupied the position as Leader naturally, at least not very securely, it was necessary to construct them as Leaders, and enhance their actual qualities with the aura of fascist Leadership (contrary to Dahlberg's performative claim).

One of the first and most direct ways of doing this was through dress and demeanour, which relied on handy signs to mark the leader as *the* Leader. They took on the roles of military commanders in speeches and articles, which was complemented through the wearing of uniforms, which underlined the hierarchical and unquestionable nature of the relationship of the leader to his followers. Mussert favoured a simple, tailored, but bespoke black or grey military jacket with a white shirt and black tie, which, while denoting him as an officer over his troops, set him above the dress regulations of the party, denoting his special rank [see figure 3]. Lindholm by contrast favoured the brown shirt SA-uniform of his party. His image of the Leader was that of the *primus inter pares*, and relied on close identification with his followers [figure 1].

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<sup>383</sup> Meyers, p. 72.

<sup>384</sup> Letter, Hofman to d'Ansembourg, Roermond, 5 July 1937, The Hague: 2.19.49: 5.

<sup>385</sup> Lindholm interview, 259: b, c. 31 mins.

<sup>386</sup> E.g.: GHC, 'Nordisk Ungdom på marsch i Stockholm: Clementsson talar', *DSN*, no 24, 24 March 1936, p. 8.



Figure 1. Standard portrait of Lindholm. *DSN*, no 92, 1937.



Figure 2. Portrait of Mussert by Meulendijk. *VoVa*, no 35, 1935.

In the guise of military commanders, the party leaders led marching columns through cities during rallies,<sup>387</sup> or subjected party branches to solemn reviews as if army regiments, letting the members march past as they theatrically saluted the columns from a platform.<sup>388</sup> Both leaders used standards as explicit symbols of their authority. From 1936 onwards Lindholm's presence was marked by a yellow-blue flag with a red Thyr rune (†), symbolising the self-sacrificing Nordic god of soldiers.<sup>389</sup> Mussert used a black standard, initially with the *fasces*, which was replaced (being 'too Italian') after August 1936, with a lion's claw grasping eleven arrows to mark his authority.<sup>390</sup> It was a simple, but evocative visual language which easily marked the men not as conventional party leaders or administrators, but something special, which allowed them to more effectively perform the role of natural Leader, and was seamlessly integrated with the militaristic myth of the party army [chapter 3]. In parties where part of the attraction was to be a missionary fascist soldier, military imagery could convincingly make a Leader for the cadres.

<sup>387</sup> E.g.: 'De Landdag: De marsch door Amsterdam', *VoVa*, no 14, 6 April 1935, p. 3.

<sup>388</sup> E.g.: 'Där vi kämpa: Nytt storstilat kampmöte med Pl. på Auditorium', *DSN*, no 17, 3 Mar 1937, p. 5.

<sup>389</sup> 'Ledarens stabsflagga', *DSN*, no 45, 14 June 1936, p. 5.

<sup>390</sup> The arrows symbolised the eleven provinces of the Netherlands. Minutes for meeting 19 August 1936, in: Book, meeting minutes *Algemeene Raad*, p. 35, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

In practice most members did not often see their party leaders in the flesh however, especially not in countryside NSAP branches, which did not get a visit from Lindholm more than once every few years, so to maintain the idea of the natural and unquestionable Leader, repetition was required in some form. This was managed particularly through print media, and the regular replication of images and text. Both DSN and VoVa produced standardised portraits of the Leader, which were featured on the front page of the papers whenever relevant, usually to emphasise the leaders addressing the members directly, their names printed in large capital letters. Generally depictions of the Leader were more common in VoVa than DSN – sufficiently often that Catholic daily *De Tijd* wrote Mussert should solicit for a job as advertising doll<sup>391</sup> – perhaps because of greater modesty on Lindholm’s part, or simply because the paper’s often shaky finances could not afford the printing costs. When the paper’s budget increased somewhat in the latter half of the decade there was a corresponding increase in photographs of the leader. To celebrate Mussert’s return from the Dutch East Indies in 1935, NSB artist Meuldijk produced an idealised portrait of the Leader, emphasising his most celebrated facial features – ‘the Napoleonic figure with that imposing head, in which the mouth accentuates the force of will like a deep trench’<sup>392</sup> – which was regularly reprinted in VoVa [figure 2]. Party programmes and meeting brochures invariably featured an image of the stern but benevolent face of the Leader, perhaps with a quotation of his wise words, or a caption such as ‘[t]he Leader of the freedom movement, foremost in the battle against the enemies of the people’,<sup>393</sup> while the NSB often included a capsule biography of Mussert.<sup>394</sup> It is of note that it tended to be the same portrait that was used over and over again, familiarising members with a single image of their Leader [see figure 1], which over the years acquired an iconic status. In the NSB this effect was enhanced further by the obligatory presence of the latest approved portrait of Mussert as part of the decoration of any party meeting,<sup>395</sup> (alongside a larger portrait of the Queen).<sup>396</sup> By contrast other important functionaries of the

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<sup>391</sup> ‘Mussert solliciteert: Voor.... reclamepop’, *De Tijd*, no 28699, 24 March 1936, p. 2.

<sup>392</sup> ‘...de napoleontische gestalte met den imposanten kop, waarin de mond als een zware groef de wilskracht accentueert.’, gkj [George Kettmann Jr], ‘Geestdrift in Utrecht: “In het teeken van den driehoek”’, *VoVa*, no 41, 14 October 1933, p. 3.

<sup>393</sup> ‘Frihetsrørelsen Ledare, främst i striden mot folkets fiender.’, Brochure, NSAP meeting programme, 1938, Arninge: 2C: 10.

<sup>394</sup> Brochure, programme for the third *landdag*, Amsterdam, 30 March 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>395</sup> Circular no 8, Org. leader to Regional Commissar et al, Amsterdam, 9 June 1936, The Hague: 2.19.49: 4.

<sup>396</sup> Booklet, *Uitvoeringsbepalingen voor de Propaganda*, p. vi.6, The Hague: 2.19.49: 2; Booklet, ‘Richtlijnen voor vrouwenvergaderingen’, *14: Instructie voor de Vrouwenorganisatie*, Utrecht, 15 December 1936, p. 10, NIOD: 123, 2.16: 1189.

parties were typically only depicted on special occasions, particularly in VoVa, while DSN more regularly produced at least smaller portraits of the Leadership. These portraits of the Leader had a special status unlike others, and had to be treated with due reverence – for instance NSAP members were not allowed to in any way commercialise Lindholm’s image,<sup>397</sup> nor use his picture or name in propaganda without special permission.<sup>398</sup> Beyond portraiture, party publications also used techniques of design and placement to give special prominence or significance to the words of the leader, emphasising his special relationship to the party. Any editorial by Mussert was placed on the front page of VoVa, usually taking up the entire page, and with his name prominently displayed in capital letters. From time to time quotations from the Leader were printed in a banner at the bottom of the page of the paper, where it would also place quotations from patriotic historical figures like William the Silent.<sup>399</sup> In 1938 VoVa took to printing a regular little column simply entitled ‘Sayings by Mussert’.<sup>400</sup> DSN seemed to have eschewed quite such blatant methods of highlighting Lindholm’s significance, but did give enormous prominence to his speeches, especially after the annual party convention [*årsting*]. Simply summarising his speeches was not acceptable. In 1934, being only a six-to-eight page paper, DSN printed every word of Lindholm’s *årsting* speech, spreading it through several issues over more than a month, taking up almost a quarter of the paper.<sup>401</sup> Party publications, being the one piece of media to which party members (and the public for that matter) were exposed on a regular basis, were not simply a mouthpiece of the Leader, but were specifically designed to construct him as a Leader, as a figure of unparalleled and unquestionable authority.

The myth of the fascist Leader required Lindholm and Mussert to not just be authoritative, but popular. Leaving aside whether or not they indeed were, efforts were certainly made to portray them as such. The propaganda apparatuses were highly observant of high attendance figures at meetings featuring the party leader, quick to point out applause and cries of agreement, and generally emphasise the loyalty of members to their Leader. The NSAP employed clagues to express support for Lindholm, though it is unclear to what extent.<sup>402</sup> At the first party convention, DSN pointed out the ‘especially strong tributes’ that were made to Lindholm, and printed in the

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<sup>397</sup> ‘Meddelande från Plg’, *DSN*, no 47, 19 June 1935, p. 2.

<sup>398</sup> *Porg*, no 11, November 1935, p. 66, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>399</sup> E.g.: *VoVa*, no 39, 29 September 1934, p. 1.

<sup>400</sup> ‘Uitspraken van Mussert’, *VoVa*, no 15, 15 April 1938, p. 3, *VoVa*, no 6, 10 February 1939, p. 5.

<sup>401</sup> *DSN*, nos 21-26, 24 May-28 June 1934.

<sup>402</sup> ‘Militärdisciplin inom grupperna’, Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 141.

front page header that Lindholm had been ‘acclaimed with ovations’ at the rally.<sup>403</sup> The following year the paper again pointed out the ‘ovations for Lindholm’ at the party congress,<sup>404</sup> and DSN never failed to point out the ‘crashing applause’ reserved for the leader at meetings in the capital.<sup>405</sup> Whenever Lindholm appeared on stage, he was immediately met with ‘endless jubilation’, and cries of *hell Lindholm*.<sup>406</sup> If the reader who had never met Lindholm was in any doubt as to the enthusiasm that Lindholm could generate in his audience, DSN could paint a vivid and exclamatory picture of the supposedly electrifying character of his speeches:

Like threatening thunder the rumbling of the applause filled the enormous circus tent! The Leader had spoken and the followers had been forged together into one single unit, ready for battle! While Lindholm had been speaking, all doubts had disappeared; problems, which one had been pondering for weeks, were solved; the lines were now clear; the goals for the fight stood out plain and firm before one’s eyes and the will to continued struggle had become even more hard as iron than ever before!<sup>407</sup>

Whether there was a word of truth to these descriptions of Lindholm’s effect on his audience is uncertain, but there is no doubt the mantric insistence on the enthusiasm of the crowds in every meeting report helped construct Lindholm as a charismatic leader.<sup>408</sup> Some of the formulaic expressions employed by DSN even found their way into branch reports of meetings with Lindholm.<sup>409</sup> The rhetoric of VoVa was a little less fervent in its assessment of Mussert’s speeches, opting instead to simply describe a meeting as ‘an evening of fervent zeal’,<sup>410</sup> or letting the headline

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<sup>403</sup> ‘Årstinget: en kraftig manifestation av nordisk frihetsvilja! Femhundra deltagare. Värdefulla föredrag. Imponerande uppmarsch. Lindholm ovationsartat hyllad’, *DSN*, no 13, 11 June 1933, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>404</sup> ‘Årstinget en mäktig manifestation: 1700 ombud samlade – Ovationer för Lindholm’, *DSN*, no 21, 24 May 1934, pp. 1, 4-5, 8.

<sup>405</sup> ‘Kampmöte i Stockholm: Lindholm talar’, *DSN*, no 52, 20 December 1934.

<sup>406</sup> Gefem, ‘Frihetsfacklor i Stockholm: Stor uppmarsch med massmöte! Partiledaren talar’, *DSN*, no 12, 13 Feb 1935, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>407</sup> ‘Som en hotande åska fyllde applådernas dån den väldiga cirkuslokalen! Ledaren hade talat och följet hade smitts samman till en kampberedd enhet! Under det Lindholm talat hade all tvekan försvunnit, problem, som man funderat på i veckor, hade lösts, linjerna had klarat, kammålen stodo tydliga och konkreta för ens ögon och viljan till fortsatt kamp hade blivit mera järnhård än någonsin!’, Munin, ‘Stormöte i Göteborg! Lindholm anklagar och kräver svensk neutralitetspolitik’, *DSN*, no 89, 13 November 1935, p. 5.

<sup>408</sup> Newspapers created fictionalised narratives of a narrow range of enthusiastic emotions, while the reality of it was rather more complicated: Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, p. 97.

<sup>409</sup> Branch report, Örebro, September 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 6, Västra Distriktets Rapporter (1935).

<sup>410</sup> gkj [George Kettmann Jr], ‘Mussert spreekte te Amsterdam: Een avond van strijdbare geestdrift’, *VoVa*, no 37, 16 September 1933.

speak for itself: ‘Mussert in Amsterdam: Thousands inspired with new courage and zeal’.<sup>411</sup> At the march to the RAI meeting hall for the April 1935 party congress, Mussert marched at the head of the party troops, while people pushed and shoved on the pavements and hung from their house windows, ‘to see Mussert’.<sup>412</sup> Appearing in the hall to speak, the audience burst out in ovations, as the Leader benevolently regarded his audience. ‘Then Mussert made the well-known gesture’, VoVa wrote, ‘as if cutting the ripe wheat with a single stroke – the loud ovations ceased’.<sup>413</sup> When the *Algemeen Leider* spoke at a meeting for the first time after a prolonged illness, his appearance was immediately met with ‘thundering shouts of *hou-zee*’, as he made his way up to the podium.<sup>414</sup> While commentators have been seriously sceptical about the rhetorical talent of the Swedish and Dutch fascist leaders, and Dutch historians have been keen to deny any charismatic qualities to Mussert in particular, VoVa and DSN present a very different image of the leaders.<sup>415</sup> In party media, the leader came across as a natural leader, one who led not just through his competence, but due to his innate commanding stature, his inexplicable but unquestioned authority, and the charismatic bond with his followers which was expressed in their wild and tremendous enthusiasm.<sup>416</sup> There was no particular need for this discursive construction to directly correspond to the reality of Lindholm’s and Mussert’s persons, because these repeated statements of Leader qualities were fundamentally performative in nature, i.e. they created what they ostensibly described. No doubt imperfectly, but certainly not ineffectively. Thus, the creation of the Leader was largely a top-down mythopoeic process pursued through the party apparatus. But as will be shown next, there was also pressure from below.

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<sup>411</sup> ‘Mussert in Amsterdam: Duizenden met nieuwen moed en geestdrift beziel’, *VoVa*, no 39, 29 September 1934, p. 2.

<sup>412</sup> ‘De Landdag – De marsch door Amsterdam’, *VoVa*, no 14, 6 April 1935, p. 3.

<sup>413</sup> ‘Dan maakte Mussert’s bekende gebaar, als maaide hij met één streek het rijpe koren – de luide ovaties verklonken.’, *ibid.*

<sup>414</sup> ‘Mussert in Amsterdam’, *VoVa*, no 6, 8 February 1936, p. 1.

<sup>415</sup> Maarten Cornelis van den Toorn, *Wij Melden U den Nieuwen Tijd: Een Beschouwing van het Woordgebruik van de Nederlandse Nationaal-Socialisten* (’s-Gravenhage: SDU, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>416</sup> On the ‘charismatic bond’, see: Aristotle Kallis, ‘Fascism, “Charisma” and Charismatisation’: Weber’s Model of “Charismatic Domination” and Interwar European Fascism’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7.1 (2006), 25–43.



### III

While the parties' propaganda apparatuses constructed the leaders as charismatic fascist Leaders, neither Mussert nor Lindholm were very comfortable performing these roles, at least initially. Both seemed aware enough of their own lack of any superhuman talents, and little of the propaganda work had yet been done to render their leading positions in the organisation indisputable. Around 1932-33, the two leaders seem to have mostly been preoccupied with securing the organisational foundations of the party and attracting a membership, with little notion of any extraordinary demands of themselves. But in a short time, they found that while they may not have required any particular adulation from their members, many of the members that came to the new movements desired a Leader to venerate.

A June 1933 letter from one member to Mussert linked the nature of the NSB as a fascist movement to Mussert's role as leader – if Mussert was not prepared to take on the role of a true Leader of his followers, '*can we be sure that the N.S.B. intends to be a fascist organisation*'.<sup>417</sup> It was rumoured that Mussert opposed a cult of personality [*persoonsvereering*], and had prohibited the '*heil Mussert*' salute – the expression *heil den Leider* appears precisely once, in the second issue of *VoVa*, and never again after that<sup>418</sup> – instead opting for the idiosyncratic maritime greeting *hou zee* (hold sea). As Mussert's rather technical title of *Algemeen Leider* (General Leader) suggests, the 'AL' saw himself as not a predestined Leader, but as a leader elected for his competence. At the first party congress in Utrecht, January 1933, he acknowledged that '[t]he fascist worldview places the life-affirming force of the personality against the dead weight of majorities. It desires strong authority; it desires personal leadership. In our own organisation we will of course have to set an example.'<sup>419</sup> But the nature of that leadership was immediately underlined as elective; Mussert promised that if a better, more competent leader emerged, he would withdraw immediately.<sup>420</sup> *VoVa* reported that the congress subsequently declared him General Leader with great enthusiasm. His anxious devotee pointed out:

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<sup>417</sup> 'Kunnen we er zeker van zyn, dat de N.S.B. eene fascistische organisatie bedoelt te zyn.' [underlined in original], Letter, T. van de Weide to Mussert, 20 June 1933, Overveen, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 16.

<sup>418</sup> 'Van den eersten landdag', *VoVa*, no 2, 14 January 1933, p. 3.

<sup>419</sup> 'De fascistische wereldbeschouwing stelt tegenover het dood gewicht van meerderheden, de levenwekkende kracht van de persoonlijkheid. Zij wenscht een sterk gezag; zij wenscht persoonlijke leiding. Wij zullen in eigen organisatie daarin natuurlijk het voorbeeld moeten geven.', 'Onze Leider aan het woord: De richtlijnen uitgestippeld'. *VoVa*, no 2, 14 January 1933, p. 4.

<sup>420</sup> This point was reiterated several times throughout the 1930s, e.g.: 'Het leidersbeginsel', *VoVa*, no 6, 8 February 1936, p. 2.

But the masses want a cult of personality, the masses want a symbol: can ‘*begeisterung*’ really emerge from the daily administration of for instance 3 people, a triumvirate? [...] And so you too must be a symbol for our Movement, and the people must not know you, they must not know you as an ordinary mortal, they must only see and hear you on the stage, or at the head of the troops.<sup>421</sup>

Mussert’s response to the letter has not survived, but it is evident that in spite of any discomfort he may have felt, the leadership did acknowledge the existence of a grassroots demand for Mussert to be a charismatic Leader. That fascist loyalty to the *Algemeen Leider* was quickly taking on forms beyond the merely conventional is suggested by one letter to Mussert from a party functionary in December 1933. He and his wife had decided to name their new-born child Anton Adriaan, since ‘we see in you the example of a good Patriot and an upright fascist, and also hope that this will be a guide to him for the rest of his life’.<sup>422</sup>

Lindholm only seemed to demand from his members something like the loyalty of soldiers to their officer, but the socialist myth of the party emphasised the fundamental equality of the leader with his followers, and made ‘voluntary discipline’ the basis of party hierarchy. In his 1980-81 interview, Lindholm noted his own discomfort with anything like a cult of personality in 1935: ‘I wasn’t particularly fond of that, but unfortunately I had to accept it. Because the fact is that it made a strong impression, on both followers and spectators – they wanted things like that.’<sup>423</sup> While the evidence outside of party publications is relatively sparse here, Lindholm’s assessment decades later does seem to correspond to the strong desire some branches expressed to have the *partiledare* speak to them.<sup>424</sup> In fact party correspondence shows the leadership explicitly used

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<sup>421</sup> ‘Maar de massa wil persoonsvereering, de massa wil een symbool; zou er “begeisterung” uit kunnen gaan van van [*sic*] een dagelyks bestuur van b.v. 3 personen, een driemans-schap? [...] En zoo moet ook U het symbool voor onze Beweging zyn, ook U moeten de de [*sic*] menschen niet kennen, ze moeten U niet kennen als een gewoon sterveling, ze moeten U alleen zien en hooren op het podium, of voor de troep.’ Letter, T. van de Weide to Mussert, 20 June 1933, Overveen, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 16.

<sup>422</sup> ‘Naar aanleiding van het feit, dat wy in U het voorbeeld zien van een goed Vaderlander en een oprecht fascist en tevens hopende, dat hem dit voorbeeld een leidraad moge zyn in zyn verder leven, hebben wy de vryheid genomen hem naar U ANTON, ADRIAAN te noemen.’ Letter, Group Leader van de Waal, to Mussert, 4 December 1933, Hillegersberg, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 16.

<sup>423</sup> ‘...jag var inte så särdeles förtjust i det, men jag måste tyvärr acceptera. Faktum är nämligen att det gjorde starkt intryck på både anhängare och åskådare – de ville ha sådant.’ Lindholm interview, 00259: b, c. 7 mins.

<sup>424</sup> Letter, Gustaf Johansson to Lindholm, 27 July 1934, Björkeryd, p. 1, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Södra Distriktet (1934).

Lindholm's visits as a reward mechanism.<sup>425</sup> There was also the dreadful poetry members sent in to DSN: 'They had no ideals to acclaim, / they had no Lindholm, them, - like us. / At his portrait there will always be flowers!', as one adoring member wrote in celebration of the 1934 *årsting*.<sup>426</sup>

Adulation apparently came automatically from the members, much in the same way as in the Netherlands, in a way that suggests prior expectations of the fascist leader – even before the propaganda apparatus had the chance to establish a strong and abiding myth of the leader. Whatever the extent of the rank-and-file's demand for a leader cult, it was an opportunity the party leadership did not leave aside. The fascist leader had a crucial mobilising function in the party organisation. To encourage and sustain devotion to the leader could only enhance that function, but this required more than just the discursive construction of popularity.

One of the means of satisfying grassroots demand for a leader cult was through idolising imagery, poetry, songs, and the like, and making these directly available to the membership. It has been noted how portraits of the Leader were frequently put on the front page of party publications, newspapers, brochures, and the like, which could quickly give them an iconic quality. Odes in the form of poetry were another form which attempted to develop a cultic appreciation of the Leader in the NSB. In July 1935 *VoVa* featured the first poem in dedication to Mussert on the front page, in acclaim of his flight to and from the Dutch Indies<sup>427</sup> - *De Tijd* commented sarcastically on the *VoVa* poem celebrating 'the immaterial fact, that someone who visits India, also returns'<sup>428</sup> - after which they featured in the paper a couple of times per year for the rest of the decade. 'The drums of Mussert' glorified the Leader's call to arms, while 'The word of the leader' envisioned Mussert as 'a hero'.<sup>429</sup> The Swedish DSN by contrast was remarkably void of such poetic celebrations of the *partiledare*, but then the NSAP never developed a particularly intensive or elaborate leader cult. The paper did however feature Lindholm's own poetry, which was another way in which members could engage with him, the party organ becoming a platform for his image as a sensitive Swede,

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<sup>425</sup> Letter, Dpch to Apch Agnér (branch 69), 27 April 1935, Kristianstad, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 4, Kristianstad (1935-38).

<sup>426</sup> 'De hade inga ideal att hylla, / de hade ingen Lindholm, de, - som vi. / Vid hans porträtt skall ständigt blommor finnas!', 'En visa om Tinget', *DSN*, 1934, transcript in Arninge: 2A: 1.

<sup>427</sup> Durandal, 'Mussert naar Indië', *VoVa*, no 29, 20 July 1935, p. 1.

<sup>428</sup> '...het onbelangrijke feit, dat iemand, die Indië bezoekt, ook weer terugkomt...', 'Mussert kwam aan: Partij-poezie', *De Tijd*, no 28370, 10 September 1935, p. 5.

<sup>429</sup> Paulus, 'De trommels van Mussert', *VoVa*, no 33, 17 August 1935, p. 6; Gabriel Geelmuijden, 'Het woord van den leider', *VoVa*, no 8, 22 February 1936, p. 6.

baring his soul, communicating the mysteries of nature and struggle.<sup>430</sup> To permit members to engage even closer with Lindholm's poetic products, a gramophone recording was made of his party anthem *Friheten leve!* (Freedom lives), a popular song frequently sung at party meetings.<sup>431</sup> Written by Lindholm at the end of 1934 or January 1935,<sup>432</sup> with a melody reminiscent of the Internationale, a performance of the song by the Stockholm SA *ortsgrupp* was recorded probably in the summer or autumn that year. Originally a speech by the leader was suggested for the reverse of the record, but in the end the cheerfully militaristic 'March of the Leader' was used instead.<sup>433</sup> Members could purchase one of the thousand records, produced by Tors Förlag, for 2.50 kronor, directly from the party supply service or certain stores.<sup>434</sup> Beyond this potentially lucrative endeavour, there appear to have been surprisingly few attempts in the NSAP to further members' interactions with the Leader through merchandise. Postcards with a portrait of Lindholm in SA uniform and one of his poems were sold, allowing members to possess a representation of the Leader, but not much more.<sup>435</sup> In the Netherlands, commercialisation of the Leader's image was much more common.<sup>436</sup> After all, the NSB did not have the same socialistic ethos as the NSAP, while Mussert clearly had a more refined instinct for business.<sup>437</sup> Many of the commercial activities of the NSB required deals with companies and businesses of all sorts across the country, something the NSAP seemed loth to do except for essential propaganda production. Portraits of Mussert in various sizes were advertised to the members, so they could display their loyalty to the Leader in their own homes.<sup>438</sup> In 1934 a 'film booklet' was made. 'By quickly passing the pages through one's fingers, a living picture is formed of the General Leader.' This was 'of great

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<sup>430</sup> E.g.: Sven-Olov, 'Svensk Morgon', *DSN*, no 9, 1 March 1934, p. 6; S. L-m, 'Norrskensbön', *DSN*, no 12, 13 February 1935, p. 5; Sven Olov, 'Folket som slår', *DSN*, no 51, 3 July 1935, p. 4; S. L-m, 'Tre år i kamp', *DSN*, no 7, 25 January 1936, p. 5; Sven Olov, 'Ett sommarminne', *DSN*, no 88, 14 November 1936, p. 6.

<sup>431</sup> See for instance: Lindholm diary, 15 March and 24 November 1935.

<sup>432</sup> S. L-m, 'Friheten leve! Nationalsocialistisk kampsång', *DSN*, no 3, 12 January 1935, p. 7.

<sup>433</sup> Letter, Torsten Winberg to Gunnar Svalander, Gothenburg, 12 July 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Sven Olov Lindholm (1935-38).

<sup>434</sup> 'Propagandanyhet!', *DSN*, no 18, 6 March 1937, p. 3. Originally the party leadership seems to have considered the production company Edition da Capo instead, who would have produced the records in Germany, at a total cost of c. 1300 kronor. Most likely the final product cost a little less than that, so that the NSAP could profit a little over 1000 kronor from this endeavour.

<sup>435</sup> Lindholm postcard, 'S.O. Lindholm: Ledare för N.S.A.P.', Arninge: 2C: 6.

<sup>436</sup> E.g.: Circular no 13, Van Bilderbeek (Dep. VII), to Chief of Materials et al, Utrecht, 5 June 1936, The Hague, 2.19.49: 4.

<sup>437</sup> Lindholm admitted that he generally did not have any understanding of party finances: Lindholm interview, 00259: b, c. 16 mins.

<sup>438</sup> Brochure, Programme for the third *Landdag*, Amsterdam, 30 March 1935, p. 49, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

propagandistic value', according to the propaganda department.<sup>439</sup> When Mussert returned from his successful trip to the East Indies by airplane, a commemorative plate was gifted to him, of which subsequently 600 copies were made available to the more devoted members.<sup>440</sup> Moreover, every party convention was used as an opportunity to sell high quality, illustrated commemorative books, which prominently displayed numerous pictures of the Leader, as advertised in circulars and VoVa, for prices as low as f 0.75.<sup>441</sup> The illustrated *Gedenkboek* (Commemorative Book) of the 1936 *Hagespraak* rally, produced by the graphic art institute Hobera in black and red, featured not only Mussert's speech in full, but over a dozen pictures of the Leader, delivering his speech, talking to functionaries, and of course greeting his adoring followers [figure 3].<sup>442</sup>



Figure 3. Mussert enters the Goudsberg. From *De Hagespraak* (1936), p. 20.

For most of these examples of merchandise it is unfortunately impossible to know what kind of investment they entailed for the party, how much it profited from the sales, or indeed how popular they were – though the continued annual production of the commemorative books

<sup>439</sup> 'Door de blaadjes vlug na elkaar door de vingers te laten gaan, ontstaat een levend beeld van den Algemeen Leider.', Circular no 66, Hilversum, 23 July 1934, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 501.

<sup>440</sup> Brochure, Programme for the fourth *Landdag*, The Hague, 5 October 1935, p. 19, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>441</sup> Circular, Publisher H. Hoogewoud Jr, to all participants of the Regional *Landdag*, Amsterdam, 28 April 1934, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 25.

<sup>442</sup> *De Hagespraak: Geïllustreerd Gedenkboek ter herinnering aan de eerste Nationale Hagespraak der N.S.B.*, (Hobera: Kortenhoef, 1936), in: Bro N 188/12, International Institute for Social History (IISG), Amsterdam.

suggests they must have been well-received. Regardless, they demonstrate a willingness of the party leadership to commercialise Mussert's image, and disseminate his image in various forms into the households of thousands of members, simultaneously satisfying and encouraging the cadres' devotional desires. It also highlights a contrast in financial capacity between the NSB and the NSAP, the latter lacking much of the resources and competence that would have made this particular method of developing the leader cult possible.

Owing to this lack of resources, the mythopoeia of the charismatic Leader was less refined in Sweden, and relied more on the aforementioned presence of Lindholm as a reward to party branches, which suited his itinerant leadership style.<sup>443</sup> In the mythopoeic development of the NSAP cult, personal presence was used to emphasise the special, unbreakable bond between the Leader and his 'never failing troops of swastika-warriors, unwaveringly devoted to their leader', rather than on Lindholm as a person.<sup>444</sup> Members had to not just be loyal to the ideas, but absolutely dedicated to their leader as a condition for party membership.<sup>445</sup> It was the *årsting*, held every year except 1936, which formed the centrepiece of the NSAP's ceremonial devotion to Lindholm. 'Out in the countryside, the fighters look towards Stockholm filled with expectations this Pentecost. After another year of struggle, loyalty, and sacrifice, they will now get the opportunity to come together with comrades from the entire country and meet their Leader...'<sup>446</sup> During the event which went on for two days, members would attend multiple speeches from the leadership, and attend outdoor rallies complete with marches through the city. While ostensibly an occasion for collective decision-making and an opportunity for the rank-and-file to enter into dialogue with the leadership, in practice the event was an opportunity for mobilising the membership and rubber-stamping the leadership's decisions. For Lindholm personally it was a moment to be in contact with his followers, and accept their adulations, the moment when the 'fighting battalions march in the capital and gather around their young chieftain'.<sup>447</sup> On the first day of the convention, the 'leader day', the Party Leadership conferred with party functionaries

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<sup>443</sup> Cf. Hitler and the NSDAP 1924-26, in: Orlow, I, pp. 53–55.

<sup>444</sup> '...en aldrig sviktande, sin ledare orubbligt tillgiven stamptrupp av hakkorskämpar', 'Speciellt regelemente för SA, SAR', Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 14.

<sup>445</sup> Transcript and extract from: *Porg*, 1/1935, p. 2., Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>446</sup> 'Förväntansfulla se kämparna ute i bygderna mot Stockholm i pingst. Efter ännu ett år av kamp, trohet och offer skola de nu få tillfälle att komma tillsammans med kamrater från hela landet och få möta sin Ledare...', Ragnar Lind, NSAP circular, no 100, 25 April 1938, Arninge: 2A: 2.

<sup>447</sup> '...det är kämpande bataljoner som marschera upp i huvudstaden för att samlas kring sin unge hövding.', -rot [Nils Dahlrot, most likely], 'NSAP samlas till ting: Stockholm står i hakkorsets tecken under pingsttagarna', *DSN*, no 44, 8 June 1935, p. 1.

from branches across the country, but on the second day the Party Leader would speak to the rank-and-file (usually around 2000 members). In 1934 'Lindholm had tried to avoid personal acclamation from the members, but it was the only thing at the convention that failed – completely spontaneously the bubbling shouts of *hail* came to him, from the depths of a thousand hearts.'<sup>448</sup> By 1935 a ritual was developed for the congress. Once all members were gathered, the band played a song such as *Friheten Leve*, and the Leader ascended the podium to ovations and shouts of *hell Lindholm*. 'An outsider cannot understand the heartfelt contact that exists in a moment such as this between Leader and followers, but we know that this natural, voluntary solidarity, founded on the kinship of souls, only exists among us', DSN insisted.<sup>449</sup> After a lengthy speech assessing the continued party struggle, Lindholm made an appeal for onward struggle. With the close of the speech, Lindholm shouted out to his followers: 'One for all!', to which the audience responded with a resounding: 'All for one!' [*En för alla – Alla för en*, figure 4].<sup>450</sup>



Figure 4. 'One for all – All for one'. The party salutes Lindholm. DSN, no 35, 1938.

<sup>448</sup> 'Lindholm hade försökt avstyra personliga hyllningar, men det var det enda på tinget som misslyckades – fullkomligt spontant brusade hellropen emot honom ur tusende hjärtans djup.', "'Judeväldet och utplundringen över vårt svenska folk skall brytas!' Årstingets enda men viktiga beslut!', *DSN*, no 22, 31 May 1934, p. 8.

<sup>449</sup> 'En utomstående kan inte förstå den hjärtliga kontakt som vid ett tillfälle som detta råder mellan Ledare och följe, men vi vet att denna naturliga frivilliga solidaritet, grundad på själarnas frändskap endast finnes hos oss.', 'Genom nationalsocialismen vinnes frihet och bröd', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 5.

<sup>450</sup> Lindholm interview, 00259: b, c. 6 mins.

The choreography was simplistic, even trivial, but the event amounted to a covenant between the Leader and his followers. As J.P. Stern argued in regard to Nazi rituals, it was a great perlocutionary [performative] act, using extremely low information content, and instead affirming the mutual identity of the Leader and his followers, performatively enacting their unity.<sup>451</sup> Annually renewed, it was a mythopoeic ritual sanctifying the charismatic bond between Lindholm and the NSAP with a solemn vow to mutual devotion, one that filled a genuine need amongst the cadres. However, it is important to note that the *årsting* never managed to gather more than perhaps one-fifth of the total party membership. Thus, in the end the actual mythopoeic potential of ritual relying on the personal presence of Lindholm was directly limited, even if the mythopoeic potential was magnified through reproduction and dissemination in print.

The Dutch *landdagen* had a similar character to those of the NSAP, but appear from VoVa's reports to have been more varied from year to year, as were the *Hagespraken* in Lunteren held every year from 1936 to 1940. At the start of the 1934 regional party congress, Mussert suddenly entered unannounced, strode up to the podium to the sound of snare drums, accompanied by a uniformed guard, and mounted the elevated platform to ovations and shouts of *hou-zee*; a conventional choreography that doubtlessly constructed Mussert as a fascist Leader, but did not do anything out of the ordinary, and maintained the hierarchical separation of Leader and followers, seeking to impress the audience more than anything else.<sup>452</sup> With minor variations, it was a ritual uniformly repeated through the thirties, its components echoing those of not just the NSAP, but fascist groups all over Europe.

Rather more intriguing is the evidence that various NSB departments were by the mid-30s working on ceremonies to develop the emergent cult of the leader with religious overtones, specifically designed to move the audience, and give the Leader mythical status. Two documents survive, one (1935) from the Council for Ecclesiastical Matters by the Catholic John Boddé, and another (1936) from the shadowy Council for *Volksche* Culture, by the Reformed E.J. Roskam (also a member of the ecclesiastical council). It is unclear whether the suggestions were ever fully implemented, but as will be made clear further on, at least elements were incorporated into mythopoeic ritual. Council Secretary Boddé suggested that for a one hour meeting, after a short speech, the present members would sing the 1626 hymn *Wilt heden nu treden* ('We gather

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<sup>451</sup> Stern, pp. 37–38.

<sup>452</sup> 'Onze Gewestelijke Landdag', *VoVa*, no 18, 5 May 1934, pp. 8-9.



together'), and subsequently proceed to gather around the Leader (presumably in a semi-circle). Boddé insisted that the ceremony 'does not become a veneration of the Leader, no deification. Rather, we gather around our Leader, we swear loyalty, and the Leader accepts that, and places himself *precisely because of that* with us before the face of our Creator.'<sup>453</sup> The initial two lines of the first verse would emphasise 'the beautiful symbolism': 'We gather together before God the Lord, / Him above all we praise with our hearts'.<sup>454</sup> Metaphorically facing God, Mussert would have stood before his loyal devotees, guiding them onwards in subservience to the Lord. 'Then we will experience a moment with which one can go on [fighting] for a year, and which one will never forget. Surely we must try to touch people in the deepest parts of their being.'<sup>455</sup> In his letter to Mussert, Roskam suggested a prayer ceremony to follow the main speech. In Mussert's speech to the audience (congregation) he would emphasise the charismatic bond with his followers: 'Our Movement is too large for us to maintain personal contact, even though we would like to. But even though that is not possible, that does not mean that there is no mystic bond which links us together and binds us.'<sup>456</sup> The speech continued to affirm it was a bond forged by God Himself in the struggle for an honest cause. In silence the audience then listened to a trumpet playing *Nader mijn God tot U* ('Closer to you, my God'), before Mussert commenced a prayer to the 'God of the Netherlands', ('Forgive us that we cannot see your light. Forgive us that we so often do not wish to see your light. We would not dare approach you if not You Yourself had called us, etc.),'<sup>457</sup> after which he announced the singing of *Wilt heden nu treden*, optionally replacing the final verse with an appeal to the Trinity. In this ceremony, the construction of the Leader as a priestly figure was taken even further, interceding with God for the Movement. It is uncertain whether these specific forms on paper were ever fully implemented, but they are a clear indication of the direction in

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<sup>453</sup> 'Het wordt dan geen hulde aan den Leider, geen mensch vergoding. Integendeel wij scharen ons rond onzen Leider, wij zweeren trouw, en de Leider neemt dat aan en stelt zich *daarom juist* met ons voor het aangezicht van den Schepper.', Letter, John Boddé, [date and place unknown, probably 1935, Hilversum], NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>454</sup> 'Wilt heden nu treden voor God den Heere, / Hem boven al loven van herten seer'.

<sup>455</sup> 'Dan beleven wij een moment waar men een jaar mee vooruit kan en wat ze nooit meer vergeten. We moeten toch pakken in hun doepste [*sic*] wezen.', Letter, John Boddé, [date and place unknown, probably 1935, Hilversum], NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>456</sup> 'Onze Beweging is te groot dat dat wij, hoe graag ik het ook zou willen, persoonlijk contact kunnen onderhouden. Maar al kan dat dan niet dan wil dat daarom nog niet zeggen dat er geen mistieke band zou zijn die ons samenbindt en samen houdt.', Letter, E.J. Roskam (Raad voor Volksche Cultuur) to Mussert, Amsterdam, 1 November 1936, p. 2.

<sup>457</sup> 'Vergeeft het ons dat wij uw licht niet kunnen zien. Vergeeft het ons dat wij uw licht zoo menigmaal niet willen zien. Wij zouden dan ook tot u niet durven naderen indien Gij Zelf ons daartoe niet had geroepen.', *ibid.*, p. 3.

which party institutions were taking the Leader myth by the mid-30s, using ritual means to progress mythopoeia, and were doing so in cooperation with the party leader.

Regardless of the personal qualities of Mussert and Lindholm, the mythopoeia of the Leader through these more or less 'cultish' methods met a deeply felt need among some members, and successfully created a thoroughly loyal core of militant devotees, if not necessarily a large one. There are a number of key moments through which this can be assessed, if in a limited way. When Lindholm spent time in prison from 17 March to 17 May, he received numerous letters of support from his followers, and the first buttercups of the season from some female members. Throughout April, Lindholm was literally inundated with flowers, which he had to eventually move out of his cell because of the overwhelming scent.<sup>458</sup> He wrote happily to his mother of the floral contributions from his devotees.<sup>459</sup> Branch 103 from Fridlevstad donated 10 kronor to the party, exclusively for flowers 'to our Leader Sven Olof Lindholm, when freedom's hour strikes'.<sup>460</sup> For his release in May, hundreds of party members had travelled to the prison to greet him – one NU-boy handing over yet another bouquet – and welcome him back to the struggle.<sup>461</sup> Many NSAP members clearly felt a strong sense of loyalty to Lindholm personally, and a need to demonstrate their commitment in some material way. Such opportunities did not often present themselves, but were used when they did. A cultic devotion to Lindholm as Leader persisted among a small core of members, who even through great setbacks, the difficult war years, and perhaps even harder post-war years until 1950, remained loyal to him.

The greater survival of the NSB party archive makes an assessment of devotion to Mussert a little easier, as some of the correspondence gives an insight into the rank-and-file's personal feelings about their Leader. On the occasion of the third party convention [*landdag*] in Amsterdam, 1935, some felt the need to 'personally express [their] feelings of honest veneration' for Mussert.<sup>462</sup> One member wrote the day after the *landdag* to thank her Leader for 'the glowing words which you spoke to us', which spurred her on to place her 'entire being in the service of the NSB, and as a woman to help you as much as possible with the great work for the good of our

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<sup>458</sup> Lindholm diary, 27 March, 19-20 April 1935.

<sup>459</sup> Letter, Sven Olov Lindholm to Sigrid Lindholm, Härlanda, 19 April 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Sven Olov Lindholm (1935-38).

<sup>460</sup> '...vår Ledare Sven Olof Lindholm, när frihetens timme slår.', Letter, Gustaf Johansson to NSAP HQ, Höryda, 12 May 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 4, Fridlevstad (1935-38).

<sup>461</sup> 17 May 1935, Lindholm diary.

<sup>462</sup> '...persoonlijk, uiting te geven van mijn gevoelens van oprechte vereering.', Letter, B.W.F. Paauwe to Mussert, 's-Gravenhage, 1 April 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1:36.

Fatherland'.<sup>463</sup> Another family wrote enthusiastically of their experience of the entire event, '[h]owever, the climax for us all was seeing the figure of the General Leader, far in the distance, heavily lit and standing tall above his thousands of loyal followers, as if on the forecastle of his admiral's ship!'.<sup>464</sup> The most important sign of loyalty to Mussert came after the electoral failure of May 1937, which was followed by an attempt to oust Mussert in the autumn by Goes van der Naters, and other leading functionaries in Department X (Education, *Vorming*). Summoning his followers to the Goudsberg in Lunteren on 9 October for an impromptu meeting, ('MUSSERT calls for his faithful', as the summons put it),<sup>465</sup> 35-40 000 turned up at their own expense to profess loyalty to their *Leider*.<sup>466</sup> The crowd burst out into ovations as Mussert appeared on the podium, meeting him with the party song *Wij zijn de zwarte soldaten* ('We are the black soldiers'). The meeting was finished with *Voor Anton Mussert zijn wij in het gevecht* ('We are in this fight for Anton Mussert'),<sup>467</sup> and a recording of Luther's *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott (Een vaste burg)*.<sup>468</sup> Hundreds more sent in professions of loyalty before and after;<sup>469</sup> one party branch (Circle 23, group 1) sent in the signatures of all the members who could not make it to Lunteren but wished to 'hereby profess their unshakeable loyalty to the *Leider*' – 'Loyal until *death!*', one handwritten note added dramatically.<sup>470</sup> Devotion to Mussert personally had clearly been generated over the years, and when put to the test it turned out to be a useful tool, and was in and of itself sufficient to mobilise the NSB on a large scale. In spite of numerous challenges to his leadership, especially during the German Occupation, even as the membership was decimated, Mussert always managed to maintain his position, being able to reliably fall back on his mythic status as predestined Leader of the Movement.<sup>471</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> '...de gloedvolle woorden die U tot ons hebt gesproken [...] mijn heele wezen in dienst stellen der N.S.B. om als vrouw U zoveel mogelijk mee te helpen aan het grootsche werk tot heil van ons Vaderland.', Letter, J. Stoop to Mussert, The Hague, 1 April 1935, pp. 1-3, NIOD: 123, 1.1:36.

<sup>464</sup> 'Het hoogtepunt was voor ons allen echter wel de figuur van onze Algemeen Leider heel in de verte te zien staan, fel belicht en hoog boven zijn duizenden getrouwen, als op de voorplecht van zijn admiraalschip!', Letter, H.J. Raad to Mr and Mrs Mussert, Hilversum, 'Sunday evening', NIOD: 123, 1.1: 36.

<sup>465</sup> Circular (summons), 'MUSSERT roept zijn getrouwen op', Utrecht, September 1937, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 71.

<sup>466</sup> 'De negende october: De getrouwen op den Goudsberg', *VoVa*, no 42, 15 October 1937, p. 4.

<sup>467</sup> Newspaper clipping, Mussert geeft rekenschap van zijn daden: Rede op de Hagespraak te Lunteren', *De Telegraaf*, 10 October 1937, NIOD: KA II, 1702.

<sup>468</sup> Newspaper clipping, 'De crisis in de N.S.B.: De derde "hagespraak" te Lunteren', *Dordrechts Dagblad*, 11 October 1937, NIOD: KA II, 1702.

<sup>469</sup> Circular, Mussert, Utrecht, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 71.

<sup>470</sup> '...betuigen hiermede hun onwankelbare trouw aan den Leider', 'Trouw tot in de dood!', Booklet, 'Bijeenkomst 9 October 1937 Lunteren', Kring 23 Groep 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 71.

<sup>471</sup> As Willem Huberts points out, the NSB was the only one of the dozens of fascist movements in the Netherlands which had the same leader throughout its entire existence. Huberts, pp. 196–97.

## IV

While the various mythopoeic methods constructed Lindholm and Mussert as ‘generic’ fascist Leaders in some sense, there were important differences, with significant implications for the quality and nature of their leadership and the greater fascist myth. But crucially the development of the myth of the Leader was a process: it was never in any sense complete, was in no sense all-encompassing, and changed substantially over time. The devotion of party loyalists and the need for mobilisation was not the only factor driving mythopoeia, as the party organisations also had to contend with respectable opinion, and a vindictive press’s attitudes to fascist leader cults. These prohibited any kind of straightforward apotheosis of the Leader, not least because political opponents interrupted mythopoeia with their own, less flattering narratives.

The myth of Lindholm was perhaps the least fantastical, and largely static compared to Mussert’s, but multi-faceted and subtle. It derived more from Lindholm’s actual person – a young, tall, blond soldier with a love for the Swedish landscape – and relied on a more egalitarian notion of leadership. Lindholm may have been as wary of a cult of personality as he claimed in the 1980s, but his supposed modesty as a fascist Leader was exploited all the more for that. As shown above, NSAP mythopoeia focused particularly on his relationship to his followers rather than his own charismatic qualities. While Lindholm’s leadership was hardly democratic in the conventional sense of the word, he held his position with the approval of the loyal membership. As a 1938 circular put it: ‘Our opponents’ propaganda often has an animus against the Nordic leader principle. They confuse our leader with oriental idols and small-German *gauführer*. Our leader is a Swedish people’s leader [*folkledare*] and nothing more. The first among comrades.’<sup>472</sup> The humble leader was *primus inter pares*, in accordance with the Nordic chieftain tradition: ‘the leader of a youthful troop ... Behind him stand men and women, boys and girls, who all wear the sign of the Nordic peoples, the swastika – the cross of light – “*We National Socialists want to continue the history of Sweden!*”’, as one propaganda leaflet put it.<sup>473</sup> The young chieftain deserved his position as a leader who was always at the front of his troops, leading them into battle, doing the brunt of

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<sup>472</sup> ‘Ofta förekommer i våra motståndares propaganda agget mot den nordiska ledarprincipen. Han förväxlar vår ledare med orientaliska avgudar och småtyska gauführer. Vår ledare är en svensk folkledare och ingenting annat. Den främste bland kamrater.’, Circular, Stockholm, 18 September 1938, in: Police memorandum, concerning NSAP, p. 1, Arninge: 2B: 11.

<sup>473</sup> ‘*Här*, ropar ledaren för en ungdomlig skara med fast stämma och blickar de gamle frimodigt in i ögonen. Bakom honom stå män och kvinnor, pojkar och flickor, som alla bära de nordiska folkens tecken, hakkorset – ljuskorset. – “*Vi nationalsocialister vilja fortsätta Sveriges historia!*”’, NSAP leaflet, on National Socialism and the history of the Swedish monarchy, Arninge: 2C: 8.

the work, taking responsibility for the party. Carrying over his habits and activities from his time as an SNSP propaganda functionary, Lindholm was immediately established as the Leader 'on the frontline'.<sup>474</sup> DSN portrayed a vivid picture of him: constantly at meetings, touring the entire country to evangelise in the remotest villages, from Scania to Haparanda, doing his duty like all the other activists, with a small unwaged team, sleeping in tents, living hand to mouth through the sale of newspapers, propaganda, and donations. Every year, during the summer months in particular, but also in the depths of winter, the paper kept the readers up to date on Lindholm's latest meetings, successes, and sacrifices, setting an example to the cadres, an apostle spreading the gospel. Illustrated with Lindholm's own photographs, it showed members how their leader lived out in the field, rising early to bathe in the lakes, going to bed late at night after a hard day of often dangerous activism, or braving arctic weather conditions to spread his message to Finnish lumberjack communities in the far north.<sup>475</sup> Lindholm was the perfect fascist activist, above all an example to his followers, while the apostolic undertones remained just that, undertones. In the words of one District functionary, 'in the last instance our struggle is a matter of will, and it is the will to life which pushes us to sacrifices of almost any magnitude, and in this, as in all other cases, Lindholm is our example.'<sup>476</sup> The principle of the leader as an example to his followers was institutionalised in the party directives for activists (1938), which emphasised that members were loyal to their leader because they were first and foremost loyal to the ideas, which the leader embodied.<sup>477</sup>

It was in this that Lindholm's myth culminated: he was the NSAP incarnate; he embodied fascism. The semantic slip from example to personification was made deliberately by Lindholm himself with the inception of the party. In his article 'to the National Socialists of Sweden' in the first issue of DSN, he justified the break away from SNSP with the notions of example and personification:

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<sup>474</sup> 'Vår offensiven begynner! Lindholm och Landahl i främsta linjen!', *DSN*, no 5, 15 March 1933, p. 5.

<sup>475</sup> 'Med Lindholm i fält: Genom arbete o. försakelse till seger!', *DSN*, no 20, 21 August 1933, pp. 1, 8; 'Lindholm erövrar Norrland!', *DSN*, no 9, 1 March 1934, p. 6; 'Lindholm till Norrland', *DSN*, no 7, 26 January 1935, pp. 1, 6; 'Lindholms fälttåg: Genom socialistisk offervilja förmår NSAP:s propaganda nå hela landet', *DSN*, no 51, 3 July 1935, pp. 1, 6; 'Drag ut i fält! Sommarkriget börjar – anmäl dig till närmaste propagandalag!', *DSN*, no 40, 26 May 1937, pp. 1, 6; 'Under Tyrslaggan: Med propagandalaget i fält', *DSN*, no 61, 11 August 1937, pp. 1, 6; 'Ut i fält! Skänk livsmedel åt våra aktiva frontmän!', *DSN*, no 43, 15 June 1938, p. 5.

<sup>476</sup> '...i sista hand är vår kamp en vilje sak, det är viljan till liv som tvingar oss till hart när hur stora offer som helst, och i detta liksom alla andra fall är det Lindholm som är vårt föredöme.', Letter, Do. to Oscar Larsson, 6 November 1934, p. 2, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Södra Distriktet (1934).

<sup>477</sup> IF, pp. 5-6.

One must demand from the *leadership* of this nat. soc. party that they are not just men who are honest, competent, and thoroughly familiar with their political task, but also that they through their personal example *represent* the ideas. Of a *leader* himself, finally, one demands that he *personifies* the ideas also in his life and in his actions...<sup>478</sup>

When the fascist sympathiser Carl-Enfrid Carlberg, owner of far-right publishing house *Svea Rike*, and later financial supporter of SSS was asked why the young acclaimed Lindholm, he answered '[b]ecause Lindholm personally embodies the ... ideal of Swedish masculinity', utterly lacking amongst other leaders.<sup>479</sup> It was not without significance that in 1936 the NSAP sought to register its official electoral name as '*Lindholm's* freedom movement'.<sup>480</sup> In the wake of the 1937 party congress, DSN proclaimed in its headline: 'NSAP and Lindholm are one'.<sup>481</sup> Closely tied up with the construction of Lindholm as the ideal fascist embodiment of the party, was the narrative of the party's origins as a moral and idealistic break with corruption and compromise represented by the SNSP. This myth was annually reified with the 15 January celebration of the founding of the NSAP, an opportunity to develop a narrative with Lindholm as the moral hero purging Swedish fascism of its 'bourgeois corruption', destined to lead his followers to victory through the struggle and sacrifice he embodied.<sup>482</sup>

The man who had led them [Furugård], had failed them – it now depended on those who felt their responsibility before the people, whether everything was going to collapse, whether the sacrifices made up to this point would be in vain. They knew, that they needed to act, and on that dark January day the revolution came. Lindholm raised his hand to strike. Lindholm raised his hand for

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<sup>478</sup> 'Av *ledningen* för detta nat. soc. parti måste man fordra inte bara att de äro ärliga, dugliga och med sin politiska uppgift väl förtrogna män, utan även att de i sitt personliga föredöme *representera* idéerna. Av en *ledare* själv slutligen, fordrar man, att han *personifierar* idéerna även i sitt liv och sina handlingar...' Lindholm, 'Till Sveriges Nationalsocialister!', *DSN*, no 1, 25 January 1933, p. 2.

<sup>479</sup> 'Därför att Lindholm personligen förkroppsligar det nordiskt-gymniska svenskmannaidealet...', C.E. Carlberg, quoted in: Confidential police memorandum, short summary of the development of the National Socialist movement in Sweden in 1933, p. 2, Arninge: 2B: 1.

<sup>480</sup> Letter [photocopy], Gunnar Svalander (Po) to Ministry of Justice, Gothenburg, 19 May 1936, Request to register party name, Marieberg: Kopiesamlingen [Copy collection] III, vol. 20.

<sup>481</sup> 'NSAP och Lindholm äro ett', *DSN*, no 38, 19 May 1937, p. 1.

<sup>482</sup> Md, 'Frihetsrörelsens årsdag', *DSN*, no 3, 12 January 1935, p. 2.

renewed struggle. Around Lindholm they gathered, the oldest and most honest fighters of Swedish National Socialism.<sup>483</sup>

As the idealistic and moral manifestation of fascism, Lindholm was increasingly associated with an above all uncompromising fascism, a reputation that by 1936 appears to have made it across the border to Denmark. 'Lindholm's name is a guarantee that the struggle in Sweden is waged without compromise', Fritz Clausen's DSNAP reported.<sup>484</sup> The 'spirit of Lindholm' would ultimately save Sweden through a 'moral revolution'.<sup>485</sup> In the latter half of the thirties the party apparatus increasingly emphasised Lindholm's ethos as the salvation of Sweden. A police informant noted in March 1937 that Party Organiser Bertil Brisman 'depicted Lindholm as the man "who will save [frälsa] the Swedish people from their oppressors"'.<sup>486</sup> In one surviving 1935 letter a former member of Lindholm's propaganda team wrote that life felt meaningless without active participation in the struggle, and fighting alongside Lindholm, who made life worth living; '*Lindholm* the leader will lead the people out of hardship and sorrow'.<sup>487</sup> Over the years a myth of Lindholm was constructed, that of a humble fascist Leader, pure and saintly in life, capable of saving the nation through his example, followed by a willing army with which he had a special, personal bond. Within a short span of time, this appears to have convinced at least some, and underpinned the devotion of the cadres, and mobilised them to unusually self-sacrificing forms of activism. As will be shown later, the corresponding mythopoeic efforts were sharply reduced in intensity around 1938, and came under fire from various directions, but for most of the 1930s it was an important factor in the cohesion and mobilisation of the NSAP.

During the first years in the Netherlands, the NSB mainly tried to shape Mussert's image in line with his social status, his past as a nationalist campaigner, and as civil engineer. Rather than

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<sup>483</sup> 'Den man, som stått i ledningen för dem, hade svikit – på dem som nu kände sitt ansvar inför folket berodde det nu, om allt skulle störta samman, om offren hitintills skulle varit förgäves. De visste, att de måste handla, och i den dystra januaridagen kom revolutionen. Lindholm höjde sin hand till slag. Lindholm höjde sin hand till förnyad kamp. Kring Lindholm samlades de, den svenska nationalsocialismens äldsta och ärligaste kämpar.', Torsten G:son Elg, 'Två år i kamp', *DSN*, no 3, 12 January 1935, p. 1.

<sup>484</sup> 'Lindholms Navn er en Garanti for at Kampen i Sverrige bliver ført uden Kompromis.', quoted in: 'Lindholm hyllas av danska nat. soc.', *DSN*, no 79, 14 October 1936, p. 4.

<sup>485</sup> Hg, 'Lindholmsandan skall rädda Sverige! Endast en moralisk revolution kan hindra vårt folk från att dö ut', *DSN*, no 52, 10 July 1937, p. 1.

<sup>486</sup> '...han framhöll Lindholm som den man "som skall frälsa svenska folket från deras förtryckare"', Police memorandum, concerning NSAP *kamratafton*, 30 March 1937, p. 1, Arninge: XII 64: 1.

<sup>487</sup> 'Lindholm ledar'n skall föra folket ur nöd och sorg.', Letter, Gösta Ståhlvärn, Uddevalle, 10 July 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Sven Olov Lindholm (1935-38).

mythicising his capacities, emphasis was on his technical competence derived from a highly successful career, and hard organisational work, which made him above all a *responsible* leader. The General Leader was *ir. Mussert* [*ingenieur*],<sup>488</sup> a respectable politician who abhorred violence,<sup>489</sup> who engaged in performative acts of loyalty to the House of Orange – most notably the public sending of telegrams to the Queen at party rallies.<sup>490</sup> That Mussert's image and reputation provided a solid foundation for mythopoeia is evident from some of the initial press reports. In reaction to the first party convention, one paper wrote:

Nothing but good is known about his past as engineer of water management. His love for his country and people is above suspicion. Indeed he has not started with bombast in a theoretical void, rather he has prepared the first appearance to the outside world methodically like a conscientious civil servant. Everything must really have been completely and neatly in order.<sup>491</sup>

The paper also favourably compared the NSB's engineered organisation to the preposterous indiscipline of previous fascist parties; the liberal conservative paper *Algemeen Handelsblad* agreed.<sup>492</sup> In the first years the party made the most of this: quite uniquely in European fascism, this became a myth of the Leader as civil engineer. Mussert was portrayed as a responsible civil servant with a dedication to both state water management and the party, who fulfilled his duty in both capacities until forced to resign from his office by the 1934 law against civil servants in revolutionary organisations (Mussert argued the law itself was right in principle, but that the NSB was not a revolutionary organisation).<sup>493</sup> That moment marked the decline of this particular construction of Mussert's myth, but it never went away entirely. While the myth would undergo radical alterations in the following years, as late as 1944 it was still brought up, with the

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<sup>488</sup> E.g.: Letter, J.L.S. [name restricted] to C. van der Voort van Zijp, Antwerp, 11 January 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 395; Press release, 'Landestagung der Niederländischen National-Sozialistischen Bewegung', NIOD: 123, 1.1: 86.

<sup>489</sup> Mussert, 'Landdagrede van Mussert', *VoVa*, no 41, 14 October 1933, p. 1.

<sup>490</sup> Note, Mussert to Her Majesty the Queen, Utrecht, January 1933 at the first *Landdag*; Letter, Secretary of HM the Queen to Mussert, no 1663, 's-Gravenhage, 7 May 1934, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 2173.

<sup>491</sup> 'Er is uit zijn verleden als waterstaatsingenieur niets dan goeds bekend. Zijn liefde voor land en volk is onverdacht. Hij is ook niet begonnen met bombardie in een theoretische leegte, doch methodisch als een conscientieus ambtenaar heeft hij het eerste optreden naar buiten voorbereid. Het moet werkelijk allemaal keurig in orde zijn geweest.', Newspaper clipping, Oudeis, 'Van Mussert tot Veraart', *M.E.*, 23 January 1933, in: NIOD: KA II, 1701.

<sup>492</sup> Newspaper clipping, 'Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 8 October 1933, NIOD: KA II, 1701.

<sup>493</sup> Mussert, 'Uit het ambt ontzet', *VoVa*, no 9, 3 March 1934, p. 1.



publication of the Nenasu biography *Mussert als ingenieur* (Mussert as engineer).<sup>494</sup> But the heyday of this myth was the first few years of the NSB, when it could count on sympathy from the conservative press. In February 1933 *VoVa* proudly quoted the local Utrecht newspaper in its description of the leader, this ‘young chief engineer of water management [*Rijkswaterstaat*], who builds roads in the day and spends his free time building up a movement, for which he has great expectations, is a born leader and organiser’.<sup>495</sup> ‘It is no accident’, *VoVa* exclaimed, ‘that an engineer is at the head of our movement’: engineers were amongst all the intellectuals the only ones who had the privilege of working with all parts and classes of the people.<sup>496</sup> In the NSB fascist myth, engineers were ideally suited to be fascists: born organisers, and leaders of the people. And Mussert was the perfect engineer, demonstrated through his every action. At a rally in Amsterdam: ‘The arrival of the leader is announced; with thundering calls of *houzee* Mussert goes to the podium in the middle of the hall. In everything Mussert shows himself the engineer: the straight line is the shortest path between two points...’<sup>497</sup>

In line with the respectability and supposed leader qualities that came with the skills of a civil engineer, Mussert was also constructed as a strongman to rival the Prime Minister, and a moral guardian of society. In the years 1932-34 Mussert was presented as an alternative to the Anti-Revolutionary Hendricus Colijn, who Mussert argued only weakened state authority through his compromises with the SDAP.<sup>498</sup> Through his editorials the *Algemeen Leider* consistently came out in defence of state authority and the, if necessary, violent suppression of unrest and disorder, as well as Christian morality in the face of cultural decadence.<sup>499</sup> In 1935 Mussert was vocal in his disapproval of the Swedish modernist novella and play *Bödeln* (*The Executioner*, *De Beul* in Dutch) by Pär Lagerkvist, which in unobvious ways portrayed fascists as murderous racist brutes.<sup>500</sup> Mussert

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<sup>494</sup> Homan van der Heide, *Mussert als Ingenieur* (Utrecht: Nenasu, 1944).

<sup>495</sup> ‘Deze jonge hoofd-ingenieur van Rijkswaterstaat, die overdag wegen bouwt en al zijn vrije tijd besteedt aan den opbouw van een beweging, waarvan hij groote verwachtingen heeft, is een persoonlijkheid, een geboren leider en organisator.’, L.P., ‘In het hoofdkwartier der Nationaal-socialisten’, from *Utrechtsch Provinciaal en Stedelijk Dagblad*, quoted in: *VoVa*, no 5, 4 February 1933, p. 3.

<sup>496</sup> ‘Het is geen toeval, dat aan het hoofd van onze beweging een ingenieur staat.’, ir, ‘De taak van den Nationaal-Socialisten ingenieur’, *VoVa*, no 47, 25 November 1933, p. 2.

<sup>497</sup> ‘De komst van den leider wordt aangekondigd; onder daverend houzee-geroep begeeft Mussert zich door het midden van de zaal naar het podium. In alles betoont Mussert zich de ingenieur: de rechte lijn is de kortste weg tusschen twee punten...’, ‘Mussert in Amsterdam’, *VoVa*, no 6, 8 February 1936, p. 1.

<sup>498</sup> Mussert, ‘Mussert blijft ons trouw: Een schrijven van Mussert aan de Provinciale Staten van Utrecht’, *VoVa*, no 8, 24 February 1934, p. 1.

<sup>499</sup> E.g. the riots in the Jordaan in 1934, and more carefully the Night of the Long Knives in Germany, see Mussert’s articles in: *VoVa*, no 28, 14 July 1934, pp. 1-2.

<sup>500</sup> Pär Lagerkvist, *Bödeln* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1943), p. 85ff.

and VoVa took the opportunity to denounce the performance of the play in Amsterdam as a scandal, and argued that ‘the decent part of the Dutch people should be thankful’ for the NSB members who disrupted the performance, before focusing on the blasphemous and allegedly anti-Christian parts of the work.<sup>501</sup> In his October 1933 Utrecht convention speech, Mussert shunned terror, rejected racism, and stated that Dutch National Socialism considered the Queen to be the personification of power in the country, and ‘fully recognises the Christian character of the nation’.<sup>502</sup> The bourgeois undertones of Mussert’s respectability were palpable, to the point where it became a source of complaint in the party: many members were prone to use ‘un-fascist’ modes of address for the Leader, referring to him as ‘Mr Mussert’ and the like, much to the chagrin of other members.<sup>503</sup> Mussert’s respectability was banal, but was a crucial part of the mythopoeia of the Leader, and retrospectively turned out to be a stepping stone towards a less mundane myth.

As the NSB entered a damaging political contest with the Catholics and Calvinists in 1934-35, suffering the opprobrium of ecclesiastical censure, the party organisation and Mussert increasingly emphasised the positive Christian dimensions of their ideology. In Mussert’s own rhetoric, faith in God, while always an aspect of the ‘leading principle’, was pushed to the fore as the decade progressed (contrary to the claims of Tessel Pollmann who argues the reverse).<sup>504</sup> As seen previously, it was precisely after 1934 that the party leadership developed mythopoeic ceremonies with heavy-handed Christian overtones, presenting Mussert as an ecumenical alternative to Colijn, RKSP leader Piet Aalberse, or CHU leader Dirk Jan de Geer. At the 1937 *Hagespraak*, Mussert castigated the three main confessional parties for their perverted sense of decency and respectability [*fatsoen*], as the political press confused the historical term for a spontaneous citizens’ council, *hagespraken*, dating back to the Middle Ages, with the early modern Calvinist *hagepreken*, accusing the NSB of a divisive Protestant bias.<sup>505</sup> In 1939 Mussert, in

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<sup>501</sup> ‘...dat het fatsoenlijke deel van het Nederlandsche volk hen dankbaar moet zijn...’, Mussert, ‘Gesubsidieerde liederlijkheid: Het Amsterdamsch schouwburgschandaal’, p. 1; ‘Protesten tegen de Godslasteringen in “De beul”’, p. 2, in: *VoVa*, no 49, 7 December 1935; incidentally DSN in Sweden took the opportunity to point to the anger the play had provoked in the Netherlands, leaving out the role played by the NSB: ““Bödeln” väcker förbittring i Holland: Den lagerquistska snuskpjäsen röner fjasko över allt’, *DSN*, no 94, 4 December 1935, p. 2.

<sup>502</sup> ‘*erkent ten volle het Christelijk karakter der natie*’ [italicised in original], Mussert, ‘Landdagrede van Mussert’, *VoVa*, no 41, 14 October 1933, p. 2.

<sup>503</sup> Letter, van der Goes van Naters et al to Cornelis Van Geelkerken, Apeldoorn, 4 July 1934, p. 3, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 341.

<sup>504</sup> Pollmann, p. 18. It was precisely in the first years that members and outsiders worried about an insufficiently *Christian* programme in the NSB, see e.g. a Jesuit letter demanding the rejection of atheism: Letter, A. de Lang Jz. to Mussert, Amsterdam, 20 September 1933, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 398.

<sup>505</sup> MS speech, Mussert, Lunteren, ‘Bergopwaarts’, 1937, p. 8, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 70.

a speech about the decline of agriculture, invoked God to attack the government as sanctimonious, founded on the atheistic principles of the French Revolution. ‘Whoever considers all this, for him it is no wonder that there is a rumbling over our fatherland. This is a miracle: that the Almighty endures it any longer, this state order which tramples and despises the laws of its Creator.’<sup>506</sup> From 1935 onwards there was a noticeable increase in Mussert’s references to God, and his rhetoric became generally more and more biblical.<sup>507</sup> He portrayed the fascist mission as being about the conscientious salvation of the people in duty to God, portraying the NSB as a martyrs’ organisation in God’s service: ‘At the end of every human life it does not matter one bit if the farewell happens in a prison or a stately bed ... it only matters, if you have done your duty, in accordance with your honour and conscience, to God and man.’<sup>508</sup> The mythopoeic qualities of his airborne journey to and from the East Indies in the summer of 1935 were exploited to depict the leader not as a daring, heroic man,<sup>509</sup> – although this was discussed by the General Council<sup>510</sup> – but as one protected by Providence.<sup>511</sup>

The image of bourgeois respectability was pushed to the background, if not eliminated, to instead turn Mussert into a Leader with a holy mission, a priestly figure. In January 1937, an article by the Head of Department X described his experience of meeting Mussert in 1927: a charismatic man had emerged in defence of his people, ‘touched by the hand of destiny’.<sup>512</sup> Where Lindholm always emphasised the long-term struggle and need for sacrifice in the face of constant (electoral and financial) adversity, Mussert, buoyed by the meteoric success of the NSB in its first three years, relied on themes of destiny and imminent salvation. A new age was dawning in Europe, and Mussert was the first in the Netherlands to realise it. As he put it at the second *Hagespraak* in 1937, also in the Dutch people a divine spark had taken hold, which spoke of resurrection, and the

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<sup>506</sup> ‘Wie dit al overdenkt voor hem is het geen wonder dat het rommelt ook in ons vaderland. Dit is een wonder, dat de Almachtige het nog langer draagt, dat een goddeloos staatsbestel de wetten van zijn Schepper vertreedt en veracht.’, MS speech, Mussert, ‘De Nood van het Landvolk en het Rechtsherstel dat komt’, pp. 1, 6, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 94.

<sup>507</sup> E.g.: Newspaper clipping, ‘Ir. Mussert aan het woord’, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 9 April 1937, NIOD: KA II, 1702.

<sup>508</sup> ‘Aan het einde van ieder menschenleven komt het er geen steek op aan of het afscheid geschiedt in de gevangenis of in een praalbed ... het komt er alleen op aan, of gij naar eer en geweten uw plicht hebt gedaan tegenover God en de menschen.’, Mussert, ‘De weg omhoog’, *VoVa*, no 1, 4 January 1936, p. 1.

<sup>509</sup> Cf. Otto Dietrich, ‘A Flight Through the Storm and Hitler’s Mission’, in: Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, pp. 291–93.

<sup>510</sup> Minutes for meeting 19 August 1936, p. 32, in: Book, meeting minutes *Algemeene Raad*, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

<sup>511</sup> ‘Welkom!’, *VoVa*, no 36, 7 September 1935, p. 1.

<sup>512</sup> Hoofd Afd. X, ‘Vijf jaar oud’, *VoVa*, no 2, 8 January 1937, p. 2.

victory of good over evil.<sup>513</sup> 'We stand in the middle of the period in which history is made'.<sup>514</sup> The NSB followed a path, on which it had found the love of God, and it wished to keep pursuing the way in which God would stay with them. In the current darkness there was a burning fire, 'that a Movement has emerged in our people ... which has shown its indestructability, and gradually makes itself ready to fulfil its calling that history has ordained'.<sup>515</sup> No longer just a thoroughly respectable Christian gentleman, Mussert was constructed as a Biblical prophet, echoing the voice of the Lord, calling to the people to heed the coming of a divinely ordained era. 'A new era is coming: that era is Mussert. Irresistible. He is the voice of the coming Netherlands'.<sup>516</sup> At the December 1936 commemoration of the founding of the NSB, Mussert declared that 'God's judgement is being executed over all that has shown itself sinful, both in the individual and in the people' – a new era is coming in the history of nations.<sup>517</sup> Commanding the flags to be lowered, and his audience to rise and stand still in silence, Mussert recited a prayer:

We do not ask, that we will be spared suffering, sorrows, and ardour in the coming years;

We do not ask, that it may go well for us;

We do not ask, that our wishes and our desires are fulfilled,

because not our will be done.

But we ask on this evening, at the beginning of a new battle period this one thing:

that God give us the insight, the courage, the determination, the honesty, the good faith, which are necessary to be a good tool in His hand, serving for the resurrection of this people, which we love, so that the Fatherland, so that the *Imperium* will not be lost, but will be maintained and the way up will be steadfastly walked according to His will.

We now sing together: *Wilt heden nu treden*.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>514</sup> 'Wij staan midden in het tijdvak waarin geschiedenis gemaakt', Mussert, quoted in: Message of the NSB Press-Service, 'De Tweede Hagespraak der N.S.B.', p. 6, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 2006.

<sup>515</sup> 'dat er een Beweging is ontstaan in ons volk ... die haar onverwoestbaarheid heeft getoond en zich geleidelijk gereed maakt om haar historisch aan de orde zijnde roeping in ons volk te vervullen...', Mussert, 'Stormloop 1938: Wij dringen naar het licht', *VoVa*, no 1, 7 January 1938, p. 1.

<sup>516</sup> 'Een nieuwe tijd is komende: die tijd is Mussert. Onweerhoudbaar. Hij is de stem van het wordende Nederland...', 'Om het vertrouwen in Mussert', *VoVa*, no 4, 28 January 1938, p. 3.

<sup>517</sup> '...dat zich een Godsgericht voltrekt over datgene wat ondeugdelijk is gebleken, zoowel in den enkeling als in het volk.', MS speech, Mussert, 'Herdenkingsbijeenkomst RAI', 12 December 1936, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 49.

<sup>518</sup> 'Wij vragen niet dat ons in de komende jaren leed en zorgen en moeite bespaard zullen blijven; / Wij vragen niet, dat het ons goed zal mogen gaan; / Wij vragen niet, dat onze wenschen en onze verlangens in vervulling mogen gaan, / want niet onze wil zal geschieden. / Maar wij vragen op dezen avond aan het begin der nieuwe strijdperiode slechts dit eene: / dat God ons geve het inzicht, den moed, de vastberadenheid, de eerlijkheid, den

Christian credentials were indispensable for a respectable politician in the interwar Netherlands, and a religious outlook had been, albeit in the background, part of Mussert's image since 1933. But as the years went on, initial success, as well as hostility from the authorities, drove a mythopoeia which transformed the respectable bourgeois leader, the down to earth civil servant, into a charismatic prophet-priest figure. Additionally, people in the Ecclesiastical Council argued that 'the increasingly calling on God's aid at our meetings has found resonance and finds this more and more amongst the best and most serious of our *Volksgenooten*', even as Germanic-pagan ideas were also gaining ground in the party.<sup>519</sup> In some respects respectability had been jettisoned in the mythopoeic process, but in this myth the NSB had found a handy marriage between the demands of respectability for Christian virtue, and the expectation of, and desire for a charismatic, fascist Leader.

## V

The mythopoeia around the leaders of the NSB and NSAP was managed with mainly the party membership in mind, building on the grassroots demand for a devotional object. The uninitiated tended to be much less impressed by the fantastic representations of the Leader. A 1937 report by the Anti-Revolutionary *De Rotterdammer*, on a Senate speech by a CHU speaker, is illustrative of how opponents perceived and portrayed Mussert's Christian myth:

[Mussert's National Socialism] does try to hide its true nature with pretty words. Sometimes they are also virtuous words, which however immediately betray that they are merely the words and concepts, handled by those, who do not know their Christian meaning ... It is an horrendous abuse, an abhorrent method for misleading the simple. Nevertheless [*sic*] ... Mussert's National Socialism is equally pagan and objectionable in its principle foundations as the German [equivalent], which he imitates. Unchristian, unhistorical, and revolutionary, concluded Prof. Anema. And rightly so.<sup>520</sup>

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goeden trouw, die noodig zijn om een goed werktuig te zijn in Zijn hand, dienende tot wederopstanding van dit volk, dat wij liefhebben, opdat het Vaderland, opdat het Imperium niet verloren zal gaan, maar behouden zal blijven en de weg naar omhoog doelbewust zal worden betreden volgens Zijnen wil. / Zingen wij te zamen: Wilt heden nu treden.', MS speech, Mussert, 'Herdenkingsbijeenkomst RAI', 12 December 1936, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 49.

<sup>519</sup> Letter [transcript], H.J. Leeuwenberg to John Boddé, [1937], p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.39: 1379.

<sup>520</sup> '...dat zijn ware aard wel onder schooner woorden tracht te verbergen. Soms ook zijn het vrome woorden, die echter onmiddellijk verraden, dat het slechts woorden en begrippen zijn, gehanteerd door hen, die den

One ARP preacher, Ds Bik, took things a bit further: ‘the brainless Mussert – that great St Nicholas figure ... every show of friendship from him I regard as a kiss from Satan – the N.S.B. is Satanism in disguise’.<sup>521</sup> Mussert’s ever more virtuous Christian image and the increasingly liturgical rituals did not necessarily impress an antagonistic press, which was keen to highlight the pseudo-pagan elements in a party that was already tarnished with the Nazi German brush. In 1936 Mussert was the butt of a satirical poem by the popular Anti-Revolutionary poet Leo Lens, decrying the indecency of his sanctimonious and hypocritical performance – ‘Such a man must and surely does know, / That outside of his wonderful N.S.B. / Not an honest, decent man can be found / In this hopeless place by the sea’.<sup>522</sup> Mythopoeia did not take place in a vacuum, and opponents exploited fractures in the party’s performance of (Christian) respectability to undermine Mussert’s myth. Although it was naturally impossible to make the Mussert myth flawlessly convincing, the party apparatus did counter the hostile feedback and wholeheartedly engaged in a public struggle to define Mussert as a symbol of fascism. The above quotation from *De Rotterdammer* was found in a press summary compiled by the NSB’s Central Documentation Bureau, which monitored press reports from all over the country, with the aim of informing party propagandists such as speakers, and providing them with the tools to offer a rebuttal, and interject the NSB’s own narrative in a struggle to reify party myths in public discourse. VoVa was constantly engaged in a battle with hostile media,<sup>523</sup> recounting and denying unfavourable reports from the ‘lie-press’.<sup>524</sup> The NSAP was engaged in a virtually identical battle with the ‘deceitful Jewish *systempressen*’ (‘the System Press’),<sup>525</sup> but by contrast made few overt efforts to construct Lindholm as a respectable figure – certainly not in any Christian sense as Lindholm and the party showed limited sympathy for the

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christelijken zin er van niet kennen ... Het is een gruwelijk misbruik, een weerzinwekkende methode om eenvoudigen te misleiden. Desondanks (goed beschouwd moet er o.i. staan “dientengevolge” doc.) is het nationaal-socialisme van Mussert even heidensch en verwerpelijk in zijn principiële grondslag als het Duitsche, dat door hem wordt nagebootst. Onchristelijk, onhistorisch en revolutionair, concludeerde Prof. Anema. En terecht.’, *De Rotterdammer*, 19 February 1937, quoted in: NSB weekly overview (press summary, District Propaganda Chamber), 2: 10, Rotterdam, 8 March 1937, p. 50, NIOD: 123, 2.49: 1529.

<sup>521</sup> Circular no 59, Van Geelkerken, Utrecht, 24 December 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 516.

<sup>522</sup> ‘Zoo’n man moet en zal het wel weten, / Dat buiten zijn pracht N.S.B. / Geen eerlijk net mensch wordt gevonden / In ‘t hooplooze land bij de zee’, Leo Lens, *De Rotterdammer*, 20 August 1936, quoted in: Weekly overview, no 19, Rotterdam, 1 September 1936, p. 27, NIOD: 123, 2.49: 1529.

<sup>523</sup> The Socialist press complained of the party’s ceaseless insults of the national press: Newspaper clipping, ‘N.S.B. beledigd opnieuw de dagbladpers’, *Het Volk*, 9 April 1937, NIOD: KA II, 1702.

<sup>524</sup> ‘De leugenpers’, *VoVa*, no 34, 21 August 1936, p. 7.

<sup>525</sup> E.g.: Jac., ‘Nazisträdsla i den “svenska” systempressen: Fruktar demokratin öppen discussion?’, *DSN*, no 17, 21 July 1933, p. 3.

Lutheran Church and Christianity in general.<sup>526</sup> But, like Mussert, Lindholm's myth was still vulnerable to comparison with foreign dictators, opening it up to accusations of an unrespectable, un-Swedish lack of patriotism, or dangerous dictatorial tendencies. It has already been noted that Lindholm was compared to 'small-German *gauführer*' and the like, or just mockingly 'the Führer',<sup>527</sup> while the socialist Prague-based paper *Neuer Vorwärts* described Lindholm as 'a man, who gathers the lumpenproletariat under [the NSAP's] flags. His style is truly Goebblesque'.<sup>528</sup>

Both party leaders were the target of damaging comparisons to the leaders of Nazi Germany, which were made not just to make them look dangerous, but also ridiculous. Positing Hitler as an undisputed, charismatic, and impressive original,<sup>529</sup> the Swedish and Dutch leaders were juxtaposed to present a pathetic picture. In 1933 the liberal *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* described the NSB leader as "Mr Mussert playing as Hitler";<sup>530</sup> the same year the Socialist paper *Het Volk* printed photographs comparing Mussert and Hitler saluting their followers from their cars, captioned 'Like the master, so the servant!';<sup>531</sup> and *De Maasbode* described Mussert as a caricature of Hitler.<sup>532</sup> In 1937, before the general election, NRC noted sardonically that if the Netherlands was to be a dictatorship it would need a dictator 'of great stature': 'many NSB-members are already coming to their senses...'.<sup>533</sup> A 1934 biography of Mussert stated that '[h]e remained the leader of an assignment; what he was *not*: a prophet who was going to make the crowd ecstatic'.<sup>534</sup> Similarly, the Swedish priest Per Gyberg described Lindholm as a man devoid of rhetorical talent, monotonous, lacking in imagination, and clumsy in his performance – an anti-demagogue, one

<sup>526</sup> See for instance report of a speech attacking the bishops, in: -rr-, 'Nazistleve i Cirkus för revolutionen: Hr Lindholms parti skall deltaga i göteborgsvalet', *Göteborgs-Posten*, no 65, 18 March 1936, p. 8; or Lindholm letter to his sister Margit, 20 February 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1 (Sven Olov Lindholm, 1935-38).

<sup>527</sup> 'Västeråspolisen måste dra blankt vid nazistmöte', *Dagens Nyheter*, 12 September 1935, p. 6.

<sup>528</sup> '...den man, som samlar trasproletariatet under sina fanor. Hans stil är äkta göbbelsk...', *Neuer Vorwärts*, quoted in: -rot [Nils Dahlrot], 'Lindholm samlar trasproletariatet: "Hitlerapor i Sverige"', *DSN*, no 55, 17 July 1935, p. 1.

<sup>529</sup> Cf. Roger Griffin, 'Der Grösste Verführer aller Zeiten?', in *Attraktion der NS-Bewegung*, ed. by Gudrun Brockhaus (Essem: Klartext Verlag, 2014), pp. 213–26 (pp. 215–16).

<sup>530</sup> 'En de heer Mussert speelde voor Hitler...', *NRC* quoted in: 'Het groenehout aan de rottetronk', *VoVa*, no 42, 21 October 1933, p. 4.

<sup>531</sup> 'Zoo heer, zoo knecht!', Newspaper clipping, *Het Volk*, 29 October 1933, in NIOD: KA II, 1701.

<sup>532</sup> *De Maasbode*, 29 October 1935, in: NSB weekly overview, Rotterdam, 8 November 1935, p. 4, NIOD: 123, 2.49: 1529.

<sup>533</sup> '...vele NSB'ers komen al tot hun bezinning...', *NRC*, 21 February 1937, quoted in: NSB weekly overview, 2: 9, Rotterdam, 1 March 1937, p. 46, NIOD: 123, 2.49: 1529.

<sup>534</sup> 'Hij (ir. Mussert) bleef de leider van een werkstuk; wat hij *niet* was: de profeet die de menigte buiten zich zelf zou brengen.', quoted in: 'Boekbespreking: *Over Mussert*, P.H. Ritter Jr', *VoVa*, no 29, 21 July 1934, p. 7.

couldn't but help compare unfavourably to his German counterparts.<sup>535</sup> *Göteborgs-Posten* compared Lindholm favourably to Birger Furugård ('a buffoon'), but also depicted the row with other Swedish fascist leaders as childish; in Sweden the sheer plurality of competing 'little Führers' was a common way to denigrate their stature.<sup>536</sup>

Beyond the respectable press, some commentators were also happy to point out just how short Lindholm and Mussert fell from the mythic constructions produced by the party, opting for *ad hominem* approaches that portrayed them as grotesque simpletons. 'How is it possible', wrote one columnist, 'that thousands of Netherlanders "work themselves up into the hysterical worship of a completely ordinary bourgeois"'.<sup>537</sup> *De Tijd* wrote that 'mister Mussert is a completely ordinary, well-off gentleman', with an unfortunate predilection for black trousers 'which are not the most flattering on his small figure'.<sup>538</sup> 'Mister Mussert was evidently a comfortable and valued civil servant in Utrecht. That is certainly praiseworthy, it is just a pity that he was a civil servant, and no longer is.'<sup>539</sup> An exaggerated emphasis on the charismatic qualities of the Leader tended to backfire with a close examination of their actual personal qualities. While it appears the Dutch press was generally very reluctant to pry into Mussert's private life during the interwar years, one propaganda leaflet of unknown origin, most likely from 1937, took the opportunity to point out that '[o]n 19 September 1917, at the city hall at de Steeg, ANTON ADRIAAN MUSSERT, 23 years old, unemployed, married Maria Witlam, the sister of his mother, a nurse, twice as old as him. ... Mothers of sons, imagine something like that. Your son with your sister!!'<sup>540</sup> Lindholm's private life did not offer quite the same opportunities for portraying him as a perverted hypocrite of any kind, and it must be noted that his leader myth was more convincing and internally directed than Mussert's. Nevertheless the left-wing press was keen to undermine his image as the natural, tall, fit,

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<sup>535</sup> Newspaper clipping, Per Gyberg, 'Nazistisk möteskultur: På diskussion hos "Lindholmarna"', *Tidningen Freden*, 1933, no 1: 21, Arninge: 2C: 1a.

<sup>536</sup> -rr-, 'S.O. Lindholm nazistledaren', *Göteborgs-Posten*, no 283, 5 December 1933, p. 11.

<sup>537</sup> 'hoe het mogelijk is, dat duizenden Nederlanders "zich opwerken tot hysterische aanbidding van een doodgewonen burgerman"', quoted in: 'Henri roert de trom – Kroniekschrijver van den Mussert-"cultus"', *VoVa*, no 16, 17 April 1936, p. 3.

<sup>538</sup> '...de heer Mussert is een heel doodgewone, gemiddelde mijnheer; ...hij draagt allernaarste zwarte broeken, die zijn kleine gestalte niet op haar voordeelst doen uitkomen...', 'Cosmopolitica: Mussert', *De Tijd*, no 28535, 16 December 1935, p. 1.

<sup>539</sup> 'De heer Mussert is in Utrecht klaarblijkelijk een bekwaam en gewaardeerd ambtenaar geweest. Dat is voorzeker prijzenswaardig, het is alleen maar jammer, dat hij dat geweest is en niet nóg is.', *ibid.*

<sup>540</sup> 'Op 19 September 1917 huwde ANTON ADRIAAN MUSSERT, oud 23 jaar, zonder beroep, op het gemeentehuis te de Steeg, met Maria Witlam, met de zuster van zijn moeder, van beroep verpleegster, tweemaal zoo oud als hij. ... Moeders van zonen, gij moet U zooiets eens indenken. Uw zoon met Uw zuster!!', Propaganda leaflet, PH. H. ter Meulen, 'Dát is MUSSERT!', NIOD: 123, 2.01: 619.



healthy and handsome sergeant, caricaturing him as strange and ungainly, an unkempt 'nazi wastrel' and gangster boss cravenly vying for German approval [figure 5].



Figure 5. 'Gangsterledarna slåss om subsidierna', *N! S! K!*, 17 January 1939.

The inherently flawed nature of mythopoeia, particularly when focused on actual, physically present human beings, did not only cause problems with outsiders; in the interstices of the mythopoeic process scepticism grew among the members, especially higher functionaries. This was quite possibly aggravated by the hostile press representations of their leaders, which provided a sobering antidote to the fervent myth-making and overt adulation that dominated the internal party cultures. By 1940 the Swedish police had picked up on signs that some of the members were unhappy with some of Lindholm's decisions in the SSS, showing that he was far from unquestionable.<sup>541</sup> In 1937 there were already some rumblings that Lindholm was 'running out' as leader, was becoming arrogant and pompous.<sup>542</sup> One functionary, in a treasonous letter to Hermann Göring, described Lindholm as an undiplomatic and unsuitable leader 'in most people's opinion', even suggesting perhaps Birger Furugård should be made leader again.<sup>543</sup> Mussert also had his sceptics in the NSB, something that is particularly evident from some of the party's disciplinary dossiers; for instance his pro-Italian stance on the invasion of Abyssinia attracted criticism from some of the members, though others considered it wrong to say so.<sup>544</sup> In spite of the

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<sup>541</sup> Police memorandum, concerning SSS, 1 September 1939-31 December 1940, Arninge: 2B: 2.

<sup>542</sup> Police memorandum, S. Fransson, concerning factionalism in the NSAP, 27 February 1937, p. 1, Arninge: XII 64: 1.

<sup>543</sup> Letter, Gösta Larsson to Hermann Göring, 9 November 1940, transcript in: Police memorandum, concerning the Nazi movement in Gothenburg, John Westlin, 19 November 1940, pp. 1-2, Arninge: 2B: 1.

<sup>544</sup> Minutes, Meeting Disciplinary Council, case HP 68, The Hague, Hilversum, 14 March 1936, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1342.

mythopoeic attempts to construct Lindholm and Mussert as undisputed and natural leaders, they had to contend with potential alternatives to their leadership. In both cases this was made painfully evident to them in the wake of electoral failure, which provided a natural opportunity to question myths, and consider alternatives. The 1937 autumn rebellion of Department X and former WA-commander J. Hogewind highlights how those who stood closest to the Leader were also the most liable to exploit mythopoeic flaws, and revolt. The NSB rebellion may have failed, but nevertheless thousands of members left the party after the electoral disaster in May that year, an important reminder that Mussert's myth as prophetic and predestined Leader was founded and to some extent contingent on success, and by no means subscribed to by the entire membership.

Lindholm's myth was far more stable. Rather than a prophet predicting imminent and total victory, the ascetic frontline soldier-chieftain promised a long and hard struggle demanding the utmost discipline as per his own example. Consequently, the opening for scepticism and outright rebellion did not immediately come from the lack of electoral success – never as dramatic as the NSB's loss of half its vote in 1937 – but from his and the Party Leadership's decision to alter and even reverse the mythopoeia the party apparatus had worked on for years. After years of constructing Lindholm as the moral and uncompromising revolutionary Leader of Swedish fascism, the New Direction [*nyorientering*] created a new, respectable Lindholm, a suited nationalist politician open for compromise with other parties.



Figure 6. Front page picture of Lindholm, *DSN*, no 35, 1938.

This was a gradual process. Although the official announcement of the *nyorientering* came at the end of October 1938, for the past year and half at least, members could spot that change was afoot. Not only was some of the anti-Semitic rhetoric toned down, but the pictures of Lindholm were increasingly not of the Leader in uniform, but neat and kempt in a suit and tie [see figure 6]. When he announced the changes at a meeting in Stockholm, attendees noted he was behaving very oddly:

Lindholm finished his speech by letting out a fourfold 'long live' the N.S.A.P.!? Now there were some members who cheered, and others who 'hailed', and some who kept silent. Was Lindholm drunk or had he become bourgeois? It had never happened before in the history of the N.S.A.P., that an ordinary member had 'long-lived' [the party], and now the leader himself did it. What was the meaning of this? [...] The meeting was finished with a very strange – not to mention oppressive – atmosphere.<sup>545</sup>

The change in image and behaviour was striking, and members immediately picked up on the shift towards respectability, something which could only be profoundly damaging of the charismatic bond that was integral to the Lindholm myth. In January 1939 the party organ even published a remarkable deconstruction and denial of Lindholm's myth. A transcript of a speech by the leader himself stated that 'already in the beginning of our community of struggle I warned that you should not regard me as some kind of super human or wizard, but I have promised to fight honourably and place myself foremost in line for our sacred cause'.<sup>546</sup> Lindholm, previously a living symbol of fascism, now found that there were other symbols to rival him, symbols which retained their mythic charge. When part of the NSAP/SSS broke away to form *Solkorset* (The Sun Cross), under the leadership of the SA branch leaders Nils Björkman and John E. Runefelt, they portrayed it as an act of loyalty to the swastika, and the ideas it represented. In abandoning the old myth of the radical and uncompromising Leader under the swastika banner, and compromising

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<sup>545</sup> 'Lindholm slutade sitt anförande med att utbringa ett fyrfaldigt leve för N.S.A.P.!? Nu var det en del medlemmar, som hurrade, en del som "hellade" och en del som teg. Var Lindholm full eller hade han blivit borgare? Det hade förut aldrig hänt i N.S.A.P.:s historia, att ens en vanlig medlem utbringat "ett leve", och nu gjorde själva ledaren detta. [...] Mötet avslutades under en mycket underlig – för att icke säga betryckt – stämning.', Confidential police informant memorandum, 14 October 1938, p. 2, Arninge: XII 64: 2.

<sup>546</sup> 'Jag varnade redan i början av vår kampgemenskap för att ni skulle betrakta mig som någon sorts övermänniska eller trollkarl, men jag har lovat att ärligt strida och ställa mig främst i ledet för vår heliga sak...', 'Partiets 6-årsdag firad i Stockholm', *Den Svenske Folksocialisten (DSF)*, no 6, 25 January 1939, p. 5.

with Jewish capital (it was rumoured), Lindholm had betrayed the cadres and the NSAP's ethos intrinsic to the Leader myth: a frontline fighter, one of and equal to his own. 'We National Socialists are loyal to our leader, as long as he is loyal to us. One for all – all for one.'<sup>547</sup>



In 1932-33, neither Lindholm nor Mussert fit the then established mould of the charismatic fascist Leader. Both had years of political experience of one kind or another, and were used to more conventional relations to their colleagues and followers. With the establishment of their own fascist parties, they quickly found themselves under pressure from the party's lower echelons to perform the part of the fascist leader. With the active support of their colleagues at the top, the party apparatus started the mythopoeic process straight away. While this initial period was *mutatis mutandis* the same in both movements, the following stages diverged significantly. The NSAP quickly established Lindholm as a young Nordic chieftain, fighting for his followers as the first among equals, and the living embodiment of the fascist idea. This remarkably insular myth saw little change or variation from 1933 to circa 1937, nor did it need to. Relatively unconcerned with any external notions of respectability and not expecting major electoral success or growth in the near-future, it could afford to strengthen Lindholm's bonds with his followers and, at least at first, ceaselessly mobilise the cadres on a path of continuous sacrifice. It must however be added that the scarce resources of the NSAP limited the efficacy of this strategy: establishing loyalty through personal contact was difficult with Sweden's geography, even as financial necessity dictated such a cost-free method.

In the NSB on the other hand, 1932-34 saw an attempt to establish *ir*. Mussert as a respectable nationalist politician, a responsible and even technocratic alternative to the corrupt and failing parliamentary government, but firstly found that this failed to satisfy the devotional demands from the cadres, and secondly that the pointed measures taken by the authorities, secular and spiritual, undermined that narrative. In the second half of the decade, spurred on by the electoral success of 1935, the party organisation set to work to recreate Mussert as a priestly

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<sup>547</sup> 'Vi nationalsocialister äro lojala mot vår ledare, så länge denne är lojal mot oss. En för alla – alla för en.', Police memorandum, concerning *Solkors* meeting, 13 February 1939, p. 2, Arninge: 4A: 1.

figure who had foreseen the future, and heeding God's call, was leading his people to national resurrection. It was a fantastic myth, and seemed to put an end to internal complaints about the banal and bourgeois leader, while simultaneously offsetting concerns about the growth of pseudo-pagan discourse and symbolism in the party around the same time. The NSB and the NSAP show that mythopoeia was by no means linear. While different stages can be discerned, the phases were intertwined, and various myths co-existed at the same time, with different intensities and trajectories – especially in Mussert's case. Neither leader hit upon any kind of 'winning formula' that would stabilise or focus mythopoeia.

The Dutch general elections of 1937 demonstrated the inherent problems. The party leadership's response to the more fanatic parts of the membership may have had great mobilising potential, but to many outsiders it was evidently perceived as sanctimonious at best, and dangerous cultic behaviour at worst – Satanic worship. However, internally the Mussert myth was of considerable value in maintaining party cohesion at this difficult time. The 1937 challenge to Mussert's authority was seen off quickly and without endangering the party organisation, as the Leader exploited the cult of the leader to mobilise his loyalists to counter the rebellion. In the period of 1937-40 mythopoeia remained in the same register, with no real changes made until the hectic days of the Occupation. Even in the latter period Mussert managed to maintain a loyal following, which desperately placed its trust in him as their saviour until the final collapse in May 1945.<sup>548</sup>

Lindholm may never have faced a rebellion of any sort had the NSAP leadership not radically altered the mythopoeic course in 1937-38. Doubtless there were already some murmurs of dissatisfaction before then. The cadres could not be permanently mobilised, and the lack of notable progress in the elections reflected badly on the party's first and foremost activist, leading to dangerous levels of frustration. Where Mussert saw off a revolt by exploiting the charismatic bonds that his myth had forged, the NSAP leadership wilfully cut them by reversing much of the mythopoeia in a turn to political respectability, hoping to catch more votes and members. The subsequent *Solkors* break-away put the spotlight on alternative objects of devotion to the mythic Lindholm. The rebellion the following year of the young and radical Arne Clementsson and the

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<sup>548</sup> Kunkeler, 'Narratives of Decline in the Dutch National Socialist Movement, 1931-1945', pp. 19–20.

NU underlined the willingness of others to perform the myth of charismatic Leader.<sup>549</sup> While Lindholm survived the internal turmoil, some level of scepticism and unrest persisted for years to come, while the SSS continued to haemorrhage followers even as it sought to establish an alliance with other far-right organisations.

Respectability did not seem to be of any real concern to the NSAP for most of the 1930s, but as the years went on the Leader himself, active as a fascist politician since 1926, started to feel the frustration of being perpetually on the fringe. Contrary to Mussert, who after little more than a year experienced spectacular political success, and subsequently settled into a, more or less, comfortable if limiting niche between fantastic myth and respectability, the NSAP had effectively painted Lindholm into a corner. The radical and uncompromising embodiment of the idea was going nowhere fast, but turning away from this myth could not be anything but profoundly damaging to Lindholm's authority, and the prestige of the party, so painstakingly acquired over the decade as it had outperformed and outlasted other fascist contenders. The tendency of the Leader myth to supplant the party itself that has been observed in Germany and Italy, was not present in the NSAP or NSB.<sup>550</sup> In different ways, and with varying if ultimately similar results, both Lindholm and Mussert were caught up in a myth-making dialectic that could neither fully satisfy their cadres nor the respectable electorate at the same time.

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<sup>549</sup> See notification of Clementsson's removal: 'Meddelanden: Meddelande från Plg.', *DSN*, no 3, 14 January 1939, p. 5.

<sup>550</sup> George L. Mosse, *The Culture of Western Europe* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1974), pp. 335–36.

### 3. The Uniform: fantasy, violence, discipline

The fascist uniform was a cultural nexus of peculiar importance in the struggle to assert the meaning and nature of fascism. No other prop in the political performances of the NSB and NSAP carried the same weight of signification, was so heavily inscribed with symbolism. The association between uniforms and fascism was not inevitable, but well-established by the early thirties. Both parties drew on this, in self-conscious homage to the precedents of Mussolini's Blackshirts and the brown-shirted SA of the NSDAP. The shirt of the appropriate colour was the most recognisable part these uniforms, but not the only one. Various other articles of clothing, accessories, and insignia completed the uniform, each part echoing the whole. At their full potential, the uniforms were worn collectively in larger groups, a full ensemble worn with insignia, in a march or similar ritual occasion with flags, music, and other symbols, which underlined a militaristic discipline that the NSAP and NSB were keen to exhibit. Therefore, while the uniform is the focus of this chapter, it must also deal with the wider culture of symbols and behaviour of the rank-and-file that was directly linked to the garments.

While the ubiquity of uniforms in fascist political culture has been widely acknowledged and discussed, especially in the German historiography, analysis has rarely been in great depth. Many historians have dismissed uniforms and the associated signs, symbols, and paraphernalia as too superficial to be worth discussing.<sup>551</sup> For instance Gerhard Paul's otherwise insightful study of visual Nazi propaganda before 1933, *Aufstand der Bilder* (1990), only has little over one page on the ubiquitous uniform specifically.<sup>552</sup> A more detailed and holistic analysis of fascist uniforms has been made by Sven Reichardt in *Faschistischer Kampfbünde* (2009), looking into the German SA and Italian *squadristi*, and through a cultural-pragmatic lens. Reichardt's research reveals some of the practical issues behind the images of uniformed troops that Gerhard Paul studied, and connects this to the emotional effect they sought to produce. Rather than just using a propaganda angle on uniforms, Reichardt also comments on the social cohesion and political identity that uniforms facilitated.<sup>553</sup> But mostly uniforms have been studied as one small part of a larger

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<sup>551</sup> Helmuth Auerbach, 'Nationalsozialismus vor Hitler', in *Der Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Ideologie und Herrschaft*, ed. by W. Benz and H. Mommsen (Frankfurt am Main: Geschichte Fischer, 1993), p. 22.

<sup>552</sup> Paul, pp. 174–75.

<sup>553</sup> Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, pp. 576–86.

spectacle, rather than as a nexus of fascist culture and myth, to which other symbols and behaviours can be viewed as secondary.<sup>554</sup>

Scholars have also placed the uniform in a wider political and social context, noting the tactical uses of uniforms in fascist paramilitaries, the impact of uniformed men on the street,<sup>555</sup> or analysing it as a symptom of the mass politics of the modern era.<sup>556</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, for such an obviously cultural phenomenon, it has rarely been studied in terms of cultural production. Historians with a specifically cultural approach to fascism, such as George L. Mosse, Emilio Gentile, or Roger Griffin have tended to overlook the uniform. But there are exceptions, of sorts, one of which is Klaus Theweleit's (now somewhat dated) psychoanalytical study of Freikorps literature, *Männerphantasien* (1983), which explores the fascist relationship to the body and sexuality. Again it is not the uniform specifically which is highlighted here, but the interface of military culture and pseudo-sexual fantasy relevant. Theweleit's analysis, while rather ahistorical, does understand the militaristic objects and behaviour of the soldiers as *producing* reality, and the manifestation of a fantasy, which makes it highly applicable to the mythopoeic project discussed here. Theweleit, then, attempted to reconstruct the mythical content of the fascist imagination.<sup>557</sup>

Here even the most improbable actions were redolent with significance. The simplest salute became a symbol of submission to an authority that bound both parties in mutually fruitful association. The slow march, tempo one hundred fourteen, became the physical and spiritual expression of discipline to the brink of death. [...] In the first instance, what the troop-machine produces is itself – itself as a totality that places the individual soldier in a new set of relations to other bodies; itself as a combination of innumerable identically polished components.<sup>558</sup>

Theweleit brought out the significative richness of the actions and signs associated with military life. But, while the psychological dimension of fascist uniforms is unavoidable, this chapter frames the fantastic and performative dimensions of the uniform in cultural terms: their primary

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<sup>554</sup> Eichberg and Jones.

<sup>555</sup> Vincent, p. 395.

<sup>556</sup> Nadine Rossol, 'Performing the Nation: Sports, Spectacles, and Aesthetics in Germany, 1926-1936', *Central European History*, 43.4 (2010), 616–38 (p. 622); Carl Levy, 'Fascism, National Socialism and Conservatives in Europe, 1914-1945: Issues for Comparativists', *Contemporary European History*, 8.1 (1999), 97–126 (p. 107).

<sup>557</sup> Jessica Benjamin and Anson Rabinbach, foreword to: Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, II: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), p. xvii.

<sup>558</sup> Theweleit, pp. 153, 155.



significance is their role in asserting the meaning of fascism in a national context. Secondly, unlike any previous analyses, this chapter puts the uniform in focus, with everything understood only in relation to the uniform, as a means of foregrounding the importance of this mythopoeic prop in the cultural understanding of fascism.

The Swedish and Dutch governments were well aware of the power political uniforms could possess, and in 1933, with an eye on developments in central and southern Europe, passed legislation prohibiting the wearing of political uniforms in public.<sup>559</sup> Compared to their Dutch equivalent, the Swedish regulations were vague and not very comprehensive, prohibiting '[t]he wearing of a uniform or similar dress, which serves to highlight the wearer's political orientation'.<sup>560</sup> The legislation was technically a warrant for local authorities (made into law in 1947),<sup>561</sup> leaving it up to them to wrestle with questions as to what and how many garments constituted a uniform, and whether or not they indeed indicated a specific political orientation.<sup>562</sup> In the Netherlands, Article 435a – partially inspired by Sweden<sup>563</sup> – stated that: 'He who publicly wears, or carries, garments, or conspicuous marks of distinction, which are expression of a particular political orientation, will be punished with incarceration of a maximum of twelve days or a pecuniary fine of at most one hundred and fifty guilders.'<sup>564</sup> This law had been proposed already in 1932, initiated by conservative concerns about communism,<sup>565</sup> but was only implemented when the rapid growth of the NSB could no longer be ignored.<sup>566</sup> The Dutch law too had its ambiguities, particularly whether certain marks or insignia were indeed conspicuous [*opzichtig*], and whether certain uniforms, garments or similar could really be regarded as being

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<sup>559</sup> The Swedish law was in force from 1 August 1933, the Dutch law 23 September 1933.

<sup>560</sup> 'Bärande av uniform eller liknande klädedräkt, som tjänar att utmärka bärarens politiska meningsriktning, vare förbjudet.' Booklet, Organisation document no 2, *Instruktioner för Frontavdelningar (I.F.) inom NSAP*, 1938, pp. 24-25, Arninge: 2H1.

<sup>561</sup> Thomas Bull and Anders Heiborn, 'Uniformsförbudet, tiden och grundlagen', *Svensk Juristtidning*, 1996, 328–47 (p. 329).

<sup>562</sup> See especially Lindholm diary, August 1933.

<sup>563</sup> Newspaper clipping, 'De overheid contra de georganiseerde wanorde', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28 July 1933, NIOD: KA II, 2296.

<sup>564</sup> 'Hij die in het openbaar kledingstukken of opzichtige onderscheidingsteekenen draagt of voert, welke uitdrukking zijn van een bepaald staatkundig streven, wordt gestraft met hechtenis van ten hoogste twaalf dagen of geldboete van ten hoogste honderd vijftig gulden.' Addition to the Penal Code, Session 1933-231, Law Draft no 2 ('Aanvulling van het Wetboek van Strafrecht met het oog op kledingstukken en onderscheidingsteekenen, welke uitdrukking zijn van een bepaald staatkundig streven'), NSB newspaper clippings collection, NIOD: Amsterdam, KA II: 1701.

<sup>565</sup> See for instance the Anti-Revolutionary commentary of: 'Het Uniformverbod', *De Standaard*, no 18 833, 8 September 1933, p. 1.

<sup>566</sup> Verhagen, p. 291.

the expression of a political orientation.<sup>567</sup> Thus the bans on uniforms, while they were in many ways effective, could not fully seal off this particular mythopoeic wellspring. Apart from outright flouting the law, fascists found subtle ways of circumventing it, leading to repeated public debate about the efficacy of the law and the threat of fascism, keeping the issue alive throughout the decade. The laws only applied to uniforms worn in public, making the legal distinction between private and public crucial to party meetings, and retaining a well-defined place for the uniform in the party.

Evocative in the extreme, and indelibly tied to the performativity of its wearer, the uniform was an unstable signifier. The evocations of the fascist uniform were equivocal, and prey to infelicitous associations. The inherent militarism, paradoxically at once denied and encouraged by the party apparatus, imbued the clothing with the threat, or promise, of violence. The unity it symbolised strengthened the feeling of comradeship, while marking fascists as outsiders.<sup>568</sup> The allusion to the German brownshirts and Italian blackshirts made native fascists part of something much bigger than a national movement, even when their own organisation remained small, but undermined their patriotic credentials.<sup>569</sup> Fascist political uniforms proved to be powerful mythopoeic objects, and were strong amplifiers of fascist performances and spectacles, but dangerously double-edged. As a lynchpin in much of the public discourse about fascism in its most militaristic guise, the uniform functioned as a defining battle site in the cultural shaping of the national understanding about fascism and its role in national political life. This made it an obvious target for unsympathetic interpretations, but as party commitment to this symbol showed, the key role it played in the fascist symbolic order guaranteed its place in the fascist mythologies.

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<sup>567</sup> See for instance the case against John Boddé and his wearing of the party insignia in a court of law, in: ‘Ons insigne voor den Hoogen Raad’, *VoVa*, no 2, 12 January 1935, p. 3.

<sup>568</sup> As many scholars have argued, violence could be cathartic and liberating for the perpetrators: Mann, p. 29; it could also bind the perpetrators together, united by mutual participation in a transgressive act: Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, pp. 39–40; Artistotle Kallis, ‘Fascism, “Licence” and Genocide: From the Chimera of Rebirth to the Authorization of Mass Murder’, in *Rethinking the Nature of Fascism: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by António Costa Pinto (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 227–70 (p. 257).

<sup>569</sup> Cf.: Nathaniël Kunkeler, ‘The Evolution of Swedish Fascism: Self-Identification and Ideology in Interwar Sweden’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 50.4–5 (2016), 378–97.

## I

In its most basic form, the uniform of the NSAP and the NSB consisted of a shirt – a brown one in the former, a black one in the latter. In the NSAP standard models were available from the party supply service, though they could be purchased elsewhere as long as they followed the required model. The Swedish police has left precise notes on the NSAP shirts from the 1935 raid of the Gothenburg headquarters, which describe a military style shirt, highly reminiscent of German SA-shirts: ‘made of a brown khaki fabric, provided with epaulettes, double-folded collar, two breast pockets ... one row of buttons at the front, consisting of five brown buttons, a waistband at the bottom, with five belt loops. All the buttons in two of the shirts had grooves, resembling swastikas...’<sup>570</sup> No such descriptions for the black shirts of the NSB seem to exist, perhaps lost when NIOD destroyed large batches of correspondence regarding uniforms to save archival space.<sup>571</sup> None of the NSB regulations prescribe a certain model or even style of shirt, so that in practice members ironically tended not to wear particularly uniform shirts. Apart from the famous shirt, the only other part of the fascist uniform that was considered absolutely essential was the party insignia: in the NSAP a swastika, worn on the left lapel when in civilian dress,<sup>572</sup> for NSB-members a triangular emblem featuring a rampant gold lion, against a black and red background. ‘Wear your insignia!’ *VoVa* reminded readers in every issue.<sup>573</sup> A small enamel pin was a cheap and easy way of readily identifying oneself and others as fascists. Shirt and insignia were only the minimum requirement however, and a full body uniform was desirable.

In Sweden the brown shirt was ideally worn with shoulder boards indicating district and branch, a blue armband, featuring a yellow swastika, as well as a brown tie, brown visor cap, and a claw belt on the waist with a shoulder strap [*koppel*]. Trousers were ideally breeches in brown, grey, or a similar colour, with leather boots, but not shoes.<sup>574</sup> Dutch uniform regulations were not as extensive. If a 1935 proposal by WA-leader J. Hogewind was actually implemented, as seems likely, the rank-and-file simply needed a black shirt with a black tie, decorated with a thin red-

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<sup>570</sup> ‘Blusarna voro förfärdigade av brunt khakityg, försedda med axelklaffar, dubbelvikt krage, två bröstfickor ... en knappad rakt fram, bestående av fem bruna knappar, linningar nedtill, vari funnos fem sleifar för livrem. Samtliga knappar i två av blusarna voro försedda med skårer, liknande hakkors...’ Inventory after raid of NSAP’s treasury office, in: Gothenburg SA police report, 1935, pp. 49-50.

<sup>571</sup> Bockxmeer, p. 229.

<sup>572</sup> NSAP, SA, and A-Group confiscated documents, in: Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 66.

<sup>573</sup> As well as the occasions for any public meeting. E.g.: Booklet, Programme for the Third Party Convention, Amsterdam, 30 March 1935, pp. 28, 49, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid*, p. 64.

white-blue stripe; the insignia; and dark trousers, with a black belt. A suit jacket over the shirt was permitted. For functionaries of the rank of Circle Leader or higher, uniforms were more elaborate, and included breeches, boots, and a visor cap.<sup>575</sup> For instance, members of the Disciplinary Council, when possible, wore a grey uniform jacket with trousers, a waist belt and shoulder strap, and an armband indicating the department and rank of the wearer.<sup>576</sup> Higher functionaries were a fairly rare sight however, so the most striking impression was made by the party paramilitaries. The Swedish *Stormavdelning* uniform closely resembled that of the ordinary members; a black tie instead of a brown tie on the shirt, collar tabs, special insignia, and a brown coat for winter.<sup>577</sup> Members of the *Weerafdeling* on the other hand stood out strongly from their NSB counterparts, wearing the black shirt with an all-black uniform consisting of jacket, breeches, riding boots or shoes with leather gaiters, waist belt and shoulder strap, visor cap, and assorted insignia indicating rank.<sup>578</sup> It is notable that the NSAP in Sweden eschewed jackets, and made a far less formal impression than the NSB with its black and grey uniforms, which evoked a mixture of militarism and cleanliness, instead of the egalitarian simplicity of the plain brown shirts.

To create something of an actually uniform impression, the thousands of party members had to be actually supplied with their uniforms and associated paraphernalia. After an initial stage when the NSAP Leadership itself supplied materials via Party Treasurer Karl Kristern,<sup>579</sup> Lennart Fornander was in charge of the supply service (*partiintendentur, Pi.*), which stocked all garments and insignia required, where they could be bought by members individually or via branch leaders.<sup>580</sup> Uniforms could be acquired from independent suppliers,<sup>581</sup> but members had to request the correct dimensions and other details from the supply service; the NSAP was keen to ensure members' uniforms were identical.<sup>582</sup> Shirts cost 6 kr, party insignia 1.50, and a waist belt no less than 4.25 kr. A full uniform for a SA member, boots not included, cost in total as much as 17.75 kr, and doubtless had to be acquired piece by piece by many members, who were often unemployed,

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<sup>575</sup> Concept, WA Inspector, 5 July 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 50.

<sup>576</sup> Letter, F.B.J. Gips to A.J. Aeilkema, The Hague, 27 October 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.56: 2020.

<sup>577</sup> NSAP, SA, and A-Group confiscated documents, in: Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 65.

<sup>578</sup> Concept, WA Inspector, 5 July 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 50, p. 3.

<sup>579</sup> Interrogation SO Lindholm, 15 February 1935, in: Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 164.

<sup>580</sup> E.g.: Letter, Ove Adamsson to Southern District, Karlskrona, 25 [month illegible] 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 4, Karlskrona (1934-38).

<sup>581</sup> E.g. Lundins paper store in Stockholm: NSAP circular, Stockholm, 15 April 1937, Arninge: XII 64: 1.

<sup>582</sup> *Tjänsteföreskrifter* (TF), 1937, p. 36.

or underage.<sup>583</sup> The uniform of a regular member did not cost much less. The desirable leather boots were not supplied by the party's supply service, and were a considerable expense for members – one letter to a Karlskrona member looking for leather boots at a reasonable price received the reply that boots regionally cost about 33 kronor ready-made, and 45 kronor custom-made.<sup>584</sup> It is not surprising that hiking boots with leg wraps or similar were an acceptable alternative. It might also offer a clue as to why the proud owners of actual leather riding boots [see also fig. 1, ch. 1] tended to wear them even after the law against political uniforms got them in trouble with the authorities.<sup>585</sup>

Dutch party members were looking at similar prices, but the NSB supply service (Department VII, *Dienst Materiaal*) headed by A.J. Hartman, did not supply full uniforms, only insignia and minor accessories.<sup>586</sup> Instead shirts had to be bought from independent suppliers, who happily advertised their black shirts in *VoVa*, for prices of *f*2-3, roughly equivalent to the cost of the NSAP's shirts.<sup>587</sup> This made any major party occasion that called for uniforms an excellent advertisement opportunity.<sup>588</sup> However, a full uniform for a member of the WA cost far more than that of his SA equivalent. At a Headquarters meeting in 1935, concerns were raised that while 80% of members were workers, the uniform cost *f*17 or *f*18, which most could not afford.<sup>589</sup> WA-members had to pay for their own uniform, which they could pay off piece by piece via their WA company (*Vendel*) administrator.<sup>590</sup> It must have been an egregious expense, given that the uniform could not be worn in public after 1933. The grey uniform of higher functionaries was even more expensive. The Utrecht-based suppliers which Headquarters recommended to functionaries of the disciplinary councils cost as much as *f*62.50.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> 'Meddelande från Plg', *DSN*, no 3, 18 January 1934, p. 2.

<sup>584</sup> Letter, Ds. to Ove Adamsson, 22 January 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Södra Distriktet (1934).

<sup>585</sup> It is intriguing how closely photographed these boots were at times, with what Maiken Umbach has termed 'an intensity bordering on fetishisation'. Umbach, p. 350.

<sup>586</sup> Booklet, *Prijslijst van Materiaal*, Utrecht, August 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.10: 857.

<sup>587</sup> E.g. see the advertisement in: *VoVa*, no 3, 21 January 1933, p. 3, or: *VoVa*, no 21, 27 May 1933, p. 1.

<sup>588</sup> See for instance the advertisements in: Brochure, *Programma van den Gewestelijken Landdag*, Amsterdam, 28 April 1934, p. 16, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 25. To a lesser extent the same happened in Sweden: *DSN*, no 12, 22 March 1934, p. 5.

<sup>589</sup> Minutes for meeting 11 July 1935, in: Book, meeting minutes *Algemeene Raad*, §1, p. 29, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

<sup>590</sup> Booklet, WA Organisation, *NSB-126a*, §64, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1005.

<sup>591</sup> Letter, F.B.J. Gips to A.J. Aeilkema, Den Haag, 27 October 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.56: 2020.

In the 1935 police interrogation of Lindholm, he noted a strong decline in the members' demand for uniforms after the 1933 ban – understandably, given the costs.<sup>592</sup> One can imagine a similar trend in the NSB, though of course the party administration did not have any direct insight into actual purchases outside of the WA. The laws against political uniforms had created a sharp division between the appearance of the party internally, and the party in public. Generally, instructions give the impression that the leadership responded to the ban by an even greater insistence that members should wear the uniform any time when legally possible, and one can imagine members were more than happy to if they had already bought one. '[T]he uniform ought to always be worn as often as possible in all closed meetings and all services for the NSB, in which one does not come in conflict with the uniform ban.'<sup>593</sup> 'Every member, who has the slightest opportunity to do so, should acquire one. Both at members' meetings and other internal meetings there are opportunities to wear the new socialism's exhorting symbol. *Wear the brown shirt!*'<sup>594</sup> The NSAP's internal organisational paper *Porg* reminded functionaries that the order to wear the uniform 'is still valid and *now even more so*, when wearing it in public is forbidden'.<sup>595</sup> For the 1935 NSB party convention in The Hague [see chapter 4], only uniformed WA-members could participate in the ceremonial march,<sup>596</sup> while a directive for the 1934 NSAP party convention ordered all participants to immediately acquire a uniform if they did not have one already.<sup>597</sup> For most of this period then, the black or brown shirt was worn only at members' meetings, at internal party events, but not at public rallies and the like, or even individually on the street. Legally, the only way an outsider in the Netherlands would encounter a fascist in uniform was if they were invited, as a sympathiser or otherwise, to a closed party meeting. In the Netherlands the legal journal *Recht* published an article in 1936 about fascist meetings which were found to have been public in character, and therefore uniformed members in breach of Article 435a. The article was

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<sup>592</sup> Interrogation SO Lindholm, 15 February 1935, in: Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, pp. 165-66.

<sup>593</sup> '...dient de uniform zooveel mogelijk steeds gedragen te worden in alle besloten bijeenkomsten en bij alle diensten voor de N.S.B., waarbij men niet in strijd komt met het uniform verbod.' Concept, WA Inspector, 5 July 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 50, p. 1.

<sup>594</sup> 'Därför bör varje medlem, som har den ringaste möjlighet därtill, anskaffa densamma. Både på medlemsmöten och andra interna möten finnes det tillfällen att bära den nya socialismens manande symbol. *Bär brunskjorta!*', Circular no 30, 'Kamporder' 3 October, 1934, Arninge: 2B1: 2.

<sup>595</sup> '...gäller alltjämt och än mera nu, när det offentliga bärandet är förbjudet.' Emphasis in original. *Porg*, no 12, December 1935, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>596</sup> Circular, J. Hogewind to all WA and RWA commanders, Utrecht, August 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1046.

<sup>597</sup> Circular, 'Kamporder' 3 May, 1934, Arninge: 2B: 1.

recommended reading for members.<sup>598</sup> When members had to travel to a meeting or function which required the uniform, public spaces were traversed fully covered up. For the 1935 convention in Amsterdam, WA-members were ordered to travel to the venue in full uniform, but with no visible parts exposed. 'An (old) *long* pair of trousers will be worn over the boots and uniform breeches. The cap will be taken with you wrapped up in paper or fabric.'<sup>599</sup> For other occasions the NSB supply service had made 'blackshirt protectors' available for 40 cents: a kind of collar, buttoned around the neck, with an attached scarf of some sort, which could be unfolded to cover up the black shirt with one of six colours (purple, yellow, dark blue, orange, green, and light blue). 'Especially the effect of the upcoming *Landdag* march through the streets of Amsterdam will be elevated, if these colourful protectors are worn a lot, and the procession will be given a gay appearance', a circular explained optimistically.<sup>600</sup>

In spite of prohibitions and exhortations, there were still disagreements between the leadership and the rank-and-file membership as to when uniforms should be worn. It is evident from Swedish police observations that many members did not wear a uniform even to internal meetings.<sup>601</sup> The fact that NSB and NSAP circulars and other directives several years after the ban still urged members to wear their uniform or shirt at all possible times is indicative of a disciplinary problem in this regard. This problem came to the fore in the case of party insignia, where the scope for wearing them was more extensive, yet many members still neglected to wear it. *Porg* complained at the end of 1935 that there were still too many members who 'could not stretch out their hand [in salute], [and] don't wear the party insignia'.<sup>602</sup> In a 1936 NSB disciplinary case in Hilversum, one member outright stated that: 'I personally do not attach the slightest value to the pin and the black shirt'.<sup>603</sup> The value of the uniform and attendant insignia was by no means valued equally by all members, and the acquisition and even wearing of uniforms whole, or in part,

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<sup>598</sup> Circular no 26, Central Bureau of Propaganda to all Circle Leaders, Amsterdam, 7 May 1936, The Hague: 2.19.49: 4.

<sup>599</sup> 'Orders W.A. en R.W.A.', in: Circular, J. Hogewind to all Circle Leaders, Utrecht, 8 March 1935, p. 1, The Hague: 2.19.49: 3.

<sup>600</sup> 'Vooral het effect van den a.s. Landdag-optocht door Amsterdam's straten zal, indien deze zeer kleurige beschermers veel worden gedragen, verhoogd worden en de stoet zal er een fleurig aanzien door krijgen.', Circular, to all Circle Leaders and Independent Group Leaders, Utrecht, 18 February 1935, The Hague: 2.19.49: 3.

<sup>601</sup> See for instance: Police memorandum concerning NSAP meeting, 3 September 1936, Arninge: 2C: 6.

<sup>602</sup> 'Det finns alltför många partikamrater som inte kan sträcka upp handen, inte bära partimärket...', *Porg*, no 12, December 1935, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>603</sup> 'Ik persoonlijk hecht niet de minste waarde aan het speldje en het zwarte hemd.', Minutes, Meeting of High Disciplinary Council, case HP 81, Comrade L. [name restricted], Hilversum, Hilversum, 20 April 1936, p. 5, in NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1343.

had its obstacles. Yet for all those troubles, and more, the uniform remained a staple of fascist performances until the end.

## II

Not just aesthetic clothing or practical outfits, the fascists' uniforms were rich in associations and symbolism, already before they arrived on the national stage. The fascist political uniform was not left to speak for itself, but was consciously imbued with a party-particular ideological symbolism, most overtly through its discursive construction in party publications. 'Symbols', in Jeffrey Schnapp's words, 'were a privileged site of self-definition for fascism'.<sup>604</sup> The NSAP's leading ideologue and Lindholm's friend, Per Dahlberg, argued in the wake of the ban that 'National Socialism concerns a state of mind, National Socialism does not reside in the brown shirt, which is merely a symbol and service garment [*tjänstedräkt*] in the struggle for the fatherland of the future'.<sup>605</sup> In the words of the party directives, TF: '[t]he National Socialists' service clothes are a symbolic expression of the struggle we wage. For us it is not some kind of military uniform, but a working shirt which makes us all equal in our duties for the same goal'.<sup>606</sup> In 1938, an order from Mussert regarding symbols in the NSB explained:

The Movement has started its struggle for the resurrection of our People with as external signs: the black shirt and the fascist salute, the black-red flag, and the insignia. The black shirt is our official dress, adopted in honour of Mussolini and his blackshirts, who have given the signal for the resurrection of Europe, accepted as an expression of our comradely cohesion in the struggle for People and Fatherland. [...] None of us would ever think of taking away these external signs of our struggle.<sup>607</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> Schnapp, p. 6.

<sup>605</sup> 'Nationalsocialismen är en *sinnelagets* angelägenhet, nationalsocialismen sitter ej i den bruna skjortan som blott är en symbol och tjänstedräkt i kampen för framtidens fosterland.', P.D., 'Uniformsförbudet', *DSN*, no 12, 1 June 1933, p. 5.

<sup>606</sup> 'Nationalsocialisternas tjänstedräkt är ett symboliskt uttryck för den kamp vi föra. För oss är den icke någon militäruniform utan en arbetsskjorta som gör oss alla lika i plikterna för samma sak.' NSAP, SA, and A-Group confiscated documents, in: Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 66.

<sup>607</sup> 'De Beweging is haar strijd voor de wederopstanding van ons Volk begonnen met als uiterlijke teekenen: het zwarte hemd en den fascistengroet, de zwart-roode vlag en het insigne. Het zwarte hemd is onze officieele dracht, aangenomen ter eere van Mussolini en zijn zwarthemden, die het sein hebben gegeven voor de wederopstanding van Europa, aanvaard als uitdrukking van onze kameraadschappelijke verbondenheid in den strijd voor Volk en Vaderland. [...] Niemand onzer zal ooit er aan denken, deze uiterlijke kenteekenen van onzen strijd weg te nemen.' Mussert order, 'Uit de Beweging: ORDER van den Leider ten aanzien van vlaggen, insignes en zwart hemd', 14 June 1938, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 79.



Community and equality in struggle were themes both the NSB and the NSAP emphasised, and both consciously referenced foreign fascist movements in their choice of colour. A united community of militants, in which all class differences were obliterated in the service of a common cause: the Fatherland; part of a new political age that was sweeping across Europe.

But, in spite of Mussert's protestations to the contrary, the external signs were not static in either party, not least on account of the awkward dynamic between militarism and respectability. The uniform constantly evoked militarism, but the parties, especially the NSB, were keen to temper this inevitable association with respectability. Sven Reichardt noted the effect of the uniform as a metaphor for militaristic violence, but the NSAP and NSB were careful to keep such symbolism in the background.<sup>608</sup> One illustrative example is NU-leader Arne Clementsson's 1937 article on the meaning of soldiers. 'When someone in Sweden in these days of decline mentions the word *soldier*, everyone recoils and see in their mind's eye the militarised dictatorships on the march, threateningly prepared to crush the last outpost of culture – the democratic North.'<sup>609</sup> Clementsson shows the NSAP was self-conscious about the problematic associations of a uniform. He argued for a distinction between the *military* and the *soldierly*, fascism embodying the latter. In an analogous case, VoVa wrote that 'National Socialist self-control' [*tucht*] was 'disciplinary, not military'.<sup>610</sup> The often precarious legal situation of the party organisations shaped discourse in this regard, moderating the military connotations lest they became a legal stick for political enemies.<sup>611</sup> We may regard Lindholm's decision in 1937-38 to change the uniform to a dark blue shirt with a grey tie in the same vein. The idea to change the shirt was first discussed in 1937. A letter from the eastern District Leader to Lindholm approved of the idea to 'change the uniform to give it a more marked Swedish character': 'a clear difference in uniform [from Germany] should more strongly mark our will to independent national life'.<sup>612</sup> The dark blue colour of the shirt, with the splash of

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<sup>608</sup> Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, p. 40.

<sup>609</sup> 'När någon i dessa förfallets dagar i Sverige nämner ordet *soldat*, ryggar alla tillbaka och se inom sig de militariserade diktaturerna marschera upp, hotfullt beredda att krossa kulturens sista utpost – det demokratiska Norden.', Arne Clementsson, *DSN*, no 10, 7 February 1937, p. 5.

<sup>610</sup> r, 'De Nationaal-Socialistische tucht: Disciplinair, niet militair', *VoVa*, no 43, 28 October 1933, p. 6.

<sup>611</sup> Slaa and Klijn, chap. 22.

<sup>612</sup> 'Mitt besök i Tyskland gjorde mig ännu mer övertygad om att din tanke att ändra uniformen så att den får en mer markant svensk prägel är önskvärd. Trots att förhållandena där nere endast gör proppaganda [*sic*] för ideen [*sic*] så skulle en tydlig skillnad i uniform starkare markera vår vilja till självständigt nationellt liv.' Letter, Land Inspector for the Eastern Region to Lindholm, Birka, 23 July [hay month] 1937, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Sven Olov Lindholm (1935-38).

grey, was reminiscent of the Carolingian army under the Swedish 'soldier-king' Charles XII, much admired by the NSAP and the Swedish far-right ever since. Here the uniform was given recognisably patriotic connotations, something helped along by the decision to swap out the swastika for *vasakärven*, the coat of arms of the royal Vasa dynasty. Thus symbols, signs, and colours, and the surrounding fascist discourse guided the outside spectator towards a more respectable reading of fascist appearances.

In symbolically enacting the party in particular, and fascism in general, it was crucial that the uniform-wearer adequately perform the myth of a respectable, patriotic fascist. Hence the NSAP and NSB were keen to inscribe certain behaviours onto the uniform. The wearer was not to merely carry the symbolic uniform around like a metaphorical sandwich board, but symbiotically bring out its fantastic qualities, just as the uniform constructed the individual as a fascist. Already the first blueprint document for NSB membership noted the importance of combining the wearing of the uniform with suitable behaviour.<sup>613</sup> The party leaderships and the propaganda departments instinctively understood, in Judith Butler's words, that '[t]he body is not a self-identical or merely factic materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic'.<sup>614</sup> Wearing the uniform, the insignia, and using the NSB salute was compulsory, and in doing so the member should always 'carry himself with pride and dignity'.<sup>615</sup> As Hogewind put it: 'Each NSB-member will consider, that when dressed in uniform, he (she) bears witness to the NSB, and that he (she) then, even more than otherwise would be the case, must be an example of decency, punctuality, politeness, and comradeship'.<sup>616</sup> The NSAP's 1937 TF instructed that '[e]ach member should wear his brownshirt with pride and when wearing it strive more than ever towards good comportment'.<sup>617</sup> The 1933 NSAP convention was portrayed as a litmus test for members' behaviour in uniform, when for three days two-hundred uniformed members were housed in the same building as a communist group. Uniformed SA and

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<sup>613</sup> W. Jason Mast, 'The Cultural Pragmatics of Symbolic Action', in: Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Performance and Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>614</sup> Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', p. 521.

<sup>615</sup> 'Hij zal zich er steeds van bewust zijn zich daarbij met trots en waardigheid te gedragen.', Concept document NSB membership, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 3.

<sup>616</sup> 'Iedere N.S.B.-er bedenke, dat hij (zij) in uniform gekleed, getuigt voor de N.S.B. en dat hij (zij) dan nog meer dan anders het geval zou zijn, een voorbeeld moet zijn van netheid, stiptheid, beleefdheid en kameraadschap.', Concept, WA Inspector, 5 July 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 50, p. 3.

<sup>617</sup> 'Varje medlem skall bära sin brunskjorta med stolthet och iklädd densamma mer än någonsin vinnlägga sig om god hållning.', TF, 197, p. 35.

communists guarded each other at the gates throughout the nights, 'without any trouble whatsoever. Not even a slap! Instead the one to get slapped was the uniform ban'.<sup>618</sup>

Lindholm placed high demands on the morality and behaviour of party members, and in 1986 confessed that perhaps the party was a little too harsh in regularly ousting members that fell short.<sup>619</sup> Both parties regularly purged the membership to get rid of inadequate and corrupt members. In the NSAP, applicants were refused membership if they were known for a poor lifestyle, such as drunkenness.<sup>620</sup> *Porg* stated there was to be no corruption, no dubious members – 'Keep the N.S.A.P. pure'.<sup>621</sup> The issue became more acute in 1936, when the dissolution of the SNSP led to an influx of new members. Applications were now accompanied by a private interview as well, to check the suitability of the candidate.<sup>622</sup> But this kind of purism was present from the beginning, as a startlingly Matthean speech by Oscar Landahl in Stockholm's Auditorium shows. 'By being intolerant we keep the ranks pure. [...] In our movement we must dispose of elements, that turn out not to measure up – many are called, but few are chosen.'<sup>623</sup> From the first concept versions of the NSB membership requirements members had to sign up for 'complete submission to the rules of discipline'.<sup>624</sup> Members had to hold Dutch citizenship or colonial subject status [!], be at least 18 years of age, and practise a profession. Intriguingly, in the original rules new members could not have a criminal record or be known for 'poor moral behaviour' [*kennelijk slecht zedelijk gedrag*], but these requirements are struck out with pencil in the original document. Aspiring members were provisionally allowed for a trial period of at least three months, after which the Circle leader could recommend them to Headquarters as a full party member.<sup>625</sup> But in practice the NSB was never quite so discriminating, and welcomed new members freely, instead opting to dispose of the useless, corrupt, and fraudulent afterwards. The massive influx of

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<sup>618</sup> 'utan att några som helst oroligheter förekommit. Icke ens en örfil har blivit utdelad! Den som fick örfilarna var i stället *uniformsförbudet*...' Confidential police memorandum, 'Kort redogörelse över den nationalsocialistiska rörelsens i Sverige utveckling under år 1933', p. 14, Arninge: 2B: 1.

<sup>619</sup> Letter transcript, Lindholm to Heléne Lööv, Rönninge, 20 January 1986, p. 2, Marieberg: SO Lindholm, vol. 5.

<sup>620</sup> Letter, Herbert Hultberg to Lindholm, 11 February 1938, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Herbert Hultberg (1937-38).

<sup>621</sup> *Porg*, no 9, September 1935, pp. 49-50, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>622</sup> Police memorandum, regarding NSAP after the fusion [sic], 17 December 1936, p. 2, Arninge: XII 64: 1.

<sup>623</sup> 'Genom att vara intoleranta hålla vi leden rena. [...] Vi måste alltså i vår rörelse avsöndra element, som icke visa sig hålla måttet – många äro kallade, men få äro utvalda.', Stenographic record of NSAP meeting, Stockholm Auditorium, 13 November 1933, Arninge: 2C: 1a.

<sup>624</sup> 'Van ieder lid wordt geëischt een volledige onderwerping aan de regels der discipline.' Design Measure of the Administration, 'Verplichtingen der leden', 2, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 3.

<sup>625</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Betreffende het lidmaatschap'.

members in the first years would have made Swedish-style screening impractical; instead, within a year of opening to new members, the NSB ousted them by the thousands.<sup>626</sup>

To make sure members lived up to the fascist myth in public, physical and ideological training was required. The active member was 'obliged in all cases, when commanded, to wear the black shirt, the uniform, the insignia, and to use the N.S.B. salute. He will always know to carry himself with pride and dignity'.<sup>627</sup> While NSAP discourse was less focused on respectability, in practice the Swedish party had no less stringent moral standards for the cadres. The minimum age was seventeen, and members were required to be Swedish citizens, and not be 'descendant from Jews or "coloured" racial elements', while they also, with a markedly different emphasis from the NSB, 'had to be known for decency and not have behaved in an un-solidary fashion towards colleagues during legitimate social wage conflicts'.<sup>628</sup> The NSAP's origins in the split from the SNSP fed into its myth of fascism, and the devotion it required:

The National Socialist Workers Party was founded precisely through a moral revolution, which purged careerism and corruption from the ranks. And now it is up to us, to not just get as many followers as possible, but the most important thing is for us to get decent comrades, such as can work for the victory of the mission, for the good of their national brothers [*folkbröder*] and not for their own.<sup>629</sup>

It was recognised that not every new member could be a consummate fascist, but they were theoretically expected to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to becoming the uncompromisingly disciplined political soldiers of fascist myth.<sup>630</sup> To instil the necessary discipline, members were trained by means of special schools, study circles, quasi-military training camps, and subjected to intellectual, technical, and physical training. In the NSAP, members were

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<sup>626</sup> For instance the NSB purged 3000 members at the beginning of 1934. 'Landdagrede van Mussert', *VoVa*, no 18, 5 May 1934, p. 1.

<sup>627</sup> 'Een *actief lid* is verplicht in alle gevallen, waarin zulks zal worden bevolen, het zwarte hemd, de uniform, het insigne te dragen en den N.S.B. groet te brengen. Hij zal zich er steeds van bewust zijn zich daarbij met trots en waardigheid te gedragen.' Ibid., 'Verplichtingen der leden', 5.

<sup>628</sup> '...icke härstammar från judar eller "färgade" raselement. Den inträdessökande måste dessutom vara känd för redlighet och får ej ha uppträtt osolidariskt mot arbetskamrater under berättigade sociala lönekonflikter.' Booklet, *Utdrag ur NSAP:s föreskrifter och reglementen*, p. 1, 2B: 4. Arninge.

<sup>629</sup> 'Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiet bildades just genom en moralisk revolution, som rensade ut streberdömet och korruptionen inom de egna leden. Och nu gäller det för oss, att inte bara få med så *många anhängare* som möjligt, utan det viktigaste är att vi få *redliga* medkämpar, sådana som kunna arbete för *sakens* seger, för sina *folkbröders* skull och ej för sin egen.' Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>630</sup> Circular no 38, 17 December 1934, Arninge: 2B1: 2.

encouraged to join the militant part of the organisation (SA and its successors), and participate in activities such as sports, gymnastics, orienteering, and musical practice.<sup>631</sup> A police informant reported that the SA organisation 'regularly organises orienteering exercises outside Stockholm ... they seem in and of themselves rather childish, but should not be ignored'. They also included what he termed military exercises, with snow balls in lieu of firearms.<sup>632</sup> Physical training was encouraged, and Lindholm trained NSAP and NU groups personally, frequently with gymnastics and hours-long marches in the woods.<sup>633</sup> Quite unlike Mussert, Lindholm – a self-described 'field and forest person'<sup>634</sup> – was himself an example of the sort of physical fitness which the party demanded of its members.

After the uniform bans, the individual member in public was still required to enact a myth of fascism through their behaviour – a myriad of individuals performatively constituting fascism through their endlessly repeated acts as fascists, a collective corporeal repertoire.<sup>635</sup> 'Those who cannot abandon pleasures for work in the service of the party are not worthy of the name National Socialist. Through his idealistic will to sacrifice and fearless energy, good bearing, and faultless behaviour the A-group man [activist] will instil respect for the ideas and the NSAP.'<sup>636</sup>

National Socialism is not just a political opinion but a world view, which first and foremost aims to change people and give them new goals. This view must also impress its character on its carrier, not just in matters of judgment, but also in the way of life and bearing. It conflicts with our world view to engage in the habits of bourgeois society. National Socialists should not participate in the degenerate pleasures of modern society, or be known as restaurant visitors and the like.<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> Police memorandum regarding NSAP, 17 December 1936, pp. 2-3, Arninge: 2B: 6.

<sup>632</sup> 'Inom SA-organisationen anordnas med jämna mellanrum orienteringsövningar utanför Stockholm. ... som i och för sig verka ganska barnsliga men som dock icke torde få negligeras...' Police memorandum, retrospect of the NSAP, 10 March 1938, p. 10, Arninge: 2B: 9-11.

<sup>633</sup> Lindholm diary, 7 January 1934; 28 October 1934, Lindholm.

<sup>634</sup> Sven Olov Lindholm, *Döm Ingen Ohörd*, 2nd edition, 1968, p. 7, Marieberg: SO Lindholm, vol. 8.

<sup>635</sup> Reichardt, 'Praxeologie und Faschismus', p. 133.

<sup>636</sup> 'De som icke kunna försaka nöjen för arbete i partiets tjänst äro icke värda namnet nationalsocialist. Genom sin idéella offervilja och oförskräckta handlingskraft, goda hållning och ett klanderfritt uppträdande skall A-gruppsmannen ingjuta aktning för idéerna och N.S.A.P.', Appendix B to circular no 40, Local group administration to members, 4 January 1935, Arninge: 2B1: 2.

<sup>637</sup> 'Nationalsocialismen är icke blott en politisk åsikt utan en världsåskådning, som först och främst avser att förändra människorna och giva dem nya mål. Denna åskådning måste sätta sin prägel på sina bärare, ej blott ifråga om föredömet utan också levnadssättet och hållningen. Det strider mot vår åskådning att begagna det borgerliga samhällets vanor. Nationalsocialister böra icke deltaga i det moderna samhällets urartade nöjesliv eller vara kända som restaurangbesökare o. dyl.', TF, VI: 212, p. 33.

The importance of good behaviour was underlined even further when members were in uniform. The shirt naturally enhanced the association of the individual member with the party, so that the party's reputation was at stake, but the garment did more than that. As the eye-catching uniform minimised or even erased the individual, the members no longer merely constituted themselves as fascists, as NSB or NSAP members – rather they came to embody the party itself, fascism, externalising the fantasy. The powerful symbolic quality of the uniform transformed the performative, from a set of repeated acts constituting individual political identity, into a mythopoeic performance. Uniformed members became living parts of the myth, constituting it in their presence and actions.

Thus it was through trained and disciplined bodies in space - on the street, in the meeting room – that the uniform made the myth. Evocative and inscribed with symbolism, when worn the uniform bestowed its qualities on the body, which through repeated performative acts constituted the fascist myth, i.e. constructed a Swedish or Dutch fascism.<sup>638</sup> The uniform, as a performative aid to corporeal signification, more effectively than any other prop inscribed the fantasy of the fascist onto the body.<sup>639</sup> The black- or brown shirt uniform was of course not the only signifier to be laden with significance from the outset of the 1930s: the stretched arm salute and the swastika (avoided like the plague by the NSB) were similarly powerful signifiers of fascism.<sup>640</sup> Together they amounted to a corporeal repertoire, a set of signs and acts by which members produced themselves as fascists: salutes, slogans, marching steps, even a firm gaze and a straight back could be part of this. This was made quite explicit in Swedish fascist discourse in particular, which spoke of a new 'style' which the NSAP brought to Swedish life. As in the aforementioned Clementsson article: 'Soldier is composure, style.' The NU-member was to be the personification of a straight-backed attitude.<sup>641</sup> By contrast to be a bourgeois was characterised as less a matter of class or ideology, but style: 'one is bourgeois if one is cowardly, superficial, and lazy'.<sup>642</sup> Similarly, the NSB emphasised the contrast between its disciplined troops, and the disorganised and rowdy left-wing

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<sup>638</sup> Jürgen Martschukat and Steffen Patzold, 'Geschichtswissenschaft und "Performative Turn"', in *Geschichtswissenschaft und 'Performative Turn': Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, ed. by Jürgen Martschukat and Steffen Patzold (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), pp. 1–32 (p. 11).

<sup>639</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 185.

<sup>640</sup> See for instance: Tilman Allert, *The Hitler Salute: On the Meaning of a Gesture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>641</sup> 'Soldat är hållning, stil.', Arne Clementsson, *DSN*, no 10, 7 February 1937, p. 5.

<sup>642</sup> '...man är borgare om man är feg, ytlig och lat...', 'Hugg och mothugg', *DSN*, no 6, 23 January 1935, p. 3.

opponents they faced on the street, a difference that foregrounded the connection between the meaning of fascism, and the corporeal signification of fascists, produced in acts and composure.<sup>643</sup>

### III

Having established the workings of the mythopoeic uniform, it becomes evident that the function it fulfilled in its mythopoeic capacity differed depending on whether it was directed inward or outward, particularly after the law established a radical distinction between private and public wear. In public, the mythopoeic effect was enhanced by acting in concert. In 1933, the symbolism of classless unity and struggle was strengthened by a plurality of uniformed actors – ‘here there is no difference of social class, the ideas unite and the brownshirt unites them’<sup>644</sup> – while utilising common social techniques of demonstrating strength and numbers.<sup>645</sup> The uniform itself, by definition, possessed that peculiar quality of being empowered through multiplicity, so that it really came into its own on occasions of mass meeting.

To this end, other props were also available. The uniform proper was not the only object with a strong mythopoeic charge, even if it was the most powerful one. Rather, as Article 435a recognised, there were certain props which could be interpreted as an extension of the uniform, and in the Netherlands were legally treated the same way.

To the outside, uniform dress on its own, chosen as a sign of a particular political orientation, also when further organisation is disregarded, has an impressive effect on the public. This effect is then also intended foremost by those who introduce the uniform [into public life]. One wants one's followers to be clearly recognisable and make an impression through their numbers. Meanwhile it is usually not left at this alone, and one starts also acting in concert, in organised formations...<sup>646</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> ‘Verslag van de colporatagetocht naar Bussum op Maandag 24 Juli 1933’, *VoVa*, no 31, 5 August 1933, p. 1.

<sup>644</sup> ‘...här är ingen skillnad på samhällsklass, *idéerna* förena och brunskjortan förenar dem’, *DSN*, no 13, 11 June 1933, p. 3.

<sup>645</sup> William H. Sewell, ‘Space in Contentious Politics’, in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 51–88 (p. 58).

<sup>646</sup> ‘Naar buiten werkt uniformkleeding, gekozen als teeken van bepaald staatkundig streven, op zich zelf, ook als van verdere organisatie wordt afgezien, imponeerend op het publiek. Deze werking pleegt ook allereerst beoogd te worden door wie de uniform invoeren. Men wil zijn aanhangers duidelijk doen onderkennen en door hun aantal indruk maken. Intusschen blijft het veelal niet hierbij en gaat men daarnevens gezamenlijk, in organisatorisch verband, optreden...’, Minister of Law Van Schaik, Memorandum no 3, Session 1933-231, (‘Aanvulling van het Wetboek van Strafrecht met het oog op kledingstukken en onderscheidingsteekenen, welke uitdrukking zijn van een bepaald staatkundig streven’), p. 1, NSB newspaper clippings collection, NIOD: Amsterdam, KA II: 1701.

These mythopoeic props as extensions of or supplements to the uniform were one of the differences between the two countries, as they were mostly legal in Sweden during the 1930s.<sup>647</sup> For instance, armbands and insignia also served to identify party members, or highlight group hierarchy. In Sweden torches were another popular feature, which quickly became an unmistakable characteristic of a fascist procession. But it was typically flags which added the greatest symbolic charge to a meeting or procession. With their large size and bright colours, party or national flags served to tie a group together visually, emphasising the unity of idealism as well as sheer numbers. NSAP meetings were invariably decorated with the party's bright yellow swastika flag, even more so after 1936 when the leadership directed formations to only use swastika flags in meetings.<sup>648</sup> Group numbers, props, performative acts like the salute, collective behaviour and so forth, came together to complete enhance and dramatise a mythopoeia first and foremost instigated by the uniform, but which could also function without it, 'by marching through the street with firm and disciplined force, with a fearless gaze and song, with style. These youths come with music and radiant swastika flags, in their hands they hold flaming torches, and they march with composure and determined will'.<sup>649</sup>

Thus props could also be used to further public mythopoeic demonstrations after the uniform bans, and exercised a similar function in the fascist symbolic universe. The NSAP managed to stand out during the party convention marches of May 1934, marching through Stockholm in long columns of 1700 participants. The procession carried sixty flags (blue-yellow-red swastika flags and Swedish national flags), marked the march through song and hail-chants, and hoped to impress the audience with an exhibition of discipline. 'The swearing, spitting, and fists of the reds, the blatant communist attempts at provocation, nothing worked; they marched calmly in their ranks, sang battle songs, and raised resounding shouts of hail.'<sup>650</sup> The Dutch NSB on such occasions made heavy use of the national flag in its dynastic orange-white-blue version, de-

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<sup>647</sup> Booklet, Organisation document no 2, *Instruktioner för Frontavdelningar (I.F.) inom NSAP*, 1938, pp. 24-25, Arninge: 2H1.

<sup>648</sup> [Photocopy] *Porg*, no 2, March 1936, §244, p. 12, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>649</sup> '...genom att marschera upp på gatorna i fast och disciplinerad styrka, med frimodig blick och sång, med stil. Dessa ungdomar komma med musik och lysande hakkorsfanor, i händerna hålla de flammande facklor, och de marschera med rättning och beslutsam vilja...', 'Där vi kämpa: Nytt storstilat kampmöte med Pl. på Auditorium', *DSN*, no 17, 3 March 1937, p. 5.

<sup>650</sup> 'Skällsord, spott och knytnävar från de röda, kommunisternas råa provokationsförsök, intet bekom dem, de marscherade lugnt i sina led, sjöngo kampsångerna och höjde rungande hellrop.', 'Hysteriska kvinnoor främst vid Masthuggskravallerna', *DSN*, no 21, 24 May 1934, p. 5.



emphasising party identity in favour of patriotic symbolism and respectable loyalty to the House of Orange. In some cases the red-black party flag was even prohibited, and the black shirt replaced with merely dark clothes.<sup>651</sup> The impressive appearance of flags in a procession, and the intrinsically respectable nature of the national flag, made it an appealing mythopoeic prop for the NSB. Correspondence shows that before major marches through cities Mussert requested permission to carry exclusively Dutch flags in the procession.<sup>652</sup> This happened sufficiently often that the national flag became a recognisably fascist feature, not just at political demonstrations but also festivities such as the Queen's birthday or Princess Juliana's wedding in 1936.<sup>653</sup> This was much to the dismay of the conservative Right. Already in 1934, a Christian Historical speaker complained at a meeting that 'the NSB uses our National Flag for its politics ... but without the Flag one can still see the armies marching up to the RAI-building [Amsterdam conference venue]'.<sup>654</sup> When in 1937 the government settled on the red-white-blue tricolour as the official Dutch flag, the NSB protested that the *oranje-blanje-bleu* version represented the historical unity of the people and the confessions, and loyalty to the House of Orange. This further underlined its associations with Orangist patriotism,<sup>655</sup> again to the irritation of the Calvinist Right in particular.<sup>656</sup>

This has foregrounded the legal ways in which the NSAP and the NSB tried to deal with the uniform ban, and other mythopoeic props and acts that were still publicly available. It was an organised attempt to propagandise the mythopoeic faculties which existed in the uniformed internal meetings, and transfer them to the public. It is evident that the NSB always paid particular attention to respectability as a core part of its myth, while by contrast the NSAP at the same time insisted on its use of party flags, even to the exclusion of national flags. Of course this practice came to an abrupt end towards the end of 1938 when Lindholm's *nyorientering* abolished the swastika, and self-consciously turned to more traditional Swedish symbols (*vasakärven*), i.e. more

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<sup>651</sup> E.g.: Message, Van Deirse, 'Instructies voor den landdag', 1933, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 10.

<sup>652</sup> Letter, Mussert to Amsterdam mayor, Utrecht, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 36; Letter transcript, Mayor of 's-Gravenhage, Ag. Nr. 19383, Afd. KZ, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>653</sup> E.g.: Circular, Van Geelkerken to all Circle Leaders, Utrecht, 18 December 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 346; Circular, de Blocq van Scheltinga to all District Leaders, Utrecht, 26 August 1938, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 283.

<sup>654</sup> 'Dat de N.S.B. onze Nationale Vlag voor haar politiek gebruikt keurt spreker sterk af, maar ook zonder Vlag kan men de legerscharen zien opmarscheeren naar het R.A.I. Gebouw...', Report on CHI meeting, Circle Electoral Leader to Farwerck, Amsterdam, 29 March 1935, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 534.

<sup>655</sup> Brochure, *Wat iedere Nederlander van zijn Vlag moet weten*, Bussum, April 1937, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2006.

<sup>656</sup> See for instance the anti-revolutionary paper: 'Wat de "Beste" Nederlanders beweren', *Nederland Waakzaam*, February 1937, in: Weekly overview, Dep. III, no 8, 27 February 1937, p. 4, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 561.

in line with NSB practice up to that point, while the latter shifted towards the use of *less* traditional and patriotic symbolism, introducing symbols like the wolf's hook.<sup>657</sup> The wolf's hook or *wolfsangel* was a symbol of particular interest in the NSB, as it was originally intended to phase out the awkward triangular party symbol. The first sign of a discussion to change the symbol is from 1936, when a party artist complained that the NSB had not tried to introduce a simple and appealing symbol instead, like the swastika or the hammer and sickle.<sup>658</sup> Eventually the pseudo-runic hook was introduced, a far simpler and distinct design.

#### IV

If public demonstrations served to proselytise, internal party meetings and rallies above all aimed to mobilise. Here the uniform served a different function. Shorn of both legal restrictions and immediate public scrutiny, the mythopoeic dynamic was altered. In the first instance closed meetings permitted uniforms to be used as a tool of discipline. In a 1935 NSB meeting of the General Council, it was discussed whether the black shirt was to be compulsory at closed meetings, as a means of raising discipline – Mussert confirming that this was going to at least be the case for functionaries.<sup>659</sup> The 1935 TF for the NSAP similarly tied the uniform to discipline, encouraging local leaders to ensure members closely followed uniform regulations.<sup>660</sup> Uniforms made the identification of members' rank, formation, and branch significantly easier, and allowed for a more effective organisation of larger meetings in particular. The Swedish uniform denoted with insignia the Circle and Local Group [*ortsgrupp*] a member belonged to, simplifying management at rallies and the like. As DSN put it admiringly in its description of the 1933 *årsting*: 'One imagines the accommodation of two hundred men, older as well as younger, with the same order as at a military camp, except that the discipline was self-assumed, and all were comrades.'<sup>661</sup> The following years NSAP conventions counted around 2000 members from over a hundred Circles.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>657</sup> Letter, Farwerck to Mussert, Hilversum, 6 July 1936, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 48; Circular no 5, Van Geelkerken to all Circle Leaders, Utrecht, 30 January 1937, The Hague: 2.19.49: 11.

<sup>658</sup> Letter, G. Huysser to E. Gerdes, Haarlem, 25 May 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.04: 719.

<sup>659</sup> Minutes, meeting unknown date (pre-October 1935), in: Book, minutes of the *Algemeene Raad*, pp. 39-40, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

<sup>660</sup> NSAP, SA, and A-Group confiscated documents, in: Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 68.

<sup>661</sup> 'Man tänker sig en förläggning av två hundra man, såväl äldre som yngre, med samma ordning som vid en militärförläggning, men disciplinen var självtagen och alla voro kamrater.', 'Göteborg i N.S.A.P:s tecken', *DSN*, no 13, 11 June 1933, p. 3.

<sup>662</sup> See e.g.: 'Årstinget', *DSN*, 45, 12 June 1935, p. 1.

At later *ting* uniformed guards were given red and yellow armbands to denote their authority, urging members to show ‘comradely discipline’ and follow orders without question.<sup>663</sup> With a similar function at its far larger meetings, the NSB used an elaborate system of insignia to denote ranks and functions among members, distinguishing between Headquarters, Districts, City services, Circles, and Groups, as well as particular HQ functionaries, the WA, propagandists, local leaders, and local functionaries. As the surviving descriptions and drawings of the distinctions shows, different coloured armbands were used to denote placement (e.g. black for HQ, red for the cities), and an elaborate system of lines and chevrons to denote function and rank.<sup>664</sup>

Internally, the uniform served to reify the myth of the party as a fantastic army, ‘the militant, spiritual army’, as Mussert put it,<sup>665</sup> ‘a political army, which believes in the calling of the NSB. You are the soldiers of that army’.<sup>666</sup> In the NSB the army myth became only stronger with time, as the oath written in 1936 highlights. As new members swore to wear the shirt and insignia with honour and dignity, the Circle Leader emphasised that:

We too are an army, and such an army, as can be compared to that of the various Crusades ... we too *act*, without asking, without complaint [...] because we know, that the Leader goes in the vanguard of the battle for a mighty ideal! –We too are zealous. Animated by the example of our Leader, by seeing our Standard.<sup>667</sup>

Conversely, in Sweden NSAP members were trained to ‘become a soldier in the future army of the socialist people’s community’,<sup>668</sup> ‘a youth army with fanatic faith and a will as hard as iron’.<sup>669</sup> In wearing a uniform at the meeting, the member became a soldier of a mighty, transcendent force, tied together by bonds of comradeship. ‘Your place is in the freedom army, / you have soon forged

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<sup>663</sup> Programme NSAP 5<sup>th</sup> *Årsting*, 1938, Arninge: 2A: 2.

<sup>664</sup> Booklet, *Distinctieven*, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 50.

<sup>665</sup> ‘...het strijdbare geestelijke leger...’, Speech notes, Mussert, Third Party Congress, 1935, p. 15, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 36.

<sup>666</sup> ‘...een politiek leger, dat gelooft in de roeping van de N.S.B. Gij zijt de soldaten van dat leger.’, Speech notes, Mussert, ‘Gelofte-Aflegging’, 1935, Fourth Party Congress, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>667</sup> ‘Ook wy zyn een leger en wel een leger, dat zou zyn te vergelyken met dat der verschillende Kruistochten. [...] Ook wy doen, zonder te vragen, zonder te morren, zonder te kankeren; omdat wy weten, dat de Leider ons voorgaat in den stryd voor een machtig idéaal! ---Ook wy zyn bezielde. Bezielde door het voorbeeld van onzen Leider, door het zien van onzen Standaard.’

<sup>668</sup> ‘...blir soldat i framtidens armé för socialistisk folkgemenskap...’, Lindholm speech, Stenographic transcript of NSAP meeting, Stockholm Auditorium, 24 October 1933, p. 30, Arninge: 2C: 1a.

<sup>669</sup> ‘...en ungdomsarmé med fanatisk tro och järnhård vilja.’, -rot, [Nils Dahlot], ‘Krig!’, *DSN*, no 15, 23 February 1935, p. 6.

yourself a sword', declaimed one DSN poem – 'Your Sweden calls you: / Your place is in the freedom army, / join, become a fighter, a man'.<sup>670</sup> The NSAP was particularly sensitive to the 'spirit of struggle' [*kampanja*] and comradeship that permeated large uniformed meetings. As *Porg* explained, '[w]ith the uniform a renewed *kampanja* always follows, which elevates the impression of the meeting and has a good effect on new comrades.'<sup>671</sup> There was nothing quite like a uniformed gathering of party comrades to strengthen the bonds of 'comradeship and the will to victory'.<sup>672</sup> This myth was discursively relentlessly reified through military metaphors, which in publications as well as internal documents imagined the parties as armies which 'conquered' and 'attacked', waged 'a struggle for freedom', 'bloody battles', and 'war'.<sup>673</sup> 'Our struggle is revolutionary and fought honourably. You are needed at the front.'<sup>674</sup> Visual depictions of the party often relied on military references, constructing the party as a fantastical military army [figure 1].



Figure 4. 'The NSB wants war!!!', *VoVa*, no 23, 1935.

<sup>670</sup> 'Din plats är i frihetshären, / ett svärd har du snart dig smitt [...] Ditt Sverige ropar dig an: / Din plats är i frihetshären, / gå med, bli en kämpe, en man!', Gunnar Henningsson, 'Frihetshären', *DSN*, no 39, 23 May 1936, p. 5.

<sup>671</sup> 'Med uniformen följer alltid en friskare kampanja, som förhöjer intrycket av mötet och gör gott på nya kamrater.', *Porg*, no 12, December 1935, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>672</sup> Magnus, 'Kamratskap och segervilja präglade Hökerumslägrät – Nordisk Ungdom på frammarsch', *DSN*, no 53, 10 July 1935, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>673</sup> Letter, E.L. to Pl. S.O. Lindholm, Sydfronten, [place & date unknown], Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Sven Olov Lindholm (1935-38); Letter, Haarlem Circle Leader to Mussert, 9 May 1933, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 16; 'De N.S.B. in den aanval', *VoVa*, no 39, 29 September 1934, p. 1-2; 'Lindholm till Norrland', *DSN*, no 7, 26 Jan 1935, p. 6; *VoVa*, no 23, 8 June 1935, p. 8.

<sup>674</sup> 'Vår strid är revolutionär och den föres med blanka vapen. Du behövs vid fronten.', Election information pamphlet, Stockholm, 3 February 1935, Arninge: 2J: 1.

The uniformed member embodied a contempt of bourgeois attitudes,<sup>675</sup> materialising ‘not just a new spirit but also a new style’, rejecting ‘petty bourgeois entertainments and all forms of “kitsch”’.<sup>676</sup> This was most powerfully embodied by the NU:

We despise bourgeois cowardice, conscious of the ruthless struggle that is the road to true freedom. Struggle is the privilege of youth, without which no regeneration of the people or upheaval of society is possible. But we are not men of violence, but intend to execute the revolution in the people's *way of thinking*, through our example of courage, faith, and will to sacrifice.<sup>677</sup>

In the NU this often went together with illicit acts of daring and provocative behaviour, culminating in the break-in at a communist party office in Gothenburg, at the instigation of the young leader Arne Clementsson.<sup>678</sup> The socialist newspaper *Ny Dag* dismissed the act as ‘ridiculous, the way in which our puberty-nazis realise their fantasies about the desirability to “live a life of danger”’.<sup>679</sup> Lindholm used the occasion as an excuse to fire Clementsson. The NSB did not possess this youthful drive to revolution, and its mythopoeia clearly stayed clear of rhetoric that would make the party sound like a red workers’ army of any kind. As highlighted earlier, the NSB was nothing if not a respectable army, emphasising cooperation with the authorities, and always full of praise for the police which it claimed to support wherever possible, particularly by letting the WA lend a hand in law enforcement.<sup>680</sup> But to some members this smacked of ‘liberal decency’, arguing the party should not avoid conflict with the law, fearing the party army was being filled up with

decent, well-meaning Fatherlanders, but who are scared to death that someone will smash their windows, who would find it terrible if a shoemaker addressed them as ‘comrade’, people who might sometimes put on a black shirt, [but only] after first having confirmed over telephone that

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<sup>675</sup> Cf.: Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, p. 14.

<sup>676</sup> ‘ej blott en ny anda utan även en ny stil’, ‘Småborgerliga tillställningar och all slags “kitsch”’, *Porg*, no 12, December 1935, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>677</sup> ‘Vi förakta den borgerliga fegheten, medvetna om att endast hänsynslös kamp är vägen till sann frihet. Kamp är ungdomens privilegium, utan vilken aldrig någon folkförnyelse eller samhällsomdaning är möjlig. Men vi äro inte några våldsmän utan ämna genomföra revolutionen i folkets tänkesätt genom vårt föredöme i mod, tro och offervilja.’, Police memo, ‘Översikt över nationalsocialismen i Sverige, NSAP’, 5 October 1935, p. 37, Arninge: 2B: 4.

<sup>678</sup> For an assessment of Clementsson’s character and the Clarté theft, see: Interrogation of Gunnar Johanssen, 9 March 1939, p.3, Arninge: 2G1: 2.

<sup>679</sup> Newspaper clipping, ‘Ganska ruskig samling’, *Ny Dag*, 6 February 1939, Arninge: 2G1: 2.

<sup>680</sup> ‘Onze eerste landdag’, *VoVa*, no 2, 14 Jan 1933, p. 3.

their friends and acquaintances are also doing it. [...] Soldiers of faith [*heilsoldaten*] an IJmuider church paper called us, and that is what we need to be, *soldiers* of faith, who fight for the salvation of our People and Fatherland...<sup>681</sup>

In the first years of the party the NSB seemed more prone to permit deliberate acts of daring that fit in with the myth of a heroic army. For instance Hogewind permitted a colportage march into the red neighbourhoods of Amsterdam, with a group of fully uniformed WA-men, simply to disprove the notion that this would be impossible without being assaulted by the reds.<sup>682</sup> The same month the NSB sent a 150 strong band of colporteurs and WA-men, with reinforcements from Hilversum, to the overwhelmingly socialist community of Bussum in North-Holland. The trip provoked a riot, requiring a large police force to restore order. VoVa proudly reported the discipline and dignity of the heroic soldiers on the front page.<sup>683</sup> One year later, by contrast, these sorts of expeditions to red neighbourhoods were absolutely prohibited as damaging to the NSB, as public discussion had turned to the threat of private organised violence.<sup>684</sup>

## V

This potent symbolic construction of the fascist army went hand in hand with the fetishisation of the uniform, and was often indistinguishable from it. While outwardly the NSB and NSAP repeatedly emphasised the non-violent nature of this uniformed army, the latent quality of the uniform as a metaphor of violence was implicitly encouraged.<sup>685</sup> 'They conveyed the sensual image of a uniformed nationalism, of dynamic youthfulness, male dominance and uncompromising violence', happily encouraging members to surrender themselves to the militaristic power

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<sup>681</sup> '...nette welwillende Vaderlanders, maar die als de dood er voor zyn, dat hun ruiten ingeworpen zouden worden, die her verschrikkelyk zouden vinden, als een schoenmaker hun met "kameraad" zou aanspreken, die misschien wel eens een zwart hemd zullen aantrekken, na zich tevoren telefonisch overtuigd te hebben, dat de vrienden en kennissen het ook doen. [...] Heilsoldaten noemde een Ymuider Kerkblad ons, en dat moeten we zijn, heilsoldaten, die stryden voor het heil van Volk en Vaderland...', Letter, T. van de Weide to Mussert, Overveen, 20 June 1933, p. 4, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 16.

<sup>682</sup> Letter, WA-Inspector Hogewind to Reydon, Amsterdam, 4 July 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 1768.

<sup>683</sup> 'Verslag van de colportagetocht naar Bussum op Maandag 24 Juli 1933', *VoVa*, no 31, 5 August 1933, p. 1.

<sup>684</sup> Letter, WA-Inspector (Hogewind) to General Leader of Propaganda, Hilversum, 21 September 1934, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1006.

<sup>685</sup> Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, p. 40.

fantasies that were overtly and covertly propagated.<sup>686</sup> While Mussert claimed the uniforms were merely handsome and practical, both parties turned the uniform into a fetish.<sup>687</sup>

Party discourse and imagery invariably constructed the uniformed member as an, above all, powerful and masculine figure, disciplined, martial, and implicitly violent. It was a construction which systematically excluded women from the myth, for whom the fascist symbolic universe seemed to have no place. On one of the extremely rare occasions that VoVa printed a photograph of uniformed women, the emphasis was on their neatness and orderliness, by contrast with the dissolute women of the SDAP. In this regard the fascist movements were both predictably conservative, denying the connotations of power and violence in the depiction of uniformed women, if they were depicted at all.<sup>688</sup>

The NSAP's depictions of the party member were perfectly uniformed, over-emphasising the masculinity of the fascist, but did not appear to have access to any artists of the same (still not very impressive) calibre as the NSB, instead using somewhat more abstract depictions most of the time. The result was eerie, but highly appropriate: an idealised figure unrecognisable as an individual – the perfect fascist, nothing but a uniform. These smaller images were recycled over and over again as column headings and the like, repeatedly imprinting on the young membership the importance of the uniform [see figure 2].



Figure 5. 'Where we fight', DSN no 26, 1933.

VoVa never missed a chance to describe a fully uniformed WA company, 'dashing file after file, the faces taut with the storm strap around the chin. There they go, martial in the black uniform with

<sup>686</sup> 'Sie vermittelten das sensuelle Bild eines uniformierten Nationalismus, von dynamischer Jugendlichkeit, Männerdominanz und kompromissloser Gewaltsamkeit...', Reichardt, *Faschistische Kampfbünde*, p. 14.

<sup>687</sup> Havenaar, *Anton Adriaan Mussert: Verrader voor het Vaderland*, p. 34.

<sup>688</sup> 'Bij de foto's: Tegenstellingen', *VoVa*, no 20, 15 May 1936, p. 4.

the wide waist belt and shoulder strap: masculine youth...'.<sup>689</sup> The DSN was similarly delighted with the SA: 'They wear blue tabs on the collar, it is Stockholm's SA under its leader [Sten] Hermann – firmly paced boys, used to "liberate the streets" for themselves. [...] [then] it is Gothenburg's brisk SA with its group leader Linder at the front. They are recognised by their yellow collar tabs, and their bold countenance – people that are scared of no one.'<sup>690</sup> Visual representations of the WA had to unfailingly show them as a completely uniformed troop; when the NSB prepared a film about the WA, Hogewind required thirty of only 'the most decorative *weermannen*' in full uniform.<sup>691</sup> With no exceptions, artistic depictions of the idealised fascist figure were of male figures, tall and often visibly muscular, with strong jawlines and steely eyes; the uniform tightly fitted, shoulder strap straining across the chest, lace-up or riding boots impossibly tight on the calves. This imagery cultivated a power fantasy that was intrinsic to the fascist myth created by the uniform; the association of the uniform with power was a strong one. In 1936, the head of Department I wrote to Mussert, to urge a simplification of the uniforms' '±102 distinctions', adding somewhat concerned, 'that there exists in our Movement a certain urge for distinctions; with this [I am] expressing the hope, that this is not in order to, through the distinction, indulge a certain lust for power'.<sup>692</sup>

While depictions of the complete uniform were favoured, specific parts of the uniform had a particular attraction to some members. There was evidently a desire to wear these as part of a uniform more complete than regulations strictly dictated, even somewhat contrary to regulations. District Leader d'Ansembourg wrote to General Secretary Van Geelkerken to tell him that 'I have been asked whether non-members of the WA are permitted to wear waist belts with a shoulder strap, and if this is e.g. prescribed for certain functionaries. The wearing of a black shirt with black or dark grey trousers requires at least a black belt, and that is why many instead wear a WA belt

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<sup>689</sup> '...kranig gelid na gelid, de gezichten strak en den stormriem om de kin. Daar gaan ze martiaal in het zwarte uniform met breeden koppel en schouderriem: de manhafte jeugd...', 'Onze Gewestelijke Landdag', *VoVa*, no 18, 5 May 1934, p. 9.

<sup>690</sup> 'De bära blåa speglar på kragen, det är Stockholms SA under sin ledare Hermann – taktfasta gossar, vana att "göra gatan fri" för sig. [...] det är Göteborgs hurtiga SA med sin gruppledare Linder i spetsen. De igenkännas på sina gula kragsspeglar och sin morska uppsyn – folk som ingen skrämmer.', *DSN*, 11 June 1933, cited in: Confidential police memorandum, 'Kort redogörelse över den nationalsocialistiska rörelsens i Sverige utveckling under år 1933', p. 15, Arninge: 2B: 5.

<sup>691</sup> Letter, WA-Inspector (Hogewind) to [name restricted], The Hague, 14 November 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1006.

<sup>692</sup> '...dat in onze Beweging een zekere draag [sic] naar distinctieven bestaat, daarbij de wensch uitsprekende, dat zulks niet zijn oorzaak vindt, om door het distinctief een zekere machtswellust te kunnen botvieren.', Letter, Head Department I to Mussert, Amsterdam, 27 February 1936, pp. 1-2, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 50.



with shoulder strap. [...] Is there any objection to this?<sup>693</sup> (There was not.)<sup>694</sup> It is notable that members bothered to inquire about and purchase such accessories, given the cost of leatherwear such as the wide waist-cinching belt. Under Sweden's less strict uniform regulations, the secret police observed that members took the opportunity to at least wear certain parts of the uniform, (while compulsively detailing all the individual shirt colours that were worn), especially breeches and riding boots, an even more extravagant expense.<sup>695</sup> The boots were sufficiently iconic by the mid-thirties in Sweden that the liberal independent *Dagens Nyheter* described NSAP members as simply 'some gentlemen in boots'.<sup>696</sup> Though not uncommon in VoVa, DSN was particularly obsessed with the description of the 'compulsory nazi-boots', as local newspaper *Göteborgs-Posten* called them,<sup>697</sup> rarely failing to take the opportunity to describe the rhythmic beat of marching heels on the pavement, an aural and visual signifier of violent force and numbers, sometimes mused over in painstaking detail. Boots were invariably marching, always resounding, always rhythmic, firmly paced, forceful, redolent of order and discipline.<sup>698</sup> Even in part, the paraphernalia of the mythopoeic uniform proved intensely evocative, 'the sensual embodiment of the political idea' in the most literal sense.<sup>699</sup> To underline the physical dimension of the uniform, party discourse went to great lengths to evoke the sensory impressions, the sounds, sights, and feelings of uniforms, rather than just symbolism.

Notably, when a new uniform was made for NU in conjunction with the 1938 New Direction, the new model was if anything more militaristic: 'army coat and breeches entirely like the army's latest model and in the same colour', including the indispensable riding boots and

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<sup>693</sup> 'Mij werd gevraagd, of het niet-leden van de W.A. geoorloofd is koppels met schouderriem te dragen en of dit b.v. voor bepaalde functionarissen voorgeschreven is. Het dragen van het zwarte hemd met een zwarte of donkergrijze broek vereischt tenminste een zwarte riem en daarom wordt door velen in plaats daarvan het W.A. koppel met schouderriem gedragen. [...] Bestaat hiertegen bezwaar?', Letter, District Commissar Inspection III (d'Ansembourg) to General Secretary (Van Geelkerken), Amstenrade, 15 September 1934, NIOD: 123, 1.6: 341.

<sup>694</sup> Letter, General Secretary to d'Ansembourg, [Utrecht], 20 September 1934, NIOD: 123, 1.6: 341.

<sup>695</sup> Police memorandum regarding an NSAP meeting, 10 October 1933, Arninge: 2C: 1a; Police memorandum regarding an NSAP meeting, 3 September 1936, Arninge: 2C: 6; Police memorandum regarding SSS meeting, 3 December 1940, p. 1, Arninge: 2C: 1 [Äldre Aktsystemet].

<sup>696</sup> '...en del herrar i kostym', 'Första maj firad i strålande sol', *Dagens Nyheter*, 2 May 1934, p. 5.

<sup>697</sup> 'Demonstration i Masthugget gav starkt eko. – Nazisterna sjunga och marschera', *Göteborgs-Posten*, no 115, 22 May 1934, p. 1.

<sup>698</sup> S. [most likely Lindholm], 'Ungdomen i Göteborg under hakkorsfanan!', *DSN*, no 9, 1 May 1933, p. 5; 'Brunskjortekolonner genom Göteborg!', *DSN*, no 13, 11 June 1933, p. 5; -rot [Nils Dahlrot], 'Till tings!', *DSN*, no 12, 22 March 1934, p. 4; Torsten G:son Elg, '...och så börjar livet', *DSN*, no 50 (Christmas issue), p. 2; Munin, 'Lindholm fri från fångenskapen', *DSN*, no 38, 18 May 1935, p. 1; 'De Landdag', *VoVa*, no 14, 6 April 1935, p. 3.

<sup>699</sup> Eichberg and Jones, p. 146.

shoulder strap.<sup>700</sup> The appeal of the shoulder strap in particular, a glossy strap of leather across the chest which catches the eye in so many photographs of uniformed fascists, lay perhaps in an implicit promise of violence. For the 1934 *årsting*, SA-guards were instructed that the military accessory, '[the] *shoulder strap* attached at the waist belt with *karabiners* was 'also useful' for self-defence [emphasis in original].<sup>701</sup> The instructions did not specify how, though it does not require much imagination. Notably these instructions were only issued orally according to Party Organiser Svalander, while no hint at such use has been found in the NSB archives at all. The shoulder strap was also one of the parts of the uniform Lindholm felt had to be disposed of with the New Direction, as a means of reconstructing the party myth in a more respectable, and perhaps less fetishistic direction. 'The only conceivable [way forward] ... would be to get rid of both name and symbol, not to mention boots, cross strap and "Hitler salute".'<sup>702</sup> The response of many members was extremely negative, and some refused to compromise on this matter.

In both movements the uniform was imbued with a special aura, and became an object of reverence in its own right, regarded with pride and adoration. The myriad close descriptions of the uniform in fascist discourse delineated it as a sacred object in the fascist symbolic order. While uniform bans succeeded in keeping them off the street, they can only have served to reinforce the mythopoeic power of the uniform within the parties, distancing it from the secular world, associating it even stronger with the close-knit militarised community, a powerful elite group with a holy mission. In an informal ceremony on the night before Article 435a came into effect, uniformed NSB-members gathered on an Utrecht square, in the rain with Mussert, 'commander of the growing army'. After a short speech, and singing of the *Wilhelmus* anthem, the dozens of assorted members ritually removed their black shirts at the stroke of midnight, raising them in the air in a show of defiance to onlookers, and the promise to one day wear them again on that same street.<sup>703</sup> (The NSAP did not turn the uniform ban into such a ceremony, instead opting to push the limits of the law for as long as possible.)<sup>704</sup> In another rather remarkable illustration of the peculiar position of the shirt in the NSAP's culture, the fifth *årsting* in Stockholm featured a little exhibition,

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<sup>700</sup> '...vapenrock och spetsbyxor fullständigt lika arméns senaste modell och i samma färg.', Police memorandum, retrospect of the NSAP, 10 March 1938, pp. 12-13, Arninge: 2B: 9.

<sup>701</sup> 'Den vid livremmen med *karbinhakor* fästade *axelremmen* är även användbar.', According to interrogation of Gunnar Svalander, Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 104.

<sup>702</sup> Letter, Lindholm to Sven Hedengren, cited in: Kunkeler, 'The Evolution of Swedish Fascism', p. 391.

<sup>703</sup> 'Ons hemd', *VoVa*, no 38, 23 September 1933, p. 2.

<sup>704</sup> See Lindholm diary, August 1933.

curated by then-NU leader Gösta Hallberg-Cuula. (Hallberg-Cuula himself was something of a legendary figure in the party – Lindholm described him as taken straight from Runeberg's *Tales of Ensign Stål* (1848-60), a romantic fascist soldier with an eye patch, who fell in battle as a volunteer in the Finno-Soviet war of 1940-41.<sup>705</sup> His grave became a pilgrimage site for Swedish neo-nazis.)<sup>706</sup> The exhibition put the black, brown, and blue shirts of the SFKO and NSAP and other uniform paraphernalia on display, while Hallberg-Cuula himself was dressed in the SFKO black shirt.<sup>707</sup> Under the guidance of Sven Hedengren and various party members in the police and military, foreign guests from Scandinavia as well as a *Völkischer Beobachter* representative were shown the enshrined items.<sup>708</sup>

The Movement uniform possessed a powerful and sacred symbolic charge, which elevated the party member from their individuality, and made them into a privileged part of the holy mission, imbued with the righteous strength this fetish bestowed. The mythopoeic force of the uniform harmonised with its fetishistic attractions, an aesthetic armour that promised violent power to the wearer, while turning them into a living embodiment of an army – the party, led by a divinely ordained Leader, part of an irresistible force of destiny: fascism. Bertil Brisman invoked this myth by quoting the nationalist Finno-Swedish poet Örnulf Tigerstedt, his description of Caesar's armies evoking the Swedish SA, a new type of man, a new world view, a new era: 'A heavy tread / and the rattling of the steel dice / resounds in my ears. / Mutely destiny walks / across the river Rubicon / and the great closing of the accounts approaches.'<sup>709</sup> As a concrete symbol in which the individual could literally immerse themselves, there was no possible connection to the myth more immediate than the uniform.<sup>710</sup> In uniform, in a symbiotic process of 'performing fascism', the individual was annihilated, sensuously dissolved in the fantasy of political myth. The poem 'Like one man', published in VoVa before the fifth NSB *landdag* is worth citing here by way of illustration.

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<sup>705</sup> Letter photocopy, Lindholm to Lennart Westberg, Rönninge, 24 October 1977, p. 6, Marieberg: SO Lindholm, vol. 5.

<sup>706</sup> Heléne Löw, *Nazismen i Sverige 1980-1999: Den rasistiska undergroundrörelsen: musiken, myterna, riterna*, 2nd Edition (Stockholm: Ordfront Förlag, 2000), pp. 439–42.

<sup>707</sup> Håwe, 'Minnen från flydda kampår', *DSN*, no 42, 11 June 1938, p. 5.

<sup>708</sup> Confidential police memorandum, 'angående Nationalsocialistiska Arbetarepartiets 5:te årsting i Stockholm', 1938, p. 7, Arninge: 2A: 2.

<sup>709</sup> 'Tungt tramp / och ståltärningars rassel / ljuder i mina öron. / Tigande går ödet / över Rubicons älv / och det stora bokslutet nalkas.', Bertil Brisman, 'S.A.', *DSN*, no 43, 7 June 1936, p. 2.

<sup>710</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, p. 7.

At the Congress I will be  
As thousands who with me came  
In that foaming current of the wave: small,  
Without ranks and without names;  
One single voice in the "hold sea!"  
Which will be shouted across the streets,  
Just One man in Mussert's army,  
One of the unknown soldiers.

In my black shirt amidst the black  
Of the others entirely lost,  
Yet I will hear the beating of my heart  
Even in the heartbeat of the masses.  
And in might I will be One,  
In endurance, in desire,  
Be One in courage and in power,  
And With these I will conquer!<sup>711</sup>

## VI

For all the mobilising force the uniform possessed internally, and crucial as it was in the mythopoeic process, it was a double-edged sword. The fascist symbolic order which defined the uniform was not invulnerable to contradiction, and while its actors could follow a script, they were not liberated from arbitrary divergence.<sup>712</sup> Uniquely marking the wearer as a fascist, the uniform amplified the consequences of infelicitous performances, shattering the authenticity of the performance, disenchanting the audience.<sup>713</sup> The uniform could be said to have been over-inscribed with symbolism, over-burdened with signification, in a way that was easily exploited by political opponents.

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<sup>711</sup> 'Op den Landdag zal ik zijn / als duizenden die met mij kwamen / in dien bruizenden golfstroom: klein, zonder rangen en zonder namen; één enkele stem in "t "hou zee!" / dat juichen zal over de straten, / één man slechts in Mussert's armee, / één der onbekende soldaten. / In mijn zwart hemd tusschen het zwart / dat anderen gansch'lijk verloren, / zal ik tot den klopp van mijn hart / in den hartslag der massa hooren. / En één zal ik zijn in macht, / in volharden in beminnen, / één zijn in moed en in kracht, / en méé zal ik overwinnen!', Rob Delsing, 'Als één man', *VoVa*, no 40, 5 October 1935, p. 4.

<sup>712</sup> Reichardt, 'Praxeologie und Faschismus', p. 132.

<sup>713</sup> Alexander and Mast, p. 15.

Most immediately and of greatest public concern was the threat of violence and disorder that seemed to be caused by the uniforms. Both parties were under suspicion of trying to instigate a civil war, particularly in areas where communists were also strong. Mindful of the political unrest that had led up to the establishment of the Italian Fascist and German Nazi regimes, state authorities including the secret police (both the Dutch *Centrale Inlichtingendienst*, CI, and Sweden's unofficial secret police) kept a watchful eye for any disturbing activities such as military training and weaponisation. When uniforms were banned in 1933, DSN portrayed the legislation as a slanderous accusation that the NSAP was hostile to the state [*statsfientlig*].<sup>714</sup> But the fascist uniform was also a simple concern of law and order, and in 1933 rival parties were keen to point to the provocative effect uniforms had on those of differing political opinions, i.e. the Left.<sup>715</sup> Rows about the provocative effect of uniformed fascists continued throughout the 1930s. The NJS youth organisation was legally apolitical, until a Dutch court decided otherwise.<sup>716</sup>

With great fury the *Nationale Dagblad* makes note of the fact that marching permission was refused to the so called "National Youth Storm". This fascist organisation, which in a defiant manner evades the uniform ban, planned to ... demonstrate throughout town. Of course with no other purpose other than fascist advertising. However, the police commissioner and the [AR] mayor have given no permission for such a provocative, uniformed procession.<sup>717</sup>

A Swedish police report of 1933 monitoring the National Socialist organisations tells of the frequent disorders wherever the NSAP had meetings, especially at the Stockholm Auditorium concert hall. While these rarely got out of hand, keeping them under control required a considerable police presence.<sup>718</sup> In the Swedish countryside matters were worse. Communists would regularly disturb fascist meetings, which often ended with physical fights and rock

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<sup>714</sup> 'Uniformsskräck – Klappjakt på statsfientliga klädespersedlar!', *DSN*, no 19, 11 August 1933, pp. 1, 8; see also: 'Även underkläder statsfientliga?', *DSN*, no 22, 11 September 1933, p. 2.

<sup>715</sup> Social Democratic politician Beukema argued that 'a fascist in uniform has an irritating effect', according to *Algemeen Handelsblad*, citing in: Reference-material, 2<sup>nd</sup> week, p. 5, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 542; Swedish politicians argued much the same thing: P.D. [Per Dahlberg], 'Uniformsförbudet', *DSN*, no 12, 1 June 1933, p. 5.

<sup>716</sup> Circular, Van Geelkerken, to all Stormers of South East Sticht, *Zeist*, 27 January 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.15: 1148.

<sup>717</sup> Communist newspaper *De Tribune*, cited in: Weekly overview, *Uitg. Afd. III*, no 2, 16 January 1937, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 561.

<sup>718</sup> 'Lindholmsnazisternas pingstmöte – Agitationsmöte i Vitabergsparken med slagsmål som efterspel', *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 11 June 1935, p. 5; 'Polismästeren slogs i gatan vid nazisttåg – Allvarligt kommunistupplopp i Göteborg', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 21 May 1934; 'Uppträden i Malmö vid nazistmöte – Bråkiga ungsocialister och kommunister i farten', *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, no 259, 23 September 1935, p. 7.

throwing.<sup>719</sup> Lindholm himself recounted numerous incidents of serious physical violence, peaking at a meeting in Sandviken in 1935: the square was filled with an angry crowd of circa 3000 – ‘I could not speak over the roaring [of the crowd] and had to duck to avoid the rocks being thrown. Have never before experienced such madness, could speak for at most 5 minutes.’ Police aborted the meeting, the crowd tried to turn over the party car, and the windows were smashed. (Laconically Lindholm ended the entry with: ‘Slept well after a real day of struggle’).<sup>720</sup> The fears of some sort of civil war, which in retrospect was highly unfeasible in Sweden, felt like a real risk to some, given the crowds the NSAP could attract, as well as local support for the party in the cities especially.

Uniforms were by no means the sole cause of unrest, which was after all usually due to profound ideological differences, and banning uniforms did not put an end to such disorders. However they were a central part of arguments about the inherently disorderly nature of fascism. While some groups appreciated the anti-communist stance, and saw socialists as the primary offenders during any unrest, conservatives were suspicious of fascist claims to be protecting law and order.<sup>721</sup> Uniformed and sometimes armed resistance to even communism was an intolerable usurpation of state authority, especially in the eyes of the Dutch confessional Right. Apart from citing concerns about public disorder and the provocative character of uniforms, RKSP minister Josef Van Schaik warned ‘that such a, more or less military, power-development of political orientations alongside legal authority – even if it is, initially perhaps *bona fide*, dressed in the form of assistance to the authorities – cannot be tolerated in an ordered state’.<sup>722</sup> In the Netherlands, where for the period 1933-37 the NSB seemed like a genuine threat to the established political system, Mussert did surprisingly little to alleviate fears of civil unrest and violence, opting for a rhetorical carrot and stick approach. In response to the various laws passed against the NSB and similar organisations, particularly the law against political uniforms, he stated that ‘[e]very

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<sup>719</sup> Confidential police report, ‘Kort redogörelse över den nationalsocialistiska rörelsens i Sverige utveckling under år 1933’, pp. 19-20, Arninge: 2B: 1.

<sup>720</sup> ‘Jag kunde ej överrösta vrålet o. måste huka för stenkastning. Har aldrig tidigare upplevt sådant vainsinne, kunde tala högst 5 min. [...] Sov gott efter en verklig kampdag.’, Lindholm diary, 29 August 1935.

<sup>721</sup> ‘Communisten contra fascistien’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, no 34563, 2 May 1933, p. 13.

<sup>722</sup> ‘...dat een zoodanige, min of meer militaire, machtontwikkeling van politieke richtingen naast het wettig gezag – al kleedt men haar, wellicht in den aanvang te goeder trouw, in den vorm van hulpverlening aan dit gezag – in een geordenden staat niet kan worden geduld.’, Van Schaik, Memorandum no 3, Session 1933-231, (‘Aanvulling van het Wetboek van Strafrecht met het oog op kledingstukken en onderscheidingsteekenen, welke uitdrukking zijn van een bepaald staatkundig streven’), p. 1, NSB newspaper clippings collection, NIOD: Amsterdam, KA II: 1701.

attempt to block the legal path of a new spiritual current within a people, for which the historical time has come, is in essence an attempt at civil war', words quoted in large font by VoVa, something which cannot have put the parliamentary Right at ease.<sup>723</sup>

In conjunction with the use of trained paramilitary formations, the uniformed party armies – even if banned in public – were under constant scrutiny for organised criminal intentions, particularly a *coup d'état*. The considerable number of files that are stored in the Swedish secret police archive are themselves evidence of the scrutiny under which the NSAP was placed, as are the surviving CI documents showing even small NSB meetings were monitored by state agents. The Swedish secret police specifically kept a file on 'illegal activities', investigating rumours of a coup d'état.<sup>724</sup> Sweden had already had a controversy about paramilitary formations in 1931 when the right-wing Munck Corps [*Munckska kåren*] was discovered to have illegally imported firearms from Germany, a small group erroneously associated with SFKO.<sup>725</sup> The corps was the invention of a number of right-wing military figures, including *Freikorps* officer Horst von Pflugk-Harttung, which ostensibly existed to help out the Swedish police in case of a Bolshevik revolution.<sup>726</sup> Sven Hedengren (himself under scrutiny from the secret police) was interrogated about the Munck Corps and its arms supply.<sup>727</sup> Lindholm himself viewed the corps sympathetically, although he considered it too bourgeois in character.<sup>728</sup> The corps was disbanded and Parliament passed a law against private armies.<sup>729</sup> Thus the connection between extreme anti-communism, fascism, and armed paramilitaries had already been made in the public mind, and the NSAP was regularly accused of, and inspected for, keeping illegal weapons. Authorities cited concerns for law and order, while *Dagens Nyheter* pointed to the danger of paramilitaries that regularly armed themselves in street fights.<sup>730</sup> In fact, when *Dagens Nyheter* reported on fascists in Sweden, it was almost exclusively in the context of violence and disorder. The left-wing press regularly portrayed the NSAP as a criminal organisation, plotting to overthrow the state with armed violence, while

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<sup>723</sup> 'Iedere poging om den legalen weg af te snijden voor een nieuwe geestesstrooming in een volk, die historisch aan de orde is, is in wezen een poging tot burgeroorlog.', Mussert, quoted on the front page of: *VoVa*, no 39, 29 September 1934.

<sup>724</sup> E.g. Secret memorandum, concerning a NS revolution, Astrid Ström, 17 April 1940, Arninge: 3B: 1.

<sup>725</sup> See also: 'Munck ensam ansvarig för skyddskåren', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 23 January 1932, p. 5.

<sup>726</sup> Lundberg, 'Within the Fascist World of Work', pp. 201–2.

<sup>727</sup> Åke Nerby, Secret composition of a P-file regarding Sven Hedengren, 16 August 1946, p. 1, Arninge: P4770: 2.

<sup>728</sup> Sven Olov Lindholm, *Svensk Frihetskamp* (Stockholm, 1943), p. 14.

<sup>729</sup> Wärenstam, pp. 68–71; Ohlsson, pp. 251–52.

<sup>730</sup> "Fara för väpnade sammandrabbningar", *Dagens Nyheter*, no 24A, 26 January 1934, p. 1.

the police turned a blind eye – the inconclusive 1935 investigation into the supposed continued existence of the SA particularly enraged socialists, especially when prosecutors failed to act on a number of illegal weapons that had been found.<sup>731</sup> In Sweden, as before in Germany, democracy protects itself with fascist judges and by general prosecutors, who sit on the indictments against the fascist bandit organisations until they can no longer be implemented.<sup>732</sup> Public suspicions persisted, and in 1939 the *Social-Demokraten* editor Schenk was informed by one anonymous individual that the SSS student organisation kept a large secret weapon depot, which was followed up by a state police investigation, though again inconclusive.<sup>733</sup> The police itself was particularly concerned with the high proportion of military men in the party, even more so when in the latter half of the decade the NSAP organised them internally as the Brown (later Blue) Army and Navy. Sometimes these would march alongside the standard bearers to help out in case of fights, at other times they just lent a splash of military colour to the picture.<sup>734</sup> ‘During the latest march ... Thorén [Brown Army leader] went next to the procession to “maintain order”. He was followed by five sailors ... in uniform, who would assist him if necessary. ... Throughout the entire march they sang along with the songs’, a concerned police memorandum reported. ‘It did not look very democratic.’<sup>735</sup>

In the Netherlands, while Mussert dissolved the WA at the beginning of 1936 in anticipation of a law against paramilitary formations, suspicions that the party kept training members in secret persisted.<sup>736</sup> *De Tribune* reported that ‘the WA is dissolved in appearance only. The uniform had been put away, [but] “with a ball of camphor”’, quoting Hogewind (now head of Indian Affairs) at a party convention in Batavia (Jakarta).<sup>737</sup> This turned out to be correct with the 1940 Occupation, but before then, though unknown to the public or authorities until the end of

<sup>731</sup> Newspaper clipping, ‘J.K. ingriper för nazisternas beväpning’, *Ny Dag*, 12 November 1935; Newspaper clipping, ‘Åklagaren struntade i Lindholmsnassarnas innehav av vapen!’, Arninge: 2E: 1.

<sup>732</sup> ‘I Sverige som tidigare i Tyskland låter sig demokratin skyddas av fascistiska domare och av allmänna åklagare, som ligger på åtalen mot de fascistiska banditorganisationerna till dess de inte längre kan verkställas.’, *Arbetartidningen*, 9-15 August 1935; Newspaper clipping, ‘Lindholmsnassarnas militärorganisation’, *FD*, 22 May 1935, Arninge: 2E: 1.

<sup>733</sup> Confidential police memorandum, 9 February 1939, p. 1, Arninge: 2B: 12; Police memorandum regarding investigation of weapons possession, Arninge: 2B: 12.

<sup>734</sup> Military uniforms in political contexts were not forbidden: ‘Politiska uniformer förbjudas’, *Göteborgs-Posten*, no 85, 12 April 1933.

<sup>735</sup> ‘Vid senaste marschen ... gick Thorén bredvid demonstrationståget för att “hålla ordning”. Han efterföljdes av 5 flottister ... i uniform, vilka skulle biträda honom vid behov. [...] Under hela marschen deltog de i sångerna. Det såg inte vidare demokratiskt ut.’, Police memorandum regarding NS in Sweden, 16 October-15 November 1937, p. 8, Arninge: 2B: 8.

<sup>736</sup> ‘Verbod van particuliere weerkorpsen’, *De Tijd*, no 28 806, 29 May 1936, p. 3.

<sup>737</sup> ‘Kort en bondig! – W.A. niet opgeheven’, *De Tribune*, 11 September 1936, p. 5.



1939,<sup>738</sup> a small elite youth corps of circa 400 members – the *Mussertgarde* – was apparently trained for a potential violent takeover, and would be the basis of the future Dutch SS.<sup>739</sup> VoVa was particularly dismayed at a report by *De Telegraaf* of ‘military-style exercises in political uniform’,<sup>740</sup> in the wake of a police raid. Conservative newspapers remained concerned about the displays of military-style discipline in NSB marches, the association of fascism with the paramilitary uniform strongly impressed on their minds.<sup>741</sup> Already in 1934 *De Tijd* reported rumours that the NSB was secretly introducing cells into the state civil militias.<sup>742</sup> The natural association of the uniform with paramilitaries, a link heavily encouraged by fascist discourse, cast a permanent shadow of suspicion on the NSB and NSAP, and was welcome ammunition for the Left, which readily used it to portray fascism as a form of organised crime. Already in 1933, the liberal progressive *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, NRC, warned that even unarmed uniformed formations could in the future quickly develop into something more sinister – ‘weapons are easy to acquire’.<sup>743</sup> Accurate or not, in public discourse political uniforms became a sign of disorder, and the laws against uniforms and paramilitaries tainted it doubly with the association of illegality, an association that stuck even when worn legally at party meetings. One article from *De Tijd*, based on a report by the Anti-Revolutionary *Rotterdammer*, speaks volumes with its title: ‘The forbidden N.S.B.: Impermissible defence squads after foreign model’, recounting rumours that the NSB was preparing an illegal paramilitary group like the *squadristi* or SA.<sup>744</sup> Even as the parties themselves emphasised their anti-communist credentials, and portrayed their uniformed formations as a bulwark of law and order, the symbolic uniform was easy prey to hostile perspectives which reinterpreted it as a threat to the peace or the state.

One of the concerns behind both the Swedish and Dutch legislation was recent developments in Central Europe, particularly Germany of course. While the main fear was for a brownshirt or communist takeover of the streets, the argument hinted at a more insidious

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<sup>738</sup> See for instance: ‘Mussert-garde op vrije voeten’, *Zaans Volksblad*, 14 December 1939, p. 8.

<sup>739</sup> Jonge, *Het Nationaal-Socialisme in Nederland*, pp. 159–61.

<sup>740</sup> ‘Machtsmisbruik en stemmingmakerij’, *VoVa*, no 49, 8 December 1939, p. 4.

<sup>741</sup> See for instance the report on the NSB procession before the regional party congress in Loosduinen: ‘N.S.B. landdag in Loosduinen’, *De Maasbode*, no 26 419, 13 October 1935, p. 3.

<sup>742</sup> ‘Mussert en de Burgerwachten: Is het hem om cellenvorming te doen?’, *De Tijd*, no 27746, 1 September 1934, p. 3.

<sup>743</sup> ‘...wapenen zijn gemakkelijk te verkrijgen.’, Newspaper clipping, ‘Het uniformverbod’, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 1 August 1933, NIOD: KA II, 2296.

<sup>744</sup> ‘De verboden N.S.B. – Ontoelaatbare Weerbaarheidsafdeelingen naar buitenlandsch model’, *De Tijd*, no 27 367, 20 January 1934, p. 2.

accusation, that of foreign associations. This was the greatest obstacle to the NSAP, which already in so many regards resembled the German NSDAP, and whose brown shirts were suspiciously similar to those of the German SA. In 1938 this was even criticised by the German Ministry for Propaganda, which stated in a report to Heinrich Himmler that Lindholm had committed the error of copying NSDAP paraphernalia too closely.<sup>745</sup> (Nevertheless, Lindholm would later maintain that anti-Semitism was the only German import in the party, as a scribble in the margins of his personal copy of the 1948 party programme implies.)<sup>746</sup>

The NSB's black shirts did not expose it to quite the same kind of criticism, particularly as Fascist Italy was regarded as much less threatening than the Netherlands' eastern neighbour, but the wearing of political uniforms on the street was still regarded as something distinctly un-Dutch, 'a more or less ridiculous urge to imitate foreign methods'.<sup>747</sup> Both SDAP newspaper *Het Volk* and the liberal conservative *Algemeen Handelsblad* thought the 1933 *landdag* constituted an awful lot of 'visual militaristic messing about', which seemed "awfully un-Dutch" for such a patriotic-acting group'.<sup>748</sup> Thus the wearing of uniforms, while partially a reminder that the fascists were part of something much greater than merely the national movement – 'the great current of the new age' –<sup>749</sup> that part of something greater was to many outsiders threatening. Black- or brown shirted fascists looked like potential foreign infiltration, a constant reminder of their ideological cousins dangerously close to home.<sup>750</sup> Accusations of treasonous activity such as sabotage or spying doggedly haunted both parties until the end of the war, and beyond, though unproven in the Swedish case, and the Dutch before the Second World War.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>745</sup> Report for Reichsführer-SS, 24 February 1938, in: Preliminary investigation protocol, Lindholm, 18 February 1948, p. 19, Arninge.

<sup>746</sup> Lindholm's private copy of *SSS: Den Nationella Folksocialismens Program*, (Stockholm: Grundläggaren, 1948), p. 17, in: Marieberg: SO Lindholm, vol. 8.

<sup>747</sup> '...een, min of meer belachelijke, zucht tot nabootsing van buitenlandsche methoden...', Van Schaik, Memorandum no 3, Session 1933-231, ('Aanvulling van het Wetboek van Strafrecht met het oog op kleedingstukken en onderscheidingsteekenen, welke uitdrukking zijn van een bepaald staatkundig streven'), p. 1, NSB newspaper clippings collection, NIOD: Amsterdam, KA II: 1701.

<sup>748</sup> 'het uiterlijk militaristisch gedoe "wel erg on-Nederlandsch" noemt voor een zoo patriottisch doende groep.', *Het Volk*, no 11 895, 11 January 1933, evening edition, p. 5; the charge of un-Dutch NSB behaviour recurred regularly, see for instance: 'De Landdag van de N.S.B.', *De Standaard*, no 19 475, 14 October 1935, p. 3.

<sup>749</sup> 'En het fascisme is de groote strooming van den nieuwen tijd.', 'Interview met Mussert', *VoVa*, no 30, 27 July 1935, p. 4.

<sup>750</sup> Kunkeler, 'The Evolution of Swedish Fascism', pp. 387–95.

<sup>751</sup> E.g.: Newspaper clipping, 'Spioneri för Tyskland blir ostraffat i Sverige', *Ny Dag*, 1 March 1939, Arninge: 2G1: 2.

## VII

The hostile press happily integrated the predilection for uniforms into their narratives of a criminal, dangerous, and foreign threat. They were helped with this by actual fascist law-breaking. This was particularly common in Sweden, where NSAP members were often ready to push the limits of local authorities' willingness to use their warranty, and the party hierarchy often lacked the means of enforcing discipline. As usual newspapers jumped on any occasion to point out fascists flouting the law –the communist paper *Ny Dag* reported the case of a colporteur selling DSN in uniform, defending himself in court with the claim that he had no choice, as these were the only clothes he owned.<sup>752</sup> *Dagens Nyheter* reported several times on *Lindholmsnazister* being arrested for flouting the law, usually with a sense of humour about the proceedings.<sup>753</sup> The party propaganda teams, Lindholm told during his 1980-81 interview, were frequently taken to the police station immediately after meetings, to be photographed and judged as to whether they had worn political uniforms.<sup>754</sup> Frequently these encounters did not end with any charges, as local police found it difficult to prove that visor caps, or boots and the like could constitute a uniform, when individual garments were commonly worn by local inhabitants. Only once, in August 1933, were Lindholm and his team actually fined for wearing political uniforms in Skene, Västergötland.<sup>755</sup> So throughout the decade the police would be constantly frustrated by NSAP members making a very particular impression with their garments, without being able to charge them. One police memorandum reported in late 1937:

It would however certainly not do any harm if the nazis left their boots at home when they held their outdoors meetings, since it is probably the uniform-like clothes which really gall the southerners in particular. If the nazis were dressed 'like normal' people, then the troublemakers wouldn't know which ones were nazis or not when they left the meetings, and would have no one to harass as is always the case at the moment.<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>752</sup> Newspaper clipping, 'Nazistbekymmer', *Ny Dag*, 2 October 1933, Arninge: 2C: 1a.

<sup>753</sup> E.g.: 'Polisen tog 5 nazister', *Dagens Nyheter*, no 233A, 28 August 1936, p. 1.

<sup>754</sup> Sven Olov Lindholm, *Döm Ingen Ohörd*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1968, p. 16, Marieberg: SO Lindholms Samling, vol. 8 (Print media).

<sup>755</sup> Lindholm Interview, 00259: a.

<sup>756</sup> 'Det skulle dock säkerligen icke skada om nazisterna lämnade sina stövlar hemma när de höllo sina utomhusmöten då det troligen är den uniformsliknande klädseln som retar galla på särskilt söderborna. Vore nazisterna klädda "som vanligt" folk kunde ju heller inte bråkstakarna veta vilka som voro nazister eller icke när de lämnade mötena och hade då inga att ofreda som nu alltid är fallet.', Police memorandum regarding National Socialism in Sweden, 16 October-15 November 1937, Arninge: 2B: 8.

The most blatant acts of legal disobedience in this regard came from the NU, particularly until 1939 under the leadership of the radical Arne Clementsson. While the youth group already had a reputation in its own right for provocative tactics in the political struggle, this was not without the connivance of the main party. For instance at the 1937 regional convention [*landsting*] in Uppsala, while the main party and SA followed police directives in marching through town in smaller groups in civilian clothes, the state police reported virtually all NU-members turned up in full uniform, the procession decorated with their striking 'Odin flags'.<sup>757</sup> At the 1939 SSS *årsting* in Malmö the party also permitted NU to turn up in their light blue shirt uniforms, although this time the police intervened during the march, ordering the participants to remove the shirts. When the hundreds of boys and girls duly obeyed and started marching topless the police ordered them to put the shirts back on again, and the march continued. (Lindholm took great delight in this episode, and recounted it whenever possible.)<sup>758</sup> But, as *Dagens Nyheter* did not fail to observe, the blue-shirted youths were fined for their transgression afterwards.<sup>759</sup> Flouting of the law in this fashion was much less common in the NSB, not least because of the far less permissive Article 435a, and stronger party discipline. Nor did the NJS constitute as large and independent-minded an organisation as the NU was, instead being closely controlled by Van Geelkerken, and disbanded the moment it was legally deemed a covert NSB organisation.

Uniformed indiscipline, an incongruence antithetical to fascist myth, occurred in to both parties, and made easy targets for hostile constructions of fascism. In spite of the exhortations of rules, directives, and functionaries, no member fully conformed to the fantasy of the perfect, uniformed, disciplined fascist. Fascists had a script to follow, but sometimes forgot, sometimes wilfully ignored its injunctions. Not every member was a dedicated fanatic, not all lost themselves in the fantastical mythopoeic process when performing in uniform. Nor was every organised collective performance a success: the uniformed fascist spectacle came with a pre-established reputation in Sweden and the Netherlands, one that required significant numbers and resources to live up to. Not only were opponents – Socialist, Catholic, Calvinist, Liberal – unwilling to accept

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<sup>757</sup> Police memorandum, regarding the fourth *landsting* at Uppsala, p. 3, Arninge: 2C: 8.

<sup>758</sup> Lindholm diary, 29 May 1939; Lindholm interview, 00260: a.

<sup>759</sup> 'Nazister få böta, uniformer i beslag', *Dagens Nyheter*, 19 September 1939, p. 4.

the fascist myth at face value, if at all, but they were ready to interject their own constructions of fascism in the interstices of mythopoeia, interstices opened up by infelicitous performances.

The NSB's first public performance, the first *landdag* in Utrecht, 7 January 1933, had a dubious impact. While surviving HQ correspondence shows that the event was an important factor in the initial upsurge in members to the young movement, much of the media observed the diminutive uniformed rally with scorn.<sup>760</sup> One fascist wrote in March to express his admiration for the bravery of men performing in uniform with hostile crowds, but also noted that the uniforms might be perceived to be ridiculous and theatrical, literally 'monkey suits' [*apepakkes*].<sup>761</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad's* stern assessment of the event's militarism had already been noted. Social Democratic *Het Volk* sardonically described it as 'decent fascism', 'but in essence no less crude'. The event was unremarkable, and what 'appeared on the theatre stage was of little interest and badly disappointing'. But it was the parade which attracted most of the paper's derision. '[T]here were, carefully counted, thirty small uniformed men, and the circumstance, that they were being inspected by "leader" Mussert with the necessary preparations, did not take away the fact that the entire fascist "army" consisted of thirty men.'<sup>762</sup> Noting that they wore black shirts like the Italian Fascists, *Het Volk* concluded that 'this group too is inspired by hideous murder-fascism, with its crude, bombastic performances and its deplorably low intellectual standards'.<sup>763</sup> The NSB, *Het Volk* concluded, had failed to make fascism into a 'respectable force' as the liberal press had hoped. Orthodox Calvinist *De Standaard* was less concerned about the militarism of the event, noting, a little dismissively, that '[t]he mise-en-scène was entirely in order', and instead mostly complained about the lack of any 'positive Christian' content, but was also scornful of the WA-men's discipline in the face of Communist harassment.<sup>764</sup> Numbers definitely mattered in a uniformed demonstration, and their lack could seriously undermine the mythopoeic effect of such performances. The group being measured against the standard of foreign 'fascist armies', their

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<sup>760</sup> E.g.: Letter, J.L.S. [name restricted] to C. van der Voort van Zijp, Antwerpen, 11 January 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 395.

<sup>761</sup> Letter, P.F.v.Z. [name restricted] to Mussert, Mombasa, 13 March 1933, p. 2, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 395.

<sup>762</sup> 'Maar in plaats daarvan waren het welgeteld dertig geüniformeerde mannetjes en de omstandigheid, dat zij door "leider" Mussert met de noodige bereddering geïnspecteerd werden, nam niet weg dat het heele fascistische "leger" uit dertig man bestond', 'Keurig fascism – Maar in wezen even grof', *Het Volk*, no 11 890, 9 January 1933, p. 5.

<sup>763</sup> '...ook deze groep zich inspireert op het weerzinwekkend moordfascisme met zijn grove, bombastische optreden en zijn jammerlijk lage verstandelijke peil...', *ibid.*

<sup>764</sup> 'De mise-en-scène was geheel in orde.', 'Een Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging', *De Standaard*, no 18 629, 9 January 1933, p. 2.

'heroic' discipline placed in a more mundane national context, the impression made through a different hermeneutic lens was primarily ridiculous, not fantastic. As SDAP commentator Henri Polak wrote, 'I really did not know whether to laugh or cry, when I saw the photos ... of the exhibition in Utrecht on that historical Saturday 7 January 1933.'<sup>765</sup>

The NSAP that same year probably experienced much the same thing, at their first convention of a few hundred attendees, but rather than the written scorn of the newspapers they were mostly met with silence, as DSN complained.<sup>766</sup> After the 1934 party congress, the local *Göteborgs-Posten* was one of the few papers that reported extensively on the event, drily noting the haphazard adherence to the law against political uniforms, with the presence of boots, barely concealed brown shirts, and brown visor caps. While the militaristic discipline of the NSAP march was noted, the overall impression was chaotic, mostly due to the shouting and taunts of counter-demonstrators, and the sometimes violent police intervention.<sup>767</sup> Typically at these larger party manifestations, it was precisely a display of order and discipline that the NSAP aimed for, and these were often hindered by the participants' disobedience. DSN's instructions for the 1935 *årsting* implored members to remove uniforms in public, reminding them in large font that '[t]he carrying of nat.-soc. *uniform paraphernalia is absolutely forbidden*', underlining that breaking the law would harm the party as a whole.<sup>768</sup> Similarly the Strängnäs *landsting* programme brochure put directly on its front page: 'The reputation of the party demands of you as a party member: Respect the uniform law'.<sup>769</sup> As noted earlier, this injunction was only partially successful, so that members' performances in uniforms were often inherently un-disciplinary, feeding directly into counter-narratives of fascists as brutes and thugs [figure 3].

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<sup>765</sup> Dr Henri Polak about Mussert, 'Als ... Paljas', *Het Volk*, no 11 901, 14 January 1922, p. 14.

<sup>766</sup> Tjalve, 'Dahlrot skrämde TT', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 1.

<sup>767</sup> 'Demonstration i Masthugget gav starkt eko', *Göteborgs-Posten*, no 115, 22 May 1934, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>768</sup> 'Bärande av nat.-soc. *uniformspersedlar är absolut förbjudet...*', DSN transcript, Instructions for *Årstinget*, 1935, Arninge: 2A: 1.

<sup>769</sup> 'Partiets anseende fördrar Dig som partimedlem: Respekterandet av uniformslagen.', Brochure, *Program för Östra Distriktets Landsting den 19 augusti i Strängnäs*, Arninge: 2A: 1.



Figure 3. Storebackegatan at Masthugget, as our artist saw it on Sunday evening.'  
*Arbetar-Tidningen*, 1934, newspaper clipping, National Archives of Sweden, Arminge.

The NSB's Disciplinary Council, partially set up to resolve internal disputes, functioned chiefly to protect the party's image and settle cases for the benefit of the party in case of disciplinary infractions.<sup>770</sup> While many of the surviving carbon copies of the case files deal with various forms of internal insubordination, there are also numerous instances of members flouting behavioural prescriptions, while wearing insignia. One Rotterdam member, a notorious alcoholic, got drunk in a café while wearing the triangular party insignia on his coat. Trying to start a fight in the café, one of the first priorities of his comrades was to remove the insignia from his clothes, commenting that 'that was no propaganda for the NSB'.<sup>771</sup> Such cases of fascist drunkenness are some of the most common in the council files.<sup>772</sup> Naturally this contributed to the image of fascists as undisciplined and immoral boors, and did not just undermine mythopoeic efforts, but straight up reinforced negative stereotypes. One member was found to be carrying a German *Parabellum* pistol during the work camp mutiny at the 1935 Hague convention work camp mutiny, while

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<sup>770</sup> Transcript of Composition and Procedure of the Regional Disciplinary Councils, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1337.

<sup>771</sup> Minutes, case comrade G.P. [name restricted], Rotterdam, 11 November 1936, p. 1, in NIOD: 123, 2.30: 2026.

<sup>772</sup> E.g.: Minutes, Meeting High Disciplinary Council, case HP 106, concerning comrade F. [name restricted], Amsterdam, Utrecht, 24 July 1937, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1342; Minutes, Meeting Disciplinary Council, case comrade M. [name restricted], Druten, Hilversum, 20 July 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1343; Minutes, Case comrade V. [name restricted], Schiedam, 14 November 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 2026; Advisory letter, case comrade G.J.G. [name restricted], Rotterdam, 8 December 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 2026.

another tried to illegally sell a revolver to other members.<sup>773</sup> One case concerned an alcoholic WA-member, with a possible habit of adultery, who was rumoured to have shot off the lock of his liquor cabinet with a revolver.<sup>774</sup>

The thug was one of the most common and harmful, constructions of fascism that the NSAP and the NSB faced,<sup>775</sup> and it relied strongly on the portrayal of fascism as simultaneously a form of organised and undisciplined violence, threatening and chaotic. The habit of some members to arm themselves for fights, at meetings and in public, was most conducive to breaking up the myth of fascism as a respectable and disciplined force. One 1934 letter, from the NSAP southern District Leader Nils Wenchert to a local functionary, even implied that while weapons were not considered part of the uniform, the leadership did not object to them. 'You'll have to get truncheons yourself individually, because they don't belong to the equipment.'<sup>776</sup> Lindholm also recounts that members of the propaganda teams regularly brought truncheons to meetings, and recounts several instances in his diary of groups attacking communists with truncheons, though this seems to have more or less stopped after the law against paramilitaries was passed.<sup>777</sup>

Armed members do seem to have been more of a problem for the NSB, in spite, or perhaps because of, stricter laws against carrying arms of any sort.<sup>778</sup> NSB-members were in 1933 numerous times found to illegally carry truncheons, knuckledusters, blackjacks, and even guns, leading to several trials which particularly *Het Volk* reported, denouncing them as 'armed Mussert-fascists'.<sup>779</sup> By far the most embarrassing incident involved Mussert himself in May 1937, when, during a visit to the communist-dominated neighbourhood Blauwe Zand in Amsterdam, he and his chauffeur fended off a hostile crowd with a whip, and his chauffeur with a gun (a Mausser revolver or semi-automatic). The heavily publicised incident went to trial, and while Mussert was never convicted, the case allowed the gleeful reconstruction of the quasi-uniformed Mussert carrying a less-than-

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<sup>773</sup> Minutes, Meeting Disciplinary Council, case regarding disorders at The Hague work camp, Hilversum, 2 November 1935, p. 3, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1346; Letter, Regional Disciplinary Council, decision regarding comrade L.S. [name restricted], 30 October 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.56: 2020.

<sup>774</sup> Minutes, Meeting Disciplinary Council, case: comrade M. [name restricted], Druten, Hilversum, 27 July 1935, pp. 1-2, NIOD: 123, 2.30: 1343.

<sup>775</sup> Damsma and Schumacher, *Hier Woont een NSB'er*, p. 121.

<sup>776</sup> 'Battonger får ni allt skaffa individuellt, enär det inte hör till utrustningen.', Letter, DK [Nils Wenchert] to Ove Adamsson (avd. 39), 8 January 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Södra Distriktet (1934).

<sup>777</sup> Lindholm interview, 00258: b; Lindholm diary, 15 July 1932, 19 July 1933, 4 July 1934.

<sup>778</sup> As instructed in the directives for colporteurs: Directive, 'Richtlyn no 2: Instructie straat colportage', p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 526.

<sup>779</sup> *Het Volk*, no 12 169, 24 June 1933, p. 13; 'Gewapende Mussert-fascisten', *Het Volk*, no 12 273, 24 August 1933, p. 1.



respectable whip in the street, flanked by a thuggish gun-toting chauffeur, picking fights in communist neighbourhoods. The investigation allowed newspapers to repeat and elaborate the story for several days, shortly before the general elections. VoVa tried to depict the incident as an assassination attempt on Mussert, but papers like *De Tijd* chose to focus on the less heroic aspects of the confrontation. '[O]ne thing is for sure, and that is that Mussert carried a whip, when he was visiting party members by car in the known communist neighbourhood, while his chauffeur carried a revolver', the paper wrote in an article entitled 'The Hero of the "Blue Sand" [*Blauwe Zand*].<sup>780</sup> The whip in particular would come to haunt Mussert's image, as a preposterous imitation of Hitler.<sup>781</sup> While VoVa claimed that fascists needed to be armed to protect themselves from Red terror, it was all too aware of how armed members made cracks in the myth of an army of law and order. NSB discourse was in constant debate with rival interpretations of fascist behaviour, arguing that papers like *Algemeen Handelsblad* presented a false picture of the respectable party members, merely resorting to legitimate means of self-defence, as became dignified and courageous men.<sup>782</sup>

The mythopoeic potential of the uniform was powerful, but a significant minefield. Moments of indiscipline, collective or individual, and even just bad luck, made for infelicitous performances that were easily integrated into alternative constructions of the fascist movements. The uniform made fascist movements into militaristic armies, a myth that members carried with them even when the uniform was left at home or covered up. The deliberately cultivated connotations of discipline, organisation, power, and militarism leaked easily beyond the boundaries of respectability, within which party discourse attempted to frame and secure them. Discipline was not trivially enforced in practice; the tight bond between uniform and behaviour did not come automatically, but had to be deliberately trained and regulated. The corporeal repertoire of salutes, steps, and straight backs was far easier to inculcate than just sound and respectable behaviour, which was open to individual judgment. In practice it was easily thwarted. Members were simultaneously encouraged to wear the uniform with honour and devotion, and forbidden from showing it off outside of private, party events – arguably an invitation to

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<sup>780</sup> '...maar zeker is, dat Mussert een zweep bij zich had, toen hij partijgenooten in de als zeer communistisch bekende wijk per auto ging bezoeken, terwijl zijn chauffeur een revolver droeg.', 'De held van het "Blauwe Zand"', *De Tijd*, no 29 399, 15 May 1937, p. 6.

<sup>781</sup> 'Hoe Amsterdam heeft getemd', *De Maasbode*, no 27 410, 27 May 1937, p. 3.

<sup>782</sup> jclb, 'Hoe het Handelsblad het fascisme bestrijdt', *VoVa*, no 13, 31 March 1934, pp. 5-6.

insubordination, especially for younger members. Neither the NSB nor the NSAP possessed anything like the resources or opportunities to train their cadres into an actually militarily disciplined and smoothly functioning army, where each member stuck rigidly to a fascist moral discipline, always dignified, powerful, masculine, yet respectable. In an organisation of thousands or tens of thousands, individual misbehaviour was inevitable – as it was in all parties – and reports of infractions and crimes were quickly carried across the country. But mythopoeia did not end at the performative stage. The fascist press continued to engage in a battle for the significance of these performances, countering hostile outsiders' portrayals of fascist misdemeanour, juxtaposing the image of a thuggish, criminal, foreign, or revolutionary fascism with their myth of a respectable, dignified, and patriotic fascism.

## VIII

If uniforms were a keystone of unsympathetic interpretations of fascism, and an unreliable tool from a disciplinary perspective, the question is why both the NSB and the NSAP maintained its central place in their symbolic order, or indeed at all. Did the benefits outweigh the negative connotations of militarism, violence, and disorder?

One answer must be that some fascist performances appeared unconvincing, artificial, or even ridiculous, without uniforms. Once uniforms had been established as a core part of the mythopoeic repertoire, their absence became noticeable, and an object of scorn for inimical analyses. When in the aftermath of the Swedish uniform ban, Lindholm appeared at a large public meeting at the Stockholm Auditorium, newspapers made fun of the un-uniform impression that the fascists now made, the 'confusion of shirts'. Lindholm, the regional *Stockholms-Tidningen* reported, performed in a blue shirt, 'his SA-leader's colour was a screaming red, and the standard-bearing boys had both speckled and striped-shirted torsos – indeed, it was such a motley selection of shirt fabrics you could notice the irony'.<sup>783</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet* also made note of how the SA-men 'performed in shirts of different colours, striped, and chequered, and single coloured...' at the 'large National Socialist hallelujah-meeting'. The paper also took note of 'a well-directed flag parade, led by a gentleman in a beautiful red shirt. ... then came party leader Sven-Olov Lindholm.

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<sup>783</sup> 'hans SA-ledares färg var skriande röd och de fanbärande gossarna voro både sträckliga och randiga på skjortöverkroppen – ja, det var en så brokig uppsättning av skjorttyger, att man rent av märkte ironien.', 'Partiledare Lindholm vill ej bli utnämnd av Hitler', *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 25 October 1933.

He wore a pleasant blue shirt.<sup>784</sup> Several other papers took similar delight in pointing out these veritable anti-uniforms.<sup>785</sup> Out of uniform, performances looked less organised, the collection of individuals less disciplined, and it heavily undermined the image of unity the NSAP and NSB were so keen to maintain.

The contrast was at its most noticeable during a party convention, when the customary marches through the cities of Amsterdam, Gothenburg, 's-Gravenhage, or Stockholm, made a rather dismal impression when the parties tried to maintain some kind of dignified and disciplined front, without the clothing to visually tie the ranks together, and lend coherence to the demonstration. At the 1935 Amsterdam convention, Mussert complained how they were forced 'to proceed through Amsterdam like prisoners-of-war, without flags, without music' – an obvious contrast to the ceremonial display in the RAI-building.<sup>786</sup> Photographs of the 'civilian' marches, even those made for fascist publications, are not instantly recognisable as displays of fascism [see also chapter 4, fig. 7]. The contrast between the brown-shirted columns of the 1933 *årstingsmarsch* and its 1934 equivalent in the rain speaks volumes. The NSB's processions, with their dark-clothed participants, looked like a sad and dismal affair when robbed of their flags. Socialist *Het Volk* described the rainy regional *landdag* procession of 1934, where the Amsterdam city authorities forced the marchers to roll up their flags, as a 'funeral procession'.<sup>787</sup> Outside commentators were but all too aware of how fascism *wanted to appear*, and took much satisfaction in highlighting the contrast, as a handy metaphor for a movement in decline. Un-uniformed performances were far less photogenic, and made much less of a spectacle: discursive and visual representations of large meetings tended to be much more focused on the indoors, private, aspect of the event, with all its ritual and ceremony, and less on the public procession which instead became about the martyrdom of the party, the heroic discipline of respectable men in the face of uncouth Bolshevik agitators.<sup>788</sup>

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<sup>784</sup> '...uppträdde i skjortor av olika kulörer, randiga och rutiga eller enfärgade.... ... Därpå följde en välregisserad flaggparad, kommenderad av en herre i vackert röd skjorta. ... och så intågade partiledaren Sven-Olov Lindholm. Han bar en trevlig blå skjorta.', Newspaper clipping, 'En folkvald', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25 October 1933, Arninge: 2C: 1a.

<sup>785</sup> Newspaper clipping, Per Gyberg, 'Nazistisk möteskultur', *Tidningen Freden*, no 121, 1933, p. 1., Arninge: 2C: 1a.

<sup>786</sup> Mussert quote: 'Wij zijn door Amsterdam getrokken als krijgsgevangenen, zonder vlaggen, zonder muziek.', 'De landdag der N.S.B.', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, no 35 254, 31 March 1935, p. 6.

<sup>787</sup> Quote: 'Onze Gewestelijke Landdag', *VoVa*, no 18, 5 May 1934, p. 8.

<sup>788</sup> E.g.: 'Hysteriska kvinnor främst vid Masthuggskravallerna', *DSN*, no 21, 24 May 1934, p. 5.

While the uniform lost its immediate mythopoeic strength in the face of the laws against political uniforms, and negative portrayals did not cease during the following years, both parties still benefited from the indirect transmission of images of uniforms to the public, through their newspapers, propaganda, and other publications. These had the advantage that, unlike the, doubtlessly more impressive, immediacy of an actually present uniformed army, they were tightly controlled and selected, framed by discursive reconstructions which directed the beholder's interpretation. Both VoVa and DSN sold in disproportionately high numbers for most of the 1930s, and were a far more common point of encounter for outsiders with the fascist uniform than the physically present. It brought the otherwise private spectacle of the uniformed ceremony or ritual outside, while the distance between the mythopoeic uniform and the observer contributed to producing reverence and respect for the object. They ensured it was always accompanied by the appropriate fascist commentary, and through selection manufactured the special character of the uniform. It was removed from the mundane, secular world, and preferentially staged in a ritual context. While such imagery was not immune to deconstruction by a critical gaze, fascist hermeneutics helped offset rival interpretations. The extent to which this was effective can only be surmised, but it was safer than physically present uniforms on the street, unprotected by discursive fascist interjections, precariously open to (mis)interpretation. Hence the uniform was, in spite of the risks and drawbacks, not a lost battle in the thirties' struggle for the meaning of fascism. The mythopoeic potential of the uniform was too powerful to be abandoned, and there were openings and opportunities to convey that mythopoeic force from inside, to the outside public.

Nor was this purely a matter of propaganda strategy. Neither Mussert nor Lindholm were in a position to simply abolish the uniform in the party. Apart from the ridicule of the press, they faced the devotion of the cadres to the garments, so that mythopoeic strategy was also tied up with their fetishistic commitment to the symbol. Attempts by the Haarlem Circle Leader to prohibit NSB-members from wearing the black shirt to IJmuiden celebrations of Queen Wilhelmina's birthday in 1933 (the event was not meant to be exploited for propaganda purposes) were met with indignant responses.

Some of our members will not go to IJmuiden, precisely because the black shirt has been forbidden to them; they say that they wish to bear witness to our loyalty to the Dynasty, and do that

preferentially in a black shirt, the dress of our Movement [...] In my opinion every compromise is out of the question, and the wearing of black shirts ought to be encouraged under all circumstances, certainly not be prohibited, with perhaps as only exception in church.<sup>789</sup>

In the years after 1933 the desire to wear uniforms in public was partially satisfied by the wearing of uniform-like clothes whenever possible – this habit in the NSAP has already been noted, while in the NSB this was rather more difficult, but still possible on rare occasions. For instance as the WA and NSB started infiltrating hiking organisations, they instructed members to participate in apolitical sport marches in identical clothing. For the traditional Four-Day march, NSB and WA-members were informed of the desirability ‘that everyone will be as similarly dressed as possible’, giving a specific list of garments and colours to be worn (long-sleeved open-necked white shirt, short black trousers, orange lower socks, black upper socks, black shoes).<sup>790</sup> In Sweden, the NSAP insisted that the ban against uniforms was ultimately temporary in nature, and its regulations even prescribed a quasi-uniform for the period when uniforms were banned: [d]uring periods of democratic uniform scares (uniform ban) a white shirt is worn (sport- or tennis shirt) as well as a brown motor cap. Note that boots and trousers are not [legally considered] uniform paraphernalia.<sup>791</sup>

It is remarkable that when Lindholm in 1937-38 identified uniforms as one of the most problematic aspects of the party image, rather than getting rid of them, the colours and design were changed. When on 28 October 1938, Lindholm gathered the leading party functionaries to explain the New Direction, he argued that ‘we have made a few mistakes. One of these mistakes is that we have used means and symbols which have scared off some of our countrymen [*folkkamrater*] and prevented them from joining us.’<sup>792</sup> Apart from a change in name and most

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<sup>789</sup> ‘Enkele onzer leden gaan niet naar Ymuiden, juist omdat men hun het zwarte hemd verbiedt; ze zeggen wy wenschen te getuigen van onze trouw aan het Vorstehuis [*sic*] en doen dat by voorkeur in een zwart hemd, de dracht van onze Beweging [...] M.i. is elk compromis uit den booze, en dient het dragen van zwarte hemden onder alle omstandigheden aangemoedigd te worden, in geen geval verboden met misschien als eenigste uitzondering: in de Kerk.’, Letter, T. v.d. Weide to Gen. Leader of Propaganda, Overveen, 27 August 1933, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 397.

<sup>790</sup> Circular, WA-Inspector (Hogewind), Utrecht, 28 May 1934, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1046.

<sup>791</sup> ‘Under perioder av demokratisk uniformsskräck (uniformsförbud) bäres vit skjorta (sport- el. tennisskortja) samt brun motormössa. Obs. Stövlar och byxor äro icke uniformspersedlar.’, NSAP, SA, and A-Group confiscated documents, in: Gothenburg SA-inquiry police report, 1935, p. 65.

<sup>792</sup> ‘...vi ha gjort en del misstag. En del av dessa misstag äro att vi använt medel och symboler som avskräckt en hel del av våra folkkamrater att ansluta sig till oss [*sic*].’, Lindholm, qu., Police memorandum regarding NSAP, 3 November 1938, p. 3, Arninge: XII 64: 2.

crucially the party symbol, the swastika, he insisted that changing ‘certain forms of presentation is absolutely necessary’.<sup>793</sup> This led to a break-away faction being formed under the leadership of SA-functionary Nils Björkman, but Lindholm thought this was good riddance. ‘If you who leave us are such friends of Germany, or if you want to go dressed in uniforms so badly, that you do not wish to follow me in the future, you are free to go.’<sup>794</sup> According to the police informant about two-thirds of the audience immediately left in silence. But in the resulting circular sent out to all members on 1 November, notifying them of the changes, the idea of abolishing the uniform had been dropped. ‘As you understand, sometimes the forms have to make way so that the content, *the ideas*, can be disseminated better’, but uniforms were not mentioned explicitly, and would continue to feature in the SSS.<sup>795</sup> NSAP/SSS members were deeply committed to the uniform, as the Swedish and Dutch fascists generally were to their symbols. Only a few months earlier in the Netherlands, Mussert had tried to replace the party’s triangular black-red symbol as displayed on flag and insignia with an encircled *wolfsangel*, but had to compromise after an outcry from the cadres.<sup>796</sup> One party veteran wrote to Mussert:

Leader, our Black Red flag, was to me and tens of thousands of others, *everything*. [...] I know, that flag was only a symbol, but still, something has been *taken away* from me, and many other older comrades. And the emptiness has not been filled by the ‘newcomer’ by a long way yet. Us older ones MISS the good old Black-Red flag. [...] And then my insignia, that strong, angular sign of honour, which as workers in the Movement. you have lent to [us]...? Must I put away my NSB-memories and instead pin [on my clothing] this sweet round little thing [the wolf’s hook]...?<sup>797</sup>

In the end Mussert had to concede that it was ‘impossible’ to be disloyal to the old symbols.<sup>798</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> ‘samt visa former för framträdandet är absolut nödvändig.’, *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>794</sup> ‘Om ni som lämna oss äro sådana tysklandsvänner, eller om ni så gärna vill gå klädda i uniformer att ni därför inte vill följa mig i fortsättningen då må ni gärna gå.’, *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>795</sup> ‘Som du förstår måste ibland formerna vika för att innehållet, *idéerna*, bättra skall kunna utbredas.’, Circular, Sven-Olov Lindholm and Party Leadership to all members, Stockholm, 1 November 1939, Arninge: XII 64: 2.

<sup>796</sup> Order concept, Mussert, Utrecht, June 1938, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 79.

<sup>797</sup> ‘Leider onze Zwart Roode vlag, was my en tienduizenden wellicht met my *alles*. [...] Ik weet het, die vlag was slechts een symbool; maar toch, van my, van zoo heel velen met my, oudere kameraden is iets wèggenomen. En de leegte is door de “nieuwelinge” nog ganschelyk niet opgevuld. Wy ouderen MISSEN onze oude goede Zwartroode vlag. [...] En dan myn insigne, dat sterke hoekige eereteken my, en ons, door U als werkers in de Beweging verleend..? Moet ik dat by myn NSB-herinneringen opbergen en ervoor in de plaats dat zoete ronde dingske spelden..?, Letter, A.P. Hengeveld to Mussert, Laren, 8 June 1938, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 79.

<sup>798</sup> Order from the Leader regarding flags etc., for publication in VoVa, 14 June 1938, pp. 3-4, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 79.

But in the end one of the most remarkable aspects of the NSAP's and the NSB's attitude to their uniforms and associated symbols during this period is how the fetishistic commitment was not just continuously propagandised, and demanded by members, but deliberately sustained in spite of all disadvantages, and ultimately through the bans integrated even further into their mythologies. The bans were not to be an obstacle to the continued acquisition of uniforms, whole or in part,<sup>799</sup> and a uniformed show of force at meetings always remained desirable.<sup>800</sup> The mythopoeic force of the uniform was pent up internally, only let out indirectly, through discursive reconstruction and visual representation. But in both parties' myths, the NSB's in particular, the struggle would one day conclude with a fascist victory, and that day the uniforms would appear on the streets of Sweden and the Netherlands again, and the fascists would march freely in their brown and black shirts for all to see. 'Our faith is not in our brownshirts or our uniforms. When there is nothing else to attack, *Social-Demokraten* attacks our boots. But truly we will not for the sake of *Social-Demokraten* put on any democratic slippers to seem more peaceful. [...] One day the working people itself will annul this curious clothing-ban.'<sup>801</sup> The NSB promised: '[o]ne day the hour will strike, when we, bold and free in our uniforms, will march on the streets behind our storm flags in the service of the NSB; but when that hour comes we must be COMPLETELY prepared.'<sup>802</sup>

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Uniforms were a lynchpin in the symbolic order of both the NSAP and NSB, and fulfilled broadly the same function in both parties. They were powerful symbols and important aesthetic components of the external propaganda, a crucial part of the fascist myth, but their real importance was within the party, as an internal mobilising and integrating force. It was directly tied up with several key themes of the same myth of a holy army under one leader, in a fated battle

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<sup>799</sup> 'Meddelande från Plg', *DSN*, no 2, 11 January 1934, p. 2.

<sup>800</sup> Police memorandum, regarding NSAP comrade evening, 30 March 1937, p. 1, Arninge: XII 64: 1.

<sup>801</sup> 'Vår tro fanns inte i våra brunskjortor eller i vår uniformering. När det inte finns något annat att angripa, angriper man i Social-Demokraten våra stövlar. Vi ämna sannerligen inte för Social-Demokratens skull anlägga några demokratiska tofflor för att verka mera fredliga. [...] En dag skall det bli det arbetande folket självt som upphäver detta kuriösa klädselbud.', -uu-, 'Stövelskräck i Social-Demokraten!', *DSN*, no 39, 23 May 1936, p. 7.

<sup>802</sup> 'Eens zal het uur slaan, waarop wy fier en vry in onze uniformen acter onze stormvlaggen in dienst der N.S.B. op straat zullen marcheeren; maar op dat uur moeten wy ook VOLLEDIG klaar zyn.', Circular, J. Hogewind, regarding the recent *Landdag*, Utrecht, 15 October 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1046.

for the nation, and even Europe, destined to overcome its enemies. The narrative itself was trite for sure, but the uniform played a huge roll in allowing members to become protagonists in this myth. It enhanced the comportment of the wearer, and added a symbolic dimension to their very body, foregrounding its imagined masculinity.<sup>803</sup> This seems to have fuelled what can only be termed a uniform fetishism amongst the cadres, implicitly encouraged by the leadership. Here some of Theweleit's psychological insights are given more historical substance, in a cultural political context. The uniform was part of an integrated network of symbols that constructed the fascist myth in various forms, with props like flags and visual signs, and a distinct fascist corporeal repertoire, all being used in conjunction with clothing to further the mythopoeic project. It is curious to see just how similar the political culture around the uniform was in both Sweden and the Netherlands, underpinning a militaristic subculture of hierarchy and fantasy, more for the benefit of the members than propaganda.

The difference between the two parties was instead outsiders' reactions, as shaped by the political climate stemming from the respective uniform bans. In neither case did media opinion seem to be particularly amenable to political uniforms, but in Sweden attitudes were far more relaxed towards the NSAP's uniformed delinquency than in the Netherlands. The threat of civil war came up in both countries, but only the NSB faced actual rumours of *coup d'états* and illegal militia infiltration; correspondingly it also saw far more practical legal repression. In Sweden on the other hand, the mainstream press was quite happy to report on uniformed fascists with humour and light-hearted mockery, even in the left-wing press. While this made the NSAP seem far less dangerous than the NSB, it also severely undermined its credibility: unlike the NSB, the NSAP was portrayed as childish and silly, which was possibly worse than being considered dangerous.

In both cases the parties nevertheless throve of the associations of danger, violence, and masculine bravado that was inherent to the uniform. Marches, fights, expeditions into red neighbourhoods, and the carrying of weapons were a liability, but indispensable to maintaining the fascist myth in its fantastical dimensions. While patriotic symbols and imagery, and a discourse of law and order were enlisted to balance out the other associations, the fascist parties found themselves saddled with an awkward dilemma. The militaristic myth was essential to the

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<sup>803</sup> Mosse, 'Fascist Aesthetics and Society', p. 248.



appeal of fascism, both to the cadres and potential newcomers, but its props and paraphernalia were an affront to conservative respectability, and fuelled hostile discourses which undermined that myth. In a way the bans against political uniforms cut the Gordian knot, as they restricted the uniform to the party internally, satisfying members' desires, and guising this dubious side of the party from the public. But through discourse and insubordination the problem kept resurfacing throughout the decade. The allure of violence and power inherent to the uniform attracted and repelled, but was ultimately too ingrained in the fascist political culture.

#### 4. The Spectacle: aesthetics, morale, immersion

The centre piece of the NSAP's and the NSB's propaganda efforts every year was the party convention, the pinnacle of the party's organisational capacities, and the greatest manifestation of the Movement to the public. Fascist rallies have attracted the attention of historians before, the NSDAP's much-publicised *Nürnberg Parteitage* in particular. The fascist spectacles have been analysed quite extensively, with academic interest in the role of aestheticism in fascism,<sup>804</sup> going back to Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. A great deal of attention has been paid to the real political value of such performances and its imagery, rather than being dismissed as merely totalitarian window-dressing.<sup>805</sup>

One angle through which such spectacle has been viewed is modernity and its technologies. Fascist rallies not only relied on modern technologies, but the format itself was symptomatic of modern mass politics. Bringing together ever larger numbers of people, in a single place to be ritually unified as an expression of political will was perhaps a uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon, symptomatic of a new 'totalitarian' approach to politics.<sup>806</sup> Accordingly, fascist parties were not the only ones to organise such political spectacles, even if theirs have been most deeply impressed on historical memory.<sup>807</sup> In the Netherlands, the SDAP used mass rallies which symbolised the strength of the unified working class, replete with red flags and music. In 1936 the SDAP managed to gather as many as 40 000 demonstrators in the market halls of Amsterdam.<sup>808</sup> At the same time leading SDAP figures were keen to counter the fascists' exploitation of myths and aesthetics to woo the working classes, developing a 'festive culture' to create a sense of socialist community.<sup>809</sup> Nor were such spectacles, appealing to the audience through a heady mixture of sound, imagery, and pregnant symbolism a preserve of the rising socialist Left and fascist Right. In 1921, the Dutch Jesuit Jacques van Genneken founded the Grail movement, which controversially relied heavily on modern technologies to orchestrate ritualistic mass performances, as well as processions through the streets of the Southern Netherlands in

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<sup>804</sup> Mosse, 'Fascist Aesthetics and Society', pp. 245–47.

<sup>805</sup> Paul, p. 13.

<sup>806</sup> David D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe: Understanding the Poverty of Great Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 430–37.

<sup>807</sup> Eichberg and Jones, pp. 143–50.

<sup>808</sup> R. Abma, 'Het Plan van de Arbeid en de SDAP', *Low Countries Historical Review*, 92.1 (1977), 37–68 (p. 67).

<sup>809</sup> Bernard Rulof, 'Selling Social Democracy in the Netherlands: Activism and Its Sources of Inspiration during the 1930s', *Contemporary European History*, 18.4 (2009), 478–97 (pp. 484–86, 495–96).

colourful uniforms, with battle cries, flags, and standards.<sup>810</sup> Sweden on the other hand was not renowned for such modernistic spectacles; with its far more spread out population and isolated communities, political theatre of any kind was generally on a far smaller scale than in the Netherlands, with the possible exception of the famous 1913 Farmers' March – which saw the involvement of fascist pioneer and sometime ally of Lindholm, Elof Eriksson.<sup>811</sup>

Since the cultural and 'performative turn', the political spectacles of the interbellum have been analysed with the understanding that the propaganda of spectacle does not merely aim to deceive or blindfold its audience, but actively creates meaning, i.e. is a cultural process. Inspired by theatre studies since the nineteenth century, historians and other academics have connected performativity to theatrical concepts of direction, stage, actors, and *mise-en-scène*, and sociological discussions of ritual, as a means of furthering the understanding of political performances.<sup>812</sup> One notable theorist of theatre studies who has turned to historical approaches, Erika Fischer-Lichte, argued that the interwar period was a time of fusion between ritual and theatre – looking particularly at the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany's *Thingspiel* – giving rise to a new form of political mass spectacle that became ubiquitous in Europe.<sup>813</sup> Ritual is here understood as a scripted form of symbolic communication, which reaffirms the ties between spectators and performers, and their joint commitment to a shared symbolic order, reifying the bonds of the community. Fischer-Lichte points to a crucial historical moment in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century where research into ritual and theatre studies intersected,<sup>814</sup> producing discussion of how theatre could build communities, and theatre techniques could be applied to ritual.<sup>815</sup> She points to the political significance of *mise-en-scène* (*Inszenierung*) not just as an aesthetic criterion, manipulating *how* the performance is perceived,

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<sup>810</sup> Marjet Derks, "'Stralende strijdlust, taaie zelfverloochening': De dynamiek van traditie en moderniteit in de Graalbeweging", in *Moderniteit: Modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland, 1914-1940*, ed. by Sophie Tates and Madelon de Keizer (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2004), pp. 284–93.

<sup>811</sup> Elof Eriksson, *Bonderörelsen: En historisk återblick*, 2 vols (Stockholm: Nationens Förlag, 1946), I, pp. 35–48.

<sup>812</sup> Martschukat and Patzold.

<sup>813</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 89–95, 128.

<sup>814</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Performance, Inszenierung, Ritual', in *Geschichtswissenschaft und 'Performative Turn': Ritual, Inszenierung und Performanz vom Mittelalter bis zur Neuzeit*, ed. by Jürgen Martschukat and Steffen Patzold (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), pp. 33–55 (p. 33).

<sup>815</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 51–52.

but whether it is perceived as staged in the first place.<sup>816</sup> This point about perceived authenticity has been picked up on by Jeffrey C. Alexander, who has also explored the interface between ritual and theatre, and the twin themes of authenticity and integration. The standard of ‘a performative’ in his reading is to be judged not by whether it is true or false, but felicitous or unfelicitous, where the former is perceived as authentic, the latter as artificial, i.e. the audience is ‘dis-encharmed’ and perceives the performance for what it is: a staged performance.<sup>817</sup> Their theoretical framework is useful in the assessment of the impact of organised fascist performances, i.e. the conventions, and analysing the connection between the modern fascist party organisation, the myth, the performance itself, and the roles of actors and spectators – sometimes embodied by the same group.

Both Fischer-Lichte and Alexander rely on performativity as understood by Judith Butler, using her re-application of J.L. Austin’s concept to apply not to just discursive, but especially bodily acts.<sup>818</sup> Butler’s work has been applied extensively in the previous chapter, but is of continued relevance here, as she has gone on to apply ideas of bodily performativity to politics in her 2015 *Notes toward a performative theory of assembly*. Verbalisation is the norm for expressive political action, but, Butler argues, acting in concert in an embodied form can challenge this through the plural and embodied form of assembly.<sup>819</sup> While she specifically considers democratic and anti-authoritarian forms of assembly, there is no reason this notion cannot be applied to the politics of fascism. What her recent work highlights in this case is that there was a specific performativity of the collective and bodily presence of individuals, which could challenge political norms in unique ways. Previously William H. Sewell has argued for the significance of gathering large groups of people in specific spaces, to further political ends, but has rooted his analysis predominantly in how this collective presence changes the meaning of space, and the outlook and experience of participants, rather than analysing political assembly at the level of the immediate production of meaning, which is of primary importance for this study.<sup>820</sup> As will be shown below,

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<sup>816</sup> Fischer-Lichte, ‘Performance, Inszenierung, Ritual’, pp. 44–45.

<sup>817</sup> Alexander and Mast, pp. 3–6.

<sup>818</sup> *Performativity and Performance*, ed. by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 1–2.

<sup>819</sup> Judith Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 9–19.

<sup>820</sup> Sewell, ‘Space in Contentious Politics’.

bodily presence was central to the mythopoeic potential of fascist conventions, and was important both for *how* it created meaning, and its emotional impact on participants.

This chapter will analyse the annual party conventions of the NSB and NSAP as a type of political spectacle that performatively constructed fascism through organised, collective, bodily performance. The party conventions of 1935 will be used as case studies, reconstructing their organisation and implementation closely to bring out their mythopoeic effects. These theatrical performances, manifesting the party as a unified force in action, were an unparalleled act of mythopoeia. This was a holistic event, where not just the actual spectacle of the political theatre was propaganda, but also the very act of organising it was performative, a construction of the strength and will of the party. At the same time the convention was an inimitable way of bringing otherwise isolated members together, reminding them of their greater purpose, and through integration reinvigorate them for future activism. In other words it was a mobilisation exercise which had a tremendous impact on party morale, something especially important for the widely scattered NSAP formations who struggled for years with few signs of progress, unlike the mushrooming and urbanised NSB organisation.

What made the conventions effective as mythopoeia was their overwhelming aesthetic and emotional appeal. The party organisations aimed to mobilise the party *en masse*, and valued the scale of the event perhaps more than anything else, enhancing the sense of collective belonging, so important for morale. The participants themselves became objects of mythopoeia, tools in the grandiose performance, designed to impress alternately members and outsiders. The nature of the spectacular was the result of the conventions' holistic nature: close organisation and theatrical staging techniques, and the closely controlled and scripted nature of the performance, all contributed to creating a coherent narrative in which spectators and participants could be fully immersed. This analysis of fascist spectacle will show that, while the liturgical elements of a 'political religion' were doubtlessly present, this dimension was largely *ad hoc*, and in service of a more central aesthetic register. More than anything this was a cultural event for the immediate physical performance of fascism, rather than the mystical worship of a transcendent principle, no matter how religious the rhetoric. The analysis here also goes beyond the focal point of ritual and theatre studies, community and social integration, to foreground the fantastical.

This comparative analysis of the aesthetics of spectacle will bring out two functions of the Swedish and Dutch fascist conventions of 1935, but which were privileged in contrasting ways by the two parties. The function of rallies as propaganda is perhaps the most obvious, the other was as mobilisation to boost morale. For the NSB, propaganda was clearly the most important, something that can be linked back to the trajectory of its success, and the scale of its organisation. For the NSAP it was morale – the Swedish party did not enjoy the media attention of its Dutch counterpart, and its struggles with Swedish geography [chapter 1] made the need to reify the bonds between the members more acute. These two approaches to the fascist convention made for quite different events, which brings out the importance of the national context for the nature of fascist mythopoeia – both in the character of its enactment and its aims. Ultimately, this chapter aims to show how and why circumstances pushed the NSAP and NSB to organise two very different spectacles, but both of which from different angles sought to construct a fantastic fascism that could punch above their immediate political weight. In the general analysis of fascist mythopoeia and respectability, this analysis unifies the examination of specific myths, practical party organisation, fantasy, activism, and national contexts and political cultures, in what served as the definitive performance of fascism, a holistic unity through embodiment. At the same time it will show that no matter how spectacular, fascists were never in control of the public discourse about their events; even the greatest mythopoeic efforts could be unpicked.

## I

When Lindholm broke away from the SNSP in January 1933, it took little time before party newspaper DSN announced the first NSAP party convention, the *årsting*.<sup>821</sup> As fascists whose first direct experience of National Socialism was as guests at the August 1929 Nuremberg rally of the NSDAP, Lindholm and the Party Leadership had an impressive idea of what such an event could be like, and its importance for the movement.<sup>822</sup> The trip had been arranged via Lindholm's friend Max Pferdekämper, who as SNSP functionary was to learn from the propaganda and organisation of the Nazis. In 1980 he recalled the powerful impression the rally made on him:

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<sup>821</sup> 'Meddelande från P.L.', *DSN*, no 5, 15 March 1933, p. 2.

<sup>822</sup> Karl N. Alvar Nilsson, *Svensk Överklassnazism, 1930-1945* (Stockholm: Carlsson, 1996), p. 98.

And it was then a perhaps mile-long column of members [came], first and foremost SA-troops from different parts of the country, with their standards and flags; masses of viewers, there were raised tribunes on the side, there stood masses of people, and in the windows and on the roofs, and waving with flags, shouting and screaming. It was something altogether indescribable, something like that simply doesn't happen in Sweden.<sup>823</sup>

With this formative experience in mind, the NSAP set about organising its own annual party convention. The *årsting* was first held on the third and fourth of June 1933 in Gothenburg, where party headquarters were initially located and where fascists were most heavily concentrated in the country. Throughout the thirties it had a set structure. Over the course of two or three days around Pentecost, party members would gather for four main events: the 'leader day', a small scale meeting on the first day of the congress for functionaries, which dealt with practical matters of organisation and instruction; indoor party meetings focused on a series of speeches from the Party Leadership; an outdoor public meeting; and the *uppmarsch*, a ritual march through town in formation. These events were interspersed with a number of rituals and ceremonies, music and singing, while every evening was ended with a 'comrade evening', a festive occasion for the members to gather for food, drink, and entertainment.

It took the NSB over a year to organise its first *landdag* (the Dutch term for a large, organised gathering), which took place on 7 January 1933, in Utrecht. While Lindholm broke out of a pre-existing party and had a need to quickly consolidate his followers, Mussert used the first year of the party to lay the foundation of the organisation and establish a small following. Just like the NSAP's first *årsting*, the first *landdag* was a small-scale affair to assert the presence and authority of the new party, to the public and to rivals, and instruct the members – a demonstration not of numbers, but of discipline.<sup>824</sup> These first conventions of the NSB and NSAP were remarkably similar in some of the features they included, such as uniformed marches through the city, instructive speeches of encouragement from the Leader, and the affirmation of loyalty to his person. But the NSB conventions across the decade diverged from their Swedish counterpart in many ways. Rather than a strictly annual event, the *landdag* was organised whenever it was

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<sup>823</sup> 'Det var då en milslång kolonn med medlemmar, först och främst SA-trupper från olika delar av landet, med sina olika standarer och fanor; åskådarmassor, det var läktare på sidorna, uppbyggda, där stod massor av folk, och i fönstrena och hustaken, och viftade med vimplor och flaggor, ropade och skrek. Det var nånting alldeles obeskrivligt, och sånt förekommer bara inte i Sverige.', Lindholm interview, 00256: b, c. 12 min.

<sup>824</sup> 'Congres te Utrecht: Niet het aantal, maar de kracht', *VoVa*, no 1, 7 January 1933, p. 2.

deemed opportune by the leadership. Instead of lasting several days, it was always a short, concentrated affair, lasting from the afternoon until the late evening. Quite unlike an *årsting*, it was not a time for celebration or entertainment, leaving only a short break of about an hour for refreshments, while the rest of the day was typically scheduled with speeches. While a march through town from the railway station to the event building was always an important part of the convention, it never had the importance of the NSAP's *uppmarscher*, and was redundant by 1936. Strictly speaking the last *landdag* of the NSB was in October 1935, after which they were replaced by the *Hagespraak*, a public open-air convention on the party's grounds in Lunteren, on the Goudsberg. These *Hagespraken* made for a very different kind of event compared to the *landdagen*: the location of a hill-top meadow in the countryside made for a very different setting from the major Dutch cities, and threw up different organisational challenges.<sup>825</sup> Their public character was of particular significance for these conventions, as they prohibited the wearing of uniforms, but also enlarged the scale of the event, as they attracted people outside of the party. The kind of organisation was also heavily altered to cater for this mixed public of members and curious outsiders. Nevertheless, the *Hagespraken* clearly fit in with the tradition of previous conventions, and retained their overall structure and ceremonial features, even if the purpose was rather altered.

In Sweden, the *årsting* were held once a year, bar 1936 when the party organisation focused on that year's general election campaign instead. The first two were held in Gothenburg, but as the party's centre of gravity shifted to the east, they were subsequently held in Stockholm. The two largest cities were an appropriate location not just for their size, but also because they were situated (very) roughly in the middle of Sweden, making the travel distance more or less fair for the members in the countryside. However, 1939 saw the event held for the first time in Sweden's third-largest city, Malmö. This too corresponded to a geographical shift of the party's propaganda and member concentration, this time focused on Scania in the south. The Malmö convention, or *Öresundstinget* as it was officially called, underlined the importance of access: for members in Norrland travel all the way to Malmö was virtually impossible, and a separate *Norrlandsting* had to be organised in Östersund in Midsummer. Otherwise the convention was held on the weekend of Pentecost, generally a popular time for these kinds of political events.

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<sup>825</sup> The Hagespraken have been researched in some detail recently in: Heijningen.



They were perhaps the only time of the year when people were guaranteed to have the time off work, and could take the time to travel to the city and be back home before Monday. Apply for the convention, 'you're free anyway', as DSN put it.<sup>826</sup> Additionally the weather was likely to be good, something of some importance for the impression the *uppmarsch* made.

The NSB conventions were irregular, two in 1933, January and October, a regional convention in Amsterdam in 1934, another two conventions in 1935, and one *Hagespraak* a year at Pentecost in 1936-40. Plans had been made to have an urban *landdag* again in 1939, but this was cancelled due to the unavailability of extra trains; instead regional conventions were organised alongside the *Hagespraak*.<sup>827</sup> In terms of locality there was a sharp divide between the urban gatherings in the major cities and the remote and difficult to access Lunteren in Gelderland. Why exactly Lunteren was chosen remains a matter of speculation – no relevant documents have been found pertaining to the party's purchase of the land. The symbolism of 'the centre of the Netherlands' is obvious, but it was very inconvenient; by 1941 it was literally impossible to organise conventions there due to fuel rationing, while railway access was almost non-existent.<sup>828</sup> The choice of place for the *landdagen* is rather self-evident: Utrecht was the place of the NSB headquarters, and conveniently situated within the *Randstad*. When the number of attendees grew too large to be contained by any public building in Utrecht, it moved on to Amsterdam and finally The Hague, the other major cities of the *Randstad*, easily accessible by rail from most places in the country. In Amsterdam it was the massive RAI-building which accommodated the event (also used for SDAP conventions), then in October 1935 a specially constructed tent in a field in The Hague outside the city centre was used, when the RAI-building also proved too small.

Attendance figures for the conventions are informative, and it is possible to reconstruct a great deal about the rising and falling fortunes of the NSAP and NSB through these.

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<sup>826</sup> 'Du är ändå ledig under Pingsten!', 'Upp till TINGS!', *DSN*, no 17, 26 April 1934, p. 10.

<sup>827</sup> Circular, de Blocq van Scheltinga to District Leaders, Utrecht, 18 September 1939, pp. 1-2, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 505.

<sup>828</sup> Heijningen, pp. 81–83, 142–43.

	1933	1933 Oct.	1934	1935*	1935 Oct.	1936	1937	1938	1939
NSAP/SSS	500	-	1700	1800	-	-	2100	2300	1200
NSB	500	5000	10 000	16 000	35 000	40 000	60 000	70 000	-

Figure 1. Approximate numbers of attendees for the conventions according to the parties' own sources. The 1934 figure for the NSB is for the regional *landdag* in Amsterdam, March that year.

\*The March 1935 convention in Amsterdam was held twice, as the RAI-building was not large enough, and could hold a maximum of 16 000 people. The NSAP convention included an additional 2-300 NU-members, bringing the total to over 2000.

Comparing the figures, the most striking difference is the extremely rapid growth of the NSB conventions in its first years. The meteoric rise of the NSB has already been discussed, and the sense of mission and destiny that came with it – as well as the firm response from the authorities that it produced. The Dutch figures for 1936-38 need to be handled with caution, as these were public events attracting numerous non-party members. Moreover the figures were highly disputed, with wildly varying estimates depending on source. The NSB did not give a figure for 1939, only speaking of ‘tens of thousands’. Regardless, these were some of the largest political rallies ever seen in the Netherlands, and even as the NSB’s membership shrunk in the latter half of the decade, it still managed to get an ever-greater proportion of its cadres to attend the event.<sup>829</sup> By comparison the NSAP saw an initial increase as the party grew and consolidated its organisation, before quickly stagnating, seeing only very modest growth until its collapse in 1939, partially caused by the unfortunate choice of location which effectively excluded the entire northern half of the country. In light of the party’s loud insistence that each convention was to be bigger and better than the last, the attendance in Malmö was downright humiliating, and reflected poorly on the ‘New Direction’ of the SSS. The figures also indicate that the size of the NSAP peaked in the mid-30s, at up to 12 000 members. The incremental growth of the *årsting* after that point to the improvements in the party apparatus in the later thirties. 1935 was in many ways a ‘year of consolidation’ for the party’s organisation, and the years that followed bore fruit in this regard. One thing that is not borne out by these figures is attendance at the adjacent public meetings, which were a standard part of the NSAP *årsting*; freely accessible, these could attract impressive crowds of up to 8000 people.<sup>830</sup> Nevertheless, it is very striking that compared to the NSB, the

<sup>829</sup> Heijningen, pp. 108–10.

<sup>830</sup> The biggest meeting Lindholm ever spoke at had an audience of reportedly 12 000 people. Lindholm diary, 19 September 1936.

NSAP at best managed to mobilise perhaps just under a fifth of its members at the conventions, the NSB closer to eighty per cent. This can largely be explained by the geographical and infrastructural context, discussed in chapter one.

The enormous amount of time, money, and organisational skills that went into these conventions indicate their central role in the life of the movements. While the NSB and the NSAP had a particularly rich meeting culture, and were constantly engaged in bringing members together and the party to the public, these events stood out. The parties were convinced that ‘the best propaganda is and remains the public meetings and marches, where the people can see and hear themselves what the National Socialists want, and through which the lies of the Popular Front press fall to the ground like empty shells’,<sup>831</sup> an explicit statement that events like these served to push their own idea of fascism into public discourse.

## II

In 1935, it was time for Lindholm’s NSAP to demonstrate how far the fledgling movement had come in two years, and prove to the public and its rivals that the *lindholmare* were the only fascists in Sweden that mattered. 1935 was an eventful year for the party: the party headquarters in Gothenburg had been raided in February, starting a police investigation into illegal paramilitaries; Lindholm had been put on trial for libel as the editor-in-chief for DSN, and was sentenced to two months in prison, from March till May. 17 March saw the Stockholm city council elections [*stadsfullmäktigeval*], in which fascist parties increased their votes from 279 in 1931 to 6300; of these the NSAP accounted for just under half, the others going to SNSP and Martin Ekström’s National Socialist Block. To heighten the sense of change, the communists gained their first seat in the city council at the expense of the Social Democrats.<sup>832</sup> By spring it was evident that the NSAP had managed to outgrow old and new fascist rivals, and gain a foothold in the capital, building up its organisation in Stockholm from scratch to a local membership of thousands, at a time when radical parties briefly seemed to be gaining ground. As Lindholm wrote to his followers on the DSN front page before going to prison, the first storm had been endured successfully, and now

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<sup>831</sup> ‘Den bästa propagandan för nationalsocialismen är och förblir alltså de offentliga mötena och uppmarscherna, där befolkningen själv kan se och höra vad nationalsocialisterna vilja, och varigenom folkfrontspressens lögnskriverier falla till marken som tomma skal.’, Transcript and excerpt from *Porg*, no 5, November 1937, Arninge: 2B: 8.

<sup>832</sup> ‘Väldig frammarsch för nat.-soc. i Stockholm: 6300 röster’, *DSN*, no 22, 20 March 1935, pp. 1, 6.

‘[t]he time of great trials for which we have been waiting has begun’.<sup>833</sup> It was with this sense of potential, new gains and new opportunities, and a gathering storm, that the Party Leadership decided to demonstrate the strength and mission of the movement, at the first fascist *årsting* ever to be held in Stockholm, named *Sveatinget*. To some extent the choice of Stockholm was a reward to the city branch for its success in the elections.<sup>834</sup>

The orchestration of the third *årsting* of the NSAP in 1935 will be reconstructed as closely as possible; sadly far from all documents pertaining to this convention have survived, so it is necessary to also rely on materials from other *ting*. The third NSAP convention was particularly interesting, as it was held at a time when the party apparatus was being consolidated, at the same time as its centre of gravity shifted from west to east. Finally, on account of Lindholm’s prison sentence, it also shows the organisation in action without the Party Leader – judging by his diary entries, he did not get involved with the preparations until 27 May.<sup>835</sup>

Centrally the convention was organised by Gunnar Svalander, one of the most influential members of the leadership, who until 1936 (when he was ousted for conspiring against Lindholm) acted as Deputy Leader, Party Secretary, and Party Organiser: in other words he had considerable organisational experience.<sup>836</sup> The *årsting* was first announced in DSN on 3 April, by Nils Dahlrot, the press chief, editor of DSN, and one of the party’s most popular speakers. His announcement of the first Stockholm *ting* started with an invocation of the experience of the previous year’s convention in Gothenburg, presenting readers with the myth of a classless *folkgemenskap* on the march. Notably he used the *uppmarsch* to evoke this myth, focusing immediately on the aesthetic impressions of the march. ‘It was 20 May 1934. The music resounded between the rows of houses, the flags were flying in the wind. But this was not a Marxist proletarian demonstration, this was not the bourgeois jogging procession of the Right, it was an emerging people’s movement which was marching forward.’<sup>837</sup> As will be shown below, the experience of being part of such a march

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<sup>833</sup> ‘Den tid av stora prövningar, som vi väntat på, har nu börjat.’, Sven Olov Lindholm, ‘Kamrater och medkämpar!’, *DSN*, no 22, 20 March 1935, p. 1.

<sup>834</sup> Munin, ‘Og. 2 Stockholm’, *DSN*, no 44, 8 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>835</sup> Lindholm diary, 27 May 1935.

<sup>836</sup> Tjalve, ‘Vad de tyckte’, *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>837</sup> ‘Det var den 20 maj 1934. Musiken genljöd mellan husraderna, fanorna fladdrade i vinden. Men det var ingen marxismens proletärdemonstration, det var inte högerens lunkiga borgartåg, det var en folkrörelse i vardande som marscherade fram.’, -rot [Nils Dahlrot], ‘Till tings: I pingst samlas vi i Stockholm’, *DSN*, no 26, 3 April 1935, p. 5.

was linked to the longing to once more tie the bonds of comradeship, and gain renewed energies for the struggle. Instructions for the convention were subsequently issued predominantly via DSN.

The *årsting* was to start on 9 June, leaving the branch organisations less than two months to prepare and organise the attendees. The applications were due 25 May, but as was always the case, an additional week was conceded to slow members.<sup>838</sup> The main thing that needed time was organising transport to the capital, which had the best railway connections in the country. However, long distance travel of this kind could be prohibitively expensive. Hiring extra trains to get formations to the city were an expense the party could not easily afford, and the party's travel leaders' organisation had to siphon off the costs to the membership. In 1934 the extra train between Gothenburg and Stockholm, the best connection in the country, cost 20 *kronor* (!) for a return ticket.<sup>839</sup> By 1938 if not earlier, transport organisation was left specifically to the Circle Leaders, implying that local branches were too small to finance and organise travel for their members. Additionally it was much easier for the centre to control the few dozen Circle Leaders, rather than the countless local *avdelningar*.<sup>840</sup> In the end twenty-seven buses were hired for the 1935 *årsting*. There were also groups who travelled on the back of trucks, even if this meant standing up for the entire journey.<sup>841</sup> Finally there were always a handful of members who simply walked the distance, even from Norrland, where the party organisation remained primitive, as did railway infrastructure. Beyond the details of organisation, such a journey was for some members simply a part of the adventure; most of the young members had never been to the big cities before in which the *årsting* were held, and to cross hundreds of miles on foot to get to the fabled event only added to the excitement.<sup>842</sup>

Financing the *årsting* was always a challenge for the party, one which tellingly shaped the way it was organised. The largely decentralised organisation of transport and reliance on branch initiative was a reflection of the fact that the NSAP was barely equipped to handle the large sums that would be involved in arranging this centrally – that they in 1935 attempted but failed to hire extra trains is symptomatic, even though this was blamed on the state railway company.<sup>843</sup> The

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<sup>838</sup> 'Meddelande från Plg', *DSN*, no 41, 29 May 1935, p. 2.

<sup>839</sup> Advertisement, 'Extratåg! Res Stockholm-Göteborg i pingst!', *DSN*, no 19, 10 May 1934, p. 2.

<sup>840</sup> 'Meddelanden', *DSN*, no 37, 21 May 1938, p. 2.

<sup>841</sup> 'Efterskörd från årstinget', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 5.

<sup>842</sup> NSAP monthly branch report, Fridlevstad, May 1934, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 6.

<sup>843</sup> Tjalve, 'Dahlrot skrämde TT: Vägrade extratåg minskade tingsdeltagarna med flera hundra!', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, pp. 1, 6.

entry ticket for the convention itself was priced at 1 krona, slightly higher than the 75 öre at previous conventions, but one which virtually all members could afford, and added some 2000 kronor to the organisers' funds, and may well have been enough to pay for the use of Stockholm's Auditorium building, the main venue. It seems the first Stockholm convention was rather more expensive than the party was used to, and members were encouraged to sort out accommodation at their own expense. Mass quarters were firstly reserved for female members, who could not be expected to sleep just anywhere.<sup>844</sup> The archives do not show what other expenses the NSAP had, but by mid-April it was evident that the party budget could not manage both the convention and the impending summer propaganda campaign with members' fees and tickets alone. Gunnar Svalander decided to start a short collection campaign for the party's 'war coffers' (*krigskassa*) from 20 April to 20 May, using a coupon system by which the cadres could collect money from sympathisers; it was deemed undesirable to demand money from the members themselves, who were already under strain.<sup>845</sup>

The main expense was probably hiring the various venues: apart from the main venue, Auditorium, the party hired the Victoria hall [*Victoriasalen*] for its 'Leader day', and three other smaller venues across Stockholm for minor functions on the second day. Auditorium (renamed *Vinterpalatset* in 1942), a concert- and cinema hall at the central square Norra Bantorget, and one of the largest buildings of its kind, could seat 1751 in its main hall, and 1952 after being rebuilt in the mid-20s.

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<sup>844</sup> 'Till tings!', *DSN*, no 29, 13 April 1935, p. 2.

<sup>845</sup> Letter, Acting Party Secretary to Enar Häll, Gothenburg, 15 April 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Västra Distriktet (1935-38).

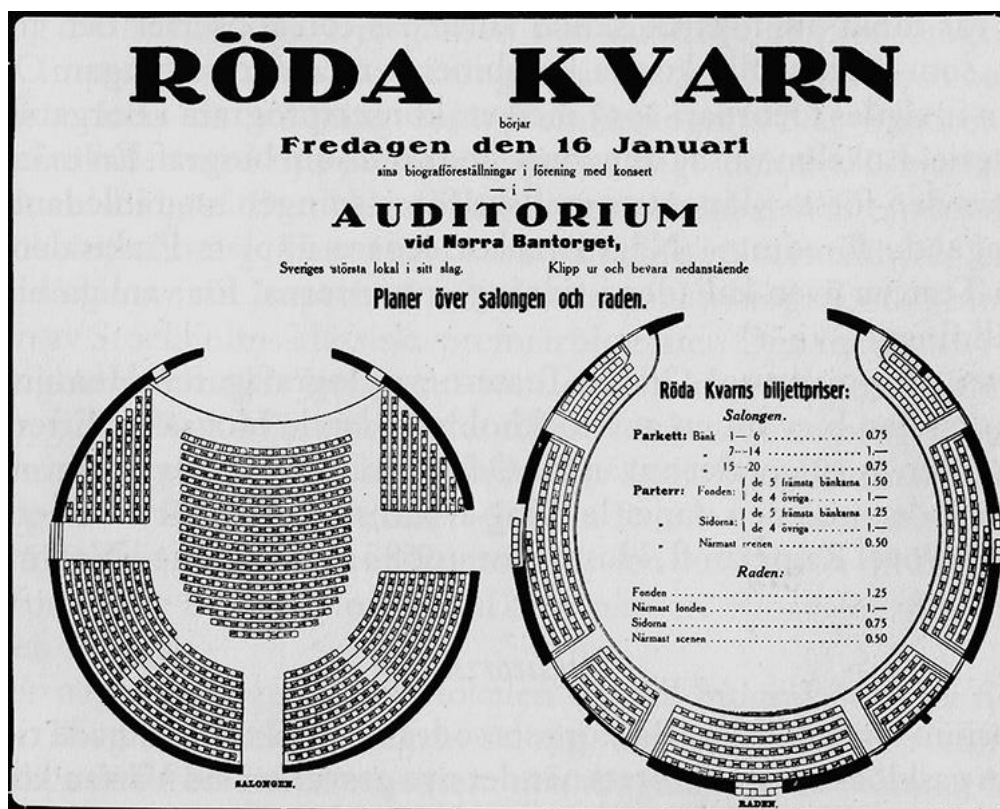


Figure 2. Advertisement from *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 14 January 1914, displaying the seating arrangement in Auditorium.

Auditorium provided an ideal space for the convention, an exciting two-tiered venue in which all members would be able to see the stage with ease, with its circular floor plan. The fact that the building was built specifically for viewing performances made it well-suited to this kind of political theatre. Additionally it was commonly used for public meetings by the Stockholm Local Group, especially when Lindholm visited. The Victoria hall by comparison was a more mundane building, suitable for an audience of a few hundred, but like Auditorium centrally located, on the picturesque Norra Tunnelgatan. For one function the party hired the house of the Christian Union for Young Women, another rather ordinary venue. The other venues were the Workers' Union building, and lastly Manhem on Odengatan 42,<sup>846</sup> a property owned by Carl-Enfrid Carlberg, and one used extensively throughout the thirties and forties for pro-Nazi lectures and meetings.<sup>847</sup> The choices of Auditorium and Manhem are obvious enough, and, in the absence of any direct evidence, one may wonder whether the NSAP got a good deal for using the property; Carlberg after all helped bankroll the movement in subsequent years. (Notably Manhem is also slightly further away from all the other venues – about 1.6 km from Auditorium, while the other venues were

<sup>846</sup> 'Program vid NSAP:s tredje årsting i Stockholm', *DSN*, no 41, 29 May 1935, p. 5.

<sup>847</sup> Wärenstam, pp. 140–41; Nilsson, p. 154.

between 700 m and 1.1 km away from Auditorium.) Regardless, the five venues were generally situated within a few hundred metres of each other, making it easy for the assembly to split up from the main venue and spread out to their respective functions within a quarter of an hour. Svalander and the other organisers then must have selected the venues firstly out of practicality, only secondly out of financial considerations, highlighting the importance of the *årsting* to the movement in spite of its perpetual financial problems.

As the 'most important action of the year' moved ever closer,<sup>848</sup> DSN harangued the cadres to apply for the convention, emphasising the significance of the event for the party's propaganda efforts, as well as promising an unforgettable personal experience; '[a]t least once a year you have to see thousands of comrades around you and march in mighty columns, once a year defy the howls of the enemies', marking the event as a rite of passage.<sup>849</sup> These mobilising messages underscore the mythopoeic potential of the *årsting*, bringing out the fantastic dimensions which the party leadership sought to evoke through their organisation. They also show that the convention as a mythopoeic spectacle was not only propaganda, but that its established mythic qualities were retrospectively employed to mobilise cadres and public alike. 'It is not a small insider clique, which gathers in Stockholm this Pentecost, [rather] they are fighting battalions that march forward in the capital, to gather around their young chieftain.'<sup>850</sup> To emphasise the point in later years, DSN would reprint photographs from former conventions to show readers what kind of spectacle they could expect. The capital was the fortress of the enemy, of capitalism and Marxism, but the fascists would gather in greater numbers than ever before, from all parts of the country, from all classes,

and you yourself [Stockholm inhabitants] will be able to conclude that the newspaper press lies, when it claims that Lindholm's militant organisation is a small clique, that the newspaper press

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<sup>848</sup> Sven-Olov Lindholm, 'Mot judefront och världsdemokrati! Samling till årstinget i Malmö!', *DSN*, no 21, 19 April 1939, p. 3.

<sup>849</sup> 'Minst en gång om året måste du se tusentals kamrater omkring dig och marschera fram i mäktiga kolonner, en gång om året trotsa fiendernas skrån!', Sven Olov Lindholm, 'Till Stockholm i pingst! Kring landet går signalen', *DSN*, no 33, 7 May 1938, p. 6.

<sup>850</sup> 'Det är ingen liten invigd klick, som samlas i Stockholm i Pingst, det är kämpande bataljoner som marschera upp i huvudstaden för att samlas kring sin unge hövding.', -rot [Nils Dahlrot], 'NSAP samlas till ting: Stockholm står i hakkorsets tecken under pingst dagarna: Möt upp till de offentliga massmötena!', *DSN*, no 44, 8 June 1935, p. 1.



lies, when it claims that the NSAP consists only of school boys and offenders! Go out into the streets and behold the large marches on the first and second days of Pentecost.<sup>851</sup>

Locals were encouraged to watch the spectacle of the marches; the convention was not just for the benefit of members, but also a strike in the battle for the myth and image of the party, the meaning of fascism in Sweden, an explicit counter-attack against the media discourse about fascism. In the run-up to the event, posters were put up all around the city proclaiming the event, announcing the time and marching route of the party. Flyers were distributed depicting the marching route, encouraging people to protest with the fascists against the rotten system.<sup>852</sup>

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The busy programme for the three-day event, with its rules and regulations, were published in DSN. Members were encouraged to cut them out and take them with them. The first day of Pentecost was officially the first day of the convention, but the evening prior was the Leader Day. Non-functionaries were encouraged to travel to Stockholm to arrive on Saturday night. To ensure all formations arrived in an orderly manner, any larger groups travelling by bus or train had to assign a commander responsible for the party. Given that members were attending as representatives for their local branches (circa 130 out of 300 were represented at the convention) it was crucial that they were organised accordingly. To this end each branch was absolutely obliged to bring the venerated symbol of each formation, the standard, a crucial prop to mark the organisation and expansion of the movement across the country. For the two to three days each member was attending they had to bring their membership card, their own blanket (two if they were to sleep in the mass quarters), toiletries, and a bag for their own breakfast, as well as a copy of NSAP songs booklets and cash. Intriguingly for the overall impression the convention must have made, members were encouraged to dress in cheap civilian clothes [*sämre civila kläder*]. Wearing a uniform in public was of course out of the question. Within Auditorium it was permitted, and

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<sup>851</sup> ‘...Du skall själv kunna konstatera att tidningspressen ljuger, när den påstår att Lindholms kamporganisation är en liten klick, att tidningspressen ljuger, när den påstår, att NSAP utgöres endast av skolpojkar och förbrytare! Gå ut på gatorna och se på de stora uppmarscherna på Pingstdagen och Annandag Pingst.’, -rot [Nils Dahlrot], ‘NSAP samlas till ting: Stockholm står i hakkorsets tecken under pingstdagarna: Möt upp till de offentliga massmötena!’, *DSN*, no 44, 8 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>852</sup> Flyer, Marching route for NSAP *Sveatinget*, Gernandts Boktryckeri: Stockholm (1935), Arninge: 2A: 1.

the schedule left enough time for members to change if they so desired, but photographs show that in practice many members, apart from the leading functionaries, did not wear the full party uniform at these events.<sup>853</sup> On the other hand, the party supply service noted that orders for equipment and accessories tended to increase quickly before the annual convention.<sup>854</sup>

Early on Saturday evening the first members arrived in Stockholm. Most came by bus or train, but some walked or cycled from Sweden's northernmost communities within the Arctic Circle. Upon arrival members registered with the convention office, where they were greeted by Lindholm himself, who had travelled to Stockholm earlier that day with his trusted aide Per Dahlberg.<sup>855</sup> Members were then directed to the sleeping quarters. At 8pm the functionaries gathered in the Victoria Hall. For the first time these also included local branch functionaries including council members and independent Section Leaders; nevertheless no more than 125 functionaries managed to find their way to Stockholm by this time. This particular event does not appear to have been of much significance: after Svalander welcomed the functionaries, Lindholm gave guidelines for the party's strategy in the coming year, after which the Stockholm District Leader Sven Rhenström chaired a discussion with the functionaries. In practice the discussion was very short, and local- and regional leaders had little input. DSN noted that 'National Socialists are not friends of discussion', but that the functionaries 'think and act in the spirit of Lindholm'.<sup>856</sup> After a short speech on state law, the event was wrapped up with party songs. The small, private gathering was in no way spectacular – Lindholm himself observed in his diary merely the order of events and that it was 'well-attended and with a good mood'.<sup>857</sup> Decorations were minimal – two banners with guards and a large flag – and did not give the impression of a particularly 'fascist space'. But as the 125 functionaries all sat politely in their chairs in the overly large Victoria Hall, listening to the representatives of the Party Leadership, an important function was fulfilled, that of reifying the bond of loyalty of the functionaries to Lindholm personally, and reinforcing his authority. Backed by a large yellow swastika on a blue background, the four speakers sat above the small group of functionaries, who were gathered at the front, intimately close. The intimacy of the

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<sup>853</sup> 'Årstinget 1935 (Bör utklippas av tingsdeltagarna)', *DSN*, no 42, 1 June 1936, also found as a newspaper clipping in: Arninge: 2A: 1; 'Program vid NSAP:s tredje årsting i Stockholm', *DSN*, no 41, 29 May 1935, p. 5.

<sup>854</sup> 'Meddelanden', *DSN*, no 14, 20 February 1937, p. 4.

<sup>855</sup> Lindholm diary, 8 June 1935.

<sup>856</sup> 'nationalsocialisterna äro inga vänner av diskussioner'; 'som tänker och handlar i Lindholms anda', 'Genom nationalsocialismen vinnes frihet och bröd: Sakkunskap och kampvilja präglade tingsföredragen på Auditorium', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 5.

<sup>857</sup> '...välbesatt o. på bästa humör.', Lindholm diary, 8 June 1935.

event, held in the convention's atmosphere of general excitement before the opening day, may well have left the attendees with a renewed sense of loyalty to Lindholm. At the same time the short event, that can have lasted no more than two hours, heavily underlined the hierarchical structure of the NSAP, the Leadership dictating to the functionaries, while the cadres were left out to be summoned the following day.

It was on Pentecost Sunday that *Sveatinget* truly started. Busses and trucks were still arriving from all over the country when Lindholm, who was staying over at a friend's house just outside the city, drove in at gam. A large audience had already gathered at Auditorium.<sup>858</sup> People were arriving who had just come off the bus, others had stayed overnight in the houses and apartments of Stockholm party comrades, while a few hundred were walking from the mass quarters shared with NU on Regeringsgatan, a stone's throw away from Auditorium, on Tjärhovsgatan – nearly an hour's walk away on the other side of Stadsholmen, the central Stockholm island connecting the city districts.<sup>859</sup> According to Lindholm's diary and DSN, 1800 party members were present in Auditorium for the opening at 10am, but this must be wrong – there are mentions of late groups, while just over 1800 is the total figure for the entire convention which DSN gives. 9-10am people entered the salon of Auditorium, occupied the seats along the curved walls and in the centre of the floor, and the balconies above the stage, while a band played marching music. Outside it was sunny, but thunder rumbled in the distance.<sup>860</sup>

The stage was decorated with long blue banners on either side, a swastika superimposed in yellow.<sup>861</sup> Behind the centre stage was an enormous yellow flag, with a blue or red circle with a yellow swastika.<sup>862</sup> All along the balcony hung coats of arms of the Swedish landscapes, from Lapland to Scania, mixed with various fascist symbols, swastikas and runes. By 10am the cylindrical domed hall was filled, not quite to capacity, with people; most in civilian clothes, some in uniform. Never before had so many of the NSAP gathered together. It was in fact the largest fascist meeting ever to take place in Sweden at this point. At 10am the band played some marching tunes – then, most likely to the cheerful sounds of the 'March of the Leader', Lindholm entered in

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<sup>858</sup> Lindholm diary, 9 June 1935.

<sup>859</sup> 'Efterskörd från årstinget', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>860</sup> 'Genom nationalsocialismen vinnes frihet och bröd', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 5.

<sup>861</sup> Stage decoration was largely the same every year in Stockholm, and probably handled by a decoration team the night before or in the morning, see: Letter, Bertil Brisman to Lindholm, Gothenburg, 16 March 1937, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 1, Lindholm (1935-38).

<sup>862</sup> Photograph, 'Det tredje årstinget', *DSN*, no 47, 19 June 1935, p. 4.

full uniform, followed by his colleagues. The audience rose, and greeted *partiledaren* with an ovation, salutes and shouts of *hell Lindholm*, which must have been acoustically overwhelming. The almost traditional fascist Leader entry, where the Leader walks between his followers who make a path through which he can pass, was not possible here.<sup>863</sup> Lindholm must have used the front doors to make sure his entrance was not anti-climactically short, but as the floor plan shows, he would have had to rather awkwardly walk around the large shield-formed section of seats in the middle [fig. 2 and 3]. Then one of the Party Leadership, Carl A. Alfredsson, member since 1931 (SNSP), DSN editor, District Leader for the West, and a party speaker, opened the *årsting* with a word of welcome; the exact contents of the short speech were not reported. Then followed the second part of the opening ceremony. To the music of Lindholm's *Friheten leve!*, the massed standards of the party marched in, carried by members of the A-group in full uniform, while the audience saluted the banners. Thanks to an irate circular a few months earlier, members had learned to stand up when the massed standards entered, salute them as they passed, and end the salute the moment the standards were on the stage, and placed on the floor in front of the guards (this last part had caused confusion before).<sup>864</sup> The lyrics of the song playing were a call to arms, proclaiming the imminent liberation of Sweden, employing imagery of marching ranks and raised banners, the Swedish landscape, and a youth army burning with passion in a struggle against bourgeois capitalist oppression.<sup>865</sup> By all accounts the spectacle was electrifying; the militaristic symbols of the party joined together in formation were marched past the attendees, up the stage, where the uniformed guard took its place around the Leader, planting their standards on the floor. The Leader stood tall on the rostrum, his brown uniform contrasting with the surrounding sea of bright blues and yellows, all facing the audience, in an aesthetic performance of the party as a glorious, unified army destined for victory. The united party sat in the hall, looking up to a stage that showed a construction of the movement in mythic form, symbolised by the sensuous colours of the fabrics, the uniforms, the music, the Leader.

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<sup>863</sup> Cf. Mosley's entrance as described in: Julie Gottlieb, 'Body Fascism in Britain: Building the Blackshirt in the Inter-War Period', *Contemporary European History*, 20.2 (2011), 111–36 (pp. 124–25).

<sup>864</sup> Circular no 46, 1 March 1935, Arninge: 2B1: 3.

<sup>865</sup> For the lyrics of *Friheten leve!*, see: Programme, *NSAP:s 5:te årsting*, Stockholm (1938), p. 3, Arninge: 2A: 2.



Figure 3. The NSAP salutes the massed standards at the opening of *Sveatinget.*. *DSN*, 1935: 46.

Then Lindholm spoke to welcome the attendees to the *ting*, followed by another popular party song, *Folk i gevär* (A people in arms), thematically identical to *Friheten leve!*, but with a more anti-Semitic emphasis, sandwiching the event opening between militaristic music dramatising the party struggle, while the movement found itself gathered with its leaders in the capital for the first time, at a politically heady time of growth and opportunity.<sup>866</sup> The whole ceremony took a little over half an hour, an aesthetically intense moment which readied the audience for the drier parts of the *årsting* that followed. In Lindholm's diary it is this first half hour which he emphasises, the 'heartfelt ovations, song and marching music'.<sup>867</sup>

For the next two hours the audience was subjected to statistical and financial reports from the Party Organiser Gunnar Svalander and the Party Secretary L.E. Dahlin, and a speech on Swedish youth (marking the growing importance of NU) by S. Ahnfeldt, before a lunch break at 12.40pm. At this point the hundreds of party functionaries that had arrived by now split up to attend events in the four other venues: for NU-functionaries, propagandists, independent local leaders, study leaders, treasurers, and women, a category of their own in the NSAP. Suffice to say that the convention continued with further speeches, with more song and music, until all

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<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>867</sup> '...hjärtligen ovationer, sång o. marschmusik.', Lindholm diary, 9 June 1935.

members were joined together again in Auditorium at 5.30pm, for the second spectacle of *Sveatinget*: the march.

The 1935 convention featured two marches, one on each day of Pentecost. The first march was the longest, from Auditorium on Norra Bantorget to Vitabergsparken, a public park on Södermalm, the southern island district of Stockholm, and generally considered a socialist area. The second march went from Norrmalm (northern district) to Östermalmstorg, a public square with a less circuitous route from the venue.<sup>868</sup> Interestingly there is one major difference between the marching route for the second day as described in the programme published in DSN on 29 May, and the flyers encouraging citizens to watch the march.<sup>869</sup> The latter includes the long, straight Karlavägen, a scenic avenue lined with blossoming trees at this time of the year, the former instead of curving north-east towards Östermalmstorg. Some sort of compromise had evidently been made, although none of the documents show why, and it would appear that the final, actual marching route was never published – a quite astounding piece of mis-organisation if that was the case. As the party's 1938 rules and regulations (IF) point out, it was ultimately the police authorities who decided the final marching route, so that most likely a route change was enforced at short notice.<sup>870</sup> The march on the first day took circa two hours, the second about one hour and fifteen minutes, probably to make sure that the convention could be concluded in time for participants to travel home in good time.

The participants gathered on the square outside Auditorium, some 1800 NSAP-members, and for the first time also the NU, divided into six columns. In practice a march to the southern park to listen to a speech by Wilhelm Sterner, veteran speaker and Western District Leader, the action had high mythopoeic potential, which DSN would make the most of. In spite of the lack of uniforms, no one could have doubted that the marching columns festooned with blue, yellow, and red swastika flags, as well as NU's 'Odin flags', was an army of sorts. In surviving copies of the party's rules and regulations (TF), emphasis was always placed on ostentatious order and discipline, more important than numbers, whereby the marching columns where contrast with those of the Left.<sup>871</sup> The detailed 1938 IF instructions for *uppmarscher* give some indication of what

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<sup>868</sup> 'Program vid NSAP:s tredje årsting i Stockholm', *DSN*, no 41, 29 May 1935, p. 5.

<sup>869</sup> Flyer, *Marching route for NSAP Sveatinget*, Gernandts Boktryckeri: Stockholm (1935), Arminge: 2A: 1.

<sup>870</sup> IF, 1938, p. 19.

<sup>871</sup> TF, 1937, pp. 31-32; IF, 1938, pp. 18-19.

the NSAP sought to achieve, although it does note that *årsting* had their own regulations.<sup>872</sup> The entire marching army was led by a marching leader – in this case former SA-leader and future Eastern District Leader, Karl Erik Ekegren, i.e. someone with ample experience of propaganda marches, and presumably someone not too ‘screechy’, which IF noted should be avoided<sup>873</sup> - a reminder of Judith Butler’s dictum that even speech acts are implicated in embodiment.<sup>874</sup>

Every National Socialist, who has participated in one of the marches organised by the party, knows what a great propaganda value a well-organised [march] has. [...] Since we National Socialists in all areas demand *order and discipline*, it is a *matter of honour* for us to order our propaganda actions of various sorts in such a way, that every *folkkamrat* who sees and hears us is *impressed* by the will to struggle, the *will to victory*, which suffuses each participant.<sup>875</sup>

At 5.30pm the first column set in motion.

There was pacing and precision, and one could *see* that those marching were *freedom fighters*. We understand very well that Stockholm’s capitalists and Marxist bigwigs, Jews and other parasites, were terrified at the sight of these columns. They could see that these people would not let themselves be compromised away; one could see that they knew what they wanted, that they marched towards a decided destination, the freedom of Sweden.<sup>876</sup>

The columns, carrying a total of seventy flags representing the NSAP districts and branches of Sweden, marched for the next two hours following a circuitous route. At the front marched Lindholm and the Party Leadership. All columns marched three abreast, which made the columns oddly narrow, reducing the visual impact somewhat much of the time, but which would

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<sup>872</sup> IF, 1938, p. 19.

<sup>873</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>874</sup> Butler, *Notes toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, p. 9.

<sup>875</sup> ‘Varje nationalsocialist, som deltagit i en av partiet anordnat uppmarsch, vet vilket stort propagandavärde en välordnad dylik har. [...] Då vi nationalsocialister på alla områden kräva *ordning och disciplin* är det en *hederssak* för oss att ordna våra propagandaaktioner av olika slag så, att varje folkkamrat som ser och hör oss blir *imponerad* av den kampvilja, den *vilja till seger*, som präglar varje deltagare.’, IF, 1938, pp. 18-19.

<sup>876</sup> ‘Det var takt och rätning och man kunde *se* på de marscherande att det var *frihetskämpar*. Vi förstår så innerligt väl att Stockholms kapitalister och marxistpampar, judar och andra parasiter blev förskräckta vid åsynen av dessa kolonner. De kunde se att dessa människor inte skulle låta sig bortkommissas; man såg att de visste vad de ville, att de marscherade mot ett bestämt mål, Sveriges frihet.’, ‘Två stora massmöten och glänsande uppmarscher: 3000 åhörare i Vitabergsparken och 6000 å Östermalmstorg. Marxistöverfall’, *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 1.

also significantly lengthen the marching army, with a strong effect on the longer streets. *Sveatinget* marched south, with a route that took the army straight through Stadsholmen, the geographical and historic heart of Stockholm. Here the ranks of three filled the space neatly, while at the same time allowing the snaking march to uncurl to its full length all along the street. From the steeply elevated side streets and alleys east of Stora Nygatan onlookers would have been able to look down on the marching fascists. Doubtless this, and the exit from Stadsholmen onto Slussen (the sluice), was the thought-out climax of the march. Slussen provided an excellent vantage point from which to watch the procession snake along the street towards the southern district, probably the only point during the march from which one could see the army in its entirety. Evidently this part of the route was deemed good enough to repeat in its entirety at the 1937 *årsting*, when the party had clearly developed a better *mise-en-scène* to capture a shot of the mythic spectacle that the marching army created. (Evidently photographing their own spectacles was something the party took time to develop over several years.)



Figure 4. The NSAP marches from Stora Nygatan onto Slussen at the 1937 convention. *DSN*, 1937: 38.

The resulting photograph displayed on *DSN*'s front page also gives a good idea of what the 1935 march must have looked like. The booted fascists marched, shouting slogans and singing party



songs, marching music played, and the seventy flags flew brightly in the wind.<sup>877</sup> Cutting through the old heart of the Swedish empire, towards the workers' quarters, this was the NSAP pulling out all the stops in a holistic mythopoeic action, making use of the full fascist repertoire.<sup>878</sup> This was intended as the ultimate manifestation of fascism in Sweden, a strong, disciplined, and unified army against the historical backdrop of Stadsholmen, conquering the capital and the enraged Red workers, a narrative unfolding right before the eyes of the public.<sup>879</sup> A collective fantasy was being fulfilled in this moment.

Column after column marched up, and one could see from the viewers, who by their thousands lined the pavements, that they were surprised. The newspaper press had not written anything about *that* freedom movement. 'Imagine that the little Lindholm sect was this big!' The Stockholmers truly got their conception of the National Socialists thoroughly corrected! After all, here they got to see with their own eyes that Sweden's National Socialists are not a few hundred Furugårdian drunkards, but thousands of farmers and workers from all the lands of Sweden.<sup>880</sup>

The final stage of the mythopoeic march took the army into Södermalmen, taking long roads in a round-about way to Vitabergsparken. A public park set on a hill top, against the background of the imposing Sofia church, it had a natural stage with elevated places for the crowds to watch the meeting in the style of an amphitheatre. The army marched up the hills to the stage, where the speaker, Sterner, was waiting from the back of a truck draped with party flags. Here the standards massed in front of the speaker's makeshift podium, making a wall of blue and yellow between him and the audience of circa 3000 that had already assembled.<sup>881</sup> As a conclusion to this spectacle, Sterner held a speech of about one hour which attacked the evils of Bolshevism, in an obvious provocation of the Södermalm inhabitants, and a fitting end to the narrative that the march constructed. To complete the event, party speaker Ahnfeldt was attacked by two 'Marxist'

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<sup>877</sup> Lindholm diary, 9 June 1935.

<sup>878</sup> Cf. SA marches through proletarian quarters, Reichardt, 'Fascist Marches in Italy and Germany', p. 181.

<sup>879</sup> 'Efterskörd från tinget, *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>880</sup> 'Om den frihetsrörelsen hade tidningspressen ingenting skrivit. "Tänk på att den lilla Lindholmssekten var så stor!" Stockholmarna fick sannerligen sin uppfattning om nationalsocialisterna grundligt korrigerade! Här fick de ju se med egna ögon att Sveriges nationalsocialister inte är ett hundratal furugårdiska dyllkajor utan tusende bönder och arbetare från allt Sveriges land.', 'Två stora massmöten och glänsande uppmarscher', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, pp. 1, 4.

<sup>881</sup> Audience figure as estimated by the police: 'Lindholmsnazisternas pingstmöte: Agitationsmöte i Vitabergsparken med slagsmål som efterspel', *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 11 June 1935, p. 5.

opponents, but the fight was quickly dealt with before police arrived.<sup>882</sup> To the frustration of the NSAP, this was the main event of the convention dailies like the national *Dagens Nyheter* picked up on, devoting about half or the entirety of their brief reports to the fight.<sup>883</sup> *Svenska Dagbladet* noted that '[t]he nazi meeting did not happen without one of the usual street disorders'.<sup>884</sup> The day was closed with a 'comrade evening' at 9.15pm, giving the participants an opportunity to meet other members from all over the country and socialise, watch a recording of the previous year's convention, and participate in song and music.

A few observations are in order about the second day's march. Most notably this time NU was separated from the party, and instead the 270 or so youths gathered on Lovön, the palace island just outside the city. Here they were treated to an apparently downright fairy-tale-like speech by Lindholm, were rewarded distinctions, and had their standards consecrated by the Leader.<sup>885</sup> From there on they marched back into Stockholm, past the royal Drottningholm palace, saluting as they went past in a sign of respect for the monarchy. Lindholm himself was evidently impressed by the march, which was recorded on film,<sup>886</sup> describing it as 'very stylish and colourful with all the standards and blue shirts'. He was so inspired by the young fascists he went home to write a poem about them.<sup>887</sup> The formal conclusion to the convention was Lindholm's speech of little more than an hour, but it was the public meeting following the final march to Östermalmstorg which provided the grandiose ending befitting *Sveatinget*.

Once again the party was organised in marching columns, and in an hour and fifteen minutes the procession made its way through the northern district, repeating the previous day's performance, but here they ran into more trouble. While the route was different, going past the party headquarters but avoiding Karlavägen, the same techniques were utilised.

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<sup>882</sup> 'Två stora massmöten och glänsande uppmarscher', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>883</sup> 'Nazistmöte med litet gruff', *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 June 1935, p. 26; 'Lindholmsnazisternas pingstmöte', *Stockholms-Tidningen*, 11 June 1935, p. 5.

<sup>884</sup> 'Nazistkongress met åtföljande gatuuppträden: Lindholmarna ha hållit sin tredje årskongress', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 June 1935.

<sup>885</sup> 'Nordisk Ungdom har svår och härdande uppmarsch', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>886</sup> Sadly it is unclear whether the film has survived.

<sup>887</sup> '...mycket stiligt o. färgrikt med alla standard o ljusblå skjortor.', Lindholm diary, 10 June 1935.



Figure 5. The NSAP marches along Kungsgatan at the 1938 convention, while onlookers watch from the bridge.  
Photographer unknown. National Archives of Sweden, Marieberg, SO Lindholm's collection, vol. 6.

The long, central street was much busier than Karlavägen, with its tram lines and two-way traffic, which detracted a great deal from the overall impression. It did have the advantage of a large picturesque bridge over the middle of the street, from which crowds could view the entire train as it extended across the street. Unfortunately for the party, the marching columns were significantly marred this day by what was afterwards described as sabotage by the police. Apparently this had also undermined the march somewhat on Sunday, but was even worse now. Police constables walked along with the marching columns, which were obliged to maintain the same pace as the constables. However, as the police men walked at different paces, the columns ended up further and further apart, of a distance up to 200 m, something which seriously undercut the impression of a single unified army. According to the police this was so that traffic could continue to flow –

particularly important for the northern city area, and police had trouble handling traffic problems at previous NSAP conventions when spectators blocked the roads entirely.<sup>888</sup> But as DSN bitterly pointed out, car drivers did not have a right to drive through marching columns. Nevertheless, in a show of respectability, the paper made sure to point out that they did not blame the police per se, but their political overlords.<sup>889</sup> It is impossible to gather what the public really did think of the NSAP's propaganda march, which greeted with straight-arm salutes and leftist spit alike.<sup>890</sup> But when the convention arrived at the public square in Östermalm a crowd of some 6000 people gathered. The numbers were doubtlessly boosted by the location in the north-eastern districts, instead of the working class south, and Lindholm's profile – 'our greatest propaganda resource', as Nils Dahlrot had called him earlier that day.<sup>891</sup>

The sky was clear, and the sun shone brightly on the large open space. Nils Dahlrot opened the meeting, then Lindholm commenced his speech, lasting an hour and a half. Unfortunately, after a march which already in several ways had not conformed to the NSAP's plans, the electronic speaker system now turned out to be inadequate. The party leader was forced to shout his entire speech, in an effort to make himself heard to several thousand people on one of the largest public squares of Stockholm.<sup>892</sup> DSN did not mention this defect, though it must have been obvious to everyone present. While Lindholm was a reasonably skilled orator, and had prior experience of crowds of this size, it is rather unlikely that he managed to make himself heard to the entire audience. The speech itself was filled with the usual fascist hobby horses, with attacks on capitalists, Marxists, Jews, the Social Democratic government, and democracy, and comments on fascist social, economic, and foreign policy. Stuffed with exclamatory statements, (the transcript is littered with exclamation marks, though one wonders whether that is because of Lindholm's shouting), it was a rhetorically over-excited piece conveying little of substance. Nor was it meant to. Starting with a portrayal of the rise of the NSAP in the past two years, in the context of a supposedly faltering democracy, Lindholm ended the speech with an appeal to present sacrifice,

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<sup>888</sup> Extract from minutes, Over-Governorship [*Överståthållarämbetet*] for police matters before the police commissioner [*för polisärenden inför polismästaren*], 24 July 1933, Arninge: 2C: 3.

<sup>889</sup> 'Hade polisen fått order att förstöra NSAP:s marschkolonner?', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 3.

<sup>890</sup> 'Efterskörd från årstinget', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>891</sup> '...vår bästa propagandistiska tillgång...', 'Annandagens förhandlingar', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 8.

<sup>892</sup> Lindholm diary, 10 June 1935.

and the power of fascism to grasp and alter the course of Swedish history.<sup>893</sup> In the rhetorical climax of the convention, Lindholm shouted:

Yes – we wish to continue the history of Sweden, says the answer which resounds from the northern land's fells to Öresund – from the western- to the eastern land! Yes – we wish to confess to the people's will which flows in our own blood! Here we wish to found a free motherland for the workers, and here fight for that culture which can speak to Nordic hearts, to the people's own soul!<sup>894</sup>

In an idiosyncratic move, he proceeded to recite two stanzas from a poem ('The Brooder', *Grubblaren*) by Viktor Rydberg (1828-1895), one of Sweden's most renowned Romantic poets.<sup>895</sup> One can only imagine the effect of shouting the stanzas across the crowd:<sup>896</sup>

There are woven, circling in space, stars  
and thoughts, circling in human brains,  
there is woven generation, there is woven death,  
and the shape of things and the destiny of peoples.

There patterns are made, shifting and bright,  
like nerve threads, quivering in desire and pain,  
but the pattern's theme is eternally set,  
an unrelenting, ceaseless struggle for life.<sup>897</sup>

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<sup>893</sup> Frank-Lothar Kroll, 'Endzeit, Apokalypse, Neuer Mensch - Utopische Potentiale im Nationalsozialismus und im Bolschewismus', in *Rechtsextreme Ideologien in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. by Uwe Backes (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), pp. 139–57 (pp. 139, 155).

<sup>894</sup> 'Ja – vi vill fortsätta Sveriges historia säger svaret som skallar från nordlandets fjäll till Öresund – från väster- till österland! Ja – vi vill bekänna oss till den folkvilja som strömmar i det egna blodet! Här vill vi upprätta ett arbetarnas fria fosterland och här kämpa för den kultur som kan tala till nordiska hjärtan, till folkets egen själ!', Sven Olov Lindholm, "'Svensk frihet är vår lösen": Lindholms tal på Östermalmstorg i Stockholm', *DSN*, no 48, 23 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>895</sup> The figure of the brooder was probably a reference to Odin, see: Viktor Rydberg, *Fädernas Gudasaga, m.m.*, *Skrifter av Viktor Rydberg*, XII (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1918), p. 39.

<sup>896</sup> The translation is my own – no English translation has been published to date, to my knowledge.

<sup>897</sup> 'Där vävas, kretsande i rymden, stjärnor / och tankar, kretsande i mänskohjärnor, / där väves alstringen, där väves döden, / och tingens skepnader och folkens öden. / Där inslås mönster, skiftande och bjärta, / som nervgarn, dallrande i lust och smärta, / men mönstrets ämne är för alltid givet, / en hejdlös, oupphörlig kamp för livet.', *DSN*, *ibid.*<sup>897</sup>

The poem, as Lindholm explained to his audience, compares human life to a weave spun through time and history, in which it is human action which forms the pattern. The interpretation linked the poem to core themes of fascist myth: nation, action, sacrifice, and struggle. Intriguingly this was not Lindholm's own interpretation: the same stanzas are quoted by Are Waerland in his 1924 popular philosophical tract *Idealism och Materialism*, and Lindholm was actually citing Waerland almost verbatim in his interpretation.<sup>898</sup> (Conveniently Lindholm left out the stanza in between the two he recited, which emphasised the smallness of humans, and their lack of perspective in a nihilistic vein which is also present in *Grubblaren* – 'We believe ourselves to will, even to be able to [act], / but are mere thread figures in the weave'.)<sup>899</sup> Invoking the poem mythopoetically interweaved the party struggle with Rydberg's epic vision of human destiny and the search for meaning, elevating the actions of the past two days to a cosmic stage. At the same time it lent the party myth as presented here a touch of the glory and respectability that clung to the national poet. After explaining the meaning of the poem to the NSAP, Lindholm ended his speech with a poem of his own, 'The people that strikes' [*Folket som slår*], a poem which was printed in full in DSN several weeks later: 'We shape Your destiny, Sweden, with the powerful voice of love, / and sing praise of your future, from thousands of young breasts! / Fly out, our freedom flags in the wakeful spring of struggle - / the dawn is rising – labour's people strike!'.<sup>900</sup> It was, in his own words, 'a grandiose conclusion to the conference'.<sup>901</sup>

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As far as the NSAP organisers were concerned, *Sveatinget* was a success. Lindholm described a great mood at headquarters the following days, and DSN had enough material to celebrate the convention for weeks.<sup>902</sup> The next issue on 12 June headed the front page with a grand acclamation of the convention, '[a]gainst lies and oppression', calling it a 'tremendous freedom demonstration

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<sup>898</sup> Are Waerland, *Idealism och Materialism* (Uppsala: J.A. Lindblads Förlag, 1924), pp. 29–30.

<sup>899</sup> 'Vi tro oss vilja, tro oss kunna även, / men äro trådfigurer blott i väven.', 'Grubblaren', in: Viktor Rydberg, *Dikter* (Stockholm: Albert Bonnier, 1929), p. 201.

<sup>900</sup> 'Vi forma Ditt öde, Sverige, med kärlekens starka röst / och sjunga Din framtids lovsång ur tusende unga bröst! / Flyg ut, våra frihetsfanor i kampens vakna vår – / det är morgendagen som randas – det är arbetets folk som slår!', Sven Olov, 'Folket som slår', *DSN*, no 51, 3 July 1935, p. 4.

<sup>901</sup> Lindholm diary, 10 June 1935.

<sup>902</sup> Lindholm diary, 13 June 1935.

against the terror laws of capital-democracy'.<sup>903</sup> Apparently hundreds of photographs had been taken, though only eleven of those made it into the party newspaper, as the paper's finances did not permit for more to be printed.<sup>904</sup> DSN interviewed the organisers of the event, who were universally pleased with the outcome. Gunnar Svalander noted drily that: '[t]he convention has been executed in a desirable fashion in its organisational aspects. It is only pleasing to note that it in certain cases has exceeded all of our expectations. But nothing is so good it can't be better'.<sup>905</sup> The treasurer, Carl Kristern, thought the convention was the most impressive one yet, though he lamented that the organisation could not afford as much music as desirable. The DSN's reporting is typical: simultaneously effusive in praise, portraying the event as exceedingly impressive, while at the same time leaving room to push members to do better. The interviews with the rank-and-file members all spoke of the fantastic atmosphere, the great propaganda, and the invigorating and inspiring effect of being together with so many comrades from all over the country, an excellent antidote to the isolation many experienced the rest of the year.<sup>906</sup> In a private letter from Svalander to District Leader Arvid Gerhardsson, who did not attend the convention, he noted that it was needless to say how other comrades had felt about the *årsting*, but one thing he could assure Gerhardsson. 'Never before has the militant spirit been so powerful and never before have the followers given their leader greater evidence of immortal loyalty and dedication [in all capitals]. It would have done you well to have been among us, comrade.'<sup>907</sup>

In the 1980s, Lindholm said that the party's outward activity in the second half of the decade largely followed a set pattern, of which *årsting* were one part.<sup>908</sup> Comparing the 1935 *Sveatinget* to its predecessors and successors this seems to indeed be the case, but it is important to note that these spectacles, as comments from the organisers imply, were not the same year-on-year, but developed over time. As the attendance figures show, until 1939 the party managed to mobilise more and more members for the *årsting*, even while absolute party membership figures

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<sup>903</sup> 'Mot lögn och förtryck! NSAP:s tredje årsting blev en väldig frihetsdemonstration mot kapitaldemokratiens terrorlagar', *DSN*, no 45, 12 June 1935, p. 1.

<sup>904</sup> 'Det tredje årstinget', *DSN*, no 47, 19 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>905</sup> 'Tinget har genomförts på önskvärt sätt i organisatorisk avseende. Att det i vissa fall överträffat allas våra förväntningar är ju enbart roligt att konstatera. Men inget är ju så bra att det inte kan bli bättre.', Tjalve, 'Vad de tyckte', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 4.

<sup>906</sup> See especially the response from Ivar Johansson from Göteborg: *ibid*.

<sup>907</sup> 'ALDRIG TILLFÖRE HAR KAMPGEISTEN VARIT SÅ KRAFTIG OCH ALDRIG HAR VÄL FÖLJET GIVIT SIN LEDARE STÖRRE BEVIS PÅ ODÖDLIG TROHET OCH HÄNGIVENHET. Det skulle stärkt Dig att vara med kamrat.', Letter, GS [Gunnar Svalander] to Dch. A[rvid] Gerhardsson, Stockholm, 14 June 1935, Marieberg: NSAP/SSS, vol. 3, Sydöstra Distriktet (1936-38).

<sup>908</sup> Lindholm interview, 00259: a, 1 min.

declined. While the organisation failed to get an extra-train from Gothenburg in 1935, the 1937 and 1938 conventions were both far better served by public transport.<sup>909</sup> But the key improvement over the years was the improving presentation of the convention in party media. Specifically the photographs of the 1937-39 conventions are markedly better than those of 1933-35, paying far more attention to the framing of the shot, composition, and timing. In fact 1935 appears to have been something of a low in this regard, with the 1934 Gothenburg *årsting* resulting in both more photographs in DSN, published in a special issue, with additional artists' representations, and more impressive ones. The pictures were a means for

[o]ur sympathisers around the country to get an impression of the massive following, the conditions, and maybe also the atmosphere. And through the photographs the convention participants get a valuable memory of the unforgettable days of struggle, a link which will tie them ever closer to [their] comrades, and urge them on to new and powerful efforts.<sup>910</sup>

But if the following Stockholm *årsting* were notable improvements on the 1935 success, this probably owed a great deal to repetition.<sup>911</sup> The 1937 convention's marching routes were almost identical to those of 1935,<sup>912</sup> and only the first march of the 1938 convention took a new route altogether.<sup>913</sup> In all other regards the proceedings followed a nearly identical structure and order to those of 1935, so that in some ways *Sveatinget* was trend-setting for the rest of the decade. This was a notable contrast to the more varied conventions of the Dutch NSB.

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<sup>909</sup> 'Två extratåg till Stockholm i pingst: Fjärde årstinget skall överglänsa de tidigare', *DSN*, no 27, 10 April 1937, p. 3.

<sup>910</sup> 'Våra sympatisörer landet runt kunna härigenom få föreställning om massanslutningen, förhållandena och kanske även stämningen. Och tingsdeltagarna få i fotografierna ett värdefullt minne från de oförglömmeliga kampdagarna, ett band som skall knyta dem fastare samman med kamraterna och egga dem till nya och kraftfulla ansträngningar.', *DSN*, no 22B, 31 May 1934, p. 3.

<sup>911</sup> In his 1943 book, *The Swedish Struggle for Freedom*, Lindholm deemed the 1937-38 *Sveatinget* the most impressive of the decade: Lindholm, *Svensk Frihetskamp*, p. 39.

<sup>912</sup> Transcript, Programme for NSAP's fourth *årsting* in Stockholm, p. 2, 1937, Arninge: 2A: 2.

<sup>913</sup> Programme booklet (Lindholm private copy), *N.S.A.P.s 5:te årsting: Stockholm 4-6 juni 1938*, pp. 4-5, Marieberg: SO Lindholms samling, vol. 8.



### III

When in October 1935, the Dutch *landdag* in The Hague began, the NSB already had an exhilarating year behind it. Membership had been growing steadily, if not quite as fast as in the two years before then, and the convention in March, in Amsterdam, had been a resounding success – in fact it claimed to be the largest political convention of its kind in the Netherlands ever. Even more beneficial for the confidence of the young movement were the results of the Provincial Elections in May that year, which rewarded the NSB with 7.94% of the vote, an unprecedented first time result for a new party, confirming all the hopes of the leadership. At the end of the month, Mussert undertook his famous journey to the Dutch Indies, staged to elevate the Leader in the eyes of his followers. It was also a time of reflection for the party, as the Leadership conferred what steps to take next, to ensure continued growth and the hoped for seizure of power. The image of the party was at stake here. The NSB was at this point under heavy attack from the party-political press.<sup>914</sup> It was heavily associated, by much of the public but also many members, with the Italian and German regimes, just when public opinion was turning against these countries. In Germany the previous year's Operation Hummingbird massacre of the SA disillusioned much of respectable opinion, while the *Kirchenkampf* unified confessional opinion against fascism.<sup>915</sup> As the convention speeches were prepared, the Catholic District Leader d'Ansembourg wrote to Mussert that it was crucial to show at this point that the NSB did not just go along with everything that happened in Germany.<sup>916</sup> At the same time, the positive reputation which Mussolini had enjoyed in the Netherlands in the late twenties was taking a turn for the worse,<sup>917</sup> particularly as the Colijn government struggled to respond to the controversial invasion of Abyssinia.<sup>918</sup> By 1935, in contrast to the NSAP's trajectory in the same period, the composition of the NSB membership was changing ideologically, reflected in increasingly explicit anti-Semitism, as more Germanophile fascists started to join the cadres.<sup>919</sup> Internally, the Leadership was pondering how to mobilise the membership more effectively, worrying that the expanding party bureaucracy was stifling

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<sup>914</sup> Paul Stoop, *Niederländische Presse unter Druck: Deutsche Auswärtige Pressepolitik und die Niederlande 1933-1940* (München: Saur, 1987), p. 71.

<sup>915</sup> Ger van Roon, *Zwischen Neutralismus und Solidarität: Die evangelischen Niederlande und der deutsche Kirchenkampf, 1933-1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1983), chap. 7.

<sup>916</sup> Letter, District Leader [d'Ansembourg] to Mussert, Amstenrade, 1 October 1935, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>917</sup> Huberts, p. 65; Verhagen, pp. 288–89.

<sup>918</sup> Dietrich Orlow, *The Lure of Fascism in Western Europe: German Nazis, Dutch and French Fascists, 1933-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 67.

<sup>919</sup> Havenaar, *De NSB tussen Nationalisme en 'Volkse' Solidariteit*, pp. 101–6.

enthusiasm [chapter 1].<sup>920</sup> In summary, while the May elections had confirmed the party's remarkable growth, it was also running up against more and more obstacles and uncertainties; here too, as in Sweden, a creeping sense of crisis set the tune for the fourth national convention of the NSB.

In the summer, planning for the next *landdag* started at Headquarters in Utrecht. This meeting provides some interesting insights into how the event was shaped early on. Some of the present District Leaders (Limburg, Groningen, Friesland) reported that the attendees of the previous convention in Amsterdam were enthusiastic and satisfied with the event, although one, Bakker, thought that one convention per year was enough. However, the General Secretary and Deputy Leader, Van Geelkerken, had the impression that some attendees did not like the massive scale of the Amsterdam convention. It lacked the intimacy of previous events, and some had left complaints. But, Van Geelkerken noted, 'the members forget, that the convention is held to make an impression to the outside', not for the benefit of the participants. Mussert agreed: '[t]he massive character of the convention is necessary to show to the outside world how strong our Movement is, while the necessity is also felt to bring members, who live far away, amidst their comrades for once'.<sup>921</sup> The initial date suggested by Van Geelkerken was 31 August, to coincide with the Queen's birthday, but Mussert argued for the autumn, so that it could re-mobilise members after the lax summer period. A date was not decided on yet, but most likely it was the extra weeks required for the building of a tent which ultimately placed the date in October. In a foreboding comment, Mussert said that: '[h]olding a convention in October is, with an eye on the season, not feasible. [Even] if we were to do so in September, we would need to be lucky to get dry weather'.<sup>922</sup>

Later that same month the *Centrale Inlichtingendienst* (CI, Central Intelligence Service) reported to the government that the NSB leadership was planning on organising a convention in a field on the outskirts of The Hague, to be held in the beginning of October. For the event a colossal tent would be imported from Köln, to be constructed under the supervision of a German engineer. One hundred WA-members would be recruited to build the edifice in a work camp, over the

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<sup>920</sup> Minutes for meeting, 11 July 1935, §1, pp. 22-23, in: Book, meeting minutes *Algemeene Raad*, NIOD: 123, 1.3: 276.

<sup>921</sup> '...de leden vergeten, dat de landdag wordt gehouden om indruk naar buiten te maken...'; 'Het massale van den landdag is noodig om naar buiten te kunnen toonen hoe krachtig onze Beweging is en ook de noodzakelykheid wordt gevoeld om de leden, die ver af wonen eens te midden van hun overige Kameraden te brengen', Minutes for meeting, unknown date, Utrecht, §6, pp. 47-48, *ibid*.

<sup>922</sup> 'Een landdag houden in October is met het oog [op] het jaargetij niet uitvoerbaar. Zouden wij dat in September doen, dan moet het geluk met ons zijn om droog weer te hebben...', *ibid*, p. 49.

course of approximately one month.<sup>923</sup> Requiring thirty train carriages to transport the tent materials, the final result would be 160 x 125m, 9000m<sup>2</sup>, with seating space for 35 000 people. Two 45m towers connected by a bridge would give the guards an overview of the entire terrain. The initial location did not work out for reasons not apparent from the documents, while the request to hire a second location from the city council was rejected.<sup>924</sup> The third option ended up being an hour's walk from the railway stations, meaning attendees were going to have to make their way back from the *landdag* late at night, in the dark. Located in the Escamppolder of Loosduinen, a meadow in 's-Gravenhage, provisions for clean water and electricity would also need to be installed at considerable expense. In the following years these problems were circumvented by purchasing the Goudsberg ground in Lunteren for the *Hagespraken*.

The same organiser of the previous *landdagen*, Jacob de Vries, was in charge of organisation, assisted by Johannis Sandberg. The Circle Leaders were in charge of collecting the funds, and recruiting members to attend the rally.<sup>925</sup> Documents from the district party administration of Limburg & North Brabant show detailed plans were made to ensure all outward aspects of the convention did not only proceed smoothly, but with militaristic discipline. Nothing could be left to chance. Headquarters issued instructions to the branches which insisted that '[i]t is for us fascists of the greatest importance, that the travel by extra-train and the marching through The Hague happens with the most consummate order and regularity'.<sup>926</sup> Circle- and Group Leaders were instructed on how to lead their subordinates to the trains, signs were made to identify each Circle and their train carriages, a precise marching order was assigned, groups were to march in ranks of four, the trains to be entered from front to back, signs held at a specific height, and so forth. A veritable hierarchy of train-leaders was created, with insignia designed for the purpose (a black band with a train wheel). The NSB *landdag* was remarkable for the centralisation of its organisation, and the micromanagement of the branches from Utrecht, not just in comparison to the NSAP's *Sveating* but in its own right. Circulars for other NSB conventions show

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<sup>923</sup> CID report, 'Landdag N.S.B.', C.I. no 22787, 's-Gravenhage, 23 July 1935, The Hague: Ministry of Internal Affairs cabinet archive 1918-1935, 2.04.26.02: 612, 22787a.

<sup>924</sup> Letter, Mayor of 's-Gravenhage to Minister of Internal Affairs, 's-Gravenhage, 31 July 1935: The Hague, 2.04.26.02: 612, 22787a.

<sup>925</sup> CID report, 'Landdag N.S.B.', C.I. no 24348, 's-Gravenhage, 16 September 1935, The Hague: 2.13.70 (General Staff archive, 1914-1940): 1574, 24348a.

<sup>926</sup> 'Het is voor ons fascistien van het grootste belang, dat het reizen per extra-trein en het marcheeren door Den Haag in de meest volmaakte orde en regelmaat geschiedt.', Circular, 'Organisatie 4e Algemeene Landdag. Algemeene instructies', Utrecht, 5 October 1935, The Hague: 2.19.049: 3.

that this was by no means unusual; instructions detailed to the point of confusion, complete with images and diagrams, seem to have been the norm.<sup>927</sup>

This level of organisation required a great deal more financial muscle than the NSAP could ever manage – especially considering that the NSB had already organised a convention that year, and run an election campaign. The fact that, instead of holding the convention over the course of two or three days, it was all done in one created its own costs and challenges. The single greatest expenditure was the extra trains which this required – the NSB could not afford for buses and the like to turn up late as they did at *Sveatinget*. There was very limited local organisation of transport to the convention; instead Mussert himself ensured that there were extra trains for the entire country to bring the tens of thousands of members to The Hague and back in one day. The bill from the Dutch Railway Service came to f 33 290.45, but was easily covered by the tens of thousands of travellers.<sup>928</sup> It also made train travel much cheaper compared to that of the Swedes. Whereas extra-trains in Sweden could cost as much as 20 kr, the Hague convention tickets, which also served as train tickets, cost f 1.25-2.50. The administration divided the country into five zones – the closer members lived to The Hague the more expensive the tickets, as a means of subsidising those further away.<sup>929</sup> It was an excellent arrangement, but it did require conventions to be held during low-travel seasons, and within the Randstad; when the *Hagespraken* were held during Pentecost in rural Gelderland, the railway services could not only not provide extra-trains, but discouraged the NSB from using the services at all.<sup>930</sup>

Actually getting the members to The Hague was left to the Block Leaders, under the supervision of the Circle Leaders. Mussert ordered the Circle Leaders to ensure at least two-thirds of the members were present – a rather more dictatorial approach to recruitment than the NSAP ever attempted – and they were to personally take charge of the party apparatus to achieve this goal.<sup>931</sup> Surviving functionary reports show that *landdag*-representatives were assigned to the branches, to ensure that sufficient members were recruited.<sup>932</sup> Within the branches, these

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<sup>927</sup> Cf. the *Landdag* document-bundle, ‘Landdag’, Utrecht, The Hague: 2.19.049: 3.

<sup>928</sup> Letter, Dutch Railway Service (Dienst der Exploitatie) to J. de Vries, Utrecht, 24 October 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>929</sup> Circular no 1, ‘Verkoop van deelnemerskaarten’, Organisation of the 4th General *Landdag*, The Hague, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>930</sup> Letter, Dutch Railway Service (Dienst der Exploitatie) to Mussert, Utrecht, 18 April 1936, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 53.

<sup>931</sup> Letter [model], Musser to Circle Leader, Utrecht, 12 September 1935, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 39.

<sup>932</sup> Week report, 26-31 August 1935, Zaandam et al, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

representatives also sent circulars to mobilise the cadres: ‘every “WAPENSCHOUW” [military review] of the movement is a mighty *Monument*, in which we, in sight of the entire people, show our determined will to, in spite of all resistance, as the Leader said: “win the soul of the Dutch People” for the National Socialist idea’.<sup>933</sup> Block Leaders subsequently walked the neighbourhoods and sold the tickets door-to-door; evidently a very effective method. The first announcement of the convention in VoVa was on 10 August, and the tickets went on sale 12 August.<sup>934</sup>

To further encourage attendance VoVa, like DSN, periodically published articles to inspire members. On 17 August it promised a ‘massive march’ to the *landdag*, and in subsequent weeks articles describing the elaborate and impressive preparations of the tent were printed, offering members a look behind the scenes.<sup>935</sup> These were alternated with circulars from Headquarters, emphasising the absolute importance of the convention, not just as propaganda, but for the future of the movement, and by extension the nation. ‘This *Landdag* will be an event in the Netherlands, which does not know its equal. The *Landdag* will leave a mark on the Netherlands of 1935, which will experience how a will has come forth from the Dutch people, to escape from a regent-regime which threatens to suffocate this people.’<sup>936</sup> It was promised that everyone would be able to see the speaker’s podium this time.<sup>937</sup> The stated purpose of the convention according to one circular from the party’s Central Election Bureau was to awaken that part of the people that is not yet aware that the NSB is on the march to power. To encourage a maximum number of participants, the party Film Service did a report on the building of the tent at the work camp, (‘Behind the Screens of our 4<sup>th</sup> General *Landdag*): [f]or those who currently still hesitate, seeing this film will help them make up their mind, while it will encourage others to bring more interested parties to The HAGUE.’<sup>938</sup>

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<sup>933</sup> Circular, A. Groeneveld to Circle 20 West-Betuwe, Tiel, [no date], NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>934</sup> ‘4e Algemeene Landdag te ‘s-Gravenhage’, *VoVa*, no 32, 10 August 1935, p. 1.

<sup>935</sup> ‘Vierde Algemeene Landdag: Een massale opmarsch’, *VoVa*, no 33, 17 August 1935, p. 10; De N.S.B. aan het werk: De dag van vijf October in voorbereiding’, *VoVa*, no 35, 31 August 1935, p. 5; ‘Het werkkamp der N.S.B.: Voor den Landdag in Den Haag’, *VoVa*, 7 September 1935, pp. 8-9.

<sup>936</sup> ‘Deze Landdag wordt een gebeurtenis in Nederland, die haar weerga niet kent. De Landdag zal een stempel drukken op Nederland van 1935, die beleeft hoe uit het Nederlandsche Volk de wil naar voren is gekomen om zich te ontworstelen aan een regenten-régime, dat dit volk dreigt te verstikken.’ Circular no 7, NSB Central Election Bureau to all Circle leaders, Amsterdam, 30 August 1935, The Hague: 2.19.049: 3.

<sup>937</sup> Circular, Provincial *Landdag* representative to District III (Limburg & North-Brabant), The Hague: 2.19.049: 1.

<sup>938</sup> ‘Voor hen die thans nog twijfelen, zal het zien van deze film den doorslag geven, terwijl anderen er door opgewekt worden meerdere belangstellenden naar Den HAAG mede te brengen.’ Circular no 1, Service 5 (Film) to all Convention representatives, The Hague, 28 August 1935, The Hague: 2.19.049: 3.

The tent was itself an attraction. It cost the NSB f 3414.66, arranged by the firm L. Stromeyer & Co from Konstanz, which specialised in these kinds of textile and wood constructions.<sup>939</sup> It would be a feat of engineering, and allow the NSB to hold the largest private political *landdag* in the Netherlands ever, if not the largest rally as such. Building the tent took weeks. The work camp at the Leyweg recruited unemployed NSB-members and WA-members, 200 in total according to camp documents, and between 65 and 175 at the same time, depending on the workload.<sup>940</sup> The construction was a propaganda effort, a sign of the party's dedication to honest work and a respectable manifestation of fascist order and discipline. Sadly for the NSB, this effort badly backfired when the Dutch autumn climate made itself felt a little more than usual – as Mussert had predicted months earlier.

On 19 September the organiser, de Vries, wrote to Mussert to inform him that constant rain had made the field exceedingly soggy, which forced the workers to labour in the mud. The city authorities managed to drain the waters enough to make conditions bearable, and even in the storm that followed the 'spirit among the comrades [was] excellent', but there was a silent longing that the Leader would visit them and eat with them at least once before the *landdag*. 'This would mean more to them, than speeches and tokens of gratitude.'<sup>941</sup> Then disaster struck as a second storm completely destroyed the tent, requiring the entire event to be postponed by one week, to 12 October [figure 6].

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<sup>939</sup> Letter, Dutch Clearing Institute to NSB *Landdag* Organisation, 's-Gravenhage, 8 October 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>940</sup> Diagram, 'Werkkamp', 7 September-26 October, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>941</sup> 'De geest onder de kameraden is voortreffelyk.'; 'Dit zal voor hen meer beteekenen, dan toespraken en dankbetuigingen.', Letter, Jacob de Vries to Mussert, The Hague, 19 September 1935, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

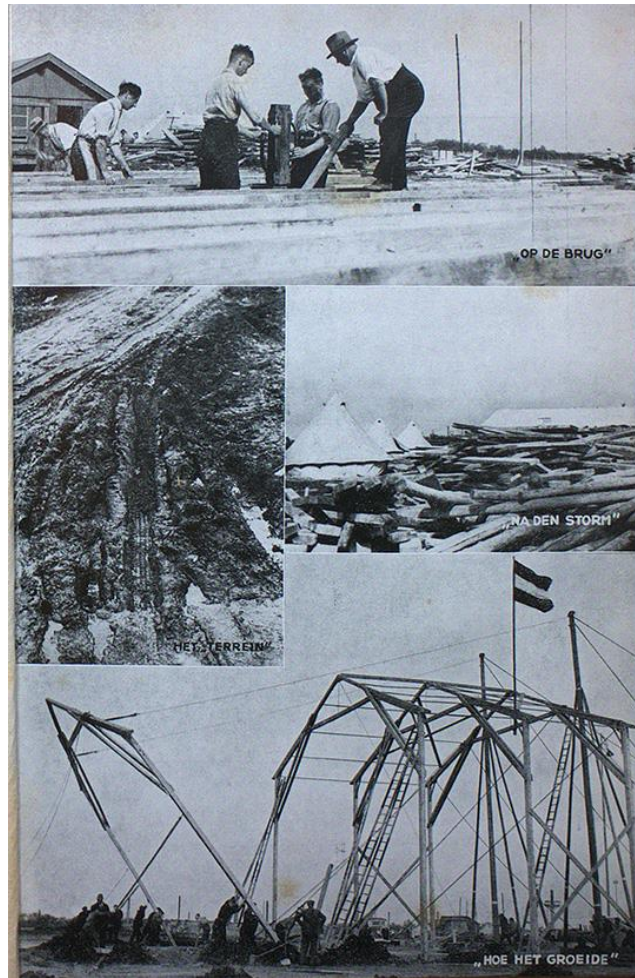


Figure 6. Page from the commemorative book, showing the construction of the tent, the soggy terrain, and the remnants after the storm.  
*Het Landdag Gedenkboek, 1935.*

To compound the embarrassment of fascists trying to build a hubristically large tent in a soggy field in Holland during autumn, mutiny followed on the night of 3-4 October. Workers prevented the camp authorities from calling headquarters, there were instances of vandalism, and the head guard was beaten up. Most of the WA-guards had joined the mutineers. Police and gendarmerie had to be called in, until the situation was defused by Van Geelkerken. Parts of the workforce had to be evicted from the camp.<sup>942</sup> Apparently the trigger for the mutiny was Mussert himself, who was scheduled to visit the camp to raise morale, but cancelled on account of a cold. In an extensive disciplinary investigation into the mutiny which took the rest of the year, it came to light that workers were unhappy with the poor living conditions, arduous working hours, lack of

<sup>942</sup> CI report, 'Revolutionaire actie bij een werkkamp van de N.S.B.', C.I. no 25160, 's-Gravenhage, 11 October 1935, The Hague: 2.13.70: 1574.

decent uniforms or boots, and perhaps above all the incompetent and antagonising camp leaders.<sup>943</sup> Needless to say, the mutiny was widely reported on in the press, which rather undermined the propaganda value of the work camp, although it seems some of the worst incidents remained a secret to all except the CI.<sup>944</sup> The fact that the workers were recruits from the WA, supposedly a model of discipline, made the whole episode even more embarrassing. ‘The W.A. stands and falls with discipline; without discipline no guard, no troop, no banner. Discipline can only be maintained in a group when it is *in extremis* ensured that a given order is followed *unconditionally* by every man’, as a reprimanding circular to all WA-commanders put it.<sup>945</sup> An appeal had to be made to the cadres for further donations, so that the extra costs could be covered.<sup>946</sup>

The tent and the mutiny were doubtless the biggest headaches for the organisers, but there were other difficulties as well. While holding the *landdag* on a Saturday made good sense in terms of members’ availability, the scheduled closing of the convention late at night offended Calvinist members. The IJmuiden Circle wrote to de Vries, complaining that it ended far too late, and reminded him that ‘the press, especially the Christian press, would probably exploit it as desecration of the Sunday, and use it as evidence for their readers that the N.S.B. is not all that concerned with the veneration of the Sunday.’<sup>947</sup> This was an issue that had already been raised previously in regard to NSB marches on Sundays, ‘a stone of offence’.<sup>948</sup> Specific requests were made for the convention to be over at 10pm, so that no one would be forced to travel past midnight, but the final schedule shows that the organisers did not meet this demand.<sup>949</sup> It was the kind of issue that holding the later *Hagespraken* on the second day of Pentecost avoided, except then the organisers ended up on the wrong side of the Catholic members, who had nowhere to

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<sup>943</sup> Report, ‘on the investigation into the unrest at Leiweg, The Hague, evening of 3 to 4 October, 1935’, pp. 2-3, NIOD: 123, 2.56: 2020.

<sup>944</sup> ‘Ontevredenheid in N.S.B.-werkkamp’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, no 35443, 08 October 1935, p. 3; ‘Moeilijkheden in N.S.B.-werkkamp’, *De Tijd*, 04 October 1935, p. 2.

<sup>945</sup> ‘Met discipline staat en valt de W.A.; zonder discipline geen wacht, geen troep, geen vendel. Slechts dan kan discipline in een afdeeling gebracht worden, indien er *tot het uiterste* de hand aan gehouden wordt, dat een gegeven order *onvoorwaardelyk* door “iederem” man wordt opgevolgd.’ Message, WA-inspector to all WA-commanders, ‘Discipline’, Utrecht, 23 October 1935, The Hague: 2.19.049: 3.

<sup>946</sup> Letter [copy for Mussert], Slinkert to Jacob de Vries, Nymegen, 18 September 1935, 1.1: 37.

<sup>947</sup> ‘Vermoedelyk zal de pers, vooral de Chr. pers het als zynde Zondagsontheiliging, uitbuiten en het haar lezers voorhouden, als een bewys dat de N.S.B. het zoo nauw niet neemt met de Zondagsheiligung.’ Letter, *Landdag* organiser of the IJmuiden Circle to the *Landdag* organiser [de Vries], IJmuiden, 20 August 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>948</sup> ‘steen des aanstoots’, Letter, M.J. Bomers to Mussert, ’s-Gravenhage, 4 April 1934, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 22.

<sup>949</sup> Letter, Circle Leader 15 IJmuiden to Jacob de Vries, IJmuiden, 29 August 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.



hear Mass in the Reformed community of Lunteren, and had to make special arrangements in neighbouring towns like Ede and Barneveld.<sup>950</sup> The demands of Dutch confessional respectability could prove quite challenging to a *landdag* organisation.

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The obstacles that the Hague convention threw in the organisers' path were ultimately surmountable for the quite large and experienced party apparatus, and on 12 October the *landdag* could go ahead. VoVa had been subjecting its readers with *landdag*-related material for weeks, with articles, drawings, instructions, and poetry, and now they could finally experience the highly anticipated spectacle that had been promised.<sup>951</sup> Nor was it just the party that got to enjoy the event: more than a dozen newspapers, including all the major national dailies (bar *Het Volk*), had been invited to attend the convention, to ensure that they could report on it accurately and in their own words to their readers. Such invitations have survived for the *landdag* in Amsterdam earlier that year, but it is also evident that papers like the *NRC*, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, *De Standaard*, *De Telegraaf*, and *De Maasbode* all accepted for the fourth General *Landdag*.<sup>952</sup> Where *Sveatinget* was above all a mobilisation action with a Stockholm public, the fourth *Algemeene Landdag* was a propaganda event, principally staged for the benefit of the national public. With this in mind, the transition to the all-public *Hagespraken* was a natural one for the NSB.

As a silver lining to the postponement of the *landdag*, 12 October 1935 was a clear and sunny day. The performance started immediately when the first trains arrived at 3pm at the twin Hague railway stations. A crowd had already gathered at the stations, aware that something major was afoot.<sup>953</sup> 'From the North and from the South, from all social strata, from all social ranks and professions, the pioneers of a new *volksgemeenschap* are come together.'<sup>954</sup> Photographers and film cameras were ready to document the arrival of the participants. As they arrived, they were

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<sup>950</sup> Urgent circular, to Circle papers, Amsterdam, 26 May 1936, NIOD: 123, 2.01: 504.

<sup>951</sup> E.g.: *VoVa*, no 39, 28 September 1935, pp. 1, 4; Rob Delsing, 'Als één man...', *VoVa*, no 40, 5 October 1935, p. 4.

<sup>952</sup> See letters of acceptance and rejection from the various newspapers in: NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>953</sup> *Het Landdag Gedenkboek: ter herinnering aan den 4den Algemeenen Landdag der N.S.B. gehouden te Den Haag op 12 October 1935*, (Hobera: Amsterdam-Zuid, 1935), p. 6, in: Bro N 188/6, IISG.

<sup>954</sup> 'Van het Noorden en het Zuiden, uit alle sociale lagen, uit alle maatschappelijke standen en beroepen zijn de pioniers van een nieuwe volksgemeenschap bijeengekomen.', Programme booklet, *N.S.B.: 4<sup>e</sup> Landdag*, 5 October 1935, p. 33, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

immediately assembled by station and Circle, for the public march to Loosduinen. Thus long twin columns were formed, one from the HSM station, and one from the SS-station (closed since 1973).<sup>955</sup> The precise route that had been planned out has not survived, but from the station to the Leyweg is a fairly straightforward route, just under 5.5 km. Under ordinary circumstances such a march would have taken a little over an hour, but with more than 30 000 participants it was expected to take until right before the official opening of the convention, at 7.25pm.<sup>956</sup>

The march itself was, in spite of its impressive size, not quite the fantastic spectacle that the organisers might have hoped for, although it was an improvement on the previous *landdag* march in Amsterdam, when participants were forced to roll up national flags in what was described as a walk of shame [chapter 3]. The mayor of 's-Gravenhage had imposed considerable restrictions on the procession, on the basis that the NSB was on the list of dangerous revolutionary organisations. The police directed the members to their places on arrival, and they were only allowed to march on the condition that 'the aforementioned participants are not allowed to form speaking choirs, not allowed to sing, not allowed to play music, no banners and signs with slogans and no flags, with the exception of national flags'.<sup>957</sup> Combined with the lack of any (visible) uniforms the whole procession had a distinctly bourgeois appearance, not least with the marching leaders in long winter coats and Homburg and Fedora hats. Apart from Mussert's characteristic military-style jacket, only Van Geelkerken seemed to have tried constructing some sort of semi-uniform for the march, with a wide waist belt and shoulder strap, and shiny leather boots peeping out underneath his long coat. The white shirt rather undercut the whole impression however, making him look quite peculiar [figure 7].

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<sup>955</sup> Diagram marching column, 'Samenstelling van den optocht', The Hague: 2.19.049: 3.

<sup>956</sup> 'De N.S.B. marcheert: Vierde Landdag in Den Haag', *VoVa*, no 42, 19 October 1935, p. 5.

<sup>957</sup> '...bovengenoemde deelnemers geen spreekkoren mogen vormen, niet mogen zingen, geen muziek mogen maken, geen doeken en borden met leuzen en geen vaandels en vlaggen, met uitzondering van nationale vlaggen...', Letter transcript, Mayor of 's-Gravenhage, Ag. No. 19 383, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.



Figure 7. The march leaders, with Van Geelkerken on the far-right. Note the triangular signs denoting Circle groups. *Het Landdag Gedenkboek*, 1935.

VoVa ultimately opted to describe it as ‘an impressive procession of workers, for whom the streets had been kept free’.<sup>958</sup> If, apart from the sheer numbers, the march was not spectacular, at least it was thoroughly respectable, something much commented on in the conservative press, which admired the order and discipline of the organisation, and the lack of unrest that accompanied this performative demonstration of the NSB.<sup>959</sup> A VoVa poem about the march exploited this impression, contrasting it with the image of the uncouth left-wing protesters that lined the streets, the real threat in the royal residence of The Hague.<sup>960</sup> In a reminder of the international context in which the NSB was viewed by the Dutch public, the procession was occasionally harassed with cries of ‘Abyssinia!’.<sup>961</sup> Quite unlike the NSAP’s *uppmarscher*, what this march had in numbers, it lacked in style, with very few parts of the fascist mythopoeic repertoire being enacted. But then, the real spectacle was going to be in the giant tent, carefully staged in a controlled environment away from undisciplined and critical spectators, with no room for the spontaneous. (There is an interesting echo here of Fischer-Lichte’s description of nineteenth-century theatre laws which

<sup>958</sup> De N.S.B. marcheert’, *VoVa*, no 42, 19 October 1935, p. 5.

<sup>959</sup> Cf. Matthias Reiss, ‘Introduction’, in *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 15–16.

<sup>960</sup> De B., ‘Langs de straten van Den Haag’, *VoVa*, no 42, 19 October 1935, p. 2.

<sup>961</sup> De N.S.B. marcheert’, *VoVa*, no 42, 19 October 1935, p. 5.

sought to eliminate the uncertainty of audience interaction from the performance – rowdy audiences were a nuisance to be eliminated, and the emphasis was placed on quiet and emphatic watching.)<sup>962</sup>

As the procession entered the Leyweg just before seven it had become dark, so that the marchers could from a distance see glowing letters at the entrance of the convention terrain, spelling out *HOU ZEE*, ‘as a symbol of our radiant self-confidence, our hope for the future of the entire Dutch people’.<sup>963</sup> At the entrance the two columns split, and then divided into sixteen groups to be seated in designated places in the tent.<sup>964</sup> All NSB reports proudly mention how smoothly this occurred, and the detailed organisation that was required. It would seem that the NSB realised that organisation itself had mythopoetic potential. The tent was impressive. It created a majestic space, well-lit and festooned with endless rows of vertically suspended orange-white-blue flags. The stage was painted in black and orange, with an enormous golden rampant lion as backdrop for the rostrum. A special podium had been constructed for the music band, orchestra, and women’s choir.



Figure 8. The tent on the inside as the *landdag* is about to begin. Note the wide central aisle.  
*Het Landdag Gedenkboek*, 1935.

<sup>962</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>963</sup> De N.S.B. marcheert’, *VoVa*, no 42, 19 October 1935, p. 5.

<sup>964</sup> Ground plan and diagram of tent and marching procession entry, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2014.

At 7.25pm Van Geelkerken opened the *landdag*. The audience could follow the proceedings in their programme booklets, a high quality production (in marked contrast to the cheap and flimsy booklets the NSAP used) of fifty pages, illustrated, and consisting mostly of advertisements.<sup>965</sup> After ten minutes, Mussert entered. Here the large central aisle between the seats allowed the *Leider* to, now in an all-black uniform with the obligatory belt and shoulder strap, walk amongst his followers, saluting them as they thronged around him [figure 8]. The contrast with Stockholm's Auditorium is intriguing: the seating must have been purposefully arranged to set the stage for this fascist ritual. In other words the *mise-en-scène* had deliberately excluded a vast expanse of central seating that would have made the proceedings easier to see for the actual audience, for the sake of enacting aesthetically appealing and dramatic rituals, but paradoxically not necessarily ones observable to the spectators. Afterwards it was reported that some members were disappointed that they had not been able to see or hear enough of what was going on – but as propaganda it was a success.<sup>966</sup> It was a striking illustration of the priorities of the *landdag*: outward propaganda first, morale and mobilisation second. Subsequently the audience listened to two short speeches, one by the dour *volkse* Calvinist E.J. Roskam on the idea of the Leader and the *Dietse* state, one by d'Ansembourg on Church and State.<sup>967</sup> In less than an hour since Mussert's entry, it was time for the next ritual: the oath-taking ceremony.

Six-thousand new members of the NSB swore their oath to the Leader, in an impressive demonstration of the growing strength of the movement. More than two months before, the head of Department I (Organisation and Statistics) had informed all districts and branches that it was Mussert's wish that several thousand new members would swear their oath to him personally at the next *landdag*. It was a striking use of physical bodies as a ritual resource, a mass imbued with fascist symbolism.<sup>968</sup> Consequently, from 1 August all new members were prohibited from taking the customary oath, so that these could happen during this ceremony instead. 'It is not necessary to tell you, that this massive oath-taking during the *Landdag* must be entirely successful and leave a grand impression on everyone present. Each administrative functionary must therefore do everything possible to make sure that no available member will miss this unforgettable

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<sup>965</sup> Programme booklet, *N.S.B.: 4<sup>e</sup> Landdag, 5 October 1935*, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>966</sup> Report, meeting District Council North-South-Holland, The Hague, 5 November 1935, p. 1, NIOD: 123, 2.01 534.

<sup>967</sup> Programme booklet, *N.S.B.: 4<sup>e</sup> Landdag, 5 October 1935*, p. 24, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>968</sup> Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, p. 116.

solemnity.<sup>969</sup> VoVa reported on the ceremony in its special *landdag* issue with great detail, giving Mussert's dramatic speech to the new members in full. Mussert embodied the priest-figure in this baptismal ritual, bathed in a patriotic orange light while looking down on this new addition to his growing army, presumably occupying the tent's central aisle which led up to his pulpit.

Aesthetically it was a composition which fused a heady mixture of elements that constructed him simultaneously as fascist Leader, priest, general, and patriot, framed by the myriad national flags, highlighting the connection between national, and party destiny. Mussert spoke:

History will elevate you to [be] saviours of our People and of our Fatherland [*ons Volk en ons Vaderland*], if you accept your part in the battle. Then may this hour remain in your memory for as long as you live, and may you at the end of your days remember with satisfaction the deed, which you perform today. Your people calls you, you report, and the N.S.B. accepts you. God be with you.<sup>970</sup>

After the Leader had brought out the transcendent significance of this moment in time, the anticipatory atmosphere was built up further as music started to play; photographs suggest the lights were dimmed.<sup>971</sup> As the tens of thousands of spectators watched in complete silence, the six-thousand initiates answered the Leader 'with a thunderous "Yes!"', arms raised in salute. The women's choir hummed the national anthem, again punctuating the national importance of the consecration.

The solemnity with which our General Leader took the oaths of six-thousand new members, after a speech which made a profound impression not just for the way in which it was formulated, but which more than ever made the National Socialist sense of reality shine brightly, formed without a doubt one of the pinnacles of the *Landdag*. For it was not only a call [*appel*] for these six-thousand

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<sup>969</sup> 'Onnoodig U te zeggen, dat deze massale gelofte-aflegging op den Landdag volledig zal moeten slagen en een grootschen indruk op alle aanwezigen zal moeten achterlaten. Ieder administratief functionaris dient dus alles in het werk te stellen, opdat aan geen daarvoor in aanmerking komend voorloopig lid deze onvergetelijke plechtigheid zal kunnen ontgaan.' Circular no 6/1935, Head of Department 1 to all Circle Leaders, Amsterdam, 3 August 1935, The Hague: 2.19.049: 3.

<sup>970</sup> 'De geschiedenis zal u verheffen tot redders van ons Volk en van ons Vaderland, indien gij uw aandeel in den strijd aanvaardt. Moge dan dit uur u in herinnering blijven zoolang ge leeft en moogt gij aan het einde uwer dagen met voldoening kunnen terugzien op de daad, die gij heden verricht. Uw volk roept u, gij meldt u, de N.S.B. aanvaardt u. God zij met u.', Mussert speech MS, 'Geloofte-aflegging', p. 5, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37; also printed in: 'Geloofte-aflegging: De Toespraak van den Algemeen Leider', *VoVa*, 19 October 1935, no 42, p. 4.

<sup>971</sup> *Het Landdag Gedenkboek*, (1935), p. 53.

men, standing with raised arm before their leader in the cleared space around the podium... It was also a call for the entire N.S.B.<sup>972</sup>

To further mark the occasion the following part of the schedule was dedicated to the collective singing of party songs, in what must have been an elated atmosphere after the tension of the grandiose liturgy; an outburst of joyful and triumphant music after the pressure of a carefully directed performance. The organisation made sure to use this opportune moment to also collect funds for the party.<sup>973</sup> This was one of the twin pinnacles of the *landdag* – the other would follow after the break.

Thanks to a system by which coupons had been sold in advance for 15 cents, attendees could quickly get their food and drink without delay, and all 35 000 people were processed without any hiccups. Even *Het Volk* wrote that this part of the convention went smoothly, if only mockingly to cast aspersions on the rest of it.<sup>974</sup> The three hundred or so toilets that were installed just outside the tent seem to also have done their job.<sup>975</sup> It is a point of interest that only one hour had been assigned for the break. The attendees had little time to socialise; getting food and drink, using the toilet, and maybe buying something at the Nenasu stall would really have been all members had time for in the throng – a sharp contrast with the ‘comrade evenings’ of the NSAP.

At 10pm everyone was seated again, for another indispensable fascist ritual: the paramilitary procession. This event had been prepared and practised months in advance; since August WA-commanders had been drilling the rank-and-file for this moment, under the oversight of WA-leader J. Hogewind. The WA assembled in ranks of eight – something that proved to be a challenge as most troops had not done this before – carrying signs to denote their company. Six different ‘model marches’ were to be performed. The instructions were an instance of painstaking military discipline, detailing the precise positions of the fingers, angling of the head, arm movements, etc.<sup>976</sup> Diagrams were provided.<sup>977</sup> The whole performance was quite challenging for

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<sup>972</sup> ‘De plechtigheid, waarbij onze Algemeen Leider zesduizend nieuwe leden de gelofte afnam na het houden eener toespraak, welke niet slechts om de wijze, waarop zij was geformuleerd, diepen indruk maakte, maar meer dan ooit den realiteitszin van het nationaal-socialisme helder deed uitstralen, vormde ongetwijfeld een der hoogtepunten van den landdag. Want het was niet slechts een appèl voor deze zesduizend man, met geheven arm staande vóór hun leider in de vrijgemaakte ruimte rondom het podium en tot ver in doorloop. Het was een appèl voor heel de N.S.B.’, ‘De N.S.B. marcheert’, *VoVa*, 19 October 1935, p. 5.

<sup>973</sup> Programme booklet, *N.S.B.: 4<sup>e</sup> Landdag, 5 October 1935*, p. 25, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

<sup>974</sup> ‘Nazi’s hielden hun landdag: Kil hoogtijfeest’, *Het Volk*, no 13582, 14 October 1935 p. 3.

<sup>975</sup> Ground plan and diagram of tent and marching procession entry, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2014.

<sup>976</sup> Circular, J. Hogewind to all WA & RWA Commanders, Utrecht, August 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1046.

the actors, not least as many of the WA-companies did not have much space or opportunity to actually practise this style of marching.<sup>978</sup>

On the day, at the given sign, the WA-drums and horns started to play, and the 1200 fully-uniformed men entered the tent through the south entrance. For this moment Mussert was standing on a central podium from which he watched his troops, with Hogewind at his side. The audience applauded and cheered; with thumping steps the jackbooted WA marched past the Leader up to the north side, and turned around the corner to fully circle the platform. On account of the muddy soil that had been caused by the poor weather of previous weeks, wooden boards had been placed all over the ground. With evident satisfaction VoVa reported how this made the WA's leather boots resound all the louder as they marched, a fetishistic detail repeated by the commemorative *Landdag Gedenkboek*.<sup>979</sup> Admiringly the VoVa report described the uniforms, stature, and appearance of the paramilitaries.<sup>980</sup> As they crossed the centre again, the music players separated from the rest of the group, before the whole army came to a halt as indicated by the *jalonneur* – an easy way of directing even inexperienced troops<sup>981</sup> – between Mussert's platform and the front stage on the west side. That way the whole procession, spectacularly outfitted in flawless black uniforms, with striking black-and-red standards, was arranged to be facing both Mussert and the audience simultaneously.<sup>982</sup> Finally at the very end came the WA camp workers and cooks in their own attire, carrying the tools of their trade over their shoulder, taking up position at the far back. According to VoVa the spectators watched the performance with great enthusiasm, in a 'spirit of young heroism'.<sup>983</sup> It was perhaps the most well-prepared and militaristic NSB performance yet, for a colossal crowd including film cameras and journalists, an ostentatious demonstration of fascist organisation and discipline, unity and loyalty, and of power. The more sinister implications of this mythopoeic spectacle could not have been lost on the audience: here was the NSB with an army of its own, a disciplined force of real, uniformed soldiers, absolutely loyal to their Leader who promised a rapid seizure of power. Given the ubiquity of propaganda

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<sup>977</sup> WA marching diagram, 'Schets van de opstelling', accompanying Hogewind's circular, NIOD: 123, 2.14: 1046.

<sup>978</sup> Circular, Hogewind to all WA & RWA Commanders, Utrecht, 15 October 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.13: 1046.

<sup>979</sup> *Het Landdag Gedenkboek*, (1935), p. 16.

<sup>980</sup> 'De N.S.B. marcheert', *VoVa*, 19 October 1935, p. 5.

<sup>981</sup> Or Guide, see: William Duane, *A Military Dictionary, or, explanation of the several systems of discipline of different kinds of troops*, (Philadelphia: William Duane, 1810), p. 244, 'Guides'.

<sup>982</sup> Diagram of the procession, NIOD: 123, 2.13: 1046.

<sup>983</sup> '...dien geest van jonge heroïek...', 'De N.S.B. marcheert', *VoVa*, 19 October 1935, p. 5.



images from Nazi Germany, displaying precisely these kinds of ranked 'black soldiers', the association must have been inevitable. The very bodies of the WA-men were symbolic,<sup>984</sup> the marriage of masculine body and black uniform infusing their very presence with a mythopoetic potential, their every movement a promise and a threat of power and violence, of war.

Now, with Mussert in the middle of the tent, the audience on one side, and his paramilitary army on the other, he started his speech which would conclude the *landdag*. It went on for well over an hour, (dashing any hopes that Reformed attendees would get home before midnight), using his return from the East Indies and the unexpected rise of the NSB which defied all expectations, symbolised by the arduous *landdag* preparations, as a starting point. Then followed a rather dry account of the political chaos and decline of the Netherlands and the incompetence of its governments, before offering a solution to these problems, and the coming task of the Movement. Aspects of the somewhat generic speech were reminiscent of Lindholm's a few months earlier. 'Great things are afoot; we feel the greatness of this time and our own insignificance, but also our responsibility and our determination and our faith, that we will be shown the way, if we take the truth and love for God and our neighbours as a guide line for our thinking and our actions.'<sup>985</sup> His last words for the audience were a pious encouragement to work harder for the Movement, closing with the words of William of Orange from the national anthem.

But you workers, carriers of the Movement, you are also the protectors of the future of your people. Nothing may stop you from fulfilling your duty. Work and pray, and may God give us the power to lead our people out of its great distress [*nood*]. 'Loyal to the Fatherland, I remain unto death.'<sup>986</sup>

The speech was interrupted on numerous occasions by more or less spontaneous applause, and shouts of agreement from the audience. With the final thunderous ovation, the fourth *Algemeene Landdag* was at an end, and the tens of thousands of members made their way to the railway stations in the moonlit night. Apparently there were still some members of the public out to watch the procession back, but no particular efforts appear to have been made for this occasion.

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<sup>984</sup> Cf.: Paul, pp. 174–77.

<sup>985</sup> 'Groote dingen zijn er op komst; wij gevoelen de grootheid van dezen tijd en onze eigen nietigheid, maar tevens onze verantwoordelijkheid en onze vastberadenheid en ons geloof, dat ons den weg zal worden gewezen, als wij de waarachtigheid en de liefde tot God en onze medemenschen als richtsnoer voor ons denken en handelen willen nemen.', Mussert speech MS, '4<sup>e</sup> Landdag 5 October 1935', p. 5, NIOD: 123, 1.1.: 37.

<sup>986</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

According to VoVa, everyone returned with an invisible bond, that this farewell was the promise of an even greater return to ‘our Leader’.<sup>987</sup>



Unlike the Swedish 1935 convention, the *Algemeene Landdag* was subject to close media scrutiny, making a different kind of analysis possible. The aftermath of this grandiose political theatre, of a scale and type the Netherlands was hardly accustomed to, emphasises two points. Firstly, the NSB had managed to largely fulfil the goal of creating a spectacle that made a lasting impression on the audience, directly and through the media. Secondly, the mythopoeic qualities of the spectacle were effective, but volatile – some were interpreted precisely as the party could have wanted, others backfired badly. There is no such thing as a homogenous audience, especially not in the Netherlands.<sup>988</sup> Ultimately, in spite of the Leadership’s priorities, the *landdag* may well have been more effective as an exercise in morale and mobilisation than propaganda.

Most remarked on was the orderly march from the train station through the city to the tent, bringing out the performative qualities of organisation, in a way that gave the movement an aura of respectability, and was an antidote against accusations of political diletantism.<sup>989</sup> The confessional dailies were invariably concerned with law and order and obedience to authorities in their reports, and could record with satisfaction that the march took place virtually ‘without incident’ – only three troublesome communists needed to be arrested. Catholic *De Maasbode* noted the military-style marching in ranks of four from the train station, and described in detail the extensive organisation to its readers.<sup>990</sup> Local newspaper *De Haagsche Courant* took a similar approach to its report on the convention. Orthodox Calvinist *De Standaard* noted that, apart from the ‘understandable’ mutiny at the work camp, organisation was good.<sup>991</sup> There were also some hints that these outsider newspapers were impressed with the spectacle: Catholic *De Tijd* wrote how ‘[a]cross these paths thousands went from all parts of our land – 35 000 men and women in total – to the central point: a tent, so gigantic in dimensions as one has never seen in our country

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<sup>987</sup> De N.S.B. marcheert’, *VoVa*, 19 October 1935, p. 5.

<sup>988</sup> Dennis Kennedy, *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 3–14.

<sup>989</sup> E.g.: ‘In de politiek: De diletantanten’, *De Tijd*, no 27785, 24 September 1934, p. 1.

<sup>990</sup> ‘N.S.B.-landdag in Loosduinen’, *De Maasbode*, no 26419, 13 October 1935, p. 3.

<sup>991</sup> ‘De Landdag van de N.S.B.’, *De Standaard*, no 19475, 14 October 1935, p. 3.

before.<sup>992</sup> Evidently impressed the article continued to describe how the crowds chanted ‘*Hou Zee*’ in a ‘thunderous choir’ while Mussert ascended the podium, until he, underneath the image of the great golden Dutch lion, greeted his devotees.<sup>993</sup>

Outsiders were by no means insensitive to the spectacle, and there is ample evidence that the ostentatiously detailed organisation of the event made an impact, but it is also clear that little of this was taken at face value, and that none of the major dailies cared to emulate VoVa’s rapturous discourse. While all approved of the orderliness of the event, there were hints of dissatisfaction that such a large police force was required in the first place. *De Standaard* remarked snidely that ‘[t]hanks to the cooperation of the authorities and organs of the democratic state, which the N.S.B. intensely hates and undermines, the participants arrived safely on the terrain’,<sup>994</sup> while SDAP paper *Het Volk* noted how the large police force and gendarmerie ensured the complete isolation of the Nazis from their surroundings, hinting at their social-political isolation as well. ‘Once the Congress visitors were on the terrain ... there were no signs left in the city, that there at the Leyweg the gentleman Mussert and his compatriots celebrated a rather bleak party.’<sup>995</sup>

The report from the predictably hostile *Het Volk* shows that a positive predisposition towards the mass rally was required to read the spectacle the way the NSB intended it to be. Of course the organisers were not so foolish as to invite *Het Volk* reporters to the convention, but this did not prevent them from sneaking in. Their report revealed some distinctly farcical elements to the rally. Inspecting the tent during the break, apart from catering arrangements, the reporters also noticed the floor boards that had been required. These proved to be rather insufficient however, so that people were at constant risk of putting their feet in the mud. The secret reporters themselves ended up covered in filth up to the knees by the end of the night. Moreover:

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<sup>992</sup> ‘Over deze paden trekken duizenden uit alle deelen van ons land – 35 000 mannen en vrouwen in totaal – naar het centrale punt: een tent, zoo reusachtig in afmetingen als men er in ons land nog geen heeft gezien.’, ‘N.S.B.-Landdag: Ir. Mussert over den buitenlandschen toestand en over Ned.-Indië’, *De Tijd*, no 28427, 13 October 1935, p. 2.

<sup>993</sup> Ibid.

<sup>994</sup> ‘Dank zij de medewerking van de Overheid en organen van den democratischen staat, dien de N.S.B. vurig haat en ondermijnt, kwamen de deelnemers veilig op het terrein...’, *De Standaard*, ibid.

<sup>995</sup> ‘Toen de landdagbezoekers eenmaal op het terrein waren ... was in de stad aan niets meer te merken, dat daarbuiten aan de Leyweg de heer Mussert en zijn volksgenoten een overigens tamelijk kil hoogtijfeest vierden.’, ‘Nazi’s hielden hun landdag: Kil hoogtijfeest’, *Het Volk*, no 13582, 14 October 1935, p. 3.

We saw the Convention in the way the majority of the 35 000 present must have seen it: a forest of hundreds of posts, stretching into an unspecified distance, garlands of little lamps, metres of flag fabric, and somewhere, very far away, a brightly lit orange spot: that would be the podium..... [...] There was nothing to see. Mussert could appear and disappear, we didn't see him. ... yes, six-thousand members could be taking an oath, without any one of us even catching the slightest glimpse of what appeared in the beacons.<sup>996</sup>

Yet, *Het Volk* continued, this did not prevent their fascist neighbours from shouting and crying with zealous enthusiasm at the spectacle which they could not see any better. The reactions of the fascist audience was in fact one of the things that most baffled and alienated outsiders. *De Standaard* in particular found it 'peculiar' how the participants invariably required only a raising of the voice and a bit of rhetorical bombast before breaking out into applause and *hou zee*-chants. Judging Mussert's speech demagogical nonsense, *De Standaard* figured that 'any good speaker could get an equally powerful applause out of this ignorant public, if he directly after Mussert had proclaimed the precise opposite'.<sup>997</sup> 'That that freethinking part of the population without principles [liberals] is enraptured by this is bad enough, but that people who want to be Christians let themselves be misled by these sophisms is tragic.'<sup>998</sup>

It turned out that it was precisely in its most successfully spectacular, its most impressive, aspects that the convention failed to strike the right note with outsiders, and greatly offended their sense of respectability. The militaristic, even aggressive values the rally demonstrated made a particularly bad impression on the Calvinist audience, especially the WA-procession. 'We experienced a procession of perhaps a thousand blackshirts, which reminded us a lot of the famous parades in Potsdam under a certain monarch. If grim faces and hard stomping are

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<sup>996</sup> 'Wij zagen de landdag dus zoals de meerderheid van de 35 000 aanwezigen haar moeten hebben gezien: een mastbos van honderden palen, verlopend in een onbestemde verte, guirlandes van kleine lampjes, meters vlaggedoek en ergens, héél ver weg, een hel verlichte oranje-plek: dat zou het podium zijn..... [...] Iets te zien was er niet. Mussert kon verschijnen en verdwijnen, wij zagen hem niet ... ja, zesduizend leden konden worden beedigd, zonder dat iemand onzer ook maar een glimpje vatten kon van wat daarvoor in het licht der schijnwerpers voorviel.', *Het Volk*, *ibid.*

<sup>997</sup> 'Ik durf zeggen, dat elk goed spreker een even krachtig applaus uit deze menigte, die geen kennis heeft, gehaald had als hij direct na Mussert precies het tegenovergestelde had betoogd.', *De Standaard*, *ibid.*

<sup>998</sup> 'Dat het beginsellooze, vrijzinnige volksdeel zich daardoor laat vangen is al erg, dat mensen, die Christenen willen zijn zich door zulke drogredenen laten misleiden is droevig.', *ibid.*

synonymous with heroic courage, then Mussert does indeed possess an elite corps.<sup>999</sup> Sarcasm aside, the WA gave the impression of being a downright dangerous force. In an extra-large font the article noted how these troops could only mean the NSB was planning to take power illegally. Here, mythopoeia failed to mesh with respectability, and spilled outside its boundaries.

Eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth is the doctrine. We will only recommend these words in particular to *those participants* of the *Landdag*, who stayed over with ‘comrades’ in The Hague because they had religious objections to travelling back by train on the night of Saturday to Sunday. Such meticulous Christians really should try to harmonise this language and morality with that of Holy Scripture.<sup>1000</sup>

NSB patriotism and royalism in particular were questioned by *De Tijd* in a front page article three days later, revealingly entitled ‘Nürnberg in Holland: Everything is German’.<sup>1001</sup> It reported:

In the Hague the N.S.B. had held a convention, which was a consummate imitation of the *Parteitag* in Nuremberg: processions, glorification of old Germanic society, condemnation of Jewish international Marxism, veneration of heroes and the dead with ‘Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden’ and finally a sort of deification of the leader, or at least of the *Führerprinzip*.<sup>1002</sup>

The choice of performances, staging, and rhetoric at the *landdag* were evocative – but of an example from abroad. In articulating a certain myth of fascism the NSB had come rather close to its German counterpart, a likeness which antagonised Dutch Christian audiences dismayed by the Church Struggle in Germany, and undermined NSB claims to be respectably nationalist. At the same, legitimating rituals of respectability like the singing of the national anthem *De Tijd* deemed

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<sup>999</sup> ‘Wij hebben een défilé meegemaakt van misschien duizend zwarthemden, dat veel herinnerde aan de beroemde parades in Potsdam onder een zeker vorst. Als grimmige gezichten en hard stampen synoniem zijn met heldenmoed, dan beschikt Mussert inderdaad over een keurkorps.’, *ibid*.

<sup>1000</sup> ‘Oog om oog en tand om tand, is de leer. Alleen bevelen we deze woorden nog een bijzondere ter overweging aan, bij *die deelnemers* van den Landdag die in Den Haag bij “kameraden” werden ondergebracht omdat ze godsdienstige bezwaren hadden tegen terugreizen per trein in den nacht van Zaterdag op Zondag. Zulke nauwgezette Christenen mogen deze taal en moraal wel eens toetsen aan de Heilige Schrift’, *ibid*.

<sup>1001</sup> ‘Nürnberg in Holland: Alles Duitsch wat de klok slaat’, *De Tijd*, 15 October 1935, p. 1.

<sup>1002</sup> ‘In Den Haag heeft de N.S.B. een landdag gehouden, die volslagen een nabootsing was van den Parteitag in Neurenberg: défilé’s, verheerlijking van de oude Germaansche samenleving, veroordeeling van het Joodsche internationale Marxisme, helden- en doodenevering met “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden” en ten sloote een soort vergoddelijking van den leider, althans van het Führerprinzip.’, *ibid*.

‘an aggravating usurpation of the song of Nassau for the advantage of Mussert’s personal glory’.<sup>1003</sup> The celebrated sending of telegrams proclaiming the loyalty of all participants to the Queen and Crown Princess during the rally, demonstratively printed on VoVa’s front page, was termed ‘propagandistic messing-about’ [*propagandistisch gesol*]. The Catholic newspaper was generally the most sensitive to and critical of these kinds of political theatre, and gave scathing and sarcastic reviews of NSB meetings throughout the decade, pointing to Germanic barbarisms and hypocritical Pharisaism.<sup>1004</sup> In other words those performances which were bound to appeal only to the fascist cadres and did not conform to any more general (particularly Christian) notions of respectability could not simply be neutralised by ostentatious demonstrations of patriotism, religiosity, and Orangism. Rather it seems that mixing these elements was an infelicitous choice, which to a critical audience marked the performance as inauthentic; a cynical display covering a sinister load.

Ultimately it was the members themselves on whom the whole event had made the greatest impression, in spite of how the *mise-en-scène* had been for the benefit of the press and cameras. Mussert received letters from his devotees to personally thank him for the *landdag*, with ‘praise for the wonderful organisation and order, and then praise for the incredible work such as the construction of the tent’, and satisfaction at his speech.<sup>1005</sup> Members and VoVa readers could not possibly have missed the great effort that had gone into this, and were probably less critical of the flaws in the organisation, especially the mutiny and misdemeanours at the work camp, which remained largely a matter of internal discipline. Whether these few letters were representative at all is impossible to say. More may have been written, but they are but a small sample out of the 35 000 attendees. Combined with letters from other conventions, one can at least reconstruct how some members experienced the event, and what the myth it created meant to fascists. For instance a branch leader in Bremen, Germany, asked Headquarters if they could send some of the

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<sup>1003</sup> ‘Dit is een ergerlijke usurpatie van het lied der Nassau’s ten voordeele van de persoonlijke glorie van Mussert.’, *ibid*.

<sup>1004</sup> See also: ‘Fascisme: Contra Nationaal-socialisme’, *De Tijd*, no 28103, 2 April 1935, p. 1; ‘De groote mond: De N.S.B. vergadert’, *De Tijd*, no 29040, 13 October 1936, p. 1.

<sup>1005</sup> ‘...hulde voor de prachtige regeling en orde dan hulde voor het ontzaggelijken werk zoals bouw van tent...’, Letter, [signature illegible] to Mussert, Rotterdam, 15 October 1935, NIOD: 123, 1.1:37.

posters from the 1935 Amsterdam convention, 'such ones as hung up in the R.A.I.-building, since many of our Bremer Comrades have never seen such a thing [before]'.<sup>1006</sup>

The desire for mementos, as well as the sale of illustrated convention albums, highlights what an extraordinary experience the spectacle was to many attendees. 'I feel the urge to prove my upright loyalty to you [Mussert] this way. A day like last Saturday gives you something which nothing else is capable of. It is a pity, that not all of our opponents can experience a day like that, maybe then they would change their minds'.<sup>1007</sup> To these people the spectacle was not just propaganda, but a transcendent manifestation of fascism as it truly was, above the realm of everyday life and mundane politics, something that was difficult to put in words and could only be experienced through the senses and emotions, through bodily presence. A *landdag* was a moment when people were in the direct presence of mythopoeia as it happened. To some it exposed the seams of the process, undermining the performances. To others the spectacle was overwhelming, and the immediacy of it all chimed emotionally with their beliefs about what fascism was, what it meant to be part of the Movement. To them the performance was authentic, reifying the collective myth as constructed by the party.

#### IV

Comparing the 1935 Hague *landdag* and the NSAP's *Sveating* that year, what stands out is the completely different press reactions, or lack thereof. If the Dutch fascists got a rather mixed, not to say negative, response to their convention, the Swedes found that while press reports tended to be ostensibly neutral, they were also sparse and minimal to the point of non-existence. The lack of media attention was deeply frustrating to the NSAP, and contributed to the specific ways in which their conventions were organised. In 1935, as during the rest of the thirties, newspapers generally reported only on the *lindhölmare* when there were fights or breaches of the law; this convention was no different, with for instance *Dagens Nyheter's* report focusing almost entirely on the minor fight with communists that broke out in Vitabergsparken. For the 1937 *årsting* the same paper only

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<sup>1006</sup> '...zooals zij in het R.A.I. gebouw hingen, daar vele van onze Bremer Kameraden zooiets nooit hebben gezien.', Letter, W.R. van de Loo Jr to the NSB, Bremen, 2 April 1935, NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2004.

<sup>1007</sup> 'Ik voel me gedrongen, U langs deze weg mijn oprechte trouw te bewijzen. Een dag als Zaterdag j.l. geeft je iets wat niets anders in staat is te geven. Het is jammer, dat niet al onze tegenstanders een dergelijke dag meemaken, misschien zouden zich dan hun gedachten...', Letter, [signature illegible] to Mussert, Groningen, 15 November 1935, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

printed eleven lines for its report, while in 1938 no report was published at all.<sup>1008</sup> For the 1939 *Öresundsting* the national daily only reported on the fact that NU had broken the uniform law, when the youths famously removed their shirts in front of the embarrassed police, but made no mention at all of the actual convention.<sup>1009</sup>

The voluminous reports on the NSB's conventions –consistent for the rest of the decade – are striking, but easily explained by the far greater size of the Dutch party, and the political furore it caused in the Netherlands. Much of Dutch politics in the 1930s was focused on the NSB, and how it should be dealt with, a key theme of both the 1935 and the 1937 elections, so that extensive media attention came naturally.<sup>1010</sup> The fact that Mussert was already a known political figure when the party was founded also helped, and ensured the initial interest from the liberal press.<sup>1011</sup>

Hence the NSAP *ting* had different priorities from the Dutch *landdagen*. While the NSAP kept angling for media attention, for instance through inclusion of the sometimes rowdy NU, or repeated (and repeatedly declined) invitations to journalists to attend,<sup>1012</sup> it always recognised attention was at least currently limited, and organised conventions accordingly. In broad terms, if the Hague convention was above all staged for propaganda, the Stockholm convention was a rally to boost morale, mobilising the members to strengthen the bonds of comradeship. *Sveatinget* was for the spectators, a spectacle put on to draw in the members, to strengthen their loyalty to Lindholm and to the party, remind them of the greater struggle to give them the willpower to continue, even in isolation. Even if the performance was dwarfed by its Dutch equivalent, it felt grandiose to the (mostly young) participants, who had often never been in Gothenburg or Stockholm before, let alone such a large political rally – perception counted for everything here. The fact that some members travelled as far as from Överkalix to Malmö (c. 1800 km) to enjoy these events is indicative.<sup>1013</sup> In the Netherlands on the other hand, the audience was more *part of* the convention, i.e. a piece of the performance, itself propaganda.<sup>1014</sup> This also explains the heavy emphasis on corporeal discipline in the NSB documents. The fact that members' complaints about

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<sup>1008</sup> 'Kommunisterna och nazisterna ha firat pingst', *Dagens Nyheter*, 18 May 1937, p. 11.

<sup>1009</sup> 'Uniformsåtal mot nazister', *Dagens Nyheter*, 31 May 1939, p. 13.

<sup>1010</sup> Remieg Aerts and others, *Land van Kleine Gebaren: Een politieke geschiedenis van Nederland 1780-1990* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1999), p. 218.

<sup>1011</sup> Meyers, p. 72.

<sup>1012</sup> 1935 was no exception: Tjalve, 'Dahlrot skrämde TT: Vägrade extratåg minskade tingsdeltagarna med flera hundra!', *DSN*, no 46, 15 June 1935, p. 1.

<sup>1013</sup> 'Vad de sade om Öresundstinget: Alla var av en mening: Det bästa tinget hittills!', *DSN*, no 38, 4 June 1939, p. 4.

<sup>1014</sup> Cf.: Eichberg and Jones, p. 139.



poor seating and vision were repeatedly met with the emphasis on propaganda speaks volumes. The point was the members' presence, not their enjoyment.<sup>1015</sup> The drive to summon ever greater numbers to the *landdagen* and later *Hagespraken* as a symbol of strength and unity were central to the NSB's conventions. As indicated earlier, even as the NSB declined, year-by-year a greater proportion of members attended the conventions, while the mixing of members and non-members in Lunteren was a powerful symbol of the supposed equivalence between Movement and nation.

Beyond membership figures, organisation and resources were crucial to managing these performances. Summoning the 35 000 or so to The Hague in 1935, or the tens of thousands more to Lunteren in later years, required an elaborate organisation, simultaneously centralised and with authority down to the smaller branches, and the financial structure to support it. The tent construction, transport arrangements, and ticket system of the NSB demonstrated the efficiency and reach of the party apparatus, and demonstration was partially the point. Being able to manage such a large-scale event within three years of their first public appearance, after an election campaign, the NSB showed the party was capable, disciplined, ordered, and a respectable force in politics: one of the real parties, not like the fascist dilettantes of the past who never acquired a single seat in parliament. NSB organisation was performative, and in terms of mythopoeia as much part of the convention as the proceedings on the day itself. Rather than just presenting a 'natural' image of the event, hiding the underlying artifice, NSB discourse actually exposed the construction, work, and organisation that lay underneath the performance, proud of the modern technologies and skills it had harnessed, the organisational muscle and discipline it managed, the work ethic of its labourers. That the *landdag* programme booklet on its cover featured the workers of the camp, tools slung over one shoulder, is a clear statement of this point.<sup>1016</sup>

By contrast the Swedes could not really visibly impress with their organisation, and lacked the financial capacity and acumen, so instead put a characteristic emphasis on the will to sacrifice of the cadres that was required to mobilise the few thousand. The NSAP's inability to effectively gather its members for the convention, hampered by infrastructure and geography, prevented an emulation of the propaganda of scale of the NSB (or the example on contemporaries' minds, the Nazi state). But the Swedish party nevertheless did manage to put on a spectacle, and succeeded

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<sup>1015</sup> Heijningen, p. 38.

<sup>1016</sup> Programme booklet, *N.S.B.: 4<sup>e</sup> Landdag, 5 October 1935*, NIOD: 123, 1.1: 37.

in places to put on a rather impressive performance with the limited resources at its disposal. The choice of the Auditorium, a space with which the party had ample experience from past meetings there, and the effective use of decorations created a good atmosphere for staging their rituals, and all accounts suggest participants were taken in by their surroundings, and enjoyed the intimacy. But most important, and impressive, was the *uppmarsch*. The emphasis on a public march as the principle piece of propaganda was interesting in light of the relatively few attendees, but made sense given the lack of press coverage. This was a way of bringing the spectacle directly to the public, without any intermediaries, a point emphasised in the party's own discourse. At the same time it was the kind of performance that financially required little more than the members' bodies on the street, and was effectively incorporated in the overall structure and schedule of the convention. As seen, the routes – paying close attention to space, setting, and symbolism – as well as the discursive reconstruction of the march, were used to great effect to maximise the mythopoeic potential of this political spectacle, and minimise the significance of low numbers.

The surprising efficacy of the *Sveatingsuppmarsch* is evident in comparison to the NSB's march through The Hague, (they were no longer a feature with the *Hagespraken*). While the 15 minute WA-procession inside the tent demonstrated all the qualities of organisation and discipline essential to fascist myth, the city march was unimaginative, and had little going for it but the sheer number of marchers. This is particularly obvious when comparing the photographs: even the NSB's own photographers failed to take any impressive or striking pictures of the march, while the NSAP's show that the party managed to fully utilise its greater freedom in the use of flags and symbols. While uniforms were as lacking in the NSAP march as in that of the NSB, the small Swedish contingent gave a far stronger impression of an army, while the NSB looked like a rather strange procession of bourgeois, be they very many.

The NSAP photographs point to the issue of technology and technique in presentation, which foregrounds how the fascist spectacles changed over time. The NSAP clearly improved its photography and staging after 1935, and subsequent photographs look much better than those of the first half of the decade. The party also managed to print more photographs in the party press in subsequent years. 1935 was a year when the NSAP was still consolidating its organisation, while in 1936-38 the party moved to Stockholm and expanded financially, buying its own printing press (if never the elusory rotational press) and city properties to house the DSN offices. Capturing the

moment on camera, and distributing the images to a wider audience was an important part of the mythopoeic project, and in this regard the NSAP would not peak until 1937-38. The NSB by contrast had very quickly acquired the technological equipment and competence to record the spectacle, and its profitable printing presses were always equipped to produce myriad pictures for a wider audience. The party also sold gramophone recordings of the speeches in 1934.<sup>1017</sup> The rather handsome and well-designed commemorative books for each of the *landdagen* and *Hagespraken* show off not only the financial capacity but also the commercial competence of the Leadership, advertising them as collector's objects, an investment even.<sup>1018</sup> The point should not be exaggerated however: the books produced for the 1935 Amsterdam Landdag were still not sold out one year later, so that it is perhaps more a point about the NSB's willingness to commercialise its activities.<sup>1019</sup>

NSB conventions did change significantly after 1935: whereas NSAP *årsting* seem to have remained surprisingly static in many respects, the Dutch party was developing the *mise-en-scène* for the *Hagespraken* every year, researched already in some detail by René van Heijningen. The large hilltop meadow was an excellent place for audiences of up to 100 000 people, albeit without shelter from the elements, though that never became a problem. Compared to the *landdagen* it had none of the viewing problems *vis-à-vis* the seating, as the audience could be freely gathered as one large mass in front of the large central tribune – that being said, managing the vantage of tens of thousands of people in a largely flat field presented its own difficulties. These were overcome over the years by the building of a large stone wall-like structure, heavily reminiscent of some of the Nuremberg structures, which was to be a lasting monument to the regenerative movement that had captured the Netherlands.<sup>1020</sup> (The wall still stands to this day, be it heavily neglected.) The tall structure rising before the audience made an imposing stage on and before which to pose standard-bearers, and from which Mussert could speak, elevating his small figure before his devotees. The party also continued to experiment with other tall but impermanent structures with which to dominate the field of vision: seven enormous black-red banners behind the rostrum, and party flags encircling the grounds captured the eye in 1937, while 1938 saw the raising of a large

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<sup>1017</sup> 'Gramofoonplaten landdag', *VoVa*, no 19, 12 May 1934, p. 6.

<sup>1018</sup> Advertisement circular, "'De Hagespraak' Geïllustreerd Gedenkboek', NIOD: 123, 2.55: 2005.

<sup>1019</sup> Monthly report, Alb. van Leeuwen Jr, Chief of Materials Circle 67 (The Hague South), 4 April 1936, p. 3, NIOD: 123, 2.10: 855.

<sup>1020</sup> Heijningen, pp. 31–32.

mast, on which flags of the 'liberated' nations (Italy, Germany, Portugal, Spain) and the Netherlands were ritually raised. Grand and imposing structures remained a key element of the NSB's staging techniques, and to great effect in the open field.

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One sentiment that emerged from time to time in both Sweden and the Netherlands was the notion that if political opponents had been able to experience a convention in person, they would feel differently about fascism. This foregrounds the crucial point about the importance of physical presence to these spectacles. Unlike any other kind of propaganda, or any other kind of meeting, the spectacular *landdag* or *årsting* was an *overwhelming* appeal to the senses, a way of accessing the emotions through sensory stimulus: beautiful sights and sounds, the feeling of being part of a mass, the throng of bodies pressed together, the symbolism, uniforms, music, applause and shouts and chants, maybe even the smell, were all a way of conjuring the myth through an immersive spectacle.<sup>1021</sup> The thing that made it all a spectacle was the holistic nature of the fascist conventions: this was mythopoeia through a tightly organised and prepared, carefully directed and staged performance, in which actors were closely following a script designed to draw in the audience. Without the interjection of critical hermeneutics, attendees were not only faced with a holistic performance of fascist myth, but were made into participants or fellow-actors – scholars such as Fischer-Lichte in theatre studies have previously identified this co-participation of spectators in the acting, seeing it primarily as a means of social integration.<sup>1022</sup> This was a rare moment for someone to actually *experience* the fascist myth, identifying with it by being part of its mythopoeia. This was the realisation of a fantasy. Given that this moment depended on a harmonious entanglement of personal and party understanding of the fascist myth it was hardly likely to have the kind of impact on outsider observers that fascists imagined, but it does cast a spotlight on the paramount importance of physical presence in fascist spectacle.

Only through physical presence could the spectator be immersed in the myth, which was perhaps the most effective way of communicating the authenticity of the performance. Discursive reconstruction in party organs, communicating the experience to the myriad absent, was

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<sup>1021</sup> Cf.: Eichberg and Jones, p. 141.

<sup>1022</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual*, pp. 23–30.

ultimately a very flawed instrument in conveying the performance intact. Even if film and photography could add to the presentation, through framing and selection, sound and sense were omitted, largely lost in translation. Reports helped underpin and clarify the narratives that the performance meant to convey, but a textual reconstruction of jackboots rhythmically pounding the floor is a far cry from the experience of seeing, hearing, and feeling it. Holistic sensory immersion required physical presence, and was ultimately needed to convey authenticity, that is to say to neutralise critical faculties and lead to an acceptance of the myth at face value.<sup>1023</sup>

What this analysis of fascist conventions gets at is that spectacle had a decisive role to play in mythopoeia: spectacle is symbolic of the wider fascist mythopoeic project in Sweden and the Netherlands in the 1930s, and shines a spotlight on the fantastic element inherent to fascist myth. As has been noted repeatedly, fascist myth relied on fantasy, a personal and collective fantasy with multiple and sometimes conflicting dimensions. The fantasy was one of being a part of an epic narrative largely cast in a military and religious register. There were obvious parallels here to Gentile's understanding of political religion: the sense of communion inherent to the liturgical-style rituals, dedication to a common faith, etc.<sup>1024</sup> But focusing on the religious aspects of this political theatre is misleading. While faith was psychologically an important part of this, fantasy and immersion are key to understanding the construction and appeal of the Swedish and Dutch fascist spectacle. The sense of the sacred and divine were merely means to that end.<sup>1025</sup>

Rather than religion, Jeffrey Alexander's notion of re-fusion is appropriate here: the performance re-fuses the disparate elements that constitute it into a seamless whole for the audience, and rather than appearing contrived conveys an aesthetic truth, allowing the psychological identification of the audience with the myth.<sup>1026</sup> The analysis here also conforms to the ideas of a number of scholars of fascism about the importance of aesthetic impressions, and the concomitant emotional response, and the role it played in facilitating individual identification with a (collective) myth, which explains the impact on morale. Mabel Berezin argued that in Fascist Italy, public rituals were a liminal space in which identities could be formed, where

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<sup>1023</sup> Cf.: Grunwald, pp. 173–75.

<sup>1024</sup> Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, pp. 25–26.

<sup>1025</sup> This does correspond to the more watered down notion of political religion, as simply 'a political religiosity', 'the acknowledgment of a divine meaning in history and life': Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, pp. 36–37.

<sup>1026</sup> Alexander, 'Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy', pp. 29–54.

emotion helped obliterate the old self and create a new one.<sup>1027</sup> Anette F. Timm more recently made the point that emotion could lead to feelings of empowerment, blurring the distinction between emotions and ideology.<sup>1028</sup> Rather than focusing on the religious aspects or liturgical nature of these rituals, this chapter has highlighted the corporeal and somatic factors that facilitated this identification: overwhelming sensory impressions, bodily presence and the literal incorporation of the audience.<sup>1029</sup> In an interpretation by David D. Roberts, the difference here is that political religion is ultimately an interpretation of ritual as referring to underlying ideology, rather than a cultural interpretation which sees meaning precisely at the level of the performance itself.<sup>1030</sup> Within the framework of performativity theory, meaning cannot be understood beyond the performance – ontologically myth did not ‘exist’ outside of the performative-mythopoeic spectacle, because performative acts are by definition non-referential.<sup>1031</sup>

While other performances on a smaller scale offered the observer glimpses of this myth, a spectacle was not just something bigger but qualitatively different. Spectacle was congruous with the fantastically epic proportions of the political myth – Lindholm and Mussert constructed the struggle in cosmic and divine terms respectively – but also offered the observer a way into *being part* of it.<sup>1032</sup> The army metaphor is apt here: the observer becomes a soldier, a knight under the aegis of the Leader in a heroic battle against evil. Immersion was a gateway to participation, of fully going up in the narrative and becoming a protagonist in the story – ‘achieving harmony through becoming a work of art oneself’.<sup>1033</sup> Ideally the observer did not just witness fascism as myth, but became a fascist;<sup>1034</sup> in this the fascist conventions offered something few if any other political parties did.<sup>1035</sup>

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<sup>1027</sup> Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, p. 28.

<sup>1028</sup> Anette F. Timm, ‘Mothers, Whores, or Sentimental Dupes?’, in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, ed. by Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 344–45.

<sup>1029</sup> For a further discussion of the limited heuristic use of ‘political religion’, see: Baumeister, p. 67.

<sup>1030</sup> David D. Roberts, ‘Myth, Style, Substance and the Totalitarian Dynamic in Fascist Italy’, p. 6.

<sup>1031</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, p. 27.

<sup>1032</sup> Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, p. 7.

<sup>1033</sup> Karlsson and Ruth, p. 16.

<sup>1034</sup> This parallels what Berezin argued the Italian Fascist regime attempted to achieve with its public rituals and festivals: Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self*, pp. 7, 19–20.

<sup>1035</sup> Introduction to: *Attraktion der NS-Bewegung*, ed. by Gudrun Brockhaus (Essen: Klartext, 2014), p. 8.

## Conclusion

We had comparatively many people at our meetings, and of course this could depend on curiosity (after all people imagined that we had the Germans behind us) – but it was also because we said something completely different from the same, old, boring party drivel, we came with something new.<sup>1036</sup>

This thesis has been about how this ‘something new’ of Lindholm’s NSAP and Mussert’s NSB was conveyed to their audiences. The premise of the research was that the ‘new’ with which the fascists came did not reside in their message, but the form, that is to say the performances, and by extension the performative of their myth. While it has been impossible to get a sense of the extent to which this actually attracted new members and voters, it is evident that this was a major reason for some members to stay and dedicate themselves to the party.

It has been shown throughout that fascist mythopoeia was a major mobilising force, and improved cadre morale. Mythopoeia had the potential to create a feedback mechanism of ceaseless mobilisation: identification with the myth raised morale and pushed the cadres to further activism and sacrifice, which could be used to enact mythopoeic performances that required those resources, and fed back into the cadres’ identification. The evidence for this is the strongest in the Swedish NSAP, where the perpetually under-resourced party managed to overcome its small size and financial difficulties numerous times through the dedication of young fanatical activists who worked hard and with little sign of success in the foreseeable future. The NSB makes a less strong case, as there appeared to be a weaker activist spirit, and the branches were more tightly controlled by Headquarters.

This points to another finding, which is that while fascist mythopoeia seems in the first instance to be above all a matter of propaganda, in reality it was frequently for the benefit of the members themselves, who one may assume already believed in or identified with the myth. Different priorities are evident between Lindholm’s and Mussert’s parties, where the former was far more concerned with sustaining morale while the latter emphasised expansion and quick

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<sup>1036</sup> ‘Vi hade jämförelsevis mycket folk på våra möten, detta kunde förstås bero på nyfikenhet (man inbillade sig ju, att vi hade tyskarna bakom ryggen) – men det var också därför, att vi sa något helt annat än det gamla vanliga, tråkiga partitramset, vi kom med någonting nytt.’, Transcript meeting, Lindholm and Heléne Lööw, Riksarkivet, Stockholm, p. 2, Marieberg: SO Lindholm, vol. 5.

success – this can be explained almost entirely by the sharply divergent growth trajectories of the two parties in 1933-35. This is at its clearest in the completely different attitudes to the party conventions: while the NSB recognised the benefit of bringing members together and allowing them the experience of being part of a greater force than their local branch, it repeatedly prioritised appearances for the benefit of the press, and largely used the cadres as part of the performance, rather than the performance being for them. This was a peculiarity of these political performances, that the spectator was often also the actor.<sup>1037</sup>

This again foregrounds the importance of identification to fascist mythopoeia. Identification was to be part of the ‘something new’, which was something that transcended everyday life and ‘normal’ politics. Integration with a collectively constructed myth was a means to realising a fantasy, which can be seen as the personal dimension of political myth. A myth of a glorious army, led by a prophetic Leader, guiding his manly and disciplined troops to a predestined victory, was a narrative that permitted members to cast themselves as protagonists, actors following a script, in a myth that transcended fiction, a higher truth. The almost mystical aspects of this identification process left their evidence in the fetishism for the props which underpinned mythopoeia: the standards and symbols, the whole repertoire of salutes and slogans and marches, and of course the uniform. This explains how myth could generate quite such extraordinary enthusiasm and self-sacrifice, seemingly without reward.<sup>1038</sup> Functionaries could be quite explicit about the mobilising instrumentality of myth: ‘[t]o create a youth movement and advance it, there has to be an integrating, inciting element: *a myth*. A thought of incredible stature, which unites everyone and drives them forward in dedicated work for its realisation.’<sup>1039</sup> But what people like Arne Clementsson perhaps did not anticipate was that in organisations prone to factionalism, internal groups developed vested interests in specific myths, which could be at odds with changing party tactics. Paradoxically, the means that generated cohesion and loyalty could end up also tearing the party apart, as we saw in the NSAP/SSS in 1938.

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<sup>1037</sup> Cf.: Grunwald, pp. 173–74.

<sup>1038</sup> The extraordinary potential for mobilisation in fascist myth has also been observed by scholars of totalitarian regimes, see: David D. Roberts, *The Totalitarian Experiment in Twentieth-Century Europe*, pp. 437–38.

<sup>1039</sup> ‘För att skapa en ungdomsrörelse och föra den vidare framåt måste finnas ett sammankittande, eggande element: *en myt*. En tanke av väldig resning, vilken förenar alla och driver dem framåt i hängivet arbete för dess förverkligande.’, Arne Clementsson, ‘Vår myt’, *DSN*, no 93, 1 December 1937, p. 6.



Fetishism revealed an interesting pressure behind the mythopoeic process, namely a grassroots demand for myth and its constituent performative elements. Embodied identification probably played a powerful role here: the invitation to 'live the myth' as it were, by integrating members physically into mythopoeic performances, was liable to produce strong personal (fetishistic) attachments. Much as the removal of beloved symbols was unacceptable to the cadres of both parties, and the uniform was considered indispensable by all, so a 'normal', respectable party leader could hardly be countenanced. While both Lindholm and Mussert showed signs of reluctance to act the part of the Leader in the style of Hitler or Mussolini, there was strong pressure from the rank-and-file to construct such a myth, and by extension sustain the collective fantasy that drove activism.

This is where the theme of respectability and its ambiguous relationship to fascist myth comes out strongly. These demands from below could push at the boundaries of respectability that the leadership was willing to transgress. To simplify, it has been clear that the NSAP and NSB started out in different places, and that the twin pressures of respectability and mythopoeic desire pushed them in opposite directions. The NSB, led by a bourgeois civil engineer, heavily appealed to Dutch conservative standards of political respectability, before giving in to internal pressures and introducing increasingly dubious elements (e.g. wolf's hook symbols, Germanic-pagan elements) which conformed to certain fascist myths, but undermined the image of respectability in the eyes of the public. The NSAP on the other hand started out as a left-oriented party emphasising militarism and revolution, before embarking on a 'New Direction' that naturalised uniform paraphernalia, party name, and symbols, to the dismay of the radicals. This confirms that respectability had a sort of limiting effect on fascist mythopoeia, with fascist parties moved by two forces that pushed in opposite directions. The image construction of fascist parties then seems guided by a dynamic paradox. Given that much of the disapproval of the public was from a patriotic angle – questioning the nationalist credentials of fascist myth that appeared imported from foreign countries – this is a problem quite specific to the fascist movements of Europe that operated within democratic societies, constantly pushing them towards an awkward compromise.

Yet the dynamic between myth and respectability was not a straightforwardly dialectical one. This is especially clear in the mythopoeia of Mussert's persona, which tried to mythicise precisely those dimensions that were symbolic of his respectability, such as his social status as

civil engineer. His evolution into biblical prophet married myth and respectability in one figure, using positive Christian elements to elevate him to providential Leader. Other aspects of fascist myth had an inherently respectable dimension to them, and depended on perspective. The NSB tried to exploit this more than the NSAP. The paramilitaries were a cornerstone of the army myth, but they were also constructed as models of respectability: neat and trim, perfectly disciplined, and a bulwark of law and order against godless communism. Similarly the NSAP utilised the heavy military presence in its ranks as a demonstration of respectability, deliberately posting uniformed army supporters alongside its processions to not just reinforce the idea of the fascists as powerful army, but also one with the support of patriotic and respected soldiers and officers. Myth and respectability were not always clearly distinguishable in the mythopoeia of the NSB and NSAP.

It is precisely in these respects, where mythopoeia was susceptible to multiple layers of interpretation, that public debate was at its most intense. Shows of organisation, discipline, and power, could be admired, by the conservative Right especially – and where they were lacking the parties faced relentless mockery – but they also raised the spectre of violence. Street fights come out of this as a major problem which threatened to undermine the respectability of both parties, as it facilitated an interpretation of fascism as a force of disorder. Such opposing interpretations quickly led to a construction of fascism as neither mythic nor respectable, but grotesque. Fascists were depicted as uncouth thugs, their leaders as gangster bosses and Hitler-parodies, or in the Swedish case as undisciplined juveniles. It appears that in the small democracies fascist mythopoeia could never entirely divorce itself from respectable concerns, and carried an innate risk of undermining itself.

Respectability, then, was not simply a limiting factor on mythopoeia, nor was the dynamic it produced consistent or predictable. Its role in Sweden and the Netherlands was very different, and one can see from how the parties were founded that it played a crucial role in the initial cultural construction of the fascist parties, and their later development. Swedish and Dutch fascists were faced with rather different strategic requirements produced by their social-political environments, but in both cases, mythopoeic desire could trump rational strategy. The internal pressure to sustain mythopoeia was powerful, and overrode considerations of respectability and public image. The backlash against Lindholm's 'New Direction' is illustrative: the leadership may have considered many of the mythopoeic props to be inimical to success, but to at least a core of

the party they were the *raison d'être* of fascism. In the comparison both cadres' are seen to have developed a specific fascist subculture, but more so in the NSAP than the NSB: the latter was always more outward looking, thriving on media attention from the very beginning, while the Dutch party apparatus was far better organised to instil discipline.

This characterisation of Swedish and Dutch fascism as subcultural highlights how not just myth, but the particular performative methods of mythopoeia such as embodied identification, are something that generated extraordinary loyalty to fascism, be it understood as the party, the Leader, or 'the idea'. This research has shown that there was a personally transformative potential in participating in mythopoeia, which can explain the dedication of some members through all adversities. The wider significance is in explaining the initial emergence and persistence of minor fascist movements in unlikely places, not just Sweden and the Netherlands, and the fanatical loyalty of some of its cadres which allowed them to punch above their weight. The comparative angle shows that this was not just the fluke of a specific fascist party, but a feature that could potentially be generalised for fascism across Europe. However, their differences however show that this is a point about survivability and persistence rather than success – the NSB after all enjoyed exponentially better results than the NSAP could ever hope for. For 'stable democracies', it highlights that political failure in its own right was not enough to eliminate fascist challengers. The implications for neo-fascism could be important.

This has raised a number of further questions and venues for future research. Fascist endurance and loyalty were not in any way universal; member turnover could be high, and branches disappeared over time. Mapping out the persistence and activism of the NSB and NSAP in specific regions would add valuable nuance to the picture painted here. The comparison of localities over time, such as the disproportionately NSB-supportive urban centres and the NSAP-dominated villages of Norrland, or the ephemeral outposts containing only a handful of activists, would add another important dimension.<sup>1040</sup> One area left open for research by this thesis is the social dimension of mythopoeia. We can speculate that fantastical myths were more likely to appeal to some social groups than others (such as youth and students), but this needs to be verified. Second to this, what myths appealed to what social groups is another important question: can we trace these in internal party factionalism over mythopoeic projects, and can we see

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<sup>1040</sup> Some of this research has been done for Amsterdam, but not in a comparative way: Damsma and Schumacher, "De Strijd om Amsterdam": Een nieuwe benadering in het onderzoek naar de NSB'.

propaganda apparatuses targeting specific groups with specific myths? It is not unlikely that a social perspective could shed further light on why mythopoeic tactics changed the way they did over time. There is also more to be learned about the relationship between myth and respectability legally. Local court records could shed light on whether mythopoeia continued in the court room, and how defendants and prosecutors portrayed the clash with respectability.<sup>1041</sup>

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These relatively small fascist parties, which did not play much of a role in the wider European context, have here been portrayed as independent and critical agents. Their failures and relative mediocrity were not the result of unthinkingly copying German methods. Rather they adopted and adapted fascist cultural techniques and strategies reflexively, and forged their own myths and identities.<sup>1042</sup> While much was copied from other models, the copycat stereotype is a crude dismissal of the complexities of such adoption, and the variety of fascist political culture in Europe. Working against the grain of their national social and political cultures, the NSAP and NSB created new structures and performances to convey their own myths to the public, but perhaps especially to their own members. These parties – especially the NSAP – come out looking surprisingly introverted.

Fascist myth was far more open-ended and varied than some historians have suggested. Not just paligenetic, the myths of fascism emerge as multiple, varied, without a core, and mutable.<sup>1043</sup> Fascist myth was not static.<sup>1044</sup> The study of fascist myth as a performative, operating in time, has shown that mythopoeia was a site of mutation and innovation, highly susceptible to internal and external pressures. Whatever the ‘something new’ that fascists brought to modern European politics, we cannot make *a priori* assumptions about its nature.

Instead, the core concept of mythopoeia as a performative emphasises instability, contingency, and mutability in fascist myth and practices. The semiotic character of fascism as an empty signifier made it prey to a ceaseless and dynamic interplay between national, international,

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<sup>1041</sup> Cf.: Grunwald.

<sup>1042</sup> Bauerkämper, ‘Fascism Without Borders’, p. 215.

<sup>1043</sup> David D. Roberts, ‘Myth, Style, Substance and the Totalitarian Dynamic in Fascist Italy’, pp. 10, 18; David Roberts, pp. 47–48.

<sup>1044</sup> Cf.: Introduction to: Bauerkämper and Rossolinski-Liebe, pp. 4–5.

and transnational influences, which constantly changed the terms of the public discourse around fascism. It is evident that in the fascist *movements*, there was reflexive engagement with their foreign counterparts – in the form of foreign regimes, movements, as well as an international phenomenon – both in their own right, as well as *through* the often hostile national press with which they debated, with a central preoccupation with respectability. Mutation in the mythopoeic trajectory of the NSB and NSAP show that whatever difficulties they faced, these were not caused by any kind of stagnation that has been attributed to mimetic fascist organisations. Instead, how the fascist regimes reflected back on the movements, and the national discussion thereof, was a constant force for fascist change.

This argument can be extended to the study of fascism generally. In Swedish and Dutch scholarship Roger Griffin's 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism' is still somewhat in vogue.<sup>1045</sup> But elsewhere, debates about the definition of fascism are fortunately well on their way out, and some historians have called for examining how contemporaries understood their own political categories as a mode of inquiry instead, which is precisely what mythopoeia has done here.<sup>1046</sup> Some scholars have defended their definitions of fascism from accusations of essentialising tendencies, describing them as 'heuristic' or unavoidable 'working definitions', but this has not avoided severely limiting how we understand the historic horizons of fascism. A definition of fascism has not been required for this thesis, which has allowed us to see the contested nature of that sign, and by extension the open-ended trajectory of that sign's political devotees, who in the 1930s, year on year, could still go in different directions.<sup>1047</sup>

This is also an important insight for the recent transnational turn in fascism studies, and demonstrates some of the usefulness of the performative-mythopoeic approach to myth. Conceptualising fascism as performative and predicated on a contingent and diachronic process is one way to situate fascism at an intersection of national and international contexts, and be sensitive to the transnational exchange of ideas – myths, specific mythopoeic techniques, competencies, resources, and so forth. Marrying cultural approaches to fascist myth with the transnational turn, mythopoeia allows us to see the diachronic (semiotic) construction of fascism

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<sup>1045</sup> E.g.: Huberts, pp. 8–11; Lundberg, *En Idé Större än Döden*, pp. 48–53.

<sup>1046</sup> Michel Dobry, 'Desperately Seeking "Generic Fascism": Some Discordant Thoughts on the Academic Recycling of Indigenous Categories', in *Rethinking the Nature of Fascism: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by António Costa Pinto (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 85–116 (pp. 59–61).

<sup>1047</sup> David D. Roberts, *Fascist Interactions*, pp. 16–17.

by contemporaries, paying attention to the transfer and exchange of specific myths and techniques in doing so. The transnational approach has a penchant for understanding fascism as a contingent and ever-developing phenomenon, constantly changing as it crosses borders, and mythopoeia and performativity are tools which match that approach neatly. The relationship of the Nazi regime to the NSB and NSAP has already hinted a little at what transnational influences on the European development of fascism (as understood by contemporaries) could look like, but there is the potential for research to uncover much more extensive networks of transfer and exchange, especially between movements (the Netherlands and Belgium, and the Scandinavian countries come to mind).

It was always the premise of the thesis that myth was central to fascist politics, but what has been brought out of this is the value of recognising the place of myth in fascism as a performative process, which in these terms can be shown to drive fascist strategy and tactics, responding to various contexts and influences. In other words, mythopoeia made fascist politics highly contingent.<sup>1048</sup> It was in the nature of myth that it could change and be deliberately manipulated, and here it has been shown how in practice the modern party organisation after the First World War had found new ways of doing so. What was quite unique to fascism however is that it operated as an empty signifier, which allowed self-styled fascists to treat the process of the creation of cultural meaning with the cavalier disregard for 'truth' that so concerned Johan Huizinga at the beginning of this thesis.

Huizinga's concerns about the immediate political future of Europe in the 1930s went beyond fascism. This study of the relationship between mythopoeia and respectability is situated in the greater context of the new forms of politics that emerged in the interbellum, and its intersection with the new Right. The expansion of the franchise, the experience of mass mobilisation, the recent emergence of the modern mass party organisation, and the development or democratisation of media technologies, all fed into the new dynamics and functions of myth-making in politics. The consequences for political organisations, tactics, and cultures were not limited to fascism. As such, the conclusions of this research open up venues of enquiry for the wider study of interwar European history. The examination of the semiotic construction of political concepts at the interface of myth and practical organisation in dynamic relation to public

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<sup>1048</sup> What has been identified as the ephemerality and hollowness of fascism, see: David D. Roberts, *Fascist Interactions*, p. 274.

discourse is surely a fertile field more generally. At the same time, the historical application of new political techniques in Sweden and the Netherlands has shown there were no hard borders around these countries that made them into impregnable 'peaceful islands'. Rather, even if physical political violence was limited here, the politics of violence, its rhetoric, aesthetics, and tactics,<sup>1049</sup> easily made their way into the 'stable democracies', demonstrating a spill-over effect which ought to make us attentive to the political-cultural integration of these countries with their more tumultuous neighbours. There were no solid boundaries to political conflict. Even if new political forms were not necessarily wielded effectively or even competently, it is worth noting how these were transferred and exchanged across Europe, and placed the smaller actors of Europe onto the continental stage.

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<sup>1049</sup> Vincent, pp. 390–400.

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